



## ***Girls Not Brides* members highlight child marriage on Day of the African Child 2013** **Summary of activities**

Every year on 16 June, Day of the African Child is celebrated as a moment to focus on the rights and well-being of children across Africa. Child marriage is deeply rooted in many communities' traditions and has devastating consequences on the children affected. As such, *Girls Not Brides* members used the opportunity provided by this year's theme – "Eliminating Harmful Social and Cultural Practices affecting Children: Our Collective Responsibility" – to collectively bring attention to the issue of child marriage in Africa and highlight the importance of working together to address the practice.

Collective action by members of *Girls Not Brides* on Day of the African Child 2013 demonstrated that there is an active and vocal civil society movement in Africa committed to ending child marriage across the continent. *Girls Not Brides* will build on this momentum and continue to work together to make child marriage history in Africa.

### **Objectives and areas of engagement on Day of the African Child**

The objectives of our collective action on Day of the African Child were: (i) to increase public awareness and understanding of child marriage in Africa – its causes, impact and the need for urgent action; (ii) to encourage strengthened political, programme and resource commitments to end child marriage by key actors at the local, national and regional levels; and (iii) to reinforce collaboration among *Girls Not Brides* members, especially those working in Africa.

From Côte d'Ivoire to Mozambique, *Girls Not Brides* members marked Day of the African Child with activities that included a specific focus on child marriage. The activities fall under the following areas of engagement:

1. [Challenging policymakers and other key actors to make child marriage a priority](#)
2. [Building a civil society movement committed to ending child marriage and mobilising around common goals](#)
3. [Raising awareness of the impact of child marriage in communities where the practice is prevalent](#)
4. [Educating children and youth on the harms of child marriage](#)
5. [Engaging the media to raise the visibility of child marriage](#)
6. [Building a vocal online movement supportive of ending child marriage](#)

**Click [here](#) to view all these activities in a Google Map or continue below for a full summary.**

The *Girls Not Brides* secretariat supported these efforts by providing advocacy tools and other materials to members and provided suggested messages, thus strengthening the Partnership's collective voice.<sup>1</sup>

### **1. Challenging policymakers and other key actors to make child marriage a priority**

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**Tosalisana (Democratic Republic of Congo)** organised a conference on child marriage in the country, inviting ten child brides to share their stories with an audience of 300 politicians, parliamentarians, traditional and religious leaders, men, women and young activists.

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<sup>1</sup> Materials provided by the secretariat included a list of suggested activities for members; a list of suggested messages and policy asks; a template advocacy letter to government representatives; a template press release; and sample social media messages and content.



Across the continent, *Girls Not Brides* members coordinated letter-writing campaigns to urge their national governments, regional and local authorities as well as international agencies to take action to end child marriage. In Uganda, nine members of the ***Girls Not Brides Uganda Alliance to End Child Marriage*** coordinated the distribution of advocacy letters to relevant authorities in the capital Kampala, and three Western districts: Kyenjojo, Kabarole and Bundibugyo.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, **Tosalisana** mobilised its twenty-six member organisations to send advocacy letters to President Joseph Kabila, the Senate and the National Assembly. In Chad, the **Association Jeunesse Anti-Clivage** addressed advocacy letters to 13 members of government, the National Assembly, Chad's First Lady, and thirteen United Nations agencies.



Children at the African Union commemoration of Day of the African Child

***Girls Not Brides* Global Coordinator Ms Lakshmi Sundaram** participated in the celebrations organised by the African Union in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. She spoke about the importance of ending child marriage during an intergenerational panel discussion on harmful practices with children from all regions of the continent.

## 2. Building a civil society movement committed to ending child marriage and mobilising around common goals

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The **Mozambique coalition to end child marriage** launched a “Civil Society Position on Child Marriage in Mozambique” and held a high-level meeting in Maputo to discuss “The role of civil society organisations to end child marriage and their obligations towards the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child”, in the presence of government representative and members of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. The coalition also organised a round table discussion with key stakeholders in Nampula province, one of the areas most affected by child marriage in Mozambique.



Civil society roundtable on child marriage in Mozambique

The **Tanzania Ending Child Marriage Network**, in partnership with *Girls Not Brides* members the **Foundation for Women's Health, Research & Development (FORWARD)** and **Children's Dignity Forum**, hosted a two-day regional conference on child marriage in East Africa to identify policy and programme lessons, as well as broader strategies for the prevention of child marriage at the national and regional levels.

**Women in Alternative Action (Cameroon)** led a one-day sensitisation workshop gathering 20 participants from civil society organisations and faith-based groups. Participants identified key steps towards a strengthened legal framework to end child marriage in Cameroon, and expressed a keen interest in joining a national coalition against child marriage.

## 3. Raising awareness of the impact of child marriage in communities where the practice is prevalent

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In Côte d'Ivoire, **ONG Génération Femmes du 3e Millénaire** held a workshop for religious, traditional and community leaders on the harmful impact of child marriage and early pregnancies in the town of Abobo - one of the poorest communities in Abidjan. The discussions were moderated by government representatives



and led to the adoption of concrete recommendations and commitments to end child marriage from participants.

**World Vision Chad**, joined by the **Association Jeunesse Anti-Clivage (AJAC)** and the **Association des Volontaires pour l'Encadrement des Filles-Mères (AVENIF)**, organised a conference with local authorities and traditional and religious leaders in Moulkou, Chad. The debate addressed the harms of child marriage and explored the role these leaders could play in preventing the practice from taking place in their local communities. Over 200 children from 13 neighbouring villages also took part in activities such as dances, performances, testimonies from girls and football games.

After a three-year community empowerment programme led by **Tostan (Senegal)**, [242 communities publicly declared their abandonment of child marriage and female genital cutting](#) in Ndorma, a village in the southern region of Senegal. A similar declaration was made in **The Gambia** where 42 communities publicly committed to abandoning child marriage and female genital cutting.

In Ndioum, **Senegal**, **DEMNGALAM** held a conference on harmful cultural and traditional practices, chaired by the Mayor of Ndioum and a representative of the Ministry for Families and Children. By the end of the conference, local officials, teachers and civil society leaders had all committed to supporting future initiatives around Day of the African Child, and to upholding the rights of children not to marry before 18.



Children at DEMNGALAM's conference on harmful cultural and traditional practices

In Malawi, **Centre for Social Concern and Development (CESOCODE)** held a series of dialogues with custodians of culture, community members and youth in the village of Yoyola, during which each group was able to identify child marriage as a harmful traditional practice and to adopt a list of key measures needed to address it.



Educational community dialogues in Cameroon

In **Cameroon**, **Couturières battantes** coordinated educational community dialogues on the causes and consequences of child marriage in rural communities of North Cameroon. The discussions were held twice a day for a week, and reached a total of 217 participants, including 7 traditional chiefs.

The **Coexist Initiative (Kenya)** held an open community forum in Nairobi to discuss how to involve men and boys in efforts to tackle child marriage, female genital mutilation and the commercial sexual exploitation of girls.

#### **4. Educating children and youth on the harms of child marriage**

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Members of the **Nigerian coalition to end child marriage** co-organised a workshop for children and youth, aged 10 to 18, in Akwa Ibom State. Participants discussed harmful social and cultural practices in Africa, and learned about government intervention to prevent child marriage.

In Kawo Kaduna, Nigeria, **Girl Child Concerns** led a discussion with 500 secondary school girls about the impact of child marriage, and the benefits of education to delay marriage. Students performed plays and dances to convey the negative consequences of marrying young.



**Joy for Children Uganda** donated 15 bicycles to girls who travel long distances to and from school. The bicycles will enable these girls to attend their classes on a daily basis, keep up with their studies and eventually complete their education.



Joy for Children Uganda donates bicycles to girl students

At an event co-organised by **Service for Peace Sierra Leone**, 11 children received scholarships to pursue their education. Well-respected community leaders, including a Member of Parliament, opened the event by speaking to children and their parents about the harms of child marriage.

The **Mozambique coalition to end child marriage** held a debate with twenty university students on the theme “Celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the African Union and key steps to eliminate child marriage in Africa”. The debate helped develop strategies for academic institutions to join efforts against child marriage.

In Douala, Cameroon, **Association pour la Promotion du Genre et du Developpement Humain Durable (COURAGE2D)** organised a youth dialogue on the rights of children and the harmful impact of early marriages. Twenty-five children and youth, age 13 to 26, were able to voice their concerns and ask for advice on how to talk to their parents about delaying marriage.

## 5. Engaging the media to raise the visibility of child marriage

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In Uganda, the **Girls Not Brides Uganda Alliance to End Child Marriage** invited five leading media houses to a joint press conference on child marriage in Uganda. As a result, the Alliance’s call for government action against child marriage was relayed in prominent national newspapers and on national television.

*Girls Not Brides* member **Kids Club Kampala** [called](#) on civil society, government and other stakeholders to rise up and strengthen the fight against early marriages during an additional press conference that was extensively covered by television channels, radio stations and leading national newspapers.

In Nigeria, **Women United for Economic Empowerment, Dynamic Youth Development Organisation** and **Women’s Initiative for Self-Actualisation** issued a joint press release with specific messaging on ending child marriage in Akwa Iborn State and Nigeria at large.

**Tosalisana (Democratic Republic of Congo)** issued a press release calling for an end to child marriage in the country, and further boosted their media presence by placing several articles on the issue in local-language publications across the country.



In Mozambique, *Girls Not Brides* members **Plan, Save the Children** and the **Civil Society Forum for Child Rights (ROSC)** co-organised a TV debate on the theme “Child marriage and impediments to girls’ education” together with CHL, Rede da Criança and others. The panel discussion led to a rich exchange between government representatives, civil society leaders, youth and parents, and enabled the audience to ask two African Union experts questions on child marriage.

Television debate organised by the Mozambique coalition to end child marriage.



In **Cameroon**, **Women in Alternative Action** recorded a 45-minute programme for Radio Health International in Yaoundé to address common misconceptions about child marriage and to raise awareness of the health risks associated with it. The programme was broadcast throughout the week following Day of the African Child.

The **Coexist Initiative (Kenya)** participated in five radio shows and three television programmes to highlight the importance of men and boys' involvement in tackling violence against women and harmful traditional practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation.

Young Zimbabwean activist and *Girls Not Brides* supporter **Yemurai Nyoni** published an article on [All Africa](#), urging African leaders to end child marriage and build an Africa fit for women and girls.

## **6. Building a vocal online movement supportive of ending child marriage**

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*The Girls Not Brides* secretariat led a week-long social media campaign to increase public awareness and understanding of child marriage in Africa – its causes, impact and the need for urgent action – and to highlight some of the existing solutions to bring an end to the practice. Activities included a series of blog on child marriage and a cross-platform hashtag campaign on the issue, generating high levels of engagement from an audience of nearly 35,000 supporters.

*Girls Not Brides* members also harnessed the power of social media to raise their collective voice and urge governments to take action to end child marriage in Africa.

**Akili Dada (Kenya)** interviewed the father of a girl enrolled in their programme about the importance of education as an alternative to child marriage. The [blog and video of the interview](#) were shared many times on social media.

**Human Rights Watch** led a social media campaign on child marriage, sharing key facts about the practice and urging African governments to set the minimum age of marriage at 18, while **Tostan (Senegal)** and **Friends of UNFPA (USA)** joined online efforts to highlight the scope and impact of child marriage in Africa, as well as solutions to end the practice.