I will marry when I want to!!

Voices of Malawian girls
My name is Irene Phiri
I leave at Mtsasa
I am 13 years old

My poem is I will marry when I want

I will marry when I want
my mother can't force me to marry
my father can't force me to marry
my brother and sister can't force me to marry
no one can't force me to marry

I will marry when I want
even if you beat me
even if you chase
even if you do any thing wrong
to me but I will marry when I want

I will marry when I want
until I get well educated
until I am well grown up
I will marry when I want

Thank you
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I will marry when I finish school and start a job.
THE MISSING VOICES:

Over the last three years there has been a constant debate on the legal minimum age of marriage in Malawi, both in civil society as well as in Parliament and within Government. Over the whole period and in the whole debate, for Girls Empowerment Network (GENET) it has been painful to observe the lack of consultation and participation of the girls of Malawi, the ones that are going to be most affected by a legal age of marriage. With financial support from the Canadian Fund for Local Initiative we were able to make a start filling this gap.

We asked for girls’ opinions and dreams for the future, for their experiences and their current situation. The results we present here, mainly in their own words. Above all other things we noticed that the girls we communicated with, do not waste much of their time dreaming on: No romancing here, no (rich) prince to make them happy ever after, no pink clouds to be seen.

Malawian girls know, from experience and from the often grim reality of their mothers’ lives what is in store for them. But there might be not much romance there is something else that we at GENET consider a very valuable asset: There is rebellion in abundance.

There is rebellion and determination not to give in to efforts to deprive them of their right to education and economic independence.

Time and time again we come across the concept that women and girls in Southern Africa do not have a voice. With this publication we seek to prove something else: Malawian girls do have a voice and a pretty strong one for that. The point is that no one is listening.

That is what we try to change.

Here is what we adults, mothers, police men, chiefs, sisters, aunts, politicians and fathers can do: We can wholeheartedly support that rebellion, by raising the minimum age of marriage for instance, by cheering girls along and by standing by them when their rights are abused. Listening to them makes for an excellent start for that.

So Please Do.

GENET team,
February 2013.
Section 22 (7) of the Constitution of Malawi says that for people between the age of 15 and 18 years, a marriage shall only be entered into with the consent of their parents or guardians. Section 22 (8) says the state shall discourage marriages between persons where either of them is under 15.

The exact wording of the Constitution (“discourage”) leads to confusion. If the State is obliged to discourage but does not prohibit, there is no legal minimum age of marriage, concludes Angela Melchiorre in a UNESCO publication. In Malawi, the common assumption is that the age of marriage is 15, but others argue that the legal age of marriage in Malawi is 18 since that is the age one can marry without consent from anybody but your partner.

The Constitution is in conflict with the common law Marriage Act from 1903 which provides that 21 years of age is the minimum age of marriage. The rational given in this common law is that persons under 21 are minors and therefore should not marry without consent of parents or guardians. This also, is in conflict with the Constitution which declares persons of 16 years old adults (and it is not very logical to refuse adults the right to marry).

The process of raising the legal age of marriage in Malawi requires a legal exercise, in order to bring the different laws in accordance and to amend the Constitution.

In Southern Africa the legal situation with regards to the age of marriage differs per country. Some countries make a difference between the legal age of marriage for boys and girls: In Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ethiopia, and Mali the legal age of marriage is 15 for girls and 18 for boys. In Tunisia the legal age of marriage for both boys and girls is 17, In Madagascar 18 and in Rwanda 21. A range of countries, Zambia, Uganda and Mozambique among them have no official minimum age of marriage.

THE PRACTICE:

According to UNICEF 9% or Malawian girls are married by 15, and at 18, 50% of Malawian girls are married. Married in the Malawian context for girls, can mean anything from being sent away by your parents to the household of the man you have been given or sold to, to a big feast with church, reception, dinner and honeymoon involved. It can also mean being send away to take care of yourself with the man who made you pregnant, or moving in with your boyfriend.

In the Malawian experience marriage and pregnancy are very closely knit together: One is supposed to follow the other within months, either way. It is therefore that the efforts to increase the legal age of marriage are often seen as key for the fight against teenage pregnancy. Early pregnancy is bad; there is a mountain of proof for that. Early pregnancy is bad for the mother, it leads to maternal mortality, and it leads to horrendous health conditions such as fistula. It is bad because it results in children having children, and children raising children. A large majority of teenage mothers face death or lifelong health issues.

According to the World Health Organisation
teenage pregnancies account for a quarter of Malawi’s maternal deaths. Figures show that the country had 460 deaths for each 100,000 births in 2009, putting Malawi among the top 25 countries with the highest maternal mortality rates. Teenage pregnancies play a role in demographic and population issues: The younger women are when they give birth for the first time, the more times they will get pregnant. Malawi is moving towards a population of 50 million in 2050, by no accounts a good idea.

There are however, also other reasons to protect girls from marriage before their body has matured and is fit for childbirth.

There are social aspects as well. Girls being married off very young often have husbands much older. They cannot pursue their education and they are fully dependent upon their husband. Domestic violence, lack of negotiation power and lack of status are hard to deal with always and even more so when you are 15 or younger.

WHY

Different socio economic factors determine the age of marriage in Malawi. Religion, Education, Region and Poverty all play a role. Over the years, research being carried out in many countries, one relationship has become very clear, everywhere and always: the relationship between girls’ education and early marriage. Send them to school, make sure that they actually learn something and the age of marriage will go up (and fertility will go down). Malawi is no exception in this respect. And as you will see in the following chapters of this publication, girls are very well aware of this.

THE DEBATE:

In 2009 the Government of Malawi made an attempt to raise the age of marriage. This was explicitly done to be able to fight teenage pregnancy and the consequent maternal mortality and morbidity. After a very public debate parliament settled for 16 years as the legal age of marriage which led to an outcry from campaigners who did not want to settle for anything under 18.

Despite the widespread opposition to the proposed law, the National Health Minister, Moses Chirambo, saw the law as a positive development. Citing early results of a study that his Ministry was conducting at the time, showing the high dropout rate of primary school girls (who are generally under the age of 16) due to pregnancy and marriage, Chirambo argued that the new law, together with intensive sex education, would help keep young girls in school. Finally the president did not assent to it and the case was put on hold.

In the debate some remarkable voices were raised: The Family Planning Association of Malawi (FPAM) stated that girls who marry at the age of 16 are exposed to pregnancy-related complications, such as obstructed labour and obstetric fistula, which are said to be common in Malawi. FPAM also made a legal argument that marriage of a 16-year-old girl is a form of child abuse, because children at that age are not equipped to give valid consent.
In a meeting of the Parliamentary Legal Affairs Committee, Malawi Law Commission assistant chief law reform officer, Chizaso Nyirongo told the members that:
“The majority of Malawians in rural areas are comfortable with a proposal allowing children to marry below the age of 16 (and often even below 14) with consent from their parents.”
However, Nyirongo defended the age (of 16), arguing research results the law body conducted in 1998 showed people in rural areas bought the proposal while urban dwellers had misgivings, a move which forced the law body to strike balance at the age of 16.
“The Malawi Law Commission consulted both urban and rural people. The view, that 15 years was okay prevailed among rural people while the urban people said 18. To strike a balance, we came up with 16, because it is not near 14 and not near 18,” he said. (vii)

This position is as unwise as it sounds. The law is supposed to be based upon the best interest of the people affected by it, not upon a compromise between two of the extremes within public opinion. Furthermore, the research that Nyirongo referred to was conducted in 1998, which is, by now, 15 years ago. Fifteen years in which the country has seen constant campaigning on gender issues. Opinions might have been changed in these 15 years.
A more recent community-based study of 500 males and females by the Women and Law in Southern Africa and The National Women’s Lobby Group found that 12% of respondents deemed early marriage as normal. (viii)

The Medical Association of Malawi (Mam) argued that Parliament did not err when passing a bill to increase the marriage age from 15 to 16 since the sex consent age has not changed and remains at 13 in the Penal Code.
The association appealed for the laws of Malawi to be completely reviewed as it does not make sense to have the sex consent age lower than the marriage:
“Currently, the law allows girls to marry after 18 years and also allows them to marry with parental consent at between 16 and 18 years, despite the age consent for sex remaining at 13”. According to Mam, maternal mortality rates involve childbirth and one cannot get pregnant without having sex.
So as long as there are teenage pregnancies from 13 years and above, there would still be high maternal mortality argued Edgar Kuchingale, MAM Chairperson, who is also a gynaecologist and obstetrician:
“What is causing women to die is pregnancy not marriage. Maternal mortality comes from pregnancies not marriages. People are not killed by their husbands, they are killed by sex.” (ix)

This is not true. Girls die from too early pregnancies and childbirth. You get pregnant from unprotected sex, within or outside marriage.
Many NGO’s argued that a girl (or boy, for that matter) of 16 belongs in school, and marriage would be an abuse of the right to education.

The Children’s Parliament advised the age of marriage to be 18.

One more position in the debate is worth discussing:
The Law is only as good as its enforcement. Several members of parliament mentioned in the debate that they did not want to vote for laws that they deem to be unenforceable.

Although it is true that countries should not have many laws that cannot be implemented, there are other factors to consider:
It would be a powerful signal from Government and Parliament to the population when Parliament would agree on a minimum age of marriage, based upon the best interest from the people involved. A minimum age of marriage might contribute to the change in attitude among those who want their daughters to marry too young. A legal minimum age of marriage would also be a weapon in the hands of those who want to fight child marriage on the ground, be it chiefs or CBOs and most importantly, girls themselves. So this publication provides the answer to the question: Who is going to implement this law? “We” is what the girls are saying: We will use it to defend our right to education and to choice.

When Joyce Banda (who is known for her dedication to Safe Motherhood) took over the presidency, her office has been lobbied from day one by international and national organisations to put the issue before Parliament once more, this time with the intend to raise the minimum legal age of marriage to 18 or 21.

This effort seems to be strongly supported by the outcomes of our research: There are as many opinions on live, love and marriage as there are girls but they are remarkably united in their disgust for a legal framework that allows their parents and guardians to have them married at 15. We did not get a single reaction defending such a rule. (x) We urge the lawmakers of Malawi to take that into account when proposing and discussing a new minimum legal age of marriage.
I want to be a banker

I want to be president
I want to be a teacher

I want to be a nurse
WHAT WE DID:

We organized a Writing Contest in 10 schools in Blantyre namely; Namame, Chichiri, Manja, Zingwangwa, Kapeni, Likulu, Nansengwe, Lunzu, Ntenjera and Matindi primary school. We targeted girls from standard 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 and from all these classes we received entrees. The youngest participant was 9 years old while the oldest was 17.

We received 1,750 entries.

We organized 6 focus group discussions of which 3 were done in communities for out of school girls and 3 in schools. 72 Girls participated in these focus group discussions.

We also did 36 personal interviews.

We organised a photo workshop for girls in which 36 girls discussed the same issues and made photographs (the illustrations in this publication) by way of an answer to the same questions.

The questions we asked were:

**What do you feel about child marriage?**
- What do you think of child marriage as girls?
- Disadvantages of child marriage?
- How would you feel if you would be forced to marry at your age?
- Do you have a friend who got married? Experiences of your friends marriages...

**What do you think is the right age for a girl to get married?**
- Why is that age right to you?
- At what age do you prefer to get married?
- Have you ever thought of not getting married? And why?

**Would you like to have the same marriage as your parents/ are your parent’s marriage a model to you?**
- What are the things you desire at your parent’s marriage?
- And what are the things that you don’t like in your parents’ marriage?

**What is your ideal or dream husband?**
- What kind of family do you like to have?
- If you wish to get married are you free to choose for yourself a marriage partner?
- Who is involved in the decision making when you/your sister want to get marriage?

**Do educated girls make bad wives?**
- What are your views on this matter?

**What do you think of relationships while in school?**
- Are relationships while in school good or bad?
- What are the consequences of having relationships while in school?
Research over many years and in many countries has come up with the three main risks for girls, connected to early marriage:

She is likely to drop out of school – most married girls will not complete secondary school, and many will become pregnant before their bodies are ready to safely deliver a child. Staying in school is one of the most important factors in reducing child marriage - girls with secondary schooling are up to six times less likely to be married than those who have little or no schooling.

She faces a higher risk for health problems, and even death – one quarter to one half of girls in developing countries become mothers before the age of 18. In fact, medical complications from pregnancy are the leading cause of death among girls ages 15-19 worldwide. Girls between the ages of 10 and 14 are five times more likely to die in pregnancy or childbirth than women aged 20 to 24; the vast majority of these deaths take place within marriage.

She is more vulnerable to violence – married girls are at higher risk of sexual and domestic violence at the hands of their husbands than women who marry later.

All these elements are being reflected in the reactions from the Malawian girls, some of them rather furious, (“You are in for a lifetime of marital rape and abuse”) others requesting protection from the law and the government against child marriage. There is no shortage of strong wording here, it is hell, prison and you might as well be death are just some of the expressions girls use when trying to describe child marriage and its consequences.

Contributions from the focus group discussions:

“To me child marriage only means going to get sexually transmitted diseases from a man you hardly know. It destroys your good future and you cannot keep track of your original dreams and make them come to pass.”

“I hate child marriage; it is a stumbling block to my bright future. It should be aborted with immediate effect. When we say a child, we mean their body is still immature both for marriage which includes child birth, raising kids and also immature to put the house in order.”

“You are regarded as his maid therefore you have to do as he says, if you do something contrary to that which he says then it is enough reason for him to beat you.”

“You have to beg for all the house needs as well as your personal needs and there is no guarantee that he will give you money let alone a slap for even having the guts to ask for it, it is like your just a beggar in your own house.”

“You may die while giving birth; many girls have been reported to die like this simply because they were too young to endure child birth.”

“Usually, when you get married at a young age, the chances of you getting sexual transmitted diseases are high because obviously you have married someone who is young and reckless with women. However if you marry someone older, it is worse because he will want to eat from different young plates and therefore infecting an innocent you at home.”
“You leave school and therefore may not have the right knowledge on how to deal with your family in times of crisis or just mere diseases.”

“Getting married at an early stage is an awful experience because you are very young and not mature enough and therefore you cannot be able to take care of a family. When you marry very young it just means your life has ended in misery because you can no longer have the life that you wanted.”

“In my opinion child marriage is the same as being killed because if I get married at a young age I will face many difficulties during birth and even a lot of violence in the home, because the man will take advantage of me. The reasons that make men to be violent is because I will not be able to provide anything at home and I am just expecting him to support me. I feel that getting married when you are not fully independent is hell.”

“It is also violence to the girl because you have terminated her future by sending her into early marriage, and also it is violating her right to education since every person has the right to education and to live peacefully”.

“Child marriage is as bad as a prison because you are not able to do your things freely, your husband bans you from visiting friends and even sometimes they can deny you to see your parents because he is feeling jealous or afraid that you will be seeing other men.”

“Child marriage has a lot of consequences, one is that when you get married very young you get infected by HIV because it can happen that your husband is also sleeping with other women apart from you and because you are young you cannot have any say on your concerns about your health.”

“And during child birth there are a lot of difficulties because your bones are not fully matured, you are on the high risk of losing your life or stop being able to bear children because of complications in child birth.”

“There are a lot of abusive husbands that just torture you, they don’t help you at home, they don’t leave money for relish and they don’t support you as they were supposed to do. When you get married very young and you are not looking as good as before the husband leaves you for other women because you are no longer attractive to him, and in the process they catch diseases and infect you.”

“When you marry at a very young age you quit school which means your future has been doomed as well. When your future is disturbed you can no longer have the pride and when a man leaves you, you have nothing to depend on hence adding one problem to the other. Poverty prevails at its best when you are not educated and I wouldn’t want to fall a victim of circumstance.”

“When a girl gets married very young she abandons her education therefore I cannot support the fact that girls should marry as young as 15 years old because by then their minds and their bodies are not fully matured and if their bodies are not well matured they can face difficulties in child bearing and they are even still in primary schools which means their intellect is still of primary school level. So I feel hurt to see a young girl getting married when she has not finished her education.”
“When a girl marries at a young age she is likely to face many problems like violence in the home from her husband because she will not have any say in any of the family matters and since she only depends on him she will choose to remain quiet and submit to every kind of abuse she can receive in the name of saving the marriage. That frustrates me a lot.”

“Another problem lies in the sense that when you marry very young you are not economically empowered and the man can chose what to do with you, he can choose not to help you at all or even leaving you with no food in the house which wouldn’t happen if you were educated enough and are able to support yourself.”

“When a girl is very young and you got pregnant you face a lot of challenges during child birth because your bones are not fully matured, therefore you and the baby can even die because the baby has not found enough passage during birth. And on the same issue of child birth you can face many complications like prolonged labour pains which sometimes can lead you into operation.”

“When you are married very young you work beyond your size. This is a terrible experience because you miss a lot, instead of playing with your friends you only think of how to take care of your family.”

“Child marriages are very bad because when the girl gets pregnant and then the marriage has ended it is always the woman who takes care of her children regardless whether she is working or not and that leads to problems of poverty because you add on yourself one problem to the other. When you are not educated obviously you cannot manage to take care of your children because you are not earning any income.”

“To me child marriage is a very painful experience whereby a girl gets married at a young age mostly because she has been impregnated and she has been forced to go and start a family. It is painful in the sense that she is too young to raise her own children.”

“Child marriage simply is getting married when you haven’t matured both physically and mentally to operate on your own.”

“Child marriage is when you get married to an older man who makes you and your parents think that he will solve all your problems, but how can you solve a problem with a problem?”

“Child marriage is being forced into marriage at fifteen simply because the law says you can get married at that age”.

“Just because your breasts have grown bigger and you have a protruding behind does not mean you are ready for marriage.”

“Complications during giving birth simply because your bones have not matured for extra strength. Some girls even get to suffer from a condition called obstetric fistula where a young lady may not have a bowel or urine control.”

“The girl is subjected to marital rape as early as 15 with a man who may be as old as her father, and at 30 years the girl will be spent and will look as old as 50.”
“Child marriage is something she has to put up with because she is too young to make any decision like child spacing, or sexual preference. So she has to submit to whatever her in-law and husband are saying.”

“A young girl misses out on her fun as a teenager if she has to deal with her marriage duties, therefore may not have the opportunity to follow her original dreams.”

“The girl is prone to domestic violence simply because she is not being as submissive as she is expected to be.”

From the personal interviews:

“Child marriage is evil because you shun the future of the child who got married whether at her own free will or forced, her future is destroyed. Therefore I cannot support this evil act of sending children into marriage. If anyone can be found to be doing this they need to face the law and answer charges. But if in this country we are not protected and it means our future is doomed as well, so if we say that a girl can marry at 15 it means we are pampering those child molesters and perpetuators of child marriage.” (Esther, 15)

“I perceive child marriage as a stumbling block to girls; it contributes to poverty in the country because it is full of uneducated women since women are the driving force of the development of the country. If you educate a woman you educate the nation but if you educate a man you educate an individual that’s where all problems come from. It’s very pathetic that people do not realize this.” (Promise, 10)

“At my age I cannot feel good to start thinking of marriage; I can feel ashamed if I can be forced to get married because the man that they will offer me to get married with will not be of my interest. But also I cannot feel comfortable because I will be scared that the man will break my vagina when I don’t want to and if I refuse to sleep with him he can end up beating me and even raping me.” (Kettie, 14)

“When a girl marries off very young obvious that person is to face a lot of trouble for example if the girl is 15 it means her body is not yet mature and can easily break her bones during child birth which can lead her into a lot of complications. Most girls lose their lives because of early pregnancies. Another problem of child marriage is that when a girl marries at a young stage it means she has abandoned school therefore she cannot be able to stand on her own and do whatever her heart desire to do.” (Maria, 14)

“Child marriage is not good because it’s a violation of human rights. If you force a child to marry it means you have killed her future and dreams. It is such a pathetic decision to force someone to get married against her wish.” (Estelle, 13)

“It is not necessary to marry at a young age because at 15 years you are still young and your bones are still tender, so when you get pregnant you can face a lot of challenges like difficulty in giving birth. And sometimes your husband can run away from you and go to another woman...
while you are pregnant and at the end you can be in a deep mess because you will not have all the care you are supposed to receive when you are pregnant.” (Patricia, 15)

“There are a lot of disadvantages of child marriage, when you marry while you are young you drop out of school and therefore you become a miserable wife because you cannot take care of yourself. Sometimes because you are uneducated you cannot be able to help your parents because you cannot work and earn your own money. When you marry as young as 15 you just add on to yourself poverty which at the end will frustrates you.” (Rose, 15)

“Child marriages are not nice, this frustrates the life of innocent girls, since most of the times they have no say, they are just being infringed. If you can get married at a tender age you find problems with child birth because your bones are not strong enough and sometimes the girl can lose her life because of unbearable circumstances that happens during birth of a child.” (Melisha, 13)

“When you marry young you become poor because you have not finished school and you are not able to look after yourself. But also when you get pregnant you face a lot of trouble during birth which sometimes they lead you into death.” (Cecilia, 15)

“When you marry young you can’t be able to find all the necessities that you want, giving birth is a problem because you are still young and cannot handle pregnancy. And since you are not educated you miss some things that are taught at the hospital during health talks.” (Esnart, 15)

“Child marriage is torture because the person you are forcing to marry feels pain in her mind. She becomes disturbed and cannot do things properly whether at home or school because she will only be thinking of the terrible things that are happening to her. She can be unhappy maybe even for the rest of her life.” (Grace, 15)

“Child marriage is a bad practice that jeopardizes the life of a young girl. I totally disagree with this malpractice. When you get married early you are forced to migrate from a rural area to urban in search for a better life. Because now you have to deal with health costs and also you’re personal needs.” (Chisomo, 14)

“My opinion on child marriage is that these are things that are keeping our country from developing because when you marry off a young person, that person is not a potential citizen to develop herself. If a person marries very young it means they have to abandon their education. So this country cannot develop at all with this situation rather we will be breeding extreme poverty in our society.” (Edith, 17)

“I am not well pleased with child marriage. As a child you meet challenges that deprive you of your childhood and which you cannot handle at a young age. As a girl you are forced into prostitution because your husband is not providing for your needs which may later lead to the acquirement of HIV infections.” (Estina, 16)

“I feel helpless because child marriage is sparked by decision makers and the people who enforce it are just doing what the law legalised. The husband is ever drunk and you do not have a
moment when you can talk as a couple and ask for some advice or just help on something. He will then end up dying quickly because of his beer leaving you as helpless as you can be. And you would be lucky if he doesn’t go from woman to woman.” (Chisomo, 14)

“It is a challenge. Girls are going in marriage simply because they have been impregnated or because they are vulnerable for help. Government should try its best to curb this malpractice. You are subject to violence where by the husband will beat you when he decides so long as he feels that what you have done is wrong. Many times the man will do this if he is very much older than the girl herself.” (Edith, 15)

“Girls under the age of 16 are five times more likely to die during pregnancy and childbirth than women in their twenties. It simply is abuse to a young girl just because she is vulnerable because of lack of resources or because of pregnancy. Premature pregnancy and motherhood are an inevitable result of child marriage. In many cases in my village girls are dying due to the consequences of child marriage. Marrying early may seem very romantic and convenient, but it has its problems. Responsibility has to be shouldered at a very young age. One has to take on household responsibilities, child rearing responsibility at a very young age. There is no adult to guide or help out. It affects your health as early pregnancy can have a negative impact on overall health, some girls have come across complications such as fistula which is when the bowel and urinary lose control.” (Fazai, 16)

“It is a violation of a girl’s right. I do not like it at all. First of all she has not finished her education which will only prove that she will be poor all her life if she does not do anything about it. You will be forced to get married to an older man because of his money who will later on just dump you. Because of this you decrease your life-span because you have not been exposed and so you do not know how to tackle things and so you are likely to fall sick and die.” (Inness, 13)

“I do not support it, not even in my next life. If you are a child you are a child, marriage is for adults. You are forced to be with someone who just impregnated you when you are young the rest of your life, making the rest of your life miserable.” (Phyllis, 17)

“I hate child marriage, it is when a young girl gets married and experiences premature motherhood. It an awful is experience. You drop out from school because now you have to take care of your husband and children. This however leads to a doomed future and therefore results into poverty.” (Chisomo, 14)

From the Letters:

“I am 15 years now and I haven’t started my menstrual periods yet. How then am I to go and get married? Well even if I had started, who would take care of my children because I am a child myself. At 15 a child hardly knows even to take good care of her, let alone to take care of her family financially. How then will she manage the logistics of her own home? We beg you decision makers to please consider these facts and revise the marriage age.” (Esther)

“A girl is not supposed to get married at the age of 15; I say so because at 15 a girl is not mature
enough to give birth. Our friends who were unfortunate and got married, today as I write, they either died at giving birth or have suffered a birth complication called fistula.” (Peace)

“I want to go to school, I want to finish my university and get my degree. I want to be a good wife who will support both her family and the community at large. How then will this be possible if I get married at 15? Help us decision makers. Help us bring our original dreams come to a reality.” (Salomy)

“It is not right for a girl to be taken to get married at 15, simply because a 15 year old is too young to look after herself and have a family of her own. Marriage comes with a responsibility and at 15, no girl would be mature enough to go through the force at giving birth therefore it may just lead to deaths of young girls whose future is very bright without marriage.” (Angella)

“Dear Madam President, I have written this letter just to let you know of some violations that are hindering girls rights. The girl child is living a miserable life both in schools and in homes. They have nowhere to run to because the environment where they were brought into is never conducive to them, some are meeting hardships of child labour and others faces rapes that are done by close relatives who were supposed to be their protectors. Our nation has denied us our human rights. If you encourage that girls can marry at 15 years old will this nation have educated girls at all? Please our president consider us a little more and have the law that will protect us so that we can have the bright future as well.” (Chimwemwe, 15)

“Marriage at 15? My jaw dropped. I couldn’t believe it; I mean how could one possibly think of marriage at such a tender age?” (Patricia)

“As a girl I strongly oppose what the government of Malawi is saying that a 15 year old girl can enter into marriage. These are the reasons behind my opposition; if the government allows this to prevail it means they are not considering us as young girls. This will encourage stubborn girls to rush into unnecessary marriages because they have the power that the government has established itself that girls can marry at that age and no one can oppose them; Another reason is that there are parents that did not go to school therefore if this bill will pass they will find opportunity to be marrying off their children when they are still young in escape of poverty, this will lead to the violation of a girls rights to education and will destroy her future. In our country if we allow girls to marry at the age of 15 years, it will lack professional nurses because most of the girls will be rushed into marriages and our country will continue to suffer. We also know that there are human rights for everyone and gender equality so if we encourage girls to enter into marriage while they are very young this will destruct the girls from doing what they can also do. So please our government sit and discuss again on this issue and see what it can be best for the girls of Malawi.” (Cathy, 12)

“By the age of 15 we are still in school and many of us are still young. How can we handle marriage at that very young age, it indeed is a misfortune that big people who are well educated can decide to do this to us. When we marry very young we do things against our wish, for example you cannot have any say on sexual matters when you get married, whether you want to have sex on that particular day or not. You just do it because your husband wants to have sex with you. You
don’t really have a right to your body you are just used as a sex object which I see as an abuse. If you can be old enough it means you can at least tell your partner about your feelings, how you want things to be working and how you can handle sex life in marriage. Apart from meeting these challenges you also face a lot of problems during child birth such as losing a lot of blood and even losing your life or the life of the child.” (Violet, 15)

“When girls marry at a very young age chances of losing their lives are high because they have not reached a good age to bear kids and most of the time they lose a lot of blood through prolonged labour pains and sometimes they give birth to premature babies. And if young girls have kids they don’t know how to take care of their babies so they are easily caught up with different diseases because they haven’t learned well of good motherhood. Since education is a key to everything I would encourage my fellow girls to work hard in school and be the better leaders of tomorrow.” (Judith, 14)

“To say the truth a person as young as 15 years old cannot handle marriage properly because at this age her mind, her bones, her body and intelligence are not well matured. So when they get into marriage all they meet is troubles because differences are very big with the husband. Sometimes your husband can abandon you together with the children and you can be suffering with them with no one to help you look after them. In the process you can start to be stressed up and be thinking a lot at the end develop a heart attack and die young and leave your children orphans. Sometimes, because of depression you can just think of committing suicide and die. In doing so you can leave your children orphans as well. So it is not good to marry when you are not ready to face pressures of life. It is better to reserve yourself from all these kind of abuses that are happening in the homes and work hard in school so that at the end you can be independent.” (Loness, 12)

“It is not wise to put 15 years as the minimum age whereby a girl can get married, this is really a violation of human rights. My plea is leave us alone, we also want to have a bright future as you did but how can we be the leaders of tomorrow if we are uneducated.” (Esnart, 15)

“As we all know education is the key to success, we also admire to be female presidents of tomorrow but all this can be accomplished through education only. If we encourage that girls to marry as young as 15 then it means we are blocking them of their bright future. The saying goes if you teach a girl you have taught the nation and it means that if there are no educated girls and women our country will not be a developed nation because there will still be lacking that element of educated girls. When in a family there is an educated woman things go on well because she is able to make budgets and she knows what is best for her children, when kids fall sick she knows the goodness of rushing with them to the hospital instead of just waiting for the husband to come and take the kid to the hospital. So if the woman gets education you obviously have a healthy home with healthy kids because the woman is the one who engineers at the kitchen.” (Bridget, 14)

“As a Malawian girl I am really upset that girls can marry at 15 years old. It is not true that a girl can marry at 15 years old because by this time our bodies are still young and if we get pregnant we face a lot of difficulties during child birth, some
girls become lame and others even die because their bones were not strong enough to give birth to a child. So as young Malawian girl I am begging our government to think twice on the marriage age bill of 15 years old, if not doing that then it’s a violation of our rights as girls.” (Chifunero, 14)

“At this age the girl has the childish mind-set, she thinks of playing and not of family issues, and at this time the girl is not yet done with her school and in so doing she can end up being illiterate, and when she is not educated she cannot be able to take care of herself because she cannot be independent. Sometimes the girl faces the risk of being abused by her husband because she is very young and she cannot have any say. Me as a girl I think of getting married at the age 25 because I will be mature enough to be in a family and also have finished my education and am able to take care of myself.” (Yankho, 11)

“Everybody knows that we all have human rights, it is a right to everyone to choose what age they want to get married and not to be decided for you, because when you marry at the age of 15 you can face a lot of troubles in the marriage such as aging early when it’s not yet your time because you are just bearing more children, sometimes you marry a man that is not of your size because these big men like to marry little girls, so those men are very dangerous because sometimes they just beat you up for knowing that you cannot fight them back. School is very important especially to girls because there is this saying that if you educate a girl you educate a nation, so educated girls do make right decisions like using birth control methods that can prevent them from having more children. When you are educated you are busy with work and you have little time to be thinking of just having children.” (Emma, 12)

“Girls are future leaders of tomorrow, if we send them to marriage so early it means their future and their right to education has been violated. When a girl marries at a very young age her capacity thinking is very low because her brain is not well matured and when things are like that she faces a lot of problems at the marriage. As we all know that many nongovernmental organizations encourage girls to go to school because we are future leaders of tomorrow, how are we going to be leaders of tomorrow if you are saying that a girl at young as 15 years can go to start a family this will encourage those parents who don’t care about their children and send them to marriage in so doing our country will be full of uneducated girls and women.” (Doreen, 12)

“It is not wise that girls should marry very young, we put ourselves steps behind. When a girl got married it is obvious that she will bear children and if she is very young she is likely to face a lot of challenges about child birth, not only that, she can also catch the virus of HIV. The girl is supposed to prepare her future first and not rushing into marriage. Disadvantage of marrying young is that you have many children and many times you are not even able to take a good care of them because you have no money or your husband left you. When we encourage girls to marry very young some parents will be taking advantages when the girls come of age and are sent to initiation ceremonies, there they are taught different kinds of bad things and when the girl reaches 15 years parents will just say you are
mature enough and you can go and have a family, so this is not a good idea for the sake of the girl’s future.” (Christina, 12)

“Another problem that can be caused by early marriages is that the population growth will increase rapidly because many girls will marry at an early age. The problem of child spacing will be there because they were not taught about family planning. Even the problem of deforestation which affects the environment will be big because of population growth in some areas.” (Chifuniro)

“We children have human rights, so leave us alone that we should learn. When a person enters into marriage while you are still young it doesn’t feel good because you face a lot of challenges. You face problems when you get pregnant and giving birth. When you are very young your bones are not strong enough and sometimes you can become crippled and even lose your life.” (Mwayiwawo, 14)

“When a man marries you at 15 all he needs is to have sex with you and nothing else, so to me this cannot benefit me anything. I would finish my school first. My desire is to reach university not just secondary level, and then when I finish my education I should find a job then I will be self-sufficient, what I admire most is to be a pilot but right now I think of becoming a doctor so that I will be able to help people, so to say the truth it is not good to rush into marriage because you will not be able to reach your goals.” (Aishah, 14)

“Problems that girls face when they marry early especially as young as 15 years: At this age your thinking capacity is not yet mature and so is your body so when you marry at this age you are still very young. When you marry at this age you are not yet done with your education, when you have not finished school it means you cannot get a job therefore you suffer a lot. Sometimes the man that has married you can impregnate you and when you start to fade away they run away leaving you with the children to take care of them alone and because you entered into marriage very young you find yourself having more children than you were supposed to have so if you are the only person to be taking care of the children you are ruined because you have no support and you trap yourself into unbearable poverty. Therefore I discourage my fellow girls from getting married at a very tender age. Let’s work hard in school and be the future leaders of tomorrow.” (Mirriam, 14)

“First of all she does not feel happy because she has been forced to marry, secondly she doesn’t know how a family operates and her future is also confused because she has been violated instead of the young girl thinking of school she just think of how to work out her marriage. In the family there are different types of abuses such as been beaten up by their husbands, being insulted by their husbands or the husband’s relatives all these are problems that young girls face when they get married. I beg my nation to stop this behaviour of sending young girls to marry because it’s a violation of their human rights and I plead with my fellow girls that you should not accept when someone forces you to marry.” (Esther, 12)
“Please madam president abolish the tradition of child marriage and establish a strong law that will protect girls from not entering into marriage at a very young age.” (Ireen, 14)

“Girls are supposed to be in class at the age of 15 not a machine of making babies. As young as I am, I cannot be able to look after the baby and the husband. Because of this we girls can be tortured by the husband and we cannot find time to go to school again. We can also get HIV/AIDS while we are still young, so it is up to our parents to encourage us to continue our education, not to force us into marriage and our government should look again about marriage age.” (Tatiana)

“I do not agree with the marriage age because you are violating our rights and our future, instead of allowing us to continue education so that we can develop our beautiful Malawi and be models to others and depend on our own. There are some parents who force their daughter into marriage, just for them to earn some money which is very bad to a young girl. An advice to my fellow girls let us take part and say no to such kind of behaviour or even to sue our parents.” (Lydia)

“It is not good that a 15 year old girl should get married while someone chooses a husband for her. When she gets married at this age she can face a lot of problems like being beaten by her husband, no one to look after her cause her husband is always out looking for another woman just because she is too young and at the end the girl contracts the virus.” (Caroline)

“I am 15 years old, at my age I cannot get married that would mean breaking some of my rights like right to education and even putting my life in danger. And it is difficult for her to find cloth, food and money for her children because she is not working. My appeal to the government of Malawi is to amend the marriage age.” (Lucia, 15)

“Early marriages destroy our right to Education, if our parents force us to get married lets tell them that we have rights to education and we can even report them to the police. Early marriages disturbs the development of the country, let’s focus on our education so that we can be good leaders of tomorrow.” (Chisomo)

“Parents will have to remember that if we educate a girl child we educate the whole nation, let us stop early marriages so that we can develop our nation and fight against STDs/AIDs.” (Lappiness)

“Early marriage leads to high school drop out rate because of this reason many girls do not go further with their education. When a girl gets married at the age of 15, she can lose her life during deliverance, and when we are losing young girls who will be the leaders of tomorrow?” (Ireen)

“Sometimes girls marry at a young age because they have been forced by their parents to marry, sometimes it is their peers; they cheat each other that having boyfriends is a good idea when it is only destructing their future. Sometimes because of their culture young girls are also found in
marriages, sometimes because they have been
impregnated. All this happens because there is no
proper law that guides girls on marriage and in so
doing everyone is doing what they know is best
for them which is violating girls’ rights and their
future. And when these girls enter into marriage
they are facing a lot of challenges because they
are not mature enough. They just bear more
children because they don’t know about child
spacing, their husbands beat them up and they
are not left with food in the house and the family
starve and they start begging from home to home
which is so embarrassing.” (Magret, 14)

“Dear MPs, we girls are meeting a lot of
challenges such as when you get pregnant at a
tender age you destroy your body or bones
during birth, you are infected with different
diseases and also you destroy your education
because you drop out from school and sometimes
you marry a wrong man who beats you every day,
so it’s my plea that as you know that girls do face
a lot of challenges please sit and discuss on the
child marriage bill of girls so that they can
properly been protected by law.” (Driana, 15)

“Dear honourable MP, the reason I have written
this letter is to let you know what problems we
face as girls; We young girls, we face challenges
like being raped, chased away from the home
where we are staying and being married off at 15.
This is really violence against girls because
reaching 15 years doesn’t mean you have been
fully grown up. Parents who do this are illiterate
parents because they don’t know the benefit of
school. These problems come sometimes because
your parents passed away and you are an orphan.
Me as a young girl I encourage my fellow girls
who are meeting these problems to go and report
to the police and to any child protection
department.” (Mwayi, 13)

“The reason I have written this letter is to express
my concern on the marriage bill that girls of 15
years old can marry. When we marry very young
we cannot achieve all what we want. We will
meet just troubles like getting pregnant and then
fail to be fruitful because we are not mature
enough and sometimes we are infected with
different diseases like syphilis, gonorrhoea and
HIV/Aids, and as a result of this being death.
Please change the bill of 15 years old to at least
18 years because marrying off girls as young as
15 is sending them to the grave.” (Mirriam, 13)

“Dear madam president, I want to let you know
that it is not necessary that a school girl should be
sent to marry at the age of 15 years because by
then she will still be in school. It is also true that
when a girl come of age and her body changes
from adolescent to womanhood, in some cultures
she is taken as an adult and when she was in
school she is told to stop going to school and go
into marriage. Sometimes they tell them to
cleanse themselves from the misfortune of their
childhood which means to sleep with a man.
So madam president if you will accept that girls
can marry at the age of 15 years there shall be
chaos in our country because girls shall never
been protected at all, and everyone shall abuse
them in any way they feel like abusing
them.” (Esther, 14)
“In order to have a better Malawi, the girl child needs to be protected from early marriage by the law of Malawi. Only then can we improve the living standard of Malawi.” (Laiza)

“If girls get married while very young, our nation will have more uneducated women and we might not have women leaders like our president. Population will also increase and social services will be inadequate. For example, hospitals will need more medicines to help the growing population and education cannot work without adequate schools. So with a growing population the government has to build more schools. Mothers build the next generation and if the mothers are not educated, they will not see the importance of sending her children to school and Malawi will not have educated people. Knowledge is power and people who are not educated cannot develop the country.” (Esther)

Malawian girls are remarkably well informed on the dangers of early marriage. They talk about STD’s and HIV. They talk about maternal mortality, they talk about fistula, they talk about domestic violence, they talk about the need for Malawi to educate the girls in order to develop, and they even talk about the dangers of population growth. In the perspective of the girls marriage equals pregnancy and the other way around. They seem totally unaware of the other way (apart from not having sex) to prevent unwanted pregnancy: using family planning methods. One might argue that this is a good thing: the fear of unwanted pregnancy (and scared they are) will keep girls out of sexual activity. But fear is a bad advisor; it tends to keep you on the desired track for about 90% of your time. But when the sun goes up over Lake Malawi or Mount Mulanje after that occasional evening where you threw it all to the wind, you are faced with potential disastrous and livelong consequences. It would be much better if Malawian girls could make informed choices based upon positive notions about their future and their life instead of fear.
Our future is being killed

We are being forced to get married at a younger age. And our future is being killed. We have no where to go or no where to ask for help. Some of us are raped and impregnated. Bruelly our future is being killed.

If we get married at a younger age, our education will be destroyed. Our future will be marred. And Malawi will be come a poor Country. And a no-development Country. Not only our future that is going to be destroyed but the whole Country's culture will be destroyed.

Because if you teach us you have teach the whole Country.
I want to be a nurse

I want to be a driver
I want to be a farmer

I want to be a teacher
GENET

Girls Empowerment Network (Malawi) is a movement of young women advocating for gender equality and justice in Malawi, operating in rural and urban settings of the country. The organization targets girls and young women in all settings, rural communities, schools, religious groups and workplaces. GENET carries out targeted advocacy initiatives for local leaders as well as policy makers at both community and national levels. The organization was formed in 2008 and operates through forming girls networks and uses various approaches such as communication and networking, workshops and training, lobbying and advocacy within the framework of social behaviour change theory models. GENET also uses a multi-stakeholder dialogue and action approach in confronting negative stereotypes and challenges related to the attainment of gender justice. The mission driving GENET is the commitment to contribute towards the elimination of gender inequalities in education and economic opportunities, gender based violence and gender discrimination, through promotion and creating safe spaces for girls participation and development. GENET also works to confront traditional and religious practices that fuel negative masculinities, gender based violence such as forced early marriages, and sexual cleansing.

ORGANIZATION’S VISION
To create a society where empowered girls and young women are free to exercise their rights and live peacefully in a just, humane and equitable society.

MISSION STATEMENT
Our mission is to promote and advocate for economic, social and emotional wellbeing of vulnerable and marginalized adolescent girls and young women and to influence positive social transformation. We believe that encouraging the leadership of girls, their participation and the development of their status benefits the entire community.

Organization Objectives
- Building a grass root network of girls/women and boy/men who can stand up and fight social injustices and defend the rights of girls and women and raise the profile of girls and women in their communities.
- Creating spaces where girls meet and discuss about their issues and explore collective solutions. This includes sexual reproductive issues (HIV/Aids, family planning etc.)
- Improving level of participation, coordination and networking between grassroots girls and young women, their organizations and civil society organizations in order to build increased support for girls and young women's issues.
- Ensuring that legislation, laws, policies and programmes are gender sensitive and supportive to women's rights and human rights
- Developing the skills and competencies of women to reach decision-making levels in all spheres.
- Promoting social awareness of women’s issues and their rights, and dismantle common stereotypes of women and their role in society.
- To promoting the role of community leaders in creating supportive environment for girls and women development.
Are girls free to choose their partner, we asked in one Focus Group:

“No, in most cases girls are not free to choose their marriage partner because sometimes there are just circumstances that lead them into marriage such as unexpected pregnancy, or poverty at home. When they found out that you are pregnant they force you to go and stay with that man even if you are not willing to go and stay with the man.”

“Always it is Uncle who is on the forefront to get involved when it comes to decision making when a girl wants to get married, and sometimes he even offers you to his friend to get married to, only to make him buy your uncle more beer at the tavern.”

“No in most cases we are not free to choose whom we want to marry. If I am forced to get married it means it’s against my wish, so it can happen that the man they’re offering me to marry is not of my liking but since I have been forced I just do it out of fear.”

“In the real sense parents do not give you a choice at all.”

“Indirectly you have no choice, your parents organize everything and allow the man to come in your home and even abuse you. When you report it to your parents, then your mother says: Then just marry him because he has caused damage already.”

“No, we do not have freedom of choice in practice. My uncle is responsible of marrying me off so long as the man fulfils his desires”.

“Yes, we are allowed to have a man of our choice but the parents have to scrutinize him first so that I can marry him”.

“Yes, I am allowed to choose a man of my choice and if I make a mistake I go down myself.”

Chisomo (14): “In the real sense, I am not free. When I do not get my mathematics right in class the teachers openly say that I should just go and get married. So I may have a choice of when to get married but my surrounding forces me to get married.”

Many marriages in Malawi are forced upon girls, and many girls have strong feelings about that:

“Girls being forced to get married very young is not right because this girl’s future will be destroyed. If she gets pregnant when she is only 15 years or 16 years old, her body is not yet matured and can face a lot of complications during child birth and she can even loose her life or the life of the baby. Sometimes you become infertile for the rest of your life. Sometimes girls face abuses like rape, molestation and sexual harassment by their relatives in the homes they live in but because they have no say, they just suffer in silence,”

“My views on this issue is that forced to marry is evil because instead of getting along with school you drop out and concentrate on the marriage thing and at the end admiring your friend who has finished her education and are able to take care of themselves without bothering anyone.”
“Forced marriage is very bad because when you get married very young you face a lot of challenges like lacking basic necessities such as bathing soap, food and also clothes for the children because sometimes you can marry a man who is not responsible enough to cater for all your needs, and because you did not go far with school you end up being rotten”.

“My feeling on forced marriage is that you give room to the man to act any violence on you, for example beating you without proper reasons, the man will not respect you because he knows that your parents don’t care about you because they are the ones who have sent you into marriage and he will know that even if you report to your parents on how the man is treating you it will just mean to them that you just want to have an escape. So you cannot have peace because you will have nowhere to run to.”

“Forcing someone to marry is violating her rights to life and education, so if there can be found someone doing that to me I can report them to the police, or I just run away to some relatives.”

How would you feel when you were forced to marry, we asked?

“If someone can force me to marry I cannot feel good because of my age. I am still young, I cannot manage to handle marriage circumstances like washing clothes and bearing children. Since you have just been forced and it’s not on your own will, things cannot be working at the house because you will not be doing anything willingly so the marriage cannot stand.”

“Devastated and disappointed with my guardians.”

“Helpless, I come from a very poor family and I am the only one who will bring the lost hope back to the family, forcing me into marriage would devastate me.”

“That would be the end of me, I mean; school is my only ticket out of my poverty stricken family, my parents did not go to school and that is why today it is difficult to convince them that child marriage is not good.”

“Heartbroken, because even my parents now know that marriage isn’t the answer.”

“I would feel awful, I mean that would just break my heart because I have friends who are married and I am so sure that what they are going through is hell.”

“If my family force me to get married at a young age I would feel pity because it means they are not thinking of my life and future, and I would report them to the police and to the chief for justice.”

” If my parents or my guardians are dragging me into early and forced marriage this means that they want to get rid of me but I cannot accept to get married. I would rather move out from the house and seek for help from other relatives.”

“It’s very sad that we girls are not valued as precious creatures that everyone can treat us as they are pleased, this is really a burden to us. We
I would feel bad if I can be forced to get married because by then my body and mind is not fully grown to handle a family and I will not be able to function properly like handling everything at home and taking care of children because I will be a child myself.

“I feel being forced to get married is such a punishment that it will make me regretful for the rest of my life, it is not true that the girl as young as 14 years old is ready for marriage, this is torture and I feel that I am not protected at all by the people who were supposed to provide security to me.”

In Interviews:

Esther (15): “I can cry and I can feel hopeless because a forced marriage is terminating my life. If they insist that I should go into marriage, I can deny and I can tell them that I cannot go into marriage because am still young and my time is not yet due that I can marry. I can try to negotiate with them that if a girl marries at a very young age she can lose her life during birth or face some other complications.”

Patricia (15): “I can feel pain if I they try to force me to get married because that person that I am supposed to marry with will be older than me so I cannot comfortably say that this is my husband because I will be ashamed that my friends will laugh at me. I cannot accept that nonsense, period. Forcing me to get married is the same as chasing me away from their house so I will just make sure that I work hard in class so that I can start work and move out of their house.”

In one Focus Group the participants discussed that it looks like there is choice but in reality there is not:

“Sometimes parents deny responsibility. If you ask them for basic needs, they say: You have grown up now, meaning that they want you to move to be the responsibility of another man.”

“Our parents indirectly look for and force girls to get someone who can relieve them from their responsibility.”

“Sometimes parents refuse to buy some basic needs because they say we have grown up and that we can look after ourselves or get married.”

“When I ask for lotion, my mother says: Why do you want to get that from us? You are the one to help us so that we can eat nice food; we are given turns to provide food for the home. Girls are used for resource mobilization, also in issues of marriage.”

But if there is a choice, what would girls look for?

Participants of a Focus Group:

“He should be a man enough not to lay his finger on me.”

“He should have gone for an engineering career so that he should be able to fix things around the home without me having to call a stranger, and above all, not looking at fellow girls.”

“A policeman, that way I am sure that I will be safe all my life from both external and internal injuries because a policeman knows all the rules and he would protect me.”
“A romantic man, I want to be treated like we just got married every day so that he will not use bad words, let alone beat me.”

“A God-fearing man, this way I am sure of a life time of love and happiness because he will respect me, my parents and above all, he will take responsibility for all that he does.”

“A very good looking man because I desire to have beautiful babies and that is how I can get them and he should be rich so that I and the children should live comfortably.”

“I want a man like my father, a business man. He will be too busy to look at other women but me.”

Letters:

“An educated man who will make sure our children go to school, and who will have a good financial status to take care of both our needs and wants.” (Chisomo)

“An army commander suits my wishes for a life partner. When going home from school I see many of them and they seem to be principled and goal oriented and they appear strong too. I would like to have one for a life time of joy and gladness.” (Edith, 15)

“Someone who will not batter me will be qualified enough to be my husband, a gentleman. Men should be sweet and charming and must treat me like an egg.” (Chisomo)

“Men are chameleons; they may pretend to be all that you want them to be. However, I would be happy all my life if I could settle down with an educated man who will understand and respect my rights as his wife and also who will take up all his responsibility as a husband and father.” (Fazai, 16)

“He should be a prayerful man, full of fear for the Lord. If he fears God, he will not cheat, nor beat you. He has a woman’s best interest at heart.” (Estina)

“One who will not be violent to me and my children. I have grown up in a domestic violence family-kind of setting and I do not want my children to go through what I go through. I go through so much emotional trauma that I fail to concentrate in my class.” (Phyllis).

Participants in a Focus Group Discussion:

“To me an ideal husband is someone who would take care of me and my relatives, he should not be stingy because if he will be like that it means he will not be able to provide me with necessary things because it will be hard for him to dig deeper in his pocket.”

“I want to have an understanding with a man who would take a good care of me and my children, someone who would not beat me and cause trouble in my house. And apart from that I want him to be a graduate because I will be assured that we will do better in our lives.”

“Drunkards as they are, most men are such cowards that they don’t even appreciate your efforts, you do something good to them and they return disrespect to you.”
“For a person to be happy she needs to find a good husband because the choice we are making will determine how we live and it is very scary because when you marry you make a lifetime commitment to that person, so as for me an ideal husband should be someone who went far with his education. The reason I want a man who is educated is that at home you don’t lack anything because your man always provides for you, and your children as well attend nice schools,”

“The husband that I dream of to have when I grow up is someone who will understand, someone who will not be beating me and someone who would love his children. I really want to have a man who will be sober minded.”

Interviews:

“When I reach the age of getting married I would like to have a man who will be working because I know that he will be able to support me and my kids. I also want a man who will not be a smoker and someone who is not a womanizer because if he is a womanizer he will infect me with HIV.” (Megrina, 14)

“I want to have a man that will take care of me, someone who will be understanding. But I also want a man who is well educated, someone who went to university and who is working at a good company. If I will be able to have this kind of man I will be happy because I will be assured that he will take care of me, and just to add he should not be a smoker or a drunkard.” (Patricia, 15)

“When I grow up I want to find a man who is not poor but also someone who is not rich. I just want to have an average man who would make me happy and who is able to take care of my family. He should be educated at least went to college. I would like to have this kind of man because we will be able to help each other with some responsibilities.” (Cecilia, 15)

Focus Group Participants:

“Nonviolent, he should be a gentleman. I should not be afraid of him because he may beat me, but he should be my friend and my confidante”

“Rich because I don’t want me or my children to be in need at any point in my life. I want to be recognized as a girl who married a rich man and who now supports the whole of her village.”

“A handsome and educated man; should be good looking and be well learned.”

“I want to have a man that will take care of me, someone who will be understanding. But I also want a man who is well educated, someone who went to university and who is working at a good company. If I will be able to have this kind of man I will be happy because I will be assured that he will take care of me, and just to add he should not be a smoker or a drunkard.” (Patricia, 15)

“God fearing.”

“Smart; should not be dirty.”

“Farmer: I want a home that is food secure and don’t need to buy basic food that we can easily grow.”

“Non-smoker.”

“Not stingy (A man who doesn’t press his hands in flour and who does not wait till the children are asleep for him to eat nice relish with meat and chicken).”

We need to finish our education so that we should depend on ourselves not husbands only. We want to be lawyers, nurses, teachers, doctors and many more. So please this
But some do not think they will marry at all:

“I have never thought of getting married because in my family there is a lot of trouble like beating each other, divorcing one another and infecting each other with diseases. With all those misfortune I just think of becoming a nun.”

“Getting married is pointless when all men do when they marry you is cheat on you.”

“No, I would rather not get married. The domestic violence I have seen in my home is enough to take away every desire to get married.”

“No, I want to serve God by being a nun.”

“No, I do not desire to get married. Every night, so long as my father is drunk he will come home late at night and demand hot nsima from my mother, failure to produce it calls for a belt around his waist and he beats her like a 7 year old child, what is there to desire?”

“No, I want to be a nun; I want to serve God all my life. My mother always said she wanted to be one but couldn’t and so I want to make her vision a reality.”

“No to me marriage is just a waste of time because these days people are like true lovebirds today, they get married and tomorrow you divorce, so what is the use of getting married? It is better I just I work hard in school and be able to be on my own and enjoy my money with my relatives, because all these men sucks they don’t want to stay faithful to their partners.”

“Me too I have never thought of getting married because in many families women are facing a lot of violence like being beaten up, they just fight every day, the man never leaves money at home for necessary things and he leaves his family starving while he eats outside the house in restaurants and goes home already full.”

“I don’t want to get married because I want to be a nun and serve the Lord then my heart will be at peace.”

At first things were going well until she gave birth to twins. The children grew up until Masozis family started having problems. They did not have food to eat, clothes to wear and money to buy school uniform for the children.
A good man should buy clothes for the wife

A good man should cook food when the wife is sick.
A good man should love the wife

A good man should provide for the family
From all the girls that mention a preferred age of marriage in their reaction (many do not mention a specific age but emphasize that a girl should finish her education before getting married), only one thinks she will be ready to marry when she is 17 years old. Some think 18 is an appropriate age. The vast majority of reactions mention an age of marriage between 18 and 30, the majority choosing the 20-25 range. It is interesting to notice that girls being asked what would be an appropriate age for them personally, they state a substantial higher age of marriage for them personally as they would state as the general minimum age.

From the written contributions:

“We need to wait till we are 20 years old to get married.”

“It is proper for us to marry over the age of 25, this will give us time enough to proceed with our education.”

“I want to marry when I am 27 years old because I want to be able to stand up for myself and start working so that I could help my parents. When I finish my studies, then I am getting married.”

“If needed I will go to another country where I can live in peace and not in pieces and where I can get married when I am between 23 and 30.”

“23 would be good, you can have finished school by that age.”

“The age for a girl to get married is 20 or 22 years old, because this is the time when a girl is old enough and she has finished school.”

“I plead with the government that please do not violate our right to education because we also admire to become a leader of this nation like our President Madam Joyce Banda. It is better to get married when you are old enough like 29 years old.”

“For me, my opinion is that a girl is well matured at the age of 23 or 25 and at this age they marry because they will be done with school and their future is bright and they can be able to be what they want to be like nurses, teachers and be leaders in different departments of government sectors.”

“I do not wish to get married at 15 because I have big dreams that I want to pursue. At 17 I want to have finished my secondary education and be ready to go into University. At 17 I will have an idea of marriage, as well as how to take care of my family and protect it.”

“Girls should get married at 20 just so we can be sure that they have grown physically to give birth and also to make sure that they have acquired enough knowledge about both marriage and family.”

“If I were the President I would enforce a law that states that anyone who marries a girl below 18 should be sentenced to life in imprisonment with hard labour.”

“I prefer to get married when I reach 27 because I will be mature enough and I will be able to make decisions on my own without anyone interfering with them. By then I will be working and own my own house and therefore I can be able to take care of myself.”

“I can say that 20 its better because by then the girl is a bit mature and can think properly but as
I will marry when I finish school and start a job.
for me I would like to get married at 25 years old because I know that by that time I will be self-dependant and have finished my education and maybe have already started work or am searching for it.”

“If a girl child wants to get married, she should get married at the age of 20 years and above or if she finishes her education. If anyone is found forcing her daughter into marriage he or she has to be reported to the authorities.”

From the Focus Groups:

“When she has fully grown.”

“18 years, at this age you have grown enough to have your own children, raise them in a way you want them to be raised and also know all about child spacing so that you do not put your own health at risk.”.

“21 years old, I will have finished my secondary education and will be able to think and act on my own, I will not be waiting for him to come back home so that he can decide on something about our family.”

“28 years old, I will have finished my university education, I will own a house, and I will be independent to the extent that I will not even need a man. That time they can force me to get married.”

“Actually I thought people are allowed to vote, getting a driving licence when they are 18 years. I think adulthood start when you are eighteen, why is the standard different for a marriage age for girls; government should use the same measure.”

“I would like to get married when I reach 30 years going up because I will be independent by then and I will be working and have my own house and everything needed in the house. I want to already have these things because I don’t want to be a slave of anyone”.

“I prefer to get married at 26 because I know by then I will have my degree and I will be able to work in some nice company and earn my own living. I will be able to help my parents and relatives without asking from a man and if I marry and happen to be divorced I will have no worries because I will know that I am financially secured.”

“I would love to get married when I am 25 years because I will be assured that I am old enough to handle family issues and also be able to support my children both financially and physically.”

“At least at 18 or above the girl is matured and can make decisions on her own and is not depending on others to do the thinking for her.”

“18 years is the average age for a girl to get married because by then her body is at least mature and can easily handle labour pains when it comes to child bearing.”

“I feel 25 years is alright with me because by then I will be independent, have started working and I will be already taking care of myself.”

“26 years is my dream age to start thinking of getting married because I want first to own a house, a car and other basic necessities that a human being needs to have so that I shouldn’t be a slave for anyone.”
I would like to marry when I am 27 years old.
“When you get married while you are fully grown and have started working, obviously you can make a good wife because you will not be a goal keeper who just waits for her husband to give her. But she will be able to provide as well so for me I think that 27 years is the right time for me to get married because I would be done with my college by then and start working.”

“Marriage is a life time commitment, it is a do the right or do the wrong thing. If you go wrong in the first place you will go wrong all your life. So no one should say I am old enough to get married except me.”

“18 years, at this age you have grown both physically and mentally to handle both a man and a family of your own.”

“21 years, at this age I will have finished my secondary school, but then again, I would prefer to get married at 25 years old because I will be financially stable and independent to take care of my own family even in the absence of my husband be it death or divorce.”

“28 years old, I will be secure enough with myself and can support myself and I will know that the love I feel is two-ways, then I can get married.”

From the Interviews:

“If I can ever have an option to get married I would love to marry when am 30 years old because I will be able to take care of myself, I will be independent and I have finished my education.”

“25 years old it’s better for me to enter into marriage because by then I would have finished my education, and if I get pregnant I can handle it and even avoid some complications that would have happen because I am not mature enough.”

“At 20 years a girl can think of getting married because at least her body is mature, and when a girl is mature she can think properly and can be an organized woman. While when you marry very young you just act as a kid.”

“I prefer from 18 years since by that time the girl is a bit mature and can handle things properly, but to me the age that I want to enter into marriage is 30 because by then I will be done with my education and I will be able to find a job or do business so that I can rely on myself.”

“20 years can be the right age because when you are 20, at least you are done with secondary school and you are expected to go to college if you have that opportunity.”

“20 going upwards because by then the girl is fully grown both physical and mentally and is able to think and analyse situations. When you marry for example at 25 you are assured that your education has succeeded and you can start working and be able to take care of yourself.”

“I cannot say that this age is right for a girl to get married because girls grow up differently and they have different goals that they want to achieve, but all I can say is that if a girl is thinking of getting married she should start to think of it when she reached 20 going upwards because she is fully grown and can easily take care of herself.”

I am a girl and I say that a girl at the age of 15 cannot get married. I know that some girls get pregnant at this age. But they must not be forced to get married and this is violating their rights to education. Those girls that have got pregnant...
I will marry when I finish school.

32 years old.
“18 years can be the minimum age for a girl to get married.”

“30 years, getting married is the most important decision in someone’s life therefore it has to be made while you are mature, educated and in your right mind.”

“27 years is right for me, because I will be mature enough and so will be able to make decisions about my family life which will call for respect from the man and then he will never intimidate me or threaten me because I know I would survive on my own.”

“I think the best time for marriage is 21-28 years old, if it is too early, then it is not good for your health and body, and we are not very mature and cannot give our families the proper financial help it needs.”

“30 years old, at this stage, I will have finished my education and will be independent enough to take care of myself and when you are educated you have a higher chance of finding a good man.”

“27 years old. This is because I will have a wider chance to choose a life partner and no one can persuade me to make a decision I am not comfortable with.”

“At 23 years a girl is mature enough and her bones can take the force at giving birth. She may even have acquired more knowledge on how to raise children.”

“The age for a girl to get married is 20 or 22 years old, because this time a girl is old enough and she has finished school. If you are saying that we can marry at 16 years old, that can destroy our future.”

“We should get married when we are between 23 and 30 years old because of the problems we will face when we marry at 15.”

“I want to get married when I am 27 years old because I want to stand up for myself and start working so that I can help my parents and have my education finished when I get married.”
THE MARRIAGES THAT SURROUND US

What the girls are saying on the issues of marriage and their future is in many cases informed by what they observe around them; the marriage of their parents, the lives of their friends.

We asked them whether the marriage of their parents inspired them:
There are positive experiences:

“I revere my parents. I think they are best friends because they are always talking and laughing and making each other happy. I want a husband like my dad.”

“Yes, my parents love one another and are a very great pair. Not for a day have I heard them fight or say bad words.”

“Yes, I admire my parents a lot because their marriage works well, when they have an argument they make sure they discuss it in their bedroom so that children should not be affected. My father doesn’t smoke and he doesn’t drink as well so he is a caring man and responsible.”

“Yes, it is a model to me because my parents married each other when they were both matured, and whenever they have an argument they don’t keep any grudges for each other. They make sure they speak to each other while sober minded and in so doing they don’t make each other angry. And my parents whenever they are going to do something they first consult each other and agree to one thing.”

“My parents are a great couple. My dad says everyone makes decisions on their own and what they do is discuss the outcome of the decisions.”

“Yes they are, my parents do not fight. Well if they do, they make sure I do not see it.”

And many more negative ones:

“What we see at home? My mother is brutally beaten, she seems to be trapped, cannot go anywhere.”

“My father does not provide for us, he leaves the home in absolute poverty.”

“Mine resorts to drinking and starts breaking things and shouting when he comes home.”

“You know what, if given a choice I would rather stay single and not get married if the only option is to get anything close to my parents’ type of marriage.”

“My father is hardly at home; my mother has never had the feel of being a wife. So, no, my parents’ marriage is not my role model.”

“My parents have not been to school and all they did when they were together was fight. My father travelled to South Africa years back and he does not send help, let alone just call. I no longer stay with my mother because when her boyfriends come home they would sleep with me and I could not tell my mother because they would bribe me with a little money and that became the practice.”
However if my father was man enough to stay home or send help, all this would not have happened and that is why now I stay with my Aunt so I can concentrate on my education.”

“No, I don’t admire my parents’ marriage because in the first place my mother did not go further with education so she does not work, but my wish is to be working. My parents did not have their wedding at church but me I want to have a white wedding. And because my father is the only person who works the house always lacks so I wouldn’t want to have such kind of family, as for me I want to be educated and also working.”

“No, I don’t admire my family because of the way my father treats my mother. My father is selfish he feels himself that he is educated and therefore don’t respect my mother and my mother is always miserable and not happy. He always tells my mother that I am the one who does everything in this house so don’t dare to disrespect me or I will chase you out of my house. So to me this family is not a good example.”

“No not at all. Me, I want to have an exemplary marriage where my children will be learning from me. But this family shames me and I feel sorry for my mother because she has to struggle to make sure we are taken care of.”

“No, my mother married when she was 13 and so my father kept going from woman to woman and now he has three wives and two died and he has to look after all the children therefore I do not get the right help as his daughter.”

“My parents fight all the time, whenever my mother goes wrong somewhere my father removes his belt and beats her up. It disturbs my peace and sometimes I just wish for him to leave us alone so my mother can be free.”

Do you know girls that have married too young?

“Yes, my friend was divorced because he said she was too young but he had already impregnated her. Right now she has come back to stay with the family and partake of the same poverty she left behind.” (Interview)

“My friend died trying to abort her baby because her husband told her that he will not take care of the child and that he will divorce her if she kept it.” (Interview)

From a Focus Group in Rural Blantyre:

“Yes, most young girls in this village are married and those of us who aren’t are being given the evil eye, meaning to wonder what we are waiting for even when it is very clear that we are in school.”

“Yes, the girls I used to play with, most of them are now married. However you would hardly recognize them because they are 18 years now but they look like they are in the mid-30s. It is a shame what child marriage can do.”

“Yes, she got married at 15 because her parents could no longer provide for her because they said she had come of age. She died when giving birth to her first born child because she was too young.”
Girls on their married friends, interviews:

“They are an eyesore.”

“She is now sick, you can hardly recognize her, people say she is HIV positive because her husband walks from bar to bar looking for other girls to sleep with.”

“She has 4 children and yet she is 19 years old, she has to clean the home, fetch for her children, take them to the hospital alone because her husband left for South Africa when she was pregnant for the fourth time and did not return. I might as well say she is single with four children.”

“She usually has a swollen face because of being beaten by her husband simply for asking for money to buy relish and other necessary things around the home.”

“She died when giving birth, doctors say she was too young for child birth and the force that comes with childbearing tore her uterus and she bled to death.”

“Her husband divorced her for not finishing her education, the whole time he married her, he kept saying she is dull whenever she messed up somewhere.”

“Her husband does not help her with the children, so she is always up and down doing piece work so she can take care of her own house.”

“Her husband forced her to go to a traditional doctor for an abortion because he said he was not ready for children. The witchdoctor inserted a cassava stick in her and pierced her womb and yes she did abort and went through so much pain. However now she is failing to get pregnant because she damaged her womb and her husband is threatening to marry another girl who will be able to give him children.”

“My friend got married to her teacher at the age of 16, she now has four children but she was sent to the village by her husband to go and plough the land to provide food for him in town.”

“Yes I have a friend who got married; her husband gave her three children but later died in a fight at a beer hall. Now she struggles to find even money for a mere soap because she did not go to school and nobody can employ her but she cannot even go back to her parents because they are equally poor.”

“She has been denied of her education. When he was marrying her he told her that she was going to finish her school and that he was going to pay for every penny just so she can make her dreams come true. Now he does not even want her to mention anything about school and if she does he beats her up.”

“She is now begging from house to house just so she can take care of her husband who was stabbed in a crime because she married a robber.”

Participants in a Focus Group Discussion:

“There was a situation whereby a young girl got married; she was 14 years old and in standard 5. When she falls pregnant by her standard 7
boyfriend her parents discovered. When the parents realized she was pregnant they took her, pack her clothes and took her to the parents of the boy. The father discussed the matter to the boy’s parents what their son had done to their daughter. Since the boy was also young his parents took the girl to stay with them. But things began to sour for the girl because she was no longer free, she could not do things that she wanted or chat with friends. She was taken as a prisoner and she was also mistreated by the boy’s parents, she always woke up too early to do all the household chores, she was taken as a servant and not like one of them. This happened because she was young and the boy’s parents did not welcome her. After sometime the girl thought it wise that though she had messed up with her parents she had no option but to go back and ask for forgiveness. She hoped that at least they would accept her back. She take heart and one day visits her parents, but when they saw her they were so furious that they even want to beat her. But when she begged and tells them of all her mistakes and what she has been going through at the strangers’ home they forgave her and took her back as their own daughter, now she stays with her parents and the baby was born and they help her. When the baby will reach an age that he can be left alone at home she will start school again.

From the written contributions:

“I have a friend and her name is Elufe. She is 15 years old and her mother told her to get married to rich man who is 32 years old. Elufe did not want to get married because she wanted to finish her school, but her mother said that she could go and live at her school if she did not marry that man. She got pregnant and the rich man stopped to give her money, he was going to marry another girl. Elufe was crying every day. Her mother was also crying but the rich man said elufe does not have my pregnancy and did not give her money.”

“One of my sisters got married when she was very young, she went to the marriage on her own will, not that someone has forced her. She was 14 years old when she started giving my mother trouble. But then when she got married her husband was just beating her without any reasons and sometimes he chased her from the home. When she had a child it was really pathetic because the kid did not have clothes and food was also a heavy burden because it was hardly been found. The reason why all these things were happening is because the man that she marries was not working and every time my sister asks him to give her money for the necessities he would start an argument which will lead into fight. And sometimes my sister will go from one house to another to look for peace work. When she had suffered for quite some time she had no choice and she came back to my parents’ house. This only shows that marring when your time is not due is not good. Now my sister stopped school and she no longer looks beautiful as she was in the first place.”

“Nduuzenani was fifteen years and Kalinde was 28 years old. Her parents said she must marry Kalinde because he is a rich man. Kalinde told the parents of Nduuzenani that they needed a wedding. They went to the Chief’s house and explained about the idea and the Chief was happy. The chief told the people. The other
people found some piece work; others were selling things so that they could shine on the wedding. Twenty days later, Ndiuzenani gave birth to a baby called Mwandie and later Mwandie passed away because of AIDS. When Kalinde knew that she had AIDS, he sent her out of his house. Ndiuzenani got back to her parents. They also chased her out of the house. She has nowhere to stay."

“I want to tell you about the story of my friend. Her name is……. She is 15 years old. She is in Standard 8 at ……..school at……. She is a very close friend of mine. One day her parents called her when we were playing. The parents shouted that the news was urgent. I had to leave because it was private. But I was hiding in the kitchen and I heard them say: We want to tell you that a man has been asking you to marry him, her father said. But since you are in school, you should stop going to school, her mother said. My friend sounded worried. On the next day, when I was going to school, I was going to fetch her. I always do. But her mother said, she is not going to school, in fact is has stopped going to school because she is getting married. I was worried about my friend and what will happen to her. I was walking around just to look for someone to play with. The man who married her is an old man who has 5 wives; my friend is the sixth, what a shame. She got married but it did not end well for her. She got pregnant but it was not easy because she was struggling giving birth. Now she is HIV positive. But I always go home to see how she is doing and now she is fine. I am just saying that please you should not force us into early marriages.”

“I have a sister who was married at the age of 14 years and she gave birth at the age of 15 and by the time she was getting married she was in Standard 8 which means she married before completing her education. As I am talking, she has five children and the husband is also a Standard student. They earn their living by farming. They are failing to send their children to school, they send them to the market to sell things.”

“In 2010 I had a friend, she was just 14, and staying with her mother. Her mother forced her to get married to a rich man in Lilongwe. This man was about 25-30 years old. She got pregnant and died during the birth of her child. After she died, at her funeral her mother was crying, saying why my daughter, why did she die so young. She said it is because of some people who are jealous because she was shining when she was in her husband’s home and her mother was shining too. So now she is gone forever but I want to advice my fellow girls in this country to work hard in school so that they can become managers in companies or even President. So girls, let’s work hard so that we can assist our country and I want to tell our parents and guardians to stop forcing young girls to get married.”

“I am so worried about what is happening in our area. The one who was my best friend is gone. Her parents told her that she is a big girl now and she must get married or she will die. My friend told me everything. I was so surprised about what she told me because in had never in my life heard about a twelve year old girl getting married. She dropped out of school because of her parents. What her parents did was wrong; I want people to marry when they are 23 years of age. Not twelve, that is wrong.”
End notes:

(i) UNESCO report, The Right to Education Project “At What Age”.
(ii) UNICEF STATS State of the Children 2012
(iv) Jejeebhoy (1995) analyzed 51 studies based on a number of data sources, mostly the World Fertility Surveys and Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), and found that education is the single factor most strongly related to the postponement of marriage, but the relationship may be subject to threshold effects.
(v) Clair Ngozo, *Sweet 16 Marriages Cause Controversy*, IPS, Aug. 21, 2009)
(vi) *id.*
(vii) *The Daily Times*, Wednesday, August 26, 2009.
(x) That does not mean that there is no support for child marriage in Malawi at all. We do not claim that our results are representative. For one, we only communicated with girls in the South of Malawi while it is known that there are substantial differences between the Northern, Central and Southern Region in this respect. Secondly, the letters were written by girls in school, by nature valuing their education. Some of the letters clearly bear the marks of girls trying to give the “right” answers to our questions, not necessarily a reflection of their own opinions or reality. Nevertheless, what we achieved was that more than 2000 girls were sitting down and thinking about things as child marriage, their own future and their goals in life. That in itself is an empowering exercise.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
We would like to thank the Canadian Fund for Local Initiative for the financial support that made this project possible.
We would also like to thank the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and in particular the office of the Blantyre District Education Officer for their cooperation as well as the schools and the teachers from the schools participating in this project.
Most of all we thank all the girls that shared their ideas and feelings with us in writing, in interviews and focus group discussion and making the photographs for this publication, we are very proud of you and we will make sure that you are listened to.
This project required the participation of the whole of GENET; Faith and Joyce provided oversight, organised the advocacy launch of this publication and the media attention. Tassy and Mercy carried out the writing competition, translated many of the contributions, and together with Arjen (who also did the lay out) facilitated the photography workshop. Joke wrote and edited this publication and Fanny took care of the financial side of the project.
From this project, we have learned a lot. We are way better informed about the thinking of Malawian girls and we are more than ever, determined to support them to realise their goals.

GENET, February 2013.
Beloved Madame President,

I write to plead for the adjustment of the marriage age from 15 to 18 years of age. At 15, a Malawian girl is usually in primary school, therefore how does one go into marriage when they can hardly fend for themselves?

You advocate for safe motherhood madam President, how then can you ensure that the mothers of Malawi do not die when giving birth when children are allowed to get married at 15?

I personally recommend you for the good work you are doing for the women of Malawi and I would love if you would consider adjusting the marriage age.

Fazila Mtelela