



**The role of civil society organisations
in making the African Union Campaign to end child marriage a success
A consultation ahead of the African Girls' Summit
25 November 2015 – Lusaka, Zambia**

Meeting highlights

On 25 November 2015, ahead of the first African Girls' Summit, about 80 representatives from civil society organisations came together to reflect on the role that civil society can have in ensuring that the AU Campaign and other regional initiatives translate into effective change in the lives of married girls, girls at risk of marriage, and their communities, and to identify concrete opportunities and recommendation for increased for civil society engagement with the African Union beyond the summit.

The meeting was convened by *Girls Not Brides*, the World YWCA, the Southern Africa Litigation Centre, the Ford Foundation in collaboration with the African Union Commission. It built on prior consultations that had been convened by the AU Goodwill Ambassador for the Campaign to End Child Marriage, Ms Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, and by *Girls Not Brides*, over the previous few years.

1. Meeting objectives

The CSO consultation had the following objectives:

- To increase civil society understanding of the AU Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa as a key regional initiative on child marriage, and of the Summit as a unique opportunity to advance the regional momentum on the issue.
- To provide space for selected African CSOs to collectively reflect on the role that civil society can have in ensuring that the AU Campaign translates into effective change in the lives of married girls, girls at risk of marriage, and their communities.
- To identify with the AU concrete opportunities for civil society engagement with the AU Campaign beyond the Summit.

2. Main outcomes and recommendations from the CSO consultation

Among the main outcomes of the consultation was the agreement that **civil society organisations (CSOs) have a critical role to play in implementing regional initiatives to end child marriage, recognising that African civil society is not a homogeneous group.** Regardless of their size, approach to the issue of child marriage, level of action or resources, all CSOs working on child marriage should be enabled to engage in regional initiatives such as the AU campaign to end child marriage from the planning stage to implementation and monitoring.

The consultation started with an interactive dialogue between the participants and three AU representatives including Mr Johan Strijdom, Head of Social Welfare Division at the African Union Commission's Social Affairs Department; Mrs Mariama Cisse, Secretary of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child; and Mrs Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, AU Goodwill Ambassador for Ending Child Marriage.

Through this dialogue **a number of opportunities were identified for CSOs to engage better with the AU Campaign and other AU processes** pertaining to child marriage, including:

- Participating in CSO dialogues organised on the sides of bi-annual AU summits and other key AU events, organised by the Goodwill Ambassador
- Engaging with national governments that have launched or are planning to launch the AU campaign in the planning, launch, implementation and monitoring of the campaign
- Submit official communications, complaints or shadow report on child marriage to the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child on the situation of child marriage in a specific country or on an individual case involving a child forced into marriage
- Work with national human rights institutions to promote a higher level of accountability from governments on the issue of child marriage.

Participants made the following **recommendations** on how to improve the engagement of CSOs in the implementation of regional initiatives to end child marriage:

- The recommendations from this CSO consultation should be included in the outcome statement of the African Girls' Summit
- The **AU campaign plan of action should include clear plans for engaging the civil society as an equal partner** in the designing and implementation of campaign strategies and activities
- Through dialogue between the AU and civil society organisations, **clear, strategic and consistent guidelines should be established for CSO engagement** in the planning, implementation and monitoring of the AU Campaign at national and regional levels
- **A CSO reference group for the AU campaign should be established**, which reflects the diversity of African civil society organisations working to address child marriage
- **The AU should create a CSO liaison desk within the AU Campaign coordination team** to ensure effective partnership between CSOs and the AU on child marriage
- At a more structural level, **child marriage should be mainstreamed in the core political agenda of the African Union** – across all sectors (including security and financial sectors) and beyond the side event-type of approach. It was suggested that child marriage be tabled as a key issue for heads of states to collectively reflect on every year as part of the official programme of the AU summits
- **Implementation and monitoring mechanisms for the various AU initiatives pertaining to child marriage, as well as the Agenda 2063 and the SDGs agenda's targets on ending child marriage be well defined and consistent, and include partnerships with African CSOs**

Lastly, it was recognised that **effective inclusion of CSOs in regional processes and initiatives to address child marriage require the support of other partners involved in these initiatives, including UN agencies and donors.** The outcomes of this meeting were therefore presented to AU Commission representatives as well as several partners including UNICEF, UNFPA, UN Women, the Government of Canada, DFID, and the Ford Foundation. All expressed their support to CSO engagement in regional initiatives.