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Intersections between Child Marriage and Climate Change: A Case Study of Malawi

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Intersections between Child Marriage and Climate Change: An Example of Malawi

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Abstract

Every day, 39 thousand girls under the age of 18 are married globally. This translates to a staggering 14 million girls annually, with a total number of 650 million married before their 18th birthday. Child marriage, often driven by poverty, deep-rooted traditions, religious beliefs, and limited access to education, is particularly prevalent in Sub-Saharan Africa, where 40% of girls are child brides. Alarming, climate change is emerging as a new driver of child marriage in developing countries, including Malawi. Studies have shown that approximately 42% of girls in Malawi are married before their 18th birthday, while 9% are married before the age of 15. Although other factors, as highlighted above, contribute to the prevalence of child marriage in Malawi, climate change has recently emerged as a leading and new driver. It is estimated that 1.5 million girls in Malawi are at risk of being exposed or subjected to child marriage before turning 18 due to extreme climatic changes, which have exacerbated food insecurity among many households and forced families to displace. This paper employs feminist theories of intersectionality, postcolonial feminism, and feminist political ecology to investigate the intricate relationship between climate change and child marriages in Malawi. The paper scrutinizes existing international, regional, and domestic policies and legislation, revealing their inadequacy in addressing the intersection of these issues. The findings underscore the urgent need for holistic strategies that consider the multifaceted nature of child marriage in the context of climate change. Recommendations emphasize the importance of empowering girls with education and economic opportunities, reinforcing the enforcement of anti-child marriage laws, and integrating climate resilience measures within communities. Ultimately, this paper contributes to the discourse on safeguarding the rights and well-being of girls in Malawi and beyond, highlighting the imperative of addressing the converging challenges of climate change and child marriage on a global scale.