

MANY MEN AND BOYS WITH MONEY WORKING IN THE RICE FIELDS LURE GIRLS INTO MARRIAGE

BUTALEJA

By Jeff Andrew Lule

At just 15 years of age, Aisha Nakiwanuka from Nanukuremu village in Naweayo sub-county, Butaleja district, is a mother of two. She gave birth to her first child who is now two years while she was aged 13 and had her second born, who is about eight months.

Unlike other girls who are forced into marriage by their parents, Nakiwanuka's story is different. She attributes everything to her parents' poverty, who she says could not afford to educate her.

"When I was in school, my parents could not afford to buy me the basic school requirements. Education was free, but I did not have books, so I had to sit home doing nothing," she says.

After some time, Nakiwanuka says a certain boy working at the Doha Rice Scheme in Butaleja district, approached her promising to buy her scholastic materials.

"From Primary One to Four, he provided me with everything I needed at school, but during my Primary Five, I started going into my menstrual periods. I informed him and he bought me sanitary towels," Nakiwanuka narrates.

She says around third term of Primary Five, the boy started demanding sex, saying he was not benefitting from his 'investment'.

"He lured me and I gave in because I still needed money and other basics," she adds.

In her second term of Primary Six, she got pregnant and the boy disappeared.

"When I told him about the pregnancy, he disappeared. I never saw him again. My parents were bitter and I decided to go to my grandparents' home at Nakaloke, where I gave birth," she says.

At Nakaloke, Nakiwanuka says two men, also working at Doho Rice Scheme, approached her, asking her to get married to their son since she was

Namujuma (left) carrying her two weeks-old baby, while her daughter Nakiwanuka, 15, also a mother of an eight months-old baby. Photo by Jeff Andrew Lule



Rice farming fuels child marriages

BETWEEN THE LINES:

■ Nakiwanuka, the child mother, says around third term of Primary Five, the boy started demanding sex, saying he was not benefitting from his 'investment'.

already a mother, which she accepted without her parents' consent.

"Since my parents could not care for me, I decided to get married. In 2016, when we had gone to see President Yoweri Museveni at Wampologoma playground, the man they had told me about asked me to escort him to his home where I stay to date. This is our first baby. My other child is two years old and stays with my grandmother," she adds.

Like they say, history repeats itself. Nakiwanuka's mother, Sumaya

Namujumba, 26, also got married at the age of 13. She has seven children and two grandchildren. Unlike her

daughter, Namujumba, now a resident of Miyaya in Mazimase in sub-county, was impregnated by a 30-year-old man. "He used to give me money while working in the rice fields," she says.

The problem

Nakiwanuka and her mother are just two examples. There are many girls who get married off at a tender age in the area.

The officer in charge of Family and Child Protection Unit at Butaleja Central Police Station, Assistant

Inspector of Police Lydia Namugere says the cases are many in the area, adding that many men and boys with money working in the rice farms lure young girls and use them.

"These girls do not talk to their parents. We are using community policing in schools and communities to encourage the girls to report the cases, once they are approached by the men trying to lure them into marriage," she said.

Namugere revealed that in 2016, about 20 girls dropped out of school and got married. "But we managed to trace and rescued them, as well as apprehended the perpetrators," she said.

Since the year started, Namugere said 94 cases of defilement have been recorded and 21 so far are being tried in court, while others are still under inquiry. She, however, hastened to add that several cases go unreported.

Other cases recorded include child neglect (92), child desertion (51), child labour (14), domestic violence (82), missing and abandoned children (29).

To address the trend, Namugere said they are working closely with various child rights organisations including Joy for Children and World Vision.

Interventions

The executive director of Joy for Children, Moses Ntenga, said they support local organisations in Butaleja such as African Women Service Trust and local leaders to raise awareness on child marriage and clarify issues surrounding the vice by emphasising the right age of marriage.

Joy for Children also hosts the Girls Not Bright Alliance, a national network of organisations that work to end child marriages around the country.

Ntenga said child marriage remains a national problem that needs to be addressed urgently to protect the girl child.

World Bank statistics indicate that 40% of Ugandan women get married before the age of 18 and 10% are wives by the time they turn 15.