



## **Education, marriage, fertility and labour market experiences of young women in Uganda: Evidence from a qualitative assessment**

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### **Abstract**

*Despite the existence of a fairly strong, enabling legal and policy framework, young women in Uganda continue to face a number of challenges as they make crucial transitions into adulthood. In particular, girls are pushed into early marriages and pregnancies and are often deprived of full education attainment. These experiences are likely to have lasting impacts on their future opportunities, particularly, their engagement in productive and decent work. Using qualitative methodologies, this paper explores the inter linkages between the transitions from school to work or motherhood and/or marriage and the ensuing effects on future labour market outcomes and choices. Overall, the study finds that some discriminatory social norms and practices still exist –particularly in rural areas - and they affect the ability of girls and young women to realise their educational and economic capabilities. The majority of young people continue to be engaged in vulnerable employment with limited prospects for growth because of limited access to capital and inadequate skills to productively engage in other activities; the youth who lack skills and capital tend to get stuck in dead-end jobs. In contrast, young people with more education are likely to transit to better jobs as and when employment opportunities arise. Moreover, early fertility and marriage experiences often result in increased caring responsibilities and restricted mobility in search of employment opportunities*

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## 1. Introduction

The choices that young people –particularly women- make regarding transitions from school to work, marriage or motherhood are likely to shape their subsequent life experiences and may have long lasting effects on their future opportunities. For example, duration spent in school may affect the timing of other fundamental transitions like the age at marriage and at first birth, and subsequently their ability to engage in productive work. Like many developing countries in sub Saharan Africa, Uganda still struggles with high school drop-out rates, child marriages and teenage pregnancies. According to the 2015 School to Work Transition Survey (SWTS), more than 50 percent of young Ugandans aged 15-24 years reported to have no formal schooling or acquired education below primary level (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2016b). The same survey shows that compared with boys, girls are more inclined to leave school before completion (51 percent against 41 percent). Early exit from school influences young people to enter the labour market early; in fact the average age at which young people start looking for a job or age of first employment experience is 15 years for females and 14.5 years for males. At this age, these young people should be attending school. The concern then is to understand how these young people (especially women) perform in the labour market, how their opportunities evolve through time, and how this compares with the labour market outcomes of those who stay in school longer and delay marriage or childbearing.

Descriptive evidence from the SWTS shows that young people tend to remain in transition for quite long; for example, young people who leave school without completing at least secondary school are less likely to transition to stable employment<sup>1</sup> or satisfactory self or temporary employment (UBoS 2016b). Six in every ten young people who did not go beyond primary school are still in transition – implying that they are yet to find stable or satisfactory employment compared with 47 percent for those with tertiary and vocational education. Related evidence based on the Demographic and Health Surveys indicates that, *ceteris paribus*, women who got married or gave birth before 20 years are less likely to be in professional/technical and managerial positions (UBOS and ICF International, 2012). Also, a higher proportion of these women are self-employed in the agricultural sector (55 percent against 40 percent for those who married later). However, employment in agriculture remains largely subsistence with many people earning inadequate income from it. According to the 2012/13 UNHS findings, 29 percent of those employed in agriculture were categorized as the working poor compared with 17 percent and 8 percent for those in the production and services sectors (UBoS, 2014).

Against the above background, this paper qualitatively explores the inter-linkages between the transitions from school to work or motherhood and/or marriage and the ensuing effects on future labour market outcomes and choices. In terms of structure, Section 2 of

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<sup>1</sup> Employment that is based on a written contract or oral contract of duration of at least 12 months

this paper provides a situational analysis; section 3 details the methodology and fieldwork design followed by a discussion of the fieldwork findings in Section 4. The conclusions and emerging issues are highlighted in Section 5.

## **2. National Context: Situation Analysis**

### **Laws, Policies and Programs**

Uganda's commitment to empower women to fully participate in economic, social and political spheres is well articulated in the 1995 Constitution. The constitution prohibits discrimination of all forms at all levels of development and provides for the protection and promotion of women's rights and other marginalized groups. Relatedly, both Vision 2040 and the National Development Plan (NDP II) for the period 2015/16-2019/20 recognise gender inequalities and inequities in the development process and point out socio-cultural factors, negative attitudes and mind-sets as some of the binding constraints. As such, government pledges affirmative action in areas where equality does not exist, and mainstreaming of gender and rights in policies and sectors as well as local government plans (GoU 2015).

The above overarching plans are in line with the Uganda Gender Policy (as amended in 2007) whose major objective is to address gender inequalities through the mainstreaming of gender concerns in national development processes and in sectoral resource allocation (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development [MoGLSD], 2007). Correspondingly, policies and programs aimed at addressing gender gaps in education, labour, and reproductive health have been formulated. In the education arena, the GoU through the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) has put in place policies and strategies aimed at improving access to education for both boys and girls at different levels of education. The Universal Primary Education Policy (1997) was introduced to provide free primary education for all children in the country thus reducing biases against sending girls to school. As a result of this policy, enrolment (for both girls and boys) have significantly improved although school retention, quality and completion remain a challenge. Likewise, the Universal Secondary Education (USE) policy was formulated in 2007 to improve progression from primary school to secondary school. MoES also has a Gender in Education policy (2009), which provides a framework for integrating gender in the education sector; the overall goal of the policy is to achieve gender parity at all levels of education by eliminating barriers (social, cultural and economic) that keep girls out of school. Notably, the policy pledges government commitment to facilitating re-entry of girls who drop out as a result of teenage pregnancy and early marriage.

Mindful of the fact that choices made during adolescence are likely to have lasting impacts on one's adult life, the National Adolescent Health Policy (2004) was formulated to mainstream reproductive health concerns in the development process. Some of the reproductive health targets highlighted therein include delaying first child births and raising the age at first birth to 18 years for females, and re-admission of adolescent mothers back into the education system. More recently in 2015, a National Strategy (2015-2020) to end

child marriage and teenage pregnancy was formulated with an overarching goal of ending child marriages and teenage pregnancies for socio-economic transformation.

With the goal of generating productive and decent employment for all, the 2011 National Employment Policy (NEP) was put in place. NEP clearly highlights the female disadvantage in the labour market and aims to address disparities in access to employment and working conditions thereby promoting equality of opportunity between women and men (MoGLSD, 2011). Similarly, the National Child Labour Policy (2006) seeks to circumvent the problem of child labour in Uganda through preventive, protective, and rehabilitative interventions to (MoGLSD, 2006). There are other policies and program initiatives that are aimed at promoting gender equality and improving the capabilities of young girls and women; some are aimed at improving access to and control over productive resources -such as land and credit- and skills enhancing programs among others.

While Uganda's legislative and policy framework looks solid, the effective implementation and enforcement of the said policies is often lacking. Cases of school dropouts, teenage pregnancies, early marriages and poor labour market outcomes continue to affect young women in Uganda. The next section provides a national situational analysis of our key themes of education, fertility, marriage and work/employment.

### **Education domain**

Upon the introduction of UPE in 1997, school enrolment for both boys and girls has increased over the years. According to the recent statistics from Ministry of Education, Uganda's Gender Parity Index at primary school level is 1.0 implying that for every boy enrolled in school, there is at least a girl enrolled. Although completion rates have been improving over time for both girls and boys (with girls attaining better completion rates than boys), 2015/16 annual education sector performance report reveals a decline in primary completion rates from 72 percent for both boys and girls in 2014/15 to 59 percent for boys and 63 percent for girls in 2015/16 (MoES 2016). Furthermore, there are wide-ranging regional disparities with some districts in Karamoja region and West Nile registering primary completion rates as low as 10 percent for girls.

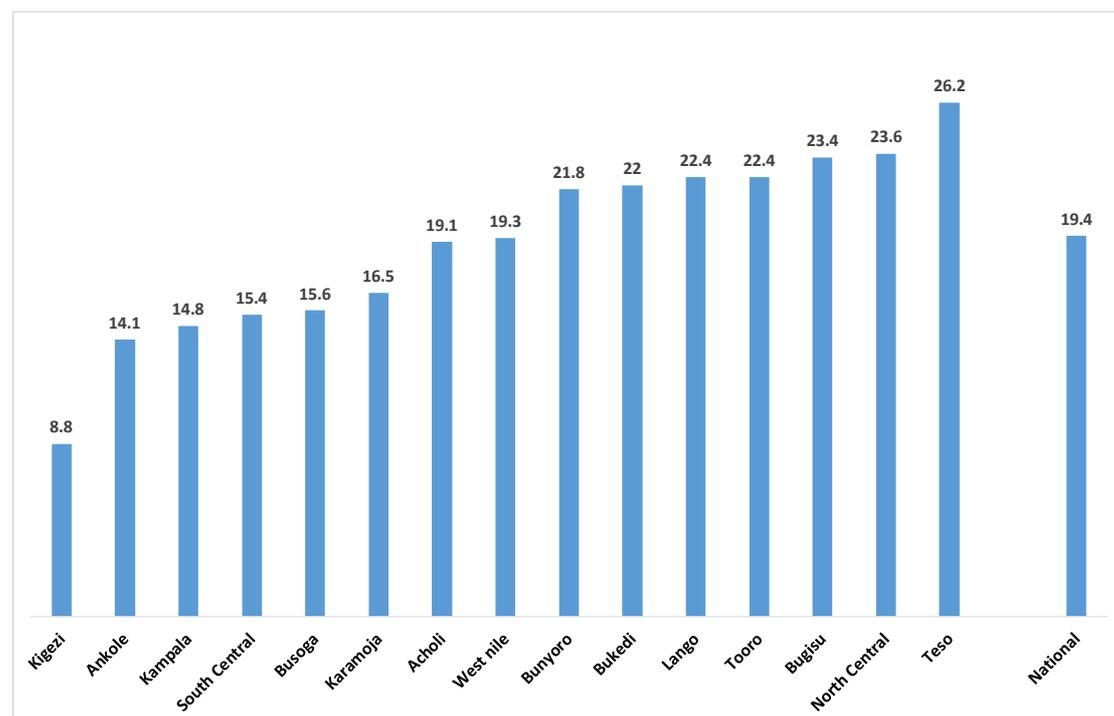
Worse still, the progression from primary to secondary remains dismal especially for girls. According to the 2015 SWTS, nearly half of the female youth dropped out before completing the education cycle; only about 29 percent of girls aged 20-24 years had an educational attainment of at least secondary school against 44 percent for boys. Under normal circumstances, those aged 20-24 years should have completed or at least be in tertiary education. The causes of school drop-out are multifaceted and range from the cost of education to pregnancy (for the case of girls). As such, gender disparities in education attainment persist despite the various policies that have been put in place to address the same. Such gender inequalities may be attributed to socio-cultural norms and practices that do not value education and in some communities, the preference of educating a boy child over a girl child. Despite the introduction of USE in 2007, the proportion of girls in total

enrolment has increased by a mere 2 percent from about 45 percent in 2007 to about 47 percent in 2014/15.

### Teenage Pregnancy and Child Motherhood

Early pregnancies continue to be a concern in Uganda; the 2016 Uganda Demographic and Health Survey show that the 25 percent of girls aged 15-19 years had begun child bearing (UBoS and ICF, 2017). For those who have commenced child bearing, 19.4 percent have had a live birth and 5.4 percent have are pregnant with their first child. Teenage pregnancies rates vary by region, level of education and wealth. Teenage pregnancies are highest among girls without any education (35 percent) followed by girls with only primary education (29 percent) compared to 17 percent for girls with secondary education and 11 percent for girls with more than secondary education. Region-wise, early pregnancies are highest in the Teso and North central sub regions (see figure 1). In addition, teenage pregnancies are highest among girls from poor households; 16 percent among adolescent girls from households that fall in the poorest 40 percent of the population and about 14 percent among girls from the richest 40 percent of the population (UBoS and ICF, 2017).

**Figure 1: Adolescents aged 15-19 years that have ever given birth (%)**



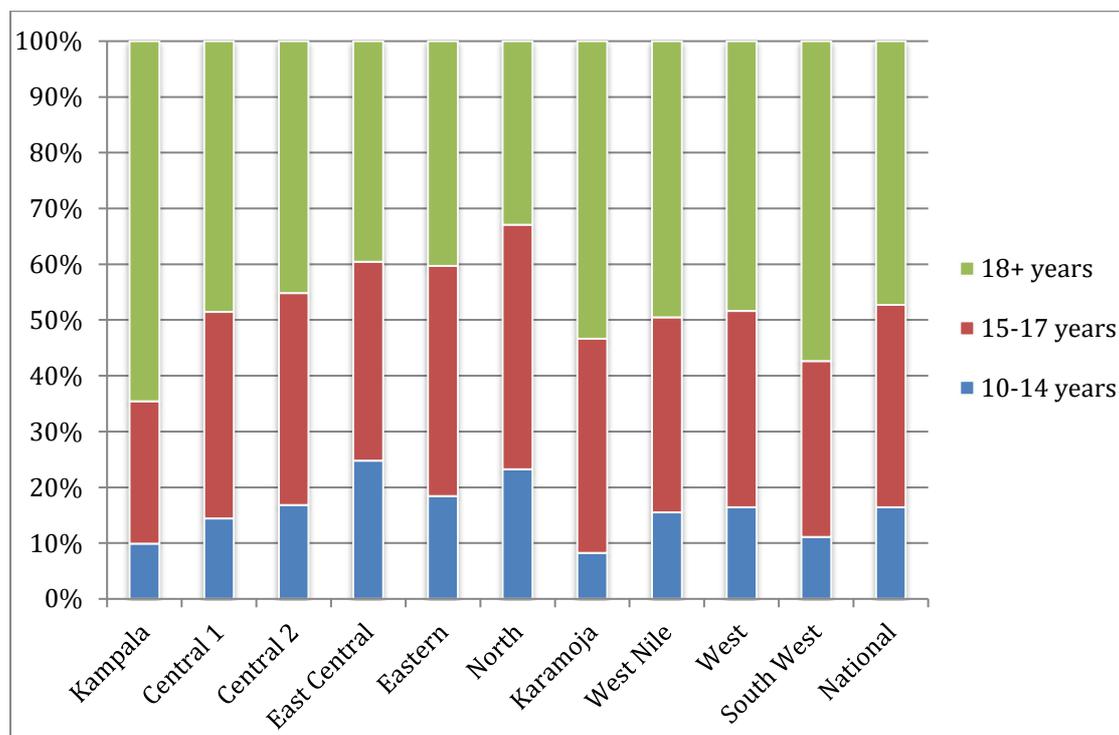
Source: UBoS and ICF (2017)

### Child marriages

While the right to marriage and family formation is provided for in the Constitution of Uganda (1995), child marriages (or marriages that occur before the age of 18 years) are considered illegal by law. The law on the minimum legal age for marriage applies to both females and males. Despite the existence of this law, child marriages (formal and informal)

continue to happen across the country; according to the 2011 UDHS, among women aged 20-49, 15 percent were married by age 15 and 49 percent were married by age 18 (UBoS and ICF International, 2012). In contrast, only about 8 percent of men aged 20-49 years were married by age 18 and 0.5 percent by the age of 15. The median age at first marriage among women aged 25-49 years is 17.9 years and has been fairly stable for the past 30 years.

**Figure 2: Age at first marriage, ever married women aged 20-49**



Source: Authors' computations based on UDHS 2011

Rates of child marriage are particularly high in the East Central, Eastern and Northern regions. Although Northern Uganda reported the highest number of marriages that occurred before the legal age of 18 years, East Central reported the highest percentage of women who got married before 15 years. Unsurprisingly, early marriages are commonest amongst those with no education (62.7 percent) against 32 percent for those with secondary education and 8.1 percent for those with post-secondary level of education.

### Labour Market Domain/Economic Opportunities

Ugandan women continue to exhibit poor labour outcomes and are more likely to be unemployed, underemployed and earning less than their male counterparts. According to the analysis based on the 2012/13 Uganda National Household Survey (UNHS 2012/13), the labour force participation rate (LFPR)<sup>2</sup> for the 15-24 year olds was lower for females

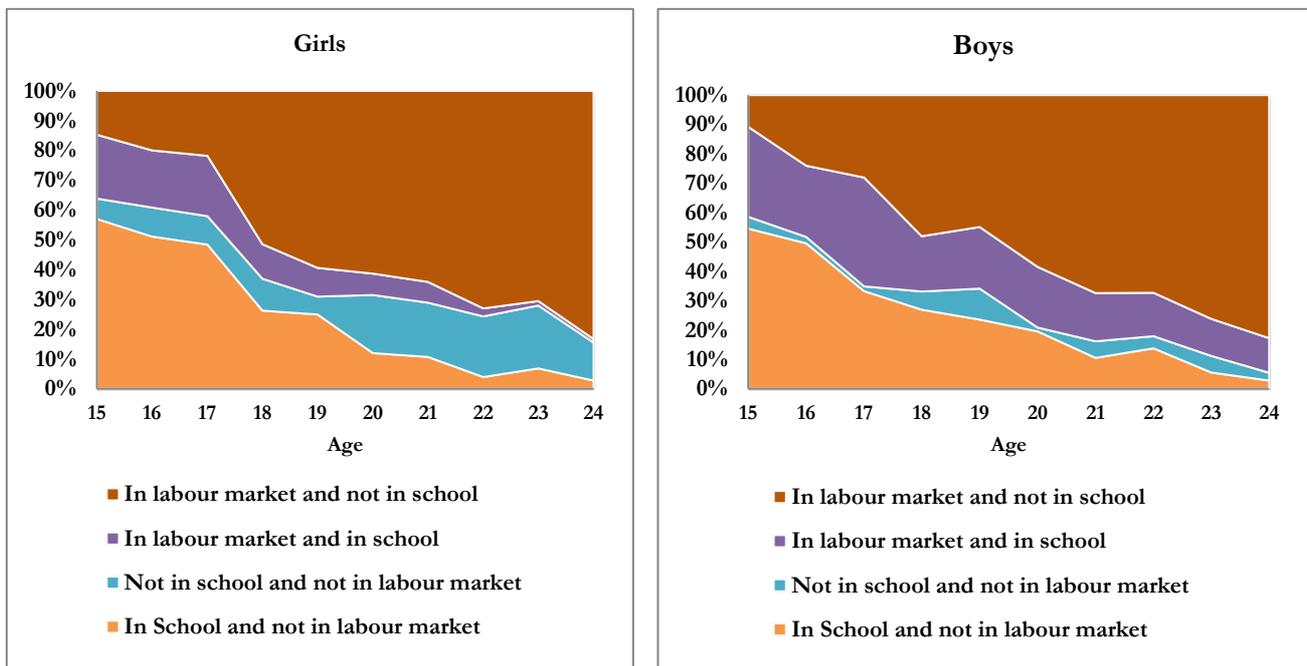
<sup>2</sup> This is based on the new definition that excludes subsistence agriculture

(37 percent) in comparison to males (43 percent). This mirrors the national picture, which shows stark gender differences between men and women- while LFPR for women aged 25-64 years stood at 55 percent, that of males was at 75 percent (based on UNHS data).

Compared to their male counterparts, young females are more likely to be unemployed; while unemployment rates stood at 12 percent among young (15-24years) males, it was relatively higher (15 percent) for females of the same age category. Larger proportions of the young females that are in employment are self-employed or contributing workers and are to a great extent underemployed. Even for the few in wage employment, most are in the lower earning bracket. In fact when compared with males, more females are in wage related underemployment. While the average nominal wage for males in employment was UGX 110,000, analysis shows lower earnings for females at an average of UGX 88,000 (UNHS 2012/13). On average, the young people in rural areas tend to have worse labour market outcomes when compared to those residing in urban areas.

It is also worth noting that a higher proportion of girls than boys are neither in school nor in the labour force and this occurrence worsens from about 19 years of age. This could be explained by the fertility experiences, which on average start around that age. In contrast, more boys than girls combine both school and work and they tend to stay in school longer (see figure 1).

**Figure 3: Economic activity by sex and age (%), 2015**



Source: Extracted from Ssewanyana et al., 2017 and based on SWTS 2015.

### 3. Field Study Design and Setting

The field study was designed to elicit information, insights and perspectives on the situation of young girls in three selected study sites in relation to education, marriage,

fertility and work. We tried to identify some of the underlying norms, attitudes and practices that either perpetuate vulnerabilities or offer opportunities for the development of capabilities amongst young people. The study was exploratory in nature and primarily qualitative in approach. While findings from an initial quantitative descriptive study were drawn into the analysis, fieldwork was restricted to a small sample of three communities spread across three districts. Findings are therefore not meant to be representative of young girls in Uganda as a whole, but rather to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of adolescents' experiences and suggest new ways of looking at factors contributing to or inhibiting girls' capabilities in particular settings.

### 3.1 Methodology

#### 3.1.1 Data collection tools and techniques

Issues of education, fertility, early marriages and labour market transitions involve multiple actors ranging from the young people themselves, parents, clan and religious leaders, teachers and community leaders. Therefore, the study population included a variety of key actors at different levels who are either directly affected by issues of our research or are known to be opinion leaders with key roles in enforcing current attitudes and practices or enabling change.

**Table 1: Data collection tools and techniques**

Instrument type	Study participants	Purpose
6 FGDs in total: - 3 with males - 3 with females  <i>Total of 81 participants (45 male, 36 female)</i>	Age group-15-24 years  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Girls and boys in school</li> <li>• Unmarried girls and boys out of school</li> <li>• Married girls and boys out of school (with or without children)</li> <li>• Working and not working boys and girls</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To explore young people' s perspectives on issues of education, teenage pregnancy, marriage and work</li> </ul>
6 Key Informant Interviews in total  <i>2 per study district</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Council Chairman or other opinion leaders/elders in the community</li> <li>• District leaders (Chief Administrative Officers, (CAOs), Community Development Officers (CDOs) and Planners)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To provide a community profile</li> <li>• To provide expert insights on our thematic areas of education, marriage, teenage pregnancy and labour markets</li> <li>• To explore the actions that have been taken to curb school dropouts, early pregnancies and marriages</li> </ul>
4 life histories in total, -3 females -1 male	Age group-15-24 years  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School dropouts</li> <li>• Experienced early marriage and or teenage pregnancy</li> <li>• In or out of labour market</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To explore examples of young people who dropped out of school and/or experienced early marriages/pregnancy to unpack what contributed to their experiences and how this affected their subsequent labour market experiences</li> </ul>

<i>Total of 4 individuals</i>		
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### 3.1.2 Study site selection and district settings

To introduce significant heterogeneity in economic, geographical, and socio-cultural contexts that underpin gender relations, fieldwork was undertaken in three purposively selected districts of Namayingo, Yumbe and Masaka. The districts were selected based on a number of factors: Rural/Urban classification: The first two were selected as representatives of rural areas (urbanization levels of less than 10 percent) while Masaka was selected because of its relatively high level of urbanization. According to the recent 2014 census statistics, Masaka was one of the three most urbanized districts in Central Uganda (excluding Kampala) with an urbanization rate of 34.8 percent. Our major hypothesis was that such differences based on rural/urban characteristics would provide a point of contrast in terms of cultural/social practices and norms around education, marriage, teenage pregnancies and labour opportunities.

Secondly, to narrow down to the aforementioned districts, we analysed existing quantitative data on our thematic areas of education, early marriages and pregnancies and labour market participation. These districts were purposively selected based on existing gender gaps in primary school completion rates, prevalence of teenage pregnancies and early marriages, level of economic activity and how culture and religion interface with these indicators.

**Table 2: Districts selected and justification**

<b>Region</b>	<b>District (sub region)</b>	<b>Justification</b>
Eastern	Namayingo (East Central)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low completion rates with stark gender differences</li> <li>• High teenage pregnancy rates and child marriages</li> <li>• Diversity of cultures which may impact on key areas of our research</li> </ul>
Northern	Yumbe (West Nile)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low completion rates with stark gender differences</li> <li>• Predominantly Muslim population which may present unique challenges and opportunities for the girl child</li> </ul>
Central	Masaka (Central 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Old district that is fairly urbanized</li> <li>• Comparably low gender gaps in education</li> <li>• Relatively higher economic dynamism in terms of farm and off farm activities</li> </ul>

Source: Authors' compilation based on literature synthesis

Figure 4: Map of Uganda showing study districts



To zero down to the communities, the district and community development officers guided us. Based on existing statistics at the districts, the communities were purposively selected based on variables like high prevalence of teenage pregnancies, early marriages, high school drop-outs.

In two of the communities, we carried out two separate FGDs per community (one for males and the other for females) while in the third community we carried out a combined FGD composed of males and females, the ratio of boys to girls in the FGD composition was about 5:4. At least one life history was carried out in each of the communities, totalling 4 life histories conducted with 3 young women and one male. The life histories were conducted with young people who either dropped out of school and or experienced early marriages or teenage pregnancies; the aim was to better understand the socio economic factors that may explain the subsequent labour market trajectories of young women and men. In all study areas, one key informant interview was conducted with an opinion leader from the community, and one district official provided the general situation at the district level.

The participants (FGD and life histories) within these communities were also purposively selected in collaboration with community leaders and also by the snowballing method. The target age group for inclusion in the FGD was 15- 24 years, and every effort was made to have a balanced FGD in terms of young people who are still in school, those who dropped out, young mothers and those who married young. Finally, key informant interviews were conducted with opinion leaders in the selected communities.

### **3.1.3 District profiles**

#### **(a) Namayingo District**

Namayingo district is situated in the East Central region of Uganda. It is a relatively new district having been carved out of Bugiri district and attained district status in 2010. According to the 2014 census, the population was about 215,443 with females constituting about 50.6 percent. The population growth rate is 3.3 percent and total household size is 5.6; these figures are above the national rates of 3.0 percent per annum and 4.7 respectively. Mirroring the national trend, the districts' population is generally youthful with the young people (0-19 years) accounting for 62.5 percent of the total population. The district is predominantly rural (93 percent) and is largely dependent on agriculture (90 percent). Agriculture is mainly subsistence in nature and is largely practiced by smallholders with of approximately 2.5 acres (Namayingo Local Government Demographic Report, 2016). Livestock keeping and fishing are also practiced by a number of people. With regard to education attainment, the district's primary school completion rates stand at 49.5 percent. In comparison to boys, girls' completion rates are relatively lower (42.1percent for girls and 56.1 percent for boys); these rates are both lower than the national average of 61.6 percent. Similarly, the rate of teenage pregnancies and, marriages is high; about 8.8 percent of female children aged 10-17 years have ever married while 13.1 percent of female children aged 12-17 years have ever given birth (UBoS, 2016a)<sup>3</sup>.

#### **(b) Yumbe District**

Yumbe is located in North Western Uganda (West Nile). The district population in 2014 was reported to be 484,822 people with a female population of 254,196 constituting about 52.4 percent of the population. The young population (below 20 years) constitutes 68.3 percent of the population. The district is predominantly rural with only 6 percent residing in the urban area (UBoS 2016a). The population growth rate is 5.5 percent, one of the highest in Uganda and the average household size stands at 7.6. The district is predominantly Muslim with Muslims accounting for (77 percent) of the population followed by Catholics who constitute 14 percent, Anglicans 8 percent, Pentecostals 0.7 percent and others 0.3 percent (Yumbe LG Statistical Abstract 2012/13). Like Namayingo, Yumbe is predominantly rural (92.8 percent) and is largely dependent on subsistence agriculture (91 percent of households). (UBoS, 2016a). The common food crops grown include maize, cassava, beans, ground nuts and simsim while tobacco and cotton remain the major cash crops grown in the district. As far as education indicators are concerned, Yumbe falls in the worst performing districts. Of those aged 18 above, only

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<sup>3</sup> Excludes pregnant ones

57.5 percent are literate (UBoS 2016a). Worse still, Yumbe’s primary school completion rates stand at 11.7 percent. In comparison to boys, girls primary school completion rates are lower (7.7.percent for girls and 16.2 percent for boys); these rates are significantly lower than the average national completion rates (MoES 2016). Likewise, the rate of teenage pregnancies and marriages is high; about 4.1 percent of female children aged 10-17 years have ever married while 8.2 percent of female children aged 12-17 years have ever given birth (UBoS 2016a).

### (c) Masaka District

Located in the Central region, Masaka is one of the oldest districts in the country. Its population currently stands at 297,004 with the females accounting for about 51 percent of the population. The population growth is about 2.2 percent per annum and is slightly lower than the national rate of 3 percent. Masaka district has an average household size of 3.8. Like other study districts, the population of the district is youthful with young people (below 20 years) constituting about 56.8 percent of the total district population). In comparison with the other study sites, Masaka is relatively urban with an urbanization rate of 34.8 percent (UBoS Sub county reports). The literacy rates in Masaka are relatively good (86 percent) and are well above the national averages. The primary completion rates are at par with the best performing districts. Unlike the other study sites, the gender differences in primary school completion in Masaka district are in favour of girls (84 percent for girls and 65 percent for boys) (MoES 2016). Regarding the other themes of fertility and marriage, 2014 census results reveal that 4.1 percent of the young girls (12-17 years) had ever married while 5.5 percent of 10-17 year olds reported to have ever given birth.

**Table 3: Summary of District Profiles**

	<b>Namayingo</b>	<b>Yumbe</b>	<b>Masaka</b>
<b>Rural/Urban</b>	Predominantly rural (93%)	Predominantly rural (94%)	Somewhat urban (34.8 % urbanization rate)
<b>Population growth rates (%)</b>	3.3	5.5	2.2
<b>Literacy rates (18 + year olds)</b>	57.5	55.5	85.7
<b>Average household size</b>	5.6	7.6	3.8
<b>Major economic activity</b>	Subsistence agriculture (75.5%)	Subsistence agriculture (91 %)	Services and industry (57.7%), subsistence agriculture (42.7%)

Source: Authors’ compilation based on literature synthesis

### 3.1.4 Study site (community) profiles

As noted above, within the three districts, our research was carried out in specific communities. The three purposively selected communities were Kitaka located in Nyendo-Senyange division-Masaka Municipality, Bukewa fishing community located in Buhemba sub county- Namayingo district and Belia village in Midigo sub county-Yumbe district. Kikata community (Masaka) is a densely populated urban slum with relatively high poverty levels. According to the LC 1 chairperson, there are about 600 households with a population of 2,320. In Masaka, we conducted a combined FGD of 7 male and 10 female youth. Bukewa village (Namayingo) is a fishing community, with Mpanga being the nearby main landing site on the shores of Lake Victoria. The male group comprised of 26 youth, while the female group had 16 youth. Finally, Belia (Yumbe) is predominately a Muslim community of the Aringa tribe. Majority of the population are subsistence farmers. The focus group comprised of 22 Youth, with 12 males and 10 female. In all the three sites, all participants for the FGD and life histories were purposively selected for inclusion in our study; the primary targets were youth aged 15-24 years.

In summary, the two rural communities are largely agrarian while the urban community is dominated by activities in the service sector especially petty trading. In terms of education infrastructure, all three communities had access to a public primary school within a 5 km radius while secondary schools were quite far away (more than 10 kms) from the communities, save for the urban community. No vocational schools were reported in the rural communities and early childhood centres (nursery schools) were only reported in two communities; the existing ones are privately owned.

**Table 4: Summary of community profiles**

Study site	Source of livelihood	Education infrastructure	Culture and religion
<b>Bukewa village, Buhemba-Namayingo district</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fishing (dominant)</li> <li>• Subsistence farming</li> <li>• Petty trading</li> <li>• Other services – saloons, bars, eateries, brick laying, charcoal burning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One government aided primary school</li> <li>• No government aided secondary school – nearest 15km</li> <li>• Two private nursery schools</li> <li>• Two private primary schools</li> <li>• Nearest private secondary school is 12km</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mixed tribes – mixed cultures</li> <li>• Mixed religions</li> </ul>
<b>Belia village, Midigo - Yumbe district</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subsistence farming – dominant</li> <li>• Petty trading</li> <li>• Other services – saloons, eateries, carpentry, bricklaying, charcoal burning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One primary government aided school</li> <li>• Nearest government aided secondary 12 km</li> <li>• Nearest private secondary school – 4km</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One dominant tribe – the Alinga</li> <li>• One dominant religion - Muslims</li> </ul>

<b>Kitaka cell, Nyendo - Masaka district</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Petty trading – dominant</li> <li>• Services – saloons, bars, eateries, boda-boda, welding, mobile money</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nearest government aided primary school is 1 km away</li> <li>• Private primary school 500m</li> <li>• Nearest government secondary school is about 4km</li> <li>• One private nursery school</li> <li>• Technical/vocational school – 3km</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mixed tribes – mixed cultures with one common language</li> <li>• Mixed religions</li> </ul>
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Source: Authors' compilation based on key informant and FGD discussions

### 3.1.4 Ethical considerations

Mindful of the fact that some of the study respondents were children (below 18 years), all effort was made to follow ethical standards for conducting research with children. Key ethical considerations related to informed consent from children, parental consent, anonymity and confidentiality and the principle of “do no harm” were respected.

During the recruitment of the study participants, the researchers, with the help of the LC1 chairperson who was in charge of mobilising participants, sought consent from parents and guardians of minors. Objectives and all features of the research were clearly spelt out to the parents in order to secure informed consent. Likewise, informed consent was secured from all participants (child and youth) before interactions could take place. To address issues of anonymity and confidentiality, the majority of the voices cited in the report have no names attached, in a few cases where names are cited, real names have been changed to protect identities of respondents.

## 4. Key Findings from Field Research

This chapter presents key findings from our research; for each theme of interest, we present the situation analysis and the factors influencing the status quo. In unpacking the driving factors, we employed a four-level ecological model that promotes a holistic approach. In line with this, we present individual, household level and community/societal level factors that promote or curtail change in key areas of interest (education, marriage, fertility, labour). In particular, we highlight (where applicable) the norms, beliefs, and social and economic systems that create and sustain gender inequities in our key areas of interest. Finally, we present the interactions between the different themes.

### 4.1 Education Domain

This section discusses and analyses major findings on gender differences in access to education and factors constraining girls' advancement in education.

### **There is increased value attached to education for both girls and boys**

Based on the discussions from the three communities, they all seemed to value education (for both girls and boys) and the positive benefits that it can bring to the individuals, their households and the community at large. The young people believe that education provides learners with knowledge, sharpens their thinking and positively changes their behaviour and mind-set. In particular, the youth pointed out the link between educational attainment and employment. While there was a general tendency to relate the benefits of education to securing a formal paid job in future, there was also a belief (not so pronounced though) that education is vital as far as equipping young people with the requisite skills to excel in self-employment or business. Below, are some voices from the field.

*“There is a big difference in behaviour and attitude between an educated and uneducated person,” (Female participant, Masaka FGD)*

*“The reason I am still in school is to enable me to speak good English. I also want to be well off in the future. I do not want to suffer like people who drop out school. Another female participant added, “Being in school helps to avoid early pregnancies and marriages which are very common in this village. (Female FGD, Yumbe District)*

*“Education is important for one to be able to access good (formal, stable) employment – those who dropout cannot be employed in formal jobs; also, education helps in equipping one with business skills, in future this helps in starting and running a successful business (Male participant, Yumbe FGD)*

*“There is a very rich man who owns a fleet of buses. Workers used to cheat him because he was not educated, until he said enough is enough and went back to school. With the business skills he acquired from school he can now ably take care of his business effectively – they cannot cheat him anymore.” (Male participant, Yumbe FGD)*

However, given the limited employment opportunities that have undeniably resulted in high unemployment levels (particularly among the educated youths), some youths think education is no longer a worthwhile investment. Some respondents felt that those whose educational attainment is low seem to be better off in terms of income when compared to those who went to school “... for example that rich man did not even go to school yet he owns cars

and many other assets” (Female FGD participants in Namayingo pointing to a rich man that was driving off in his car).

*“You leave your friends in the villages fishing or trading, and you go to school. After completing senior four or six you come back to the village without a job. Only to be employed by the illiterates to clean and arrange their fishing gears. Why did I go to school? one wonders!. This is frustrating and as a result many youth in this village shun education and look at it as a useless venture.” (Male participant, Namayingo FGD)*

Some participants observed that when compared with boys, girl’s education is not as important. They argued that girls have higher chances of getting married at young ages and being taken care of by the husband unlike boys who have to fend for themselves.

### **There is increased enrolment for both girls and boys but observed gender gaps in retention and completion'**

While primary school enrolment has noticeably increased over the years with the introduction of UPE in 1997, retention and completion remain a challenge. Participants reported considerably high drop-out rates in all the three sites although the extent and magnitude differs.

*“Boys mostly dropout in S.2 between the age of 16 and 17, while the girls dropout much earlier, in P.5 and P.6 between the age of 13 and 14” (FGD participants, Yumbe)*

*“School dropout tends to occur in P6 and P7 classes, both for boys and girls, but the rate of drop outs are higher among girls (FGD participants, Namayingo)*

Dropout rates were reported to be higher in rural Bukewa (Namayingo) and Belia (Yumbe) and more among the girls compared to urban Kikata (Masaka). In fact, primary school completion rates for males were reported to be higher among girls than boys in Masaka. *“At primary level boys tend to drop out in P4 and P5 at the age of 10 – 12 years old. On the other hand, girls complete primary level and normally drop out in S.2 and S.3” (FGD participants, Masaka).* This is in tandem with the Ministry of Education statistics that reported 83.7 percent completion for girls and 65 percent for boys (MoES 2016).

There were a number of individual, family/school and community level factors that were advanced by the participants that limit boys and girls access to education and those that are contributing to the high rates of dropouts as outlined below:

#### ***Individual and household level factors***

Economic barriers: Most respondents cited poverty as one of the key factors impinging on the young people’s right to access education. Although, by and large, Uganda provides free education at primary level, respondents pointed out that the supplementary costs are significant and unaffordable to already poor households. *“Children are sent to school with*

*nothing, no books, pens, uniform etc, they eventually feel out of place and dropout,*” one male participant noted. Besides, supplementary contributions required from parents are unaffordable to many households. Parents are required to contribute towards children’s lunch, paying extra teachers who are not on government payroll, and a few other running school costs. This is further accentuated by the high fertility rates resulting in a considerably high number of school going children in rural households. Subsequently, the failure of parents to get money towards education for all their children limits access and leads to drop-out for those already in school *“I dropped out of school due to lack of school fees, we are ten children at home, my mother was a housewife earning her livelihood from subsistence farming while my dad was engaged in petty trade which was not very rewarding. I ended up dropping out of school to let my young siblings stay and learn how to read and write and I got married”* Life history female participant, Masaka. As a result of the biting poverty, when faced with choices between keeping a boy child and girl child in school, the majority of the respondents felt that boys stand a better chance. This was particularly attributed to the fact that girls are less likely to complete their education and this investment would hence be wastage of the households’ scarce money. However, there were a few voices who expressed equal opportunity for both girls and boys *“It depends on one who is more promising”* noted a female teenage mother in Namayingo. Nonetheless, some of the focus group participants noted that there are some poor households with low incomes that have struggled and somehow managed to educate their children. *“It’s all about the parent’s attitude towards education,”* noted a male participant, FGD Masaka.

Early pregnancies: Early pregnancies amongst girls were cited as significant contributors to the observed school dropouts. It was observed that girls tend to start schooling late and grow out of school. *“By the time girls reach P.6 they look mature and they become sexually active at a tender age leading to early pregnancies”* noted participants in Namayingo. For most girls, pregnancy and motherhood mark the end of their education, as there is not much support for pregnant girls wishing to remain in school, let alone for new mothers wishing to return. *“Going back to school after giving birth is completely unheard of, parents think it is a wastage of money, teachers think teenage mothers will spoil other pupils in school, and there is generally a lot of stigma around teenage mothers from fellow students and teachers”* noted FGD participants in Namayingo. Moreover the girls develop an inferiority complex and feel that they no longer fit in school after giving birth. *“I had a girl child in P6 and she got pregnant. I only found out after she had escaped and run away from home to her aunt. After giving birth, I pleaded with her to go back to school but she refused; currently she is just at home doing nothing,”* KI, Namayingo. The case is different for boys, when a school going boy impregnates a girl, he is given a chance to choose between quitting and staying in school; *“When a girl gets pregnant, the next thing is to find the man responsible and he marries her, she is not even asked about the possibility of continuing with school but for a boy it is different, there is a discussion as to whether he wishes to continue schooling as his parents take on the responsibility of looking after the pregnant girl”* (FGD participants, Yumbe). Also the fear of teenage pregnancies was hinted upon as one of the reasons why some parents withdraw their daughters from school. *“Girls who join secondary school are more likely to be exposed and end up getting pregnant”* noted a Female Participant in Masaka. They observed that girls are likely to be impregnated by fellow students, community members and in some cases teachers.

Parent negligence: The young people noted that parental guidance and follow up is limited. Parents tend to be so immersed in their work and rarely follow up with the progress of their children at school, *“A child may study from primary 1 to 7 without the parent ever interfacing with his or her teachers. Besides some parents do not even read their children progress reports,”* lamented one female participant. To reinforce the limited support from parents, participants reiterated the fact that parents do not provide scholastic materials to their children, leading to children being constantly sent home for lack of scholastic materials; the children eventually get frustrated and drop out.

Peer influence and individual choice: A number of social attractions were blamed for enticing children out of school. The attractions include; cinemas, nightclubs and karaoke. Pressure from peer groups, the urge to have money, the desire to look beautiful and a yearning to wear fancy clothes especially for young girls, further exacerbates this. *“Some girls in this community sell their bodies to earn a living and ‘easy’ life,”* observed one female FGD participant in Namayingo. Immigration of many young people (who are most likely school drop outs) into urban areas (particularly in slums) was seen to lure boys out of school and girls into prostitution. Consequently, young people lose interest in education and quit schooling. In addition, the limited mentoring and guidance from parents further heightens the situation. *“Parents are paying school fees through the nose. Therefore when a child loses interest in education or gets pregnant, parents feel they have been relieved of the burden of paying for education,”* FGD female participant, Masaka.

Involvement in economic activities: The involvement of young people in employment while still schooling is yet another factor that promotes early school exit. Due to the crippling poverty, young people (especially boys) tend to contribute to the household livelihoods through work. These earnings however tend to entice them (young people) into devoting more time to work and they subsequently lose interest in school and eventually drop out; *“once a boy starts getting money through fishing, he does not think about school anymore”*, noted FGD participants in Namayingo. Due to the poverty status of most households, the parents rarely condemn or deter the young boys from engaging in such work since they bring in extra income to the household *“I wished to study and complete at least senior 4; but as an orphan, my mother did not have enough money to support me in school and I used to work (fishing) while studying in order to support my mother. While this worked fine when I was still in a nearby primary school, it became much harder to combine work and school at secondary level since the school was a bit far away from home. I eventually gave up and resorted to full time fishing and business (saloon)”*, Life history, Namayingo. Whereas both girls and boys participate in household chores, the girls tend to spend more time on these domestic activities. Girls are more involved in chores like cooking, fetching water, childcare, digging, collecting firewood-all of which take up a substantial amount of time and eventually impact girls’ performance in school.

### ***School-level factors***

Deficiency of schools and long distances: As earlier pointed out in the community profiles, there are still limited primary and secondary public schools in rural areas. This leads to overcrowding of pupils in classes, limited attention from teachers, which eventually makes pupils lose interest in school. Also, for fear of bullying by older students, parents tend to send their girls to school at an older age (8-9 years) which eventually leads to them growing out of school early. While there was at least one primary school in all the three sites visited, two of the three sites did not have a nearby (within 5-10km) government aided secondary school: *“there is no government school in the entire sub county, the nearest government aided secondary school is 15 km from the village”* noted FGD participants in Namayingo, *“nearest government aided school is 12 km away from the village”* noted Yumbe FGD participants. Consequently many children who manage to complete primary seven may not progress with secondary education as accessibility is limited: *“The lack of nearby government secondary school affects the girls more than boys,”* added a female FGD participant in Namayingo. While the boys may ride bicycles and still attend school, this may not be possible for girls, the only option is to enrol in the boarding section or consider renting a room near the school. Both of these options yet are too expensive for most of the households and parents do not approve of girls living independently at such a young age for fear of getting ‘spoilt’ (FGD participants, Namayingo). It is worth noting that the two rural communities did not have a vocational school within their reach and the presence of private schools was equally low, further limiting the choices available to young people.

Poor quality schools: While availability was not a major issue in urban Masaka, the issue of the quality of education in public schools was cited as a contributory factor to school dropouts. The schools are poorly staffed with about 10 teachers responsible for a population of about 1000 pupils. The number of pupils in P.1 and P.2 are sometimes as high as 200 in each class; thus limited attention is given to learners as the few teachers are overwhelmed. This leads to disengagement and subsequent drop out. Moreover, there is continued absenteeism and late coming amongst teachers *“teachers first attend to their other businesses and report to school late, the supervision is poor”* KI, Namayingo. If classes pupils remain unattended to, pupils lose interest in learning and eventually drop out. On the other hand, private schools are often highly priced and are unaffordable to the majority of poor households.

The other school level hindrances to education included: limited guidance from teachers, corporal punishments, and issues of menstrual hygiene. Youth reported exploitation and abuse from teachers and increased sexual affairs between teachers and pupils; *“One of the girls got pregnant in primary six, she is now married to one of the teachers. How do other pupils think of this situation?”* narrated one male FGD participant in Namayingo.

### **Community/societal factors**

Cultural, religious, social norms and practices: Although the influence of religion and culture did not feature prominently as key contributors to school dropout in sites with diverse cultures and religions (Namayingo and Masaka), it was notable in Yumbe-Belia

which is a Muslim stronghold with one distinct culture; *“the parents prefer the ‘madarasa’ muslim teachings compared to the secular education”*, noted a KI in Yumbe. Also the glorification of dowry and early marriages in this traditional community often leads to school dropout amongst girls. A girl’s early entry into marriage to bring bride price often outweighs any potential long-term gains from investment in education: *“it’s better to marry off the girls early and get cows early so that they start reproducing rather than waiting for a girl to go through education with the hope of getting a job and provide for the family thereafter, by this time the cow would have reproduced and brought in more wealth and income”* narrated one FGD male participant in Yumbe.

**Lack of role models:** Young people, particularly in rural areas, lack positive role models of educated individuals in their communities which makes it hard for them to value education; there are very few youth who have completed education up to the level of university: *“I do not know anyone in this village, or even in the entire parish, who has graduated from university”*, *“Even those that have had some education are not better off and many are jobless”* noted FGD participants in Namayingo. Such occurrences demoralize and discourage young people from continuing and completing their education; *“Why should I waste time with schooling when the youth who have money never went to school,”* wondered one male youth in Namayingo. Another female youth added, *“Girls who dropped-out before me are doing better as saloon and bar attendants than me who was struggling with schooling”*. Issues of parents education were also pointed out., *“children of rich uneducated men do not see the use of education stressing that their fathers did not go far in education yet they are wealthy; such adolescents tend to drop out of school early and join their father’s businesses,* FGD, Masaka.

### Case study: Dropping out of school

#### *Hadija’s story*

Hadija (not real name) is 22 years old; she dropped out of school at age 14 whilst in primary six to get married. She gave birth to her first child at the age of 17; she currently has 3 children and wishes to have 3 more. Hadijah did not drop out of school due to lack of fees, she attributes her early exit from school to *“limited guidance from parents, love for material things from older men, engagement in relationships at a young age and general ignorance about the value of education then”*.

Hadija is currently a subsistence farmer and also engages in petty trading, selling pancakes and tomatoes. She has been engaged in these activities ever since she quit school. Although she had wanted to engage in tailoring and hairdressing, she lacked the capital and skills to start these businesses. She says that as a mother of 3, it is hard for her to search for economic opportunities away from her village because she has to take care of her children. She regrets having quit school early despite the availability of fees from her parents. She believes that she would probably be holding a better job or be engaged in more lucrative activities if she had had not cut short her education; *“I will work hard, mentor and guide and my children to successfully complete school, I want them to be better persons in future”*.

## 4.2 Fertility

### High rates of teenage pregnancy

Teenage pregnancy- both within and outside marriage- remains an issue not only in the study areas but in other parts of the country as well. Most study participants acknowledge high rates of teenage pregnancy and childbirth as a significant problem in their communities. The average age at first birth for girls was reported to be 14-15 in the rural sites and 16-18 for the urban area. The average age at which boys start siring children ranged from 16-18 in rural areas and about 20 years in the urban site. They further observed that by the age of 30 the male youth tend to have about 6 children, while the female youth have between 4– 5 children. However, in the Muslim community, where polygamy is common, men tend to have an average of three wives by the time they are 30 years of age and about 10-12 children. In Yumbe, both the female and male participants had no preferred age to stop giving birth. They hold a strong belief that one has to bear children for God and oneself. *“You have to produce as many as possible because some die and others remain,”* male FGD participant, Yumbe.

### Drivers of teenage pregnancy

Early sexual initiation: Early sexual initiation was reported to result in un-intended pregnancies. In some sites such as Namayingo the fishing community, the age of sexual debut was reported to be as low as 12 years for girls and 14 years for boys. At these ages, the young people have limited knowledge about their bodies; girls do not understand the implication of the onset of menstruation on the readiness to conceive. Asked about the knowledge of contraceptives, a few girls who were knowledgeable about it pointed out the limited support from men regarding this *“Contraceptives are being used by some women although men rarely allow their women to use them”*, noted female FGD participants in Namayingo.

Peer pressure and sex for material gain: When girls reach puberty and become aware of their sexuality, they think they are old enough to do whatever they want –including engaging in sexual relationships. The environment in which one lives further influences the behaviour of young people *“young girls are copying ‘bad behaviour’ from the girls and women who stay with the fishermen by the lake side”*, Female FGD participants, Namayingo. Some girls were reported to be outright stubborn and make uninformed decisions regarding sex and relationships *“I was in S.2 and in a relationship with a fellow student, the love was too much and we just could not wait, we had sex and I got pregnant and dropped out of school”* narrated a female life history participant in Masaka. The situation is exacerbated by men who lure young girls into sex using material things.

Child marriages: Child marriages were noted to be a significant contributor to the high levels of teenage pregnancy among young people. When a girl is married off before the age of 18, she is no longer looked at a child but rather a woman/wife who is supposed to engage in child bearing. Hence, child marriages automatically result in early motherhood.

Weak sanctions: More often than not, men who impregnate girls tend to get away with it as sanctions against defilement are rarely followed through; this eventually perpetuates the practice; *“some men impregnate girls and run away, no follow up is done”* noted one Female FGD participant in Masaka. While some parents try to seek justice, they are often put off by the unfair justice systems and they give up along the way. Besides, for families to maintain a harmonious living, an agreement is often reached between the parties involved, outside the courts of law.

### **4.3 Early Marriage**

#### **Early marriage is prevalent in two of the three communities visited**

Findings from the study communities reveal a high prevalence of early marriage, with girls getting married between the ages of 16-17 in rural areas and 18-20 in urban areas. Although early marriage was described as being more prevalent among the out-of-school girls, it was also clearly linked to school dropouts: Among the boys, the age at first marriage was reported to be slightly higher and ranges between 18-20 years in the urban and rural study sites. Early marriages (below 18 years) persist amidst the existence of laws that forbid them. According to the respondents, the leaders rarely enforce the existing law against child marriages and defilement. Although customary, civil and religious marriages are by law the recognized forms of marriage, informal marriages/cohabitation are on the rise and have surpassed the recognized formal marriages – at least in our study sites. The rise of these informal unions has to some extent contributed to the poor implementation of the said laws since such unions/marriages happen behind closed doors with parents of the girl and boy secretly agreeing to the terms of the informal union.

#### **Drivers of child marriages**

##### *Individual and household level factors*

Poverty: Poverty was cited as a major driver of child marriages especially in the rural areas; girls are looked at as source of wealth through bride price; *“Girls are gold, they are a source of dowry”* pointed out FGD participants in Yumbe. *“Once a girl develops breasts, gets her first period, next is pregnancy and marriage,”* male FGD participant, Yumbe, *“ also the fact that bride price has significantly increased from average of UGX 100,000 to about UGX 1,000,000 entices parents to marry off school age going children,* KI Yumbe. Moreover, given the high levels of poverty coupled with the high number of children per household, some parents look at their children as a burden and tend to marry off their daughters to ease the situation at home by having one less person to feed and look after.

Early school exit: Early exits from school are fuelling the increase in early marriages; when a girl drops out of school, the next step is to marry her off. Parents believe that girls who are out of school are likely get pregnant yet pregnancy outside of marriage is viewed negatively. Without education or skills to earn a reasonable livelihood, the girls themselves

and their parents frequently see marriage as their only choice; *“when I left school due to lack of fees, my paternal aunt put me under pressure to look for a man and get married, she said I would get spoilt from home; within a year I had gotten a man and was married off at 17 years of age”*, Female Life history interview, Masaka.

Early pregnancies: Pre-marital pregnancy triggers marriages, *“if a girl gets pregnant, the parents will push her to go and marry the man who is responsible for the pregnancy”* noted FGD participants in Namayingo, this is attributed to the stigmatization of pre-marital pregnancy. Besides, forcing the pregnant girl into marriage is a definite way of ensuring that the responsible man takes care of the child and mother. On the other hand, without education or any skills for a girl to independently look after the baby, marriage is looked at as the only choice. However in some cases, pregnancies do not necessarily lead to marriages, *“some girls are abandoned after getting pregnant”*, lamented a female FGD participant in Masaka.

Love for material things: Participants noted that in the midst of dire poverty, girls covet material things and any man that provides them (money, shoes, clothes etc..) and promises a good life is looked at as a potential husband; *“if I visit a man and I find that he has a well-furnished house and some assets, I will not return home, I will just remain and that will be the beginning of marriage, what if I leave and some other girl takes him?”* Female FGD participant, Namayingo. Participants felt that there has been an erosion of morals, and some girls have become wild and uncontrollable under the guise of children rights. They do not listen to their parents and due to peer pressure; end up running away with men contributing to the observed trend of increasing informal unions.

### **Community level factors**

Cultural and social norms/beliefs: Although no deep-rooted cultural and religious norms regarding marriage were reported in two of our study sites, they were strong cultural/religious practices that were educed in the Muslim community where culture and religion are intertwined; Muslims still uphold premarital virginity as a strong religious norm that is guarded at all costs and hence they tend to marry off girls as soon as possible to protect them from getting ‘spoilt’ through premarital sexual relations and pregnancies; *“Girls are believed to be ripe for marriage as soon as they develop breasts and start their menses”*, male FGD participant, Yumbe. Additionally, they are some societal beliefs that are fuelling early marriages, *“if a girl is seen walking with a boy in the late hours of the evening at about 7pm onwards, they believe the two are engaging in sexual relations and the parents of the two young people immediately arrange to get them married; KI, Yumbe*. In some rural communities, early marriages have become the norm and have become ‘acceptable’ over time. Girls grow up knowing that when one gets to primary 5 or 6, they have matured and should find a man and get married; *“almost every girl gets married at around 15 or 16 years, so it’s the order of the day”* pointed out female FGD participant in Namayingo.

Weak/non-existent sanctions against early marriages: While participants and community members are very knowledgeable about the existence of a legal age for marriage in Uganda, they universally agreed that this law is rarely enforced. Despite the high prevalence of child marriages in the three sites visited, participants reported no sanctions against early

marriages. *“As far as I can remember I have not heard of a case against child marriage in this sub-county. Once the parents of the girls get the dowry that’s the end of the story”* FGD male participant, Yumbe. The enforcement of this particular law on child marriages is hindered by factors including but not limited to rise of informal marriages- girls disguise as maids when they are in fact married by their bosses, some parents supporting informal marriages as a way of circumventing this law. Without the support of parents, such cases are rarely reported and the law becomes hard to implement. In the absence of birth certificates the ages of many children cannot be proved with certainty, exacerbating the situation.

## 4.4 Labour market

### Economic Participation

In the rural sites of Namayingo and Yumbe, the youth are predominantly engaged in the agricultural sector; subsistence farming for both boys and girls, and fishing for boys and subsistence farming for girls in Namayingo. In the urban site of Masaka, young people are heavily engaged in the service sector- petty trading, bodaboda, hair dressing, saloons, restaurants etc. What is common across the study sites is that the kind of employment/work is largely concentrated in the informal sector and is considered as self-employment.

**Table 5: Common economic activities of young people in the three study sites**

Village	Activities	
	Boys	Girls
<b>Namayingo - Bukewa</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fishing -dominant</li> <li>• Subsistence farming</li> <li>• Petty trading</li> <li>• Other services – saloons, bars, eateries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subsistence farming -dominant</li> <li>• Petty trading</li> <li>• Other services – saloons, bars, eateries</li> </ul>
<b>Masaka – Kitaka</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Petty trading – dominant</li> <li>• Other services – saloons, bars, eateries, boda-boda, welding, mobile money</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Petty trading – dominant</li> <li>• Other services – saloons, bars, eateries, mobile money</li> </ul>
<b>Yumbe – Belia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subsistence farming – dominant</li> <li>• Petty trading</li> <li>• Other services – saloons, eateries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subsistence farming – dominant</li> <li>• Petty trading</li> <li>• Other services – saloons, eateries</li> </ul>

Authors’ compilation based on FGDs in the three sites

Although there aren’t observed glaring differences between the kinds of economic activities between girls and boys in the study areas, there was some notable gender segmentation of work within the sectors of employment. For example the women tend to operate relatively smaller businesses with limited capital; they also tend to locate their

businesses near their places of residence. Additionally, while both boys and girls are heavily engaged in subsistence agriculture, the girls tend to spend more hours on the farm than the boys; some activities (e.g. weeding) are looked at as women activities and are mostly undertaken by women.

The levels of unemployment (total lack of work) were considered to be low since the young people cannot afford to be out rightly unemployed. The challenge however is underemployment; most youth are engaged in vulnerable work for survival purposes accruing little income. However, when the new definition of employment as adopted by UBoS is applied<sup>4</sup>, the majority of youth in the rural sites are actually unemployed.

### **Limitations to economic opportunities**

Most youth are faced with the challenge of finding well paid, productive employment due to the limited employment/economic activities available to them, low skill and education levels, and inadequate start-up/expansion capital. *“For most male youth, economic activities are shaped by startup capital than skills”*, FGD participants, Namayingo. We delve into these details in the following paragraphs.

Limited employment opportunities: Economic opportunities beyond agrarian agriculture and petty trading were regarded as limited within the communities of our study; this was in part attributed to the poor infrastructure and level of development in the study communities. Due to the unavailability of power, piped water and a good road network, there were not even small scale industries within or near the rural communities; *“There are no interventions in the village to create job opportunities for young people and formal opportunities are very limited*, KI Namayingo. Even in the Masaka community which is urbanized with the above infrastructure, industrialization remains limited, *“There are no factories in Masaka to support access to employment opportunities”*, noted FGD participants in Nyendo, Masaka. Most of the young people create their own jobs by putting up small businesses which do not require enormous amounts of capital or unique skills.

Inadequate education and requisite skills: The dismal educational attainments among the youth limit their entry and scope of employment opportunities. Entry into formal sector employment more often than not requires particular qualifications; even some informal jobs are starting to put minimum education qualifications for some tasks *“Now days, for most job opportunities in the informal sector, even in small restaurants require someone who has completed senior four level of education, yet many youth lack these qualifications,”* noted a male youth from Masaka. As earlier pointed out, both girls and boys lack opportunities for vocational training owing to the few established public training institutions within their reach. Where they are available, a higher proportion are privately owned and charge tuition fees which may not

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<sup>4</sup> New definition excludes subsistence farming

be affordable to many households. Subsequently, due to the limited access, enrolment remains low. This has an impact on the skill-set amongst the youth and may hamper their entrepreneurial capacities.

Lack of capital for initial start-up and expansion: While some youth possess selected skills that would help them start up a business, the majority reported lack of credit and start-up capital to be a huge challenge; *“I wanted to start up a saloon and/ buy a tailoring machine but I have failed to raise the money and there was no one who could give me a loan“*, lamented a female participant in Namayingo. Limited infrastructure in terms of business workspace, especially in the urban areas was cited as a constraint; workspaces are hard to locate and even when found, they are very expensive in terms of rent and other supplementary fees; *“spaces are restricted and the municipal council officers often confiscate people’s merchandise and items”*, lamented one male FGD participant in Masaka.

Asked about accessibility of government programs like the Youth Livelihood Program that provides start up to youth between the ages of 18-30 years, the majority reported ignorance of such programs. Even those engaged in agriculture reported limitations in terms of access to improved seeds and other farming inputs despite the existence of government programs like NAADS and Operation Wealth Creation that are meant to provide extension services and inputs respectively. Limited control of productive assets (e.g. land) among women was cited as yet another challenge that derails productive investment in agriculture.

Restricted labour mobility: Although young people are engaged in economic activities as listed in Table 3 above, in rural areas, there’s is limited outward migration in search of better opportunities. Compared to males, a few females were reported to move out of the village to work as maids and child caretakers in urban areas. Some of the factors fronted for the limited migration ranged from low educational attainments which is a prerequisite for formal employment to lack of information about the available opportunities outside the community. Unlike the rural sites, frequent inward and outward migration for both male and females in search of better economic opportunities was reported in the urban study community.

#### **4.5 Interactions between education, fertility, early marriage and labour market outcomes**

As discussed in preceding subsections, early marriages and early pregnancies often lead to school drop-out in many instances. The reverse is also true, early exit from school is positively correlated with early pregnancies/marriages. Both low educational attainments and early fertility/motherhood experiences may have a significant impact on young girls’ potential to develop the skills needed to engage in productive activities and/or secure decent employment.

#### **Intersection between education and labour market outcomes**

Study participants appreciated the positive role that education plays towards securing a formal paid job since such jobs require specific qualifications and skills. *“When you have your qualifications and an employment opportunity comes up in the community you can easily get it, unlike the uneducated youth who may not qualify”*, Female FGD participant, Masaka. However, given the nature of the labour market in the three communities and Uganda as a whole, the largely informal and “do it yourself/self-employment” kind of labour market does not regard education as necessary to succeeding in business; *“as long as both the educated and uneducated youth possess counting skills, they can run a business, success in business depends on one’s innovation and entrepreneurial skills rather than the theoretical education attained in formal education”*, pointed out FGD participants in Masaka and Namayingo.

On the flip side, early entry into the labour market affects school completion rates among young people. It was reported that young people who start working at an early age tend to drop out of school since it is often hard to balance the time between work and school and many tend to be enticed by the earnings from work and eventually drop out.

### **Intersection between fertility, early marriage and labour market outcomes**

The timing of first birth was believed to interfere with education and labour market participation; taking on the early burden of childcare limits the time available for engagement in productive activities outside of the home. For young women that give birth before entering the labour market, their employment chances dwindle. *“Labour market opportunities and choices are affected as many employers in the informal sector are hesitant to offer jobs to girls with children – it’s considered as an extra baggage”*, *“even those that are already employed need to nurse and take care of their children and by the time they are ready to return to their job, it will already be taken. FGD participants, Namayingo. “Even for those in self-employment, building a customer base again after a long break is not always easy”* Female FGD participant, Masaka. It was noted that early fertility affects the male youth too, *“For the male youth, the new responsibility comes at a heavy cost, it’s worse if children are giving birth to children, their education and labour opportunities are ruined,”* KI, Namayingo.

Marriage at a young age was reported to significantly affect labour market participation among females –at least- in the short run. It was noted that once a young girl is married, it becomes harder to access job opportunities. It is cited that some husbands restrain their wives from taking on work outside the home. Some men are insecure and think their wives will be sexually abused by their bosses while others think independent women are hard to control.

*“My husband dictates the kind of work I can engage in, he even restricts me on the number of hours I can work”*, 17 year old, Masaka district.

*“Men feel very insecure. It takes some years in marriage for a man to trust you to work,”* Female participant, Masaka. *“How do you donate your wife to another man to work for him?”* Male FGD Namayingo.

*“Economically empowered women are big headed, they often divorce”*, Male FGD Namayingo

*“Men are hesitant to have joint investment with their wives; once a woman has money, she becomes uncontrollable and disobedient”*, Male FGD Namayingo

*Apart from working on the family farm, women are not allowed to engage in other economic activities or control assets; Male FGD, Yumbe*

## **Implications of early labour market experiences on future labour market outcomes**

Early labour market experiences are likely to shape future labour market opportunities. Based on our findings, there is limited movement between jobs and occupations. The limited upward movements and progression to better and more productive jobs is intensified by the lack of requisite skills, inadequate capital to facilitate expansion and limited economic opportunities. The scarcity of technical and vocational training options that are tailored to the needs of school drop outs, young mothers and wives makes it harder for these young girls to further enhance their economic capabilities. The majority of women tend to remain at home with mothers having limited participation in activities beyond the household farm. Young women are likely to have horizontal movements between activities in the same sector and stature; those who start off within the informal sector are likely to remain in the same activities given the limitation in employment activities.

## **5. Conclusions and emerging policy issues**

### **5.1 Conclusions**

Findings from the field research show that discriminatory social norms and practices still exist –particularly in rural areas - and they affect the ability of girls and young women towards achieving their educational and economic capabilities. These are reinforced by poverty, inadequate access to services (social, financial etc.) and limited economic opportunities. The study shows that, despite the existence of a generally strong legal and policy framework capable of addressing girls’ vulnerabilities as they make vital transitions from school to work, marriage or motherhood, they still face numerous challenges.

Notwithstanding the progress made towards girls’ educational attainment over the past decade, especially through UPE and USE policies there are some persistent challenges.

The study documents multifaceted factors hindering girls' completion of the full education cycle. Whereas some of the factors are related to supply-side paucities in the education sector as a whole, others are linked to household poverty, mindset of parents and teenagers and others more broadly relate to social norms and practices in the study areas.

Even though teenage pregnancies and child marriages are known to have negative future health and economic implications to young girls, they still persist. Despite the existence of a law that acknowledges 18 as the legal age of marriage, the majority of Uganda's young women are married by age 18. While the weak implementation of the laws related to child marriages and defilement has contributed to this a great deal, the prevalence of early marriages also arises from household poverty, cultural and religious beliefs and social norms.

Whereas both girls and boys face economic difficulties, the predicament of girls appears worse, exacerbated by early fertility and marriage experiences which result in increased caring responsibilities and restricted mobility in the search for employment opportunities. The majority of young people continue to engage in subsistence agriculture and petty trading with limited prospects for growth. As a result of limited access to capital and inadequate skills, the youth who lack skills and capital tend to get stuck in dead-end jobs and fail to productively engage in other activities. This is reinforced by the lack of opportunities for vocational training, especially that which is tailored to out of school girls and mothers. In contrast, those with more education are likely to transit to better jobs as and when employment opportunities arise.

## 5.2 Emerging policy issues

**Keep girls in school:** There is a need to put in place measures to address both demand side and supply side constraints that hamper educational attainment and completion for girls. Issues of social, cultural and religious norms that contribute to girls' early exit from school should be tackled head on through media campaigns on the importance of education, targeting the young girls, parents and other community members; community leaders (parish chiefs, cultural leaders and religious leaders). The re-admission of teenage mothers back to school as opposed to forcing them into marriage should be taken on seriously through formulating a clear policy on the same, and implementing the policy through involvement and sensitization of various stakeholders- the communities, the teachers and parents.

**Broaden employment opportunities:** While several policies aimed at mitigating the supply side of labour are being put in place, there is a need to focus more on the demand side with a particular emphasis on job creation. It is necessary to develop policies that are aimed at providing a conducive investment environment for the private sector to expand and create the much-needed opportunities. Rural development programs such as public works programs may be implemented to support the underemployed young people.

**Enhance young people’s capabilities:** To take advantage of potential employment opportunities and/or create their own jobs through self-employment, both girls and boys need the requisite education and skills. Where employment opportunities are available, higher levels of education are associated with easier transitions to better paid jobs and occupational mobility. Hence there is a need to not only focus on enrolment but rather on retention, completion and quality of education. Furthermore, expanding access to quality vocational and technical training is central to enhancing economic capabilities.

**Strengthen enforcement and awareness of legal provisions and policies:** Whereas the study confirmed the existence of enabling policies that are aimed at protecting girls and ensuring gender equality, enforcement of the said policies remains shaky. For example, the enforcement of the law on defilement and minimum age for marriage is weak. Going forward, there is a need to enhance effectiveness of the redress system and child protection systems; the police, probation officers, local leaders and community leaders need to work together to address this issue. Relatedly, other policies such as UPE should be strictly enforced and monitored so that all children who enrol in school are supported and encouraged to complete.

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