



BRIEF

A feminist vision on awareness raising for preventing child marriage

PARTNERS

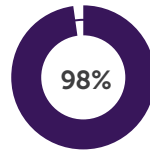
The Women's Refugee Commission
Rozaria Memorial Trust
King's College London



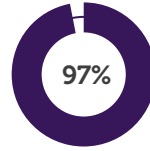
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Participatory action research using consensus-building methods was conducted from 2021-22 with feminist and women-led civil society organisations, experts, and practitioners to learn how best to end child marriage and support already married girls in forcibly displaced and crisis-affected communities in East Africa. This brief summarises findings on awareness raising, which study participants identified as a priority for **preventing child marriage**. Direct quotes from participants are included in italics throughout. 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 advocacy and awareness raising/creation led by married girls are essential components of child marriage prevention programmes.



Currently collaborate across sectors to support community awareness and rights knowledge.



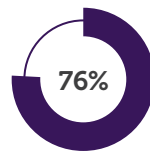
Agree that awareness raising at multiple levels (i.e., individuals, communities, society) is an essential component of child marriage prevention programmes.



Agree that working together on awareness campaigns contributes to effective cross-sector collaboration and collaboration across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.



Agree that communities should be involved in designing information and awareness to prevent child marriage.



Agree that lack of community awareness acts as a barrier to addressing child marriage and transforming gender norms.

WHY IS AWARENESS RAISING ESSENTIAL FOR CHILD MARRIAGE PREVENTION AND TRANSFORMING GENDER NORMS?

- Child marriage is often driven by gendered customs and traditions, and therefore, awareness raising, advocacy and media engagement support the process of social norms change.
- Awareness raising may create and instill a sense of responsibility to prevent child marriage at societal and community levels.
- Awareness raising that involves communities and emphasises the harms and impacts of child marriage can encourage community-based and community-led responses that provide girls with *'a support system that they desperately need'* at an individualised and local level.



RECOMMENDED PRACTICE

Awareness raising on child marriage occurs at different levels, with various target groups, and employs numerous approaches. Our participants believe that it needs to take place with individuals, households, communities, and at national and regional levels.

Awareness raising can encompass legal and justice information, negative consequences associated with child marriage, children's rights, gender equality, discussions of consent, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) information, and programmatic efforts to address child marriage.

The definition of awareness raising is not entirely clear, and sometimes it is referred to as 'advocacy' or 'awareness creation'.

A range of awareness-raising methods was mentioned by our participants, including media and social media engagement, community-based seminars, radio and television programming, visuals, documentaries, visiting rural communities, sports tournaments, school debates and engaging with faith-based actors and high-level officials.

Most of our participants (84%) agree that including child marriage as a session within girls' empowerment or life skills programming is the most effective form of awareness raising for preventing child marriage.

CRITICAL ISSUES

Due to the wide range of awareness-raising approaches, questions of what approach to use and which approach may yield the most impact are critical. It is also difficult to know which approach might be the most effective because awareness raising is difficult to evaluate, particularly at the community and national level. Additionally, some awareness-raising approaches may not be culturally appropriate or long-lasting in specific contexts. For example, one of our participants from Kenya said: *'I think for a long time, awareness raising has been seen as a western response. We see NGOs with many international managers coming into communities— it's important for communities to see these campaigns as their own, we need to eliminate those colonial ways of working. Therefore, working with local activists to design and implement awareness raising campaigns is so important.'*

Our participants noted that there are challenges when communities *'deliberately choose not to listen'*. Some of our participants highlighted that rural communities may be too isolated for awareness-raising efforts and vital information regarding child marriage prevention initiatives to reach them.

Collaboration across sectors and the humanitarian-development-peace nexus is complex but essential in prevention of child marriage. Participants note the barriers to collaboration including lack of momentum, lack of access or relationship with other actors and sectors, and limited opportunities for girls and women at all levels.

LEARNINGS FOR ACTION

- Collaborative and joint awareness-raising programmes across sectors and across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus provide an opportunity to demonstrate unity and strength of convictions about child marriage.
- Communities should be involved in the design of information and awareness-raising approaches to ensure that efforts are harmonious and contextually grounded.
- Investment must be made in promoting the voice and agency of girls as part of awareness raising to *'build the blocks'* to support girls as self-representing feminist actors throughout their lives.
- Actors working across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus at the regional level should strive to understand the nature of socio-cultural norms, traditions and religion within all settings and how they may present in various contexts and within different communities. This can provide critical cross-contextual learnings regarding which awareness-raising approaches may be most appropriate and effective.