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Special meeting now held to prevent next FGM ritual

Daily News (26.10.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2qcEXhp> - A committee in-charge of protecting children and women in Tarime District has held a crucial meeting to deliberate on what should be done to prevent the next female genital mutilation (FGM) ritual.

The meeting of the committee was made possible through funding from Children's Dignity Forum (CDF), a non-governmental organization leading an on-going campaign against FGM and child marriage in the region.

Among others, the committee is composed of government officials from various departments entrusted to protect and safeguard children's rights.

These include gender and children's desks at police stations, the Prisons Department, the Social Welfare, Education and Community Development. There is fear that hundreds of girls will be subjected to FGM in the district in December, this year.

The committee, which also includes religious leaders, proposed several measures that will help curb FGM in the area.

Some speakers during the meeting wanted female circumcisers locally known as 'ngaribas' to be arrested and kept until January next year, when the FGM season ends.

"These 'ngaribas' and traditional leaders should be arrested and kept until January 2019 because they are known.

"Let them be arrested," suggested Ms Mariam Julius, a villager from Nyasaricho. Ms Julius and other members of the committee also wanted traditional leaders to be benched from the ongoing anti-FGM campaign in the area on grounds that the elders had been betraying them.

"Traditional leaders are the ones planning and coordinating FGM. It is time to keep them away from this campaign and instead educate girls and women. This will be helpful," the woman, who is well familiar with FGM in the area, noted. Another committee member Mwihechi Marwa said it was time the campaign involved people, who were not seeing FGM as an important culture.

"The traditional leaders cannot help because they are the ones coordinating FGM," Mr Marwa, who is the chairman of Saved Aged People in Tarime, said.

The committee further said there would be public announcement banning FGM ceremonies in the area. Government officials in Mara Region have also blamed traditional leaders from betraying the anti-FGM campaign in the area.

"It is very unfortunate that these traditional leaders are dishonest always taking us backward. This is the truth of the matter," Rorya District Commissioner (DC) Simon Chacha said recently.

The DC made remarks during a crucial meeting held in Tarime to deliberate on measures that they thought could this time save girls from undergoing FGM in Tarime and other parts of the region.

'Don't use birth control,' Tanzania's President tells women in the country

By Stephanie Busari

CNN (11.09.2018) - <https://cnn.it/2OcPCmp> - Tanzania's President John Magufuli has told women in the East African nation to stop taking birth control pills because the country needs more people, according to local media reports.

"Women can now give up contraceptive methods," Magufuli said.

"Those going for family planning are lazy ... they are afraid they will not be able to feed their children. They do not want to work hard to feed a large family and that is why they opt for birth controls and end up with one or two children only," he said at a public rally on Sunday.

He was quoted in a local newspaper, The Citizen, as saying that those advocating for birth control were foreign and had sinister motives.

Magufuli urged citizens to keep reproducing as the government was investing in maternal health and opening new district hospitals.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) representative for Tanzania, Jacqueline Mahon, was present when Magufuli made his comments, reports said.

CNN has reached out to the UNFPA for comment but did not immediately receive a response.

"I have traveled to Europe and I have seen the effects of birth control. In some countries they are now struggling with declining population. They have no labor force," the Citizen newspaper quoted him as saying.

Tanzania's population is around 53 million people, and 70% of them living on less than \$2 a day, according to a 2015 World Bank report.

"You have cattle. You are big farmers. You can feed your children. Why then resort to birth control?" he asked. "This is my opinion, I see no reason to control births in Tanzania," Magufuli, who has two children, said.

Opposition MP Cecil Mwambe criticized the President's comments, saying they were against the country's health policy.

President Magufuli is known as 'The Bulldozer' for his tough stance against corruption and his hardline policies, which include denying education to schoolgirls who become pregnant.

In another development, the speaker of the Tanzanian parliament banned female lawmakers from wearing fake nails and eyelashes in parliament.

"With the powers vested in me by the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania, I now ban all MPs with false eyelashes and false finger nails from stepping into Parliament," Job Ndugai said, a day after Magufuli's comments.

The new rules also ban women MPs from wearing short dresses and jeans. Female visitors to parliament are also expected to adhere to the dress code.

President Magufuli supports polygamy to end prostitution

CAJ News (12.02.2018) - <http://bit.ly/2nYvsSc> - The Tanzanian President, John Magufuli, is encouraging men to practise polygamy and reduce prostitution in the East African country.

Speaking in the commercial capital, Dar-es-Salaam, he disclosed government will be giving some incentives to men that married more than one wife.

The leader argued promiscuity was also fuelled by imbalances around population in a country with 40 million women and 30 million men.

"Our women are crying every day due to lack of men to marry and support them economically hence they engage in prostitution," Magufuli said.

"So please try to work hard and be productive so that you can help our women by marrying two or more wives provided you are able to provide for their basic needs," he told thousands of men attending a conference.

Prostitution is illegal but quite widespread in Tanzania.

Poverty, lack of job opportunities, culture and the disintegration of family unit are blamed for the trend.

National survey on child marriage

[Full 2017 study in English \(192 pages\)](#)

[Summary in English \(32 pages\)](#)

[Link to full study & summary in Swahili](#)

Girls Not Brides (04.04.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2pQK7NO> - Child marriage can look different from one country to the next. Without context-specific data, it is difficult to design interventions that will effectively tackle the practice.

To better understand why child marriage happens in Tanzania and how best to tackle it, the Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children (MOHCDGEC) there conducted a national survey with the support of several Girls Not Brides members: Children's Dignity Forum, Plan International and FORWARD. They have released their findings and recommendations. Here is what we learned.

Not all girls are equally affected by child marriage

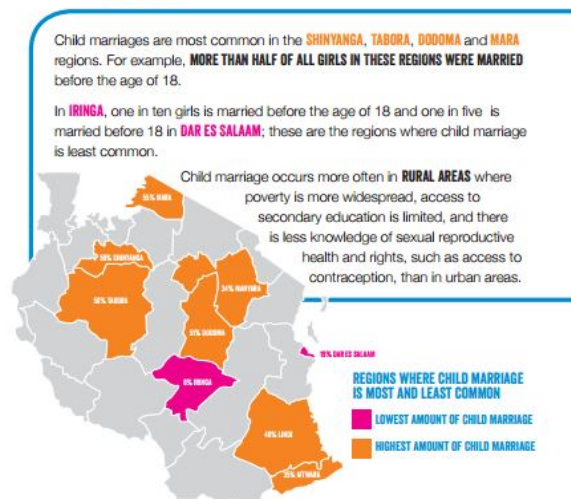
According to the survey, 37% of girls in Tanzania are married before their 18th birthday. This is based on the percentage of women aged 20-24 years old who were married before they were 18 years old. But not all girls face the same level of risk.

Some regions have higher rates than others, with Shinyanga and Tabora having rates of up to 59% and 58% while Dar es Salaam and Iringa have rates as low as 19% and 8%. Girls who live in rural areas and/or come from a poor family are also much more likely to be married early.

WHERE DOES IT HAPPEN?



One girl out of 3 is married before the age of 18 and it is a problem all over Tanzania.



Child marriage is usually driven by poverty

While there are many drivers of child marriage in Tanzania, poverty is by far the biggest factor. Poor families who are unable to pay school fees or take care of their children often resort to marriage, seeing it as a form of economic and social protection. The bride price that parents receive upon marriage – often paid in cattle and cash – is also seen as a strategy to reduce poverty.

...But Gender is always a factor

From a very young age, girls in some regions are raised to perform traditional gender roles as mothers, wives and caregivers. As a result, they often have limited economic value to the household, except the bride price they bring when they marry. Boys, on the other hand are seen as an investment in the family's future.

Fear of dishonour and teenage pregnancies also drive child marriage

Parents worry about the shame, and financial burden, that an unwanted pregnancy brings to the family. In many cases, girls are made to marry the men who got them pregnant, whether they want to or not.

Girls are often tested for pregnancy in schools and expelled if they test positive. Once out of school, they are more likely to be married. There is a real concern that, with the recent increase in teen pregnancies (from 23% in 2010 to 27% in 2016), child marriage rates could rise too.

Girls are not fully protected by the law

Tanzania's Law of Marriage Act (1971) is different for boys and girls. It allows girls to be married at 15 years old whereas boys have to be 18. Both boys and girls can marry at 14 with a court's permission. In June 2016, Tanzania's high court ruled this to be unconstitutional but the law has yet to be amended.

Bribery and corruption are also an issue. There have been various cases of parents bribing government officials who may be likely to report a case of child marriage.

What is needed to end child marriage in Tanzania?

- Reform and harmonise conflicting laws, such as the Law of Marriage Act of 1971. Make it clear that marriage is only for those 18 and above. Ensure the legislation is enforced.
- Educate community members about the adverse effects of child marriage. Develop strategies to end poverty so families don't see marriage as a coping mechanism.
- Strengthen education and learning environments for girls in rural and urban areas. Invest in quality education, and offer reliable transport to school. Encourage married children and teenage mothers to return to school.
- Teach sexual and reproductive health education in schools and communities. Girls and boys need to know and understand what consent means and how to protect themselves, if they do decide to have sex.
- Fund and implement the National Plan of Action to End Violence Against Women and Children in Tanzania (2017/18-2021/22) across the country. Ensure that all relevant Government ministries such as education and health are involved in tackling child marriage together in collaboration with civil society organisations, UN agencies, community leaders and other stakeholders.

Girls forced out of school by rampant sexual abuse and discrimination

Tanzanian girls face endemic issues of corporal punishment and sexual harassment by teachers say campaigners.

By Elsa Buchanan

International Business Times (14.02.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2ltQ5Dq> - Despite education being a national priority for successive Tanzanian governments since independence in 1961, impunity for teachers sexually abusing girls and discriminatory policies against

girls force tens of thousands out of school each year, human rights campaigners have warned.

In 2015, Tanzania made the positive decision to implement a free education policy for secondary education. However, a number of other barriers prevent 40% of Tanzania's adolescents – 1.5 million children – from attending secondary school, including financial reasons, a lack of secondary schools in rural areas, a leaving exam that limits access to secondary school, discriminatory policies and widespread abuse.

Introduced to fight "immorality", the current government policy allows for the automatic expulsion of visibly pregnant or married girls – child brides married before they are 18 – and girls who are tested positive for pregnancy.

"There's a very conservative estimate that 8,000 girls drop out of school annually because of teenage pregnancies – but some NGOs think it's much higher. When you add that, it's a really big percentage of girls who are already underrepresented in secondary education and are pushed out of the system," Elin Martínez, children's rights researcher at Human Rights Watch (HRW) told IBTimes UK.

Martínez recently visited Mwanza, Shinyanga, and Tabora regions in northwestern Tanzania, the latter being two regions with the highest prevalence of child marriage, teenage pregnancies and HIV rates in adolescents. There, nearly 60% of 20 to 24-year-old women are married by the age of 18 and 23% of adolescents aged 15-19 are pregnant or already have children.

Since 2013, the Tanzanian government has would consider adopting a policy for schools to not expel girls and in November 2016 it said the question was still in discussion and that it would soon be signed off. According to Martínez, the government is yet to make it official. The issue thereafter will be how to monitor the policy and its parameters are actually enforced as there is a lot of discretion at school level, where the head teacher can interpret the policy in his or her own way.

The issue of teenage pregnancies is further compounded by the endemic issue of corporal punishment and sexual harassment, with girls describing caning or beating to buttocks and breasts.

"There is widespread sexual harassment in schools by male teachers, or often male teachers persuade girls into sexual relationships that often, for some girls, ends up in pregnancies, and therefore means they will be expelled," she added.

In a school in rural Shinyanga, some ten girls confessed that one male teacher in their school was causing girls to drop out. "A girl recently dropped out because she had been raped by the teacher, and there had been no action [to hold him accountable or prosecute him]. We heard of a very large number of girls who were exposed to him," Martínez explained.

"It also means that a lot of girls decide to drop out of school because they no longer want to put up with a male teacher seducing them or courting them into sexual relationships."

According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), there is a pattern of this issue across Tanzania, where there are often no mechanisms for children to report any form of abuse, whether it is corporal punishment or sexual abuse. In the cases where girls had reported this, they had not been taken seriously by teachers or officials, HRW confirmed. "Often the girl drops out, and the teacher remains in the school, or is shifted to another school without any investigation or prosecution."

Girls living far away from schools face the risk sexual exploitation on their way to schools. "Adult men offer them rides, money for transport or food in exchange for sex. That is a huge problem."

HRW urged the government to tackle the issue by recognising the widespread pattern and demonstrate their commitment towards ending the abuse in schools.

Challenges of education in Tanzania in numbers

- Tanzania has one of the world's youngest populations, with 43% under age 15
 - Education has been a national priority for successive Tanzanian governments since independence in 1961
 - 22% of the 2016-2017 budget allocated for education – representing TZS4.77tn (£1.7bn, \$2.1bn)
 - Since 2005, the government has taken important steps to increase access to secondary education, including by committing to build secondary schools in every administrative ward
 - In some remote and rural areas of the country, students still have to travel up to 25km to school
 - One in every five children are not in primary school
 - Two out of five children of lower-secondary school age are out of school
-

Tales of a child bride: 'My father sold me for 12 cows'

When she was 12, Grace was abducted and then raped and beaten every day for 11 months.

By Marc Ellison

Al Jazeera (12.07.2016) - <http://bit.ly/29BgHwm> - So common are the practices of abduction, rape and forced marriage of girls in northern Tanzania that a single word is used to encapsulate them all: kupura. It is a word used by people from the Sukuma tribe to describe the snatching of girls in broad daylight as they walk to school; a three-syllabled euphemism that downplays their long-term physical and sexual abuse.

And yet here in the region of Shinyanga, the practice of kupura is validated by the oft-recited motto of Sukuma men: alcohol, meat and vagina.

"This slogan is in their blood and a way of life," says Revocatus Itendelebanya. "These are the three things they feel entitled to as men."

Itendelebanya, the legal and gender officer for the local NGO, Agape, says this sense of entitlement, in what is a perennially patriarchal society, also explains why passers-by don't intervene when they witness an abduction.

"When a Sukuma man is attracted to a girl he will start asking people where she lives, and what her routine is," explains Itendelebanya.

"Once he finds out these details he might wait for her near the borehole - or whatever he thinks is the best place to get that girl - and then grab her."

Kupura is so prevalent in the region that when a girl disappears, her parents will suspect what has happened. But rather than calling the police, they will seek the man out not to rescue their child, but to negotiate the dowry - or bride price - in cattle.

Cash cows

For daughters are sadly seen as a short-term investment for poor, rural households - cash cows that can boost a family's financial position at the expense of a girl's schooling and wellbeing.

Such is the value placed on a girl's head that Itendebanya says parents will take their daughters to a witch-doctor if they are not attracting any suitors.

The ensuing samba ritual involves cutting cruciform nicks into the girl's chest and hands with a razor to not only help cleanse her of her bad luck, but to make her more attractive to older men.

And if ever there was a poster child to highlight the pernicious effects of child marriage, it's Grace Masanja.

"Bitterness still fills my heart when I look at them," she says, pointing at the cows grazing at the rear of her family's compound. For Grace they are a daily reminder of how she was treated like cattle, a commodity to be bought and sold.

"But given what I went through, I sometimes wish I had been born a cow," she whispers.

Her father had bartered a dozen cattle for his daughter but, despite daily beatings with sticks and her father's belt, she still refused to marry the older man.

But a deal had been made; a dowry had been paid.

And so it was that Grace was abducted on motorbike by her betrothed early one morning - all with the complicity of her father.

That night, and every day for the next 11 months, she was raped and beaten.

She was only 12.

"That day felt like the end of everything," Grace recalls, glancing again at the cattle.

A country of contradictions

When it comes to child marriage, Tanzania was until very recently a country of contradictions.

The 1971 Marriage Act set the minimum age of marriage for girls at 15 with parental consent - but a girl of 14 could wed where judicial approval was given.

And while the 2009 Child Act did not expressly outlaw child marriage, it did define a child as a person under the age of 18, stating that a parent should "protect the child from neglect, discrimination, violence, abuse, exposure to physical and moral hazards and oppression".

This contradictory legal Venn diagram was further obfuscated by the Local Customary Law of 1963, which allowed Tanzania's many ethnic groups to adhere to their customs and traditions.

The Tanzanian government had long made noises about a constitutional review process to address these conflicting laws, but last year's presidential election campaign, in addition to a lack of consensus in community surveys, had served to stall any political momentum on the issue.

Only in July 2016 did the government finally ban child marriage outright - but will it actually make a difference?

Female genital mutilation was outlawed in Tanzania in 1998, and yet a 2010 government survey found that in remote parts of the Mara region, more than 40 percent of girls and women had been cut.

While it is true that Tanzania does not rank among the countries with the highest rates of child marriage, with four out of 10 girls being married before their 18th birthdays, it seems to be a problem that is not going away.

And this national average masks more disturbing regional trends in the vast East African country.

In the Shinyanga region, more than 59 percent of girls like Grace - some of them as young as nine - are forced into child marriages.

Police corruption

Itendelebanya believes that the actual figure is concealed by the remoteness of many rural communities, as well as widespread reports of corrupt police and court officials burying cases in return for bribes by family members.

The legal and gender officer says there have been cases of police being paid to ignore some early marriages in villages, to lose crucial evidence, and to even help forge the incriminating birth certificates of child brides.

"Police entertain corruption because they benefit from it," claims Itendelebanya. "And police see NGOs like Agape as preventing the flow of money into their pockets."

But Superintendent Pili Simon Misungwi, who heads the gender desk at the Shinyanga district police station, dismisses any claims of wrongdoing by her staff.

In 2008, the Tanzanian government requested that every police station have such a specialist unit, with trained personnel who could handle cases of gender-based violence and child abuse across the country.

"I can't deny that corruption does exist because it's mostly done in private," she says. "But I also can't say that 100 percent of all cases are delayed because of corruption."

"For example, the poverty-stricken parents of a victim may accept financial compensation from the perpetrator's family, which would lead to the adjournment of a case."

Misungwi says it's also not uncommon for a child bride's parents to scupper investigations.

"A girl's parents may be offered two, three or five cows by the husband's family to derail the case," she says. "And because life is hard for these people, they often take the money."

"The police may think the family is cooperating with them, but then when the time comes to testify they tell us the girl is sick, in another village, or even dead."

Misungwi stresses that her officers were hired because of their high moral standing, and then provided with the necessary training.

"And we provide people with a confidential environment where they can have a one-on-one conversation in private rooms where others cannot listen," she adds.

But what the superintendent says, and what actually happens in her absence, appear to be two different things.

Before Misungwi arrives at the station, a young mother sits in the main office as she tells a police officer about the regular sexual assaults she endures at the hands of her husband - the private rooms sit empty.

The officer takes no notes, his attention not on the mother, but on the Nigerian soap opera blasting from the television set in the corner of the room.

Other staff members sit nearby, staring into space, periodically checking their phones for text messages.

Meanwhile incidents related to child marriage have doubled over the past two years.

When staff compile a list of these they do not use the Swahili terms, instead opting for the English equivalents, to mitigate the shocking nature of the crimes.

Kubaka is replaced with rape, kulawiti is replaced with sodomy, kumpa mimba mwanafunzi is replaced with child pregnancy.

And Misungwi says it is the lack of police resources, rather than corruption, that has contributed to the prevalence of child marriage in the region.

"When the government is giving budgets to ministries like Home Affairs, they don't have a separate pot of money for the police gender desk," she says.

As a result, her unit has to rely on using one of the station's three vehicles to reach remote villages where child marriages have been reported to them - but these are often already being used for routine police business.

"And the witnesses may live very far in the villages and can't afford to come to town to do a follow-up interview," says Misungwi. "As a result we often can't reach a conclusion on a case."

The curious case of Agnes Dotto

"There can be no secrets in the villages." So says Paulo Kuyi, who is fighting the ground war against child marriage in the nearby town of Muchambi.

The 53-year-old activist acts as a primitive early warning system for the NGO Agape, which in turn tips off the local police force.

Last September, it was the sudden appearance of 16 cows in a family's compound that triggered alarm bells for Kuyi. And he knew the poor family had a 13-year-old daughter, Agnes Dotto.

"When a dowry has been paid a feast is arranged before the wedding," Kuyi explains. "The family now has cows coming into their clan and they want to celebrate and invite other villagers."

Ten days later, thanks to Kuyi's regular updates by phone, police and Agape staff raided the wedding ceremony.

The husband-to-be was arrested and taken to the local police station in Maganzo, where he should have remained until his case went to trial.

The next day the man walked free; neither he nor Agnes has been seen since.

Kuyi says that he saw a Maganzo police officer leaving a late-night meeting with village leaders.

"These leaders were paid by Agnes' parents to help arrange the marriage," he claims. "It was because of that complicity they paid a police officer to release the perpetrator."

These are the "meanders" - as Itendelebanya euphemistically calls them - that child marriage cases take on their way to the courts.

Three months on, the police tell the legal officer that they are no closer to finding Agnes or the man.

Assistant Superintendent Meshack Sumuni says the village leaders and the girl's parents have refused to cooperate.

"And we don't have the resources to be more proactive in our investigations," he says. "The Tanzanian government provides no specific budget for gender-desk teams, which means we often rely on NGOs for assistance."

The lack of police resources is felt even more keenly here than in Shinyanga.

Roads are regularly washed out in the rainy season, the unit has no dedicated car pool of its own, and their office is bereft of furniture or computer equipment and has a leaking roof, which in the past has led to important legal documents being damaged.

"So the gender desk staff feel like they have been given this role as a punishment," says Sumuni. "So this in turn affects their motivation to chase down reports of child marriage and related cases of abuse."

Back in the village, where there can be no secrets, it is common knowledge that Kuyi is the one reporting cases of child marriage to the police.

Resentful of the potential loss of income that marrying off their daughters can generate, villagers have threatened to lock the activist in his hut and burn it down.

Kuyi says that he doesn't care; he is an old man and he has nothing left to fear.

But what worries him are what advances in technology mean for future child marriages going undetected by him.

He has heard rumours that a dowry has already been paid for Agnes' sister - but by mobile money transfer, and not cattle.

This shift from the traditional, physical form of payment means Kuyi can no longer be visually tipped off about an impending marriage.

"Many other activists are now reluctant to report cases to the police," Kuyi says. "They've been intimidated by death threats, or demoralised when they see only a few cases actually go to court."

Picking up the pieces

Only through death has Grace Masanja clawed back something resembling a life.

After physically and sexually abusing her for 11 months, her husband was killed in a motorbike accident.

Grace, now 13, was filled not with joy, but sorrow.

The man who had raped and beaten her for the better part of a year was dead - but she now has a child to take care of, and no income.

Grace and her child Mathias are at her family's home, where she and her father live out an uneasy truce.

After hearing an announcement on the radio, she applied to enrol on one of Agape's vocational skills courses. Each year, the organisation provides dozens of girls with an opportunity to learn a trade so that they can become breadwinners in their own right.

The majority of the girls opt for tailoring classes, but others want to take the courses in welding and electrical engineering - professions that challenge the patriarchal and gendered stereotypes so ingrained in Tanzania's communities.

It is also hoped that the lure of this additional income will lessen the short-term appeal of a dowry to parents.

Grace's father, Kurwa Masanja, says that he now regrets what he did to his daughter.

"It was Sukuma tradition that forced me to have Grace married when she finished primary school," says Kurwa. "When she came back I apologised, and I hope now that we can slowly become father and daughter again.

"I cannot repeat this mistake because when Grace came back, she told us what had happened to her."

But Grace has her doubts, and fears for her four-year-old sister Birha.

"My father has only six of the cows left from my dowry," she says. "He sold the others to build a second home."

"What do you think he will do when the others have gone, and he is poor again?"

Tanzanian women face high rates of abortion-related deaths

By Donald G. McNeil Jr.

NY Times (25.04.2016) - <http://nyti.ms/1WnWy11> - Unsafe abortions kill many Tanzanian women, according to a recent study, but the deaths result from several factors and women in some regions die much more often than others.

Birth control is hard to get, and public health clinics lack trained staff and vacuum aspiration kits used to perform abortions. In addition, the legality of abortion is ambiguous, forcing many women to try to do it themselves or see illegal abortion providers. Of one million unintended pregnancies in 2013, the study found, 39 percent ended in abortion.

The study, done by the Guttmacher Institute, Tanzania's national medical research institute and the country's leading medical school, and published in PLOS One, was based on surveys of hospitals and clinics and interviews with Tanzanian doctors.

Although Tanzania ratified the African Union's 2005 Maputo Protocol on women's rights — which endorsed abortion rights — and also recognizes colonial-era British case law permitting abortion in some circumstances, national law mandates 14-year sentences for anyone "unlawfully" performing an abortion and seven years for women who try to make themselves miscarry — but without defining "unlawfully," said Sarah C. Keogh, a Guttmacher Institute researcher and the study's lead author.

Women have been prosecuted under it, she said.

The notion that two doctors must approve an abortion to make it legal "is just a rumor, but widely believed," Dr. Keogh said. "As is the rumor that it's just illegal, full stop."

Tanzania's abortion rate — 36 per 1,000 women — is typical for East Africa. But abortions and related deaths are nearly five times higher for women in the north, near Lake Victoria, and in the southern highlands, than for women living on the island of Zanzibar. Zanzibar is 98 percent Muslim; polygamy is common and extramarital sex is taboo, so unplanned pregnancies are rare, Dr. Keogh said.

Abortion laws, she added, are clearer in nearby countries like Uganda, Kenya and Rwanda.

You'll now get 30 years in prison if you marry a child in Tanzania

By Joe McCarthy

Global Citizen (05.07.2016) - <http://gblctzn.me/29kJRPN> - Tanzania has just taken a huge step toward eliminating child marriage. Now, a man who marries or impregnates a school-age girl faces up to 30 years in prison.

Sex with underage girls was already a criminal offense, but previously girls as young as 14 could be married if her parents or a court approved. "Unfortunately, loopholes still remain and girls can still get married off at 15 with parental consent or at 14 under court order if special circumstances exist. These loopholes significantly weaken the new law.

However, this latest effort signals that the government is heading in the right direction and may remove these contradictions in the future.*

It also follows on the heels of the government expanding free primary and secondary education for all children, with a special emphasis on girls.

The latest attempt to tackle child marriage is being framed as a complement to that policy — keeping young girls from getting married means they'll actually be able to take advantage of that free education. To maximize attendance, the government intends to punish parents who fail to keep their kids in school.

The threat of jail time will no doubt act as a strong deterrent, but it doesn't fully address the problem of child marriage. The new law is dependent on schools notifying officials if a girl becomes married or pregnant. But most child marriage occurs informally with community assent, outside the view of law enforcement, which may discourage informants. In some communities, child marriage is an accepted tradition. In others, parents need money and sell their daughters to prospective husbands. In all cases, it may be hard for teachers to fully assess a girl's situation.

It's important that protections against child marriage are on the books across the board, and that the government reform current inconsistencies/contradictions. The Law of Marriage Act which we are campaigning around still allows girls to legally marry at 15 with parental consent, which obviously creates loopholes in the legal system.

Child marriage doesn't affect men and women equally. In the vast majority of cases, child marriage means an older man marries a young girl.

It means a girl is pulled from school and denied an education; a girl becomes pregnant when her body isn't ready and faces potentially fatal consequences as a result; a girl is shut off from the world of opportunity; a girl is more likely to contract STDs; and a girl is more likely to experience domestic violence.

It's something that contributes greatly to gender inequalities around the world.

15 million girls are married off as children every year around the world.

Tanzania has one of the highest rates of teen pregnancy, with 21 percent of girls aged 15 to 19 having given birth.

But the country has also shown a willingness to tackle this issue head-on. Situating the problem within the context of education is also an ingenious way to both acknowledge and cut through the web of barriers that oppress girls and limit their potential.

It also helps keep the eyes of society on the larger prize: educating girls. Because when girls get educated, the benefits are endless.

As the attorney general George Masaju told the parliament, "We are aiming to create a better environment for our school girls to finish their studies without any barriers."