Today the whole of Africa, including Namibia, celebrates the Day of the African Child, under the theme "Accelerating our Collective Efforts to End Child Marriage in Africa".

This year, the Day of the African Child is unique in that it coincides with the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC). The aim of this year’s celebration is to raise awareness on child marriages which still remain an unacceptable reality for millions of girls across Africa.

Child marriage is a reality for millions of children – predominantly girls – across Africa. Reports show that thirty-nine percent of girls in sub-Saharan Africa are married before their 18th birthday; thirteen percent are married before their 15th birthday. It is sad to learn that 15 out of the 20 countries with the highest rates of child marriage are in Africa.

**What is Child Marriage?**
Child marriage is a formal marriage or informal union entered into by an individual before reaching the age of 18.

In Namibia, child marriage does not rule out teenage pregnancies which is very high and has the same far reaching consequences.

Reports show that in some regions, harmful cultural and social practices reinforce the practice of child marriage.

**Consequences of Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancies**
- Child marriage denies girls of every opportunity to thrive.
- Child brides cannot make decisions on their health, education and whom to marry. Therefore they don’t get the opportunity to enhance their socio-economic status. Thus the vicious circle of poverty continues.
- Child brides face the risk of sexually transmitted infections such as HIV/AIDS, gonorrhea, syphilis etc. as they don’t have a choice of the partners with whom they can practice safe sex.
- Girls who give birth before the age of 5 are five times more likely to face the high risk of death or injury in childbirth.
- Child marriage puts girls and women at an increased risk of gender based violence throughout their lives.

**Is Child Marriage happening in Namibia?**

Child marriage in Namibia is a practice that persists in certain regions of the country. The 2011 Population and Housing Census finds that approximately 9% of girls between 15 and 18 years old in Namibia had given birth to one or more children and most of these are in traditional marriages. This percentage has not changed significantly since 1991 and there was little difference between urban and rural areas.

However, there were significant regional differences with noticeably higher percentages in Kavango West, Kavango East and Kunene.

**What does the law say about Child Marriages?**

The Namibian government recognises that whether it happens to a girl or a boy, child marriage is a serious violation of child rights. It is a direct form of discrimination against the child. who, as a result of the practice, is often deprived of his or her basic rights to health, education, development, and equality.

Namibia also has a legal framework for addressing child marriage. The newly enacted Child Care and Protection Act, Act 3 of 2015, prohibits child marriage in traditional unions and civil marriages complementing the existing Married Persons Equality Act that sets clear age limits and procedures for preventing civil marriages involving children.

**A Call for 2015**

This year’s Day of the African Child theme calls for the active engagement of Government, UN Agencies, traditional leaders, civil society groups, religious groups and the young people themselves to address the structural causes of child marriage through awareness raising, strengthening of existing protection mechanisms and enforcement and monitoring of laws to protect the basic human rights of millions of girls across Africa including Namibia.

Inadequate data on child marriage remains a key constraint to enable proper planning and responses. Investment in data collection and budgeting for responses should be a priority. This will assist and enable stakeholders to evaluate interventions to end child marriage.

Namibia will also seize the opportunity to engage with traditional and religious leaders to advance positive cultural norms and denounce harmful practices.

**Spot Child Marriage to Stop It!**

Ministry of Gender Equality & Child Welfare

African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) on Child Marriages

1. Child marriage violates the child’s right to association (article 8); to privacy (article 10);
2. Education (article 11), especially article 11(3)(e) which requires special measures for female, gifted and disadvantaged children; leisure, recreation and cultural activities (article 12);
3. Health and health services (article 14); protection from child labour (article 15); protection against child abuse and torture (article 16);
4. Protection of the family (article 18); parental care and protection (article 19); protection against harmful social and cultural practices (article 21); protection in case of separation from parents and his or her family environment (article 25);