



## Technical Brief

# THE ROLE OF WORLD VISION IN ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE IN ZAMBIA: GAPS AND OPPORTUNITIES

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### Background

Child marriage is defined as a formal or informal union, including religious and customary marriage, of anyone younger than 18<sup>1</sup>. With high rates of child marriages in Zambia, currently estimated at 29%<sup>2</sup>, many children continue to experience multiple violations of children's rights, such as domestic violence, forced pregnancy, and limited or no education and economic opportunities, restricting their prospects for the full realization of their potentials<sup>3</sup>.

As ensuring the survival and rights of children remain a priority, World Vision Zambia joined government efforts to

end child marriage in Zambia on 21st March 2018, when it launched the "It takes Zambia to End Child Marriage" Campaign. World Vision Zambia is currently spurring conversations on harmful vices associated with child marriages within its operational areas, advocating for policy changes to address children's injustices and ensuring that children's fundamental rights are protected. This Technical Brief provides insights into some of the interventions that World Vision Zambia is implementing to end child marriage and the gaps and opportunities to improve the fight against child marriages.

### Technical Approaches

Programmatically, World Vision Zambia implements the end child marriage campaign using three main techniques. These include raising awareness of the dangers of child marriages, supporting efforts to respond to child marriage cases and collaborating with partners to end child marriages in Zambia.

#### Awareness Raising to End Child Marriage

World Vision Zambia works with faith and traditional leaders to raise awareness of the dangers of child marriage and advocate for protecting children from child marriages. World Vision Zambia also uses public media to convey awareness messages on the risks of child marriage. World Vision Zambia also conducts interviews using media platforms with faith and traditional leaders, Government and other partners to educate the public on the roles played by different actors in ending child marriages in Zambia. Traditional leaders also take the leading role in

sensitizing their subordinates through the traditional councils on the effects of traditional practices such as initiation ceremonies as contributors to child marriages.

Faith Leaders utilize the main church programs to discourage harmful practices and preach on scripture that recognizes girls and women as equal partners in development. Further, World Vision Zambia works with local champions to end child marriages in its operational areas. For example, in Katete

<sup>1</sup>Zambia National Child Policy

<sup>2</sup>UNICEF (2019). Case Study on the Ending Child Marriage in the Republic of Zambia <https://www.unicef.org/esa/media/8941/file/Zambia-Case-Study-Child-Marriage-2021.pdf>

<sup>3</sup>UNICEF (2015). Qualitative study of Child Marriage in Six Districts of Zambia, April, 2015

District, World Vision Zambia works with a team of traditional counsellors in a community initiative called "Nileleni Program" to reach out to families using door-to-door sensitizations with messages of child marriage prevention and protection of children from harmful practices.

**Text Box 1: Approaches used by World Vision to End Child Marriage in Zambia**

World Vision Zambia applies three approaches to end child marriages in Zambia. These are:

- Raising awareness of the dangers of child marriages;
- Supporting efforts to respond to child marriage cases and;
- Collaborating with partners to end child marriages in Zambia.

### Supporting Efforts to End Child Marriage

At the District level, World Vision Zambia works with the District Child Protection Committees (DCPC), comprised of representatives from government departments. The role of the DCPC is to protect children from abuse and exploitation and prevent them from entering marriages. They also support children to get required services that have experienced sexual, emotional and physical violence.

At the chiefdom level, World Vision Zambia works with traditional leaders to formulate child protection By-Laws that

guide communities on conduct against child marriage and advocating against other child-related abuse.

Further, World Vision Zambia supports communities to develop Zone and Village Child Protection committees to strengthen the monitoring and reporting mechanisms on child abuse-related cases, including cases of child marriages.

World Vision Zambia supports the establishment of School Councils and Children's Journalist Cubs to have formal platforms where children can participate in decision making on issues that affect their wellbeing. The platforms used by children to air their voices has strengthened reporting systems of child abuse cases and other matters affecting children.

### Collaborating to End Child Marriage

At the National level, World Vision Zambia is part of the Joining Forces Alliance, which comprises five other NGOs that use their collective power to accelerate change to secure children's rights and end violence against them.

At the District level, World Vision Zambia collaborates with the church through the district Pastor's Fellowship to advocate for ending child marriages in Zambia.

## Outcomes of World Vision's End Child Marriage Interventions

A 2021 World Vision Zambia survey showed a significant reduction of adolescents (aged 12 to 18 years), indicating that they were married from 7.2 percent in 2017 to 2.3 percent in 2021. This change is attributed to increased sensitization and community action to end child marriage and vices previously held as socially acceptable norms yet perpetuate child marriage. Further, the study revealed that harmful traditional or customary practices that violate children's rights and lead to child marriage have declined by 40% in WVZ's programme areas<sup>4</sup>.

Working with the Zonal Child Protection Committees (ZCPC) and traditional leaders, World Vision Zambia supported the formulation of community child protection by-laws in 13 chiefdoms that harmonized how abuse and child marriage cases were dealt with at the community level in the absence of legal guiding principles.

Further, World Vision Zambia worked with District Child Protection Committees (DCPC), traditional and faith leaders to put in place and strengthen reporting and referral systems to support child survivors, including children experiencing abuse such as sexual violence. With increased knowledge among people of the reporting systems and mechanisms to refer children affected by child violations, 848 cases of different child violations, including child marriages, were reported over a period of two years. Of the reported cases, 506 girls were retrieved from child marriages, and 315 were supported to school through various community initiatives and parental responsibility. In 2020 alone, 486 cases of child marriages were reported compared to the 300 reported in 2019 and 62 reported in 2018. This shows that with increased awareness on reporting channels, more and more people come forward with information that would safeguard the wellbeing of children affected by violence.

<sup>4</sup>World Vision Zambia (Draft). Technical Programme Evaluation Report. May-June 2021

## Limitations and Challenges

Zambia is home to 73 tribal groupings spread across ten Provinces<sup>5</sup>. The majority of the population is situated in rural areas with strong traditional and cultural beliefs<sup>6</sup>. For example, initiation ceremonies have been part and parcel of traditional beliefs as a rite of passage to adulthood<sup>7</sup> (UNFPA, 2020). For years, they have been used as a channel for passing down cultural and social norms, teachings and traditions – including gender, relationships and sexuality (Mutale, 2017; Kamlongera, 2007; Skinner et al., 2013; Kangwa, 2011). This has made it difficult to reform traditional practices, such as initiation ceremonies, that drive children, especially girls, into marriage.

Moreover, not all traditional leaders have embraced the idea of reforming inculcated traditional practices that have lived on for many decades, despite such practices being drivers of child marriage and high rates of school dropouts, especially among girls. To safeguard cultural norms, some traditional leaders disallow discussions that threaten to change people's mindsets regarding practices that have been upheld from time immemorial.

The other challenge pertains to geographical coverage. For example, World Vision Zambia's campaign to end child marriage is only implemented in 39 of the 116 districts of Zambia. Districts not covered by World Vision Zambia are either supported by different partner NGOs or are not receiving any information regarding ending child marriage. As a result, Districts without interventions on ending child marriages lag in upholding and protecting children's fundamental rights and liberties.

## Opportunities

Despite World Vision Zambia not implementing the ending child marriage campaign countrywide, there is an opportunity to utilize the House of Chiefs at the National level to sensitize the communities countrywide that have no program implementation of ending child marriages in their districts. Through this process, the House of Chiefs, who oversee Chiefdoms in Zambia, can also engage all traditional leaders, including those hesitant to reform harmful traditional practices and advocate for changes that would enhance child protection in Chiefdoms.

## Our Call for Action

With increased awareness-raising and action to end child marriages, there have been significant gains in improving knowledge about the dangers of child marriage and its detriments to children's welfare. As a result, the narrative of deciding to marry off children, especially girls who fall pregnant or those that attain puberty, is slowly changing despite continued high poverty levels and the inability of families to provide for children. Therefore, to effectively address child marriage, we call for the following measures to be undertaken:

### Policy makers

- Policy makers should enact the Children's Code Bill to harmonize the existing policies and laws on child protection. The enactment of the Bill will domesticate the international regulations and enhance child protection mechanisms.

### Partners

- There must be a harmonized approach of programs aimed at enhancing child protection and ending child marriage.
- Partners should form or strengthen their joint efforts to advocate for effective child protection laws.

### Program Implementers

- Program implementers should integrate prevention messages on ending child marriage.
- World Vision Zambia programs such as WASH, Education, Economic Empowerment, and Health should mainstream ending child marriage activities in their programmes to enhance the number of people reached with ending child messages, during their day to day programming.

<sup>5</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Zambian\\_tribes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Zambian_tribes)

<sup>6</sup><https://www.everyculture.com/To-Z/Zambia.html>

<sup>7</sup>Rites of passage are very important among communities, cultures and groupings observing them. For years, they have been used as a channel for passing down cultural and social norms, teachings and traditions – including about gender, relationships and sexuality (Mutale, 2017; Kamlongera, 2007; Skinner, et al., 2013; Kangwa, 2011).

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WorldVision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families, and their communities to reach their full potential by tackling the root causes of poverty and injustice. World Vision serves all people, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, or gender.

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