



SUCCESS STORIES



Zambia | Story 4 – 2020

One region 16 nations Towards a common future

From the beginning of time, the principles of Ubuntu have guided African societies. Best described as an African philosophy rooted in a deep awareness of: “I am because of who we all are”; the spirit of Ubuntu resonates in every fibre of SADCs existence – past and present. The 40th anniversary of SADC in 2020 commemorates a journey of progress on the complex road to achieving peace and security, development and economic growth. This “SADC Success Stories 2020” series shines a spotlight on the positive impacts achieved through regional integration in communities and in the lives of the people of the SADC region.

This story ‘Ending child marriage’ is based on the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, adopted in 2008.

Ending child marriage

“Often, parents feel it is best for a girl to marry young; that this will protect her. But child marriage puts girls and women at risk of sexual, physical and psychological violence throughout their lives.”

“I was totally against my niece getting married at age 14. I am not educated myself but I realised that my niece needed to go to school so that she could take care of herself, her mother and her siblings. I had to seek help from Chief Madzimawe, who retrieved my niece,” reports the aunt of Misozi Banda, a young girl who thought that early marriage was the key to a better life.

At the age of 14, Misozi Banda of Kasenengwa District in the Eastern Province of Zambia, consented to marriage with a man seven years older than her. This was after she failed her grade seven examination and her father – the family’s sole bread-winner – died. Banda was one of eight children that her widowed mother had to take care of.

“Marriage was my escape plan,” says Banda, who is now 16. “It was clear I would never go back to school as there was no one to sponsor me.” She and her partner eloped and planned to move to Lusaka. Fortunately Banda’s aunt, who lives in Madzimawe Chiefdom in Kasenengwa, where child marriage has been outlawed, learnt that her niece had eloped with the 21-year-old man. She immediately reported the matter to Chief Madzimawe, who retrieved Banda.

“My mind was set on marriage, but not anymore. After being counselled and learning the dangers of child marriage, I realised that I needed to go back to school in order to attain my dream of being a teacher,” Banda says. In 2018, with



the help of the Madzimawe Foundation, Banda enrolled back in school.

Chief Madzimawe started his campaign in 2011 and the national campaign for ending child marriage was launched in 2014 by then-First Lady Christine Kaseba-Sata. Chief Madzimawe was elected SADC Regional Convener under the Council of Traditional Leaders in Africa (COTLA), during the African Union Heads of State and Government Summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in February 2019.

COTLA's core objective is to build a continent-wide social movement of traditional leaders and institutions that can harmonise customary norms with statutory laws to eliminate harmful practices like child marriage – defined as a marital union with a person younger than 18.

Zambia has signed both the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, which states that any person under the age of 18 is a child.

Other legislation also comes into play. The Marriage Act states that the recommended minimum age for marriage is 21 but that, at 18, one can get married with consent from one's parents or a judge in a court of law. The Education Act No.23 of 2011 criminalises the marrying, or marrying-off, of a learner. The Anti-Gender Based Violence Act No.1 of 2011 prohibits child marriage, describing it as a form of abuse, while the Gender Equity and Equality Act No. 22 of 2015 provides protection for victims of gender-based violence.

Zambia is also a signatory to the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, which states that no person under the age of 18 may marry unless otherwise specified by law that takes the best interests and welfare of the child into account.

Dr Joseph Pitso, Head of the Gender Unit at the SADC Secretariat, says that Malawi has the highest-recorded prevalence of child marriage among the SADC countries, with a rate of 54 per cent. Zambia is second at 40 per cent. In Zambia, 31 per cent of women aged 20-24 married before 18. The Zambia Demographic and Health Survey 2013-2014 found that 17 per cent of girls aged 15-19 were married compared to only one per cent of boys in the same age group.

Namatama Chinyama, Ministry of Gender Assistant Director in the Gender Rights Protection Department, says that when girls have access to economic opportunities, they can plan a more prosperous future for themselves, their families and their communities. "Delaying marriage can lead to delayed sexual initiation and first birth; increased spacing between births; reduced maternal morbidity; fewer child deaths; less gender-based violence; and lower HIV infection rates. This will improve girls' health and wellbeing throughout their lives."

Working in partnership with stakeholders, government launched the Campaign on Ending Child Marriage in April 2013. The National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage in Zambia 2016-2021 was launched in April 2016, with the aim of nationalising efforts to end child marriage by 2030. The National Plan of Action on Ending Child Marriage 2016-2021 was launched in December 2017, to operationalise the National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage.

President Edgar Lungu was recognised as the African Union Champion on Ending Child Marriage in 2017. In December 2018, the Ministry of Gender launched the National Advocacy and Communication Strategy on Ending Child Marriage. These efforts are supported under the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage.

Other Zambian interventions include the Girls' Education and Women's Empowerment and Livelihoods project. This project, which is being co-ordinated by the Ministry of Gender in collaboration with the Ministries of General Education and Community Development Services, seeks to increase access to secondary education for thousands of adolescent girls in extremely poor households.



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