

2ND ADOLESCENT GIRLS SUMMIT ON CHILD MARRIAGE

21ST TO 24TH NOVEMBER, 2018



LABADI BEACH HOTEL – ACCRA, GHANA



“ENOUGH OF THE SILENCE”

REPORT

Polycom Development Project was represented at the 2nd African Union Summit of Child Marriage in Accra Ghana from 21st to 24th November 2018. The event was attended by among other people several young women from across African countries including Kenya. Polycom Development Project works to mentor adolescent girls living in Kibera slums, were supported by UNFPA together with the Chairperson of UNFPA's Youth Advisory Board to participate in this great event.

Background

The AU Commission promotes adaptation and implementation of various instruments at regional and national levels, as well as conduct monitoring of implementation by Member States to ensure accountability. Through the framework of the AU Campaign to End Child Marriage among others, the AUC has aimed at promoting quality education and sexual and reproductive health (SRHR) services including meeting the unmet needs of married and unmarried adolescents for family planning, strengthen the evidence base needed to design and implement effective policies and programmes for reducing child marriage at scale.

Polycom Development Project in collaboration with UNFPA have been working to promote sexual and reproductive health (SRH) education and life skill among school going adolescent girls living in Kibera Slums. The Summit was a great platform for us to learn from other actors and to share our innovations on listening to girls voices through anonymous notes – The Talking Boxes.

ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH PRE-SUMMIT – 21ST – 22ND NOVEMBER 2018

Over 200 adolescent girls and young attended the pre-summit event, most of them were adolescent girls from Ghanaian schools. The Pre-summit was launched by the 2nd Lady of Ghana who shared about powerful progress on ending child marriage in Ghana.

The sessions included presentations by the AU on the current status in the continent, where child marriage is decreasing but at a very low pace; Ghanaian Minister for Gender shared about the milestones in Ghana compared to many African Counties, Femnet led the youth in making their own presentations which were very forced and targeted to the young women. A few other civil societies made their presentations as well on child marriage and the initiatives they are undertaking to mitigate the same.

There were 4 parallel thematic sessions namely;

- Human Rights, Laws and Practices
- Access to SRHR Information and Services
- Role of various stakeholders/sectors
- Frameworks and systems for addressing Child marriage

The session on Role of Various Stakeholders/sectors in ending child marriage was more relevant to Polycom's work and to learn more about what others were doing as well as share our milestones. Our less than 2 minute presentation on the Talking Boxes got several mentions thereafter and enabled us to create to establish networks with 2 organizations willing to use the same model.

The 2nd day had plenary presentations from the parallel thematic sessions, messages targeting various Stakeholders were consolidated for the main conference, some messages captured:-

To the UN and Donor Communities – Support for grassroots led organizations should be accelerated to ensure sustainability of the initiatives, since the grassroots initiatives exists beyond any funding period.

AU - Should compel the various member states to implement the frameworks that they had ratified. Most of the countries commit to the laws but never implement them an example of the Maputo Protocol.

Civil Society Organization – To work closely with the Government and other stakeholders in preventing child marriage.

Governments – Should practice what they preach, should provide protection for adolescent girls, should make education free for all adolescent girls, for as far as they are willing so that they can delay their marriage to mature up

Cultural and Religious Leaders – Should work closely with other leaders in fighting child marriage, should not use culture to justify child marriage, should come out openly and condemn the vice, they should be prosecuted if found to support child marriage.

The Media – Should be louder in condemning child marriage, should name and shame perpetrators of child marriage. Should start reporting less on politics and report on society welfare.

THE SUMMIT

Opening remarks by Ghanaian Minister for Gender, Children and Social Protection by sharing statistics of the status of Ghana as far as child marriage is concerned and the steps that have been taken by the state to mitigate the same. Remarks followed from various representatives from UNICEF, Girls Not Brides and the Commissioner of Social Affairs of the African Union Commission as well as **one youth activist who also read the message for the Pre-summit**. Then there was the official **opening by the 1st lady of Ghana**, other first ladies present were from Sierra Leone, Niger and Liberia. The first ladies stayed for the High Level meeting for the whole day, showing their commitment to the campaign on ending child marriage. Panel discussions gave room for different speakers to share about their commitment in ending child marriage.

Unique: *The first lady of Sierra Leone is a survivor of Child marriage, she used education to delay her marriage to a man who had been engaged to her when she was 12 years old. He gave up when she prolonged her education and flew to UK for further studies.*

Education is the first step towards ending child marriage, the fight can never be won if girls still drop out of school due to school fees and other related circumstances.

Parallel sessions had discussions from organizations working in various countries which demonstrated the challenges that hinder girls from pursuing their education while exposing them to child marriage.

The day ended with a short programme to launch the Compendium Laws in Ending Child marriage in Africa very late in the evening. Many participants had left.

Day 2 of the Summit

Started by a presentation from the World Bank on the African priority in ending child marriage, the presenter shared the statistics and collaboration opportunities available towards ending child marriage.

Next was a panel and experience sharing by AU Goodwill Ambassador on child marriage, AU's Special Rapporteur on child marriage, youth expert and the Director & AU Representative, Save the Child International.

The traditional leaders for a minute got the young and adolescent girls on their feet and apologized on behalf of all traditional leaders for any wrong that they had caused them in the past, especially on the derogative cultural practices that have made the women look less in the community.

Traditional leaders in the room applauded and promised to set up structures that would ensure that women girls and adolescents are respected and enjoy their rights as equal citizens and learn from those already with community structures that fight child marriage.

Parallel session discussions: -

Improving menstrual health management in Africa, accelerating an end to child marriage and change through the involvement of community traditional and religious leaders, the role of media and civil society in raising awareness

Learning points:-

- Education is free for all Ghanaian children, there have been more than 100% increase in school enrollment in less than one year as well as reduction in school dropouts especially among the girls.
- There are back to school programs for adolescent mothers which is a great step towards ensuring that the girlchild gets here education despite the challenges they go through in life. Teenage mothers have been taken back to school under the free education program and have a chance to make their lives better.
- Youth friendly clinics have been established where they can access services freely
- Traditional leaders have committed to protect the girls and to punish offenders of child marriage.
- Girls should be exposed to such platform so that they can speak for themselves.
- Schools for husbands have been established where young men are trained to be responsible adults, they also learn to understand why they should mature first before starting families.



Representing UNFPA



Power of Love with AU Ambassador

Information Booths

Stakeholders with information booths were UNFPA, UNICEF, PLAN, Right to Play, Rosaria Foundation among others. They all offered various i.e.c materials for the participants, and also gave information on Child marriage and their various services.

Unique Safe Space

Rosaria Foundation had an ongoing safe space for adolescent girls, where they would sit flat on the ground and choose a topic to discuss, they would call whoever they thought would be important for the conversations. The sitting was organic which made the girls feel free to talk, ask questions and share their stories without fear.

Our takeaway, we start this for the mentors during this implementation period with UNFPA.

Lessons Learnt

- All the sessions started so late, giving very little room for the plenary, engagement of participants was therefore so limited.
- During the High-level meeting, there were same people on 3 panels, they at some point were not able to present anything new but continued repeating themselves.
- The panels mostly consisted of adults, yet many in the audience were children, making the children unengaged and bored.

Recommendations

More spaces should be provided for cross learning among especially on stories with happy ending that can inspire the girls.

Girls led exhibitions inspire them to be good leaders, continuous mentorship of identified youth and adolescent girls leaders should be done at country and regional level to inspire other upcoming leaders and to promote women leadership.

There should be preparations in good time to enable quality participation among different stakeholders.

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