

CHILD BRIDE

Policy Brief

Ending Violence Against Children in Zambia

March 2022

Context

Child defilement cases have been on the rise in recent years. The Zambia Police Service reported that in the second quarter of 2021, 576 children were defiled¹. That number increased by 10% from that reported in the first quarter of the same year. Children have also fallen victim to Gender-Based Violence (GBV). As of February 2022, 1,814 children were abused countrywide, representing 22.9% of all the victims of Gender-Based Violence reported. Girl children were the most affected with GBV, accounting for 1,342 (74%) cases compared to boys at 472 (26%) cases². It should be noted that the reported cases are just a fraction of the many incidences that remain unreported.

On the other hand, child marriage is currently estimated at 29%³ in Zambia, a slight decrease from 31% reported in 2014. This reduction can be attributed to several implemented efforts by the Government and its partners, following the National Campaign launch to end child marriage in 2013. The campaign intended to address the causes and effects of child marriages in Zambia.

However, with high levels of poverty still limiting access to livelihood opportunities among families, the risk of more children getting married increases as they

experience additional vulnerabilities that lead to adopting coping mechanisms such as child marriage. For example, as households suffer limited livelihood opportunities and sometimes economic effects of COVID-19, the marriage of girls aged below 18 can be seen as the best alternative for parents and guardians to reduce the household burden or a means of earning incomes through informal dowry-based economies⁴. Furthermore, culture and traditional norms that encourage initiation ceremonies¹ for girls that have attained puberty contribute to child marriages. During initiation ceremonies, girls are taught how to please men sexually and run a home, influencing their mind set to get married at a young age⁵. These issues are a sad reminder that Zambia needs to take stern actions to end child violations repeatedly reported and those that go unreported.

Nonetheless, we appreciate ongoing efforts to end violence against children by the Government and its cooperating partners. Among the interventions implemented, Zambia ratified international human rights instruments on the protection and rights of children, including the Sustainable Development Goals, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the

¹Traditional rites of passage for girls into womanhood that attain puberty

Rights and Welfare of a Child. Moreover, Zambia became a pathfinding country in 2020 to end violence against children, raise awareness, provide a roadmap for action, and stimulate leadership commitment in preventing violence against children^{6,7}.

Furthermore, Zambia has made headway in reviewing the policy and law that bears considerable influence on child marriages. For example, the Children's Code Bill was drafted, which brings together all the laws governing the children's welfare and harmonizes the definition of a child. If passed, the Children's Code Bill will incorporate provisions under the customary law on marriages into Zambia's legal statutes to ensure that the minimum age of marriage cuts across all forms of marriages in Zambia – both statutory and customary.

Other laws and legislations that seek to protect children legally include the Education Act, the National Child Policy, the Anti-Gender Based Violence Act, the Re-entry Policy and the Education Policy.

Further, other measures included the development

of the National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage 2016 - 2021 to provide strategic direction in multi-sectoral interventions and the provision of child-focused services. The Strategy also intended on strengthening ending child marriage partnerships, strengthening policy and law and changing beliefs, behaviours and practices⁸. In addition, the National Prevention and Response Plan on Ending Violence Against Children (2021-2025) was recently launched. This plan intends to continue living up to the 2015 commitment by world leaders to end all forms of violence against children by 2030 as part of the Agenda for the Sustainable Development Goals⁹.

To a large extent, all these commendable efforts will minimize child violations in households and communities, including public places such as schools. However, more needs to be done to eliminate multiple violations of children's rights that many still face in Zambia. For example, we continue to see domestic and sexual violence, limited or no education and economic opportunities that restrict children's prospects for realizing their full potential.

World Vision's Response

World Vision Zambia complements the Government's efforts to realize a nation where children are protected and free from all forms of violence. In 2017, World Vision International launched the "It Takes a World to End Violence Against Children" Campaign, which World Vision Zambia domesticated as the "Ending Child Marriage" campaign. Since 2017, World Vision Zambia has contributed to growing the ending child marriage movement in Zambia by creating awareness in communities about the dangers of child marriage. In 2021 alone, World Vision Zambia reached 75,688 people, including children, with messages on ending child marriages through community engagements and awareness programmes. World Vision Zambia also uses national television and radio to disseminate awareness messages, publish documentaries and adverts advocating to end child marriage to all people in Zambia. In addition, World Vision Zambia creates platforms for children activists to engage government leaders, including faith and traditional leaders, in debates on measures to protect children from violence. An estimate of 3 million viewers is reached through national television during each broadcasting.

Through the EU-funded Natwampane, Prevent! Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) projectⁱ implemented in Northern Province, World Vision Zambia engages critical stakeholder groups to challenge and change beliefs, cultural practices, and attitudes that condone violence and perpetuate sexual violence and gender-based violence, including child marriage. From 2020 to 2021, the Natwampane project recorded and supported 9,981 survivors of GBV, including child/forced marriages. Of the total reached, 61 survivors (48 females and 13 males) were cases of child/forced marriages involving children aged 13 to 17 years. Subsequently, these were supported with age-appropriate case management services and referrals to enable healing and recovery. While these accounted for only 0.61% of the overall 9,981 GBV cases reported through the One-Stop Centers and mobile outreaches, the project acknowledges that many others are unreported.

Further, working with religious and traditional leaders, children, and young people, World Vision Zambia under the

ⁱNatwampane, Prevent! SGBV is a Prevention and Survivor Support project under Natwampane program in the Luapula and Northern Provinces of Zambia, working with the government in partnership with Sport In Action, Catholic Medical Mission Board (CMMB), Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA), to stop sexual and gender-based violence in communities.

Natwampane project reached 223,296 people with messages on reducing SGBV, including child marriage, through community engagements.

World Vision Zambia also creates platforms for young advocates to participate in high-level forums to advocate and address issues that affect them. For example, children moderated and engaged in conversations with high-level delegates during the Southern Africa launch of the Regional Children's Consultation Report and the European Week of Action for Girls (EWAG) to secure commitments to protect children and make the world a safe environment for children. They also make recommendations on improving the welfare of children in policy documents¹⁰.

World Vision Zambia is a member of the Joining Forces consisting of five other child-focused organizations that aim to use their collective influence to accelerate change to secure children's rights and end violence against them. Working in collaboration with members of the Joining Forces, World Vision Zambia advocates for children's rights using various means, including joint press releases and statements to call on leaders to protect children against all forms of violence. Further, through the Joining Forces Alliance, World Vision Zambia engaged with 40 Members of Parliament to prioritize children's rights and support the enactment of the Children's Code Bill. World Vision Zambia also participated in the Internal Legislative Review of the Bill. During the commemoration of key events such as the Day of the Child, World Vision Zambia uses such platforms to engage leaders on issues affecting children and secure commitments on actions leaders would take to enhance child protection mechanisms.

In World Vision Zambia's operational areas and

respective districts, World Vision Zambia works with key Government Departments, such as the Victim Support Unit of the Zambia Police Service, the Department of Community Development and Social Welfare, and District Education Board Secretary, among others, to advocate against all forms of child rights violations. This is done through the formulated structures called District Child Protection Committees (DCPC), representing all government departments. Further, World Vision Zambia works with faith and traditional leaders at the village level to form Zonal and Village Child Protection Committees to strengthen the reporting systems on child abuse-related cases. This also involves training the traditional leaders and their councils on ending child marriage messaging and the use of child marriage educational tools developed by World Vision Zambia. As a result of continuous engagements with traditional leaders on child rights and protecting children from violence, 18 traditional leaders out of the 35 chiefdoms in World Vision Zambia's operational areas formulated Child Protection By-Law. The By-laws prohibit child marriage and also outline measures to be taken against those violating the guidelines.

Working with the DCPC, World Vision Zambia also supports sexually and physically abused girls and those retrieved from child marriages. From 2018 to 2021, World Vision Zambia, working with the Child Protection Committees, including faith and traditional leaders, rescued 936 girls from child marriages out of the 1,335 child marriage cases reported. Close to 700 of the rescued girls were supported to go back to school using various sources of income, including family support and income-generating activities initiated by traditional leaders.

World Vision's Recommendations

Ongoing interventions to end violence against children are commendable and continue to raise awareness of the urgent need to prevent further violence targeted at children. Nevertheless, more needs to be done to eradicate child violations such as sexual violence, child labour, and corporal punishment that continue to threaten the protection and rights of children. There is also a need to make schools safer environments for children to learn and thrive. Further, enforcement on preventing child marriage remains a grey area because of the dual law system, i.e., customary and statutory, currently in place in Zambia. Children who attain puberty at any age, including as young as 12 or 13, can marry under the customary law. There is little to no enforcement of laws to protect children married under the traditional system, thereby undermining child development.

As enhancing the welfare of children and protecting them from violence remains a concern for all, World Vision Zambia calls on the Government to take the following measures.

Government Should:

- Prohibit violence against children in all settings. As the Government of the Republic of Zambia is also one of the pathfinding countries to end violence against children, it should ban all forms of violence against children in homes, schools, communities, and all public spaces.
- Ensure that the national legislation is aligned with the relevant international human rights standards. Government should prioritize passing the Children's Code Bill into law. For over a decade now, the Children's Code Bill has not been enacted, denying many Zambian children who would have benefited from the progressive provisions of the Children's Code Bill since the comprehensive review of all child-related legislation began.
- Harmonize statutory and customary marriage age limits through statutory instruments. Statutory laws in Zambia, closer to international statutes on child abuses, including child marriage, are compromised by customary laws.
- Create social and economic support mechanisms for children withdrawn from marriage at the local level. Most of the children get back into marriage relationships due to a lack of socio-economic support mechanisms at the local, community, or family level.
- Ensure schools are accessible for all children to learn and grow. Recently, the Government of Zambia gave policy direction to provide free education for all children in Zambia and provided bursaries for boarding schools. However, many children are still not in boarding schools because of limited school places. In addition, those outside boarding facilities are not accessing the bursary. Therefore, the Government should build more schools with boarding facilities to provide equal opportunities for all children to access quality education and keep girls in school.

¹<https://zambia.savethechildren.net/news/joining-forces-joint-press-statement-576-children-defiled-measures-address-sexual-gender-based>

²<http://www.zambiapolice.gov.zm/index.php/112-news/389-zambia-police-service-2021-fourth-quarter-gender-based-violence-cases-statistics>

³UNICEF (2019). Case Study on the Ending Child Marriage in the Republic of Zambia <https://www.unicef.org/esa/media/8941/file/Zambia-Case-Study-Child-Marriage-2021.pdf>; Zambia Demographic and Health Survey, 2018. <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR361/FR361.pdf>

⁴World Vision International, 2020. COVID-19 Aftershock Report

⁵UNICEF and Population Council of Zambia, 2015

⁶<https://www.end-violence.org/articles/zambia-becomes-31st-pathfinding-country>

⁷https://www.google.com/search?q=zambia+as+a+path+finding+country&rlz=1C1GCEU_enZA929ZA929&oq=zambia+as+a+path+finding+country&aqs=chrome..69i57j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8

⁸National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage 2016-2021. <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/documents/1073/Zambia-National-Strategy-on-Child-Marriage-2016-2021.compressed.pdf>

⁹https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=2998007210464677&id=1443749825890431&post__id=1443749825890431_2998007210464677

¹⁰Children's Rights to be heard: We are talking, are you listening? <https://joining-forces.org/publications/childrens-right-to-be-heard/>



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

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