

Girls Not Brides-Uganda Stakeholders Workshop Report  
On

“Following up on Government commitments to end child marriage in Uganda”

25<sup>th</sup> September 2014

Grand Imperial Hotel, Kampala, Uganda



**Organised by Joy for Children-Uganda in collaboration with World Vision  
Uganda**

## **List of Acronyms**

AIDS.....Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome

CEFM..... Child Early Forced Marriage

FGM/C..... Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting

GNBU ..... Girls Not Brides Uganda

HIV..... Human Immunodeficiency Virus

JFCU ..... Joy for Children Uganda

KAFOP..... Kaana Foundation For Outreach Programs

NDP2..... National Development Plan 2

UNICEF .....United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund

## **1. Introduction**

Joy for Children Uganda in Collaboration with World Vision Uganda, the Girls Not Brides (GNB) Uganda Alliance conducted a half day stakeholders Workshop on the 25<sup>th</sup> September 2014 at the Grand Imperial Hotel, Kampala. 51 participants (List of the Participants is attached as an Annex attended . Attending the workshop were participants from Local NGOs, International NGOs, UN Agencies, Academia and the Media.

The workshop aimed to discuss and agree on strategies to engage the government on fulfilling their commitments made at the girls summit held in London on July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2014, as well as plan ways forward for strengthening coordination and cooperation among stakeholders on activities for ending child marriage in Uganda.

## **2. Opening remarks.**

Mr. John Aturinde, the Fundraising and Communications Officer at Joy for Children Uganda, warmly welcomed the participants by highlighting the essence and objective of the workshop as a follow up on commitments that were made by the Ugandan government to end child marriage. These commitments were made by Minister of Gender, Labour and Social Development, Hon. Karoro Okurut, at the Girls Summit that was held in London 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2014 organized by UK Government and UNICEF to end Child Early and Forced Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation/ Cutting (FGM/C) .

Generally speaking, he added that the Girls Not Brides Uganda Alliance is a membership of CSOs in Uganda that come together in efforts to end child marriage in Uganda. He also stressed that the alliance provides the opportunity to its members and stakeholders to build a network with different organizations working on children's rights and amplifies a voice to bring child marriage to an end.

After his opening remarks, John invited the participants to introduce themselves, while naming who they are, which organizations they represent and what they do. Most of the participants' organizations are focusing on child rights. He then invited Ms. Phiona Kabahubya, the Programmes Coordinator of Joy for Children Uganda to make a presentation on the GNB Uganda Alliance.

### **3. Presentation on the Girls Not Brides Uganda Alliance.**

The presentation was highlighting the formation of the Alliance, Girls not Brides Uganda (GNBU). She mentioned that, GNBU is a member of *Girls Not Brides* a Global Partnership to end child marriage and enabling girls fulfil their potential based in the United Kingdom<sup>1</sup>. The global partnership is comprised of more than 400 civil society organisations from over 60 countries committed to ending child marriage throughout Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Europe and America.

She added that, *Girls not Brides* was initiated by *The Elders*, an independent group of global leaders who work together for peace and human rights. The Elders were brought together by Nelson Mandela in 2007<sup>2</sup>. The other elders include; Graca Machel, Kofi Annan, Arch Desmond Tutu, Jimmy Carter, Mary Robinson among others. In Uganda, Girls Not Brides is hosted and coordinated by Joy for Children Uganda and is currently comprised of 15 NGO members. Together the members are working towards bringing child marriage to local, national and global attention, calling for laws, policies and programmes to be put in place that will make a difference in ending child marriage.

To this end, she pointed that a coordinated cooperation (by GNB) between its partners and the civil society organizations, stakeholders, the academia, media and government can be an imperative tool to achieve the goal of ending child marriage in Uganda.

### **4. Presentations from Alliance members**

#### **Presentation from Joy For Children Uganda**

This presentation was delivered by Phiona, in her presentation she mentioned that, Uganda is among the 15 worst African countries with high numbers of child marriages. 49% of Ugandan girls below the age of 18 are forced or lured into marriage due to different reasons, for example poverty, cultural beliefs among others. Joy for Children Uganda has been at the forefront to end child marriage through its project in Kabarole and Fortportal districts, where

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/about-girls-not-brides>

<sup>2</sup> <http://theelders.org/about>

families with vulnerable girls are sponsored, provided with scholastic materials and given goats as an encouragement to keep them in schools. This project also aims at raising awareness in communities through sensitising teachers, girls, parents and community leaders on the dangers of child marriage. Joy for Children acknowledges that child marriage is a cancer that is robbing girls of their future and needs collective efforts to end it. Kabahubya Phiona urged members present to join the alliance as a way to increase local and national engagements to end child marriage in the country. She said anyone is eligible to be a member of the alliance as long as they are committed to ending child marriage, gender based violence and amplifying the voices of married girls and those at risk of getting married.

KAANA Foundation for Outreach Programs (KAFOP) and Concern for the Girl Child as members of the Ugandan Girls not Brides Alliance highlighted their activities and efforts to end child marriage in communities. *Concern for the Girl Child* aims at protecting, respecting and fulfilling the rights of vulnerable and young girls in the areas they work in mainly through supporting girls with education, that is paying their fees and provision of scholarstic materials.

*KAANA Foundation* aims at promoting and protecting vulnerable children and women in Kabarole district through various activities like community dialogues, provision of scholarstic materials, awareness raising at both community,national and international levels through engaging in the vigorous media activities.

## **5. Discussion and reactions**

This session of the workshop was modulated by John Aturinde from Joy for Children Uganda who engaged members to react on child marriage and strategies to end the vice. Members had various views and concerns that include the following;

### **Key points**

- It was realised that despite the fact that universal primary and secondary education being in place, there are some girls who are unable to go to school.
- Members reacted that instead of starting from secondary school, organizations should develop strategies to empower vulnerable girls starting from primary school and follow them up throughout their education until they achieve their educational goals.
- The meeting was concerned about girls dropping out of school to get married, they cited menstruation as one of the challenges. Some girls from poor families can not afford to

buy sanitary pads and therefore they miss out on school during their menstrual period. Due to the state of poverty, their parents force them into marriage hoping that the husbands will provide for them. *The meeting recommended that as a way to empower the girl child, programs and activities should be designed to train girls to make reusable sanitary pads. This will help them to keep in school during their menstrual period.*

- Participants noticed the boy child is neglected in the discussion, yet some of the boys are also victims of child marriage. For example, in an instance where a young boy is forced to marry a girl who he has impregnated, the pressure of adulthood falls on him.
- Participants recommended that, advocacy strategies should be designed to increase awareness on child marriage using the media and community leaders. Community leaders should be trained to frequently communicate and address issues of child marriage at the grassroots. This will create awareness that boys are also victims of child marriage. Members also argued that the boy child should be empowered as one way to keep boys in school hence reducing the rate of child marriage.
- The meeting agreed that cultural beliefs is also one of the causes child marriage. For example, in some cultures people believe that when a girl gets her first period she is ready for marriage despite her age. Moreover, virginity is celebrated in some cultures which leads to older men marrying young girls because of the beliefs attached to virginity.
- The participants acknowledged that mindsets like these might not be changed in a day. However, with awareness and advocacy on the dangers of child marriage, they hope to slowly influence communities the vice.
- Participants recommended a formation of committees in communities including drama groups, religious, community and political leaders to increase awareness on the dangers of child marriage. It could also influence the government to implement policies and laws hence ending child marriage. They also suggested that intensifying radio programmes and having the media on board would increase the visibility of child marriage problems.

## **6. Presentation on the Government commitments**

Ms.Kabahubya Phiona from Joy for Children Uganda, made a presentation highlighting the government commitments to end child marriage. During the Girl Summit in London, the government of Uganda represented by Hon.Minister Karooro Okurut, the Minister of

Gender, Labour and Social Development, the Parliamentary Forum on Children also made commitments to end child marriage and Female Genital Mutilation as indicated here under.

**a) Government commitments**

- Commitment to prioritize attention to pursue abandonment of FGM/C and address child marriages in National Development Plan 2 (NDP2) and the Social Development Sector Plan.
- Commitment to prioritize attention to pursue abandonment of FGM/C and address child marriages in NDP2 and the Social Development Sector Plan; Integration of FGM abandonment activities in the District Development Plans
- Formulation of Sector Development Plan with priorities on FGM/C and child marriage
- Mobilisation of domestic resources - To bring FGM/C and CEFM on the list of key priorities in the Social Development Sector; and to adequately fund the sector to respond to them. Currently, the SDS receives less than 1% of the national budget.
- Improved coordination and documentation of the national response on FGM and Child marriages.
- Improved effectiveness of district probation and child welfare departments.
- National campaign to reduce teenage pregnancy. Work to tackle social norms.
- Improved disaggregated data in sector management Information system to correlate drop out to FGM and CEFM for stepping up targeted efforts in the sector. Increasingly mainstream issues in all subsector plans and budgets with increased public spending to improve quality and to implement policies and programmes to the learners. Policy on re entry of child mothers and retention of young pregnant girls in school or education institutions (skilling Uganda).
- An information management system for FGM and Child Marriages managed by MGLSD to improve national planning.
- An enabling environment for civil society advocacy on FGM and EFCM.

**b) Uganda Parliamentary Forum for Children**

- To advocate for the passage of the Children's Act.
- Encourage government to fast track the formulation of the birth and death registration policy- This will establish a robust birth and death registration system since birth registration is key in child protection as it determines age and helps hold perpetrators and

accomplices accountable.

- Lobby Central government and Local governments to provide necessary budgetary resources- This will improve child protection work in terms of creating community awareness, coordinating and strengthening child protection structures to adequately facilitate law enforcement agencies like probation office, police, and courts to improve their effectiveness.
- Lobby Ministry of Gender, Labour and social development to develop a comprehensive child protection strategy, together with increased budget allocations. This is to guide interventions at all levels and will make a significant difference.
- Stop Violence Against Children in and around schools. Corporal punishments are widely accepted and yet the harm our children. As a Forum we know that there are better effective approaches to child discipline as it is also against the Ministry of Education Policy.

## **7. Reactions and Wayforward on the commitments.**

The session of group discussions was facilitated by Prudence Komujunya , the Advocay Coordinator of World Vision Uganda. Participants were split into four groups following by group presentations and discussions, each group was led by a chairperson and asked to select a person to record major points from the discussion and report back to the larger group. The group work and discussions. The questions discussed were;

1. What do we need to do to follow up on the government commitments to child marriage?
2. What can we do together as an alliance to end child marriage?
3. What policies or law do we need to target to address child marriage?
4. What other actors are needed on board for the Alliance to address child marriage and how?

## **8. Group work presentations**

**GROUP ONE : What do we need to do to follow up on the governments commitments to end child marriage?**

- Track the commitments to end child marriage in national planning mechanism
- Participate in development of strategy framework to end child marriage at national level.



- Strengthen Alliance against child marriages through continuous regular quarterly meetings.
- Strengthen documentation and information sharing
- Prioritization of issues from commitments for advocacy
- Follow up meetings with representatives of government to the alliance
- Strengthen engagements with key and strategic policy makers and ministry persons through dialogues
- Popularize the government commitments at the district level
- Capacity building of alliance members to raise awareness on social norms fueling child marriages
- Send out an email to the alliance members to share the social development sector to track indicator on child marriage.
- Alliance to participate in the launch of the campaign to end child marriage
- Involve policy leaders to influence decisions

**GROUP TWO : What can we do together as Girls Not Brides Uganda: National Alliance to end child marriage?**

- Information flow among members should be clearly communicated because most of them were not aware of the Girls not Brides Uganda Alliance before the workshop.
- Document and share information regarding child marriage with the alliance, what works and what doesn't work in order to avoid making repetitive mistakes as well as supporting each others work
- Strengthen researches so that there is data and evidence of the problem.
- Devise strategies on how to involve different actors in ending child marriage, for example the community leaders, teachers, parents and the government at both the district and sub county level. Men and boys in the communities should be included in ending child marriage through awareness and livelihood activities because the fathers are the ones responsible for forcing girls to get married at a tender age.
- Also, capacity building of vulnerable families through income generating activities would enable more girls to stay in school instead of being exchanged for bride price gifts, ie. goats.
- The visibility of the Girls not Brides Uganda Alliance should be given more publicity. This could be done through joint advocacy events, such as the **International Day of**

**the Girl Child (October 11).** Furthermore, the alliance should get the media on board to publicize their activities on ending child marriage, because the media determines what people talk about on a daily basis.

**GROUP THREE: What other actors are needed on board for the Alliance to address child marriage and how?**

- Advocacy and awareness can be done by cultural leaders, religious leaders, media houses, teachers, students and even local artists passing on messages through music, dance and drama.
- The ministries of gender and of education should also be involved, as well as the child and family protection police department.
- Involve men, young and old. Different strategies can be used to get these actors involved, for example holding meetings with the actors on child marriage and increasing media campaigns.

**GROUP FOUR: What policies or law do we need to target to address child marriage?**

- Various policies that are in place and that can be implemented to address child marriage, for example **The Children Act** which emphasises that children should be protected from any social or customary practices that may be harmful to the child's health.
- The **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child** which stresses that every child has a right to an education, a right to grow and fulfil their potential as well as expressing their opinions in matters affecting them and be taken seriously.
- The **Birth and Death Registration Bill** which helps to define a child and how old it is in case of legal aspects regarding child marriage issues. Other policies were discussed, for example the **Female Genital Mutilation Act, Policy on Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health** from the Ministry of Health and the **Sexual Offense Bill**.
- Child marriage has various implications on young girls especially during pregnancy and child birth. These girls are at a risk of acquiring HIV/AIDS, Fistula and other complications that may result into death. Child marriage denies girls a chance to education and thus leads to continuous cycle of poverty. Therefore members expressed that through the discussed Ugandan and international laws and policies, child marriage can be addressed.

- The need to interpret and translate laws and policies to communities in languages they understand best, as a way to advocate and create awareness on issues regarding child marriage. Community leaders should be trained to make binding bylaws that can be used to address child marriage. In the long run this will change the mindsets of people in the communities.
- Collaboration and clarity from different ministries, especially Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education among others to be involved in addressing the issues of child marriage. Strategies and policies should be put in place to retain pregnant girls as well as encourage child brides to go back to school.

## 9. Way forward

This session was modulated by Judith Nakamanya from World Vision. Basing on the discussions of the day, members agreed on a way forward. Participants agreed on the following:

- To increase the visibility of Girls not Brides Uganda Alliance to all stakeholders.
- Joy for Children Uganda, the Secretariat of the Alliance to hold another meeting soon in order to engage prospective members about the Alliance, its vision, policies and what is expected of members.
- The secretariat should design and share with members a strategic plan that encompasses activities of the alliance, a work plan and the budget.
- The secretariat to complete and activate the website for Girls not Brides Uganda Alliance so that information can be shared and disseminated on the website for members to access information regarding child marriage.
- Efforts to end child marriage should be addressed at the community level because it is the girls and parents that are participating in child marriage. These parents force their young daughters into marriage hoping to receive bride wealth and gifts like goats in exchange.
- Vulnerable families should be empowered with capacity building and sustainable projects as a way to reduce the number of girls forced into marriage.

- Sensitise communities through awareness campaigns, dance and drama groups, involvement of community and religious leaders, schools and teachers among others, to reach out to the grassroot people.
- Engagement at a local as well as national level to help push the alliance ahead.
- The secretariat to engage with Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development and come up with campaigns geared towards ending child marriage.
- Participate in the International Day of the Girl Child which will be on 11th of October. The meeting suggested that they could get together and share different activities and information among themselves towards ending child marriage.
- Use of the mass media to publicize activities of the alliance. Participants argued that the media determines what people talk about and it reaches both the government and the grassroot communities.
- The academia should also be involved in activities and meetings since there are a lot of experts on gender issues who are doing research on child marriage and have a lot of data and evidence on the issue. These researches can bring the issue of child marriage into the light as well as encourage more actors to participate to end child marriage.
- Joy for Children Uganda, as the secretariat of Girls not Brides Uganda Alliance, should continue to take the role of hosting the alliance and coordinating its activities, and also share information including a list of the partners of the alliance.
- Participants agreed that they can contribute towards the activities if presented with a budget.
- The secretariat to communicate about the next meeting and send out information about the Girls not Brides Alliance.

## **10. Closing remarks**

Ms. Phiona, Programme Coordinator of Joy for Children, delivered the closing statement. In her concluding remarks, thanked World Vision Uganda for their support and collaboration. Special mention was also given to Joy for Children for the efficient organization of the workshop. She Thanked all participants for their participation and encouraged members to join the Girls not Brides Uganda Alliance so as to end child marriage.