

Concept Note and Call for Papers

Conference

**Pathways to resilience and empowerment: child marriage at the crossroads of law
and societal dynamics**

16-18 June 2027, Morogoro, Tanzania

Child marriage is a gendered issue: about 18 % of those married before age 18 are boys, while about 82 % are girls. Child marriages can result in early and frequent pregnancy and play a significant role in the proliferation of sexual and reproductive health problems. Child marriages exacerbate risks of maternal morbidity and mortality as well as infant mortality. In addition, child marriages often curtail further educational and economic opportunities, especially for girl children, creating further risks of intergenerational poverty.

There are a number of risk factors, which range from gender discrimination in the society and the gendered provisions in the law allowing girls under the age of 18 to get married with parental consent to underlying socioeconomic determinants such as a lack of access to educational and economic opportunities as well as to everyday resources. These socioeconomic risks are exacerbated by environmental challenges, particularly those caused by the climate crisis such as droughts or flood impacts, leading to increasing resort to child marriages as a survival tactic.

Through multi-stakeholder learning and a gender-sensitive approach, girls' and young women's needs for resilience in adaptation to climate change can be identified. Empowerment of girl children and young women through law and policy means to support them to make informed life decisions by providing them with the necessary knowledge and an enabling environment. In this process, the recognition and respect of the cultural embeddedness are crucial: a contextually responsive approach, including cultural, social and structural aspects, not only helps to identify root causes, risks and roles of community members (including those with influence on traditions), but it can help communities to build resilience in the community as a self-sustaining mechanism that requires little or no outsider participation.

Call for Abstracts

We invite forward-looking contributions on child marriage across different African contexts that foreground pathways to resilience and empowerment through legal approaches. While the conference will have a primarily legal orientation, we also welcome interdisciplinary contributions (in particular from social work and social sciences, more generally). In this regard, diverse methodological approaches are also encouraged. Sub-themes include, but are not limited to:

- Approaches to rethinking domestic law on child marriage as a resilience enhancing and empowering vehicle
- Approaches to rethinking regional and international human rights law on child marriage as a resilience enhancing and empowering vehicle
- Approaches to rethinking human rights-based approaches to child marriage as a resilience enhancing and empowering vehicle

- Approaches to rethinking climate law (and other areas of law) as a resilience enhancing and empowering vehicle
- Approaches to rethinking law on child marriage through customs and traditions
- Empirical studies on resilience and empowerment through legal and non-legal approaches
- Resilience enhancing and empowering approaches to child marriage in social work
- Strengthening girls' agency, voice and pathways to empowerment: contributions that enhance understanding of girls' lived experiences, strategies, aspirations and negotiations with their families and communities.
- Community-grounded pathways to changing child marriage: contributions that enhance understanding of how community systems and individuals navigate and negotiate changes in child marriage practices.

The conference is intended to be a platform for scholars and practitioners in the fields of law (especially human rights and climate law), anthropology, social work and the broader social sciences to meet, present papers and share their perspectives under the conference's overarching theme, *"Pathways to resilience and empowerment: child marriage at the crossroads of law and societal dynamics"*.

How to submit an abstract

Interested contributors are invited to submit an abstract of max. 300 words outlining the proposed contribution. Submissions should be accompanied by a bio (max. 500 words) indicating the author's background and explaining how their experience relates to the conference topics. Please use the following [link](#) to submit your abstract. The **call closes on 15 September 2026**. Accepted participants will be informed by 20 October 2026 at the latest.

Funding

Participation in the conference is free of charge and catering will be provided. Participants are, however, expected to cover their own travel and accommodation costs.

Limited funding will be available to support early-career researchers based on the African continent who do not have access to institutional funding to attend the conference. Interested applicants who meet these criteria may apply via the [link](#) by submitting a short motivation letter of up to 2,000 characters explaining why they should be considered for financial support. Please note that the support offered will be provided as a fixed bursary and will not necessarily cover the full costs of travel and accommodation.

Publication

The discussions and insights generated during the conference will be developed into a written scholarly output in the form of a special issue in the Journal of Contemporary African Legal Studies (JCALS), tentatively titled *Gender, Law and Positive Changes regarding Child Marriage in Africa*. Participants are strongly encouraged to contribute to this special issue. Those wanting to have their papers considered for publication must be prepared to submit a first draft of their full manuscript by **15 April 2027**.

About the conference organizers

The upcoming conference is organised as part of the Re-Empower Project *Resilience through empowerment: overcoming socioeconomic and environmental risk factors for child marriage in Tanzania through a positive engagement with customs & traditions*, which is funded through VLIRUOS and jointly implemented by the Faculty of Law at Mzumbe University in Tanzania, the Law and Development Research Group at the University of Antwerp and Hogeschool Gent in Belgium. The organizing committee comprises Seraphina Bakta, Gamze Erdem Türkelli, Wouter Vandenhoele, Sofie Vindevogel, Lukiko Lukiko and Isabelle Zundel.