



BRIEF

# A feminist vision on economic empowerment and livelihoods for meeting the needs of married girls

PARTNERS

The Women's Refugee Commission  
Rozaria Memorial Trust  
King's College London



NOVEMBER 2022

Participatory action research using consensus-building methods was conducted from 2021-22 with feminist and women-led civil society organisations, experts, and practitioners to learn how best to end child marriage and support already married girls in forcibly displaced and crisis-affected communities in East Africa. This brief summarises findings on economic empowerment and livelihoods that study participants identified as a priority for **meeting the needs of married girls**. Direct quotes from participants are included in italics throughout the brief. For additional details about the study, this brief can be read in conjunction with a separate brief outlining the research process.

## CONSENSUS DATA FROM GRASSROOTS FEMINIST ACTORS IN EAST AFRICA



Agree that poverty acts as a barrier to meeting the needs of married girls.



Agree that economic empowerment and livelihoods opportunities are essential components of programming for married girls.



Agree that collaboration across sectors and the humanitarian-development-peace nexus is essential for reducing poverty.



Agree that collaboration across sectors and the humanitarian-development-peace nexus is essential for facilitating economic empowerment and livelihoods opportunities for married girls.



Agree that essential programming includes life skills and empowering married girls so they are able to voice their needs and wishes, and are involved in the decisions that affect their lives.

## WHY IS ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT ESSENTIAL FOR WORKING WITH AND MEETING THE NEEDS OF MARRIED GIRLS?

- Economic empowerment enables married girls to meet their needs and support their children and partners.
- Empowerment programmes embedded within life skills training and rights-based education can turn married girls' vulnerabilities into leadership at grassroots level.
- Economically empowering married girls supports them to become financially independent and earn a living independently of their partners, strengthening their autonomy and decision-making capacity.



## RECOMMENDED PRACTICE

Economic empowerment and income-generating activities reduce the impact of poverty on women and girls, enabling married girls to provide for themselves and their families, and to develop skills, social networks and an identity outside of the family home.

Critical enablers of economic empowerment for married girls are:

- access to financial assets and credit;
- access to land/property rights, markets for their local products;
- group-based income-generating activities (e.g., cooperatives to support enhanced access to resources and safe spaces);
- and for married girls affected by conflict, there should be *'engagement with devolved government officials to allocate affirmative action funds to support them as beneficiaries'*.

## CRITICAL ISSUES

Economic empowerment and livelihoods activities that are available for married girls are usually those which are available for unmarried girls, which can sometimes overlook the specific needs of married girls.

There was 100% agreement that child marriage programming should be organised in a way that takes into account the situation and needs of married girls.

This includes taking into account:

- childcare needs;
- the roles and responsibilities they have at home;
- supervision and transport needs so they can travel from their homes;
- consent from their husbands and in-laws.

Other elements that ensure married girls effectively generate income and have control over it are:

- financial literacy;
- livelihoods opportunities that are appropriate and safe for them;
- home-based income-generating activities;
- decision-making power in selecting a livelihoods activity;
- knowledge of rights;
- support from community leaders;
- access to bank and savings accounts.

While our participants advocate for group- and home-based income-generating activities, it was highlighted that there are potential issues with home-based activities as it presents *'increases social isolation'* and potentially *'inadvertently perpetuat[es] patriarchy, [through] women not [being] allowed to work outside the home'*.

## LEARNINGS FOR ACTION

- Critical enablers of economic empowerment need to be underpinned by a gender-transformative approach that takes into account the needs of married girls and amplifies their voice and their experience.
- The coordination of services for married girls is critical to ensuring that economic empowerment and livelihoods opportunities are complemented by other services that are required to meet their needs (e.g., education, health, legal aid and justice).

