

Young women leaders from 10 organisations call for bold action to end child marriages

By Gadosa Lamtey

Every October 11, the world marks International Day of the Girl Child whereby various stakeholders, including government, CSOs, private sectors and individuals raise awareness of the plight of these girls, such as lack of education, marriage under the age of 18, teen pregnancies and various sexual and gender based violence such as rape.

In marking the day this year, 10 young women-led organisations with support from Women Fund Trust Tanzania (WFT-T) have organized an outreach in a caravan style which is carried in 3 regions, starting in Shinyanga, Tabora and end in Dodoma on 11th October, the climax of the commemorative events for the Day of the Girl.

Ten (10) representatives from 10 young feminist organizations are conducting caravan activities to advocate for ending child marriages with particular focus on the reviewing of the Law.

Caravan leaders under Msichana Initiative coordination carry the theme End child marriages: Amend the Law of Marriage Act, inspired by this year's National theme: Digital Generation: Our Generation: where they elucidate on the need to protect girls from all sexual and gender based violence, if at all we are to reap the benefits of bridging the gender digital divide. The campaigners emphasize that in order to reach the digital generation, we must invest in the protection of the girls including from child marriages.

The outreach will involve engagement with the in and out of school spaces (2 primary schools and 2 secondary schools for each region) in Shinyanga and Tabora, then conduct a community dialogue in Bahi, Dodoma.

Media engagement which includes social media is carried out through the week using the ongoing hashtag #NiZamuyaWabunge #NdozaUtotoni. Badilisha Sheria Ndoa, Tokomeza Ndoa za Utotoni:

Caravan activity is derived from the need for young women leaders engaged in girls' issues in their institutions to come together collectively and strengthen the role of young women and women movement in demanding for change and amplify the child marriage issue in their communities.

The need which has led to a two years project (Enhancing Women and Girls' Rights



Youth women leaders ready to travel to the regions of Shinyanga, Tabora and Dodoma to meet various adolescent girls who wish to raise their voices.

Movement through Ending Child Marriages Efforts in Tanzania) funded by the WFT-T and coordinated by the Msichana Initiative Organization in collaboration with ten young women led organisations: Hope for Young Girls, ICCAO; Binti Makini Foundation; Binti Salha Foundation; Open Youth Opportunities; Center for Zero Tolerance; Her Ability Foundation; Mwanamke na Uongozi; Afriyan; Tanzania Youth Vision Association

and Bright Jamii Initiative.

What has been done by Msichana Initiative?

The government started the process to implement the Court of Appeal judgment in the case of Attorney General V Rebeca Z Gyumi (Civil Case no 207 of 2017) [2019] TZCA) in Parliament earlier this year, however the presented Bill was taken back through the Ministry of Constitutional and Legal Affairs to collect

more input from stakeholders including religious and traditional leaders before it is tabled back to the Parliament.

However due to the rapid increase in child marriages each year, there is a need to speed up the process in order to protect the girl child against child marriage. Leaders of these institutions are urging the government to speed up the process as two years have passed since the court ruling.

In addition to urgency, we

urge the government and stakeholders to reach out to girls and take their views further as they are the main victims of child marriages, especially those in rural areas due to the challenges they face including walking long distances to school, being given more work and family responsibilities; lack of basic necessities and lack of friendly infrastructure especially in Menstrual Health and Hygiene issues that discourage girls from going to school.



Not all the time male parents are the cause of child marriages, in some cases mothers secretly assent to their daughters' marriage. "I am a 16-year-old girl who was married off September 2021, in absence of my father, my mother received 12 cows as my dowry," a narrator is one of the survivors of early marriages.

Voices from young leaders in marking the Day

Consolata Chikoti Programs Manager from Msichana Initiative argues that, "There is a strong need to amend the Law so that girls, in and out of school will be protected from child Marriages because girls continues to be married off every day we have heard many stories of girls who were forced to be married by their parents in Kishapu district girls said their parents do not appreciate to educate a girl child and prefer to marry them off so that they can get cows as a dowry."

Clara Kabwe from Her-Ability Foundation said she met with a student from Nzega district who lives with her mother. She said her big dream is to become an editor after graduating but there are some challenges that hold her back academically.

The biggest challenge she faces is that the infrastructure at the school is not friendly to her, for example she is forced to wait until all the classmates go to bed so that she can take a shower outside. "I called the school and the government to help in building that suitable infrastructure to meet the needs of people with disabilities."

Another leader from Binti Salha Foundation Ms Salha Aziz Ng'amilo commented that "I have learned that we have a lot of work in helping to eradicate various social and economic challenges to bring about change and development for individuals and the nation as a whole."

"We have found that a number of existing challenges such as girls dropping out of school because of child marriage are compounded by many social but also economic challenges," she said.

On other hand, Shamira Mshangama, director from Mwanamke na Uongozi, said that we encourage girls to participate in leadership and decision-making from family level as well as economic and political issues. Challenges we face include financial resources. When we go to the field we find girls have many challenges and we are unable to reach them.

"The caravan has given me an opportunity to see the real picture of girls. I learned that the issue of child marriage is not the issue of one person, it is supposed to be the national agenda, and it is true that girls are married at a young age," she said.