

The Role of Traditional Leadership in Ending Early Child Marriages for Education: Experiences from Kalonga Gawa Undi Chiefdom of Katete District, Zambia

by

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Abstract

This paper explores the role of traditional leaders on ending early child marriages for education as panacea to the implementation of the 'National Strategy on Ending Child Marriages in Zambia 2016 – 2021'. The Chewa Chiefdom of Zambia was used as a reference point on the role traditional leaders can play in implementing government policies. The article focused on how traditional leaders through their chiefdom structures discouraged early child marriages and supported girls and boys to continue with their education. A case study research design which was qualitative in nature was employed. Data was collected using face-to-face interviews, and observation of various practices among the Chewa people of Zambia. The interviews and observations covered historical information on traditions and cultural practices; including measures the chiefdom had put in place to ensure that all young girls and boys in the chiefdom have access to education. The article revealed that, in a quest to end early marriages and promote child education, Kalonga Gawa Undi had put in place several measures. These included; awareness campaigns, collaborating with support groups, and revising some traditional practices such as the times when Chinamwali and Nyau initiation ceremonies were expected to take place so that they do not disturb school going children. Respondents reported that, the measures positively reduced cases of early marriages and increased the number of children accessing education. Despite this improvement, lack of financial support remains a major constraint to ending early marriages and promoting child education in the Chewa kingdom. The article recommended among other things that, chiefdoms should have partnerships with stakeholders such as NGOs and government in supporting children's education and discouraging early child marriages. In addition, more publicity was needed through various media; leaflets, posters, billboards in Chewa language and community drama.

Key words: Child Marriages, Early Child Marriages, Early Marriages, Girl Marriages, Education and Traditions, Cultural and Education.

Introduction

Marriage is a culturally or legally recognised union of two people in an interpersonal relationship where social and sexual matters are usually acknowledged and sanctioned (Mkandawire, Simooya, and Monde, 2019:64). Traditionally, marriage was restricted to a union of two people of opposite sexes (man and woman) called spouses, who establish rights and obligations between them and their children, and between them and their in-laws (Haviland, Prins, McBride, and Walrath, 2011). Child marriages are cultural practices that force children into an interpersonal union or relationship with or without their consent. Child marriages or early marriages are many times viewed as a violation of children's human rights. Although child marriages are prohibited by both national and international laws, they continue to disadvantage several girls under the age of 18 around the world because it is embedded in people's cultures. Cultures that support early marriages deny girls their right to make vital decisions about their sexual health and well-being. It forces them out of education and into a life of poor prospects, with an increased risk of violence, abuse, ill health or early death (<https://plan-international.org/sexual-health/child-marriage-early-forced>).

Culture is a central aspect of any given society as it is people's way of life (Bate, 2009). It is transmitted from one generation to another in various forms (Thomson, 1975). For this reason, some scholars have come to say that a society without culture is a lost society (Brey, 2014). Culture consists of different elements that range from beliefs, practices, ceremonies, norms, values and customs to oral history (Mkandawire, 2015). Marriage is also part of culture and it is critical for human existence as it is a back-bone route to recreation (Mwanza, Phiri, Muyangana and Chibamba, 2019). However, young people should not rush into marriage because it is their social duty to perpetuate the institution of the family in future, rather, they should wait for their right time to come. Traditional leaders and traditional marriage counsellors are there to prepare young people into marriage and not to rush them into marriage. This article, therefore, looks at how the traditional leaders in Chewa Chiefdom can work with the governments and other agencies in implementing public policies on ending early marriages and encouraging girls to go to school.

Zambia was rated third highest in terms of cases of child marriages in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region and twentieth in the world and that approximately, six percent of girls are married before the age of fifteen and thirty-one percent married before the age of eighteen (Central Statistical Office - CSO, 2014). In 2013, the government of Zambia launched a nationwide campaign to end child marriage which was spearheaded by the Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs and continued by the newly formed Ministry of Gender. The campaign prioritized engagement with traditional leaders and law reforms on the subject matter. Therefore, the Zambian government under the marriage Act 1964 adopted a constitution amendment that rose the legal age

of marriage from eighteen (18) to twenty-one years and above for boys and girls to reduce child marriage and its impact including girls education (CSO, 2014). The campaigns on ending early marriages were carried out under existing legislative frameworks discussed in the next section and these campaigns partly contributed to the formation of the ‘National Strategy on Ending Child Marriages in Zambia 2016-2021’. Before this policy, the fight against child marriages was one of the major challenges in Zambia because there was no specific policy and law on child marriages, early and forced marriages with exceptions of scant legal provisions. This was an anomaly which compelled civil society, government, traditional leaders and other stakeholders to embark on a campaign on ending early child marriages.

Legal Frameworks on Ending Early Child Marriages in Zambia

Zambia does not have strong legislative frameworks that support the ending of early child marriages (Mkandawire, Simooya and Monde, 2019). For instance, Chapter Fifty (50) of the Laws of Zambia labelled ‘The Marriage Act’, Section Number Seventeen (17) recommends that the normal marriage age is twenty-one (21) where a marrying person does not need consent. However, when parents, or guardians, or court judges give consent, marriage can be instituted even at a young age as implied in the following extract:

If either party to an intended marriage, not being a widower or widow, is under twenty-one years of age, the written consent of the father, or if he be dead or of unsound mind or absent from Zambia, of the mother, or if both be dead or of unsound mind or absent from Zambia, of the guardian of such party shall be produced and shall be annexed to the affidavit required under sections ten and twelve and, save as is otherwise, provided in section nineteen, no special licence shall be granted or certificate issued without the production of such consent (The Marriage Act, Section 17).

There is still a lacuna in this law because a father or purported parent or guardian may give a written consent to an underage child to marry. In other words, while, the Marriage Act provides for the solemnisation of marriages, the validation of marriages already solemnised, and matters incidental to or connected with the foregoing, it is not very strong on baring child marriages. Section Thirty-three (33) stipulates that both parties must be at least, 16 years old to constitute a marriage; otherwise, a marriage will be void. This Act was enacted on 1st October, 1918 and up to 1994, it was amended fourteen times. In all those times, the issues of child marriages were not strongly addressed. Section 19, of the Marriage Act, says, a court judge may authorise marriage if the parent refuses to authorise that marriage and again, it does not state the age limit.

Chapter Fifty-three (53) of the Laws of Zambia labelled ‘The Juveniles Act’, Section Twenty-two (22), sub-section one (1), recommends that, “The person to whose care a juvenile is committed by any such order . . . , provided that the authority and control shall not include power to give consent to the marriage of the juvenile or to deal with the property of the juvenile”. In this Act, child marriages are not tolerated. The difference here is that, the age limit is given. Section Two (2), sub section one (1), of the Juveniles Act defined a child as “a person who has not attained the age of sixteen years”. This implies that, a sixteen year old person and above can be married.

The National Strategy on Ending Child Marriages in Zambia 2016 – 2021 (Ministry of Gender, 2015:11) reported and cited some legal instruments on child marriages;

The National Gender Policy defines ‘child marriage’ as marriage of children younger than 18 years. According to the Penal Code (Amendment) Act No. 1 of 2012, defilement or sex with anyone younger than 16 is prohibited, and this legislation was expected to act as a major deterrent to child marriage. Similarly, the Education Act (part IV, section 18) provides for offences against any person who marries a student, or takes a child out of school to be married. The Act further enables everyone with the right to go to school, regardless of marital status. These provisions may however be circumvented due to the constitutional exceptions given to customary marriage. That the legal framework remains open to interpretation is an ongoing concern for efforts to end child marriage (Ministry of Gender, 2015:11).

The marriage age of eighteen (18) as reported in the National Gender policy was in conflict or contravention with existing legal age of sixteen for marriages as outlined in the Marriage and Juveniles Act. While sixteen is the legal age for marriage, this age is not rigidly respected in the customary law as children under the ages of sixteen get married.

Other legal frameworks highlighting on issues of marriage include, the Adoption (Amendment) Act, No. 24 of 1997, The Penal Code (Amendment) Act, No. 1 of 2012, The Matrimonial Causes Act, No. 20 of 2007, The Anti-Gender-Based Violence Act, No. 1 of 2011, Education Act, No.23 of 2011 and the Local Courts (Amendment) Act, No. 18 of 2003.

Mkandawire, Simooya and Monde (2019) contended that there are three ways marriages in Zambia can be constituted and these are the Statutory Law Marriages, Customary or Traditional Marriage and Common Law Marriage. The first two are the most common and celebrated while common law marriage is rare and not celebrated due to its nature and validity. In these marriages, the only age limit provided that may restrict marriage to the later, is sixteen years of age as provided in the Juveniles Act.

Policies on Education in Zambia

In recent years, the Government of Zambia through the Ministry of General Education has introduced many policies that aimed at promoting equity and equality in education in the country. Since 1997, the government introduced the re-entry policy which allows a girl who fall pregnant to go back to school after giving birth. This policy gives opportunity to girls who may have unknowingly or knowingly fallen pregnant to access education. In all national development plans, the government has recognized education especially for a girl child as one thing that can propel national development in Zambia. The challenge has been the implementation of such policies.

In the Seventh National Development Plan (SNDP), the Government has highlighted measures that are aimed at improving child education across Zambia. At primary level, which is from Grade 1 to 7, education has been made free to all children in Zambia. The Ministry of General Education has also introduced a differential cut off point for boys and girls at Grade 7 and 9 (Ministry of National Development Planning - MNDP, 2018). This is to give opportunity to a girl child and rural pupils to access education. The government has also embarked on construction of both primary and secondary schools across the country especially in rural areas, supply of teaching and learning materials such as books, desks, chalk and other facilities that enhance learning (MNDP, 2018). Despite all these government efforts, access to education by girl child especially in rural areas has been a challenge. One of the contributing factors to this challenge has been some of the traditional and cultural practices taking place in some parts of the rural areas. In 2018, it was reported that over 3, 796 pupils in Eastern Province dropped out of school between the months of January to June. Of the total figure, 2,189 accounted for girls while 1,607 accounted for boys. A total of 212 girls dropped out of school due to early marriages, 365 girls fell pregnant, while 1,612 dropped out of school due to economic reasons. In response to this, Undi instituted different measures in his kingdom including Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique that are aimed at promoting child education and ending early marriages (CSO, 2019).

The Indigenous Standpoint Theory (IST)

This study was guided by the indigenous standpoint theory which supports the idea that when local people are experiencing a problem, they are better placed in resolving it with a little scaffolding. Nkhata et al., (2019:109) contended that:

The indigenous standpoint theory (IST) purport that, when working or researching in a community, there is need to involve and respect the ethos of local people culturally, socially, spiritually, and morally, and that, actions should be done by indigenous people for their own benefit.

The theory is associated with Nakata (2007) who reported that the indigenous standpoint theory is a method of inquiry, a process for making more intelligible, ‘the corpus of objectified knowledge about us’ as it emerges and organises understanding of our lived realities (Nkhata et al., 2019). In IST, it is expected that the ontology and epistemology of the work or research must reflect the ethos of the local people and in this study, the theory is applied to support indigenous people, chiefs, indunas and members of the community to work together in resolving issues of early marriages. In other words, the local people where early marriages take place are better placed to understand the causes and, therefore, they can address the problem better.

Research Questions

The study sought answers to the following research questions:

- (i) What was the place of girls in the Chewa customs and traditional practices?
- (ii) How did the traditional and cultural practices of the Chewa people promote early marriages?
- (iii) What initiatives did the Chewa chiefdom put in place to address issues of early marriages as a way of implementing the national policy on ending marriages?
- (iv) What were the challenges and prospects of implementing the Early Marriage Policy in the Chewa Chiefdom of Katete?

Method

This study focused on unearthing in-depth knowledge on how the Chewa traditional leaders of Kalonga Gawa Undi Kingdom acted as change agents in ending child marriages. As such, a qualitative case study research design was employed. The participants included selected chiefs and headmen who are part of the system (Chewa Kingdom) that formed our case of analysis. To collect data, researchers sought consent from participants and audio-taped the face-to-face interviews with chiefs, headmen and indunas. Furthermore, observations of various practices among the Chewa people of Zambia were also made. The audios from interviews were then transcribed and subjected to a constant comparative process to generate specific themes which were supported by data from observations. Conclusively, data was thematically presented and supported by selected verbatim.

Results and Discussion

The results and discussion of this study are presented in themes with respect to the research questions.

The Place of Girls in Traditional and Cultural Practices

The first research question sought to establish the place of girls in the Chewa customs and traditional practices. When asked this question, respondents stated that, culturally, girls were expected to take care of the house, cleaning it, cooking and cleaning kitchen utensils as well fetching firewood. One of the respondents had this to say;

In the past, girls were restricted to work in the house and its yard, fetching water, firewood and farming. They were caretakers of the home and provided whatever was needed in the house except for serious big things like hunting, fishing, and construction which were associated with boys. Activities such as farming were shared as both boys and girls could take part.

Such roles restricted girls from accessing education in the same way boys did because both sexes can do what each one of them does (Central Statistic Office, 2014).

Three respondents also added by stating that, girls in the past were seen as marriage materials or sexual objects and mothers in the eyes of boys and men in the society. As such, people thought they could not do much in comparison to boys as far as education was concerned. A female respondent had this to say:

It is not a long time ago, these things are still happening here. Some parents still think that girls should not go to school because they will be married by boys that went to school. They say that if a family has a boy and girl, the boy should go to school so that they are educated and these same educated boys would come back to marry the girls.

This cultural belief has negative consequences on girls' education. Such traditions that place girls outside the school in chiefdoms, should not be encouraged. Another respondent added that:

...yes, the situation these days is not as bad as it used to be. Nowadays, families have learnt to send both girls and boys to school due to the sensitisation campaigns from the chief, NGOs and education people. In the past, girls used to go for different practices such as chinamwali, traditional dances, social gatherings and initiation ceremonies during the time when they were supposed to be at school.

The data presented above is consistent with (Phiri, 1997) who reported that the main Chewa tradition and cultural practice that influence the growing up and status of boys and girls in the chiefdom are initiation ceremonies such as chinamwali and social spiritual dances such as Gule-wamkulu. A Chewa girl undergoes a ritual known as chinamwali, a traditional initiation ceremony for girls that have become of age. The local people believed that girls that went through this ceremony were "sacred vessels of life" and a means by which fertility for the girl is established for replenishing the race. It is done soon after a girl reaches

puberty. Chinamwali, is a ritual that Chewa girls undergo for them to gain their status in the chiefdom. It is done soon after a girl reaches puberty. The girl is taken into confinement where she is counseled by elderly women (known as Anankungwi) on a number of issues believed to prepare her into adulthood. The fundamental lessons attached to chinamwali were; female body menstruation, bodily hygiene, childbirth, fertility, and the practicalities of marital relationships (Zubieta, 2009).

During the entire process of chinamwali, powerful desires are often expressed within the Chewa society through metaphors related to animals and food. In the context of the chinamwali initiation, girls are not allowed to eat meat until the end of the ceremony. Eating meat represents the capacity to initiate or engage in sexual intercourse as fully grown women (Zubieta, 2012). A baboon is an animal symbol used during chinamwali initiations. Women here are regarded as a baboon carrying another baboon 'just as baboons carry their children'. Baboons are recognised as humans in the way they care for their young and in their use of medicines. Baboons, along with dogs and hyenas, have been identified as representative of human sexual passions (chilakolako) and it is also widely believed that male baboons may have forced sexual intercourse with women (Morris 2000). Perhaps it is through the combination of images and language (for example, songs, proverbs, and riddles) that metaphors associated with animal symbolism were passed on in certain teachings (Zubieta, 2012).

Moreover, animal and human connections materialise not only as clay or rock painting but also through the initiate's ability to symbolically transform into an animal during the initiation ceremony. This takes place at the culmination of the ceremony, a phase known as Chingondo, when the initiates wear a headdress shaped as an animal. Chingondo, which is a representation of an animal occurs once the initiate has learnt the dances and songs of chinamwali. This animal varies according to area, but it generally represents the kasiyamaliro (ntchefu), known as the mother of all Nyau masks and linked to fertility and rebirth (Boucher 2012).

Last and the most important animal symbol used in this ceremony is the njobvu (elephant). The njobvu represents the father ancestor and the chief, and it has great authority as it personifies the dead chiefs and the ancestors. It also represents the link of the headman with fertility. Before the njobvu enters the village, it is protected with medicine (mankhwala) at the headman's house. The ritual consisted of a series of speeches by different men praising the headman for his first Chinamwali Mkangali and showing their appreciation with gifts and money. The arrival of elephant structure into the main arena during chinamwali is a dramatic expression of the connections found in Chewa culture between humans and spirits, including spirits of the dead, and between hunting and agriculture that form an essential unity (Morris, 2000).

According to Boucher (2012) the initiates are blindfolded and taken in the

evening to the bwalo to meet the njobvu mask and asked to touch the trunk. The elephant trunk symbolises the penis. The action of touching the elephant mask has an important immediate benefit to the initiate as she will be given ‘the power of the chief, who is the spiritual head of the community and the representative of the spirits. Handling it [the trunk] helps to remove fears the girls may have about their first sexual encounter (Boucher, 2012). Actually, when the girls are allowed to grasp the tusks of the njobvu, it shows they have learnt about the opposite sex and shows respect for the chief. The elephant, thus, represents both authority and fertility and it is possible that this symbolism was associated with its presence in Chewa rock art (Zubieta, 2009).

Sometimes initiates are told to touch the tusks while songs regarding sexual taboos are sung to remind them that sexual activity is regulated by strict rules of behaviour (mwambo), closely supervised by the headman of the village. Moreover, the headman also has the responsibility, along with the initiate’s parents, to resume in sexual intercourse with their respective spouses at the end of the ceremony to unlock the girl’s fertility (kulongosola - to redeem) (Boucher, 2012). This is also to show the people that she is now a matured person ready for marriage. When the celebration is done, she is free to live a normal life which includes eating food with salt and even cooking, but she is not allowed to play with young girls who are not yet matured.

On the other hand, Gule-wamkulu or Nyau has really influenced the growing up of most of young boys in the chiefdom as most of them join nyau at an early age (Nthala, 2009). Nyau secret society for men is highly regulated and secretive: strictly for the initiated. Children and the uninitiated are taught that these are Virombo, creatures that have been fished up from the bush especially the graveyard. The three broad categories of masks in Gule-wamkulu tradition include; the bush, which is the realm of men and the mysterious night masks, the domestic area of the village and the carved satirical face masks which perform with women as a chorus (Mtonga, 2006). In the past, it was a requirement for each boy reaching a puberty stage to join the Nyau group. There were various tasks given to the boys during this initiation to prepare them to adult life. Some of the tasks given were meant to instill some values such as courage, honest and trust. For example, to instill courage, a boy was sent to kill a dangerous animal such as a hyena. Once the boy accomplishes the task, it meant he has proved courage and is allowed to enter into marriage.

How Traditional and Cultural Practices Promotes Early Marriages

The second research question sought to establish how cultural practices among the Chewa people of Gawa Undi were promoting early marriages. Findings revealed that some cultural beliefs such the idea that boys should be prioritised to go to school than girls was a recipe for promoting early child marriages. One respondent had this to say:

I know some parents who prioritise their boys to go to school and girls are treated like house wives or second class citizens. This is not right and its one way of telling girls to go to unpleasant social practices and early marriages because these things begin in the families.

Parental and community treatment of girls should not be different from that of boys as both genders have potential to succeed at school. On a similar matter, another respondent said:

This issue of saying boys should not sweep or girls should not do boys work is another problem that may lead to early marriages. Although we are in the village, things are changing now and I know about two families here where girls do everything that boys do in our community and some boys are even left behind.

All children should be treated equally. Traditional and cultural practices are very important because they are products of social norms which aim at upholding cultural ideas about gender roles and social relations (Guhrs, Kapwepwe, Lewanika, Mtonga, Galande, Kapinga, Guhrs and Magnolia, 2015). A girl child is the most victim of cultural practices which include; forced early marriage, dowry-related violence, and son preference which have become common relatively recently but may be considered harmful traditional practices as they are rooted in and upheld by such ideas (Brey, 2014).

Another respondent noted that “the idea of asking girls to serve or parade in some of the traditional rites give girls ideas about marriage. Girls should not even be invited to take part in some traditional practices”. This will help reduce child marriages. In the case of chinamwali, the content which is taught during the initiation includes; a girl child being taught how to handle a man in bed, how to clean their bodies and how to shave, how to do house chores and how to take care of the children, good morals, respect for elderly people and submission to their husbands. Hence, to some extent, this influences a girl child to go and practice handling of a man in bed at a premature stage. Therefore, this promotes early marriages, teenage pregnancies and sexual transmitted diseases such as HIV and AIDS, syphilis and Gonorrhoea to mention but a few. In addition, during the last day of the initiation, by the ritual a person called *Afisi* also known as ‘Hyena concept’ is called upon to perform a ritual. Hyena concept is where parents employ a mystery man who is engaged to a girl child in prediction of the baby’s sex during pregnancy or after birth. The *Afisi* takes different types of gifts called ‘*chigwirira mala*’ to the parent before and after birth of a girl child such as maize, mice (mbeba), and some manual services, in order to be recognised by the parents as a husband to the child. Therefore, *Afisi* is the chosen man to test the sexual skills of a young girl after initiation ceremony. However, this is one of the cultural practice that promotes early marriages in that, a girl child is

prompted to have sexual activities even more after the initiation ceremony before marriage, hence, this leads to early marriages, teenage pregnancies and sexual transmitted diseases. This likely leads to sexual activity for a girl at an age when she is neither physically nor sexually mature. These young brides may become pregnant at an early age; meaning they are more likely to die during the process of giving birth and may experience obstetric fistula (United Nations International Children's Fund, 2012).

Gule-wamukule as boys initiation ceremony has negative effects in that, boys are socialised to adulthood ways of living such as how to take care of the wife, how to handle a woman in bed and their specialised duties and obligations as men or husbands of the house. Hence, it influences them to practice these livelihoods before the right time. This, consequently, leads young boys engage themselves in premarital sexual activities for instance, this causes early marriages and teenage pregnancies. During the in –depth interviews with one of the Indunas, it was reported that:

'Gule-wamukulu of the chewa people plays a role in promoting early marriages in the sense that, the things which young ones are being taught at the sacred place includes preparation for marriage. Young boys are being initiated (kumwela) and are taught things like on how to handle a woman in bed, to stop entering their parents' bedroom, respect elders, trying sex before they get married and the use of different traditional medicine which will make them to be more attractive to girls and even enlarging their penis and increase their sexual desire. This really promotes early marriages in the chewa chiefdom in such that after passing through this ceremony, the young boys go into the society with the motivated heart that they can handle marriages and later, find a partner who is also young. In addition, these young boys will easily get into sexual activities, which will result into unwanted pregnancy cases. Due to fear of being fined, a lot of young boys are being forced into early marriages at an early age when they are not yet matured.' (Induna 2, Personal communication, August 31, 2019)

Measures Put in Place to End Child Marriages and Ensure Access to School

The third research question sought to address measures put in place to end child marriages in Gawa Undi Chiefdom. Researchers observed that the Chewa people had put measures to ensure that all the girls in the chiefdom have access to education as recommended by local and international legal instruments. Zambia practices a dual legal system which applies customary law side by side with statutory law. The customary law is recognised and upheld provided that it does not conflict with the statutory law. Customary law is often unwritten whereas statutory law is written. The constitution is the highest law of the land, and under Chapter One of the laws of Zambia, the constitution guarantees the rights of all

persons in Zambia including children. The issue of early marriage and rights of a child has become the main concern of all nations (Panos Institute of Southern Africa, 2014). Below are some of the measures the Chewa Kingdom has put in place to end early marriages.

Awareness Campaigns

Awareness campaigns to the members of the community emerged as one among the measures to promote girl child education and ending early marriages in Chewa kingdom. Kalonga Gawa Undi, through his senior chiefs, subordinate chiefs, Indunas and village headmen have played a pivotal role in this campaign. During funerals, social gathering, or any other activities, village headmen or Indunas preach about the dangers of early marriages, teenage pregnancies and school dropouts. Emphasis is posed during such gatherings that parents should encourage their children to go to school and they should support them by providing food and discouraging them as much as possible on issues of sex. Parents are also encouraged to find mechanism of financial support for their children. Moreover, parents who marry off their children are taken to the chief where they are punished by paying a goat or any other form of punishment as may be decided by the traditional leaders of that community.

Community Radio Campaigns and Collaboration with Government Ministries

Community radio campaign is another measure that has been instituted to promote child education. Kalonga has through his subordinate chiefs' selected active members of the society that air out issues aimed at promoting child education. There is the Chewa Heritage Foundation in Lusaka Zambia, another one in Malawi and Mozambique. In these foundations, there are specialised individuals who talk against issues of early marriages and teenage pregnancies. These specialists are trained by experts from the Ministry of Health and Education. During such programmes, however, members of the community tend to ask questions or contribute via phone calls on issues of promoting child education especially the education of the girl child. Invited to such radio programmes are, experts from the Ministry of Health and Education who explain on various matters such as sexual reproductive health, re-entry policy and many other issues concerning the rights of children.

Collaboration with Non-Government Organisations (NGOs)

Kalonga Gawa Undi has observed that promoting child education and ending early marriages in his vast kingdom is such an involving task. For this reason, he has allowed various NGOs to operate in the kingdom to promote child education and end early marriage. Among these NGOs are SAWA, Paralegal, and Network for People Living With HIV/AIDS (NPLHA), KWATU, Plan International, YES I DO, Neighborhood, Safe-motherhood and many others. These NGOs have

different agendas in the kingdom. For example, Paralegal has formed groups from the villages that conduct meetings with community members on the dangers of early marriages and teenage pregnancies. They also talk about the advantages of educating a girl child as well as child education in general. They also have meetings with teenage boys and girls where they explain issues of abstinence, working hard at school, use of condoms and distribution of condoms where possible.

These organisations work with the help of subordinate chiefs and village headmen who coordinate meetings with community members. Organisation such a Paralegal and Plan International have gone further in distributing bicycles to facilitators of such programmes in the community. USAID is also using education development assistance and PEPFAR funding to assist the Ministry of Education with strengthening educational support for vulnerable students in its community schools. They have also put up posters that promote sending boys and girls to schools and ending early marriages (Figure 3.1).

Figure 1: Posters Meant to Promote Education for Boys and Girls in the Chewa Chiefdom



Reducing the Initiation Period for Chinamwali and Gule-wamukuklu

Culturally, the practice of chinamwali and nyau secret initiations takes a periodical seclusion of instruction (Yoshid, 1993). For chinamwali the seclusion takes a period of thirty days making it a complete month. Similarly, the Nyau secret initiation takes about fourteen days (two weeks). During the period of seclusion, initiates from the two initiations are not exposed to the public thereby giving them no chance to go to school as they are recorded as absentees. Absenteeism is an impediment to curriculum implementation in schools (Mkandawire, 2010) and (Mwanza and Mkandawire, 2020). Thus, Kalonga Gawa Undi has suspended

the practice of chinamwali and gule-wamkulu during schools days. His command has been instituted in the entire Chewa kingdom that is Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique. No practices of these ceremonies are performed until schools are closed. It was interesting to learn that Kalonga has allowed only a short period of not more than a week of seclusion during these ceremonies. He has also banned the Afisi Concept in the kingdom. In addition, King Gawa Undi has emphasized the creation of youth groups so that these youths should have time to discuss on issues patterning the importance of education, health and sex education so that they focus much on education and change their life's and that of their families. Additionally, children are also given the platform to discuss a number of things such as the consequences of impregnating a girl child, sexual harassment, and also the punishment for committing these offences among others. The punishment includes providing a goat as payment and also to stop going to school and only resume when the girl delivers.

Parents to girls proposed that chinamwali should be done during the holidays and within a short period of time. In addition, they stated that the curriculum of chinamwali must focus on hygiene. This would act as one of the measures to increase access to education by the girl child. The parent said;

Chinamwali ndi mwambo womwe unakhala cikhalire. Palibe amene angafune kuti mwana wake angokhala popanda kuuzidwa ai. Koma kulingana ndi nyengo yomwe tafikamo nkotheke kuti tipeze njira yomwe ana athu angathandizidwiremo poti akafukufuku ambiri amemeza m'mene anthu akhalira m'mbuyo ndi mwambo wathuyu polingana nkuti nthawi yomwe akhala m'chinamwali ikula apa nkuti anzao akuphunzira. (Chinamwali is our culture from time immemorial which has to be celebrated and no woman who would want her child to grow up without being taught but now looking the time and era in which we are in, researchers have taught us and opened up our eyes that our girls miss out a lot whilst in seclusion, and for this reason we agree that it is better to find appropriate time as to when our girls can be confined unlike when schools are in session because its true, they miss out a lot and eventually stop schooling).

In line with what this parent reported, the Anamkungwi further said;

Mwambo ndi mwambo komanso kulingana ndi nthawi yomwe tilimo, nzoona kuti tifunika upeza njira yomwe tingathandizilemo ana athu kuti maphunziro awo apite patsogolo. Mwaici, kupeza nthawi yabwino yolangizilamo ana anthu osatipomwe ana ali pakati pamaphunziro ai. Tionetsetse kuti ana, auzidwa cabe ulemu ndinso m'mene angadzisamalile pomwealikudwala kumwezi ndim'menenso angasamalilenso nsalu ya mwele komanso kuonetsetsa kuti ana auzidwa zinthu zikuluzikulu zomwe ziyenera kuuzidwa atsikana amene alipafupi kulowam'mbanja. tikatero ndiko kuti ana athu angathandizidwe kuti

apite patsogolo ndimaphunziro. (Culture is culture, and looking at the era in which we are living in, it's true we need to find a way in which our girls and even the future generation can be helped so that the illiteracy levels can be reduced amongst ourselves. The best way to help our young girls is to see to it that girls are just taught respect and hygiene and how they are supposed to take care of the sanitary towels when they are having their menses. Other teachings should be preserved for older girls about to go into marriage. It's only through such that our girls can be assisted in improving their education).

Revising Age Groups for Initiations

According to Chewa customs and traditions, a girl who had their first menstrual periods were taken for chinamwali initiation. This practice did not consider the age but rather menstruation was the onset in which a girl was considered to have matured and that they must learn issues of womanhood. Girls from chinamwali considered themselves as matured enough to have their own homes. This made many get married thereby promoting early marriages in the kingdom. On the other hand, boys of between 11 to 15 years were recruited to the nyau secret society. These boys were taught on issues of manhood which included sex education. After the ceremony, most of these young boys and girls considered themselves ready to man a house. Thus, both chinamwali and nyau secret ceremonies created a capacity for high school dropout among children but also early marriages and teenage pregnancies. Kalonga Gawa Undi, however, has officially allowed only boys and girls of age that is 18 and above to attend the nyau and chinamwali initiations.

Collaboration with Teachers in Schools and Health Care Givers in Health

Teachers in schools have also played a vital role on ending early marriages and teenage pregnancies. They have also helped in pupil retention rates among others. During parents and teachers committee meetings, teachers encourage parents to take both girls and boys to school. Moreover, there is also the introduction of guidance and counselling in schools. The guidance teachers also provided guidance to pupils on what they should value in life. However, sometimes teachers become the main perpetrators of sexual harassment among school going children. Nurses and doctors also provide guidance to the young boys and girls on how to refrain from sexual activities. All clinics have the Youth Friendly Corner Department which distribute condoms to the boys and girls that are in need. This department also provides counselling to youths who are sexually active, on better methods of avoiding teenage pregnancy and STIs.

Using the Traditional Council in Implementing the Government Policies

The council plays a major role of informing and enforcing the government rules and regulations. For example, a deliberate government policy on education and

child marriage has to be communicated through the traditional council who will later inform and enforce it on its subject. The desired punishment for the would-be offenders is then pronounced. Thus, promoting education and ending early child marriages. This, in return, brings a positive development to the country at large. One of the Indunas interviewed said this;

'It is therefore worth mentioning that the traditional council is the backbone of the entire chiefdom and without it chaos can be unavoidable. It is also in the helm of conflict resolution amongst subjects. For example, people go there to be judged just like it happens in the local court, hearing from both sides then passing on the judgement based on the crime and those found guilty are given punishment. The other role of the council is to collect and distribute the land to the members of its chiefdom. If a person wants a land which he or she can use either for farming or building a house, there is a procedure to follow. The council does not only give the land to but also implements the government policies including ending early child marriage. Those who do not obey are reported to the Council and discipline is instituted.' (Induna 1 Personal communication, August 31, 2019).

Challenges Faced in Implementing Measures on Ending Child Marriages

The chiefdom faced several challenges in implementing the measures put in place to end early marriages. These challenges include lack of resources to fund children who come from low socio-economic status. For example, there are students who perform very well in national examinations but their parents cannot afford to pay for their school fees, some withdraw from school in their ninth grades and others completed their Grade Twelve but no sponsorship to go for tertiary level. The article looked at challenges in two dimensions namely; challenges in promoting child education and in ending early marriages.

Challenges in Promoting Child Education

Poverty

About 75% of the rural population in Zambia is in poverty, and the Chewa's are not an exception (Ministry of National Development Planning, 2018). Thus, poverty remains a major challenge in promoting child education in Chewa Kingdom. It is noted that most of the families are living in extreme poverty. Most people in rural areas depend on farming to earn money. For the past four years, however, the kingdom has not been experiencing favourable rainfall patterns. This has reduced agricultural production and, therefore, worsening poverty levels among the Chewa people. The majority of the parents are unable to take their children to school because they do not have financial support. Moreover, certain children were orphans who lacked both financial and family support.

Long Distance to Schools

It was explained that long distance to schools was another challenge faced in Gawa Undi chiefdom. Most schools are located far from one to another. In some areas, learners walk 2 to 7 kilometers to schools. Children of younger age find it difficult to go to school. This results in most of the children starting their grade 1 later than 7 years. Others resort to being absent from class. Thus, long distance to schools not only lead to absenteeism but also low retention rates among pupils.

Lack of Schools

There are few schools in rural areas. Secondary schools are very scarce and mostly located in urban districts. It is reiterated that sometimes pupils pass to secondary school but the long distances to school makes them dropout from school. Pupils travel long distances to Grade 8 or 10 where they rent and cook for themselves. This increases the burden to parents as they strive to pay both tuition fees as well as the money for the up keeps of their child at school. This becomes difficult for parents to manage and hence, most of the children end up dropping out from school.

Lack of Family Support

It was explained that most of the parents did not value education. This is highly attributed to ignorance among parents. Instead of sending their children to school, some parents sent their children especially boys to look after cattle. In such families, children were not given enough food or money when going to school and such children were not motivated to go to school. This has contributed significantly to low retention rate.

Challenges in Ending Early Marriages

Poverty

It was also noted here that poverty was a major driver to early marriages in the communities. Most parents were illiterate and did not encourage their children to go to school. Thus, they saw wealth in their children especially the girl child once she reached puberty. Some parents marry off their girls due to three main reasons; first, they want to earn something especially dowry or Lobola paid in form of money or animals. Some parents stated that when a child is married, she reduces a burden at their homes. Children such as girls engage themselves in sexual relations in order to source for money for their daily needs. These factors increased the levels of early marriages in the Chewa Kingdom.

Lack of Compliance to Measures on the Practice of Nyau and Chinamwali Initiations.

It was noted that despite the different measures against the practice of chinamwali and nyau secret society initiations, some villages still practiced these initiations during school days. The practices of these ceremonies were common in places far from schools and roads (Induna 2). Some people still believed that chinamwali and nyau initiations were part and parcel of the history and culture of the Chewa people. The two practices were performed as they were important culturally, morally and hygienically for the preservation of culture (Mkandawire and Daka, 2018). They provide cultural education to the young as they facilitated transmission of morals as younger ones transitioned to adulthood.

Social Media

The emergence of technology and internet is another challenge that promotes early marriages. It was seen that phones became a major platform where boys and girls learn most of the immoral behaviours. A respondent indicated that, children nowadays watch nudes and pornographic materials on social media and internet. After watching such things, they want to experiment. Unfortunately, in the process, they end up indulging themselves into sexual relationships. Consequently, levels of teenage pregnancy and early marriages became common. It was explained that such things like pornography in African cultures was not there and children could not be exposed to sexual behaviour before they become of age. This was unique to Chewa Kingdom or the rural areas but not any more.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The article demonstrated that for effective public policy implementation, the traditional leadership plays a big role. This is important as leaders are found on the ground and in remote areas where the government does not have offices and officers. In addition, traditional leaders have existing structures known as traditional councils which they use for information dissemination and enforcing of policies. The traditional leadership normally have a larger audience especially on social events such as traditional ceremonies where various messages can be disseminated to the people. The Chewa Kingdom can, therefore, be used as an example on how the government public policies can be implemented to the people. The article, therefore, makes the following recommendations:

- (a) The Government should involve traditional leaders in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of the policy performance.
- (b) The chiefdoms should always engage government in the challenges they might be facing in the implementation of the public policies.
- (c) Traditional leaders and the government should put in place stringent measures on avoiding child marriages for education. Perpetrators

including parents should be punished for marrying off young girls and boys.

- (d) Law makers should make provisions in the Constitution of Zambia that bars child marriages.

Non-Governmental Organisations, which are crowded in the urban should extend their visibility and services to the rural and help different communities in their needs.

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