



Image by freepik

Joint Eastern and Southern Africa Civil Society Forum Declaration Communiqué to End Child Marriage 10 December 2025

We, representatives of forty civil society organisations, grassroots movements, youth-led groups, and human rights defenders from across Eastern and Southern Africa, together with Equality Now, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) Civil Society Forum, Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage, and the Pan African Alliance on Ending Child Marriage, convened virtually on 10 December 2025 to commemorate International Human Rights Day.

Standing united in our firm resolve to end child marriage in all its forms, recognising the devastating impact on the lives of millions of girls, including loss of education, health risks, and violation of fundamental rights, we assert the urgent need for collective action grounded in justice, equality, and respect for children's rights and dignity.

Reaffirming our shared commitment to ending child marriage as a grave, pervasive, and systemic human rights violation that undermines the dignity, equality, autonomy, and future of millions of girls across Eastern and Southern Africa. Uniting for Action: Translating Laws and Commitments into Coordinated Action to End Child Marriage in Eastern and Southern Africa.

Guided by the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and recalling obligations under international and regional human rights instruments, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights on the Rights of women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), the SADC Model Law on Eradicating Child Marriage and Protecting Children Already in Marriage, and other relevant frameworks;

Reaffirming the universality, indivisibility, and interdependence of all human rights and the principle that all persons are born free and equal in dignity and rights;



Civil Society Organisations from the Eastern and Southern Africa Region during the CSO Forum in Lesotho, November 2025.

Recognising that child marriage constitutes a serious violation of multiple human rights, including the rights to education, health, bodily autonomy, participation, equality, and freedom from violence, exploitation, and discrimination;

Acknowledging progress made by States in Eastern and Southern Africa through legislative reforms and policy commitments through regional and global human rights frameworks, while remaining deeply concerned by persistent budget and implementation gaps between law and lived realities and mindful of



persistent implementation gaps driven by low budgeting for children, weak enforcement, harmful norms, and socio-economic pressures;

Deeply concerned that millions of girls across our region continue to be subjected to child marriage, perpetuating cycles of poverty, gender inequality, and violence, thereby denying them education, health, bodily autonomy, and full participation in society,

Alarmed that millions of girls across Eastern and Southern Africa continue to be subjected to child marriage, perpetuating cycles of poverty, gender inequality, and violence—often exacerbated by economic instability, humanitarian crises, conflict, climate shocks, and entrenched harmful social norms and implementation gaps between legal commitments and lived realities, exacerbated by economic insecurity, humanitarian crises, harmful social norms, and inadequate enforcement mechanisms,

Convinced that coordinated civil society action, strengthened collaboration, and sustained accountability are essential to accelerate progress toward ending child marriage;

We declare that ending child marriage is both a legal obligation and a moral imperative requiring urgent, multisectoral, and rights-based action

We, the undersigned civil society organisations, commit to the following:

1. Re-Affirming Child Marriage as a Human Rights Violation

- Re-affirm that child marriage is a grave human rights violation that denies girls dignity, autonomy, equality, and life opportunities.
- Adopting rights-based, survivor-centred, gender-responsive, and child-sensitive advocacy, programming, our work, and policy engagement.
- Address root causes of child marriage, including poverty, gender inequality, harmful social norms and practices, lack of education and information, and economic insecurity.
- Centre the voices, agency, and best interests of girls and young women in all interventions.

2. Accelerating Implementation of Legal and Policy Frameworks

- Intensify advocacy for full domestication, implementation, and enforcement of national, regional, and international laws prohibiting child marriage,
- Call for adequate budgetary allocations, institutional capacity, and enforcement mechanisms to ensure laws translate into protection.



- Urge harmonisation of statutory, customary, and religious laws to ensure 18 years as the minimum age of marriage, without exception.
- Strengthen monitoring, documentation, and accountability mechanisms to address violations.
- Support child-friendly, accessible, and confidential reporting and redress mechanisms.

3. Strengthening Coordination and Collaboration

- Enhance collaboration among CSOs, grassroots movements, faith-based organisations, youth-led groups, and regional human rights mechanisms across Eastern and Southern Africa.
- Establish regular platforms for knowledge exchange, joint advocacy, collective learning, and resource sharing.
- Strengthen linkages between local, national, and regional advocacy efforts.
- Ensure meaningful participation and leadership of adolescents and youth in all decision-making processes.
- Coordinate sustained advocacy to advance unified regional strategies.

4. Addressing Root Causes and Prevention

- Promote community-centred prevention strategies that transform harmful social norms and challenge gender stereotypes, and promote girls' empowerment
- Advocate for universal access to quality education, sexual and reproductive health services, economic opportunities, and social protection systems.
- Mobilise communities, families, and youth-led movements to reject harmful practices, challenge harmful gender norms and empower girls to exercise their rights.
- Engage men, boys, traditional leaders, religious authorities, and community gatekeepers as partners for change.
- Integrate child marriage prevention and response into humanitarian preparedness and response.



5. Protection and Support for Survivors and Married Children

- Support girls already in marriage through access to education, healthcare, legal aid, economic opportunities, and safe exit pathways that enable girls to rebuild their lives with dignity
- Advocate for annulment of child marriages and comprehensive, survivor-centred support services.
- Ensure interventions for married children are designed with meaningful participation and prioritise safety, dignity, aspirations, and well-being.



6. Collective Accountability and Monitoring

- Monitor State compliance with human rights obligations through shadow reporting and engagement with national, regional, and international mechanisms.
- Hold duty-bearers accountable through engagement with treaty bodies, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC), national human rights institutions, and regional bodies, including the African Union (AU), SADC, and EAC.
- Support civil society participation in Universal Periodic Review processes, treaty body reporting, and special procedures.
- Contribute to AU and Member State monitoring frameworks through complementary and shadow reports.
- Commit to ensuring transparent reporting on progress, challenges, and lessons learned.
- Reconvene regularly to assess progress, strengthen collaboration, and adapt strategies based on evidence and lived experiences.

7. Resource Mobilisation and Sustainability

- Pursue joint resource mobilisation and call on governments, donors, and development partners to increase dedicated funding for child marriage prevention and response.
- Advocate for funding that reaches grassroots and youth-led organisations.
- Promote innovative and sustainable financing models to ensure long-term, locally led action beyond short-term project cycles.

8. Call to Action

We call on governments, communities, traditional and faith leaders, regional institutions, and development partners to:

- Fully align national laws with international and regional standards, clearly establishing 18 years as the minimum legal age of marriage for both girls and boys, without exception or loopholes.
- Ensure enforcement approaches and strategies protect children from all forms of violence and exploitation, with the best interest of and in respect of adolescents' evolving capacities, and clearly distinguish consensual close-in-age relationships from exploitative or forced marriages involving minors and adults.



- Implement survivor-centred justice and protection systems that ensure access to remedies and accountability through prioritising robust and survivor-centred enforcement strategies that guarantee access to justice and protection services for survivors and hold accountable those who perpetuate or tolerate child marriage.
- Invest in community-driven education, health, and social protection programs that empower children and families to reject harmful practices and build supportive environments.
- Mobilising grassroots movements and engaging with leaders at all levels to challenge and transform the social norms, beliefs, and traditions that sustain child marriage.
- Strengthening monitoring, reporting, and data collection systems to track progress transparently and respond effectively to emerging challenges.
- Ensure sustainable financing and inclusive partnership frameworks that elevate civil society leadership and voices and enable long-term, locally led solutions.
- We urge the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) and other regional bodies to enhance their oversight and provide technical support for effective implementation.

Conclusion

We recognise that ending child marriage is not only a legal imperative but a moral one that demands persistent advocacy, collaboration, and solidarity. Together, united in solidarity and accountability, as civil society actors rooted in the communities we serve, we renew our collective commitment to advancing the rights, dignity and futures of all children across Eastern and Southern Africa, striving for a region where every where every child can grow, learn, and thrive free from child marriage and every child's potential can flourish free from the chains of child marriage.

Signed with conviction and hope for a just and equitable future.

| Name | Country |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1. Santana Momade (ICDP Mozambique) | Mozambique |
| 2. Naver Chayelega (PAAECM, Zambia) | Zambia and 8 other African countries (Zimbabwe, Malawi, |



| | |
|--|---|
| | Mozambique, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda) |
| 3. Irene Nambuo (Children's Dignity Forum-CDF) | Tanzania |
| 4. Florence MUGISA BURA (DJPRD asbl) | République Democratique du Congo (RDC) |
| 5. Sharon V. Chava (Legal Resources Foundation) | Zimbabwe |
| 6. Chinga Govhati (Help Her Heal) | Zimbabwe |
| 7. Kudakwashe Stephen Dizha (Rozaria Memorial Trust) | Zimbabwe |
| 8. Washington Mumbamarwo (Youth End Period Poverty Movement) | Zambia |
| 9. Dina Fanoharana Randrianaivojaona (Stop violence-Stop child marriage project YWCA) | Madagascar |
| 10. Gcebile Ndlovu (WLHIV) | eSwatini |
| 11. Dumiso Gatsha (Success Capital Africa) | Botswana |
| 12. Girls leaders Forum | Rwanda |
| 13. Emma Kaliya | Malawi |
| 14. Margarida Jeiambe Como (Coalizao) | Mozambique |
| 15. Lindiwe Nkomo | Botswana |
| 16. Khomotso Komape (Boys and Girls Educational Foundation) | South Africa |



| | |
|---|------------|
| 17. Tania Aspirante Jamal (NAFEZA) | Mozambique |
| 18. Munukayumbwa Ellis-Mwiya (Zambezi Girl Child Foundation) | Namibia |
| 19. Antonio Rogerio Carlos (Plataforma Mulheres em Acção) | Angola |
| 20. Veronica Sapalo (Plataforma Mulheres em Acção) | Angola |
| 21. Women Unlimited Eswatini | Eswatini |
| 22. Women Unlimited Zambia | Zambia |
| 23. HAGURUKA | Rwanda |
| 24. Peggie Ramaphane, Women Against Rape Trust | Botswana |
| 25. Faith Phiri, Girls Empowerment Network, | Malawi |
| 26. Lorato Ruth Moalusi, Botswana Gender Based Violence Prevention and Support Centre (BGBVC) | Botswana |
| 27. Rebeca Gyumi, Msichana Initiative | Tanzania |
| 28. Violet Muthiga(Sauti Ya wanawake Pwani Organisation) | Kenya |
| 29. Womba Wanki (Generation Alive and the Network on Ending Child Marriage in Zambia) | Zambia |
| 30. Women and Law in Southern Africa Research and Education Trust Malawi | Malawi |



| | |
|---|----------|
| 31. Women and Law in Southern Africa Research and Education - Lesotho | Lesotho |
| 32. The Eastern Africa Child Rights Network (EACRN) | Kenya |
| 33. WeLead Africa | Zimbabwe |
| 34. Catherine Mootian-AfyAfrika | Kenya |
| 35. Tukwasibwe Sandra - Joy for Children Uganda | Uganda |
| 36. Tasaru Ntomonok Initiative(TNI) -Agnes Pareyio | Kenya |
| 37. Il'laramatak Community Concerns(ICC)- Agnes Leina | Kenya |
| 38. Dorcus Parit HSC- Hope Beyond Foundation | Kenya |
| 39. Girls Not Brides, The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage | Global |
| 40. Equality Now | Global |