

**COMMUNITY SKYROCKET GENERAL SUMMARY
REPORT FOR LEARNING EXCHANGE MEETINGS HELD IN
AIIVU SUBCOUNTY (ARUA DISTRICT), ODUPI
SUBCOUNTY (TEREGO DISTRICT) AND YIVU SUBCOUNTY
(MARACHA DISTRICT) ON 1ST THROUGH 3RD OCTOBER 2020**

JOY FOR CHILDREN

UGANDA

**A learning exchange on community responses to addressing the
links between adolescent girl sexuality and ending child
marriage**



INTRODUCTION

The More Than Brides Alliance, through its learning arm, the *Making the Most of What We Know* project (MMWWK), awarded small learning exchange grants to organizations in nine countries in Africa and Asia, as part of a participatory grant making process under the Learning Spark Fund. The Learning Spark Fund partnered with organizations belonging to one of four Dutch-funded Child Marriage Alliance Programs – *More Than Brides*, *Yes, I Do*, *Her Choice*, and *Girls Not Brides*.

Under the overall theme of MMWWK, which aims to learn about the link between adolescent female sexuality and Child Marriage, these Community Skyrocket grants focused on community responses to address the links between sexuality and child marriage for the purpose of ending the practice.

Our organization, Joy For Children, along with Amani Initiative, was awarded a grant for our learning exchange entitled: **A learning exchange on community responses to addressing the links between adolescent girl sexuality and ending child marriage.**

Why community response? Why a learning exchange?

Leveraging community response to gain multiple knowledge perspectives

The Learning Spark Fund is designed to capture and elevate practical and experience-based knowledge and insights on the links between sexuality and child marriage, rather than that generated from research studies. Instead of prioritizing or giving favor to any one source of knowledge we seek to hear and learn from different voices and perspectives. Rather than assuming that child marriage programs have a monopoly on knowledge and experience on how change happens, we believe that adolescent girls and other community actors, such as community-based organizations, religious and traditional leaders and families have valuable knowledges about addressing female adolescent sexuality and ending child marriage.

The Community Skyrocket grants are designed to shed light on the community knowledge, experiences, and actions that happen organically, not having been prompted by external intervention/ development programs.

The learning exchanges

The learning exchange is one way to bring these different knowledges together, elevate them, and build upon them. We see learning exchanges as a space where professionals from different organizations and people from different communities come together to share and listen to what communities do and know. They can dive into the issues and questions that excite them in exploring the links between adolescent sexuality and child marriage, first sharing their knowledge, strategies, and experiences, and then reflecting on the implications of community knowledge and experiences for improving the design, implementation, and advocacy of child marriage programs.

Learning Exchange Objectives

The Community Skyrocket grant window facilitated a learning exchange for community members and organization that have lived and/or professional experience related to the community response to the linkage between adolescent sexuality and Child Marriage in Uganda. During this learning exchange, our organization facilitated a conversation that allowed participants to:

Share community experiences and practices in the area of addressing the link between adolescent girl sexuality and Child Marriage

Learn from the experiences of different communities and or community actors.

Engage in knowledge co-creation, including recommendations for improving Child Marriage programs

This report summarizes the learning exchange conversations that took place, including individual stakeholder perspectives and experiences, group reflection, new knowledge generated, and recommendations for building on community knowledge and ways of working for improving Child Marriage programs, that address the linkages between adolescent sexuality and Child Marriage.

THE DESIGN OF OUR LEARNING EXCHANGE

In this section, we share the basic information about our learning exchange design.

The Guiding Question

As with all Community Skyrocket grantees, our learning exchanges were designed to address a Guiding Question:

How can community knowledge and responses to addressing adolescent sexuality in tackling Child Marriage, including meaningful ideas and actions on community response to addressing this link, be leveraged and built on to improve Child marriage programs?

Learning Exchange Focus

Our specific learning exchange focused on addressing certain Key Questions that were of particular interest to our organization and in our context:

- **How do community positive social norms, attitudes and beliefs address adolescent sexuality to end child marriages?**

These Key Question(s) aligned with the work of our organization in that Joy for Children Uganda and Amani Initiative have a long and vast experience in handling issues relating to Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy. The main mission of these two organizations is to help curtail the increasing vice of Child Marriages and Teenage Pregnancies in Ugandan Communities. The mission of Joy for children is, **“To end violence against Children in Uganda through capacity building, advocacy, psycho-social and legal support.”** But Amani Initiative Mission is, **“To create sustainable solutions to teenage pregnancy and child marriage through the direct involvement of the community.”** These Key Questions built on what we already know about this topic **A learning exchange on community responses to addressing the links between adolescent girl sexuality and ending child marriages in the subcounties of Aiiyu in Arua district, Odupi in Terego district and Yivu in Maracha district** in that the two organizations have done and are doing a lot of work relating to ending Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy whose cases are rampant in Ugandan Communities. The Key Questions were specifically interesting to us for three reasons:

Our context: The fact that the two organizations are deeply involved in activities of ending Child Marriages and Teenage Pregnancy made the key question an interesting target for learning. We found this topic and communities exciting, important and relevant because the topic is directly related to the challenge of Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy faced in the selected communities of Aiiyu, Odupi and, Yivu.

Our motivation to learn: In designing the learning exchange, we wanted to work on/we reflected on the desire to establish clear knowledge on how community positive social norms, attitudes and beliefs address adolescent sexuality to end child marriages. This topic is relevant to the challenges of Child Marriage and Teenage Practice, affecting the communities of Aiiyu, Odupi and Yivu..

In the end, we were hoping to learn what communities know and do in relation to addressing adolescent female sexuality and draw out implications for improving the design, implementation and evaluation of Child Marriage Programs.

Carefully Selected Participants

In designing our three learning exchanges, we carefully selected participants who could add to the conversation with their knowledge and experience, engage in knowledge co-creation, and benefit from this co-created knowledge.

Below is a table describing the total number of participants we selected and invited in the three subcounties of Aiiyu, Odupi and Yivu:

Figure 1: Learning Exchange Members by Stakeholder Type

Stakeholder Type	Short description Role/affiliation, experience	Total number
Community Leaders	Community leaders including male and female elders and cultural leaders were invited for the community Focus Group Discussions. This category of people are very influential in community because they play a very vital role in efforts to end child marriages.	09
Religious Leaders	As spiritual guides, religious leaders are among the most respected figures in the selected Aiiivu, Odupi and Yivu sub county communities and often contribute to prescribe which behaviors are acceptable or not. Their influence helps change existing norms in these communities and are therefore critical allies in the move to end child marriages.	08
Parents	Both male and female parents were sampled and selected for the engagement in Aiiivu, Odupi and Yivu subcounties. The parents are key pillars on encouraging their children and providing knowledge on how children can live a meaningful life. They are therefore the first line of reference to any issues affecting children, most especially young girls. They have the better knowledge to drive meaningful programs related to ending child marriages.	50
Girls/Boys Groups	Adolescent girls and child mothers were selected from within Aiiivu, Odupi and Yivu subcounties to take part in this program. The selected teenage girls and child mothers presented real life experiences, challenges on child marriage and teenage practice in Aiiivu, Odupi and Yivu subcounties. Some adolescent boys were equally selected to be part of the engagement to share their perspective on this crucial subject.	45
Community-Based Organizations	No community-based organizations were selected for these particular engagements in Aiiivu, Odupi and Yivu subcounties.	00
NGOs	No specific NGOs were selected for this program but the Grantee organization at this engagement was Joy for Children Uganda as well as the sub grantee organization Amani Initiative. The two organizations did not participate in the direct discussions, although they handled the administrative part of the learning exchange meetings.	00

Government	Government representatives including local council authorities, heads of education institutions, senior women teachers, police and other subcounty leaders were invited for this stakeholder engagement. This category of leaders has direct experience and wealth of knowledge about Child Marriage issues in the communities of Aiiyu, Odupi and Yivu subcounties.	32
[Other]	Other nonessential category of people for this engagement were not invited because all the key stakeholders were identified and involved.	00
Total number of participants		144

In convening these participants, we were hoping that they would add new knowledge, insights, experiences and share personal stories about Child Marriages, Teenage pregnancy as well as Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health information to the conversation and our individual and collective learning.

Intentional and Structured Conversation

The learning exchange events were designed to take place over six hours in each selected subcounty (Two hours per stakeholder category of Parents, Adolescents and Community/Religious/Government leaders) at Aiiyu, Odupi and Yivu subcounty Headquarters. We designed the following agenda to structure our learning conversation:

Time	Session/Activity (The particulars that actually transpired)
20 minutes	Coming together /building rapport by target stakeholders
50 minutes	Sharing and listening by target stakeholders and staff of implementing organizations.
40 minutes	Sense making, reflections and analysis
10 minutes	Capturing knowledge and translating it into lessons and recommendations

This design reflected our desire and intention to capture a wide range of knowledge, insights and experiences from the selected stakeholders on the crucial matter concerning how community positive social norms, attitudes and beliefs address Adolescent Sexuality to end child marriages.

This design kept the selected stakeholders engaged and active, hence were able to reveal a lot about the topic of discussion. However, some of the selected adolescents felt shy and had to be probed to speak their minds. But considering the small number of participants in each category, the design was generally helpful in generating the needed knowledge on the topic of focus.

Considering the seriousness of the topic of discussion and the good probing by facilitators, most stakeholders were able to speak out their minds on the topic.

THE LEARNING EXCHANGE CONVERSATION AND LEARNING

In this section, we summarize the knowledge and insights that were shared during member conversations and discussions in the respective selected subcounties.

Sharing & Listening + Reflecting

The following information was generated from the three sub counties including Aiiyu, Odupi and Yivu respectively.

AIIYU SUBCOUNTY

During the learning exchange in Aiiyu subcounty, participants shared their experiences and knowledge with each other. The trends of knowledge and experience sharing are presented according to the three categories (adolescents, parents and community leaders) involved in the focus group discussions as below;

ADOLESCENTS (GIRLS AND BOYS)

The first group of participants we interacted with were the adolescents (boys and girls) and they shared the following knowledge and experiences;

Cultural norm that empowers boys to control their adolescent sisters: The male adolescents in Aiiyu revealed that it is culturally their duty to control their sisters in adolescent stage. This gives the boys an age over the girls and hence preventing them (girls) from possible child marriages but could also deny the adolescent girls the power to make relevant decisions related to their sexual and reproductive health such as when to have sex and with whom.

The community belief that adolescence means readiness to marry: While sharing with adolescents of Aiiyu Subcounty on their sexuality, some of them testified to community pressurizing them to marry and start families on account of been adolescents. This is a factor contributing towards increasing child marriages.

The cultural norm that considers it a taboo to discuss adolescent sexuality: Some adolescents in Aiiyu revealed that their parents remain silent on adolescent sexuality matters because culture considers the topic a taboo to discuss with adolescents, hence creating a knowledge gap resulting into increased cases of child marriages.

Cultural norm that bars girls from spending a night out from home without permission from parents: The norm in Aiiyu that bars girls from spending night(s) away from home in unknown places makes it possible for the Aiiyu community to control girls and reduce on Child

marriages. There was a cultural superstition known as “Nyara or Yakani” which would curse a family of a girl who eloped with a boy without traditional marriages. The curse would lead to suffering in the family and could only be stopped with a cultural offering. Unfortunately adolescents of late no longer believe in these cultural norms which leads to the many cases of out of wedlock pregnancies that contribute to child marriage.

The culture that adolescent girls and boys should not play together: Some of the adolescents in Aiiyu indicated that their parents believe that it is culturally wrong for adolescent boys to play with adolescent girls. This according to them, may lead to sexual relationships that contribute towards teenage pregnancies and eventually child marriages, considering the changes that take place on their bodies. This is usually why in the villages boys undertake different responsibilities such as animal rearing with the girls taking up domestic responsibilities like cooking.

The norm that bars girls and boys from sleeping together in the same house during the adolescent stage, culturally known as “Odrojo”: Some of the adolescent participants said, their parents don't encourage them to sleep together in the same house with adolescents of opposite sex. This, according to them is dangerous and lead to teenage pregnancies and child marriages. This reportedly occurs when the adolescents of opposite sex are tempted to start sexual activities based on the misleading advice, they get from peer adolescents in the houses they sleep in. Other adolescents are also tempted to be involved in sexual activities among themselves, sleeping in the same house. However, there are parents according to the adolescents who share house with their adolescent girls and boys. This makes the adolescents to attempt to imitate their parents and start practicing sex with their lovers.

Views on adolescent sexuality: The participants expressed that adolescent sexuality is all about self-awareness on the body changes and gender of an adolescent. They mentioned that lack of adolescent sexuality education leads to misguided decisions about sexuality choices that can contribute to child marriage.

Access to adolescent sexuality information: In this discussion, the adolescents revealed that the community does not provide willing information on adolescent sexuality, apart from the school setting and some few mothers. However, according to the adolescents, schools and the parents even tend to avoid elaborations on some of the critical issues concerning adolescent sexuality. The participants say, they mostly rely on their peers for adolescent sexuality information.

Most participants accuse their parents of not giving time for providing adolescent sexuality information. The participants suggested that it will be okay if parents put aside time to talk to them on sexuality matters while sober.

PARENTS

Our discussions with the parents in Aiiyu sub county raised the following knowledge and experiences;

Cultural norm of using aunts to talk to adolescent girls over their sexuality: Some parents in Aiiyu revealed that they use aunts to discuss adolescent sexuality matters with their adolescent daughters. This is reportedly helpful in ending child marriages among some of the adolescents in this area.

Gender roles relating to adolescent sexuality through assigning mothers to talk to girls and fathers to talk to boys over adolescent sexuality: Due to the fact that mothers are always closer to their daughters and men closer to their sons, the culture in Aiiyu has it that these categories are rightly placed to communicate adolescent sexuality messages to their children. Although some parents reportedly do not effectively play this role.

The cultural belief that siblings should marry according to order of birth: The parents shared that the culture in Aiiyu has a belief that siblings should marry according to their order of birth with the elder child expected to marry before her/his siblings. This gives time to the younger siblings to know about adolescent sexuality matters before they get married, hence helping to end child marriages.

The norm of pressurizing boys to marry early on account of being only male child of their parents in order to expand the family: Some parents shared that there are cases of relatives pressurizing young boys to marry as many wives as possible and produce many children on account of been the only male child in a family lineage. This norm puts pressure on young adolescents to marry early, hence fueling child marriages.

What parents say they would do if their adolescent girls became pregnant or adolescent boys impregnate a girl: Some parents said that if a girl gets pregnant, they would keep her at home and let her resume studies after delivery.

“I would get to know the person responsible for the pregnancy and then calmly resolve the matter and keep the girl with me.” a parent commented.

Another parent said he *would send his adolescent boy away from home if he made a girl pregnant.*

Engaging adolescent children on adolescent sexuality information provision: Majority of male parents say they have limited time to engage adolescents in sexuality information provision. Others say they feel uncomfortable discussing adolescent sexuality issues with their children. Only some mothers dare touch the topic on adolescent sexuality but they do not discuss the issues into depth.

Challenges parents face in discussing sexual and reproductive health with their adolescents: Most parents say when their children start active sexual behavior, they cannot pick advice from them. There are children who tell parents openly that they cannot afford to lose their partners simply because of the discouragement from the parents.

Some parents say they feel shy and find it difficult to discuss sexual and reproductive health issues with their children.

COMMUNITY LEADERS

The culture of community responsibility and concern over children: The community members in Aiiyu shared that it has been a common culture in the area for the community to take responsibility and concern over children including passing adolescent sexuality education to the adolescents, hence curtailing child marriages. The community leaders were however quick to point out that, this is currently not in play as many parents prefer to advise their own biological children and now mind less about other children.

The attitude of some parents looking at adolescent girls as source of wealth: The community leaders shared that there is a section of parents in Aiiyu subcounty who consider their adolescent daughters as source of dowry. The community leaders say this is a negative attitude which does not address adolescent sexuality issues among adolescents. This attitude promotes child marriages rather than ending them.

The belief of Islam where adolescent girls who start menstruation period are considered ready for marriage: The community participants in Aiiyu criticized the Islam religion for allowing marriage of adolescent girls just on account that they have started menstruation. This reportedly fuels child marriages as it raises negative adolescent sexuality impact.

The norm of senior woman teachers and senior man teachers in addressing adolescent sexuality issues in schools: The senior woman teachers and senior man teachers with support from school administration have played significant role in schools to create awareness on adolescent sexuality matters. This has helped to reduce child marriages.

The cultural belief that a girl will get misfortunes if she slept with boys out of marriage: It is a belief among the cultural group in Aiiyu since time immemorial that when a girl has sex with a boy out of wedlock, something bad will happen like snake bites or an accident either on the girl or any of her close relatives which will help the elders to know that the girl has been involved in sexual activity. This, according to the community makes the girls take keen interest in understanding and respecting their adolescent sexuality changes, which eventually makes them able to control themselves, fearing the associated upshots leading to ending child marriages and teenage pregnancies.

Relationship between adolescent sexuality and child marriage: Community leaders say, the absence of adolescent sexuality information is a fueling factor in promoting child marriage because the children are forced to discover things for themselves, resulting into serious errors in making decisions about their sex life.

How adolescent sexuality education can protect children against early marriage: According to the community leaders, adolescent sexuality education can help children get out of the risks of child marriage. Another community participant said, adolescent sexuality education helps the young people to understand one another and treat themselves with dignity not just as sex objects.

Trends of child marriage in this community: There are reportedly high cases of child marriages in this community and many of these young couples have failed to take care of their families. The trends of child marriages in this community of Aiiyu subcounty are increasingly becoming normal and only few educated parents are trying to fight the vice.

Factors that have driven the rising child marriage trends in this community: Society has lost moral duty and there is no collective responsibility to correct behavior of children, hence high cases of child marriages. Government policies on child rights gives children a lot of freedom and makes it difficult for the parents to correct their children, hence resulting into increasing trends of child marriages.

Many parents in this community see girls as burdensome to maintain and prefer taking responsibility for the male children. They then encourage these girls to get married at a young age.

Other factors raised include, decadence of cultural responsibility over children, desire for dowry by parents.

The fear of the cultural belief that taking child marriage issues to police may result into misfortunes is a factor that fuels child marriages in this locality. The culture of this locality seems to be lenient and tolerant about child marriages.

These specific stories stood out to us:

Story 1: How I was raped and married?

My boyfriend had arranged a meeting with me in the trading center. But because I was in my menstrual periods, I did not turn up for that meeting. Immediately after the end of my period, I then came to him. He was bitter with me and accused me of not keeping my word. He then forced me into having sex with him. I was not prepared for this but there was no option for me.

I decided to follow my boyfriend up to their home and got married to him. But after producing my baby, life became very hard. I could not manage taking care of family responsibilities. I returned home and currently live with my parents.

Story 2: I learnt from my mistake

I was a student in St Mary's Ediofe Girls secondary school when I conceived to my boyfriend and I dropped out of school. I sought advice from relatives and school authorities. They guided me and after delivery, I nursed my baby for a year and then returned to school. Although many people laughed at me and made fun of my situation, I worked very hard and concentrated in my studies. I then passed exams in senior four. I later proceeded with my studies till I became a health assistant. I now serve in Aiiyu sub county. I am properly married and able to take care of my expenses. Arising from the advice of concerned stakeholders, my father was able to give me a second chance to continue with my studies even after disappointing him. Thanks be to the people who gave me hope, guidance and resources to further my education.

Story 3: How I conceived out of ignorance on my menses?

I started experiencing my periods at the age of ten. I kept quiet about it and could not tell anyone about it. But I realized a lot of sexual desire after my periods. I then started seeing boys for relationships and eventually sexual intercourse at the age of thirteen. I got used to sexual activity and could not do without it till I became pregnant at the age of fifteen years. I got married but failed to sustain the family. I came back home and now live with my parents. I had no knowledge of my fertile days. My parents were not of help amidst all I went through concerning my adolescent sexuality changes, leading to the mistakes I made in my life. Child Mother

Reflections

After each sharing their experiences and insights with others, learning exchange participants had the opportunity to reflect together on what we are collectively learning, the sum of our knowledge. We reflected that;

ADOLESCENTS (GIRLS AND BOYS)

The following came up in the discussions that followed the sharing and listening phase with the adolescents;

Conflict: The adolescents offered conflicting views on their understanding on marriage. While some said every individual above the age of seventeen years has the right to choose a marriage partner, others still believe that it is the responsibility of their parents and relatives to dictate on marriage matters.

Discovery: The participants shared light moments talking about issues concerning sexual and reproductive health. For example, when a participant told colleagues that she chose to remain at her boyfriend's home as his wife after forced sexual intercourse with him, this amused some of them.

Surprises for me: The revelation by some female participants that they started experiencing menstruation periods at as young as nine years was a surprise to me. And the fact that some of the adolescents testifying to having sexual knowledge at less than ten years was also very surprising to them.

Surprises for other participants: The other fairly mature participants of the same adolescent group were surprised by the fact that even younger adolescents had sexual experience.

Not discussed: The adolescents were not comfortable discussing about their sex lives. Some participants seemed uncomfortable discussing into details issues concerning their sexual experiences.

PARENTS

The following came up in the discussions that followed the sharing and listening phase with the parents;

Conflict: Parents presented conflicting views on who is involved in guiding the teenagers in matters of sexual and reproductive health. Some mothers accused men of not creating time to talk

to their teenagers, although some male participants claim their children do not pick advice from them.

Discovery: Some parents claim that adolescent children threaten to beat them up, trying to advise them on how they should lead their lives.

Surprises for me: The fact that many families in the selected subcounty no longer have family meetings was very surprising to me.

Surprises for other participants: The participants expressed surprise about the focus group discussion. This according to the participants is new arrangement towards curbing the challenge of Child Marriage and Teenage pregnancy.

Not discussed at length: The issue of parents discussing sexual and reproductive health was not discussed at length. This is because some of these parents still believe that it is a taboo to discuss sex issues with their children or in public. Some female participants were particularly not comfortable to contribute views on the matter.

COMMUNITY LEADERS

The following came up in the discussions that followed the sharing and listening phase with the community leaders;

Conflict: The cultural leaders were accused of abetting child marriage because it was discovered that many cases of child marriages in the area were not reported to police but the cultural leaders have handled such issues out of court. They get dowry and allow the young girls to suffer in those marriages. However, some of the cultural leaders denied these allegations. They instead blame government for been strict on child rights and not revising the mature age bracket of eighteen years, something they say is fueling child marriage.

Discovery: It was discovered that there is conflict in policies regarding adolescent sexuality, child marriages and teenage pregnancy. The government position varies from the religious and cultural perspective over the same matter.

Surprises for me: The issue of many parents in the area seeing girls as burdensome and wishing that they marry at tender age surprised me. This is reportedly influenced by the desire for dowry by some of these parents.

Surprises for other participants: Some parents colluding with some community leaders to process false birth certificates in order to get money and dowry from perpetrators of child marriage. Some community leaders especially politicians fear to denounce child marriages for fear of losing votes from perpetrators.

Not discussed at length: The challenge of the community having varying perspectives on handling child marriage matters in this community was not discussed exhaustively. This was due to time factor as there were many other questions to discuss.

ODUPI SUBCOUNTY

During the learning exchange in Odupi subcounty, participants shared their experiences and knowledge with each other. The trends of knowledge and experience sharing are presented according to the three categories (community leaders, parents and adolescents) involved in the focus group discussions as below;

COMMUNITY LEADERS

The first group of participants we interacted with were the community leaders and they shared the following knowledge and experiences;

The norm of elders telling cultural ancient stories and proverbs to adolescents about adolescent sexuality after supper: The community leaders in Odupi subcounty revealed that some elders sit down after supper to tell past adolescent sexuality stories and proverbs to adolescents. Such stories and proverbs communicate lessons to adolescents on their sexuality, hence ending child marriages. The community leaders however said this role is not been played by some elders.

The belief that if a girl has sex out of marriage, she brings misfortune to her relatives: The community leaders in Odupi subcounty revealed that it is a strong belief in this area that a girl will cause misfortune and bad luck to any of her relatives once she is involved in sexual intercourse with a man. The misfortunes can be in the form of accidents, snake bites among others. Such information is communicated during adolescent sexuality education and helps prevent the girls from involving themselves in early sex.

The cultural norm of approving a boy for marriage by his ability to cut the root of a weed called “moba”, building a house, owning a cassava plantation and goats: The culture in Odupi has been that a boy can be approved for marriage if he ably cuts the roots of “moba” weed, builds a house, plants cassava and owns goats. These tasks indirectly delayed child marriages. But the community leaders were quick to point out that this norm is not so much in practice these days.

The social norm of preference of a boy child to a female child: This social norm in Odupi subcounty attaches more importance to the boy child than the female one. This makes the adolescent girls feel less important hence tempted to get married off.

The culture of community responsibility and concern over children: The community members in Odupi shared that it has been a common culture in the area for the community to take responsibility and concern over children including passing adolescent sexuality education to the adolescents, hence curtailing child marriages. The community leaders were however quick to point out that, this is currently not in play as some parents especially women would quarrel with anyone who tries disciplining their adolescents.

The attitude of some parents looking at adolescent girls as source of wealth: The community leaders shared that there is a section of parents in Odupi subcounty who consider their adolescent daughters as source of dowry. The practice of sending the girls early for marriage in this

community is worsened by the presence of refugees who offer fairly good number of cattle as bride price. The community leaders say this is a negative attitude which does not address adolescent sexuality issues among adolescents. This attitude promotes child marriages rather than ending them.

The belief that only senior woman teachers and senior man teachers are the ones to handle adolescent sexuality issues in schools: The senior woman teachers and senior man teachers with support from school administration have played significant role in schools to create awareness on adolescent sexuality matters. This has helped to reduce child marriages.

Relationship between adolescent sexuality and child marriage: Community leaders say, the absence of adolescent sexuality information is a fueling factor in promoting child marriage because the children are forced to discover things for themselves, resulting into serious errors in making decisions about their sex life.

Factors that have driven the rising child marriage trends in this community: Society has lost moral duty and there is no collective responsibility to correct behavior of children, hence high cases of child marriages. Government policies on child rights gives children a lot of freedom and makes it difficult for the parents to correct their children, hence resulting into increasing trends of child marriages.

Many parents in this community see girls as burdensome and prefer to attach more importance to the male child. They then encourage these girls to get married at a young age.

Other factors raised include, decadence of cultural responsibility over children, desire for dowry by parents.

The fear of the cultural belief that taking child marriage issues to police may result into misfortunes is a factor that fuels child marriages in this locality.

The cultural belief that a girl will get misfortunes if she slept with boys out of marriage: It is a belief among the cultural group in Odupi since time immemorial that when a girl has sex with a boy out of wedlock, something bad will happen like snake bites or an accident either on the girl or any of her close relatives which will help the elders to know that the girl has been involved in sexual activity. This, according to the community makes the girls take keen interest in understanding and respecting their adolescent sexuality changes, which eventually makes them able to control themselves, fearing the associated upshots leading to ending child marriages and teenage pregnancies.

How adolescent sexuality education can protect children against early marriage: According to the community leaders, adolescent sexuality education can help children get out of the risks of child marriage. Another community participant said, adolescent sexuality education helps the young people to understand one another and treat themselves with dignity not just as sex objects.

Trends of child marriage in this community: There are reportedly high cases of child marriages in this community and many of these young couples have failed to take care of their families. The trends of child marriages in this community of Odupi subcounty are increasingly becoming normal and only few educated parents are trying to fight the vice.

PARENTS

Our discussions with the parents in Odupi subcounty raised the following knowledge and experiences;

The social norm that promotes decent dressing by adolescents: According to the selected parents in Odupi subcounty, the social norm of promoting decent dressing among adolescents has helped curtail child marriages. Decent dressing promotion is impeded in adolescent sexuality education, hence leading reduction in child marriages and teenage pregnancies. But, due to modernity, a few adolescents still dress indecently, fueling child marriages and teenage pregnancies.

The norm of cursing girls not to get any kid when married at young age: Parents who participated in this focus group discussions in Odupi subcounty said, the norm of cursing adolescent girls not to conceive if married at a tender age has helped the adolescent girls to control themselves and avoid child marriage and teenage practice.

Cultural norm of using aunts to talk to adolescent girls over their sexuality: Some parents in Odupi revealed that they use aunts to discuss adolescent sexuality matters with their adolescent daughters. This is reportedly helpful in creating awareness on adolescent sexuality leading to ending child marriages among some of the adolescents in this area.

The cultural belief that siblings should marry according to order of birth: The parents shared that the culture in Odupi has a belief that siblings should marry according to their order of birth with the elder child expected to marry before her/his siblings. This gives time to the younger siblings to know about adolescent sexuality matters before they get married, hence helping to end child marriages.

The norm of pressurizing boys to marry early on account of being only male child of their parents in order to expand the family: Some parents shared that there are cases of relatives pressurizing young boys to marry as many wives as possible and produce many children on account of been the only male child in a family lineage. This norm puts pressure on young adolescents to marry early, hence fueling child marriages.

Engaging adolescent children on adolescent sexuality information provision: Majority of male parents say they have limited time to engage adolescents in sexuality information provision. Others say they feel uncomfortable discussing adolescent sexuality issues with their children. Only some mothers dare touch the topic on adolescent sexuality but they do not discuss the issues into depth.

Challenges parents face in discussing sexual and reproductive health with their adolescents: Most parents say when their children start active sexual behavior, they cannot pick advice from them. There are children who tell parents openly that they cannot afford to lose their partners simply because of the discouragement from the parents.

Some parents say they feel shy and find it difficult to discuss sexual and reproductive health issues with their children.

ADOLESCENTS (GIRLS AND BOYS)

These were the last group of participants we interacted with in Odupi subcounty and they shared the following knowledge and experiences;

Cultural norm that empowers boys to control their adolescent sisters: The male adolescents in Odupi revealed that it is culturally their duty to control their sisters in adolescent stage. This gives the boys an age over the girls and hence preventing them (girls) from possible child marriages but could also deny the adolescent girls the power to make relevant decisions related to their sexual and reproductive health such as when to have sex and with whom.

The community belief that adolescence means readiness to marry: While sharing with adolescents of Odupi Subcounty on their sexuality, some of them testified to community pressurizing them to marry and start families on account of been adolescents. This is a factor contributing towards increasing child marriages.

The cultural norm that considers it a taboo to discuss adolescent sexuality: Some adolescents in Odupi revealed that their parents remain silent on adolescent sexuality matters because culture considers the topic a taboo to discuss with adolescents, hence creating a knowledge gap resulting into increased cases of child marriages.

Cultural norm that bars girls from spending a night out from home without permission from parents: The norm in Odupi that bars girls from spending night(s) away from home in unknown places makes it possible for the Odupi community to control girls and reduce on Child marriages. There was a cultural superstition known as “Ranya” which would curse a family of a girl who eloped with a boy without traditional marriages. The curse would lead to suffering in the family and could only be stopped with a cultural offering. Unfortunately, adolescents of late no longer believe in these cultural norms which leads to the many cases of out of deadlock pregnancies that contribute to child marriage.

Views on adolescent sexuality: The participants expressed that adolescent sexuality is all about self-awareness on the body changes and gender of an adolescent. They mentioned that lack of adolescent sexuality education leads to misguided decisions about sexuality choices that can contribute to child marriage.

Access to adolescent sexuality information: In this discussion, the adolescents revealed that the community does not provide willing information on adolescent sexuality, apart from the school setting and some few mothers. However, according to the adolescents, schools and the parents even tend to avoid elaborations on some of the critical issues concerning adolescent sexuality. The participants say, they mostly rely on their peers for adolescent sexuality information.

Most participants accuse their parents of not giving time for providing adolescent sexuality information. The participants suggested that it will be okay if parents put aside time to talk to them on sexuality matters while sober.

These specific stories stood out to us:

Story 1: I organize monthly meetings for adolescent sexuality education

In my home, I and my wife have planned and carry out monthly meetings with all our children. Our first daughter and two of her followers are now adolescents. We tell them all we know about adolescent sexuality without reservations. Our belief is that this makes them to make informed decisions in their lives. The meetings have also helped us to know about the challenges and needs of our adolescent children. For purposes of privacy, I some times allow my wife have meetings with the girls and I do the same with the boys.

Story 2: My relatives removed me from marriage and took me back to school

Due to limited knowledge on adolescent sexuality, I conceived to my boyfriend at the age of sixteen years and got married to him. On learning about this, my relatives acted quickly and removed me from my husband's place. After delivery and breastfeeding the child for one year, my mother took over the responsibility of caring for my child. Relatives returned me to school in Primary Seven. I successfully completed and I am now a senior one. I have now realized that the decision to withdraw me from marriage was a good one because we were not prepared to manage a family.

Story 3: We raised responsible children through constant adolescent sexuality awareness creation

As a family, we have successfully raised four children through constant family meetings on adolescent sexuality matters. This was through open discussions on adolescent sexuality and its associated challenges and risks. I and my husband always ensured that we had time for our children even before they reached adolescent stage. We also involved relatives and other members of the community in shaping the behavior of our children. These children listened to us and they successfully completed their studies and some of them are working. The community now consults us on how we were able to raise such responsible children.

Reflections

After each sharing their experiences and insights with others, learning exchange participants had the opportunity to reflect together on what we are collectively learning, the sum of our knowledge. We reflected that;

COMMUNITY LEADERS

The following came up in the discussions that followed the sharing and listening phase with the community leaders;

Conflict: The community leaders offered conflicting views on whether they have deliberate arrangements to talk to their children on matters concerning their sexuality. Although some of them say they create time for this important talk, others revealed that this has not been done in many families in Odupi subcounty.

Discovery: It was discovered that there is conflict in policies regarding adolescent sexuality, child marriages and teenage pregnancy. The government position varies from the religious and cultural perspective over the same matter.

Surprises for me: The issue of many parents in Odupi subcounty arranging marriages for their adolescent girls with the refugees simply because they give comparatively a greater number of cattle (about 8-10) as bride price surprised me. According to the locals, this is far better than what is paid locally (about 2-3 herds of cattle)

Surprises for other participants: Some parents colluding with some community leaders to process false birth certificates in order to get money and dowry from perpetrators of child marriage. Some community leaders especially politicians fear to denounce child marriages for fear of losing votes from perpetrators.

Not discussed at length: The challenge of the community having varying perspectives on handling child marriage matters in this community was not discussed exhaustively. This was so because of time limitation for this focus group discussion.

PARENTS

The following came up in the discussions that followed the sharing and listening phase with the parents;

Conflict: Parents presented conflicting views on who is involved in guiding the teenagers in matters of sexual and reproductive health. Some mothers accused men of not creating time to talk to their teenagers, although some male participants claim their children do not pick advice from them.

Discovery: Some of the participant parents in Odupi subcounty say they are taking the responsibilities and burden of children that their adolescent sons and daughters produced in child marriages because these couples most times fail to take care of their families.

Surprises for me: The fact that many families in the selected subcounty no longer have family meetings was very surprising to me.

Surprises for other participants: The participants expressed surprise about the focus group discussion. This according to the participants is new arrangement towards curbing the challenge of Child Marriage and Teenage pregnancy.

Not discussed at length: The issue of parents discussing sexual and reproductive health was not discussed at length. This is because some of these parents still believe that it is a taboo to discuss sex issues with their children or in public. Some female participants were particularly not comfortable to contribute views on the matter.

ADOLESCENTS (GIRLS AND BOYS)

The following came up in the discussions that followed the sharing and listening phase with the adolescents;

Conflict: The adolescents offered conflicting views on their understanding on marriage. While some said every individual above the age of seventeen years has the right to choose a marriage partner, others still believe that it is the responsibility of their parents and relatives to dictate on marriage matters.

Discovery: The participants shared light moments talking about issues concerning sexual and reproductive health. For example, when a participant told colleagues that she chose to remain at her boyfriend's home as his wife after forced sexual intercourse with him, this amused some of them.

Surprises for me: The revelation by some female participants that they started experiencing menstruation periods at as young as nine years was a surprise to me. And the fact that some of the adolescents testifying to having sexual knowledge at less than ten years was also very surprising to them.

Surprises for other participants: The other fairly mature participants of the same adolescent group were surprised by the fact that even younger adolescents had sexual experience.

Not discussed: The adolescents were not comfortable discussing about their sex lives. Some participants seemed uncomfortable discussing into details issues concerning their sexual experiences.

YIVU SUBCOUNTY

During the learning exchange in Yivu subcounty, participants shared their experiences and knowledge with each other. The trends of knowledge and experience sharing are presented according to the three categories (community leaders, parents and adolescents) involved in the focus group discussions as below;

ADOLESCENTS (GIRLS AND BOYS)

These were the first group of participants we interacted with in Yivu subcounty and they shared the following knowledge and experiences;

The belief that the brother or father of an adolescent girl will get misfortune if she has sex out of marriage: The adolescent girls in Yivu subcounty revealed that it is a common belief in this area where misfortunes such as snake bites, accidents among others occur to an adolescent girl's brother or father if she involves herself in sexual intercourse out of marriage. This reportedly prevents some of the young girls from conceiving out of marriage. And the adolescent boys are also scared by this belief on account of avoiding trouble.

The cultural norm of parents encouraging adolescent children to bring their friends home for questioning and approval: The adolescents in Yivu subcounty revealed that some of their

parents encourage them to bring friends home so that they interrogate and approve them. So that, should such parents realize that the friends of their adolescent children may expose them to dangers of child marriages, they discontinue the friendships. This norm helps to increase adolescent sexuality awareness hence reducing on child marriages.

Cultural norm that empowers boys to control their adolescent sisters: The male adolescents in Yivu revealed that it is culturally their duty to control their sisters in adolescent stage. This gives the boys an age over the girls and hence preventing them (girls) from possible child marriages but could also deny the adolescent girls the power to make relevant decisions related to their sexual and reproductive health such as when to have sex and with whom.

The community belief that adolescence means readiness to marry: While sharing with adolescents of Yivu Subcounty on their sexuality, some of them testified to community pressurizing them to marry and start families on account of been adolescents. This is a factor contributing towards increasing child marriages.

The cultural norm that considers it a taboo to discuss adolescent sexuality: Some adolescents in Yivu revealed that their parents remain silent on adolescent sexuality matters because culture considers the topic a taboo to discuss with adolescents, hence creating a knowledge gap resulting into increased cases of child marriages.

Cultural norm that bars girls from spending a night out from home without permission from parents: The norm in Yivu that bars girls from spending night(s) away from home in unknown places makes it possible for the Yivu community to control girls and reduce on Child marriages. There was a cultural superstition known as “Ranya” which would curse a family of a girl who eloped with a boy without traditional marriages. The curse would lead to suffering in the family and could only be stopped with a cultural offering. Unfortunately, adolescents of late no longer believe in these cultural norms which leads to the many cases of out of deadlock pregnancies that contribute to child marriage.

Views on adolescent sexuality: The participants expressed that adolescent sexuality is all about self-awareness on the body changes and gender of an adolescent. They mentioned that lack of adolescent sexuality education leads to misguided decisions about sexuality choices that can contribute to child marriage.

COMMUNITY LEADERS

The second group of participants we interacted with were the community leaders and they shared the following knowledge and experiences;

The norm of elders telling cultural ancient stories and proverbs to adolescents about adolescent sexuality after supper: The community leaders in Yivu subcounty revealed that some elders sit down after supper to tell past adolescent sexuality stories and proverbs to adolescents. Such stories and proverbs communicate lessons to adolescents on their sexuality, hence ending child marriages. The community leaders however said this role is not been played by some elders.

The belief that if a girl has sex out of marriage ,she brings misfortune to her relatives: The community leaders in Yivu subcounty revealed that it is a strong belief in this area that a girl will cause misfortune and bad luck to any of her relatives once she is involved in sexual intercourse with a man. The misfortunes can be in the form of accidents, snake bites among others. Such information is communicated during adolescent sexuality education and helps prevent the girls from involving themselves in early sex.

The cultural norm of approving a boy for marriage by his ability to cut the root of a weed called “moba”, building a house, owning a cassava plantation and goats: The culture in Yivu has been that a boy can be approved for marriage if he ably cuts the roots of “moba” weed, builds a house, plants cassava and owns goats. These tasks indirectly delayed child marriages. But the community leaders were quick to point out that this norm is not so much in practice these days.

The social norm of preference of a boy child to a female child: This social norm in Yivu subcounty attaches more importance to the boy child than the female one. This makes the adolescent girls feel less important hence tempted to get married off.

The culture of community responsibility and concern over children: The community members in Yivu shared that it has been a common culture in the area for the community to take responsibility and concern over children including passing adolescent sexuality education to the adolescents, hence curtailing child marriages. The community leaders were however quick to point out that, this is currently not in play as some parents especially women would quarrel with anyone who tries disciplining their adolescents.

The attitude of some parents looking at adolescent girls as source of wealth: The community leaders shared that there is a section of parents in Yivu subcounty who consider their adolescent daughters as source of dowry. The practice of sending the girls early for marriage in this community is worsened by the presence of refugees who offer fairly good number of cattle as bride price. The community leaders say this is a negative attitude which does not address adolescent sexuality issues among adolescents. This attitude promotes child marriages rather than ending them.

The belief that only senior woman teachers and senior man teachers are the ones to handle adolescent sexuality issues in schools: The senior woman teachers and senior man teachers with support from school administration have played significant role in schools to create awareness on adolescent sexuality matters. This has helped to reduce child marriages.

Relationship between adolescent sexuality and child marriage: Community leaders say, the absence of adolescent sexuality information is a fueling factor in promoting child marriage because the children are forced to discover things for themselves, resulting into serious errors in making decisions about their sex life.

Factors that have driven the rising child marriage trends in this community: Society has lost moral duty and there is no collective responsibility to correct behavior of children, hence high cases of child marriages. Government policies on child rights gives children a lot of freedom and makes it difficult for the parents to correct their children, hence resulting into increasing trends of child marriages.

Many parents in this community see girls as burdensome and prefer to attach more importance to the male child. They then encourage these girls to get married at a young age.

Other factors raised include, decadence of cultural responsibility over children, desire for dowry by parents.

The fear of the cultural belief that taking child marriage issues to police may result into misfortunes is a factor that fuels child marriages in this locality.

The cultural belief that a girl will get misfortunes if she slept with boys out of marriage: It is a belief among the cultural group in Yivu since time immemorial that when a girl has sex with a boy out of wedlock, something bad will happen like snake bites or an accident either on the girl or any of her close relatives which will help the elders to know that the girl has been involved in sexual activity. This, according to the community makes the girls take keen interest in understanding and respecting their adolescent sexuality changes, which eventually makes them able to control themselves, fearing the associated upshots leading to ending child marriages and teenage pregnancies.

How adolescent sexuality education can protect children against early marriage: According to the community leaders, adolescent sexuality education can help children get out of the risks of child marriage. Another community participant said, adolescent sexuality education helps the young people to understand one another and treat themselves with dignity not just as sex objects.

Trends of child marriage in this community: There are reportedly high cases of child marriages in this community and many of these young couples have failed to take care of their families. The trends of child marriages in this community of Yivu subcounty are increasingly becoming normal and only few educated parents are trying to fight the vice.

PARENTS

Our discussions with the parents in Yivu subcounty raised the following knowledge and experiences;

The social norm that promotes decent dressing by adolescents: According to the selected parents in Yivu subcounty, the social norm of promoting decent dressing among adolescents has helped curtail child marriages. Decent dressing promotion is impeded in adolescent sexuality education, hence leading reduction in child marriages and teenage pregnancies. But, due to modernity, a few adolescents still dress indecently, fueling child marriages and teenage pregnancies.

The norm of cursing girls not to get any kid when married at young age: Parents who participated in this focus group discussions in Yivu subcounty said, the norm of cursing adolescent girls not to conceive if married at a tender age has helped the adolescent girls to control themselves and avoid child marriage and teenage practice.

Cultural norm of using aunts to talk to adolescent girls over their sexuality: Some parents in Yivu revealed that they use aunts to discuss adolescent sexuality matters with their adolescent daughters. This is reportedly helpful in creating awareness on adolescent sexuality leading to ending child marriages among some of the adolescents in this area.

The cultural belief that siblings should marry according to order of birth: The parents shared that the culture in Yivu has a belief that siblings should marry according to their order of birth with the elder child expected to marry before her/his siblings. This gives time to the younger siblings to know about adolescent sexuality matters before they get married, hence helping to end child marriages.

The norm of pressurizing boys to marry early on account of being only male child of their parents in order to expand the family: Some parents shared that there are cases of relatives pressurizing young boys to marry as many wives as possible and produce many children on account of been the only male child in a family lineage. This norm puts pressure on young adolescents to marry early, hence fueling child marriages.

Engaging adolescent children on adolescent sexuality information provision: Majority of male parents say they have limited time to engage adolescents in sexuality information provision. Others say they feel uncomfortable discussing adolescent sexuality issues with their children. Only some mothers dare touch the topic on adolescent sexuality but they do not discuss the issues into depth.

Challenges parents face in discussing sexual and reproductive health with their adolescents: Most parents say when their children start active sexual behavior, they cannot pick advice from them. There are children who tell parents openly that they cannot afford to lose their partners simply because of the discouragement from the parents.

Some parents say they feel shy and find it difficult to discuss sexual and reproductive health issues with their children.

These specific stories stood out to us:

Story 1: I miss took my first menstrual periods for a serious sickness

I was at school in primary four, when my first periods started. Because of the gap of information on adolescent sexuality, I was not aware of what was happening to me. When I saw blood in my pants, I thought it was a thorn that pricked me. On checking, I never found any thorn. I then rushed home and told my mother to take me for treatment, thinking it was a sickness causing the blood. On inquiring, my mother then explained to me that it was the beginning of my periods. She also explained to me how I could protect myself during my periods. She bought for me pads. This later created comfort in and I then started managing my periods well.

Story 2: My relatives put me on pressure to marry early on account of been the only son of my parents

Due to the fact that I am the only son of my parents, my relatives pressurize me to marry a wife and start producing children. The overall culture here attaches great importance to reproduction of many children, especially the male ones. The relatives tell me to marry early so that I could produce many children whom I could refer to as my brothers and sisters. I am left with no option other than considering bowing to this pressure.

Story 3: I was forced to sacrifice my virginity in exchange for material support

When I reached menstruation stage, I realized that my needs increased. But it was not possible for me to meet these very urgent needs including soap, jelly, pants and pads. I could ask my mother but she could not help me sometimes. But I later asked my boy who started supporting me materially. He later started demanding for sex. I was forced to pay back through sex.

Reflections

AIIVU SUBCOUNTY

After each sharing their experiences and insights with others, learning exchange participants in Aiiyu sub county had the opportunity to reflect together on what we are collectively learning, the sum of our knowledge. We reflected that;

ADOLESCENTS (GIRLS AND BOYS)

The following came up in the discussions that followed the sharing and listening phase with the adolescents;

Conflict: The adolescents offered conflicting views on their understanding on marriage. While some said every individual above the age of seventeen years has the right to choose a marriage partner, others still believe that it is the responsibility of their parents and relatives to dictate on marriage matters.

Discovery: The participants shared light moments talking about issues concerning sexual and reproductive health. For example, when a participant told colleagues that she chose to remain at her boyfriend's home as his wife after forced sexual intercourse with him, this amused some of them.

Surprises for me: The revelation by some female participants that they started experiencing menstruation periods at as young as nine years was a surprise to me. And the fact that some of the adolescents testifying to having sexual knowledge at less than ten years was also very surprising to them.

Surprises for other participants: The other fairly mature participants of the same adolescent group were surprised by the fact that even younger adolescents had sexual experience.

Not discussed: The adolescents were not comfortable discussing about their sex lives. Some participants seemed uncomfortable discussing into details issues concerning their sexual experiences.

PARENTS

The following came up in the discussions that followed the sharing and listening phase with the parents;

Conflict: Parents presented conflicting views on who is involved in guiding the teenagers in matters of sexual and reproductive health. Some mothers accused men of not creating time to talk to their teenagers, although some male participants claim their children do not pick advice from them.

Discovery: Some parents claim that adolescent children threaten to beat them up, trying to advise them on how they should lead their lives.

Surprises for me: The fact that many families in the selected subcounty no longer have family meetings was very surprising to me.

Surprises for other participants: The participants expressed surprise about the focus group discussion. This according to the participants is new arrangement towards curbing the challenge of Child Marriage and Teenage pregnancy.

Not discussed at length: The issue of parents discussing sexual and reproductive health was not discussed at length. This is because some of these parents still believe that it is a taboo to discuss sex issues with their children or in public. Some female participants were particularly not comfortable to contribute views on the matter.

COMMUNITY LEADERS

The following came up in the discussions that followed the sharing and listening phase with the community leaders;

Conflict: The cultural leaders were accused of abetting child marriage because it was discovered that many cases of child marriages in the area were not reported to police but the cultural leaders have handled such issues out of court. They get dowry and allow the young girls to suffer in those marriages. However, some of the cultural leaders denied these allegations. They instead blame government for been strict on child rights and not revising the mature age bracket of eighteen years, something they say is fueling child marriage.

Discovery: It was discovered that there is conflict in policies regarding adolescent sexuality, child marriages and teenage pregnancy. The government position varies from the religious and cultural perspective over the same matter.

Surprises for me: The issue of many parents in the area seeing girls as burdensome and wishing that they marry at tender age surprised me. This is reportedly influenced by the desire for dowry by some of these parents.

Surprises for other participants: Some parents colluding with some community leaders to process false birth certificates in order to get money and dowry from perpetrators of child marriage. Some community leaders especially politicians fear to denounce child marriages for fear of losing votes from perpetrators.

Not discussed at length: The challenge of the community having varying perspectives on handling child marriage matters in this community was not discussed exhaustively. This was due to time factor as there were many other questions to discuss.

ODUPI SUBCOUNTY

After each sharing their experiences and insights with others, learning exchange participants in Odupi sub county had the opportunity to reflect together on what we are collectively learning, the sum of our knowledge. We reflected that;

COMMUNITY LEADERS

The following came up in the discussions that followed the sharing and listening phase with the community leaders;

Conflict: The community leaders offered conflicting views on whether they have deliberate arrangements to talk to their children on matters concerning their sexuality. Although some of them say they create time for this important talk, others revealed that this has not been done in many families in Odupi subcounty.

Discovery: It was discovered that there is conflict in policies regarding adolescent sexuality, child marriages and teenage pregnancy. The government position varies from the religious and cultural perspective over the same matter.

Surprises for me: The issue of many parents in Odupi subcounty arranging marriages for their adolescent girls with the refugees simply because they give comparatively a greater number of cattle (about 8-10) as bride price surprised me. According to the locals, this is far better than what is paid locally (about 2-3 herds of cattle)

Surprises for other participants: Some parents colluding with some community leaders to process false birth certificates in order to get money and dowry from perpetrators of child marriage. Some community leaders especially politicians fear to denounce child marriages for fear of losing votes from perpetrators.

Not discussed at length: The challenge of the community having varying perspectives on handling child marriage matters in this community was not discussed exhaustively. This was so because of time limitation for this focus group discussion.

PARENTS

The following came up in the discussions that followed the sharing and listening phase with the parents;

Conflict: Parents presented conflicting views on who is involved in guiding the teenagers in matters of sexual and reproductive health. Some mothers accused men of not creating time to talk to their teenagers, although some male participants claim their children do not pick advice from them.

Discovery: Some of the participant parents in Odupi subcounty say they are taking the responsibilities and burden of children that their adolescent sons and daughters produced in child marriages because these couples most times fail to take care of their families.

Surprises for me: The fact that many families in the selected subcounty no longer have family meetings was very surprising to me.

Surprises for other participants: The participants expressed surprise about the focus group discussion. This according to the participants is new arrangement towards curbing the challenge of Child Marriage and Teenage pregnancy.

Not discussed at length: The issue of parents discussing sexual and reproductive health was not discussed at length. This is because some of these parents still believe that it is a taboo to discuss sex issues with their children or in public. Some female participants were particularly not comfortable to contribute views on the matter.

ADOLESCENTS (GIRLS AND BOYS)

The following came up in the discussions that followed the sharing and listening phase with the adolescents;

Conflict: The adolescents offered conflicting views on their understanding on marriage. While some said every individual above the age of seventeen years has the right to choose a marriage partner, others still believe that it is the responsibility of their parents and relatives to dictate on marriage matters.

Discovery: The participants shared light moments talking about issues concerning sexual and reproductive health. For example, when a participant told colleagues that she chose to remain at her boyfriend's home as his wife after forced sexual intercourse with him, this amused some of them.

Surprises for me: The revelation by some female participants that they started experiencing menstruation periods at as young as nine years was a surprise to me. And the fact that some of the adolescents testifying to having sexual knowledge at less than ten years was also very surprising to them.

Surprises for other participants: The other fairly mature participants of the same adolescent group were surprised by the fact that even younger adolescents had sexual experience.

Not discussed: The adolescents were not comfortable discussing about their sex lives. Some participants seemed uncomfortable discussing into details issues concerning their sexual experiences.

YIVU SUBCOUNTY

After each sharing their experiences and insights with others, learning exchange participants in Yivu subcounty had the opportunity to reflect together on what we are collectively learning, the sum of our knowledge. We reflected that;

COMMUNITY LEADERS

The following came up in the discussions that followed the sharing and listening phase with the community leaders;

Conflict: The community leaders offered conflicting views on whether they have deliberate arrangements to talk to their children on matters concerning their sexuality. Although some of them say they create time for this important talk, others revealed that this has not been done in many families in Yivu subcounty.

Discovery: It was discovered that there is conflict in policies regarding adolescent sexuality, child marriages and teenage pregnancy. The government position varies from the religious and cultural perspective over the same matter.

Surprises for me: There is reducing community ownership and responsibilities over children in Yivu subcounty. As a result, the behavior of many adolescents in this area is not good. This is a surprise to me.

Surprises for other participants: The demand for dowry by some parents in Yivu subcounty where they send their young girls to marry early just to fulfill their interest and desire for dowry. This was a surprise to some participants.

Not discussed at length: The challenge of the community having varying perspectives on handling child marriage matters in this community was not discussed exhaustively. This was so because of time limitation for this focus group discussion.

PARENTS

The following came up in the discussions that followed the sharing and listening phase with the parents;

Conflict: Parents presented conflicting views on who is involved in guiding the teenagers in matters of sexual and reproductive health. Some mothers accused men of not creating time to talk to their teenagers, although some male participants claim their children do not pick advice from them.

Discovery: Some of the participant parents in Yivu Sub County say they are taking the responsibilities and burden of children that their adolescent sons and daughters produced in child marriages because these couples most times fail to take care of their families.

Surprises for me: The fact that many families in the selected sub county no longer have family meetings was very surprising to me.

Surprises for other participants: The participants expressed surprise about the focus group discussion. This according to the participants is new arrangement towards curbing the challenge of Child Marriage and Teenage pregnancy.

Not discussed at length: The issue of parents discussing sexual and reproductive health was not discussed at length. This is because some of these parents still believe that it is a taboo to discuss sex issues with their children or in public. Some female participants were particularly not comfortable to contribute views on the matter.

ADOLESCENTS (GIRLS AND BOYS)

The following came up in the discussions that followed the sharing and listening phase with the adolescents;

Conflict: The adolescents offered conflicting views on their understanding on marriage. While some said every individual above the age of seventeen years has the right to choose a marriage partner, others still believe that it is the responsibility of their parents and relatives to dictate on marriage matters.

Discovery: The participants shared light moments talking about issues concerning sexual and reproductive health. Participants created light moments out of the discussions.

Surprises for me: The revelation by some female participants that they started experiencing menstruation periods at as young as nine years was a surprise to me. And the fact that some of the adolescents testifying to having sexual knowledge at less than ten years was also very surprising to them.

Surprises for other participants: The other fairly mature participants of the same adolescent group were surprised by the fact that even younger adolescents had sexual experience.

Not discussed: The adolescents were not comfortable discussing about their sex lives. Some participants seemed uncomfortable discussing into details issues concerning their sexual experiences.

Engaging in Sense making

AIIVU SUBCOUNTY

After reflecting on what was shared about different experiences and insights that community members in Aiiyu subcounty know about addressing the links between adolescent sexuality and Child Marriage, we began to co-create new knowledge.

Together, we learned:

- Most parents in this community fail to take issues of child marriage to police for fear that the matter will attract “Aru’ba” (a traditional fine paid by the relatives of a married girl for taking the matter to police). Normally, one goat and one chicken are paid for cleansing. It is traditionally believed here that the girl will get misfortunes at her marriage place if this Aru’ba is not paid. Consequently, some parents opt to handle the child marriage issues traditionally.
- There was existence of cultural beliefs such as “Nyara” which could discourage adolescent girls in engaging in sex out of marriage which no longer exist or people especially adolescents don’t believe in due to civilization.
- There exist gender norms in relationship to adolescent sexuality and child marriage with the fathers responsible for their sons and mothers responsible for their daughters informing and guiding them around aspects of adolescent sexuality and child marriage. Unfortunately, these roles have not been taken up due to lack of confidence, relevant information and also tight schedules from parents to engage their adolescent children.
- Many adolescents in the visited community lack key information related to their sexuality. Some of these adolescents accuse parents and community of remaining silent on adolescent sexuality information. It is considered a taboo to openly talk about sex in this community. So many parents tend to avoid discussions about adolescent sexuality.
- Community leaders, especially politicians fear to denounce child marriages and teenage pregnancy because the perpetrators threaten to vote them out of political offices. This makes the politicians to drag their feet and deliberately decline to take action against the vice. So, the politicians are forced to abet child marriages for fear of losing votes.
- Variations in policies (those of government, culture and religion) on child marriage and teenage pregnancy makes it difficult to follow a unified approach in addressing the vice of child marriage in this community. There are differing perspectives on ways to handle child marriage matters.
- Growing poverty levels drives some parents to marry off their young daughters so that they may get bride price and dowry. On this basis, the parents and the community look at the girls as source of wealth and starts to put them on pressure to get married. And some of the girls out of harsh economic conditions in their father’s home opt to marry, considering it a fair option.

- There still exist social and religious norms which take menstruation for girls and beards for boys as a sign of maturity and readiness for marriage.
- The most unexpected learning was that Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy is increasingly becoming something normal in this community and the cultural norms that used to be of help in controlling the practice in this community are no longer effective.
- The revelation that some politicians fear to denounce child marriage in order to save their votes is another unexpected learning.

There are also reports of some community leaders in this area colluding to abet child marriages. Cases revealed include requests by parents for change of birth certificate information, police receiving bribes not take action against perpetrators of child marriages.

Here are some notable quotations for this conversation:

...“The community here is becoming comfortable with falsehood and they vow not to vote a leader who tells them the truth about child marriage.” a politician participant said.

“The biting poverty forces some parents to request for false Birth Certificates for their adolescent daughters allegedly to trap and get money from child marriage perpetrators.” a Reverend Priest who participated in the discussion said.

“Whenever I experience my menstruation period, my body becomes sexually active and I feel like having sex. This is rather a difficult feeling to resist.” a female adolescent participant said.

ODUPI SUBCOUNTY

After reflecting on what was shared about different experiences and insights that community members in Odupi subcounty know about addressing the links between adolescent sexuality and Child Marriage, we began to co-create new knowledge.

Together, we learned:

- There is need to use multi linguistic and cultural approaches to communicate adolescent sexuality information to the adolescents in Odupi subcounty because of the multi-cultural set up this community arising from the presence of refugees in the area. There is said to increase in intermarriages between the Ugandan locals and the refugees.

- Most parents in this community fail to take issues of child marriage to police for fear that the matter will attract “Mesa dri” (a traditional fine paid by the relatives of a married girl for taking the matter to police). This is allegedly for cleansing purposes. It is traditionally believed here that the girl will get misfortunes at her marriage place if this “Mesa dri” is not paid. Consequently, some parents opt to handle the child marriage issues traditionally.
- There used to be cultural beliefs such as “Ranya” in Odupi subcounty, which could discourage adolescent girls in engaging in sex out of marriage which no longer exist or people especially adolescents don’t believe in due to civilization. Religious leaders have also demystified such beliefs.
- There exist gender norms in relationship to adolescent sexuality and child marriage with the fathers responsible for their sons and mothers responsible for their daughters informing and guiding them around aspects of adolescent sexuality and child marriage. Unfortunately, these roles have not been taken up due to lack of confidence, relevant information and also tight schedules from parents to engage their adolescent children.
- Many adolescents in the visited community lack key information related to their sexuality. Some of these adolescents accuse parents and community of remaining silent on adolescent sexuality information. It is considered a taboo to openly talk about sex in this community. So many parents tend to avoid discussions about adolescent sexuality.
- Variations in policies (those of government, culture and religion) on child marriage and teenage pregnancy makes it difficult to follow a unified approach in addressing the vice of child marriage in this community. There are differing perspectives on ways to handle child marriage matters.
- Growing poverty levels drives some parents to marry off their young daughters so that they may get bride price and dowry. On this basis, the parents and the community look at the girls as source of wealth and starts to put them on pressure to get married. And some of the girls out of harsh economic conditions in their father’s home opt to marry, considering it a fair option.
- The most unexpected learning was that Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy is increasingly becoming something normal in this community and the cultural norms that used to be of help in controlling the practice in this community are no longer effective.

Here are some notable quotations for this conversation:

“The talk of elders with adolescent girls over past child marriages gone bad creates fear in them not to marry early. This helps the adolescent girls to take charge of their sexuality” a parent said.

“Adolescent sexuality education must start early when children approach puberty so that the adolescents don’t fall prey and victims of child marriage.” a community participant said.

“Heads of families should be united and create conducive and peaceful environment at their home so that children can grow up emulating the same” a participant adolescent said.

YIVU SUBCOUNTY

After reflecting on what was shared about different experiences and insights that community members Yivu subcounty know about addressing the links between adolescent sexuality and Child Marriage, we began to co-create new knowledge.

Together, we learned:

- Lack of harmony and unity among parents in some homes in Yivu subcounty is affecting communication of adolescent sexuality information. This leads to misinformation among peers, hence increased cases of child marriage in the area.
- Most parents in this community fail to take issues of child marriage to police for fear that the matter will attract “Mesa dri” (a traditional fine paid by the relatives of a married girl for taking the matter to police). This is allegedly for cleansing purposes. It is traditionally believed here that the girl will get misfortunes at her marriage place if this “Mesa dri” is not paid. Consequently, some parents opt to handle the child marriage issues traditionally.
- There is said to be cultural beliefs such as “Ranya” in Yivu subcounty, which could discourage adolescent girls in engaging in sex out of marriage which no longer exist or people especially adolescents don’t believe in due to civilization. Religious leaders have also demystified such beliefs.

- There exist gender norms in relationship to adolescent sexuality and child marriage with the fathers responsible for their sons and mothers responsible for their daughters informing and guiding them around aspects of adolescent sexuality and child marriage. Unfortunately, these roles have not been taken up due to lack of confidence, relevant information and also tight schedules from parents to engage their adolescent children.
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- The most unexpected learning was that Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy is increasingly becoming something normal in this community and the cultural norms that used to be of help in controlling the practice in this community are no longer effective.

Here are some notable quotations for this conversation:

"Due to adolescent sexuality education, some girls have delayed marriage and therefore made it big in education. Others have also avoided premarital sex and made right decisions on who to marry." a community leader said.

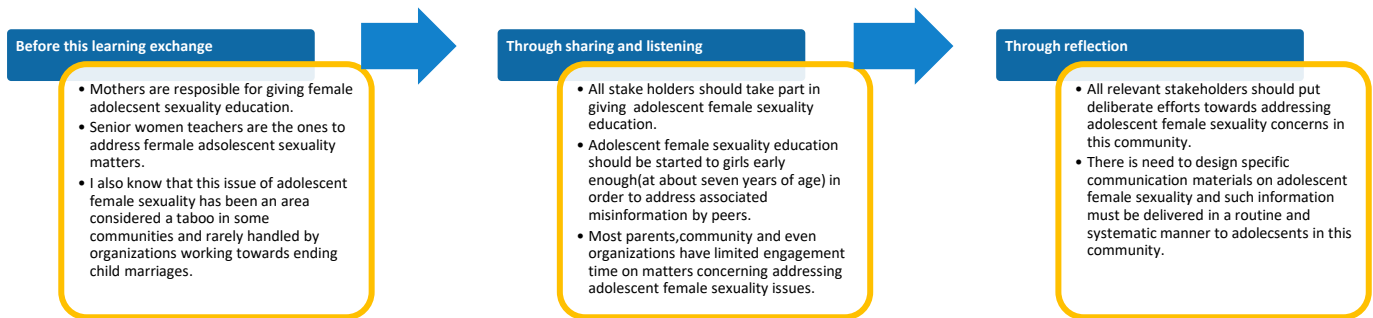
"There is an urgent need to revive community responsibility over children .This offers a good opportunity for members of the community to check the behavior of adolescent children." a parent suggested.

"When your friend tells you that he has started enjoying sexual intercourse, you will also start thinking about doing the same." a participant adolescent said.

In an attempt to summarize our knowledge-sharing and knowledge co-creation process, we have created the following diagram:

Figure 3. Our learning trajectory

The same learning trajectory was noticed in the three sub counties and hence presented as below:



FORMULATING IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING CHILD MARRIAGE PROGRAMS

The learning exchange closed with members naming the implications of what we learned about local knowledge and actions related to addressing the links between sexuality and child marriage within their norms and practices, and specifically recommendations for what the knowledge and actions could mean for improving child marriage programs.

Engaging in Sensemaking

In order to design future intervention that more adequately and fully address the links between sexuality and child marriage in terms of what communities in Aiiyu, Odupi and Yivu do and know, we put forth the following recommendations based on these learning exchanges:

AIIYU SUBCOUNTY

Parents need to be encouraged to spend more time with their children: This helps them to be able to discuss adolescent sexuality matters with these adolescents so that they are aware about the associated risks and are able to avoid child marriages.

Need to empower and support schools, senior women teachers and senior men teachers with information and communication materials on adolescent sexuality: This will help the teachers to organize regular interface meetings with the adolescents on their sexuality, hence ending child marriages.

Harmonization of policies on child marriages: There are currently varying policies and perspectives in play on child marriage. The fact that some of the policies on child marriages have varying perspectives requires a harmonized position. There is need to revisit the mature age bracket of Eighteen years to about Twenty years so that properly matured persons can only be allowed to marry and start a family. The position of culture and religion about child marriage

should also be revised by the government. For example, in Islam, a girl is considered mature and ready for marriage if she begins experiencing menstruation.

Need to set up Youth Information Centers: No youth information centers exist in this subcounty. However, the absence of these centers is creating a big information gap on sexual and reproductive health to children, leading to misinformation among adolescents on the subject. As a center for information access on Adolescent Sexuality and Reproductive Health, this will contribute a great deal of knowledge and enlighten the adolescents on matters concerning them. The government and NGOs should think about setting such centers with staff to provide continuous and compulsory education to the young people.

Revival of useful cultural norms: Most useful cultural norms that were at play in past to regulate child marriages are no longer in force. For example, according to participants, the community in this locality used to be responsible for disciplining and education of children. Sadly, this is not the case now. Each parent now advises own biological child/children. There is need to create awareness in the community so that they may appreciate the importance of useful cultural norms in raising children.

ODUPI SUBCOUNTY

In order to design future intervention that more adequately and fully address the links between sexuality and child marriage in terms of what communities do and know, we put forth the following recommendations based on this learning exchange:

Each sub county should set up a youth center: Such youth center can be useful to communicate adolescent sexuality information to the adolescents so that they may understand well their sexuality matters and avoid falling into the prey of child marriages.

Community facilitators should be employed to offer advice on adolescent sexuality education: There is need by government to employ community facilitators whose mandate is to offer awareness creation on adolescent sexuality so as to save the adolescents from falling into child marriages.

Parents need to be encouraged to spend more time with their children: This helps them to be able to discuss adolescent sexuality matters with these adolescents so that they are aware about the associated risks and are able to avoid child marriages.

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Cultural activities such as traditional dances should be re-introduced to keep adolescents busy and educated on their sexuality. Adolescent Sexuality messages should be part of the dance activities.

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Ends.

Knowledge Harvested by Mr. Atiku Robert and Ms. Bako Judith.

Reports Compiled by Atiku Robert in Maracha District.

Thank You.