



Recommendations to SADC Heads of State and Government on Strengthening Protection and Support Mechanisms for Survivors of Child Marriage following a side event hosted by Equality Now and Partners, at the Southern African People's Solidarity Network (SAPSN) SADC People's Summit, 15 August 2025, Antsirabe, Madagascar.

Introduction

Equality Now is an international human rights organisation founded in 1992, working for the protection and promotion of the rights of women and girls worldwide. Since 1995, Equality Now has been advancing a campaign against child marriage by advocating for legal frameworks that protect women and girls from child, early, and forced Marriages and provide accountability and redress where they occur. Within the Southern Africa region, Equality Now has been advocating for the uptake of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Model Law on Eradicating Child Marriages and Protecting Children Already in Marriage, a progressive framework whose hallmark is the prohibition of child marriage under 18 without exception.

As part of the Africa End Child Marriage Campaign, on 15 August 2025, forty participants from Madagascar, Lesotho, Botswana, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Zambia, and Eswatini, including state, inter-state, and non-state actors, convened at a side event of the Southern Africa People's Summit titled "Strengthening Protection and Support Mechanisms for Survivors of Child Marriage". The event was organised by Equality Now in partnership with the STOP VIOLENCE – STOP CHILD MARRIAGE Project, Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) of Madagascar, Plan International, the SADC Parliamentary Forum (SADC PF), and the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC). Participants at the event reflected on the progress of domesticating and implementing the SADC Model Law on Eradicating Child Marriage, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, and relevant UN frameworks. Participants identified challenges, good practices, and opportunities to strengthen protection and support mechanisms for survivors. The following recommendations are submitted for consideration by SADC Heads of State and Government:

1. Legal and Policy Harmonisation

- Harmonise statutory, religious, and customary laws to eliminate contradictions, ensuring the minimum age of marriage is set and enforced at 18 years, without exceptions.
- Accelerate domestication and full implementation of the SADC Model Law on Eradicating Child Marriage, SADC Model Law on Gender Based Violence (GBV) the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Maputo Protocol and related African Union and United Nations instruments, including to ensure adoption of comprehensive laws and policies on child marriage that also take into account prevention, response, and access to support services for survivors of child marriage.

2. Evidence-Based Policies and Data Systems

- Establish national child rights observatories, disaggregated data collection systems, and child surveillance mechanisms to track the incidence, prevalence, and impact of child marriage.
- Ensure data includes information on education, healthcare, access to justice, and the well-being of survivors of child marriage.

3. Survivor Protection and Support Services

- Ensure prosecution of child marriage cases to end impunity.
- Establish an Anti-Child Marriage Fund to ensure adequate budget allocation to finance survivor protection programmes, setting up of safe homes, supporting children who are under threat of child marriage, want to escape or leave child marriage, foster care, counseling, and reintegration services.
- Guarantee free and accessible healthcare, psychosocial support, rehabilitation, education, and legal services for survivors and their children.
- Develop standard operating procedures to ensure all facilities and services are survivor-centered and uphold the rights, dignity, and safety of survivors.

4. Multisectoral Collaboration and Capacity Strengthening

- Strengthen coordination across health, education, justice, and social services ministries to deliver comprehensive protection and prevention responses.
- Develop and strengthen the capacity of law enforcement and judiciary; as well as traditional, community, and religious leaders, ensuring they are equipped to implement survivor-centered interventions.
- Provide adequate budget allocations, technical support, and tools to duty bearers to enforce laws and deliver services effectively.

5. Community Engagement and Social Norms Change

- Actively engage traditional, religious, and community leaders in awareness campaigns, advocacy, and law enforcement.
- Support community networks, centers, and watch committees to prevent child marriage, provide safe reporting spaces, and support reintegration of survivors into families, schools, and communities.

6. Education and Empowerment of Girls

- Guarantee equitable and accessible school re-entry policies for pregnant and married girls.
- Accelerate curriculum reforms to include knowledge on child marriage prevention, rights awareness, access to justice, and available protection and support services.

7. Accountability and Oversight

- Develop and implement monitoring and evaluation frameworks for instruments and capacity dedicated to tracking, documenting, and measuring progress to strengthen accountability to state obligations.

- Strengthen parliamentary monitoring and oversight to ensure compliance with regional and international obligations, including the African Children's Charter, Maputo Protocol, and the SADC Model Laws on Child Marriage and GBV.
- Encourage parliaments to establish permanent sub-committees on ending child marriage to sustain political will and accountability.

8. Survivor and Youth Leadership

- Institutionalise survivor-led platforms to influence policy design, implementation, and monitoring.
- Ensure youth- and girl-led initiatives are embedded in national strategies, empowering young women and girls to be central actors in prevention, protection, and advocacy.

Conclusion and Call to Action.

These recommendations, aligned with the SADC Model Law on Child Marriage and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, emphasize the need for political will, legal clarity, survivor-centered services, community ownership, and adequate funding. By adopting and implementing these measures, SADC Heads of State and Government can accelerate the eradication of child marriage, protect survivors, and uphold the rights and dignity of children across the region.