




A Profile of
Child Marriage in Africa

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children

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A man stands in the center-left of the frame, wearing a dark, patterned shawl draped over his shoulders and a dark, textured skirt. He is looking towards the camera with a serious expression. To his right, a young girl sits on the floor, wearing a blue and white patterned dress and a black headscarf. She is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The background is a rough, textured wall with several small, round, dark objects hanging from it. The lighting is warm and focused on the subjects.

Worldwide, more than **700 million** women and girls alive today were married before their 18th birthday.

Seventeen per cent of them, or 125 million, live in Africa.

More than **one in three** of these women and girls (**over 40 million**) entered into marriage or union before age 15.

African child brides are most likely found in **rural** areas and among the **poorest** segment of the population.

Girls in **rural** areas are **twice** as likely to become child brides as girls from urban areas. Similarly, girls from the **poorest** households are **twice** as likely to marry before age 18 as girls from the richest households.

KEY FACTS



The prevalence of child marriage across Africa is slowly **decreasing**.

This progress, though, has not been equitable; **high levels** of child marriage **among the poorest** have persisted, while declines in the practice have been limited to the richest.

In all other regions of the world, current rates of reduction mean there will be **fewer child brides** with each passing year.

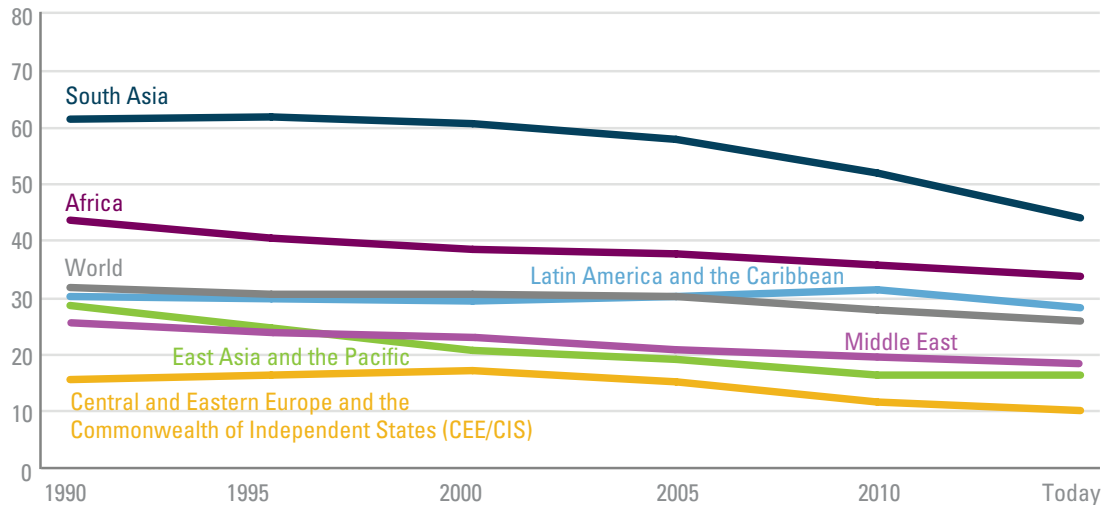
However, in **sub-Saharan Africa**, even a doubling of the rate of reduction would not be enough to reduce the number of child brides.

Worldwide, more than **75 million young women** aged 20 to 24 years, a quarter of them in Africa, entered their first marriage or union before they celebrated their 18th birthday. But the global profile of child marriage is changing. A growing child population combined with a slow decline in the practice of child marriage in Africa will put millions more girls at risk. If current trends continue, **almost half of the world's child brides in 2050 will be African**.

PAST

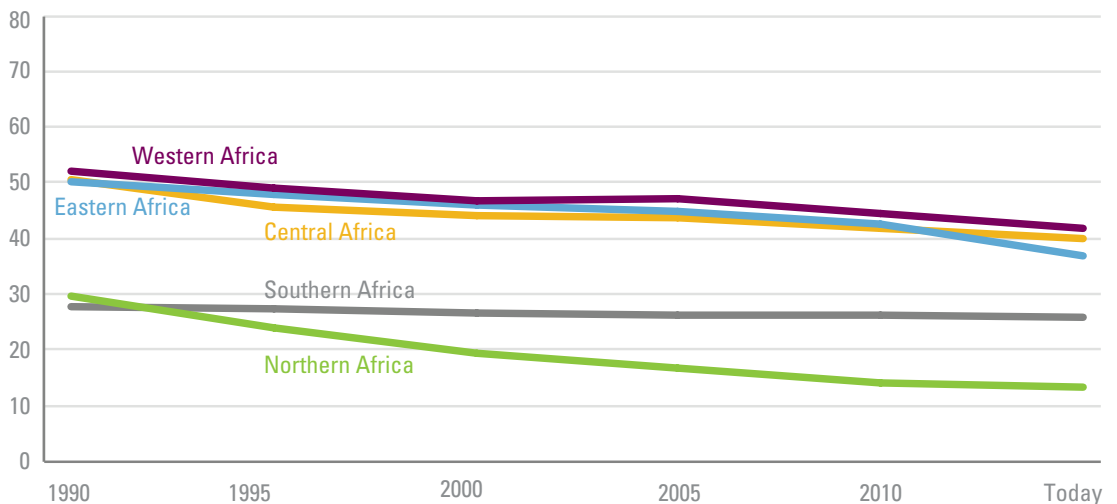
The prevalence of child marriage has been slowly declining in Africa, but remains higher than the global average

Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were married or in union before age 18, by region



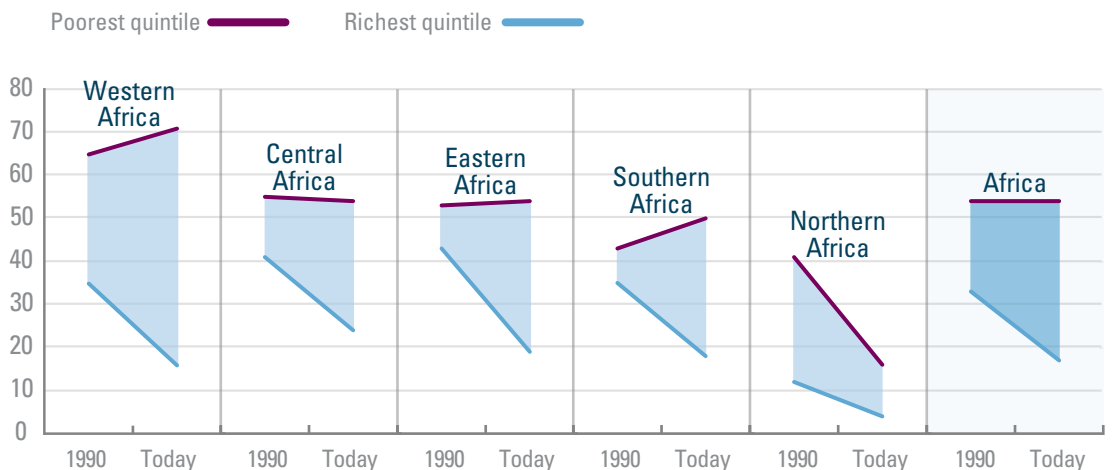
The fastest progress in reducing child marriage in Africa has been in the Northern region

Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were married or in union before age 18, by African sub-region



Since 1990, the prevalence of child marriage in Africa has been halved among the richest; among the poorest, the level remains unchanged

Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were married or in union before age 18, by wealth quintile and by African sub-region



One in three young women in Africa

In **Mauritania**, 60 per cent of married adolescent girls have husbands who are at least 10 years older than they are.

In **Niger**, young women who married as adults were four times as likely to receive antenatal care during their pregnancies as young women who were married before age 15.

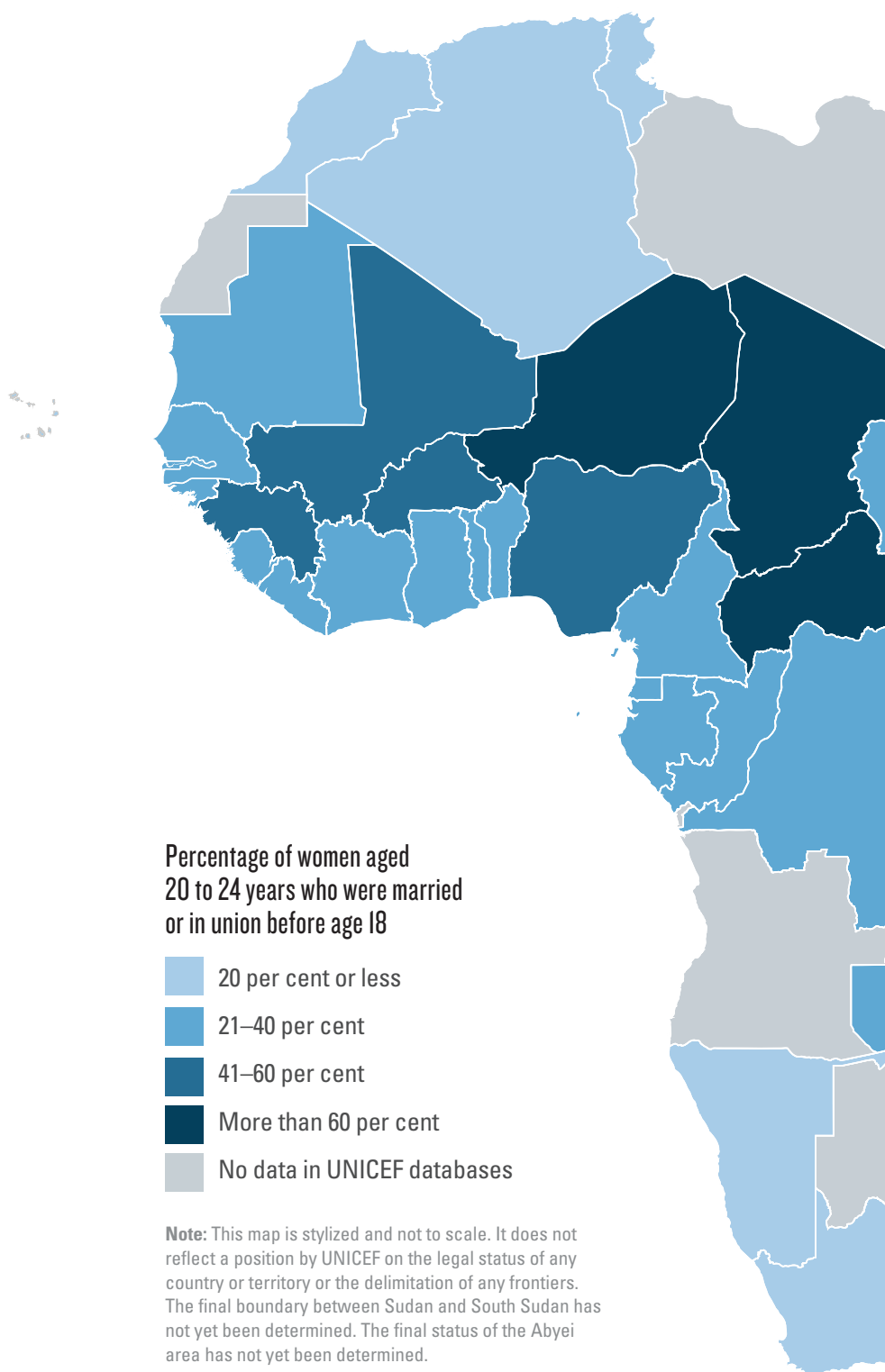
In **Guinea**, levels of child marriage are more than twice as high in rural than in urban areas, and three times higher among the poorest households than among the richest.

In **Liberia**, women with no education have a median age at first marriage of 17.8, four years earlier than those with a secondary education or beyond.

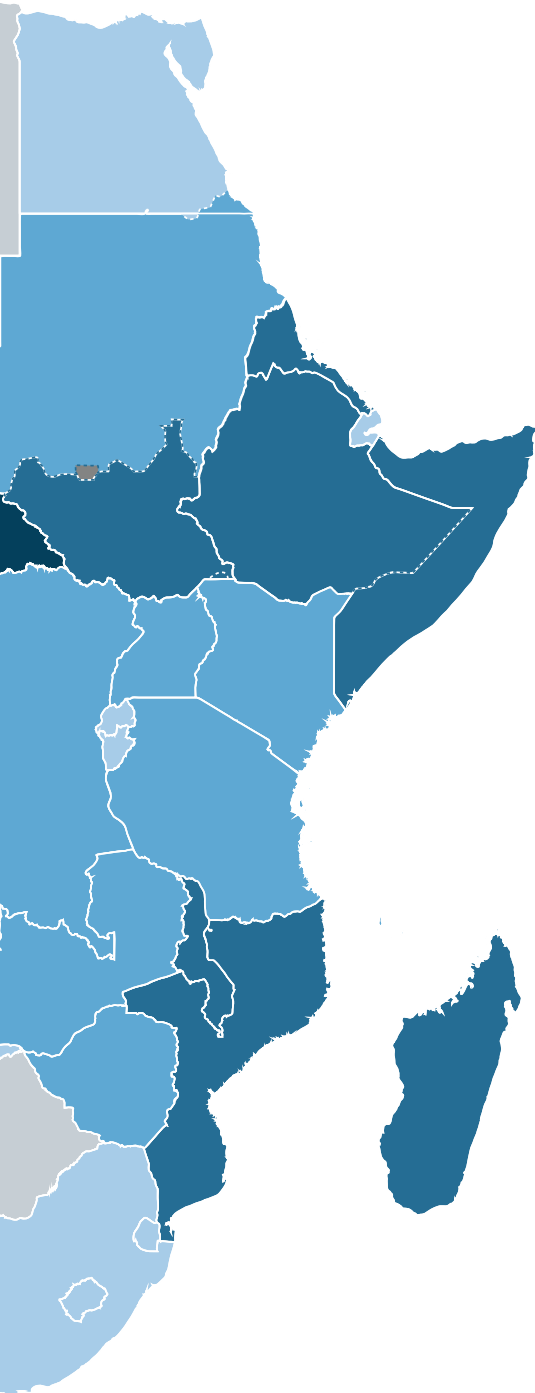
One in three married adolescent girls in **Guinea-Bissau** are in a polygynous union, one in four in **Burkina Faso**, and one in five in **Benin** and **Cameroon**.

Nigeria is home to the largest number of child brides in Africa, with 23 million girls and women who were married in childhood.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the lowest levels of child marriage are seen in **Djibouti**, **South Africa**, **Swaziland**, **Namibia** and **Rwanda**, all below 10 per cent.



were married or in union by age 18



In **South Sudan**, child marriage is common even among more advantaged families. Girls from the wealthiest households are nearly as likely to be married by age 18 as girls from the poorest households.

Chad has among the highest levels of marriage by age 15, at 29 per cent.

Boys are more likely to be married in childhood in the **Central African Republic** than in any other country in Africa. Still, girls remain most affected, with levels of child marriage that are more than twice those seen among boys.

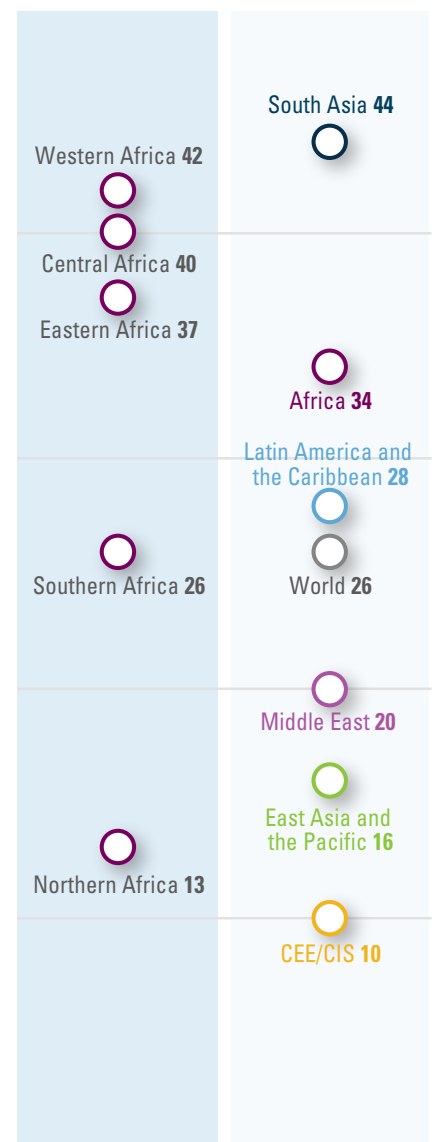
In **Kenya**, women living in Nairobi marry more than six years later than those living in the North Eastern province, where the median age at marriage is 17.6 years.

While 28 per cent of adolescent girls in **Madagascar** are married or living with a partner, another 6 per cent are already divorced, widowed or separated.

In **Mozambique**, the likelihood a young woman already had three or more children is seven times higher for those who had married by age 15.

Three in five sub-regions of Africa have levels of child marriage higher than the global average

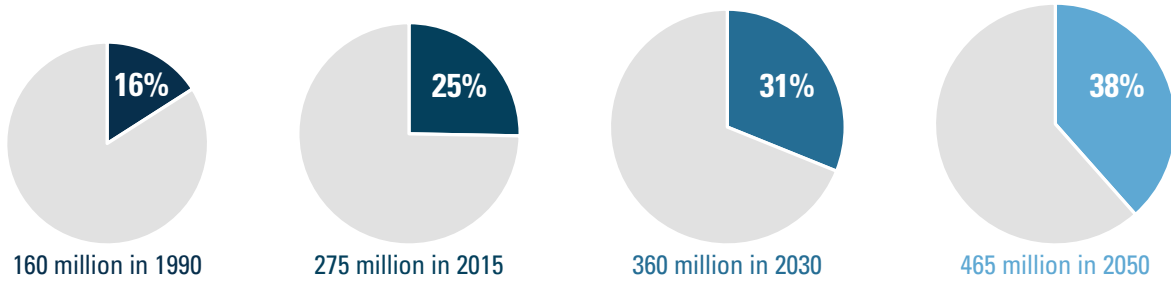
Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were married or in union before age 18



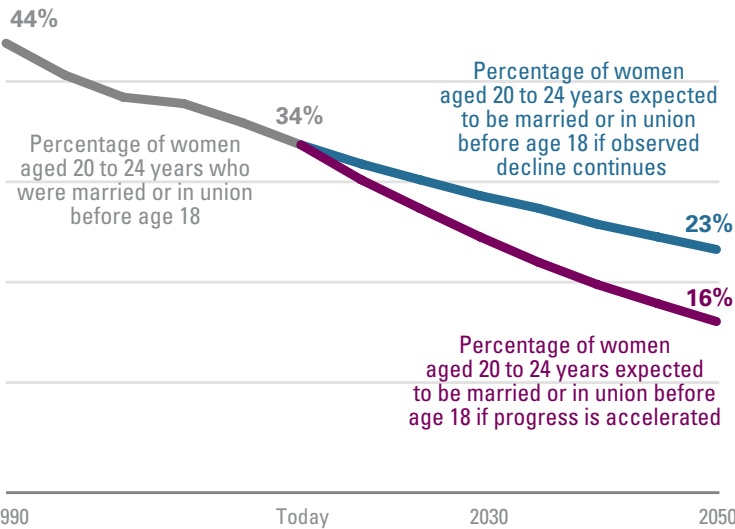
FUTURE

The child population of Africa is expected to grow rapidly in the coming years, putting millions more girls at risk of child marriage

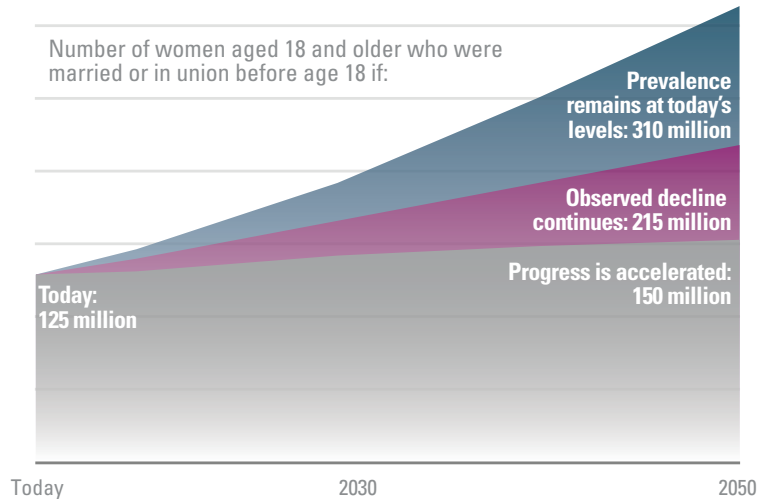
Global population of girls under age 18 (size of pie), and proportion who are African (blue portion), 1990 to 2050



If progress is accelerated, the prevalence of child marriage in Africa could be halved by 2050

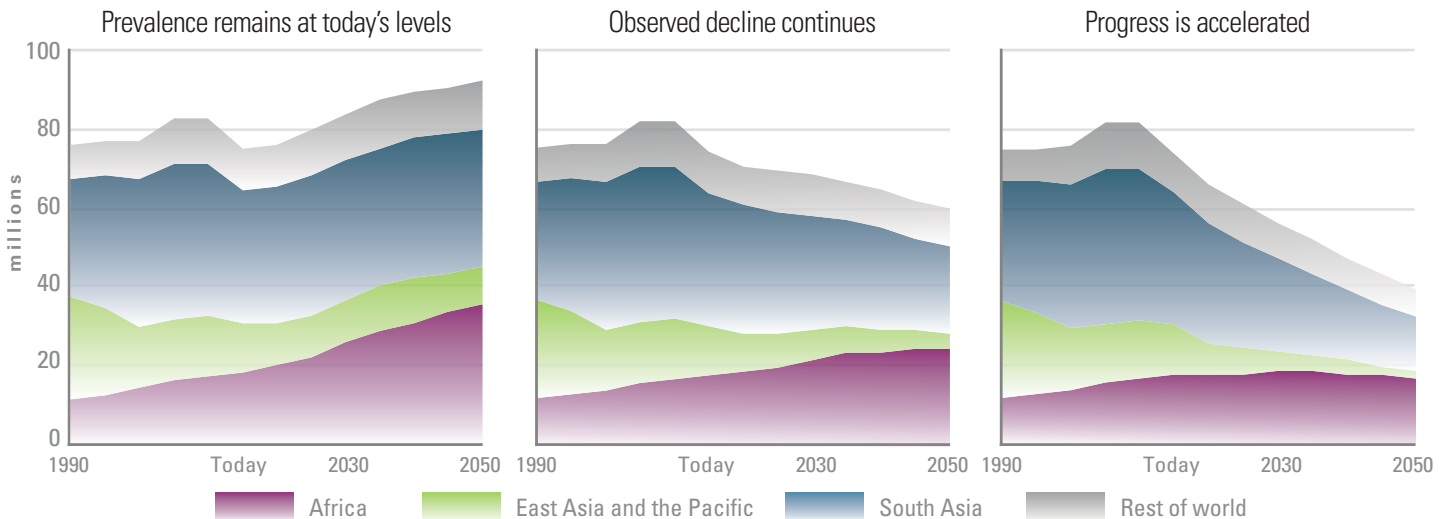


Even doubling the rate of reduction will not be enough to reduce the number of child brides in Africa



Africa will have the largest number and global share of child brides by 2050

Number of women aged 20 to 24 years who were married or in union before age 18, according to three scenarios



“Child marriage happens because adults believe they have the right to impose marriage upon a child. This denies children, particularly girls, their dignity and the opportunity to make choices that are central to their lives, such as when and whom to marry or when to have children. Choices define us and allow us to realize our potential. Child marriage robs girls of this chance.”

– *Desmond Tutu and Graça Machel*

NOTES: The country facts refer to the following indicators: Adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 who are currently married or in union (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar and Mauritania); young women aged 20 to 24 who were married or in union before age 18 (Central African Republic, Chad, Djibouti, Guinea, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Rwanda, South Africa, South Sudan and Swaziland); girls and women of any age who were married before age 18 (Nigeria); and median age at first marriage among women aged 25 to 49 (Liberia), and 25 to 29 (Kenya). Estimates presented here are based on a subset of 49 African countries with available data covering 97 per cent of the African female population. The African sub-regions are based on the regional classification of the African Union. Global estimates are based on a subset of 119 countries with available data covering 64 per cent of the female population. Regional estimates represent data covering at least 50 per cent of the female population. Data coverage is below 50 per cent for East Asia and the Pacific due to the lack of comparable data on child marriage for China in UNICEF global databases. The term ‘child brides’ is used to refer both to girls under age 18 who are currently married or in union, as well as women of any age who were first married or in union as children. On the page titled ‘Future’, acceleration of progress refers to a doubling of the rate of reduction of the child marriage prevalence observed since 1990. For additional information, please contact data@unicef.org.

DATA SOURCES: UNICEF global databases, 2015, based on Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) and other nationally representative surveys, 2003-2014. For detailed source information by country, please see data.unicef.org. Population data are from: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Population Prospects: The 2015 revision*, CD-ROM edition, United Nations, New York, 2015.

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This brochure was produced by the Data and Analytics Section of UNICEF for the African Girls’ Summit on Ending Child Marriage (26-27 November 2015, Lusaka, Zambia). The

meeting brings together high-level personalities from Member States to share good practices and challenges in ending child marriage; to secure and renew commitments from stakeholders to invest more to accelerate an end to child marriage; and to provide a platform for discussion among community leaders, traditional and religious leaders, girls affected by child marriage and youth advocating against child marriage.