

EDITORIAL

# Let all stakeholders work to end child marriages

Uganda ranks 17th internationally among countries that have the highest rates of child marriages, according to a report titled *State of the World's Children, 2016* by United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF).

Forty per cent of girls in Uganda are married by 18 years of age. One in every two girls in Uganda is married by 18, according to the findings by GirlsNotBridesUganda (GNBU), a non-governmental organisation that advocates against child marriages. World Bank research on Uganda shows that teenage marriages account for about 36 per cent school dropouts.

The alarming statistics in relation to child marriages make the launch of the five-year campaign "Live Your Dream" against child marriages and teenage pregnancies last Monday by Speaker Rebecca Kadaga timely. The campaign, which is in partnership with United Nations Population Fund and Ministry of Health, will be implemented by other smaller organisations such as Reach A Hand Uganda.

**The issue:**

**Child marriages**

**Our view:**

**Ending child marriages is a crucial step towards development, thus must be given priority by all stakeholders.**

Child marriages have been attributed largely to high poverty levels so it is not surprising that areas with high levels of poverty such as districts in eastern Uganda post high statistics in child marriages.

According to the Uganda Demographic and Health Survey (UDHS) 2016, poverty makes it easy for young girls to be lured into sex, parents' mindsets to child marriages, and low education attainment. Such a cam-

campaign therefore needs to largely focus on empowerment of girls and their families if it is to succeed. There are already many government programmes in place to fight poverty such as Operation Wealth Creation among others.

These interventions need to deliberately focus on ending child marriages as an end and monitored efficiently. However, it is also important to go back to the drawing board and analyse previous campaigns. Why have these not been able to achieve reduction in child marriages? What was not done right? What are some of the discoveries made during those campaigns? In 2015, for instance, the government launched the African Union Campaign to End Child Marriage and the National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy (2014/2015-2019/2020).

This campaign was to outline approaches and interventions to end child marriages and teenage pregnancy in the country. What became of this campaign? At the launch of new campaigns, the progress of those already in place need to be made public to avoid duplication and wastage of resources. It is important to institute a campaign and do it well than have multiple haphazardly done campaigns. Ending child marriages is a crucial step towards development, thus must be given priority by all stakeholders.

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