

## Girls' Initiation Ceremonies in Zambia: Reflections on their Role in Girl Child Educational Advancement.

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**ABSTRACT:** *Girls' initiation ceremonies are an important aspect of the Zambian culture and traditions, and culture and traditions are powerful symbols of human identity. They convey a sense of special uniqueness attributed only to that particular group of people. In this package, one finds beliefs, norms, values, customs and numerous identity tags held dear by that group. Anyone who belongs to that group is expected to adhere to and abide by these norms and traditions. While culture and traditions are designed to preserve people's identity, possibly in perpetuity, this same principle is antagonistic to development, which by simple definition demands making improvements to the past and present. Development embodies progress; an element of learning from the past and striving to make things better for the future. Concerned about the increase in school drop outs among girls due to early marriages, this desk study was undertaken in two regions in Zambia: Eastern and North-Western Provinces, to understand the role of culture and traditions in contemporary society, with particular reference to girls' initiation ceremonies (Chinamwali ceremony among Chewa people in Eastern Province and Wali ceremony for Luvale people in North-Western Province). The paper questions these cultural and traditional practices conducted for girls at puberty (e.g. female initiation ceremonies) that systematically socialize a girl child to be subordinate to her peers in that cultural set up. The study found that these practices train a girl child to perceive herself as dependent on other people, in particular men; and not as a full package in her own right. Cultural expectations orient and prescribe her destiny towards getting married and becoming a care giver to her family. Not only does this type of socialization demoralize a girl child from aspiring to achieve more, but also takes away her desire and motivation to exist as an independent human being who should aspire to achieve the best and reach her full potential in that society. Furthermore, these cultural practices violate girls' privacy rights, including their freedom of expression and movement. In short, this cultural orientation robs girls of their independent thinking and becomes an obstacle in a girl's educational advancement. The paper concludes with two questions: 1. Growing up in such a traditional background, is there room for a girl child to break away from what appears to be "cultural bondage"? 2. What role should culture and traditional practices play in promoting girls' educational advancement?*

**Key Words:** *Girls' initiation ceremonies, culture, traditions, identity, early marriages, child rights, Zambia*

### Background

It has been noted that Zambia faces a huge problem on early child marriages, and this challenge affects more girls than boys (Population Council, UNICEF & GRZ, 2017: p1; Yowela, 2016). Many socio-economic factors feed into and accelerate this problem (Yowela, 2016; Mann, *et. al.*, 2015). Yet, the most highlighted among these is poverty. People claim that parents are forced to marry off their daughters for economic gain – whether directly or indirectly. It is argued that parents do this to reduce the number of children a family would be

responsible for (Mann, *et. al.*, 2015), thus reducing the financial burden associated with looking after a large family (Yowela, 2016: p13). In identifying causes of and solutions to child marriages, there is hardly any discussion to understand and / or question the role of traditional ceremonies at puberty that socializes girls in a particular fashion. At puberty, girls in some communities are introduced to adult education where they are taught how to become good wives and good mothers. They are essentially taught to aspire for marriage! Considering that girls who undergo initiation ceremonies at puberty are exposed to adult sexual education, could these girls' initiation ceremonies be part of a larger underlying factor contributing to early child marriages in Zambia?

This paper is written to ignite debate on girls' initiation ceremonies and solicit solutions on what should be done to protect their human rights and promote their future socio-economic well being. It addresses the intersection between culture/traditions and development; how do these two areas sit in a contemporary society? Culture advocates for preserving in perpetuity the original state of what is practiced (i.e. maintaining that culture original and "undiluted"). On the other hand, development is constantly forward looking; it looks for improvements to make things better for the current and future generations. It is a process that learns from the past and present and makes changes for the future. In this context, girl child educational advancement is loosely considered as a form of development because by simple definition education adds value to an individual's wellbeing – from information, knowledge and skills gained.

Culture plays a critical role in shaping people's customs, traditions, norms, beliefs, values, morals, and aspirations. Simply put, culture shapes and moulds people's behaviour and, therefore, their way of life. Culture is also a school and form of education, and is believed to add value to an individual's life. This paper addresses itself to Zambian traditional initiation ceremonies conducted for girls at puberty, and takes two examples to highlight some concerns, namely: Chinamwali ceremony among Chewa people in Eastern Province and Wali ceremony for Luvala people in North-Western Province. What is the main purpose of these ceremonies? What are girls taught during this process? Are these teachings age appropriate? What is the impact of these ceremonies on girls' future aspirations? Do these ceremonies inspire girls for anything more other than to get married? Is there room to modify the teachings or delay the initiation process altogether until at the appropriate time?

In short, the paper presents a larger question of should these initiation ceremonies continue to be conducted at puberty in this contemporary world? What are the implications for child rights? This debate seeks to solicit input that might be helpful in dealing with some social issues Zambia is currently facing such as school drop outs due to early marriages. Since it is generally acknowledged that culture is dynamic, maybe this is a window that can be explored for improvement – to conduct these cultural initiation ceremonies when girls attain the legal age of at least 21 years old<sup>1</sup> and preferably when one gets engaged. At 21 years of age, girls will have completed at least their Grade 12 (which they can build on later) and if they get engaged at or after this age, the training from initiation ceremonies will be delivered at the right time. The girl is no longer a minor but a young adult.

## I. INTRODUCTION

School drop-out and early marriages has been observed to be on the rise in Zambia, and that this problem is more pronounced among girls than boys (Katilo, 2018). A research by Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED) indicates that as much as 43,000 girls in Zambia drop out of school annually, of which 11,000 girls drop out due to early pregnancies. Development indicators compiled by the World Bank from official sources also confirm this sad scenario that school drop-out continues to increase for both boys and girls. However, strategies to address this problem focus on providing educational sponsorship to vulnerable children, implementing the school re-entry policy that enables girls to go back to school after delivery, and mass

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Joseph Yowela, (2016: p32) found out that the latest entry for a girls' initiation ceremony in Chibombo District was 22 years.

education for parents and guardians to encourage their children and dependants to go to school. To date, there is no discussion to interrogate the impact of girls' initiation ceremonies that are conducted at puberty, which trains and socializes girls to be ready for marriage. One of the key areas covered in this process is sex education; girls are introduced to adult sex education about how to please a man in bed. They are taught sensual dancing, an element considered extremely important for a happy marriage. Considering that these trainees might be curious to start practicing what they learned from these cultural practices, could these initiation ceremonies be an underlying factor contributing to early pregnancies and marriages? This study explored this question and interrogates the impact of initiation ceremonies on girls' socialization. Does this process inspire girls to value education over marriage, or vice versa?

Culture and traditions are powerful symbols of human identity. They convey a sense of special uniqueness attributed only to that particular group of people. Culture encompasses beliefs, norms, values, customs and numerous identity tags held dear by that group. Any person belonging to that community is expected to adhere to and abide by these norms and traditions. Tradition is passing on of beliefs and values from one generation to the next and tends to remain the same or is preserved for a long time. In a feature article published by the *Times of Zambia* on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016, Himaambo (2016) gives a summary of Zambia's diverse culture and traditions, and bemoans the changing scenario in this regard, which is mainly negative. For example, it has become fashionable to entertain people in public using sensual dances, something that was frowned upon a decade ago.

Although *culture and traditions* sit and move closely together, they are actually slightly different from each other. *Traditions* reflect beliefs and customs that translate into people's behaviour, and these are passed on from one generation to the next generation. *Culture*, on the other hand, is a full package that encompasses not only beliefs and customs, but also includes art (traditional heritage), moral prescriptions, skills and knowledge generated and acquired over time by people in that community. *Culture* may be defined as a social and cultural heritage expressed through traditional practices (shaped by people's values and beliefs), discourses, and behaviour patterns that people in a given society hold in common.

While culture and traditions are designed to preserve people's identity, possibly in perpetuity, this same principle is antagonistic to development, which by simple definition demands making improvements to the past and present. Development embodies progress; an element of learning from the past and striving to make things better for the future. This paper questions the role of culture and traditions in contemporary Zambia, with particular reference to girl child educational advancement, envisioned to be attained through education. The paper questions certain cultural and traditional practices (e.g. initiation ceremonies at puberty; rite of passage into marriage; etc.), which systematically socializes a girl child to be subordinate to her peers in that cultural set up. It sets up a girl child to perceive herself as a person dependent on other people, in particular men. The major role of a traditional ceremony at puberty is to prepare a girl for marriage and generally teach her how she is going to function as a wife, mother and care giver to her family. More importantly a girl is taught how to keep her husband happy (sexually satisfied, well groomed, a properly kept home, etc.) so that he does not go after other women. In return, she is taught that the man will look after her well. In this context, cultural expectations prescribe and to a large extent determine the girl's destiny as that of getting married and becoming a good mother and care giver to her family. Not only does this type of socialization stifle the girl's imagination to aspire for more and bigger things in life, but in essence hands to her marriage as the only big thing to look forward to. This is systematically prescribed as her destiny! Clearly, this type of socialization not only takes away a girl's motivation and desire to exist as an independent human being who should also aspire to achieve the very best and reach her full potential in that society. On the contrary this type of socialization limits her choices. She is taught to aspire for marriage only as her best achievement and destiny. Coming from such a traditional background, should society wonder why girls and their parents / guardians embrace early marriages? Both are socialized in the same manner and agree to embrace and perpetuate such cultural prescriptions. May be the question that needs answers now is: is there room for a girl child to break away from such a "cultural bondage"? What role should culture and traditional practices play in promoting girls' educational advancement?

## II. Theoretical perspective

Culture and traditions go hand in hand, they sustain and re-enforce each other. Culture is a social and cultural heritage expressed through traditional practices (shaped by people's values and beliefs), discourses, and behaviour patterns that people of a given society hold in common. Culture and traditions are designed to preserve people's identity in perpetuity. They are supposed to be kept undiluted, passed on from one generation to the next in its original state. Modification or making changes is usually deemed akin to culture. Culture unites people together and gives them a sense of identity belonging. Vassallo (2016) points out that, culture is a broad topic that cannot be easily summarized in one short definition because culture encompasses so many things: food, dress, language, etc. and these cannot simply be collapsed into "traditions" and "customs" (p2). She argues that one way to look at culture is to think of it "as some kind of roots upon which we keep building all sorts of human relationships and experiences – and therefore, they are always changing and renovating, never fixed - and these shape our perceptions, attributions, judgments, and ideas of self and others" (p2). In a deeper context culture is an educational tool that socializes and makes people behave in a particular way. In other words, culture can be considered as a pack of institutions (prescription of norms, rules and laws) that mould people's values, beliefs and aspirations that translates into a societal identity.

It is also important to note that culture is not free of bias or autocratic tendencies that force people to belong and behave in a particular way. Instead, its preservation is constructed from or relies on social forces of power and privilege that makes everyone succumb to expected norms within a given society. And sadly, women and children are always on the lower end of that power hierarchy; both are expected to submit to men's and / or any elderly authority in that community. In societies where children's rights are not protected, such as during female initiation ceremonies, this power problem is even more magnified.

On the other hand, *Development*, like most intricate words, has no single definition either. It is defined and measured differently by different people. However, development generally means "making a better life for everyone" (Peet and Hartwick, 2009: p1), which means people being able to meet their basic needs; sufficient food to maintain good health; a safe and healthy environment to live in; affordable social services for everyone; and being treated with dignity. And this summary agrees with Armatya Sen (2000) who argued that development should bring freedom from poverty, hunger and any form of socio-economic suffering. Peet and Hartwick (2009) also conceive development as a process of modernity, which constantly embraces change – what is new now becomes old quickly. They look at development as a social transformation process because development strives to create improved conditions where people are able to meet their basic needs and attain descent human survival and wellbeing (p1). The most common measure currently is a human development index<sup>2</sup> (HDI), which considers "longevity (life expectance at birth); knowledge (adult literacy and mean years of schooling)" as well as "income sufficiency (the proportion of people with sufficient resources for a decent life)," based on gross national product (GDP) (Peet and Hartwick, 2009, p8). In short, human development addresses the need to invest in people through education and attainment of skills necessary for socio-economic empowerment. In reflecting on the purpose of girls' initiation ceremonies, one wonders how much of these aspirations from development proponents are embedded in that teaching and socialization.

Kate Mills (2011) looks at development as a form of modernization; a process that strives to make a system more modern and more suitable for use at the present time, e.g. using modern equipment, ideas, etc. Although Mills (2011) approaches development from a market perspective, her perspective sits well with how we need to look at culture – are prevailing practices still appropriate for current day dispensation? What aspects should be

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<sup>2</sup> This index was developed in the 1990s by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Based on their HDI, States are classified into Low, Middle and High income States. Any State that scores below 0.5 represents low development in HDI.

modified or discarded to respond to the present situations? Peet and Hartwick, (2009), further argued that development was important because “it produces an economy and more broadly a society and culture that determines how people live – in terms of income, services, life chances, education and so on” (p6). In their view, development is not an option but an obligation because they found out that “characteristics such as production, income, or education are, in reality, culturally specific rather than universal” (Peet and Hartwick, 2009:p6). In other words, a people’s culture plays an important role in shaping their outlook at life and promoting values that enhance their well being. In this paper’s context, one would ask: what role does Chinamwali and Wali cultural practices play in advancing girls well being? Do these initiation ceremonies motive girls or promote values that inspire them to achieve more than just getting married? What cultural elements are there to propel girls to higher heights?

This paper puts aside arguments that conceptualize development as westernization of the world (Serge Latouche, 1993: p160); looking at development as an externally driven process by industrialized nations or even classification labels of “them” versus “us”. Instead, the paper focuses on the underlying concept of development as a process aimed at promoting positive change for the common good of humanity. For example, complaints such as “where colonialism left off, development took over” (Rajni Kothari, 1988: p143), simply confirms that development is a process of change. Our role in this process is to begin to design, own and champion that change. At this point it would be reasonable to embrace the approach offered by Jonathan Crush (2005) who defines development as the power to transform old worlds and the power to image new ones.

**“The Philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.”  
(Carl Marx)**

Arising from the foregoing discussions, one notes that development is a process that builds in stages. Likewise, there is room to make improvements to cultural practices in Zambia such as girls’ initiation ceremonies that seem to [indirectly] impede rather than promote girls’ educational advancement.

### III. Role of Traditional Ceremonies at Puberty

As noted earlier, culture is a powerful identity symbol; it distinguishes one group of people from the other. It communicates people’s values, beliefs or simply their way of life to the outside world. In Zambia, one such area relates to cultural practices observed among some ethnic groups<sup>3</sup> when a girl attains puberty. Married and elderly women of integrity are requested by the girls’ mothers to teach their daughters. This paper uses two examples of girls’ initiation ceremonies from Eastern and North-Western Provinces to illustrate key processes involved and potential negative impacts from *Chinamwali* and *Wali ceremonies*, respectively.

In the *Chinamwali* girls’ initiation ceremony among the Chewa people, women approached for this process choose a team leader from among themselves, referred to as a Queen Mother, to lead the process. One of the teachers (initiation mentors) offers her home to be a meeting place and also a classroom. It is an intensive training that takes 2-3 months, and exclusively conducted for girls who have attained puberty (*Figure 1*). Mothers to the girls are not involved in the teaching. Training is conducted behind closed doors, and out of bounds to non-initiates. People in that village can hear the drumming and singing; they know that girls are undergoing secret lessons and this is what adds to the intrigue (Guhrs, 2009: p178).

In the *Wali* initiation process for Luvale people of North-Western Province, a small shelter is built on the outskirts of the villages, specifically for this training purpose. The place is strictly out of bounds for everyone except initiates and their tutors (mentors). During this process, girls who have attained puberty are excluded

<sup>3</sup> Zambia has 73 ethnic groups (...and counting); distinguished by language and their traditions.

from all social interactions for a period of 2-3 months. *Chilombola* (a teacher for each girl) are responsible for the girls' welfare during this time of seclusion. In addition, each girl under initiation is given another small girl, *kajilu*, who becomes her attendant and helps her with chores. There are several taboos associated with *Wali* initiation teaching such as girls should not be seen by men or boys, not speak to anyone, avoid certain foods, and not talk to anyone except their mentors. Girls are brought back home at dusk, completely covered under a wrapper (*chitenge*) material so no one sees them (Guhrs, 2009: p69). They leave home very early in the morning to resume their lessons which mainly focus on home management, sexual agility, fertility, and the arts (Guhrs, p69).

#### **Chinamwali Ceremony, Chewa girls' initiation**



Initiation mentors (*Nyamkungwe*) teaching girls behind closed doors during *Chinamwali* initiation training. The initiate demonstrates her dancing skills (p178).



*Mama Nyangu* (the Queen Mother) and her initiates sing and dance to demonstrate what the girls have learned (p178).

**Source:** Guhrs, Tamara (2009). *Ceremony! Celebrating Zambia's Cultural Heritage*. Celtel Zambia Plc.

**Figure 1: Training session in progress during *Chinamwali* girls' initiation ceremony.**

During this confinement period, girls are taught numerous topics covering hygiene; respect for elders; dangers of pre-marital sex; sexual dances in bed; keeping secrets about their marriages; and generally how to look after their husbands and be good mothers and care givers to their family members. Emphasis is placed on how to keep their husbands happy (sexually, well groomed, doing all house chores for their husbands, etc.) so that their men do not go for other women. Essentially, the training revolves around pleasing men and managing homes as wives, mothers, and care givers. Girls undergo rigorous training to equip them with sexual agility skills (*Figure 2*) that gives a man so much pleasure that when he sleeps with a girl who has undergone such training that man looks forward to more! As a result, men look out for these "well trained graduates."

Trained to be mothers, girls are constantly reminded during training that they are society pillars who must keep home secrets at all times. After completing their training, a public event is organized to celebrate their

“graduation”. Girls are made to dance in public to display their newly attained skills, mainly in sexual dancing (Figure 2).

**Wali Ceremony, Luvale girls' initiation**



An instructress (*Chilombola*) leads initiates (*myali*) to the public arena (p70).



Initiates (*Myali*) perform in the public square, during *Likumbi lya Mize* (p70).



Initiates (*Myali*) perform in the public square, during *Likumbi lya Mize* (p71).

**Source:** Guhrs, Tamara (2009). *Ceremony! Celebrating Zambia's Cultural Heritage*. Celtel Zambia Plc.

**Figure 2:** Trainees and Graduates show off their newly acquired Skills.

Although these traditions and practices belong to specific cultural groups, and one would expect these traditions to remain in those societies, [un]fortunately electronic media has made sharing of information seamless. The fact that there is a public celebration organized, and is free for all to attend, to appreciate what girls have learned during that process makes it easy to share video clips from such celebrations. Therefore, even girls who have not undergone this training are likely to be “trained” by their colleagues, and ultimately lead to a multiplier effect. Under such circumstances, should society be surprised about pre-marital pregnancies becoming a routine occurrence in Zambia?!

Chinamwali (Eastern Province) and Wali (North-Western Province) traditional practices share the same “curriculum” and choice of teachers (*Table 1*). Married and elderly women of integrity, chosen from within that community, conduct the training. Because women have total control over this process as reservoirs of knowledge, in a way, this probably gives them a false feeling that they are doing the right thing and being useful to society. However, looking at the topics covered, timing of the process, and practices enforced, it is easy to notice that these initiation ceremonies bring more harm than good to the girls, and by extension to society at large. Negative impacts are more than positive ones (*Table 2*). In fact, the whole curriculum is a RED flag

because most of the topics offered are age-inappropriate. At the time this training is offered, a girl is nowhere near to being ready for marriage, or qualifying for marriage! So why “teach” her adult stuff?

**Table 1: Topics Covered: Chinamwali and Wali Girls’ Initiation Ceremonies**

Topics Taught	
1	Hygiene (e.g. during menstrual period)
2	Dangers of pre-marital sex
3	Respect for elders
4	How to dance and sexually please a man in bed
5	Grooming their husbands
6	Submit to their husbands
7	Keeping secrets about their relationship
8	Fidelity in marriage
9	Home management: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking care of their husbands and children</li> <li>• Performing all home chores (cleaning, cooking, doing laundry, etc.)</li> </ul>
10	How to welcome and look after visitors
11	Looking after dependants

People have mixed feelings about this tradition; some strongly feel these traditional practices are necessary and should be continued, while others think they are offered at a totally wrong time. The latter group argues that girls at puberty (9-14 years old) are too young to be exposed to adult stuff, the kind of teaching offered on sex and marriage. At 9-14 years of age, these girls are babies themselves. To socialize them into believing they are old enough to become mothers simply robs them of their childhood. In fact, it is quite incompressible how traumatic this experience is to the girls. Unfortunately, no research has been undertaken to learn from girls who have undergone this process, to hear their views on how this process impacted their future plans. Society seems to be happy that their girls are well prepared for their future roles as mothers, and that seems to be a huge achievement. Yet, strictly speaking these practices have more negative than positive impacts as *Table 2* below illustrates. Out of eleven (11) core areas taught, only three (3) are age appropriate (*Table 1*). The other seven (7) topics are adult stuff that should not be introduced to kids at their age. It is time scholars and child rights advocates paid attention to this tradition.

#### IV. Cultural Traditions and Impact on Girls’ Educational Advancement

Traditional practices in Zambia are as varied as its 73 ethnic groups (and counting). *Table 2* below summarizes positive and negative impacts accrued from girls’ initiation ceremonies at puberty. It is important to note that topics captured in the first column are normally provided at home by any parent / guardian. These are routine teachings children (boy or girl) receive at home; there is no need to confine a child in a puberty initiation ceremony to be trained in something which is part of a child’s routine training at home. Therefore, from our analysis, real impacts from these cultural initiation practices are negative in nature (*Table 2*).



**Table 2: Impact of Cultural Traditions on Girls Advancement**

POSITIVE IMPACT <sup>4</sup>		NEGATIVE IMPACT
<b>Topic covered and associated Impacts</b>		
1	Hygiene, especially during menstruation period	
2	Dangers of pre-marital sex	
3	Responsibility over their decisions	
4	Respect for elderly people	
5		Teaching about <b>sexual maneuvers in bed is age-inappropriate</b> . Girls are too young for that type of teaching.
6		<b>Girls stop going to school (for 3 months!)</b> to undergo training after puberty.
7		Initiation Confinement (for 3 months) and <b>teaching about sex is quite traumatic for girls at that age</b> . The process socializes girls to look at marriage as their destiny and ultimate goal in life.
8		<b>Girls tempted to “practice” what they learned.</b>
9		<b>Public display of sexual maneuvers exposes girls to men hungry for sex, and will abuse them.</b>
10		<b>Human traffickers are ready to collect these sexually “skilled” girls for the brothel industry.</b>

When girls undergo training and graduate from these initiation processes, society confirms that they are ready for marriage, and therefore these girls can be married off. Since the “graduation” process involves public display (through erotic sexual dancing) of what these girls learned from the initiation ceremony, naturally this public advert expose girls unnecessarily to male “vultures” in that community. These men will stop at nothing to pursue and exploit these girls. In other words, the public display of girls invites men to pursue these new graduates for marriage or simply casual sex. Men look at these girls as a new product to be tried and enjoyed.

With the advent of TV and explosion of social media, cultural teachings which used to be confined to specific regions are now spread out everywhere. Erotic dancing has become part of cultural dances in Zambian schools and public meetings, and no one seems to care about the impact of such exposure on young minds. Hence, when people express concerns over rising cases of early child marriages, society should start looking at some of the root causes to the problem. Initiation ceremonies could one such piece in this puzzle.

Second, if one takes the purpose of any training as a process aimed at producing graduates who should effectively put into practice what they learned, it follows therefore that these graduates will also be inspired to try what they learned. If graduates don’t practice what they learned, that would defeat the purpose of that training, and especially the graduation. Hence, it is quite plausible that some early pregnancies and marriages are an effect from this curiosity to practice.

<sup>4</sup> These things are taught at home, irrespective of whether or not a girl undergoes puberty initiation ceremonies.

Third, there is a larger concern pertaining to infringement on child rights, and Zambia is a signatory to the international Convention on Rights of the Child (CRC) of 1990. Initiation ceremonies do not uphold children's human rights; adult power hierarchy runs supreme and gives no room for children to express themselves and share their feelings. Girls are totally under adult tyranny, they have no say or choice in what should be done to them. They are withdrawn from school for 2-3 months, and confined to be trained how to become good wives, mothers and care givers. Introducing girls to adult stuff and teaching at 12-13 years of age, when some of them attain puberty, is clearly and totally age inappropriate. At this age, girls are psychologically not mature enough to comprehend such teachings. Furthermore, the fact that part of the teaching emphasizes secrecy – e.g. keeping home secrets – these young girls are taught to bottle up adult stuff (and keep quiet over any infringement) at an early age. This is a violation of a child's freedom of speech and expression. Confinement and seclusion from other members of the family and the larger community is equally tantamount to imprisonment and a violation of girls' rights to education and freedom of movement. One wonders how traumatized girls are as they undergo this process and trying to make sense of the training. Yet, silent submission is expected from all girls throughout this ordeal, which most likely is against their wish. But, as Daly (1978) explains, men and women have the same human capacity for reason and should be given equal opportunities to apply their rationality and enjoy their human rights. Children deserve this space of freedom as they grow up. Unfortunately, initiation ceremonies go against this expectation; they are clearly an affront to child [privacy] rights. Girls have no choice on whether or not to participate, let alone on what type of training to undergo during the process. As noted above, this training is age inappropriate and its impacts generally negative on girls' psychological disposition. Hence, there is need to relook at the timing so that such training is offered at the right time in a child's development.

For some girls, this initiation process marks the end of their formal education; they never go back to school again because they are ready to be married off. And for those who may go back to school they have to be mentally, psychologically and emotionally strong to answer questions from other kids and teachers on why they were absent from school for so long. Since initiates are not supposed to share what they learned, it puts these girls in a very awkward situation. Eventually, such encounters discourage girls from going to school anymore because they feel out of place. Instead, they settle for getting married as their newly acquired destiny. In fact, as early as 1900s, Howitt (1907) found a similar problem among native tribes of south-east Australia where girls focused on pursuing womanly responsibilities of getting married and having children after their initiation ceremonies. Of course, giving up on their education robs such girls a better future. To know how girls feel about these female initiation ceremonies and the impact this has on their future and life aspirations, a study to get views from girls who underwent this process would be ideal. It would help inform future interventions on girls' educational advancement, and more specifically on addressing early child marriages. Adolescent girls, like any other child, have a right to education, health, and human dignity. Therefore, protecting and fulfilling these rights at all times should be every adult's primary business.

If these initiation ceremonies should be held at all, the Zambian society should decide to delay them until girls attain the legal age of 21 years. At this point, they will have completed Grade 12 and will also be in a position to decide for themselves what is right and what is wrong. Besides, since marriage is a legal union, it is even more appropriate that girls should make that decision when they are legally old enough to sign themselves off in that social contract. This will signify proper respect for children's rights – let them enjoy their childhood with full protection under the law.

With early marriages becoming a huge problem in Zambia (UNDP, 2017; Population Council, *et. al.*, 2017; Yowela, 2016), it is time society interrogates the impact from girls' initiations ceremonies. These ceremonies may insidiously be playing a role in accelerating early marriages and curtailing girls' educational advancement. To begin with, a female initiation ceremony focuses on training a girl to become a good wife, mother and care giver. It socializes girls to aspire for marriage as their ultimate goal. Therefore, it is quite likely that girls themselves start to eagerly look forward to getting married and will accept the first man who expresses sexual interest in them. Second, there is a likelihood that girls would like to practice what they learned from that

process, after all that is a natural progression from any training. Graduates are expected to demonstrate skills gained, competence and their agility. Of course, doing this leads to unplanned pregnancies and ultimately forced early marriages. The school re-entry policy that allows girls who drop out of school after getting pregnant and to go back to school is a solution designed to respond to this problem. However, if not well managed, this too can be abused. Third, easy access to internet and explosion of social media makes it easy for these “graduates” and other people who witness the grand finale graduation to share (via videos) what these girls learned. As a result, these teachings are no longer a private affair and neither are they confined to that social group where the tradition applies. The training is available to a wider audience, thus polluting more innocent minds. And this information explosion entices men to try these girls out whether at a fee or free sex. Fourth, since there is a public celebration and display of these graduates’ sexual skills, in essence, that serves as a public advert which says: these girls are now ready for grabs. Naturally, this public display and advert invites men in that community and encourages them to pick from that group of “graduates” as soon as possible. *Early birds pick the best worm*, becomes a true adage in this respect. So the question is: are these initiation ceremonies still relevant in modern day Zambia? How can society protect adolescent girls from exploitation?

## V. CONCLUSION

Culture will always have a role to play in people’s lives. Likewise, advocates for girls’ initiation ceremonies (and in some ethnic groups for boys as well) feel these traditions help to uphold that community’s identity. However, these practices should be interrogated to retain what is good and discard bad elements. As noted in the impacts from *Chinamwali* and *Wali* traditional ceremonies in Eastern and North-Western Provinces, respectively, many of the negative impacts can easily be turned into positive impacts if such teachings are delayed and only offered after a girl is 21 years old and above, or preferably when there is a man who has expressed interest to take her hand in marriage (at 21 years and above). For instance, this is a tradition for some ethnic groups in Zambia (e.g. in Luapula Province) where a girl is introduced to sexual teachings only when she gets engaged. They believe, and rightly so, that this is the right time to expose a girl to such intimate stuff. At puberty, teaching emphasis covers only hygiene (especially during menses), sexual abstinence (dangers of pre-marital sex), appropriate dressing, and respect for elderly people. And there is no confinement involved. But at the parent’s discretion, a girl may stay away from school for 2-3 days just to monitor how she copes with her menses, which is clearly a new and huge responsibility.

One way to “modernize” some traditions or eliminate redundant aspects is to provide criteria against expectations. For instance, one may ask: is this aspect of culture and tradition still applicable this time and era? Is the teaching age appropriate? Is it timely? Can the teaching be given at a later stage? What are the implications for this type of teaching? Who benefits and who loses from such teaching?

Another way of looking at this subject is to evaluate these traditions in light of value added to the well being of a trainee. Is this teaching going to uplift or endanger the girl’s life? Is it increasing or reducing the girl’s dignity? What value / benefit does displaying sexual maneuvers in public bring to the girl and or society at large? Doesn’t this aspect of the tradition belong to a private space? If these sexual skills belong to the private space, why bring them out for public display? What are the effects from this public display?

Honest answers to these questions are likely to reveal that, in a way, public display of initiates’ graduation attract people with wrong intentions, who later start abusing these girls. Strictly speaking, after that public marketing performance, abusers are certain those girls have proper sexual skills they can enjoy them or facilitate to sell them in the brothel industry. So when society notes or complains about increase in sexual immorality, child marriages, teen pregnancies, girls school drop outs, human trafficking for the brothel industry, etc. it is time to interrogate some of the underlying factors; culture and traditions in Zambia might be fueling the trend. It is time to take stock of some root causes and address them accordingly.

Based on the foregoing discussion, one notes that development is a process that builds in stages, and the power of development should force communities to dream how to create new worlds for their common good. Likewise, there is room for making improvements to cultural practices that seem to impede rather than promote girls' educational advancement. Girls need an environment that educates, inspires, motivates, and challenges them to achieve way beyond their wildest dreams. They must be given that space and an opportunity to be kids first (to enjoy their childhood) and to become mothers later. This area of development (modernizing or modifying some cultural practices) falls squarely in the parents and educators' hands first, and practitioners later.

It is hoped that this paper has ignited sufficient interest and desire to do something about "modifying" some cultural aspects in the *Chinamwali* and *Wali* girls' initiation ceremonies that do not motivate girls to achieve their very best! The current focus of these initiation ceremonies train girls to see themselves as subordinate to their male counter parts, and instead aspire only for marriage as their ultimate achievement in life.

## VI. Possible Interventions

Culture and traditions are designed to be preserved in perpetuity. In this case, advocating for change essentially means asking people for behaviour change, and this may take a long time, but it will be worth any investment. The following policy interventions could be considered.

1. Delay girls' initiation until a legal age of 21 years old.
2. Make going to school (G1-12) for all kids mandatory.
3. Make child marriages (before 21 yrs of age) a criminal offence; similar to assault and defilement.

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