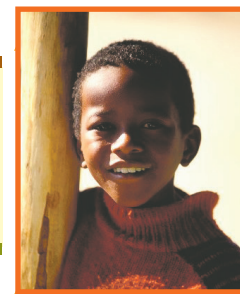


DAY OF THE AFRICAN CHILD

JUNE 16, 2015

THEME: Accelerating Our Collective Efforts to End Child Marriage in Africa



Study shows child marriage still rampant in Kenya despite being outlawed

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Child marriage refers to any marriage of a person below 18. This is according to Article 1 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The UN declares it a violation of children's rights and a direct form of discrimination. It deprives children, and particularly girls, who are the most affected, the right to health, education, development and fair treatment.

The theme for this year's Day of the African Child (DAC) is: "25 Years after the Adoption of the African Children's Charter: Accelerating our Collective Efforts to End Child Marriage in Africa".

In Kenya, child marriage is still rampant, especially among the rural communities. This is despite the enactment of a law prohibiting the practice.

A recent report by Plan International in

Kenya indicates that many parents in the rural areas marry off their daughters as young as 12, ostensibly to escape poverty and out of the fear and stigma associated with teenage pregnancies and children born out of wedlock. In such communities, girls are either seen as an economic burden or valued as capital for exchange with goods, money and livestock.

Yet the Marriage Act 2014 outlaws marriage below the age of 18. It specifies that no person shall get engaged or betrothed to another who is under the age of 18. The law imposes stiff penalties to anyone who violates it.

There is need for the government, non-governmental organisations, community groups, and individual families to mobilise and build the capacities and competencies of men, boys and entire communities towards the eradication of child marriage in Kenya.

"Improving access to education for both girls and boys and eliminating gender

gaps in education are important ways of ending child marriage," says Samuel Musyoki, acting country director of Plan International in Kenya.

He suggests the creation of girl clubs and networks, and committed advocacy on children's rights in order to change attitudes towards child marriage.

"At governmental level, ministries need to work together to coordinate efforts to tackle the social and economic barriers to girls' education. These barriers cut across multiple sectors," Mr Musyoki says.

QUICK FACTS

Kilifi has the highest prevalence of child marriage, with 47.4 per cent, followed by Homa Bay (38 per cent), Kwale (37.9 per cent), Bondo (29.5 per cent) and Tharaka (25.3 per cent). (Source Plan International in Kenya).

About Day of the African Child

The Day of the African Child, abbreviated as DAC, is commemorated every year on June 16 by Member States of the African Union (AU), and its Partners. This occasion is firstly a commemoration to recall the 1976 uprising in Soweto, when a protest by school children in South Africa against apartheid type of education resulted in the killing of the unarmed young protesters by police officers. DAC further presents the opportunity to focus on the work of all actors committed to the rights of children on the continent, to consolidate their efforts in addressing the obstacles for realising these rights. The day also provides an occasion for governments, international institutions and communities to renew their commitments towards improving the plight of children by organising activities and involving them.

Speak out today against Child Abuse

The Gender Violence Recovery Centre (GVRC) is a non-profit making, non-partisan charitable trust of the Nairobi Women's Hospital (NWH). GVRC's main purpose is to bring back meaning to survivor's lives and their families. Our purpose is realised by providing comprehensive free medical treatment and psychosocial support to survivors of gender based violence.

GVRC's services are demand driven. So far, **over 30,000** GBV survivors (57 per cent women, 36 per cent girls, three per cent men and four per cent boys) have benefited from these services.

Child abuse is more than bruises and broken bones. While physical abuse might be the most visible, other types, such as emotional abuse and neglect, also leave deep lasting scars. At GVRC, out of the 3,247 survivors reported in our facility last year, 29 per cent were girls while nine per cent were boys.

Sexual violence cases against children were reported at 31 per cent in comparison to seven per cent physical abuse. Female child survivors constituted approximately 900 of the reported sexual violence cases. A portion of the total child survivors had to be rescued from traumatic abusive

environments because their physical safety was at immediate risk.

Child marriage is defined as the marital union of a child before they reach 18 years. It is classified as a form of child abuse. Child marriage is increasingly recognised as a gross violation of the rights of children. This vice effectively deprives them of significant education, blocking any opportunity to gain vocational and life skills and adversely exposing them to risks of early pregnancy, child bearing and motherhood before they are physically and psychologically ready. In addition, there's an increased risk of intimate partner sexual violence and HIV infection. They are more likely to be victims of domestic violence and social isolation. The result is serious emotional harm.

We recognise that both state and non-state actors have put forth insurmountable

efforts in addressing child abuse through legislation of laws, such as the Protection against Domestic Violence, the Sexual Offences Act, and revisions of the Children's Act, among other bills relating to child protection.

Despite these efforts, there remains a great challenge in addressing Child Sexual Abuse, Child Trafficking, Child Labour, Child Neglect and Early Child Marriages, among other forms of child abuse present in Kenya.

Child marriages significantly challenge the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals 3, 4 and 5: to promote gender equality; to reduce child mortality; and to improve maternal health.

GVRC, in close partnership with the Embassy of Denmark (DANIDA), is actively engaged in raising awareness of the adverse consequences of early marriages and lobbying for monitoring

and implementation of laws that protect children. We are in continuous efforts to focus on running programmes that provide children with viable alternatives to marriage, and demanding more effective enforcement of existing laws that condemn child marriage.

With the right combination of effective programmes, policies and political will, millions of children will have the opportunity to fulfil their potential and become future change agents. We continue to enhance our referral platforms to temporal and long-term shelters for abused children, with the purpose of bringing back meaning to their lives and offer an avenue to pursue their dreams away from the abusive environments. GVRC urges the Government, community and religious leaders, civil society, the private sector, and Kenyan families, to uphold children in the best regard and to speak out when child abuse is occurring.

It shouldn't hurt to be a child!

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Join the Become 1 in a Million Movement and stand in solidarity against Child Abuse!

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