



BRIEF

# A feminist vision on safe spaces and peer-to-peer education for preventing child marriage and addressing the needs of married girls

PARTNERS

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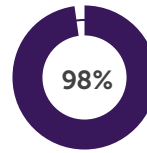
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Participatory action research using consensus-building methods was conducted from 2021-22 with feminist and women-led civil society organisations, experts and practitioners to learn how best to end child marriage and support already married girls in forcibly displaced and crisis-affected communities in East Africa. This brief summarises findings on safe spaces and peer-to-peer education that study participants identified as priorities for **preventing child marriage and 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



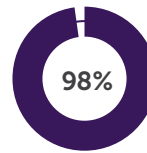
Agree that safe spaces for unmarried and married girls are an essential component for child marriage prevention and mitigation programming.



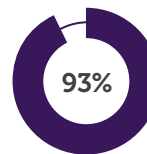
Agree that communities should be involved in offering girl safe spaces within their communities.



Agree that mentors and peer educators are an essential component for child marriage prevention programming.



Agree that collaboration and joint working across sectors and the humanitarian-development-peace nexus is essential for creating safe spaces for unmarried and married girls.



Agree that communities should be involved in establishing community role models.

### WHY ARE SAFE SPACES AND PEER-TO-PEER EDUCATION ESSENTIAL FOR CHILD MARRIAGE PREVENTION, TRANSFORMING GENDER NORMS & MEETING THE NEEDS OF MARRIED GIRLS?

- Safe spaces provide girls with a secure environment to share experiences, learn from each other, strategize and mobilise and access support. They often act as an 'entry point' to reach girls with messaging concerning sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and gender-based violence prevention.
- Community role models serve an important role for girls and parents '*to look up to as an example of success*'; these role models or peer mentors often engage with girls within designated safe spaces.



## RECOMMENDED PRACTICE

The use of safe spaces and peer-to-peer educators, role models or mentors were mentioned by our participants as key programmatic components when preventing child marriage and working to meet the needs of married girls.

Safe spaces are typically known or familiar community-based locations for girls and their families (e.g., schools, recreational/community centres, health centres, youth associations). They are interchangeably referred to as 'safe spaces' or 'girl clubs' and can also include 'safe houses'. Some spaces are set aside just for girls; other spaces will be used for different groups at different times.

Safe spaces go beyond serving as a physical space within communities. These spaces increase girls' access to information, trusted adults, peers and services. Generally, safe spaces are utilised for empowerment-based programmes, life skills, or informal education.

Programming or sessions held in safe spaces are often delivered by peer-to-peer educators. These are usually female educators close in age to the girls participating in the programming and (ideally) well-known to girls and their families. Training and supervision of peer educators is crucial to ensuring educators are prepared and well-suited to programmatic goals. Our participants highlighted that safe spaces are

places where girls can feel protected and know that whatever they choose to share is treated respectfully and confidentially. They are spaces where girls are able to speak freely without the perpetrator or family members who are potentially encouraging marriage.

## CRITICAL ISSUES

The inclusion of communities in identifying and offering safe spaces for girls is critical to ensuring success and increasing the mobility of girls. Involvement of community members in this process should be prioritised so any potential barriers to girls' participation and access to the safe space can be addressed.

Additionally, it is important that peer educators or mentors are accepted and known to the wider community so they can effectively discuss child marriage and related issues with community members. Sourcing appropriate and capable peer mentors can be a challenge in specific contexts (e.g., humanitarian settings). Moreover, conducting sufficient training for peer mentors may not be feasible depending on resources and timing of programming. Ensuring that educators are well-equipped and well-trained may considerably improve programme outcomes.

Safe spaces for married girls need to consider the constraints these girls may face related to access. Responsibilities and duties of being a wife and often a mother may impede on their availability and capacity (e.g., childcare provision incorporated within safe spaces may enable married girls to attend sessions).

## LEARNINGS FOR ACTION

- Establishment of safe spaces for unmarried and married girls requires collaboration and joint working across sectors and the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. This collaboration can support building of resources and mitigation of potential issues, for example, the accessibility of safe spaces and sourcing of appropriate peer mentors.
- Communities should be involved in the identification of safe spaces and choosing community peer-educators or mentors to ensure that there is community ownership of safe spaces, and trusted and respected relationships with educators or mentors.
- Programming that engages with married girls should endeavour to address any challenges that may prevent married girls from accessing a safe space and any related sessions, information, services, etc. The voices and perspectives of married girls should be prioritised when developing and establishing a safe space and recruiting peer educators or mentors.