

Launching the Children's Participation Platform on Ending Child Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation

Department of Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development

Saturday, June 3rd, 2023 | AUC VIRTUAL LAUNCH |
ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

MEETING REPORT

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The African Union Commission (AUC), Health Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development Division through its Child Participation Platform on Ending Child Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation on June 3rd, 2023 organised and hosted Department of Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development at the AU International Conference Center in Addis Ababa. The launch of the children's participation platform was a virtual event through a webinar.

A total of 200 participants particularly children attended the launch. The adult guests at the launch were; Angela Martins- AU Ag. Director of Social Development, Sports and Culture, Dr. Laila Gad- UNICEF Rep, , Chege Ngugi- ChildFund Regional Director, This event was child led and was Moderated by children who included Margaret Peterson (South Africa), Josephine Samakasa (Zambia), Foday Bangura-(Sera Leon), David Monwabisi, Karen Mwikhoma, Kayanett Chelagat (Kenya), Brian King (Kenya), The panel of presenters was composed of children representatives come from all countries across the African continent. These included, Desire Ednah Atim (Uganda), Vasty Nkhoma (Zambia), Shekinah Banda (Malawi), Susy Thomas (Zambia), Eliana Wanjiku (Kenya), and Narindwa Matikanya (Tanzania), Ekram Mudesir (Ethiopia), Catherine Taku (Cameroon). The African Union ACERWC Special Rapporteur on Ending Child Marriage Hon. Hermine Gatsing Kembo made the closing remarks and officially launched the platform.

The **purpose** of the event was to create an interactive space to fully engage children and young people to share their experiences, practices, knowledge and utilizing evidence from programmes to accelerate efforts to end child marriage and FGM across the continent.

The **objectives** of the event were:

- a. To create an interactive platform for children and young people to actively lead and champion efforts and initiatives to end child marriage and FGM

- b. To provide a platform for country technical assistance including capacity building, knowledge transfer and awareness raising for children and young people to fully engage in actions and influence policies to end child marriage and FGM
- c. To provide a space for young people to share their lived experiences and provide solutions that aim to end child marriage and FGM across the continent.
- d. To create opportunity for follow-up of children's child participation mechanisms and decision making processes at the country and continental level aimed at ending child marriage and FGM.
- e. To create a space that stimulates key child led discussions that engage and advocate for specific actions and support from African Union divisions, partners, members states and stakeholders on the incorporation of child generated strategies in all current ECM campaign and FGM activities
- f. To capture, document and widely disseminate key deliberations and perspectives on what African children are asking key stakeholders for to End Child Marriages and FGM

The event expected **outcomes** were;

- Children are actively leading and championing on programmes and advocacy initiatives that aim to end child marriage and FGM at the community, national and continental level
- Children have adequate skills and knowledge to fully undertake actions and lead programmes that uphold their rights and protect them from all forms of violence against children.
- Children openly share their experiences and provide concrete solutions to address issues that affect them related to child marriage and FGM in their countries.
- Children's perspectives and voices are documented and widely shared among member states to influence policies and actions related to ending child marriage and other harmful practices.
- Children are meaningful influencing decision making process on issues related to child rights and ending violence against children at all levels

2.0 MODALITY OF THE LAUNCH OF THE CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION PLATFORM ON ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE AND FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

2.1 OPENING CEREMONY

During the official opening ceremony remarks were delivered by the AU Ag. Director of Social Development, Sports and Culture, Angela Martins. UNICEF Representative Dr. Laila Gad, ChildFund Regional Director (Chege Ngugi), and Young person representative, Unaludo Masego made opening remarks emphasizing that Children have the right to participate in decisions affecting their lives and expect that decision makers will listen to and consider their views. A poem was made by Catherine Taku (Cameroon) on ending child marriage.

2.2 PRESENTATIONS BY THE CHILDREN:

Children made several presentations that included:

1. Overview of the AU Children's participation Platform on Ending Child Marriage and FGM on the children's participation– What do we want to achieve
2. **Ending child marriage:**
 - How big is the problem of child marriage in Africa?
 - How has child marriage affected girls' well-being?

- What are the causes/ drivers of child marriage?
- What actions can be undertaken to end child marriage

3. Ending Female Genital Mutilation (FGM):

- How big is the problem of FGM in Africa?
- How has FGM affected girls' well-being?
- What are the causes/ drivers of FGM?
- What actions can be undertaken to end FGM?

4. Empowering Girls through Knowledge : Book overview titled: "Her Is My Name"

2.3 CLOSING CEREMONY:

The closing ceremony was led by Hon. Hermine Gatsing Kembo; The African Union ACERWC Special Rapporteur on Ending Child Marriage Hon. Hermine Gatsing Kembo. In her closing remarks, Hon Kembo emphasised the protecting children against child marriage and FGM has a huge impact on the realisation of children's rights and welfare including, among others, their right to health, right to education, right to life, survival and development and psychosocial wellbeing. She also recalled that the Committee should undertake several initiatives to ensure that children are effectively protected against all forms of harmful practices including child marriage and FGM. She further recalled that the African Union (AU) should be engage in efforts to eliminate child marriage and FGM in Africa through the AU campaign to end child marriage that was launched in 2014 and the Saleema initiative to end FGM, among others.

2.4 MAINTAINING THE PLATFORM:

This session was presented by Dr. Richard wamimbi and Ms Nena Thundu from the African Union Commission. The following procedure has been put in place to ensure that the platform is maintained and sustained to achieve its objectives and outcomes:

- o Select children aged 12 to 17 years to participate in the platform through member states and civil society organizations
- o Children should come from all countries of the continent.
- o In order for children to participate in the platform, they should have parental consent forms signed by their parents or care givers submitted to the African Union Commission division for social development, culture and supports – Ending Harmful Practices Unit.
- o Webinars shall be conducted on a quarterly basis led by the children on selected topics
- o Open a whatsapp community platform for all the children selected to interact in the platform hosted by the African Union division for social development, culture and supports – Ending Harmful Practices Unit.
- o Children select themes and topics to talk about during the webinars
- o Children conduct planning meetings to prepare for the webinars including selecting of speakers
- o Develop recommendations, resolutions and call to action capturing children voices for policy makers and decision makers to eliminate child marriage, FGM and other forms of violence against children.
- o Regular review progress of the platform activities and plan to improve the work of the platform

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE CHILDREN DURING THE LAUNCH OF THE CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION PLATFORM ON ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE AND FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

3.1. RECOMMENDATIONS ON ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE

1. The African Union, governments, development partners, various dignitaries, and researchers should amplify the voices of the girl child and support them to remain at school instead of marrying us when we are young.
2. Systemize or harmonise statutory laws and customary laws
3. Governments in Africa should implement those existing laws and policies that support both girls' and boys' education.
4. Community, cultural, and religious leaders should protect and defend girls from being sold or exchanged for money by ensuring that we remain at school and complete our education cycle.
5. Parents, communities, governments, and organizations to rise and intensify the fight against this awful behaviour by supporting us girls to remain at school.
6. Parents and members of society should make sure that every child receives proper education by providing an enabling environment equal for all children.
7. Generate evidence for decision making. There is need to ensure that programs aimed at reducing child marriage are based on evidence.
8. Child Participation Platform represents a powerful tool for empowering children in the fight against child marriage.
9. By amplifying their voices, promoting education, encouraging peer support, and engaging decision-makers, we can create a future where every child has the opportunity to thrive and fulfil their potential.
10. Poverty: is one of the reasons that leads to child marriage. There is need to empower parents /families to avoid making their daughters a source of income,
11. Digitalization: when a child is exposed to electronic devices such as phones, they tend to see videos and pictures they are not supposed to see, and they may want to practice it too not knowing that they are destroying their lives. There is need to prevent children from watching bad on videos and pictures through awareness sessions in schools.
12. By harnessing evidence from existing programs being implemented to protect children against violence and secure their rights, this platform will be part of the efforts to accelerate efforts to put an end to violence against children including Child Marriage, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and other Harmful Practices.
13. The platform can provide a unique opportunity for children to bring forward their insights, experiences, and ideas that will serve as a catalyst for change and foster an inclusive and collaborative approach towards protecting the rights and well-being of children across Africa.
14. Reporting an case of child marriage to victim support.
15. Use of multi sexual approaches, Harmonize the costume and civic laws,
16. Awareness raising, Traditional leaders playing their roles as leaders, Health workers playing their roles in spreading awareness as well and Involving the media to talk about it.

3.2. RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENDING FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

1. Legal frameworks: African countries should enact legislation criminalizing FGM and providing protection for girls and women.
2. Education and awareness campaigns: Efforts to raise awareness about the negative consequences of FGM and promote gender equality and women's rights are crucial in changing cultural attitudes and behaviors.
3. Community engagement: Engaging community leaders, religious leaders, and traditional practitioners in dialogue and education plays a vital role in challenging and changing social norms surrounding FGM.
4. Education - Simply put to keep the girls in school
5. Addressing FGM requires a multifaceted approach that combines legal measures, awareness campaigns, and community engagement.
6. By prioritizing girls' rights, advocating for gender equality, and promoting comprehensive education initiatives, African societies can work towards eradicating FGM and creating an environment where all girls have equal access to quality education and opportunities for personal and academic growth.
7. Children are actively leading and championing on programmes and advocacy initiatives that aim to end child marriage and FGM at the community, national and continental level
8. Children are equipped with skills and knowledge to fully undertake actions and lead programmes that uphold their rights and protect them from all forms of violence against children.
9. Children openly share their experiences and provide concrete solutions to address issues that affect them related to child marriage and FGM in their countries.
10. Children's perspectives and voices are documented and widely shared among member states to influence policies and actions related to ending child marriage and other harmful practices.
11. Children can meaningful influencing decision making process on issues related to child rights and ending violence against children at all levels.