

## Implications of the Practice of Child Marriage on the State

The practice of child marriage in Lagos State has devastating implications:

It hampers the efforts of the government to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development. It also locks away women's enormous potential to help solve global problems and undermines the efforts of international communities, donors and the government to achieve the objectives of the SDGs.

It may eventually rob the state of its position as the trendsetter state in Nigeria because a high number of immature, illiterate and poor mothers will produce children with limited care. An associated outcome of this will be seen in a society with a vast population of uneducated children and teenagers from extremely poor homes engaging in a lot of social vices, which portend security risks to the society.

It may also fuel insurgency and militant activities in the State.

### NIGERIA'S CHILD MARRIAGE STATISTICS

# 23M

**Nigeria is home to the largest number of child brides in Africa. An estimate of 23 million girls and women are married off in childhood (UN 2018).**

# 49%

**of women aged 25-49 were married by age 18. NDHS 2013.**

# 18%

**and 44% of women aged 20-24 got married or in a union before they turned 15 and 18 years respectively. MICS 2016 - 17.**

# KEEPING LAGOS FREE OF CHILD MARRIAGES

## A CALL FOR ACTION

“ Child marriage is a clear demonstration of gender inequality and outright disrespect for the rights of women and girls.

In spite of the existence of the child rights law, and its status as Nigeria's most cosmopolitan and enlightened state, child and forced marriages still go on in several communities in Lagos unabated.

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According to UNICEF (2017), Child marriage is defined as a marriage of a girl or boy before the age of 18. It also refers to both formal marriages and informal unions in which children under the age of 18 live with a partner as if married.

Section 23 of the Child Right Law (2007) of Lagos states that it is a criminal offence to marry a girl under 18 years and prescribes a penalty of 5years imprisonment.

The universal declaration of human rights recognizes the right to free and full consent to a marriage, acknowledging that consent cannot be free and full when one of the individuals is not sufficiently mature to make an informed decision about a life partner. *Hence child marriage is a human rights violation.*

Research shows a negative correlation between a country's rate of child marriage and its Human Development Index (HDI) ranking. It has been established that countries where child marriage is rife, are not scoring well on their citizens' wellbeing outcomes. Nigeria is listed as one of such countries.



### Contributions of the Practice of Child Marriage on Nigeria's International Development Ratings

Vesico-vaginal fistula suffered by about 400,000 and 800,000 Nigerian women, and estimated to be the highest global occurrence.

High Maternal Mortality estimated at 814 deaths per 100,000 live births, accounting for 19% of the world's maternal mortality rate (WHO, 2017).

High Infant Mortality - 262,000 babies die at child birth accounting for the world's highest national total; UNICEF.

Deprivation of educational opportunities - 60% of the 13.2 million out of school children are girls.

Poverty: 40.1% of population in Nigeria live in poverty – NBS 2019.

It is worthy of note that, customs and traditions are susceptible to change, as the practice of child marriage has nearly disappeared in several countries like China, Indonesia, Taiwan etc. where it used to be an entrenched cultural practice about one or two generations ago.

It is therefore crucial that harmful traditional practices must be eradicated in our country Nigeria. There is an urgent need for intervention in Lagos State to put an end to this custom/practice that endangers and destroys the future of women and girls.

### ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN

#### The State Government

- Enforce community compliance to the Lagos State Child's Right Law to ensure that young girls complete their secondary school education, and the age of marriage is delayed to a minimum of 18 years.
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Create a State wide public awareness of the provisions of Lagos State Child's Right Law in relation to the practice of Child Marriage.

#### The Local Governments

Pass and enforce a Bye-Law in compliance with the Child's Right Law of Lagos State.

Work with young people – including boys to understand and build peer support on the importance of preventing child/early marriage.

#### Community Leaders/Community Development Associations

Raise awareness and commitment among parents, teachers, religious leaders and other influential adults to eradicate the practice of child marriage.

### Conclusion

Our girls have the right to experience childhood, make friends, go to school, pursue their aspirations and live a healthy life that is free from violence and other violations of their rights. The practice of child marriage robs young girls of these opportunities. Everyone should rise up to put a stop to this menace that robs the nation of its bright future.

Many local and international organisations are doing substantial work to end the practice of child marriage. There is therefore the need for sustained and coordinated support from the government. With increased commitment from all key stakeholders especially government, we have the opportunity to significantly reduce the number of child marriages in the next few years.

#### References

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