

EMPOWERED GIRLS AT THE HEART OF ADVOCACY TO ADDRESS CHILD MARRIAGE IN MOZAMBIQUE

48% of girls in Mozambique are married before their 18th birthday. The highest rates of child marriage are seen in the northern provinces, with 55% of girls married before 19 and nearly 25% before the age of 15.

While the rate of child marriage has decreased in the last decade for girls below the age of 15, population growth has outpaced the progress made, leading to an increase in the overall number of girls married.

Adolescent pregnancy is closely linked to child marriage in Mozambique. In rural areas, the overwhelming majority of adolescent mothers are married in their teens. On average, girls have their first child 15 months after they get married. In the north of the country, rites of initiation – traditional practices aimed at children from 10 to 13 years – contribute to child marriage by emphasising the subordination of a girl to her husband and by “preparing” a girl for marriage.

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In 2014, the National Partnership *Girls Not Brides* Mozambique was formed, also known as the Coligação para a Eliminação e Prevenção dos Casamentos Prematuros (CECAP). Comprising 60 civil society organisations, the partnership co-ordinates collective advocacy, knowledge-sharing and research to address child marriage.

Girls are at the centre of advocacy efforts build authentic connections with young people at the grassroots level

Since 2016 *Girls Not Brides* Mozambique has organised a national annual girls' conference to support its advocacy work, as it believes its work is ultimately accountable to girls themselves. The partnership also has a pivotal role in organising local girls' conferences. Girls attending the local conferences are elected to represent their province to follow up and debrief with their peers in the community. Elected girls are also responsible for designing the national conference agenda and taking key issues from the local community to the national conference, where they are able to engage with key decision-makers including government ministers, parliamentarians, influential traditional leaders and donors.

With a clear youth-led approach, the conferences are opened by a young girl, who also shares recommendations from the previous year. Because partnership members are based all over the country, they can ensure girls from even the remotest areas are able to have a platform at a national level.

In 2018 *Girls Not Brides* Mozambique member Foundation For Community Development, the United Nations Population Fund and the government of Mozambique organised the national girls' conference in Maputo Province. The event was attended by 300 girls and 80 boys representing 11 provinces. All panels over the two days were led by girls and boys who set the agenda and tone. As Gina from the Foundation For Community Development explains, the beauty of the girls' conference is that "By working collectively, CECAP [*Girls Not Brides* Mozambique] members from all over Mozambique can connect grassroots youth to powerful people at the national level."

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GIRLS NOT BRIDES

The Global Partnership
to End Child Marriage