Report

February to June 2015



February-June 2015

Defence for Children International Sierra Leone

Kabala Report

Kabala Children and Youth Advisory Board

**Strengthening Children and Youth Advocacy Work**

**Background of the Project**

Sierra Leone is a country where nearly three-fourth of its population consists of young people below the age of 35 years and nearly half of the populations are children below 18years. In recent times there have being progress in reforming the laws and formulating new policies to protect children and advance their rights. These polices include the Education Act 2004, the Anti human Trafficking Act 2005, the Child Rights Act 2007 and the Sexual Offences Act 2012. However the adoption of these policies has not created desired impact on the children and young people.

Child Abuse is still prevalent. These abuses happen as a result of the failure by those in the position of power to respect and protect those rights. Young people are marginalized and ignored in decision making and development processes. The government is not doing much to invest in them. Example, The net school enrollment rate for primary school currently stands at 64%. This means that 36% of children of primary school are not in school and are more vulnerable to child trafficking, exploitation, child labor, violence abuses, girls being harassed in school by teachers, increase in pregnancy, school dropout etc.

Currently UNICEF, Defence for Children International, Save the Children, Plan International and other NGO’s are working together to build child protection system in the country. A strong component of child protection system strengthening is capacity building of children themselves so that they can add their voice to the process and also be in position to resist potential abusers especially when protection system is weak. In this respect, DCI-SL and plan international have being working together to strengthen and harmonize young people groups at national and district level so that they can work together. This has been done in Moyamba, Kailahun, Port Loko and Bombali District.

Through this intervention, children and young people in these areas now have groups that represent them in decision making and also advocacy on their behalf. Due to the success of this intervention, the Stritching Tiama Andreas has partnered with DCI-SL to extend similar intervention to Kabala, Koinadugu District where it is equally needed.

**Objectives**

For this period, the project worked on the following objectives.

* To strengthen and harmonize the work of existing children and youth groups for effective participation
* To influence the District Council to include child protection into their development agenda.
* To support advocacy work of children and youths in order to assist them contribute addressing issues that affect them particularly at the local level.

**Activities undertaken from February –June 2015**

1. Meeting with Stake holders to introduce project
2. Formation of children’s advocacy group
3. Orientation meeting with the children’s groups
4. Initial training of the Children
5. Facilitate the development of children position paper against early marriage
6. Commemoration of the Day of the African Child. (DAC)

**Activity l.Meeting with Stake holders to introduce project**

**The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affair**

DCI-SL Officer in charge of the kabala project, Samira Halloway first visited the Ministry of Social welfare, Gender and Children’s Affair.

The Social Service Officer (SSO) Kandeh Mansaray and the Deputy Alie Samba Kamara were so happy to come in contact with DCI- SL for the first time in Koinadugu District. They are aware of the good work Defense for children have been doing in the country and the impact they have made in promoting child rights.

In Koinadugu District Child protection is weak as there are limited Child Protection Organization in the district.

In introducing the project and the objectives; they were delighted to have such a program in the District. In our discussion I realized that Social Welfare is only beginning to be active in child protection within the district because the former SSO was not active and also even though some organization do come in time to time to do Child Protection, it is not sustainable and much impact has not been felt.

Kandeh Mansaray Social Service Officer (SSO) made mention of the gaps in the district. He said that there was no structure in place for child protection when he took office. He said that they have being trying to push cases that need legal advices but sometimes these cases are being compromised. He is well aware of the Legal advocacy work of DCI-SL in other districts and he knows that this is a blessing in Koinadugu to have a Child Protection Organisation like DCI-SL of such. He said that there are so many youth groups but they are not active because there are no qualified child protection organizations to monitor the activities or even sponsor these groups. As Social Welfare they only have activities with these groups occasionally (DAC, June 16). He said that they have many cases of teenage pregnancy and child labor and they alone cannot do all the work.

Alie Samba kamara Deputy Social Service Officer (DSSO) also said that since the EBOLA outbreak, they alone have being working to make sure child victims are supported and also reunified with their families. It has not being an easy job running around the District for Child protection. He said that the Children’s ForumNetwork (CFN) is the only recognized as a Children’s group in the District but they are not active. They don’t engage in any activity and it is only now they are trying to bring them (CFN) on board to work with them.

The Radio station is allowed to give air time to children programs but the whole thing of Child protection and Child right is on the bottom level of development in the District. Most organization would come and try to do activity with children but then, much impact is not felt because they only run short term projects.

The Ministry of Social Welfare is very happy that a Child Protection Organization with a legal background is coming to work with the children in the district and they look forward to work with DCI-SL as partners.

**Meeting with the Koinadugu District Council**

The Council Cheif Administrator Sahr Emmanuel Yambasu was so deligheted to have Defence for Children Sierra Leone in Koinadugu. He said such organisation will make justice be given to children who are in conflict and come in contact with the law.

He welcomed DCISL and the project as he believes that it will become a very succesful project in koinadugu. He said that there are lots of NGO’s working in koinadugu district but they focus on other things instead of child protection. Child protection is not about making money but making sure that you guide these children for the future. Children do copy both good and bad but if there is no guidance, they tend to be misled and its some of these young people that grow and be come bad examples in socity.

There are so many cases in court and at the police that have been compromised because no one is there to monitor these cases. He made mention of a case of teenage pregnancy at the court. The girl is his neice and she was pregnated by a teenage school going boy. The case has been in court for long now and there is no progress of the case. The magistrate court only works 3 times a week but then no one is there to monitor the case. He said if this continues, what will become the fate of this girl?

The Chief Administrstor finally said he hope to introduce the project to the Council Chairman who is out of the town to attend official meeting and make sure they discuss it in their Council meetings. he said any time he is called upon, he will make it a point of duty to render his service. He hope to work with the organisation and help make sure the said goal is achieved.

**Meeting with the Primary Health Center & Government Hospital Koinadugu District**

The District Medical Officer (DMO) of the District Health Medical Team (DHMT), Francis Moses also reiterated me about the increasing rate of teenage pregnancy within the district. He said as he goes around doing rounds in the different PHU’s in the district, he sees teenage girls coming to register for clinic and most of these girls are schools going children. He said Child protection is lacking in Koinadugu and children who go through abuses have no voice to speak for them.

The Ministry of Social Welfare is trying hard but they need a strong Child Protection Counterpart in Koinadugu. He said Children are vulnerable and they have their rights, they need people to advocate for them. Bringing a program like this is a big blessing and relief in Koinadugu.

District Medical Officer believes Defense for Children Sierra Leone is indeed going to make a difference and others will follow. He said a project will help children’s voices to be heard. Francis Moses concluded by welcoming the project and said that he is ready to render his service and work in partnership with DCI-SL to make sure child protection improves in Koinadugu.

**Meeting with the Kabala Police Station**

The Local Unit Commander Alimamy Bangura (LUC) of the Kabala Division Headquarter is grateful of having the project and an organization such as DCI-SL in the District to help in guiding children and advocating for their rights. He said that they have the Family Support Unit that is responsible for cases of domestic violence and child abuse. He said they have many child abuse cases at the High Court and some are still in the files.

He said apart of Social Welfare there is no Social Worker attached to monitor these cases. He said teenage pregnancy is on the increase. LUC believes in justice and equality; a crime of any type should not be compromised at all. Children who abuse the law should be remanded. People have being preaching child Rights and responsibilities, it is hide time children are involved in preaching to their peers and stand as role models. LUC believes that this is a good project that everybody will benefit since children are the future leaders and now that they have being involving them; he believes that there is hope for them.

The Family Support Unit attached to the police, Deputy Line Manager said for now they have so many domestic cases under investigation.The problem now is they lack a conducive office to do their work effectively. She said they are only occupying a small room and this makes most files to be misplaced.She said there is no Social Worker attached to the FSU to help counsel some of these children who have problems in their homes. She said she looks forward to DCISL intervention in Kabala. She believes we can work as a team in making sure children and women rights are heard. The increase rate of teenage pregnancy is becoming alarming because there are no Psycho-social activities these children engage in to keep their minds off sex. She said teenage boys would drop out of school to ride motor-bikes.

Having a project like this is a good thing because it will serve as good example for other children. Involving youths and giving them responsibility will divert their minds off doing bad things. These children will reach out to other children and guide them to become good children in society.

**Existing group: Children Forum Network**

Child Forum Network (CFN) President Joseph Fofanah who was introduced to me by Social Welfare is 17years of age and a former head boy of the Kabala Secondary School and also a President of Kabala Secondary school Student Union. I asked him few questions about their activities in Koinadugu, how well are they working with Social Welfare? Are they involved in any radio programs on Advocacy and if they have being attending CFN meetings in other areas in the country? I asked him about school clubs and also any youth group in the district.



Joseph Fofanah reported that he has been attending CFN meetings outside Kabala but normally ashamed to be part of those meetings because he has nothing to report on as no activities undertaken in Kabala. He said the only activity they do is on the Commemoration of the African child, they will come together and move to offices for support. The little money they raise is what they useto buy food and drinks for their performance.It is only now that Ministry Social Welfare Gender and Children’s Affair is planning to start working with them and they now have meetings every Friday. He said sometimes they will want to undertake an activity but to have the funding is difficult.

They usually go to different NGO’S for funding but for most of the time they are turned down. This is also affecting other youth clubs and so most of them are not functioning.

Since he started school he has never heard of a Guidance Counselor and he does not know the role they play in schools. He said their student union group is not active and they only recognize it by name. They also don’t have free access to radio to do their awareness raising program.

He told me about a rape case wherein a 26 year old man raped a 7year old girl at the Mongo Chiefdom. He said they were monitoring the case but the case was later compromised and most times they identify these cases but because of lack of support they lose the cases. They don’t know how to monitor and refer these cases.

In conclusion, Joseph Fofanah said since he has being President of CFN, this is the first time an organization would walk up to him to ask about their activities and is also proposing to work with them. He cannot express how he is feeling and now with such a project in kabala, they as children will now have a voice and speak up. He said most of his school mates have become dropouts and with this kind of program, there is hope for them to be good children in the community. Defense for Children and the Project Strengthening Children and Youths advocacy Work will be a chance to get back on track and speak for other children whose voices cannot be heard.

**Activity ll. Formation of Youth group**

Formation of the group, as done in other districts, was carried out in March 2015 DCI-SL brought together children to form a network called Children and Youth Advisory Board (CYAB)

These children are attending the different Secondary Schools within Kabala Township. They are forty (40) in number which comprises of twenty girls and twenty boys all falling under the age range of fourteen (14) to twenty-one (21).

These children who were chosen are to be role models or ambassadors in their schools and community. They are to identify issues affecting them and how they think is best for them to solve these problems. These forty children as peer educators would then reach out to many more children and youths each year to influence their lives positively knowledge they have acquired.

**Activity111. Orientation meeting with the children**

This meeting was to introduce the project to the group and also to let them know what is expected of them and how they will be working. In the orientation, I gave a brief background of the organisation; DCI-SL and their role in the community. I also gave a background of why the group is formed and why Kabala was chosen and also how the other districts have been working all to achieve one goal.I also informed them about the Stitching Taima Andreas and their role in providing funding and technical support towards the project.

Atthe first Orientation, meeting, we agreed we should be meeting frequently.In April 2015 we met twice a week to be able to kick starts the project soon. We meet at the Ministry of Social welfare Gender and Children’s Affair office conference hall. This was to know the level of commitment of children and also to get a brainstorm on their level of awareness about advocacy and child participation.

Also to knowissues that is affecting them, their level of understanding in identifying and reporting cases in the community.

The meetings were always child friendly without much familiarities observed for children to be well comfortable and free in thinking what they want to discuss. On the chosen Wednesdays and Fridays children will come after school within the hours of 3:30pm to 5:30pm to hold the meeting and they themselves always moderate the meeting.

The meeting’s agenda goes like this;

* Arrival of children 3:30- 4:00pm
* Prayer
* Welcome Address (DCI-SL)
* Introduction of children and their different schools and roles they play.
* Issues discussed in previous meetings
* Cases identified in school and community
* Wise words (children will give out proverbs and Poems)( 10mn)
* Songs ( 10mn)
* Discussion on the Child Protection issues using the Child Rights Act 2007. ( the children discuss this as if they are doing radio presentation)
* Identify advocacy issues from discussions above.
* Talent (song, poem, drama etc.)
* Closing prayer.
* Refreshment.

**Activity lV. Initial Training of the Children**

A day Initial training in June 2015 was organized for the children to be taught about the different rights and responsibilities using the UN Convention on the Right Child 2007. We started with this tool for children to be aware of their rights and also to know what their responsibilities are since there was confusion in the minds of community people saying that rights are given to the children but they (children) do not know their responsibilities and that is why they are being wayward.



In emphasizing on the responsibilities towards the rights given, children became more knowledgeable about what they should do and not do. Children were so intelligent in highlighting the 12 rights and created a room for discussion and questions asked and answered.

**Objective**

1. To know about the twelve rights of children
2. To know about their Responsibilities
3. To increase knowledge amongst children in identifying what is abuse and violence against them.
4. To know about the effects and causes of child abuse and violence
5. To know possible solutions in stopping or preventing child abuse.

The children were divided into three groups with each group given a task to highlight:

Group 1: child rights and responsibilities

Group2: what are the causes and effects of violating child rights?

Group 3: what are the measures Governments, NGO’s and Stakeholders need to put in place to stop child abuse?

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**Activity V. Facilitate the development of children position paper against early marriage**

In preparation for the Day of the African child (16th June), a consultative workshop was organized for children in Koinadugu by the Ministry of Social Welfare Gender and Children’s Affair. The Workshop was held on Friday 12th of June, 2015. It was attended by 48 children (30 girls and 18 boys) from different schools in the district.

Defence for Children International Sierra Leone, as one of the lead facilitator, facilitated the session in an interactive manner with a PowerPoint presentation to discuss on following:

1. Eliminating all forms of illegal and traditionally sanctioned practices that allow early child marriage.
2. Ensuring equal treatment of girls and boys (Able and Disable) in education, employment, access to public services and benefits.
3. Advocacy on remedial and affirmative measures for girls to seek redress for accumulated consequences of early child marriage and discrimination.

Following the PowerPoint presentation, I put the children into groups and asked them to discuss the issues of early marriage, their concerns and what would they like the government and NGO’s do to stop Early Marriage. The children’s presentations were compiled and used to draft their Position Paper

**Activity Vl. Day of the African Child**

Every year June 16 is celebrated as the Day of the African Child right across African countries in order to reflect on the child Rights and actions that the AU and African government should take to promote and ensure child right.Every year, Government, NGO’S, UN offices and Stakeholders gather to discuss the challenges and opportunities children face in Africa.



In Sierra Leone, the National event of the commemoration of the Day of the African Child was organized in Kabala town at the Community Center- Koinadugu district. The Ministry of Social Welfare Gender and Children’s Affairs (MSWGCA) in collaboration with development partners including Defense for Children International,CAUSE Canada, Oxfam, and UNICEF among others led the coordination of the event. The national theme for this year is ''Accelerating our Collective Efforts to End Child Marriage in Sierra Leone''. Translated in Krio:'' le we join hand together for tap pikin married na salone''.

Apart from honoring and remembering the brave children who were killed when they protested against apartheid and discrimination in educational service delivery in Soweto on 16th June 1976, we were also reminded why this should never happen and collectively we renew our commitment to the rights of the African child. The commemoration of this day has raised awareness of the continuing need for improvement of the education and rights of the African children as enshrined in many international legal instruments.June 16th day brought together representatives from Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies and Nongovernmental organizations working on Child Protection. The Vice president of Republic of Sierra Leone was the guest of honor.

The day was commemorated as children matched peacefully from the Koinadugu clock tower onto the district hall with different messages written on ply cards and wearing different printed t-shirts with messages of ending Child marriage.This year, it was organized to condemn Child Marriage advocacy forum. Statements were made on the importance of the day, meaning of the theme, effects of child marriage to the children, community, and the country.

Each statement ended with an advocacy message to ensure effective laws and implementation on ending child marriage. Many child protection agencies made statements including UNICEF, Council of Paramount chiefs, Plan International, Ministry of Health and Sanitation, Ministry of Education Science and Technology, Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, Ministry of Youth Affairs, and Ministry of Social welfare Gender and Children’s Affairs. In both the statement of the Minister of the Ministry of social welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs and the Honorable Vice President of Sierra Leone, they both acknowledge the work of DCI-SL for organizing the children and help them to make the position paper. They encouraged DCI-SL and its donors to continue with the good work.

A child representative from the group Children and Youth Advisory Board (CYAB) recently formed by DCI-SL and also a member of the Children’s Forum network Fatu Sewanatu Mansaray read and presented the Position Paper to the Vice President. Joseph Fofana also a member of the Children’s Forum network and Children and Youth Advisory board (CYAB) became the President of the day and where seated a t the high table with the vice President and all protocols observed.

**Results of Activities Undertaken**

**Activity 1.Meeting with Stake holders to introduce project**

Stakeholders who were met now know about the existence of Defence for Children Sierra Leone in Koinadugu District and are also aware about the project and its objectives demonstrated willingness to work or partner with the DCI-SL to promote youth participation.

**Activity11.Formation of children’s group**

**Result.**

* A very formidable children and youth group has been formed and gained recognition from the government. Forty children from different Secondary schools formed the group each between the ages of 14 -21, twenty girls and twenty boys.

**Activity 111.Orientation meeting with the children**

**Result**

* Children now know about the Organisation DCI SL, role in community, the project and the establishment of the project and why Kabala was chosen.
* Their involvement in the project
* Activities they will be undertaken

**Activity 1V.Initial training of the Children**

**Result.**

* Children are now aware of the twelve important rights and their responsibilities in the Child Rights Act
* They know the different types of abuses and violence they encounter in school, home and community
* Children learned how to be role models amongst their peers
* They now know how to identify and report issues that affect them and who they should report to.
* The group work amongst them promoted understanding unity and friendship amongst them.
* The workshop created an atmosphere for reliability and confidence in discussing issues.
* It brought confidence and boldness for children to speak up in any forum.

**Activity V. Facilitate the development of children position paper against early marriage**

**Result**

For the first time in KoinaduguDistrict, children have presented a Position Paper on Child Marriage which is one of the key issues that affect them.

Fatu Jalloh is a 23 year old woman who lives in a village in our district; she was forced into early marriage at the age of 12 because her father had to pay for killing a cow with his motor bike. Because her father had no job and can only support the home by doing backyard garden, Fatu was the only means of settling this dispute between her and the cow owner. She elucidated;

At the DAC, this was what she explained.

***‘'My name is Fatu, the eldest of 5 siblings. I entered into early marriage at the age of 12 years. Now I have two sons and one girl. I developed fistula after giving birth to my second child who died 3 days later. My marriage became a death sentence because I married to a 55year old man, older than my father. I was forced to have sex with him because he believes that I am his property and that nobody can stop him. I am unable to cope with the demands of such life after the man died and left me with this bad condition and two children to take care of. My family has rejected me and also my community because of my condition. I blame my parent and also the community for taking this decision of marriage at a tender age. I would love to have being educated and become a ''Banker''.***

**Activity V1: Day of the African Child**

**Result:**

* A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Government, International Non-governmental and Non-governmental institutions and the Chiefs, Traditional leaders, Traditional Birth Attendants, Societal Heads and all Stakeholders in Koinadugu to end all Child Initiation into Secret societies. ( Female Genital Cutting)
* Airtel Sierra Leone in partnership with SOS Sierra Leone provided life time scholarship to seventy Ebola survivors.
* Defence for Children Sierra Leone was recognized for their success in Child protection in Sierra Leone
* A Girl child read and presented the Position Paper to the Vice President of the republic of Sierra Leone
* On behalf of all the Children in Sierra Leone, a Child Representative who was the President of the day read and presented the Position paper to the vice President of the Republic of Sierra Leone.

**Annex 1: Discussion of children on Early Marriage**

**WHY EARLY MARRIAGES IN KOINADUGU DISTRICT?**

The children expressed that the following are the major reasons for this practice (early child marriage) in Koinadugu:

1. Customs and traditions play an important role. *Bondosocity* are some of the traditions that play significant role in girls’ early marriages. There is also a mindset that considers a girl as *‘Nkorjuwor’ (in Fula)* that has to be handed over to her in-laws with her virginity intact. Parents often try to get rid of this “huge responsibility” as soon as possible. Girls are seen as a burden on the family, and are married off at an early age. In some cases, the marriage actually brings money or other benefits. Grooms are required to pay an already agreed amount to father or a male guardian to marry a girl.
2. Dispute settlement is another important reason. Girls are given in marriage to the men of wronged families to settle disputes. These girls have to live a life of slave to pay for the sins committed by their male relatives (brother, father, uncle).
3. The non-enforcement of enacted laws that prohibit early child marriage is another big factor. The parent’s habit of compromising cases of early marriage is abundant in Koinadugu and both the Ministry of Social Welfare, and Koinadugu district council weak capacity to monitor marriages has contributed to aggravate early marriage in the district.
4. Lack of awareness among people is also a very important factor. Literacy level is very low in Koinadugu. People have little knowledge of the negative impact of early marriages on children especially girls as the impact on a girl is multi-fold which include psychological trauma and physical health hazards. A girl married off at early age is too young to adapt with the requirements of an adult relationship.
5. Birth Registration system is very ineffective and non-responsive. The birth registration for children, especially girls is never prioritized, which gives room for manipulation regarding the exact age of the child/girls at the time of marriage.
6. Marriage registration process is weak. The District Council officials do not perform their duties of verifying the age of the persons getting married, and do not make formal complaint to the relevant police officials. In fact most of these people are of the same mindset, girls should be married as early as possible.
7. Religious belief like the Islam beliefs a girl that has reached the age of 15 is ripe for marriage.
8. Peer group influences causes child marriage. Children admire their peers who have entered into marriage because of wealth, fame, prestige,

**CONSEQUENCIES OF EARLY MARRIAGE**

The children went further to identify the following as effects of early child marriage on the lives of the girl child;

Early age marriages hamper children’s growth into healthy adults. They are not given a chance to make their own informed choices to enter into one of the most crucial relationships of their lives. It burdens them with responsibilities of marital life at a time when they should be going to school or playing games. It leads to generational subjugation and control over women.

In most of such cases, the girls are married to persons much older than themselves. This creates a very odd power equation.

The girl is young, uneducated and not aware of her rights, while the man is experienced, often has some education and is aware of how to manipulate things. Such young girls are treated like animals through coercive use of power, and subjected to violence and abuse.

When a marriage takes place between two children it is very difficult for them to take up the responsibilities of an adult life, but girls again suffer more because boys often have outlets and escapes because of their contact with the outer world and choices given to them by the patriarchal norms of the society. Due to societal choices available to men even after early marriage they can still rebuild their lives and start a fresh life, but girls are left with no choice but to undergo generational subjugation.

Psychological impact on the girls when they enter into such relationships they are young the education and background and hostility of relationships and environment like dispute settlement further adds to their miseries.

Limited choices and bodily control Awareness about reproductive rights and information of contraceptives is often lacking, which results in teenage pregnancies, and large family size. Thus they are unable to break the poverty cycle as large family size prohibits them from educating their children.

A direct consequence of early age marriage is early childbirth and greater vulnerability to related complications especially morbidities like fistula. The top three causes for maternal death in Koinadugu are post-partum hemorrhage (excessive bleeding), sepsis (major infection) and eclampsia (hypertensive disorder). All three are found to have greater prevalence in teenage pregnancies due to biological and physiological factors. [Early Age of Marriage: A Position Paper by children of Koinadugu District]

**POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

**REVIEWING OF THE LAWS ON EARLY MARRIAGES**

In Koinadugu the issue of early marriages remains un-addressed and no measures are taken by the stake holders to arrest this trend. Though some patchy efforts were made by the government, civil society and child protection organizations, but they were not enough even to make it a main stream rights issue of children particularly girls.

The laws on “Child Rights Act 2007” and “Sexual Offences Act 2012”discourage child marriages but section 2.4 of the Customary Act compromises this two acts. The punishments for violating this law are not commensurate to the offence. Furthermore, if a marriage involving young children takes place, the adults who agreed to the marriage and arranged it are unpunished, and the marriage does not stand dissolved. As usual, the implementation of this law is in-effective. Therefore, it is very important for the state to take corrective measures. The legislators need to bring amendments to the law making the punishment stricter. The monitoring and implementation of the law should be mandatory, while the law should be publicized properly so that everyone in the country knows about it.

**ACTIONS AT THE LOCAL /COMMUNITY LEVELS:**

We need to emphasize on strengthened and responsive local government structures at the district level, so that birth registration processes and marriage registration processes are made smoother and efficient.

One of the major reasons why early marriages go unreported and the crime is often un-attended is that the district structure is not pro-active in marriage and birth registration, nor they bother about the ID-Card (the basic citizenship document) of a woman.

District Council structure needs to be active enough to register the marriages and be responsible to cross check/verify the age of the girl/boy before the ceremony. The KDC structure with the help of police should stop the marriage if the girl/boy is found under-age for the marriage. This structure and procedure is not active as hundreds of marriages go un-registered, while the person facilitating the marriage ceremony never verify the age of the couple. If the structure at the KDC level is pro-active enough to take up its prime responsibility of marriage registration and the verification of age, the early marriage phenomenon can be curbed.

There is a serious need to create awareness about birth registration process and the significance of the birth registration.

There should be appropriate criteria for issuing licenses to marriage Registrars. They should be provided proper training on the relevant laws of the country.

All associated persons such as parents, opinion makers, local and national media, and relevant officials at all levels must be trained and sensitized about the importance of appropriate and legal age for marriage.

**POSITION PAPER ON PROPOSE INTERVENTIONS AND LEGAL RRFORMS TO END EARLY CHILD MARRIAGE**

Keeping in view the above discussion, the children made the following recommendations

As the issue is now rampant, the second forthcoming Constitutional amendment should completely and clearly prohibit early child marriage. In the purview of the provincial local governments, all the provincial local governments need to enact new and comprehensive laws to put an end to the child marriages in their respective provinces.

Birth Registration should be made mandatory and it should be done immediately after the child birth.

The minimum punishment for violators or perpetrators of early marriage should be giving at least ten years imprisonment and a fine of at least Le50, 000,000. Punishment should be made applicable to all the parties involved in child marriage including the parents of both the groom and the bridegroom, and the person who solemnizes such a marriage, bridegroom if over 18 years of age, and the legal witnesses of the girl.

The discrimination between boys and girls should be abolished forthwith. The legal age for marriage for boys and girls should be same – 18 years and above.

Children should be members of all decision making bodies of their respective district and chiefdoms, especially those that determines and dictates issues affecting their lives.

**Annex 2. Koinadugu Children’s Position Paper**

**KOINADUGU CHILDREN POSITION PAPER**

The chair person, our Vice president, all elders and my colleague children, I welcome you to Kabala and extend greetings to you all.

In the Koinadugu district the incidence of girl child marriage is rampart due to our customs and traditional beliefs- the idea that once a girl is matured, she should go into marriage.Some traditions like FGM promote child marriage, it is made to appear that after their initiations, and the girls are prepared for marriage. Child marriages promote poverty in the family and the community.

Below is an example of a child marriage victim in Koinadugu.

Fatu Jalloh is a 23 year old woman who lives in one of our chiefdoms, she was forced into early marriage at the age of 12 because her father was so poor, he had no money to pay for a cow he accidentally killed, and she was given into marriage to the owner of the cow as a means of settlement.

Hear her*, “I am the eldest of five siblings; I entered into marriage at the age of 12 years. Now I have two sons and one girl. I developed fistula after giving birth to my second child who died 3 days later. My marriage became a death sentence because I was married to a 55 years old man who treated me as his personal property. After the man died I was faced with the challenges of taking care of my children and my health condition. My family and the community rejected me. “I blame my parents and the community for taking this decision of putting me into marriage at my tender age”.*

From the Koinadugu Children’s Consultative Conference held on the 12 June 2015, the children expressed that the following are the major reasons for the practice of child marriage in the district:

1. Customs and traditional practices
2. Initiation of children below the age of 18 years in the Bondo society.
3. Dispute settlement; Girls are given into marriage as a way of settling dispute.
4. The non-enforcement laws dealing with children
5. High illiteracy rate amongst the people.
6. Poverty
7. Those who do officiate the marriages may lack adequate knowledge on the laws and policies governing marriage.

**CONSEQUENCIES OF CHILD MARRIAGE**

We have identified the following effects of child marriage:

1. Children at an early age take marital responsibility.
2. Unequal power relationship between the man and the girl.
3. Psycho-social effects on the girl.
4. Increased population growth.
5. Medical complications e.g. fistula.
6. Poverty in the community

**POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

As children of the Koinadugu district, we are asking our fathers and mothers to end child marriage in the district by:

1. The establishment of by laws against marriages of children below 18 years.
2. Not allowing girls below the age of 18 years to join the Bondo Secret Society.
3. Registering of all births and marriages.
4. Prosecuting without compromise all child sexual abuse cases.
5. Children to participate in the decision making process on issues affecting them.

**Children’s Message to the Government of the Republic of Sierra Leone And All Child Protection Agencies (Position Paper)**

Madam Chair, Your Excellency the Vice President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, all protocols observed, I greet you all.

I feel honored to deliver this statement to the government on behalf of thechildren of this our beloved nation, Sierra Leone.

On behalf of the children, I would like to thank the government and its development partners in the continuous fight against the dreadful Ebola Virus Disease, especially the successes gained in child protection, gender and psychosocial support. .

However, Honorable Vice President, we are gathered here today to commemorate the Day of African Child with key focus on ending child marriage, which is a major impediment on the survival, development and participation of the girl child.

Major issues affecting us in addressing the issues on child marriage are as follows:

1. Birth registration – most of child births are not registered.
2. Traditional beliefs and practices – e.g. settling of family conflicts through handing in the girl child in marriage.
3. Weak enforcement of laws and policies to protect the child, especially the girl child.

**Judiciary/legal Services**

1. Government and stakeholders should ensure that all child births are registered.
2. Government through the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs and line ministries should ensure the legal required age of marriage is 18 years and above and to also fast track the harmonization of all laws regarding marriage in its ongoing constitutional review ( Child Right Act, UNCRC, Customary Law and the Sierra Leone Constitution).
3. Government and partners should ensure there is a sitting magistrate in all districts addressing children’s welfare issues and also strengthen the law enforcement bodies, for example the police (Family Support Unit FSU) to enforce the laws.
4. Children in contact or in conflict with the law must have easy access to legal aid and the legal aid board should be seen as visible and effective.

**Education**

1. Government through the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs and Ministry of Education, Science and Technology to ensure all legal instruments on children (Child Right Acts, UNCRC) related to children must be incorporated into the school’s curriculum.
2. Government must ensure all children have access to affordable quality education.
3. Government should provide grants to outstanding girls up to tertiary institutions.

**Health**

1. Free health care facilities for all children are provided.
2. Access to quality health facilities in schools (eg Water and Sanitation facilities in all schools)

**System Strengthening**

1. The Government through the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs and partners should provide support to Community Advocacy Groups.
2. Government, partners and communities to promote child participation in all decision making processes.
3. Government should provide the necessary platform for massive sensitization to stop child marriage.
4. Stakeholders (Traditional/Religious Leaders, Local Councils, Community Leaders, Parents, CWCs)
5. Government must ensure there is a Memorandum of Understanding with all stakeholders, emphasizing the need to eliminate child marriage.
6. Parents and families must be engaged by child protection partners and the ministry to promote good parenting skills at all levels.
7. Government through the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs to strengthen and empower community structures such as CWCs, CAGs, and Mothers Clubs etc. in all districts.
8. Traditional leaders, religious leaders and local authorities to ensure that children are not used as bargaining chips in settling disputes a practice in the Koinadugu District.
9. Government must provide psychosocial support for all child marriage victims.

**Institutions**

1. Government must establish safe homes for child abused victims in all districts

Mr. Vice President, as chairman of the Leadership Group Meeting we are appealing for these recommendations highlighted to be swiftly acted upon.

The place of children is the School and not bridal home.

I thank you all for given me audience.

**Case Studies**

**Joseph B. Fofana:***“I am 17yrs of op, attending the Kabala Secondary School and in Senior Secondary school level 4(SS4) about to take my West African Senior School Certificate Exam (WASCE). I have being idling around in the midst of bad company and friends. Sometimes we sit at the ghetto playing dice, drinking and smoking because I don’t have hope to go to college since my father is poor and my relatives in the city do not help us. I decided to go into bike riding so I can support myself in school and feed my family since I am the eldest son.*

*I came in contact with DCI -S L through Aunty Samira one day when I took her with my bike to her office. During the bike ride, she started asking me questions about my schooling, and family. At first I became adamant in answering, but she then told me her reason for asking and told me where she is working and her purpose to work in Kabala. I became interested to confide in her and so we went in her office to discuss. She counseled me never to lose hope and asked me to join group that she is establishing,*

*Since I became part of the project, my lifestyle has changed. I now focus more on my studies than sitting with friends or ride bike. The project has taught me how to be responsible in making life meaningful and how to perceiver to become somebody in future.*

*Aunty Samira calls me every day and talks to me. She always asks me what I have done today and what I want to do tomorrow for what and when. She has helped me organize my life. Being part of the group is rewarding. It is so interesting to be together with other youths to constructively discuss on problems.*

*I am happy for the intervention of DCI SL and this project; I can now advice my friends who are misguided using myself as an example”.*

**Fatu Mansaray:***“I am fourteen years old and in Junior Secondary School, form three. My parents are business people in Guinea and I stay with my Aunty in Kabala. I have being a shy person in school and even at home because people always mock me saying I am stupid. I always feel that I am not being appreciated even in my family; I always stay at the back thinking that if I try to do anything, it will be nonsense and I will be laughed at.*

*With the intervention of DCI SL and this project, I have built up my self-esteem and confidence in anything I do even if it is not 100% correct. I can speak- up in a crowd and even my family is surprise to see the rapid change in me. Now I talk to girls of my age to be self-confident and bold”.*

**Iye Fofanah:***“I am sixteen years of age and the eldest of three siblings. I always sit at the back in class, even when the teacher teaches I don’t pay much attention or even answer to questions like other girls do. Last year my report card was not good and it was all painted with red ink. My father says if I continue to fail, he will put me into marriage. Within me I know I can do better and become a very responsible person someday.*

*When this project was introduced in my school, I was fortunate to be part of the group. I have not regretted joining this group because now I take my studies very serious and I also help to advice other girls to take their education as a tool for future development. Even my father is very proud of me because he has seen so much improvement in me. I even study with my siblings at home. I am happy for being part of this program”.*

*The secret is that Aunty Samira of DCI SL has helped me organized my life, I now know my priorities especially education. I also know how to study and how to seek help when I need information on a subject that I’m reaching in school. I have learnt to believe that focus and perseverance is a key to success.*

**Alimamy Sesay:***“I am fifteen years old. I always fight and bully younger boys in school. I do it to gain fame in school and also for my school mate to fear me. For me it has always being fun and I am always suspended for doing it.*

*With the intervention of this project and DCI-SL, I have now become a changed person. Instead of bulling, I advocate against my peers who bully others in school. I have learnt about the rights of children and I believe every child must be treated fairly. I am very happy for DCI-SL and the changes impacted in me”.*

**Challenges**

1. Domestic engagement of children limit their participation at meetings
2. Lack of guidance counselors at schools
3. Limited services in the District to linkup the children with
4. Traditional and customary practices
5. Schools not providing quality education

**Plan for July to September**

1. Training of the group members as peer educators
2. Signing of the MOU with schools
3. School Assembly talks
4. Radio programs