



Until we are all equal

Social Traditional Norms and Child Marriage Research in Adjumani, Nebbi, Packwach and Zombo Districts, West Nile Region



Final Report Plan International Uganda

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Acronyms

AFARD	Agency for Accelerated Regional Development
CBO	Community Based Organization
CBSD	Community Based Services Department
CDO	Community Development Officer
CEFM	Child Early and Forced Marriage
CFPU	Police Child Family Protection Unit
CPC	Child Protection Committee
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DCDO	District Community Development Officer
DHO	District Health Officer
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
GGE	Girls Get Equal
LC 1	Local Council 1
MGLSD	Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NUSAF	Northern Uganda Social Action Fund
OVC	Orphans and other Vulnerable Children
PIU	Plan International Uganda
PLE	Primary Leaving Examinations
PSW	Para social Worker
PSWO	Probation and Social Welfare Officer
PWD	Person with Disabilities
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
TMF	Trailblazers Mentoring Foundation
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Education Fund

VHTs Village Health Teams

Definition of Local Concepts Used

Agwara	Wooden trumpet/ long hones used as musical instruments by Alur community
Ali	Girl escorts to the newly married bride among the Madi
Ambaba	A band of young men who escort the groom to pay bride price among the Alur
Atala	Unmarried girls who escort the bride to her new home among the Alur
Awila	Exchange of gifts between the girls and boy's families among Alur
Dyel kir	Goat among the Alur
Jakwenda	Go-between or Mediators of marriage among the Alur
Kasurube	Bride price among Madi. Also used to refer to the fine for failure to follow the right procedures for asking for a hand in marriage from the parents.
Keny	The literal meaning is bride price among the Alur. But Keny also refers to the main traditional ceremony when bride price is received, and the groom is officially introduced to the bride's family. An elaborate ceremony that lasts between 3-5 days.
Konge	A festival among the Alur where young girls gather in the evenings at designated places to dance and make merry.
Losira itii	Money given as a gift to the mother of the bride among Madi.
Ndara	Local musical instruments among Alur similar to a xylophone,
Nyamuliya	Bride among the Alur
Obola	A girl whose body looks too old after giving birth among the Alur of Jonam.

Okiro	Goats given to the girl's family as a fine for having her pregnant before marriage among Alur. Also used to ward off bad luck following the pregnancy.
Okiru	The process of sprinkling blood (of goats) around the home to clear forces of evil among the Alur
Rwot	Paramount chief for Alur
Ukwo	Fine for failure to follow the procedure of bride price among the Alur

Definition of Other Key Concepts

Child marriage: A formal or informal union where one or both parties have not attained the age of 18 (MGLSD & UNICEF 2015).

Early Marriage: The government of Uganda does not officially use the concept of early marriage, but as used in this study, it is equated to child marriage where at least one party has not obtained the official age of consent (18 years) (UN human Rights Commission, 2021).

Forced marriage: Marriages in which one and/or both parties have not personally expressed their full and free consent to the union. A child marriage is a form of forced marriage, given that one and/or both parties have not expressed full, free and informed consent (UN Human Rights Commission, 2021).

Social norm: The shared beliefs about what is typical and appropriate behaviour in a group of people often accentuated through informal rules and sanctions and underpinned by beliefs and values within a particular reference group (Mackie et al, 2015). Social traditional norms are often passed on from one generation to the next and become normalised as part of a people's culture.

Young people: Although of the practical usage of young people in Uganda refers to girls and boys aged 15-24 years, we used the term more generically to encompass all girls and boys aged 10 to 24 years (including adolescents and other young people as an intertwined category as defined in the Uganda National Adolescents Health Policy (2004).

Executive Summary

This study investigated the social traditional norms that promote child early and forced marriage (CEFM) in the West Nile districts of Adjumani, Nebbi, Packwach and Zombo where Plan International Uganda is implementing the Girls Get Equal (GGE) project. The purpose of the research was to identify underlying factors and perceptions that lead to discriminatory social norms resulting in CEFM to inform more relevant programming by Plan International Uganda, government and other stakeholders. Specific objectives included identifying the roles of different stakeholders in promoting and preventing CEFM, their roles in addressing social traditional norms and the effectiveness of the approaches used, involvement of the girl bride in the marriage decision making process, as well as assessing the functionality and effectiveness of the community level child protection system.

The study adopted a cross sectional descriptive design and used a mixed methods approach involving a quantitative household survey as well as

participatory qualitative methods. A total sample of 849 involving young people (10-24years) and adult men and women was covered; as well as 16 Focus Group discussions (FGDs), 9 Case studies with child marriage victims as well as over 80 individual interviews with district officials, cultural and religious leaders, Local councillors, Police, community volunteers and opinion leaders. Quantitative and qualitative data analyses were undertaken, and findings integrated for a more holistic presentation and discussion. The study received ethical approval from Makerere University School of Social Science Research Ethics Committee and the Uganda National Council for Science and

Technology. Plan International's child safeguarding protocols were adhered to in conducting the study.

1. Key Findings

a) Prevalence and perceptions on child early and forced marriage.

The survey considered all girls and boys 15 to 24 years who had been married before the age of 18. Findings indicate a very high prevalence of child marriage at 38.8%, increasing to 48% among girls. This is much higher than the national estimates of 34%¹ with the increase probably attributable to the COVID-19 induced lock down.). These results were also reflected in the 72% of adult respondents who reported witnessing a case of child marriage in the past 12 months and a further 18% of these respondents whose daughter who had married before the age of 18. The worst affected district was Zombo where 60% of married young people (15-24 years) entered marriage before the age of 18; the least was Packwach with 30.8%. The difference was attributed to relatively stronger cultural attachments among the Alur community in Zombo compared to neighboring districts.

Major drivers of CEFM are poverty, social traditional norms such as bride wealth, teenage pregnancy, and peer pressure. At bivariate analysis the results were significant for household poverty ($P=0.000$), social cultural norms ($P=0.000$), peer pressure ($P=0.002$), teenage pregnancy ($P=0.001$), and lack of SRHR information ($P=0.001$). Factors associated with religion and lack of parental guidance were not statistically significant although parental neglect was emphasized during qualitative discussions. Regarding forced marriage, there were contradictions between what respondents stated in the quantitative survey and the views from qualitative interviews. Although quantitatively, 82% of males and 86% of girls reported that it was their decision to get married, with no differences across the four districts, qualitative discussions revealed that forced marriage does happen especially where there is a pre-marital teenage pregnancy, which is considered dishonourable to the family. Cultural, religious and local leaders did not appear to acknowledge a high prevalence of forced marriage and rather explained it from other socio-economic factors that leave parents and children with limited options than to enter into child marriage.

¹ <https://www.unicef.org/media/88846/file/Child-marriage-Uganda-profile-2019.pdf>

b) Common norms associated with CEFM

The most outstanding social traditional norms associated with CEFM revolved around bride price, traditional marriage ceremonies, unacceptability of pre-marital pregnancy (teenage pregnancy), role of aunts and other relatives in mediating marriage, living arrangements where children and parents sleep in separate huts, and gendered care roles for girls and boys. Specifically, the 'Keny' traditional marriage ceremony among the Alur (Nebbi, Pakwach and Zombo) and 'Kasurube' among the Madi (Adjumani) have evolved to serve as a risky environment for teenage pregnancy and child marriage. The value, acceptability and allure of bride price especially in the context of extreme poverty is a driver for many parents to not resist CEFM. Among all three cultural groups, pregnancy before marriage is still considered a shame to the whole family and is associated with bad luck. Thus, when a child gets pregnant even if they are 14 years, they are expected to get married. Aunts play the role of counsellors but also mediators of marriage and they are rewarded for it. It is this material reward that increases the risk of arranging child marriages by aunts and relatives. There is a host of other marriage related norms including the practice of sending young girls to escort their newly married sister and stay at her home for some time- which normalizes the cycle of CEFM. The gender roles and expectations of the girl child as a home maker mean that there is less emphasis placed on her education and rather, she is prepared physically and psychologically to look forward to marriage and childbearing. But also, she bears the brunt of care roles at home which interferes with her schooling and dropping out of school increases her chance of CEFM. The traditional practice of separating sleeping huts for children was intended to protect and preserve the children. Instead, it is exposing girls to sexual abuse and exploitation and consequent CEFM.

c) Role of stakeholders in promoting CEFM

All cultural practices undertaken for marriage directly involve parents right from identification of a bride to negotiation and payment of bride price and the hosting of the traditional marriage ceremonies. The prevailing perception about parents was therefore that of playing an active role in perpetuating CEFM either directly or indirectly. The direct role was linked to demands for bride price and not accepting pregnant daughters at home, while indirect roles were interpreted in terms of inability to provide for children and keep them in school

as well as limited parental guidance and role modeling. However, quantitatively, only 20% of young people stated that it is common for parents to directly force girls into marriage either through arranged marriage or outright coercion. Relatives promote CEFM by mediating marriages and being supportive of parents' actions. The quantitative data suggested that majority of community members do not perceive cultural leaders as having a strong role in promoting child marriage but rather they are perceived as not doing enough to address harmful social traditional norms despite their current efforts. Religious leaders such as those from the Catholic Church discourage

use of modern contraceptives which promotes teenage pregnancy, a precursor to CEFM, while Muslim leaders were reported to be complicit in CEFM through concealing it and directly officiating child marriages especially in Adjumani. Community members (men and women) do not report CEFM while girls and boys engage in risky sexual behaviour that exposes them to teenage pregnancy and child marriage.

d) Role and specific actions of stakeholders in preventing CEFM and addressing negative social traditional norms

Across districts, it was the formal community structure of local councils (79.5%) and police (30%) that were perceived to be mostly taking action to address child marriage. Parents were mentioned by 29.5% of adult respondents, with most participants in interviews and FGDs instead blaming parental neglect for increased cases of child marriage. Religious and cultural leaders and civil society were perceived to play complimentary roles to the formal structures while young people -both male and female were almost non-visible in these efforts according to the survey findings. The main roles of parents in preventing CEFM were interpreted in terms of supporting their children's education (both girls and boys) as well as to a limited extent, reporting cases of sexual violence to formal authorities. About 13% of parents interviewed belong to an organized group or association that tries to address CEFM, with majority of these in Adjumani district (26% were members, 35.7% knew another parent or community member belonging to such an organized group). Relatives like aunts are involved in providing sexuality education which might help to avoid unwanted pregnancies. Three key interrelated roles were identified with cultural leaders namely taking a stand against child marriage and publicly denouncing the practice, instituting byelaws on social traditional practices such as the Keny, jointly conducting awareness and sensitization among community members, and supporting and campaigning for girls' education. Some religious leaders are using places of worship to sensitize their congregants to shun practices and norms that promote child marriage, although sexuality is not a common topic in the places of worship. The roles of men and women are subsumed in their other statuses as parents or leaders in the community. Beyond that, no organised groups of men or women in the community were identified save for the few who raise awareness or support each other through their church groups or through VSLAs.

Results point to the fact that young people are perceived as not actively involved in preventing CEFM. The community, including local leaders perceives young people's actions and behaviours as risky and sanctioned by increasing urbanization (growth of trading centres), access to communication gadgets, lack of access to sexual reproductive health information and services as well as the several social cultural practices and events that encourage early sexual relations. Qualitative data indicated low peer support against child marriage across all communities. Instead, it is peer pressure that is perceived to contribute to child marriage. There are barely any organized

efforts to involve young people as only 5.6% of all young people belonged to clubs or associations that seek to challenge child marriage and transform negative social norms. This could be attributed to the fact that the PIU project had not been fully implemented at the time of the study.

e) Effectiveness of what has been done and is being done by different stakeholders in preventing CEFM and addressing elements of social traditional norms.

Outstanding approaches and interventions that have been and continue to be used in addressing negative social traditional norms and preventing CEFM by different stakeholders included, awareness creation, supporting children's education, passing of by-laws against child marriage, qualifying marriages through issuance of certificates, reporting of cases of defilement and child marriage, referral,

among others. Sensitization and awareness creation is good but not adequate to change deep-rooted beliefs and practices especially when these norms act in combination with forces of extreme poverty, deprivation, and lack of education. Byelaws, issuance of certificates and denouncing of practices by cultural leaders are not always enforceable especially when they are seen as top-down even within the context of cultural institutions. Supporting children's education is perceived as effective because it keeps children in school and also exposes them to critical information that can be empowering.

f) Involvement of the bride in marriage decision making

Even though culturally (Alur and Madi) the marriage mostly involves adults (parents, relatives and cultural leaders), traditionally the bride must have consented to the marriage through a time of courtship. If she were not interested in the man identified for her, she could not be forced into marriage. Currently, it could be said that due to a combination of socio-economic and cultural factors, children are being 'forced' to take decisions to marry even if legally that decision is invalid because they have not attained the age of maturity to consent. Out of the 85 girls who were currently or ever married below the age of 18, 86.7% stated that it was 'their decision'. The remaining 12 did not resist the marriage due to fear of consequences of refusal (33%) and not knowing what to do (33%). While this might appear to suggest an active role by the bride, it must be interpreted in the context of an environment that offers limited alternatives and freedom due to unwritten rules and expectations for example regarding pre-marital pregnancy, coupled with poverty and deprivation leading to high school dropout.

g) Functionality and effectiveness of the child protection system

There are national laws, policies and guidelines that should facilitate smooth programming and interventions for child protection, but the enforcement is extremely problematic due to weak institutions, limited financing, and a culture of corruption and impunity. The government has established positions for the

child protection workforce up to the subcounty, but all the districts and sub-counties are understaffed and have other capacity gaps. Child protection is an unfunded priority in all the four districts and much of the intervention is supported by NGOs and development partners, making the intervention too projectized and therefore not sustainable. The volunteer structure that manages child protection at the grassroots is neither coordinated, not adequately capacitated to play their roles. Whilst the district coordination structures such as the District Orphans and Vulnerable Children Committees were said to be existent, the referral system is weak due to obstacles in access to services such as health, psychosocial support and justice.

2. Conclusion

Social traditional norms combine with a range of social and economic factors at individual, interpersonal, household, community and societal levels to promote CEFM in the West Nile districts of Adjumani, Pakwach, Nebbi and Zombo. Their power to influence child marriage is very much sustained by the socio-economic situation of extreme poverty and deprivation, low adoption, access and utilization of adolescent reproductive health services especially information and contraceptives as well as a generally weak child protection system at the community level. Therefore, addressing child marriage requires a multipronged approach through multi sectoral collaboration involving the efforts of different actors including government ministries and departments, development partners as well as voluntary and private actors at the grassroots. The region has reasonably established cultural institutions that play critical roles in influencing social traditional norms. Therefore, a strong integration of these institutions and actors into CEFM programming will be essential besides other stakeholder involvement.

3. Recommendations

Based on the key findings and conclusions from the study, the following suggestions for programming and advocacy should be considered:

Recommendations to Plan International

- ***Given the slow nature of social norm transformation, Plan International Uganda should consider adopting medium to longer term programming for social norm change using tested models that address deep rooted traditional beliefs, values and practices.*** Project based interventions should be designed in such a way that community engagements and assessment of change can continue beyond the project period. The already familiar model of Champions of Change should be widely adopted at the community level to address socio-traditional norms through stronger community engagement.
- ***Build capacity of parents and community stakeholder to fulfil their roles in child protection through for example parenting programs at the community level, strengthening of village savings and loan associations.***

- Paternal aunts are highly respected and play essential roles in sexual reproductive health. The project should therefore invest in approaches that build the capacity of paternal aunts and subsequently involve them in provision of accurate and appropriate sexual reproductive health education.
- ***The Local Council structure as well as police are playing critical roles in response to child marriage. They should be targeted with training and mentorship programmes to develop critical skills in child protection case management, with an emphasis on prevention and response services.***
- ***The project should implement a strong model of young people's engagement that puts life skills development at the fore.*** Skills and confidence building interventions can be through promotion of in-school and community level clubs and associations to enhance young people's participation in decision making and actions that directly affect their lives.
- ***Supporting children's and young people's access to sexual and reproductive health information and services is critical in*** preventing teenage pregnancy. Incorporating age-appropriate sexuality education in schools and awareness campaigns and integrating adolescent and youth friendly reproductive health services in the health care system are some of the ways this could be achieved.
- ***Support girls to remain in school through provision of a package of material and psychosocial services*** - including for example, provision of scholarships, ensuring access to menstrual hygiene management facilities, psychosocial counseling and mentorship support programmes.
- ***Continue to work with cultural and religious leaders to enhance their active engagement in addressing socio-traditional norms.*** Outstanding practices that should be targeted for change or modification include the evolving nature of the Keny traditional ceremony and the bride price per se. Cultural institutions' efforts to address these could be harnessed through more community.
- ***Integrate household economic strengthening into current programming.*** This is because poverty was found to be a significant driver of CEFM in the region.
To contribute towards strengthening of the child protection system, the project should support the following interventions.
- Support the development and dissemination of simplified versions of common laws, policies and guidelines to community level child protection workers including LCs, Paraprofessionals (PSW, VHTs, CPCs) and parents in their respective languages. This should be supported by development and dissemination of job aids for case management for these frontline workers.

- Advocate an amendment of the law to streamline child marriage more clearly in the existing legal framework.
- Support periodic refresher training for the social service workforce both in the government departments as well as for community level structures.
- Arrange periodic stakeholder engagement meetings that discuss issues beyond simple coordination and information sharing.
- Provide logistical support to district and subcounty child protection frontline offices including equipment for reporting, documentation and communication and follow up of child protection cases.

Recommendations to Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development

- Strengthen advocacy for more financial, human and logistical resource allocation to the districts, sub county and other child protection institutions and agencies at the community level including the parish level.
- Work towards formalising and standardising the community level parasocial worker cadres as part of the formal child protection system and build their capacity through a harmonised child protection curriculum that could apply across different projects.
- Lobby for increased staff positions in the community-based services department at the district and sub county levels to ease the caseload and increase attention to child protection issues.

Recommendations to District Local Governments

- District local governments should include child early and forced marriage as a substantive indicator in district plans so that there is regular assessments and reporting on this phenomenon to guide decision making. This will also ensure that CEFM remains on the agenda.
- Strengthen linkages and support supervision to community level child protection structures including parasocial workers, CPCs and local councillors.

Recommendations to Cultural Institutions

- While it may not be possible or desirable to abolish some of the social traditional norms such as bride price and associated marriage ceremonies, the cultural institutions should institute mechanisms to regulate the practices so that they are safe and do not promote CEFM. This regulation should not be top-down but rather achieved through a dialogical process where communities appreciate and support the decisions and actions taken.
- Cultural institutions could also innovatively promote positive values and practices through identification and recognition of positive role models in the community.
- The Alur cultural institution should support the chiefs and elders and grassroots structures to implement the resolutions of the 2015 Pronouncement on ending child marriage (updated 2020) and broaden it's scope beyond HIV/AIDS to consider all vulnerabilities confronted by adolescents and young people, particularly girls.

Recommendations to development partners and other Civil Society Organisations

- Work in concert with other implementing partners addressing CEFM to harmonise goals and approaches and achieve long term high impact results in addressing child early and forced marriage.
- Develop and implement joint advocacy strategies to address gaps in current laws and policies especially the contradicting Ministry of Education and Sports guidelines on readmission of teenage mothers in school as well as the need for a distinct, standalone law on child marriage.

1. Background, Purpose and Objectives

1.1 Introduction

This report presents findings of a study on Social Traditional Norms and Child Marriage in Zombo, Nebbi, Packwachi and Adjumani Districts. The aim of the study, conducted under the auspices of Plan International's Girls' Get Equal (GGE) project, was to identify and provide a detailed account on culture and social norms that perpetuate child early and forced marriage (CEFM) within the West-Nile region. A survey using participatory approaches was used to execute the study. Field data were collected in March 2021. This report elaborates the purpose and objectives of the study, the approach and methodology, key findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

1.2 Project Background

The Girls Get Equal (GGE) project was launched in 2020 by Plan International Uganda (PIU), with funding and support from NORAD and Plan International Norway National Office (NNO). It is being implemented in partnership with Agency for Accelerated Regional Development (AFARD) and Trailblazers Mentoring Foundation (TMF) in the districts of Zombo, Nebbi, Packwach and Adjumani, West Nile Region. The project aims to reduce CEFM through delivering on five core project outcomes namely: Keeping girls in school; increasing adolescents' knowledge on Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), Empowering Youth (especially girls) economically; changing discriminatory social norms and improving child protection policies and implementation. A baseline study was conducted to provide benchmarks on all five project outcomes. The current study is an independent research focusing on outcome four (changing discriminatory social traditional norms) and to some extent five (child protection system strengthening).

1.3 Purpose of the Study

This study sought to dig out detailed information on culture and social norms that perpetuate child early and forced marriage within the West-Nile region. Therefore, the purpose of the research was to identify underlying factors and perceptions that lead to discriminatory social norms resulting in CEFM in the mentioned districts of west-Nile region. Findings will facilitate understanding the drivers of CEFM in the target project area to inform the current approaches and strategies being used by PIU and government and other development partners to end CEFM in West-Nile region.

1.4 Research Questions

This study was guided by questions on cultural and social norms that surround CEFM as well as the functionality and effectiveness of the child protection systems.

1.4.1 Cultural and social norms

For each of the culture group (Alur and Madi Cultural Institutions), the study attempted to answer the following.

1. What are the roles in **a) Promoting Child Marriage b) Preventing child marriage** of each of these groups? Elaborate the roles, the specific practices and norms as well as how effective their efforts for and against CEFM are; (Parents, Clans and relatives, Religious leaders, Cultural leaders, Boys and men, Women and girls in the communities)
2. What is the involvement of the bride-to-be in the decision-making process about her marriage?
3. What has been and is being done to address social norms and practices that promote child early and forced marriages by different stakeholders (Parents, Clans and relatives, Religious leaders, Cultural leaders, boys and men, women and girls in the communities)
4. Assess the effectiveness of what has been and is being done by women and girls, men and boys, parents, clan leaders, community and religious leaders to mitigate socio-cultural practices that promote child early and forced marriages.

1.4.2 Child protection system

5. Assess the functionality and effectiveness of the child protection systems from the community, district and national level. Identify strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats and make recommendations to inform project intervention.

1.5 Uganda's Legal and Policy Context for Addressing CEFM

The Uganda Constitution and other laws place the minimum legal age for marriage at 18 years. The Constitution also provided for the right to marriage free from any form of coercion and violence and criminalises child marriage as a form of defilement². Furthermore, Article 33(6) of the Constitution prohibits laws, cultures, customs, or traditions

² Article 31 of the Constitution, the Penal Code [amendment] Act -CAP 120 2007; Children's Act - CAP 59 (amended 2016)

which are against the dignity, welfare, or interest of women or which undermine their status. The Children's Act (as amended 2016) spells out a bill of rights and responsibilities for children and outlaws all forms of abuse, neglect, and violence against children including subjecting children to harmful customary practices.

The recently developed National Child Policy (2020) and its programme Plan of Implementation acknowledge the high prevalence of child marriage and the role of social and cultural norms beside other factors that sustain the practice including limited access to education, household poverty and gendered social norms that place high value on girls' reproductive capabilities. The policy identifies child marriage as one of those harmful norms to be addressed. Several other laws and policies reflect the government's commitment to address child marriage including for example, the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act (2009), the Domestic Violence

Act (2010), and the Anti- Female Genital Mutilation Act (2010), The Uganda Gender policy (2008), the National Youth Policy (2001) and the National Adolescent Reproductive Health Policy (MOH, 2004) and the Gender in Education policy. Both the National Adolescent Reproductive Health Policy and the gender in education policy spell out government's commitment to ensure that adolescent mothers are re-admitted in school. This commitment has reiterated through several government pronouncements and guidelines including the Ministry of Education guidelines (2018, updated in 2020) that allow pregnant girls to sit their final examinations³. This was applied during the COVID-19 period where the government ordered all school administrators to allow pregnant and nursing adolescents and young people to sit their national examinations⁴. which pledges commitment to advocate for, coordinate and monitor implementation of programmes for the readmission of adolescent mothers into the school system.

In 2015 the government of Uganda developed a comprehensive National Strategy to End Child Marriage. Key areas of focus include improved policy and legal environment for protection and promotion of children's rights, improved access to quality sexual and reproductive health services, education, child protection services and other opportunities; changing social norms related to child marriage; empowerment of both girls and boys with correct information to enable them recognize child marriage and early pregnancy as a gross violation of their rights and take mitigating action. Despite its existence for more

³ Ministry of Education and Sports, 2020. Revised guidelines for the prevention and management of teenage pregnancy in school settings in Uganda

⁴ <https://www.pmldaily.com/news/education/2020/10/pregnant-students-to-be-allowed-to-do-final-examsuneb.html>

than five years, there has been no noticeable decrease in the prevalence of child marriage in the country.

Despite the enabling legal and policy environment, child early and forced marriage has not decreased partly due to limited enforcement and implementation of laws and policies and conversely due to other deep-rooted drivers of the practice at the institutional, community, family, and individual levels. Weak child protection systems, community sanction of the practice and other norms that facilitate it, household poverty, limited access to information and services on adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights, low levels of school retention especially among girls, have been indicated as key drivers⁵. From a legal and policy perspective, although the commitment to end child marriage is reflected in several documents, there is lack of a distinct law against child marriage and rather the age of consent and the law on defilement are the proxy interpretations against child marriage.

1.6 Theoretical Perspectives

The study was informed by two critical theoretical frameworks deemed instructive for the study of social and traditional norms and CEFM namely, the socio-ecological model and the social norms theory.

1.6.1 Socio-ecological model

Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological model emphasizes how individual, social, institutional, and macro level factors combine to influence people's actions⁶. These factors exist at the micro, meso, and macrolevel environment. The main argument is that a phenomenon like CEFM cannot be easily understood through a linear cause and effect analysis of any given factor, but rather a complex interaction of many factors within different societal systems at different levels. Social traditional norms do not occur in a vacuum but must be understood in combination with other factors within the overall environment.

1.6.2 Social norms theory

Although originally developed to address issues of peer influence on behaviour (Perkins and Berkowitz, 1986), the social norms theory has been extended to interrogate issues of the social and cultural environment (including beliefs and acceptable standards and practices) and interpersonal influences on individual behaviour. Social norms, which refer to shared expectations or informal rules among a set of people (a reference group) as to how people should behave, are often maintained through societal approval and disapproval or sanctions. Social norms are

⁵ UNICEF, 2015

⁶ Cislighi & Lori Heise, 2018

interwoven with gender norms which refer to informal rules and shared social expectations that distinguish expected behaviour based on gender. The perpetuation of positive or harmful practices and behaviours is often due to social motivations sanctioned by community beliefs and actions rather than simply those of the individual and their immediate family. Not all social norms are negative. Traditional social norms are thus a double-edged sword, that can promote positive behaviour while at the same time, discriminatory, retrogressive norms inadvertently accepted by a particular community do perpetuate harmful practices such as CEFM. Social norms are categorised into two namely: Descriptive norms (i.e., one's beliefs about what others in one's group do); and 2) injunctive norms (One's beliefs about what others approve and disapprove of). Hence, in examining social traditional norms in the West Nile region, we interrogated beliefs about acceptable practices and behaviour as well as the value systems that inform such norms. We also assessed the extent to which such norms exert influence on individual behaviour that results in CEFM since the existence of a norm may not necessarily imply its strength to determine behaviour (Cislaghi & Heise, 2018). In other words, there are those in the same reference group that may not act according to a standard norm (positive deviants). Hence the need to examine confounding factors for conformity to retrogressive social traditional norms.

1.6.3 Assessing the functionality and effectiveness of the child protection system.

A child protection system is a set of coordinated formal and informal elements working together to prevent and respond to abuse, neglect, exploitation and other forms of violence against children⁷. Child marriage is categorised as one of the common types of violence against children and therefore demanding action within any child protection system. A child protection system "...operates at several levels (ranging from the formal to the less formal), involves several nested contexts, and relies on different actors." (UNICEF 2010: 21).

The actors include children, the family, the community, and the state, and they can operate at one or more levels. Structures, functions and capacities are the "building blocks" of a child protection system, while "the continuum of care delineates the specific ways in which the system responds to rights violations, whereas the process of care specifies the procedures that are followed when the system engages children, families and communities.

⁷ World Vision, 2008

In assessing the functionality and effectiveness of the community child protection system, we based on the UNICEF framework⁸ to develop a set of questions based on the key elements of the system including a) Laws, Policies, Standards and Regulations, b). Cooperation, Coordination and Collaboration, c). Capacity Building, d). Service and Service Delivery Mechanisms. E). Communication, Education and Mobilization for Change, f). Financial Resources, and g). Accountability Mechanisms (UNICEF, undated, pg 10). The assessment focused on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) of the child protection system and structures especially at the community and district levels.

1.7 Organisation of the report

This report is presented in chapters. This chapter has provided the background to the study the main purpose and objectives as well as the legal, policy and theoretical frameworks. It also highlights the main theoretical frameworks adopted. Chapter Two presents a brief overview of the approach and methods, including ethical issues and child safeguarding protocols. The findings are presented in two chapters, beginning with findings from the quantitative survey in chapter 3 and qualitative findings in chapter four. In chapter five, a discussion of key emerging issues is done to reach sound conclusions and recommendations.

2. Study Approach and Methods

2.1 Research Design

A cross-sectional descriptive design was adopted to identify underlying factors and perceptions that lead to retrogressive social norms, resulting in child early and forced marriages. We used mixed methods combining quantitative and qualitative participatory survey methodologies in design, data collection, analysis and reporting of findings. The qualitative approach was used to describe and interpret social interactions regarding selected research themes while quantitative methods generated the required statistical data on the key variables related to CEFM such as education, socio-economic status, patterns in behaviour and practices of key stakeholders and prevalence of CEFM. Face to face interviews using a structured questionnaire were conducted to collect quantitative information from young people and adults, while Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), case stories and key informant interviews were used to gather

⁸ Available at:

<https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/files/Child%20Protection%20Systems%20Mapping%20and%20Assessment%20Toolkit.pdf>

qualitative data. The study also benefited from review of relevant literature.

2.2 Study Area and Target Respondents

The study focused on four project districts of Adjumani, Nebbi, Pakwach and Zombo. The project covers a total of 20 sub counties. A representative sample of 14 sub counties constituting both rural and urban or peri-urban areas was covered. The distribution of the sub counties was proportionate to the total sub counties covered by the project per district. Hence, in Adjuman, since only 2 sub counties are targeted, both were included in the sample while in the remaining 3 districts where the project covers 6 sub countries, 4 were selected (Table 18 Appendix 1). The study population comprised all key stakeholders in the community including adult men and women (Parents, guardians), adolescents and young people -both male and female aged 10 and 24 years, Clan leaders, Religious leaders and Cultural leaders. Others included local council leaders, child protection committees, community volunteers including parasocial workers, partner organisations, and key informants from the governmental child protection workforce including for example, Probation and Social Welfare Officers (PSWO) and Community Development Officers (CDOs).

2.3 Sample Size and Selection Procedures

2.3.1 Sample size and distribution

The sample size calculation was based on the formula by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) (Appendix 1). The calculation generated a total sample of 824. This sample was distributed among districts as well as different age and sex categories based on the proportion to population size (table 1). At least 60% of the sample were females given that CEFM mostly affects girls. Similarly, more adults aged 25 and above compared to young people aged 10-24 years respectively because the traditional social and cultural norms are inter-generational and mostly passed from older to younger generations. Table 1 presents the actual sample distribution.

Table 1

Targeted sample covered per district

District	Household size	Sample size	Proportion of young people			Proportion of adults		
			Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Adjumani	5.4	193	42	40	81	64	60	124
Packwachi	5.1	205	42	40	81	64	60	124

Nebbi	5.1	205	45	43	88	69	65	133
Zombo	4.7	221	39	37	77	60	57	116
Total		824	168	159	327	255	242	497

The actual number of household respondents reached was 849 representing 103% response rate due to gains through district and sub-county stratification of the sample.

2.3.2 Sampling procedure

This study used a multistage sampling technique where each project district served as a stratum. The selection of the sub counties from each district followed the sampling frame as targeted by GGE project. Subsequently, 14 out of 20 sub-counties were sampled representing 70% of the project area. From each selected sub county, 2 parishes and below them two villages were randomly selected. Systematic sampling with a random start was used to select household respondents. In each household, a maximum of 2 respondents were interviewed i.e., a parent/caregiver and a young person 10-24 years old irrespective of their marital status and whether they are the household heads or not. Both in and out of school young people were targeted. In cases where we found more than 2 qualifying respondents, random numbers were assigned and used to pick the final respondent. Local council leaders at the village level supported the identification of selected households through provision of physical directions.

2.4 Participants for FGDs, Key Informant Interviews and Case Studies

Sixteen FGDs were conducted with community members including men, women, girls, and boys in the selected districts. Key informants were purposively identified based on their presumed knowledge and roles in addressing child marriage. Cultural leaders, religious leaders as well as local council leaders were interviewed in each district.

Others included local government staff including District Community Development Officers (DCDO), PSWO, CDOs, Police Child and Family Protection Unit (CFPU). The team also held discussions with key staff from PIU and the two implementing partners i.e., AFARD and TMF. To capture the lived experiences of child marriage, 9 girls who got married before age 18 years were identified and interviewed (at least 2 from each district). These were identified either through the FGDs or with the help of local leaders at the community level.

2.5 Data Collection Methods

A structured questionnaire with both closed and open ended questions structured in respect to the study objectives was used to collect data from household respondents. The questionnaires were translated in Alur and Madi, programmed on the Open Data Kit (ODK) and directly administered by trained research assistants using Android tablets. An Interview guide was used to collect data from the purposively selected key Informants. The guide contained thematic areas structured in accordance with the study objectives. For purposes of accurate transcription of data, with the respondent's consent, all the interviews were recorded. This also applied to interviews with CEFM survivors. An FGD guide was developed to guide discussions with participants. Each FGD had 6-8 participants. Women and men, girls and boys were met separately to enhance freedom of speech and interaction as per the local culture. The purpose of FGDs was to get in-depth information, ensure data harmonization and factual analysis of the status of CEFM and the social norms that surround it. Data capture involved electronic recording as well as handwritten notes as a safeguard against loss of data. Each FGD was facilitated by a moderator and a notetaker both of whom spoke the native language. Sixteen experienced research assistants comprising 10 females and 6 males were recruited and trained to collect both quantitative and qualitative data.

2.6 Data Management and Analysis

2.6.1 Quantitative data management and analysis

Data collected via ODK were submitted to a server daily and crosschecked for errors daily. This enabled a high level of quality and completeness of the data. After, data were downloaded from the server and exported into Microsoft Excel and later exported to Stata version 15, statistical software for further analysis. In Stata, data variables and value labels were created. Data were analysed using both Stata and Microsoft excel, and is presented in tables and graphs. Descriptive statistics, including use of frequencies, cross tabulations and chi-square tests were applied to make sense of the data.

2.6.2 Qualitative data analysis

Qualitative data was analysed using thematic and content analysis following key research questions and study themes. Verbatim quotations are used to support the key themes and issues that emanated from the analysis.

2.7 Quality Assurance and Control Protocols

To ensure quality, the study was preceded by a thorough preparation and discussion of objectives, methods and tools between the consultant and PIU. Tools were translated into local languages and pretested prior to final programming onto ODK. The use of electronic data collection strengthened quality control and ensured strict checks to avoid errors during data collection specifically the household survey. The field teams underwent thorough training prior to data collection and were native speakers. All data collectors worked under the direct supervision of the consultant.

2.8 Validation of Findings

The findings of the study were validated in three stakeholder meetings organised by PIU in the respective districts. Based on the feedback from stakeholders from whom data were collected, district and other government officials, PIU programme and project managers, implementing partners, revisions were made to produce a final report.

2.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Makerere University School of Social Sciences Institutional Research Ethics Committee and the protocol submitted to Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) for official registration. The study team obtained approval from the respective district authorities prior to field work.

Child Safeguarding protocols: The research team was oriented on Plan International's Children and Young People Safeguarding Policy during training and ensured compliance with the ethical standards. All other ethical issues for research with human subjects such as informed consent, privacy, and confidentiality, ensuring no harm to participants and objectivity in reporting were adhered to.

2.10 Limitations of the Study

Like any other social research, this study had its limitations. The study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. The schools had been closed for a year and many anecdotal reports implied increased levels of teenage pregnancy and child marriage during this period. Hence the perceptions of the community and views shared could have been partly influenced by the current circumstances. To mitigate the impacts of this, the questions were designed to probe beyond the current crisis to understand the everyday situation in the communities. The study delimited its scope to socio-traditional norms as per the TOR and therefore it does not widely interrogate other socio-ecological aspects of sexual

reproductive health and rights. The emphasis from the TOR was that already there is adequate knowledge of the situation of adolescent reproductive health and rights and therefore specific interest was on the role of social traditional norms.

3. Findings from the Quantitative Survey

The findings presented in this chapter are based on data collected through the household survey. A profile of household respondents is provided to contextualize the responses. Whilst CEFM can be studied from different perspectives and is a function of complex social, cultural, economic and political factors, the discussion limits the scope to social traditional norms in accordance with the main research question.

3.1 Socio-demographic characteristics of house hold respondents

The socio-demographic profiles of respondents were identified since they have an influence of individual's decisions and actions regarding child marriage. Table 2 presents the profiles of adolescents and young people in the household survey while Table3 presents profiles of adult household respondents.

Out of 375 adolescents and young people, 258 (68.8%) were female while 117 (31.2%) were male. Females were over sampled because CEFM mostly affects girls. Table 2 shows their socio-demographic profiles.

Table 2

Socio-demographic characteristics of young people

Variable	Category	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Age of respondent	10-14 years	28.2	23.6	25.1
	15-19 years	41.9	41.9	41.9
	20-24 year	29.9	34.5	33.1
Marital status	Single	85.5	72.9	76.8
	Married	13.7	22.5	19.7
	Separated/ Divorced	0.9	3.9	2.9
	Other	0	0.8	0.5
Religion	Born again	6	6.2	6.1
	Catholic	67.5	68.6	68.3
	SDA	0	1.6	1.1
	Protestant/Anglican	21.4	20.2	20.5
	Muslim	5.1	3.1	3.7
	Traditional religion	0	0.4	0.3
Ever attended school	No	2.6	2.7	2.7
	Yes	97.4	97.3	97.3
Currently enrolled in school	Yes	60.5	51	54
	Dropped out of school	38.6	47.4	44.7
	Just completed a level	0.9	1.6	1.4
Highest education level	Primary Lower(P1-3)	16.7	12	13.4
	Primary Upper(P4-7)	53.5	73.7	67.4
	Secondary Lower (S1 –S4)	25.4	10.8	15.3
	Higher Secondary (S5-S6)	2.6	1.2	1.6
	Technical/vocational	1.8	0.8	1.1
	University/college De	0	0.8	0.6
	Other	0	0.8	0.6
Reason for dropping out	Got pregnant/Made girl pregnant	2.3	15.1	11.7
	Got Married	0	7.6	5.5
	Lack of school fees/scholastic materials	75	65.6	68.1
	To care for my siblings	0	3.4	2.5
	Care for sick relatives	2.3	1.7	1.8
	Other	31.8	19.3	22.7
Grade of drop out (n=163)	Primary Lower(P1-3)	20.5	12.6	14.7
	Primary Upper(P4-7)	43.2	76.5	67.5
	Secondary Lower (S1 –S4)	31.8	10.1	16
	Higher Secondary (S5-S6)	2.3	0.8	1.2
	Technical/vocational	2.3	0	0.6

Occupation	Student/Pupil	55.6	44.2	47.7
	Peasant farmer	23.1	34.1	30.7
	Domestic care worker	1.7	2.3	2.1
	Petty trading	1.7	9.3	6.9
	Business attendant	3.4	0.8	1.6
	Shop attendant (Other	1.7	0.8	1.1
	Casual laborer	3.4	0.4	1.3
	Other	9.4	8.1	8.5
Biological parents	Yes, both alive	70.1	77.5	75.2
	Only father alive	2.6	3.9	3.5
	Only mother alive	18.8	12.8	14.7
	Both dead/total orphan	8.6	5.8	6.7
Living with parents	Yes, with both parent	51.4	46.1	47.7
	Yes, with father only	5.6	6.6	6.3
	Yes, with mother only	28	18.1	21.1
	None	15	29.2	24.9
Has a disability	Yes	3.4	1.9	2.4
	No	96.6	98.1	97.6

Most young people interviewed (42%) were between 15-19 years, with a quarter between 10 and 14 years old. Twenty-two percent (22.5%) of girls and 13.7% of boys were married. Over 97% of young people had ever enrolled in school but just 54% were currently enrolled, while 44.7% stated that they had dropped out of school. Of these, 47% were girls and 39% were males. Lack of school fees and other materials accounted for 68% of all drop out while pregnancy accounted for 15% of drop out among females and 2.1% among males. Close to 8% of girls reported marriage as the reason for dropping out. As will be discussed later, pregnancy and marriage are strongly associated since those who get pregnant often drop out of school to get married. Most boys (53.5%) and girls (73.7%) only had a primary level of education, attributed both to their age as well as an extremely high dropout rate. This has implications for the high prevalence of child marriage in the region. Majority of young people still had both parents alive but less

than a half lived with their parents, with girls less likely to live with their parents due to child marriage. Only 9 young people were living with disabilities. Four of these were from Adjumani, three from Packwach and two from Zombo. Five were female and four were male.

Table 3 shows the demographic profile of adults. There were more females (55.9%) than males (44.1%) in the sample.

Table 3

Profile of adult household respondents

Variable	Category	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Age (n=474)	25- 30	20.1	21.1	20.7
	31-59	67	68.3	67.7
	60+	12.92	10.6	11.6
Household headship (n=474)	No	6.7	47.2	29.3
	Yes	93.3	52.8	70.7
Marital status (n=474)	Single	3.83	4.9	4.4
	Married	90.9	74	81.4
	Separated/Divorced	4.78	10.6	8
	Widowed	0.48	10.6	6.1
Religion (n=474)	Born again	7.18	8.3	7.8
	Catholic	63.2	69.4	66.7
	SDA	0.96	0.4	0.6
	Protestant/Anglican	25.36	18.5	21.5
	Muslim	2.9	3.4	3.2
	Other	0.48	0	0.21
Ever attended school (n=474)	No	0.96	15.5	9.1
	Yes	99	84.5	90.9
Highest level of education (n=431)	Primary Lower(P1-3)	10.1	33.5	22.3
	Primary Upper(P4-7)	50.2	49.1	49.7
	Secondary Lower (S1 –	27.1	9.8	18.1
	Higher Secondary (S5	3.9	1.3	2.6
	Technical/vocational	4.4	1.3	2.8
	University/college Diploma	4.4	2.7	3.5
	Other	0	2.2	1.2
Has disability (n=474)	Yes	6.2	5.7	5.9
	No	93.8	94.3	94.1
Has PWD in household (n=474)	No	74.2	66	69.6
	Yes	25.8	34	30.4

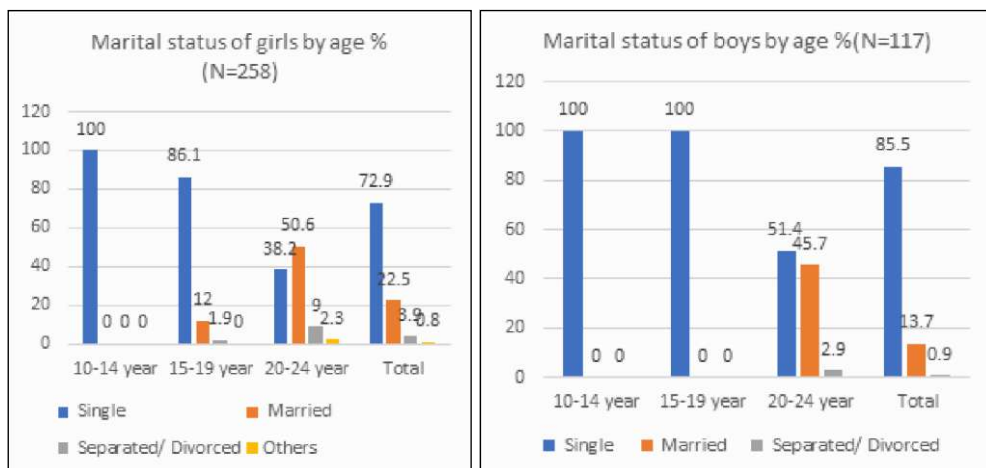
Majority of adult household respondents were middle aged (31-59 years), married (81.4%) and Catholics (68%). Most (91%) had ever attended school but with low levels of education (71% stopped at primary level). Six percent of respondents has some form of disability while 30.4% reported having a PWD in the household, which is way higher than the 12% national average.

3.2 Prevalence of Child Early and Forced Marriage.

The household survey data confirms a high prevalence of child marriage. Overall, 20% of young people aged 10-24 years were in some marital relationship, and specifically 22.5% of girls interviewed (Figure 1).

Marital status of young people

Figure 1



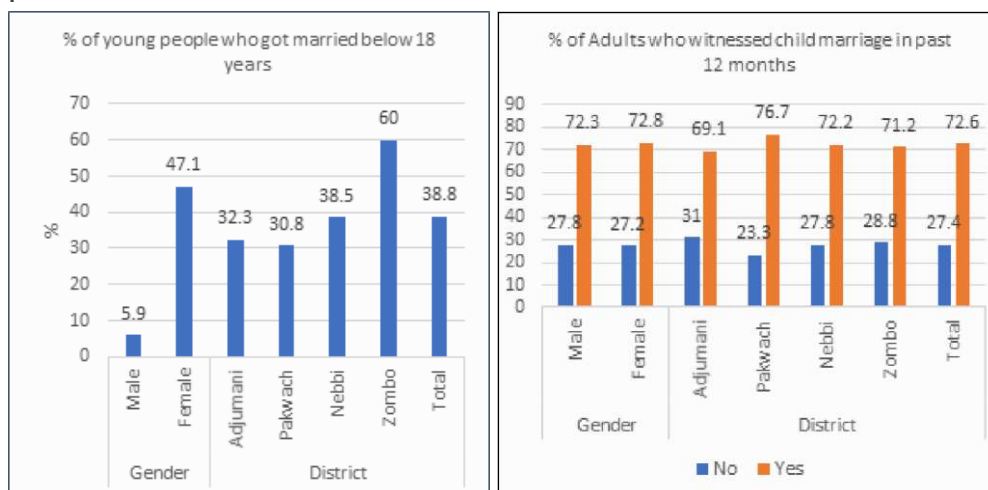
While none of the males aged 19 and below were married, among females, 13% of girls aged 15 and 19 years had ever or were currently married, with this percentage increasing to 61.9% among girls aged 20 to 24 years. It was established that adolescent boys who impregnate girls seldom marry them. Instead, they deny responsibility and girls have to be taken care of by their parents or strive on their own.

As shown in Figure 2, 47% of girls (15-24 years) that were currently married got married below the age of 18 years, compared to 6% of the married males. The worst affected district was Zombo where 60% of married young people (15-25 years) entered marriage before the age of 18; the least was Packwach with 30.8%.

A plausible explanation could relate to the fact that the district hosts the Alur cultural institution, and the community members claim a stronger cultural identity as Alur compared to their neighbouring communities in Nebbi. It also experiences intense cross-border interactions which leads to transactional relationships between young people and older traders from the neighbouring countries.

Proportion of young people who got married before age 18 and adults who witnessed a case of CEFM recently

Figure 2



The high prevalence of child marriage was confirmed by adult respondents whereby 72.6% reported they had witnessed a case of child marriage in the past 12 months. Other data showed that 18% of these respondents had a daughter who had married before the age of 18. Whilst this might have been worsened by the COVID -19 lockdown, it nonetheless shows a remarkably high child marriage prevalence in the region as reiterated in the qualitative data. Although the Uganda Demographic and Health Survey (UDHS, 2016) data does not provide district disaggregated data on child marriage, it shows that the average age at marriage in the West Nile Region is 18.1% and that 43% of women aged 25-49 years in this region got married when they were below 18 years as compared to 10% men of the same age group.

3.3 Decision to Marry

Eighty-two percent (82%) of males and 86% of girls reported that it was their own decision to get married, with no differences across the four districts. This could be explained by the fact that many young people do not evaluate the circumstances that 'force' them into marriage' as amounting to coercion. For example, if a girl gets pregnant, she does not have many options because the expectation from her family and community is for her to get married. That decision is deemed personal despite the limited options.

Table 4

Whose decision was it to get married?

Whose decision was it for you to marry(N=85)	District				Gender		Age Category		
	Adjumani	Pakwach	Nebbi	Zombo	Male	Female	1519 year	2024 year	Total
It was my own decision	77	84.6	92.3	93.3	82	86.8	93.3	84.3	85.9
My Mother's decision	6	0	0	0	0	2.9	6.7	1.43	2.4
My father's decision	10	0	0	0	0	4.4	0	4.29	3.5
My other relatives/cl	0	0	3.9	0	0	1.5	0	1.43	1.2
Other	6	15.4	3.9	6.67	18	4.4	0	8.57	7.06

For the remaining respondents who reported other people in this decision, it was mostly fathers (4.4%) than mothers (2.9%). Similarly, 89% of adults who reported a case of child marriage said it was a child's decision, with only 4.7% reporting arrangements by parents and other relatives. This forced marriage affected almost only girls. Adjumani district had the highest proportion of young people attributing the decision to their parents particularly the father. The district accommodates a mix of cultures from the refugees and host communities. The ratio of refugee and host communities is almost 50:50 while in some communities, the refugees are more than the host population. The refugees themselves have numerous subcultures and these can potentially influence or modify existing cultures. For example, among some Sudanese ethnic refugee groups, the girl brides are booked at birth and by age 12, they are handed over to the groom. Thus, rather than discourage child marriage, the mix of local and refugee cultures seems to enhance the practice. The monthly market and auction days were reported as some of the activities that are highly unregulated in terms of who participates and they in turn are well known for unsafe sexual relationships involving underage children.

3.4 Factors Attributable to Child Early and Forced Marriage

Adult respondents identified teenage pregnancy (57.4%), household poverty (50.6%) and peer pressure (49%) as the main factors associated

with child marriage across all the districts. Young people, conversely, identified household poverty (57%), peer pressure (55.6%), some girls simply wanting to get married (42.8%) and teenage pregnancy (40%) as the leading drivers of CEFM. Only 7% of adult respondents and 8% of young people attributed the practice directly to socio-cultural and traditional norms such as bride price.

Table 5

Factors associated with CEFM (%)

Factor	Adjumani	Pakwach	Nebbi	Zombo	Adult Total	Young people 10-24
Teenage pregnancy	46.4	82.2	69.6	32.2	57.4	40.0
Household poverty	66.7	50.4	47.8	43.8	50.6	57.2
Peer pressure	58.3	40.3	66.1	37.7	49	55.6
Lack of enough parental guidance	36.9	36.4	33.9	30.1	34	35.6
Some girls just want to get married before 18	44.1	21.7	24.4	36.3	30.8	42.8
Other	15.5	36.4	10.4	30.1	24.5	21.1
Some girls lack adequate information on sexual reproductive health	20.2	15.5	7	7.5	11.8	13.6
Cultural norms and practices like bride price	19.1	3.1	5.2	5.5	7.2	8.3
Some parents force them	16.7	6.2	0.9	7.5	7.2	12.8
Some religions require that you marry early	3.6	0	0	0	0.6	0.3

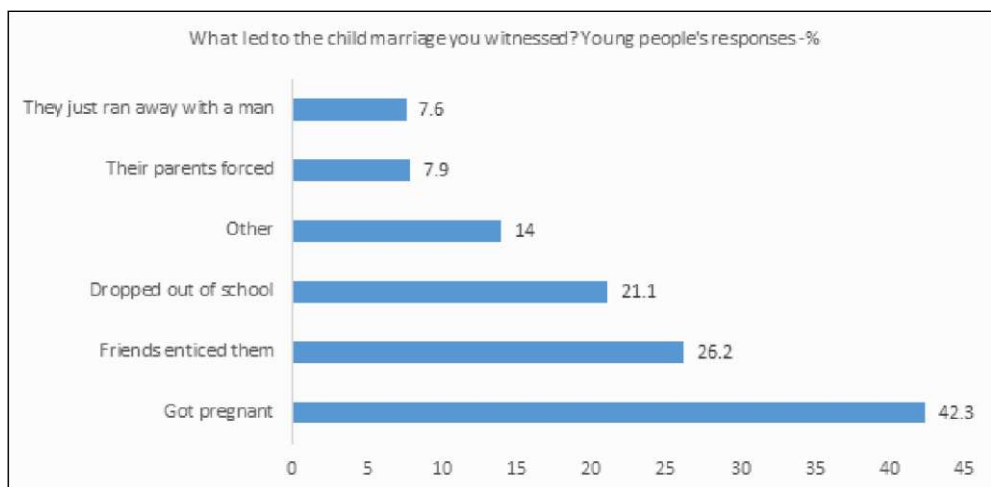
Multiple responses allowed

At bivariate analysis, the results were significant for household poverty (0.000), social cultural norms (0.000), peer pressure (0.002), teenage pregnancy (0.001), lack of SRHR information (0.001), parentings forcing children into marriage (0.001). Factors associated with religion and lack of parental guidance were not statistically significant.

As will be discussed in the subsequent sections, teenage pregnancy has a social norm perspective to it besides being a sexual reproductive health issue. The social norm aspect makes it a major factor in child marriage due to the unacceptance of pregnancy outside marriage by both the Alur and Madi cultures, which deem pre-marital sex and pregnancy as dishonourable to the individual and the family. This trend was confirmed in young people's responses when asked why the case of child marriage they had witnessed in the past 12 months had happened.

What led to the case of child marriage recently witnessed by the young person?

Figure 3



As seen from Figure 3, 42.3% of young people identified pregnancy as the cause of child marriage. A related factor was peer pressure (26.2%). Similarly, among adult respondents who reported that their daughters had gotten married below the age of 18, 60% attributed the marriage to teenage pregnancy while 26% mentioned peer pressure (10.4%) and being out of school (15.6%) (data not shown).

3.5 Community Perspectives on Child Marriage

From the quantitative survey, several statements were posed to adult respondents to detect their interpretation and perception of CEFM. Table 6 presents percentage of 'yes' responses to the statements. The findings suggest near universal understanding of child marriage as defined by law, across districts and among both men and women. Only about 10-11% of adult respondents did not perceive the first

5 statements as constituting child early and forced marriage. A slightly lower percentage (84.8%) construed marriage between two adolescents (below the age

of 18 as child or forced married-mostly attributed to the misperception that there is no adult ‘forcing’ them to get into a union. But still majority understood it as child marriage. However, as will be elaborated in the qualitative discussions, this awareness of the legal age for marriage is not necessarily translating into practice. Overall, 87.5% of adult respondents believed that the right age for a girl to get married is 18 years and older. Females were more represented among those who mentioned an age lower than 18 years (6.2%) compared to males (4.3%) (data not presented on table),

Table 6

Knowledge and perceptions on child marriage among adults aged 25 and above (N=475, only yes responses shown on table %)

Statement	District				Gender		Total
	Adjumani	Pakwach	Nebbi	Zombo	Male	Female	
Knowledge of what constitutes child marriage							
An adult male willingly marrying a girl before she is 18 years	89.3	100	67	99.3	91.9	88.3	89.9
An adult female willingly marrying a boy before he is 18 years	89.3	99.2	67	99.3	91.4	88.3	89.7
A girl below the age of 18 years marrying a boy below 18 years	66.7	99.2	67	96.6	87.1	83	84.8
A girl below 18 years forced to marry a man above 18 years.	95.2	98.5	67.8	98.6	91.9	89.4	90.5
A boy aged below 18 years forced to marry a woman above 18 years.	94.1	99.2	67.8	100	91.4	90.6	90.9
Perceptions on child marriage							
It is the role of parents to decide whether and to whom their daughter should get married or not.	6	19.4	27	27.4	23.9	19.3	21.3
It is okay for parents to marry off their daughter if she is not in school, even when she is below 18 years.	4.8	3.1	0.9	5.5	1.9	4.9	3.6
It is okay for parents to marry off a girl below 18 if she has started her periods	4.8	0	0	2.7	1	2.3	1.7

<i>It is okay for parents to marry off a girl below 18 if her breasts begin to grow</i>	4.8	0	0	1.4	1	1.5	1.3
<i>It is okay for parents to force a boy below 18 to marry if his voice starts to sound deeper/starts growing a beard</i>	6	0	0	3.4	1.4	2.6	2.1

Note: Only 'yes/agree' responses are shown on the table. The remaining percentages refer to those who disagreed with the statement or said 'I don't know' although the latter were very insignificant.

In terms of cultural perceptions, 21.3% agreed that parents should decide when and to whom their daughter gets married. This view was mostly pronounced in Nebbi and Zombo districts and lowest in Adjumani (6%). It was also mostly held by men (24%) compared to women (19.3%). In Adjumani (4.8%) and Zombo (5.5%), a few adult respondents felt it was fine for parents to marry off their daughter if she is out of school irrespective of age. Similarly, close to 5% of parents in Adjumani felt it was fine for a girl to be married as long as they had started their periods or if their breasts have begun to develop, which in essence supports child marriage. Table 6 presents young people's interpretation and perceptions on child marriage.

Table 7

Young people's perceptions on CEFM (Yes responses -%)

	District				Gender		Age Category (years)			Total
	Adjumani	Pakwach	Nebbi	Zombo	Male	Female	10-14	15-19	20-24	
Knowledge of child marriage										
An adult male willingly marrying a girl before she is 18 yrs.	91.1	98.8	54.5	92.5	87.2	79.8	75.5	84.7	83.8	82.1
An adult female willingly marrying a boy before he is 18 yrs.	84.2	98.8	55.4	95	86.3	78.7	74.5	83.4	83.1	81.07
A girl below the age of 18 yrs. marrying a boy below 18 yrs.	71.3	99	55	96	82.9	75.6	71	80	80.7	77.9
A girl below 18 yrs. forced to marry a man above 18 yrs. N=375	94	98.8	53.6	98.8	88	82.2	75.5	86.6	87.1	84
A boy aged below 18 yrs. forced to marry a woman above 18 yrs.	91.1	97.5	53.6	97.5	82.6	80.6	74.5	84.1	87.1	82.7
Perceptions on child marriage										
It is okay for parents to marry off their daughter if she is not in school, even when she is below 18 yrs.	5.9	3.7	2.7	7.5	2.6	6.2	7.5	4.5	4	5.1

It is okay for parents to marry off a girl below 18 if she has started her periods	2	0	0.9	5	2.6	1.6	2.1	1.3	2.4	1.9
It is okay for parents to marry off a girl below 18 if her breasts begin to grow	2	0	0.9	1.3	1.1	1.0	2.1	1.9	0	1.3
It is okay for parents to force a boy below 18 to marry if his voice starts to sound deeper/starts growing a beard	1	0	0	2.5	0	1.2	0	0.6	1.6	0.8
It is easy for a girl to refuse to marry if she doesn't feel like it	71.3	84	81.3	71.3	76.1	77.1	70.2	82.8	74.2	76.8
It is easy for a boy to refuse to marry if he doesn't feel like it	84.2	97.5	83.9	85	91.5	84.9	81.9	88.5	88.7	86.9

Young people's views followed the same trends as those of adults, with majority (over 80%) able to correctly identify different manifestations of child marriage. The young people similarly disagreed with the practice and instead believed that girls (76.8%) and boys (86.9%) can reject child early and forced marriage. But as will be shown in the qualitative section of this report, this seems to be the expressed desire rather than the practice. There was also a reasonable proportion of young people who believed that parents should take a leading role in the marriage of their daughters (16%) as presented in Table 7.

Table 8

Young people's perceptions on the role of parents in their daughters' marriage

	Adjumani	Pakwach	Nebbi	Zombo	Total	P-value
It's ok for a girl to get married at any age as long as her parents want it 0.000						
Agree	34.7	6.2	6.3	2.5	13.1	
Disagree	65.4	93.8	92.9	97.5	86.6	
Don't know	0	0	0.9	0	0.3	
Parents have the responsibility to choose or approve of a partner for their daughters N=375 0.004						
Agree	18.8	18.5	4.5	25	15.8	

Disagree	81.2	81.5	95.5	73.8	84	
Don't know	0	0	0	1.3	0.3	

The highest proportion of young people agreeing with the parent's right to force their daughters to marry irrespective of age was highest in Adjumani (34.7%) and lowest in Zombo (2.5%) and the results were statistically significant ($p=0.000<0.05$). Yet regarding parents' responsibility to choose a marriage partner for their daughters, Zombo had the highest proportion of young people who agreed (25%) with statistically a significant association. This would seem to suggest that young people respect parents' role in marriage but not necessarily in forcing them to get married when they are underage.

Notwithstanding the varied views on the role of parents in their children's marriage decision, most young people (79%) as well as adults (81%) hold the view that currently girls get into marriage mostly without the direct involvement of parents as indicated in Table 8.

Table 9

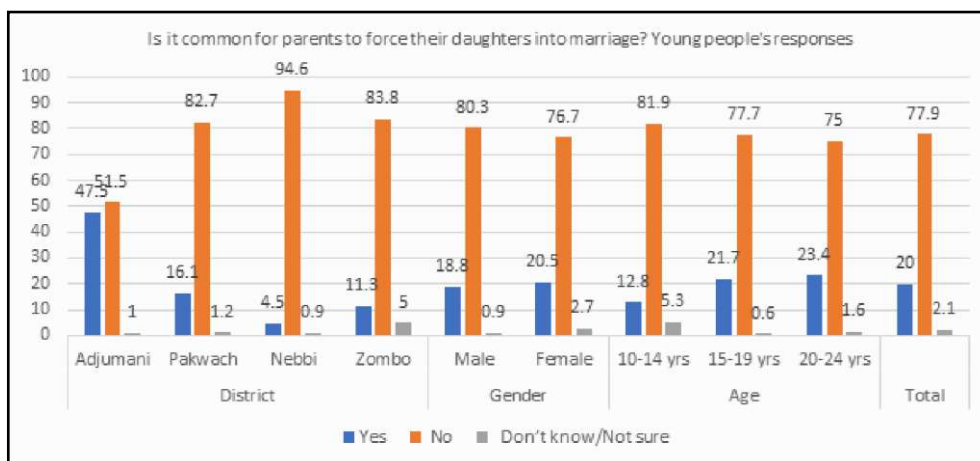
Current practices on girl's decision to marry.

Who determines when and whom to get married to?	Young people 10-24%			Adults 25+%		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
The girl herself	76.1	80.6	79.2	77	84.2	81
The girl's father	14.5	13.2	13.6	6.2	4.5	5.3
The girl's mother	13.7	13.2	13.3	9.1	4.2	6.3
The elders in the community	3.4	4.3	4	1	0.8	0.8
Other	4.3	3.9	4	1.9	2.3	2.1

From quantitative findings, only 20% of young people said it is common for parents to force girls into marriage as shown in Figure 4.

Perceptions on how common it is for parents to force their daughters into marriage.

Figure 4



Unlike in the traditional practice where adults mediated the meeting of two young people, most marriages currently begin as casual sexual relationships which result into unplanned pregnancy. It is from here that a marriage is entered into due to the social expectation associated with pregnancy and marriage. On the basis on these socio-traditional and cultural nuances, majority of respondents in the community do not acknowledge the prevalence of forced marriage by parents. Forced marriage was commonly mentioned by females (20.5%), young people 20-24 years (23.4%) and young people in Adjumani district where the percentage (47.5%) was more than 10 times higher than the lowest percentage in Nebbi (4.5%). Perceived reasons for parents marrying off their daughters are presented in Table 10.

Table 10

Adults' views on reasons on why parents marry off their daughters.

Reason	Adjumani	Pakwach	Nebbi	Zombo	Total
They cannot pay their fees	66.7	61.5	60	11.1	58.7
Want bride price	62.5	38.5	80	33.3	56
Cannot meet girls' needs	54.2	38.5	20	11.1	44
They do not want girls to be pregnant /give birth at home	47.9	46.2	20	33.3	44
They believe it is better for girls to get married young	35.4	53.9	0	11.1	33.3
Other	6.3	23.1	20	22.2	12
Don't know	2.1	0	0	11.1	2.7

Leading factors still rotated around poverty (failure to pay fees -58.7%, failure to meet girl's needs-44%) and relatedly desire for bride price (56%)

which is both a cultural factor as well as enhanced by high poverty levels. In Zombo, bride price and not wanting girls to get pregnant at parents' home were the main reasons. Both are more related to social traditional norms than economic factors.

As stated before, it was established that communities in Zombo claim a relatively stronger cultural identity than the neighbouring districts of Nebbi and Pakwach. It is also mostly rural. This might point to relatively stronger influences of social traditional norms.

3.6 Perceptions on who is mostly taking action to address

CEFM

Different stakeholders were engaged in various activities aimed at preventing child marriage. Outstanding approaches and interventions included, awareness creation, supporting children's education, passing of by-laws against child marriage, qualifying marriages through issuance of certificates, reporting of cases of defilement and child marriage, referral, among others. The quantitative survey explored perceptions on the roles of different stakeholders; adult responses are summarized in Table 11.

Table 11

Adult perceptions on who is mostly taking action to address child marriage (%)

Stakeholder	Adjumani	Pakwach	Nebbi	Zombo	Total
Local Council 1	82.1	87.6	84.4	67.1	79.5
Police	39.3	32.6	46.1	11	30.4
Parents and guardians	44.1	20.2	38.3	22.6	29.5
Religious leaders	16.7	8.5	20.9	18.5	16.0
Cultural leaders	6	6.2	27.8	19.2	15.4
CBOs/NGOs	23.8	1.6	34.8	4.8	14.6
Para-social workers/VHTs/ volunteers	35.7	7	2.6	7.5	11.2
Other	6	5.4	0	24	9.9
Child protection committees	6	0	6.1	0	2.5
Young people (Males)	1.2	2.3	1.7	0	1.3
Young people (Females)	1.2	2.3	1.7	0	1.3

Across districts, it was the formal community structure of local councils

(79.5%) and police (30%) that were perceived to be mostly taking action to address child marriage. These results were statistically significant across the districts ($p=0.000$). Parents were mentioned by 29.5% of respondents, with most participants in interviews and FGDs instead blaming parental neglect of their roles for increased cases of child marriage.

The quantitative data suggested that majority of community members do not perceive cultural leaders as having a strong influence in encouraging child marriage. Less than 10% of adult respondents associated cultural leaders and elders with some influence on child marriage among girls, with the highest percentage in Zombo (11%) followed by Adjumani (10.7%). Males were more likely to report such influence on boys (7.2%) and girls (9.1%). Details are indicated in Table 12.

Table 12

Adult perceptions on the influence of cultural leaders on CEFM

District					Gender		
	Adjumani	Pakwach	Nebbi	Zombo	Male	Female	Total
Elders in this community have the strong influence to compel a boy to get married at any age even below 18 yrs.							
Agree	8.3	3.9	0	9.6	7.2	4.2	5.5
Disagree	91.7	95.4	100	89	92.8	94.7	93.9
Don't know	0	0.8	0	1.4	0	1.1	0.6
Elders in this community have a strong influence to compel a girl to get married at any age (even below 18 yrs.).							
Agree	10.7	5.4	1.7	11	9.1	5.7	7.2
Disagree	89.3	94.6	98.3	87.7	90.9	93.6	92.4
Don't know	0	0	0	1.4	0	0.8	0.4

Religious and cultural leaders and civil society are perceived to play complimentary roles to the formal structures while young people -both male and female were almost non-visible in these efforts according to the quantitative findings. Below we provide a synthesis of roles of different stakeholders from the qualitative survey.

About 13% of parents interviewed belong to an organized group or association that tries to address child early and forced marriage, with majority of these in Adjumani district (26% were members, 35.7% knew another parent or community member belonging to such an organized group.

Table 13

Parents' membership in organised associations to address CEFM and associated norms.

	District				Gender		Total	
	Adjumani	Pakwach	Nebbi	Zombo	Male	Female		
As a parent or community member, are you a member of any group that is taking action to prevent child marriage? N=474								
No	73.8	91.5	88.7	89	82.8	90.2	86.9	
Yes	26.2	8.5	11.3	11	17.2	9.8	13.1	
Do you know of any other parents or community members who belong to such organized groups to address child marriage?								
Yes	35.7	9.3	13	9.6	18.2	12.5	15	
No	63.1	90.7	79.1	87	79	84.2	81.9	
Don't know/Not sure	1.2	0	7.8	3.4	2.9	3.4	3.2	

Further inquiry revealed that most of these groups referred to by respondents included church-based groups such as Mothers' union and in some cases the VSLA where occasionally, issues of child marriage are discussed. They do not necessarily take concrete action against CEFM and related norms.

3.7 Young people's personal agency and peer support in rejecting CEFM

According to the social norm theory (Perkins and Berkowitz,1986), positive deviants who choose to go against the common norms mostly rely on their agency (ability, personal skills, attitudes etc) as well as social support from their significant others. According to survey findings majority of both male and female young people (75%, 71% respectively) believed that girls in their community could reject early or forced marriage by parents or clan members.

Table 14

Personal agency, peer support and reporting of CEFM by young people (%)

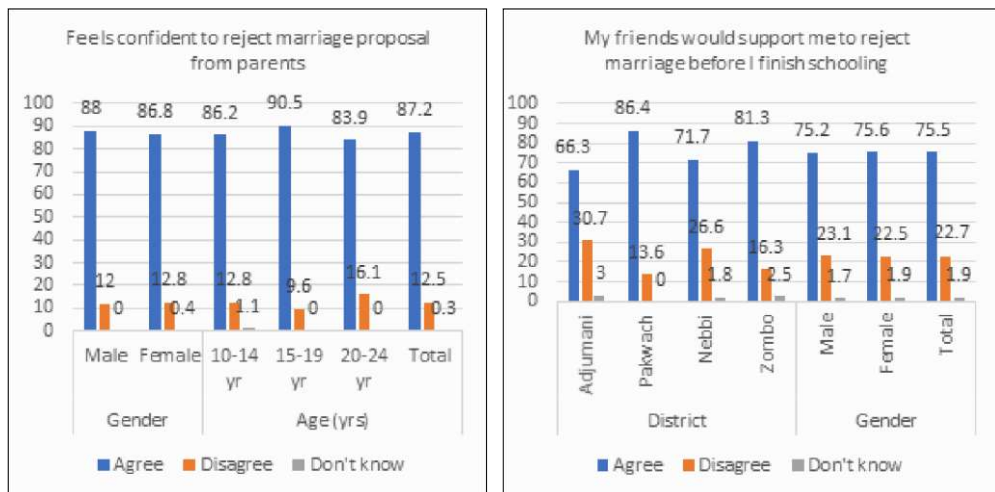
	Adjumani	Pakwach	Nebbi	Zombo	p-value	Male	Female	p-value	Total
Most girls in my community can reject early or forced marriage by parents or clan members.									
Agree	78.2	69.1	62	83.8	0.020	75.2	71.3	0.295	72.5
Disagree	20.8	25.9	33.6	13.8		22.2	25.2		24.3
Don't know	1	4.9	4.4	2.5		2.6	3.5		3.2
Most boys in this community support girls to reject early or forced marriage N=375									
Agree	68.3	63	62.8	56.3	0.170	69.2	60.1	0.137	62.9
Disagree	30.7	30.9	30.1	32.5		26.5	33		30.9
Don't know	1	6.2	7.1	11.3		4.3	7		6.1
When me and my peers see cases of a girl child being forced into marriage, we report to police or other local authorities									
Agree	63.4	75.3	71.4	42.5	0.000	61.5	64.7	0.106	63.7
Disagree	35.6	24.7	25	57.5		37.6	33.3		34.7
Don't know	1	0	3.6	0		0.9	1.9		1.6

The highest percentage of those asserting ability to reject child marriage was in Zombo (83.8%) while the lowest was in Nebbi where a third of the respondents did not think that girls had the ability to reject CEFM by parents and clan members. The results were significant across districts ($P=0.02$) but not gender. And yet, as indicated in previous sections, Zombo had the highest proportion of girls marrying before the age of 18. This might be explained by the difference between what young people feel is expected of them (injunctive norm) and what is practiced (descriptive norm).

Regarding social support, while 69% of males said that boys support girls to reject CEFM, there were slightly fewer girls who agreed with the assertion (60%), with Adjumani (68%) and Zombo (56.3%) having the highest and the lowest proportions, respectively. These differences were however not significant. What was significant is the reporting of violence by young people with more young people in Nebbi (71.4%) and Pakwach (75.3%) stating that they report violence compared to those in Zombo and Adjumani ($P=0.000$). A direct question regarding confidence to reject CEFM yielded comparable results as shown in Figure 5.

Personal agency and peer support

Figure 5



Almost equal proportions of girls (13%) and boys (12%) did not feel confident to reject CEFM while in terms of age, the highest proportion of those claiming confidence to reject CEFM was among the 15–19-year-olds. Ironically, this is the age group that is mostly affected by the child marriage. There was low peer support though, with more than a fifth of both girls (22.5%) and boys (23%) disagreeing with the assertion that their friends would support them to reject CEFM. This is again an indication of the difference between young people’s expressions of confidence vis-à-vis the actual practice which is sanctioned by institutional and environmental factors that may be too strong to withstand.

Findings further revealed that only 5.6% of all young people belonged to clubs or associations that seek to challenge child marriage and transform negative social norms. Majority of these mentioned straight talk clubs (38%), school-based child rights clubs (23%) and debating clubs (19%) (Data not shown). None of the respondents in Zombo district mentioned straight talk, debating or child rights clubs.

Again, only 33 out of 375 adolescents and young people could mention any specific activity they are engaged in, with majority mentioning awareness creation (76.2%), counselling (38.1%) referral (14.3) and reporting cases to authorities (9.5%). It was established that boys and girls are mostly beneficiaries of CSO/NGO/CBO programmes for in and out of school children where common activities include sensitization campaigns, child rights and other clubs at school, and skills training for boys and girls out of school.

4. Qualitative Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents findings collected through FGDs, key informant interviews, case studies of child marriage survivors and a review of relevant documents. The chapter provides a qualitative interpretation of findings focusing on social traditional norms and the role of different stakeholders in promoting or addressing it. It also discusses the functionality of the child protection system at the community level.

4.2 Socio-traditional Understanding of Child Marriage

Among the Alur (Packwach, Nebbi and Zombo districts) and Madi culture (Adjumani), marriage is recognized as a union between two willing 'mature' male and female. Maturity is not measured in numerical age but rather capabilities and physical features such as onset of menstruation and being strong enough to undertake certain household chores. In all the districts and cultural sub-groups, mature age for marriage for both girls and boys was estimated at 18 and 20 years for girls and 20 to 25 years for men. The age 20 for girls appeared to be a universal claim amongst all respondents; ordinary participants in the community as well as cultural and religious leaders based on the argument that such a girl or woman has the physical strength to fulfil challenging household chores besides having fully developed biologically to fulfil childbearing roles.

The type of marriage that can be accepted is that one between mature people- that means you should be above 18 years of age. You should be able to fetch water, collect firewood and cook food. At that age even if the girl conceived, she would not get hard time during delivery and also able to manage their home (FGD, Madi Clan leaders, Adjumani).

These views were shared across different cultural and religious leaders in the four districts as well as other respondents. It would then appear that even though there was no numerical attachment of the right age for marriage, there were indicators used to measure maturity. When currently applied, these parameters can be problematic since young people have different experiences of growth and development. Hence if for example the onset of menstruation signified maturity, it could easily lead into child marriage.

The involvement of elders and parents was considered as crucial in cementing relationships between the two families. Although the young person was expected to consent to the marriage at some point, most of the prior arrangements were made by parents, aunts and clan elders. Given this traditional background, the concept of 'forced marriage' was found to be largely unfamiliar. On the contrary, the community members perceived the low involvement in the choice of partner for their children as something negative that is contributing to risky sexual

behaviours, teenage pregnancy and ultimately CEFM. This explains the low percentages from the quantitative survey who acknowledged its existence.

Notwithstanding the perspective that child marriage was not condoned in the three sub-cultures, most respondents acknowledged its high prevalence.

Child marriage is happening in Puvungo, but not in the interest of their parents. It is by the children themselves. This marriage is not mediated by relatives. The boys look for their own girls, sometimes they meet at schools, dancing places or in any social place. We, as elders and clan leaders don't like it because this marriage is never strong because the marriage doesn't last. Those days the elders were involved in the marriage arrangement and the marriages were long lasting (Cultural leader, Packwach district).

Qualitative findings reiterated the role of poverty and a web of other factors as drivers for CEFM.

Many families here are poor so when some of the girls realize that they are too poor, she may decide to get married to relieve her family from the burden of taking care of her and if by luck she ends up being traditionally married her family can gain something from the bride price paid (child marriage survivor, Zombo).

Migrant communities, cross border trade and fishing communities around Lake Kioga means that some families are on the move and it is hard to plan sustainable interventions that are impactful.

The fishing communities are not stable communities, they are people who keep moving, even when you have interventions around such areas, how do you hold specific people accountable in a situation where you might go to this home today or community and you identify capable beneficiary, and you begin to work with them then you come tomorrow, and you find they have gone (CSO key informant, Nebbi).

Parents and cultural and religious leaders on the other hand often blamed child marriage on the diminishing authority over their children in the face of children's rights as well as exposure to external environments sanctioned by urbanization and easy access to information.

The kind of children of these days do not obey and they don't listen to advice. When you tell him don't go there, he won't listen. To them dancing is good. Different activities and small businesses that happen at night are contributing to child marriage. For us parents, they are blaming us for nothing, we are really trying but it is not working out (Men's FGD, Nebbi).

Thus, parents and other community stakeholders do not seem to directly perceive their role in child marriage and instead blame the changing socio-

economic and political environment, the changing parent-child relationships for the increase in practice.

4.3 Social traditional norms that promote CEFM.

Social traditional norms were investigated in terms of beliefs, values and traditional cultural practices associated with and that might promote child marriage, although we were open to the fact that some traditional norms do in fact enhance child protection and therefore can prevent child marriage. Various traditional practices and underlying beliefs and values were identified as working in concert with other socio-economic environmental factors to promote CEFM in the study areas. Some of the outstanding practices identified in this study include traditional marriage ceremonies such as Keny, bride price and related gifts associated with marriage, unacceptability of premarital pregnancy, domestic care roles allocated to girls and male preference and low value attached to girl's education, the Ndari and Agwala traditional dance festivals, among others. We present bride price and the ceremony of paying bride price (Keny marriage ceremony) as two separate norms due to the different perspectives they present on CEFM.

4.3.1 Keny- traditional marriage ceremony among the Alur

Keny is the Alur traditional marriage ceremony where the groom's family officially visit the bride's family to pay bride price (keny). It is an elaborate ceremony that goes on for up to three days. Besides the elders, the boy is escorted by a band of young men (Ambaba) who join the party for the three days. On the other side, girls from the village are carefully selected to 'open the gate' for the groom's entourage and to entertain them. Keny is highly adored. It emerged across all cultures that marrying a girl traditionally in a Keny function signified respect for the brides' parents. However, this function was reportedly exposing girls to teenage pregnancy and child marriage. In almost all the FGDs and interviews with key informants in Nebbi, Packwach and Zombo, it was highlighted that Keny is currently one of the leading facilitators of child marriage. According to information gathered, the function provides a ground for young men to engage in sexual affairs with underage girls who gather to 'open the gate' for the groom's entourage. It was also claimed that once the groom's party has paid the fee for the 'gate to be opened', it gives them access to the girls and some of them also engage in sexual relations. Many become pregnant and consequently elope or are forced by their parents to go and 'look for the person who is responsible for the pregnancy.

It is actually common; you know in our culture as Alurs when a girl is going to get married, 'Ambaba' (boys who escort the groom) are part of the team that come, they spend the night at the girls home and by the time they are leaving they leave young girls pregnant and this forces the young girls to get married before they are 18 years.(Adult women, Jangokoro sub

county, Zombo).

It is one other hidden thing that traditional people don't explain or come openly about. Actually it is where many girls lose their virginity, many get impregnated, whether she is a school going girl, whether what provided you come from that village for you to fit best then you must be going for Keny and Keny when they pay the gate price then you know you cannot deny any sexual right to any man (District official, Nebbi).

The reciprocity involved inspires most girls to attend these functions. Similarly, girls who refuse to participate in Keny are teased irrespective of age and parents who refuse to release their girls to participate are isolated and labeled as being jealous. These community sanctions perpetuate the practice including the inappropriate interaction of boys and girls.

Some Alur cultural leaders however noted that the original practice of exchange of gifts between the girls and boy's families, known as "Awila" was conducted during daytime and even if it involved interactions between boys and girls, maternal aunts would be present to ensure there was no risky sexual behaviours involved. One of the key informants attributed the problem to the evolving nature of the practice and its mix with modern culture as the root of the problem. In this regard it is imperative that relatives like aunts actively participate in these activities to monitor the behaviours of the young people and refer them for SRHR information and services.

4.3.2 The Atala/Alii cultural practices – Girl escorts to the newly married bride

Coupled with kenya is the Alur practice of unmarried girls (Atala) escorting the bride (**Nyamuliya**) and staying at her marital home for some time to help her settle in and fulfil her obligations to the family including cooking for the whole extended family, fetching water, cleaning the home etc. This is practiced in Nebbi, Zombo and Packwach districts with the equivalent practice in Adjumani called Alii. During this period the escorts become vulnerable to sexual relationships and sometimes they too are identified and taken as brides, thus becoming a vicious cycle for child marriage and teenage pregnancy as illustrated in the narrative by a child marriage victim.

I was 12 years when we journeyed to take the clothes of my sister who got married in the nearby village as culture permits. By that time, I was in primary two and I did not know anything concerning men and sexual relationship. So, when we were there, this boy came to me that he wants to be my boyfriend. I refused for the first time, the next day he came back again and asked me to go and watch movie with him, we went and when the movie was over, he told me to escort him to his house which I did. From that moment, the boy used to take me to his home every day, for the whole one week I spent at my sister's place. But when we now came back at our parents' homes,

after some time people started saying that I am pregnant yet for me I was thinking may be growing up and getting much matured. My mum took me for pregnancy test which turned out positive. This was in the sixth month of my pregnancy (Child marriage survivor).

A related social norm is the practice of parading young girls as an advance team during traditional marriage ceremonies, common across all four districts. Before the actual bride comes out of the house, she is preceded by groups of girls from as young as 4 years. The groom's entourage pretends to search for the bride from these girls until the actual bride is brought out. According to participants across the four districts, this common practice is some sort of grooming for the young girls which normalizes child marriage.

4.3.3 Bride price and other related payments

Apart from the traditional marriage ceremony which involves payment of bride price, we investigated pride price as a social norm. Bride price is one of the major customs across all cultures that was identified to perpetrate child early forced marriage. Bride price is used to validate and legitimize customary marriages and involves exchange of the bride for material items like cows, goats, food items and monetary compensation, among other things, as commonly agreed by the families of the bride and groom. Bride price is highly treasured among the Madi and Alur culture because it is interpreted as an appreciation of the effort that parents put into raising their daughters. The argument that boys are also raised does not hold since marriage is seen as a loss to the girls' family and a gain to the boy's family since it is the girl to joins the boy's family. All children born by this girl belong to the boy's lineage. Hence, the boy must pay for the girl.

Different items constitute bride price in different cultures. For instance, among the Madi culture a man is expected to pay about 3 cows, 1 bull, 5 tobacco leaves and about 5 hoes. However, it was reported that these have changed overtime due to the influx of people from neighbouring countries like South Sudan hence making bride price a money making practice. It was also revealed that, a man is respected in a girls' home if he offers many materials for bride price. Participants revealed that a man who fails to pay bride price is considered irresponsible and risks missing out on the blessings from the parents of the bride. In addition, when a man gets married to a girl before pride price is paid, they are charged for disobeying the tradition for instance among the Alur, the man pays "ukwo" [usually a goat for 'stealing' the girl). Among the Madi, one is expected to pay "Kasurube" (a bull) as a fine for failing to follow the procedure of bride price. Kasurube specifically refers to the gift that goes to the girl's father but there are several other gifts that come along with this which are given to the mother, brothers, uncle and

aunt. The practice involves the exchange of wealth which in most cases motivates parents to marry off their daughters at an early stage.

Kasurube is bad because it drives us into early marriages. Parents usually tend to use that as an opportunity to obtain wealth. Even when your time for marriage hasn't arrived. They start to yell things like "you don't want us to eat your bride price?" (Girls' FGD, Itikira sub county, Adjumani district).

Because of poverty some of the girls are seen as a source of wealth because when they are married their parents gain in terms of the bride price paid for the girls so such parents can easily accept the offer of someone marrying their daughter as long as the person is ready to pay bride price (FGD, with girls, Zombo District).

Here most fathers don't hesitate when a girl gets pregnant. They will immediately take her to the man that's made her pregnant. Because they see that it as a way to getting some wealth (Girls' FGD, Itirikwa S/C Adjumani).

The Kasurube and Keny also imply that whilst pregnancy is traditionally unacceptable and humiliating, on the other hand, parents see it as an avenue to get material gain from the girl by demanding for fines from the man's family.

Participants revealed that some parents especially from poor families persuaded their girls to get married for their economic benefit.

When the man pays bride price, your status as a parent also improves, yes, your status will improve, you will also have some wealth (Cultural leader, Alur)

These women of ours tend to see what is happening in the neighbours' place and they push their daughters too to get men, for example she will see that the neighbours' child has received high 'kasurube' and maybe goats and cows plus the 'losira iti'. She will keep talking to her daughter about the marriage what happened there claiming she also wants the same for her daughter, and sometimes saying that it should be bigger, these girls end up getting involved with men with the thought that they will get the same as the mom wants (FGD with men, Adjumani).

These qualitative findings contradict the responses from the quantitative survey where most respondents denied the high prevalence of forced marriage. The difference could be in the interpretation of 'forced' marriage which may not include elements such as targeted persuasion or withdrawal of support which leave girls with little options apart from marriage.

In Adjumani, besides the payment of bride price, there is exchange of money and gifts to parents during the dating and courtship. Where dating

is officially initiated through boys visiting the girl at her parent's home, they are required to leave some money under the mat for the mother. This money becomes an incentive for the mother to support the girl's marriage. *We also have social norms called 'losira lii' or 'losira itii' where a girl is in a relationship and she is visited by the boyfriend. Before he leaves, he has to put some money under the mat where the ladies have been sitting, but that money goes to the mother. This 'losira lii' is even charged very highly, for example for a civil servant like me, they can charge me one million,(about USD 285) while someone from Juba with a good job ,they can charge him like three million for 'losira itii'(money for the mother) (CDO, Adjumani District).*

This socio-cultural practice has been commercialized through the influx of refugees from South Sudan and cross border traders who pick interest in young girls in the community and are able to pay the losira. As a result, many girls have been lured into early marriage. Therefore, strategies should be put in place to economically empower parents as well as raise awareness on the negative consequences associated with child marriage in the region.

4.3.4 Unacceptability of pre-marital pregnancy

The findings indicate that currently, child marriage is in majority of cases preceded by teenage pregnancy. It was revealed that among the Alur and Madi cultures, pregnancy and childbearing are expected to be within the limits of a marriage relationship. Girls are not expected to remain in their parents' home when they become pregnant. Hence, whenever a girl becomes pregnant, they are expected to get married to the person responsible to the pregnancy. There still exist specific beliefs and rituals associated with pregnancy and a girl giving birth at her parents' home which support this practice of forcing pregnant girls into marriage. Premarital pregnancy is associated with misfortunes. If some rituals were not performed, it is believed that the pregnancy would bring bad luck to the family such as rat infestation.

When a girl gets pregnant from home you will find strange things happening to that home like rats can eat the clothes and other belongings of the people living in that house. Then also the people in that house can get injuries and this can be solved when the girl goes to the man's home and the man has to give a goat to be slaughtered such that the blood is sprinkled around the home to clear forces which could bring about the destructions that I talked about and the goat plus that process of sprinkling the blood is called "okiru (sprinkling). So, when I went to stay with him I told him to take a goat home such that it is slaughtered and the blood would be sprinkled at home before the rats destroy all my people's clothes (laughs) (Child marriage survivor, Zombo).

Due to the misfortunes associated with premarital pregnancy, families perform rituals to cleanse the home once a girl becomes pregnant before

marriage. There were variations in the kind of fines associated with impregnating a girl, with mostly informants from Packwach mentioning three goats vis-à-vis two goats mentioned by most respondents in Nebbi and Zombo.

They send the girl to go to the boy's home, she is escorted, and they go and ask the date and month they had sex, if they agree then she comes back with 2 goats (Dyel kir) a male goat and a female goat. The male goat is slaughtered and eaten by male youth and the girl sprinkles the waste at home to cleanse the home so that boys at home do not get problems like accidents.

The female goat remains at the home of the parent of the girl (cultural leader, Packwach)

If a girl got pregnant, she would go and pick a goat from the boy's home and move with it to her home as a way of cleansing her home and everyone would know she was pregnant and had been rejected by boys' family-it was a shameful scenario so girls would keep themselves to avoid getting pregnant (Alur cultural leader, Nebbi)

In Alur culture these fines are called “ Okiro” (goats given to the girl's family for having her pregnant before marriage). One goat is given to the chieftom (Kaal), another is slaughtered and eaten by men and boys and a third goat to the mother of the girl. Women and girls were not permitted to eat the goat because it was believed they could suffer the same fate of premarital pregnancy.

The socio-cultural stigma that comes with teenage pregnancy also makes it difficult for girls to find men for marriage later. This leaves them with limited options other than to get married to the men responsible for their pregnancy. Participants revealed that, parents directly or indirectly force the girls to get married to the men responsible for impregnating them to cover up the shame and disgrace associated with pre-marital pregnancy.

When the lady gives birth, her nice figure is deformed, and men may not want to marry her and she will be called by many names such as “Obola” and “Olonge” (too old and outdated or second hand). Men also fear marrying second-hand ladies because their children will have to be taken care of by the new husband (LC1 official, Packwach).

The challenge is that teenage pregnancy has become prevalent due to a complex web of socio-cultural, economic, and sexual reproductive health service-related factors. Once a child is pregnant,

she is fully aware that she will not be accepted at her parents' home, so she immediately considers 'staying with' her boyfriend. To address this challenge, the Ministry of Education and Sports revised the guidelines on school retention and re-entry in 2018 (and again in 2020) allowing pregnant girls to return to school after at least one year of maternity leave. However, this policy has been ineffective in the face of a culture that does not accept premarital pregnancy.

4.3.5 Ndara, Agwara and Konge traditional dance festivals among Alur

Ndara (xylophones) and Agwara (long horns used as musical instruments) are traditional dance festivals performed in the community on some significant events such as harvesting or traditionally, installation of a king or chief. These days however, they have been reduced to simple merry-making and adhoc rituals within the community. The festivals are shrouded in mystery such as some miraculous crop harvest, followed by drumming ceremonies. At the sound of the drum (Ndara) men and women and especially girls and boys gather to dance and make merry. Due to the amount of alcohol involved and the belief in the appeasement of the divine spirits, sexual relations are allowed between people of the opposite sex irrespective of age during these festivals.

This Ndara dance also really makes our children to dance so badly. They dance almost naked; even the mature people train them to dance very badly. You find them dancing, you find them drinking. Now in that way they go even beyond and they begin to mess on their way home. In that way many of our children are marrying (Men's FGD, Nebbi)

A related dance festival is 'Konge'. Here, young girls gather in the evenings at designated places to dance. The boys come to cheer them up and judge who is the best dancer. This, though culturally acceptable, has become an avenue for development of relationships among underage boys and girls eventually leading to risky sex, unplanned pregnancies and to 'marriage' since it is an unwritten code that once a girl gets pregnant, she is no longer acceptable at home.

4.3.6 Living arrangements: Separate huts for children

In the Alur and Madi cultures, adolescent girls and boys do not share the same house with their parents. On average, a child moves out into a separate hut by the age of 12. The motivation was to create private space for parents and safeguard children from witnessing their parents' sexual activity since the space is shared. The original concept involved a girls' hut in the middle surrounded by boy's huts as security and safeguards from danger and to monitor the girls' movements. However, currently the safeguards do not hold much since both boys and girls connive when they want to escape from home or to bring visitors at

home without their parent's awareness. According to data gathered from different communities, this norm has led to increased risky sexual behaviours among adolescents, leading to pregnancy and child marriage.

In our culture here, you know we stay in these grass thatched houses, they are built in these small sizes and parents sleep alone in their own house, the children are left to sleep in their own houses so at night you just enter inside, you think they are inside and when they are not there. It has given children chances to do bad things at night. For you, you think your child is inside, when your child is not there by the time you come to realize the child is already pregnant (Cultural leader, Alur)

For us here children sleep in different houses with the parents so sometimes when you think of going to check whether the children are there at night you get the beds empty and you cannot do anything about it (Adult women, Jangokoro sub county, Zombo).

The above living arrangements are a social expectation. Once the boy or girl is sent into a separate hut, it is also an indirect communication that they are now considered mature enough and should be preparing for marriage. Hence psychologically young people begin to explore intimate sexual relationships that end up into unplanned pregnancies and then marriage. In Adjumani the risk was reported to be increased by girls who fail in their marriages and return home ('Borne ones') and stay with their younger sisters in the same hut.

We have these girls who got married before and they call them "born one" but they have returned back to their parents' house, so when they come back, the young sisters start caring for their children when they are away to the market...They even get new boyfriends and start communicating to these men when their young sisters are there...In this case when the young girls reach like fourteen years ,they start getting boyfriends and later start also immoral acts which leads them to teenage pregnancies and child marriage (CDO, Adjumani).

The once married girls who return home were seen as negatively influencing their peers into risky sexual relationships that lead to child marriage.

4.3.7 Marriage as a family affair – role of parents and paternal aunt

In Alur and Madi cultures, like many other cultures in Uganda, marriage is a family affair rather than an issue between the intending husband and wife. This practice is mostly positively perceived due to the several

safeguards it provides to the newly married couple and the cementing of relationships amongst family.

It was every ones' responsibility. All clan members were involved and that is why a married woman is called "dha Puvungo" (Puvungo wife) if she was married in Puvungo. This means that Puvungo clan married her. The husband was just her overseer and the household head. (Rwot- cultural leader, Packwach district)

The marriage process involved courtship and was mediated by either an aunt, sister, or any other relative who got married in another clan. This practice is still very prevalent. It emerged in all cultures that in some cases paternal aunts take the lead in identifying marriage partners for their nephews. They act as mediators and are charged with the responsibility of investigating whether the girls selected for marriage are morally upright and strong enough to perform caretaking roles in the new home. However, in some cases the aunts do not consider the age of the girl but use other parameters to make a choice of the partner. For instance, some consider; if the girl has started menstruating, developed the breast and is able to do domestic care roles. The varying parameters may lead to identification of girls who are below 18 years hence contributing to child marriage.

When the aunt comes to seek her hand in marriage, she may also ask her about her menstruation because for the aunty she doesn't fear her. Culturally, the aunts usually have a say in the arrangements for the girls' marriage (Cultural leader, Alur).

We accept "jakwenda" (go between or mediators) as it was before. You see, the mediators are channels through which information from both sides are passed and on the day of "keny" (bride price) the Jakwenda is given five (5) goats as an appreciation for the tireless work he did (Rwot -cultural leader, Packwach district).

This practice is still predominantly perceived positively since the aunt provided checks and safeguards on the appropriateness of the marriage and ensured that the girl was mature and responsible enough for marriage. However, currently it appears to be a double-edged sword, presenting both positive and negative elements. The positive relate to ensuring that the marriage is traditionally acceptable and respected. The negative is that it incentivizes child marriage because there is material benefit associated with the role of the aunt and a relative who serves as the mediator of the marriage (Jagwenda). Among the Alur cultures, the Jagwenda is entitled to 5 goats during the Keny ceremony. Due to this, the Jagwenda may not hesitate to arrange marriage for an underage child and may not proactively prevent child marriage from happening.

4.3.8 Boy child preference

Similar to the rest of the communities in Uganda, the Alur and Madi communities are highly patriarchal and have all the characteristics that go with this structure of society especially placing more power and value in males while women and girls occupy subordinate positions. Boy children carry on the family lineage while girls are perceived as being raised for another family into which they will marry. The highest value attached to girls is in terms of how much bride price they will fetch for the family. Consequently, families prefer to invest in boys in terms of education while girls are perceived as home makers who will ultimately get married and be cared for by their husbands. Because some parents attach less value to the education of girls, they do not provide the necessary scholastic materials which forces some girls to drop out of school and hence getting married.

In rural communities they think it is a waste of resources to send girls to school after all tomorrow she will be married and the husband will provide for her while she will be bearing children,
cooking and taking care of the man (District official, Packwach).

Some parents look at their daughter as asset towards bring bride price that is why they don't pay they rather educate a boy child. Let the girl go and get married to bring bride price to be used for paying fees for the boy. These girls are sent to school for formality so that the girl keeps growing. When the girl's father sees breasts developing, he starts to reduce on schooling materials such as books, pens, and development funds so that the girl dropout of school and she marries her off (Religious Leader, Nebbi)

The low value attached to girl's education, coupled with widespread household poverty results in most families not hesitating to accept gifts and bride price for a child marriage since it becomes a source of financial relief for the family. This is coupled with highly gendered care roles. Domestic care roles are allocated to girls to prepare them as wives. Participants revealed that, when aunties are selecting potential wives for their sons, they prefer girls who are disciplined but must have the skills to care for the new home including cleaning, cooking, and fetching firewood among others.

She should be that woman who will wake up early, sweep the in-laws compound, fetch water, boil water for bathing everyone in the home, cook food and serve everyone in such cases the in-laws would pay bride price on her with a lot of pride (Cultural Leader, Alur)

Due to the gendered division of labour, girls are overburdened by care taking roles at home. This sometimes discourages girls who perceive it as

harassment -especially where stepparents are involved. Some decide to enter marriage as an escape route with the conviction that the situation might be better in their 'own homes'. Several studies have showed domestic workload to be associated with increased risk for early marriage in several parts of Uganda. For instance, Bantebya and others (2014) found increasing establishment of informal marriages or cohabitation arrangements, where young girls escape unfavorable home environments and get married. Measures to improve child protection at family and community levels can contribute to prevention of child marriage.

4.4 Role of Stakeholders in Promoting Child Marriage

Different actors were found to be playing various roles in the process of marriage some of which are promoting child marriage. These could be active or passive roles, intentional or inadvertent actions and inactions that serve as risk factors for CEFM. These are discussed in the following paragraphs.

4.4.1 Parents

In both Alur and Madi traditional culture, parents play a primary role in the marriage of their children -both boys and girls. All cultural practices undertaken for marriage directly involve parents right from identification of a bride to negotiation and payment of bride price and the hosting of the traditional marriage.

Specific ways through which parents promote child marriage rotate around bride price as well as failure to provide for their daughters' material and scholastic needs.

i) Consenting to child marriage to get bride price

Some parents consider bride price as an option for them to escape poverty hence encouraging their girls to get married even at a young age.

These days we see parents accepting bride price from those who have married their under aged daughters instead of them fighting such an act they just support it (FGD Cultural leader Paidha).

Some of the parents also offer their children for marriage in exchange for money; when their children begin misbehaving instead of doing things to stop the misbehave, they will just encourage them to go ahead because they are interested in the bride price that they may get in case their children get married (FGD women, Zombo).

The findings also revealed that some parents may expedite marriages to avoid exposure to sexual abuse among young girls. Some parents view

child marriage as a form of protection and a way to keep the honour of their daughters. It was reported that girls who become pregnant before marriage may place a double burden of attracting less bride price as well as causing shame on her family.

ii) Child abuse and neglect

Most key informants and community members argued that several parents were neglectful and sometimes abused the children. This abuse was mostly linked to physical and psychological abuse by stepmothers but also physical abuse and neglect by fathers. The parental neglect was attributed to alcohol abuse among parents, as well as frustration sanctioned by extreme poverty.

... but also, their refusal to pay my fees. You know, my mother and my father separated and she re-married so my stepfather is very harsh and would say that the reason he is not paying for my studies is that he will not benefit from me in future since I am not his biological daughter. That I should look for my own father. I called my father he is there in Paidha and told him about school fees; he also told me that he is not having money. I got annoyed and told my mother that I am going to get married (Child marriage survivor, 21 year at time of interview, Packwach).

Domestic violence was also mentioned as a factor through which parents inadvertently promote child marriage. Domestic violence results in frequent separations of parents and this forces girls to assume caretaking roles at home which leads to school dropout and then marriage.

Another major factor is violence at home. This is a place where alcohol is highly consumed. We have violent parents at home who do not know how to take care of their children very well. The girls end up taking responsibilities of their mothers. So, in turn they end up dropping out [of school] (District official, Adjumani)

Domestic violence thus not only affects parents but has consequences for all children and especially for girls' ability to continue in school or drop out and subsequently get married. Other factors related to girls' dropping out and seeking marriage were lack of sanitary pads.

Sometimes we need supplies like pads, underwear, soap, vaseline, and our parents can't afford these. So, when you get a boyfriend who can buy you these you end up pregnant for him and then marry him (FGD with girls, Adjumani)

The issue of sanitary pads has been outstanding nationally as one of the factors for girls dropping out of school. In this study, young people especially girls, linked it to CEFM. Girls sometimes engage in transactional sex simply to buy sanitary pads. In the process, they get pregnant which increases the risk of marriage.

iii) **Misconceptions among parents regarding childbirth**

Discussions with adults and leaders in study areas highlighted the contribution of myths around childbirth to CEFM. It emerged that parents continue to encourage their girls to get married so that they can start childbirth when they are still young for fear of complications associated with pregnancy and childbirth at later stages of life.

I know some mothers and aunts, in particular, tend to motivate their children into early marriage. They say if you delay delivering you will get difficulty in childbirth. Some even go on comparing this young girl to their peers saying can't you see all your age mates have children for you what are you waiting for such words really can influence children in to child marriage (FGD Cultural leaders, Paidha)

Since parents have a strong influence over their children, this leaves children in a vulnerable state and some take up the decisions of their parents. This implies that interventions aimed at changing the attitudes of parents and equipping them with appropriate SRHR information would make a great contribution in reducing cases of child marriage as the result of parental influence.

iv) **Unwillingness to report and follow up of defilement cases**

Lack of reporting and instead choosing to negotiate with perpetrators of defilement is another way through which parents are promoting child marriage. This is partly explained by the social acceptability of marriage as discussed in previous sections as well as the bureaucratic and expensive procedures in seeking justice.

As a CDO as you are here very busy following up the issues, you find that the victim's parents and the perpetrator are seriously doing negotiation, yet you are here struggling to take things to court. Sometimes they will come to you and say, 'I realized that he is my relative so am suggesting settling it out of court'. So, at this point the police will never proceed with this case (CDO, Adjumani).

Parents who attempt to seek justice meet hurdles at police when they are asked to pay for the service. They realize they might not get justice and would rather negotiate with the perpetrator to marry the girl and pay a fine or bride price.

4.4.2 Relatives

The most common relative associated with marriage among the Alur is paternal aunt. The aunt acts as a go between (Jagwenda) and has the responsibility to get a bride for the boy child who desires to get married. The aunt usually must get this bride from the family or clan where she is married. She approaches the girl's parents on behalf of the boy and once

the parents have agreed, then an arrangement is made for the boy and girl to meet and consent to the marriage. This practice is presumed to align with the cultural interpretation of marriage as occurring between two 'mature' consenting adult men and women. However, it was clear from the qualitative discussions that the practice provides a loophole for promotion of child marriage since the conversations take place between this aunt and parents, and the girl is brought in at the tail end of the process and finds it difficult to reject the proposal. Some aunties arrange marriages for their girls early before they engage in pre-marital sex. Aunties are appreciated when they identify good marriage partners for their children. In return aunts are reward with goats, clothes, chicken among other things which may motivate them to connive with parents to marry off young girls.

There are some children who are obedient to parents, but you may find that her aunt who is married elsewhere may be impressed by this girl on her visit here. You may find the same aunt of the girl approaching the parents to allow the girl to marry before she gets ruined. This issue is hard for up fathers to control because there is high confidence in the aunts who are considered to be taking the girl to a good home (FGD with men, Kango, Nebbi)

4.4.3 Cultural Leaders

From qualitative findings, there were mixed perspectives about the role of cultural leaders. Cultural leaders were mostly seen as having the power and respect to influence social norms but were not always outrightly associated with promoting child marriage save by a few respondents. Instead, the blame was on failure to take action to prevent child marriage or address negative social traditional norms.

Cultural leaders are not doing much because these are the same people who at times support these child marriages as long as some token is given to them. Even some of these cultural leaders we have in the communities are not aware of the sexual reproductive rights (Government official, Adjumani).

Hence their role and contribution to child marriage is in not doing much to transform retrogressive social and cultural practices and beliefs that expose girls to child early and forced marriage. Cultural leaders are custodians of social norms and should actively participate in any approaches adopted to change these norms and practices,

4.4.4 Religious leaders

Religion per se was not an outstanding factor associated with CEFM in the districts covered by the study. Less than one percent of girls reported feeling pressurized by their religious community and leaders to get married, meaning that religion is not actively promoting child marriage in the West Nile region. Different religious leaders interviewed reported that

they only officiated marriage ceremonies involving two consenting adults. Religion acknowledges and encourages the active role of parents in ensuring that their children are married at the right age and in an acceptable manner but does not condone CEFM.

The only outstanding reference to religious leaders in promoting child marriage was in Adjumani where, specifically, the Catholic church was blamed for speaking against contraceptives and preaching abstinence and yet the young people are sexually active. Conversely, the Islamic religious leaders were identified with the practice either directly or indirectly through covering up the age of girls and officiating at child marriages.

We also have the Muslim community in Majji parish. For them there is a high rate of child marriage and teenage pregnancy but for them when these occur, they sit on it quiet, they look at it as something very normal (District official, Adjumani)

Most people subscribe to the catholic religion and a few to the Anglican and Islam. Emerging Pentecostal and born-again affiliations are not very pronounced but where they exist, what came out as an issue of concern was the practice of 'overnights' where members are encouraged to attend prayers at church throughout the night. According to some respondents, the young people use this pretext to engage in unsafe sex, while some are raped enroute to or from the overnights and consequently they get pregnant. In most cases, the pregnancy results in marriage since most parents are not willing or ready to have the pregnant girl at home.

4.4.5 Men and women

Men and women are members of the community who apart from being parents and leaders also have mutual responsibilities towards each other as community members. Their roles ranged from being perpetrators of child marriage to inaction towards addressing the vice. One key finding was related to indifference and lack of reporting by community members. The communities know about them [child marriage] but cannot even report to the authorities so that action can be taken against the culprits. So this is one of the gaps we are talking about (Local leader, Nebbi)

4.4.6 Boys and girls

Boys and girls are essentially engaging in risky sexual relationships which expose them to teenage pregnancies. Their risky behaviours are due to limited knowledge of SRHR, lack of access to appropriate and correct information and services.

4.5 Roles and Approaches adopted in addressing negative social traditional norms around CEFM

Different stakeholders were engaged in various activities aimed at preventing child marriage. Outstanding approaches and interventions included, awareness creation, supporting children's education, passing of by-laws against child marriage, qualifying marriages through issuance of certificates, reporting of cases of defilement and child marriage, referral, among others.

4.5.1 Parents and guardians

The main roles of parents in preventing CEFM were perceived in terms of supporting their children's education (both girls and boys) as well as to a limited extent, reporting cases of sexual violence to formal authorities. Participants acknowledged that despite the economic hardships, most parents try to support their children's education. The challenge comes in when this child becomes pregnant or conversely when parents cannot sustain the child in school and they drop out.

I think when you look critically here in our community of Jupakeno, you will find that most parents are sending out their daughters in school to enable these girls to get busy and continue with education that will nurture them into somebody in future (FGD with Boys, Packwach)

Parents are working hard to ensure children go to school and also give us the basic need (FGD with girls, Adjumani)

Whilst some parents consent to their children's marriage, several others actively discourage their children from getting married and try to counsel them against risky behaviour although they complained that children do not listen to them and continue to engage in risky behaviours. Parents are also the first line of support for children who get sexually abused and while some are blamed for negotiating with abusers, there was evidence of willingness and attempts at reporting.

Parents are fighting hard to seek for justice in case their children are sexually abused, but the challenges are that when they register the issues at police, a lot is demanded from them for example, money for registering the case, for medical examination, payment for transport to make the arrest, pay for man power (the officers to do the arrest), and so many other demands, yet these authority know that these parents are financially constrained, so they end up losing interest in the case and opt for negotiations. If people in the authorities who are to help people in need are frustrating them, communities will lose trust in them and withdrew from seeking their services. At least parents should liaise with NGOs who will voice their concerns because the government has failed to help (Rwot Packwach)

Informal negotiations are sometimes encouraged by the unresponsive, bureaucratic and corrupt justice system especially the police department.

Parents' efforts are not collective or systematically organized and supported. In all the 14 sub-counties it was difficult to identify any associations or organized groups of parents fighting to address CEFM or the negative social traditional norms.

4.5.2 Relatives and clan leaders

Participants revealed that relatives like uncles play advisory roles in cancelling marriage arrangements involving children. However because the relatives get to know about these relationships when the young people have either eloped or become pregnant, their efforts at preventing the marriage are often not fruitful.

Whenever we notice that the marriage is for a girl who is still a child, we just refuse. We would sit our brother down to discuss the marriage proposal and advise that it be cancelled. But when the child herself insisted on the marriage to go on we shall have no option but to let it go on. However, we shall warn the man that we are not in favour of the marriage because the girl is still underage and not ready for marriage.” (FGD, men, Zombo)

From the above verbatim, the roles of relatives are more advisory since they cannot enforce anything. The elders seem to lack the skills to engage with the young people in such critical decisions since if the child insists 'we shall have no option but to let it go on'. Warning the man without taking concrete steps to stop the marriage through legal and formal means becomes an ineffective approach.

Relatives like aunties are involved in providing information about sexuality to avoid unwanted pregnancies. However, information from the field revealed that most aunties are no longer performing this role which has made girls vulnerable to manipulations by men leading to child marriage.

Those days the Aunts would keep watch on the girls. Whenever they discovered that a girl is getting ready, they would pull her close for training. Girls you not to get pregnant before marriage because they were well trained by the aunties. They would wait until the married off officially (Cultural leader, Alur)

Investing in approaches that involve aunties in awareness creation is paramount in the fight against child early and forced marriage.

4.5.3 Cultural leaders

Three key interrelated roles were identified with cultural leaders namely taking a stand against child marriage and publicly denouncing the practice, instituting byelaws on social traditional practices such as the Keny, jointly conducting awareness and sensitization among community members, and supporting and campaigning for girls' education.

Taking a stand against child marriage: The cultural institutions are currently only issuing cultural marriage certificates after ascertaining the age of the bride and groom as being 18 and above. Backchecks are done to ensure that no certificate is given for marriages involving minors.

We issue out certificate of marriage that is first thing and before preparation of the certificate, we ask the following questions. What tribe is the man, whose daughter is the lady, how old is the lady and the man, and their background. Should we find out that both or one of them is below 18 years, we cancel the marriage and tell them to wait until they are 18 years because we don't issue out certificate to children in order to prevent child marriage. (Rwot, Alur cultural institution).

The chief of Alur kingdom advises parents not to allow receiving bride price for a daughter who is underage. The kingdom now offers marriage certificates for anyone marrying in Alur kingdom and the people involved in this marriage must be 18 years and above (Alur Princess and LC 3 official, Nebbi)

These assertions by cultural leaders were confirmed by government officials and community members specifically in Nebbi and Zombo. In Packwach due to several chiefdoms present in the area, it was difficult to ascertain if the practice is uniformly applied.

Passing by-laws to regulate marriage ceremonies: Cultural leaders like Kaal (Alur) had passed by-laws to regulate marriage ceremonies that are believed to fuel teenage pregnancy and child marriage. For instance, the cultural leaders passed a by-law to reduce the duration of Keny from 5 to 2 days. The number of young boys who attend these functions is also supposed to be regulated. The challenge has been in enforcing the byelaws.

The Kaal as an institution is really trying its best to ensure that everything is done in the right way. One of the things we as the leaders have come up with is the new law which states that the "keny" that is the traditional marriage ceremony days have been reduced to at most 2 days and the number of young men attending the ceremony must also be regulated. (...) reason is that the prolonged stay would bring about unhealthy

friendship especially where girls and boys are involved the impacts might be disastrous. –Cultural leader Kaal Alur

The bylaw was aimed at reducing socialization among boys and girls that could result into child marriage. Most participants perceived the bylaws as not effective because the practice goes on and there are no serious sanctions.

Awareness creation: The cultural leaders are also engaged in community awareness campaigns against CEFM in partnership with government and civil society organisations in all four districts. Participants revealed that some cultural leaders were engaged in radio talk shows and enlightened communities on negative consequences associated with child marriage.

Cultural leaders are always involved on radio talk show trying to pass the information about disadvantage of early marriage, it is done every Sunday of week on radio program (FGD with girls, Adjumani).

Personally, I do sensitization in the community about the dangers of child marriage monthly especially I call for cultural meetings and I also encourage the clan leaders to always emphasize that during their clan meetings. But also NGOs are fighting against this vice(Rwot, Packwach).

We listen to the radio when the Alur Kingdom officials hold talk shows on Radio Paidha. They teach good things which if implemented would reduce child marriage, but the problem is that people don't follow what is taught on the radio. I know one of the things they Kingdom is fighting against is the long duration of the traditional introduction ceremony (Keny). They say that people should not stay long when they come for the ceremony, but it has not changed (FGD with boys, Paidha, Zombo).

The findings of this study revealed that majority are aware of what constitutes child marriage and do not support it.

Advocating for education as a strategy for delaying marriage: It was revealed that cultural leaders actively encourage parents to embrace education for children especially primary education that is free. The efforts by cultural leaders have been instrumental in changing attitudes towards girl-child education though parents are still constrained by poverty. It was reported that some parents engage their children in income generating activities to contribute to the wellbeing of the family which limits their attendance of school leading to poor performance and eventually dropping out of school. Cultural leaders are trying to advocate for support from NGOs to ensure that children remain in school and those who drop out acquire employable skills.

We also do advocacy to the NGOs to support school drop out by skilling them with short courses like tailoring and catering so that they are kept busy and not think of early marriage (Rwot Packwach).

Evidence shows that enrolment and retention of girls in school is protective against child marriage (Mone, 2017). When girls are already out of school before marriage, whether this is due to disinterest, failing the primary school completion exam or a lack of income in the family to pay school fees, parents prefer seeing them married so that they do not get pregnant at their parents' home. Strategies that promote school enrolment, retention and completion are critical in preventing child marriage. These can include community dialogues to change negative attitudes towards the education of children including girls. Cultural leaders were said to be proactive in not only education but also working with other stakeholders who address issues of child protection especially violence against children.

The cultural leaders like they are also helping because they have come up with something they call "Kulamatemala". In that Kulamatela, they have come up with a list of issues that address violence in homes and also violence against children. They are yet to implement that thing, they were supported by UN women to come up with that and they are also in their own way doing awareness creation handling cases at that level (District official, Nebbi).

Generally, it emerged that cultural leaders are actively engaged in child protection issues in general and addressing issues around child marriage and retrogressive aspects of socio-traditional norms. Their promising practices lie mainly in their openness to dialogue and partnership with government and CSOs to address critical issues around child protection. The major challenge to the effectiveness of their approaches is the limited ability to enforce pronouncements, declarations and byelaws.

4.5.4 Religious leaders

Some religious leaders are using places of worship to sensitise their congregants to shun practices and norms that promote child marriage, although sexuality is not a common topic in the places of worship. However, participants revealed that some religious leaders are providing guidance to boys and girls on how to cope with modernisation and to embrace church marriages.

Our religious leaders are giving out guidance through preaching the word of God among others to ensure that our young girls and boys cope up with the modern way of marriage like wedding in churches (FGD with boys, Packwach).

The religious leaders talk to us and our parents. They talk about abandoning some of the norms that lead to early marriages. It is quite helpful (FGD with girls, Adjumani).

The religious leaders, the capacity building we are giving them, they are trying because I see in churches sometimes they organize conference and in the conference one of the areas they talk about is that in the church where mother's union are very strong, I give an example of this place "Goli" where the mothers union are very united and working the cases of child abuse is low so I feel the church are trying their best (District official, Nebbi).

Sharing of information is paramount in changing attitudes of young people since some of them enter marriages because of limited information especially regarding their sexual and reproductive health. Relying on church leaders to create awareness is an effective approach to influence and change attitudes for both parents and children since religious leaders are based in the community. However, it should be noted that not all preaching is positive since some religious leaders preach against SRH issues such as use of modern contraceptives even when there is evidence that young people are sexually active.

4.5.5 Men and women

The roles of men and women are subsumed in their other statuses as parents or guardians in the community. Beyond that, no organised groups of men or women in the community were identified save for the few who support each other through their church groups and VSLAs. The general perception was that men and women are indifferent to what takes place in other people's families and households. They have not been adequately mobilised to take action. They also lack the skills and confidence since they suffer the same fate of witnessing or even being party to their girls' marriages when underage.

In our community here if a girl is to be married traditionally no one will do anything about it even if she is below 18 years of age. In fact, people will just say that the girl's parents are blessed to have an opportunity for their daughter to be married. And if you try to talk to the parents about it, you will be looked at as an evil person, they can even call you a wizard. What people do is to support the girl's parents (Adult women Jangokoro subcounty, Zombo)

The limited scale in preventing CEFM and addressing negative sociotraditional norms that promote CEFM are generally attributable to low levels of conscientization and collective empowerment. More targeted community engagement through multi-prolonged strategies is required to rally communities around addressing CEFM and the associated social traditional norms.

Table 15

Summary of roles and actions taken by different actors to prevent and change negative social traditional norms that promote CEFM

Table 15: Summary of roles and actions taken by different actors to prevent and change negative social traditional norms that promote CEFM.

Stakeholder	Approach for preventing CEFM	Action to address harmful social traditional norms around CEFM	Benefits	Gaps or challenges
Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting both girls and boys to attend school Supporting children with scholastic materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting their children both girls and boys to attend school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empowers girls to say no to child marriage Delays age at marriage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poverty which affects retention Competing domestic roles especially for the girls.
Cultural leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Passing by-laws against marriage ceremonies that expose adolescents to CEFM Community sensitization and advocating for education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Passed a by-law that reduced the duration of Keny to 2 days from 5 Participate in Radio talk shows and inform communities about the consequences of child marriage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When adhered to, it reduces exposure to risk of sexual relationships Contributes to positive behavior change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some families cannot access radios. Sensitization on radios may not be taken seriously by some community members. Social norm transformation requires much more than sensitization to engagements that alter the patriarchal power structures.
Relatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reject marriage arrangements involving children Offer guidance to children on their reproductive health and consequences of engaging in risky sexual behavior. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reject marriage arrangements involving children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourages children to delay marriage until the appropriate age is reached 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most girls elope without involving parents and guardians
Religious leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They preach against child early forced marriage Sensitize adolescents on how to cope with modernization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage people to shun traditional practices and embrace church marriage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotes positive behavior change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They lack capacity to enforce behaviour change. It remains up to the individual/family Not everyone takes religion and morality seriously
Boys and girls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use drama to sensitize communities Identify girls who elope and skilling their peers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use drama to influence attitudes and beliefs regarding CEFM 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drama messages are instrumental in attitude change since it is also entertaining 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not have adequate resources

4.6 Involvement of the Bride in the Marriage Decision

Making Process

During this study, nine child marriage survivors were interviewed. In all cases, it could be argued that the girl played some role in the process, although in a few cases, parents reacted to the pregnancy by 'chasing the girl into marriage'. In 5 out of the nine cases, parents forced the girls to go to men who had made them pregnant, and all five girls took no action to resist it because of fear and due to lack of viable alternatives for survivor once the parent was no longer supporting them. For the rest four, girls made the decision to marry even against their parents' wishes and objections. Table 16 summarises the cases.

Table 16

Summary profile of child marriage case studies showing the diversity of case and involvement of the bride/girl.

	Case description	Schooling status	Role of parents and relatives
1	Tina-(Zombo) got pregnant at 14 and parents forced her to marry	Dropped out before pregnancy	Parents sent her away from home
2	Etha (Nebbi) got married at 17 because of restrictions and violence at home.	Dropped out before decision	Her mother did not support it
3	Anne got pregnant and eloped with her partner	Was in school	Parents did not force her
4	Aidah got married at 17 years due to pregnancy and parental neglect	Out of school	The father forced her to get married after pregnancy
5	Loise (Nebbi) was 14 when she was kidnapped by 4 boys and taken to a man's home who raped her for three weeks.	Was in p.6 at the time	Thinks her parent had a hand in this because they did absolutely nothing to report the matter or rescue her
6	Ken (Zombo) was staying with her aunt when she got pregnant at the age of 14. She eloped with her partner	She was in school	Her mother and aunt did not support her marriage
7	Bera (Packwach) got pregnant at the age of 14 when she escorted her newly married sister (Nyamulia) and her parents forced her to marry	She was in school	Her parents forced her to get married
8	Peace (Adjumani) got pregnant at the age of 15 and eloped with her partner	She was in school	Her father objected to her getting married

9	Sylvia (Packwach) got married at 17. She felt she was old enough	Out of school	Parents were not involved
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Note: All names changed to protect the respondents

According to these case-studies picked randomly from all 4 districts, pregnancy and child marriage go hand in hand. Pregnancy is mostly associated with lack of SRHR awareness, skills and access and utilization of services besides other socio-cultural and economic factors operating at the individual, family, community and institutional levels.

4.7 Functionality and Effectiveness of the Child Protection

System

The study assessed the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the child protection systems based on key elements including the legal and policy frameworks, service delivery structures, human resources, coordination and collaboration, funding and logistical support.

4.7.1 Legal and Policy Frameworks

At the national level there is a dynamic legal and policy framework that provides a reasonable environment for child protection interventions. The Children’s Act (Amended 2016) provides the overarching framework for child protection as it provides a bill of rights and responsibilities for children and specific roles of different stakeholders. A national child policy and plan of implementation were launched in 2020, replacing the outmoded Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) policy which had only focused on a minority category of children. The reasonably well laid out legal and policy framework at the national level potentially promotes informed decision-making and builds confidence among the social service workforce cadres in the execution of their duties (MGLSD, 2019). To better coordinate the fight against child marriage, the government developed a National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy 2014/2015 – 2019/2020 (MGLSD & UNICEF, 2015).

There is however a challenge of poor dissemination of the legal and policy documents amongst the frontline workers in child protection as well as the community. Interviews with key informants from district community-based services departments, Police and sub-county staff revealed limited access to key child protection legal and policy documents. This becomes worse for community level child protection actors including volunteers, local council leaders and parents and guardians. Besides lack of physical copies, the laws and policies are not often well grasped because of language barriers. These findings are consistent with the 2019 Functional review of the child protection social service workforce (MGLSD, 2019) which reported that only 21% of the 56 social service workforce

participants from the community-based services departments reported having been oriented in the Children Act (2016, as amended), while most Police CFPU staff lacked adequate knowledge of the provisions of the Act and yet they must base their decisions and actions on the law. Although e-books of key child protection policies and laws have been availed online through a Social Service Workforce Application, language and internet accessibility remain a challenge.

The low awareness of the legal and policy frameworks is reflected amongst the population that should benefit from these laws. Quantitative data revealed for example that only 14.6% of adult respondents were aware of any laws or policies on CEFM while 33% were aware of any ordinances or bylaws within their district or community despite the fact that each of the four districts reported passing some ordinance or byelaw relevant to addressing CEFM and /or related norms.

Table 17

Awareness of laws, policies and byelaws amongst community members

District	Gender							
		Adjumani	Pakwach	Nebbi	Zombo	Male	Female	Total
Awareness of government laws or policy on CEFM	No	81	92.3	76.5	89	81.3	88.7	85.4
	Yes	19.1	7.8	23.5	11	18.7	11.3	14.6
Awareness of community byelaws against CEFM	No	41.7	73.6	65.2	77.4	63.6	69.8	67.1
	Yes	58.3	26.4	34.8	22.6	36.4	30.2	32.9

Similarly, only 17.3% of young people were aware of national laws that prohibit CEFM with the most common being the constitution that sets the age of consent at 18 years. Conversely, 23.2% were aware of any byelaws prohibiting CEFM in the community even though each of the four districts reporting passing ordinances and byelaws that address child marriage. This ties in with the finding on low dissemination and implementation or enforcement on national laws and policies as well as district ordinances and other byelaws at the community level. In most districts, just over a half of adolescents and young people had been reached with messages against child marriage, save for Adjumani where

this percentage was 76%). The commonest source of such information is the radio (67%), while 31.4% obtain information from teachers.

Participants in this study also reiterated the well-known challenge of low enforcement of laws and guidelines as well as poor implementation of policies.

The current gap is about enforcement of the law, you find that the law breakers are not seriously punished for example when a man has married a girl of 16 years instead of this man being arrested and charged, he will instead be made to pay fine which not even heavy one. So this makes others to continue committing the same crime because the law is not strong (Para social worker, Packwach).

Hence, the legal and policy framework have not been effective in addressing child marriage not because of glaring gaps but rather due to poor enforcement and a culture of impunity among duty bearers and the public.

4.7.2 Service delivery structures

The child protection system has well laid out structures and institutions within a decentralized system of governance with the MGLSD providing overall coordination and oversight. The Justice, Law and Order Sector (JLOS), Education, Health, Agriculture, Industry etc all contribute towards realisation of child protection because of the cross-cutting nature of child protection issues. The community-based services department at the district provides the overall coordination of child protection services within the local government structure. The referral pathway for child protection services entails different providers from different sectors with mostly community-based services, police, health and education directly involved. In the four districts studied, there are several NGOs and CBOs that compliment government services and try to fill in gaps. It is nationally acknowledged that these implementing partners shoulder a huge burden of child protection at the district and community levels.

However, there are weaknesses associated with the child protection services across the districts. The most outstanding is the poor quality of services and more importantly the fact that most emphasis is placed on remedial, reactive response services more than on services that prevent abuse and violence⁹. In addition, although in practice the

response services seem available, they are many times inaccessible due to various obstacles such as corruption and lack of logistics. In response to how easy or difficult it is to work with the different structures within the

⁹ MGLSD (2019). Functional Review of the Social Service Workforce in relation to child protection.

child protection referral pathway, most key informants brought out the issue of bureaucracy and corruption amongst some departments particularly police.

For me it is easy to collaborate with the CDOs because they act very fast, and they make follow-ups until justice is done. Police are hard to work with they can easily be bribed by the offenders and secondly their motto is 'help police to help you' meaning that if you do not give the money, they will not come to your rescue. To me the way police handles issues lightly is making the community to continue doing evil day and night because once the offenders have the money the offended person should forget about justice on his/ her side (Para Social Worker, Packwach district).

In some instances, key informants accused the school system of covering up cases of child abuse instead of reporting especially where it involved fellow teachers.

4.7.3 Community child protection mechanisms

Just like in the rest of the country, the West Nile region benefits from the existence of formal and informal child protection structures at the community level. The formal structures include the local councils, parish chiefs, and sub county community development officers as well as police. Informal structures include para-social workers, VHTs and in a few communities, child protection and child wellbeing committees. These work with government and non-governmental partners to identify children at risk, report and respond to child protection cases.

A major weakness is their voluntary nature and lack of formalization by the government. Voluntarism leads to fatigue and to high rate of turnover of volunteers which disrupts service delivery.

You know at parish level the stakeholders are volunteers, secondly those who were there long time now they have disappeared, they have shifted, the composition which was there, the member, the committees who were there some are not now functioning because there is no monitoring being done on them. There is no support supervision being given to them (District official, Nebbi).

The Local Council1 (LC1) was identified as the most active child protection structure at the community level, followed by police both through the quantitative survey and the qualitative findings. The challenge is that most LC1 councillors lack skills to handle child protection case management.

And then another capacity gap is the LCs -you know LC1 is supposed to handle children's cases but their capacity to handle is low (District official, Nebbi).

Although in most other communities, child protection committees are a key feature, this was not the case for the districts studied. Information

obtained from district key informants indicated that CPC theoretically exist at the sub county levels but have not been functional. They have not been trained on case management and child protection in general.

4.7.4 Human resources

Preventive, promotive and response services in child protection are managed by a mix of governmental and non-governmental social service workforce cadres including both formal and informal cadres at the community level. Unfortunately, there are serious concerns in terms of human resource capacity – both low staffing levels, gaps in skills and competences and high turnover of staff. The CBSD at the district is severely under-resourced in terms of establishing, recruiting, and deploying staff, and in building the capacity and competencies of existing social service workforce cadres. This understaffing becomes worse at the sub county level where the CDO plays the role of child protection and yet at the same time this position combined several other mandates of gender, disability, rehabilitation, youth, and community development. In some cases, the CDO might play the role of sub-county chief due to lack of filled positions. Due to lack of resources and workforce to deliver services in the Local Governments, there is a heavy reliance on community-based cadres supported by Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). However, these cadres are not formally recognized, standardized, or regulated through a systematic nationally coordinated structure (MGLSD, 2019:13). This role overload is one of the outstanding challenges in the child protection system in the West Nile region just like in other parts of the country. This is worsened by limited relevant training in child protection related fields.

Another weakness is capacity, you know we have various qualifications, not all CDOS have done social works especially in child protection, so the issue of capacity both in child protection and reporting data and information. Of course, we have not mobilized enough resources, because the annual budget for probation is five million which is inadequate (District official, Adjumani).

Since the CDO should provide the primary link for referral and reporting from the community child protection structures such as Para social workers and LC1s, the implication is that child protection issues are not given the attention they deserve at the community level. Conversely, the police CFPU mostly plays a reactive role in responding to child protection issues and does little to prevent issues such as child marriage. Even then, the cadres employed in the CFPU lack required competences and resources to adequately respond to child protection issues including CEFM because they barely possess relevant qualifications and training, and they are constantly redeployed which

makes any efforts at training ineffective.

4.7.5 Coordination and collaboration

A key strength identifiable at the national and sub national levels is the multi-sectoral coordination structures. The National OVC Steering Committee, chaired by the MGLSD, brings together all government and development partner actors that have a stake in the provision of services to children. Child protection actors also further coordinate their services through the National Child Protection Working Group hosted at the Ministry.

At the district and sub county level, OVC committees provide mechanisms through which child protection actors within specific local governments coordinate, share best practices and leverage resources for better service delivery. In all four districts, while the coordination structures were reported to be functional, there were reported gaps at the sub county level where the supposed coordination structures do not meet regularly and most have not been trained in their coordination and collaboration mandates.

Our weakness is the coordination at the sub county level is not very strong. At the district it may be strong ... most of the partners have been at the district level (District official, Adjumani).

A related weakness is the weak link between the district and the sub county especially in terms of support supervision and mentorship. This is partly related to the convergency of roles of the child protection and other wider social protection roles into one position of CDO at the subcounty. Ideally, they should receive mentorship and support from different officers at the district level, which was reported to be lacking. Conversely, the district level personnel are already overburdened and also lack logistics for regular supervision and mentorship visits unless it is project related. The coordination mechanisms are also mostly supported by NGOs and therefore become less sustainable. For example, in Nebbi, it was reported that district OVC committees ceased to hold meetings when IDI (Infectious Diseases Institute) ceased operations in the district. They are still waiting for support through the renewed IDI project.

4.7.6 Funding and logistical support for the child protection sector

The MGLSD is one of the least funded in the national budget. This low funding becomes worse at the district level where the CBSD receives low budget allocations and within it, the resources allocated to child protection services are insignificant to plan and deliver any meaningful services. In Nebbi information gathered from the DCDOs and PSWO indicated that the PSWO office is allocated only five million shillings (approx. USD 1400) in a year and even then, just less than a half of this might be released. While in

Packwach, the whole CBSD got 39,000,000 (USD 10955) for the current financial year.

Like in our department we don't have a vehicle and in most cases when defilement cases are reported, you find that the child needs to be picked, taken to the police from police to hospital for medical examination, but many times you call the police, they tell you that they don't have the vehicle and if the vehicle is there is always no fuel so you find that they begin to ask for transport and fuel from the victim's parents ... what next, the parents lose interest in the matter and opt for negotiations (District official, Packwach).

I don't have any budget in my department, we are mainly being supported by organizations like OPM, Refugee Law Project, LWF, UNHCR, and Plan International (Police CFPU, Adjumani).

The departments majorly depend on resources from partners such as Plan International Uganda and others to implement joint activities. In other words, statutory services are not officially funded by government and child protection interventions will only proceed depending on the presence, resource capacity and priorities of the development partner and implementing organisations. Ultimately, the child protection becomes projectized, adhoc and disjointed. The lack of funding affects the whole range of services from prevention to response and referral. Ultimately, the social service workforce often is forced to engage in more funded programmes at the district and sub county level such as the young livelihood and other economic strengthening programmes by government. The child protection departments at district (including Police) and sub county levels lack adequate infrastructure for ethical and effective service delivery. Sometimes they have to meet clients under trees where there is no privacy. Most offices lack computers and internet and telephone lines for ease of communication and reporting.

The infrastructure in my unit is very bad because I sit in a union as you have seen.me I hadly sit in the office that's why we are seated under this tree to discuss issues, because during dry season like this with too much heat, you cannot sit in the office (Police CFPU, Adjumani).

Table 18

Summary of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of the community child protection system.

Table 18: Summary of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of the community child protection system.

Parameter	Strength	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Legal policy framework, standards and regulations	Dynamic and enabling laws and policies exist at national level.	<p>Extremely poor enforcement and implementation of existing laws and policies</p> <p>Limited dissemination and access to the legal and policy documents by frontline workers and the public.</p> <p>Child marriage is not distinctly underscored in the law and rather there is a tendency for it to be ignored when reporting on defilement.</p> <p>Comprehensive sexuality education framework not formally approved.</p> <p>Non-existent ordinances and bye-laws against child marriage and related practices in the 4 districts.</p>	<p>The new national child policy is more encompassing and should have better reach in terms of addressing child rights and protection issues with minimal risk of excluding categories of children.</p> <p>Recently launched social service workforce App provides access to electronic copies of key child protection documents</p>	<p>Low adoption of the law even when it is known due to an environment of corruption, and ambivalence amongst duty bearers and the public.</p> <p>Poor public perception of some laws and guidelines including those on child rights (the whole concept of rights being not fully sanctioned by the community), and comprehensive sexuality education.</p>
Service delivery	<p>Service delivery points are mostly within geographical access of most communities.</p> <p>Community level structures such as LCs, PSW, VHTs potentially provide a first line of identification of children at risk and response and referral.</p> <p>Harmonised case management package and toolkit enables smooth identification, assessment service</p>	<p>Lack of a well-defined package of services for child protection</p> <p>Limited focus on prevention and promotive services and a lot of focus on remedial, reactive response services</p> <p>Over reliance on the non-governmental partners for direct delivery of services</p> <p>Largely unresponsive service referral system</p>	<p>Presence of several governmental implementing partners in the four districts.</p>	<p>Poorly funded services along the referral pathway threaten access and utilization.</p> <p>Sustainability of services and follow up for migrant fishing and cross border communities in the region.</p> <p>A lot of focus on emergency services in refugee communities in Adjumani at the expense of preventive and long term services</p>

	<p>delivery and referral across different actors in child protection.</p>	<p>Designated positions at district and subcounty levels for child protection</p> <p>All districts have PSWO and SPSWO as well as a functional CBSD headed by a DCDO. They also have CDOs at sub county level.</p> <p>Adjumani had an additional staff serving as a social welfare officer at sub county level (being piloted by MGLSD & UNICEF)</p> <p>Availability of a cadre of paraprofessionals and volunteers working at the community level fill some human resource gaps at that level.</p>	<p>Inadequate staffing and gaps in deployment of appropriately trained personnel at district and subcounty levels.</p> <p>Inadequately trained and supported community level volunteer workforce e.g. Community level child protection structures have not been trained in child protection case management.</p> <p>Newly created subcounties in Nebbi, Pockwach and Zombo lack CDOs.</p>	<p>The MGLSD (supported by UNICEF) is in the process of developing a national SSW strengthening framework which will lay a plan and strategies for addressing human resource issues.</p> <p>The pilot posting of social welfare officers at the sub county level in some districts such as Adjumani could illustrate the need for more established positions for child protection at that level and refocus more attention on CP issues at the community level.</p>	<p>across whole communities.</p> <p>Unofficial fees charged by health, police and other services threatens utilization.</p> <p>Inelastic wage bill in the interim threatens recruitment and retention of qualified staff for to manage the CP system.</p> <p>Lack of formal integration of the paraprofessionals in the government CP system and structure leads to lack of standardization and low morale for the volunteer workers.</p> <p>The pilot exercise of subcounty based social welfare officers might not be taken up by government as strategy may lack financial resources and therefore not be immediately implemented.</p>
Financial resources	<p>District allocations to the CBSD cover services for children.</p> <p>Off budget support to the child protection sector by development partners.</p>	<p>Child protection as an unfunded priority in district plans/budgets</p> <p>Overdependence on development/implementing partners for resources for CP</p>	<p>Long standing interest in child protection by development partners means that there is an opportunity to raise funds to supplement the meagre resource that come through government.</p>	<p>Perpetual funding deficits by national and local governments</p> <p>Limited capacity for fundraising by LGs and IPs.</p>	
Other logistical and material resources		<p>Limited logistical support -lack of physical offices and appropriate space for meeting service users, limited means of transport to follow up cases, lack of computers and internet and</p>		<p>Low prioritisation of child protection in the national and district budgets means that these challenges might be faced into the foreseeable future.</p>	

Coordination and collaboration	District and sub county coordination structures exist in all four districts – DOVCs/SOVCS- and they are largely functional.	other quick response communication gadgets etc Irregularity of meetings due to inadequate funding Structures mostly facilitated by development partners making them unsustainable		
Accountability mechanisms	Government offices are open to feedback. Availability of mass media such as radio provide avenues for feedback. Other mechanisms include 'Barazas' held at sub-county level, periodic community engagement meetings, public notice boards and regular reporting and oversight by the district councils. NGO and CBOs share reports with districts and regularly engage with communities through meetings where issues can be raised.	No standard structure and mechanism for downward accountability to beneficiaries and community stakeholders	Existence of organisations interested in enhancing community engagement through empowerment programmes e.g. ActionAid, PIU etc	Most community members lack adequate information and confidence to meaningfully demand accountability from government and non-governmental stakeholders.

5. Key Emerging Issues, Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Emerging Issues and Conclusions

This study on socio-traditional norms around child early and forced marriage in the West Nile districts of Nebbi, Pakwach, Zombo and Adjumani reveals key outstanding issues regarding the relationship between the social traditional context and child marriage. Social traditional norms combine with a range of social and economic factors at individual, interpersonal, household, community and institutional levels to promote CEFM. The power of the social traditional norms to influence child marriage is very much sustained by the socio-economic situation of extreme poverty and deprivation, low adoption, access and utilization of adolescent reproductive health services especially information and contraceptives as well as a generally weak child protection system at the community level. Therefore, addressing child marriage requires a multipronged approach through multi sectoral collaboration involving the efforts of different actors including government ministries and departments, development partners as well as voluntary and private actors.

Prevalence of CEFM

Child marriage in this region (48% for girls) is much higher than the national estimate of 34% (UNICEF, 2019). Child marriage is sanctioned by a complex web of factors and social traditional norms are simply part of a bigger socio-ecological environmental challenge. Poverty, teenage pregnancy, peer pressure and social traditional norms among others are significant drivers of CEFM in the region. Recent evidence indicates that the multidimensionally Poor in West Nile constitute 76% of the population¹⁰ Forced marriage exists but is not perceived by the community as forced marriage. This explains the discrepancy between the quantitative data where both adults and young people do not acknowledge forced marriage, and the qualitative findings where it is more evidently acknowledged. Manifestations of forced marriage revolve around unacceptability of premarital pregnancy. This means that teenage girls who become pregnant automatically move into marriage because that's what they believe society, peers and parents expect them to do.

Social traditional norms and CEFM

Traditional marriage ceremonies, bride price, structure of homesteads and living arrangements for children as well as a strong cultural unacceptance

¹⁰ <https://www.unicef.org/uganda/reports/multidimensional-child-poverty-and-deprivation-uganda-reportvolume-1>

of pregnancy outside marriage strongly influence CEFM. It is difficult to assess these factors in isolation, but it emerges that teenage pregnancy is the dominant causal factor for CEFM. Most other socio-traditional norms become risk factors for teenage pregnancy which provides ground for child marriage whether forced or not.

Role of stakeholders in promoting child marriage

Parents: As primary duty bearers directly or indirectly promote child marriage through neglect of their parental duties of care and provision, which in turn is sanctioned by poverty, lack of information, alcohol abuse which was suggested as perverse and on the increase in the region. Due to poverty and the cultural value attached to bride price, parents fall prey to accepting bride price in exchange for child marriage. They may not always report the case of a child marriage because they believe the involvement of police will not yield positive results and at the same time will lead to loss of the potential payments in the form of bride price.

Relatives and clan members - are involved in the marriage process and sometimes mediate the marriage irrespective of age. This is especially true for paternal aunts.

Cultural leaders - are not perceived to directly condone CEFM and the Alur and Madi cultures do not support child marriage.

Religious leaders - The Catholic church which is the most predominant (over 70%) discourage contraceptive use by adolescents, which leads to pregnancy and consequently marriage. Conversely, others like the Muslim leaders condone child marriage and do not hesitate to officiate over a marriage involving an underage child.

Boys and girls engage in risky sexual behaviour while other community members (men and women) are complicit and sometimes passive.

Actions undertaken by stakeholders in preventing CEFM and addressing socio-traditional norms

Parents try to prevent child marriage through keeping their children in school and reporting cases of defilement although they were strongly criticized by virtually all categories of respondents for not doing enough. Cultural leaders issue certificates for traditional marriage only after ascertaining the age of the bride and groom and have started speaking against risky forms of social traditional practices such as the duration of the kenya. Both religious and cultural leaders are engaged in advocacy and sensitization through NGO interventions. A few young people (both girls and boys) are members of clubs and associations especially school-based clubs through which they share information and support on sexual reproductive health and rights in general. They are less involved with addressing socio-cultural norms and practices. In general, the community

does not perceive young people are being actively involved in challenging CEFM. Formal structures of LC1 are the most perceived as taking some action to address child marriage although it is not a proactive but rather a reactive role to cases that have already happened.

Effectiveness of actions that have been and are being used to prevent CEFM and address retrogressive norms.

The study findings revealed that key approaches used by different stakeholders include sensitization, reporting, formal arrests of perpetrators as per the law and issuance of certificates for cultural marriages to individuals who have attained the legal age of 18. There are some by-laws, but they are seldom enforced. These approaches are generally not yielding the expected results since CEFM is still very high in the respective communities. Also the fact that there was less evidence of grassroots community engagement among both adults and young people implies that the approaches have not yet penetrated to the target and action systems that could drive change. Social norm change occurs at the community level and therefore community members must be actively engaged not as recipients of information and awareness interventions per se but as change agents. This was not very evident from the study.

Functionality and effectiveness of the child protection system

The most outstanding strength of the child protection system is the existence of largely relevant laws, policies and guidelines, with the most referenced being the Children's Act. Others include structures and institutions of government mandated with child protection, formally recognized human resources as well as community level volunteers who mostly work with NGOs and CSOs but link with formal government systems. The weaknesses revolve around weak law enforcement, low human resource and logistical capacity, lack of financing and an overdependency on civil society interventions that are too projectized and therefore unsustainable. The community level structures are threatened by unreliability of volunteerism and lack of skills in child protection case management. The referral system is plagued by poor and inaccessible response services.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the key findings and conclusions from the study, the following suggestions for programming should be considered: **Recommendations to Plan International**

Adopt medium to longer term programming for social norm change using tested models that address deep rooted traditional beliefs, values and practices. Given the slow nature of social norm transformation, Plan International Uganda should consider adopting medium to longer term programming for social norm change using tested models that address deep rooted traditional beliefs, values and practices.

Project based interventions should be designed in such a way that community engagements and assessment of change can continue beyond the project period. The already familiar model of Champions of Change should be widely adopted at the community level to address social-traditional norms through stronger community engagement.

Build capacity of community stakeholder to fulfil their roles in child protection. *The results show that parents have not been able to fulfil their roles of provision, guidance and support to the adolescent girls and boys. This is partly due to hard socio-economic situations and also due to limited knowledge of effective parenting. Based on this:*

- Parenting training programmes will be essential for parents to appreciate their roles and responsibilities and how to have healthy relationships with their children through their different stages of development. It will also be helpful to form parenting support groups in the communities where critical issues related to child protection can be discussed and mutual accountability and support accorded. Issues of alcohol and substance abuse among parents and young people in both urban and rural settings should be incorporated in the interventions.
- Paternal aunts are highly respected and play essential roles in sexual reproductive health. The project should therefore invest in approaches that build the capacity of paternal aunts and subsequently involve them in provision of accurate and appropriate sexual reproductive health education.
- The Local Council structure as well as police are playing critical roles in response to child marriage. They should be targeted with training and mentorship programmes to develop critical skills in child protection case management, with an emphasis on prevention and response services.

The project should implement a strong model of young people's engagement that puts life skills development at the fore. Skills and confidence building interventions can be through promotion of in-school and community level clubs and associations to enhance young people's participation in decision making and actions that directly affect their lives. Since girls may exercise some autonomy in decisions to marry, there is need for strategies to empower them to say no to child early marriage. Interventions to educate children about the negative consequences of child marriage, its drivers and how to prevent it, and where to seek support if constrained or forced into marriage are crucial. Such information should be elaborated in the sections of the curriculum that address issues of child rights abuse. Debates and child rights clubs for in and out of school children can also be used as a forum for discussing and equipping them with information on the dangers of child marriage, how to prevent it and where to seek support.

Supporting children's and young people's access to sexual and reproductive health information and services is critical in preventing teenage pregnancy. Incorporating age-appropriate sexuality education in schools and awareness campaigns and integrating adolescent and youth friendly reproductive health services in the health care system are some of the ways this could be achieved.

Support girls to remain in school through provision of a package of material and psychosocial services - including for example, provision of scholarships, ensuring access to menstrual hygiene management facilities, psychosocial counselling and mentorship support programmes. Also consider attaching parasocial worker volunteers and peer educators to schools to follow up children at risk of dropping out of school. Through education girls gain the confidence to challenge traditional norms and work towards achieving their goals. This will also alter the cycle of ignorance and poverty which empower negative socio-traditional norms.

Continue to work with cultural and religious leaders to enhance their active engagement in addressing socio-traditional norms. Since cultural and religious leaders already have the will to address child marriage, they need to be supported to evaluate their approaches to make them more potent in promoting change. Outstanding practices that should be targeted for change or modification include the evolving nature of the Keny traditional ceremony and the bride price per se. Cultural institutions' efforts to address these could be harnessed through more community engagement and dialogue. Establishing close working relationships between cultural and religious leaders and formal structures of government such as police and local councils should be necessary in strengthening the enforcement of some of the proclamations and by-laws developed by cultural leaders.

Integrate household economic strengthening into current programming. This is because poverty forces parents to consent to or even force child marriages in exchange for bride price and associated gifts or due to failure to take care of the children. Existing interventions by the government through the NUSAF programme can be leveraged through strengthening community and household linkages to these programmes and building skills for families to productively engage with the programmes. In addition, families can be supported through their already existing village savings and loan associations to engage in productive income generating activities.

To contribute towards strengthening of the child protection system, the project should support the following interventions.

- Support the development and dissemination of simplified versions of common laws, policies and guidelines to community level child protection workers including LCs, Paraprofessionals (PSW, VHTs, CPCs) and parents in their respective languages. This should be supported by development and dissemination of job aids for case management for these frontline workers.
- Advocate an amendment of the law to streamline child marriage more clearly in the existing legal framework.
- Support periodic refresher training for the social service workforce both in the government departments as well as for community level structures.
- Arrange periodic stakeholder engagement meetings that discuss issues beyond simple coordination and information sharing.
- Provide logistical support to district and subcounty child protection frontline offices including equipment for reporting, documentation and communication and follow up of child protection cases.

Recommendations to Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development

- Strengthen advocacy for more financial, human and logistical resource allocation to the districts, sub county and other child protection institutions and agencies at the community level including the parish level.
- Work towards formalising and standardising the community level para-social worker cadres as part of the formal child protection system and build their capacity through a harmonised child protection curriculum that could apply across different projects.
- Lobby for increased staff positions in the community-based services department at the district and sub county levels to ease the caseload and increase attention to child protection issues.

Recommendations to District Local Governments

- District local governments should include child early and forced marriage as a substantive indicator in district plans so that there is regular assessments and reporting on this phenomenon to guide decision making. This will also ensure that CEFM remains on the agenda.
- Strengthen linkages and support supervision to community level child protection structures including parasocial workers, CPCs and local councillors.

Recommendations to Cultural Institutions

- While it may not be possible or desirable to abolish some of the social traditional norms such as bride price and associated marriage ceremonies, the cultural institutions should institute mechanisms to

regulate the practices so that they are safe and do not promote CEFM. This regulation should not be top down but rather achieved through a dialogical process where communities appreciate and support the decisions and actions taken.

- Cultural institutions could also innovatively promote positive values and practices through identification and recognition of positive role models in the community.

Recommendations to development partners and other Civil Society Organisations

- Work in concert with other implementing partners addressing CEFM to harmonise goals and approaches and achieve long term high impact results in addressing child early and forced marriage.
- Develop and implement joint advocacy strategies to address gaps in current laws and policies especially the contradicting Ministry of Education and Sports guidelines on readmission of teenage mothers in school as well as the need for a distinct, standalone law on child marriage.

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Appendices:

Appendix 1 Sample size and distribution

Equation 1

Sample size calculation

The sample size calculation was based on the formula by Krejcie & Morgan (1970).

$$n = \frac{Z^2 * P(1 - P) * Deff}{E^2 * RR * h}$$

The calculation generated a total sample of 834.

Define:

p: Proportion of population that you want to estimate (proportion of young people (15-24 years) and adults (25+)) =0.519 **q:** 1-0.519=0.481

n: Sample size

RR: Response Rate (95%). The response rate of 95% means that 95% of the population targeted will respond to the survey.

H: Household size

E: The level of precision you want to achieve (we will use the level of precision at 0.04- equivalent 4%)

Z: Confidence level at 95% (1.96)

Deff: Design Effect (1.5) (The design effect will be used in order to adjust the survey sample size due to sampling methods that will be used such as cluster sampling resulting in better sampling than what you would expect with simple random sampling. The design effect tells you the magnitude of these increases.

Total sample size was estimated at 824. Total covered was 849.

Table 19

Sampled sub counties and parishes per district.

District	Sub County	Total covered
ADJUMANI	ITIRIKWA, UKUSIJONI	2
NEBBI	AKWORO, ERUSSI, KUCWINY, NYARAVUR	4

PAKWACH	PAKWACH T.C PANYIMUR PANYANGO WADELAI	4
ZOMBO	JANGOKORO, KANGU, PAIDHA S/C, WARR	4

Appendix 2 Respondent information sheet

You are being invited to take part in an important study. Before you decide to take part, it is important you understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. Please listen to the following information carefully.

What is the project about?

Plan International Uganda with funding and support from NORAD and Plan International Norway National Office (NNO) is implementing in partnership with Agency for Accelerated Regional Development (AFARD) and Trailblazers Mentoring Foundation (TMF) the Girls Get Equal- Ending child early and forced marriage project in the districts of Zombo, Nebbi, Pakwach and Adjumani, West Nile Region. The project aims at reducing Child Early and Forced Marriage that the project will achieve through delivering on the five core project outcomes of; Keeping girls in school, increasing adolescents' knowledge on SRHR, Empowering Youth, especially, girls, are economically, changing discriminatory social norms and lastly Improving Child Protection Policies and implementation.

What does this have to do with young people?

Many young people are affected by social norms and child marriage, but sadly their views are rarely considered when decisions are made about what to do about the problem. To obtain the views of young people we have designed part of the project to involve young people about how best to mitigate the problem of child marriage.

So, what will happen?

We shall work with Ministries, Departments and Agencies as well as communities to; Identify underlying factors and perceptions that lead to discriminatory social norms, resulting in child early and forced marriages in the mentioned districts of west–Nile region.

Why am I being asked to take part?

Your Local Government officials have agreed to be a partner in the project and so we are asking all the young people that were selected randomly to take part, you have not been especially singled out.

Do I have to take part?

No, it is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in the project, however if you are above 18 years and if a parent or guardian objects,

then you will not be able to participate. Nothing will happen to you if you decide not to be part of the project.

What is required of me if I do take part?

In the first instance, this means answering questions about your opinions and experiences. The questionnaire should take you about 45-50 minutes to complete. You can stop answering the questions at any time, but we would appreciate your full opinion in all sections.

I want to take part, but I am worried about who will see my answers.

Your answers will NEVER be given to other people (only the researchers will have the information), so we shall NOT as for your name. No-one will ever know who responded to a particular questionnaire because there will be no name on it.

Who is in charge of this project?

The project is managed by Plan International Uganda but is being carried out with the support of the Consultant. The person responsible for the work is Dr. Janestic Twikirize. Her contact details are at the end of this sheet.

Will I be affected by taking part?

Answering questions about social norms and experiences of child marriage can be very upsetting. If you would like to receive guidance and counselling, please contact the Child Protection Expert on the team. If you wish to speak to a counsellor in future, you could contact Florence Turyomurugyendo on Tel: +256 781 524441 to allocate you one. You can also talk to the researcher who is giving out the questionnaire.

We would be very grateful if you would take the time to complete the questionnaire and thank you in advance for your help.

Further Questions?

If you are interested in taking part but have further questions, please contact one of the research team.

The Principal Investigator:

Dr. Janestic Twikirize,

Tel: (+256) (0) 706 339564

Email: janestic@gmail.com

If you would like to talk to someone other than the researcher about; **(1)** concerns regarding this study, **(2)** research participant rights, **(3)** research-related injuries, or **(4)** other human subjects' issues, please contact:

Dr. Stella Neema

The Chair

Makerere School of Social Sciences

Research Ethics Committee

Telephone: +256- 772 457576

E-mail: sheisim@yahoo.com

Or

Dr. Peter Ndemere

The Executive Secretary

The Uganda National Council of Science and Technology,

Kimera Road. Ntinda

P. O. Box 6884 Kampala, Uganda

Telephone: (256) 414 705500

Fax: +256-414-234579

Email: info@uncst.go.ug

Appendix 3: Child Consent form

Study title: The Social Traditional Norms and child Marriage Research in Zombo, Nebbi, Packwach and Adjumani Districts, West Nile Region

Introduction

We are pleased to inform you that Plan International Uganda is conducting a study on Social Traditional Norms and child Marriage in Zombo, Nebbi, Packwach and Adjumani Districts, West Nile Region. The purpose of the research is to identify underlying factors and perceptions that lead to discriminatory social norms, resulting in child early and forced marriages in the mentioned districts of west-Nile region. Finding will facilitate understanding the drivers of child early and forced marriages in the target project area to inform the current approaches and strategies being used

by Plan International and government and other development partners to end child early and forced marriages in West-Nile region.

Background Information

Plan International Uganda with funding and support from NORAD and Plan International Norway National Office (NNO) is implementing in partnership with Agency for Accelerated Regional Development (AFARD) and Trailblazers Mentoring Foundation (TMF) the Girls Get Equal- Ending child early and forced marriage project in the districts of Zombo, Nebbi, Packwach and Adjumani, West Nile Region. The project aims at reducing Child Early and Forced Marriage that the project will achieve through delivering on the five core project outcomes of; Keeping girls in school, increasing adolescents' knowledge on SRHR, Empowering Youth, especially, girls, are economically, changing discriminatory social norms and lastly Improving Child Protection Policies and implementation. The approximate number of children and parents participating in the study will be about 800.

What the participants will be asked to do

If you agree to participate in the study, we will then ask you to read and sign the assent form. You will be responding to questions in our questionnaire which will take approximately 45 minutes.

Risks and benefits

We believe that your participation may help to improve support and services in the future for children experiencing child marriage. On a personal level, you may find it beneficial to be able to share your experiences and may be informed about services available in case you face a similar challenge.

Participation in this study causes no risk to you. The only potential risk is that some children might find certain questions to be sensitive. If you think that participating in the study will put you at risk of harm, we shall support you in seeking help and protection through our partners like Trail Blazers Mentoring Foundation. You will be given contact details of counsellors who can be contacted on phone.

Confidentiality

The study has been designed to protect your privacy. Children will not expose their names. Also, no child will ever be mentioned by name in a report of the results. All data collected will be handled with extreme care and will, be kept with passwords in the computers of the research managers and used only for its intended purposes. The data will only be seen by members of the research team. If you reveal any information that suggests someone is at significant risk of harm, we will

ask your parents' permission to inform the appropriate authorities or support you in doing so.

Voluntariness

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You will be allowed to walk away from the interview if you are not interested in participating in the study. If you feel upset, the interview will be paused and can take a break or can withdraw from the study. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

Compensation

We will not provide monetary compensation to you since you will be interviewed at home, but we will provide a bottle of soda (Soft drink) and a cake/biscuit costing 2,000= during the process of filling the questionnaire.

Feedback/Dissemination

You will be provided feedback on the study findings. The project team will organise a workshop where the findings shall be communicated to various stakeholders including Representatives from Ministries, Departments and Agencies, Local Government, Development Partner and Civil Society Organisations.

Ethical Clearance

This study has been approved by Makerere University School of Social Sciences Institutional Research Ethics Committee.

Further Questions?

If you are interested in taking part but have further questions, please contact one of the research team.

The Principal Investigator:

Dr. Janestic Twikirize,

Tel: (+256) (0) 706 339564

Email: janestic@gmail.com

If you would like to talk to someone other than the researcher about; (1) concerns regarding this study, (2) research participant rights, (3) research-related injuries, or (4) other human subjects' issues, please contact:

<p>Dr. Stella Neema</p> <p>The Chair</p> <p>Makerere School of Social Sciences</p> <p>Research Ethics Committee</p> <p>Telephone: +256- 772 457576</p> <p>E-mail: sheisim@yahoo.com</p>	<p>Or</p> <p>Dr. Peter Ndemere</p> <p>The Executive Secretary</p> <p>The Uganda National Council of Science and Technology,</p> <p>Kimera Road. Ntinda P. O. Box 6884 Kampala, Uganda</p> <p>Telephone: (256) 414 705500</p> <p>Fax: +256-414-234579</p> <p>Email: info@uncst.go.ug</p>
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CHILD ASSENT:

1. I confirm that I have been given the information sheet for this study. I understand the purpose and nature of the study, have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had these answered to my satisfaction.

2. I allow to take part in the study. I know that my participation is voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without facing any adverse consequences.

3. I understand that the study is confidential, and my real name will not be used at any stage.

4. I understand that I can refuse to answer any questions.

5. If I am distressed as a result of taking part in the study, I will be given help to access counselling or support from an appropriate agency.

6. I understand that all information gathered in this study will be kept confidential unless there is a possibility of harm occurring to a child or other vulnerable person. In the event of the possibility of harm, I give permission for appropriate authorities to be informed.

_____	_____	_____
Name of child	Date	Signature/Thumbprint
_____	_____	_____
Name of parent/Witness	Date	Signature/Thumbprint
_____	_____	_____
Name of researcher	Date	Signature

Appendix 4: Parent consent form

Study title: The Social Traditional Norms and child Marriage Research in Zombo, Nebbi, Packwach and Adjumani Districts, West Nile Region

Introduction

We are pleased to inform you that Plan International Uganda is conducting a study on Social Traditional Norms and child Marriage in Zombo, Nebbi, Packwach and Adjumani Districts, West Nile Region. The purpose of the research is to identify underlying factors and perceptions that lead to discriminatory social norms, resulting in child early and forced marriages in the mentioned districts of west–Nile region. Finding will facilitate understanding the drivers of child early and forced marriages in the target project area to inform the current approaches and strategies being used by Plan International and government and other development partners to end child early and forced marriages in West-Nile region.

Background Information

Plan International Uganda with funding and support from NORAD and Plan International Norway National Office (NNO) is implementing in partnership with Agency for Accelerated Regional Development (AFARD) and Trailblazers Mentoring Foundation (TMF) the Girls Get Equal- Ending child early and forced marriage project in the districts of Zombo, Nebbi, Packwach and Adjumani, West Nile Region. The project aims at reducing Child Early and Forced Marriage that the project will achieve through delivering on the five core project outcomes of; Keeping girls in school, increasing adolescents' knowledge on SRHR, Empowering Youth, especially, girls, are economically, changing discriminatory social norms and lastly Improving Child Protection Policies and implementation.

The approximate number of children and parents participating in the study will be about 800.

What the participants will be asked to do

If you agree, we will then ask your child to read and sign the assent form. Your child will respond to questions in our questionnaire which will take approximately 50 minutes.

Risks and benefits

We believe that your child's participation may help to improve support and services in the future for children experiencing child marriage. On a personal level, the child may find it beneficial to be able to share their experiences and may be informed about services available in case they face a similar challenge.

Participation in this study causes no risk to your child. The only potential risk is that some children might find certain questions to be sensitive. If you think that participating in the study will put your child at risk of harm, we shall support him/her in seeking help and protection through our partners like Trail Blazers Mentoring Foundation. Participants will be given contact details of counsellors through Florence Turyomurugyendo, who can be contacted on Tel: +256 781 524441. **Confidentiality**

The survey has been designed to protect your child's privacy. Children will not expose their names. Also, no child will ever be mentioned by name in a report of the results. All data collected will be handled with extreme care and will, be kept with passwords in the computers of the research managers and used only for its intended purposes. The data will only be seen by members of the research team. If your child reveals any information that suggests someone is at significant risk of harm, we will ask your permission to inform the appropriate authorities or support you in doing so.

Voluntariness

Your child's participation in this survey is voluntary. Your child will be allowed to walk away from the interview if he/she is not interested in participating in the study. If the child feels upset, the interview will be paused and can take a break or can withdraw from the study. The child may discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

Compensation

We will not provide monetary compensation to the children as they will be interviewed at home but we will provide a bottle of soda (Soft drink) and a cake/ biscuit costing 2,000= during the process of filling the questionnaire.

Feedback/Dissemination

You will be provided feedback on the study findings. The project team will organise a workshop where the findings shall be communicated to various stakeholders including Representatives from Ministries, Departments and Agencies, Local Government, Development Partner and Civil Society Organisations.

Ethical Clearance

This study has been approved by Makerere University School of Social Sciences Institutional Research Ethics Committee.

Further Questions?

If you are interested in your child taking part but have further questions, please contact the principal investigator.

The Principal Investigator: Dr. Janestic Twikirize,

Tel: (+256) (0) 706-339564

Email: janestic@gmail.com

If you would like to talk to someone other than the researcher about; (1) concerns regarding this study, (2) research participant rights, (3) research-related injuries, or (4) other human subjects' issues, please contact:

Dr. Stella Neema The Chair Makerere School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee Telephone: +256- 772 457576 E-mail: sheisim@yahoo.com	Or Dr. Peter Ndemere The Executive Secretary The Uganda National Council of Science and Technology, Kimera Road. Ntinda P. O. Box 6884 Kampala, Uganda Telephone: (256) 414 705500 Fax: +256-414-234579 Email: info@uncst.go.ug
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PARENT'S CONSENT:

1. I confirm that I have been given the information sheet for the research. I understand the purpose and nature of the study, have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had these answered to my satisfaction.

2. I allow my child to take part in the study. I know that my child's participation is voluntary and that he/she has the right to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without facing any adverse consequences.

3. I understand that the study is confidential, and my child's real name will not be used at any stage.

4. I understand that my child can refuse to answer any questions.

5. If my child is distressed as a result of taking part in the study, he/she will be given help to access counselling or support from an appropriate agency.

6. I understand that all information gathered in this study will be kept confidential unless there is a possibility of harm occurring to a child or other vulnerable person. In the event of the possibility of harm, I give permission for appropriate authorities to be informed.

Name of child **Date** **Signature/Thumbprint**

Name of parent/Witness **Date** **Signature/Thumbprint**

Name of researcher **Date** **Signature**

Appendix 5: Ethical Approval

MAKERERE

P. O. Box 7062,
Kampala, Uganda
Cables: MAKUNIKA



UNIVERSITY

Tel: 256-41-545040/0712 207926
Fax: 256-41-530185
E-mail: makssrec@gmail.com

**COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**

Your Ref:

Our Ref: MUSSS-2021-38/AR

19th April 2021

Dr. Janestic Twikiriize

Principal Investigator (MUSSS-2021-38)

Makerere University, Department of Social Work & Social Administration

P O Box 7062, Kampala, Uganda

Tel: +256 775949772/+256 0706 339564

Email: jtwikiriize@chuss.mak.ac.ug OR janestic@gmail.com

Dear Sir,

Initial Review – Regular

Re: Approval of Protocol titled: “The Social Traditional Norms and child Marriage Research in Zombo, Nebbi, Pakwach and Adjuman Districts, West Nile Region”

This is to inform you that, the Makerere University School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (MAKSS REC) granted approval to the above referenced study. The MAKSS REC reviewed the proposal using the full board review on **25th March 2021**. This has been done in line with the investigator’s subsequent letter addressing comments and suggestions.

Your study protocol number with MAKSS REC is **MUSSS-2021-38**. Please be sure to reference this number in any correspondence with MAKSS REC. Note that, the initial approval date for your proposal by MAKSS REC was **25th March 2021**. This is an annual approval and therefore; approval expires on **24th March 2022**. Please note that, final approval should be done by Uganda National Council for Science and Technology. You should use stamped consent forms and study tools/instruments while executing your field activities at all times. However, continued approval is conditional upon your compliance with the following requirements.

Continued Review

In order to continue on this study (including data analysis) beyond the expiration date, Makerere University School of Social Sciences (MAKSS REC) must re-approve the protocol after conducting a substantive meaningful, continuing review. This means that you must submit a continuing report Form as a request for continuing review. To avoid a lapse, you should submit the request six (6) to eight (8) weeks before the lapse date. Please use the forms supplied by our office.



Please also note the following:

- No other consent form(s), questionnaires and or advertisement documents should be used. The Consent form(s) must be signed by each subject prior to initiation of my protocol procedures. In addition, each research participant should be given a copy of the signed consent form.

Amendments

During the approval period, if you propose any changes to the protocol such as its funding source, recruiting materials or consent documents, you must seek Makerere University School of Social Sciences Research and Ethics Committee (MAKSS REC) for approval before implementing it.

Please summarise the proposed change and the rationale for it in a letter to the Makerere University School of Social Sciences Research and Ethics Committee. In addition, submit three (3) copies of an updated version of your original protocol application- one showing all proposed changes in bold or "track changes" and the other without bold or track changes.

Reporting

Among other events which must be reported in writing to the Makerere University School of Social Sciences Research and Ethics Committee include:

- i. Suspension or termination of the protocol by you or the grantor.
- ii. Unexpected problems involving risk to participants or others.
- iii. Adverse events, including unanticipated or anticipated but severe physical harm to participants.

Do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions. Thank you for your cooperation and commitment to the protection of human subjects in research.

The legal requirement in Uganda is that, all research activities must be registered with the National Council for Science and Technology. The forms for this registration can be obtained from their website www.unsct.go.ug

Please contact the Administrator of Makerere University School of Social Sciences Research and Ethics Committee at makssrec@gmail.com or skshuhid@yahoo.co.uk or telephone number +256 712 207926 if you counter any problem.

Yours sincerely,



Dr. Stella Neema
Chairperson

Makerere University School of Social Sciences Research and Ethics Committee



c.c.: The Executive Secretary, Uganda National Council for Science and Technology



Until we are all equal

Plot 24, Prince Charles Drive,
Kololo, Kampala-Uganda
Tel: +256 312 305 000
www.plan-international.org/uganda

Social Traditional Norms and Child Marriage Research in Adjumani, Nebbi
Pachwach and Zombo Districts, West Nile region