



Cultural Innovation for Adolescent Sexual & Reproductive Health & Rights



ROZARIA
MEMORIAL TRUST
Creating Opportunities: Unleashing Potential

A Case Study of Rozaria
Memorial Trust, Zimbabwe

Introduction

Rozaria Memorial Trust (RMT) has been promoting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) through shifting of traditional and cultural norms in Murehwa and Shamva Districts. With support from Hivos through the Regional SRHR Fund, RMT implemented a project themed *“Promoting adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights through shifting of norms by traditional leaders”*. The project was aimed at contributing to the availability of a critical mass of traditional leaders on adolescent SRHR campaigns for norm shifting to increase adolescents’ access to SRHR information and services in rural communities.

The project sought to develop and strengthen child marriage and SRHR by-laws in chiefdoms in Zimbabwe as well as to document and develop tools for the application of Nhanga safe spaces as a cultural innovation to promote ASRHR¹. Therefore, the project worked in partnership with traditional leaders as the gatekeepers of tradition and culture.

Founded in 2007, RMT is a Zimbabwe registered non-profit organization with community-based interventions in Murehwa and Shamva Districts in Zimbabwe as well as a track record of collaborative advocacy work nationally, regionally and globally. RMT has been consistently focused on the securing the rights of and opportunities for girls and young women and People Living with HIV especially children, prioritizing education, health and entrepreneurship. RMT’s work is rights-based and focused on empowering the rights holders to claim and enjoy their rights and equally demanding accountability of the duty bearers to fulfil their obligations.

RMT through its activities ensures that women, particularly girls and young women are empowered to have a voice and capabilities to assert for respect and protection of their human rights, especially in the context of SRHR, by addressing HIV and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) issues including child marriages.



¹ RMT-HIVOS Half Year Progress Report; November 2019-May 2020. Page 3

THE STATE OF CHILD MARRIAGES

Child marriages are prevalent in Murehwa District, with a prevalence rate of 38% which is higher than the national prevalence of 33%.² Most of the causes of child marriages are preventable and are caused by a myriad of interlinked factors. In Zimbabwe, there are three main drivers of child marriage; poverty, religion and culture.

In poverty-stricken families, parents are often compelled to marry off their daughters when faced with difficult socio-economic conditions, as a way of reducing their expenses for food, clothes and education.³ Retrogressive marriage practices such as *kuripa ngozi*⁴ (virgin pledging), *kutizira*⁵ (unplanned pregnancy marriages) and *kuzvarira*⁶ (pledged marriages) are also continually used to justify marrying off young girls in Zimbabwe.⁷

The Zimbabwean Constitution prohibits child marriages through section 81(2) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment No. 20 Act 2013 which states that a child's best interests are paramount in every matter concerning the child and Section 81(e) protects every child from economic and sexual exploitation and any form of abuse.⁸

The same amendment recognises traditional institutions as integral to the identity and institutional framework of governance. The application of customary law principles and practice is to be exercised in furtherance of the constitution and its values.

Despite Zimbabwe having progressive policies and laws on adolescents SRHR, there is a gap between policy and lived realities in communities with rural youths at higher risk and have a higher burden of SRH problems that include teenage pregnancies, child marriages and HIV.



²Zimbabwe Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2019)

³Kidman R. (2017). Child Marriage and Intimate Partner Violence: A Comparative Study of 34 Countries. International Journal of Epidemiology. 46(2): 662–675. pmid:27733435

⁴Kuripa ngozi, young girls are married off to appease an avenging spirit.

⁵Kutizira is a practice where if a girl gets pregnant out of wedlock, she is expected to elope to her boyfriend or the person responsible for the pregnancy. This is done to mitigate the shame of premarital sex and childbearing in a bid to preserve the "family honour".

⁶Kuzvarira is often a survival tactic where low-income families negotiate with wealthy families to marry off their daughters at a younger age in exchange for grain, cattle or money

⁷Chitakure J. (2016). Shona Women in Zimbabwe. A Purchased People? Marriage, Bridewealth, Domestic Violence, and the Christian Traditions on Women. Eugene: Pickwick Publications.

⁸The Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013), Amendment No 20.

NHANGA AS A CULTURAL INNOVATION

To address the challenges young women and girls face in relation to SRHR and child marriages, RMT undertook the project using a cultural innovation through the 'modern' Nhanga concept. Nhanga is a cultural innovation for social empowerment providing a safe and leadership space led by young women and girls. The Nhanga is a space for mentorship, learning and advocacy for young women and girls. It creates safe spaces for young women and girls to influence laws and policies that uphold their SRHR at sub-national, national, and regional levels.

"We realised that a Nhanga is a safe space that girls and young women can meet up and discuss issues affecting them,"

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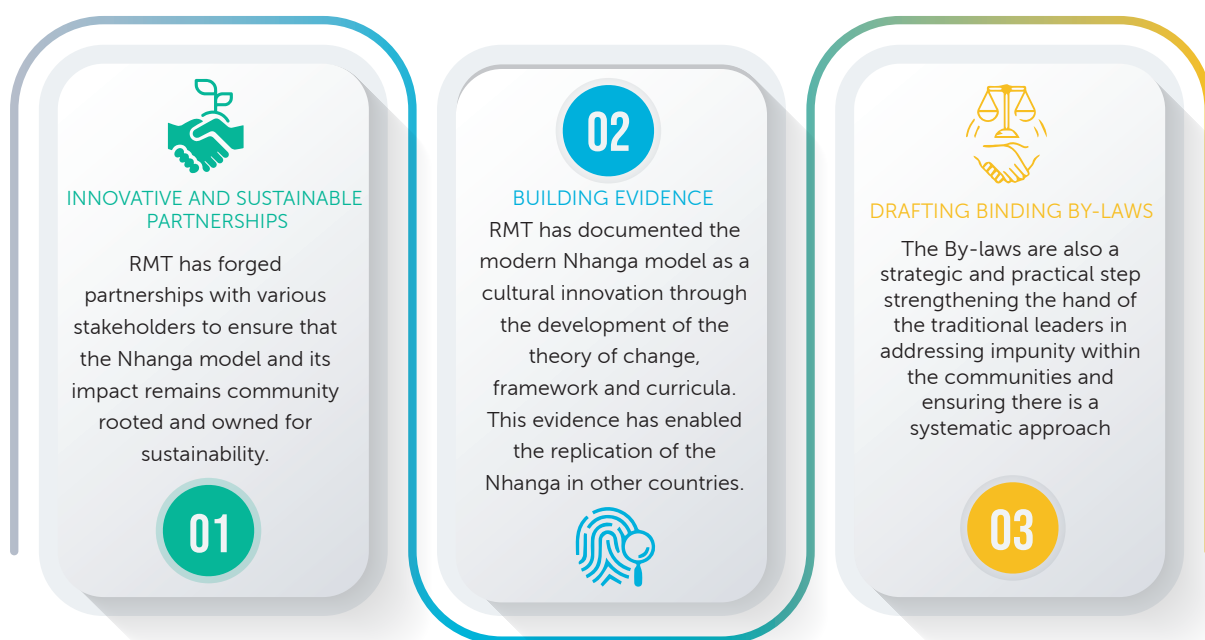
Ruwadzano Muzvondiwa, RMT Gender Justice Officer.

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RMT maintains that today's adolescent girls are faced with critical challenges, related to growing up, knowledge system, relationships, and communications within families. Some girls are in school while others are out of school. The disjuncture of formal and informal spaces for mentoring and nurturing is seen in the key indicators on barriers to completion of education as well as SRHR aspects such as adolescent teenage pregnancies, and child marriages.

This has led RMT to conceptualize the project to address issues of child marriage, empowerment of girls and promotion of health and education. RMT through the Nhanga is advancing the welfare and wellbeing of girls and young women with a special focus on education, leadership, SRHR and child marriages.

In the implementation of the Nhanga Model, RMT uses the following approaches to achieve its goal; innovative and sustainable partnerships, building evidence and drafting binding by-laws. These approaches have resulted in girls who experienced child marriage having a second chance at education and making them understand the importance of education.



THE NHANGA THEORY OF CHANGE

RMT has been introducing and amplifying the Nhangang Concept in its subnational, national, and regional and international work as part of creating girls' agency and social movement building on education, adolescent SRHR and leadership.

Nhangang as a concept is defined as both a physical structure and a methodology all aimed at providing a safe space for women and girls for social scaffolding from girlhood to womanhood and initiating them into economic empowerment in several spheres.

Nhangang is a shelter built and allocated to girls by the head of the family. This description by Shoko portrays the physical structure allocated to the girl child as the identity of Nhangang.⁹ This description implies an additional role of Nhangang to the girl child which required privacy from parents, boys, and any other unsanctioned visitors that came into the home. From this description, Nhangang was more than a physical structure but possibly an approach to respond to the needs of a girl child into maturation and sustainable contribution to the African Society.

In the modern Nhangang, all age groups are welcome in the Nhangang sessions, what differs is the kind of instruction or service that is given to each age group at any given time and space. The RMT Education and Counselling Centre (ECC) also houses a safe house for survivors of any form of SRHR violations. The safe house contributes far more than just a safe place to stay. It provides essential aspects of protection, services and resources which enable women and girls who have experienced abuse to recover from the violence, to rebuild self-esteem, and to take steps to regain a self-determined and independent life.

To further entrench the concept, RMT constructed the physical Nhangang Space at RMT Education and Counselling Centre (ECC) in Murehwa District in 2018 and it has been in use since 2019. Furthermore, RMT developed the modern Nhangang theory of change, framework and curricula to enable its replication locally, nationally and regionally.



9. Shoko, T (2016) Karanga Indigenous Religion in Zimbabwe: Health and Well Being. Harare. Routledge.

RMT established 11 Rozaria Girls clubs (Nhanga) for in and out of school girls in Murewa and Shamva Districts focusing on mentorship, leadership and adolescent SRHR. The Nhanga provides a socially empowering space for crucial conversations on sensitive issues such as menstruation and dating, a place for learning with educational programmes as well as peer exchange and support.

Ethel Bondera, a beneficiary of this initiative wishes she had been schooled about SRHR well in time,

I wish I had been empowered about SRHR earlier, I wouldn't have fallen trap to child marriage," she says. "Nevertheless, I'm glad that after experiencing child marriage, I'm now back in school with the help of Rozaria Memorial Trust."

RMT also introduced the concept of 'Tseketsa kuMwanasikana' which aims to foster economic empowerment and income generation for the girl child, aimed at alleviating poverty and addressing causes of child marriages and gender-based violence.¹⁰

IMPACT OF THE NHANGA CONCEPT

Development of By-Laws



The Nhanga model has resulted in the drafting of by-laws on ending child marriage and protecting children who have experienced child marriage in Murehwa District. This was achieved in partnership with Murehwa Chieftancy, traditional leadership and the local council.

Eradicating child marriage is, therefore, a profound step in bringing back the true value and respect to the institution of marriage within the traditional values of the people. It also brings back and rebuilds the positive mores that lie behind the adage, *"It takes a village to raise a child"*, emphasizing the collective responsibility for the wellbeing and welfare of each child.

The By-laws are also a strategic and practical step strengthening the hand of the traditional leaders in addressing impunity within the communities and ensuring there is a systematic approach within Mudunhu Ramambo Mangwende (a local Murehwa Chiefdom) to addressing the issues of abuse of children. Historically the Mangwende Chieftaincy has sought progress and positive development for the area with successive chiefs carrying the mantle over generations have upheld this tradition.

The By-laws on Ending Child Marriage in Chief Mangwende's Chiefdom affirms the universally accepted principles in the Zimbabwe Constitution and enforces the following;¹¹

Best Interest of the Child are the paramount and overriding principles underlying the interpretation of these By-laws, their implementation, enforcement, and monitoring.

- Ending child marriage is the core objective reinforced by the multi-pronged approaches adopted focused mostly on prevention measures.
- Disability, inclusion and protection of most vulnerable children and their families, is paramount as such persons face double discrimination and are at higher risk of exploitation

10. Tseketsa kuMwanasikana is a concept where a girl-child is empowered through raising a hen or a goat as an income-generating project meant to cater for the girl's needs which include buying sanitary wear.

11. By-laws on Ending Child Marriage and Protecting Children who Experience Child Marriage (Murewa District)

- Inter-disciplinary measures addressing behaviours, services and poverty recognises the importance of taking measures that address the root causes of child marriage at individual, family, and society levels.
- Justice and enforcement as essential for social cohesion and critical to getting impunity and for societal collection sanctioning of deviant behaviours.
- Capacity building and monitoring is critical to track effectiveness and impact.
- Prohibition of Child Marriage and Abuse of Culture-any person who uses custom, tradition, or practice to justify commission of a crime, especially sexual abuse or child marriage is assumed guilty of the criminal offence according to the laws and is infringing on the values and expected moral conduct of this community.



Innovative and sustainable partnerships



RMT has forged partnerships with various stakeholders to ensure that the Nhangas model and its impact remains community rooted and owned for sustainability. RMT partnered with the African Union through the Gender is my Agenda Campaign (GIMAC) network where RMT is a member. RMT has been able to ensure the participation of girls from rural communities to attend GIMAC to self-represent RMT with other GIMAC members. RMT also hosted 5 Youth advocacy trainings prior the AU Summit with a youth position paper which RMT had influenced for the past 5 years. The advocacy issue of using culture as a tool to end child marriage has been received well at GIMAC with RMT leading the Nhangas as a side event at all the GIMAC meetings. RMT is also the thematic lead for GIMAC this year focusing on arts, culture, and heritage.

With the Nhangas being a positive cultural practice for conversations, mentorship, learning and advocacy for girls and young women's SRHR including ending child marriages will continue being harnessed.

RMT has partnerships with line ministries including the Ministry of Women Affairs; Community, Small and Medium Enterprises; traditional leadership; the Victim Friendly Unit; the Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association; and Murehwa Rural District Council. This partnership ensures a well-coordinated, multi-sectoral and sustainable approach to adolescent SRHR and ensures social protection and legal redress for violation of young women and girls' rights.

The Nhanga model has also been introduced as a replicable cultural innovation in East and Southern Africa. The Nhanga Concept has also been growing popular and being replicated by partners as an effective approach for influencing policy at national, regional, and international level.



Building Evidence

RMT has documented the modern Nhanga model as a cultural innovation through the development of the theory of change, framework and curricula. This evidence has enabled the replication of the Nhanga in other countries. The model has also reflected positive results, with other village heads requesting for the same model to be implemented in their areas of jurisdiction as well as district authorities requesting that the Nhanga be implemented in the whole district.

The Nhanga has also seen the increase of cases reported at the RMT ECC because girls are now aware of their sexual and reproductive health rights.

However, while the Nhanga model has recorded impact, the challenge experienced in implementation of the approach is that the faith-based leaders are missing in the SRHR equation. Most are not open to participating in the SRH discussions and needed to be convinced of the importance of working with the peer champion educators. Another challenge is that of the exclusion of the boy-child in the Nhanga concept. The rationale is that the boy child also needs to be re-socialized and empowered in SRHR issues so that they do not violate young women's and girls' SRHR. Therefore, engagement of religious leaders and inclusion of men and boys will enhance the shifting of social norms and gender role expectations that drive child marriages



LESSONS LEARNT



There are various lessons learnt from RMT on shifting norms on SRHR issues. These include the following:



Traditional leaders are more than custodians of community values because they are part of the referral pathway for services, involved in mediation and also adjudication of cases. Therefore, the development of by-laws must strongly be informed also by the SADC Model law which is comprehensive.



The development of by-laws by traditional leaders must continue to involve religious communities so that some of the progressive language and outcomes could be adapted in its ethos within the faith environment.



A combination of skills sets is essential in the implementation of the project as it demands sociological, health and legal approaches so that the final outcomes are concrete and can be adapted in various contexts. A multi-disciplinary team is therefore critical in delivering the objectives of the project.



The development of the Nhangwa Framework and Curricula enables the concept to be replicated in other parts of the district; province, the entire country and beyond using little or no resources.

LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE



RMT will establish a robust online engagement plan that influence regional advocacy on the role of traditional leaders and culture in promoting ASRHR at the regional platforms such as Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) People's Summit, the Africa Union and the Council of Traditional Leadership in Africa (COTLA) on Ending Child Marriages.

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