



REVIEW OF THE AFRICAN UNION CAMPAIGN TO END CHILD MARRIAGE 2014 – 2018



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Introduction

The African Union (AU) Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa was launched on 29 May 2014 during the fourth AU Conference of Ministers of Social Development. Initially, the campaign was set to last for two years, from 2014 to 2016, targeting ten high burden countries, but it was extended for another two years, to 2018, targeting 30 high prevalence countries; a new campaign strategy for the 2019–2023 period has just been developed.

The AU Commission's (AUC) strength lies in its ability to convene the continent's governments and to work towards an integrated and prosperous Africa, uniting around key issues. Child marriage continues to affect millions of girls every year, and in response, the AU has organized a series of high-level meetings and consultations, to mobilize Member States and partners towards the launch and implementation of the campaign. The AU appointed a Goodwill Ambassador for Ending Child Marriage, and the campaign was integrated into the work of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC), which appointed an AU Special Rapporteur for investigating special cases of child marriage.

The AU campaign aligns with the United Nations Population Fund – United Nations Children's Fund (UNFPA – UNICEF) Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage 2016–2019, which was developed to accelerate action to end child marriage in at least 12 high-prevalence countries around the world, eight of which are in sub-Saharan Africa.

This review provides an analysis of the key successes, challenges and opportunities of the AU Campaign 2014–2018 and will feed into an independent evaluation being supported by the AUC. The desk review of key documentation was undertaken, together with inputs from key informant interviews.

The review assesses the AU Campaign modality but does not assess regional and national strategies for implementation.

Summary of findings

In summary, the campaign has been greatly effective at bringing the issue of child marriage to the fore on the continent. However, moving forward the campaign should focus on improving its conceptual framework, targeting of countries, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E).

KEY STRENGTHS OF THE CAMPAIGN

The review found many key strengths of the campaign, namely:

- **Member State engagement:** The AU has established its leadership on ending child marriage in Africa. The campaign has created a space and platform for African leaders to engage on the issue of child marriage and has enlisted all but four targeted countries in its support of the campaign.
- **High-level advocacy and events:** Many high-level key events have been held, which have united Heads of State and partners, including civil society, in committing to end child marriage and calling for action, including hosting the first (and soon second) African Girls Summit.
- **Profile of child marriage raised within the AU:** The campaign has brought child marriage onto the agenda of AU institutions of importance, including the Peace and Security Council.
- **Partner commitment:** Although insufficiently resourced, the campaign has generated commitment and enthusiasm from multiple partners in its support.
- **Advancements in pan-African policy and normative framework:** The campaign has resulted in tangible advancements in the pan-African policy and normative framework for ending child marriage, including the adoption of the African Common Position on the AU Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa.
- **National results:** National gains have been made from the revision of legislation to the production of costed national plans to end child marriage.
- **Enhanced evidence base:** The campaign has directly enhanced the evidence base to support programming to end child marriage in terms of country-specific and thematic research, for example, on child marriage and adolescent pregnancy, and on harmful traditional practices and economic development.

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FIVE CORE FINDINGS

The review has five core findings, with associated recommendations. More detailed recommendations are included in the main review.

FINDING 1: The conceptual framework needs updating

The conceptual framework for the campaign is very ambitious with inadequate distinction between what the campaign is able to achieve (advocacy and capacity building) and the subsequent implementation and outcomes sought from Member States. For example, an increase in birth registration rates in Member States cannot be directly achieved as a result of campaign inputs.

Recommendation: A robust theory of change needs to be developed in consultation with partners. Inputs, pathways to results, and indicators of success should reflect the campaign's core aim of enhancing continental awareness of the effects of child marriage.

FINDING 2: Monitoring and evaluation needs streamlining

The campaign M&E framework is currently one large framework that combines monitoring of campaign activities with data on child marriage indicators. Member State accountability has been weak since the campaign began. Although there are other accountability mechanisms, such as the Action Plan for the African Common Position, reporting by the continental champion, and reporting to the ACERWC, more work is needed to enhance and/or institutionalize them. Campaign monitoring needs to be stronger, agile, frequent and responsive.

Recommendation: The M&E framework needs revising in light of a newly developed theory of change. Monitoring the campaign and child marriage indicators are two core components of the framework. These can be tailored in terms of frequency of reporting, government focal point for reporting,

and dissemination and use. Civil society should be enlisted to support data-gathering at the subnational level and for social accountability. The campaign needs intense support to create an effective accountability mechanism among Member States.

FINDING 3: Targeting of Member States needs a strict focus

The campaign tends to, or is perceived to, adopt a one-size-fits-all approach to targeting all 55 Member States. Limited resources are supporting non-targeted Member States at the possible cost of strategic, focused engagement in selected high burden countries, alongside AUC's insufficient capacity for coordinating a continental campaign. The campaign can inspire, enhance or catalyse commitment of Member States, but success can only be determined via targeted actions in selected countries, with close follow-up and an effective accountability mechanism.

Recommendations: The Campaign Secretariat needs additional staff, and AUC and partner resources need to be transparent, budgeted and coordinated. There needs to be structured engagement with Member States and proper use of the limited resources available to support a smaller number of targeted countries per year, drawing on partners to support individually constructed national campaign strategies, with clear commitments and goals.

FINDING 4: A comprehensive campaign narrative is needed

Girls may too often be depicted as victims or survivors rather than as rights-holders. A focus on lack of access to education or sexual and reproductive health services should be reinforced with the issue of broader gender inequalities and power disparities that underpin the practice of child marriage. It is highlighted that the use of language is important in the campaign, for example, 'multisectoral working' needs to be defined and clarified in order to effectively engage partners and the use of euphemisms such as 'defilement' for rape of a child needs to be avoided. The abstract nature of policy-level work needs to be translated into meaning for communities in order to help bridge the gap in implementation.



Recommendations: The campaign needs reframing in terms of girls as rights-holders. This includes the need for an analysis from a right-based and gender perspective that looks at the issue of discrimination and gender equality. Member State and partner guidance is needed on core campaign concepts such as multisectoral working, with associated indicators of success developed. Language needs to be purposeful and reflect the campaign's core aims such as to uphold the rights of girls, to consider child marriage as violence, and to lead the communities to understand the significance of the gains achieved so far in order to involve them, which is fundamental to the campaign's success.

FINDING 5: Partner engagement needs strengthening in the community

The campaign is highly effective at the highest level, with significant policy-level gains and engagement of senior leaders, but needs to cascade down to the community. Greater efforts need to be made, with serious investments in time and resources for communities. This includes the engagement of civil society organizations (CSOs), traditional and religious leaders, girls, women, boys, men, and child brides. The AU aims to strengthen the agency of girls by giving them a role and voice in the campaign, and in turn, in their own lives. The value of the campaign to different audiences and how they can be involved need clarification.

Recommendations: Stakeholder mapping needs to be supported at the community level to determine the resources and activities, together with advocacy for sustainable and significant financing for CSOs. The involvement of CSOs, communities and survivors of child marriage needs to be integrated into the campaign, for example, in developing a

collaborative theory of change and in knowledge exchange and monitoring efforts. A clear partnership framework needs to be produced with associated budgeting and planning of partner inputs to the campaign in order to determine and coordinate what can realistically be achieved. A narrative should be developed on the value addition of the campaign with guidance notes for stakeholders on how to engage, particularly for civil society.

Conclusions

The AU Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa is now in its fifth year and has made impressive gains in advocating for the end of child marriage on the continent, from enhancing the normative framework to harnessing the political commitment of multiple countries. The campaign has the good will and enthusiasm of national, regional and global partners and donors, and has renewed determination to create results on the ground, where the hard work is needed and where positive changes will be felt in the lives of young girls.

The re-launch of the AU Campaign presents an opportunity to strengthen partnerships, accountability and sharpen the focus and finetune the narrative and conceptual framework of the campaign, so that these efforts will accelerate the end of child marriage in Africa at a faster rate.

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