COUNTRY PROFILE 2021: UNFPA-UNICEF GLOBAL PROGRAMME TO END CHILD MARRIAGE

UGANDA
Child marriage context

There are 4.7 million child brides in Uganda, 1.3 million of whom were married before the age of 15. In 2016, the prevalence of child marriage (marriage before the age of 18) among girls stood at 34 per cent. The practice has become less common in the last 25 years, with the percentage of young women aged 20–24 who were married before age 18 years old dropping from 52 per cent in 1991 to 34 per cent in 2016. However, this rate of progress is not rapid enough to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) target to end child marriage by 2030. Even if the rate observed over the past decade was doubled, 18 per cent of all girls will still be married in childhood by 2030 and 8 per cent by 2050.

Programming context

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly affected the everyday lives of girls for a second year in 2021, including their physical and mental health, education and the economic circumstances of their families and communities. Globally, up to 10 million more girls are estimated to become child brides by 2030 as a result of the pandemic. UNFPA and UNICEF Evaluation Offices conducted a joint assessment of Global Programme adaptations to the COVID-19 crisis in 2021. The COVID-19 assessment aimed to:

- Assess relevant contingency planning and implementation and alternative delivery and

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management arrangements for the Global Programme due to the COVID-19 pandemic, taking into account the views of vulnerable adolescent girls, their families, communities and key implementing partners.

- Make recommendations for the immediate to mid-term improvement of the Global Programme response to COVID-19, identify ongoing programme changes and recommending any additional support required to implement those programme changes and shifting priorities.

- Make any recommendations required to adjust the Global Programme Phase II to the new context, including its theory of change and the targets established before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The results of the assessment indicate that:

- It is critical to keep the focus and efforts in reaching the most vulnerable and marginalized adolescents, including those in remote areas.

- Lessons could be taken from experiences using multi-channel and two-way communication approaches, while also being attentive to the digital divide.
• Vulnerable adolescents must continue to have access to education (especially if provided remotely), health and social welfare services.

• It is key to overcome drivers of poverty by leveraging existing social protection schemes.

• Ensuring the use of evidence led programming is important and so too is advocating with governments to keep child marriage prevention and responses on national agendas while continuing to develop legal and operational frameworks to help accelerate the end of child marriage.

These results will inform future adjustments and refinements to the programme. They will help continue delivering in changing contexts and accelerating the pace, during the Decade of Action, of eliminating child marriage to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

Key highlights

• Over 200,000 adolescent girls (aged 10-19) actively participated in life skills or comprehensive sexuality education in programme areas

• Over 3 million individuals (boys, girls, women and men) reached by traditional and social media messaging on child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality

• Over 100,000 individuals (boys, girls, women and men) participated in group education or dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality

• Launch of the National Child Policy which aligns with Uganda national development strategy (Vision 2040)

• Launch of a nationwide campaign to prevent defilement, teenage pregnancy, child marriage and to promote positive parenting

TABLE. Conclusions and recommendations from the COVID-19 assessment

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<td>Programme advocacy and engagement efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic kept child marriage on national agendas</td>
<td>Advocate with governments to continue developing legal and operational frameworks contributing to ending child marriage with a rights-based and multisectoral focus</td>
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<td>Adoption of digital and mass media approaches demonstrated a high potential for sustaining engagement of adolescent girls at scale, although the digital divide should be considered</td>
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Providing intensive support to marginalized girls

Vulnerable girls, at risk of violence or gender-based violence, and their families, including in humanitarian contexts, accessed information on gender-based violence, violence against children, gender equality and economic opportunities during 2021. This was done through the adolescent life skills initiative using rights-based training.
 manuals for in- and out-of-school girls. It enhanced the girls’ knowledge and understanding of human rights and developed their confidence to seek and demand services, make informed decisions, report incidents of child marriage and strengthened their resilience to withstanding the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Following the closure of schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the approach to up skilling adolescents shifted from in-school to out-of-school community-based club engagement. This approach enabled them to acquire enhanced knowledge of life skills and an understanding of risk factors on violence against children in schools, gender issues, HIV, sexual and reproductive health and rights, prevention of teenage pregnancy and child marriage. 170 peer educators have been trained to deliver life skills sessions with support of UNICEF’s partner Straight Talk Foundation. The peer educators have in turn trained and mentored a further 200,407 girls and 88,998 boys using the out-of-school club platforms and the community dialogue sessions.

The Global Programme also supported the establishment and strengthening of 30 new adolescent clubs which empowered adolescent girls with knowledge and skills related to decision making on issues related to sexuality, reproduction, marriage and risky behaviours. The empowerment of adolescent girls was further strengthened through the girls empowering girls mentorship programme, supported by peer educators and para-social workers who conducted home visits and referrals to services during COVID-19.

The launch of the Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Teenage Pregnancy in School Settings by the Ministry of Education and Sports, which provides for the re-enrolment of adolescent mothers into schools. The re-entry guidelines created momentum for the return of pregnant girls and teenage mothers to school and for them to remain in school. To support this, all District Resident Commissioners have been instructed through the office of the president to work with the District Education Officers to mobilize girls that became pregnant during the lockdown to go back to school. In addition, task forces have been formed at district level to implement the directive from the First Lady’s office. Relatedly, the Ministry of Education and Sports launched guidelines for senior male and female teachers to strengthen their role with mentoring and referring adolescent girls to protection and health services as required.

Although schools were closed for an extended period since March 2020 across the country, the Global Programme aligned with the government strategy and modalities that supported home-based distance learning and community-based, non-formal education to ensure continuation of schooling. Support for the delivery of home- and community-based learning in partnership with civil society organizations resulted in 14,144 adolescent girls being better prepared for the transition to secondary school.

The promotion of digital technology and virtual learning also contributed to sustained learning during the prolonged school closures, although there were with challenges on reach and scale for under-served and marginalized adolescent girls, especially in hard to reach communities that did not benefit maximally from these modalities. In addition to the digital learning approaches, the programme, together with partners, also supported 1,784 young people (1,020 girls and 764 boys), including 7 adolescents (2 girls and 5 boys) living with a disability who are currently out of school to attain literacy and numeracy skills sessions facilitated by commercial officers. Provision of livelihood materials was also considered based on a market survey and 23 empowerment club members were provided with tailoring equipment, five received bead making materials and two received bakery start up items to support their economic empowerment.

**CHALLENGES AND NEXT STEPS**

The ability of Global Programme implementing partners to reach all categories of vulnerable adolescent girls with life skills and comprehensive sexuality education, for example girls in hard-to-reach communities, was curtailed under the COVID-19 lockdown measures as restrictions of
movement and girls’ limited access to virtual platforms and issues of the digital divide impacted how the programme could reach them. Prolonged school closures also affected the implementation of school-based interventions, leaving only space for community- and home-based interventions, which had implications on the quality of interventions, their reach and scale and the ability to monitor and report.

The adapted approach also impacted the budget required in terms of both human and financial resources. The shift in focus to health interventions, home schooling and the revitalization of the economy to address the impact of COVID-19 additionally resulted in limited attention and de-prioritization of the government for the implementation of adolescent-friendly interventions, such as comprehensive sexuality education and life skills sessions, especially at subnational levels.

Most child marriages involve girls from poor families, marginalized groups, and those in poor and remote areas. COVID-19 has put these vulnerable groups at even greater risk. The pandemic has exacerbated several risk factors that drive child marriage and, at the same time, created new threats. As a result, the priority going forward will be to tackle underlying causes of child marriage and help to create alternative life options for girls and boys. Adaptation of existing programmes and new innovations will be required to address the drivers and advance progress in reducing child marriage, including new and alternative approaches to engage with girls, boys, families and communities and new strategies to reduce the risk of child marriage related to prolonged school closures.

The Global Programme will strengthen partnerships and collaboration for an integrated package of services and broaden reach to hard-to-reach adolescent boys and girls. Particular attention will be paid to supporting adolescent girls and boys who are unable to return to formal education to consider non-formal education through the provision of vocational skills training, literacy classes and access to employment opportunities, including access to start-up loans.

Enhancing the family and community environment

The implementation of gender-transformative approaches as a key strategy for addressing child marriage demonstrated great potential for changing negative gender and social norms, beliefs and attitudes that drive child marriage. The men’s and boys’ engagement for social change and girls’ empowerment, community mobilization through religious and cultural institutions and multi-media campaigns with messages on gender-based inequalities, harmful gender norms and power imbalance inherent in patriarchal societies promoted open discussions on negative gender and social norms, beliefs and attitudes on child marriage. These interventions built a critical mass of male activists, community leaders and stakeholders who lead discussions on a deeper analysis of men’s power over women and challenge the practice of child marriage resulting in an appreciable change in attitudes and practices related to child marriage among the target population.

In 2021, the country witnessed the unusual commitment of religious leaders through the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda supporting several sexual and reproductive health and rights services that have previously been considered contentious. Religious leaders are now increasingly playing leadership roles through engagement and conversations with adolescents on sexuality and meaningful decision-
making, including on marriage. The religious leaders committed to join the national campaign to end child marriage and teenage pregnancy. In addition, during the 16 Days of Activism, the forum of cultural leaders from eight institutions in the Bugisu, Busoga, Buganda, Acholi, Karamoja, Bunyoyo, Tyanga Dhora Lango and Lugbar districts made a joint statement and commitment to end teenage pregnancy and child marriage and denounced other harmful practices, including female genital mutilation. The programme supported the leadership of seven main religious denominations (the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of the Province of Uganda, the Uganda Orthodox Church, the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council, the Seventh-day Adventist Uganda Union, the Born Again Faith in Uganda and the National Alliance of Pentecostal and Evangelical Churches in Uganda) to mobilize communities for gender-based violence prevention, ending child marriage and demand sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence services through commonly agreed messaging at the level of the Inter-religious Council of Uganda and utilization of religious structures for community dialogues and mass media communication. Through media communication, mainly radio talk shows, 1,300,000 individuals (782,000 males and 1,518,000 females) were reached with messages that contributed to building consensus on alternatives to child marriage and enhanced knowledge on the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality.

Furthermore, a total of 1,389 men and boys were engaged through Male Action Groups and through Accountable Practices (EMAP) in the programme areas, as champions for change on gender norms. This approach empowered men and boys to play active leadership roles in mobilizing and engaging other men and boys in open discussions and dialogues that address harmful masculinities and promote gender-transformative results.

The Global Programme support to civil society organizations (Action Aid and IRC) ensured the identification, training and monthly meetings of the trained male champions and built their capacity as change agents. The male champions further identified and reached fellow men and boys including fathers, clan and cultural leaders, young men, religious leaders, village health team members, senior male teachers, political leaders and opinion leaders in their respective communities. Through the men’s and boys’ engagement sessions, a total of 10,120 men and boys engaged with a variety of information, such as sexual and reproductive health and rights for girls and women, gender-based violence, child marriage and other harmful practices and on changing behaviours and power dynamics both in homes and in the community.

Complementary interventions such as the Spotlight Initiative also supported a critical mass of community leaders and stakeholders to gain skills to lead discussions on deepening analysis of men’s power over women and to challenge the silence around child marriage and harmful masculinities. The Spotlight Initiative supported the SASA! Together community mobilization training, engaging 918 community activists, which was cascaded to 137,078 people in rural communities, which in turn increased their understanding of the nexus between power, violence and gender equity. The silence around gender relationships and harmful masculinities, violence against women and harmful practices, such as child marriage, has gradually been broken as open discussions continue to take place at community level amongst different social networks.

Building on previous years’ interventions, the programme continued to mobilize and work with women- and youth-
led organizations including BRAC, Action Aid, RAHU, ACORD, Girl Up Initiative and Reproductive Health Uganda to support the challenging of social norms and the promotion of gender equality. Through community-led interventions including intergenerational dialogues, Male Action Groups and SASA! methodologies, social media advocacy campaigns and peer-to-peer activities provision of critical services to girls and women were strengthened, including livelihood empowerment and access to sexual and reproductive health services, which contributed to preventing teenage pregnancy and child marriage among vulnerable adolescent girls, including in refugee communities and in hard-to-reach locations. The youth-led organizations focused on building the capacity and agency of adolescent girls to enhance their voices for meaningful participation and decision making. The organizations also addressed gender inequalities and empowered women and girls to become advocates of human rights while enhancing their self-esteem, autonomy and self-worth.

CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS

The concept of male involvement and leadership in open discussions that challenge deep-rooted gender issues and harmful masculinities and that promote gender equality and transformation is alien to the culture and tradition of the patriarchal Ugandan society. Therefore, changing gender dynamics and decision-making roles using gender-transformative approaches is a gradual process that will gain gradual acceptance. Opposition from religious and cultural institutions entail careful identification of allies and support networks at all levels. In 2022, in-depth analysis of gender-transformative approaches will be conducted to generate evidence and better understand the approach for evidence-informed planning and implementation.

Working with families, communities, traditional and religious leaders and other influencers to build consensus on alternatives to child marriage will have an impact in the long term. However, these interventions need to
happen in tandem with efforts to tackle structural drivers of child marriage to make a significant impact on reducing the risks of child marriage. These interventions must be accompanied by other support systems and services, such as social protection, saving and loan programmes and access to education for all girls and boys.

Civil society organizations have continued to play a lead role in advancing the rights of women and girls, including challenging negative social norms, gender-based violence and holding duty bearers accountable in line with international standards. Recently, the ability and commitment of civil society organizations have been met with restrictive legal provisions such as the Public Order Management Act, the amended Non-Governmental Organization Act and the Anti-Terrorism Act which impacts civil society-led interventions. Reported incidents of name calling and branding of non-governmental organizations as supporters of homosexuality, agents of foreign interests and enemies of national security has also curtailed the activity of some organizations, keeping the civil society organizations at a crossroad as national policies continue to narrow their operational space thus limiting their potential as advocated for the rights of vulnerable girls and women.

**Strengthening systems**

By strengthening national protection systems at a national and decentralized levels, enhanced capacity for the delivery of coordinated, multi-sectoral quality services to adolescents and their families was achieved, among actors, such as USAID, Save the Children and the Spotlight Initiative, under the leadership of the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development. For example, dissemination and implementation of the national child policy in 50 districts, including the establishment of district-level child wellbeing committees and a social care and support technical working group, contributed to improved coordination, collaboration and leveraging of resources between development partners and civil society organizations within the humanitarian context. In addition, nine districts were supported enforce a sustainable and integrated child protection system through the training of 402 (209 male and 193 female) justice, health and social workers on case management, case referral and coordination, providing multisectoral protection services to 16,403 adolescent girls. The implementation of policies, frameworks and guidelines, such as the adolescent girl multisectoral framework, the revised guidelines on the prevention and management of teenage pregnancy in school settings and the menstrual health management guidelines for in-school adolescents provided further clear guidance on multisectoral roles and responsibilities for integrated service delivery to meet the needs of adolescents.

The Global Programme and partners utilized the opportunity of the school closures to train 832 teachers from 216 schools on comprehensive sexuality education using the Presidential Initiative on AIDS Strategy for Communication to Youth (PIASCY) curriculum to deliver sexuality education sessions to young people at the community level. The teachers then mobilized young people aged 10-14 and 15-19 respectively to attend the sessions. A total of 121,839 young people acquired information and deepened their knowledge on sexual and reproductive health, HIV and AIDS, prevention of gender-based violence, relationships, life skills and menstrual hygiene through the sessions.

Key results were also achieved through support for policy development and institutional capacity strengthening, which contributed to strengthening the resilience of the education system at a very difficult time. Support from the Ministry of Education and Sports contributed to the approval of the Revised Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Teenage Pregnancy, which is key in creating an enabling environment for the safe return of vulnerable adolescent girls to school. Support for the printing and distribution of essential schoolbooks and materials for the different categories of students also supported home-based/distance learning during the school closures.

The Global Programme supported integrated outreach on sexual and reproductive health and rights, in line with the Ministry of Health’s COVID-19 control guidelines.
These were designed to respond to the needs of different groups of young people, including those in hard-to-reach communities, which facilitated their access and referral to different sexual and reproductive health services. Community mobilization and dialogues generated demand for services, for example, through radio talk shows led by district leaders and small group community meetings organized by civil society organizations. The Global Programme also supported a total of 204,247 girls and boys to access HIV and other sexually transmitted infections testing, ante- and post-natal care, HPV vaccines for adolescent girls (10-14 years), comprehensive information and counselling on adolescent and youth growth and development, sexual and gender-based violence response services, services for pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections prevention and sexual and reproductive health and rights education.

The Global Programme additionally supported the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs in providing legal services to survivors of violence and gender-based violence, with a special focus on child marriage. 143 individuals from the justice, law and order sector institutions, including technical teams, high court judges, registrars, deputy registrars, assistant registrars, chief magistrates, the police, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecution, Uganda prisons, the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development and advocates from private practice were trained to strengthen their capacity. This was done to support survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, including children, women, refugees, internally displaced persons and people living with disabilities to access justice. In addition, media was utilized to intensify sensitization about the on-going sexual and gender-based violence court sessions and the key roles of the judiciary, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecution, probation and social welfare officers and the community in promoting justice for adolescent girls and women. During the year, a total of 682 sexual and gender-based violence cases were handled out of the total of 771 cases, meaning an achievement of 88 per cent clearance of the listed cases.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The pandemic introduced a new era of use of technology to accelerate learning. Schools adapted the use of computers for online learning, and other platforms, such as radios, to promote distance learning, although with limited access and reach especially to rural populations. The challenge of the digital divide between urban and rural populations, and especially for marginalized adolescent girls, continued to be an issue in reaching all girls and boys.

Reprioritization of programmatic approaches were contextualized to accommodate the limited availability of the health structures to implement sexual and reproductive health interventions due to the priority on addressing the COVID-19 pandemic. The child protection structures were, to a large extent, overwhelmed with a high prevalence of cases of violence against children, especially sexual violence resulting in teenage pregnancy. This situation resulted in the implementation of community-based interventions using more of a social and behaviour change approach to promote a gender-responsive service environment.

There is a need to integrate adolescent-friendly services into health, gender-based violence and child protection emergency preparedness and response plans to ensure continuum of services and care for adolescents, especially girls, during public health emergencies. The current COVID-
19 pandemic clearly highlighted a huge gap in the delivery of quality adolescent-friendly sexual and reproductive health services to vulnerable adolescent girls.

**Facilitating supportive laws and policies**

At the national level, the Global Programme supported the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development in the development and implementation of adolescent-friendly policies, frameworks and instruments that are based on international human right principles. Example of such policies are:

- The National Child Policy which aligns with Uganda’s national development strategy (Vision 2040). The policy demonstrates the government’s commitment to ensuring the well-being of all children, including adolescent girls. The policy is structured around four broad categories of children’s rights: survival, development, protection and participation, plus system strengthening to anchor and sustain effective and coordinated implementation in the short- and long-run, providing services for all children in Uganda, including refugees in accordance with international and national legislation.

- The National Strategy to End Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy is also aligned with national development frameworks and international human rights standards with a focus on ending child marriage.

- The Revised Guidelines on the Prevention and Management of Teenage Pregnancy in School Settings provides guidelines to support prevention and management of teenage pregnancy in schools, making reference to the Draft National School Health Policy and Sexuality Education Framework, and specifically to: 1) outlining modes of service delivery within a learning institution setting that enable prevention of pregnancy among girls; 2) propose linkages for a minimum care package for prevention and management of teenage pregnancy in learning institutions; and 3) outline steps and services that should be in place to re-integrate adolescent mothers into learning institutions.

- The National Strategic Plan on Violence Against Children in Schools aims to ensure a safe learning environment that enables children in Uganda to stay in, learn in and complete school and be able to unlock their potential for development. The overall goal of the strategic plan is to ensure that measures are in place to prevent, protect and respond to violence against children in schools.

- The Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Male Involvement Strategy by the Ministry of Health and the male engagement strategy by the Ministry of Gender provides a platform to engage boys and men to advance women’s and girls’ rights.

In 2021, the Global Programme intensified its high-level advocacy for an integrated government approach, supporting leadership and political will to address child marriage and teenage pregnancy, especially in the context of COVID-19. The launch of a nationwide campaign to prevent defilement, teenage pregnancy and child marriage and to promote positive parenting under the leadership of the First Lady and co-championed by the Vice President and Prime Minister galvanized national action and cross-sectoral commitment of all stakeholders including ministries, departments and agencies, parents/guardians, political leaders, religious, cultural and community leaders, civil society organizations, academics, media and children to address child marriage and other related issues affecting adolescents. The launch of the one-year national campaign is aligned to the key strategy of the Global Programme which is based on a three-pronged approach (prevention, protection and evidence generation and knowledge
management) and provides a platform for collaboration, strengthened partnerships and engagement for re-enforced actions to end child marriage at all levels. The campaign has been embraced by civil society organizations in Uganda, resulting in a pledge by the Vice President, regional female political leaders and other high-level political representatives to lead the campaign at national and regional level. The high-level advocacy also ensured that child marriage and teenage pregnancy were reflected as critical issues in the 2021 Uganda State of Population Report, thus providing key information to policymakers and planners across the country for prioritizing investments to address child marriage.

The Global Programme supported the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development to undertake a mid-term evaluation of the National Strategy to End Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy. The evaluation aimed at determining the extent to which the five-year strategy targets were achieved, documenting major achievements, lessons and emerging issues with recommendations to guide programme development and implementation on ending child marriage.

At subnational level, five Global Programme-implementing districts were supported to develop ordinances on child marriage and cultural institutions supported to review their customary laws. An additional eight districts were supported to develop and implement costed district development plans which integrate child marriage and gender-based violence as thematic issues with implementation strategies for addressing the issues. In addition, cultural institutions were also supported to develop and implement child marriage related protocols that align with international standards and national and subnational guidelines. For example, Acholi Cultural Foundation developed marriage protocols with a prohibition on child marriage to guide marriages in their culture.

CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS

The Global Programme has supported the development of several policies that are in line with international human rights standards aimed at preventing child marriage, protecting those at risk and addressing the needs of those affected in Uganda. Going forward, efforts should focus on popularizing and implementing the policies and laws to contribute to an enabling environment for ending child marriage.

Unfortunately, the implementation of interventions to facilitate laws and policies was slowed down by the onset of the second wave of COVID-19 in Uganda. Interventions around capacity building of government focal persons were initially suspended and then reduced to not more 20 persons at a time, which drastically impacted on resources required and timelines planned for the interventions. In addition, there is a general apathy to initiate development of policies and enactment of laws which affected the achievement of programme targets.

A further challenge was the limited understanding and conceptual clarity on gender-transformative approaches and subsequent programmatic issues among implementing partners that have impacted the development of multisectoral plans, especially at subnational level. Evidence generation and multisectoral capacity building on gender-transformative approaches is key to the development and implementation of a budgeted multisectoral plan as a key strategy for addressing gender equity and negative social norms fuelling the practice of child marriage.

Generating and applying data and evidence

Enhanced knowledge and skills of the government and civil society partners under the Global Programme recognized and identified a knowledge gap on the impact of COVID-19 on harmful practices and on adolescents. Hence, the Global Programme supported the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development to assess the impact of COVID-19 on harmful practices, with a focus on child marriage and female genital mutilation, to deepen the understanding of how the pandemic has impacted risks and vulnerabilities of girls in selected districts and refugee communities. The results of this assessment will
provide evidence for the development of a new national strategy to end child marriage and teenage pregnancy as well as strategic programme direction, planning and implementation that address critical knowledge gaps on the impact of COVID-19 on harmful practices.

The Global Programme further supported the Uganda Bureau of Statistics to incorporate, generate and use indicators on gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health and rights in community information management systems in 14 districts. During the reporting period, data was collected in the Arua, Tororo and Kampala districts.

Data generation to show the cost of inaction on teenage pregnancy was also conducted during the year. The findings of this study were presented at the national launch of the campaign to address teenage pregnancy and child marriage with theme Protect the Girl, Save the Nation. Going forward, evidence from this study will be utilized in policy dialogue to call for investments in adolescent health and well-being. The evidence will also guide engagement with leaders (religious, cultural and political, among others) at a regional level for a call to action to address the high incidence of teenage pregnancy and child marriage in the three most affected regions of Busoga, Buganda and Bukedi.

Additionally, leveraging other programmes, the Parliamentary Research Department was supported to produce compelling evidence that is informing evidence-based advocacy, legislation, and budgeting in Uganda. The results of a study on teenage pregnancy conducted in 2020 led to a motion for a resolution of parliament urging government to develop and enforce policies and strategies to protect girls against escalating cases of teenage pregnancy and child marriage during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The resolution, which was presented and debated in Parliament in April 2021, generated an open discussion on strategic approaches to prevent teenage pregnancy and child marriage and sought parliamentary commitment for a safe policy environment to address teenage pregnancy and child marriage.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The COVID-19 containment measures impacted the implementation of research and the programme’s learning plan, resulting in the postponement of planned research. For example, the baseline study planned at the inception of the current phase of the Global Programme (in 2020) was not possible to conduct due to unavailability of data, while new activities were initiated to respond to upcoming an urgent need for evidence on, for example, the impact of COVID-19 to guide ongoing programme implementation.

A training workshop on harnessing the power of data, conducted by UNICEF through the Spotlight Initiative, deepened the knowledge and skills of government and civil society implementing partners to generate and use data for planning and implementation of programmes to end child marriage and female genital mutilation. Thanks to initiatives such as this, there is an increased recognition and appreciation for the role of evidence in all aspects of programming, from assessment, design, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation to reporting and documentation.
end child marriage