

Transforming Masculinities for Gender Equality and to End Child Marriage

MORE THAN 20% OF GIRLS AGED 15-19 ARE CURRENTLY IN A UNION/MARRIED IN ZIMBABWE.

GIRLS AGED 15-19 FROM POORER HOUSEHOLDS ARE SIX TIMES MORE LIKELY TO BE MARRIED THAN GIRLS IN RICHER HOUSEHOLDS.

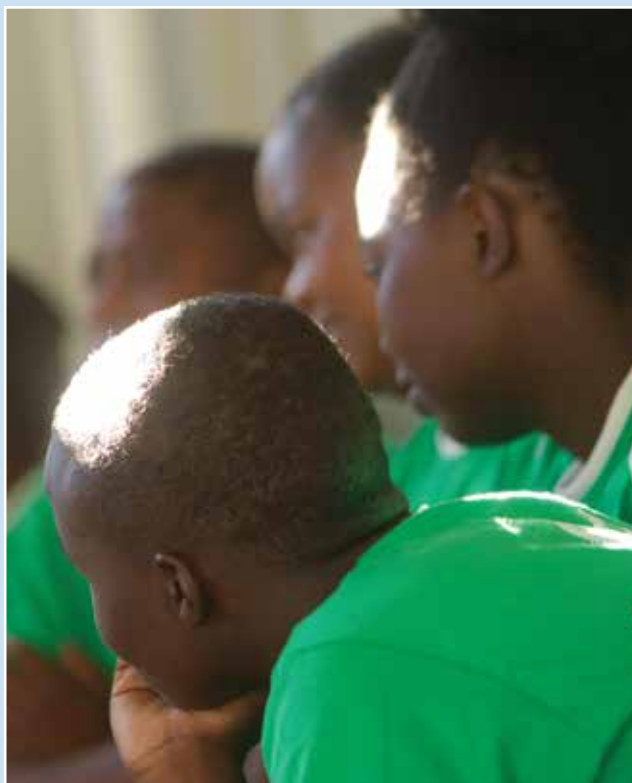
The situation

Despite a slight overall reduction in child marriage over the past twenty years, child marriage rates in Zimbabwe remain high: more than 20% of girls aged 15-19 are currently in a union/married. There is a sharp rural-urban divide: two in five women aged 20-24 got married before age 18 in rural areas compared to one in five in urban areas. Child marriage in Zimbabwe is driven by poverty and fuelled by religious beliefs, particularly followers of the Apostolic faith whose beliefs require girls to marry between the ages of 12 to 16 to prevent sexual relations outside marriage. Among girls aged 15-19, girls living in poorer households are six times more likely to be married or in union than girls in the richest households.

Child marriage has a devastating impact on the lives of girls. The practice disrupts childhood development and deprives girls of their right to be a child. It often leads to school drop-out, disallowing girls to develop their full potential and to early pregnancies when a girl is not mentally and physically ready to birth or take care of a young child. Child marriage deprives girls of their rights to acquire appropriate skills to enter the labour force as adults pushing them further into poverty. Child marriages also increase the risk of domestic violence, psychological and physical violence, including sexual violence, and HIV-infections.

Zimbabwe's response to ending child marriage is guided by International Conventions. The country has a fairly well-developed constitutional, legal and policy framework underpinning strategies to end child marriages. The legislation framework includes the Marriages Act, which explicitly outlaws child marriages. However prevention of child marriages continues to be hampered by gaps in legislation and policy, patriarchal gender norms and unequal power relations, weak implementation capacity and social and religious practices. The situation is worsened by the socio-economic situation, which pushes households to engage in negative coping strategies including compromising on quantity and quality of food, foregoing precautionary health care and keeping children out of school. All these factors combine into an intricate web of risks for gender equity broadly and child marriage.

While child marriage is a widely researched topic that has grown substantially over the past twenty years, the vast majority of the empirical and programme literature on child marriage is focused on drivers, prevalence and trends. Additional evidence and programme lessons are needed on the effectiveness of a range of responses that are being implemented in different programme settings.



UNICEF Response

There are no standalone solutions to ending child marriage.

Different combinations and pairings of approaches will be supported in different contexts to ensure that child marriages are prevented from the household and community to the national level.

UNICEF's response will support:

Implementation of existing policies, laws and legal reform efforts;

- Improved access to good quality education for girls;
- Referral to and provision of child protection and social protection services through the National Case Management System (NCMS) for the Protection and Welfare of Children;
- Interventions to shift harmful religious and social

norms focusing on the four provinces with high prevalence rates: Mashonaland Central, Manicaland, Matabeleland South;

- Support implementation of the costed National Action Plan to End Child Marriages developed with technical assistance from UNICEF under the Spotlight Initiative.
- Advocate for, and strengthen integration of Ending of Child Marriage in national and sectoral policies and for budget allocation.

UNICEF will invest in participatory research to generate additional evidence on child marriage and to bridge knowledge and practice. The generated evidence will be used to shape strategies and approaches that are fit for the realities of girls, including children with disabilities, and for families living in urban and rural contexts.

Target beneficiaries

Women and girls in four provinces with the highest incidence of Child Marriages

Communities in all UNICEF programme districts

CONTACTS

Zeinab Adam, Deputy Representative, Programmes
zeadam@unicef.org

Pierre Ferry, Chief of Child Protection,
pferry@unicef.org

Alexandra Makaroff, Partnerships Specialist
amakaroff@unicef.org

TOTAL BUDGET \$2m

ECM referral and disability-inclusive response through the NCMS	\$800k
Prevention – social norms, SBC and community awareness	\$600k
Evidence generation – research and evaluation	\$200k
Policy, coordination and advocacy	\$200k
Technical assistance – operationalising NAP for ECM	\$200k