

AFRICA ACTION GROUP **TO END** **CHILD MARRIAGE**

Workshop Report

4-6 July 2023



Image: AAGECM Group photo

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The 1,400 *Girls Not Brides* member organisations working at the community, national, regional and global levels to bring child marriage to global attention, build an understanding of what it will take to end child marriage, and call for laws, policies and programmes that will make a difference in the lives of millions of girls.

Our donors, their generosity drives our contribution to the global movement to end child marriage.

With special thanks and gratitude for the collective commitment and expertise of the workshop participants (a participant organisations list is available in annex 1).

The 2023 workshop was made possible by the hard work, expertise, mobilising power and organisational skills of the *Girls Not Brides* team – in particular Fatou Gueye Ndir, Jean Casey, Nerida Nthamburi, Noleen Sang and Rachael Hongo.

The workshop was facilitated, and this final report written, by independent consultants Amy Harrison, Katy Chadwick, Natalie and Robi Tingo.

Acronyms

AAGECM – Africa Action Group to End Child Marriage

AGI-K – Adolescent Girls Initiative, Kenya

FCDO – Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (UK)

FGM/C – Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting

GBV – gender-based violence

LASDEL – The Laboratory for Studies and Research on Social Dynamics and Local Development

MICS – multiple indicator cluster survey

SADC – Southern Africa Development Community

SRHR – sexual and reproductive health and rights

VAC – violence against children

VAWG – violence against women and girls



SECTION 1:

Background



Background

AAGECM and Workshop Background

The Africa Action Group to End Child Marriage (AAGECM) was established in 2019 as a pan-African platform. Its primary purpose was to bring together advocates, practitioners and partners who are dedicated to ending child marriage¹ in Africa. The formation of this group aimed to foster a more strategic and cohesive approach to addressing child marriage.

The objective of the AAGECM was to identify evidence gaps and enhance the use of research products, evidence and policy documents. The focus was on ensuring these resources are effectively adapted to context by the communities and community-based organisations that would benefit the most from them.

The 2023 AAGECM research workshop – held from 4 to 7 July in Nairobi, Kenya – built on a series of

previous activities, including a convening in 2021. It brought together a diverse group of practitioners, researchers, activists and advocates from across Africa who are all working to end child marriage. The workshop focused on critically reviewing the existing evidence base on child marriage in Africa, enhancing collaboration between researchers and practitioners, and building a platform for researchers and practitioners to contribute to the global movement to end child marriage.

Workshop Overview

The workshop aimed to set up a safe and inclusive space where everyone could share and contribute, recognising that participants had a diversity of lived experiences in relation to child marriage and other harmful practices. To do this, the group agreed to ensure respectful dialogue, active listening, confidentiality of people's own personal stories and bringing an awareness of positionality and power dynamics. The group discussed making space for different learning styles, ways to structure activities to ensure that everyone was able to contribute, and ways to bring our own personal stories and motivations to the work.

During the workshop, participants examined current research, data and evidence regarding the prevalence, causes, consequences and drivers of child marriage in Africa. They also identified effective interventions to address child marriage, while highlighting areas that require further research.

A key focus of the workshop was to establish a collaborative platform for researchers, policymakers, practitioners and civil society organisations. This

platform aimed to facilitate knowledge exchange and discussion on how research findings can be effectively translated into policy and practice, and how research partnerships can be strengthened to bridge existing knowledge gaps. Participants discussed promising practices, how to contribute to building an evidence base for effective intervention, how to accelerate efforts, and how to contribute to the broader movement to end child marriage. The workshop also provided a space to strategise on what to prioritise as a region, and how to move forward as a group.

There was also space for more personal reflections on people's own motivations to participate in the global movement to end child marriage, including the sharing of stories and poems (see a selection of poems in Annex 3). During the workshop many participants shared their own research, practical experience and expertise. This report sets out some of the key discussions and themes but is not exhaustive. In addition to this report, a longer version of the literature review conducted for the workshop will be published.



SECTION 2:

**Learning From the Latest
Evidence on Preventing
Child Marriage and
Supporting Married Girls**



Learning From the Latest Evidence on Preventing Child Marriage and Supporting Married Girls

During the workshop, participants looked at the current prevalence and trends in child marriage and a literature review of effective interventions in Africa. They highlighted key points from a systematic scoping review focused on interventions in Africa and heard from a number of researchers and practitioners on their own work. There were also sessions to gather collective inputs on some of the key emerging topics.

Prevalence and Trends of Child Marriage Across Africa

Key statistics

Globally, approximately **650 million** girls and women² alive today were married before age 18.

The Sahel is home to over **20 million** girls who married before age 18.



Nigeria has the highest share of girls and women married before 18 in Africa.

Projections show that Africa's child marriage burden³ will be **41% by 2030**, and over **50% by 2050**.⁴

Over the last decade, child marriage prevalence⁵ has **declined globally** from **23% to 19%**, and in West, Central, East and Southern Africa from **35% to 32%**.⁶

The workshop started with a review from Rachael Hongo, Senior Data, Evidence and Policy Officer at *Girls Not Brides*, that highlighted key statistics⁷, regional trends, prevalence and burden in different parts of Africa. Child marriage remains a pressing global issue affecting millions of girls and women. Despite some progress in recent years, there is still much work to be done to end this harmful practice, and an urgent need for accelerated action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target of ending child marriage by 2030. At current rates of progress, it will take 300 years to end child marriage; to reach the SDG target by 2030, progress needs to happen more than 20 times faster.

South-East Asia currently shoulders the largest burden⁸ of child marriage at 45%. However, there has been a shift in the global burden towards Africa – due in part to population growth – and Africa’s burden is projected to reach 41% by 2030 (up from 15% 25 years ago), and more than double by 2050.

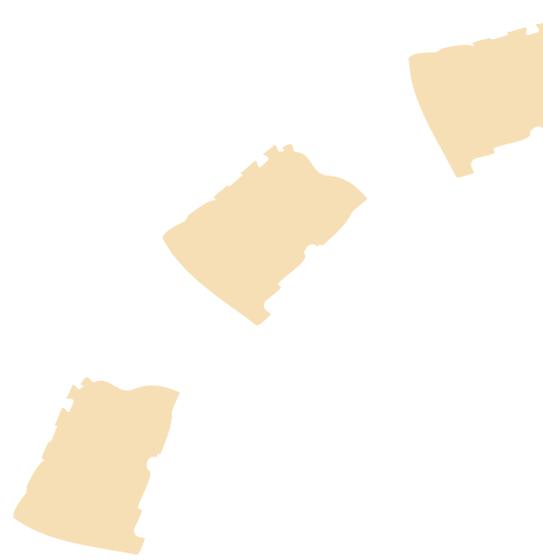
Within Africa, Nigeria has the highest share of girls and women married before 18, and is in the top ten countries globally for highest burden (alongside Ethiopia). Child marriage prevalence has declined globally, from 23% to 19% in the last 10 years. However, in West, Central, East and Southern Africa – where child marriage is most concentrated and girls are at the highest risk⁹ – progress has been slower, with prevalence only decreasing 3%, from 35% to 32%.

Prevalence across the region vary between countries, and within different regions/communities within the same country. Girls in West and Central Africa are at particularly high risk – seven of the 10 countries with highest prevalence are in this region, and Niger has the highest prevalence in the world.

Within West and Central Africa, the Sahel is particularly affected. It is home to over 20 million girls and women who married before age 18, and there has been little shift in prevalence over the last 25 years. This is an area also impacted by multiple and overlapping crises – like conflicts, public health crises, and natural disasters – which increase the risk of child marriage by impacting education, security and income.

There is much to learn from countries like the Gambia and Rwanda, which have both made accelerated progress over the last 25 years. Looking at where burden and prevalence are stagnant, or are even increasing, compared to countries that have accelerated progress and decreased prevalence is an important part of determining what is having impact, and where we need to increase or concentrate efforts.

Key takeaways from the review include the need for faster and more equitable progress, the detrimental impact of conflicts and crises on child marriage, and the importance of investing in interventions to accelerate an end to child marriage. Without significant investment and a change of course, for example, the Sahel is at risk of facing challenges in its efforts to end child marriage.



The State of the Evidence Base for Child Marriage – a Literature Review on Interventions in Africa, and a Systematic Scoping Review

While the prevalence and burden of child marriage across Africa is well documented, less attention has been paid to research on which interventions have the most impact on ending child marriage.

On day one of the workshop, Amy Harrison presented a review of current evidence on effective interventions to address child marriage in Africa, building on the Child Marriage Research to Action Network's 2023 global [Evidence Review: Child marriage interventions and research from 2020-2022](#).¹⁰

On day two, Jean Casey, Research and Humanitarian Manager at *Girls Not Brides*, summarised a recent [systematic scoping review of interventions to prevent and respond to child marriage across Africa](#).¹¹

Below is a summary of the **key areas and key takeaways** covered by both presentations.

✓ Key Takeaways

- There is a **rich and diverse set of evidence and practice to learn and take inspiration from across Africa**, with many opportunities for cross-regional learning and exchange.
- There are **key evidence gaps in specific geographies, particularly Central Africa and the Sahel**; gaps on what works to reach specific groups of girls and young people – including girls living in crisis and conflict settings, married girls, girls with disabilities, and gender non-conforming and LGBTQIA+ youth; and thematic gaps on climate change and livelihoods.
- **Activities need to be contextually grounded, but there are opportunities for the adaptation and scale-up** of proven interventions. This requires formative research, careful attention to girls' wellbeing and the potential for backlash, and engagement across the ecosystem of people in girls' lives, including husbands, families and the wider community.
- **Expanding girls' voice, choice and agency, and shifting inequitable norms, is essential yet under-utilised.** There is need to develop clearer conceptualisations and measurement of empowerment and norms-focused interventions to inform adaptation and scale-up.
- **Addressing norms, fear and stigma around girls' sexuality**, the desire to control girls' sexuality, and addressing the gendered power dynamics in girls' lives are often overlooked, but could be key to the longer-term success and sustainability of interventions.
- **Programming should take a holistic view of girls' health and wellbeing**, rather than investing in narrowly specific sectors. There are opportunities for cross-cutting approaches to prevention across child marriage, education, health, rights and gender-equitable norms.
- There is interesting **emerging evidence, and potential for scale up, on building girls' peer and wider support networks**, and investing in girls' collective power.
- **Education may be a necessary component of multi-component programming** and keeping girls in schools can protect against marriage, but a focus on the quality of education, and on connecting schooling with girls' future economic prospects is also needed.
- **"Cash plus" programming** that provides conditional cash transfers alongside gender-transformative programming components **can help to shift restrictive norms** in girls' lives.

1. Voice, choice and agency

- There is a lack of conceptual clarity and measurement of girls' empowerment approaches, which range from a focus on individual self-assertion to the relational nature of empowerment and the assets and opportunities available to girls.
- **Safe spaces** – which can be girls' and adolescents' only opportunity to feel secure, make choices and connect with a range of support services and activities – are likely to be most effective when paired with transformative interventions at the community level.
- **Peer networks** can be an important component of empowerment interventions targeting refugee girls, and peer educators can serve as role models on key topics like sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).
- **Empowerment programmes** can help to understand girls' own decision-making processes, but may have limited impact for girls who are very poor or marginalised, in places where violence is widely accepted, or where social norms severely restrict girls' voice, choice and agency.
- Empowerment programmes need to consider what is realistic for girls in particular contexts, and what opportunities there are for alternatives to marriage that offer genuine choice.
- The **involvement of girls in both the programme design and implementation** is important to the success of the intervention, but is not always prioritised.



Evidence spotlight

A 2023 [CRANK Research Spotlight](#) highlights the benefits of peer networks and designated safe spaces as important components of interventions targeting refugee girls. It suggests peer educators can also serve as role models, particularly for SRHR interventions, though implementers from refugee and other marginalised communities also face the constraints.

A 2023 [study by the GAGE research programme](#) examined the experiences of young married girls in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Jordan and Lebanon. Based on an assessment of the experiences of ever-married girls.¹² The study highlighted how married and divorced girls need opportunities to spend time with peers and friends in safe spaces that also offer access to caring adults, alongside interventions that support them to build positive relationships with husbands and mothers-in-law.

2. Social and gender norms

- For adolescent girls to exercise voice and choice, they need **economic and political opportunities and freedom** from restrictive social and gender norms.
- Programmes aiming to shift norms may have limited success if supply-side/systems do not allow for behaviour change; and change is unlikely to happen only through awareness-raising.
- While inequitable gender norms are a key driver of child marriage, there are comparatively few interventions that address these norms.
- **Safe space programming** is likely most effective when **paired with transformative interventions** at family/community level. Appropriate engagement with boys, men and decision-makers can help reduce backlash and support individuals to act as agents for change.



Evidence spotlight

In Nigeria the “Sibling Support for Adolescents in Emergencies” (SSAGE) demonstrated the potential of taking a whole-family approach to shifting attitudes around adolescent girls' agency and the acceptability of violence at the household level. Through addressing whole family units in synchronised gender-transformative curricula, SSAGE reported shifts towards more egalitarian familial relationships, decreased violence, decreased acceptability of violence and reduced stigmatisation of girls who had experienced violence.

3. Education

- Girls' education is a consistent protective factor against child marriage, with girls who leave school early being significantly more likely to marry early. Climate change, COVID-19 (and other health emergencies like Ebola) and conflict all increase the likelihood of girls leaving school early.
- Evidence on what supports married girls to re-enter the school system is limited.
- Interventions focused on the demand-side of education may be unsuccessful if supply-side factors (e.g. quality and accessibility of education) aren't also addressed
- Gender-transformative approaches, including through individual and collective political leadership and advocacy for girls' education, are likely to have greater impact.
- Schools can serve as key spaces for protecting girls and preventing marriage. However, this is less likely in contexts with high rates of early school leaving, or where marriages are girl (not parent)-driven.
- Evidence shows the positive impact of conditional cash transfers tied to education and school attendance, but these can risk excluding girls at high risk of marriage. Who receives the transfer – male or female – may influence whether transfers reduce or increase girls' risk of marriage.



Evidence spotlight

In a [2020 study](#) that examined how Ethiopia's reduction of national child marriage prevalence is reflected in different regions, the role of schools was highlighted as a critical space for child marriage prevention in the Amhara region, with girls often sharing concerns around potential marriage plans with teachers who can then advocate to parents for delaying or suspending marriage plans. This trend was not observed in Afar or Oromia regions, however, due to factors including low school attendance amongst adolescent girls, norms that restrict teachers' engagement around child marriage, and the fact that marriages are often driven more by girls themselves than by their parents.

4. Economic opportunities and livelihoods

- Building girls' life skills (alongside or instead of education) can help them access existing roles or become self-employed, but this doesn't always reduce the risk of marriage, other types of violence, or economic insecurity, particularly as roles held by girls and women are often insecure.
- Evidence on livelihoods interventions is limited; emerging evidence on the effectiveness of conditional cash transfers is largely from East Africa, with no evidence available from the Sahel.
- Girls are often more interested in life skills components than is reflected in programmes, but then can also lack the freedom or time to put those skills into action.
- Emerging evidence demonstrates that reducing economic insecurity is most effective when paired with a norms-change component; combined economic and social empowerment approaches, especially in conflict and fragile settings, can have positive impacts on attitudes and norms around GBV (including child marriage).
- Links need to be drawn between education, life skills and systems-level workplace protections, including within emergent sectors such as green entrepreneurship and eco-tourism.
- Girls' own perceptions around their career prospects can influence their willingness to stay in school, and to use contraception as a protector against early pregnancy.



Evidence spotlight:

A [2023 study in Northwest Nigeria](#) examined the influence of different dimensions of girls' empowerment (academic self-mastery, perceived career feasibility, progressive gender norms and marriage autonomy) and family planning indicators (knowledge, desired family size) on girls' future intentions to use family planning. The study found that half of the girls had no intention to use contraception, and only one-quarter intended to use contraception for both delaying/spacing and stopping pregnancies. The one dimension of empowerment that was associated with increased intention to use contraception is perceived career feasibility, suggesting girls were more willing to use contraception if they believed a career would provide them with financial security and status.

5. SRHR and mental health



- SRHR interventions may be most effective when paired with supply of contraception, and/or linked with other services.
- Discomfort around girls' sexuality, and attitudes and norms on contraception use, can undermine the success of SRHR interventions (even where contraception is available).
- SRHR interventions are likely to face significant challenges when girls' and their households' basic needs are not met, particularly in crisis settings where basic services are hard to access.
- Girls and young women can face significant barriers in accessing age-appropriate SRHR services, due to harmful attitudes, low skill levels of providers and limited knowledge about available services; taking a gender-transformative approach can help to address these barriers.
- Evidence suggests SRHR programming is more likely to be effective if delivered as part of a comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) approach, and if CSE is reflected in national policies, curricula and budgeting.
- SRHR has been a key focus of health interventions aimed at married and unmarried girls, but studies have focused less on the links between child marriage and mental health.
- Married girls and young mothers need specific focus in SRHR and mental health programming, including wrap-around services and psychosocial support. Interventions targeting married girls and young mothers have demonstrated success, yet most only target unmarried girls.



Evidence spotlight

In [Sierra Leone](#), mentoring schemes to support young mothers have been effective in reducing maternal mortality and increasing agency and wellbeing. The 2YoungLives mentorship programme supported young mothers from pregnancy to post-1 year giving birth. Of the 250+ girls mentored, no maternal deaths were reported and girls reported close relationships with mentors and increased agency and wellbeing. Success factors included: mentor support; accessing local services and support systems (mentors encourage mothers to take up antenatal care and hospital birth, re-establish family contact where appropriate, and provide practical SRHR, parenting and childbirth advice); and economic empowerment (mentees are supported with small business start-ups).

6. The polycrisis – conflict, crisis, and climate



- 9/10 countries with the highest child marriage prevalence are considered fragile, and the prevalence of child marriage in states experiencing fragility is twice the global average; UNICEF estimates that an additional 10 million girls will marry/enter a union before age 18 by 2030 as a result of COVID-19.
- There is growing evidence linking extreme weather patterns and child marriage, and evidence that extreme weather can drive marriages that are more violent, less economically secure and within which married girls have less agency.

- The intersections of age, gender and violence as a cause and consequence of insecurity are understudied, even though marriage restricts girls' engagement in community-based crisis response efforts and access to services in crisis-affected settings.
- Addressing educational barriers in crisis settings is critical; of the **224 million** school-age children and adolescents affected by crisis, 72 million are out of school, 53% of which are girls. Girls and caregivers often identify education as their top priority in displaced settings.
- There is emerging evidence on what works to reach and engage ever-married girls in the design and delivery of humanitarian action

in crisis settings, including through word of mouth, engagement with community leaders and outreach workers.

- In emergency contexts, creative SRHR programming like mobile/out-of-hours clinics, working with community health workers, and engaging girls in programme design, can help to reach girls most at risk of marriage.
- Girls' resilience in emergency contexts often depends on their access to familial, community and peer support networks, and whether interventions to support girls focus on listening to their needs and providing opportunities to strengthen their support networks.



Evidence spotlight

In Burkina Faso, **MSI's "La Famille Ideale" programme** demonstrated the effectiveness of working with community health workers and traditional birth attendants to deliver services in areas with limited facility-based post-rape care. The programme worked with young women and key influencers (including husbands and in-laws) to improve SRHR access for adolescent girls. Community-based mobilisers used participatory tools to encourage support for adolescent rural mothers to access family planning, facilitate community dialogue on issues like girls' education, and build male support for girls' access to services. MSI teams then delivered free contraceptive methods nearby. The programme saw a 24% increase in adolescent reach at outreach sites during the pilot.

7. Intersectionality and inclusion



- Girls facing multiple forms of discrimination can face heightened and unique risks around marriage, and require targeted interventions. However, interventions typically do not target the most marginalised girls, and their impact on the most marginalised girls is often unclear.
- Interventions supporting already married girls must address marital and family power dynamics in order to promote girls' agency and improvements to health and wellbeing.
- There is limited evidence on the relationship between child marriage and disability. People with disabilities often find programmes mirror the stigma they face in their everyday lives.
- There is virtually no knowledge on the links between LGBTQIA+ youth and child marriage. LGBTQI+ individuals may experience violence and abuse at home, including sexual violence to 'correct' their sexual orientation, and may marry to escape this violence.



Intervention spotlight

The **Indashyikirwa programme** in Rwanda partnered with the National Council of Persons with Disabilities (NCPD) to train programme staff on disability inclusion. An adapted version of this training was then delivered by the Rwanda Women's Network to all programme community activists, safe space facilitators, and 280 community members with disabilities. A programme evaluation recommended for programmes to focus on challenging ableist gender norms and disability-related stigma within programme teams, and to look at collaborating with local disability-focused organisations to meaningfully include and centre the needs of persons with disabilities.

8. Law and policies

- Enforced legislation can have a positive or negative impact on child marriage and girls' agency. It should be considered alongside other thematic or norms-based components.
- There are potential benefits to increasing the (often low) awareness of existing laws, and how to use them amongst girls and possible allies. However, increased awareness may not shift the norms supporting child marriage.
- Legal reform may be more effective if it is indirect. For instance, married girls' legal access to education may be improved, particularly in settings where enforcement may limit girls' agency.
- There are multiple examples of successful low-cost pilots supporting CSOs to engage in gender-responsive budgeting processes.



Evidence spotlight

The [Linda Mtoto \("Protect a Child"\) programme](#), in Kilifi County, Kenya, which was implemented by the Kenya Muslim Youth Development Organisation (KMYDO), used \$7,500 to increase the 2020-21 budget of the Kilifi county government and secure tangible costed budget lines to address child marriage in the county's annual work plan. Success included the ongoing engagement with key stakeholders, which showed the impact of child marriage and how this links to broader issues.

9. Women's rights organisations and feminist movements

- Evidence shows the role women's rights organisations (WROs) and feminist movements can play in achieving tangible progress towards gender equality. A strong, autonomous feminist movement is a significant predictor of government action on VAWG. It is less clear if this is also the case for child marriage.
- Women's rights organisations, women-led organisations and feminist movements are critically and consistently underfunded. Feminist organisations themselves have outlined what effective funding and partnerships with institutional and multilateral donors should look like.



Evidence spotlight

A [2022 report](#) by AWID, Mama Cash and Count Me In! identified key stumbling blocks that restrict funding to feminist organisations and movements, and examined funding programmes that have overcome these barriers. This included an analysis of several modalities – political commitment, eligibility criteria, programme design, funding mechanisms, governance and management – that can facilitate effective funding of feminist organisations.



Image: AAGECM World café conversation

World Cafe Conversations¹³ – Identifying What is Working, Key Gaps and Research Priorities

In the world cafe conversations, participants discussed some of the key thematic areas emerging from the evidence. Drawing on the collective expertise in the room, they considered what we know is working; where the evidence gaps are/what we want to know more about; and how research could better support understanding of key issues.

The issues discussed included:

- the polycrisis
- mental health, and sexual and reproductive health and rights
- social protection
- voice, choice, agency, and reaching marginalised girls
- education.

A brief summary of these discussions is presented in the table below.

What is working?	Where are the evidence gaps?	What are the research priorities?
1. THE POLYCRISIS		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi-sectoral approaches and coordination (Example: DRC). • Contextualised to specified types of conflict. • Moving money directly to girls. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involvement of women's rights organisations (WROs) • Sustainability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research on sustainable approaches to ending child marriage during crisis. • Engaging girls' lived experiences. • Establish frameworks to help with preparedness and programme delivery. • Governance and accountability.

2. MENTAL HEALTH AND SRHR

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• AGYW friendly services through building capacity of service providers. Integrated into CSE.• Gender transformative approaches.• Cash transfers.• Safe spaces for psychosocial support.• Multi-sectoral and multi-agency collaboration. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tracking budgets, particularly allocation to youth friendly services.• How to take an Afrocentric approach to Eurocentric models of mental health.• Understanding how to effectively integrate SRHR into Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE).• Exploring effective ways to integrate Comprehensive Sexuality Education into communities.• Assessing the impact of cash transfers on SRHR outcomes.• Strengthening capacity-building efforts for service providers in delivering adolescent girls and young women-friendly services.• How do we define what a 'safe space' is? Are these spaces safe for everyone, including girls in their many different diversities? How do we replicate safe spaces in different contexts?• How safe spaces work, and how they can be replicated in different contexts.• Appropriate ways to integrate CSE.• Multi-sectoral and male engagement?• Mental health needs within integrated referral systems.• Public and private sector collaboration. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Centring the voices of girls and young women in research and decision-making.• Exploring intersecting identities to better understand the nuanced ways in which different forms of discrimination and oppression intersect and impact the wellbeing of adolescent girls and young women.• Disseminating research findings in consumable ways. Prioritise making findings on SRHR and mental health accessible and consumable to a broad audience.• Embracing multidisciplinary and research efforts in SRHR and mental health. |
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3. SOCIAL PROTECTION

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cash transfers, particularly when given to women.• Strengthening child protection systems. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evaluating the effectiveness of social protection programmes in preventing child marriage in different contexts.• Considering the impact of inflation on cash transfer amounts.• Establishing frameworks for preparedness and effective programme delivery.• Ensuring governance and accountability in social protection initiatives.• Examining effective targeting strategies in social protection interventions. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Research on the role of child protection systems in mitigating gender-based violence. |
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4. VOICE, CHOICE, AGENCY AND REACHING

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|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender transformative approaches. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interventions that work for the most marginalised and hardest to reach girls. • Investigating the role of safe spaces in providing psychosocial support for girls and young women. • Evaluating the effectiveness of economic empowerment and SRHR interventions for marginalised girls. • Designing multi-layered and holistic approaches to empower marginalised girls. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging girls and incorporating their lived experiences into research and programming. • Researching systemic challenges that contribute to the vulnerability of marginalised girls. • Centring the voices of girls and young women in research and decision-making. • Exploring the intersecting identities of girls and how this impacts on child marriage. • Research that focuses on disseminating research findings in an engaging, accessible way. |
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5. EDUCATION

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investment in quality education, and education that is free for all. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring of education programmes that support married girls return to school. This process is complicated in some contexts by discriminatory policies that restrict the access of girls who are pregnant (and/or young mothers) to school. • The cost-effectiveness of different education interventions. • Investigating the role of community advocacy in promoting education for girls. • Existence of safe spaces: how safe are they? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marginalised girls: how to address their needs within education? • Multidimensional studies to address the needs of marginalised girls. • The most accessible/effective ways to conduct research with this group. |
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GENERAL

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi-layered, multi-dimensional, and holistic interventions are the most impactful. • Economic empowerment as part of a multi-component package. • Involvement of women's rights organisations (WROs) in child marriage prevention efforts. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessing the effectiveness of sanctions in discouraging child marriage. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disseminating research findings to communities in accessible formats. • Emphasising multi-disciplinary approaches in research on child marriage. • Understanding effective collaboration between public and private sectors in addressing child marriage. • Ensuring accountability in joint efforts to combat child marriage. • Tracking budgets and allocations to youth-friendly services. |
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Participant Presentations on Existing Research, Data, and Evidence

Throughout the workshop, participants were invited to present their own research and practice. These sessions were designed to facilitate learning from the latest evidence on efforts to address child marriage and support married girls. How can we strengthen and further target policy interventions? And how can child marriage programme outcomes be improved?

Day 1: Child marriage and other harmful practices –a regional research update

On the first day of the workshop, this regional research update drew lessons from multi-country studies on what prevents child marriage, what interventions work to prevent female genital mutilation, and the impact of COVID-19 on child marriage and FGM. Presentations included:

Presentation 1:

Evidence/research from multi-country analyses of adolescent datasets (MICS, VACS) on what prevents child marriage. *Bothaina Eltigani, Accelerate Hub team.*

Presentation 2:

The perceived effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on female genital mutilation/cutting and child or forced marriages in Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia and Senegal. *Tamary Esho, Amref International University.*

Presentation 3:

What interventions are effective to prevent or respond to female genital mutilation? A review of existing evidence from 2008–2020. *Dennis Matanda, Population Council.*

Key lessons emerging from presentations included:

Food security, positive gender norms and good parenting are accelerators for preventing violence against children and child marriage

In Namibia, Kenya, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Eswatini and Nigeria the Accelerator Hub utilised two sets of surveys – the [Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey](#) (MICS) and the [Violence Against Children and Youth Surveys](#) (VACs) – to understand ‘accelerators’ for preventing violence, and for adolescents’ wellbeing. Across all countries, three accelerators were identified as having the most impact in preventing violence against children, including preventing child marriage: positive gender norms, food security, and good parenting.

In Namibia, Zimbabwe and Lesotho, the presence of all three of these accelerators, and in Kenya the presence of two accelerators may be linked to greater risk reduction of child marriage as compared to the presence of one or none of these accelerators. It was also found that when a certain number of accelerators were reached (around three in most cases), there was a plateau in the reduction of risk. The study demonstrates that policies and programming that focus on the economic strengthening of households, youth-friendly services and mental health support, and that work to improve school safety, supportive parenting and caregiving, and comprehensive sexuality education, are all likely to support further improvements in adolescent wellbeing outcomes.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on rates of child marriage and female genital mutilation varied across different contexts

It was widely understood that the COVID-19 pandemic increased the rates of both child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM). The Amref Health University's multi-country survey – carried out in Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, and Senegal – looked at how the perception of this increase varied across different contexts. The study established that in Kenya, there was a perception that the pandemic had significantly contributed to an increase in both FGM and early forced child marriage. In Uganda – where the study happened before the FGM cutting season had started – the COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to a minimal increase in FGM/C cases and a significant increase in CEFM cases. In Ethiopia and Senegal, the pandemic was seen as having had a minimal effect on changes in FGM, cutting and child early forced marriage cases.

To prevent and respond to harmful practices such as FGM, use evidence-informed programming that works at multiple levels – systems, services, community, and individual

The Population Council's review of evidence (2008–2020) of what works to prevent and respond to female genital mutilation (FGM) assessed the quality and strength of evidence generated by studies that have evaluated interventions for the prevention of, or response to, FGM. The evidence review included FGM interventions evaluated by studies deemed to be of moderate and high quality, and determined which are most promising. It categorised these interventions by using the global theory of change of the UN joint programme to end FGM, and a compendium of indicators for measuring the effectiveness of FGM interventions, and looked at interventions across the ecological model – at the systems, service, community, and individual level.

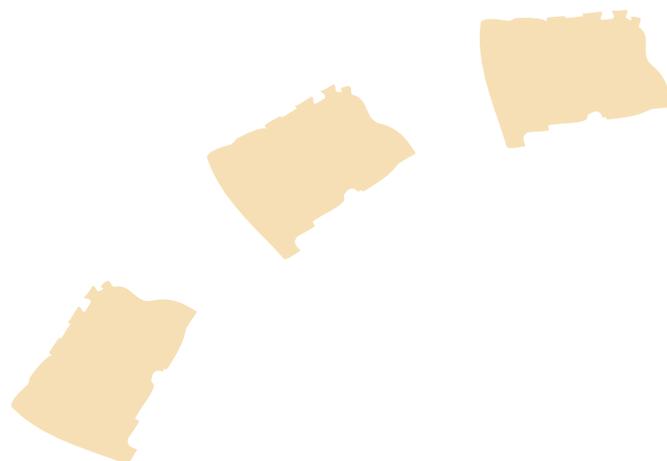
At the systems level, the review looked at the enactment and implementation of anti-FGM legislation. It found that legislation, when accompanied by political will, sensitisation, and locally appropriate enforcement mechanisms, can reduce female genital mutilation, while laws implemented as a single intervention can be

counterproductive: they can alienate beneficiaries of health services, reduce the age of cutting, and increase secrecy in performing FGM.

At the service level, there is still limited evidence on health provider training to improve the capacity for preventing and treating FGM. Evidence is also limited on the viability of rescue centres as a strategy to end FGM: they offer a short-term solution of housing girls and women running away from FGM.

At the community level, the review examined programming in health education, community engagement, media, public declarations, working with religious or cultural leaders, and the conversion of excisors. It established that health education and community dialogues with parents and religious leaders can change attitudes towards FGM. Furthermore, media and social marketing efforts are effective in changing social norms and attitudes towards abandoning FGM and, in some cases, reducing FGM prevalence. On the other hand, efforts to convert, and/or provide excisors with alternative sources of income, are not effective in preventing FGM.

At the individual level, the reviewed studies ascertained that educating mothers can reduce the number of girls being cut. Educating girls also leads to improved knowledge and changing attitudes towards FGM. There are several programmes that use alternative rites of passage (ARPs), and the review showed that while these can lead to increased knowledge, for instance about the consequences of FGM, there is no evidence yet that they lead to prevention.



Day 2: What works to end child marriage

On the second day of the workshop, a panel discussed some of the interventions and evidence around what is working to end child marriage. Presentations included:¹⁴

Presentation 1:

Evidence on what supports young women who become mothers/ are married early. *Silinganisiwe Dzumbunu, Accelerate Hub.*

Presentation 2:

Breakthrough Generation Initiative – an evaluation of the effectiveness on TOSTAN's community empowerment programme. *Godfrey Okumu, Tostan.*

Presentation 3:

18+ programme on ending Child marriage. *Lynn Chinene, Plan International Zambia.*

Presentation 4:

Experience sharing on how girls, including already married girls, are advocating against child marriage in Zimbabwe. *Loveness Mudzuru, Rozaria Memorial Trust.*

Key lessons emerging from the panel included:

To support pregnant girls and young mothers in school consider their interlinking relationships and networks – and build active support in the school system

In South Africa, the Department of Basic Education and the Accelerate Hub partnered to undertake research on the implementation of the Department of Basic Education Policy on the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy in Schools. In a collaborative, systematic research project, they conceptualised what pregnant learners and young mother learners need to return to school successfully. What might a 'support package' look like? They adopted a three-pronged approach: reviewing the latest evidence from existing reviews and South African interventions; conducting quantitative analysis of data from a longitudinal cohort study with over 1,000 adolescent mothers and their children (who were part of the 'Hey Baby' project); and conducting participatory research activities with an Eastern Cape-based teen advisory group that included young people with recent or current secondary schooling, pregnancy, and parenting experience.

The findings demonstrated that access to school whilst pregnant, access to daycare creche services, access to youth-friendly health services, and building confidence and self-efficacy all had an

impact on school progression and school return, as well as future condom use. The qualitative results also demonstrated the importance of peer relationships, and supportive school environments free from stigma and discrimination. The study recommended creating active support in the school system: learning environments that are positive, enabling and supportive; strategic partnerships, and active referral networks, with the health and social sectors; and support networks of pregnant and young mother learners.

Prioritise community relationships, community-led change, respect, wellbeing and trust to make progress on the abandonment of harmful practices

In Mali, Gambia, Guinea, and Guinea Bissau, Tostan's Breakthrough Generation programme utilised a relational wellbeing framework that reinforces the capacities of communities to bring about systemic social change from within. Tostan places importance on building relationships with communities over time, and the organisation highlights the process of communities developing their own vision for change. They have observed that this emphasis on relational wellbeing also supports and reinforces functional wellbeing. The programme emphasises multi-sectoral approaches (working towards changes in health, education

and economic empowerment); working from the community's broadest vision; connecting with traditional values; and using methodologies of broad inclusion. The programme also emphasises that efforts on identifying and changing social norms which are seen as coming from outside the community will often result in resistance and backlash.

The programme reported a wide range of positive changes across communities. They included an increase in women's voice, agency and leadership; increased value of education for girls and women; and a strengthening of new positive social norms that support the abandonment of harmful practices, including female genital cutting (FGC), child marriage and corporal punishment. There were some significant differences across communities in rates of abandonment of harmful practices. Evidence suggests that social cohesion, mutual respect, peaceful relations and trust are conducive to enabling communities to make dramatic progress in the abandonment of harmful practices. Conversely, high levels of violence and discord at inception in the villages are indications that the road to wellbeing may be longer.

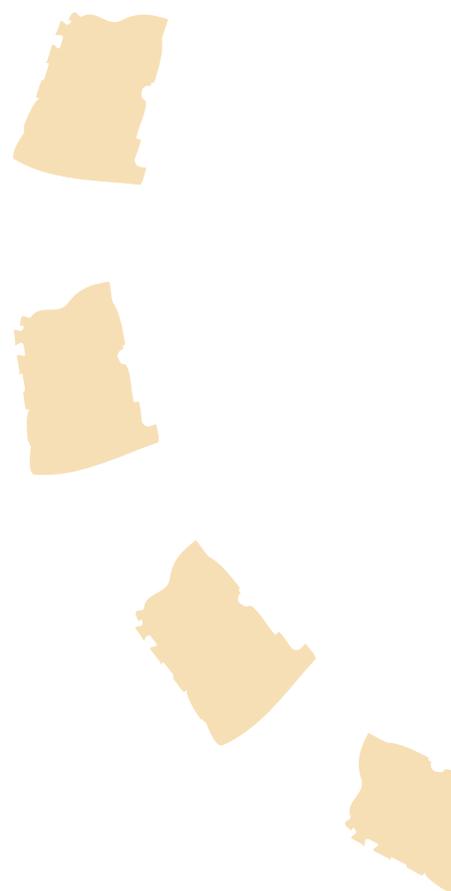
Invest in initiatives to support the mental health and wellbeing of survivors – and create culturally relevant, intergenerational spaces for knowledge and experience sharing, and healing

In Zimbabwe, a strong partnership with girl and survivors promotes girls' and young women's wellbeing through addressing mental health and child marriage. The Rozaria Memorial Trust works on research and advocacy-based initiatives to co-create programmes with young women to improve their health, education outcomes, and the prevention of child marriage. One innovation used is to support the empowerment and wellbeing of girls in the 'Nhangas safe space'. In Shona culture, the Nhangas is a word for the room where girls sleep, and it was traditionally used as a space to prepare girls for marriage – including tips on how to satisfy and take care of her husband. The Rozaria Memorial Trust has reclaimed this as a transformational space that respects the wishes, choices, rights and

dignity of girls and women. It is women and girl-led and offers an inclusive space in nature for girls and women to talk and to heal.

Use a girl-centred approach

Plan international's +18 Ending Child, Early, and Forced Marriage and Unions Programme in Middle East, Eastern and Southern Africa utilises a girl-centred approach to address the drivers of child marriage in various contexts. Through empowerment, advocacy, community engagement, economic initiatives, and evidence-based interventions, the programme has made significant progress in ending child, early, and forced marriages and empowering girls and young women in the programme region.



Learning From the Latest Evidence:

✓ Key Takeaways

- **Child marriage prevalence in the Africa region is reducing slowly – from 35% to 32%** over a ten-year period. Due mainly to population growth, child marriage burden in the region is projected to increase substantially over the next decade.
- There is a rich and diverse set of evidence and practice to learn from across the region. **To accelerate progress, there is a need to co-ordinate efforts, learn from what is working, and rapidly scale up efforts** to apply that evidence to policy and practice.
- Efforts that **focus on girls' holistic wellbeing, that build peer and support networks**, that strengthen their collective power, that shift the gendered power dynamics in girls' lives, and that involve girls in both programme design and implementation have all been shown to be effective, but are often not prioritised, or implemented consistently.
- There is **compelling evidence on education as an element of multi-component and cash-plus programming**, both of which have the potential to be scaled up. But there is a need to expand the evidence base to other regions, as current evidence is mostly concentrated in East Africa.
- **Research has helped to identify 'accelerators' that can be applied at the national level to make significant progress on adolescent wellbeing, including preventing child marriage.** Initiatives such as these have the potential to contribute to reducing child marriage prevalence at the population level.
- It is possible to make significant progress on eliminating harmful practice across whole communities, as has been demonstrated by organisations such as Tostan. But **changing harmful practices to positive social norms requires investment in building trust, relational wellbeing, and community-led change processes.**
- **A focus on prevention should not mean forgetting about girls who are already married and/or pregnant and young mothers** – and more needs to be done to support them. Girls can be supported back into school if they have the right enabling environment, services and support networks. Survivors should be able to access support and healing spaces, and innovations such as the Nhanga Safe Space can help to provide contextually relevant spaces for girls to share experiences, build peer networks and support, and heal.



SECTION 3:

**Partnering for
Stronger Linkages
Between Research
and Practitioners**



Partnering for Stronger Linkages Between Research and Practitioners

Throughout the workshop, there were discussions on how to strengthen the links between research and practice. Key concerns included how we can ensure that practice informs what needs researching, and how to approach the research; how to ensure that evidence informs how we programme and prioritise; and how research can be utilised to effectively drive policy and advocacy.

Participants shared strategies and projects that included good collaboration, key challenges they faced in building effective partnerships between researchers and practitioners, and ideas for how

to further strengthen links between research and practice. There was also a focus on what it takes to conduct ethical research, and establish equitable partnerships.

Prioritising, resourcing, and carrying out ethical research

In a session on equitable partnerships, three participants reflected on how to centre the safety and wellbeing of women and girls, navigate power dynamics, and build effective collaboration. The session went on to gather inputs from the group about their own experiences navigating power dynamics in research partnerships, and ways to support better collaboration.

Philomena Makena, from UN WOMEN, reflected on centring the safety and well-being of girls and women during the research process. She shared some of the key issues to think about when conducting survivor-centred research, and used the example of a multi-country study on harmful practices, which was conducted by UN Women and collected data in 10 countries that had the highest burden and prevalence. Researchers had to consider how to mobilise participants, including traditional leaders, and needed to think about the ecosystem of the family, of cultural institutions and of the survivors themselves – who should always be the first priority. It is important to think about how to deal with disclosures, how to build trust, and how to co-create the research with girls and with survivors.

Naver Chayelesa, from the PanAfrican Alliance On Ending Child Marriage (PAAECM), shared reflections on how effective collaboration can generate evidence and inform policies and programmes. When you collaborate with practitioners, researchers and policy makers, you can generate more robust findings.

Collaboration increases reliability. Sometimes, we can go into communities with our own agendas, but good collaboration helps to contextualise that evidence. It is also important to consider what happens beyond the research. In Zambia, for instance, a lot of research takes place – but the results will sometimes just sit in government offices. Effective collaboration can help with utilisation, implementation, and transparency of research results. It can also help with efficient utilisation of limited resources. Peer reviews and quality assurance are essential to enhance the quality of both the programming and the research.

Dr. Chimaraoke Izugbara, from the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), reflected on power dynamics within research. Power manifests itself in ‘research agenda setting’ – and this agenda is often set by universities in the ‘global North’, before it is cascaded down. This means priorities and agenda can both change regularly. Major discussions that take place in places like Chatham House find their way, by diplomatic means, to the global South.

Often, those issues are related to the economic interests of the global North. On the other hand, methodologies that are set in the South do not get as much airtime in academic publications. The 'big journals' are not based in the global South, and a strong grasp on the English language is required to be able to publish in them. It is also expensive: publishing in the Lancet can cost up to \$5,000 and it is not always possible for someone from, say, Makerere University, in Kampala, Uganda, to publish in this journal. Researchers end up publishing in lesser known journals, but such papers tend to get cited less regularly, and are not as likely to get picked up by policy makers. Another dynamic to consider is how lived experiences show up in the room where research is being discussed. For many academic audiences, there isn't much consideration

of policy implications: research is about the science, and the voices of the researched get muted in these processes. Research is not about the individual, but about aggregating voices to make it have meaning for an audience; this is how power can be asserted in very silent ways. Dr Chimaraoke also emphasised the importance of developing African philanthropy. The more outside funding is relied on, the more local voices are muted. The research process itself offers people the power to think about their own lives, and it is important to think about Afrocentric responses to big, and often sensitive, current issues, such as LGBTQI or abortion issues, where an evidence based, African-centric response is needed, but does not currently exist.

Reflections and examples shared from the wider group included:

✓ Key Takeaways

- There was awareness of the need to be conscious of power dynamics in all groups, and to utilise the strengths of all partners involved. It is important to be watchful of who is leading the outputs and who is collecting the data. Capacity-building needs to be a part of your research.
- There are often unequal power dynamics when it comes to the acceptability and uptake of research findings. For example, findings can be perceived as being more acceptable when they come from UN Agencies.
- There is a lot to learn from how other sectors engage with youth advocates and communities. For example, the HIV sector held one of the first unique youth conferences, where young people worked on their own research and abstracts, before presenting in a forum where government representatives were present.
- It was questioned whether it is possible to have truly equitable partnerships when funding is involved. The funder brings in the money, and the community is at the receiving end, so this dynamic will always be there.
- At UN Women, the model of operation has been changed to allow more time for co-creation and for accompaniment. This can be seen as painful, as results may be delayed, but it is one way to allow for more equal partnerships.



Diversifying the Research Base

Presentations in this session highlighted key successes, approaches and lessons in diversifying the research base and valuing different types of research. Expanding the research base will help to develop a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of what works to end child marriage. Presentations included:

Presentation 1:

A Feminist Vision for Ending Child Marriage in East Africa that was developed out of a Delphi study on Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings in East Africa- Integrating the response to child marriage. *Loveness Mudzuru.*

Presentation 2:

Inter-sectoral collaboration. *Crystal Onyekachukwu Ikanih Musa, the Global Partnership for Education.*

Presentation 3:

From Data to Action: Use of Data for Program and Policy. *Karen Austrian, Population Council.*

Presentation 4:

Young feminist research initiatives on SRHR in Kenya. *Sally Wuodi.*

Key lessons that emerged during this session included:

Why it is important to partner with feminist and women-led organisations on child marriage research in East Africa

The Rozaria Memorial Trust recently conducted a two-year research initiative – in partnership with the Women’s Refugee Commission and King’s College London – to capture the perspectives and experiences of feminist and women-led actors on how to end child marriage using the Delphi methodology. The research sought to build consensus on the enablers, barriers, and collaborative working practices to end child marriage. It focused on fostering equitable engagement with key actors to identify shared priorities and gaps in preventing and responding to child marriage in the region. The research process was designed as a multi-stage participatory action research, involving 80 feminist and women-led actors across East Africa. The process involved initial qualitative workshops and three rounds of the Delphi survey, and the methodology became a catalyst for building momentum, and generating a shared agenda for action to end child marriage.

The key themes emerging from the research included education, justice, awareness raising, community engagement, and collaborative working. These themes formed the foundation for their new feminist vision and a five-year roadmap. Five target

outcomes were identified to guide efforts until 2027 which included:

- strengthening disaster prevention and response mechanisms and improved functioning and coordination of national systems critical for women and girls
- promoting evidence-based gender transformative services
- strengthening justice systems
- feminist and women’s rights actors who are well trained, well resourced, and well positioned to transform practice and policies that drive humanitarian preparedness and response
- ensuring adequate funding for child marriage prevention.

The research also highlighted the significance of multisector coordination and collaboration in preventing child marriage and transforming gender norms. Participants emphasised the need for empowering girls, offering gender-transformative approaches, and using accountability mechanisms. Collaborative efforts across sectors fostered collective voices and ensured better implementation of the child marriage laws and policies. To further enhance collaboration, the research recommended engaging grassroots organisations, providing equitable funding across sectors, facilitating knowledge sharing to bridge communication gaps, and to amplify girls’ voices in collaborative spaces and address the power imbalances between grassroots and larger organisations.

Share evidence and best practices, scale innovative pilots, and use agile feedback loops to refine strategies and ensure evidence-based action

The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) demonstrates the power of a diverse multi-stakeholder partnership to end child marriage. They are dedicated to promoting gender equality and ending child marriage through various initiatives and investments in lower-income countries. GPE's approach involves hardwiring gender equality into their education programmes and working towards broader societal goals. They have invested significantly in activities that promote gender equality, with 82% of grants to countries mainstreaming gender equality in their activities. GPE has also created the Girls' Education Accelerator to support girls' education opportunities, including addressing child marriage as a core indicator.

To promote knowledge exchange and capacity development, GPE focuses on gender equality as one of six thematic areas through the Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX). GPE actively supports partner countries in building equitable, inclusive, and resilient education systems fit for the 21st century. For instance, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, they use agile feedback loops to put evidence into action and continuously refine their education strategies.

GPE provides support for civil society organisations through the Education Out Loud fund to advocate against child marriage and shape education policies that meet community needs. They collaborate with various stakeholders, including the private sector, to advocate for girls' education and address child marriage in countries like Kenya and South Sudan. In South Sudan, GPE supported the development of a gender-responsive national curriculum and conducted a mapping exercise to target interventions for vulnerable out-of-school children, including those at risk of child marriage.

It is possible to use data for the scale-up of multi-sectoral approaches via local government infrastructure

The Adolescent Girls Initiative-Kenya (AGI-K) is a research programme by the Population Council funded by FCDO, Elrha, and CIFF that aims to assess what package of multi-sectoral, multi-level interventions has the most impact for adolescent

girls and whether early interventions can improve longer term outcomes. Four packages of different intervention components were tested, and the components included a community-based violence prevention programme, an education conditional cash transfer (CCT), health focused girl's empowerment clubs and wealth creation for girls via financial education and savings activities.

The first phase of the programme ran from 2014 to 2020, followed by an extension and testing phase to then sustainably scale up the programme in Wajir Kenya, via the local county government. Two years after the intervention, the endline survey in 2019 showed significant improvements in school enrolment, literacy, numeracy, and delayed marriage and pregnancy for girls who participated in the programme. The testing phase aims to identify the most cost-effective version of AGI-K that can be scaled up by the Wajir County Government, and results showed that impact was most significant for the groups that had received the programme combination of community conversations, girls' empowerment groups, and conditional cash transfers over four terms (with higher amounts going to girls who are out of school). Key principles for designing the intervention components include scalability, integration with government and community structures, and cost-effectiveness. The AGI-K program is being domiciled under the Wajir County Ministry of Health, and delivered in coordination with Ministries of Education and Gender. The research continues to assess the long-term effects of the interventions to understand their sustainability and cost-effectiveness.

The research highlights the importance of a multi-sectoral, multi-level approach in delaying marriage in the context of Wajir, and demonstrates how data can be used for effective scale-up through existing local government infrastructure.

Establish and strengthen diverse partnerships to improve research outcomes and child marriage policy

In Kenya, diverse and multi-stakeholder partnerships have been instrumental in strengthening child marriage policy and research outcomes in various contexts. A young feminist research initiative on SRHR demonstrates the effectiveness of using the 'SCAMPERM' methodology (subvert – combine – adapt – modify/ maximise/minimise – purpose – eliminate – reverse/reengineer/rearrange – magnify) – which emphasises intersectionality and inclusivity. The

approach involves challenging power structures, fostering interdisciplinary collaborations, adapting research methodologies, and prioritising genuine engagement with marginalised communities. The goal is to centre the voices and experiences of diverse groups, amplify their perspectives, and

advocate for policies that address the intersecting barriers they face in accessing SRHR information and services. By recognising and valuing diverse knowledge systems and collaborating with local organisations and activists, research efforts can be more inclusive and impactful.

Translating Research Findings Into Policy and Practice

The presentations in this session looked at approaches for ensuring that evidence can translate into action, and how to effectively use evidence to drive national policy and advocacy on ending child marriage.

The session emphasised the importance of partnerships between researchers and practitioners to provide sophisticated tools and skills that empower youth activists to engage in credible advocacy. It looked at the importance of research being specific to the context and informed by local-level data to facilitate contextual responses. It was stressed that policy needs to be agile and responsive to changing dynamics and evidence, and that, by closing the data, access, and understanding gaps, research can inform policy and programmatic responses to combat child marriage more effectively. **Presentations included:**

Presentation 1:

Education and Child Marriage in Francophone West Africa. *Aicha Ba.*

Presentation 2:

Child Marriage and the Law in Southern Africa. *Admark Moyo.*

Presentation 3:

Orchid Project's Research Agenda in relation to Policy Change. *Shannon Thompson.*

Key lessons from the session included:

Invest in youth-led approaches to drive advocacy, policy implementation and budgeting for ending child marriage and investing in girls' education

In Niger and Burkina Faso, the youth-led research initiatives of Education Our Loud – supported by LASDEL and *Girls Not Brides* – empower young researchers to engage in credible advocacy. The research served as a tool for knowledge brokerage and visibility of child marriage and girls' education issues in their communities. The evidence-based research on Ending Child Marriage in West Africa,

in partnership with Save the Children, analysed policy implementation and budgeting in Burkina Faso and Niger. Advocates used the results to urge governments to improve policies and funding commitments to end child marriage and promote girls' education. The region's protracted humanitarian crises hamper efforts to end child marriage and promote education. In Burkina Faso and Niger, young researchers documented the experiences of displaced girls, their education rights, and their vulnerability to child marriage, providing evidence for advocacy by coalitions on issues like displacement, insecurity, and gaps in government responses.

Close the gaps in implementing the national laws and regional protocols that protect girls and young people from child marriage

The SADC (Southern African Development Community) Protocols on Gender and Development, Children's Rights, and Ending Child Marriage aim to promote gender equality, protect children's rights, and eliminate harmful practices, like child marriage, in the region. The protocols emphasise the importance of non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, and child participation.

However, challenges remain in implementing these protocols effectively. Harmonisation of laws between international and domestic norms, especially regarding the minimum age of marriage, is lacking in some countries. Gender discriminatory marriage laws that allow for different minimum ages for boys and girls perpetuate inequality. Exceptions to the Minimum Age of Consent to Marriage (MACM) in some countries undermine the protection of girls and can lead to child marriage. Affirmative action measures for girls are needed to address this historical marginalisation and promote their rights.

Research and programming in the region should be guided by a rights-based approach, with a focus on non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, and child participation. Harmonizing laws, eliminating gender discriminatory provisions, and addressing exceptions to the MACM are crucial steps in the fight against child marriage in the SADC region.

Use local level data to inform policy and programmatic responses that are context specific

Policy and programmatic responses to child marriage, FGM/C and other forms of violence against girls need to be specific to each context and informed by local-level data. Agility and responsiveness are essential in policy-making to address the nuances and changing dynamics of FGM/C and child marriage. Orchid Project's research strategy aims to close three gaps: the data gap, access gap, and understanding gap. Using data to drive responses in Mali, for example, involves engaging with religious leaders at local and policy-making levels, as there is a strong connection between the belief that FGM/C is a religious requirement and its continuation. While there has been a decrease in prevalence among women aged 15-49 in Mali, the prevalence among girls aged 10-14 is increasing, and the practice is shifting from urban to rural areas.

Additionally, linking research to action requires considering absolute numbers, prioritising resources based on subregional and local data, and identifying communities that are being left behind. It also involves developing contextually adaptive programming and policy, ensuring alignment between donor policies and contextual evidence, and engaging subregional governments to implement evidence-based responses. By closing the knowledge gaps and promoting evidence-based approaches, policy and programming can effectively address FGM/C and child marriage, while considering the contextual realities in different regions and communities.

Image: AAGECM Session facilitation



Packaging, Translating and Disseminating Research Findings

To ensure that research outcomes have a meaningful impact on policies, programmes, and interventions aimed at addressing child marriage, researchers need to communicate their findings in plain language. Information needs to be made relevant and understandable to diverse audiences, including policymakers, community leaders, and advocates. This synergy ensures that research is aligned with practical needs and can lead to more contextually appropriate strategies.

The CRANK - a platform for global research coordination

The Child Marriage Research to Action Network (the CRANK) was formed by *Girls Not Brides* and the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme in 2021, with the objectives of strengthening coordination and harmonisation of an equitable global child marriage research agenda. The CRANK brings different child marriage actors together to share and discuss the latest evidence on priority learning topics, encourage evidence uptake by policymakers and practitioners, and serves as a knowledge management mechanism for tracking ongoing and upcoming research.

In this last day of the workshop, we discussed the experiences of participants engaging with the network, disseminating their research findings and using the space to learn from peers to inform their work going forward.

The background of the CRANK

In 2019, *Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage*, the World Health Organisation, and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)-United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Global Programme to End Child Marriage brought together researchers, policy makers and programmers to review the evidence on child marriage, in recognition of these continued evidence gaps and the common failure to use existing evidence to inform policy and programming. The meeting had three aims: to review progress made in addressing research priorities on ending child marriage and supporting married girls; to identify an updated set of research priorities for the next five years and the rationale for these priorities; and to identify how best to support the dissemination and uptake of research findings and execution of the new research agenda.

It was clear there was a need to facilitate greater interaction and coordination between these actors, and to fill priority research gaps - the CRANK was set up to meet this need.

For more on this please see: <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/resource-centre/child-marriage-global-research-meeting/>

The CRANK's ways of working

The CRANK aims to disseminate the latest research in a variety of accessible formats. It convenes quarterly calls where there is a space for researchers to walk through their evidence. These calls also aim to make sure that the language is clear and accessible, and that the 'and so what' question is answered – with key takeaways for advocates, policymakers and practitioners. The space is also used to ask each other questions, and to try to build shared dialogue. What are we contributing to, and to what impact? Translation is available, though the moderation is primarily in English (this is something the team are trying to work on.) The CRANK puts a focus on using different types of evidence, and addresses the challenge of getting people to value different types of evidence: community-based research and more qualitative pieces are given equal weight and consideration. Evidence-to-action piece is emphasised, with bi-annual research spotlights, for example on the polycrisis, and summaries with key takeaways and actions. These are translated into French and Spanish. After each quarterly call, the meeting's recordings, presentations, and reports are made available on the website.

Sharing Research and Disseminating Findings – the Experiences of Researchers and Practitioners

Contextualising research outcomes: “Its a big table of different voices!”

Silinganisiwe Dzumbunu, Accelerate Hub, shared that their accelerator analysis started around the same time as the CRANK, in 2020/2021. One of the challenges they faced as a team was how to disseminate, and to reach platforms that are outside of academic spaces. Initially, the team shared their research from Ethiopia, and having a platform that brought together policymaker and practitioners to the same virtual table, especially during the difficult period of COVID-19, felt incredibly valuable to them. At the time, the team were looking at the impact of the health extension programme on various adolescent outcomes, including child marriage, and

there were various gaps that they couldn't explain – contextual issues that were not in the data they were using. Through the CRANK, the team was given feedback from practitioners in Ethiopia about factors they hadn't considered. They were then able to acknowledge those gaps in the research, and think about how those factors might influence the outcomes. Silinga shared that she always tried to join the calls, as it provides an opportunity to get to know the emerging evidence, and hear from the whole region: “It's a big table of different voices!”

Cultivating a practice of research, learning from other's methodologies and listening to youth advocates: “Our participation is not symbolic.”

Aïcha Awa BA shared that in West and central Africa there are a number of barriers both to accessing and disseminating research. In part, this is an issue of language, with the majority of platforms being facilitated in English. While people in English-speaking places ought to make research more accessible, the issue is also that there is not enough research being generated in West and central Africa itself, and a similar history of publication does not exist. Working on youth-led research on child marriage and the polycrisis, her team was keen to hear from other regions on what they were learning about the polycrisis and conflict, and to see the methodologies being used. The CRANK was an important platform for this learning. Her team also pioneered the first budget analysis, something no one had done in West and central Africa before. Aïcha travelled to Bangladesh, where she saw this in practice, found a model laying out the how and the why, and discovered ways to engage with the government and how to manage evidence uptake.

Aïcha reflected on how important it is to move beyond ‘panic narratives’, to speak to people's reasoning, and to talk about the problem as a structural issue. There are so many young advocates who are dedicated to the task, but they are not being listened to. “Our participation is not symbolic,” one young advocate said. “Don't call us at the end of the process” We have internalised that youth participation is a service to them, but young people are going to take the lead in the future. They know the issues in their communities better than we do and have the tools to talk about them in a credible manner. It is important to have people who are very well trained to do research, but it is also important to have the reflection of ‘whose knowledge counts?’, and value the lived experiences of what child marriage is doing in their own communities. It is also important to consider dissemination: we need to think about how to package this knowledge so it is accessible for decision makers, as well as communities. Space and funding need to be made available so knowledge can be packaged in a way that is accessible to everyone.

Strengthening Research Partnerships, and Translating Evidence into Practice and Policy

✓ Key Takeaways

- **Invest in co-creation** – it can take longer, but will result in better research results and products.
- **Develop diverse, cross-sectoral partnerships**, including women and girl-led organisations, local and national government structures, NGOs, research institutes, service providers, and youth advocates.
- **Research** – when it is being implemented with attention to power dynamics and meaningful involvement/ leadership of young people and community members – **can be a transformative process**. It provides participants with the opportunity to reflect on their own lives, and document their own stories.
- **Working with youth advocates, survivors and grass-roots organisations can help to drive evidence-based advocacy** and support evidence up-take.
- Use **evidence to drive policy responses**, including budget analysis and domestic resource allocation.
- Use **local-level data to drive contextual responses**, and to support sustainable the scale-up of evidence-based approaches.
- **Prioritise the wellbeing and safety of girls, survivors and other community members**, and always include time and funding for dealing with disclosures, including providing psychosocial support and making links with relevant service providers.
- **Consider the power dynamics of the research process**: whose voices are being heard? Who has been forgotten? Are the voices of the researched represented or muted?
- **Shift and disrupt the power hierarchies in research** – from where funding comes from to what is being published.
- **Exchange knowledge and learnings across the region**, and learn from each other's practice and methodologies.
- **Aim for research to answer the 'and so what?' question**. How does this research translate from evidence into action? And invest time and resource in effective, accessible dissemination.
- Create **accessible, useable products for dissemination** – for policymakers and for community members.
- Value **different types of research and knowledge**, including practice-generated and qualitative knowledge products.
- **Diversify the languages and geographies that research is available in**, and ensure research reports and products are available in multiple languages.



SECTION 4:

**Where Next?
Priorities, Synergies,
and Opportunities
Moving Forward**



Where Next? Priorities, Synergies, and Opportunities Moving Forward

Over the course of the workshop, participants worked together to identify key priorities for future research and interventions, and to explore synergies and opportunities for collaboration. They also discussed how priorities diverged across different sub-regions.

This section presents a collective of key priorities on four key topics:

1 Research themes	2 The process of conducting research	3 Increasing the impact and uptake of research	4 Recommendations to relevant stakeholders
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The idea is that these initially identified priorities can provide the starting point for developing a set of shared priorities and a regional research agenda that can support the work of the AAGECM going forward.

The Start of a Shared Research Agenda – Thematic Areas to Prioritise

Theme 1: Polycrisis and emerging trends (including urbanisation)

Key priorities

- Addressing child marriage in urban settings. In the face of urbanisation and compounding crises, we need to consider the drivers and interventions that operate in these complex environments, and start to better understand the unique challenges and opportunities for intervention.
- Exploring how climate change interacts with child marriage in climate-affected regions, with the aim of building resilience and empowering girls to lead change in their communities and promote advocacy for climate resilience and child marriage prevention.



Theme 2: Laws and policies

Key priorities

- Investigating the unintended consequences of existing laws to inform legal reforms aimed at protecting girls.
- Identifying areas for policy improvement to create robust legal frameworks that protect girls' rights.
- Discerning the role of culture in ending harmful practices like FGM and child marriage in different contexts.
- Exploring the link between budget processes and child marriage – ensuring adequate resource allocation for effective programming and advocating and building evidence for effective budget process to address child marriage.



Theme 3: What works to end child marriage

Key priorities

- Focusing on research to identify effective interventions on what works end to child marriage.
- Advocating for increased funding and support for research initiatives particularly in West Africa.
- Exploring the challenges and risks associated with scaling up successful interventions.
- Evaluating the cost-effectiveness of different approaches to prioritise sustainable solutions.
- Promoting sustainable funding models and fostering partnerships for effective programme implementation.
- Investigating the lived experiences of married adolescents to understand their needs and views on support interventions.
- Amplifying the voices of married adolescents to inform the design and implementation of tailored interventions.
- Identifying gaps in existing services and programmes to better meet the needs of married girls.



Theme 4: Mental health

Key priorities

- Highlighting the importance of mental health in child marriage programming and its impact on the well-being of young girls.
- Identifying strategies to address mental health challenges faced by married adolescent girls.
- Advocating for comprehensive mental health support within child marriage intervention programs.



Theme 5: Girls' education

Key priorities

- Exploring the dynamic link between child marriage and school dropouts in rural Kenya to understand and identify interventions that can empower girls to stay in school and prevent child marriage.

How research is conducted

To establish meaningful partnerships that can drive real change in our efforts to end child marriage, key priorities and approaches are:

Co-creation and deciding research questions together.

- Emphasising the need to involve stakeholders, including girls themselves, in shaping research questions to ensure that research addresses the most pressing issues faced by girls affected by child marriage.

Challenging dominant narratives to empower girls and challenge prevailing narratives around agency and choice.

- Centring girls throughout the research process, giving them agency in shaping the research design, data collection, and analysis.

Making publications widely accessible by using language and formats that resonate with different stakeholders.

- Ensure that research findings are understood and utilised to inform evidence-based interventions.

To ensure meaningful participation of girls and to elevate girls as researchers and putting girls at the heart of research, key priorities and approaches are:

Research led by girls and communities:

- Commitment to meaningful participation begins with placing girls at the forefront of research. Girls' voices, experiences, and perspectives are essential in understanding the realities of child marriage and crafting effective solutions. Through participatory research, girls become the architects of change, shaping research questions, methodologies, and interpretations. This approach not only empowers girls but also generates robust and relevant data to guide our efforts to end child marriage.

Address gaps in understanding:

- To effectively address the complexities of child marriage, there is a need to prioritise conducting research where gaps in understanding persist. Focusing on areas where child marriage is poorly understood or underrepresented in existing research. By identifying key areas where data is lacking or insufficient, critical knowledge voids can be filled and develop targeted interventions. Our intentionality also extended to ensuring girls as key stakeholders are prioritised in every research endeavour, involving girls and young people in setting research priorities ensures that their needs and aspirations are reflected in the research agenda.

Be intentional in addressing inequalities:

- Commitment to being intentional in our approach, ensuring that we look out for signs of inequalities and actively work to address them. This means adopting an intersectional lens, considering how various forms of discrimination intersect to compound vulnerabilities. By being mindful of these disparities, research can be designed to capture the diverse experiences of girls and offer tailored solutions.

Share back findings with girls and communities:

- Commitment to participation goes beyond involving girls in research; it also calls for prioritising sharing research findings with them. Transparent communication fosters trust, validates girls' contributions, and ensures they are equipped with knowledge to advocate for their rights.

Prioritise marginalised populations:

- Emphasising the importance of prioritising vulnerable populations. It is essential to actively engage with and prioritise the voices of girls living with disabilities or HIV, migrant girls, and other marginalised groups. Understanding the unique challenges they face is critical to developing tailored and targeted interventions that leave no one behind.

To guarantee the safety and well-being of girls and women involved in research, key priorities and approaches are:

Prioritising safeguarding:

- Safeguarding needs to be a priority from the outset, rather than an afterthought. It is necessary to proactively develop safeguarding guidelines to protect the rights and dignity of our research participants. Commitment to safeguarding should extend to every stage of the research process, from recruitment to data collection and dissemination.

Centring safety:

- We are acutely aware that the research process can inadvertently re-traumatise girls and women. To mitigate this risk, we centre safety by providing prior warnings to participants about sensitive topics that may arise during interviews, transparently communicating potential triggers, and empowering participants to make informed decisions about their involvement.

Psychosocial support:

- There should be commitment to offering psychosocial support to participants as needed. Recognising the realities of child marriage may evoke emotional responses. As researchers, ensuring that access to support is readily available during or after the research process, and allowing participants to process their experiences in a safe environment.

Guarding against over-researching:

- We need to be mindful of the potential burden placed on certain groups, leading to research fatigue. To guard against over-researching, there is a need to actively monitor our research initiatives and collaborate with other organisations to ensure that the same communities are not repeatedly approached. By balancing the need for understanding with the wellbeing of participants, we strive to create a sustainable research landscape.

In addition to these, the following priorities were presented:

Embracing qualitative research:

- To gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of child marriage, there is a need to embrace qualitative studies that allow us to explore the intricacies of the issue. By delving into the "why" and "how" questions, we can unearth the root causes, contextual nuances, and individual experiences that quantitative data may miss.

Gaps in our understanding of the polycrisis and compounding crises:

- Our research themes delve into the complexities of polycrisis and compounding crises, understanding how various risks converge and exacerbate the vulnerabilities faced by girls and women. By identifying these interconnected challenges, we can develop more holistic and effective interventions.

Increasing impact and uptake of research

The group recognises the importance of careful planning and strategic partnerships to maximise the impact and uptake of research. If we avoid duplication, define scaling up, and embrace co-creation and strategic collaborations, we can ensure that research findings will have real-world relevance and can be effectively implemented to create positive change.

The group discussed the following key priorities and approaches to planning and partnerships:

Building on existing evidence and avoiding duplication:

- Prioritising the review of existing evidence to avoid duplication before embarking on new studies. Building on the knowledge base created by previous research enables the deepening of our understanding of child marriage while optimising the use of limited resources.

Defining scaling up:

- There is no one-size-fits-all approach to scaling up; understanding context is key. The group recognises that what works in one context may not be equally effective in another. A deep understanding of the specific contexts where interventions will be implemented allows us to define scaling up. By conducting rigorous needs assessments and considering local realities, we ensure that our research findings translate into practical, context-specific solutions.

Embracing co-creation and strategic partnerships:

- Research is most impactful when it is co-created with practitioners, policymakers, and communities. By embracing co-creation, we ensure that our research questions are relevant, our methodologies are practical, and our findings resonate with those on the ground. Strategic partnerships with stakeholders from various sectors, including academia, government, civil society, and the private sector, enrich our research with diverse perspectives and enable effective knowledge dissemination.

Context matters:

- We need to commit to being open and receptive to the voices of those affected by child marriage. Listening to the experiences, needs, and aspirations of communities is crucial to understanding the context in which child marriage occurs. Conducting needs assessments, and engaging in meaningful dialogue with stakeholders, helps us to align our research with the realities of those we aim to support.

Discussing key priorities and approaches to scaling, the group recognises that scaling requires a well-thought-out learning journey agenda, increased funding, and robust government ownership of policies.

Developing a learning journey agenda:

- Scaling up is not a linear process, but a dynamic and adaptive journey. To effectively scale up interventions, we need to develop a comprehensive learning journey agenda. This agenda maps out the steps, challenges, and milestones required to bring evidence-based practices to larger populations. By continuously learning from our experiences and iterating our strategies, we ensure that our scaling efforts are strategic, impactful, and sustainable.

Allocating more funding to scaling up:

- Evidence-based interventions have the potential to drive meaningful change. To unlock this potential, we need to prioritise allocating more funding to scaling up proven initiatives. Adequate financial resources enable us to reach more communities, support greater implementation, and sustain long-term impact.

Governments' ownership of policies:

- Effective scaling demands strong government ownership of policies and initiatives. However, this is not always achieved, and this gap can prevent scaling efforts to reach their full potential. That's why we need to work closely with governments to cultivate a sense of

ownership, and the commitment to addressing child marriage. If we involve governments from the inception of our research and interventions, we make room for the co-creation of policies and strategies that align with national priorities and catalyse lasting change.

Discussing key priorities and approaches in dissemination and knowledge products, the group stressed the need to prioritise targeted dissemination, local language translation, and meaningful engagement with those with lived experiences.

Disseminating findings at the community level:

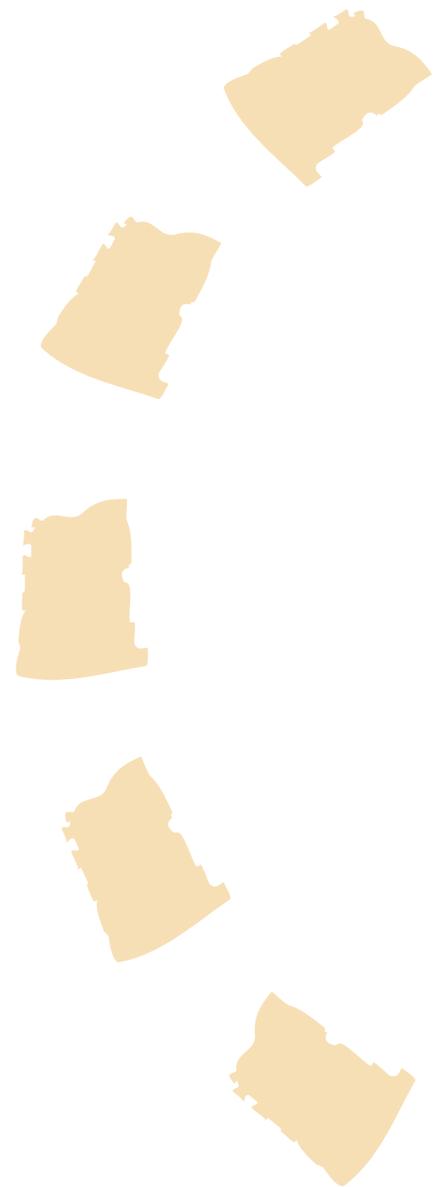
- At the heart of our dissemination strategy is the aim to reach communities directly. To achieve this, we need to ensure that research findings are shared at the grassroots level, where they can have the most significant impact. By organising community-based events, workshops, and awareness campaigns, we can foster open dialogue and encourage communities to take ownership of the solutions to child marriage.

Translating knowledge products into local languages:

- The group recognises the importance of translating knowledge products into local languages – to ensure that the research is accessible to all. By doing so, we promote inclusivity and foster a deeper understanding of our findings, amplifying their impact across diverse communities.

Engaging those with lived experiences as researchers and advocates:

- Those with lived experiences of child marriage possess invaluable insights that shape our research and advocacy efforts. By actively engaging girls and women who have experienced child marriage, as researchers and as advocates, we are empowered to draw on first-hand knowledge to develop targeted and relevant interventions that resonate with the realities faced by affected communities.



Recommendations

For Funders

- **Consider long-term funding cycles:** Change takes time, and strictly activity-based approaches to funding may not result in the desired transformation in the lives of girls. Funders are urged to consider longer-term funding cycles, which allow organisations to implement comprehensive strategies, leading to lasting change.
- **Provide flexibility in funding:** A degree of flexibility in funding is paramount to addressing the dynamic nature of child marriage challenges. Open and flexible funding models can enable practitioners to respond to emerging needs, adapt to context-specific realities, and invest in innovative solutions.
- **Make sure funding is context-informed:** Programming to end child marriage is multifaceted, and context matters. Funders are encouraged to be responsive to variations in context, informed by local-level evidence. Tailoring funding to specific contexts allows researchers and practitioners to address unique challenges and harness local knowledge.
- **Allow the flexible allocation of resources:** Flexible funding empowers organisations to allocate resources to research, learning, and capacity-building initiatives. This approach allows for continuous improvement and innovation in programming and research strategies.
- **Invest in West Africa:** Funders are called to prioritise investment in this region, where efforts can have a substantial impact.
- **Decolonise funding:** An inclusive funding approach, which decolonises traditional funding structures, should be embraced. By valuing indigenous knowledge, local leadership, and culturally relevant practices, solutions can be built that resonate with the communities we serve.
- **Focus on government priority areas:** Investing in contextual and government priority areas ensures alignment with national development agendas. This approach strengthens collaboration and fosters sustainability in the efforts to end child marriage.
- **Address the greatest gaps:** It is recommended to prioritise funding in areas where the greatest gaps in research, advocacy, and programmatic interventions exist.
- **Invest in local language translation:** If resources are allocated to translate knowledge products into local languages, we can ensure broader accessibility and understanding among local communities. Supporting local translation initiatives can help bridge language barriers and promote knowledge-sharing across diverse regions.
- **Support the integration of research into programmes:** There is a need to encourage and fund the integration of research findings into programmatic interventions at the local level. Research-grounded programmes yield more significant impact and can inform evidence-based strategies.

For Researchers

- **Engage stakeholders from the start:** Beneficiaries, practitioners, and policy actors should be involved from the conceptualisation of a research project. By creating spaces for meaningful engagement, researchers will ensure that research aligns with real-world needs and leads to practical solutions.
- **Use clear and accessible language:** Research findings should always be communicated in language that is clear and understandable to practitioners and policymakers. By bridging the gap between academia and practice, researchers can turn their work into a powerful tool for change.
- **Empower girls as partners:** Girls should not be merely participants in research; they should become active partners throughout the process. Capacitating girls to conduct research gives them a voice and agency in shaping solutions that affect their lives directly.
- **Collect relevant data:** Research should be focussed on collecting data that directly addresses the research objectives. By gathering

only what is needed, researchers will ensure efficient and targeted research that leads to actionable insights.

- **Decolonise the approach:** Researchers are encouraged to challenge traditional research paradigms and embrace decolonised methodologies. If we value indigenous knowledge, cultural context, and local expertise, we can create research that is relevant and respectful of local communities.
- **Embrace indigenous research methodologies:** It is important to consider how indigenous research methodologies may strengthen the

research approach. By incorporating local practices and perspectives, researchers can enrich the depth and authenticity of their findings.

- **Adopt feminist research principles:** Researchers should explore how principles of feminist research could inform their research approach. By ensuring that research is gender-sensitive, inclusive, and attentive to power dynamics, they can amplify the voices of marginalised girls and women.

For Girls Not Brides/CSOs/programmers

- **Address the root causes of child marriage:** To focus solely on the symptoms or drivers of child marriage risks depoliticising our efforts. To create sustainable change, we must address the root causes of child marriage, including patriarchal norms and gender inequalities.
- **Foster collaboration:** To increase our impact, it is vital to support and engage in collaborations with other organisations and stakeholders. Collaborations offer valuable learning opportunities, capacity-building, and identification of gaps.
- **Encourage shared learning:** By building bridges between organisations, we can encourage shared learning and collective advocacy. Creating platforms for knowledge exchange and collaboration enables us to draw on each other's strengths and expertise.
- **Strengthen local networks in regions with**

similar contexts: By sharing experiences and resources, we can develop context-specific approaches to ending child marriage and create a stronger collective impact.

- **Utilise community channels:** Existing community networks and channels are vital to the effective dissemination of knowledge products. By engaging local leaders, community meetings, and cultural events, we will ensure that the information reaches the grassroots level.
- **Co-create research questions and initiatives:** Gatherings of civil society organisations are a powerful way to collaboratively identify research questions and strategies. This participatory approach ensures that research is grounded in real-world needs and enhances the relevance and effectiveness of our interventions.

For Policymakers

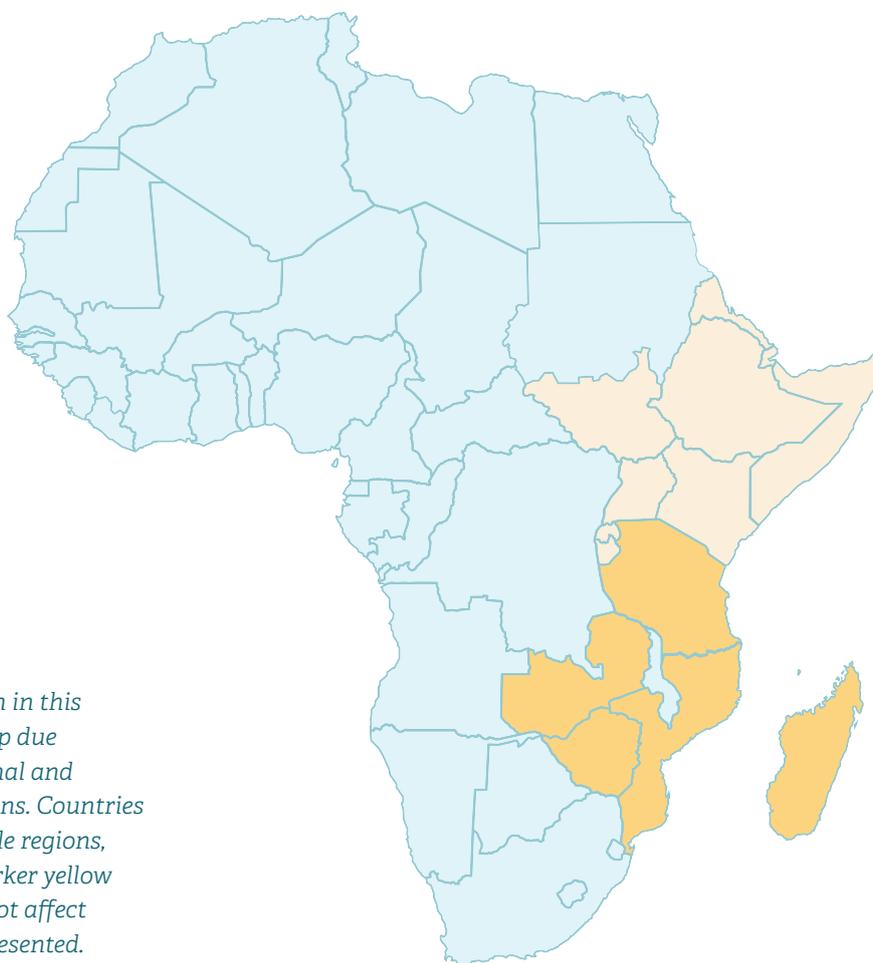
- **Utilise the evidence:** Policymakers are encouraged to embrace evidence-based policy making. By engaging with research findings and data to inform their decisions and shaping policies, they will accelerate efforts on what works to end child marriage.
- **Collaborate with researchers:** If policy makers and researchers collaborate – working hand-in-hand to synthesise and interpret evidence – they can foster a deeper understanding of the issues and ensure that policy decisions are well-informed and data-driven.

- **Evaluate the impact of policies and interventions:** By regularly monitoring and evaluating the impact of policies and interventions, policymakers are able to identify what works and what needs improvement – leading to more targeted and impactful strategies.

Sub-regional priorities

Participants also discussed how priorities might diverge across regions. The results of these conversations are summarised in the table below.

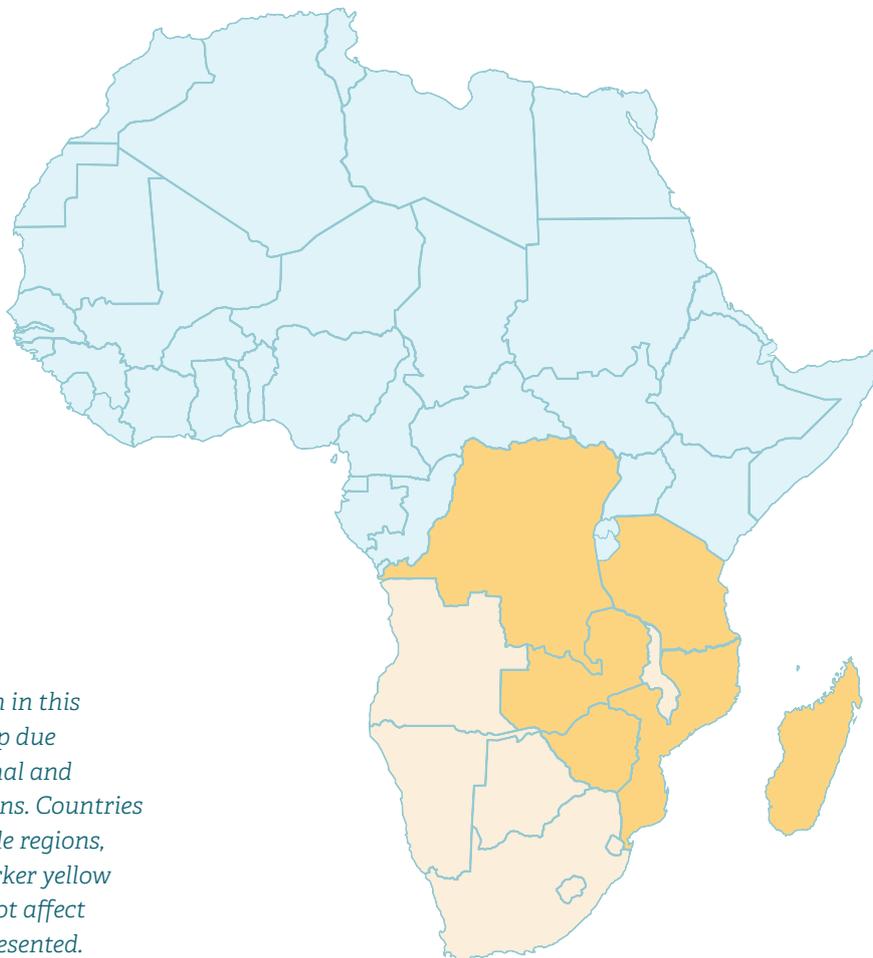
Research theme priorities	Process of conducting research	How to increase the impact and uptake of research	Recommendations
EAST AFRICA			
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Climate change and child marriage 2. Urbanisation and child marriage 3. The lived experiences of married girls 4. Cross-border, cross-city migration 5. Mental health 6. Polycrisis 7. Culture, religion and backlash in ending child marriage 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Equitable participation in the research process 2. Inclusion of vulnerable groups in the community, for instance those living with HIV, those living with disability, adolescent mothers, married adolescents, and domestic workers 3. Conduct research in an ethical way and safeguard research participants 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Embrace co-creation of research 2. Flexible funding 3. Government ownership of research findings and working with government when undertaking research 4. Engage people with lived experience in advocacy 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Build on partnerships and sustainable networks 2. Use accessible language in documentation 3. Contextualise research 4. Partner with universities for publications



Regional classification in this document may overlap due to differing institutional and geographical definitions. Countries may appear in multiple regions, represented by the darker yellow countries. This does not affect advocacy priorities presented.

SOUTHERN AFRICA

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Girls and young feminists organising against harmful practices 2. Polycrisis – conflict, public health emergencies, poverty and hunger, climate change 3. Mental health 4. Digital environment and harmful practices – age-appropriateness and mental health 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Contextualisation. Different countries have different issues, for instance kingdoms and chiefdoms in Eswatini, Lesotho, Mozambique 2. Increase agency of research participants, such as women and girls 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Disseminate the research findings to the community levels and translate productivity 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Co-creation and inclusion in programming to include beneficiaries, policymakers, and programmers 2. Long-term funding that is flexible and funding that is not activity-based – as change does not happen from just one activity/engagement 3. Design research and programming interventions that address harmful social norms 4. Strengthen equitable partnerships where funders do not set the agenda priorities
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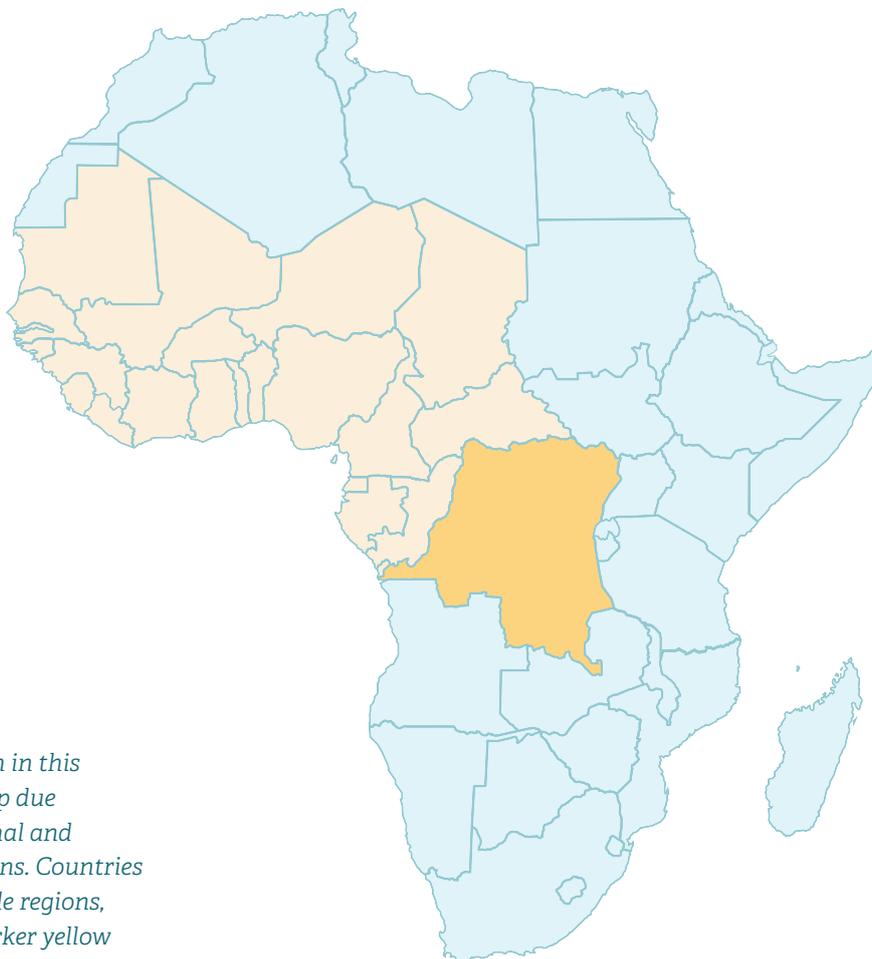
WEST & CENTRAL AFRICA

1. Correlation between child marriage, girls' education and polycrisis. 2 Girls' mental health in the context of crisis
2. Country-specific qualitative research on child marriage and girls' education
3. Policy and budgeting to end child marriage in West and Central Africa
4. Emerging concepts around girls' agency and cost opportunity in child marriage and girls' education

1. Stronger emphasis on more inclusive and participatory research – particularly youth-led or girl-led research
2. Promote a stronger Francophone research agenda exploring the links between child marriage and girls' education

1. Promote the publication of research papers in French and the translation of resources from English to French, Portuguese and Spanish
2. Promote the dissemination of research findings in more accessible packaging, tailored to the target audience (policymakers, communities, girls/ children)

1. Build stronger connections between West and Central Africa and other African regions to advance mutual learning on research



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SECTION 5:

Conclusions



Conclusions

The AAGEM 2023 workshop – which brought together diverse voices and perspectives from across the region – emphasised the urgent need for a comprehensive, collaborative, evidence-informed approach to end child marriage. Across three days, discussions illuminated the intricate interplay of cultural norms, social and gender power dynamics, and systemic barriers that perpetuate child marriage – while showcasing the innovative strategies and promising initiatives that hold the potential for transformative change.



Highlighting the collective efforts of researchers, practitioners, policymakers, civil society organisations, and activists, participants emphasised the pivotal role of partnerships in amplifying the impact of research and interventions. By fostering meaningful collaborations across sectors, disciplines, languages, and geographical boundaries, we can harness the power of collective wisdom and experience to create holistic solutions that resonate within local contexts.



The dissemination of research findings in accessible formats emerged as a bridge between research and practice. This can ensure that evidence fuels tangible change. Policymakers' role in evidence-based decision-making was highlighted, emphasising the transformative potential at the systemic level. As we move forward, the insights gained from this workshop provide a solid foundation for shaping research agendas, policy reform, and grassroots initiatives.



Central to discussions was the significance of prioritising girls' and young women's voices and needs. By prioritising their agency, aspirations, and lived experiences, we not only strengthen the effectiveness of our efforts; we also ensure that our interventions are tailored to address their unique challenges. As such, the research itself can become a transformative process, rather than an activity that reinforces power inequalities.



Through the efforts of committed activists, practitioners, researchers, policymakers, and civil society organisations at the workshop, a shared agenda has emerged, which outlines key priorities and strategies to drive accelerated progress.



At the workshop, intersectionality emerged as an essential guiding principle. There was strong recognition that girls live multi-dimensional lives and hold a number of different intersecting identities across gender, race, class, sexuality, and ability. Adaptation of research methodologies, language, and approaches to encompass these diverse identities must be a priority moving forward.



How can meaningful progress be accelerated beyond the workshop? A commitment to collaborative action and learning from each other; the scaling up of evidence-based strategies; creative and innovative approaches; using evidence and research to drive policy and budgetary commitment; and, more broadly, our ongoing efforts to contribute to the global movement to end child marriage, can all help, particularly in the regions where child marriage prevalence remains stubbornly high.

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Organisations list

Organisation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accelerate Hub/University of Cape Town• Accelerate Hub/Oxford• Accelerate Hub/Kenya• Rozaria Memorial Trust• Stellenbosch University• University of Nairobi• Akili Dada• Orchid Project• Pan African Alliance on Ending Child Marriage• Girls First Fund• TOSTAN• Global Partnership for Education (GPE)• UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage and UNICEF• Makerere University School of Social Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Plan International Zambia• Girls Not Brides• Makerere University School of Social Studies• Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria• Centre for Gender Studies, University of Rwanda• Amref International University• Population Council• Action Aid Kenya• International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)• UN Women Regional Office East Africa• Population Council Kenya• Africa Population and Health Research Center APHRC• Brave Movement

Annex 2: Workshop Programme

TIME	AGENDA
DAY 1: TUESDAY 4TH JULY 2023	
8:30am	<p>Participant registration</p> <p>Welcome: Fatou Gueye Ndir, <i>Girls Not Brides</i></p> <p>Opening remarks: Nerida Nthamburi, Head of Africa Engagement, <i>Girls Not Brides</i></p> <p>Review of workshop objectives and introduction of workshop facilitation team: Nerida Nthamburi, <i>Girls Not Brides</i></p> <p>Review of logistics: Noleen Sang, <i>Girls Not Brides</i></p>
9:00-10am	<p>Participant introductions</p> <p>Setting up a safer space</p>
9:30 -10:00am	<p>Background to the Africa Action Group to End Child Marriage: Nerida Nthamburi, <i>Girls Not Brides</i></p> <p>An introduction to the CRANK (Child Marriage Research to Action Network (global overview): Jean Casey, <i>Girls Not Brides</i></p>
10:00 -11:00am	<p>The child marriage Data and Evidence landscape in Africa: An Overview</p> <p>Latest Data and Evidence on Child Marriage: Trends on Prevalence and Burden in Africa: Rachael Hongo, <i>Girls Not Brides</i></p> <p>The State of Data and Evidence on Child Marriage in Africa: A Literature Review: Amy Harrison</p>
11:00-11:30am	Tea/Coffee Break
11:30 -1:00pm	<p>Child Marriage and other Harmful Practices Regional Research Updates</p> <p>Evidence/ research from multi-country analyses of adolescent datasets (MICS, VACS) on what prevents child marriage, the Accelerate Hub team, led by Silinganisiwe Dzumbunu</p> <p>The perceived effects of COVID-19 pandemic on female genital mutilation/cutting and child or forced marriages in Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia and Senegal, Tamary Esho, Amref International University,</p> <p>What interventions are effective to prevent or respond to female genital mutilation? A review of existing evidence from 2008–2020, Dennis Matanda, Population Council</p>
1:30 -2:30pm	Lunch

2:30 - 4pm	<p>Conversation Café: Research updates</p> <p>Theme 1: Child Marriage and Education</p> <p>Theme 2: Child marriage and Social protection</p> <p>Theme 3: Child Marriage, SRHR, and Mental Health</p> <p>Theme 4: Reaching the most marginalised girls/girls already married</p> <p>Theme 5: Child marriage in conflict and crisis</p>
4:30-5:30pm	<p>Emerging themes discussion and participants recommendations. Mentimeter poll.</p> <p>Wrap up of the Day and Next Steps</p>

DAY 2: WEDNESDAY 5TH JULY 2023

8:15 -8:45am	Optional Early Morning Wellness session - Breath and Stretch!
8:45am-9:00am	Recap of day 1, and ice-breaker
9.30 – 10am	Presentation of Evidence from recent systematic scoping on child marriage prevention and response interventions in Africa - Jean Casey.
9:30 -11:00am	<p>What Works to End Child Marriage?</p> <p>Evidence on what supports young women who become mothers/ married early (mostly South African data), Silinganisiwe Dzumbunu, Accelerate Hub.</p> <p>Breakthrough Generation Initiative, an evaluation of the effectiveness on TOSTAN's community empowerment program, Godfrey Okumu, Tostan.</p> <p>18+ programme on Ending Child marriage, Lynn Chinene, Plan International Zambia</p> <p>Experience sharing on how girls, including already married girls, are advocating against Child Marriage in Zimbabwe, Loveness Mudzuru, Rozaria Memorial Trust.</p>
11:00am-11:30	Tea/Coffee Break
11:30 am -12:00pm	<p>The Importance of Collective Mobilisation: Reflecting on the <i>how</i> of research partnerships</p> <p>Centering the safety and well-being of girls and women during the research process, Philomena Makena, UNWOMEN</p> <p>Power dynamics of the research process, Dr. Chimaraoke Izugbara, International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)</p> <p>Connecting the dots - Collaboration and mobilisation on generating effective evidence, and using evidence to inform policies and programmes, Naver Chayeleda, PanAfrican Alliance On Ending Child Marriage (PAAECM)</p>
12:00-1:00pm	What are the emerging priorities for how we conduct, and collaborate on, research? (Mentimeter poll)
1:00pm-2:00pm	Lunch

2:00-3:30pm	<p>From Evidence to Action: How to Effectively Use Data to Drive Regional and National Advocacy on Child Marriage</p> <p>Panelists:</p> <p>Aicha Ba, <i>Education and Child Marriage in Francophone West Africa</i></p> <p>Admark Moyo, <i>Child Marriage and the Law in Southern Africa</i></p> <p>Shannon Thompson, <i>Orchid Project's Research Agenda in relation to Policy Change</i></p>
3:30-5:00pm	Group work: Looking ahead: identifying priorities for future research, synergies and collaboration
5:00pm	Wrap up of the day and Next Steps
DAY 3: THURSDAY 6TH JULY	
8:30 - 9:00am	<p>Welcome Back</p> <p>Optional Early morning wellness session – breathe and stretch</p>
9:00 -9:30am	Day 2 recap and reflection session
9:30-10.30am	The Child Marriage Research to Action Network (the CRANK) role in strengthening coordination around research, partnership and funding
10:30 -11:30am	<p>Diversifying the research base in Africa: The value of partnerships</p> <p>A Feminist Vision for Ending Child Marriage in East Africa that was developed out of a Delphi study on Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings in East Africa- Integrating the response to child marriage. <i>Loveness Mudzuru</i></p> <p>Young feminist research initiatives on SRHR in Kenya, <i>Sally Wuodi</i></p> <p>Inter-sectoral collaboration, <i>Crystal Onyekachukwu Ikanih Musa, the Global Partnership for Education</i></p> <p>From Data to Action: Use of data for Program and Policy, <i>Karen Austrian, Population Council</i></p>
11:00-11:30am	Tea/Coffee Break
11:30am -12:30pm	Emerging themes
12.30 – 1.30pm	Windows into passion: sharing our stories and motivations for the work
1:30pm-2:30pm	Lunch
2:30-3:30pm	Regional priorities and prioritisation exercise
3:30 -4:00pm	Looking forward and Closing Remarks: What's next for the Africa Action Group to End Child Marriage?

Annex 3: Participant written poems

Accelerate Hub

Let the girl be a girl
let her chase after butterflies
Follow her dreams, achieve and realise
Let the girl be a girl.

Sir, let the girl be a girl
let her blossom into womanhood gracefully
to find herself, the world, hers to discover
let the girl be a girl

Ma'am let the girl be a girl
a reminder of your youth, of promise
be her teacher, her mentor, her guide
Let the girl be a girl.

World, let the girl be a girl
she's a mom, she's a wife no doubt
in the future, when the clock chimes her turn
But Now, let the little girl, be a girl!

UNVEILING DREAMS: EMPOWERING GIRLS TO SOAR

**IN LANDS WHERE CUSTOMS DIM YOUNG GIRLS' GRACE,
MY HEART YEARNS TO ERASE THEIR TEARFUL TRACE.
WITH LOVE AND STRENGTH, TRADITION I'LL DEFY, AND
LET THEIR DREAMS AND SPIRITS TRULY FLY.
NO CHAINS OF OLD SHALL BIND THEIR PRECIOUS LIGHT,
I'LL CHAMPION THEIR RIGHTS, WITH ALL MY MIGHT.
TOGETHER, WE'LL CREATE A WORLD THAT'S NEW,
WHERE GIRLS CAN THRIVE AND DREAMS CAN ALL
COME TRUE.**

**IN THEIR INNOCENT EYES, HOPE BRIGHTLY GLEAMS,
THEIR LAUGHTER, A SYMPHONY OF PRECIOUS DREAMS.
WITH COMPASSION'S FLAME, WE'LL MEND EACH
SORROW, AND PAVE THE PATH FOR A PROMISING
TOMORROW.**

**LET'S BREAK THE BARRIERS, LET LOVE IGNITE,
UNLEASH THEIR POTENTIAL, EMPOWER THEIR FLIGHT.
FOR EVERY GIRL DESERVES A LIFE SET FREE, WHERE
LOVE AND DREAMS BLEND IN PERFECT HARMONY.**

SALLY WUODI



Annex 4: Bibliography

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Endnotes

1. "Child marriage" refers to all forms of child, early or forced marriage and union – whether formal or informal – where at least one party is under age 18.

2. UNFPA. (n.d.). [Child marriage remains an urgent problem in East and Southern Africa](#). UNFPA East and Southern Africa.

3. "Burden" describes the total number of women aged 20-24 who married or entered a union before age 18.

4. Mokyr, J. (n.d.). Africa 2050: [The demographic truth and consequences](#). Hoover Institution.

5. "Prevalence" describes the percentage of women aged 20-24 who married or entered a union before age 18.

6. UNICEF, 2023, [Is an end to child marriage within reach?](#)

7. Source: UNICEF, is an end to child marriage within reach? Last trends and future prospects, 2023 edition, UNICEF, New York, 2023

8. Ibid.

9. One in three girls across West, Central, East and Southern Africa marry or enter union before age 18.

10. The long version of the literature review PowerPoint was shared with all participants, and is also available as a separate PDF.

11. Margaret E Greene, Manahil Siddiqi, Tarra F Abularrage (2023) Systematic scoping review of interventions to prevent and respond to child marriage across Africa: progress, gaps and priorities

12. "Ever-married" refers to girls who are or have been married or in a union, including those who are now separated, divorced or widowed.

13. Small groups engaging in a series of conversations in a café-like setting, with participants moving between tables at regular intervals.

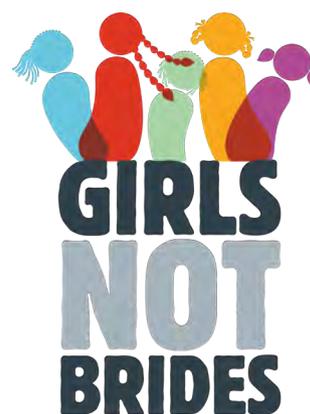
14. Presentations from the panellists are all available in the workshop ppt pdfs

AFRICA ACTION GROUP TO END CHILD MARRIAGE

Workshop Report

July 2023

***Girls Not Brides* is a global partnership of over 1,400 civil society organisations from more than 100 countries committed to ending child marriage and ensuring girls can fulfil their potential.**



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