Addressing child protection concerns in Eastern and Southern Africa:
Case studies of promising practices from across the region
Preface

In recent years, Governments, UNICEF and others have devoted significant attention to improving children’s protection and wellbeing. Doing so requires not only reducing the myriad forms of abuse, neglect and maltreatment that children experience, but also helping them to envision and realize a better future for themselves and their families. These efforts are both vital and challenging at the best of times, let alone now, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is exacerbating the social and economic forces that threaten children’s health and wellbeing in Africa and around the world. Now, more than ever, it is necessary to understand and address these drivers holistically across multiple sectors, and to ensure that responses are contextualized and adapted to different settings.

This compendium aims to bring this much-needed information to light. It presents three case studies from across the Eastern and Southern Africa region in order to highlight programmatic approaches or interventions that are working to address issues of concern to children, families and communities in different settings. The purpose is to explore what is working well, and why, in order to share promising approaches across the region and beyond. All efforts profiled are supported in some way by UNICEF, governments, and/or partners on the ground. Each is designed and implemented as part of broader system-strengthening efforts at the sub-national and national levels.

Children’s protection must take centre stage in policy and practice in Africa and globally. Now is the time to redouble efforts to tackle the structural drivers and social and cultural practices that threaten their wellbeing and that of their families and communities. The practical information, analysis and insights provided in these case studies offers a status update on the range of approaches that can be used to support children to reach their full human potential. It is our responsibility to use them to think, learn and take action.

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Case study on delaying adolescent pregnancy and child marriage in the Kingdom of Lesotho
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Purpose of the case study

The purpose of this case study is to highlight a promising programme that has been identified by UNICEF as contributing to the delay of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage in Lesotho.*

It provides an outline of the work that is being done, and an analysis of its successes and challenges. The information presented is based on a documentary review and interviews with those involved and available. Its intended audience includes those working in the areas of research, programmes, and policy to end child marriage in Lesotho, in the region, and elsewhere, such as UNICEF, UNFPA, the Government of Lesotho, donors, civil society organisations and academics.

The context of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage in Lesotho

Child marriage is defined as a formal marriage or informal union that takes place before the age of 18. In many contexts, the practice has been shown to have profound physical, intellectual, psychological, and emotional impacts, especially for girls. Children who are poor, live in rural areas and/or are out of school are disproportionally at risk of marrying young. Globally, the prevalence of child marriage has declined over the last decade, with the most progress seen in South Asia, especially among girls below 15 years of age. Nevertheless, in 2020 the total number of girls married before the age of 18 remained at approximately 12 million per year.¹ Progress must be substantially accelerated to meet the

* UNICEF Lesotho Country Office supports efforts to address child marriage using its own resources. It is not one of the twelve countries involved in the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage.

¹ Progress must be substantially accelerated to meet the
Sustainable Development Goal 5.3 of ending child marriage by 2030. Moreover, recent and growing evidence from the COVID-19 pandemic suggests that some of these gains have been lost over the past year and thus an even greater investment is needed than earlier predicted.²

Getting married as an adolescent is a longstanding practice in Lesotho,³ as it is in many societies across the Southern Africa region and globally. The drivers of the practice have varied over time and across contexts. Traditionally, these unions were a means of formalising reciprocal relationships between families and solidifying social networks. The social and cultural norms underlying marriage-related decisions still inform the choices that girls, boys, and their families make. Today, these norms work in concert with two main drivers: poverty and pregnancy. These two issues are intertwined and their relationship to child marriage is bi- and tri-directional. Girls who live in poverty – either with their parents, other caregivers, or family members, or as heads of household in which parents have died or have migrated for work – are in need of food, clothing, transport and other necessities. Many must engage in risky behaviours to meet these needs; often this means engaging in transactional sex with older men who promise to provide them with material and/or financial support. Many girls lack information and access to contraceptive methods and sexual and reproductive health more generally. Even among those who are informed, differentials in age, gender and wealth mean those in these relationships typically do not have a say in whether a condom is used or not. In these and other similar circumstances, girls may get pregnant. The recent Violence Against Children and Youth Survey (2018 data) found that among 18-24 year old females, 11 percent had their sexual debut before age 15, and 18 percent of girls’ first experience of sexual intercourse was physically forced or coerced.⁴ Less than half of these girls told someone about this violence when they experienced it, and only 8 percent received health and other services.⁵ A further 13.5 percent reported having become pregnant before age 18.⁶ Earlier data (the 2014 Lesotho Demographic and Health Survey) found that among sexually active females 15-19 years old, 79.9 percent were not using any contraception.⁷

Pregnancy is considered an undesirable condition for an unmarried girl in most communities in Lesotho.⁸ Many pregnant girls leave school, either because familial investment in school fees is no longer considered a priority or affordable, because school authorities required them to drop out, or because stigma, discrimination and condemnation from peers and staff make going to school intolerable.⁹ The personal and social consequences are also felt within families, who may ill-treat a girl in these circumstances because they feel a sense of shame, disgrace and loss of honour; community members may also insult and verbally abuse pregnant unmarried girls, or treat them in other demeaning or damaging ways. The economic penalties may include exacerbated levels of poverty and lower levels of employment and income-earning opportunities. The impacts on girls’ mental health and wellbeing can be significant; across the country girls in these circumstances have described feelings of helplessness, anger, rejection and self-recrimination.¹⁰ These struggles may be worsened by the potential health outcomes that poor, marginalized girls who are pregnant may encounter, such as contracting HIV: although adolescent girls and young women represent only 11 percent of the national population, they account for 25 percent of new infections.¹¹ Pregnancy also puts them at risk of anaemia, post-partum haemorrhage
In Lesotho, this reality is borne out in statistics. The LDHS (2014) indicates that adolescent pregnancy is most common among girls and young women who live in rural areas, have low levels of formal education and are living in poverty. More than half of adolescent pregnancies and childbearing happen to girls before they reach 18 years of age. Girls and/or their families may try to mitigate these overwhelmingly negative repercussions by getting married. Situating adolescent pregnancy within the context of marriage diminishes the social stigma and other costs associated with it. Importantly, it also establishes a formal connection between the pregnant girl and the boy or man involved that brings with it a set of rights and responsibilities, social supports, and a cemented bond between families. For the most vulnerable girls, these hoped-for benefits provide them and their families with a sense of security, at least in theory, that a child will be raised in the best possible (or least harmful or problematic) conditions, with a sense of belonging and all of the benefits that come with membership in an extended social group.

In Lesotho, nearly one in five girls marries before the age of 18 (19.4%, 2018). As with unintended adolescent pregnancy, rates of marriage are higher among girls in rural areas (24.9% vs 13.8% urban), and among those who are the poorest and have the lowest levels of schooling. Low rates of birth registration across the country suggest that these figures are underestimates of the actual numbers of child marriages. Although marriage is often pursued as a means of mitigating the financial, social and other difficulties that girls and families face, it nevertheless poses serious threats to their development and wellbeing. This fact was emphasized in 2017, when World Vision identified child marriage as the top national child protection issue. For those girls who are not pregnant when they marry, pregnancy typically happens soon thereafter. In addition to the health, social, economic and other risks outlined above, girls in this situation face an even greater likelihood that they will not resume schooling and will have few opportunities to pursue vocational training or other means of skill enhancement and social engagement. Moreover, pregnancy and pregnancy-related deaths are a leading cause of mortality for married and unmarried girls between the ages of 15-19 in Lesotho. The interconnectedness of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage in Lesotho requires that the two issues be tackled in tandem.
Lesotho has a plural legal system in which laws related to child marriage co-exist and contradict each other. This lack of harmonization is evident in the Marriage Act (1974), which stipulates that a girl may marry at the age of 16 (and a boy at 18) provided there is parental consent, while the Children’s Protection and Welfare Act (2011) states that marriage before the age of 18 is unlawful, and that a child who is being forced to marry is in need of urgent protection. International and regional conventions to which Lesotho is a signatory also fix 18 years as the minimum age of marriage. Customary law (Laws of Lerotholi), which governs family and community life in many parts of the country, allows a girl or boy to marry, as long as they have reached puberty. Although technically illegal, many marriages are negotiated according to custom and not reported to the authorities. Impunity means that traditional practices like elopement (chobeliso), in which a girl is abducted for marriage, are prevalent in some regions. These contradictions in legislation also enable practices like the marrying of girls who have been victims of sexual abuse to their perpetrator.

In line with SDG Target 5.3, the Government of Lesotho has committed to the elimination of child, early and forced marriage by 2030. The country began its efforts in 2015, after the African Union declared child marriage to be a harmful practice and a major barrier to social, human, and economic development on the continent. Later that year, and in recognition of the challenges posed by child marriage and adolescent pregnancy (both as cause and effect), Lesotho began its efforts to harmonize all relevant laws and policies. It tabled the Motion to Eradicate Child Marriages in Lesotho on July 4, 2016. Shortly thereafter, Parliament adopted the SADC Model Law on Eradication of Child Marriages. Government also began consultations with Chiefs, community councillors, religious leaders, parliamentarians, and other decision-makers. In 2017, a mass-media advocacy campaign was launched to raise awareness of the harms of the practice among a broad spectrum of audiences at the grassroots and national level. This work was done in conjunction with the African Union campaign to end child marriage in Africa, also launched that year. It was led by the Ministry of Social Development, in collaboration with the Ministries of Health, Police, Education, UNICEF, and several civil society organisations and is still ongoing. In April 2018, Princess Senate Seeiso (born in 2001) was engaged as a figurehead of the movement.
Promising practice to delay the age of marriage and first pregnancy

As part of efforts to reach people of all ages across the country, a number of activities were carried out on the ground in villages. A spinoff of these initiatives is one led by Help Lesotho, called GIRL4ce*. A youth-led movement to end child marriage and sexual and gender-based violence, GIRL4ce uses drama, dialogue, speeches, songs and interactive activities to engage, educate and mobilize people of all ages to better protect and empower girls and women in Lesotho.

In the five years since it began, the movement has grown and its efforts have become more targeted. Initially, activities were undertaken in Leribe and Butha Buthe districts only. Now, GIRL4ce works in 3 additional districts, including Berea, Quthing and Thaba Tseka. Adolescent girls and boys from across these districts are recruited as volunteers, to act as ‘Champions’ to enrich and grow the movement. All are provided with information about laws relating to gender-based violence and child marriage, practical training on how to present these issues through creative means and to organise events, and support to build their skills to facilitate conversations in communities, at schools, churches, workplaces, and in other social settings. Young people work in teams to carry out activities and then debrief and discuss them with people of all ages. In practice, the model works like a snowball – individuals watch or listen to GIRL4ce plays and songs, participate in discussions with others, become interested in being involved themselves, receive training and support to further spread the word, and so on.

* More information about GIRL4ce and Help Lesotho can be found at www.helplesotho.org.
Programme achievements

Girl4ce is one part of a broader effort across Lesotho to delay adolescent pregnancy and child marriage. Its efforts are understood to complement and strengthen the efforts of civil society and government; awareness raising is one part of a suite of interventions, services and approaches that are being implemented across the country.

The Girl4ce movement has proven an effective means of sharing information in creative ways about sensitive topics with a wide range of people. Because Champions are themselves members of nearby communities, their messages are understood to be less judgemental and threatening than those that come from outsiders. Using drama and song and other means of sharing has enabled people to connect to the stories of imaginary others, stories that resonate locally in meaningful and lasting ways. In so doing, communities have been able to critically reflect on the drivers of adolescent pregnancy, child marriage and gender-based violence (GBV) and to begin to challenge the myths and assumptions that contribute to keeping these practices in place. Champions and participants connect to each other and describe feeling a shared sense of ownership and responsibility to make change and to bring others on board to join the movement.

“I had always known that violence is real, however I never personalised it or tried to understand the pain it causes for the victims.” (A new Champion, after witnessing a drama performance)

Another achievement of the Girl4ce movement is its success in involving boys and young men as educators and facilitators.

In Lesotho, amplifying the voices of those affected by pregnancy, marriage and GBV means recognising that boys and young men also have experience and insights to share. Their engagement in the work of GIRL4ce has not only provided the movement with supportive allies, but it has also raised important issues related to young males’ experience of exploitation, abuse, and violence. It is this team-based approach that makes the messages more interesting and, potentially, more acceptable to families and communities, including those without daughters.

“I take pride in respecting women and girls and treating them with love. It is doable. Maybe you should try it sometime.” (Motebang Mosola, GIRL4ce Champion)

With time and experience, a critical mass of engaged young people and adult allies has developed, and the movement is now furthering discussion through social media sites such as WhatsApp and Facebook, and via local meet-up groups. GIRL4ce Champions regularly visit local radio stations to share information and answer call-in questions about GBV and child marriage to a wider audience. To further extend the reach of the GIRL4ce movement, television stations have recently run pre-recorded dramas in Sesotho.

“I am very lucky to be part of the GIRL4ce Core, because I can ask for my rights and I am able to advocate for others who can’t fight for themselves. Before I was part of this I was not aware of so many issues. Now I am a different person from before I was part of the Core.” (Maseleke, GIRL4ce Champion)
Challenges faced and future directions

The COVID-19 pandemic, in particular the restrictions related to group gatherings, has meant that community-based performances have been paused since March 2020. The inability to use its traditional means of information sharing and discussions has required the movement to re-think how it can best share its resources under the current circumstances. Efforts are now underway to strengthen GIRL4ce’s social media presence and to develop more interactive drama presentations via radio, using post-production call-in shows, using a question-and-answer format. The use of other non-formal and distance-based mechanisms are also being explored. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic GIRL4ce has continued to communicate with rural communities in ways that did not require person-to-person contact, including newspaper advertisements, billboards, print brochures and an essay and poetry competition. GIRL4ce has adopted the slogan ‘Do the Right Thing’ to highlight the responsibility that all members of the community have in stopping GBV.

Other challenges include:

**Champion turnover** – youth are rarely able to commit for long periods of time (they start school, find jobs, move to try to find jobs, etc.). This reality means that training new members is a constant imperative. Doing so, however, provides an important opportunity to keep the delivery mechanisms and content fresh with new perspectives and ideas.

**Behaviour change is a long-term effort** that requires patience and commitment. GIRL4ce Champions work to build trusting relationships slowly and support change through ongoing interaction and repeated messaging.

**Contradictory customary and statutory laws related to GBV and child marriage makes clear messaging difficult.** GIRL4ce Champions try to respond to these challenges with facts, in an effort to demystify harmful beliefs.

**Getting influential local leaders and village chiefs onside is challenging at times.** Addressing GBV and child marriage requires a redistribution of power and acceptance of responsibility; these changes are sometimes slow in the making.

The dramas include humour as a tool for audience engagement. **Moving from humour to the serious issues being addressed takes skillful acting and genuine conveyance of emotions** which can be challenging for beginner-level Champions.

**For some audience members, the content of GIRL4ce performances triggers difficult memories.** GIRL4ce does its best to make events and performances safe spaces for all community members, but the content is too close to reality for many women who see themselves in the characters portrayed. GIRL4ce Champions are trained in psychosocial support so that they can help people process their emotions in these instances, and connect them to other supports, as needed.
Delaying adolescent pregnancy and child marriage is a pressing priority for those working to support children’s protection and wellbeing in Lesotho. The efforts of UNICEF, UNFPA, the Government of Lesotho and numerous civil society organisations have been directed towards the harmonization of laws and awareness raising at the community level of the risks and potential consequences of marrying, giving birth, and becoming a parent at an early age. GIRL4ce, an initiative of Help Lesotho, has developed a creative means of exploring these issues with community members in diverse settings. The resourcefulness and commitment of young people to share information and promote dialogue has enabled public discussions of what have traditionally been private issues.

In terms of future strategies, it will be important to ensure that efforts to tackle pregnancy and marriage are incorporated into the soon-to-be-draft violence against children National Action Plan. Having one plan of action will help to avoid the fragmentation of child protection interventions; a consolidated strategy will promote integrated, multi-sectoral programmes to tackle the shared structural risk factors for VAC, child marriage and adolescent pregnancy to ensure a holistic response to addressing girls’ and boys’ needs. Moreover, the significance of these issues requires that government and development partners invest in this area of work. Finally, it is important that investments are made to address gaps in data and understanding so that effective responses can be developed and implemented at scale.

Key learning

Delaying adolescent pregnancy and child marriage is a pressing priority for those working to support children’s protection and wellbeing in Lesotho. The efforts of UNICEF, UNFPA, the Government of Lesotho and numerous civil society organisations have been directed towards the harmonization of laws and awareness raising at the community level of the risks and potential consequences of marrying, giving birth, and becoming a parent at an early age. GIRL4ce, an initiative of Help Lesotho, has developed a creative means of exploring these issues with community members in diverse settings. The resourcefulness and commitment of young people to share information and promote dialogue has enabled public discussions of what have traditionally been private issues.

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Sources


[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.


Case study on ending child marriage in the Republic of Madagascar
Acknowledgements

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Purpose of the case study

The purpose of this case study is to highlight a promising programme, service or approach that is supported by UNICEF at the country level and that contributes to delaying the age of marriage in Madagascar. It provides an outline of the work that is being done, and an analysis of its successes and challenges. The information presented is based on a documentary review and interviews with those involved and available. Its intended audience includes those working in the areas of research, programmes and policy to end child marriage in Madagascar, in the region, and elsewhere, such as UNICEF, other UN agencies, the Government of Madagascar, donors, civil society organisations and academics.¹

The context of child marriage in Madagascar

Child marriage is defined as a formal marriage or informal union that takes place before the age of 18. In many contexts, the practice has been shown to have profound physical, intellectual, psychological and emotional impacts, especially for girls. Children who are poor, live in rural areas and/or are out of school are disproportionately at risk of child marriage. Globally, the prevalence of child marriage has declined over the last decade, with the most progress seen in South Asia, especially among girls below 15 years of age. Nevertheless, in 2020 the total number of girls married before the age of 18 remained at approximately 12 million per year.² Progress must be accelerated in order to meet the
Sustainable Development Goal 5.3 of ending child marriage by 2030. Moreover, recent and growing evidence from the COVID-19 pandemic suggests that some of these gains have been lost over the past year and thus an even greater investment is needed than earlier predicted.

In Madagascar, the Law on Marriage and Matrimonial Regimes 2007 sets the minimum age of marriage at 18 years for girls and boys. The law also states that marriage can be allowed by the President of the Court of the First Instance before the age of 18 if parents request it,3 and when the tribunal receives the formal consent of the child to be married.4 Prior to 2007, girls could be married at age 14 and boys at age 17.

Madagascar has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world; many of these unions are informal. Girls are disproportionately affected. However, compared to other countries in the region, there is also a relatively high rate of marriage among boys. According to the 2018 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey for Madagascar, 40% of women and 12% of men aged 20-24 years were married or in a union before the age of 18, and 12% of women and 2% of men aged 20-24 years were married before the age of 15.5 The median age at first marriage among women aged 25-49 years is higher in urban areas compared to rural areas, and among those women who have achieved higher levels of schooling and come from wealthier households. A comparison across generations shows a slight upward trend in child marriage among the younger cohort, unlike in most countries where this trend is typically declining.6 Five regions have particularly high rates of child marriage: Atsimo Atsinanana (60%), Atsimo Andrefana (66%), Melaky (54%), Androy (51%) and Soa (54%).7

As seen elsewhere in the world, the drivers of child marriage in Madagascar include high levels of poverty; limited access to quality education, particularly beyond primary level; limited life choices; and a lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services, among other factors.

Madagascar has committed to eliminate child marriage by 2030 in line with the target laid out in Sustainable Development Goal 5.3. In 2018, Madagascar adopted a National Strategy to combat Child Marriage (2018-2024),8 developed with the support of UNICEF and UNFPA. The overall aim of the strategy is to reduce the rate of child marriage from 41.2% to 31% over a seven-year period and ensure that increasingly villages are declared free of child marriage.9 Guidelines and tools have been developed with UNICEF to support local level implementation of the national strategy. These are focused on orienting actors at the local level on their respective roles in the response to child marriage, and guiding local authorities in developing and implementing local action plans to eliminate the practice.10 In collaboration with the Ministry of Population and USAID, these guidelines have been rolled out in three regions since 2020/2021, and will be
implemented in three additional high prevalence regions in 2021 with UNICEF funding.

In response to high levels of violence and exploitation against children, including child marriage, the Government of Madagascar, through the Ministry of Youth and Sport, established a national Life Skills programme in 2010 that focused inter alia on adolescent sexual and reproductive health and preparation for parenting. In 2016, with financial and technical support from UNICEF, the Life Skills programme was updated by the Ministry of Youth and Sports in collaboration with the Ministries of Education, Health, Population, and Communication and relevant CSOs. A greater emphasis was placed on prevention of child marriage, violence and exploitation and on developing young people’s self-esteem and self-confidence. Efforts were made to adapt the programme to the local contexts where it is being implemented. The Life Skills programme aims to reinforce the capacity of children and adolescents to manage risks and challenges, and in turn to reduce rates of child marriage, adolescent pregnancy, and violence. This case study takes a closer look at the Life Skills programme as a promising practice that has been in place in Madagascar for more than a decade.
The Life Skills programme is currently being implemented in several communes across seven regions where rates of child marriage are at or above the national average, and where implementation can be supported and monitored. These are: Analamanga, Atsimo-Andrefana, Analanjirofo, Anôsy, Androy, Boeny and Vatovavy Fitovinany.

A manual has been developed to guide the sessions and is available in French and Malagasy. It was updated in 2017 to include some additional basic skills in self-awareness and community living. The programme currently includes seven thematic areas:

1. Basic skills in self-awareness;
2. Basic skills regarding community living and awareness of one’s own surroundings/environment;
3. Understanding young people’s health, including sexual and reproductive health and risks of early pregnancy;
4. Preparing for parenthood, including understanding the risks of child marriage and challenges of parenting too young;
5. Protecting oneself against violence and exploitation, including understanding the rights of the child and the fact that child marriage is a form of violence and is illegal;
6. Understanding the importance of environmental protection, and;
7. Basic skills in new technologies and communication techniques, including prevention of online abuse and exploitation.

Promising Practice to combat child marriage

The programme was developed using a peer-to-peer facilitation model. Youth facilitators are selected by their community leaders from among young men and women between the ages of 18 and 24 who have studied to at least grade 10. They follow a 9-day training that includes theory and practical sessions, organised by a pool of national trainers from different ministries under the leadership of the Ministry of Youth and Sport. The facilitators work in male-female pairs on a voluntary basis and conduct life skills training sessions with adolescent girls and boys between the ages of 10 and 18, who are either in or out of school. Efforts are made to prioritise the inclusion of vulnerable children such as adolescent mothers and children who are at risk of or have been victims of abuse, exploitation or child marriage. Mixed groups of 25 girls and boys participate together, separated by age. Individual participants attend one to two sessions per week over a two-month period (a total of 32 hours over 16 sessions).
As one Life Skills facilitator explains:

“We deal with several themes during the Life Skills sessions, such as early pregnancy, the fight against child marriage or the environment. Through these sessions, adolescent girls can better understand behaviours and good practices to succeed in life.”

A theme on positive masculinity has also recently been introduced in parallel with the Life Skills programme in communities where social roles and structures are largely dominated by men to the detriment of women and girls. In collaboration with MenEngage, groups of fathers attend sessions on positive masculinity. Participants are encouraged to work towards a more equitable division of power between men and boys and women and girls in their communities.

The life skills sessions are designed to be as participatory and interactive as possible, and to encourage discussion and individual reflection in a supportive and enjoyable learning environment. The choice to use young facilitators is a deliberate effort to encourage participants to relate to them and to feel comfortable discussing sometimes sensitive issues. The aim is to create a positive environment where young people are able to share the challenges that they face and to find solutions together within the group.

Programme Achievements

Between 2019 and 2020, the numbers of facilitators and ‘encadreurs’ (supervisors) trained in life skills across six regions were 335 (148 boys and 187 girls) and 72 (28 male and 44 female) respectively. The total number of children that were reached as part of the Life Skills programme between January 2020 and February 2021 was 9,579, of which 5,629 were girls and 3,950 were boys.

To date, there are no published data about the impact of the Life Skills programme on child marriage prevalence rates. However, anecdotally, staff from UNICEF and the Ministry of Youth and Sport report evidence of impact from communities where the programme is operational. Those involved assert that fewer children are marrying because participating girls and boys have a better understanding of what constitutes violence, and what the legal provisions related to child marriage. Feedback from adolescents who take part in the Life Skills programme is very positive. They report increased levels of self-esteem and confidence to speak to their parents and peers about their needs and aspirations. Learning related to Themes 3, 4 and 5 in particular, on sexual and reproductive health and the risks and challenges associated with marrying young, is said to be helping adolescent girls and boys to make more informed decisions about when they would like to marry. UNICEF staff report that for young people who sometimes feel helpless and frustrated, such programmes can help girls and boys to recognise that there are other options than marriage and that they do not have to accept the status quo.
“Having participated in life skills sessions, I can no longer be one of the girls who does not respect her body. My parents cannot try to convince me to marry now as happens to many girls at home. The sessions are very pleasant, we learned to express ourselves respectfully to each other within an atmosphere that is both fun and educational. I always felt very comfortable to be part of it. The thing I regret is that the programme time was too short; I still want to continue.” (16 year-old girl from Anôsy, 2018)

“When my parents learned that we were talking about adolescent reproductive health, they were worried and thought that the facilitators would teach us how to have sex, but the notes in the notebook allowed them to understand that this was not the case, that it was rather learning about my own body and its development, respect for my body, the effects of early pregnancy on life and the effects of communicable diseases. My social relationships have improved since my participation in life skills sessions. I now know better how to avoid fights and arguments with my peers, and I have a lot more friends.” (14 year-old girl from Anôsy, 2018)

According to UNICEF staff, a significant success of the programme is the participation of children and adolescents in discussions about issues that affect them in a systematic, sustained way, as opposed to more common one-off events centred around the International Day of the African Child, for example.

During a 2020 inter-sectoral monitoring mission to one of the implementation regions, parents of those involved in the Life Skills programme described it as a positive force in their children’s lives, and said that it provided skills that parents also wanted to benefit from. Previously, adults in the community had eyed the programme with suspicion. In 2020, parents began to be included and plans are afoot to expand their engagement further in future programmes. A parental education component was added to the Life Skills programme in two regions (Anosy and Androy), covering topics such as child marriage, teenage pregnancy and keeping children in school. Programme approaches were adapted to include focus group discussions and door to door sessions that were conducted by youth peer educators and para social workers. In all, 382 parents were reached, 60% of whom were women. A formalised curriculum will soon be developed based on these experiences.
A concern raised during interviews about the Life Skills programme was the fact that its continued implementation may not be sustainable: an injection of funds from UNICEF re-invigorated the programme in 2016 but currently none of its costs are budgeted for by the government, for which commitment to prioritising child protection remains a challenge. This lack of government investment threatens the longer-term viability of the programme as well as options for scaling up nationally. For now, the Life Skills programme is limited to regions where UNICEF supports government activities.

After more than ten years, there is still no formal monitoring and evaluation system in place to track progress and measure the impact of the Life Skills programme. Although anecdotal feedback is positive, it remains difficult to gauge how successful the programme outcomes are on the lives of those who benefit from it, including whether it does indeed contribute to a reduction in the numbers of girls and boys who marry before the age of 18. Similarly, while some follow up by the supervisors does take place after each Life Skills programme cycle to monitor how the participants are integrating their learning, it appears that current efforts are insufficient. There are no formal data to examine participants’ understanding and appreciation of the modules included in the programme nor how they may internalise and act on new skills acquired. There are plans to conduct an evaluation of the programme; for funding reasons, this may not happen until 2022.

Covid-19 disrupted the Life Skills programme considerably between March and August 2020 when tight restrictions on movement and gatherings were in place. However, since then the programme has re-started without issue.
The value of the Life Skills programme for those who participate appears to be significant. However, **clear monitoring and evaluation tools need to be developed**, standardised and implemented so that the government and UNICEF can effectively measure change and assess programme impact in general and, in particular, on child marriage. Facilitators and supervisors need to be further technical support and capacity building and resources need to be made available to ensure that follow up can take place after each programme cycle has ended.

**Funding is urgently required to evaluate the success of the Life Skills programme thus far**, and to secure its continuation and expansion beyond 2021. Equally, funds need to be secured to implement the National Strategy to Combat Child Marriage (2018-2024). Interventions envisaged under the national strategy are intended to target specific drivers of child marriage, complementing work initiated under the Life Skills programme and furthering its impact.

**It is positive that parents have been included in the programme in two regions** and that this expanded engagement will take place in the other regions. Parents, especially fathers, play an important role in the decisions taken regarding their children, including marriage, so it is helpful for them to share the same understanding and learning as their children. Similarly, further consideration should be given to the inclusion of the numerous traditional and religious leaders across Madagascar given the influence they have in their communities.

Other initiatives are taking place in Madagascar, such as those that relate to positive parenting skills (implemented by SOS Villages). Programmes such as these are often implemented in different communities to the Life Skills programme. For greater impact and complementarity, **it is important to ensure that linkages are created across programmes**, regardless of provider, and that, where possible, staff and volunteers work in concert with each other in the same communities. In this way, stronger referral mechanisms could also be established, enabling youth facilitators to link Life Skills participants to para social workers who can refer them on to appropriate support services, as needed.

Poverty and food insecurity as a consequence of drought are a reality for many families in the South of Madagascar, and marriage is a survival mechanism for many girls and boys and young people. Marrying into another family creates links and solidarity in the community, which community members need to ensure families can support one another. Alongside any initiative that seeks to raise awareness about the risks and challenges of early marriage and early parenthood, **there need to be opportunities that can help generate income to better support families and parents** economically.
UNICEF Madagascar Country Office supports efforts to address child marriage using its own resources. It is not one of the twelve countries involved in the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage.


[3] Article 3 of the marriage law stipulates that marriage is allowed for ‘serious reasons’ (motifs graves), although these are not defined and are left to the judgement of the Court President.


[11] Information presented in this paragraph was provided during interviews with UNICEF Madagascar staff and the Technical Assistant and National Trainer at the Department for Reproductive Health and Youth Protection within the Ministry of Youth and Sport.

[12] Quote provided by the Technical Assistant and National Trainer at the Department for Reproductive Health and Youth Protection within the Ministry of Youth and Sport.


[14] Information obtained during an interview with the Technical Assistant and National Trainer at the Department for Reproductive Health and Youth Protection within the Ministry of Youth and Sport.

[15] The ‘encadreurs’ are civil servants from the Regional Directorate of Youth and Sport who follow up and monitor the life skills sessions and assist with the movement/travel of the facilitators.

[16] Source: Directions Régionales de la Jeunesse et des Sports des 6 régions as provided by the the Technical Assistant and National Trainer at the Department for Reproductive Health and Youth Protection within the Ministry of Youth and Sport.

[17] This testimony is one of many collected by UNICEF Madagascar in 2018. See also a YouTube link in which an adolescent girl discusses the benefits of attending the Life Skills programme in Anôsy: Life skills program in Anosy - YouTube

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Sources

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Sources
Addressing witchcraft in Tanzania: case study of a promising approach
Acknowledgements

The UNICEF Eastern and Southern African Regional Office (ESARO) commissioned Child Frontiers to develop a compendium of promising practices on ending harmful practices and violence against children across the region. This documentation was written by Emma de Vise-Lewis of Child Frontiers with essential contributions from UNICEF Tanzania Country Office staff, and government, NGOs and other partners. Thanks also go to Jean Francois Basse and Mona Aika of UNICEF ESARO for their leadership and support throughout the process of developing the brief. The publication was designed by hopeworks.

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Purpose of the case study

The purpose of this case study is to highlight a promising programme, service or approach that is supported by the UNICEF country office and that seeks to address issues of violence against children in Tanzania. It provides an outline of the work that is being done, and an analysis of its successes and challenges. The information presented is based on a documentary review and interviews with those involved and available. Its intended audience includes those working in the areas of research, programmes and policy to address violence against children in-country, in the region, and elsewhere, such as UNICEF, the Government of Tanzania, donors, civil society organisations and academicians.

Introduction

 Violence against children includes ‘all forms of physical or mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse’.

According to the Global End Violence Against Children campaign, one billion girls and boys suffer from violence every year, including physical, emotional and sexual violence.

Children all over the world are threatened by violence, yet the poorest and most marginalised children face the greatest risks and are least likely to be protected by their societies. Girls are especially vulnerable: they are subject to multiple forms of violence, including infanticide, femicide, sexual and physical violence, emotional violence, intimate partner violence,
trafficking and harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation.⁴

Violence is an ongoing reality for children in Tanzania. A study conducted in 2009 on violence against girls and boys found that children experience high levels of sexual, physical and emotional violence in multiple settings, including the home, the community, the workplace, in care facilities and in school.⁵ One of the ongoing violence issues for children in Tanzania is witchcraft, although it is poorly documented. The Witchcraft Act of 2002 stipulates that witchcraft includes sorcery, enchantment, bewitching, the use of instruments of witchcraft, the alleged use of magical or supernatural powers and the alleged possession of any supernatural beliefs and knowledge.⁶ Anyone found guilty of exercising witchcraft with the intent of causing harm, death, fear or misfortune to people can be sentenced to seven years’ imprisonment or more.⁷

Although there are no specific data on numbers, over the past decade, witchcraft has been linked to young girls and boys being raped or injured, sometimes killed. Children living with albinism have been particularly targeted. Witch doctors, or traditional healers, advise adults to bring the blood or a limb of a child, or to rape a child, because it is believed that body parts and blood are needed in witchcraft to bring prosperity, good fortune and good health.⁸

The Government of Tanzania recognises that witchcraft is a serious concern and considers it to be a hindrance to national development. However, witchcraft remains entrenched in some parts of the country, such as Iringa and Njombe in the southern highlands, and Mwanza and Kigoma in the north, despite opposition from religious leaders, widespread sensitisation and tough legal penalties.⁹

Criminal acts related to witchcraft happen every year in Tanzania but, according to UNICEF staff, 2018 and 2019 were particularly bad years in the Njombe and Mbeya regions with high numbers of children being injured and killed for witchcraft purposes. It is unclear why more children were injured and killed in these years, although numbers had been rising over time. This case study showcases how the Tanzanian child protection system is robust and flexible enough to respond effectively to extreme cases such as these, without having to develop separate structures, guidelines and procedures.
UNICEF Tanzania’s support in addressing VAC through system strengthening

Since the enactment of the Law of Child Act (2009), UNICEF has supported the government to design a child protection system that can prevent and respond to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of children. As part of the child protection systems model, different regulations were developed to guide the implementation of the law. A child protection system coordination mechanism was designed and implemented at all Government administration levels (village, ward, district, regional and national level), and UNICEF continues to support the establishment and strengthening of these structures. The model was piloted in 2009 in four regions (Dar es Salaam, Kilimanjaro, Mwanza and Kigoma). It is now being scaled up nationwide, although different Local Government Authorities are at different stages of development. UNICEF currently supports 39 of 185 Local Government Authorities.

In strengthening the child protection system, UNICEF supported the development of regulations, guidelines and training manuals, which were used to train key frontline workers, such as police, social welfare officers, community development officers, magistrates and teachers. It also encouraged prevention and response mechanisms in homes through the enhancement of parents’ and caregivers’ knowledge and skills on ways to protect children, with a specific focus on developing and practicing non-violent discipline techniques. UNICEF also supported the development of the National Plan of Action to End Violence against Children, which was later expanded to a National Plan of Action to End Violence against Women and Children (2017/8 – 2021/22) in which all the components of a child protection system are included. This plan is multi-sectoral and is now being implemented by key ministries and UN agencies.
Promising approach
to respond to cases of violence against children

Background

Between July 2018 and February 2019, there were 13 cases of rape against children – all girls under the age of 10 years – in the mining area of Matundas Ward, Chunya District, in Southern Tanzania, resulting in two deaths, including a three year old and a six year old. The rape cases were linked to witchcraft because the perpetrators were in search of blood and body fluids from young girls, which they believed were needed to conduct rituals to boost their production in mining activities. From November 2019 to February 2020, ten girls and boys below the age of 10 were also attacked in Njombe, resulting in seven deaths. These killings were also linked to witchcraft.

Child protection system response mechanism

As soon as these events in Chunya and Njombe came to light, social welfare officers visited the concerned families. They initially conducted an assessment of the safety and needs of the victims and their families, including other children in the household. This evaluation was followed by a preliminary enquiry to ascertain what had happened and write up a social enquiry report. In response to these cases, social welfare officers were able to provide financial, medical, psychosocial and legal assistance to victims and families as needed through the case management fund financed by UNICEF, as well as additional funding provided by the government and community members. The financial support primarily helped to cover the funeral costs for some of the children who had died. Legal assistance was also provided to help support victims and family members to understand and navigate judicial processes, and to follow up on cases that had gone to court. Psychosocial support was provided for as long as it was needed to the victims and other family members, including other children residing in the household who may have been traumatised and grieving.

According to UNICEF staff, social welfare officers collaborated closely with the Gender and Children’s Desks in Chunya and Njombe, which sit within the police and conduct investigations, as well as with community leaders, such as chiefs, elders and religious leaders, and District Commissioners. The social welfare officers were involved in regular community meetings, and worked closely with traditional leaders to better understand what had happened.

Once the severity of the situation became apparent, the Women and Children Protection Committees got involved in Chunya and in Njombe. These committees meet quarterly to discuss child protection issues in their areas. During this period, the groups realised that the number of cases associated with witchcraft was increasing rapidly. Extraordinary meetings took place outside of their regularly scheduled gatherings to try to address the ongoing rapes and killings. The committee members were very active and organised, and met with community members in village assemblies to discuss, agree and implement prevention strategies at the community level. These included:
encouraging parents and caregivers to accompany children to and from school, and ensuring that children walk in groups when not with adults;

advising parents to not leave children unattended at home;

spreading key messages using community radio, community meetings, brochures for distribution in public areas, mega phones and mobile cinemas\(^13\) to encourage community members not to believe in nor follow the advice of the witch doctors;

increasing numbers of police stations in wards;

strengthening the women and children protection committees to carry out their responsibilities in addressing child protection issues in their respective areas.\(^14\)

Each district took responsibility for developing agreements with community members to prevent violence and ensure safety. Some of these by-laws included: closing all bars at 6pm; requesting IDs from all newcomers to the villages; identifying all visitors in guest houses and households; and cutting back bushes around homes to reduce hiding spaces.\(^15\)

**Achievements**

In early 2020, UNICEF supported Njombe region to develop and finalise its regional communication plan (as called upon by the NPA-VAWC)\(^16\) to prevent violence against children. Key messages were developed and pre-tested and are disseminated through theatre groups, religious and traditional leaders, influential elders and through community radio and community dialogues. As a consequence, there is an increase in the number of child protection cases being reported and more people, including traditional healers, are speaking out against violence and rape in general. Anecdotally, killings associated with witchcraft appear to have decreased, although there are no hard data to verify this.\(^17\) Typically, cases of witchcraft increase around elections, but last year the anticipated rise did not appear to take place.

As a result of the coordinated action taken by the police and the social welfare officers, five people were arrested in relation to the rape cases in Chunya,\(^18\) and four people were arrested in connection with the killings in Njombe.\(^19\) One suspect was a child who confirmed that he had killed children due to witchcraft beliefs. His case is ongoing.

Although they had no direct connection with the rape cases in Chunya, ten witchdoctors were arrested for inciting violence among community members.\(^20\) These witchdoctors were known for claiming to know who in the community had put a curse on other community members, which would then contribute to tension and conflict among community members. The witchdoctors were not taken to court, but were educated on the effects of what they were doing, and cautioned.

According to the Njombe Ward Executive, the District Commissioner convened many meetings with community members and ordered police to conduct frequent patrols in the community. He openly condemned violence associated with witchcraft and urged parents to expose suspects. His actions are paying off; children are now safer and signposts advertising witchdoctors’ services have significantly reduced.\(^21\)
Addressing witchcraft is not an easy task. Government officials work in fear because some, like many others in these regions, believe in witchcraft. Community members respect and believe in the power of witch doctors and continue to seek their services for a fee. Furthermore, it is often difficult to provide the evidence needed to prove that violence has been caused by witchcraft.

UNICEF staff explained that while there is support from UNICEF and other partners to strengthen the child protection system, resources at district level are inadequate to meet the high number of child protection related challenges.

According to the minutes of a meeting in Chunya in February 2019 and interviews with UNICEF staff, one of the biggest challenges the districts face in bringing perpetrators to justice is that parents choose to settle cases outside of court and refuse to testify. There is a general distrust of the justice system. Families prefer to find solutions among themselves, with perpetrators often prepared to pay large sums of money to a victim’s family to settle out of court.

In a Legal and Human Rights Centre report, 22 teachers and community members in Njombe reported that the police were generally uncooperative until the severity of the issue attracted a lot of media attention and became of public interest. At that point, Senior Police Officers were sent to investigate and social welfare officers were told they could no longer provide support to the families involved. The lack of local security mechanisms means that communities are entirely dependent on the police. There were also frustrations among community members that legal procedures took too long and they therefore took matters into their own hands. In one instance, an alleged rapist was seriously injured.
A lot of time, resources and effort have gone into strengthening the child protection system in Tanzania, and the response mechanisms that kicked in following the brutal attacks and killings of children demonstrate that it is reasonably robust to respond to such extreme events in an effective way: all actors concerned played their role, investigating the incidents and providing assistance as needed to victims and families. Coordination and communication among the different sectors involved in the cases were also strong and led to multiple arrests of suspected perpetrators. Subsequently, sustained messaging in the affected communities and surrounding areas appears to have led to an increase in reports of child protection concerns to the police and a decrease in numbers of incidents linked to witchcraft.

That said, in areas where it is practiced, witchcraft is still both revered and feared and it is difficult as a consequence to fully address the violence that can accompany it. Furthermore, a combination of a lack of resources and a lack of faith in the judicial system from community members appears to undermine the child protection system’s ability to follow through on cases, thereby jeopardising the need for perpetrators to be brought to justice and for victims to feel better protected.

People in Tanzania and across the region tend to rely on the informal system of negotiations between families and individuals when crimes have been committed, particularly in instances of grave violence. Moving forward, it would be helpful to identify, understand and consider dynamics and priorities at play within communities as agencies seek to build and strengthen a child protection system that can respond effectively to the needs and priorities of the people it seeks to protect.
UNICEF Addressing witchcraft in Tanzania: case study of a promising approach


[4] https://www.spotlightinitiative.org/ The Spotlight Initiative is a global partnership spanning several years between the European Union and the United Nations. It was launched in 2017 and aims to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls through prevention, protection and the provision of services, with a focus on women’s economic empowerment and participation in all aspects of society.


[6] United Republic of Tanzania (2002). The Witchcraft Act. The Witchcraft Act defines ‘instruments of witchcraft’ as “anything which is used or intended to be used or is commonly used, or which is represented or generally believed to possess the power, to prevent or delay any person from doing any act which he may lawfully do, or to compel any person to do any act which he may lawfully refrain from doing, or to discover the person guilty of any alleged crime or other act of which complainant is made, or to cause death, injury or disease to any person or damage to any property, or to put any person in fear, or by supernatural means to produce any natural phenomenon and includes charms and medicines commonly used for any of the purposes aforesaid.”


[13] Vehicles, installed with equipment to show movies, travel to remote areas, including where there is no electricity, to show free movies with specific messages for the community.

[14] Information is taken from the minutes of a meeting in Chunya in February 2019 involving Social Welfare Officers, Community Development Officers and UNICEF staff, as well as a UNICEF report on the killings of children in Njombe.

[15] Information is taken from the minutes of a meeting in Njombe in February 2019 involving Social Welfare Officers, Community Development Officers and UNICEF staff.


[17] Social welfare officers in Njombe and Chunya told UNICEF staff that up until now there have been no additional cases reported of killings or rape associated with witchcraft in their districts.

[18] Information is taken from the minutes of a meeting in Chunya in February 2019 involving Social Welfare Officers, Community Development Officers and UNICEF staff.


[20] Information is taken from the minutes of a meeting in Chunya in February 2019 involving Social Welfare Officers, Community Development Officers and UNICEF staff.


[22] Ibid,