

LOCAL ACTIVISM: CHANGING CULTURE NORMS

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ABSTRACT

Child marriage, though internationally recognized as a human rights violation, is a common culture norm in many traditional societies around the world. As a norm, it is therefore difficult to change due to its longstanding tradition and seemingly inherent nature. This study seeks to emphasize those change agents who work to end such harmful culture norms. The primary research question thus asks what effect local activists have on changing dominant culture norms in a given society. In order to understand this effect, I emphasize the local activist by investigating three factors: who they are, what norms they deem warrant change, and how they use the help of TANs and concerned NGOs to achieve their mission. The case study for this research incorporates these three factors by studying how Chief Theresa Kachindamoto of Malawi served as the initiating local actor in banning child marriage in her district alongside the help of TANs and NGOs. Through interviewing and corresponding with various local, state, and international actors and organizations across Africa, I conclude my study with a series of hypotheses aimed towards understanding how the initiating local activist effectively brings about lasting norm change.

Cultural Norms and Child Marriage

Each year, children across the globe are subjected to marriage before the age of eighteen. In fact, currently more than 650 million women, worldwide, were married as children and twelve million children continue to be married every year.¹ This harmful cultural norm, known as child marriage, is a pervasive and prevalent tradition typically found in countries and cultures struggling with financial insecurity and/or gender inequality.² Child marriage is keeping girls from getting an education and robbing them of opportunities. However, in order to know how to curtail child marriage, it is important to first understand its significance and impact as a norm.

Cultural norms are integral parts of different societies and cultures. They comprise of the expected behavior or rituals which constitute a society's culture and way of life. Though such rituals are often cherished as preserving tradition within a given culture, they are not always in the best interest of all the people. For example, cultural norms regarding rites of passage such as child marriage, are damaging to the children involved, as the focus on tradition seems to outweigh the well-being of the girls involved. In fact, it would benefit the society more if girls are given the opportunity to complete their education so, by the time they marry, they are older and mature in both mind and body. In this way, the society may see a decline in poverty as both sexes are educated and can work for their income.

So, how do such cultural norms change? According to Article 16 of the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full

¹ "UN Programme to Help Spare Millions from Child Marriage, Extended to 2023," UN News, March 10, 2020, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/03/1059141>.

² Girls Not Brides, "About Child Marriage," *Girls Not Brides* (blog), accessed May 21, 2020, <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/about-child-marriage/>.

consent of the intending spouses.”³ Furthermore, Article 26 of the Declaration states that “everyone has the right to education.”⁴ Though child marriage is internationally recognized as a human rights violation, and one which hinders education and subsequently warrants change, action taken against it must be initiated from the local and societal level for lasting success to occur. Therefore, reform of culture norms cannot only come from external organizations; it must also come through local activism. If norm reform is initiated from external sources, such as the UN or certain non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the given community will not be as receptive and would perceive such an action as an imposition or even as a form of cultural imperialism.

Therefore, it is crucial for norm change to begin from local activists. Change seems to be most effective when initiated by local actors who know the community and can work their cause from the inside. In this way, the people of the given community must be seriously considered as reform can be initiated by their local actor, but it is they who must also help maintain such reform. Alternatives to the previous norm must be created and undertaken as the road is long and difficult. However, transnational advocacy networks (or TANs) become integral to changing culture norms, such as child marriage. By locating and identifying the local actor initiating change in a community, TANs can build a bridge between regional and international levels. They build this bridge through means of information, resources, and media attention to broaden the scope of the local actor’s mission. These provisions will allow for the necessary clout to carry-out successful and lasting reform.

This study explores such partnerships between local agents and TANs, as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) through a single case study focusing on child marriage in

³ “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” October 6, 2015, <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>.

⁴ “Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”

Malawi. This case study begins by identifying a local activist who initiated the fight against child marriage, a harmful culture norm prevalent in many districts of Malawi. This local activist, Chief Theresa Kachindamoto, banned child marriage in her district of Malawi, and is actively encouraging other chiefs and local/state authorities to do the same. Through her partnerships with several transnational actors, Kachindamoto has spread her influence across southern Africa. The TANs and NGOs which aided her in banning child marriage, work to empower her mission and bring her voice to an international stage. By identifying the chief as the local agent initiating change and by studying the TANs and concerned NGOs helping her achieve her mission, this study provides an in-depth view of how local activists bring about culture norm change in their community and beyond.

In essence, the overall study of local activists and culture norms, examined through a single case study of Malawi, is grounded on the central research inquiry which questions what effect local activism has on changing dominant culture norms. It is, therefore, the goal of this study to examine which local actors bring about norm change, and how their partnerships with transnational actors help them do so. As such, where previous studies have targeted their focus more towards the TANs themselves, this study adds to the literature by shifting the focus to the work of the local actors, by way of examining who they are and what they do in seeking to change culture norms. In focusing on Chief Kachindamoto's work on fighting child marriage in Malawi, we may have a better idea of how culture norms can be changed in similar societies and situations. Upon concluding this research, we will have a series of hypotheses which will help us understand how this single case study of Malawi could be applied to other countries and cultures.

Understanding Child Marriage in the Context of Human Rights and the Evolution of Norms

According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN OHCHR), child marriage is internationally defined as a form of forced marriage “where at least one of the parties is under 18 years of age,” and is thus classified as “a human rights violation and a harmful practice.”⁵ It serves as a common custom and tradition in many countries and tends to affect girls more so than boys. Child marriage is, unfortunately, a stark reality for many girls across the world. However, in less developed countries, many of which are struggling with ongoing conflict, poverty, and “humanitarian settings,” the percentage of child marriage greatly increases to a prevalence of 40%; that is, 40% of girls marry before 18, while 12% marry before 15.⁶

Africa holds some of the highest rates of child marriage, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. According to an atlas provided by *Girls Not Brides* (a non-profit organization focused on ending child marriage), which maps the prevalence of child marriage across the world, Niger (76%), the Central African Republic (68%), and Chad (67%) have the highest rates of child marriage in all of Africa.⁷ These three countries are marked with insecurity, poverty, and ongoing conflict. This results from governmental systems which cannot provide stability. Therefore, with no state stability, a country’s culture norms offer a lasting sense of stability. Unfortunately, these culture norms can come in the form of harmful human rights violations, such as child marriage or female genital mutilation, which target certain groups of people within a society.

Such governmental instability is a large part of the prevalence and perpetuation of child marriage, alongside other harmful culture norms. However, there are a number of other factors

⁵ “OHCHR | Child, Early and Forced Marriage, Including in Humanitarian Settings,” ohchr.org, accessed May 29, 2020, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/women/wrgs/pages/childmarriage.aspx>.

⁶ “OHCHR | Child, Early and Forced Marriage, Including in Humanitarian Settings.”

⁷ Girls Not Brides, “Atlas,” *Girls Not Brides* (blog), accessed June 3, 2020, <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/where-does-it-happen/atlas/>.

which greatly contribute to the continued tradition of child marriage. These main factors include gender inequality, tradition, poverty, and lack of policy making and enforcement of the law.

Many African countries follow strict gender roles and norms that perpetuate gender inequality. It is because of this gender inequality that women and girls are disproportionately affected regarding human rights and equal opportunity. Furthermore, traditions within certain cultures perpetuate these cultural norms. For instance, in Malawi the rate of child marriage rests at 42%. A large part of the perpetuation of child marriage in the country is due to its reliance on long-held traditions. Tradition strengthens gender roles, placing women in a rigid position where their only contribution consists of domestic work, childbearing, and obedience. This heavy restriction on girls sets them at an inferior rank to men, making their worth less than that of a man.⁸ This discrimination against women becomes evident especially in regions struggling with poverty.

When families in impoverished districts have a girl, she is valued less than a boy and considered an economic burden for the family.⁹ Educating the boy is seen as more valuable than paying for a girl's education. As such, once the girl has her first menstrual cycle, she is often forced to quit her education and marry. The dowry her family receives by selling her off, often comes in the form of cows, and thus helps the family stay financially afloat. This leaves girls between the ages of 12 and 19 especially vulnerable to child marriage; even girls under 12 are susceptible. Furthermore, the men they are forced to marry are often times much older than they. In one case cited by the *Human Rights Watch*, a fifteen-year-old girl from South Sudan was married to a 75-year-old man.¹⁰ With such an age gap, the girl is much more susceptible to both domestic and

⁸ Brides.

⁹ "Ending Child Marriage in Africa," Human Rights Watch, December 9, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/12/09/ending-child-marriage-africa>.

¹⁰ "Ending Child Marriage in Africa."

sexual abuse by her husband. In fact, according to a report from the *Human Rights Watch*, the chances of marital abuse from the husband to the wife, increase the younger the wife is.¹¹

Unfortunately, because child marriage is most prevalent in countries rife with insecurity and poverty, the law and government officials are weak and largely corrupt. Therefore, cases of domestic and sexual abuse filed by the wife to the police or justice system, are often swept aside because of bribes. In other words, if a woman (or girl) comes to a state or local official to file a complaint of abuse about her husband, her husband will, unbeknownst to her, bribe the official to delay the case. Delaying the case then makes it almost impossible for anything to ever be done regarding the filed report of abuse, leaving the women of the community mistrustful of the government's law and its enforcement.¹²

With child marriage as seemingly the only solution to keep families out of insecure and/or impoverished situations, girls face immense and harmful consequences. First of all, when girls are pulled out of school at a young age for the sake of marrying, they are forever robbed of any opportunity to receive further education. Moreover, with an inadequate amount of education, their search for employment becomes exceedingly limited, leading them to sink even deeper into poverty.¹³

Additionally, as many of the girls forced into marriage are in their early teens, their bodies are not yet fully mature for childbearing, nor are the girls "psychologically ready to become wives and mothers."¹⁴ Subsequently, when girls have babies at such a young age, the possibility of complications during childbirth increases, risking the life and health of both the mother and the

¹¹ "Ending Child Marriage in Africa."

¹² "Ending Child Marriage in Africa."

¹³ "Child Marriage," UNICEF DATA, accessed June 4, 2020, <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/child-marriage/>.

¹⁴ "Child Marriage," UNFPA ESARO, December 2, 2014, <https://esaro.unfpa.org/en/topics/child-marriage>.

child. Moreover, child marriage also significantly increases the rate of HIV infection as the women and girls have no access to sexual or reproductive health awareness or education.¹⁵ In fact, in a striking account shared by the *Human Rights Watch*, some girls are completely unaware that sexual intercourse leads to having children; they think it is a game.¹⁶

Now, as mentioned in the introduction, fighting to end child marriage must originate from an internal source. According the 2015 report of child marriage from the *Human Rights Watch*, “African leadership is essential.”¹⁷ Local authority figures, such as chiefs, serve as prime actors for initiating norm change. In many of these sub-Saharan countries, there is a system of chiefs who each have a certain district that they have jurisdiction over. In Malawi, this system comprises of four levels, with the senior chief having the most power over the other chiefs alongside their own chiefdom. Senior chiefs in Malawi have the power to contact and correspond with the government and president of the country. Where government policies cannot reach the rural levels, chiefs can step in to enact these policies in rural districts, and thereby serve as a parallel government.¹⁸

Since senior chiefs have this power of enacting governmental policy in their districts, it also gives them the ideal advantage to changing culture norms. With such an advantage, they can partner with several organizations or transnational advocacy networks to help them implement the change they want to see. This can first start with sexual and reproductive health education, alongside continued academic education. Moreover, as Chief Kachindamoto of Malawi is advocating, there must also be a push for small businesses; for once women are saved from child marriages, they often times do not have enough education to help them find a job. By advocating

¹⁵ “Child Marriage.”

¹⁶ “Ending Child Marriage in Africa.”

¹⁷ “Ending Child Marriage in Africa.”

¹⁸ Josh Cauthen, Correspondence, interview by Isabel Pattee, Zoom Video Conference, May 20, 2020.

for small businesses based on skillsets they already possess, women can make money and also have a sense of purpose.

Most importantly, the core of ending child marriage begins by first empowering women and girls.¹⁹ By empowering them and showing them their worth and their rights, the women will start to frame the right mindset to move forward. Then, the community alongside various transnational advocacy networks can work to provide resources and services such as education and can also urge for the enforcement of governmental policies which heighten the minimum age one can marry. In fact, the African Union (AU) is strongly advocating for a significant change in the marrying age. In 2015, the AU announced their 50-year plan to “Ending Child Marriage”.²⁰ This new agreement “[urges] its Member States to establish comprehensive action plans to end child marriage, including establishing and enforcing laws which set the minimum age for marriage at 18.”²¹ They hope that through this 50-year plan, significant change regarding child marriage will be achieved by 2063.

In the case of this study, I focus on norms, which are integral parts of every culture as they “describe collective expectations for the proper behavior of actors with a given identity.”²² In order for domestic actors to bring about change to these norms, it seems that they must often times seek help from external actors if they are to make a significant and lasting breakthrough. For those local

¹⁹ Girls Not Brides, “How Can We End Child Marriage?,” *Girls Not Brides* (blog), accessed June 5, 2020, <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/how-can-we-end-child-marriage/>.

²⁰ “African Union Adopts Common Position on Ending Child Marriage Agreement Signals AU’s Commitment to Empower Women and Girls and Protect Their Human Rights | African Union,” African Union, June 18, 2015, <https://au.int/en/newsevents/29331/african-union-adopts-common-position-ending-child-marriage-agreement-signals-au%E2%80%99s>.

²¹ “African Union Adopts Common Position on Ending Child Marriage Agreement Signals AU’s Commitment to Empower Women and Girls and Protect Their Human Rights | African Union.”

²² Margaret E Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, “Transnational Advocacy Networks in International and Regional Politics,” n.d., 13.

actors pursuing human rights causes, having this external help is crucial. In light of this, such cultural norms regarding human rights issues are the main focus of my study.

To succeed in ending a cultural norm such as child marriage, help from an external source is crucial. Transnational advocacy networks, or TANs, are great actors to partner with. Examples of TANs which focus on the issue of harmful global norms would include various NGOs regarding human rights. For instance, some top organizations concerning themselves with human rights, and with a focus on child marriage, include *Human Rights Watch*, United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), OHCHR, *Plan International*, and *Girls Not Brides* among numerous others. Such NGOs can be instrumental in fighting child marriage. Their global reach and extensive research allow them to locate and assist local actors fighting towards the same goal.

In fact, to fulfill the 50-year plan the AU is working towards, the local actors in each state involved would benefit greatly from partnering with some of the NGOs listed above. These human rights organizations have the resources and media access that the local actors need, as well as the ability to apply pressure as needed to convince the government officials and legal systems in place. Before delving into their partnership with local actors, however, I first turn to the existing and relevant research on the development and work of TANs.

The promotion of and interest in transnational activism has grown significantly since the 1990s.²³ With the revolutionizing research from Keck and Sikkink on TANs, there has been more recognition, attention, and support directed to several pressing human rights issues. TANs are defined by Keck and Sikkink as, “those actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound

²³ Julie Gilson, “Transnational Advocacy: New Spaces, New Voices,” *Alternatives* 36, no. 4 (November 1, 2011): 288–306, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0304375411430622>.

together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services.”²⁴ Essentially, these TANs act as a bridge between international and regional actors.

Keck and Sikkink’s work subsequently fed into a multitude of different political scientists and anthropologists who focused their attention on various aspects of transnational actors. For instance, Susanne Zwingel studied the transnational perspective on Global Norm Diffusion.²⁵ Sally Merry, on the other hand, approached the topic from an anthropological viewpoint, studying how TANs must work through vernacularization to connect with the local cultures in order to instill the change they are trying to implement.²⁶ Another example comes from political scientist Julie Gilson, who posits that TANs offer a new space for these issues of human rights and norm changes to be discussed.²⁷

Transnational advocacy networks thus comprise those actors who work with local activists to bring attention and resources to certain issues. These networks are crucial to “framing” the issues that local activists want to address in their cultures or societies.²⁸ Essentially, TANs serve as key actors in bridging national and international politics regarding “cultural and social negotiations.”²⁹ Through their ability to bridge national and international levels, they can be instrumental participants in enacting social reform, specifically regarding norms. As political scientist Susanne Zwingel notes, TANs are able to “make the general public aware” while also serving as “powerful norm translators”.³⁰

²⁴ Keck and Sikkink, “Transnational Advocacy Networks in International and Regional Politics.”

²⁵ Susanne Zwingel, “How Do Norms Travel? Theorizing International Women’s Rights in Transnational Perspective,” *International Studies Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (2012): 115–29.

²⁶ Sally Engle Merry, “Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle,” *American Anthropologist* 108, no. 1 (2006): 38–51.

²⁷ Gilson, “Transnational Advocacy.”

²⁸ Keck and Sikkink, “Transnational Advocacy Networks in International and Regional Politics.”

²⁹ Keck and Sikkink.

³⁰ Zwingel, “How Do Norms Travel?”

This attention to harmful and systematic norms, such as child marriage, is especially important due to globalization. Anthropologist Sally Merry builds off the key role of TANs as cultural translators in emphasizing the significance of vernacularization. In other words, when NGOs travel to smaller districts or communities they adapt, or vernacularize, their ideas “to local institutions and meanings.”³¹ Especially in the case of child marriage, which revolves around children and women’s rights, norm translation is the best route to ending norms as it is “cross-culturally negotiated rather than imposed.”³² Through this norm translation, TANs can adapt external ideas to local ones, while also bringing the awareness of certain norm change to the global level; essentially, this process thereby “[brings] the local into the realm of the global.”³³

This local-to-global dynamic especially applies to situations where domestic NGOs or local activists require international help pressure the governments. In other words, the state often times does nothing to support the mission(s) of domestic actors and thereby hinders their chance of success. As such, TANs become crucial actors. Described by Keck and Sikkink as the ‘Boomerang Pattern,’ domestic actors and NGOs can partner with external TANs to bring pressure on the state. Essentially, the objective of this ‘Boomerang Pattern’ is for the TANs to “change a state’s behavior.”³⁴ In this way, TANs can push the state from a top-down approach while the local actors push from a bottom-up approach in order to pressure and confront the state on implementing the policies and enforcement needed to support the mission of the local actors. Using this top-down approach from global TANs has proven, in other situations, to be largely effective as it “strengthens local activism” and presses the state to enact the policies needed.³⁵ This ‘Boomerang

³¹ Merry, “Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism.”

³² Zwingel, “How Do Norms Travel?”

³³ Gilson, “Transnational Advocacy.”

³⁴ Keck and Sikkink, “Transnational Advocacy Networks in International and Regional Politics.”

³⁵ Kiyoteru Tsutsui and Hwa Ji Shin, “Global Norms, Local Activism, and Social Movement Outcomes: Global Human Rights and Resident Koreans in Japan,” *Social Problems* 55, no. 3 (August 1, 2008): 391–418, <https://doi.org/10.1525/sp.2008.55.3.391>.

Pattern' is thus mostly used in issues regarding human rights, making it an effective approach for fighting child marriage.

While many researchers have studied TANs and the work they do, such as those described above, I direct my attention to those activists with whom they work: the local activists. There is a large pool of studies which examines the rise and success of TANs. However, sufficient information and attention on the local activists themselves is lacking. Subsequently, my contribution to this existing body of research is the focus on the local activists. In studying who the local actors are and what means they use to achieve their mission I can gather a more comprehensive view of how they change culture norms. Moreover, the case study I am conducting on Chief Theresa Kachindamoto will allow a visualization of the identity of local activists as well as their partnerships with TANs and concerned NGOs to bring about norm change.

With this in mind, my framework throughout this research, unlike previously literature, is heavily directed towards the local activists and their subsequent impact on both the domestic and global arenas regarding culture norms and human rights. Essentially, this framework is comprised of three main concerns: Who are the local activists? What sort of cultural norms warrant change? How do local activists work with TANs to change culture norms? The first portion of the framework identifies the local activists and those people who may serve as the ideal local activist. In identifying these ideal local actors, I ask questions such as: which local actors are the most effective at gaining the trust of the people?

The second portion of the framework investigates which culture norms warrant change. After identifying the most ideal and efficient local activists, I study how they proceed to change the certain culture norms they target. In many cases the norms which necessitate change are harmful and can even be human rights violations, such as child marriage or female genital

mutilation (FGM). By asking which sort of culture norms local activists are fighting to change, we can better understand the ways in which they bring about the culture norm change. In other words, I study which methods and actions local change agents take to carry out the norm reform.

The last portion of the framework examines how partnering/working with TANs helps local activists achieve lasting reform in their community. While local activists are the necessary initiating actors in bringing about norm change in their community, the partnership and help of TANs is crucial to achieving lasting reform. In addition to studying which TANs local activists work with, I also study how these partnerships work. In specific, I investigate how local activists maintain the trust of the community while introducing external actors to help instill change. This framework is then applied to the case study of Chief Kachindamoto as a reference for a comprehensive view of local activism and how it transcends culture norms and transnational levels. Thus, by shifting the focus to the local activists, I contribute to the existing literature by sharing a thorough study and examination of the ground-level work.

Therefore, I study how these local actors begin their work towards ending cultural norms in their society. Upon the completion of my research, I generate a series of hypotheses regarding the local actors and what they do in changing culture norms. These hypotheses are subsequently drawn from my case study of Chief Kachindamoto of Malawi, as this study illuminates a successful mission initiated by a local activist and thereby sheds light on the possibility of a similar situation of similar status and issue, succeeding elsewhere.

Mapping out the Case Study

Boundaries and Case Type

To address my main research inquiry of the effect local activists have on changing dominant culture norms, I conduct a hypothesis-generating case study of Chief Theresa Kachindamoto of

the Dedza District in Malawi. I specifically study the situation of child marriage in Kachindamoto's district and how her time as chief led to the banning of child marriage in her district of 900,000 people. The case study begins with her 2003 appointment as chief until the present. Within this time frame, I study how she managed to ban child marriage and how she continues to influence other districts and countries to do the same.

Since this inductive case study is hypothesis-generating, the results and conclusion of the study consist of a series of hypotheses which seek to clarify the effect local activism has on strong cultural traditions. These hypotheses thus serve to “[develop] more general theoretical propositions, which can be tested through other methods, including large-N methods.”³⁶ In other words, hypothesis-generating studies, such as this case study of Chief Kachindamoto, are instrumental in contributing to theory construction in their narrowed approach on “causal mechanisms” and “interaction effects”.³⁷ With this investigation and subsequent hypotheses, we gain a better understanding of how this case study, of local activism breaking culture norms, can be applied to other situations involving seemingly unbreakable culture norms.

Furthermore, in order to thoroughly gather my evidence on the chief's work from the time of her appointment as senior chief until the present, I use a process-tracing approach. This approach is ideal for hypothesis-generating case studies. Essentially, process-tracing helps to observe how the independent variable is affecting the dependent variable by observing causal relationships and interactions. In the case of this study, the chief is the independent variable who has an unusual effect on the dependent variable of child marriage as a culture norm. As the actor who initiated changing the culture norm of child marriage, the chief represents quite an influential independent

³⁶ Jack S. Levy, “Case Studies: Types, Designs, and Logics of Inference,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 25, no. 1 (February 1, 2008): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07388940701860318>.

³⁷ Levy.

variable. However, in order to change the norm of child marriage across Malawi, the chief needed; the help of TANs, as they help provide the resources and aid needed to bring about lasting change. Therefore, TANs serve as the intervening variable as they help the independent variable in changing the norm necessitating change.

Process-tracing is thereby an ideal approach for small case studies because it empirically analyzes “decision making at the individual, small group....” and also focuses on “perceptions” and “judgements.”³⁸ Essentially, this method allows us to follow a narrative or chain of events, of how the independent variable, and later intervening variable, work to fight and subsequently end the dependent variable. With this in mind, process-tracing can be crucial in allowing for a deeper understanding of small, single case studies with its narrowed approach on causation.

Case Selection

As previously discussed, I conduct a small single case study of Chief Theresa Kachindamoto of Malawi. This case study expands on information already gathered in my 2019 project on Chief Kachindamoto by analyzing local activism and culture norm change at the ground-level. The chief was selected as my case study because she serves as an ideal local actor whose accomplishment in banning child marriage in her district of Malawi helps us to understand the three factors of my analytical framework: 1) who local activists are, 2) what culture norms they deem necessitate change, and 3) how they work with TANs and other concerned NGOs to bring about culture norm reform.

Malawi consists of a heavily traditional society whose rural villages and districts often rely on long-held culture norms, many of which are detrimental to the well-being of the people. In fact, one such culture norm is child marriage, which is internationally recognized as a human rights

³⁸ Levy.

violation. Uprooting such culture norms, especially child marriage, is seen as a formidable and almost impossible task. Therefore, a study of someone who has succeeded in ending such a culture norm offers a narrowed and current example of how local activism, initiated from the area of concern, can effectively topple seemingly inherent culture norms. Chief Kachindamoto serves as the ideal candidate because of her work in ending child marriage in her district. Studying her work generates a series of hypotheses which add to this literature of local and transnational activism by emphasizing the focus on, and significance of, the local actor.

This study is an influential, hypothesis-generating case study. Studying a successful local activist in a country which adheres to strict, traditional culture norms, sheds light on how change can be achieved in other countries with similar situations. In investigating how the chief initiated banning child marriage and how she partnered with TANs and NGOs to do so, we can apply the hypotheses drawn from this investigation to larger case studies and analyses.³⁹ Moreover, since this case study focuses on Chief Kachindamoto as a local activist initiating change to the culture norm of child marriage in her district, she represents an “influential configuration of the independent variable”.⁴⁰ In other words, the chief represents the local activists who work to change culture norms and is thus influential because of her feat in ending child marriage within her district. Her accomplishment is not only unusual, but quite unheard of, in a poor, largely rural sub-Saharan state in which cultural norms are traditionally followed.

Although many norms and rituals should be kept and remembered for their historical and cultural value, some are no longer necessary for survival and have no cultural value; instead such norms are rather detrimental to the well-being of the people. Studying culture norms which violate

³⁹ Jason Seawright and John Gerring, “Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options,” *Political Research Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (June 1, 2008): 294–308, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912907313077>.

⁴⁰ Seawright and Gerring.

human rights provides a good example of how local actors can make lasting changes in their community. Such harmful culture norms warrant reform and thereby offer a broader view as to how local activists, such as the chief, combat issues on a regional and international stage.

As stated in the previous section, many researchers have directed their attention towards TANs, and while this was revolutionary step forward for transnational activism, there must be more attention on the local activists themselves. My goal of this study, therefore, is to examine who these local activists are, what culture norms in their community they choose to change, and how they use the help and partnership of TANs and NGOs to do so. I am therefore taking an inductive approach as to how local activists bring change to their country in toppling dominant culture norms.

Required Evidence

The three factors of my analytical framework for this research question include who the local activists are, what culture norms they deem warrant change, and how they work with TANs to change these culture norms. The evidence I gather according to each of these factors results in the series of hypotheses I state at the end. In explaining my process for gathering my evidence, I reiterate the independent and dependent variable while emphasizing how the information I have gathered helps to address each of my three framework factors. The sources I use are largely comprised of various interviews and correspondences with state, international, and local sources within and without Malawi. I target a wide range of sources in order to gain a well-rounded view of Chief Kachindamoto's work as a local activist in ending child marriage from the time she became chief until now, where she is known as the "Marriage Terminator".⁴¹

⁴¹ Phoebe Kasoga, Child Marriage in Malawi, interview by Isabel Pattee, Zoom Video Conference, February 6, 2020.

Throughout this research, I expand on the chief's work and impact in ending child marriage as an example of local activism concerning human rights. My research on the chief, thus far, involves conducting interviews with those who know the chief personally or know of her work. With the help of the US Embassy in Malawi, I was able to correspond with *Plan International*, as well as the chief herself. It is important to note, that corresponding with the US Embassy in Malawi was instrumental to finding many of the contacts I have now.

The interviewees include Lisa-Anne Julien (South African freelance journalist), Phoebe Kasoga (director of *Plan International Malawi*), the three founders of Nigerian NGO, *It's Never Your Fault* (Susan Ubogu, Kudirat Abiola, and Temitayo Asuni), African Union Youth Advisory Council Member Petrider Paul, and lastly a project manager of *World Connect* Frank Kasonga. Furthermore, my correspondence with the chief also gives me a personal account of the work she is doing and helps me understand her mission directly from its source. In doing this and applying the chief's case to the three factors of my framework, I am able to gain a more comprehensive view of what Kachindamoto has accomplished and how she has influenced others to do the same.

Generally, the interviews I conduct last between forty-five to ninety minutes, which allow for an in-depth look into the interviewee and their work. When conducting and gathering these interviews of various local activists, NGOs, and TANs alike, I have a standard questionnaire broken into three to four sections. With this questionnaire I can attribute its sections towards the three factors of my analytical framework. These sections question the interviewee 1) about themselves, 2) about their work, 3) about their interaction and/or work with Chief Kachindamoto (if applicable), and 4) about the impact their work has had on their community or country. By asking these questions, in this order, I am able to gather information on each interviewee moving from them as an individual, to their work in local activism or in transnational activism, and lastly

into the overall impact of their work. Furthermore, I can gauge the influence and characteristics of Chief Kachindamoto as well as the influence and characteristics of those with whom she works or inspires.

Pertaining to the first factor of the analytical framework which seeks to identify the local activist, I use the first section of the questionnaire to ask the interviewees about their personal background. For instance, when I interviewed Lisa-Anne Julien I first asked her why she became a freelance journalist and how she discovered her passion for gender equality and women's rights. When I interviewed Phoebe Kasoga, I asked her how she became the director of *Plan International Malawi* and if she had any personal experience regarding child marriage. With the young women from *It's Never Your Fault*, I asked how they decided to establish the organization and again if they had any personal experience regarding gender inequality. Essentially, these questions concerning each interviewee's personal background allow for an idea of the individual in discovering their impetus in fighting for gender equality and thereby finding their passion.

Moving to the second factor of the analytical framework which investigates what culture norms local activists deem necessitate change, I focus the questions on the interviewees' work. By targeting their work, I can see how they direct their attention towards child marriage as a harmful culture norm. For Petrida Paul, I asked about the African Union's mission regarding gender-based violence and their 50-year plan to end child marriage. With Frank Kasonga, I directed the questions more specifically to *World Connect's* role when they invest norm change in various communities across Malawi, as well as their partnership with *Corps Africa*, of which constitutes a TAN (*World Connect* and *Corps Africa*) I want to see how the two organizations work together to bring about efficient and beneficial investments in communities which face formidable issues of gender-based violence and poverty. Facing a broader scope, I asked *It's Never Your Fault* what their

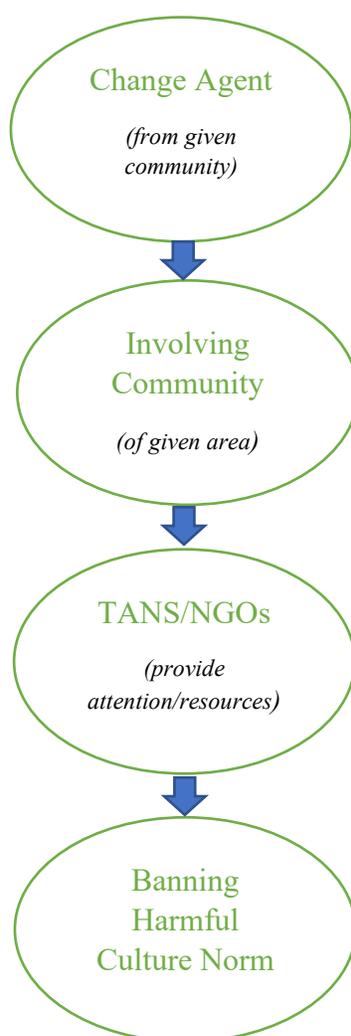
organization's global and domestic mission and vision is. In doing this, I can see how they spread awareness about the child marriage and gender-based violence in Nigeria and beyond.

To address the last factor of the analytical framework which questions how local activists work with TANs to change dominant culture norms, I ask about my interviewees' relationship with, or knowledge of, Chief Kachindamoto. By first establishing a basic foundation of who each interviewee is and what they do, I move to how they work with the chief or see how they view her work of fighting child marriage. The first questions I ask when referring to the chief, revolve around what prompted the interviewees to reach out to her and how the chief became an inspiration for them. Additionally, I want to know how the chief is viewed outside of her community.

For Lisa-Anne (since she interviewed Chief Kachindamoto), I asked what she thinks the chief represents in Malawi and Africa, and how she would describe the chief. Alternatively, when interviewing Phoebe Kasoga, I asked how Kachindamoto has helped with *Plan International*. I asked questions such as why and how the chief became *Plan International Malawi's* ambassador as well as what this role means. By seeing how this nongovernmental organization picked the chief as a strong local actor and voice for change, I have a clearer idea of how the relationship between local actors and NGOs are forged and maintained. Similarly, my interview with Frank Kasoga of *World Connect* centered on how the organization was directly involved with Chief Kachindamoto and the Dedza District. Furthermore, I inquired into *World Connect's* partnership with *Corps Africa* in order to better understand how local activists work with TANs. Through these two crucial interviews, we can examine how TANs and NGOs help spread the local activists' reach and influence in matters of great urgency, such as child marriage.

Now, in the case of those who do not know the chief personally, such as the founders of *It's Never Your Fault*, I direct the questions more towards the influence the chief has had on them.

Moreover, I also ask about what impact their organization has had on their community. *It's Never Your Fault* was quite impressed with the chief and found her as quite an incredible influence to fighting gender-based violence and inequality. Moreover, in asking Petriker Paul of the African Union about her view of the chief's influence, I also gathered how Chief Kachindamoto's work and influence is widely known and respected across Eastern Africa. By asking these questions of the chief's influence, I can see how far her influence has spread across Africa. Starting from a small district in Malawi, the chief has spread her name and influence as far as Western Africa and beyond. Lastly, by questioning each interviewee about what impact their work as a local activist or as an NGO has had on their country, I can see how the fight against child marriage is faring in other situations as well as better understand the impact the chief has had on not only Malawi, but Africa as a whole.



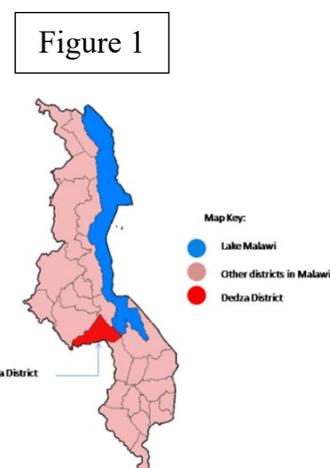
Before delving into the case study, we can turn to the Case Study Model presented above, in order to understand the sequence of steps a local activist can take in initiating culture norm change. From first initiating culture change, to involving the given community and then TANs and concerned NGOs, we observe how the banning of a harmful culture norm can be achieved. It is through these steps, that the chief was able to ban child marriage in her district of Malawi.

Banning Child Marriage in Malawi

Factor One: Identifying Local Activists

In the southwestern region of Malawi, bordering Mozambique, lies the Dedza district of Malawi. It is a rural, traditional district comprised of several villages with a population amounting to about 900,000 people.⁴² Dedza is also a very poor area and is therefore lacking in adequate access to education and job

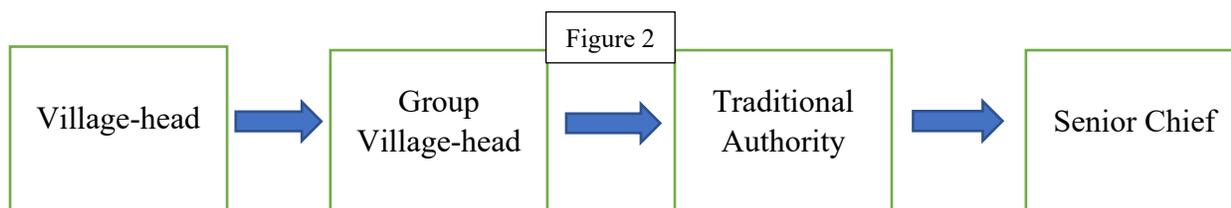
opportunities. As is common in various other villages, districts, and countries around the world, child marriage is a traditionally prevalent practice in Dedza. The reason for this high rate of child marriage lies not only in tradition, but in need as well. Many families marry their daughters or sons in order to earn some money to keep them from sinking into extreme poverty. By marrying their children off, the families receive a bride price, which can sustain them for a period of time. Unfortunately, this practice disproportionately affects more girls than boys.⁴³



⁴² Lisa-Anne Julien, "Women in Policy Making: Chief Theresa Kachindamoto," Africa Portal, September 27, 2019, <https://www.africaportal.org/features/women-policy-making-chief-theresa-kachindamoto/>.

⁴³ Kasoga, Child Marriage in Malawi.

The tradition of child marriage requires the support or encouragement of local chiefs in order to ensue. To briefly summarize the role and hierarchy of chiefs in Malawi, chiefs are regarded as the cultural “gatekeepers” of culture and tradition.⁴⁴ As seen in Figure 2, there are various levels of chiefs. The lowest chief is known as a village-head, the next level is the group village-head,



next is the traditional authority, and then finally there is the senior chief.⁴⁵ All of the chiefs below the senior chief, report to the senior chief. Through this hierarchy of chiefs, long-held cultural traditions are continued and protected. In many cases this can be advantageous. However, in situations where cultural traditions are severe and harmful to the people of the community, protection of their continued use can be detrimental. In the case of child marriage, Chief Theresa Kachindamoto made it her goal to do just that.

Child marriage is an expected future for many girls in Malawi, as well as across Africa. Women and girls do not have a say in what to do with their lives and are instead expected to marry, have children, and be obedient to their husbands. When girls have their first menstrual cycle, they are brought to what is known as an “initiation camp” (however they are sometimes brought even before starting menstruation). Here, girls as young as seven are brought to the camp for “cleansing” and are taught how to be a “good wife” by being “submissive” so they can “please men.”⁴⁶ The camp subsequently ends with the initiation itself. The girls are often blindfolded, and then required to have sexual intercourse with men called “hyenas”. These hyenas are mostly men that are older

⁴⁴ Kasoga.

⁴⁵ Frank Kasonga, World Connect in Malawi, interview by Isabel Pattee, Zoom Video Conference, July 29, 2020.

⁴⁶ UN Women, *Ep 1: Chief Kachindamoto | COURAGE TO QUESTION VR*, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n5_yPX17-Yc.

and also who are often infected with STDs and/or HIV.⁴⁷ Naturally, these hyenas are large contributors to the spread of HIV and STDs. These initiation camps were a normal occurrence in the Dedza district, but they would not last long after the Kachindamoto's 2003 appointment as senior chief.

Chief Theresa Kachindamoto is from Mtakataka, Dedza district. She is the youngest of 12 in a family of "traditional rulers" or chiefs.⁴⁸ Her father, who was senior chief of Dedza, sent Kachindamoto to boarding school and then later university. After her education, she spent 27 years as a secretary at a college in a district called Zomba.⁴⁹ After being called upon by the elders of the Dedza district, Kachindamoto left her job as a secretary and came back to the Dedza district to accept her appointment as senior chief.



Chief Kachindamoto

In interviews, Kachindamoto expressed that she was quite shocked at her appointment as senior chief, as she was the "youngest and a woman."⁵⁰ Women were not usually chosen to be chiefs, let alone, senior chiefs. In a correspondence with the chief, I was informed that according

⁴⁷ UN Women.

⁴⁸ UN Women.

⁴⁹ Hannah McNeish, "Malawi's Fearsome Chief, Terminator of Child Marriages," Al Jazeera, May 16, 2016, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/03/malawi-fearsome-chief-terminator-child-marriages-160316081809603.html>.

⁵⁰ AFIDEP, *Senior Chief Inkosi Kachindamoto, the Woman Fighting Child Marriage in Malawi*, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wa3b3L1uiS4>.

to her Ngoni culture, women were not typically chosen as chiefs because they cannot fight.⁵¹ Despite these cultural boundaries, Chief Kachindamoto was appointed, and has been senior chief of Dedza since December 23rd, 2003.⁵² With the highest position of cultural authority in the Dedza district, Chief Kachindamoto was in the perfect position to initiate and implement change to one of the most pressing issues in Malawi: child marriage.

Factor Two: Choosing the Norm Warranting Change

Chief Kachindamoto first realized the extent to which child marriage was practiced in Dedza when she came to accept her appointment as senior chief. Kachindamoto vividly remembers the first time she encountered a child bride. On her first day back to Dedza, she saw a young girl holding a baby. The chief went to the girl and asked whose baby it was. The girl replied it was hers. Shocked, the chief asked how old the girl and was taken aback when the girl replied that she was only twelve.⁵³ Kachindamoto proceeded to ask who the father was, and the girl pointed to a boy who was playing soccer nearby. According to a UN interview of the chief, “Kachindamoto never knew about the prevalence of child marriage and its strong traditional hold.”⁵⁴ After realizing the severity of the situation for children in her district, Kachindamoto met with all the chiefs in Dedza to state that child marriage in the district needed to end.⁵⁵

As previously mentioned, Chief Kachindamoto was in the perfect position to initiate change in cultural tradition. As the main change agent, Kachindamoto’s first action was to make a cultural mandate that child marriage could not be continued in Dedza. After little to no success, Kachindamoto decided to visit every chief, or gatekeeper, in Dedza. Kachindamoto spoke with

⁵¹ to Theresa Kachindamoto, “Whatsapp Correspondence with Chief Kachindamoto,” August 2, 2020.

⁵² to Kachindamoto, “Whatsapp Correspondence with Chief Kachindamoto.”

⁵³ to Kachindamoto, “Whatsapp Correspondence with Chief Kachindamoto.”

⁵⁴ UN Women, *Ep 1*.

⁵⁵ AFIDEP, *Senior Chief Inkosi Kachindamoto, the Woman Fighting Child Marriage in Malawi*.

each chief informing them that any child marriage in their village was to be stopped. Any chief who did not comply would be dismissed. In a correspondence with the chief, I was informed that twenty chiefs were dismissed for disobeying her.⁵⁶

After meeting with the chiefs, Kachindamoto addressed the initiation camps. Despite their many threats, Kachindamoto stopped the hyenas, thereby ending the camps.⁵⁷ She then went to speak to the parents of the children in the district to persuade them not to marry off their children. However, there were two key factors the parents raised in protesting Kachindamoto's fight to end child marriage. The first factor was money. Parents who married their children needed the money from the bride price in order to keep from sinking further into poverty. The second factor was that child marriage was their "culture and tradition!"⁵⁸ Kachindamoto responded by stating that "if you educate your girls, you will have everything in the future."⁵⁹ She explained how child marriage was therefore no longer needed to earn money, and it was no longer a cultural tradition to be respected and followed. Education would be the key to the girls' future and would provide them with the opportunities needed to lift them out of poverty, and thereby help their families as well. Lastly, Kachindamoto visited the husbands of the young girls. She told them that the girls needed to leave the marriage and continue their education.⁶⁰

After years of advocating for the end of child marriage in Dedza, Kachindamoto has ended thousands of child marriages. In fact, as of November 2019, the chief "ended 3,549 child marriages" effectively banning child marriage in the Dedza district.⁶¹ The girls and boys released

⁵⁶ to Kachindamoto, "Whatsapp Correspondence with Chief Kachindamoto," August 2, 2020.

⁵⁷ AFIDEP, *Senior Chief Inkosi Kachindamoto, the Woman Fighting Child Marriage in Malawi*.

⁵⁸ AFIDEP.

⁵⁹ "Malawi Chief Annuls 330 Child Marriages," UN Women, September 17, 2015, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2015/9/malawi-chief-annuls-330-child-marriages>.

⁶⁰ AFIDEP, *Senior Chief Inkosi Kachindamoto, the Woman Fighting Child Marriage in Malawi*.

⁶¹ AFIDEP.

from their marriages were then able to continue their education. In the case of girls, those who were pregnant or had children, were still able to attend school and often had families willing to take care of their daughter's children when they were away at school. So far, about "22 girls and 15 boys have transitioned to college," allowing them to complete their education and have the opportunities they otherwise would never have had.⁶² The ability to continue and complete one's education is what Kachindamoto stresses the most in her fight against child marriage. In an interview with UN Women, Chief Kachindamoto stated that "keeping girls in school is the single most important factor in breaking the cycle of poverty and preventing life-long problems for women."⁶³

In 2015, largely due to the chief's advocacy, the government of Malawi passed the Marriage, Divorce, and Family Relations Act.⁶⁴ This act set the minimum age of marriage for girls and boys at 18. However, at the time, this was not solidified by a constitutional amendment and could therefore not be properly enforced, leaving child marriage still legal in the country. Then, in 2017, the necessary constitutional amendment was passed. Constitutional Amendment No. 36 was passed on February 14, 2017, stating that the minimum age of marriage in Malawi was to be set at 18.⁶⁵

Factor Three: Working with TANs

In order to broaden her reach and influence the fight against child marriage, Chief Kachindamoto continued her "door-to-door campaigning" in Dedza.⁶⁶ She also reached out to various NGOs and

⁶² AFIDEP.

⁶³ UN Women, *Ep 1*.

⁶⁴ Julien, "Women in Policy Making."

⁶⁵ Girls Not Brides, "Malawi's Constitutional Change: A Step Forward towards Ending Child Marriage.," n.d., accessed September 16, 2020.

⁶⁶ "Malawi Chief Annuls 330 Child Marriages," September 17, 2015.

“faith-based leaders” in Malawi.⁶⁷ UN Women was a significant aid to Kachindamoto’s campaign. UN Women started raising awareness about the chief, and child marriage in Malawi, around 2015. In helping to promote the chief and her cause, UN Women stated that it will continue supporting “traditional leaders” and the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Welfare to make sure “changes in marital law are fully understood and implemented.”⁶⁸ Because of this, various other NGOs around the world were able to learn about the chief and raise awareness about child marriage.

Of the various TANs and NGOs that helped Kachindamoto, I was able to conduct extensive research on, and interviews with, various advocates across the continent. The practice of child marriage is an ongoing issue that is being actively addressed by organizations such as the Nigerian NGO *It’s Never Your Fault*, and prominent youth activist African Union Youth Advisory Council Member Petrider Paul. The former is an NGO focused on women’s rights in Africa and the latter is a prominent advocate for ending child marriage and female genital mutilation. Speaking with both shed more light on the issue of child marriage in underdeveloped communities and countries.

However, the two advocates comprising of my primary focus in obtaining information on the chief, were an NGO and a TAN which significantly contributed to Kachindamoto’s campaign. The first was *Plan International-Malawi*, and the second was *World Connect* and its partnership with *Corps Africa*. *Plan International* is an international NGO which “strive[s] to ensure and advance the rights of children.”⁶⁹ Specifically, the organization centers its focus on girls, since they are those who are disproportionately affected. Moreover, *Plan International* wants equality for

⁶⁷ “Malawi Chief Annuls 330 Child Marriages.”

⁶⁸ “Malawi Chief Annuls 330 Child Marriages,” UN Women, accessed July 27, 2020, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2015/9/malawi-chief-annuls-330-child-marriages>.

⁶⁹ Kasoga, Child Marriage in Malawi.

girls and partners with “adolescent girls and children in 55,000 communities around the world to overcome oppression and gender inequality.”⁷⁰ As an NGO based in England, *Plan International* has several branches across the globe, one of which is located in Malawi.

The director of *Plan International-Malawi* and Malawian native, Phoebe Kasoga, provided valuable insight into how the organization works and how it is working to fight child marriage in Malawi. Furthermore, Kasoga also delved into how its relationship with Chief Kachindamoto has furthered this campaign of ending child marriage. *Plan International-Malawi* first started actively working with the chief in 2017 after the Malawian constitutional amendment which moved to raise the age of consent of marriage to eighteen was passed.⁷¹ Additionally, Kachindamoto serves as an ambassador for *Plan International* as well, which furthers her reach across the country and onto the international stage.

As an ambassador, Kachindamoto can use her experience and on behalf of *Plan International*, advocate for the end of child marriage when meeting with other activists, chiefs, and donors across the world. In fact, according to *Plan International*, Kachindamoto not only worked with the villageheads and chiefs in her district and country, but also with other chiefs in surrounding countries. By speaking at a council of chiefs, the chief was able to spread her campaign to other chiefs and to the media. For instance, a Zambian chief present at the council Kachindamoto spoke at, ended child marriage in his district after being influenced by her fight against child marriage.⁷²

⁷⁰ Plan International, “About Us,” accessed August 7, 2020, <https://www.planusa.org/about-us>.

⁷¹ to Phoebe Kasoga, “Whatsapp Correspondence with Phoebe Kasoga,” July 30, 2020.

⁷² Kasoga.

According to Kasoga, there are two major adjustments for girls when they escape, or are released from a marriage. The first is the need of education and the second is the need for economic and social support.⁷³ These two are crucial for girls as they help sustain the girl and lead to her to opportunities for her life. However, escaping a child marriage comes with “barriers at every level.”⁷⁴ In other words, the struggle does not end when the girl leaves the marriage, rather she faces yet another plethora of social challenges. For instance, when a girl leaves a marriage, she faces stigma both at school and at home.⁷⁵ This indicates another part of *Plan International’s* mission which is not only to end child marriage and raise awareness about child marriage’s existence, but to also help those leaving marriages with the next set of social barriers and stigma.

After finding the chief and appointing her as an ambassador for the organization, *Plan International* spread the news of her campaign and its success across Africa and the world. Through its promotion of Kachindamoto’s work on child marriage in Dedza and across Malawi, *Plan International* provided the chief’s campaign with the necessary media coverage in order to widen the chief’s campaign to neighboring countries and to major news outlets like *Reuters*, *Al Jazeera*, and *UN Women*, to name a few. The benefit of such media attention is that the “media has the capability to transcend barriers.”⁷⁶ By getting information about campaigns out on the world stage, the social barriers facing ex-child brides are made known, making these barriers subsequently more vulnerable to reform and change.

The TAN invested in Kachindamoto’s ban on child marriage is *World Connect* and *Corps Africa*. The Malawi Country Manager of the *World Connect*, Frank Kasonga, provided insightful

⁷³ Kasoga, Child Marriage in Malawi.

⁷⁴ Kasoga.

⁷⁵ Kasoga.

⁷⁶ Kasoga.

information into the mission of *World Connect* in Malawi and the projects it is involved in; namely its involvement with Chief Kachindamoto and the Dedza District. According to Kasonga, *World Connect* is an organization, placed in more than forty-four countries, that focuses on investing in community development at the “local level” by “supporting” villages and districts within the given country.⁷⁷ Moreover, Kasonga stressed that *World Connect* is not a charity that gives money to a village or district in need, rather, the organization works to “invest” in the given community by working with the local partners to accomplish the community’s mission.⁷⁸

According to Kasonga, *World Connect* goes to the root of the problem in communities. In order to do this, it goes through four stages (as described on its website as well).⁷⁹ The first stage centers on discovering leaders; typically, the organization targets “women-led efforts.”⁸⁰ The second stage is then investing in a chosen community. This is accomplished via *Corps Africa*, which is an African, non-profit organization that “places ambitious young Africans in remote, high-poverty communities in their own countries to facilitate small-scale, high impact projects.”⁸¹ These projects, moreover, are all according to the needs of the people in the community.

Essentially, this organization operates like the Peace Corps but only recruits Africans, by placing them in their own country to help bring about meaningful and impactful change. Furthermore, since *Corps Africa* is focused on “[facilitating] small-scale, high impact projects”⁸² in the given communities, *World Connect* is the perfect addition in providing the investments necessary for helping the community build and sustain the projects they need for their

⁷⁷ World Connect, “About Us,” accessed August 9, 2020, <https://www.worldconnect-us.org/about-us#why-we-do-it>.

⁷⁸ Kasonga, *World Connect in Malawi*.

⁷⁹ World Connect, “Home :: World Connect,” accessed August 9, 2020, <https://www.worldconnect-us.org/>.

⁸⁰ Connect.

⁸¹ “CORPSAFRICA,” CORPSAFRICA, accessed February 20, 2021, <https://www.corpsafrica.org/>.

⁸² “CORPSAFRICA.”

communities. *World Connect* sends one or two volunteers of *Corps Africa* to live in one of the underdeveloped communities for a year. In this way, they get to know the people and discuss with them what is needed to develop their community.

Then, *World Connect* enters the community by first listening to what the people need and then working with the people to come up with a plan for how to fund and maintain the project needed. In this process, the organization invests about 75% leaving the community to come up with the remaining 25%. In this way, *World Connect* and the people of the community work together to create their project rather than relying solely on donations.⁸³ The third stage is where *World Connect* keeps up with the communities it has helped and measures their progress. Lastly, the fourth and final stage focuses on success. Overall, the organization aims for “project-level impact in four sectors: health, educational, environmental, and economic.”⁸⁴

Beginning in mid-2017, *World Connect* carried out these four stages after discovering Chief Kachindamoto. The organization then sent a *Corps Africa* volunteer to live with Kachindamoto’s community in Dedza for a year to listen to the people on what needed to be improved. After sending the volunteer and working with the Dedza people and the chief to come up with a plan, *World Connect* invested in three projects. The first was a primary school (with a \$3,000 investment), the second a reforestation project (with a \$3,000 investment), and the third was a maternity house (with a \$10,000 investment).⁸⁵

These project ideas and plans came directly from the chief and her people, in hopes of addressing the most critical issues at hand. With a new primary school and maternity house,

⁸³ Kasonga, *World Connect in Malawi*.

⁸⁴ Connect, “Home.”

⁸⁵ Kasonga, *World Connect in Malawi*.

children released from marriage would have a school to attend and those pregnant would have the support they needed from the maternity house.⁸⁶ By working together with the people of Dedza, *World Connect* ensures that the projects will be maintained. According to Kasonga, *World Connect* is now planning on working with the chief again, by investing \$3,700 in a new kitchenware production project.⁸⁷

The impact of *World Connect* on underdeveloped communities across Malawi, and specifically with the chief and her district, is profound. The projects it invests in are aiding the chief in the aftermath of banning child marriage. With education and support for girls and young mothers, the chief is working to ensure opportunities for them. As Kasonga stated in the interview, the key to making the projects last is by helping communities through partnerships and small investments rather than donations. Since *World Connect* is focused on local-driven development, it also sees the news of its projects reaching others. Communities across Malawi that have not worked with *World Connect*, use the model *World Connect* used in the Dedza district, in their own communities. *World Connect* invests small amounts into the projects communities need and thereby bring about change themselves. Then these projects they invest in serve as examples for other communities to initiate and sustainably implement change on their own.

Lastly, the vision of this organization is twofold. First of all, as with many upcoming transnational organizations, more women are wanted in leadership. By having more women lead, underdeveloped communities will begin to develop quicker and will work towards better opportunities for their people. Second, *World Connect* focuses on the youth as the driving force

⁸⁶ Kasonga.

⁸⁷ Kasonga.

behind localized development. Through the youth, new ideas for improvement can be implemented and carried out.

Analysis

Kachindamoto's success in banning child marriage in the Dedza District is based on a number of factors, involving her position of authority and the specific tactics she chose in fighting child marriage. Namely, her position of authority allowed for a perfect vantage point in initiating and leading the culture norm change. Since chiefs are seen as the gatekeepers of tradition and culture, they are ideal candidates for initiating and enforcing change regarding norms and traditions. As senior chief, Kachindamoto faced fewer obstacles when it came to informing the community of the norm change and involving them in the transition as well. This position as a cultural gatekeeper enabled the chief to initiate the child marriage ban by first changing mindsets, then enacting and enforcing reform, and lastly working with other organizations to help spread this campaign to ban child marriage.

Kachindamoto's education and life experiences pose a question of relatability with other activists in similar situations, however. The chief did not personally experience child marriage and had no idea of its strong prevalence until her appointment as chief; yet she was able to ban it. Her father sent her to school so she could have opportunities, which is why she did not know of child marriage's prevalence. She was able to gain the trust of the community who knew her only through her royal family line. Though this may seem peculiar, it was exactly the fact of her education, family line of royalty, and strong will which enabled the community to trust her. Similar to many activists across Africa and the globe, the position they have and their leadership within a given community is what leads to their success.

However, it is important to note that any activists seeking to bring about similar norm change in a community need to have some position of authority within the community, or they must be in partnership with someone who has this authority. In other words, the initiating agent must have a respected and powerful position within a given community in order to have the influence and means to carry out their campaign. Additionally, depending on the culture and society, the position must be filled by a person of the community so as to avoid the outsider problem. If the initiating actor is not in a position of authority, they must partner with a person in a respectable position of authority within a culture or society and work with them so that they can have the influence and means needed to bring about the change.

Moreover, the specific tactics used by the chief in banning child marriage could be applicable to other cultures and societies as well. The chief's specific tactics came through open communication with all members and levels of the community. She started with the other cultural authorities in Dedza and in neighboring districts, namely those who held her same rank or had a similar position (before moving on to speak with the traditional authority, group-village-heads and village-heads). She then began speaking with each member of the community to inform them of the alternatives to child marriage and how these alternatives in fact benefitted the situation of girls and their families unlike child marriage. This strategy that Kachindamoto used, was tailored to her community as it is a traditional, rural community. However, after researching Kachindamoto's process and speaking with several activists and nonprofits, I have found that the chief's process could be applied as an efficient model for other activists similar to her in Sub-Saharan Africa and across the globe.

Kachindamoto then began to lobby and reach out to several other organizations, TANs and NGOs, to help her community with issues related to poverty and lack of education; the latter of

which was largely a result of child marriage. Moreover, in advocating for the relief of poverty and the development of the education system, child marriage would be ended. Through open communication and discussion with the community and other TANs and NGOs, the ban on child marriage could be enforced and maintained through community effort. Therefore, the involvement of TANs and NGOs were paramount to the chief's success. These organizations were instrumental in helping the chief with the means and awareness needed to bring about the ban and solidify it. Without the active support and involvement of NGOs and TANs, grassroots activists would not have the investments, partnerships, and awareness needed to further their cause and widen their influence.

Furthermore, because Kachindamoto reached out to the African TAN (*World Connect* partnered with *Corps Africa*) and to other concerned NGOs, they were more welcomed in the society. The TAN that worked with the Dedza district worked with the people of the community to help them accomplish and sustain their projects. Moreover, the people of this TAN were largely Malawian and would thereby avoid the 'outsider' problem. If TANs and NGOs work with the people of the community and partner with them, and if they are largely citizens of the given country, the 'outsider' problem is virtually eradicated, allowing for more trust and progress.

NGOs and TANs, such as *Plan International* and *World Connect* with *Corps Africa*, provided the necessary investments and resources needed to develop the alternatives to child marriage; these alternatives including the promotion of education as a way out of poverty. By investing in projects and by promoting and improving the education system, the would-be child brides and ex-child brides of the Dedza district now have better access to more opportunities to help lift them out of poverty. Moreover, the media coverage offered by NGOs such as *Plan International* are critical to weakening the barriers facing ex-brides and activists. Through

widespread media coverage, harmful norms such as child marriage become more vulnerable and the strength of the campaign against these norms is strengthened with its support from international actors.

Furthermore, TANs can promote success stories, such as Kachindamoto's success on ending child marriage. As stated in the case study, surrounding villages and communities see how *World Connect* and *Corps Africa* worked to invest and implement the given community's change through active involvement of the people within the community and strive to do the same. The sustainable and successful projects carried out by the Dedza District with the help of the TAN thus serve as influences for other communities and societies.

This case study of Chief Kachindamoto and the Dedza district is not atypical, however. The political and cultural issues found in this case with child marriage are in other societies as well. Within Africa, child marriage and female genital mutilation are some of the most pressing issues facing humanitarian groups and local activists. Moreover, simply the issue of unequal rights for women in Africa is something which is actively campaigned against, and this inequality is the focus of many NGOs and activists within Africa. One such example mentioned in the case study is the Nigerian NGO, *It's Never Your Fault*. This NGO was started by three teenage girls who saw the stark inequality and mistreatment of girls and women within their own society and sought to change the social norms and gender norms which hindered the rights and opportunities of women.

One of these barriers, is child marriage in Nigeria, which the founders of the organization are fighting to change. This organization's main goal is to raise awareness about the pervasive gender inequality across Nigeria. As citizens of their country, these young women (the founders of *It's Never Your Fault*) have a stronger and more ideal chance at bringing about norm change. If

they were outsiders, there would be issues of external imposition, making any initiation of change more difficult and most likely not lasting. As Nigerians, they can reach out to other cultural or political leaders to help them raise awareness about the issues they are campaigning against, in order to bring about the meaningful change. This study suggests that TANs and NGOs which employ local residents have an advantage when working with activists. By placing individuals of a given country within the TAN or NGO positions, it immensely decreases the ‘outsider’ problem and promotes lasting change.

Another activist, also mentioned earlier in the case study, is Petrider Paul, a prominent Youth Advisory Council Member of the African Union. With her position in the African Union, she is able to listen to the needs of grassroots activists and through their needs enact and campaign for the necessary change. According to Paul, change must start from the youth.⁸⁸ To start from the youth, however, there must be opportunities for education made available so as to empower and strengthen young people. Specifically, in the case of Paul’s activism (which is based in Tanzania and focuses on Eastern and Southeastern Africa), female genital mutilation and child marriage continue to be prevalent in certain tribes located in rural areas which are very strong in tradition and social norms. To inform these tribes of the dangers of these social norms, Paul begins by reaching out to chiefs and religious leaders within the community. In this way she works with the highest authority of the given community which is crucial to any norm change.

This strategy of reaching out to the local or provincial leaders within a community is the surest way to enact lasting change. Cultural leaders are the key people to contact if an activist wants to initiate change. In the case of Paul, she sees the issue at hand and actively speaks with

⁸⁸ Petrider Paul, *Fighting Child Marriage in East Africa*, interview by Isabel Pattee, Zoom Video Conference, July 24, 2020.

and informs the cultural leaders of the harmful culture norms within that given community that need to change. In this way, cultural leaders can then also work with the political leaders of the country to change the policies upholding harmful practices (such as child marriage) in place. Chief Kachindamoto, as senior chief, is of a status parallel to the government of Malawi. As such, she can directly contact the president and advocate for policy changes.⁸⁹ For example, the chief contacted the president and political leaders when she pushed for the minimum marrying age to be eighteen rather than fifteen. By doing this, the chief was successful in leading to the ban of child marriage.

Both the Nigerian NGO and Petriker Paul see Chief Kachindamoto as an inspiration and an influence not only for their activism, but for the benefit of Africa as a whole. According to *It's Never Your Fault*, the chief was very influential for them, as she pushed through boundaries and persisted.⁹⁰ To them, she is not only inspiring, but an example of courage. Furthermore, the importance of transnational support was emphasized by Petriker Paul. In speaking with her, she noted that such organizations were essential to building the foundation and resource support needed for a given community's campaign. Moreover, such transnational involvement allows for more "room to learn from other situations and countries."⁹¹ As more communities begin to initiate, enact, and call upon various organizations to help them with their campaigns, they learn from other examples, such as with the Dedza district. Essentially, NGOs and TANs help communities with their needs and then broadcast these success stories and efforts on the media. Through this media

⁸⁹ Cauthen, Correspondence.

⁹⁰ Susan Ubogu, Kudirat Abiola, and Temitayo Asuni, Child Marriage and Gender Inequality in Nigeria, interview by Isabel Pattee, Zoom Video Conference, July 1, 2020.

⁹¹ Paul, Fighting Child Marriage in East Africa.

attention, the stories of these communities then serve as influences for other communities wishing to bring about similar change within their own culture or society.

One question that could be posed, is if the partnership between grassroots activists and TANs or concerned NGOs is a new idea of the 21st century or something which has always been practiced. The recent literature of transitional organizations from the early 1990s show that if the study of transnational organizations is new, then the partnership with grassroots activists would also be relatively new, making this partnership a notable practice of the 21st century. In speaking with Frank Kasonga of *World Connect*, my thoughts were confirmed. According to Kasonga, the *idea* of partnering with grassroots activism to bring about last change is not new, but the *execution* of it is new.⁹² The promotion of grassroots activists by TANs and NGOs that is being employed in societies with harmful culture norms is becoming increasingly more common because it brings about sustainable and lasting change. By involving the community in the change, as many TANs and NGOs helping the grassroots activists now do, change is maintained as it was initiated by the community itself and further supported by help from outside the community.

Grassroots activists in positions of authority are also instrumental in reaching others of the same rank or position. For example, Kachindamoto worked with other chiefs to spread and influence reform in the districts across Malawi. In fact, the chief not only meets with other chiefs in Malawi, but across Southern Africa as well. Every year she joins a panel of chiefs in the South African region to speak about her campaign against child marriage and the push for education and opportunities for the community. Through this council, and as mentioned in the case study, Kachindamoto influenced a senior chief in Zambia to ban child marriage in his district.⁹³

⁹² Kasonga, *World Connect* in Malawi.

⁹³ Kasoga, *Child Marriage* in Malawi.

Results

Hypotheses Generated

This study generated three hypotheses. The first regards a local activist's position of authority.

H₁- The more formal authority (positional) the initiating local actor has within the community or society, the more effective and durable the change.

This hypothesis subsequently spawns a corollary.

H₂- The higher the position of authority of the change agent, the greater chances of successful norm change.

However, this position of authority must be seen as legitimate at the local level. The position must be stationed within the community. For example, it would be a much different situation if the change agent were a cultural minister in a faraway city whom the local community had never met. The key to the position of authority within the local community is that person's presence as well as their position. Like Kachindamoto, the change agent must come from, and be within, the local community. In this way, the change agent can work with the people of their culture and society to initiate the needed norm change and search for any necessary external help (namely TANs or NGOs).

The third hypothesis is suggested by the case study and analysis.

H₃- The more local involvement in norm change, assisted by TANs, the more effective and welcomed change.

By placing citizens of a given country within the TANs and NGOs seeking to help change agents in local communities, the ‘outsider’ problem is avoided. This avoidance of the ‘outsider’ problem thus ensures that the chances of successful norm change increase. NGOs coming from Europe and North America with members who are not of the given community seem likely to be a less successful component of the kind of TAN needed for culture norm change. However, there exist many wealthy NGOs that are headquartered in either Europe or North America but have several branches around the world (*Plan International* would be an example of this). These branches are then directed by people of the given country and are staffed by people of the given country as well. In this way, the NGO would be a successful component of a TAN.

Conclusion: Process of Culture Change

Through this study and the subsequent hypotheses generated, I have found there is a certain process of culture change that seems to be the most efficient and most successful. In reference to the case study model, there are four stages of efficient norm change in a community/society. First, the culture norm change must be initiated from the change agent (namely a person of high authority) within the given community. Next, this change agent involves the community of the given area by informing them of the change and explaining why the norm is harmful and detrimental to the well-being of the society.

After informing and working within the community, the change agent then reaches out to various TANs and concerned NGOs in order to have the resources and both local/international media attention necessary to carry-out the norm change successfully and potentially influence other communities with the same or similar harmful norm changes to follow suit. The last step then culminates in the ultimate banning of the harmful culture norm. After the change agent and

community have worked with the TANs and NGOs to set the foundation for reform, the last step results in the banning of the harmful culture norm.

As noted, one of the keys to successful culture change is the active involvement of local residents of the community involved. This study's results are at least partially corroborated by the extensive fieldwork in humanitarian peacebuilding summarized by Séverine Autesserre. As she notes: "It is conventional wisdom that local ownership is essential for successful peacebuilding, but local stakeholders rarely feel included in the design of international programs."⁹⁴ Such essential local 'buy-in' is facilitated by the three, key factors of identifying the local activist, identifying the norm warranting change, and working with TANs and concerned NGOs.

Moreover, the motivation to initiate change is the key to culture norm change. Traditional leaders such as Kachindamoto face obstacles of long-standing norms, but they have the advantage through their position. Recognizing harmful culture norms and having the motivation to campaign against them, may not come as naturally as it does with Kachindamoto, however. As such, it is critical for successful local actors, such as chief Kachindamoto, to spread their story across neighboring countries and the world. It is also instrumental for them to speak with other chiefs around them to inform them of the dangers of harmful culture norms still employed by many communities. Through open discussion and the spread of success stories through the local actors themselves and/or NGOs, other traditional leaders may be inspired and have the motivation to initiate and enable similar norm change.

This case study has helped to understand the process of norm change within a community, similar to Autesserre's summary of peacebuilding. Child marriage is a norm which continues to

⁹⁴ Séverine Autesserre, *Peaceland: Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Politics of International Intervention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 4.

persist and affect thousands of children across the world. According to UNICEF's data for 2020, 21% of young women, globally, "were married before their 18th birthday."⁹⁵ Moreover, child marriage is most heavily concentrated, at 37%, in Sub-Saharan Africa.⁹⁶ With the work of Kachindamoto, this percentage can begin to decrease, as her influence is spreading rapidly through the help of the UN and multiple other NGOs and TANs. In fact, child marriage is already on the decline in South Asia, as 25 million child marriages were prevented in the last ten years.⁹⁷

A large minority of the world's population of young girls and women have been affected by child marriage. It is an issue which merits active attention, discussion, and activism. Through the initiation of local actors, the rate of child marriage can decline in other parts of the world, as it is in the Dedza District and South Asia. Furthermore, campaigns against other human rights violations, such as female genital mutilation (which affects 3 million girls each year), can be initiated by local actors.⁹⁸ Essentially, the process of change employed by Chief Kachindamoto can be applied to female genital mutilation, and other harmful culture norms which threaten young girls and women, as well as other disadvantaged groups within a society. The four-factored process described above, is one which is applicable to various forms of norm change and allows for lasting change in its focus on initiation from the local level.

This case study of child marriage shows that culture norm change is possible in all societies across the globe. The success of one district or city serves as an example to other communities who face similar situations. Kachindamoto's success shows that courage, resilience, and action are the driving forces to any norm change. The power of the local actor cannot be undermined, as it is

⁹⁵ "Child Marriage."

⁹⁶ "Child Marriage."

⁹⁷ "Child Marriage."

⁹⁸ "Female Genital Mutilation," World Health Organization, accessed March 18, 2021, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/female-genital-mutilation>.

they who hold the potential for the most success in the initiation and process of norm change within a given community/society. It is precisely the importance of the local actor which must be impressed upon and encouraged with affected communities.

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