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West and Central Africa Regional Capacity Building Workshop on Ending Child Marriage and other Harmful Traditional Practices in Africa, ends in Abuja, Nigeria.

Abuja, Nigeria, 09 October 2015—A five-day capacity building workshop for African Union Member States, Regional Economic Communities and Civil Society Organizations from West and Central Africa and focusing on ending child marriages and other harmful traditional practices ended today in Abuja, Nigeria.

The workshop which held at the ECOWAS Secretariat in Abuja was organised by the African Union Commission and UNICEF under theme; "Ending Child Marriage and Other Harmful Traditional Practices in Africa - Mechanisms and Strategies". Other facilitators were drawn from UNFPA, the Inter-African Committee, the African Child Policy Forum and Girls not Brides.

The workshop focused on providing an understanding of child marriage and other harmful traditional practices within the broad framework of social development linking it to the key goals and outcomes of the AU Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa, AU's Agenda 2063 and the sustainable development goals. More specifically, it provided a holistic view of harmful traditional practices programme (HTP), explicitly evidence based design, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning.

On behalf of the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Mr Ezekiel Oyemomi, Permanent Secretary of the Federal Ministry of Women affirmed the urgency and need for all stakeholders to join forces in ending all harmful practices affecting girls, women and hindering the development of Africa. He emphasized that most girls forced into marriages are coerced and their consent are not sought.

Dr Bolanle Adetoun, the Principal Programme Officer - Gender at the ECOWAS Commission, Abuja, in her welcome address noted that practices such as female genital mutilation and child marriages primarily stem from illiteracy and poverty and all must work together to eradicate them. She pointed out that this training was timely for child protection in the region and that the ECOWAS is at the forefront of this human rights and developmental issue. She reiterated the commission's commitment to the intervention for victims of child marriage by way of scholarships, capital to create economic value and education about gender equality and women rights amongst others.

The UNICEF Representative for Nigeria, Ms Jean Gough affirmed Africa's leadership role in setting the minimum age for marriage at 18 years in 1990 in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, noting that this was a standard that the UN Member States, just one year before, had failed to agree on when negotiating the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. "Africa therefore led the way in setting the standard for ending child marriage". Ms Gough closed the workshop by charging all participants to translate the learning into action and work collectively in ending all forms of violence against children.

Speaking on the essence of the workshop, the African Union Commission Director for Social Affairs, Ambassador Olawale Maiyegun stated that a key component of the African Union Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa is to enhance the capacity of Member States Experts, Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in dealing with the harmful practice of child marriage, thus making them suitable or better equipped to design and manage development plans in which social and economic policies and strategies are fully interfaced to deliver the kinds of transformative outcomes desired in ending child marriage and other harmful traditional practices affecting children in Africa.

Child Marriage has negative effects on the girl, her family, the nation and the whole world and large. These girls are also exposed to a number of health disadvantages such as the risks of contracting HIV/AIDS, the risk of cervical cancer, pregnancy and child bearing complications and even death. These and other effects as well as how to better work towards ending them is what the series of regional based workshops seeks to address.

About the AU Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa

The campaign was launched at the continental level in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 29 May 2014, during the Conference of Ministers of Social Development. It aims at ending child marriage by: (i) supporting legal and policy actions in the protection and promotion of human rights, (ii) mobilizing continental awareness of the negative socio-economic impact of child marriage, (iii) building social movement and social mobilization at the grassroots and national levels; and (iv) increasing the capacity of non-state actors to undertake evidence based policy advocacy including the role of youth leadership through new media technology, monitoring and evaluation among others.

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