

Child marriage in africa

[Society](#), [Child Abuse](#)



According to the UNICEF website (2018), child marriage is a still existing world-wide problem. Child marriage can be defined as a formal marriage of a child younger than 18 years old. Both boys and girls can be involved, however, it affects girls to a much higher extent than boys. Plan International (2018) indicates that child marriage is a violation of children's human rights, because of several reasons. First of all, it takes away the girls' right to make their own decisions. Secondly, it takes away their childhood, since these children are forced to quit education and to enter a life with a high risk of violence, abuse, ill health or early death. Today, more than 700 million women all over the world were a victim of child marriage. Seventeen percent of them live in Africa (Girls not brides, 2018). There are several reasons why child marriage still exists. According to Nour (2006, p. 1645), 'Poverty plays a central role in perpetuating child marriage'. For parents, having a daughter can be very costly. Therefore, an incentive is to have their daughter married, at a preferably young age, in order to get a dowry, which decreases as a girl gets older (Nour, 2006). Also, the legal system in Africa fails in protecting these children, because of contradictory laws and regulations. Finally, traditional beliefs support the idea of child marriages, which therefore can be a driver for many parents (Smaak & Varia, 2015).

There is a high need to address this problem and several attempts have already been made. One of these attempts has been made by the United Nations. According to Walker (2012, pp. 237), 'Research findings suggest that the longer the period of education to which girls are exposed, the less likely they will be married off as a child'. Therefore, the United Nations has set up several campaigns such as the "Education for All Campaign" and "

Early Childhood Care and Development”, with a common purpose, namely to retain more girls in schools. Although this can be helpful in the process to reduce child marriages in Africa, the problem still exists. The following could be a reason why these campaigns were not as successful as it had expected them to be. These campaigns only focus on one single part of the problem, namely education for the children. However, it does not consider all the other factors that together create the problem of child marriage in Africa. Supporting children to continue going to school does not take away the poverty issues parents have. Moreover, it does not have any influence on the legal system and it does not have any effect on the traditional beliefs that are still currently existing.

The Save the Children Website (2017) declares that in October 2017, another attempt has been made by a coalition of the following organisations: Forum for African Educationalists, Girls Not Brides, Plan International, Save the Children International, Women in Law and Development in Africa, World Vision International, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN WOMEN. Hosted by the Government of Senegal, these organizations together organized a meeting with numerous key actors who can play an important role in solving the child marriage issue. The purpose of this meeting was, according to Sunderland (2017), ‘ to strengthen their commitments to ending child marriage and agree on tangible and measurable steps towards eliminating the practice in the region’. There has already been made some progress, but this time the purpose was to really make huge steps in solving the problem. What the exact agreements and outcomes were is not clear and what the influence was on the number of child marriages in Africa has never been researched.

However, Pearson (2018) indicates that the number of child marriages has dropped, but according to UNICEF, there is still a long way to go. They already made huge progress by bringing together all important actors and trying to make agreements. However, the child marriage issue still exists all over the world. This again is because they did not include every component that has something to do with child marriages in their plan, such as traditional beliefs. Also, they did not take into account that there are already laws to prohibit child marriages, but these laws are rarely enforced.

According to Dapaah (2016), ' Child marriage is deeply rooted in poverty, gender inequality, persistent gender-based violence and gender discrimination', ' Practices is most common in rural areas ... in many cases, parents arrange these marriages and young girls have no choice'.

Furthermore, another mistake could possibly be that all organizations and authorities come together for only once, agree on a few issues, but do not organize a follow-up. In order to really improve these complex situations, you should probe, sense, respond and then do the same all over again and maybe come up with another plan. These are all possible reasons why current authorities and organizations have failed in making big steps towards a future without child marriages.

Child marriage is a complex problem and therefore, needs emergent change. One of the things the civil society organisations could do is to join forces, bundle all resources and start a huge project to create more employment opportunities for children under the age of 18. This project consists of many small projects which will be located all over Africa. One of those projects could, for example, be restoring old buildings or schools (such as painting

the walls), providing typical African cooking workshops for tourists, or caring for sick or injured wild animals. These working opportunities are all under the supervision of a professional and are only meant to provide work after school hours so that children will still have the opportunity to go to school and after that, make some money. Also, these projects will only be accessible for unmarried children. Since on the long run, the amount of money underage children earn by working a few hours after school or in the weekends will be significantly higher than the dowry they get by marrying, this will take away one of the biggest incentives for parents to have their daughter married. Of course, critics could say that civil society organisations do not possess enough financial resources to run these projects. However, the government and the United Nations will be able to finance a huge part of the project and if needed some crowdfunding can also be done to attract external capital. This is a way to address the problem and to maybe have a life-changing impact on society. I hope one day, all human beings will have the freedom to choose their own partner, all over the world.