ROLE OF EDUCATION AND CULTURE IN COUNTERING CHILD MARRIAGES IN MALAWI

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Abstract - The population of the world increases every year. The young generation has a big amount in this increment. Among the young generation teenage girls encounter different cultural attitudes in the environment they belong to. One of them is getting married before their 18th birthday. Nearly at the age of childhood they get married or are forced to marry according to their traditions. UNICEF claims that quarter of the total child marriages are seen in Africa. However the growing child population shows that the global profile of child marriage will be changed and half of the child brides will bein Africa by the 2050. Glancing at current trends, it is clear that millions of girls are at risk in the coming several decades. African child brides are generally found in rural areas where the cultural attitudes are strong with lack of access to education, less or none economic opportunity and weak legal mechanisms. Therefore it is needed to observe, understand and examine the inter-linkages among the national and international bodies in terms of social, economic, and cultural sustainability and the challenges for implementation.

Keywords - Education, Culture, Child, Child Marriages.

Nowadays in some parts of Africa are facing multiple threats posed by child marriages. Children may act innocently and personally but their actions are disastrous; implicates on the whole culture and national resources. This situation poses a threat to a nation's peace, development and in most instances, to the health of the community's future. Evidence seems to confirm these especially the prevalence of child marriages, threat of early marriages has made a new peak particularly in, but not limited to the Malawi and whole region((ICRW, 2007; UNICEF, 2016; HRW, 2014). In this recent surge, spontaneous child marriages have raised concern of local authorities as well as government. When one or both spouses are below the age of 18 for a union, it is called Child marriage. It is defined as a formal marriage or informal union before age 18(UNICEF, 2014; World Atlas, 2017,ICRW, 2007). Although the legal marriage age is 18, however in some certain countries, cultural traditions take priority over legislative law (Nour, 2009). In those places the perception and attitudes are rolled the behaviors and relations by cultural traditions. Strong social and cultural norms also drive the practice despite legislation in place (UNFPA, 2010).At the age of childhood when the children encounter such situations, they don't have or find opportunities to live their lives and play with their peers. Therefore it also violates the rights of children and affects both boys and girls but it is more common among girls(UNICEF, 2012). Affecting both sides but mainly girls have widespread and long term consequences for child brides and grooms such as being pregnant during the child age without knowing how to care for a new born, health, illiteracy and poverty, domestic violence, children and women's rights, development etc. The consequences for child marriages have variety of reasons throughout the history. There can be found and understood in the societies which drive the causes of child marriages including poverty, bride price, dowry, religious, social pressures, cultural traditions, laws that allow child marriages, regional customs, fear of remaining unmarried, illiteracy, and perceived inability of women to work for money (Forwarduk, 2015;ICRW, 2007; Girls not Brides, 2017; HRW, 2014; Xinhua, 2003;UNFPA, 2010;UNICEF, 2016; Raj, 2010; Gaffney-Rhys, 2011;Nguyen&Quentin, 2012).The reasons can be chanced and the understanding can be different society to society according to their environment. After finding out the causes of child marriages, it is needed to examine with the inter-linkages among the national and international bodies in terms of social, economic, and cultural sustainability and the challenges for implementation.

Top 20 Countries with Highest Rates of Child Marriage[1]

RANKING	COUNTRY	PERCENT MARRIED YOUNGER THAN 18
1	Niger	76.6
2	Chad	71.5
3	Bangladesh	68.7
4	Mali	65.4
5	Guinea	64.5
6	Central African Republic	57.0
7	Nepal	56.1
8	Mozambique	55.9
9	Uganda	54.1
10	Burkina Faso	51.9
11	India	50.0
12	Ethiopia	49.1
13	Liberia	48.4
14	Yemen	48.4
15	Cameroon	47.2
16	Eritrea	47.0
17	Malawi	46.9
18	Nicaragua	43.3
19	Nigeria	43.3
20	Zambia	42.1

(Figure 1).ICRW (2005). Analysis of Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) data

At the beginning of 21st century child marriage are still on the list of several global organizations as a risk for the young generation. It is still widespread mainly in areas such as parts of Africa, South,West and Southeast Asia and Latin America (UNFPA, 2010; UNICEF, 2001; ICRW, 2005; The Economist, 2011; Mathur, Greene and Malhotra, 2003). The highest rates of child marriages below the age of 18 have been observed generally in African countries such as Niger, Chad, Mali, Guinea, Central African Republic, Mozambique, and Uganda. However Niger, Chad, Mali, and Guinea are the countries with the rate above 60% in Africa (Figure 1).

According to research (ICRW, 2005) Malawi is the one of the country which has the highest rates of child marriage. On the other hand, Malawi has made significant progress to end child marriage. However, child marriage is still a thorny issue. Malawi is one of the two countries in Eastern and Southern Africa with over 50% of women aged 20-24 first married before the age of 18. About 4% of the population are married below age 15, 24% are married before the age of 18, and one in every five teenage girls is in a formal marriage whilst 4% are in an informal union (UNFPA, 2012). Trends however show that teenage boys of the same age group are less likely to be married as only 2% are in comparison to their female counterparts. Girls from poor households and those raised by women with no education are more likely to be married early.Strong social and cultural norms also drive the practice despite legislation in place (UNFPA, 2010). Though there is already a growing conviction regarding the necessity of educational instruments, the asymmetric nature of the current threat hardly matches any previous example and therefore demands a multi-layered and multi-sector engagement for sound, inclusive and lasting solutions. The unprecedented numbers of child marriages who have not joined school, has placed the issue at the top of the national agenda. More than 20.000 young girls from over the country have dropped from school in the last 5 years (ICRW, 2005; Ministry of Education, 2011; Child Labour in Agriculture, 2012). Even more disturbing is the very fact that this new generation of child marriages involves a complex population including many poorly educated middle-class.Many girls fail to go back to school because of money to pay school fees, lack of child care, unavailability of flexible school programs or adult classes and the need to do household chores and the others attributed their failure to go back to school on lack of family support to do so (GENET, 2013).

The tension of heightened poor culture and lack of education, create a misguided search for meaning vis a vis uncertainties of age that seems to have rendered many individuals vulnerable to the utopian initiation ceremonies of early marriages. As envisioned in the Government and UNICEFgoals on Countering Child marriage, building awareness on the drivers and indicators of early marriage and recruitment needs to be an essential preventive aspect against on this tragedy. Another driving force behind the problem is the absence of widely shared frames on core issues such as poor education, religious diversity, wrong cultural practices and weak constitutional regulatory provisions. The horrendous threat especially not only in Malawi but also in its region is highlighting the urgent need for inter-faith and intra-faith efforts to address the pressing contemporary questions regarding politics, society and individual freedoms. The absence or weakness of such efforts, leads to the emergence of enabling and growing sociological climate for overconfident approaches that tend to invite of young girls as the victims, the overall cultural conventions of the child marriages where either majoritarian or poor educated local authorities trends limit political participation that needs to be scrutinized. Concepts such as compromise, accommodation and consultation still continue to be marginalized around early marriages. As inclined towards wrong public opinion when not obstructed by state power. In the end; dangerous culture along with sectarian, religious and local authorities who are supposed to be staunch leaders of communities risk becoming proxies.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Child marriages are still a big problem in this century. It can be seen easily that millions more girls are at risk for the coming decades. The child brides are generally found in rural areas where the cultural attitudes are strong with lack of access to education, and weak legal mechanisms. Therefore it is needed to observe and understand according to societies' conditions and their circumstances to examine the inter-linkages among the national and international bodies in terms of social, economic, and cultural sustainability and the challenges for implementation.

Given the complex background of and the immense danger posed by the problem, it can be argued that the challenge of child marriages will not leave the regional agenda in the foreseeable future. Therefore solutions and projects that will be brought together a broad spectrum of stakeholders to generate productive ideas need to continue in order to devise, implement, monitor and improve strategies against the grave problem of child marriages and will make a consensus among the high-level personalities from Member States and International Organization to share good practices and challenges in ending child marriage; to secure and renew commitments from stakeholders to invest more to accelerate an end to child marriage; and to provide a platform for discussion among community leaders, traditional and religious leaders, girls affected by child marriage and

youth advocating against child marriages. People from different positions and background are interested in partnership and provision of financial support in countering child marriages identified.

- It should be identified the key areas required to achieve countering child marriages through the frameworks.
- It should be developed action-oriented recommendations and help drive countering child marriages implementation of the research based on the commitment to achieve countering child marriages and the realization of women's and girls' human rights.
- Educational, cultural, physiological and the factors that combine to encourage or trigger child marriages both of the industrial and community level should be identified and isolated. Creating a long term campaign against child marriages to isolate the factors effecting community life and changing the mindset of people within the considerable period.
- A platform of various stakeholders with various roles in countering child marriages should be created.

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