



Concerned Children make a presentation about acts of child abuse and underage marriages during the launch of end to child marriage campaign at Nakasongola District headquarters recently. PHOTO BY DAN WANDERA

Survey. In a recent survey conducted by End Violence against Children, Nakasongola had 46.8 per cent of women aged 20 to 24, reporting that they got married before the age of 18.

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Underage marriage cases worry Nakasongola leaders

NAKASONGOLA. Ann (not real name) 16, is a victim of early marriage whose parents refused to pay school fees for and forced into marriage at the age of 15.

She was forced to get married to a 22-year-old man who mistreated her while they lived in Kiryandongo District forcing her to flee.

"I made up my mind to escape from the marriage after spending more than seven months in Kiryandongo District. I was mistreated by both my husband and the relatives who kept on abusing me," Ann says.

She continues: "I decided to walk a distance of more than 40km back to Nakasongola where my parents live to try another chance of getting back to school. However, my effort did not yield results because my father was very annoyed that I had left marriage."

At the recent launch of the end to child marriage campaign under the theme; *'It takes a World to end violence against Children'*, which was held in Nakasongola District, Ann was among the lucky girls to be chosen to receive assistance after narrating her ordeal at the district council hall.

Nakasongola District Woman MP

Margaret Komuhangi, who attended the event offered to take her back to school.

"This girl has narrated her ordeal and wants to go back to school. I am going to assist her achieve the dream. I chair the parliamentary Committee on Gender, which is now drafting a pre-entry policy for girls to get a chance of going back to school after such unfortunate incidents, including early pregnancies," Ms Komuhangi, who was also voted the end to child marriage campaign ambassador in Nakasongola District said.

Underage marriage cases

While the Ugandan laws put the age of consent to marriage at 18, child marriage cases continue to exist despite the sensitisation about the illegality of the act.

Recent statistics released at the launch of the end child marriage campaign reveals a compromising situation where children below the age of 18 are married off by their parents and guardians in exchange for gifts such as cattle and money.

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Voices



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MARGARET KOMUHANGI, NAKASONGOLA DISTRICT WOMAN MP



"Some parents connive to deny girls a chance to continue with education opting to force them into underage marriages. The unfortunate part of such acts is that the right of child to get education is denied"

SAMUEL TINGIRA, NAKASONGOLA DISTRICT VICE CHAIRPERSON

got married before the age of 18. Nakasongola District senior probation

officer, Irene Sanyu, says cases of child marriage overwhelm her office though many of the cases only get to be known after a disagreement between the parties involved.

"We register between five to six cases of child marriage per month in Nakasongola District. It is unfortunate that most of the cases only come to our attention after a disagreement between the parties involved. We have particular cases that have been handled by the relevant authorities in the district," Ms Sanyu says

Nakasongola District vice chairperson Samuel Tingira says child marriages are fuelled by parents for their selfish gains.

"Some parents connive to deny their respective daughters a chance to continue with their education, opting to force them into underage marriages. The unfortunate part of such acts is that the right of child to get education is denied," Mr Tingira says.

"It also endangers the life of the child forced into marriage before maturity, which results into child pregnancies. We are trying to fight the vice through community sensitisation to ensure that our children are not forced into early marriages

by greedy parents. We are working with relevant agencies, including the police to bring to book any individual who acts as an accomplice in this criminal act," he adds.

Janet Bamulekye, a Primary Seven pupil at Mayirikiti Primary School attributed child marriages to teachers who seduce young girls into sexual acts against their will.

KEY ISSUES

Common. While the Ugandan laws put the age of consent to marriage at 18, child marriage cases continue to exist despite the sensitisation about the illegality and criminal element of the act.

Parents. Nakasongola District vice chairperson Samuel Tingira, says child marriages are fuelled by parents for their selfish gains.

Cases. Nakasongola District senior probation Officer, Irene Sanyu says cases of child marriage overwhelm her office though many of the cases only get to be known after a disagreement between the parties involved.

Teachers. Janet Bamulekye, a Primary Seven pupil attributed child marriages to teachers who seduce young girls into sexual acts against their will.