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**The Unspoken Injustice: Early Marriage in Africa; A Violation of Girls' Rights
and the Cycle of Poverty**



I am Rwandese: the child of educated parents and a girl with the good fortune to have been educated alongside my two brothers. I believe I will one day become a great leader. These facts and my expectations of a bright and prosperous future are highly unusual for many African women. They should, however, be the status quo:

If every girl is valued and given the same opportunities as boys; if she is free from not only child marriage, but from all forms of violence and discrimination, amazing things can happen- not only for the girl whose life is changed forever but for the whole world which becomes safer, happier and more balanced (Hassan).

On December 10, 1948, The General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights(UDHR). The UDHR was a way to foster the understanding of basic rights and freedoms that international communities should respect and protect: “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been followed by a number of treaties that elaborated on its basic rights and freedoms. These treaties protect civil, political,economic,social, cultural rights, also prohibit racial and gender discrimination” (Musalo). These human rights treaties sometimes conflict with cultural or religious practices“ The U.N Declaration specifically condemns FGM, the cutting of the clitoris and the labia minora, as an act of violence against women and states that countries should condemn violence against women and should not invoke any custom, tradition, or religious consideration to avoid their obligations with respect to its elimination.” (Musalo).

Despite all those laws and international treaties, some African cultures simply do not think women and men should have the equal rights. These cultural practices are bad for the girls as well as for their societies. A girl, sometimes as young as 8 years old, who is forced into marriage is deprived of her right to marry someone she chooses. She is more likely to be the

victim of domestic violence. She is more likely to suffer complications or even to die in childbirth. This practice is at the root of a vicious cycle. In Africa it is the custom for the groom's family to give the bride's family a dowry, so girls from poor and uneducated families are pushed into marriage for economic reasons. Essentially, they are "sold" into marriage.

First, however, these girls must be circumcised so that she will not enjoy sexual activity and will be more likely to be faithful to her husband. After marriage, a girl cannot return to school due to her new responsibilities. Poverty, illiteracy and strict patriarchal practices emphasizing the inferior role of women, continue into the next generation.

Countries such as Kenya and some parts of Northern Nigeria resist and resent interference from those outside the culture. They argue early marriage and the practice of circumcision, often referred to as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), is a sacred and valued cultural tradition. Should these girls be protected from harmful indigenous and cultural practices? The answer is "Yes." Therefore, in an effort to eradicate this vicious cycle, the United Nations should initially work not primarily with women within these societies, but with men and local government officials to discourage early marriage by emphasizing how the practice is not only detrimental to women, but also to men and to the very culture they wish to maintain.

Early Marriage, A Vicious Cycle

In her documentary about, "*Protecting a Girl Child*," Yasmeen Hassan says "Child marriage is a human rights violation, often following from and leading to further human rights violations" (Hassan).

A strict patriarchal society traps everyone into gender roles:
The African Woman has a position and status which is in many ways
definitely inferior to that of a man, and this is in spite of the fact that

she does most of the hard work in supporting the family. They were regarded as socially inferior to men and were always treated as minors (Zerbo, 31).

The clitoris allows a woman to experience sexual pleasure whereas its absence will most likely lead to pain during intercourse. Circumcision leaves a small hole in the vagina for the passage of menstrual fluid and urine.

A documentary "I will never be cut" (2011) tells the story of Kenyan girls fighting against the practice of genital mutilation. The documentary features young girls experiencing the same struggles and injustices as their mothers. One of the girls in the documentary says "It's a vicious cycle of mother, daughter, mother, daughter."

Another girl, seventeen-year-old Nancy Tomee, lives in the Pokot community of Kenya. The Pokot community has been circumcising their girls for centuries as a ritual passage to womanhood. Pokot village elders believe circumcision stops women from cheating on their husband when the husbands are away. Circumcising girls in the Pokot community became "Just a way of life," says the narrator of the documentary.

Despite pressure from her parents to be circumcised, Nancy hopes to escape the procedure. Her circumcised friends have described their experiences. Often a single knife is used for all the girls. If one girl has AIDS or other sexually transmitted disease all the girls are risk. Nancy is the oldest of seven. A younger sister has already been circumcised, but Nancy is resisting. Nancy's mother has told her men in the village view an uncircumcised girl as an abomination. Her mother emphasizes the need the family has for those cows that would come out of her dowry. The dowry would enable her brothers to be educated, key to her family's financial security.

UNICEF has estimated 100 million girls ages fifteen or younger will be forced into marriage over the next decade in Africa, Southern Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. The African country of Nigeria has the highest rate of child marriage in the world. An estimated 42% of young girls in Nigeria are forced into marriage before the age of eighteen years old. Nigeria is comprised of many ethnic groups, and nearly all of them practice child marriage as a traditional, cultural or religious ritual. The way child marriages are arranged in Nigeria varies through regions and families. Most are arranged by the parents or by another person of authority in family. If the prospective groom is wealthy or of high social and religious status, his age is not a factor which accounts for you 13-years-old married to 33-year-old. “On average a husband is 12 years older than the child brides in monogamous unions and up to 15-20 years older in polygamous unions” (Adedokun). Polygamous unions can be even more harmful to a young girl if the older wives regard her as a threat. In Nigeria for example, the first wife is in charge of sharing the goods and supplies.

Women in Nigeria and other African societies are a labor force especially in rural areas. You will find women working all day under the heavy sun on the farm and men collecting all the money that women brought from the harvest. Women are more vulnerable to their husbands. “women constitute the most important rural labor force, and a traditionalist form of control may be the most important rural labor cost” (Rwomire, 67). This tradition is now affecting young girls who are turned into woman at a very young age by being married and forced into working for their husband leading to them depending on their husbands economically. “ In the Nigerian traditional setting, the man is the absolute breadwinner responsible for his family” (140).

This stigma of women dependence on men is carried down generations after generations.

Men have been trying to find a way over time to control women and used the ideas of a "traditionalist form of control" and now they want to start controlling the women at a young age for it is easier to start manipulating a person at a young age and make them believe that it is right that " boys or men are superior and therefore should have more rights." It is often women enforcing the inferiority of girls more than the men since that's the way they have been raised.

Most girls younger than 18, do not have the maturity to make such important decisions like getting married. Also teenagers removed from school at an early age to marry have little basic understanding of the consequences of early marriage. The problem is compounded if the boy is also very young, but this is the exception rather than the rule.

In Nigeria for example men tend to marry after they have an education and find a job. Tradition demands a man to pay a dowry to the bride's father, so he or his family must be financially stable. Men, therefore marry later and there can be a large age gap between husband and wife.

The Causes And Consequences Of Early Marriages

Child marriage is practiced in rural areas, where people are less educated on how this affects the young girls' life and the society in general. Although most people in rural areas would practice early marriage as a cultural tradition or religious belief in their communities, we often find that some families forces their girls in an early marriage for them to get money from the dowry. "Child marriage is predominantly practiced in the rural and poor communities where young girls are regarded as economic burden and quickly married off to alleviate household expenses" (Adedokun). In those communities like in Nigeria, girls have fewer economic and educational opportunities.

Despite the fact that some people might consider dowries immoral, others see them as a way to honor their daughter's value and to thank the parents for raising their daughter. The amount of the dowry is often influenced by the girl's beauty, her cooking skills and how well she can take care of the house and the kids, and, of course, her virginity. "The bride is endowed with by nature, such as beauty, native intelligence and industry are sometimes made most of her kin. The bride is, of course, a commodity as far as her kin are concerned," (Rwomire, 73). It is a vicious cycle: a girl treated as currency re-enforces the belief that she can be bought, and, because, unlike a boy, she can be bought, she is of lesser value than the boy.

Girls are not only seen as inferior, but also untrustworthy. If a girl becomes pregnant while still living with her parents, her parents will force her to marry either the father of the child or any man who will pay the biggest dowry. Sometimes the girl must hide her pregnancy and lie to her future husband to preserve the family's reputation. After the wedding, the husband may treat his wife any way he likes because he has paid for her, and she is dependent on him for food and shelter. Rarely will she have a job of her own.

The economic dependence of women in urban and suburban areas therefore creeps into the marriage relation. In 1934, a Luanshya woman (Zambia) told her interviewer. "Yes, my husband beats me, but what can I do? You see, I am totally dependent on him as my employer. Who else would give me work here?" (Hafkin, 46).

For various reasons, these young married women are scared to challenge their husbands. She may have no education. She was probably raised in a home where her father was verbally and sometimes physically abusive to her mother. Her mother would not have resisted or protested, so the girl has no model for resisting and protesting. She does not ask, let alone

demand respect and kindness.

The Impact Of Early Marriages On The Health Of Young Girls

The health of these young wives is also at risk. The “World Health Organization (2006) revealed that the risk of death following pregnancy is twice as high for women between 15 and 19 years than those between the ages 20 and 24 years” (Adedokun). This means that a younger girl would be even more likely to die while giving birth. The young girls are pressured by their husband to prove that they are fertile in the first year of their marriage which puts the young girl more at risk of complications linked to pregnancy. Also young girls have a higher rate of miscarriage. When a young girl loses her child, it is something that will mark her for the rest of her life for when you lose a child it is hard to forget. When a girl is married at a young age most of the time her body has not fully matured which put the young girl at major risk of future health problems for both her and her child. Sometimes young brides may not be able to access the hospital during childbirth complication due to the lack of money, distance or sometime the husband creates barriers. There is also a problem of fistulas especially in Nigeria where 400,000 to 800,000 are suffering from untreated fistulas (UN report). Fistulas is mostly common in African countries where poor health care and traditions of giving birth at home are combine. Fistulas happens when “Teenagers who tried to deliver their first child at home and failed at labor; their babies were lodged in their narrow birth canals, and it resulted into pressure cut off blood to vital tissues ripping holes in the bowels or urethras, or both” (Lafraniere).

When a young girl has a fistulas problem, she may suffer physical and social consequences. The physical consequences are that the young girl might not be able to restrain her urine and excrement. Also the young girl may become paralyzed if the nerves to the lower limbs

are damaged. The social consequences are that if a young girl has fistulas then she is no longer able to give birth. The young girl may remain childless for the rest of her life which means that the husband is more likely to get rid of her or get a second a wife; especially in a society where having a child of your own is highly valued. The young girl might even be excluded from the society and thought of as a shame to her family. “Victims of Fistulas, therefore, become social outcasts” (Hamlin). Those young girls with fistulas are often left with emotional and social trauma.

Looking back at the documentary, "I will never be cut" about the young Kenyan girls fighting against the Pokot community tradition of Female genital mutilation (FGM), they interview a young girl named Veronica who has been cut and married immediately and now was pregnant and waiting to give birth. Veronica said that she thought she was about fifteen years old and said that she lived too far from town to go to school and even now that she is pregnant she might give birth at home. Veronica is just one of the victims of this cruel tradition of FGM. Veronica like many other young girls in the Pokot community after being cut or having their clitoris and labia minora removed they were stitched up. The removal of the stitches happened during their first wedding night which is as you might imagine a really painful experience. But it doesn't stop there for with circumcision, Veronica and other girls like her faces many difficulties while giving birth. Rhoda Lodio, a pokot woman who is leading the Anti FGM's campaign told the interviewer; “ In our community, we believe that if a mother is pregnant and is almost to deliver, her grave is open”.

Since women who have been cut when their wounds heal, they heal in a way that leave just a little opening. For a woman who has been circumcised to give birth, they need an

episiotomy meaning that the walls of the vagina must be cut open to enlarge the space for her to deliver. Rhoda Lodio explained the fate that Veronica might soon have to face, “She will be given a home episiotomy where anything can be used to cut. For example a piece of iron sheet just laying there, especially if they were not prepared and the pregnancy was precipitated all this because the passage is very tight.” This is a common practice in the pokot community where they cut young girls just like Veronica before they are old enough to resist. The bodies of these young girls are not even fully mature enough and ready for them to give birth, this means that if the young girls are not taken to the hospital to give birth they have a higher risk to lose their child and die in the process due to the lack of adequate maternal health care. Also those young girls who were circumcised are at high risk of having Fistulas which means that those young girls will see all their dreams and hopes being crashed by culture or tradition.

Every person in the world has the right to good health, yet some girls are denied their rights to good health. With Early marriage, girls are at high risks of having health related problems that might last for their entire lives.

Education

Young girls who are forced into early marriages are also forced to give up on their studies and education. These young girls are considered housewives meaning they stay home clean, cook, take of the house and kids. They are deprived from an education that can be the path to their knowledge and development. Not only are the girls physically and emotionally well-being violated but they are also less likely to know if they have the rights to fight against all those problems and situations hurting them. “The situation is most extreme in sub-Saharan Africa, where the gender gap in enrollment at university level has actually widened from 66 girls per 100

boys in 2000 to 61 girls per 100 boys enrolled in 2011” (UN Millennium Development Goals and beyond 2015).

Girls who could become one of the best doctors or engineers and develop their countries and Africa in general are not given the chance to make a change in their lives and the lives of people around them. UN research shows that if a girl is married at an early age and gives birth, “the vicious cycle of poverty and discrimination often continues into the next generation, especially for any daughters she may have” (Hassan). This means that not only will this affect the next generations of young girls but the society in general for if girls and boys are educated and both have equal chances to get into universities and study what they want, it will be beneficial for the girls and the country. “ More than half of the girls in Bangladesh, Mali, Mozambique and Niger are married before age 18. In these same countries, more than 75 percent of people live on less than \$2 a day” (Child Marriage Facts and Figures).

Government Role In Early Marriage

Child marriage prevent girls from living a healthy, violence-free life. Most parents want their children, no matter what sex they are, to live a healthy life, be educated and happy. Some parents do not care for their young daughters as they should and prefer giving them away in early marriages, often dooming them to lives of unhappiness. The question is then why are the forces supposed to stop early marriage not doing anything? Why isn't the general assembly of the United Nations enforcing the Universal declaration of girls rights? The answer to these two questions is simple but at the same time complex, for it is not the general assembly of the United Nations duty to enforce girls' rights in all the countries around the world. The governments in those countries are in charge of enforcing and protecting girls' rights. But in this world we live in not all countries have the same governmental system. In some African countries, for example,

the government is ran by religious people, they might be Muslims or traditional practitioners who would write the Constitution of their country favoring their religion.

Most West African countries maintain legal systems that are to some degree confluences of customary, colonial and Islamic law. The degree to which one type of law predominates differs not only between countries but among regions and ethnic groups. A government can have a constitution that combines customary, colonial and Islamic laws which make the constitution confusing to some extent because what may be acceptable in Islamic laws, may not be acceptable in colonial laws, so where do we place a limit (West Africa).

In most parts of Northern Nigeria the small courts uses the sharia law as their legal systems since most people are Muslims: 50 % are Muslims, 40% are Christian and 10% indigenous traditions. The sharia law are laws that originated from the Koran and the teachings of Mohammed. Northerners in Nigeria have been trying to insert the sharia law into the national court system but since Nigeria is a democracy and has many different religions and beliefs, the government can not enforce or favor one religion over the others. But since half of the population in Nigeria are Muslims the government does its best to create laws that do not harm or go against the Islamic laws. In this complex and confusing system of governance some rights are lost or ignored.

For example if a young girl is forced into a marriage, once married as stated before she becomes the property of her husband, meaning that the husband can choose when or even where to make love to her and the young wife doesn't have a choice to say no. In other parts of the world like in most developed countries they would consider it rape if the husband was forcing his wife to make love to him. But in countries like Nigeria where the government system is full of confusing correlations of customary, colonial, and Islamic laws, it becomes hard to enforce some rights like the women's or girls' sexual and reproductive rights. "Modern law in Nigeria does not

recognize marital rape: *the law in Nigeria as it stands, would not punish a husband who forcibly had sexual intercourse with his wife without her consent..*” (Rwomire, 73). This is not the only odious practice that a confusing constitution system can generate. The biggest problem that was created by this confusing system is, early marriage and the violations of girls' rights.

In 1988, There was a conferences that took place in Nigeria involving the Nigeria's Minister of Justice, Health and Social Welfare with the UNICEF to talk about and draft laws to protect children in Nigeria. In 2003, the Child Rights Act was renewed and signed in Abuja. However not every state in Nigeria appear to agree on implementing the Child Rights Act (CRA)in their constitution. “Implementation has been made challenging as Nigerian state and local governments represent a diverse range of ethnic groups and customs” (Representing Children Worldwide). This means that some states might choose to ignore the Child Rights Act under which Child marriage is prohibited; in a country where 39% of young girls are married at a young age, the Child Rights Act should be taken more seriously and in fact enforce at a national level. The Nigerian parliament should be the first to take action and protect the girls, yet Senator Ahmed Sani Yerima, 50, in 2010 married a 13 year old Egyptian girl. This act caused chaos in the country. The Child Rights advocates demanded that Senator Yerima be punished for marrying an underage girl. Faced with these complaints Senator Yerima rose to defended himself. “According to Senator Yerima, whether or not the Child Rights Act forbids marriage to teens was of little significance since the Holy Koran does not forbid it and he would only respect what is in the Holy Koran” (Eze-Nliam). Senator Yerima used the confusing system of laws to make the court decision play on his favor. He further claimed that the Nigerian constitution gave him the right to marry that young girl: “Every Nigerian has absolute and total freedom of religion

without hindrance and Senator Yerima was following the teaching and practice of Prophet Mohammed.”

It was difficult for the opposing side to argue against Senator Yerima arguments since the Nigerian constitution doesn't give a minimum age; “ Infact, section 29 (4) (b) of the constitution states that a married woman is deemed to be of full age”(Eze-Nliam). This means that if a young girl of 13 years who is not mature enough to bear a child, make responsible decisions for her future is married then she automatically is considered an adult. The future generation of girls in Nigeria are in danger of completely losing their rights due to this confusing system of laws that hinders them. For example with the customary law, a young girl can be forced into a marriage with an adult and with the Islamic law, adult Muslims are allowed to marry a girl no matter how young she might be. The only reasonable law that protects girls' rights is the statutory or colonial law that only authorizes marriage if the girl is 18 or older.

The government system is trying to satisfy different religious or traditional practices in Nigeria but this can only lead to more harm done to the society in general. Nigeria has a lot other serious problems they should focus on. As Stella Damasus a Nigerian Actress says on a video she posted:

“ Of all the issues facing this country: corruption, energy, unemployment, infrastructural deficiency, health, education security, our senators have decided to waste tax payers money by sitting down and discussing on how to enable shameless old man to marry underage children legally” (Damasus).

The safety of a child should always be considered more important than any other issues, but here the senate is not trying to protect an innocent child but to harm her future, this is a shameful act that people should recognize and stop before it ruins more young girls' lives. For a change to happen it all should start in the government, all those three laws (the Customary,

Islamic and Colonial laws) should come to an agreement on enforcing girls' rights. "The Supreme Court should make it clear to persons of all faiths that they have the absolute right to believe in their beliefs. However, the liberty to act out those beliefs must not intimidate the safety of a democratic society" (Eze-Nliam). Because if the Supreme Court continue favoring the senator Yerima with his argument that early marriage is a religious privilege, then does this mean that if it is a religious tradition to kill a virgin young girl for the gods; people will be allowed to do it? The society can not develop if something is not done to raise awareness on how bad this issues of early marriage can destroy a young girls' future.

If this continue even young boys will grow up thinking that it is right to hurt and harm girls, their sisters because of the way their dad might be maltreating their mom. Senator Yerima uses religion as a way to justify this ideology that child marriage is fine by using the argument that "if a girl is married under the sharia law she immediately is considered an adult". This must stop for no religious or cultural practices can justify destroying young innocent girls lives.

Can The Culture Of Early Marriage Change?

Can the culture of undermining girls' rights in African countries be changed? Yes, it can! The ideology of girls as less valuable should be changed in the societies and one way it can be done is by showing that girls can do what boys can. For example through educating girls, giving them the same opportunities as boys. Understanding that girls can be leaders or women in politics. Being a girl or woman is not a bad thing, for example in Rwanda now they have 64% women representation in the government. The situation in Rwanda proves that if given a chance a girl can help develop the economic of the country no matter how much work the country needs to undergo for it development. Rwanda is a countries most know for the genocide of more than

800,000 people than happened during 1994. Women and girls suffered a lot during the genocide, they were raped, tortured and left to die in pain. Men were immediately killed.

During the 1994 genocide, contrary to former customs in wartime, women and girls were explicitly targeted, partly because of their ethnicity, but often regardless of their ethnicity or political affiliation (Human Rights Watch/Africa 1996: 20), thus only because of their gender, whereby their bodies [were] used as the figurative and literal sites of combat (Bunch and Reilly 1994: 38) (Felicia).

Rwanda understood the importance of having women in power and of protecting girls. During the Rwandan genocide more men were killed than women. Many women survived but were victim of rapes and torture. Now the strong women who survived the genocide are fighting to keep the country stable by sharing their knowledge and wisdom in reshaping the future of Rwanda. The women in the government of Rwanda are helping young girls by enforcing their rights and making them clear in the constitution. "In our global village, women make up less than 1% of the world's land owners. An estimated 3.5 billion women and girls still do not have full access to human rights"(Stegemann). Also education is key to success and that is why girls in Rwanda are now encouraged by the government to pursue their education and find a suitable job, for girls before were considered only good for cooking and cleaning the house with their moms.

Many organizations in Rwanda are created to help empower girls. In Rwanda, there is fewer women in the education system and that might be the reason why fewer girls are completely or motivated to finish their secondary education. "With insufficient numbers of qualified female teachers in the teaches in the Rwandan education system, young girls are seeing fewer inspiring role models"(Tadesse). To solve this problem the Rwandan government is incorporating gender equity education in primary, secondary and the university curriculum to

teach young girls that they can learn and do what boys can. The government of Rwanda demanded universities to help and facilitate young girls who are trying to enroll in the teacher training institutes. Through the economic prosperity of Rwanda, women show how their contribution helped in improving the country. “The country’s GDP has grown 8 percent, on average, every year since 2001, and Rwanda has cut poverty by 14 % in the same period, pushing more than a million people above poverty line” (Moore).

Rwanda is an example we see how mothers and adults in general are needed in protecting and helping enforce girls' rights. Nigeria is trying to close the gap of inequality between men and women by having more women in politics but is still failing. In 2007, 94 women emerged in the Nigerian government: 6 deputy governors, 9 senators, 27 members of the House of Representatives and 52 members of the State house of assembly. This was a great achievement for the government of Nigeria. In 2010, the Nigerian first lady dame Patience Jonathan launched "Women for change" campaign to encourage Nigerian women to participate in politics and even run as candidates for some political positions.

In 2011, 9% of lawmakers were women in Nigeria but “However, with more men in that position, laws affecting issues of gender will always remain inequitable”(Okoronkwo-Chukwu). Women in power should raise up and try to get into the legislature because they are needed to help young girls empowerment. As Stella Damasus say it on her video: “Where are all the so called women in power? Are you all going to seat down watch them do this to our children?” Stella Damasus is calling for women in the government to do something to stop people like Senator Yerima from using Islam as an excused to hinder girls' rights. Stella Damasus is especially asking the first lady to step up because she is considered as "the mother of the Nation,

the mother of Nigeria". All the women are looking up to her so she should be the first one to take a step like she did in 2010 with launching the women for change. Patience Jonathan the first lady should at least publicly give her opinion on the issues of early marriage as a start.

This culture of early marriage and the inequality between girls and boys can change. People, especially government officials need to take action in changing these vicious cultures. For with women and girls empowerment come economical success and prosperity for the countries.

UN helping Stop Early Marriage

Outside forces are promoting women's equality rights in Nigeria. "The UN under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women Madame Michelle Bachelet paid a 3-day official visit to Nigeria from 9th – 11th January 2013" (UN Women). Madame Michelle Bachelet went in Nigeria to encourage Nigerian women to continue the fight for their rights and continue being involved in the countries politics and economy. Madame Michelle Bachelet talked to the president of Nigeria Goodluck Jonathan on having more women in the cabinet. Madame Bachelet pressed the government to engage in a strong fight against FGM because of its negative impact on young girls. The visit of the UN under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN women in Nigeria was very important because She was able to see and fully examine the progress that Nigeria is making in protecting women and girls rights, and what still needs to be done.

The UN plays a big role in helping end Child marriage. The UN has many organizations that are working together to help fight early marriage in developing . These organizations include: PMNCH(Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health), Girls Not Brides,

United Nations Foundation, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women etc. Ending Child marriage around the world has been one of the main goals of the UN. UN millennium development goals 3, 4 and 5 are about promoting gender equality around the world. But the goals of gender equality is continuously hampered by the increase early marriage especially in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa which is estimate to be 14.2 millions girls annually.

United Nations is determined to focus on solving Early marriage as being a priority for they are convinced that if early marriage is eradicated then countries would be able to achieve other goals easily such as, ending poverty, fighting against HIV/AIDS, malaria, more education etc.

“ The needs of adolescent girls were overlooked in the Millennium Development Goals; they must have a central place in any new goals set by the international community,” said Lakshmi Sundaram, Global Coordinator of Girls Not Brides. “ By using the rate of child marriage as an indicator to monitor progress against new goals, we can make sure that governments address the practice and focus on ensuring the welfare of their girls” (Child Marriages: 39 000 Every Day).

The UN is giving money to those countries that still practice early marriages to open more schools and make it easier for young girls to go to school, to start programs that will educate parents in rural areas on how bad early marriages are for their girls and how girls when educated can contribute to the family income and development of the community/country in general. The UN is trying to help governments encourage girls that have already been married and have kids to go back to school and change their lives.

Although the UN has been encouraging the eradication of child marriage, it is the citizens of individual countries who must end it. Educated women and men living in the cities of Nigeria and Kenya and any other countries in Africa with a high rate of child marriage, need to stand up and fight for the young girls in rural area.

What Can Be Done To Stop Early Marriage?

All African governments should have clear laws that protect girls from early marriage. These laws should state 18 as the minimum age for marriage without any exception, this means that there will be no marriage of a child under the age 18 even with the parents consent. The law should also punish people who force their girls to marry young and those who marry those girls because they are pedophiles. The Nigerian government and other African government should understand that early marriage doesn't only harm the girl but also it creates a continuous cycle of poverty in the communities that practice it. When a girl gets married she is most likely to endure health related problem for example the FGM's that she might undergo before the marriage, the child labor that she will have to deal with without her body being mature enough to go through it. the girl will have to drop out of school to take care of her kids and so she won't be educated, this leads to her passing down this cultural or ritual to her kids or her daughters and that is how the cycle of poverty is created this should be stopped.

African governments should create more educational opportunities for young girls and encourage families in rural areas to let their girls go to school. If possible make it a law that girls should be in school at least up to when they are done with high school, then they can choose to drop out or continue. Not all families in rural areas can afford taking all their kids to school and that is why most will choose to take boys instead of girls. The government should build schools that will teach kids for free so that parents in rural areas won't have any excuse to not send their girls to school. And most importantly it should be written into law and enforce that FGM's Female Genital Mutilation is an outrage to girls rights and will be punished severely if practiced.

We can raise awareness around us to how bad child marriage is, we can build a world

where girls are proud to be girls, and can dream of becoming doctors, architectures, business women, teachers etc. I am seventeen, and I have had the opportunity to be educated and to understand that it is not wrong to be a girl. I have the right to dream. Let us strive for a world where girls rights' are protected and where girls can become the leaders of tomorrow

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