

UNFPA-UNICEF GLOBAL PROGRAMME TO END CHILD MARRIAGE AND
UNFPA-UNICEF JOINT PROGRAMME ON THE ELIMINATION OF FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE ACCELERATOR

Uganda Country Report



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INTRODUCTION

A gender-transformative approach promotes gender equality – including shared control over resources and decision making – and is grounded in adolescent girls' and women's agency and empowerment. Gender-transformative approaches actively examine, question, and change rigid gender norms and imbalances of power that advantage the majority over marginalized groups, men/boys over women/girls and people who adhere to other subordinated identities and groups.

Examining programmatic strategies and measurement design through a gender-transformative lens is not simple because both the approach and the context in which programmes are executed is tremendously complex and challenging. The Gender-Transformative Accelerator (GTA) tool has been developed to facilitate a process to identify concrete actions to help country office programmes to become more gender-transformative. In Uganda, the GTA was used by both the Global Programme to End Child Marriage and the Joint Programme to Eliminate Female Genital Mutilation through a joint five-day workshop which ran from 18–22 September 2023. UNFPA and UNICEF co-lead the Joint Programmes.

The gender equality continuum encourages critical reflection and awareness to understand how programmes are addressing the unequal distribution of resources between genders, consider how roles and responsibilities are allocated between different genders and identities, and assess how power secures higher status and privilege for some people over others.

A majority of children in Uganda have experienced violence that threatens and halts their holistic and positive development. Fifty-nine per cent of girls and 68 per cent of boys have faced physical violence. Gender-based violence and sexual violence are also prevalent, with 35 per cent of girls and 17 per cent of boys having experienced sexual violence during childhood.¹

Adolescent girls are particularly at risk of child marriage, teenage pregnancy, and female genital mutilation. Uganda is home to more than five million child brides;² 1 in 3 young women were married in

childhood. 1.3 million girls are married before age of 15 and 34 per cent of women aged 20–24 were married before they were 18.³ FGM prevalence is 68 per cent among women aged 45 and 8 per cent among girls aged 15–24 (FGM survey 2016, UBOS). Although the practice is common in the Sebei region and Karamoja region in the eastern and north-eastern part of the country, anecdotal evidence shows that the practice is extending to other districts such as Bukwo, Kasese and Kampala.

The GTA workshop began with values clarification activities to address gender, agency, and power to illustrate the six core components of a gender-transformative approach, namely: (1) adolescent girls' skills, agency and empowerment; (2) addressing masculinities and engaging men and boys; (3) family and community mobilization; (4) gender norms and stereotypes; (5) systems and services strengthening; and (6) policy and structural change through institutional partnerships.

Throughout days one to three of the workshop, values clarification activities were intermingled with a brief overview of each core component and then a ranking and reflection of where participants' current programming falls on the gender equality continuum. Statistical evidence on both child marriage and FGM at global and national levels was shared and analysed. On day four, participants mapped out their current work, opportunities, and programmes across the socio-ecological framework. Finally, on day five, participants underwent a prioritizing exercise to identify areas of focus so that they could develop an action plan of concrete activities to implement progress towards gender-transformative programming.

During the values clarification activities, individuals reflected on:

- how their personal values shaped their work;
- how their personal values did or did not align with the institutional values and objectives of the Global Programme to End Child Marriage and the Joint Programme to Eliminate Female Genital Mutilation;
- several case studies related to child marriage and FGM;

They developed and performed role plays and conducted a power-walk exercise focusing on intersectional identities. There was a vigorous

¹ <https://www.unicef.org/uganda/what-we-do/child-protection>

² <https://childmarriagedata.org/country-profiles/uganda/>

³ <https://www.unicef.org/media/88846/file/Child-marriage-Uganda-profile-2019.pdf>

debate about whether medicalization of FGM should be considered as a positive progress towards addressing the practice. Some people felt this could worsen the situation because some profit-driven health centres would have incentives to continue offering the procedure to increase their revenue. Group discussions about gender norms at the individual, interpersonal and institutional levels uncovered how gender norms and stereotypes create further inequalities and drive girls towards marriage and FGM. For instance, there is a strong expectation that parents should marry off their daughters and/or have them undergo FGM by early adulthood to protect them and ensure a good future.

Some of the most relevant social gender norms and stereotypes for adolescent girls include:

- girls who are not subjected to FGM cannot get married;
- adolescent girls and women should do all household chores;
- adolescent girls and women are expected to be submissive in both cultural and religious institutions and they should not speak or make decisions at meetings; and
- women do not lead in cultural settings.

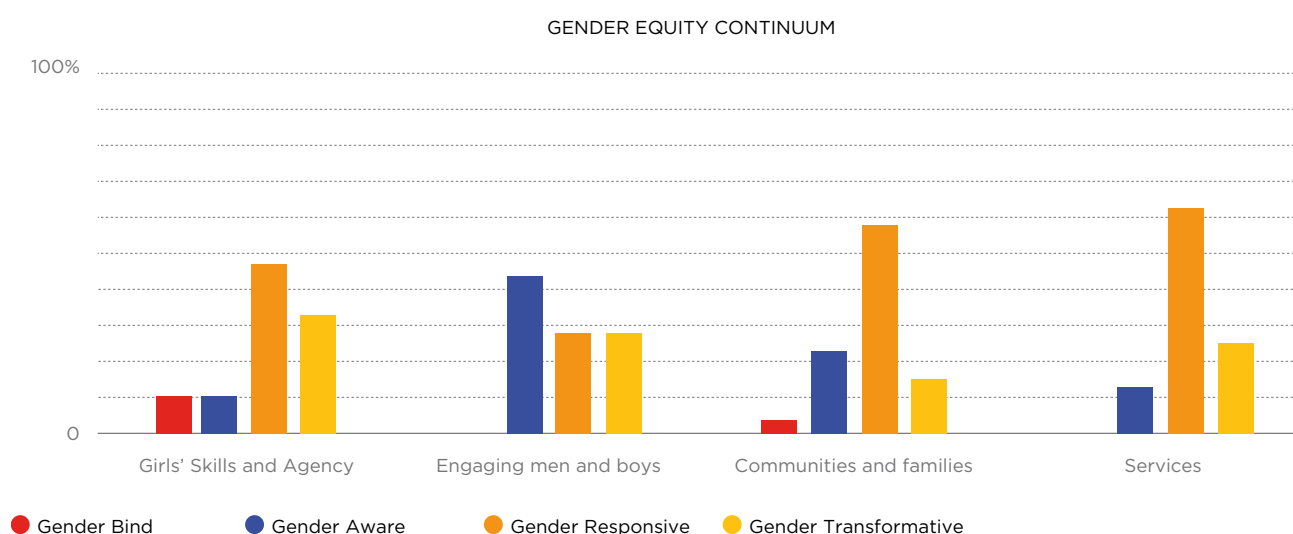
In contrast, boys and men are expected to be strong and tough and typical roles for men included being a leader, managing all resources, disciplining family members and generating income and wealth. The discussion around gender norms and stereotypes throughout the workshop was nuanced and complex.

Participants agreed it is possible to change negative social gender norms and stereotyping, though it requires intentional design and longer, more sustained programming. Participants recognized that individuals are introduced to social and gender norms in their families and therefore emphasized that interventions that target the family are an essential strategy. Interventions only targeting adolescent girls will not make much difference because many institutions are influenced by the patriarchy. Engaging boys and men to strengthen positive masculinities will benefit men in addition to addressing gender inequality and harmful gender norms. There is reinforcement of negative gender norms in all institutions from family to school, and from religious and cultural institutions.

Retrospectively, it was pointed out that gender norms and stereotyping influence personal values and unconscious biases among individuals. When personal values do not align with institutional values, this affects programming because individual values influence the decisions made in the workplace. The individual values should tie into institutional values because they are working towards a common vision or solving a problem. Also, power dynamics largely impact programme interventions and therefore these need to be understood while planning programmes.

Figure 1 shows how a presentation on the overview of the gender equity continuum stimulated an evaluation of what partners had achieved and the gaps towards achieving a gender-transformative approach.

Figure 1: Ranking on GTA core components



ADOLESCENT GIRLS' SKILLS, AGENCY, AND EMPOWERMENT: GENDER-RESPONSIVE

The adolescent girls' skills, agency, and empowerment core component had the highest number of gender-transformative responses although it was currently ranked at the gender-responsive stage. The session on agency included participants brainstorming the definition of agency and a taking part in a role play on the various actors in the community who can facilitate girls' agency and empowerment.

Action Aid Uganda mentioned being at a gender-transformative level in their programme interventions, focusing on enhancing self-awareness, self-care and feminist leadership to build agency and address power inequalities. Plan International, in its Ugandan programming, was also noted to be gender-transformative because it was centred around empowering girls. Need assessments are done at project inception to ascertain the root causes of inequalities between men, women, boys and girls. At the intervention level, approaches aim to address power imbalances, enhance gender equity, mitigate harmful social norms and engage boys and men as allies of change. The Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, on the other hand, had ranked themselves as being gender-responsive. Their gender mainstreaming department developed a school toolkit, although this needed a wider reach through dissemination to more districts. Similarly, the Ministry of Education and Sports also noted being at a gender-responsive level. However, they also mentioned that a gender mainstreaming department was in place and could help the institution incorporate more gender-transformative approaches.

Participants also highlighted that sometimes the programmes are designed to be gender-transformative, but when it comes to actual implementation they may not always meet gender-transformative standards. Overall, NGOs seemed to be implementing their work in more gender-transformative ways than government institutions. More collaboration and movement-building can help both to keep at par when it comes to such important development approaches.

The feedback from the meeting highlighted the fact that a majority of girls living in rural areas lack agency. They do not know who to report violence to or where to seek help when their rights are abused

because they have inadequate awareness of the referral pathway.

The group suggested a need to define the key actors in achieving adolescent girls' agency and create awareness of a referral pathway of services from which adolescent girls can seek redress when faced with violence. Providing adolescent girls with information on who will support them is key, because they need to go to people who can listen and address the challenges they face in a timely manner.



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ADDRESSING MASCULINITIES AND ENGAGING MEN AND BOYS: GENDER-AWARE

Addressing masculinities and engaging men and boys was ranked at the gender-aware stage. Programmes are engaging men and boys in community awareness campaigns without questioning existing gender norms and stereotypes related to harmful masculinity. It was also highlighted that it takes time to see the impact when conversation and dialogue is structured around questioning patriarchy and power, and how these factors manifest masculinity norms which are then made visible in roles and behaviours. Also, it is important to acknowledge that gender norms are deeply rooted and this conditioning and socialization process takes a long time to change or shift.

The meeting participants learned that key government institutions had initiated efforts to engage men and boys. However, these interventions are still modest and it is hard to measure gainful change. For instance, the Ministry of Gender, Labour

and Social Development has begun to use and disseminate the male engagement strategy, but only in very few districts in Uganda. The Ministry of Education and Sports is reviewing the school curriculum through its gender unit. This could be an opportunity to rectify aspects of the curriculum which reinforce negative gender norms and stereotypes and impede the efforts of schools and educational institutions to be centres of change.

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT – FAMILY AND COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION: GENDER-RESPONSIVE

This component was ranked at the gender-responsive stage. Interventions are underway targeting the most marginalized adolescent girls who are most at risk of child marriage and FGM. These are girls who live in urban slums, in rural and hard-to-reach areas and who also come from poor families. Several community actors are being engaged and associated with adolescent girls and child marriage, promoting gender-specific interventions to improve outcomes for girls and/or boys. However, the gap noted here was the inadequate engagement of persons with disability (PWDs). Interventions targeting PWDs had been left to PWD-focused organizations. Similarly, community mobilization efforts were leaving out indigenous

minority ethnic groups such as the Ik people, who are found in the Kaabong district in Northeastern Uganda.

Thoughts on community engagement and mobilization recommended inclusive programming where all groups of people in the community, such as persons with disability and traditional leaders, and issues such as livelihood and empowerment are integrated into the same programme. The Parish Development Model is a government strategy for organizing and delivering public and private sector interventions for wealth creation and employment generation at the parish level, the lowest economic planning unit. Currently being rolled out in districts, a review of its impact could consider whether it might also include gender transformative programming, since it could be used as a mobilizing tool.

Engaging traditional leaders is crucial because they are the custodians and drivers of cultural practices such as FGM. It was noted, for instance, that natural disasters and misfortunes such as drought were often associated with girls not being circumcised and the rain gods consequently being unhappy. Such attitudes could be addressed through intergenerational and targeted dialogues, drama and edutainment. Similarly, the issue of engaging families was also discussed, noting the pressures that drive families to push adolescent girls towards marriage and FGM. The need for interventions that target whole families was suggested.



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SYSTEMS AND SERVICES STRENGTHENING: GENDER-RESPONSIVE

The systems and services core component were ranked as being gender responsive. Insights from the participants indicated that the systems supporting the relevant government sectors and the concerns being addressed were in place. Some of the services and systems highlighted include policies such as the 2016 amended Children's Act which enhances the protection of children from all forms of violence, including the establishment of the Child Helpline as a government child protection service; a national strategy to end violence against children in school and child marriage; the 2010 Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act 2010; and the 2020 National Policy, to uphold children's rights and protection from abuse.

Gaps exist when the laws are inadequately enforced or resourced. Similarly, social service sectors are required to be gender-equitable, but their activities are constrained by inadequate budget allocations. Services are being offered right from the national level to the local government level, but there is a need for capacity building, and for support for duty bearers handling cases with children because many are unaware of these laws. Perpetrators of violence who have power often go unpunished due to the incidence of corruption in parts of the justice system, among the police and in the courts of law. However, sometimes action is difficult; for instance, FGM is secretly being practised across borders and the police are unable to address this.

Recommendations for systems and services strengthening to move towards gender-transformative stages include creating more awareness of the law; movement-building beyond geographical location to build synergies with activists doing similar work; and advocating for resources in strengthening systems at national and district levels.

As an example of movement building, experiences were shared from the work of the Global Youth Consortium Against FGM. This is a youth movement with representation in 55 countries and a mission to achieve a world free of female genital mutilation by 2030. The Ugandan chapter of the consortium has worked closely with UNFPA in implementing the Joint Programme on the Elimination of FGM. The lesson from this partner is that instead of using a top-down approach, movement building has to come from the communities affected and, in this case, putting youth at the forefront of advocacy and all campaigns.

PRIORITY FOCUS AREAS AND RELATED ACTION PRIORITIES

The process of coming up with the priority focus areas involved discussions on the current strategies and programme content in Uganda, using the gender equality continuum and the socio-ecological framework. The groups zeroed into three priority areas:

- adolescent girls' agency, skills and leadership;
- creating an enabling environment through community mobilization; and
- systems and services strengthening.

These priority areas are seen as likely to have the most impact on the programme goals in the next phase.

At the individual level, the Global Programme to End Child Marriage is focusing on the acquisition of life skills by learners through the Ministry of Education, and dissemination of information to adolescents on social and behaviour change (SBC) and individuals reporting cases through the referral pathway. At the community level, a lot of work has been done around community sensitization and mass campaigns to end child marriage. At the service level, the Global Programme is focusing on strengthening Gender Based Violence (GBV) services through initiatives such as shelters and reception centres created at district levels and door-to-door home visits to identify adolescent girls in need and link them to services. At systems level, initiatives include establishment of district Child Wellbeing Committees and capacity building on gender-responsive budgeting, among others. At the policy level – the approval of guidelines for the re-enrolment of adolescent girls in school; supporting district local governments to implement social protection programmes; development of policies and laws in ending child marriage; and the development of parenting guidelines and family policy at cabinet level.

Similarly, the Joint Programme to End FGM had offered life skills training for girls and promoted positive parenting at individual and family levels. At the community level, community outreach workers reported intergenerational dialogues with cultural and religious leaders; the formation of community resolutions; and dissemination of messages on FGM in school health clubs. At the systems and policy level – capacity building and coordination meetings; cross-border harmonization of FGM laws; and community policing and resolutions on FGM. Discussions identified current gaps and emerging opportunities for each of the priority areas, as set out below.

Priority area #1: **Adolescent girls' agency, skills and leadership**

Adolescent girls' agency, empowerment and leadership was agreed to be a crucial priority area since the issues of child marriage and FGM revolve around the girl child. Prior discussions noted the continuing vulnerability of rural girls. This is worsened by negative gender norms and stereotypes being reinforced from the family to community level; knowledge and capacity gaps and inadequate resources for education; access to justice in cases of abuse; and widespread apathy regarding the FGM law. Teenage pregnancy is still high with 25 per cent of Ugandan women having given birth by the age of 18 (UBOS 2018). Among the reasons noted for this are a lack of sexual and reproductive health information, a lack of services, and poverty. Although there is a school re-enrolment policy, full implementation is also lacking due to the negative attitude of educators. There is still a need to enhance their agency and leadership so as to foster their empowerment to end child marriage and FGM.

The opportunities in place to shift towards a more gender-transformative approach include improved literacy levels among adolescents; peer-to-peer support systems; the use of role models and mentorship; and the availability of Government livelihood programmes that they can benefit from.

The adolescent girls' agency, skills and leadership priority area included emphasis on conducting assessments before interventions to find out the needs of adolescent girls; and to continue building on what is already being done, such as providing life skills training that includes knowledge and competencies about their human rights, sexual and reproductive health and financial literacy. Additional elements of life skills training might include economic empowerment through helping adolescent girls gain skills that enhance their employability, and the engagement of men and boys in positive masculinities.

Priority area #2: **Enabling environment through community mobilization**

The communities prone to child marriage and FGM are patriarchal in nature with power largely in the hands of males. These communities have strong cultures, traditions and negative gender norms and stereotypes. Community engagement strategies are very expensive

and intense and take up a lot of resource, and yet the men they hope to engage have poor attitudes towards meetings. Porous borders in north-eastern Uganda, coupled with highly secretive and hard-to-reach communities, have made curbing FGM challenging. External factors like climate change have worsened poverty levels because many communities rely solely on rainfall for agriculture.

However, an opportunity is seen here. Several partners, such as NGOs and coalitions with existing government structures like the Village Health Teams and youth safe spaces, are working to end child marriage and FGM. Some cultural and religious leaders were also willing to challenge child marriage supported by public-private partnerships and effective engagement and information dissemination using online platforms and edutainment.

Priority Area #3: **Systems and services strengthening**

The discussions also pinpointed systems and services strengthening as important because various systems must work well if child marriage is to be discouraged and ended. Among the gaps noted are weak law enforcement; bureaucracies in the justice system; corruption; and inadequate statistics and administrative data to inform evidence-based programming. Lack of political will is evident in infrastructural limitations and poor dissemination of the law.

The opportunities for system strengthening include the recruitment of social welfare officers by NGOs; improved coordination among the child well-being committees from district to sub-county levels; the existence of the Child Helpline (SAUTI 116); an enabling policy environment; and Government commitment to end child marriage. Others include cross-border collaborations and follow-up mechanisms; the engagement of key cultural structures such as the Sabinu elders associations; gender-inclusive approaches within school clubs; and advocacy for affirmative action for girls from FGM practising districts.

It is recommended that duty bearers should expand the reach of social services, including child protection and social protection services, to provide holistic and integrated quality services to adolescent girls. At the local government level, partners could also use the district planning process to include priorities in the district development plans.

ROADMAP & ACTION PLAN

The following recommendations were suggested to achieve each of the above-mentioned priority areas.

- **Drama and edutainment:** radio drama or drama groups to engage the community with messages that are easy to understand and relate to, and stick in people's minds.
- **Standardized messages:** the same messaging should be in all engagements whether on radio, talk shows or community meetings, and they should be translated into local languages.
- **Specific needs assessments:** parasocial workers and duty bearers from the Office of the Secretary for Children's Affairs conducting should work at village level to identify unique challenges faced at the family level.
- **Targeted dialogues with adolescents:** through religious leaders, traditional elders and peer-to-peer education for boys, girls and women, culminating in district multisectoral engagement to harmonize issues from dialogues from communities.
- **Cross-border dialogues:** to harmonize the issues being addressed.



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ROADMAP FOR THE UGANDA - GLOBAL PROGRAMME TO END CHILD MARRIAGE

	ACTION	WHO IS RESPONSIBLE	TIMEFRAME	SUPPORT NEEDED	HOW TO MEASURE SUCCESS
Adolescent girls' agency, skills and leadership	1) Review the ELA model supported by UNFPA and UNICEF life skills approach and FGM programmes with partners to assess if it is gender-responsive /transformative. Integrate gender-transformative elements and harmonize models so content converges and can use similar indicators. 2) Capacity building of stakeholders to implement gender-transformative approaches including values clarification methodologies 3) Partners will cascade training to their partners.	Ministry of Gender - MGLSD Local government ActionAid, BRAC, IRC Girls Not Brides	1&2 - 2024 Q3&4 - 2024 2025	Review of revised / recommended tools Training manual on gender-transformative approaches for partners How to measure gender-transformative results (ODI developing toolkit)	Documentation of story of change Periodic assessment of life skills (baseline and endline) Qualitative measures of GTA
Enabling environment and community mobilization (Output 12.10)	1) Co-create the community care programme/toolkit and integrate GTA 2) Co-create mind-heart dialogue methodology through GTA lens 3) Review community mobilization activities, harmonize strategies, and standardize messages including the power dimension • intergenerational community dialogues • edutainment and other activation events 4) Roll out gender-transformative content through various platforms/ entry points for a structured approach to multisectoral community engagement and mobilization • cultural, traditional, and religious leaders • structured community-based parenting programme • youth-led and women-led participation 5) Media and social media • drama (radio) messaging • talk shows • social media platforms	Min of Gender (Family and Culture Department) Care International, Relevant NGOs and CBOs	Q1&Q2 - 2024	Co-creation of community care and mid-heart dialogue programme tool kits to integrate GTA Training of facilitators on two methodologies and measurement	Documentation of stories of change KAP survey Social norms survey and assessment Use of the Media Analysis Report
Male engagement and positive masculinities	1) Review male engagement strategy to integrate GTA, messages in current content and process. Make improvements as necessary to support positive masculinities, shift deeply rooted gender inequality, and engage men as allies to women's empowerment that also benefit from gender equality (not to give them more power) 2) Conduct baseline and end line assessment on male engagement and positive masculinities interventions and strategy 3) Capacity building and support to Male Action Groups on GTA implementation, monitoring and reporting	UNFPA & UNICEF MoGLSD, MoH, MoES MoGLSD MoGLSD	Q1-Q4 2024-2025 Q2-Q3 2024 & Q3- Q4 2027 Ongoing 2024-2027	Monitoring tool/ checklist Monitoring tool Training manual and monitoring tool	GTA integrated in the male engagement strategy Baseline and endline report on male engagement strategy Capacity of male action groups enhanced on GTA

	ACTION	WHO IS RESPONSIBLE	TIMEFRAME	SUPPORT NEEDED	HOW TO MEASURE SUCCESS
Systems and services strengthening	1) Capacity building on gender-transformative approaches - Review Ministry of Gender tools and determine what GTA can be brought into district level and child protection - Build capacity at the national level, so they can support local level training on GTA - Capacity building of frontline health workers, district DTH member, schools and teachers at sub-district and district levels 2) Support quality gender and adolescent responsive services and delivery to increase utilization; - Assessment of sector service delivery points to determine if they provide gender-responsive/transformative services. Gaps identified in the assessment will inform the design of capacity building 3) Strengthen coordination to improve multisectoral collaboration and interventions - Support child well-being committees at national and sub-national levels (health, education, social services) - Support inter-ministerial committees at national level for child marriage also includes CSOs- quarterly meetings 4) Review existing laws and policies on child marriage and FGM with a gender-transformative lens - Integrate GTA into gender policy review and revision - Adolescent health policy and out of school sexuality guidelines - Map out calendar of policy revisions for the next four years and integrate GTA	MOH, MoES and MGLSD MOH, MoES and MGLSD, MoH, CSOs, DLG, JLOS MoGLSD, MoH, MoES MoGLSD MoGLSD, Ministry of Justice	Q1 - 2024 Q1-Q4 - 2024-2025 Ongoing Q1-Q4 (2024) Q1-Q4 2024-2027 Q1-Q4 2024-2027 Q1-Q4 2024-2027	Training manual & monitoring tool kit with measuring indicators. TOR for coordination structures TOR for coordination structures Monitoring tool/ checklist	GTA approaches integrated into multisectoral partners strategies and monitoring framework Enhanced capacity of government and CSO partners on GTA Enhanced capacity of frontline service providers on GTA. Strengthened coordination of multisectoral partners on GTA strengthened coordination of interministerial committee on GTA GTA integrated in the reviewed laws and policies

PARTICIPANT LIST

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32	Karamoja Women Unmbrella Organization	Odelek Thoma	M	Executive Director
33	Karamoja Elders Association	Nangiro Simon Peter	M	Chair
34	Sabiny Elders Association	Lamin Kassim	M	Association Secretary
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36	Joy for Children	Moses Ntenga	M	Executive Director
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Links to slides presentation

Uganda GTA workshop slides:

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1O63qzo0CIYgEffAkqolAOyNB1hUbrH4n/edit#slide=id.p1>

FGM Statistics presentation:

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1SxV3jr95ttco0lNJuxma1XI_tm6UAo7T/edit#slide=id.p1

Uganda Child marriage country profile:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1X8QnZvUzZfoNPCymjLAeANDAAiDLSL_T



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