Celebrating the fifth anniversary of the UNFPA–UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage in East and Southern Africa

Reflecting on progress made and how to move forward bolder and better
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Ending child marriage globally is a moral imperative and critical to achieving the goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The social, cultural, religious and economic factors driving child marriage are complex, but we have made significant progress towards ending the practice in the last few decades. Nevertheless, worldwide, one in five young women aged 20–24 years is married before her 18th birthday.

Clearly, challenges remain, not least of which is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change. But the work of the Global Programme to End Child Marriage must continue and adapt to overcome gender-discriminatory social norms and ensure that every young person can fulfil their aspirations.

To do this, we need not only robust national legislation, sustainable funding and major international strategies, but also collaborative, community-led initiatives that can work in remote rural areas and implement small-scale, evidence-based, locally adapted interventions to win hearts and minds, and finally end child marriage by 2030.

Ms. Graça Machel, Founder of the Graça Machel Trust, summed up how we should move forward:

“... learning from good practices and making bold and ambitious investments in the girl child are thus an imperative to create a world in which girls and young women can take charge of their own lives, make their voices heard, be the agents of change and lead the way to a more gender-equal world.”
Introduction

Despite significant progress made in the past few decades, globally about 12 million girls are married before the age of 18 every year, with serious consequences for their health, education, safety and future prospects. Child brides are more likely to drop out of school, get pregnant, experience traumatic childbirth and gender-based violence, and contract HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. Complications from pregnancy and childbirth are a leading cause of death among girls aged 15–19 globally. Although child marriage affects both girls and boys, girls are disproportionately affected.

Ending child marriage is a key target of the African Union’s Agenda 2063 and the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular, Sustainable Development Goal 5 to “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”. To accelerate progress towards achieving the 2030 target, in 2016, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) launched the Global Programme to End Child Marriage (GPECM) in 12 countries with a high prevalence of child marriage: Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Yemen and Zambia. Four of these countries (Ethiopia, Mozambique, Uganda and Zambia) fall within the East and Southern Africa region, which has some of the highest child marriage rates in the world, with 31 per cent of girls marrying by the age of 18.

“Child marriage is a scourge that not only imperils girls’ health, education and safety but also deprives girls of the opportunity to realize their full potential.”

– Dr. Bannet Ndyanabangi, Regional Director a.i., UNFPA
East and Southern Africa
Regional Office
The GPECM promotes girls’ rights to avert early marriage and pregnancy and encourages them to pursue an education and opportunities to fulfil their aspirations. It supports evidence-based interventions with the following aims: empowering girls, keeping them in school and providing them with life skills; engaging families, communities and leaders on girls’ rights; and strengthening access to good quality sexual and reproductive health services. The GPECM also addresses the social and cultural norms that sustain child marriage, advocating laws and policies that protect girls’ rights, while highlighting the importance of robust, evidence-based legislation and policymaking.

In its first phase (2016–2019), the GPECM empowered 7.9 million adolescent girls in Africa and beyond. However, in recent years, extreme events related to climate change have increased girls’ vulnerability, putting them at greater risk of child marriage. And in the last two years, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented a serious setback for initiatives to end child marriage: a UNICEF study found that up to 10 million more girls are at risk of becoming child brides by 2030 because of the pandemic.

Against this background, the GPECM reached its fifth anniversary in 2021. Throughout the year, the UNFPA and UNICEF offices in the region marked the anniversary with a series of events, culminating in a two-day virtual celebration, hosted in South Africa on 11 and 12 October 2021, to coincide with the International Day of the Girl Child.

The celebration brought together high-level government officials; senior representatives of UN agencies, partners and civil society organizations (CSOs); academics; community leaders; traditional, faith-based and religious leaders; and young people. The celebration showcased the work done in the region to end child marriage and to empower girls and young women; reflected on successes and lessons learned and identified opportunities to move the GPECM forward in the region; examined new and emerging issues, such as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change on child marriage; and served as a platform for stakeholders to renew their commitment to end child marriage by 2030 and to reverse the increase in the practice resulting from the pandemic.

Now, in the Decade of Action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, UNFPA and UNICEF are stepping up efforts to end child marriage, teenage pregnancies, gender-based violence and female genital mutilation (FGM), and calling on partners in the East and Southern Africa region to increase their investment in empowering girls and women. According to UNFPA, ending child marriage by 2030 requires an investment of $35 billion – but this is $24.1 billion more than the official development assistance currently committed to achieving that goal.

This report is based on the presentations given and discussions held over the course of the two-day celebration, reflecting on
successes, good practices and lessons learned, emerging and linked issues, such as climate change and FGM, and financing initiatives. It pulls out the key messages for partners in the East and Southern Africa region and includes the call to action, with which the celebration closed, expressing stakeholders’ renewed commitment to end child marriage by 2030.

Welcoming participants to the celebration, HE Mutale Nalumango, Vice President of Zambia, set out the action needed to achieve that goal:

“... if Africa is to eradicate child marriage by 2030, cross-sectoral action is required, aimed at tackling poverty; lack of opportunities for girls; barriers to accessing education; and addressing negative social and cultural practices, as well as gender inequality.”

She outlined some of the important actions the Zambian government is taking:

“Zambia has mainstreamed comprehensive sexuality education in schools and has invested in making sexual and reproductive health services accessible to adolescents. The government is further committed to accelerating action to increase access to secondary education, especially for girls, as well as to address gender-based violence and gender inequality. While focusing on ending child marriage, it is equally important to support girls who have already been married as children. The government is thus also committed to providing married girls with access to education, economic opportunities and health services, including HIV and sexual and reproductive health services.”
2.1. Adopt a multi-strategy approach

No single strategy can end child marriage, and so a multi-strategy approach is essential. Such an approach includes empowering girls and young women to be agents of change in their own lives, changing familial and societal attitudes towards them, providing them with good-quality health care and education, and creating a policy and legal environment that enables their empowerment.

The cornerstone of such an approach is legislation. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) model law on eradicating child marriage and protecting children already in marriage was adopted by the SADC Parliamentary Forum in 2016 as a result of regional efforts to end child marriage. It has since become an integral part of the GPECM and has resulted in several SADC member states enacting anti-child marriage laws. The model law has also highlighted links between child marriage and education (or rather, lack of it) and resulted in half of SADC member states providing comprehensive sexuality education in schools.

Ms. Boemo Sekgoma, SADC Parliamentary Forum Secretary General, explained the significance of the model law:

“The SADC model law has facilitated understanding of the implications of child marriage and the human rights that it infringes by making it easier for parliamentarians to analyse issues, make comparisons and delineate problems, including legal issues, with a view to closing gaps in national legislation.”
To make further progress, it is now imperative that all countries in the region domesticate the model law, or adopt it as part of their national legislation. To achieve this, and to implement the law on the ground, will require close collaboration between stakeholders and innovative awareness-raising campaigns.

2.2. Promote collaboration between stakeholders

Ending a harmful practice such as child marriage needs stakeholders to collaborate across sectors and mobilize at all levels, from the global to the local.

The Madzimawe Foundation is a CSO working to end child marriage in the Eastern province of Zambia, where up to 45 per cent of girls are child brides. The foundation works in partnership with government and UN agencies to get married girls back to school by offering them educational and material support. Its work is yielding positive results: it has increased chiefdoms’ capacities by training community members in sexual and reproductive health and equipping them to be psychosexual counsellors, and it has supported girls to complete their secondary education.

Ms. Nerida Nthamburi, Head of Africa Engagement, Girls Not Brides, summed up the importance of partnership working:

“To achieve the goal of ending child marriage, this work can only be done in partnership. It is further worth emphasizing that no single strategy can be effective and that everyone must be involved, from girls themselves to governments and religious, traditional and community leaders. Such movement-building has to be catalysed at all levels – global, regional, national and local – and cut across sectors, for success.”

2.3. Engage community leaders as ambassadors for change

Traditional, religious and faith-based leaders can play a pivotal role in transforming traditional cultural practices in ways that support girls’ and women’s well-being.

The Council of Traditional Leaders of Africa (COTLA) is a pan-African movement of progressive traditional leaders with a primary focus on ending child marriage, FGM and other harmful practices in Africa by 2030. It works with various African Union and UN agencies and the private sector. Such partnerships are critical for developing bottom-up strategies adapted to local contexts, so that communities are fully involved.
HRH Chief Madzimawe from COTLA highlighted the power of local ambassadors:

“Advocacy by traditional, religious and faith-based leaders has been instrumental in the formulation of legislation and policies in several countries, and also the transformation of cultural practices in ways that support the welfare of girls and women.”

For example, in Zambia, COTLA focuses on programmes that advocate girls’ and women’s empowerment and works in partnership with CSOs, as well as the government, with support from UN agencies and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Ms. Lorence Kabasele, President of the African Youth and Adolescents Network on Population and Development (AfriYAN) in East and Southern Africa, pointed to the importance of community leaders:

“Having such champions, especially among religious and traditional leaders, is particularly important to bring about change in villages and remote rural communities.”

Speakers from Canada, Norway and the EU emphasized the importance of working with local opinion leaders on community-led initiatives that can achieve real progress on the ground.
2.4. Develop mentoring programmes

Given the dearth of female role models, despite the high regard accorded to strong women in communities, mentorship programmes are particularly important for empowering girls and young women to become change agents in their own lives and in their communities.

Ms. Lorence Kabasele from AfriYAN explained the importance of youth organizations in empowering girls and young women:

“In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, AfriYAN, together with UNFPA and the country’s First Lady, is working on a project that provides Congolese adolescents, especially girls, comprehensive sexuality education and access to quality sexual and reproductive health services. The project also includes a mentorship programme to encourage girls to take leadership positions and avert early marriage.”

The Berhane–Hewan programme in Ethiopia showed that mentoring programmes, including help to access health clinics, are effective in reducing child marriage. And the Madzimawe Foundation, working in Zambia, also offers mentoring for girls as part of its work to end child marriage.

An important point to bear in mind when developing peer-mentoring approaches is that the mentors will need psychosocial support.
2.5. **Include boys and young men in initiatives**

Advocacy and awareness-raising initiatives against child marriage and related issues, such as teenage pregnancies and gender-based violence, should include boys and young men so that they come to see girls and young women as their equals and can become agents of change.

HRH Chief Madzimawe from COTLA stressed the importance of including boys and young men as a way of changing traditional social norms:

“To ensure that no one is left behind, [our] work also embraces boys – who need as well to understand that girls deserve respect.”

2.6. **Adapt interventions to local contexts**

Effective interventions need to be evidence based and scalable, while also being sensitive and adapted to local contexts.

For example, the Berhane–Hewan programme set out to delay marriage and to support married adolescent girls in rural areas with a high prevalence of child marriage in Ethiopia. The main interventions were initiating community conversations about
social norms, providing educational materials and financial incentives to families to keep girls at school for the duration of the programme (two years), and offering mentoring groups for girls and help to access sexual and reproductive health clinics.

An evaluation of the programme showed that it was very successful: girls living in communities participating in the intervention were 90 per cent less likely to be married than their peers in control communities and three times more likely to be at school. Married girls in intervention communities were three times more likely to adopt family planning than those in control communities. The programme highlighted how a simple community-based intervention can achieve a significant reduction in child marriage in a relatively short period.

A second phase of the programme, run in Tanzania and Burkina Faso, tested even simpler, carefully costed approaches to delaying child marriage, which proved to be very cost-effective. It also demonstrated that interventions need to be evidence based and adapted to the local context to be effective. For example, if schooling is to be used as a strategy to delay marriage, good quality schooling that girls can access safely needs to be available locally. An intervention needs to be well researched to find the most effective ways of reducing child marriage in a given setting in sub-Saharan Africa.

Dr. Anabel Erulkar, Country Director for Ethiopia, Population Council, who ran the Berhane–Hewan programme, summed up the challenges:

“... child marriage persists, particularly in remote and hard-to-reach rural areas. For programmers, activists and researchers, the challenge is to learn how to implement quality interventions at scale and, so as not to leave any girl behind, how to implement them in the most remote and hard-to-reach rural areas in sub-Saharan Africa, while ensuring that initiatives are highly locally driven and locally owned.”
3.1. Climate change increases the risk of child marriage

Climate change and environmental disasters increase girls’ vulnerability and put them at greater risk of child marriage. The countries with high child marriage rates in the East and Southern Africa region are also among those worst affected by climate change.

A review by UNFPA and Queen Mary University of London found that child marriage rates are strongly influenced by environmental disasters and the climate crisis. Extreme climate events, such as droughts and flooding, push already impoverished families deeper into poverty and increase their vulnerability. This creates a situation in which child marriage is seen as a coping strategy, as girls’ families benefit from receiving a ‘bride price’ and having fewer mouths to feed. This is borne out by evidence from Uganda, where there is a clear link between prolonged droughts and increased rates of child marriage. Girls’ vulnerability to early marriage also increases when their schooling is disrupted because schools are either closed or it is not safe to attend them.

There is therefore an urgent need for more research on the ways in which climate change has an impact on harmful practices such as child marriage.

Interventions to end child marriage need to take account of climate change and build resilience in communities affected by
climate crises. Similarly, climate adaptation strategies must be sensitive to the rights of adolescent girls and young women.

Ms. Anandita Philipose, Youth and Gender Specialist for UNFPA East and Southern Africa Regional Office, summed up the link between climate change and child marriage:

“There is a need to ensure that efforts to end child marriage are integrated into work on climate change. Climate adaptation strategies must address the link between environmental crises and sexual and reproductive health and rights, including the rights of adolescent girls. Vice versa, actions to end child marriage need to consider how global and local environmental crises can impact interventions, for more resilient and sustainable programming.”

3.2. COVID-19 is a setback to the commitment to end child marriage

The COVID-19 pandemic has slowed and even undone some of the work to end child marriage, by disrupting school-based interventions; restricting community engagement because of social distancing measures and restrictions on movement; restricting girls' access to sexual and reproductive health services, as resources are redirected to focus on the pandemic response; and curtailing planned field research. All of this has resulted
in an increase in child marriage in many countries where it is prevalent: for example, Malawi recorded an additional 13,000 child marriages, coupled with an 11 per cent increase in teenage pregnancies, between January and August 2020, compared with the same period in 2019.

However, the GPECM has continued to operate throughout the pandemic by adapting its approach and innovating, as the following examples show:

- In Uganda, messages about COVID-19 and related issues have been shared in 24 local languages on radio stations, television channels, social media and the country’s child helpline.
- In Mozambique, counsellors are being trained to deliver remote psychosocial support to young people.
- In Zambia, the government is providing emergency cash transfers to support struggling families and avert child marriage.
- In Ethiopia, youth associations are mobilizing young people to engage in the COVID-19 response in communities and help monitor access to sexual and reproductive health services and the incidence of child marriage.
Dr. Bannet Ndyanabangi, Regional Director for UNFPA East and Southern Africa Regional Office, stressed how important it is for governments to build child marriage interventions into their COVID-19 recovery strategies:

“Governments must enforce laws against child marriage and prioritize interventions to end this harmful practice, as part of COVID-19 response and recovery processes.”

3.3. Child marriage and female genital mutilation can be addressed together

Harmful practices such as child marriage and FGM are closely linked in certain cross-border communities in East Africa. Therefore, combating FGM is seen as an important way of reducing child marriage in these communities. Ending such harmful practices needs cross-border cooperation and strong commitment at government and community levels.

For example, on 6 February 2021, the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation, representatives of the Kenyan and Ugandan governments met Pokot community elders and signed a declaration to end cross-border FGM. Consensus-building meetings have been held with elders of communities on the Kenya–Ethiopia border, where FGM is also prevalent, and with Masai communities on the Kenya–Tanzania border. Thus, by engaging with the fight to end FGM, governments and communities are helping to end child marriage.
Ms. Bernadette Loloju, Chief Executive Officer, Anti-Female Genital Mutilation Board, Kenya, summed up the progress made and the challenges remaining:

“There is political commitment to ending FGM in Kenya at the highest level. The President of Kenya has committed to ending FGM by 2022 – eight years ahead of the 2030 deadline. This political commitment is giving impetus to efforts on the ground and, with the support of partners, Kenya is making progress. The main challenges remain poverty and keeping girls in school.”

Effective national policy interventions must be evidence based, consultative, participatory and adequately resourced. It is also important to monitor and evaluate their implementation and, based on data gathered on the ground, adapt them to fill the gaps and respond to changing circumstances.

A good example of this is the National Costed Roadmap to End Child Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in Ethiopia 2020–2024 – a product of years of preparation and intensive consultation – which is now being implemented with support from the GPECM.

The roadmap is an evidence-based strategic plan: it is based on physical assessments in hotspots, as well as statistical assessments, and incorporates the latest research and most up-to-date information. Before the roadmap was implemented, familiarization work was done in all regional states, and they have incorporated the roadmap into their annual plans.

Mr. Seleshi Tadesse, Director of Women’s Mobilization and Participation Enhancement, Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs, Ethiopia, emphasized the importance of supporting regional states to implement the national roadmap:

“Implementation of the roadmap has been facilitated by the development of several strategic documents, including a social manual, placing the plan in the country’s social and cultural context, and a joint implementation manual, outlining the roles and responsibilities of different sectors.”

The roadmap’s current emphasis is on tracking, monitoring and assessing the existing implementation of initiatives to end child marriage and FGM in order to chart progress in all the regional states. This exercise will allow the government to identify gaps and see the full extent to which the costed plan has been implemented. The government is also implementing an accountability mechanism and has mandated all sectors to incorporate the national roadmap into their work on improving gender equality.

Ethiopia’s approach shows how consultation with and familiarization of stakeholders are key to the successful implementation of a national policy. It also demonstrates how both public (domestic) and partner (donor) financing are critical for success.
4 Financing initiatives and renewing the commitment to end child marriage by 2030

4.1. Strengthen the sustainability of programming to end child marriage

Ensuring the sustainability of programming means developing a comprehensive, coordinated, holistic and action-oriented approach based on strong partnerships.

A well-coordinated multi-sectoral approach is particularly important, given the variety of social, cultural, religious and economic factors driving child marriage. To achieve the desired impact, interventions need to cover not only girls' and young women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights, but also their education and economic empowerment. For example, comprehensive sexuality education in schools, along with support for menstrual hygiene, clean water and sanitation, has had a direct impact on girls' access to education and averting child marriage in Mozambique.

HE Caroline Delaney, High Commissioner of Canada in Mozambique, summed up how such an approach can overcome the challenges of sustainable programming:

“In Mozambique, a key recurring theme and present challenge is the absence of a centralized approach to activities on early marriage, which means that there is a
lack of clear understanding of the ways and extent to which different interventions work. A focused donor effort on child and early marriage helps to highlight the issue in other sectors and to identify gaps in programming and lessons learned from previous efforts."

Partnership working is crucial. The EU Spotlight Initiative to end all forms of violence against women and girls is a major partnership with a number of UN agencies currently working in 26 countries in six regions. Launched with a financial commitment of €500 million from the EU, the initiative promotes effective legislation and policies, builds institutional capacity, promotes gender-equitable social norms and practices, ensures access to high-quality essential services, improves data collection and analysis, and empowers women’s movements.

4.2. Provide donor support for local organizations

Donor support to local organizations – especially youth and women’s organizations and grassroots groups – has an important role in ensuring that interventions to end child marriage are locally owned and locally driven. Support for local women’s rights organizations, in particular, can ensure that the voices of girls and women themselves are heard and provide opportunities for them to become leaders.

For example, in Mozambique, a small amount of Canadian funding supported national consultations led by CSOs and the National Assembly, and resulted in legislation being introduced in 2019. Canada’s global initiative, Women’s Voice and Leadership, provides funding directly to local women’s rights organizations, supporting their work and providing training in areas such as organizational governance. It recently enabled a local organization working to end gender-based violence to respond to the challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.
4.3. **Provide sustained and flexible core funding for organizations**

Core funding for organizations working on eliminating harmful practices such as child marriage is vital – all the more so in the uncertain circumstances arising from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

For example, Ms. Hilde Kirsten, Senior Adviser for Gender Equality at the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, explained how Norway’s International Strategy to Eliminate Harmful Practices focuses on child marriage and FGM, and emphasizes maintaining high levels of core funding to organizations working to end these practices. Norway supports both the GPECM and the UNFPA–UNICEF Joint Programme to Eliminate Female Genital Mutilation and provides ongoing funding to the agencies working in these areas. It is also supporting several programmes in the East and Southern Africa region to strengthen national legal and policy frameworks; build young people’s capacity to protect themselves from harmful gender norms and practices through education, economic empowerment and life-skills training; give girls and their families opportunities to earn their livelihoods; mobilize men and boys to change social norms; and work with traditional, religious and faith-based leaders to promote zero tolerance of harmful practices.

4.4. **Adapt interventions in response to evidence**

Data collection, continual learning and evidence-based adaptation are essential for effective and sustainable interventions.

The EU’s flexible core funding of grassroots organizations, which has become all the more necessary in the context of the
COVID-19 pandemic, has increased the availability of data, including data on child marriage, in 60 per cent of the countries supported. These data will in turn help to improve future interventions.

4.5. Establish 18 as the legal minimum age for marriage

“The EU identifies the legal prohibition of FGM, forced marriages and marriage of girls under the age of 18 as an imperative.”

Ms. Fabienne van den Eede, Directorate-General for International Partnerships, European Commission

However, merely enacting legislation is not sufficient: laws must be enforced if they are to be effective. We need to engage the traditional, religious and faith-based leaders to act as ambassadors for change in their communities, to uphold the law, and to empower young people, especially girls and young women, to overcome gender-discriminatory social norms and practices. We also need to recognize that changing social norms takes time.
Despite achieving some good results, which should always be celebrated, the fight to end child marriage is far from over. The fifth anniversary of the UNFPA–UNICEF global programme provided an opportune time for stakeholders in East and Southern Africa to reflect on both achievements and challenges. Ending this practice is not only a moral imperative for humanity but also the aspiration of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Mr. Andrew Brooks, Child Protection Adviser, UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office, summed up the ultimate goal of the GPECM:

"Over the past decade, Ethiopia's progress has been one of the strongest in the East and Southern Africa region: 4 in 10 young women were married in childhood in 2015 compared with 7 in 10 in 1990. Our efforts are generating impactful results, but we want this number to be zero in Ethiopia and across the region."
We, the participants in this virtual workshop – including the Vice President of Zambia; ministers in charge of gender; community leaders; representatives of UN agencies, development and civil society partners; academics; traditional and religious leaders; and young people, including girls and young women who have experienced child marriage – have gathered online, from 11 to 12 October 2021, to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the Global Programme to End Child Marriage, hosted by the UNFPA and UNICEF offices in the region. We have successfully taken stock of the progress made to end child marriage across the region, identified emerging issues, and shared evidence and best practices. Renewing our shared commitment to ending child marriage and other harmful practices in the East and Southern Africa region and beyond, we issue the following declaration.

1. We recognize that child marriage is a discriminatory harmful practice violating a broad range of human rights, which manifests women’s and girls’ unequal status in society and hampers their personal development, future opportunities, education, health and well-being,
particularly the right to determine when and whom to marry.

2. We acknowledge that the practice significantly affects the sexual and reproductive rights of women and girls through a series of harms, including early pregnancy, maternal death and morbidity, and others that have a long-term damaging impact on the lives of girls and women, as well as countries’ socio-economic development and prosperity.

3. We reaffirm that ending child marriage is an indispensable measure both for realizing the aspirations of the African Union’s Agenda 2063 and for attaining the UN Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

4. We further reaffirm the obligations and commitments under international treaties signed and ratified by governments in the region, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and consensus documents such as the Programme of Action adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo and the Beijing Platform for Action.

5. We recognize the commitments made by governments in the region to uphold the articles of the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights, the UN Convention on the Rights of Children, the Maputo Plan of Action, the Additional Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights, and the African Youth Charter endorsing children’s and women’s rights and reinforcing the prohibition of child marriage.

6. We acknowledge the role that all stakeholders and partners, communities and young people themselves can play in ending child marriage and other harmful practices, and also the fact that the matter needs prompt and
coordinated action.

7. We therefore call upon governments, civil society partners and other partners dedicated to eliminating child marriage to take joint action, with the full participation of young people and as a matter of urgency to:

- Review and harmonize national laws and policies relating to child marriage in line with constitutional guarantees of fundamental rights and state obligations under international law to respect, protect and fulfil human rights.

- Create accountability frameworks to ensure that government and other stakeholders implement administrative and legal measures to monitor, prevent and address child marriage and thus fulfil the commitment they have made to end this practice by 2030.

- Eliminate discriminatory provisions concerning marriage in all laws, including personal laws, by establishing a uniform minimum legal age of marriage of 18.

- Facilitate a social movement at local, regional and
national levels, with the participation of young people, traditional and religious leaders, community leaders, government and civil society partners, and parents and elders, to bring about permanent social changes towards ending child marriage.

- Work collaboratively with ministries of education and other stakeholders to implement focused interventions and measures to keep girl children in school beyond the primary level.

- Establish systems for evidence-based interventions to ensure that investments are made “in the right girls, in the right places”.

- Include cash transfers and other household livelihood interventions in national response plans to counteract the economic pressures driving child marriage as a source of emergency cash for families.

- Give emphasis to children and young people aged 10–14 years in national policies targeting gender-differentiated investment.

- Ensure that girls who are married under the age of 18, or who have left a child marriage, have access to legal remedies by introducing appropriate laws, raising legal awareness,\(^1\) providing legal counselling and legal aid, and enforcing penalties for violating the law.

- Ensure that girls who are married under the age of 18, or who have left a child marriage, have access to various forms of institutional support, including psychosocial counselling, protection mechanisms, and opportunities for economic empowerment.

- Consider emerging issues, such as climate change, the humanitarian–development nexus and the impact of COVID-19, in local roadmaps to end child marriage by 2030 and vice versa (i.e. include initiatives to end child marriage in strategies to address emerging issues).

- Strengthen the linkages between social measures addressing harmful traditional practices, such as FGM and child marriage, to achieve sustainable change and cost-effective results.

We express our gratitude to the various government representatives, donors, academics, community members, civil society partners, UNFPA and UNICEF jointly, and other partners who have provided funding and technical support for this event to ensure its success.

\(^1\) Applies to both raising awareness among legal practitioners and raising awareness of the law in communities.