

At What Cost?

A Policy Brief on the Economic Impacts of Child Marriage in Uganda

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Child marriage, defined as a marriage or union in which either or both parties are below the age of 18, today remains a threat to adolescent girls globally. Around the world, an estimated 41,000 girls fall victim to the practice every dayⁱ, resulting in a range of negative outcomes that follow women throughout their lives and even affect future generations. **In Uganda more than one third of girls still marry as children, and in some regions more than half of girls end their childhoods through marriage.**ⁱⁱ

This brief provides an overview of evidence on the impacts of child marriage in Uganda and recommends policy options to reverse and prevent the harmful practice. According to the Ugandan National Partnership to End Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy, released in June of 2015, child marriage is highest in the northern part of the country, estimated at 59%. The Western region has similar rates, at 58%, followed by the Eastern region (52%), East central (52%), West Nile (50%), Central (41%), South west (37%), and with prevalence being lowest in Kampala (21%).ⁱⁱⁱ These are the statistics provided in the National Strategy to end child marriage. Please refer to page 17 of the strategy.

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THE ISSUE

Child marriage is, first and foremost, a human rights violation that robs girls of their childhoods and denies them the opportunities to determine their own futures and contributes to an intergenerational cycle of poverty.

The beginning of a marriage is often the end of an education for a girl, and while marriage can wait, education cannot. **Incentives for girls to remain in school or go back to school if they dropped out appear to be among the most effective interventions** to delay the age at first marriage and prevent early childbearing. Girls who stay in school and delay the age at which they are married are better able to negotiate for their own futures, and are also more likely to have healthier, better-educated themselves if and when they choose to become mothers. Implementing **universal primary education for girls could raise earnings by 18% nationally**. The impact of secondary education would be even larger. Universal secondary education could also increase women's decision-making ability in the household by 19 percent, as well as lead to increases for aspects like women's ability to seek care.

In Uganda, being born of a mother younger than 18 increases the risk of under-five mortality by 4.7 percentage points, and of under-five stunting by 22 percentage points. Child marriage also has a significant impact on the prevalence of intimate partner violence, with one in every five cases in Uganda associated with child or early marriages.

Ultimately, the prevalence of child marriage, early childbearing, and consequent low educational attainment for girls can be linked to tremendous negative impacts in Uganda. In terms of economic costs, ending child marriage and improving girls' education could result in hugely significant benefits nationally.

- **Ending child marriage today could generate by 2030 up to US\$2.7 billion¹** in annual benefits (in purchasing power parity terms) simply from lower population growth and a reduction in rates of under-five mortality and stunting for young children.^{iv}
- In addition, if Ugandan women who married as children were able to marry later, their potential wages were estimated to have been **US\$ 514 million²** in 2015.^v
- **In Uganda, child marriage is likely the cause of more than half of all instances of early childbearing** (having children before the age of 18). This is largely because women who marry early are more likely to begin childbearing earlier and have more children over their lifetimes.^{vi}

CURRENT POLICY LANDSCAPE

In 2015, the Ugandan government adopted a national strategy aimed at ending child marriage and increasing adolescent girls' educational attainment. Though this policy and current trends reflect progress in lowering rates of child and early marriage nationally, various cultural, economic, and social conditions that have historically contributed to the phenomenon continue to stunt advancement for Uganda's girls. As of September 2017, The National Strategy to End Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy had been implemented in 30 districts and 51 additional districts have allocated some level of funding to implement Child Marriage Action Plans.

According to a World Bank report on Uganda's economic growth, "In 2016/17, the rate of real GDP growth barely reached 4.0 percent, and was driven by consumption, rather than investment. This is not sufficient to achieve sustained progress towards poverty reduction."^{vii}

Work is desperately needed to address child marriage rates in Uganda, which are not going down at the rate required to meet our own national goals and to grow our economy, much less to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 5.3 to end child marriage by 2030. Uganda was one of the first countries to localize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and volunteered to conduct a National review ahead of the High Level Political Forum in 2016, when the government reaffirmed its commitment to the implementation of Agenda 2030.^{viii}

A number of national and international legal instruments have been put in place and ratified by the government of Uganda to protect the fundamental rights of children to not be married before the age of 18, including the national constitution. Despite national and global commitments to address child marriage, these commitments have yet to be matched with the action and financial investments necessary to carry them out. Girls Not Brides Uganda has several concrete policy recommendations for policymakers at various levels of the Ugandan government in order to fulfill our commitments and set a global example.

The Government of Uganda should be committed to evidence-based solutions that work to tackle the root causes of child marriage, prevent new child marriages from taking place, and to addressing the needs of already married girls. Specific policy recommendations follow for the Administration, Parliament, and local government.

¹2.7 billion US dollars is equivalent to 9.75 trillion Ugandan Shillings, using historical conversion rates for 2017.

²514 million US dollars is equivalent to 1.86 trillion Ugandan Shillings, using historical conversion rates for 2017.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for the Administration:

1. Allocate a specific budget to implement the National Strategy to End Child Marriages and Teenage Pregnancies to make it a reality. Annual reports should be posted in a transparent manner for those outside of the government to review.
2. Promote mandatory registration and issuance of birth certificates both in health centers and for traditional birth attendants.

Recommendations for Parliament:

1. Parliament should pass the Marriage and Divorce Bill. This would eliminate the need to amend the existing marriage laws independently so as to bring them in conformity with the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, written in 1995, and would align national laws on the topic.
2. Government should provide specialized training and capacity building to the District and Probation and Social Welfare Officers to handle the issue of child marriage.

Recommendations for Local Government:

1. Mobilize social groups such as religious, political leaders and political leaders and cultural leaders to coordinate campaigns against harmful practices such as FGM and child marriages.
2. Monitor of law enforcement personnel closely to ensure proper investigation and prosecution of child marriages. Of particular focus should be monitoring mechanisms for the Police and Family Protection Unit and State Prosecutors by the Inspector General of Policy and Director of Public Prosecution.
3. Local government and other political leaders should enact bylaws and make public commitments on the elimination of child marriages in their local constituencies. These public commitments should be coupled with programs that involve men and boys in the elimination of child marriages since they are one of the drivers of social cultural practices.



Photo credits (in order of appearance): S. Pereira_ICRW, M.Adams_ICRW & Annie Spratt

SOURCES AND SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

ⁱWorld Bank, (August 24, 2017). Educating Girls, Ending Child Marriage. Accessed at:

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/immersive-story/2017/08/22/educating-girls-ending-child-marriage>

ⁱⁱWorld Bank. (December 5, 2017). Educating Girls: A Way of Ending Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy. <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/uganda/publication/educating-girls-a-way-of-ending-child-marriage-and-teenage-pregnancy>

ⁱⁱⁱUNICEF, (June 2015). National Strategy to End Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy. Accessed at:

https://www.unicef.org/uganda/NATIONAL_STRATEGY_ON_CHILD_MARRIAGE-PRINT_READY.pdf

^{iv}World Bank. Educating Girls: A Way of Ending Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy.

^vIbid.

^{vi}Ibid.

^{vii}Sebudde, Rachel K.; Wodon, Quentin T.; Mawejje, Joseph. 2017. *Uganda economic update: tenth edition – accelerating Uganda's development : ending child marriage, educating girls (English)*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group.

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^{viii}Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform. *Review Report on Uganda's Readiness for the Implementation of Agenda 2030: Voluntary National Review 2016*. Accessed at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/memberstates/uganda>



ABOUT GNB UGANDA

The Uganda Alliance to End Child Marriage started in January 2013 and became an official Girls Not Brides National Partnership in July 2016. Girls Not Brides Uganda has over 50 members across Uganda working at community, district, regional and national level. Girls Not Brides Uganda is an affiliate of the Girls Not Brides Global Partnership, a global partnership of more than 1000 civil society organisations from over 95 countries committed to ending child marriage and enabling girls to fulfill their potential.

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