INTEGRATING THE RESPONSE TO CHILD MARRIAGE IN HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS
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.
BRIEF | ENGAGING FEMINIST CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS TO END CHILD MARRIAGE IN EAST AFRICA

**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.

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<td><strong>LEARNING FOR ACTION</strong></td>
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<td>The coordinating partners conduct participatory action research with feminist actors and women-led civil society organizations to explore the enablers and barriers of engaging across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and across sectors in child marriage programming in East Africa (Initiative Phases 1 &amp; 2).</td>
<td>Durable solutions to end child marriage and address the needs of married girls are identified and prioritized in humanitarian responses in East Africa.</td>
<td>Adolescent girls in East Africa can decide if, when, and whom to marry.</td>
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<td><strong>REGIONAL RESPONSE</strong></td>
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<td>A broader consortium of humanitarian and development actors collaborates on an agenda that supports a coordinated and integrated response to child marriage and support to married girls in forcibly displaced and crisis-affected communities in East Africa (Initiative Phase 3).</td>
<td>Humanitarian sectors work more effectively together and with civil society to end child marriage in forcibly displaced and crisis-affected communities in East Africa.</td>
<td>Married adolescent girls in East Africa have increased rights, opportunities, and capacities for a healthy life.</td>
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<td><strong>POLICY INFLUENCE</strong></td>
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<td>A broader consortium shares the agenda and its priorities with key stakeholders and works to get its components incorporated into policy, guidance, and practice (Initiative Phase 3).</td>
<td>Funders and governments support a re-envisioned feminist-led agenda to end child marriage in East Africa.</td>
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**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.

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**Research Informing Action:**

**Using the Nhanga Approach to Push Forward Our Pathway to Impact**

On July 11, 2022, the initiative held a Nhanga 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 Nhanga 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 Nhanga 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.

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**For More Information**

If you would like more information on the initiative please contact:

Janna Metzler | associate director for research, WRC
JannaM@wrcommission.org.

Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda | executive director, RMT & Africa Union Goodwill Ambassador on Ending Child Marriage
nyaradzayi@rozaria.org

Aisha Hutchinson | lecturer, King’s College London
aisha.hutchinson@kcl.ac.uk.

Monica Giuffrida | research advisor, WRC
MonicaG@wrcommission.org.

Loveness Mudzuru | programmes and research associate, RMT
loveness@rozaria.org.

Katrina Kiss | research assistant and graduate teaching fellow, King’s College London
kath.kiss@kcl.ac.uk.