

Tackling Child Marriage in Malawi: A multi-pronged approach

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EveryChild.

About EveryChild Malawi

Target group: children without and at risk of losing parental care (CWPC)

In Malawi, we work in Mndolera (Dowa District) and Bulala (Mzimba District)- ***see map on the next slide***

Vision: a world where CWPC enjoy the right to a childhood in a safe and caring family, free from poverty, violence and exploitation.

Map of Malawi



About child marriage

Our 2006 baseline study on issues affecting children in Mzimba and Dowa suggested that child marriage is a **major challenge affecting girls**:

- **77.2%** of girls got married aged 13-18
- **24.6%** of respondents said household poverty caused child marriage
- **16.5%** of respondents said peer pressure & cultural traditions caused child marriage
- Child marriage is a deep rooted practice that impedes girls' education, exposes them to HIV and other STIs, and maternal mortality

Our strategy

Holistic approach - many angles and actors:

- Changing attitudes and beliefs
- Reducing social and economic risk factors for child marriage
- Supporting Traditional Leaders to develop and implement community by-laws against child marriage.
- Advocating to government for national legislation against child marriage

Our approaches

- 1) Supporting traditional leaders to introduce and implement **by-laws**
- 2) Involvement in the **Girls Not Brides partnership** to advocate for ending child marriage
- 3) **Child participation:**
 - school-based Child Rights Clubs in schools (3,200 children)
 - community-based Children's Corners (6715 children)
- 4) **Mother participation** (38 Mothers' Groups)
- 5) **Educational support** (117 school bursaries)
- 6) **Secure livelihoods** (Village Savings and Loan Associations and promotion of livestock pass on scheme; Farm Inputs)
- 7) **Early childhood development** (120 community-based care centers, 7981 children)



Child marriage symposium in Dowa



VSLA in session

A VSLA member selling flitters



Results of our work

- Child marriage prevalence reduced from **77.2%** in 2006 to **9%** in 2013 in programme areas
- 646 girls who were at risk of marrying are now living with their parents and are in school.
- Introduction and implementation of child marriage by-laws in 51 communities in Bulala and 35 communities in Mndolera
- Child marriage issues highly profiled- strong proposal that minimum age entry into marriage should be raised from 15 years to 18 years

Lessons Learned

So many but key ones:

- Entertainment and sporting element is useful for effective child participation but also need to explicitly plan for learning [drama, songs, games etc]
- Effective participation needs involvement in the entire project cycle [Engaging children in research, Planning, Implementation, and M and E]
- Programs can integrate local culture [traditional leaders and elders engaging children on culture and their family roots]
- Local participation has limited power unless complemented by laws [people fear the punishment if they break the by laws]

Need to question theory of change

- Children living with grandparents and away from parents are part of the CWPC group - i.e. at risk for child marriage. However, we found that children might live with grandparents for various reasons, such as school proximity
 - > Need cultural sensitivity and thoughtful targeting
- To allow effective child participation, children need additional skills
 - > In 2013-14, children in the target communities will continue undergoing life, leadership and advocacy skills training

Large-scale challenges: what can we solve?

- Changing macro-level context: inflation and climate change
- 25% of Malawi residents are ultra poor, so girls see child marriage as a solution
- Frequent funerals and sicknesses affect savings and operations of small scale business
- Migration to South Africa means parents are more likely to leave their children behind
- Traditional practice of *usiki* where families contribute food stuffs to communal celebrations affect food security
- Inadequate complementary services (e.g., poor education quality)



Thank you!
Questions?