



BRIEF

A feminist vision on engaging communities in programme design and implementation for preventing child marriage

PARTNERS

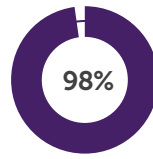
The Women's Refugee Commission
Rozaria Memorial Trust
King's College London



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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 engaging communities in programme design and implementation that study participants identified as a priority for **preventing child marriage**. 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 the involvement of whole communities and stakeholders in the **design** of programmes is essential for preventing child marriage and transforming gender norms.



Agree that the involvement of whole communities and stakeholders in the **implementation** of programmes is essential for preventing child marriage and transforming gender norms.



Agree that collaboration and joint working across sectors and the humanitarian-development-peace nexus are essential for meaningful community engagement in the design and implementation of programming.



Agree that the involvement of whole communities and stakeholders as **target groups** of programmes is essential for preventing child marriage and transforming gender norms.

WHY IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN PROGRAMME DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION ESSENTIAL FOR CHILD MARRIAGE PREVENTION AND TRANSFORMING GENDER NORMS?

- Community involvement is often the principal starting place for effectively connecting and engaging with girls and the wider community.
- Community engagement increases durable solutions.
- Involvement of key community members, including community leaders (e.g., religious and traditional leaders), parents and girls, creates a sense of community ownership among various stakeholders that can lead to collective agreement and understanding of child marriage programming, and promote *'positive behaviour change'*.



RECOMMENDED PRACTICE

Important community-based actors include:

- young men and young women;
- leaders of faith-based groups;
- government officials (including women members of parliament, councils for children and women, and law makers);
- teachers;
- doctors;
- customary justice actors;
- traditional leaders.

These actors should be engaged at all the programmatic stages. Getting key actors involved following programme design may be too late.

Community-based actors should be involved in:

- influencing peers;
- suggesting adjustments to programming;
- engaging with parents;
- providing evidence of the consequences of child marriage;
- providing safe spaces for girls;
- collaborating with government officials;
- designing awareness-raising information and identifying/establishing role models for girls.

This 'grounding' of programming within communities

can create a sense of community ownership and initiative towards creating shared social change goals that capitalises on consensus and understanding of approaches.

CRITICAL ISSUES

Child marriage programmes should elevate children and young people's voices through '*involving [them] in the design and implementation*' phases and centring their experiences in the programme to '*ensure the solutions are youth-friendly and youth-appropriate*'. Moreover, programming needs to make significant efforts to include girls and women in the community, whilst intentionally harnessing the support of men and boys as key allies in the fight to end child marriage.

Practitioners and organisations cannot work within communities without gatekeeper approval from leaders. Yet, these leaders may not agree with preventing child marriage. Participants highlighted the difficulty of '*convincing*' community leaders of the impact that child marriage has on girls, as many are '*retrogressive to change*'. It was particularly felt that '*community leaders in rural settings are against initiatives*'.

Drawing on socio-ecological models, social and behaviour change communication models, and targeted dialogues involving men, can be effective strategies for engaging with reluctant community members. It is also important to have community-based feedback mechanisms and the information from these mechanisms should be included in humanitarian response plans

LEARNINGS FOR ACTION

- Programmes should work to centre the experiences of girls within their approaches and engage in collective and collaborative efforts to transform harmful patriarchal norms at individual, household, community and societal levels. There needs to be particular emphasis on strengthening of communities to support collective gender norms change.
- Community engagement must be conducive for including girls, young women and married girls as well as a wide range of other adults (particularly religious leaders and government officials) and attention paid to power relationships between different actors.
- Coordinating community engagement with other organisations and sectors will enable more holistic, efficient, responsive and coordinated programmes that address child marriage and support more meaningful engagement by a range of community members.