



# INTEGRATING THE RESPONSE TO CHILD MARRIAGE IN HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS

# Engaging Feminist Civil Society Actors to End Child Marriage in East Africa



## PARTNERS

### The Women's Refugee Commission

*The Women's Refugee Commission (WRC), a research and advocacy organization that works to advance equitable and inclusive transformative change for women, children, and young people in the response to crises and displacement, WRC serves as the initiative's coordinating lead and provides technical support to the research and consortium-building components.*

### Rozaria Memorial Trust

*Rozaria Memorial Trust (RMT) is a non-profit that supports girls and women in East and Southern Africa through innovative initiatives that promote education, health, and entrepreneurship. In this initiative, RMT works to conceptualize and translate research into action with partners, fostering strong, local commitment and ownership as well as deeper collaboration and coordination.*

### King's College London

*King's College London (King's) is an academic institution that has a large number of research projects, across all Faculties, which are contributing to progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. In this initiative, King's provides technical support to the initiative's action research on implementing effective child marriage programming across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and sectors.*

## THE INITIATIVE

"Integrating the Response to Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings" is a two-year initiative (January 2021–December 2022) to engage feminist and women-led civil society organizations, experts, and practitioners to learn how best to enhance coordination and collaboration with humanitarian actors to end child marriage and support already married girls in forcibly displaced and crisis-affected communities in East Africa. The initiative is coordinated by the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC), Rozaria Memorial Trust (RMT), and King's College London (King's).

Through participatory action research, this initiative works to identify gaps in existing practice to prevent and respond to child marriage and the needs of married adolescent girls impacted by conflict and displacement in the region. It also aims to identify promising gender-transformative approaches to prioritize effective strategies to end the harmful practice. We are working in partnership with feminist leaders to develop advocacy goals and evidence-based strategies to influence regional and national humanitarian responses and policies that combat child marriage.

**This brief provides an overview of the approach and the key advocacy and research activities undertaken in the first three phases of the initiative.**

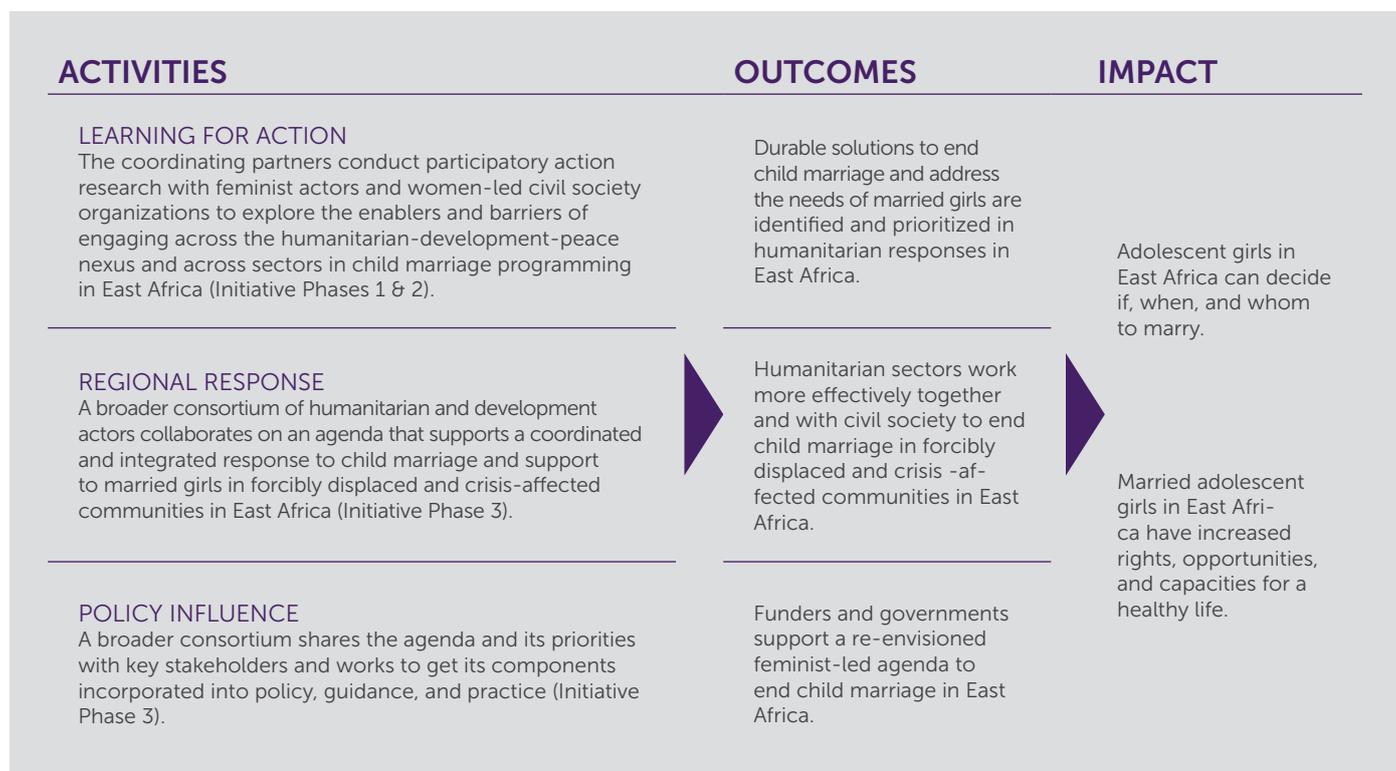
## OUR APPROACH

Our approach centers on strong dialogue and collaboration between the initiative's coordinating partners – WRC, RMT, and King's – and among a wider consortium of development and humanitarian partners working to prevent and respond to child marriage in humanitarian settings in East Africa.

The success of this approach depends on the wider consortium of partners reflecting on both the initiative's research and their own experiences to co-create a concerted, feminist change agenda that promotes collaboration across humanitarian sectors and among practitioners and policymakers working to prevent this harmful practice and support the needs of married girls. This participatory process is proving to play a critical role in building a localized and contextualized evidence base. It is also critical to understanding areas of consensus among feminist actors and women-led civil society organizations on what supports and what hinders effective, integrated child marriage programming in the region.

## OUR PATHWAY TO IMPACT

Systemic change is needed to ensure girls are valued, safe, and able to reach their full potential. We believe that gender-transformative change is needed to ensure girls can make their own decisions about if, when, and whom to marry.



## OVERVIEW OF KEY ACTIVITIES

To achieve these impacts, a series of activities was undertaken over three phases of the initiative as described below.



### PHASE 1: INFORM

During the first phase (January–September 2021), a systematic scoping review was conducted to explore evidence on the dimensionality and effectiveness of existing interventions used to prevent child marriage in crisis-affected contexts. The review placed particular emphasis on interventions that are multi-level and/or multi-sectoral, as well as on the more qualitative factors that were identified to contribute to programmatic measures of success or failure.

Learnings from this review were used to inform Phase 2's research design and methodology, including the use of the Delphi technique to draw consensus across a diverse range of practitioners expertise in prevention and risk mitigation programming for child marriage in the region. Phase 1 learnings were also used to develop evidence-based advocacy messaging that was delivered during a panel discussion at the 2021 African Girls Summit and at a side event to the

4th Gender Is My Agenda Campaign (GIMAC) RECs Meeting. The messaging detailed the key enablers and barriers to implementation of strategies to end child marriage and respond to the needs of girls who have already experienced child marriage. (See box: Research Informing Action for more information)

### PHASE 2: INSPIRE

Phase 2 (October 2021–May 2022) used a responsive research design and consensus-building methodology to engage actors from feminist and women-led civil society organizations with experience working with crisis-affected populations on what supports and hinders effective, integrated child marriage programming in East Africa.

Beginning in October 2021, three online participatory research workshops were conducted in the lead-up to the African Girls Summit. The workshops brought together key actors working in child marriage

programming to explore child marriage prevention, risk mitigation, and multi-sectoral workings within development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding contexts.

The Delphi method, a technique used to build consensus on key topics and identify gaps through structured and iterative feedback rounds (in this case, via a multi-round online questionnaire), was used to support the processes of reflection by a broader range of actors from feminist and women-led humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding organizations to seek consensus on what is essential for child marriage programming to be successful, what prevents child marriage programming from being successful, and the elements of collaboration across sectors and the humanitarian-development-peace nexus that are integral to effective child marriage programming. Engagement in the surveys was substantial and resulted in a high level of consensus on enablers,

barriers, and collaboration on strategies that can be used to prevent child marriage or respond to the needs of already married girls.

Following the Delphi survey, key informant interviews were conducted with leading feminist activists in East Africa working at the community, national, and regional levels to further unpack the results and their influence on programming and policies in the region.

### PHASE 3: INNOVATE

Phase 3 (June–December 2022) continues to engage a wider consortium of actors in East Africa, including those who work more broadly across the multiple and intersecting systems, to reflect on the research findings and develop innovative solutions to end child marriage. This consortium will draw on learnings from earlier phases to support innovations in child marriage programming, advocacy, and policy, and support to married girls in East Africa.

## RESEARCH INFORMING ACTION:

### USING THE NHANGA APPROACH TO PUSH FORWARD OUR PATHWAY TO IMPACT

On July 11, 2022, the initiative held a Nhang meeting with adolescent girls and key policymakers, civil society actors, and African Union Commission officials during the 4th Gender Is My Agenda Campaign (GIMAC) RECs Meeting in Lusaka, Zambia.

A Nhang is a traditional practice used to create an intergenerational space of women-girl mentorship in the Shona/Bantu culture. This approach provided an innovative and safe platform for event participants to breakdown traditional institutional and relational power hierarchies and use emotions and storytelling to reflect on the findings from the research and discuss the elements of coordination and collaboration that are vital to end child marriage in forcibly displaced and crisis-affected communities in East Africa.

#### Recommendations from the Nhang included:

- Working more directly with adolescent girls and their families, given their critical role in ending the harmful practice, and similarly, promoting family-centered approaches
- Including government representatives in the consortium, given their influence on policy and practice,
- Expanding consortium representation and initiative focus to Southern Africa, given cross-regional work and shared goals.

These recommendations will inform the engagement of a wider consortium to develop innovative solutions to end child marriage and support married girls in Phase 3.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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