

Ambassadors Against Child Marriage in Zimbabwe

A program by The Women Advocacy Project Trust

1. Period: October 1, 2018 – December 31, 2019.

2. Area: Five different communities in Harare, Zimbabwe: Mbare, Hopley, Epworth, Waterfalls, and Chitungwiza.

3 Background and need:

Child marriage has a devastating impact on girls' health, safety, education, and lifelong ability to realize a range of essential human rights. According to UNICEF, one third of all girls in Zimbabwe marry by the age of 18. Child marriage was outlawed in 2016, but it still continues as many girls lack critical understanding of their sexual and reproductive health and many families force girls who fall pregnant to marry.

Since 2012, WAP has worked to end child marriage and empower women and girls in Harare, Zimbabwe. Through our women's economic empowerment and youth training programs, we have forged strong ties to the communities in which we work and developed an understanding of their unique challenges. Consistently in our work on the ground, we have seen that educating girls about the dangers of child marriage can be a powerful deterrent. We have also seen that Zimbabwe's widespread lack of comprehensive adolescent sexual and reproductive health education combined with lingering social norms which tie a girl's perceived "purity" to her families' honor drive child marriage in both urban and rural areas.

During June and July 2018, WAP conducted a needs assessment in which we interviewed 136 women and girls in the Mbare, Epworth, Hopley, Waterfalls, and Chitungwiza communities in and around Harare. This assessment – layered on top of WAP's years of experience working in the community – revealed that child marriage in Zimbabwe has several key drivers: serious gaps in girls' understanding of sexual and reproductive health, harmful social norms which tie a girl's perceived "purity" to her families' honor, and the belief among both girls and communities that child marriage is an acceptable and viable path out of poverty.

Reproductive health: WAP's research has shown that impoverished girls became pregnant very young, due to a lack of opportunity and limited knowledge of sexual and reproductive health. These pregnancies then led girls to leave school and marry. The vast majority of child marriages we have documented are unions between girls and adult men; this dynamic creates a power imbalance in which girls have limited ability to negotiate safe sex and make decisions about pregnancy and healthy birth spacing.

According to UNFPA, only 4% of Zimbabwean girls between the ages of ten and nineteen have a comprehensive understanding of pregnancy. The same report found that sexual education in school is rare and that 43% of parents do not talk to their children about sex.

These statistics were borne out by WAP's consultations in the field. Take for example, Tinotenda (pseudonym) one of our beneficiaries from the Hopley neighborhood in Harare. She married at age 17, after discovering that she was pregnant. "My boyfriend was the one who told me that I was pregnant, I didn't know about those things then," Tinotenda told WAP. When her father learned of the pregnancy, he threw her out of the house – effectively forcing her to marry.

Harmful social norms: Stories like Tinotenda's are not uncommon. One woman we spoke to, Angeline, was forced to marry at age seventeen after her aunt spotted her out with a boyfriend. Angeline's family suspected that she might be sexually active and forced her to marry the boy to preserve their reputation.

Discriminatory social norms which link a girl's perceived "purity" to her family's honor are among the factors which push girls into marriage. We have seen that young women and girls who become pregnant, stay out late, are seen in the company of a suspected boyfriend, or are otherwise thought to be sexually active are often forced into marriage.

Mentoring and education: The needs assessment, also reaffirmed our belief that training and mentoring are essential for keeping vulnerable girls out of marriage. When our team met young women under age 18, we asked them what they knew about child marriage. Girls who have participated in WAP's training programs universally said that child marriage "causes many challenges" for women and leaves them vulnerable to health risks, violence, and poverty. They all emphasized the importance of waiting for adulthood to marry.

Of the girls interviewed who have not participated in WAP's programs, the vast majority said that they knew "nothing" about child marriage. But we found a significant exception to this group: girls who had a close friend or family member who married as a child overwhelmingly say that child marriage causes problems and that they want to wait until they are grown to marry. We believe this data underscores how powerful mentoring can be in terms of changing attitudes toward child marriage. Many women felt that marriage was a way to escape poverty, but many who had seen their sisters marry young knew better.

Even in dire circumstances, marriage is not a girl's best option. Abigail, one of WAP's beneficiaries experienced an incredibly dire situation at home last year. Her parents abandoned her, and the relatives she went to stay with cast her out of the house after she tried to find her father. At 17, Abigail was all alone in Harare with no one to support her. She considered getting married as a way out, but WAP's programs convinced her otherwise: "I couldn't stand up for myself as a girl. I didn't know my rights as a girl. I couldn't open up and tell someone about my situation. Now I have the confidence to speak out. I almost got married at 17. When we had a seminar with WAP, I learned about child marriage and what it does to girls' futures. No matter how bad the situation is – now I wouldn't think about getting married."

Abigail is a promising student. When her headmaster learned of her situation he agreed to pay her school fees himself. Even with that support, Abigail works all the time she is not in school to feed herself and rent a small windowless room where she sleeps on the floor. WAP believes that young women like Abigail would make ideal ambassadors – as they will be able to speak to their peers from a place of understanding and experience.

WAP's 2018 needs assessment led us to conclude that three elements must be included in any program to fight child marriage in Zimbabwe: filling gaps in sexual health education, combatting harmful social norms, and providing girls with the confidence and guidance to resist early marriage. We are now piloting an innovative new program, Ambassadors Against Child Marriage, which will combat these interconnected drivers of child marriage.

WAP has several years of experience running anti-child marriage training programs based on the Girls' Not Brides "Stand Up, Speak Out" youth activism training manual. We have consistently seen that girls are the most effective educators about the dangers of child marriage and when equipped with knowledge and confidence they can be powerful change agents in their communities. We believe this program has the potential to bring sustainable change in the communities in which it is launched.

4. Beneficiaries:

WAP's Ambassadors Against Child Marriage program will provide essential mentorship and sexual health education to girls in five different communities in Harare, Zimbabwe: Mbare, Hopley, Epworth, Waterfalls, and Chitungwiza. Each ambassador will work to reach a group of at least forty girls, and through them their friends and families.

The five Ambassadors will also be beneficiaries of the program, which through financial support and rigorous anti-child marriage training will enable them to be strong voices for change in their communities and Zimbabwe's next generation of women's rights activists.

5. Goals:

Our goal is to select five gifted girls to work with us as Ambassadors for reproductive health and against early marriage. Their task will be to mentor other more vulnerable girls, answer their questions about sexual and reproductive health, and lead trainings and counseling sessions in their communities. If a girl is at risk of being forced into marriage by her family, the ambassador will act as a first line of response and notify WAP's staff who can then intervene with the family.

Through this innovative new approach, we will reach five communities in and around Harare and in the course of the year, train over 250 girls in reproductive health. The "Ambassadors Against Child Marriage" program will empower an amazing group of girls to become the first line of response when their peers are at risk of marriage and allow them to lead the global fight for women's health for years to come.

- a) *Short-term goal (2018-2019):* Five ambassadors will train 250 girls in their respective communities in Zimbabwean law, the dangers of child marriage and reproductive health. With WAP's team they will prevent forced marriages. This pilot group will allow us to test and refine the program and show how this new approach can be defined and scaled.
- b) *Long-term goals for WAP and the Advocacy Project (by 2022):* The ambassadors model will be widely replicated in Zimbabwe in both urban and rural areas and endorsed by Zimbabwe's government and international organizations working on child marriage. The program will be implemented in other regions with high rates of child marriage.

6. 2018 – 2019 activities:

In 2018-2019, WAP will select a pilot group of five "Ambassadors against Child Marriage." These ambassadors will be selected through a competitive application process based on their leadership potential, commitment to girl's rights, educational or professional experience, and financial need. WAP aims to select a diverse group of young women from the five communities in which we have the strongest ties: Mbare, Hopley, Epworth, Waterfalls, and Chitungwiza. We aim to include both girls in school and girls who have left school as well as young mothers in order to maximize the program's reach to women outside an educational sphere, who are often at elevated risk of child marriage and unintended pregnancy.

Once selected, the Ambassadors will be awarded a stipend to help cover either school or living expenses and they will enter into a formal, year-long contract in which they will work as Woman Advocacy Project "Ambassadors against Child Marriage."

Ambassadorships will begin with an intensive training period at WAP headquarters in Harare. The trainings will be guided by the SAfAIDS "A Guide to Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) Rights and

Responsibilities for Young People in Zimbabwe,” the Youth 2 Youth, “Sexual and Reproductive Health Training Manual for Young People” for Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Girls Not Brides’ “Stand Up, Speak Out” youth activism training manual to end child marriage (which WAP has been using to conduct anti-child marriage seminars for the past three years). The curriculum will also include: education about child marriage and its effect on girls’ health, education, safety, and earning potential; and information about girls’ rights under both international and Zimbabwean law.

Once their training is complete, each ambassador will be responsible for deliverables formally articulated in their Ambassadorship contracts. These deliverables will include: child marriage data collection, leading a weekly “Give Us Books, Not Husbands” clubs to discuss child marriage and reproductive health, holding sessions for personal counseling, and keeping an open line of communication with WAP if a girl in her community is in danger of forced marriage or is experiencing abuse.

The weekly clubs will compliment WAP’s ongoing, “Give Us Books, Not Husbands” campaign. The curriculum will mirror the training given to Ambassadors at WAP Headquarters during the beginning of the fellowship. These clubs will serve as an open and safe space for the Ambassador and her peers to discuss the issues facing girls and take substantive steps to provide essential information which can help keep girls healthy and out of marriage.

Ambassadors will provide targeted training sessions about sexual education, safe sex, contraception, consent, STIs and HIV/AIDS. They will also be prepared with information about free and affordable health care services in their community for girls who need specific medical assistance.

If a girl is at risk of forced marriage due to pregnancy or experiencing abuse at home, the Ambassador will contact the Woman Advocacy Project’s staff, who can then intervene with the girls’ parents or the authorities. This is a new approach which will not only expand WAP’s proven training techniques, but also empower girls to be the first line of response when one of their peers is at risk of marriage or harm.

Finally, the Ambassadors will join Woman Advocacy Project staff as trainers at child marriage prevention events in both Harare, and in Zimbabwe’s rural areas—which have high rates of teen pregnancy and child marriage and very few prevention programs.

a) Objective: Select 5 ambassadors (by end-2018)

Description: WAP will use its network in schools and communities to solicit ambassador applications, select finalists, conduct interviews and make final offers by the beginning of September 2018. All selected girls will receive stipends for school tuition or living expenses in 2019.

Results:

- Outputs: profiles of the five ambassadors on the WAP website; five completed and signed ambassador contracts.
- Outcomes: Pilot class of ambassadors are selected, and ready to begin training in October 2018.

b) Objective: train the five Ambassadors in girls’ rights under Zimbabwean law, the harms of child marriage, peer mentorship, and sexual and reproductive health.

Description: Each Saturday, during October and November of 2018 WAP’s Executive Director and staff will hold ambassador training sessions at WAP’s Headquarters in Harare. The curriculum will be guided by the SAfAIDS “A Guide to Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH)

Rights and Responsibilities for Young People in Zimbabwe,” the Youth 2 Youth, “Sexual and Reproductive Health Training Manual for Young People” for Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Girls Not Brides’ “Stand Up, Speak Out” youth activism training manual to end child marriage (which WAP has been using to conduct anti-child marriage seminars for the past three years). The curriculum will also include: education about child marriage and its effect on girls’ health, education, safety, and earning potential; and information about girls’ rights under both international and Zimbabwean law.

Results:

- Outputs: a total of eight training sessions, with evaluations completed by each ambassador at the training midpoint and conclusion.
- Outcomes: The Ambassadors gain a comprehensive understanding of the issues which drive child marriage in their communities and the best ways to help their peers mitigate these challenges. They will gain an understanding of Zimbabwean law, human rights law, sexual and Reproductive health, youth activism, free and affordable health referrals in their communities, and best practice for peer leadership and mentorship. They will be thoroughly prepared to talk to their peers and have developed a strong line of communication with WAP’s team.

c) Objective: Each Ambassador will establish a weekly “Give Us Books, Not Husbands” Club in her community.

Description: Each club will be open to all girls in the community. Club activities will follow the WAP ambassadors training curriculum, while also being targeted to the individual community and the club’s participants. Activities will include: training on Zimbabwe’s marriage laws, discussions of human rights, trainings on reproductive health, and outreach activities including the production of small plays about child marriage.

Results:

- Outputs: Each ambassador will lead roughly 40 club sessions and carry out anti-child marriage outreach with the club.
- Outcomes: beneficiaries given essential anti-child marriage training through the clubs. Clubs will then work to expand outreach activities and child marriage prevention actions to the larger community through performances and other events.

d) Objective: Identify 25 girls at high risk of child marriage.

Description: Through the clubs and community outreach, WAP Ambassadors will identify 25 vulnerable girls at high risk and actively work to keep them out of marriage through sustained and personalized mentorship.

Results:

- Outputs: Ambassadors will hold weekly counseling sessions with the identified vulnerable girls.
- Outcomes: beneficiaries and their families are identified by February 1. Personalized mentorship begins thereafter.

e) Objective: Ambassadors work to stop forced marriages.

Description: WAP Ambassadors will identify girls at risk of forced marriage because of pregnancy or suspected sexual activity. If a girl in this position seeks their help, the Ambassadors will notify WAP's staff, who will intervene with the girl's family.

Results:

- Outputs: Ambassadors notify WAP staff of girls at risk of marriage, WAP staff intervene.
- Outcomes: beneficiaries prevented from marrying, families educated about the dangers of child marriage.

f) Objective: Ambassador's change attitudes, provide essential knowledge, and prevent marriages.

Description: WAP Ambassadors training and mentorship activities will prevent early and forced marriage in their communities.

Results:

- Outputs: numbers of participants at "Give Us Books, Not Husbands" clubs, database of WAP interventions with girls and families.
- Outcomes: vulnerable girls are fortified to resist marriage.

g) Objective: Provide economic support for beneficiary girls and their families.

Description: WAP will develop small scale economic support projects for girls and their families who agree to resist marriage. This will involve an income generation activity tailored to the specific community and might include raising chickens, hair braiding training, or embroidery. The Advocacy Project will raise at least \$1,000 through crowdfunding in summer 2019. Ultimately, this will evolve into a sustaining cooperative.

Results:

- Outputs: Development of a community specific income generation activity.
- Outcomes: Women and families who resist child marriage will be economically supported, breaking the cycle of poverty which fuels child marriage.

h) Objective: promote the youth led Ambassadors model in Zimbabwe and internationally.

Description: WAP will work with the Advocacy Project in the US and with other international partners, including Girls not Brides, to promote the Ambassadors model and have it adopted by at least one international agency. This could include attendance at an international meeting (for example, the Girls Not Brides General Meeting or the UN Human rights council.) The Advocacy Project and WAP will promote the program and produce content about its activities on their respective websites.

Results:

- Outputs: 25 Ambassador profiles on the WAP site by end 2019; 10 outreach meetings by WAP with ambassadors, coverage in the media; one international meeting is attended.
- Outcomes: WAP ambassadors model is clearly defined and attracting international support by the end of 2019.

7. Monitoring and Evaluation:

The Ambassadors program will be carefully monitored and evaluated by WAP staff. At the beginning of the Program, each ambassador will receive a formal contract listing her deliverables and their timeframe for completion and submission. Each term, the Ambassador will be required to systematically collect data on the situation of young women and girls in her respective community, lead a weekly “Give Us Books, Not Husbands” club, and hold weekly slots open for counseling sessions in which her peers may come to her for individualized advice or questions.

Ambassadors will carefully record their activities and confidential information about girls who seek their advice to help WAP assess the specific needs of their community. WAP staff will hold bi-weekly check ins with Ambassadors and be available to support them, should they face challenges in their work.

WAP will collect comprehensive data about the number of young women and girls trained through this program, which will be updated every six months to indicate the program’s effectiveness.

- Baseline survey of girls considered threatened by marriage (by March 1, 2018).
- Bi-monthly monitoring and reporting on child marriage by Ambassadors (May 2019 – December 2019).
- End year survey showing whether Give Us Books, Not Husbands club participants are married, or plan to be married (December 2019).

8. Staff and management:

- Constance Mugari, Executive Director (fulltime)
- Dickson Akenga Mnyaci, Programme Officer (fulltime)
- Five WAP Ambassadors Against Child Marriage (part-time, on scholarship)
- Advocacy Project Peace Fellow (fulltime April 1 to November 31, 2019)

9. Budget and fundraising (October 1, 2018 to 2019):

- Program plan and budget by end August 2018
- Budget estimate: \$7,500 in 2018; \$20,000 in 2019
- Money sources: crowdfunding (\$3,000 in 2018-2019); Rockflower (\$4,000); Spark (\$2,000)