Qualitative study of child marriage in six districts of Zambia

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Executive summary

Background

Zambia has one of the highest rates of female child marriage in Africa, with a reported national prevalence of 42%.

A recognized dearth of comprehensive data on the practice led UNICEF to commission this study, which was overseen by a Technical Working Group, composed of representatives of government, multilateral, nongovernmental (NGOs) and civil society organizations. Its aim was not to acquire statistically significant data, but to focus on obtaining in-depth, qualitative information on the underlying social, cultural and economic factors that motivate and sustain the practice.

Methods

The research was conducted in six districts: Katete, Lusaka, Luwingu, Mufilira, Mwinilunga and Senanga. Purposive sampling techniques were employed at the district level to determine the specific sites for the study. Qualitative methods were used to explore the nature of child marriage in Zambia, its manifestations, motivations and prevalence. The study examined the underlying social, cultural and economic factors that underpin the practice in order to better understand its origins, dynamics and implications for boys, girls, their families and communities. Its findings are expected to provide those working on behalf of children with a wider evidence base with which to develop more effective prevention and response interventions, ones that resonate with families and communities and are perceived as legitimate.

Challenges and limitations

A number of limitations were observed. These included: 1. Reduced time for data collection because of unanticipated challenges associated with travel to remote, hard to access locations; 2. Substitute researchers were required in some locations; these individuals did not undergo the required research training programme; 3. Occasional difficulty identifying or gaining access to respondents; 4. Delayed decisions on the selection of research sites meant that the research team was in some cases unable to complete preparation visits; and 5. Unavailability of a number of reports, policies and strategic documents that were being developed and finalized at the time of writing and hence were unavailable for review. Each of these limitations was managed in a way that minimized impact on the overall study.

Findings

Child marriage is widely practised across all six sites where data were collected and prevalence rates on the ground appeared in all cases to be higher than those recorded in the last two rounds of the ZDHS (2007, 2013-14) and the 2010 Census. The practice itself is not monolithic: this study found six different ‘types’ of child marriage. Some of these involved girls and men, others women and boys. However, the most common unions are those that take place between peers – girls (from age 12 or 13) and boys (from age 14), usually with an age difference of about two to three years. The majority of marriages involving children do not adhere to traditional processes. Children often decide on their own to marry. In these

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1 UNFPA 2012, based on reports from ever married girls 18-24 years old on whether their marriages took place
cases, parental consent is not sought (or granted) and bride price is tokenistic, made as an ‘IOU’ or not paid at all. Many marriages do not last for longer than a few months or a year; divorce is common.

**Trends and patterns in child marriage:** Those more likely to marry include children from poor families or backgrounds, those living in rural areas, those not attending school, pregnant girls and their boyfriends, orphans and stepchildren, difficult or ‘hard to manage’ children, and children without adequate supervision or support. While both globally and in Zambia, girls appear to be statistically at greater risk than boys of marriage, this study found significant numbers of boy husbands and fathers. The factors that help delay or prevent child marriage for both boys and girls include the education level of parents, access to quality education, strong community leadership, involvement in income-generating activities, opportunities for personal development and access to safe recreational activities, and the presence of positive and negative role models.

**Benefits and risks of marriage:** Many child marriages are driven by a desire to seize an opportunity – to escape bad living conditions, to meet basic needs, to enhance one’s own or one’s parents’ status in the community, to secure an economic benefit or to remain within the peer group. Numerous people have a stake in and an influence on whether a marriage takes place, thus each marriage involves a negotiation between a series of competing and, at times, conflicting agendas. Decision-making involves weighing the actual and perceived benefits against the known risks of early pregnancy and other health-related problems, voluntary or forced withdrawal from formal education, truncated personal development, becoming a single child mother, placing an increased burden on parents and families in the event of divorce, inadequate parental care and supervision and increased rates of domestic violence. Often boys, girls and their families see the status quo as so intolerable that marriage is understood to be the best among the limited options available.

**Main intervening actors and their focus of their efforts:** The number of actors at the national, district and local level involved in addressing child marriage has increased in recent years. The focus of their efforts is on 1. the harmonization of customary and statutory marriage law; 2. ensuring that these laws are enforced; and 3. raising awareness and sensitizing communities about the negative consequences of child marriage. Each of these programme approaches is described in this report in order to identify strategic points of learning for the development of the National Plan of Action to End Child Marriage. Given the adverse economic and social circumstances in which many children and families live in Zambia, these efforts to combat the practice are seriously constrained by the lack of viable alternative options for boys, girls and their families. From this perspective, awareness raising on its own will not reduce child marriage.

**Implications**

The implications of the study’s findings are numerous and wide-reaching: 1. in the vast majority of cases, child marriage is less a ‘cultural practice’ than a reflection of social and economic inequality; 2. children’s agency needs to be factored into understandings of child marriage; 3. child marriage is a gendered phenomenon that involves boys as well as girls; 4. understanding child marriage means understanding what adulthood has to offer children; 5. child marriage is a protective strategy employed by parents as well as boys and girls; 6. puberty and initiation rites are milestones in the life of girls and boys; 7. a focus on child...
marriage should not preclude attention to broader issues of sex, pregnancy and parenthood in childhood; 8. child divorce is as much a reality as child marriage; 9. improved intergenerational relationships and communication are essential to reducing child marriage; 10. sensitization efforts need to be accompanied by a multisectoral response to child marriage.

Recommendations

This study makes a series of recommendations for how the issue of child marriage can be dealt with in the future. It builds upon the opinions and priorities of the communities, families and children who participated in this study and frames a strategic process for moving the agenda forward in Zambia.

1. Base the National Plan of Action to End Child Marriage on the findings of this study.
2. Consolidate the available evidence.
3. Secure support and resources to implement the National Plan of Action.
4. Articulate and agree a multisector approach and collaboration.
5. Develop and implement programmes that address the underlying causes of child marriage and create alternative life options for children.
6. Evaluate the role of legislative reform.
7. Recognize the agency of boys and girls in child marriages.
8. Improve and expand recreational programmes for urban and rural children and young people.
9. Revise and improve approaches to sexual and reproductive health.
10. Use puberty as the nexus around which an integrated protection plan or risk reduction strategy is based.
11. Develop programmes for boys and girls who are separated or divorced.
12. Reappraise current approaches to sensitization and awareness-raising.
13. Build the capacity of government, non-government and other relevant actors.
14. Pilot interventions in selected districts.
Section 1. Introduction

Child marriage, defined as a legal or customary union before the age of 18, threatens children’s well-being and constitutes multiple violations of their rights. In numerous contexts around the world, the practice has been shown to have profound physical, intellectual, psychological and emotional impacts, especially for girls. It is most prevalent in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa and least common in North Africa, the Middle East and South-East Asia. Globally, those children most affected by child marriage are those who are poor, live in rural areas, are out of school and without opportunities for labour force participation. Girls are significantly more likely than boys to be married before the age of 18.

Zambia has one of the highest rates of female child marriage in Africa, with a reported national prevalence of 42 per cent. Abundant evidence on its adverse consequences has galvanized a series of actors at the national and local levels to address concerns related to the practice. Interventions aimed at legislative change and revised service provision in education, health and child protection have been underway for several years. A motivational boost was given to this work in April 2013 when the Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs, supported by the former First Lady, started a nationwide campaign to end child marriage. It is widely acknowledged that there is a need to back this campaign with a strong evidence base from research.

The major source of information on the extent of child marriage in the country is quantitative data contained in the 2007 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) and 2010 Census. These data show that there has been little to no change in the national prevalence rate since 2002 and that the practice is most common in Eastern Province (60 per cent), followed by Luapula (50 per cent), Northern (48 per cent), North-Western (47 per cent), Central (46 per cent), Southern (38 per cent), Western (34 per cent), Copperbelt (32 per cent) and Lusaka (28 per cent). These marked differences in prevalence by area of residence suggest that more information is needed on how the social, historic and economic reality in which children and families live influences or mitigates decisions related to child marriage.

Who is a ‘child’? Who are the decision makers and under what circumstances are decisions made about child marriage? What role do girls and boys have in this process? In what ways do social institutions, such as traditional leadership or religious bodies, influence the maintenance or hindrance of the practice? How does context and circumstances – such as living in poverty – become a ‘driver’ or ‘drivers’ of child marriage? Why do some children living in similar material, cultural and social circumstances marry while others do not? Is child marriage always harmful to girls and boys? What are the responses of government and non-government actors to the practice? The nuances and patterns that emerge from investigating questions such as these are critical to understanding child marriage in Zambia and

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4 Singh and Sumara, 1996.
5 Mathur et al., 2011; UNICEF, 2005.
6 UNFPA, 2012, based on reports from ever-married girls 18–24 years old on whether their marriages took place before they turned 18. The ZDHS 2013-14 was released just as this report was being finalized and secondary analysis of child marriage related statistics had not yet been completed at the time of publication. A consolidation of all current evidence on the topic is expected to be produced in mid-2015.
elsewhere. Although the DHS data provide indications of trends and associations between child marriage and other sociodemographic characteristics, they give only a partial picture. They do not provide the kind of in-depth data that are needed to understand the questions just outlined.

This study was designed to provide this complementary understanding. It was commissioned by UNICEF and involved a partnership between the Children in Need Network (CHIN) and Child Frontiers. It was overseen by the Technical Working Group on the Child Marriage Study, composed of representatives of government, multilateral, non-government organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations. This group provided in-depth support and feedback on the design of the methodology, the selection of research sites, the data collection methods and the interpretation of the research findings.

The research used qualitative methods to explore the nature of child marriage in Zambia, its manifestations, motivations and prevalence. It examined the underlying social, cultural and economic factors that underpin the practice to better understand its origins, dynamics and implications for boys, girls, their families and communities. These insights are crucial for engaging with children and adults to reduce the personal, social and economic pressures that lead boys and girls to marry and the threats posed by child marriage. The findings from this research can help inform the development of a multifaceted response to child marriage that is constructive and appropriate to context.

This report is divided into seven substantive parts. The first section provides the objectives of the research and the methodology used. The second examines the definitions, scope and manifestations of child marriage at the national and local levels. The next part of the report focuses on trends and patterns in child marriage, specifically who is marrying, why and to whom. The fourth section describes the benefits and risks associated with the practice, while the fifth examines existing laws, interventions and efforts in Zambia to stop the practice, including the way in which they are understood and how they inform the decisions that children and families make regarding marriage. The sixth section presents the main implications of the research findings, placing them in the broader social, cultural and economic context in which child marriages are taking place in Zambia. The seventh and final section provides conclusions and recommendations for policy and practice regarding child marriage in Zambia and elsewhere.
Section 2. Research districts

Research was conducted in six districts: Katete (Eastern Province), Lusaka (Lusaka Province), Luwingu (Northern Province), Mufulira (Copperbelt Province), Mwinilunga (North-Western Province) and Senanga (Western Province).

Figure 1. Districts where the primary research was conducted

One main research site was chosen in each district; data from these sites were complemented by information from secondary sites and from research at the national level with government, NGOs, CSOs and multilateral agencies. These districts were purposively selected by the Technical Working Group on the Child Marriage Study. Selection involved balancing a number of divergent characteristics, such as setting (rural, urban and peri-urban); prevalence of child marriage (high and low); rates of poverty (high and low); and the cultural context (including initiations and other rites of passage). For more details on site selection, see section 3.3.

Snapshots of each of the research sites in the six districts are provided in Annex A.
Section 3. Objectives and methodology of the research

This section outlines the objectives of the study and the methodology designed to ensure their successful completion.

3.1 Research objectives

The specific objectives of the study were:

1. **Identify the influencers or drivers of child marriage within families and communities in the six selected districts.**

2. **Establish the social and cultural environments and traditions that promote or prevent child marriage at the local and district levels.**

3. **Assess the extent of child marriage in selected communities in Zambia.**

Because most of the available information on child marriage in Zambia is quantitative in nature, this research was not designed to acquire statistically significant data. Instead, it focused on obtaining in-depth, qualitative information on the underlying social, cultural and economic factors that motivate and sustain the practice of child marriage in the six selected districts. Doing so involved exploring the reasons why child marriage exists and identifying its various manifestations in different relationships and household, family and community settings; eliciting the contextual understandings of childhood and adulthood that inform decisions around child marriage; and identifying the drivers that sustain child marriage in the selected districts and communities. Its findings are expected to provide those working on behalf of children with a wider evidence base with which to develop more effective prevention and response interventions, ones that resonate with families and communities and are perceived as legitimate.

3.2 Research questions

A series of targeted questions were developed to facilitate the achievement of the objectives of the study.

**What are the underlying drivers of child marriage within families and communities?**

- Why are boys and girls marrying? Are reasons for marriage different for boys than for girls?
- What types of households are most affected by child marriage?
- Which boys and girls are most likely to marry as children (such as orphans or children out of school)?
- What are the benefits associated with child marriage? What are the risks?
- What are the benefits associated with not marrying? What are the risks for children who do not marry?
- Why do some children choose to marry and others do not?
How do social and cultural beliefs and traditions promote or prevent child marriage?

- What are the understandings that communities have of who is and is not a child?
- What are the beliefs, norms and values that underlie or promote child marriage?
- What motivates community members to uphold or to try to stop the marriage of children?
- What are the different rites of passage that girls and boys undergo? What role, if any, do these have in preparing children for marriage? Are these practices different or similar in urban and rural areas? Do they vary by region? By sex?
- Are there some community members whose sons and daughters are not entering child marriages? If so, what is their rationale for not doing so? How does the wider community perceive or respond to the decision not to marry as a child?

To what extent are communities influenced by practical interventions and legal and policy frameworks related to child marriage?

- How do communities react to messages against child marriage, such as from the Government (such as the campaign by the Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs launched in 2013 and from civil society organizations)?
- Are communities aware of the national laws relating to early marriage? How do these laws resonate with communities? Do they find them relevant?
- What legal and policy changes need to be implemented to reduce early marriage?

3.3 Research design

A mixed-methods approach was employed to investigate the study questions. This methodology was deemed most appropriate because of the variety of questions under investigation and because different methods and sources were needed to corroborate participants’ perspectives with data and research findings from other sources. By capturing data from different contexts and different respondent groups, the research was designed to acquire a cumulative view and information that is as valid, reliable and objective as possible.

The appropriateness and relevance of this approach was monitored throughout the research process – during the training of the research team, two pilot phases and the subsequent collection of primary data at the community and national levels. Doing so ensured that the methods used facilitated the full participation of respondent groups, regardless of their age, sex, education, literacy level or abilities. Data collection was also facilitated by the ongoing review of notes and preliminary data analysis to confirm that tools and recording formats were functioning well and implemented appropriately. Working in this way ensured that any necessary adjustments or other challenges were detected as soon as possible and that corrective action was taken.

The mixture of research methods included:

**A review of relevant documentary sources**: NGO and government assessments, reports, ethnographic and other academic research, project needs assessments and evaluations and other relevant archival materials were reviewed throughout the study and in the data analysis stage. In addition, literature was reviewed that related to child marriage – manifestations, interpretations and interventions – elsewhere in Africa and globally. A small portion of these
documents are listed in the ‘Works cited’ section of this report, which inventories only documents referred to specifically in this report.

**Key informant interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted in person at the national, district and community levels as well as by phone/Skype, where necessary.

**Table 1. Key informants at the national and district levels**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key informant agencies/organizations at the national level</th>
<th>Key informants at the district level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs</td>
<td>Village heads/chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Community Development and Child Health</td>
<td>Traditional initiators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
<td>Religious leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Health</td>
<td>District social welfare officers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Nations Population Fund</td>
<td>Health workers from government and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>civil society organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Marriage Working Group</td>
<td>Child protection, education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children in Need Network Zambia Centre for Communication</td>
<td>and other staff from government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Platform for Social Protection</td>
<td>departments and NGOs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAMFED</td>
<td>Local councillors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan International</td>
<td>Police officers, including staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Save the Children</td>
<td>of the Victim Support Units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign Against Early Marriage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YWCA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Gender Studies, University of Zambia</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>ifeLine/Childline Zambia</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Focus group discussions:** These activities were conducted with members of the communities where data were collected, using participatory techniques, and were approximately 2–2.5 hours in duration. Group discussions were also employed at the national level with members of various multilateral, government and non-government agencies.

All of the sessions explored participants’ specific experiences and opinions about child marriage in an open, flexible and engaging manner. Each group discussion was led by one facilitator, and participants’ comments and discussions were recorded by a note-taker. Consent was obtained from all participants along with permission for any materials produced in the sessions to be kept by the research team for analysis.

**Table 2. Community focus group categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child respondent groups in each site</th>
<th>Adult respondent groups in each site</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married girls (13–17 years)</td>
<td>Mothers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married boys (13–17 years)</td>
<td>Fathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried girls (13–17 years)</td>
<td>Married young adult females (18–24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried boys (13–17 years)</td>
<td>years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Married young adult males (18–24 years)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In all research sites, focus group discussions were organized with groups of 6–10 participants from each of the eight target respondent groups (mothers; fathers; married and unmarried girls (aged 13–17); married and unmarried boys (aged 13–17); married young adult females and males (aged 18–24)). These groups were disaggregated by sex, age and marital status to support participants' openness to participate and a commonality of experience. Each group discussion was led by a facilitator and note-taker of the same sex as the participants. In each site, representatives of the eight respondent groups were selected to participate.1

In each group discussion, four drawings of married and unmarried girls and boys were used to elicit the views and experiences of participants.

With participants seated in a circle, the facilitator began by introducing the first picture and explaining that it depicted an ‘unmarried girl’ in the participants’ community. A discussion was then facilitated around why she was unmarried. What were her personal circumstances? Family relationships? Daily activities? Participants were then asked which people had an influence on her and about the household and community environment that contributed to her staying ‘unmarried’. A similar process was then used to explore the circumstances of a married girl and her decision to marry. Again, participants were asked to identify those who had an interest and a voice in the girl’s decision to marry. The discussion then went on to explore the situation of unmarried and married boys.

Some responses to the drawings included:

“Most girls who marry early, like at the age of 15, do not listen to the advice of their parents. Mostly, these girls marry … without the consent of their parents. Most of them get into marriage because they admire others who have children and are respected in the community. Some get into marriage as a way of running away [from] poverty in the homes of their parents and guardians.” A boy in a group of unmarried boys aged 13–17 in Mwinilunga

“Most parents marry off their girls or young daughters at an early age as long as they can gain something from the marriage. Most parents have problems with their young daughters and hence they force them to get married. This usually happens when a girl is seen to be naughty. The families would rather she gets married to prevent shame on the family.” A young man in a group of married young men aged 18–24 in Senanga

“Child marriage is a result of no help from anyone. No parents, no school fees, death of parents, getting mistreated.” A girl in a group of married girls aged 13–17 in Mufulira
**Testimonies:** Individual testimonies or case studies were used to gather life stories from children and adults about their perceptions and experiences of child marriage, including those who have decided not to enter child marriage or not to marry their son or daughter (‘pioneers’). Testimonies were asked of men who married girls to gain a detailed understanding of how they rationalized and made that decision. The in-depth case studies were designed to illustrate and give meaning to salient issues that emerged from the primary and secondary data.

**Surveys and questionnaires:** A targeted survey was developed and distributed nationally using the U-Report platform. This SMS-based survey consisted of a short set of questions that was developed following the literature review and an initial analysis of the primary data. The questions were aimed at males and females between the ages of 12 and 21 years and were designed to provide generalizable data at the national level on a number of salient topics.

### 3.4 Site selection and sampling

The six districts where the research took place were selected by the Technical Working Group on the Child Marriage Study. District selection was based on the group’s analysis of existing information and experience of implementing programmes. It involved balancing a number of divergent characteristics, including setting (rural, urban and peri-urban); prevalence of child marriage (high and low); rates of poverty (high and low); and cultural context (known to carry out initiations and other rites of passage). The aim of the selection process was to accumulate findings that were generalizable or that would resonate beyond the specific settings in which the primary data were collected.

Purposive sampling techniques were employed at the district level to determine the specific sites for the study. This means of sampling is particularly useful where a targeted number of respondents need to be reached quickly and where sampling for proportionality is not the main concern. Using a purposive sample enabled research sites to be selected where there was the greatest likelihood of learning about the specific issues under investigation. A number of additional criteria were developed in consultation with the Technical Working Group on the Child Marriage Study to select the most appropriate sites for data collection (see Annex C).

The Central Statistical Office also supported the final selection of sites, using data from the 2010 Population and Housing Census, including unpublished data. These data helped the research team to identify communities with the highest or lowest rates of child marriage in the selected districts and to assess the data alongside the other selection criteria.

Once specific sites were selected, the research team either visited or liaised with a local contact to seek permission from the local government, the traditional authorities and community leadership to undertake the study. The research team then worked closely with these parties as well as with colleagues within the CHIN network who live and work in the selected districts to identify a broad range of individual and group participants. Individuals

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8 This term is employed by Malhotra et al. (2009) to refer to community members who break from tradition and expected behaviour.

9 Members of the Technical Working Group on the Child Marriage Study are listed in Annex B.
from the different respondent groups were then selected using stratified random sampling to ensure inclusion of all the respondent categories deemed relevant for the study.

In addition to the six primary sites in each of the six chosen districts (Table 3), the research teams attempted to visit an additional site where statistical data indicated that the prevalence of child marriage contrasted with the primary research site. For example, in districts where research was conducted in sites with a high rate of child marriage, the team sought to visit a community with a low rate of child marriage. However, this was not always possible and was contingent upon logistical and time constraints. For the secondary sites visited, the intention was not to employ all the research methods but instead to collect as much relevant information as possible.

Table 3. Research sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Ward</th>
<th>Reason for selection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Luwingu</td>
<td>Katapola Ward</td>
<td>Fits the general criteria and has lowest district rate of child marriage, at 12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mufulira</td>
<td>Bwananyina Ward</td>
<td>Fits general criteria and has highest district rate of child marriage, at 17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mwinilunga</td>
<td>Kasampula Ward</td>
<td>Fits general criteria and has highest district rate of child marriage, at 23.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mulumbi Ward</td>
<td>Fits general criteria and has lowest district rate of child marriage, at 11.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katete</td>
<td>Vulumukoko Ward</td>
<td>Fits general criteria and an international NGO has a wide-ranging programme on child marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kapoche Ward</td>
<td>Fits the general criteria and has the highest rate of marriage, at 25.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lusaka</td>
<td>Chaisa Ward</td>
<td>Fits general criteria and has highest district rate of child marriage, at 12.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senanga</td>
<td>Senanga Central Ward</td>
<td>Identified as having high levels of child marriage and teenage pregnancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kataba Ward</td>
<td>Identified as having high levels of child marriage and to provide rural urban contrast</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[10\] The original plan was to conduct the field research in Mata ward but doing so proved impossible due to the distances involved and the inaccessibility of the community (due to sand). The team took guidance from the District Commissioner and local civil society organisations to identify alternative sites that were also reported to have high rates of child marriage.
3.5 Sample size

The final number of respondents in the study was larger than the intended sample size of 384 respondents. Categories of respondents included: married boys (13–17 years); married girls (13–17 years); unmarried boys (13–17 years); unmarried girls (13–17 years); married young adult males (18–24 years); married young adult females (18–24 years); mothers; fathers; and informants working at the central, district and local levels in government, multilateral agencies, NGOs, civil society organizations and traditional leadership.

In total, 444 individuals participated in the research. Of this total, 36 per cent were younger than 18, and 64 per cent were adults. The participation rate was, however, not constant across the respondent groups; married boys and girls (13–17 years) were underrepresented, as were unmarried boys (aged 13–17) and fathers. Most adults groups were overrepresented (see Table 4 for details). Some of the reasons why fewer married children participated than planned are outlined on page 14.

Table 4 includes both the original targeted number of respondents by category and the actual number of respondents who took part in the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Katete</th>
<th>Lusaka</th>
<th>Luwingu</th>
<th>Mufilira</th>
<th>Mwinilunga</th>
<th>Senanga</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Actual total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married boys (13–17 years)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6¹¹</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>19 (35%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married girls (13–17 years)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9¹²</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>27 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried boys (13–17 years)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>43 (80%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried girls (13–17 years)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9¹⁴</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14¹⁵</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>71 (131%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married adult females (18–24 years)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8¹⁶</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18¹⁷</td>
<td>12¹⁸</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>61 (113%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹¹ One or two participants in this group had turned 18 years of age.
¹² Some of the group did not stay for the duration of the focus group discussion.
¹³ This includes girls who were divorced and/or single mothers.
¹⁴ This includes nine unmarried single mothers and eight unmarried girls with no children.
¹⁵ This number represents two focus group discussions.
¹⁶ This group was mixed between married and unmarried participants.
¹⁷ This includes nine married and nine unmarried young adult females.
¹⁸ Four of this number took part in a joint group discussion with the unmarried group aged 13–17.
Married adult males (18–24 years) | 17 | 7 | 9 | 9 | 14 | 8 | N/A | 54 | 64 (119%)
Mothers | 6 | 14 | 11 | 8 | 7 | 10 | N/A | 48 | 56 (117%)
Fathers | 0 | 8 | 8 | 5 | 11 | 11 | N/A | 48 | 43 (90%)
Informants at national, district and local levels | 6 | 7 | 10 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 20 | 30 | 60 (200%)
Overall total | 51 | 60 | 90 | 63 | 79 | 81 | 386 | 444 (115%)

3.6 The study team

The study team consisted of 12 individuals, excluding logistical and support staff. The research was overseen by two principal investigators, assisted by two advisors who provided technical support to the eight field researchers. The team was also assisted by two representatives of the Central Statistical Office who had an important role in secondary data analysis, research site selection and primary data collection.

Because this was one of the first pieces of qualitative research on child marriage to take place in Zambia, it was important to ensure that the research team was well prepared prior to the data collection at the community level. An eight-day residential capacity-building programme was organized for the research team, with representatives of the Central Statistical Office also in attendance. The programme covered a range of topics to ensure that the team understood the purpose of qualitative research; it also provided opportunity for the team to familiarize themselves with the data collection tools expressly designed for this study. Specific topics covered during the capacity-building programme included:

- introductions and overview of the research aims, objectives and process;
- significant welfare and protection issues confronting children;
- overview of the skills and methods involved in qualitative research;
- ethical considerations and the code of conduct for researchers;
- facilitating qualitative research methods, including focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews and collecting case stories (testimonies);
- note-taking, including completing data recording sheets;

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19 This group was unmarried and two focus groups discussion were conducted along with two testimonials.
20 This group was actually unmarried adult males aged 18-24 and two group discussions took place.
21 Two different focus groups were undertaken in separate sites in Kasampula Ward in Kakoma Chiefdom and Mulumbi ward in Kanongesha Chiefdom.
22 Among these eight researchers was a mixture of staff from the Children in Need Network (CHIN) and independent consultants. All were Zambian nationals, as was one of the two principal investigators.
- writing up of notes;
- safeguarding participants in the research process;
- obtaining consent; and
- language and translation issues.

The research team applied their learning from the training in ‘real life’ settings in two pilot exercises conducted in different compounds in Lusaka. Experiencing the research methods as both participants and as facilitators provided the team with the opportunity to deepen their understanding of the data collection tools and to give feedback so that the tools could be revised to better suit the Zambian context.

All the learning materials, research tools, guidance notes, protocols, consent forms and information sheets were compiled into a research guide. This manual was reviewed by the group and then distributed to each team member. ERES Converge, a national research ethics board, also reviewed and approved the manual and a detailed research proposal.

During primary data collection in the districts, the team was split. Each smaller team consisted of five members, including two facilitators, two note-takers/recorders and one technical advisor to support and guide the process of data collection. The teams spent four to five days in each research site and used the weekends to travel from one district to the next. In each of the six selected districts, the teams not only collected primary data from the respondent groups and various individuals but also wrote up and conducted the initial analysis of their findings. Each team worked in parallel during November 2014 to complete the field research.

In addition to the two field research teams, one of the principal investigators was supported by a representative of the Central Statistical Office to conduct focus group discussions and key informant interviews at the central level. This period of data collection took place just after the community fieldwork so that it could be informed by the study’s emerging themes and findings. This process of sharing was critical to the further refinement of the research tools, the triangulation of findings and the identification of new lines of investigation.

3.7 Liaison with the Technical Working Group on the Child Marriage Study

The research team worked closely with the Technical Working Group on the Child Marriage Study throughout the research process, including in the design of the methodology, the development of site selection criteria and in the determining potential respondents at the district and national levels. The research team provided the working group with ongoing updates as the study progressed and shared preliminary findings immediately after the district-level data were collected. Working in this way helped to ensure the involvement of all stakeholders and facilitated the exchange of expertise and opinions of the working group at critical stages in the research process.

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23 Copies of the research guide are available through MoCTA, UNICEF or CHIN.
3.8 Ethics

The research was designed to ensure that the knowledge and learning generated were used to improve the protection and well-being of children and families living in Zambia. It was designed to comply with internationally and nationally recognized research standards. On the basis of a detailed research proposal, ethical clearance was provided by ERES Converge prior to the commencement of data collection.

Ethical principles

The ethical principles underlying the study derived in part from a framework of requirements laid out by Emanuel, Wendler and Grady. Ethical considerations were discussed on an ongoing basis with the Technical Working Group to ensure that the study adhered to international and national research standards. The research aimed at all times to set high standards that allowed for trust to be established between the research team and respondents, thus allowing respondents to answer questions openly and in a way that promoted the accuracy of the study’s findings.

The study was designed to minimize risks to respondents and to maximize the potential benefits of participation. The research team members received specialized instruction in the ethical guidelines and principles of the study prior to data collection, and each was required to sign a researcher code of conduct (see Annex D) and a child protection policy as part of their terms and conditions for involvement in the study.

Box 2

Summary of ethical principles and guidelines for the research

The following 10 ethical principles were applied at all stages of the research.
1. The research should have social and scientific value
2. The research will have scientific validity
3. Subject selection will be fair and transparent
4. Research participants will be protected from harm
5. Researchers will remain main objective
6. The study team will commit to independent review
7. All research participation must be voluntary
8. Respect for potential and enrolled participants
9. Confidentiality and data protection
10. All participation will be voluntary and no compensation will be paid

Note: See Annex E for a full description.

24 Although the proposed research was not clinical in nature, the strict ethical guidelines associated with clinical research were appropriate, given the sensitive nature of the research topic and because a number of research interlocutors were in positions of relative vulnerability. These guiding principles required additional adaptation and contextualization at the local level; guidance for doing so was found in Wessells (2009).
3.9 Challenges and limitations

Undertaking an extensive study such as this one within the available time frame was a challenging undertaking. A detailed risk register was developed prior to the collection of primary data. Although mitigation strategies were also outlined, a number of challenges were nevertheless confronted. Each was managed in a way that minimized overall impact.

**Logistical and timing issues:** The research took place in many remote locations and required the team to travel extensively both within and between districts. As a result, there were logistical and timing challenges, including, but not limited to, negotiating difficult terrain, finding accommodation and accessing electricity, planning for refuelling of vehicles and replenishing stationery and other supplies. Although these challenges were to some extent expected, their confluence at times placed pressure on the team to take time away from data collection and to work in highly constrained conditions.

**Researcher attrition:** Several of the researchers who participated in the capacity-building programme were unable to take part in primary data collection in the districts. Although more individuals received training than were theoretically required, the loss of particular team members had implications in terms of the language capacity and contextual knowledge of certain research teams. As a result, in two sites, substitute researchers who had not been trained for this research were brought in to assist. Each received intensive briefings and guidance from the technical advisor to familiarize them with the research tools and protocols.

**Participant identification or availability:** At times it was difficult to identify or gain access to some respondent groups. This problem arose for a number of reasons, including suspicions about the motive for the study and fear that married children were being documented for legal reasons. Other causes included the inability of some groups to attend planned sessions due to last-minute events and responsibilities (funerals, work, weather, etc.). The ability to mobilize respondent groups was also compromised in some sites by a lack of community structures, by village leaders denying the existence of married children or as a result of the low density of population and remote location of the research site.

**Site selection:** The process to select both the districts and research sites was subject to much discussion and debate. Careful consideration was given to this process, especially in terms of identifying sites that would generate useful data. However, final decisions were made later than expected, which meant that the research team was unable to complete preparation visits to some sites. This omission proved problematic. In Senanga, for example, the plan was to conduct the field research in Mata ward but doing so proved impossible due to the distances involved and the inaccessibility of the community. In this case, the team took guidance from the District Commissioner and identified an appropriate alternative site.

**Accessing documents:** At the time of writing, a number of reports, policies and strategic documents were being developed and finalized and hence were unavailable for review (such as the secondary analysis of child marriage-related data in the 2013-14 ZDHS). Much of this literature contains information relevant to this report.

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25 This was the case in Lusaka for both boys and girls aged 13–17 years.
26 These challenges were found to different degrees in Mfulira, Katele, Mwinilunga, Lusaka and Senanga.
Section 4. Understandings of ‘child’ and ‘marriage’

The meaning of being a child or a parent in a particular population is influenced by the economic, social and cultural aspects of the environment in which families live. These macro features combine to influence cultural beliefs pertaining to children and childhood: opinions about the nature of infants and children, differences between boys and girls, and notions of their roles, responsibilities and appropriate behaviour at different ages inform the manner in which parents and others interact with children. Ideas about who is a child and what constitutes a ‘proper’ childhood are context-dependent. For example, in many settings, childhood is a period of apprenticeship to adult roles. By participating in domestic tasks, such as sibling caregiving, animal husbandry and other economic activities, boys and girls take on increasing levels of responsibility for household functioning as they grow older and more mature. This integration of childhood and adulthood contrasts sharply with worldviews that emphasize childhood as a time of innocence and play, separate from the realm of adults. Normative understandings enshrined in international conventions and national laws tend not to reflect the reality that childhood is not similarly understood in all contexts. These conceptual differences are at the heart of the child marriage ‘debate’: Are those boys and girls who marry understood in their own and others’ eyes to be children?

This chapter explores the question of who is a child, in light of the primary data that were collected in this study. It also explores the nature of a marriage. It presents evidence of diverging and sometimes contradictory responses to these questions.

4.1 Who is a child?

Defining a child is a complex undertaking. Childhood is a diverse, shifting category that is shaped by cultural, social and economic context. Legal frameworks at the global and national levels often do not correspond to one another or to the definitions held by individuals and communities in different settings. This is the case in Zambia.

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), a child is defined as anyone from birth to the age of 18, unless the age of majority is attained earlier. Zambia signed the CRC in 1990 and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child in 1992 but does not consistently employ the definitions contained in these conventions. Despite long-standing efforts to harmonize national law with these instruments,27 the end of childhood in Zambia is legally defined as between 16 and 18 years.

For the vast majority of respondents at the community and district levels, these age demarcations are meaningless (and not known). Instead of using a numerical marker, communities tend to understand a child in terms of developmental stages and achievements. Particular emphasis is placed on an individual’s degree of helplessness, dependence or need for others to provide care, guidance and assistance. The term ‘child’ can range from newborn babies to unmarried males and females in their twenties who are still living with their parents or relatives. Childhood does not end abruptly when a person turns 18, but is instead a fluid and dynamic concept that involves the confluence of a number of individual,

27 A definition consistent with international definitions is expected to be articulated in the forthcoming Children’s Act.
social and cultural factors. Puberty, completion of initiation rites, withdrawal from or completion of school, engagement in sexual relations, full-time labour, wage employment or development of the capacity to care for oneself and others – these, rather than age, are the markers of maturity used by children and adults alike. This process of change, from child to adult, can occur anytime from the approximate age of 12 (or younger) for girls and 14 for boys.

“A child is that under 18 years of age, but if you ask a grandmother in the village, she will say from 0 to 12 years only. Traditionally, a girl at 12 years old is ready to marry. Boys are ready to marry when they have a beard.” A young man in a group discussion of married men 18-24 in Senanga

“Boys are ready for marriage when they start changing their behaviours from boys’ behaviours – like playing with toys, always fighting with friends – to behaving like an adult: going to look for food and bringing home help to the parents.” A mother in a group discussion with mothers in Luwingu

It is no coincidence that males and females begin to marry at puberty. In environments characterized by high levels of poverty and other adversities, the transition from childhood to adulthood can be swift and decisive. When roles change and new responsibilities are assumed, the material and emotional dynamics of the household change and adapt to new and emerging pressures. Sometimes, boys and girls do not feel ready to take on adult roles. They want to remain in school or to continue to hang out with their friends rather than to be responsible for themselves and others. Parents, too, may feel their children are not yet ready for these tasks and obligations. Nevertheless, the social and economic circumstances in which many children live mean a hasty shift from childhood to adulthood. In these settings, what is called ‘child marriage’ by the international community was understood by respondents in Zambia only as ‘marriage’.

4.2 Child marriage as defined in international conventions

Internationally, ‘child marriage’ is defined as a formal or informal union, including religious or customary marriage, of anyone younger than 18. Zambia has ratified the following conventions and agreements focused on the reduction and elimination of child marriage:

- **The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC):** Although child marriage is not explicitly addressed in the CRC, it is linked to a number of other rights and frequently highlighted as a serious rights violation by the Committee on the Rights of the Child. A ‘child’ in this instance is anyone younger than 18 years.

- **The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW):** Under CEDAW obligations, “States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations and in particular shall ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women.” CEDAW goes on to state that the “betrothal and the marriage of a

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28 See, for example, UNICEF 2001.
29 Adapted from www.unicef.org/protection/57929_58008.html.
30 See www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm#article16.
child shall have no legal effect, and all necessary action, including legislation, shall be
taken to specify a minimum age for marriage and to make the registration of marriages
in an official registry compulsory”.31

- **The Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and
  Registration of Marriages**: In addition to outlining the need for consent and
  registration of all marriages, this convention calls for legislative action to specify a
  minimum age for marriage. It specifies that a marriage entered into by any person
  younger than this age should be considered illegal, except where a competent
  authority has granted a dispensation, for serious reasons, in the interest of the
  intending spouses.

- **The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child**: The charter states
  that “child marriage and the betrothal of girls and boys shall be prohibited and effective
  action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify the minimum age of marriage to
  be 18 years and make registration of all marriages in an official registry compulsory”.

- **Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of
  Women in Africa**. Article 6 of the protocol promotes the equality of men and women
  in all aspects relating to marriage and, among other things, highlights the need for
  consent and marriage not to take place before the age of 18.33

4.3 Zambian laws on marriage

The Zambian legal system is dualist in nature and, as a result, marriages can take place in
accordance with either customary or statutory law.

The Marriage Act of Zambia establishes the legal age for marriage at 21 years of age and
requires that consent be obtained for anyone younger who wants to marry (without defining
who can give consent). For those requiring consent, section 33 stipulates that both parties
must be at least 16 years old – otherwise the marriage shall be void. However, the provision
can be averted by an application to a judge of the High Court, who can consent to the
marriage if the particular circumstances of the case are not contrary to the public interest.34
The Marriage Act of Zambia is not absolute in terms of defining the minimum age for
marriage; it is open to interpretation on the issue of consent or circumstances in which a
marriage involving persons younger than 21 might take place. According to the Penal Code
Amendment Act of 2003, defilement or sex with anyone younger than 16 is prohibited.35 This
legislation was also expected to act as a major deterrent to child marriage, but “despite these
efforts, early marriage persists in Zambia”.36

31 ibid.
35 Tembo and Matenga, 2008.
36 ibid.
Under customary law, the age of consent is lower than that defined in the Marriage Act and is often described as coinciding with puberty. Statutory law is supposed to take precedence over customary law, but this is often not the case in practice. According to previous studies and reports, the majority of Zambians, especially those living in rural areas, follow customary law because it is the legal system with which they are most familiar. This study substantiates these findings: in all the communities where data were collected, the vast majority of respondents were not aware of statutory laws regarding children or failed to see their relevance in relation to the marriage practices. Decisions regarding child marriage were not informed by statutory laws or the definitions enshrined within them.

4.4 Marriage in the Zambian context

The purpose of this study was to learn more about child marriage in Zambia; however, the researchers did not start out by asking about ‘early’, ‘forced’ or ‘child’ marriage. The subjective and context-dependent nature of these terms makes them problematic in a research setting. Accordingly, respondents were asked to define marriage in general and then further probed on the ages at which marriages were taking place in the community, among whom and why. This approach aimed to highlight the perspective of community members rather than that of the researchers and to determine if the practice of child marriage in each setting conformed with or deviated from more normative understandings of marriage. It was also employed to avoid the use of terms often construed as judgemental.

Marriage is a revered institution in Zambia. Traditionally, the custom has been treated with great respect, and the ritual of marriage is practised according to certain ‘correct’ procedures, including the giving of tokens of commitment, negotiations and ceremonial feasts that involve not only the individuals getting married but also their families and communities. This study found that in the villages and urban neighbourhoods where data were collected, there is a clear and widely held view of what constitutes a ‘proper’ or ‘legitimate’ marriage, how it should be arranged and the different steps that should be followed in advance of it taking place.

“Male and female agree to come together to make a union and have a family and ask permission from their elders. Have a wedding, kitchen party or any form of gathering of both sides of the family to celebrate and bless their union.” A married young woman in a group discussion with married women aged 18–24 in Lusaka

“Marriage here is when a boy or man and a girl or woman comes together by way of living under one roof. But a boy or man should pay dowry to the mother of the girl if the marriage is to be recognized officially by both family members of the girl and the community as well.” A boy in a group discussion with married boys aged 13–17 in Luwingu

Following the ‘proper’ process for marriage was deemed very important because it ensures that parents and families are involved in and approve the decision to marry. Adult

37 The problem is manifested in the customary legal system in which the age of maturity is the attainment of puberty. This definition results in marriages in which a girl of 14 years can legally marry under customary law.
38 Tembo and Matenga, 2008.
respondents were unanimous in their view that marriages that adhered to customary practices were more likely to last than those that do not. Male and female adult respondents widely argued over whether the key to the durability of marriage was the ongoing support that families provide to newly married couples, including advice giving, guidance and counselling to help them adjust to their new situation and any challenges that they might encounter. Despite there being a clear sense of how marriages should ideally take place, this study found that the majority of marriages involving children no longer adhere to this process.

“If they ‘marry’ without consent or a ceremony taking place, then it is often more likely to break after a short period of time. If blessed and approved by families, then at least the couple can benefit from support and advice, and this can be important as it helps them to learn about responsibilities and to put them on a firm foundation. They are able to seek the advice of the elderly people as needs arise, and this is very beneficial.” Adult male in a group discussion in Senanga

Respondents noted that the motivations for marriage had changed over time. Marriages have traditionally been arranged or undertaken for the purpose of uniting a couple so that they can produce a family, build a home together and care (emotionally and financially) for parents and grandparents. However, many marriages are now considered to be borne out of necessity, either an individual or collective need to address adversity. When a marriage takes place to alleviate poverty, to prevent stigma from pregnancy or to escape intolerable living arrangements, the customary (and expected) processes for sanctifying that marriage are often not respected. As a result, many of these marriages, especially those involving children, are not recognized by all members of the community as a marriage.

In Mwinilunga district, this reality was summed up in the view of adult women, who argued that marriage loses its true meaning when it is decided on the basis of social or economic pressures:

“Marriage is the union of two people – male and female – at their own free will. Why this is the best definition of marriage is because it does not include marriage out of poverty as a means of survival, marrying each other to avoid embarrassment or being laughed at in the community after falling pregnant, marriage after being raped or defiled, marriage as a result of paying back debt or in order to reduce the number of mouths to feed in a household. Every home has problems but that should never lead into marriage of children.” Adult woman in a group discussion in Mwinilunga

Traditionally, agreements relating to marriage in Zambia have involved some form of payment. 40 Today, financial and material exchanges continue to serve important economic and symbolic functions. Lack of consent or payment of bride price reduces the legitimacy of marriages and tarnishes them in the eyes of parents and communities. When males and their families are unable to meet the obligation of bride price, girls and their families may be forced to settle for no compensation, especially if the girl is pregnant. Settling for less or no payment has implications for others in the household, because money received as bride price is often required so that male family members – such as brothers, cousins or young uncles – are

later able to marry. Marriages for which a bride price is not paid may be recognized by communities, but reluctantly so. Respondents of all ages asserted that failure to pay bride price can remain a source of longstanding tension, especially if difficulties arise later in the marriage.

4.5 Child marriage in Zambia

Child marriage is widely practised across all six sites where data were collected. This study found that there are many types of child marriage in Zambia. The most common unions are those that take place between peers – girls (from age 12 or 13) and boys (from age 14), usually with an age difference of about two to three years.

The following types of marriage emerged through the research. These forms can be distinguished from each other primarily on the basis of the process undertaken and how parents and communities view or respond to them. There is considerable overlap between these typologies; some marriages move between categories as circumstances change.

- **The traditional or ideal marriage**: This type of marriage is one that follows accepted social practices involving consent from families and payment of bride price prior to marriage. Ideally, the decision to marry is made freely and not as a result of coercion or as a means of addressing other issues, such as pregnancy or extreme poverty. Many marriages involving two children – as opposed to a child and an adult – were widely perceived not to be following this process.

- **Self-decided, peer marriage**: This type of marriage occurs when the decision to marry is made by children, and familial consent is not necessarily sought or granted (as in elopement).\(^{41}\) Marriage of this type is seen in a negative light by adults because it does not involve the agreement of the families involved or an agreement regarding bride price. As such, it does not conform to and is not seen as legitimate under statutory or customary law.

- **Co-habitation-based marriage**: Often linked to situations in which children decided on their own to live together, this type of marriage is based on the length of time that a couple have resided together. In situations in which children have been living as together as ‘spouses’ for periods of three months or more, the relationship comes to be understood as a marriage by the wider community. This type of marriage is also reflected in statutory laws, which recognize such unions as marriage.

- **Duty or responsibility-based marriage**: This type of marriage is undertaken because it is ‘socially necessary’ to rectify a situation that might bring shame or dishonour to families. It is typically established as a means of addressing pregnancy outside of marriage. The tradition in many – but not all – parts of Zambia is for a boy or an adult male to marry a girl if he impregnates her.\(^ {42}\) Sometimes, marriages of this kind can be avoided if payment of ‘damages’ as a result of pregnancy is agreed by the families involved (such as money or

\(^{41}\) Similar types of marriage have been reported recently in India, Bangladesh and Nepal. See ICRW and Plan Asia Regional Office, 2013.

\(^{42}\) Tembo and Matenga, 2008.
cattle paid by the boy or man). Chiefs and their representatives may become involved in such processes.

- **Retroactively ‘consented’ marriages:** This type of marriage often follows a self-decided marriage among peers (and could be considered a subset of that type). It takes place when families come to accept, albeit reluctantly, a union that they previously did not recognize. A process of negotiation then begins regarding the payment of bride price or the need for both families involved to accept the marriage. The birth of a child can be an important influence in both families’ decisions to accept such situations as marriage.

- **Transactional marriages:** This type of marriage largely conforms to the stereotypical view of child marriage, wherein an older man enters into a relationship with a girl. Such marriages are generally frowned upon from a moral or social point of view yet tolerated from an economic perspective because they can bring a series of financial or material benefits to a girl and her family. In the communities where this study was conducted, poverty is widespread and families are often unable to meet the needs of their daughters and other household members. In such situations, girls may be open to the advances of older, wealthier men. In the two urban research sites, young boys were found to enter into marriages with older women who had the economic means to look after them.

  Transactional marriages were also established for other reasons. The ability of both boys and girls to do adult work is an important consideration in the decision to marry. Respondents across the rural research sites stated that boys may be expected to marry to increase domestic help for their family or to provide additional agricultural labour. The opposite was also found to be true, for example in Katete Site 2, where girls were encouraged to marry in order to augment the household labour force. Male orphans living with grandparents or other members of their extended family were cited as the group most likely to marry for this reason.

- **Pre-arranged or promised marriages:** Agreements relating to marriage may be established before girls are born, when girls are young or when girls reach puberty. In such cases, an older suitor will make a proposition to a family indicating that he wants to marry the girl when she comes of age (typically after she has reached puberty). Arrangements may involve the man participating in or taking responsibility for the costs of the girl’s education or other needs while she is growing up. Previous research identified this practice in Katete. In this study it was only referred to Senanga and does not appear to be widespread in the country.

**4.6 Perceptions of child marriage**

This study found that the majority of marriages involving children do not adhere to traditional processes.

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43 *Kugalika* is the name used to refer to marriages of this kind in Katete; see Gender Studies Department (undated).
“Marriage is when the boy and the girl are staying together and eating together in one house.” An unmarried girl in a group discussion with unmarried girls aged 13–17 in Mufulira

“Marriage is making a family. Meaning that a boy and a girl are staying together, sleeping together and having sex together in one house.” An unmarried girl in a group discussion with unmarried girls aged 13–18 in Katete

Respondents of all ages argued that the term ‘marriage’ is increasingly used to describe children entering into a joint living arrangement rather than a ‘real’ marriage.

“Sometimes marriage starts from a boyfriend or girlfriend living together in their own home at night. But during the day they may be in their parents’ home to share food, but this does not qualify to be called marriage as it is regarded as shameful on the family. Because the dowry is not paid and there is no blessing from the parents.” A father in a group discussion with fathers in Mufulira

“We would not say in a real sense that these are marriages because of the nature and style of how they are contracted – we would say that they are just playing. These marriages are marriages that are mostly triggered by poverty and immoral behaviour. The immoral behaviour being referred to is where a girl ends up getting pregnant as result and parents are pushed to force the boy to get the girl. Real marriage in our community receives approval from both parents and not just because of the circumstances – meaning the boy and the girl have to go to their parents to seek permission to marry.” An unmarried boy in a group discussion with unmarried boys aged 13–17 in Lusaka

The general perception in the six research sites was that these marriage arrangements would face many challenges and were less likely to last than marriages that had been approved by parents and families. Marriages of this type were considered to be a break with tradition or social convention but were argued to nonetheless endure because parents become resigned to accepting them.

4.7 Understanding the definitions of child marriage

There are numerous definitions of what constitutes marriage in Zambia. While on the surface the variations between them may seem subtle or even insignificant, in reality these differences matter, for at least two reasons.

First, it is not clear if citizens’ responses to questions about marriage, such as those included in the Census are an accurate reflection of their actual practices. This survey tool does not define marriage; rather, it leaves the respondents to determine whether they deem themselves to be or to have been in a marital union. Despite the flexibility inherent in the question, it is impossible to know if the response given is a reflection of an individual’s own definition of marriage or their assumption of what marriage is according to the questioner.
The result is uncertainty about the veracity of prevalence rates derived from this survey. For example, data from the 2010 Census indicate a child marriage prevalence rate of 12 per cent in Katapola ward, Katete. This was deemed the lowest prevalence rate in the district and for that reason it was selected as the ward in which to select a research site. However, in reality, both the village headman and local councillor argued that this statistic was a gross underestimation, stating that 75 per cent of boys and girls between the ages of 15 and 18 were married in their community. Respondents in all six of the focus groups independently concurred with this estimation.

Second, because not all types of marriage are equally valued, some children may not be perceived by their family and community as married, even though they define their relationship in this way. Others may be reluctant to say they are married because of stigma and social tensions around the nature of their union. As a consequence, the needs and perspectives of boys and girls (and their children) in these circumstances may fail to be considered.

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44 A social desirability bias (choosing to answer a question the 'right' way) may also have led respondents to underreport.
45 Interviews with village headman and village councillor in Luwingu.
Section 5. Trends and patterns in child marriage

This research generated considerable information on trends in child marriage practices in Zambia. This section outlines the main findings related to the categories of children who marry and their motivations. The reasons why some children do not marry are examined, including an analysis of those factors that appear, in some cases, to delay marriage for boys and girls.

5.1 The children more likely to marry and why

As stated earlier, child marriage affects both boys and girls in Zambia. In the sites where this study was conducted, girls tend to marry at younger ages than boys and are assumed to marry in greater numbers. In many countries around the world, girls marry older, adult men. However, in Zambia, many of the marriages are between peers. The following sections delineate the circumstances and reasons why girls and boys married. In many cases, the reasons for and consequences of marriage are similar, albeit gender-specific. Several categories of boys and girls appear to be more likely to marry than others.

Children from poor families or backgrounds: This research, like many other studies, found that poverty is one of the most significant factors driving child marriage in nearly all of its forms in Zambia. Parents and guardians see child marriage as a potential opportunity to benefit financially from the bride price for their daughter and also as an opportunity to ease the strain on household resources. In larger families, for example, the marriage of an older boy or girl can free up resources to support the education of younger children. Economic hardship forces parents and guardians to make difficult choices as they try to manage their living situation and encourages short-term strategic thinking rather than consideration of investment in longer-term gains. For their part, children see marriage as an opportunity to escape challenging economic and material circumstances and as a means of responding to their own basic needs. This viewpoint is particularly prominent among girls.

Rural children: In Zambia, as elsewhere, rates of child marriage are higher in rural than urban areas, as are teenage fertility rates. Data from the 2007 DHS (latest available) indicate that girls in some rural areas are more than twice as likely to marry as their counterparts living in large towns and cities. They also tend to marry, on average, about two years earlier than girls their same age living in urban areas. This study found that children in rural areas have limited access to a range of programmes, information and services and, in many cases, few opportunities for leisure and recreation, skill development and employment. Boys and girls in all six research sites lamented their lack of things to do and stressed that sex and marriage were often pursued in the absence of any other available avenues.

Children not attending school: The dynamics between child marriage and education are complex and flow in multiple directions. Evidence from this research and other studies suggests that some girls marry because they cannot go to school. For many families, the financial cost of sending children to secondary school is prohibitive. With annual secondary

46 Nour, 2009; Sakala et al., undated; Tembo and Matenga, 2008.
48 See, for example, Brown, 2012; Plan, 2014; UNICEF, 2005. This study was unable to find any published data on the relationship between educational enrolment and child marriage among boys.
school tuition reported to be approximately 2,700 kwacha$^{49}$ and annual family incomes in rural areas reported at around 900 kwacha,$^{50}$ secondary schooling is financially prohibitive for many families, even before taking into account the indirect costs for items like uniforms, materials and transport. With an average rural household size of 5.2 persons, the high ratio of school fee to income makes it impossible for families to consider sending more than one or, at the most, two children to school at any one time.$^{51}$ Additionally, the opportunity costs associated with school enrolment are also prohibitive: in poor households, a school-going child cannot contribute much-needed waged or domestic labour.

Even for those who are able to enrol, these challenges shed light on the commonly experienced cycle of enrolment–drop out–enrolment–drop out. Children can only attend school when they have the money to pay the fees, and these resources are not consistently or predictably available (in some communities, for example, families are only paid for their agricultural produce once a year). Boys’ and girls’ intermittent enrolment means that it often takes many years to complete schooling, especially at the secondary level. Graduates and those in their final years are often in their twenties. Given that almost half of all girls in Zambia are married before the age of 18,$^{52}$ it is usually only those who have enjoyed sustained and uninterrupted attendance who are able to complete high school.

Young respondents across all six research sites stressed their frustration – and in some cases, despondency – at being unable to complete their education and thus to forge a personally and socially desirable future. Many described lives characterized by significant periods of idle time in which they operate with greater personal mobility and less adult supervision than their school-going peers. In the absence of recreational activities, wage employment, vocational training or income-generating activities, boys and girls are considered more likely to develop sexual relationships and become parents.

“Sometimes children want to go to school and parents are ready to take them to school, but they don’t have funds for school fees. Hence, children stay at home without anything to do…. Children here have no recreational centres; hence if they can’t go to school, recreation becomes sexual activities.” An elder father in a group discussion with elder fathers in Luwingu

“To be married as a child, the girl probably has no school, can’t pay school fees, has no parents or they can’t manage to pay for her school fees or the parents cannot give her and her siblings enough support at home. She was admiring her friends from school or admiring her already married friends from home saying ‘…it feels good to stay alone, no restrictions from your parents and you have your own rules’…” An unmarried girl in a group discussion with unmarried girls aged 13–17 years in Katete

$^{49}$ This amount is approximately equal to US$385 ($1=7 kwacha).

$^{50}$ This amount, cited in the agricultural areas of both Luwingu (village headman) and Katete (headmaster) is approximately equal to US$128.


$^{52}$ UNFPA 2012.
On the other hand, school attendance also exposes girls to risks that may precipitate marriage. Married girl respondents in Luwingu, for example, said that it was common for girls who lived far from school to exchange sex for transport to school to avoid punishment for tardiness. This situation exposes girls to pregnancy, HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases and to violence. It can also result in poor academic performance. This situation, combined with a perceived low quality of education, encourage some parents to refrain from committing limited resources to support their daughters to remain in school. School attendance can therefore be both a cause and a consequence of child marriage for girls in Zambia.

**Pregnant girls and their boyfriends:** Marriage is a common response to teenage pregnancy. In many – but not all – communities where this research took place, it is widely accepted that if a girl becomes pregnant then she should marry the father of the child. In the group discussions, boys were also clear that were they to impregnate a girl, their own family would almost always oblige them to marry her. Doing so would in all likelihood require the boy (and the girl, if she was enrolled) to leave school and seek some form of paid work. Despite being aware of the negative effects of marriage on children, respondents reported that it nonetheless remained the most viable solution among a limited range of alternatives.

It is, however, important not to assume an automatic link between teenage pregnancy and child marriage. In Katete and Mufulira, pregnancy did not appear to be as significant a driver of child marriage as it was elsewhere: In these sites, girls tended not to marry, either because their family wanted them to remain at their natal home to contribute labour to the largely agricultural-based domestic economy (as in Katete) or because the community was in major flux and not governed by traditional structures that would normally influence and frame adherence to social norms and practices (as in Mufulira). Instead, families may agree a damage payment to be made by a boy and his family when a girl becomes pregnant. These payments are increasingly being made as an alternative to marriage. However, in part to promote the social and cultural value of marriage, it is usually cheaper to marry than it is to pay damages.

**Orphans and stepchildren:** The vulnerability of orphaned and stepchildren to child marriage was cited in other studies in Zambia and elsewhere. In all research sites, orphaned boys and girls were singled out as more likely to be married. This appeared to be especially the case in areas where HIV prevalence rates are high or there are greater levels of divorce and remarriage. At the community level, extended families are involved in the care of orphans and in meeting their basic needs through early and middle childhood. Respondents of all ages asserted that when orphans reach puberty, guardians may think that their duty of care has been met and that it is acceptable to seek out marriage for non-biological children in the household.

> “The main issue is orphan children – their inability to feed themselves or be fed by their guardians and the quality of care by guardians. Orphans come mainly from

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54 Akwara et al., 2010; Palermo and Peterman, 2009; UNICEF, 2001.
Similarly, stepchildren – both boys and girls – are often pressured by step-parents to become independent as a means of reducing the demands on the household economy or of freeing up the limited resources available to support children from the current marriage.

Orphans and stepchildren were also widely cited as being mistreated or discriminated against. Such treatment renders marriage a more attractive option to children because they seek to run away from what they deem an intolerable living situation. This may correspond with a more general finding that children reported choosing marriage as a way to escape the control of parents, especially where tension and disharmony exist, and to have more personal freedom and independence.

“She must have been mistreated at home by her cruel stepmother, who may not have been giving her food to eat or might have been beating her.” A young woman in a group discussion with married young women aged 18–24 in Mufulira

**Difficult or ‘hard-to-manage’ children:** Marriage is sometimes seen as a strategy to control boys and girls who are engaging in behaviour that is deemed inappropriate or unacceptable. Such behaviour includes: having multiple sexual partners; repeatedly staying out late; hanging out in bars; and becoming increasingly disrespectful and uncooperative at home. In these cases, adult respondents asserted that parents and guardians may see marriage as a risk-management strategy. From this point of view, monogamy through marriage is a more favourable option than a child exposing him or herself to the risks of infection with HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases or, in the case of girls, becoming pregnant outside of marriage.

“When someone is married, they tend to stop their bad behaviour and concentrate on their marriage and home.” A girl in a group discussion with unmarried girls aged 13–17 in Luwingu

“Sometimes we parents decide and allow our girls to get married in order to have her stop from sleeping around, especially if she has already fallen pregnant but she is not yet married.” An elder woman in a group discussion with elder mothers in Luwingu

A widely held view in both the urban and rural research sites is that children are becoming less respectful, difficult to manage and more materialistic. Girls in particular were characterized as engaging in sexual relationships for material benefits. Associated with this view is the idea that girls manipulate boys and men – particularly those who are wealthier than they are – into marriage by having unprotected sex to get pregnant and thereby ‘catch’ the man. Boys and adult men asserted that girls are materialistic and willingly exchange sex for such items as clothing and cosmetics. On the other hand, girls and women reported that girls have transactional sex for essential items, such as soap, lotion and menstrual pads, or to pay for transport to school so that they will not be punished by teachers for being late.

“Parents are unable to provide what is needed for the child, so the children don’t have their basic needs. Female children especially go out to find what they want and
Children without adequate supervision or social support: In all six research sites, adult respondents in group discussions and interviews said that migration to urban areas and the emergence of new, unplanned settlements has led to the weakening of traditional family structures. Not only has migration led to family separation but when parents are focused on securing a livelihood, they are perceived to have too little time to supervise their children. As a consequence, there is a perceived lack of supervision for older children, particularly adolescent girls and boys. In Lusaka, for example, adult community members stated that the lack of adult supervision was due to parents working long hours and the absence of extended family networks. As a result, children were thought to be at greater risk of pregnancy and thus marriage.

“Parents don’t supervise their children and let them do whatever they want in the community – they don’t give time to counsel or discipline them.” A father in a group discussion with fathers in Mufulira

Weakening traditional structures have resulted in a reduced level of social support for children in general. For example, headmen have traditionally had an important role in their communities, addressing social issues and providing guidance. However, in newer communities in Mufulira and Lusaka, many traditional structures have not been replicated, and social norms and customs have not been enforced.

Children leaving home to attend boarding school are also perceived to be at risk of marriage. The cost of attending boarding school is high, and it is not uncommon for people to seek cheaper accommodation outside of school-provided residences. Doing so results in children moving to new, unfamiliar areas where they are unsupervised by adults and are free to visit restaurants, bars, movie halls and nightclubs. According to respondents, girls who spend time in these places interact with older boys or men. Some of the men they encounter use the promise of economic support or gift-giving to persuade them to engage in a sexual relationship.

5.2 Factors that help delay or prevent child marriage

In addition to asking respondents to identify which children likely marry in their communities, the research team also posed questions about who is not marrying and why. The findings generated important information on protective factors that policymakers and service providers can potentially build upon in their efforts to reduce child marriage in Zambia.

Education level of parents: Parents who had achieved a higher standard of formal education were widely viewed as more likely to have their sons and daughters in school and less likely to allow them to marry. These parents were understood to have a strong sense of the importance of education and an appreciation of its value in increasing the life opportunities for their children. They were viewed by community members and leaders as more willing to invest in securing a future for their children than in taking the short-term benefit associated with their child marrying. They were also understood to support their
children more in their school work and to promote their children’s active involvement in academic activities.

**Quality education:** Decisions about schooling are not confined to the ability to pay for or access formal education. Parents and children also need to envision an end result or a beneficial outcome associated with their investment of time and resources. Those children, especially girls, who succeed academically are encouraged by their teachers and are able to demonstrate to their parents or guardians that they are benefiting from schooling and thus appear more likely to remain in school. This finding is substantiated by numerous studies; globally, education is widely understood to be the most significant factor for delaying marriage among girls.⁵⁶

**Strong community leadership:** Community leaders, including chiefs, *ndunas* (headmen/women), religious leaders and councillors who speak out against child marriage were seen as having a powerful impact on behaviour in their communities. Some took on this role because they saw the negative effects of the practice in their own families and communities, including high numbers of girls and boys dropping out of school due to pregnancy and marriage. Others have been targeted for awareness raising and have had support from NGOs to initiate dialogue on the issue. The hierarchical nature of society and respect for tradition and authority means that these groups and individuals are a powerful agent of change when they decide to speak about the risks of child marriage, importance of education and other social issues.

**Involvement in income-generating activities:** The research revealed two divergent yet complementary findings: Those girls who are involved in generating income for their household and family appear less likely to marry, regardless of whether they are enrolled in school. In Katete, for example, many respondents asserted that the value of girls’ agricultural or domestic labour to natal families often outweighs any potential benefits associated with child marriage. This conclusion may reflect any number of marriage-related considerations, such as a perception that economic gains from marrying a daughter are unlikely to materialize because the bride price may not be paid or may not be paid in full. On the other hand, children, particularly boys, living in households in which additional labour is required for subsistence may marry – either by choice or through pressure from family – to augment the domestic labour pool.

**Opportunities for personal development and access to safe recreational activities:** In all the communities where the research was conducted, respondents, especially children and young people, reported that teenagers have too much time on their hands. In rural settings, a lack of educational and recreational opportunities can lead to the establishment of new relationships, some or one of which may quickly become sexual, ending up in pregnancy or marriage. In urban neighbourhoods, idle teenage boys and girls may hang around bars, watching sports or movies. Exposure to alcohol and drugs in such settings can reduce social inhibitions and increase the likelihood of girls and boys having sex.

Respondents of all ages in all communities and at the national level articulated the view that children who are involved in school or extracurricular activities are less likely to fall into this

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cycle of risk. A civil society organization worker in Senanga asserted that there were more recreational options for children and teenagers in the past: Associations like those for young farmers, scouting groups, reading clubs and church youth groups meant that boys and girls not only had something to do but also spent more time under adult supervision. In Lusaka in particular, married and unmarried girls and boys said that had they places to go and recreational opportunities to pursue, they would be far less likely to have sex, become pregnant and marry in their teens. Evidence from seven countries in different regions around the world substantiates this finding.57

**Presence of positive and negative role models:** The presence of role models was not referred to as a direct way of preventing child marriage, but they are considered to have the potential to reduce the numbers of children marrying by showing them alternative roles in the community. Female role models, such as teachers and nurses, demonstrate to girls the value of education, how it can lead to a good job or allow a child to develop into a person who can contribute to improving the lives of others in the community. It is important to remember that the idea of girls completing their education and finding professional jobs is still relatively new in many communities, especially in rural areas. People are still battling to overcome gender biases, and the presence of professional women is giving them a concrete point of reference in challenging long-held gender norms.

Children and adults in all research sites also referred to seeing negative effects of child marriage on older sisters, relatives and girls in their communities and that it had influenced them to rethink life options and to either resist marriage or to remain in school. Health complications associated with early and frequent child birth, exposure to HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, curtailed education and its consequent impact on employment, failed relationships and the resulting divorces – families across all six districts were aware of the negative effects of marriage on their children. Having this knowledge, however, does not always change the options that parents and children feel are available to them. The risks associated with marrying as a child need to be weighed against those faced in the here and now; often, individuals and families decide that the status quo is so intolerable that these risks must be taken.

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57 Parsons and McCreary-Sills, undated.
Section 6: Benefits and risks associated with child marriage

This section explores some of the perceived and actual benefits and risks associated with child marriage as articulated by respondents. Its purpose is to highlight the complexity of the practice and to complement results presented earlier on the types of marriage that exist in communities, the categories of children most likely to marry and the drivers of child marriage. It becomes apparent through the analysis that children and families make decisions about marriage within a range of options, each potentially bringing positive and negative outcomes. Additionally, a range of people influence decisions related to child marriage; thus, each marriage involves a series of competing and, at times, conflicting agendas.

6.1 Benefits associated with child marriage

In the communities where this study took place, many of the marriages involving children are driven by a desire to seize an opportunity – to escape bad living conditions, to meet basic needs, to enhance parents’ status in the community or to secure an economic benefit. Marriages driven by such pragmatism appear to be at odds with the ‘ideal’ type of marriage as described by community members. It might be that the harsh reality of everyday life has led to a fundamental shift in the meaning and rationale for marriage, from forming a stable platform for a future life to an opportunity for individual or collective gain or as a means of addressing other issues of social concern. That many people have a stake in and an influence on whether a marriage takes place further complicates the matter, because each marriage involves a negotiation between a series of competing and perhaps conflicting agendas.

According to respondents at the national, district and community levels, there are several benefits associated with child marriage.

**Economic gain for families and individuals:** Families seek to benefit from the marriage of their daughters by gaining cash, livestock and other material items. If a bride price is paid, then this money and/or in-kind payment may help with the education of younger children or to support sons to marry by increasing the family’s capacity to pay the required bride price. A desire to reduce the numbers of dependants living within a household is also an important factor that shapes decisions about marriage. Girls in all six sites reported that it is common in extremely impoverished circumstances for a girl to try to improve her living situation by seeking a marriage with a man who could provide her with basic material items, including clothing, lotion, soap, menstrual pads and better-quality food. When marriage brings additional labour or income-earning power to the household, it also brings economic gains.

**Improvements in living situation:** Children were unanimous in their view that marriage is understood as a means of improving difficult living situations or of escaping neglectful or harsh treatment by parents or guardians. Adult respondents in all sites agreed that this perception was widespread among children, especially those whose living situations are considered intolerable. Marriage is also seen as a way for children to have their own house, more freedom from parents or guardians and to have a greater degree of autonomy over their own lives.
“The environment here is that everyone is married and it is difficult to resist. The child is exposed to fighting and domestic violence or arguments, so she wants to leave the house so she doesn’t have to see the parents fighting every day. So when a guy says he loves her, she will easily go to be with him.” A father in a group discussion with fathers in Mufulira

Enhanced social status: Marriage acts to enhance the social standing of a number of different individuals. Demonstrating that you have raised a son who is ready to undertake the responsibility of marriage or a daughter who is deemed to be a desirable choice for a wife is a great source of respect for parents. The advent of grandchildren also further enhances the social standing of the wider family. For boys and girls, marrying is an internal and external signifier that that they are no longer children and are now entitled to the respect shown to adults. The enhanced status that comes with this respect is augmented when they become fathers and mothers.

“Maybe she failed at school and ended up just staying at home and doing nothing and so would choose marriage as another way of upgrading her life.” Adolescent girl in a group discussion with married and child single mothers aged 13–17 in Mufulira

Remaining a part of the peer group: It was widely reported that the decision to marry is often influenced by peers who are married (including sisters, brothers, cousins and friends). Unmarried children may think their married friends are in a better position than they are – enjoying a home, a sense of independence, a caring relationship and some sense of security. Insofar as boys and girls tend to attach a great deal of significance to personal relationships, and especially to friendships with peers, social approval and acceptance among age-mates and in the community at large is a significant motivator in their behaviour and decision-making. The value children attribute to friendships and peer relations is also reflected in the reports from married children in this study who acknowledged they encouraged their friends to marry so that they can remain together and continue to share experiences.

6.2 Who benefits from child marriage and how

Child marriage not only formalizes a relationship between two people but also cements alliances and builds networks between kin and non-kin. In this way, it is a shared enterprise from which many individuals and groups stand to gain (or lose).

This study sought to situate the practice of child marriage in the context of these shared goals and expectations. Using a photo elicitation exercise in a focus group setting, it asked respondents of all ages to identify who in a child’s family or community stood to gain from his or her marriage and in what way. The following table summarizes the main findings from this exercise. It clearly illustrates the wide scope of personal and social interests that are embodied in the practice of child marriage.
Table 5. People who influence decisions related to child marriage and associated perceived benefits (according to respondents)

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<th>People who influence decisions related to child marriage</th>
<th>Perceived benefits associated with the marriage of a child</th>
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| Parents                                                 | • Increased social status as a result of having raised a child that somebody wants to marry and because of likelihood of becoming grandparents.  
• Economic benefit associated with the receipt of bride price.  
• Assistance with labour and domestic tasks associated with gaining a daughter-in-law or a son-in-law.  
• Reduction of risk that no suitable husband will be available for daughter at a later date.  
• Reduction of the economic burden on the household and freeing up of resources for younger children or other activities. |
| Grandmothers                                           | • Improved social status linked to the arrival of great grandchildren.  
• Expected economic benefits of gifts, including chitenge, household items and shoes.  
• Maintenance of tradition.  
• Greater assistance with domestic and household responsibilities and tasks.  
• Grandchild is on his/her way to achieving goals of marriage and parenthood (seen by some as a more ‘useful’ choice than formal education). |
| Married friends and sisters                             | • Increased opportunities to socialize.  
• Status improvement because of role as wife and mother.  
• Independence from parents – manage own household and make decisions about lives.  
• Able to engage in socially sanctioned sexual relations and remain part of their peer group (they can experience and discuss relationships together).  
• Someone to care for and look after them (and hopefully provide for them financially). |
| Children who marry                                      | • Independence and freedom from the control of parents or guardians.  
• Enhanced social status because they will be treated as adults by the community.  
• Able to engage in socially sanctioned sexual relations.  
• Someone to care for and look after them (especially for boys who want someone to cook and clean for them).  
• Prove their manhood or womanhood by bearing children.  
• Sense of pride because of ability to look after a husband and a child (or children) (for girls). |
| Aunts and uncles                                        | • Access to economic benefits to help manage their own situation, particularly where they have been caring for orphans.  
• Improvements in social status by establishing connections to other families.  
• Some economic benefit derived for the handling of the marriage arrangements. |
| Brothers and sisters                                    | • Economic benefit from bride price to assist in their own education or income-generating activities.  
• Strengthens social networks and links to others in the community (for brothers, when sisters marry).  
• Material benefit from, for example, clothing of sister who leaves home to marry (for sisters who remain in the family household). |

6.3 Risks associated with child marriage

In Zambia, as elsewhere, the risks associated with child marriage are well known. In the communities where this research took place, respondents of all ages and education levels were clear about its potentially harmful consequences. Both boys and girls face these risks,
though their nature and consequences are gender-differentiated and appear to differ across context and circumstance. For example, the health risks associated with child marriage, and especially those associated with pregnancy and childbirth, were regularly cited by adults, children and young people. So, too, were the emotional difficulties that many girls experience when they move out of their family home, and the challenges that couples encounter in managing their relationship with one another, caring for small children when they themselves are young and lack experience, and meeting the financial and material needs of their household when they lack the education, training and expertise to do so. Some of the major risks confronted by those in child marriages include the following.

**Early pregnancy resulting in a number of health-related complications:** The health risks of child marriage for girls are widely documented. They include maternal mortality, \(^5^8\) sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV, \(^5^9\) cervical cancer \(^6^0\) and other problems. \(^6^1\) Childbirth places significant risks on girl mothers; girls are more likely than older mothers to die in childbirth because of haemorrhaging and obstructed labour. Girls are also vulnerable to developing fistula, a condition that can cause feelings of humiliation and embarrassment because it leads to a leakage of urine. \(^6^2\) As a result, girls can become stigmatized and may be rejected by their husbands. That those girls who marry tend to be among the poorest girls in the poorest communities means that few can access decent, affordable antenatal and postnatal care. Most are financially dependent on their husbands (who also tend to be poor) and have limited say in how household finances are allocated. Girls in this study commonly reported these problems, as did adults and some boys. The health risks associated with pregnancy and childbirth were well understood and feared by many. So, too, were the risks to children born of girl mothers: These children were also perceived by adult community members (primarily) to be at risk of malnutrition, stunting and inadequate stimulation, in addition to substantial social and economic challenges.

**Voluntary withdrawal from or forced end to formal education:** In the communities where data were collected, girls’ education appears to be valued less than that of boys. This point was made explicitly in all the girls’ group discussions and by some boys and adults, who explained that, in some circumstances, parental investment in girls’ education is sometimes considered an inappropriate use of limited resources. The logic behind this view is that once they reach puberty, girls will either marry – or become pregnant and then marry – and that doing so makes them less likely than boys to complete their education. Coupled with the fear that pregnancy will lead girls to drop out of the education system is the dominant expectation that girls will assume the principal role in managing a home and that this task does not require significant levels of schooling. The result is that girls are more likely to have their access to education curbed when resources are limited, a constant reality for nearly all families who lived in the communities where this research took place. The anticipation of an early marriage appears to influence families’ decisions about the longevity of girls’ education from a young age.

When school-going girls become pregnant or married, they are much more likely to drop out

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\(^5^8\) Gordon and Mwale, 2006; Nour, 2006, 2009.  
\(^5^9\) Clark, Bruce and Dude, 2006.  
\(^6^0\) Nour, 2006.  
\(^6^1\) UNICEF, 2001.  
\(^6^2\) UNFPA, 2012; Mathur et al., 2003; Clark, Bruce and Dude, 2006.
of the education system. This was found to be the case in all six districts. Once they drop out of the system, married children are unlikely to re-enter school. Despite policy initiatives led by the Ministry of Education to support the enrolment or re-enrolment of girls in these circumstances, school attendance is not seen by parents – and some girls – as beneficial to girls who are ‘only’ going to settle down and raise children.

These findings are substantiated by research conducted in Zambia and elsewhere. A 2008 study in Mansa, Chadiza, Chibombo and Mazabuka districts found that among non-school-going female respondents, 27 per cent had dropped out of school to marry. Likewise, national data analysed by the Population Council in 2005 indicated that 68 per cent of girls who married did not complete primary school, and approximately 60 per cent were unable to read or write. Studies in other contexts provide a robust body of global evidence that married girls are more likely than their unmarried peers to have no or low levels of schooling. Child marriage thus denies many girls the well-established benefits of schooling, such as improved economic prospects and better health status.

**Truncated personal development:** The young age at which children enter into relationships was recognized as a major challenge by adults and child participants in this study. It was widely acknowledged that most girls and boys are not sufficiently mature to enter a marital relationship. Initial benefits around freedom, unrestricted sexual activity or escaping difficult or abusive living situations in the home of their parents or guardians quickly evaporate and are replaced by the challenges of trying to manage a home and a relationship, dealing with a pregnancy or bringing up children.

It was noted that marriage not only brings to an end educational opportunity but hampers personal development. In many districts, respondents reported that boys are often unable to handle the financial, social and emotional responsibilities that come with marriage and family life, resulting in tensions within the marriage or indeed abandonment of the family.

**Child single mothers:** Child marriage and pregnancy among girls aged 12–17 are widely considered as responsible for the large numbers of single mothers in some communities. Adult and child respondents asserted that often the girls who are rearing children without the father are those whose marriages have failed. In the vast majority of divorces, it is girls who are left to care for any children that the marriage produced. This research did not reveal any stigma attributed to boys whose marriages have failed.

Single mothers face significant challenges. The majority appear to have only limited formal education, thereby constraining their opportunities for paid employment and for important information related to their own and their children’s health and well-being. Their inability to support themselves and their children means they often must depend on their parents, grandparents or extended family for support. There is stigma associated with being a young single mother; there is apparently a perception among the broader community that girls in these circumstances are unable to provide adequate care, support, guidance and supervision for their children. In Mufulira, adult respondents declared that single child mothers – resulting from a failed child marriage – were responsible for contributing to the

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63 Tembo and Matenga, 2008; Population Council, 2005.
64 Brown, 2012; Nour, 2009; WLSA et al., undated.
population of street and working children in their community, a situation characterized by a number of protection concerns, including sexual abuse and exploitation.

**Increased burden on parents and families:** In the vast majority of group discussions, respondents drew attention to the negative impact that failed child marriages – a common occurrence – have on the natal families of both husband and wife. These effects were most common when parents’ support for the marriage of their daughter was related to the desire to reduce the economic burden on the household or to benefit from a bride price. In such cases, parents may feel aggrieved that they have to resume the care of their daughter as well as provide for any children that she may bring into the household. This resentment may be compounded when the bride price has not been paid in full; not only do returning girls require support for themselves and their children, they have also failed to deliver an economic boost for the wider family.

**Inadequate parental care and supervision:** In all six districts, widespread concern was voiced by adults at the community level that child marriage and early pregnancy results in an ongoing cycle of children growing up without adequate parental care. Such concerns have also been highlighted by research in a number of contexts outside of Zambia. Given that many child marriages do not last, there is a fear that the cycle of poverty, lack of education and employment and teenage pregnancy will continue into future generations. Many young married parents may be forced to work away or have little time for child-rearing, leading to a lack of adequate supervision and attention. In such scenarios, older and extended family members, especially grandparents, are often required to take on child-rearing responsibilities.

**Increased rates of domestic violence:** It is a widely held view across the six research sites and among NGOs and government officials that early marriage contributes to increased levels of domestic violence. This observation is supported by the global literature on child marriage. Police officers working in the Victim Support Units and the staff of a children’s helpline reported that incidents of domestic violence often take place in the context of child marriage. Respondents said that these incidents were largely related to marriages between girls and older men, in which girls refused to consistently perform the sexual and domestic roles expected of them. Incidents of domestic violence were said to also take place when boys and girls in peer marriages feel overwhelmed by unwanted responsibilities and subsequently act inappropriately by having extramarital affairs or abusing alcohol.

6.4 Balancing benefits and risks

This study found that people are not only aware of the potentially negative consequences of child marriage but are also cognizant of the ‘fleeting’ or short-term nature of the benefits associated with it. For example, the desire of parents to benefit from dowry was widely cited as a major driver of child marriage, despite the widespread acknowledgement in all adult respondent groups that dowry was often not paid in full, if at all. Similarly, respondents

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65 For a similar finding from India, see: www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/ForcedMarriage/NGO/CREA.pdf.
articulated concerns around a number of health risks facing pregnant children, but these were often over-ridden by the desire for grandchildren or for their daughters to demonstrate their fertility. In Mwinilunga, adults expressed concern that child marriages resulting from pregnancy rather than love were often unhappy and short-lived. However, the achievement of independence and adult status conferred on girls and boys through marriage was highly sought after by children and by their parents.

These examples highlight the highly contradictory relationship that individuals and communities have with the practice of child marriage. The risks posed by the practice are significant, but adults and children measure them in relation to highly revered values and behaviours. In many ways in the communities where this research was conducted, challenges to child marriage are construed – consciously or unconsciously, by both children and adults – as challenges to the very nature of personhood. Because marriage tends to take place in families and communities characterized by high levels of poverty, there are limited options through which boys and girls can make a life for themselves that match their personal and social expectations.

To become an adult is to become financially and materially independent of parents and to bear children of one’s own. These goals can be achieved through a series of different means and sequences – through education, for example, or through paid employment – but these opportunities are not readily available in all communities. Boys and girls have to make their own way from childhood to adulthood, and one way to do this is to marry. Strategic or not, the decision to become a husband or a wife and a father or a mother is one that enables children in these circumstances to grab hold of the status and sense of achievement that otherwise eludes them. The decision to marry may or may not have been their first choice or even their own, but it is at least one that enables them to pursue their desire to become a respected adult member in their community. This aspiration does not always materialize, especially in the early stages of a marriage that takes place without parental or familial consent. Nevertheless, it is motivated by a specific purpose – one that is understood to be unavailable by almost any other means.
Section 7. Interventions and efforts to address child marriage

The previous sections outlined the forms and perceptions of child marriage in Zambia, documenting the opinions and attitudes of children, families and communities about the practice. The findings of the study bring into question the appropriateness of current approaches to ending child marriage and raise a number of important issues for policy makers and service providers. The dynamics of child marriage have been shown to be complex and multifaceted. It is thus all the more important that existing and new initiatives be tailored to respond to the opinions of children, families and communities, even if so doing confronts or challenges the prevailing approach of government and NGOs, civil society groups and others. For example, most child marriages involve children who choose to marry (albeit within a range of limited options), and most are not characterized by coercion, exploitation or by a deliberate intention to violate the rights of children.

This section looks at existing interventions and efforts to combat child marriage in Zambia. It builds on the findings presented in the previous sections on the definitions of marriage and the complicated and inconsistent legal and policy frameworks in place. It describes ongoing efforts to harmonize all relevant domestic laws and ratified international agreements and explores the potential impact of these efforts. It goes on to outline current work in the area of policy and programming related to child marriage in-country.

Child marriage is an issue that has gained significant attention in Zambia. Nearly every week there are media reports and press releases on the topic, and regular statements are made by chiefs, members of Government, multilateral organizations, academics and front-line workers in rural and urban areas. Recent initiatives launched with the support of the governments of the United Kingdom and Canada have helped to galvanize government and non-government agencies to develop programmes to prevent or/and respond to child marriage.

Initiatives to address child marriage are subject to strong scrutiny, and the subject remains a politicized issue, even at the highest levels. The current challenge is how to harness good will and financial support to develop a strong coalition of partners that can act together to end the practice of child marriage. Different agencies have different priorities and philosophical understanding of how the practice should be dealt with. These can range from strict enforcement of the law and prosecution of perpetrators to deter the practice to using social protection or other programmes to tackle its root causes. Although these different approaches need not be mutually exclusive, there is considerable debate about what approaches should be prioritized.

Coordination mechanisms have been established, and participating agencies are now outlining their work plans and activities for 2015 and beyond. The completion of this study comes at a useful juncture and allows for timely reflection on the role of different actors and the effectiveness of current approaches to ending child marriage. The challenge now is to

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68 One of countless examples is the press release issued by Lifeline/Child line Zambia on 15 January 2015, ‘CHILD HELPLINE rescues girl 15 years from early marriage’.
develop a realistic National Plan of Action to End Child Marriage that is grounded in the Zambian context.

7.1 Main intervening actors

The number of actors involved in addressing child marriage has increased in recent years, perhaps in part as a result of the high-level attention granted to the issue within Zambia and globally. A National Plan of Action to End Child Marriage will be developed in mid-2015; this process can be usefully informed by a stock-taking of the actors working at different levels on the issue and the nature of the programmes they are currently implementing.

National Level

Work at the national level to combat child marriage is led by the interministerial consortium to end child marriage. This group is chaired by the Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs though a secretariat dedicated to the Campaign to End Child Marriage and includes representation from other government ministries. The consortium comprises 10 ministries, and this number is expected to expand to 13 in the near future. The ministries involved have both direct and indirect roles in dealing with child marriage and its underlying causes. The consortium meets on a regular basis and has now developed a terms of reference and a workplan. Included in this plan is the process to develop a National Plan of Action to End Child Marriage with support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Regional consultations have been conducted with traditional leaders and other influential actors; additional national planning workshops are scheduled for mid-2015.

Table 6. Members of the consortium to end child marriage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current members</th>
<th>Programmes with direct and indirect impact on child marriage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs (MOCTA)</td>
<td>Campaign to End Child Marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Community Development</td>
<td>Harmonization of statutory and customary laws concerning child marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
<td>Social protection (including cash transfers and public welfare assistance scheme)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Health</td>
<td>Family planning, including child spacing and contraception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Youth and Sport</td>
<td>Mother-to-child health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Gender</td>
<td>Fistula (awareness-raising)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Labour</td>
<td>Re-enrolment policy for pregnant girls and child mothers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Justice</td>
<td>Sensitization of chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Home Affairs</td>
<td>National child policy – covering all programmes for children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Local Government and Housing</td>
<td>Sexually reproductive health outreach – sensitization programmes to prevent teen pregnancies and explain impacts of early marriage</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Youth resources centres</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Income-generation capacity building for young people</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improving service provision through decentralization</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The government-led consortium is assisted and supported by a coalition of civil society organizations working to end child marriage. Representatives from these two bodies make
up the Technical Working Group to End Child Marriage. It appears that this group is preparing to take an expanded role in ensuring that there is a consistent and coordinated effort to end child marriage through 2015 and beyond.

The coalition of civil society organizations, though active, is a relatively new body that began to take on an organized structure following the 2014 Symposium to End Child Marriage. The coalition has now drafted a terms of reference, is meeting on a regular basis and has just completed a planning exercise to develop a multi-year strategy. Membership of the coalition is broad-based and includes national and international civil society organizations, networks and faith-based organizations. Currently, the membership consists of 13 organizations.

The members of this coalition are involved in a range of activities at both the national and subnational levels. In addition to supporting the Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs, they are working closely with structures and institutions at the district and community levels. At a national level, this group provides technical support for legal and policy reform, development of awareness-raising strategies and campaigns and strategic planning. Table 7 describes the general clustering of current civil society organization activities.

**Table 7. Civil society activities to end child marriage**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of focus</th>
<th>Activities</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legal and regulatory framework</td>
<td>▪ Harmonization of statutory and customary law</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Strengthening statutory laws to reduce gaps through legal analysis and use of the media to highlight problematic areas</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Enforcing the laws – trying to take cases and prosecute perpetrators and ‘rescue’ children</td>
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<td></td>
<td>▪ Using other aspects of the law, such as the Education Act and gender-based violence legislation, to prevent early marriage</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Support chiefs to develop more protective by-laws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevention</td>
<td>▪ Awareness-raising at community levels involving chiefs, ndunas (headmen/women), religious leaders and councillors</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Safe spaces and children’s clubs to create awareness of opportunities and risks associated with child marriage</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Radio programmes and drama groups to sensitize communities</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Simplification of laws and messages about child marriage</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Developing community scorecards on how participation and protection are linked to development activities</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Building the capacity of teachers to better protect children, especially girls</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Combined life skills and literacy programmes to empower children and parents</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Capacity building for peer educators (parents and children)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>▪ Working with traditional initiators</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Supporting community-based mechanisms (child protection, area development and other committees)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Monitoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response</td>
<td>▪ ‘Rescuing’ children from early marriage situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Provision of safe homes or shelter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Assistance to help children return to school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Family support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Vocational training</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
District and local level

There are a number of local-level groups working to end child marriage. These groups are often the mechanisms through which national actors carry out their practical work: They are the front line for preventing or responding to child marriage, and some of them are the only point of reference in areas where civil society organization or government staff are not physically present. This study found that many of these local groups and individuals are highly respected and perceived by communities to be agents of change.

**District councils:** Each district council has a Department of Social Welfare with responsibility for implementing national policy and programmes relating to different aspects of child welfare, including child marriage. Under the decentralization process, these councils will take on more responsibility for implementing and coordinating development programmes. It is expected that their human, financial and logistical resources will be increased as part of this process.

**Traditional authorities:** Representing the substructure of the traditional authorities, chiefs form the most widespread and accessible mechanism for addressing family and social issues in Zambia. The role of chiefs as champions in tackling child marriage is well documented, and their influence has been substantiated by this research. The role of the *ndunas* (headmen/women) may be particularly important because they are ever present in communities and thus the most accessible ‘authority’ for the majority of people living in rural areas. It is unlikely that any legal or policy reform will have any effect on communities without the involvement of this group.

**Local-level welfare committees:** The Community Welfare Area Committee is a substructure of the Area Coordinating Committee. These groups are the link between communities and the district level, where there is also a District Welfare Assistance Committee. In areas where there is external support or proximity to the district council offices, these groups are active on a range of development issues. In more remote areas, they are still present but generally receive less capacity building or support to undertake their activities. Typically divided into a range of subcommittees, these groups link government, traditional and non-government actors.

This research found that these committees are willing to take a more active role in the promotion of child well-being, including ending child marriage. Doing so would require considerable capacity building because group members are often unaware of or confused about national laws and policies relating to child marriage and other related issues, such as school enrolment.

**Police:** The police are widespread throughout the country, and many stations now have a Victim Support Unit or an officer who has been trained on how to handle domestic and gender-based violence. Officers report that cases of child marriage often initially come to their attention as cases of domestic violence. Experiences such as these have led the police to become increasingly active in awareness-raising around child marriage. Though cognizant of the laws, officers assert that resource constraints, combined with the preference of communities to use traditional mechanisms, hinder their ability to bring cases of child marriage to trial.
“We need to have the referral mechanism and services to respond to cases of child marriage when they happen. If we have laws, then it is important we can put them into practice or enforce them – otherwise the laws will just look weak and people will not be committed to them.” Police officer in Mwinilunga

Health workers, teachers and community workers: People working in these professions are the most widely dispersed civil servants and civil society organization staff in Zambia. They are often present in or visit communities where there is a dearth of other service providers. They are aware of the risks associated with child marriage and appear to take regular part in awareness-raising and community discussions about its risks and negative effects.

Figure 2. National framework of actors involved in ending child marriage

7.2 Current programme approaches

In many countries, strategic approaches to ending child marriage have been strongly influenced by recommendations made by the CEDAW and CRC committees. The primary proposals of these groups have been to focus on developing a consistent definition and a minimum age for marriage across their legal frameworks (harmonizing customary and statutory law) and on implementing sanctions against perpetrators of child marriage. A synthesis of the recommendations for governments includes:69

- Raise the minimum age of marriage to 18 for both females and males.

- Conform regional, customary and religious law with federal and civil law.
- Define the crime of rape as sexual intercourse without consent.
- Provide for sanctions against perpetrators of early marriage, and ensure the investigation of cases as well as the prosecution and punishment of perpetrators.
- Eliminate all disparities between males and females regarding minimum-age requirements.
- Implement compulsory registration of all marriages.
- Prioritize the best interests of girls, including the right to education.
- Do not invoke freedom of religion to justify discrimination against girls and practices, such as forced and early marriages.
- Do not allow exceptions to minimum age of marriage, even with consent.

In its concluding observations in September 2011, the CEDAW Committee also called upon Zambia to train and sensitize administrators of customary and traditional courts on the provisions in CEDAW and statutory laws that promote and guarantee the rights of women and girls, including that of marriage and family relations, specifically “certain harmful customary practices, including early marriage”. Respondents from government, international and national civil society organizations were largely in agreement with these recommendations; many suggestions have either already or are in the process of being implemented in Zambia.

In this study, adult respondents working with the Government and with non-government and civil society organizations and in service provision clearly articulated three main priority approaches to tackling child marriage. First is the need to prioritize the harmonization of customary and statutory marriage law. Second is to ensure that these laws are enforced. Third is to raise awareness and sensitize communities about the negative consequences of child marriage. The launch of the Campaign to End Child Marriage signalled a major upsurge in activities relating to these three areas. Each of these programme approaches is described here in an effort to identify strategic points of learning for the development of the National Plan of Action to End Child Marriage.

### 7.3 Harmonization of national legal and policy frameworks

The dualist nature of Zambian law means that there is no consistent definition of the minimum age of marriage for boys and girls. The Marriage Act, a statutory legal instrument, stipulates 21 years as the minimum age of marriage (or 16 years where permission is granted by parents or guardians), whereas the Constitution specifies 19 years (Article 60(2)). These demarcations exceed the age of 18 provided for in the ratified CEDAW and African Union Children's Charter and implied in the CRC. Both age delineations contrast sharply with customary law, in which a child is able to marry, with parental consent, from the time of puberty (approximately 12 years for girls and 14 years for boys).

The preferential treatment accorded to customary law and the resulting absence of protection for children from marriage was raised by the CEDAW Committee in May 2010. “The Committee is concerned about the negative impact of the dual system of law in Zambia.

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71 See Annex F for a comprehensive table of Global Conventions and Regional Charters.
While the State party has indicated that statutory law will prevail, where there is a conflict with customary law, the Committee is concerned that customary law is in fact preferred and is more likely to be applied in family and personal relations, namely, adoption, marriage...”.

Although customary marriage law reduces bureaucratic engagements with the State and its agents, eliminating prohibitive fees and licensing, among other inconveniences, its suitability may also be related to inheritance, divorce, custody and child maintenance. Most certainly it resonates with widely held understandings equating physical maturity with adulthood and therefore marriageability. Given that customary marriage is ubiquitous in the communities where this research took place and in the country as a whole, boys and girls in Zambia are able to marry as many as nine years before the statutory legal age.

Efforts to harmonize customary and statutory laws in Zambia have been ongoing for at least a decade. However, it is proving to be a complicated and time-consuming process. One of the main complications is the reality that, regardless of their age, once a girl or boy is married, she or he reaches the age of majority. Thus, they become an adult in the eyes of the law and cease to have access to their protective rights as children.

This study found that child marriage in Zambia is not monolithic. In addition to cases of forced or coerced marriage, a significant number of marriages take place between peers and are decided upon and supported by both the children and parents involved. This reality raises a series of questions that need to be thoughtfully considered as part of the harmonization process, particularly in terms of how the law frames punishments for child marriage. Is the ‘zero tolerance’ approach the most appropriate and effective, or should a more nuanced approach be taken that distinguishes between the types of marriages undertaken?

There is a risk that an overly punitive approach may end up criminalizing large sections of the population. For example, would a case of two 16-year-olds electing to marry be subject to the same procedures for prosecution as a 28-year-old marrying a 16-year-old? In marriages involving parental consent, would parents also be subject to prosecution? Would those who witness a child marriage or fail to report that a child marriage has taken place be subject to prosecution? These questions are not intended to trivialize the strategic role that legal reforms have in ending child marriage. Rather, they are meant to highlight the need to carefully consider the intended and unintended implications of changes to the legal framework before final legislative decisions are made. These decisions will not only shape the content of the law but will also have a direct effect on how enforceable any changes to law are likely to be in practice.

7.4 Enforcement

Concomitant with support for harmonization is a need for greater enforcement of the statutory law against child marriage. Theoretically, statutory law supersedes customary law. Respondents at the national level argued strongly against waiting for harmonization – it

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mattered little, from their perspective, whether the minimum age of marriage is 18 or 21 – and were vociferous in their view that enforcement of statutory law is a critical component of efforts to combat child marriage, especially in rural and remote areas. Child protection organizations are already using the statutory law to ‘rescue’ children, mostly girls, from marriages and bring cases to the attention of the authorities for the purpose of prosecuting those involved.

“The Government needs to find ways to punish and enforce parents to marry their children after 18 years.” A female civil servant in Luwingu

These views correspond with those held by many policy-makers and international advocates, such as Da Silva de Alwis, who notes that weak laws and their inadequate implementation result in child marriages being conducted with impunity. In fact, advocates against child marriage argue that the conviction rate in breach of the prohibitions against child marriage in most countries is nil”.75

In the six districts where this research was undertaken, there was strong support for the enforcement of statutory law among officials from government, civil society organization, police officers, community leaders and, in some cases, groups of children. Those in favour argued that the punishment of children, their parents or guardians and the leaders of churches that ‘blessed’ child marriages, could deter the practice and through this process reinforce the effectiveness of the law.

In many ways, those who advocate legal enforcement as a way to curb child marriage are supportive of a punitive approach because it is perceived as a kind of awareness-raising and sensitization by proxy. When prosecutions take place and people are punished, the hope is that a strong message of discouragement is delivered to families and communities. At the same time, many who advocate for stronger use of statutory law also acknowledge that there are a number of significant barriers associated with this approach, particularly in rural areas. In addition to facing serious resource constraints that would hamper any attempt to enforce statutory laws, there are a number of other barriers that would also need to be overcome.

Police officers and government officials stressed the difficulty inherent in bringing a case of child marriage to trial. The statutory system is far removed from the daily lives of communities: People are both wary of the time it takes to process cases through the courts and are less trusting of the outcomes than they are of those derived from customary mechanisms of dispute resolution. A person seeking to proceed with a case through the courts is also likely to come under considerable pressure to drop the case. In this study, the involvement of the police and the courts was perceived by the vast majority of community members to cause considerable disharmony within communities and families and was therefore seen as something to be avoided.

Not all respondents agreed that the revision and enforcement of statutory law was the most effective way to tackle child marriage. Child and adult respondents at the community level and those working for NGOs and multilateral agencies in Lusaka argued that to eliminate the

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75 Da Silva de Alwis, 2007, p. 33.
practice, its root causes need to be overcome. They recommended alternative approaches, including providing for children’s and families’ basic needs, improving access to education, offering life skills, recreational activities, vocational training and job creation (especially in rural areas). It was asserted that such an approach would not only slow the rates of child marriage but would create a more fertile environment for sensitization and awareness-raising.

“There is a need for curriculum to include more in the area of life skills, especially on handicraft or things that will help children in terms of earning a living or supporting their families. There is a need to look at education policy and bring back a full package of life skills that can help people practically. Also, other associations to help the young, for example, in the past we used to have a young farmers’ association, scouts, etc. All these were good in terms of preparing the youth for life and also in terms of linking them into a structure that could guide and support them.”

A male civil society organization officer in Senanga

7.5 Sensitization and awareness-raising

Child and adult respondents in this study were well aware of the risks of child marriage (see section 6.3). This knowledge and understanding was derived primarily from personal experience and observation and, in their view, not from any sensitization or awareness-raising campaigns. Although village heads, representatives of chiefs and staff from rural health posts were known to emphasize the negative impacts of marriage, such efforts were said to have no influence on child marriage-related decisions. Whether or not to marry is a matter of weighing options, both real and perceived. Advice on the potential risks from those external to the individual contexts in which these decisions take place was found to be of limited influence in the majority of the sites where this research took place.

The majority of respondents across the six research sites were not aware of any major campaigns or awareness-raising activities in relation to child marriage. There was a slightly higher tendency for people in Lusaka and Mufulira (the two urban districts) to have been exposed to some information than people living in more remote areas. Knowledge and understanding of related laws was extremely limited, except among government and civil society organization staff and those traditional leaders who had taken part in sensitization activities.

It was only in those communities with civil society organization presence that it was possible to see the outcomes of sensitization and awareness-raising. For example, in Katete, where an international NGO has been working for many years to promote girls’ education, improve women’s health and reduce child marriage, participants in a group discussion with unmarried girls (aged 13–17) sang songs they had learned about child marriage and its negative effects and spoke positively and confidently about feeling empowered to continue in school and to seek assistance if at any time they felt pressured to marry (they had a telephone number to call in such instances). The physical presence – over time – of a service provider was acknowledged as important for bringing about child marriage-related change. Staff of organizations with a constant presence were able to build relationships with communities, understand their issues and social dynamics and develop trust and rapport with community leaders and other influential change agents.
Service providers and adults who participated in this study also cited a number of unintended negative consequences associated with awareness-raising activities. In the few study sites where these had taken place, there was a feeling that an overly negative or punitive approach had been taken. In essence, community members of all ages did not appreciate being told what they are doing wrong. They expressed a desire for a more positive or solutions-based approach, one that recognizes the numerous and complex challenges they face and the decisions that they are forced to make as a result of their material, financial and social circumstances.

Adult participants in a number of districts also reported that they thought awareness-raising on children’s rights had led to children becoming disobedient and unmanageable. They asserted that boys and girls were given information that encouraged them to make their own decisions and admonish their parents or guardians for not being able to provide for their needs. Studies elsewhere on the continent have had similar findings. In exploring this issue in greater depth, it appears that it is not messages about children’s rights that are the problem per se but, rather, the way these messages are presented to communities. Adult respondents stressed the need for more care to be given to how messages are packaged. There is a clear need to develop more supportive approaches that situate children’s rights within a framework of well-being, mutual responsibility and the benefits of positive developmental experiences for children and their families and communities.

In Katete and Lusaka, there was an assertion that a heightened awareness of child marriage had resulted in feelings of fear and shame within communities. Parents’ fear of prosecutions resulting from the marriage of their child was often coupled with the shame of not being able to provide more support and protection to children. These serious outcomes are of enormous significance for the planning and implementation of sensitization campaigns and other interventions to reduce child marriage. The risks that children (and girl wives, in particular) face in marriage can have serious and sometimes fatal consequences. Respondents at the national and local levels widely recognized that driving the practice underground will only exacerbate those risks. Married boys and girls need understanding and constructive support rather than to feel degraded and humiliated.

“The sensitizations the clinic was carrying out had brought so much fear to the members of the community that the parents started hiding their young married children in the house and helped them deliver [their babies] silently from their homes despite the complications that the girls were going through, such as not getting cleaned up properly after giving birth, which was contributing to the [girls] getting infected with other complicated diseases…. I advise the researchers to be as calm and good to them [the community] as much as possible so that they can be able to feel free to share and be able to open up because they might think and feel like they have come to get arrested.” A teacher in Katete

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76 Columbia Group for Children in Adversity, 2011.
7.6 Links with other sectors and programmes

In Zambia, programmes specifically designed to combat child marriage are complemented by numerous sectoral initiatives, which directly or indirectly tackle the issue. Representatives from education, health and other sectors are now active in the Consortium to End Child Marriage. Respondents of all ages in all sites cited a range of causes for child marriage; it is hoped that intersectoral collaboration of this kind will support the development of more broad-based, holistic approaches to tackling the roots of the problem.

Interventions fall generally into the following five thematic areas, with much overlap between themes.

**Child rights and protection**

The focus of work in this area has been on harmonizing legislative frameworks and sensitization and awareness-raising at the national and local levels on children’s rights and protection. Strategies include policy advocacy, development and implementation, and capacity building with a range of professionals in specific areas, such as health, education, social services, justice and law enforcement.

**Education**

Significant efforts to combat marriage have been undertaken in and through the education sector. The main focus of this work in Zambia (and elsewhere)\(^77\) has been on the enrolment and retention of girls in school.\(^78\) Interventions in the policy domain have centred on increasing accessibility, affordability, quality and safety of schools. In terms of provision, interventions offer scholarships, school nutrition and feeding programmes and infrastructure improvements of school facilities, such as latrines. The thinking behind these interventions is that families are less likely to marry their daughters if a girl is seen to benefit from being in school, either through the programmes she has access to or the skills and knowledge that she is learning.

There has also been considerable effort to raise awareness among chiefs, communities and families of the value of girls’ education and the various re-entry, non-formal and vocational opportunities that are available to them.

To date, however, little attention has been given to how educational interventions and policies could reduce the marriage of boys or support those boys who are married.

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\(^{77}\) See, for example, World Health Organization, available from www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2013/child_marriage_20130307/en/; www.girlsnotbrides.org/increasing-access-girls-education-key-ending-child-marriage/

\(^{78}\) This study found that child marriage affected both boys and girls. However, most school and education-based interventions are designed to support girls specifically. It is hoped that the findings of this study will generate the momentum needed to initiate policy and programmes that also target the needs of married boys or those at risk of marriage.
Social protection

Social protection is a pillar of the Sixth National Development Plan (2011–2015). The Government of Zambia “recognizes social protection as a broad range of activities which aim to protect and promote the welfare and livelihoods of the poorest and of those most vulnerable to risks and shocks. These include destitute households, households that are severely compromised in terms of meeting their own needs, street children and others living without adult care, and women and children affected by violence.”

A National Social Protection Strategy is in place and a policy is nearing completion. There are a number of social protection instruments in use in Zambia, including the Social Cash Transfer Programme, the Public Welfare Assistance Scheme, the Food Security Pack, the Assistance to Basic Education Scheme and a pension scheme. Some of these instruments have strong child protection components and were designed to affect the underlying causes of many of the risks confronting children, including the drivers of child marriage. Respondents in this study, however, constantly referred to the need for more or expansion of the social protection programmes as a form of assistance that would help them to safeguard children from marriage.

Health, sexual and reproductive health, and maternal health

The health sector coordinates a range of important programmes that have direct impact on some of the drivers and negative outcomes associated with child marriage. Of particular note are sexual and reproductive health programmes that are focused on pregnancy, contraception, sexually transmitted infections, HIV and related issues. Some interventions include life skills programmes on disease prevention, self-esteem and personal care. Programmes in maternal and child health are also provided, although respondents in this study reported that these were not readily accessible to married or out-of-school girls. These programmes tend to focus on the general health of mother and child and emphasize such issues as nutrition, breastfeeding, care of infants and newborns and disease prevention in childhood. There are also several major campaigns to address serious health consequences affecting many young women, including fistula and cervical cancer.

Economic livelihood and vocational training

Interventions in this area tend not to have as their specific objective the reduction or elimination of child marriage. However, those programmes focused on income generation and improving livelihoods are often established to help families cover their children's basic needs and to pay the costs of schooling. These are often implemented with women specifically and sometimes teenaged girls; their focus is on personal, social and economic empowerment. Programmes such as these can impact the rate of child marriage by addressing at least two of the primary reasons why girls and boys marry. They can also make a difference by supporting girls – and their mothers – to see that marriage need not be imminent: Other futures are possible, ones in which they can have more authority and decision-making power over their own lives and those of their children. Boys and young men

could benefit from programmes with similar goals, which could open up more opportunities to talk openly about life plans and how and when marriage fits within such a plan.

The Ministries of Science, Technology and Vocational Training and Sport, Youth and Child Development and a number of civil society organizations are active in this area; but their reach is limited due to resource constraints. The Ministry of Sport, Youth and Child Development recently joined the Consortium to End Child Marriage, an extension of their earlier work on this issue with the Office of the First Lady. This Ministry is developing a new policy, including strategies focused on reproductive health, entrepreneurial skills and the expansion of youth resource centres. They are also looking at revising the definition of youth, down from 18–35 years to 15–35 years, to include more out-of-school children in their programmes.

7.7 Challenges

Addressing child marriage in Zambia is a complex and difficult undertaking. Current efforts are hampered by tremendous challenges at the national, district, local and familial levels. These challenges require reflection in order that policymakers and service providers are able to increase the effectiveness of their programmes and interactions with communities.

**Lack of alternative options:** Communities are aware of the many risks associated with child marriage but consistently reported the lack of alternative options available to them. Communities recommended the need for campaigns or awareness-raising to be supported by programmes that would help them to address the underlying causes of child marriage. Respondents cited the need for more social protection programmes, training in life skills, recreational opportunities and economic support to keep children in school. Essentially, the message is that if alternative options were available, then child marriage would decline; but creating awareness on its own is unlikely to lead to any significant decline in the practice.

**Coordination:** A number of coordination mechanisms and structures have emerged over the past year and a half. The intention is for different ministries to combine their direct and indirect efforts to end child marriage. However, a coordinated strategic plan has yet to be developed, and as a result, it is difficult to assess the impact of different sectoral programmes and to attribute changes to specific interventions or policies. This research clearly found that child marriage will be best tackled by a multiple stakeholder approach that is systematic, focused and collaborative. Policies and interventions need to be situated in the context of children’s and families’ everyday lives; they need to acknowledge and engage with the multiplicity of factors that precipitate or preclude the practice. It is hoped that the development of the National Plan of Action to End Child Marriage will address the need for improved coordination across sectors and actors.

**Top-down policy and programme approaches:** A widely held concern among local government, civil society organization staff and community leaders is that decisions at the national level are made without adequate input from subnational actors. Respondents voiced disquiet that the decisions made at the national level were based on unrealistic expectations about the capacity of local actors. These groups also questioned the relevance of many of the recently developed laws and policies, especially in terms of how they fail to resonate with rural populations or to take into account the challenges they face in their daily lives.
Resource constraints: Many service providers and community structures are severely resource constrained and are unable to implement their responsibilities under the various laws and policies. Furthermore, service providers are largely unable to maintain any form of regular contact with hard-to-reach communities. Occasional visits have limited impact and often led to confusion within communities – who are told that they need to change the way they deal with issues but then hear nothing more or are left in isolation to process these messages. The result is that communities continue to manage the challenges they face as they were doing previously, drawing on local structures for advice or coping, based on the limited options available. Thus, the practice of child marriage persists, not always because it is deemed desirable but because, from the perspective of communities, families and children, there is little else to be done.

Children deciding to marry: For a variety of reasons, children often decide for themselves to marry or not. This reality presents a conceptual challenge for many organizations and institutions (even those who emphasize the agency of children) because they have difficulty accepting that boys and girls might be making the decision to marry without external pressures. If a robust and coherent national strategy is to be developed on the issue of child marriage, it is essential that agencies find a common platform and agree, based on the evidence presented in this report, that a united, collaborative and pragmatic way forward is urgently needed.

Access to and high costs associated with education: Keeping children in school, especially girls, has long been used as a strategy for combating child marriage. Programmes are already in place to support girls to return to education following pregnancy. But despite these initiatives, communities and children cite many challenges confronting girls in this regard. Distance from school, the high cost of education, fees and additional costs, the need to educate young siblings and fear of stigma all combine to make it difficult for girls to remain in or return to school (as discussed in section 6).

Lack of services and recreational opportunities for children and youth: According to respondents of all ages, boys and girls have an abundance of unstructured time, especially if they are not attending school. In the absence of recreational activities and facilities, some turn to relationships or hanging around bars or video halls. Children reported that spending time in this way is dangerous because it can lead to pregnancy and, in some cases, marriage. It was widely noted by children and young respondents that having sex is the only accessible recreational activity for boys and girls.

Unintended negative impact of messages about children's rights: As discussed earlier in this section, it appears that many messages from child protection agencies and other service providers are not received as intended by communities. It may therefore be useful for the Technical Working Group to agree on a basic communications package that members would adopt as a more consistent approach to awareness-raising. Piloting and field testing to ensure that the intended messages are received as intended may also prove beneficial.
Section 8. Implications of the findings

This section builds on the findings presented in the previous sections. It explores their potential implications in terms of understanding the complexity of child marriage in Zambia and developing appropriate responses to address it.

Implication 1: Referring to child marriage solely as a cultural practice conceals the reality that, in the vast majority of cases, it is a reflection of social and economic inequality.

The global dialogue on child marriage typically frames it as a cultural practice. This term is used to refer to a custom or tradition that has developed within specific communities or ethnic groups. The implication is that there is often a cultural imperative for the marriage of children – be it to cement alliances between kin and non-kin groups, to increase the wealth and labour power of households and family groups, to reinforce and maintain gender roles or to institutionalize the care of the vulnerable, including widows and orphaned children. That child marriage exists to serve these and other goals is widely acknowledged. In some societies, it is a longstanding tradition that has evolved over time. It serves as a mechanism for preserving the values of a culture and a means of enabling its members to achieve what they want out of life.

This understanding of child marriage as a cultural practice is coupled with widespread recognition that it is most prevalent in the world’s poorest countries, especially those where there are limited social and economic opportunities for girls and women. Poverty is a known driver and its impact on school drop-out rates and a lack of future employment is well-researched. Demographic and Health Survey and Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) data from 78 low- and middle-income countries for 2000–2011 indicate that 16 per cent of women aged 20–24 in the richest quintile were married by age 18, compared with 54 per cent in the poorest quintile. The indisputable reality that the poorest girls in the poorest countries are those most likely to marry weakens the assumption that ‘culture’ drives the practice in and of itself in most settings.

Zambia is a case in point. Census data for 2010 indicate that 40.3 and 36.4 per cent of ever-married girls (aged 12–24 years) came from households in the first- and second-poorest quintiles. Although marriage is a rite of passage to adulthood, it is especially so for girls who are poor, out of school and living in rural areas. Urban girls in the richest wealth quintile have the highest rates of literacy and school enrolment and the lowest rates of child marriage. These factors have far more predictive value as to whether or not a girl will marry

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82 See, for example, Boyden, Pankhurst and Tafere, 2012; Erulkar and Muthenge, 2009; Sakala et al., undated.
83 Boyden, Pankhurst and Tafere, 2014 on child marriage in Ethiopia, particularly how it was once a means of sealing alliances between wealthy households. See also Tomkinson (undated) on similar intentions in India.
85 Mathur et al., 2003.
86 Boyden, Pankhurst and Tafere, 2012; Brown, 2012; Erulkar and Muthenge, 2009; Nour, 2009; Sakala et al., undated.
87 Cited in Marcus, 2014, p. 5.
89 CSO, 2014.
than do cultural practices, like initiation ceremonies (rites), which are often assumed to lead to child marriage.

In Zambia, traditional cultural practices, such as the exchange of bride price, call into question the ability to separate the cultural from the economic and the social in discussions of child marriage. Customarily, bride price is given to reimburse a girl’s family for the investment they have made in her and for the labour and other contributions she will go on to make in her husband’s household (because it is the practice that in a patrilineal community, a married couple moves into the husband’s natal home). It is an economic transaction with cultural and social significance. In the poorest communities where this study was conducted, bride price is tokenistic and even then, often waived or only paid in part. Child marriages rarely take place because they are the ‘right’ thing to do at the ‘right’ time but because of a confluence of factors unrelated to culture, including – but not limited to – a lack of options for quality, accessible education or wage employment; inability to access sexual and reproductive health information; and a desire for care and protection and improved household circumstances. The culmination of these factors is an inability among many girls and boys to achieve or even imagine another, alternative future. In these cases, child marriage is not a cultural practice. Rather, it is a response to inequality and lack of opportunity.

These findings suggest that policy and programmatic interventions need to engage with the reality that while child marriage often takes place in ‘traditional’ communities, it is no coincidence that these are almost always places where children face significant economic and social hardships. Whether child marriage is a cultural practice or a social and economic imperative is not an either-or argument. In Zambia, it is a complex practice driven by a multiplicity of factors, including – but not limited to – culture.

**Implication 2: Children’s agency needs to be factored into understandings of child marriage.**

The most common form of child marriage found in this study was peer marriage: Many boys and girls in Zambia choose to marry, often against their parents’ advice or preference. They do so out of love, responsibility, personal, social and economic necessity or some combination thereof. Policy and programmes need to confront the reality that, in this context, child marriage may not be a rights violation, at least not in the way that it is commonly portrayed. The choice to marry may be one among a limited set of options, but it is nonetheless pursued by boys and girls for specific and individual reasons. Reconciling children’s agency in this regard is challenging, particularly when it conflicts with normative assumptions about children’s development and their relative vulnerabilities and capacities. The CRC manifests this tension between the principle of protecting children and supporting them to participate in decisions that affect them. Those responsible for developing effective measures to address child marriage need to engage with this tension to understand how best to conceptualize the practice, given this reality. In marrying, boys and girls discard their status as ‘children’ – they are not entering a child marriage, they are entering a marriage.

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90 A detailed search for advocacy materials from agencies working to end child marriage was unable to reveal a single instance in which marriage was referred to as a choice made by boys and girls.
The contextual appropriateness of policies and programmes is contingent on the ability to grapple with these conceptual challenges.

**Implication 3:** Child marriage is a gendered phenomenon that involves boys as well as girls.

There is an implicit assumption among those working to combat child marriage that it is a practice that predominantly affects girls. On a global scale, it is true that girls are far more likely than boys to marry before the age of 18.\(^{91}\) The majority of literature on the topic is based on reports and studies conducted in West Africa and South Asia, where child marriage tends to take place between girls and adult men.\(^{92}\) However, in the Zambian communities where this research was conducted, the most common form of child marriage is one between peers – girls and boys – not girls and men.

Boys were also found to marry older women. Despite this reality, there are no data on the numbers of married boys in Zambia. Prevalence rates at the national, provincial and district level are based on the age of first marriage of girls only.\(^{93}\)

This lack of data underscores the shortage of attention paid to boys in policy and programming aimed at addressing child marriage and its causes. The serious risks to health and well-being faced by girls certainly warrant investigation and concerted action. So, too, do ideologies that limit their mobility and their social and economic interactions and experiences. Preventive measures to support girls’ school enrolment, attendance and retention, access to information on sexual and reproductive health, the provision of mentorships, income-generating activities and vocational training are all important and necessary. They should be available to all those at risk of being married – both boys and girls – before negative consequences result.

This study found that many, but not all, of the challenges that lead girls to marry are similarly experienced by boys. These entail high levels of material deprivation; unaffordable, poor-quality schooling; limited opportunities for labour force participation and wage employment; relationships with parents and guardians that involve violence, abuse, maltreatment and discrimination; absence of recreational activities; inaccessibility of relevant and appropriate information on family planning and safe sex; and deficiency of advice and counselling from knowledgeable and supportive adults. These realities are gendered in the way that they are experienced and manifested in the lives of children, but they are nonetheless relevant to girls and boys alike. Understandings of child marriage in Zambia need to acknowledge and engage with this complex reality.

**Implication 4:** Understanding child marriage means understanding what adulthood has to offer children.

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\(^{92}\) Marcus, 2014.

\(^{93}\) For example, 2007 DHS asked this of females but not of males (Question 6). Organisations working to combat child marriage rarely, if ever, provide data on child marriage among boys. See, for example: www.girlsnottobrides.org/about-child-marriage/; www.icrw.org/child-marriage-facts-and-figures; www.plan-uk.org/because-i-am-a-girl/early-and-forced-marriage.
Understanding why a girl or boy marries means understanding what womanhood has to offer girls and their families and manhood has to offer boys and their families. Gender is always a relational concept: Notions of femininity and masculinity only make sense in relation to one another in particular cultural contexts. In Zambia, girls become women when they do the things that women do, such as bearing children, caring for a husband and a family and managing a home. Similarly, boys become men when they perform the tasks of men, some of which include having a wife and children and a means of supporting them. From an early age, in both play and work, children imitate what they understand to be appropriate masculine or feminine behaviour. They interact with each other according to age-related norms, which transform over the life cycle.

When a child reaches puberty, these notions of masculinity and femininity are informed by a burgeoning sexuality and social recognition of their changing status. Children come to understand that these changes are integral to becoming a man or a woman in their society. The way they behave may or may not be driven by sexual desire, but the role their sexuality has in patterning their relationships with others is nonetheless manifested in their social interactions and shapes the way they come to see themselves. As ‘adults-in-waiting’, they seek to consolidate the knowledge and experience they need to become legitimate adult members of their community. Independence is essential to this enterprise. But when structural conditions do not enable them to achieve independence – an inability to pay school fees, for example, or to find reasonably paid work, they may seek it in other ways, such as through pregnancy or marriage. Becoming an adult in this way is riven with ambiguity and contradiction for many children. But the freedom, status and perception of ‘getting on with one’s life’ and also in becoming a man or a woman is a powerful pull for many boys and girls.

This study found that those children who chose to marry were those who wanted what adulthood had to offer (or what they thought it had to offer). Interventions to address child marriage in Zambia need to learn from children and young people what it is they want out of life and explore with them the various ways that their aspirations can be achieved. In so doing, the challenge is to help them see that many different futures are possible and to recognize the gender dynamics at play in everyday life without essentializing ‘girls’, ‘boys’, ‘men’ or ‘women’.94

Implication 5: Child marriage is a protective strategy employed by parents as well as boys and girls.

Both the qualitative and the quantitative literature and the results of this research reveal that child marriage is strongly associated with poverty, lack of affordable and accessible education, an absence of social protection systems and an insecure environment. While the global dialogue on child marriage tends to portray it as a protection problem, in these contexts, child marriage is often pursued as a means of protecting girls from abuse, exploitation and maltreatment in the home, from pregnancy outside of marriage, from HIV and other sexually transmitted infections and from sexual violence in the community. In Zambia, marriage is a strategy to preserve a girl’s reputation and the honour of her family and to provide her with better material, economic and social circumstances. It takes place in

contexts in which the status quo is thought to pose risks so serious that marriage is understood as the best – or only – option available.

Efforts to stop child marriage need to engage with this widely held perspective. The challenging conditions of everyday life in the communities where this research was conducted highlight the difficult choices that children and parents are forced to make: Which is the greater or lesser evil – a pregnant girl marrying or a girl raising a child as a single mother? Being mistreated or abused by guardians or married to someone who may behave differently? Dropping out of school with nothing to do or marrying someone who has promised he will pay for re-enrolment? In an environment of extremely limited options within which to make a life for oneself or one’s child, marriage is understood as one way to secure a girl’s future.

Marriage also can be a protection strategy for boys in Zambia, although marriage for this reason appears to take place far less frequently than it does for girls. Nevertheless, for those boys who are orphaned or who are living with elderly or unrelated guardians, marriage may be a route out of a difficult, abusive or untenable household relationship or responsibility. It may also provide much longed for love, care and affection. To date, there has been insufficient acknowledgement of the protective role that girls and boys hope marriage will serve.

**Implication 6: Puberty and initiation rites are milestones in the lives of girls and boys.**

In Zambia, girls and boys in many communities undergo traditional initiation practices to acknowledge their coming of age.\(^95\) The social, economic and demographic background of children does not appear to be a primary determinant in whether or not a child participates. The majority of adult respondents interviewed and consulted at the central level spoke about the initiations they had experienced as children. Some were sent from their city home to a family member’s rural home area; others lived in rural or urban communities where initiation ceremonies were practised. The prevalence of the practice is suggested by the membership of the Traditional Initiators Association, which in 2014 stood at more than 900 alangisi, or traditional initiators.\(^96\)

Different ethnic groups employ different approaches and models for initiating children.\(^97\) For the most part, boys and girls undergo initiation ceremonies around the time of puberty. Doing so involves learning gender-differentiated skills and knowledge thought to be essential or advantageous to adult life in the community. Although a number of issues are apparently discussed, including appropriate behaviour in different relationships and the promotion of income-generation and other economic livelihood strategies, the focus is on self-care (personal hygiene and, for girls, menstruation) and bedroom issues – meaning sex, sexuality (including masturbation for boys) and pregnancy.\(^98\)

\(^{95}\) Rasing, 2002.
\(^{96}\) Interview with the chairwoman and chairman of the Traditional Initiators Association of Zambia in November 2014.
\(^{97}\) Rasing, 2002.
\(^{98}\) Interview with the chairwoman and chairman of the Traditional Initiators Association of Zambia in November 2014.
There was no consensus among respondents in this study as to whether or not initiation promotes sexual activity in pubescent boys and girls. This is a perspective that was commonly mentioned by respondents working for the government, NGOs and civil society organizations at the central level. In some sites, such as Senanga and Mwinilunga, high rates of child marriage were said to be in part the result of girls and boys who had undergone initiation and wanted to ‘try out’ what they had learned. But in the sites where initiations were not commonly practised, such as the community in Mufulira, children were nonetheless engaging in premarital sex, and girls were getting pregnant or married and having babies.

It is clear from this research and many other studies that initiation marks an important point on the path to adulthood by publicly declaring an individual’s readiness to take on adult roles and to engage in sexual activity. However, in those communities where initiations are not practised, girls’ and boys’ readiness is nevertheless noted through changes in their behaviour (washing more, dressing differently) and their body (developing breasts, having a period, voice changing (boys) and filling out (boys). Girls who participate in initiations are taught explicit information about sex that is not provided in any formal way to girls who are not initiated. But just as all girls who are initiated do not go on to have sex as children, girls who are not initiated still have sex, become pregnant and marry as children. Boys and girls asserted during this research that there are more ways to learn about sex than through initiation; pornography was cited as a main source of information for boys.

An observed decline in the age of menarche, often to the age of 12 years, over the past generation has led some parents and others to adjust the content of initiations so that girls are not exposed to explicit information about sex and sexuality before they are deemed ready to use it. In Luwingu, some families are choosing to conduct initiations of pubescent girls in secret so that community members will not know of any formal change in status. These modifications of the practice to account for the changing social and biological conditions in which children live are important indications of the willingness of families and communities to adapt to changing circumstances to protect the boys and girls under their care.

To date, as with almost all other issues related to child marriage, there has been little exploration of the role that boys’ initiation may have in kick-starting their sexual lives. There is some research among Bemba students that suggests that boys feel significant pressure to live up to the demands and expectations of being a man, particularly in relation to proving their virility.99 Boys and young men who participated in this research articulated a certain kind of pride associated with impregnating a girl. The extent to which initiations foster or promote fertility as the measure of a man remains to be investigated.

Implication 7: A focus on child marriage should not preclude attention to broader issues of sex, pregnancy and parenthood in childhood.

It is simplistic to say that child marriage is not only about marriage. But in Zambia, where this study found peer marriage to be the most common form of the practice, it is important to recognize that in these unions, children are doing more than marrying and sharing a home: They are having sex, becoming pregnant, giving birth and parenting other children.

Acknowledging this reality means looking at the whole issue of child marriage in a different way: Is it marriage – the agreement between two people to enter into a formal relationship and potentially establish a family together – that is the problem? Or is the major concern about the conditions that lead children to become married in the first place – issues like poverty, maltreatment, lack of love and a dearth of alternative life paths? Finally, is it the potential consequences associated with child marriage that motivate efforts to eradicate the practice – the educational, health and emotional impacts?

The likely answer to these questions is that all aspects are of concern. This research revealed, however, that there is a considerable amount of discomfort among adults with two main issues that are part and parcel of child marriage: sex and parenthood. Yet, these concerns are not unique to married children; in both Mufulira and Katete research sites, single child mothers were cited as an issue of greater prevalence and concern than was child marriage. In Lusaka, pregnant girls were reported to frequently remain single rather than to marry. In all research sites, children lamented what they saw to be a lack of information and services about sexual and reproductive health. They described in detail the challenges they experience as parents, a responsibility they undertake often without social or familial support. Analysing why child marriage is a problem – or, what the most problematic aspects of the ‘problem’ are – is essential to developing focused, relevant interventions to support children, be they married or not.

Implication 8: Child divorce is as much a reality as child marriage.

Globally, and in Zambia, discussions of child marriage are centred on the losses experienced by girls who marry (dropping out of school and diminished family support) and the consequences they experience as a result of their marriage. Little attention is directed on the many child marriages that do not last. In the communities where this research was conducted, especially in Lusaka and Mufulira, child divorce is as much a reality as child marriage. Many relationships end after a few months, and few last longer than a year or two. In some cases, girls as young as 14 are divorced, single mothers. Others are perhaps 16 years old, twice divorced with two children from different marriages. This plethora of circumstances demands that conceptualizations of child marriage and its implications are expanded to include child divorce. Doing so means better understanding the challenges experienced by divorced boys and girls, their children and their families of origin.

In Zambia, there are no safety nets for divorced children or their offspring aside from their parents and families of origin. In every case studied in this research, divorced girl mothers were responsible for the care of their children after their marriage had dissolved. Ex-husbands, while theoretically responsible for providing financial assistance to their former wives, were not found to do so. For example, in Luwingu and Mufulira, boy husbands were said to feel only a fleeting sense of responsibility to their girl wives: It was widely stated that the material and financial pressures of the relationship, pregnancy and parenthood, combined with no longer finding their wives attractive results in boys and young men leaving their marriages. Extreme poverty and a lack of access to social protection measures require that the vast majority of these girls return with their children to live in their parents’ or guardians’ home. This move often results in tensions in the household as a result of unhappiness, unmet expectations and unanticipated financial pressures on the part of both divorced girls and their parents. Returning home can be especially distressing for girls
because the independence they acquired through marriage stands in sharp contrast to the dependency they once again have on their parents and other family members.

If and when divorced girls remarry, another set of challenges arises as their offspring become stepchildren in a new household. Respondents of all ages were clear that boys and girls in these circumstances were sometimes maltreated and discriminated against. In the worst case, they were cast out of their mother’s new home. Interventions and policies designed to eliminate and mitigate the negative impacts of child marriage need to grapple with the gendered and multigenerational impacts of divorce on children.

**Implication 9:** Improved intergenerational relationships and communication are essential to reducing child marriage.

In this study, discussions of child marriage, intergenerational relationships and communication were inseparable. In every community where data were collected, boys and girls said that a primary cause of child marriage was the absence of parental guidance, support and supervision. Boys and girls expressed a strong desire for greater communication with their parents and other family members, such as aunts and grandparents. They articulated their own and other children’s need for parents to spend more time with them and to share information and experience with them so that they could learn from each other. Parents and other adults, most notably grandparents, expressed a similar desire to alter existing patterns of intergenerational connections and interactions. Some break taboo by speaking directly to their own children – as opposed to their sibling’s children, as is custom in most communities – about sex, contraception and romantic relationships. One grandfather in Mwinilunga said that he did this because he had seen his own sons and daughters marry as children and he did not want the same for his grandchildren.

Respondents of all ages lamented the economic imperative that required parents to spend considerable amounts of time making a living away from their children. Being ‘busy surviving’ meant that adult family members feel less able than they want to protect the children under their care. That grandfathers and others are stepping in to fill this gap is an indication of the fluidity and dynamism of culture. So, too, however, are reports from child respondents who said that even when their parents do give them advice, they ignore it and choose to marry anyway. In this case, the cultural norm of intergenerational respect and obedience is also being challenged. Tackling child marriage means engaging with these realities, finding inroads for greater communication and understanding and building bridges between adults and children so that different choices appear possible and acceptable to both parties.

**Implication 10:** Sensitization efforts need to be accompanied by a multisectoral response to child marriage.

This research found that adults and children are aware of the risks associated with child marriage, particularly in terms of maternal mortality, childbirth-related problems and truncated schooling. They know the consequences, but marriages proceed anyway for a number of reasons, primarily because the status quo is considered intolerable: living in extreme poverty without access to basic needs; living among guardians who mistreat, abuse, or discriminate; living with the shame of being a pregnant, unmarried girl or a child single
mother; being out of school and unemployed and unable to acquire adult status because of unwanted dependence on parents and a lack of other means of doing so.

So formidable are these circumstances that parents and children are willing – or think they have no choice – to take the risks. In this case, marriage offers something to these children and their families that they think they cannot access in any other way: a better life.

Addressing child marriage means addressing this reality and its underlying causes through targeted interventions to improve the lives of girls, boys and their families. These can be delivered through multiple channels, including programmes in health, child and social protection, education, training and other areas. As a single strategy, sensitization and awareness campaigns will not work and may stigmatize those who do not think they can make any other choice. Doing so may drive the practice underground and may augment the risks faced by those boys and girls who are already married or at risk of marriage.
Section 9. Recommendations

This section makes a series of recommendations for how the issue of child marriage can be dealt with in the future. It builds upon the opinions and priorities of the communities, families and children who participated in this study and frames a strategic process for moving the agenda forward in Zambia.

These suggestions acknowledge the committed efforts already underway, as highlighted in section 7. However, to check if they represent a realistic way forward, it will be critical to juxtapose those initiatives – and the rationale upon which they are based – with the conclusions drawn from this study’s discussions in communities. By examining the opinions and attitudes of a range of actors, it is possible to better appreciate which types of initiatives need to be strengthened and what new approaches should be considered.

Child marriages rarely take place because they are the ‘right’ thing to do at the ‘right’ time, but because of a confluence of factors unrelated to culture, including a lack of options for quality, accessible education or wage employment; the inability to access sexual and reproductive health information; and a desire for care and protection and improved household circumstances. The culmination of these factors is an inability among many girls, boys and parents or guardians to achieve or even imagine another, alternative future. The key to defining an appropriate strategy for Zambia will be to dispel many of the assumptions and preconceived notions about child marriage and to forge a path that deals with the reality of the situation as defined by families and children.

Recommendation 1: Base the National Plan of Action to End Child Marriage on the findings of this study.

The process to develop the National Plan of Action (and the subsequent implementation of this plan) represents a unique window of opportunity to formulate an approach that really reflects the Zambian context. The development of the National Plan of Action needs to be a comprehensive process of consultation that aims to define a holistic, appropriate and coherent approach to child marriage. At a minimum, it should:

- Define a strategic vision for dealing with the issue of child marriage, including clarifying how the term is understood and applied at different levels, based on the Zambian context.
- Delineate a series of interlocking interventions and actions across a range of agencies, institutions (such as chiefs) and sectors to deal with the issue of child marriage.
- Reflect the Zambian context in tailored programmes to address child marriage, especially recognizing the different challenges associated with urban and rural areas.
- Incorporate a clear and realistic workplan, performance assessment and monitoring and evaluation framework.
Recommendation 2: Consolidate the available evidence.

In parallel to the development of the N Plan, it is essential to consolidate the existing evidence base from both qualitative and quantitative sources. The Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs has completed regional consultations on child marriage, and the results of these should be analysed alongside the findings of this study. The 2013–2014 Demographic and Health Survey results have just been released and secondary analysis is currently underway. All these sources of highly relevant information will emerge at the same time. To maximize the potential of all this information, there should be a combined analysis of findings to assess the inherent contradictions and convergence in the results. The newly available quantitative and qualitative information will mean that strategic planning and decision-making will be grounded in a broad base of evidence.

Furthermore, this study demonstrates the importance of contextualizing initiatives to address child marriage in Zambia. Thus, secondary research should be undertaken to bolster existing information:

- a desk study to learn more about tested initiatives from other regions and countries, which would provide approaches to be adapted to the Zambian context;
- an examination of evidence, both global and local, on how common child marriage is for boys and its implications for their lives and those of family members;
- a small-scale study on child divorce – its prevalence, the reasons why it occurs and its implications for boys, girls, their children and their natal families.

Recommendation 3: Secure support and resources to implement the National Plan of Action.

Once finalized, the National Plan of Action will become the guiding framework for government, civil society, United Nations, bilateral and multilateral agencies to structure their programmes and initiatives. The challenge is to mobilize the necessary resources for the long-term as well as the short-term implementation of the National Plan of Action activities. To avoid such complications, the Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs and its partners, especially UNICEF and UNFPA, should ensure that interested donors are involved in the development of the National Plan of Action. A detailed costing of the Plan should be undertaken and include any resources already committed by the Government.

Recommendation 4: Articulate and agree a multisector approach and collaboration.

The research findings emphasize the range of underlying factors (drivers) that lead children to marry. It is clear that a multisector response is required to address these because child marriage is not solely a child protection issue. There are many complex, dynamic forces that propel children into marriage, and the solutions are beyond the scope of a single sector. Instead, child marriage should be managed within the context of broader national development planning.

Dialogue with actors involved in education, social protection, health (especially HIV) and gender equality is now required as a matter of urgency. Beyond the donor community and United Nations agencies, the development of a strategy to address child marriage should now encourage the wider participation and alignment of other government ministries and
agencies as well as local and traditional leaders and the civil society community. There are already groups and networks mandated to work on the issue, yet they have still to harmonize their approaches and resources. It is strongly recommended that relevant agencies define a common path and delineate how their specific programmes and workplans align with and contribute to the broader efforts to end child marriage.

**Recommendation 5:** Develop and implement programmes that address the underlying causes of child marriage and create alternative life options for children.

Communities are aware that the risks associated with child marriage outweigh the benefits. In some sense, however, the practice is still perceived as providing protection against other risks children face. In most cases, child marriage persists not because it is desirable but because it is the most protective option available. The adults and children who participated in this study were unanimous in their aspirations for a better future for girls and boys; they were, however, clear that nothing will change unless the underlying causes that lead many children into marriage change. Programmes to tackle poverty, access to quality education, sexual and reproductive health issues, social protection, gender equality and HIV need to be more cognizant of their potential to reduce rates of child marriage and to provide better protection to married children.

**Recommendation 6:** Evaluate the role of legislative reform.

For their part, policy-makers and service providers agree on the harmful effects of child marriage and have focused their efforts on developing legislation that bans the practice and prioritizes the prosecution of perpetrators. Even though a legal framework needs to be developed and implemented, policy-makers and service providers should recognize that changes in statutory law are likely to have limited impact on the lives of many families, especially in rural areas, who continue to live beyond the meaningful reach of service providers. In many places, the prevailing system continues to be customary law: This situation is likely to continue in the foreseeable future. Even if customary law is reformed and harmonized with statutory law ‘on paper’, major obstacles will persist in ensuring implementation.

It is questionable whether a legalistic approach to addressing child marriage will be effective. Again, in the absence of alternatives, marriage is considered a good solution. Children are choosing to be married, and criminalizing them for their choice is unlikely to be in their best interest. Although all stakeholders want to see the practice decline, it cannot be achieved solely through legal enforcement or a ‘zero tolerance’ approach, especially where that involves forced divorce and prosecution of young people, many of whom have families.

**Recommendation 7:** Recognize the agency of boys and girls in child marriages.

Most child marriages are between peers rather than a child and adult relationship, and the decision to marry is often made by the children, albeit often within a range of limited choices and opportunities. Most marriages are not characterized by coercion, exploitation or by a deliberate intention to violate the rights of children. This reality means that any solution must involve listening to children and trying to understand the decisions that they make.
For some, this finding may prove controversial or difficult to accept. After all, isn’t child marriage inherently a children’s rights violation? It is indisputable that the practice has serious negative effects on children’s ability to fulfil their potential. It can be argued that boys and girls are not sufficiently mature to make such a decision. The debate on this topic should not lose sight of the reality that children are making choices. All programming on the issue should incorporate the children’s rights principle of inclusion and participation, ensuring that children’s perspectives, opinions and recommendations are heard.

**Recommendation 8: Improve and expand recreational programmes for urban and rural children and young people.**

This study collated the challenges that arise when boys and girls have much ‘free time’, notably those out of school and with minimal opportunities to engage in other activities. It was frequently pointed out by children and adults that boredom leads to early sexual debut. Engagement in sexual relationships is a strong precursor to teenage pregnancy and/or marriage. For children in urban areas, the process may begin with frequenting bars and movies halls, thus leading them to come into contact with alcohol and other children or adults interested in having sex with them. In many rural areas, from the perspective of children, there is simply ‘nothing to do’, and sex is considered the only form of recreation available.

In addition to improved educational opportunities, the role of sport, youth clubs and other associations (such as young farmers or workers, literacy clubs, vocational training, microcredit schemes) should be enhanced. These activities would help to alleviate the boredom children experience and would also provide a vehicle through which to raise their awareness on such issues as sexual and reproductive health, the pitfalls of child marriage, livelihoods and vocational opportunities while also exposing them to positive role models and new skills.

**Recommendation 9: Revise and improve approaches to sexual and reproductive health.**

This study found that the prevalence of child marriage is inextricably linked to adolescent sexuality. There are numerous programmes on sexuality and reproductive health ongoing in Zambia, but the findings in the six districts call into question the effectiveness of these interventions. Teenage pregnancy has a strong influence on child marriage, especially when marriage is understood as a means to protect the honour of a (pregnant) girl and her family. Given this overwhelmingly strong correlation, it is recommended that more open dialogue be established on sex and sexuality, including programmes to help parents be more open in their conversations with their children.

Sexual practices are linked to gendered concepts of what it means to be a man or a woman. These notions have a bearing on the use of contraception and safe sex practices. Information and awareness-raising initiatives to targeting teenage pregnancy – as well as to avoid the spread of sexually transmitted infections and HIV – need to be bolder and more wide-reaching while at the same time appropriate to the context in which they are rolled out.
Recommendation 10: Use puberty as the nexus around which an integrated protection plan or risk reduction strategy is based.

Puberty for both boys and girls is a time of opportunity and risk, marking the point at which children transition into adult roles and status. Service providers need to ensure that programmes are adapted to this reality and target their initiatives to this critical period in children’s lives. The confluence of changes – educational, social and biological – at puberty means that it is a period of great change for children, not least because in many communities they are initiated and deemed ready to enter into sexual relations and marriage. Boys are also under pressure to demonstrate their masculinity. Programmes and services tailored to this period of change require greater priority.

Recommendation 11: Develop programmes for boys and girls who are separated or divorced.

This study found that child marriage is often temporary, lasting a few months to a year. This reality raises a challenge: How can the longer-term needs of married children be supported? What types of support are required by children and their families after a marriage ends?

The dissolution of a child marriage usually results with two children in more vulnerable positions than when they were married. When they return to their families with children, they place additional burdens on the household economy; they may suffer stigma and may find future relationships more difficult to establish. This reality raises significant challenges for child protection service providers. Programmes should begin to understand and align themselves more closely with the welfare and protection needs of children whose marriages have dissolved. Doing so also involves attending to the particular vulnerability of their sons and daughters.

Recommendation 12: Reappraise current approaches to sensitization and awareness-raising.

Many different organizations are involved in awareness-raising and sensitization on the negative effects of child marriage. To date, the approach has been to focus on increasing awareness of national laws and the harmful consequences of child marriage. Although this is certainly important, the findings of this study suggest that a change in approach may be required. The emphasis of the messaging needs to be more balanced and appropriate to the reality of children’s and families’ lives. In the future, messages should focus on the positive outcomes for individual and family well-being and welfare when children do not marry. This more positive strategy is more likely to engage community members and leaders who currently may resist ‘scaremongering’ tactics.

Central to this argument is the need to re-conceptualize and harmonize how child marriage is understood. At the moment, communities receive mixed messages and contradictory advice because of the variety of actors involved. Service providers should develop standardized messages for awareness-raising and campaigning on child marriage. Sensitization strategies should be harmonized with a multisectoral response. Doing so would help to ensure that consistent and mutually reinforcing messages from the Government, civil society
organizations and other service providers reach communities, chiefs, district councils and parents. It would also reduce the negative impacts of ill-defined campaigns that may isolate girls, boys and their families.

Recommendation 13: Build the capacity of government, non-government and other relevant actors.

The Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs is already planning to build the capacity of traditional leaders to address child marriage. Capacity-building modules and support materials should be developed that draw on the findings from this and other relevant studies and then should be rolled out with traditional leaders, district councils and civil society organizations. This activity should be undertaken in close partnership with both the Consortium to End Child Marriage and the Technical Working Group. It should also build the capacity of these groups.

Under the decentralization process, district councils will assume a more important role in delivering a range of development activities and services. Given their proximity to communities, traditional leaders and other local structures, these councils should be prioritized for capacity building. Doing so would enable them to better coordinate and engage in programmes related to child well-being and child marriage.

Recommendation 14: Pilot interventions in selected districts.

The National Plan of Action to End Child Marriage will outline a new approach to ending child marriage. However, before going to scale, it is important for this approach to be tested, then reviewed, assessed and refined. This process is necessary to generate a solid evidence-base upon which to extrapolate proven and successful activities that might be replicable on a national or provincial level. Pilot programmes should be informed by, build upon and strengthen the recommendations made in this report. Development actors need to demonstrate that they can support boys and girls to choose a better life than that provided through child marriage. Awareness-raising alone will not address the factors contributing to child marriage. New and innovative intersectoral approaches need to be developed and piloted. A robust monitoring and evaluation framework should be designed to assess the viability and sustainability of the district interventions.
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Annex A. Snapshots of research sites

Katete Site 1 + Site 2, Katete District, Eastern Province

Katete District Town is located in Eastern Province, 500 km from Lusaka, in close proximity to both the borders of Malawi and Mozambique. The town is based around two long main roads with many freight trucks parked alongside various bars, restaurants and hotels, some commonly known to be brothels. A large international NGO is working within the district and wards with some programs to address child marriage and gender based violence.

Katete Site 1: This community is located 15 km outside the town. Two FGDs were held in this site with unmarried children aged 13–17 years. Traditions such as Nweu dancing and initiations were cited here. Due to challenges in mobilizing respondents, the research continued in Katete Site 2.

Katete Site 2: This community is located within Milanzi constituency, several kilometres from the Mozambique border and approximately 50 km from Katete town via gravel road. The main tribe is Chewa and the dominant economic activities are agriculture and the raising of cattle, goats, chickens and pigs. The population density is very low and family compounds with several huts are located sometimes several kilometres apart across the plains.

There is a government primary school and several community schools located within Katete Site 2. The closest high school is located 15 km away and costs 900 kwacha annually. Children walk up to 7 km to attend primary school with classes starting at 7 am. However, it was widely stated that due to the largely agricultural economy, education is not a priority for parents, even in cases where they could afford to pay school fees. Boys often start herding cattle from 7 to 10 years of age which continues for up to four years. During this time, they do not attend school and tend not to enrol after this period.

In Katete Site 2, child pregnancy was considered an issue of greater prevalence and concern than child marriage. According to respondents, HIV exists but is not a significant problem and most children have both parents.

Lusaka Site, Chaisa Ward, Lusaka, Lusaka Province

Chaisa is a large compound that has been growing over the past three decades. Longer-term residents described it as initially a small township that had expanded rapidly over recent years, in line with the high levels of urbanization taking place in Zambia. The population is now estimated at more than 45,000, with residents coming from all areas of the country. Living conditions were described as difficult, with high rates of poverty and low-quality and often overcrowded accommodation.

There are a number of service providers active in the community, but these are seen as insufficient to meet the needs of the ever-expanding population. Government and community schools are present, but there are still many challenges in terms of children completing their education. There are several health facilities and some civil society organizations and women’s groups. The local council office works with the zone development committees.
(there are 14) to draft and implement action plans to address social issues. Child protection, including child marriage, is being given more attention, but there are many challenges.

There are a large number of bars, video and dance halls, and their presence is seen as exposing children to several protection concerns. One of the main challenges is the issue of unattended children or a lack of parental care. This is often due to parents being away from home for work elsewhere in the city and returning late at night.

**Luwingu Site, Katapola Ward, Luwingu District, Northern Province**

Luwingu District is located within Northern Province and located 844 km from Lusaka. According to the 2010 Census, this district had the highest population growth rate in the country, at 5.2 per cent. The HIV prevalence rate in 2007 (DHS) was 6.8 per cent.

Luwingu Site is located on the periphery of Luwingu district town, approximately 5 km from district government offices, market areas and the high school. It is a rural, remote area with a traditional structure, governed by a village headman and councillor under Chief Chipalo.

There are more than 600 households located within the site, normally featuring a common household building, a central roofed meeting space, a dug well and a small vegetable garden with village chickens. There is no electricity connected. The main livelihood of the area is agricultural piece work (farming beans, ground nuts, maize, cassava and millet); some women also sell items in the market, and some boys and men work in fishing. Local residents said piece work provided approximately 30 kwacha per day, with an annual average income per household in the site of 2,000 kwacha.

There is a government primary school located within the site with 1,000 students attending. The cost is approximately 90 kwacha annually. There is only one high school available within Luwingu District, which is 3 km walk away. The annual cost is approximately 2,700 kwacha. According to the village headman, there are 17 girls and 70 boys attending high school. The closest post-secondary college is in Kassama (165 km).

The majority tribes represented within the site are Bemba and Bisa, followed by Tonga, Mambue, Lozi and Lingoni. Five churches are onsite: Catholic, Seventh Day Adventist, Church of Christ, New Apostle Church and Christ Mission Main Lands.

Child and adult respondents said that child marriage takes place from the age of 12 years for girls and from age 14 for boys and that there are significant numbers of orphaned children due to AIDS.

**Mufulira Site, Bwananyina Ward, Mufulira District, Copperbelt Province**

Mufulira is a medium-sized district town located 400 km from Lusaka and 20 km from the DR Congo border. It is a copper mining and transport hub for trucks and freight moving through and from DR Congo across the pedicle road. The 2007 DHS indicated the prevalence of HIV/AIDS was that year 17 per cent at the district level.
Bwananyina Ward is located approximately 5 km from the central business district. It contains a mix of middle class houses with gardens, defence force personnel housing (new) and several unplanned settlements on the ward's periphery. Mufulira Site, where the research was conducted, is an ‘unplanned settlement’. There are no government services, including schools, police or health services within this large and highly populated area. There is no electricity connected. The closest government schools are located 6 km away by foot.

There is a large market on the gravel main road into the settlement with food and clothing vendors as well as numerous bars and cinemas. The population of the settlement is unknown but it is a large, highly dense area, with high levels of poverty. More than 500 children are enrolled in the community primary school.

The only clinic present within the settlement is that run by the Catholic Mission. There is no traditional structure in the community – no chief, village headman or councillor. Several study respondents had migrated to Mufulira from Mansa, Luapula Province. It was also said that there are no NGOs working within the site.

In Mufulira Site, respondents identified pregnancy and child single mothers to be a more significant issue than child marriage. Concerns raised by respondents related to high numbers of orphans due to AIDS, high rates of divorce and remarriage and alcohol abuse.

**Mwinilunga Site 1, Kasampula Ward, Mwinilungu District, North-Western Province**

Kasampula Ward is located nearly two hours from the district town and is accessed via a dirt road that can become difficult for vehicles to pass during periods of heavy rain. There are some 2,500 households in the ward, but they are spread out; there is no market, and only one school, with classes up to Grade eight. There is no health post in the village, and residents are forced to travel to the paved road to access a clinic. Health workers do make occasional visits, although these were reported as being infrequent (maybe once or twice a year). There are no civil society organizations or NGOs active in the area, and as a result, there are no social programmes or development activities.

Many children were reported as not in school or attending infrequently. The majority of families are involved in agriculture and move from the village to be closer to their land during planting and harvest seasons. This practice tends to be disruptive for the education of children.

There is a village area development committee that meets to discuss social issues and to resolve disputes that arise within the community. There is also a parent–teacher association, but this tends to meet on an ad hoc basis. There are also a number of churches of different denominations in and around the village, but these were not perceived to be active on issues relating to child protection and child marriage. There is limited access to outside information, with few people having radios or televisions and even difficulties accessing the mobile phone network.

Initiation ceremonies were reported as common for both girls and boys and perceived to be an important part of social and cultural identity. Child marriage and teenage pregnancies
were also reported to be common, and the high levels of poverty and low education level of the adult population were considered as factors that increase the risk of children marrying.

**Mwinilunga Site 2, Mulumbi Ward, Mwinilungu District, North-Western Province**

Not far from the district council offices, Mwinilunga Site 2 is located along a paved road. The area is close to markets, schools, police station, hospital and other services. Given its proximity to the centre of the district town, it is relatively well provided for by service providers. However, its close proximity to bars and video halls is seen as problematic when it comes to such issues as child marriage and teen pregnancy. This is a community where boys marry older women (whom they meet when they frequent the bars); this practice was cited by adult respondents as a concern.

**Senanga Site 1, Senanga Central Ward, Senanga District, Western Province**

A medium-sized township located near to the district council offices, Senanga Site 1 has grown rapidly in recent years; residents come from around the district. There are some services, including recreational activities for children and adolescents; there are schools, a police station, a market and access to health services in Senanga town. A number of international and national civil society organizations have offices in the town and are providing education, social protection, health, agricultural support and other programmes around the district.

The village development committee is active and works with both government and civil society organizations to address a range of social issues in the community. Child marriage and early teenage pregnancy are perceived to be common; many grandparents look after children due to the effects of HIV and AIDS. Initiation rites were reported as common, especially for girls.

The area is also home to many children attending secondary school. These children have come to town to continue their education but are now living in cheap accommodation and often without adult supervision. This situation is seen as very risky for adolescent girls, especially in terms of early marriage, teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

High levels of alcohol consumption are also reported in the area due to unemployment and a lack of opportunities for many residents. Adolescents, both boys and girls, are reported to be frequenting bars and music and video halls, where they come into contact with adults. Many adolescent girls were reported to be entering into relationships with older boys and adult men in order to supply their basic needs.

**Senanga Site 2, Kataba Ward, Senanga District, Western Province**

A small rural settlement approximately one hour drive from the district town, Senanga Site 2 is accessible via a dirt road. The settlement is dispersed along a river bank, and there is a well-organized school approximately 20 minutes’ walk from the site, where the research took place (the school was also visited). There are some civil society organizations active in the area, especially in terms of providing agricultural support to farmers in the form of extension workers.
Annex B. Members of the Technical Working Group on the Child Marriage Study

- Plan International
- UNICEF
- Young Women’s Christian Association
- Youth Vision Zambia
- Central Statistical Office
- Campaign against Early Marriages
- Society for Women and AIDS in Zambia
- Department of Gender Studies, University of Zambia
- Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs
- Zambia Centre for Communication Partnership
- Communications Support for Health
Annex C. Criteria for site selection

The six districts where the research took place were selected by the Technical Working Group on the Child Marriage Study, based on analysis of existing information relating to child marriage and experience of implementing programmes to address the practice. The districts and reasons for their selection were as follows:

- Luwingu and Senanga were selected because both have high levels of poverty but varying prevalence rates.
- Katete and Mwinilunga were selected due to the strong influence of cultural practices that were understood to have an impact on child marriage.
- Lusaka and Mufulira were selected to establish the dynamics of the practice in urban settings and to see how this was consistent or divergent from rural areas.

To guide the final site selection process, a number of additional criteria were developed, streamlined and determined in consultation with the Technical Working Group on the Child Marriage Study. These included:

- A community with a high prevalence of child marriage and high levels of poverty
- A community with a low prevalence of child marriage and high levels of poverty
- A community where boys are married before age 18
- A community where older men tend to marry girls
- A community where the chief has spoken out against child marriage
- A community where the chief has not spoken out against child marriage (or is understood to not oppose the practice)
- A community with high rates of teen pregnancy
- A community with low rates of teen pregnancy
- A community with high levels of secondary school enrolment
- A community with low levels of secondary school enrolment
- A community with a high HIV prevalence rate, especially among young people
- A community with a low HIV prevalence rate, especially among young people
- A community where child marriage has been practised for generations
- A community where initiation ceremonies is a common practice for boys and girls
- A community where customary law is given precedence over statutory law
Annex D. Researcher code of conduct

All research team members were required to read, sign and abide by a code of conduct. This applied to the full duration of time that team members were involved in the research, whether field based or not, and included time not officially on duty.

Research team members were in a privileged position to learn about the lives, perspectives and experiences of the participants. With this role came a set of expectations and responsibilities to ensure that participants and their communities were not put at risk through the research process.

The code of conduct contains simple guidelines developed to help ensure that researchers, colleagues and participants were protected and had a richer, more purposeful, interaction. It was important for all research team members to familiarize themselves with the code of conduct and to follow it in practice.

**Code of Conduct for Researchers: Statement of Commitment**

I hereby declare that I have read and understood the ethical protocol for this research and the child protection policy of UNICEF/CHIN and that I will comply with the guidelines therein for the duration of this research project.

I have a duty to ensure that no one is put at risk of harm as a result of their participation in this research. I have a responsibility to respect participants’ views and experiences and to ensure that participation in the research is in every individual’s best interest. I will do my utmost to ensure that participation in this study is a positive experience for all.

While associated with this research, I will never:

1. Share the information acquired from any specific individuals who participated in this study with anyone outside the research team.
2. Hit or physically assault any participant.
3. Behave physically in a manner that is inappropriate or sexually provocative.
4. Use language or offer advice that is inappropriate, offensive or abusive.
5. Act in ways intended to shame, humiliate, belittle or degrade participants.
6. Act in ways that may place a participant at risk of danger, abuse or exploitation.
7. Act in ways that could be deemed coercive, exploitative or abusive.
8. Encourage children to act in ways that are illegal, unsafe or abusive.
9. Develop intimate physical or sexual relationships with participants.
10. Invite a child participant to my room or to stay overnight at my home unsupervised or sleep in the same room or bed as a child participant.
11. Do things for children of a personal nature that they can do for themselves.

I understand that failure to comply with this Code of Conduct may result in disciplinary action, including termination of my contract.
Annex E. Ethical principles and guidelines

The study was designed to minimize risks to respondents and to maximize the potential benefits of participation. The following ethical principles and guidelines were applied at all stages of the research process:

a) The research should have social and scientific value. This research was designed – in collaboration with several government ministries and a national Technical Working Group on the Child Marriage Study – to ensure that the knowledge and learning generated are used to improve child protection and the more general well-being of children and families living in Zambia. On a global level, its findings will contribute to the ongoing international dialogue on child marriage by presenting findings from Zambia, a context with its own specificities, history and experiences. The research methodology was also designed to ensure that it was scientifically sound and sufficiently rigorous in its approach. To ensure that the knowledge acquired can be put to effective use, the findings of the study will be disseminated in a way that reaches all those who might benefit from the information contained herein, including the communities who participated in the research.

b) The research will have scientific validity. One of the questions surrounding concerns about scientific validity relates to the legitimacy and accessibility of the concepts and terms used over the course of a piece of research. Given the different languages spoken in Zambia and specifically in the districts selected for data collection, issues of translation were carefully addressed in the design and implementation of the research. Several steps in the research process helped to bolster the scientific validity of the study:

The research tools were piloted following the training of the research team and adjusted accordingly before the data collection phase. The piloting was undertaken in Lusaka. Data was collected in two areas of city separate from the principal Lusaka research site; information obtained through the piloting process did not form part of the main study data. Group and individual reflection on the research process and findings were conducted daily throughout the period of data collection and at other set points in the process. This approach created the space for the research team to address any potential concerns about validity and allowed for adaptations to be made when necessary.

c) Fair subject selection. The research team developed clear recruitment guidance to ensure that respondents represented diverse socioeconomic statuses, age ranges, varying levels of exposure to explicitly defined vulnerability factors and a variety of religious, ethnic and social factors. The selection of unit of analysis site locations ensured the inclusion of a diverse array of locations were included in the study.

d) Protect research participants from harm. This research principle sought to ensure that all participants were protected from any emotional or physical harm that might have occurred as a result of their involvement in the research and to protect their rights and interests. Participants were not asked to talk about personal experiences of violence or abuse. Researchers also avoided asking insensitive questions or probing for information when it was clear that participants preferred not to answer.
Because participants’ attitudes towards research are shaped to a large extent by their perception of the purpose of the study and their expectations about what it will achieve, the research team was careful to clearly explain the study objectives and what would be done with the information gathered. They also emphasized the lack of immediate, tangible benefits to those participating in the research and were careful not to make promises to children, adults and communities, especially about future programmes or actions that might improve their situation.

Before the research began, the team agreed what actions were to be taken, in accordance with UNICEF child protection procedures, should a child disclose abuse (actual or potential) of him/herself or of another child. Similarly, the team agreed upon a procedure to ensure that distress was immediately recognized and mitigated and that appropriate support was found for ensuring the comfort and well-being of respondents.

e) **Remain objective.** Researchers were advised to remain as objective as possible. At all times, researchers allowed participants to express their own views and opinions and not to interrupt, make suggestions or engage in personal debates about the views expressed. Participants’ responses were recorded using the specific words used, regardless of whether the researcher agreed with the statement expressed.

f) **Commit to independent review.** Although this research did not have a formal independent review board, the Technical Working Group on the Child Marriage Study (consisting of government, multilateral and civil society agencies) and the ERES Converge served as a check on the quality and ethics of this study. These groups provided regular feedback on the development of the research framework, scope and tools development as well as the final research report.

g) **All research participation must be voluntary.** Informed consent was obtained from all research participants. In this study, the research team was clear about who they are, the purpose of the research, what will be done with the information collected and any potential consequences of the research (Morrow and Richards, 1996; Schenk and Williamson, 2005). These discussions were initiated at the beginning of all data collection sessions, with adults, caregivers and children.

The consent forms were based on the Investigator Brochure provided by ERES Converge and were discussed and reviewed during the training of researchers. Revisions to information sheets and consent forms were made, based on the feedback and advice provided by ERES Converge prior to the commencement of the field research.

h) **Respect for potential and enrolled participants.** The research team was instructed to respect and adhere to local codes of dress and behaviour. They respected participants’ points of view at all times and refrained from criticism of research participants or acting as a teacher or instructor. The research team sought at all times ways to minimize power imbalances between researchers and participants, particularly when working with children.

i) **Confidentiality and data protection.** At the outset of data collection, all participants were informed that their answers would be kept confidential. Responses and comments are summarized in this report without the use of names or other identifying characteristics. All
interviews and group discussions were conducted in a quiet, private setting, and all efforts were made to avoid interruptions. Only the researchers and participants were present on these occasions.

All information collected during the study will be kept strictly confidential and will not be shared except through the verbal or written dissemination of the findings of the study. Once assent and/or informed consent were obtained, completed forms were placed in secured files. The notes of researchers will not be shared outside the research team. After all data for the study was collected, only the lead researchers had ongoing access to the field notes, transcripts and other research materials.

j) Compensation. Research respondents did not receive any monetary compensation for their participation in this study. However, in focus group discussions, refreshments were provided. When appropriate and necessary, compensation for transport costs was provided.
Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)
Signed: 1990
Ratified: 1996
**Article 24:** States Parties shall take all effective and appropriate measures with a view to abolishing traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children.

**Article 28:** States Parties recognize the right of the child to education and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity.

**Article 34:** States Parties undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.

Convention to End All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
Signed: 1980
Ratified: 1996
This Convention states, “The betrothal and the marriage of a child have no legal effect …,” and requires governments “to specify a minimum age of marriage and to make the registration of marriages in an official registry compulsory.”

Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages
Adopted: 1979
Not signed or ratified
**Article 1:** 1. No marriage shall be legally entered into without the full and free consent of both parties, such consent to be expressed by them in person after due publicity and in the presence of the authority competent to solemnize the marriage and of witnesses, as prescribed by law. 2. Notwithstanding anything in paragraph 1 above, it shall not be necessary for one of the parties to be present when the competent authority is satisfied that the circumstances are exceptional and that the party has, before a competent authority and in such manner as may be prescribed by law, expressed and not withdrawn consent.

**Article 2:** States Parties to the present Convention shall take legislative action to specify a minimum age for marriage. No marriage shall be legally entered into by any person under this age, except where a competent authority has granted a dispensation as to age, for serious reasons, in the interest of the intending spouses.

**Article 3:** All marriages shall be registered in an appropriate official register by the competent authority.

African Union Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
Ratified: 2009
**Article 21:** Protection against Harmful Social and Cultural Practices. 1. States Parties to the present Charter shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate harmful social and cultural practices affecting the welfare, dignity, normal growth and development of the child and in particular: (a) those customs and practices prejudicial to the health or life of the child; and (b) those customs and practices discriminatory to the child on the grounds of sex or other status. 2. Child marriage and the betrothal of girls and boys shall be prohibited and effective action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify the minimum age of marriage to be 18 years and make registration of all marriages in an official registry compulsory.
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