

EDITORIAL

Deal with causes of child marriages

When Celestine Cheredio's story was published in the *Sunday Monitor* of August 13, the reactions were of shock, sympathy and anger. Cheredio was 10 years when she was forcefully married off to a 40-year-old man by her parents. She is now 19 years old and has four children.

Another girl named Ann for purposes of concealing her identity, has been luckier than Cheredio. Ann, whose story the this paper published on Monday titled: 'Underage marriage cases worry Nakasongola leaders', was forced to marry a 22-year-old man.

Seven months later, she could not stand the torture and decided to leave and go back to her parents' home. But when she arrived, her father was unhappy with her decision.

Luckily for Ann, the Woman MP for Nakasongola District, Ms Margaret Komuhangi, offered to take her back to school. But there are many other young girls in such terrible situations who see no end to the troubles they face.

The issue:

Underage marriage

Our view:

Having more girls get a decent education leads to fewer unwanted pregnancies, better lives for children born and a more productive economy.

Many like Cheredio stay in their marriages because there is nowhere else to go. They are forced to have sexual relations with men much older than them when their bodies are not ready for it. They get pregnant and have children when they are just teenagers, not prepared for the physical, mental and emotional rigours that motherhood comes with.

In Nakasongola District specifically, the probation officer, Ms Irene Sanyu says her office is overwhelmed as they get between five to six cases of child marriages every month. There are many reasons this vice continues. Desperately poor people are willing to sell off their daughters in order to get some cattle or property that will see them survive. For others, culture is overriding.

If a woman got married at 16, she sees no reason as to why her daughter should not do the same and get her own home and security. Also, even though it is a crime to let one's child get married below the age of 18, there is no enforcement of the law so many get away with it.

Such a vice will take a long time to be gotten rid of. But the work must start. Organisations such as Reach a Hand Uganda (RAHU) are doing sensitisation - telling parents how important it is for their girls to study and have a better future. In Nakasongola District, an end to child marriage campaign has been launched with the aim of having fewer girls getting married off too early.

These and other efforts should be supported by the government, especially in districts where the problem is widespread. Having more girls get a decent education, research has shown, leads to fewer unwanted pregnancies, better lives for children born and a more productive economy. It is, therefore, in the government's best interests that this problem is dealt with.

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editorial@ug.nationmedia.com

CARTOON



AUGUST

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