

# Ending child marriage and forced unions in Mozambique

This brief highlights key learnings and puts forward evidence-based recommendations for the Government of Mozambique to take action for preventing and addressing child marriage and forced unions.

**CURRENT STATE**

## Progress towards ending child marriage and forced unions in Mozambique

Over the past decade, the Government of Mozambique has made great strides toward the achievement of bringing an end to child marriage and forced unions (SDG 5.3). World Vision recognises the efforts undertaken by the government to realise this significant progress, including enacting the Law for Preventing and Ending Child Marriage in 2019 and amending the longstanding Family Law to remove the special exception of allowing unions at 16 with parental consent.

Mozambique has also demonstrated it is committed to eliminating child, early and forced marriage by making “Ending Early Unions” a strategic objective in the recent National Plan of Action for Children III (2023–2032); and through initiatives like the 2016 Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Affairs’ National Strategy to Prevent and Combat Child Marriage and its participation in the regional 2014–18 African Union Campaign to End Child Marriage.

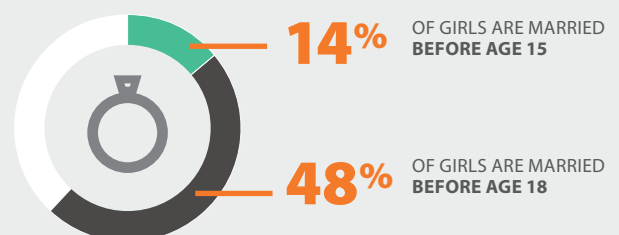
Though Mozambique has seen rates of child marriages and forced unions greatly decline, the country maintains one of the highest child marriage rates in Africa and around the world.<sup>1</sup> **Nearly half of Mozambican girls**



*Belita, former child bride, is now an activist for children's rights.*

**today are still married or given in informal marriage unions before turning 18, with 48% of women aged 20 to 24 report having been married before 18; and 14% before 15.**<sup>2</sup> The challenges of economic insecurity and school closures during the Covid-19 pandemic also have notably reversed some of the gains made to end forced unions.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, conflict and the rise in natural disasters in Mozambique’s fragile areas have further exacerbated negative coping mechanisms among families, increasing the vulnerability of girls to early marriage<sup>4</sup> — particularly in rural areas.<sup>5</sup>

The consequences of child marriage for girls in Mozambique includes a lower likelihood of completing primary school and starting secondary school. Likewise, for girls, **child marriage is also associated with lower wealth, higher labour force participation and a lower likelihood of literacy.**<sup>6</sup>



**Child marriage is driven by varied and complex factors that require multisectoral solutions, delivered through strong child protection systems.** Ending child marriage by 2030 will require sustained commitment and coordinated action across all levels of society and government in Mozambique committing to addressing root causes that contribute to child marriage including: social, cultural and gender norms, lack and quality of secondary schools, lack of life skills including sexual reproductive health, limited life choices<sup>7</sup> and reporting and monitoring data.

A socio-ecological approach is critical to address the multiple intersecting drivers of child marriage. While drivers differ by context, interventions are more effective when they address barriers and enablers at all levels: individual, family, community, societal and institutional. The socio-ecological approach recognises that the ability of girls to make strategic choices about their lives is influenced by the context in which they live and the multiple systems they interact with, including social, cultural, economic, political, religious, legal, community and family systems. These systems are interlinked and interdependent and must be addressed simultaneously to generate sustainable and meaningful change.<sup>8</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Evidence-based recommendations to take action against child marriage and forced unions in Mozambique

World Vision believes the Government of Mozambique can make significant progress in ensuring all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential without the threat of child marriage. Therefore, World Vision and its partners urge the government to renew its commitment to ending child marriage by adopting evidence-based, INSPIRE-aligned pledges at the Global Ministerial Conference on Ending Violence Against Children and beyond. These commitments also should be clearly and measurably reflected in the forthcoming National Action Plan for Children.

**World Vision is confident that, in partnership with civil society organisations, the Government of Mozambique can effectively combat child marriage and protect the rights of children, in the present and for their futures.**



Girls and boys from the Children's Parliament interacting with Government authorities.

## We call on the Government of Mozambique to commit to ...

### CHALLENGE PERCEPTIONS – TO TRANSFORM THE NORMS

## 1 Scale up initiatives to combat harmful social, gender and cultural norms:

- A. **Expand effective community-level behaviour-change programmes** including Community Conversations, to address initiation rites and other social norms related to child marriage.
- B. **Replicate the Behavior Change Model for Initiation Rites**, enabling religious and community leaders to influence the ending of child marriage and gender-based violence.
- C. **Strengthen access to quality education** for girls and boys by integrating life skills, sexual and reproductive health education and empowerment programmes.

### How is this related to Government plans?

The National Plan of Action for Children III (2023-2032) includes a strategic objective to end early unions by promoting changes in social norms and practices. Priority actions include:


- » Engaging religious leaders, traditional doctors, matrons and community leaders to adapt initiation rite messages.
- » Shaping initiation content to positively influence culture, education and prevent early marriages.
- » Developing a communication strategy to shift social norms.
- » Facilitating community dialogues to reduce early unions by challenging harmful social norms.



### EVIDENCE

#### These recommendations are supported by the evidence as follows:

- » Community Conversations led to high awareness among community members, who were able to identify child marriage as the most prevalent form of violence against children in their communities. According to the survey, 50% of household survey participants stated that child marriage is a significant problem in Mozambique<sup>9</sup>. Recognising and acknowledging child marriage as a form of violence against children is the first step toward addressing it. Lastly, a study by World Vision, Coventry University and Queen Margaret University<sup>10</sup> demonstrated that, in cases of child marriages and forced unions, it is essential for messages to reach the individual level and influence personal behavior. Involving faith leaders and faith communities, and creating platforms for their interaction with community leaders and members, is crucial.<sup>11</sup>
- » World Vision's implementation and evaluation of the Behavior Change Model for Initiation Rights (BCM-IR) in various districts of the provinces of Nampula, in the north, and Zambezia and Tete, in the central region of Mozambique<sup>12</sup> has demonstrated its effectiveness in addressing harmful elements within the deep-rooted, secular practice in those regions. Evidence from this implementation shows that working collaboratively with religious and community leaders, as well as initiation rites practitioners (masters and matrons) can successfully change norms and behaviors, and monitor their impact effectively. This has led to a reduction in child marriage and broader issues of violence against children. Additionally, it has contributed to a decrease in early pregnancies resulting from sexual activities encouraged by certain age inappropriate teachings in initiation ceremonies.
- » Research on perceptions and harmful practices related to initiation rites<sup>13</sup> has demonstrated a link between these rites and an increase in early marriages, early pregnancies, and school dropouts. This link stems from the initiation rite practice of teaching children about sex and encouraged them to engage in sexual activity.
- » Furthermore, the evidence from the BCM-IR implementation shows how local-level learning is informing national discussions to develop a child-friendly initiation rites model. This model is expected to allow children to learn about traditionally covered topics such as personal hygiene, respect for their parents and the elderly, the importance of education, and the risks of early unions. At a later age, when they are ready to marry, they can enter the final phase of initiation and learn about sexual rights.
- » Lastly, another piece of evidence those countries/regions that have seen the greatest reductions in child marriage are also those that have seen the greatest success in educating girls.<sup>14</sup>

 Norms and values

 Education and life skills

## We call on the Government of Mozambique to commit to ...

### FUND – TO FUNCTION

## 2 Invest in monitoring and reporting of child marriage, alongside implementation of child marriage-related policies.

- A. **Establish an intersectoral body** to monitor initiation ceremonies and eliminate harmful practices.
- B. **Enhance data monitoring, reporting and referral mechanisms** with a focus on child marriage at both local and national levels, using this data to inform interventions.
- C. **Implement policies for bilingual education and school feeding programs** to increase access for the most vulnerable children, leading to a reduction in hunger, dropouts and early unions.

### *How is this related to Government plans?*

- » The current design of the Economic and Social Plan and the state budget makes it difficult to identify the specific percentage dedicated to combating premature unions. However, it is clear that 14% of the budget is allocated to SDG 16 as a whole.
- » It may be effective that the government clearly delineates and makes it easy to measure the percentage of the budget allocated to interventions aimed at reducing the incidence of premature unions, a key indicator in the government's five-year plan (PESOE).




### EVIDENCE

#### *These recommendations are supported by the evidence as follows:*

- » The Annual Report of the UNICEF-UNFPA Joint Programme provides comprehensive evidence on how intersectoral collaboration has reduced harmful practices.<sup>15</sup> It is through this collaboration that intersectoral efforts to monitor harmful practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and child marriage are made possible.
- » World Vision's use of Community Conversations demonstrates how data gathered through citizen engagement can be used to create a demand for action from local and national authorities, civil society, citizens themselves and global actors to end violence against children, including child marriage.
- » A 2021 CESC study reveals that in Mozambique, education is often seen as ineffective and irrelevant, especially in rural areas, leading to a lack of job opportunities; This view ultimately contributes to early child marriages as education is not valued.
- » The 2016–2020 gender strategy for education highlights that the current system, characterised by poor quality, gender-biased infrastructure, and a lack of female teachers, fails to meet the needs of girls, but improving educational quality could help reduce child marriage by demonstrating the value of education in overcoming poverty.
- » Evidence from Girls Not Brides demonstrates that programmes that aim to reduce food insecurity have the potential to simultaneously reduce a key driver of child marriage, as well as mitigate its effects.<sup>16</sup>

 **Response and support services**

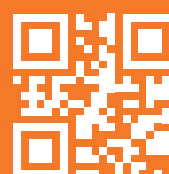
 **Parent and caregiver support**

**World Vision would like to thank our donors, international and local partners and the Government of Mozambique for their ongoing commitment and investments to end all forms of violence against children, including their critical support in addressing child marriage and forced unions.**



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**Learn more about World Vision's work to end violence against children**



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## WORLD VISION RESOURCES

### **National Reports:**

The Role of Faith in Child Marriage: Mozambique Final Report. Queen Margaret University, Coventry

University and World Vision, September 2022.

Citizen perceptions on violence against children in Mozambique

World Vision Mozambique Ending Violence Against Children policy brief

The Research Report on the Impacts of Initiations Rites on Early Unions in Zambezia, Nampula, Tete and

Gaza Provinces. 2022.

Impact of Initiation Rites on Early Marriage, Early Pregnancy and School Dropout of

Adolescents in Zambezia Province, World Vision 2018

### **Global Reports:**

Young and Married, World Vision. October 2023

No happily ever after, What children really think about child marriage in humanitarian crises, World Vision, 2020

Case Studies: Strengthening livelihood and preventing child marriage, World Vision, 2020

Fighting for a future: an index of girls' opportunities in countries and regions with high rates of child marriage, World Vision, 2022

Breaking the chain: Empowering girls and communities to end child marriages during COVID-19 and beyond, World Vision, 2020

Child Marriage Round Table, World Vision, UNICEF, Girls Not Brides, UNFPA, Save the Children, Global Affairs Canada, December 2023.

Faith Norms, are they the neglected angle? Reflection from research and work of World Vision, International, 2022

## ENDNOTES

- 1 UNICEF, 2021.
- 2 IDS, 2011.
- 3 UNICEF 2021.
- 4 Save the Children Gender and Power Analysis on Child Marriage in Cabo Delgado.
- 5 56% rural prevalence v. 36% urban prevalence. UNICEF 2021, UNICEF, UNFPA and CECAP 2015a.
- 6 World Bank, Basic Profile of Child Marriage in Mozambique.
- 7 UNICEF 2021, Packere t al. 2020, Chifeche and Dreyer 2019, Lindgren 2017, UNICEF, UNFPA and CECAP 2015b n.d.
- 8 Child Marriage Round Table, December 2023. World Vision, UNICEF, Girls Not Brides, UNFPA, Save the Children, Global Affairs Canada.
- 9 Citizen Perceptions on Violence Against Children in Mozambique, World Vision, p3.
- 10 The Role of Faith in Child Marriage: Mozambique Final Report. Queen Margaret University, Coventry University and World Vision, September 2022.
- 11 Jailobaeva & Niyonkuru, 2021.
- 12 BCM-IR has been implemented in the districts of Nacaora, Memba, Monapo ana Murrupula, in Nampula province, Maganja da Costa, in Zambezia province, and Angonia and Mutarara, in Tete province.
- 13 Research on the Perceptions and Harmful Practices to Children in Initiation Rites, World Vision, 2022.
- 14 Child Marriage Round Table, December 2023. World Vision, UNICEF, Girls Not Brides, UNFPA, Save the Children, Global Affairs Canada.
- 15 UNICEF-UNFPA Joint Programme on the Elimination of FGM
- 16 Taking Actions to Address Child Marriage, Brief 6, Global Alliance to End Child Marriage, Girls Not Brides.