

Using football to end child marriage in Tanzania

Organisations

Plan International Tanzania, Children's Dignity Forum, Tanzania Football Federation and Tackle Africa

Country

Tanzania

Length of project

February 2015 – January 2017

Supported by

European Commission

Project summary

Plan International Tanzania in partnership with Children's Dignity Forum, Tanzania Football Federation and Tackle Africa implemented a two year project using football clubs to reach girls at risk of child marriage. The project was implemented in 5 wards in the Tarime district, Mara Region. This district was carefully selected due to the high prevalence of child marriage but existence of few interventions.

Football clubs provided a place where girls could meet with their peers to have fun while at the same time learning about issues such as child marriage, female genital mutilation/ cutting (FGM/C) and their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Alongside working with girls, the project also involved young women who acted as champions to end child marriage and FGM/C in their local community and engaged parents and caregivers, community leaders and local government officials including police officers.

What were the anticipated outcomes as identified in the *Girls Not Brides* Theory of Change?

- Girls have the opportunity to develop solidarity with one another through peer groups and collective action.
- Girls are increasingly aware of their rights.
- Families, communities and young people are increasingly aware of the harmful impact of child marriage and alternatives available.
- Families and communities prefer not to marry girls who are still children.

What were the key activities of the project?

Football clubs connected girls and equipped them with life skills

Girls' clubs using peer educators and football coaches were formed to provide girls with life skills and increase their confidence and ability to make informed decisions about their lives. In total, 30 girls clubs were created, of which, 26 were based in schools and 4 outside of schools. The clubs used football as a way for girls to meet with their friends, exercise and gain information on adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights, life skills education, child marriage and FGM/C. The clubs used a specially designed curriculum which addressed a range of issues in a sensitive way through the use of football drills with plenty of time for girls to talk to their coaches in a relaxed and safe context.

Trained coaches with the right skills tackled traditional gender norms and sensitive issues

Coaches were specially trained by Tackle Africa UK in using football drills as a way to deliver sensitive information and work to change social norms around issues such as child marriage. As a result of girls participating in the football sessions, they were able to send out powerful messages to the community that girls too can play football, a sport traditionally confined to men.

Community engagement increased acceptance and engagement of boys, parents and communities on girls' rights and prevention of child marriage and FGM/C

The project also used sport to reach out to young men and boys, to engage them on issues of masculinity which can perpetuate violence against women and girls. Men and boys were informed about the consequences of child marriage and FGM/C so they too could become advocates of change.

The project mobilised parents, community members and local leaders, all of whom were educated on child rights, related policies, and their responsibility on issues related to child marriage and FGM/C. Over 30 teachers from primary and secondary schools within the 5 wards received training on adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights so they could be focal points to provide guidance and support to girls and boys.

Local systems were strengthened to protect women and girls from harmful practices such as child marriage and FGM/C

The project worked with existing child protection mechanisms at district, ward and village level and strengthened links across all levels to facilitate effective ways of reporting and responding to child protection issues such as child marriage. The project assessed the capacities of existing formal and informal child protection structures with particular attention given to formal governmental structures such as the District Child Protection Team (DCPT), Ward Child Protection Teams (WCPT) and the Most Vulnerable Children Committees (MVCC). By working with these teams, the project aimed to increase their understanding of the law and worked to ensure they were providing advice and support in a sensitive way. Child protection officials also worked to raise awareness at the community level by working with clan leaders who can play a crucial role in changing community perceptions regarding child marriage.

Furthermore, a child protection committee was set up at the district level involving members from key government departments (mandated with children's issues), CSOs and youth representatives. The committee has a mandate to coordinate efforts to address all forms of violence against children in the district, working hand in hand with Ward Child Protection Teams and Most Vulnerable Children's Committees (MVCCs) at the village level.

The multi-sectorial nature of these community based child protection teams involve many stakeholders such as the police, social welfare officers, teachers, court officials, health personnel, community development officers, local government leaders, parents, the media, children and clan leaders. It is therefore vital that all these individuals are knowledgeable about these practices and know how to respond.

Has the project been evaluated?

Yes, a baseline and endline survey took place. Some key findings are below:

- Girls who participated in football activities demonstrated increased self-efficacy and self-confidence.
 - Knowledge of the causes of child marriage increased by the end of the programme. 94.7% of girls demonstrated high knowledge on the causes of early marriage compared to 57% at baseline. 93.3% of boys showed high knowledge compared to 67% at baseline.
 - 97.1% of interviewed household members said that child marriage before 18 is a bad practice compared to 51% of men and 45.4% of women interviewed at baseline.
 - Over 90% of the heads of households interviewed had increased knowledge on the consequences of child marriage compared to 65.7% of males and 67.5% of females at baseline.
 - 98.1% of interviewed heads of households confirmed that if their children refused to get married at an early age they would support their decision.
 - 72.7% of 10-14 year old girls compared to 66% at baseline demonstrated greater knowledge on alternative rites of passage to FGM/C, such as applying white powder and ceremonies involving no cutting.
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What were the challenges in implementing the project and how were they overcome?

- Young people were facing challenges accessing family planning services at the health facility as they were told they were too young to have access to contraception and that it would destroy their reproductive system. To address this challenge the project approached the Head of Sexual Reproductive Health at Tarime District Hospital and asked her to deliver sessions on providing youth friendly services to health clinics in the District.
 - Schools were only providing limited time for awareness raising activities about child marriage and FGM/C to their pupils. Furthermore, closure between May and July meant the number of sessions delivered by peer educators was limited. To address this challenge; the project managed to discuss with the school management and secure peer educators for two sessions per week to increase awareness among children.
 - There were also challenges trying to change the attitudes and behaviours of parents especially when marriage or FGM/C meant more money or cattle. To help deal with this, the project formed a 'Most Vulnerable Children's Committee' (MVCC) and Ward Child Protection Team to provide awareness to the parents and guardians on child protection, child rights and the importance of reporting and providing information on child abuse cases.
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What factors were important to the success of the project?

- **Monitoring and Learning:** the project team spent a lot of time with communities during monitoring visits of the project activities, supporting young girls and boys in education sessions to fellow peers, community engagement and addressing challenges together with local leaders. Understanding more about the challenges at the community level allowed the team to respond and make the project stronger.
- **Using football:** this is a game traditionally reserved for men, so by engaging girls in the game, the project challenged gender norms. Football drills, learning about life skills and taking part in tournaments and sports leagues built the confidence of girls and showed the community that girls too can play and benefit from sport.
- **Engaging various stakeholders:** traditional leaders, incisors/ cutters, local leaders, key decision makers and police were all involved and helped to make the project a success by ensuring the messages around child marriage and FGM/C were heard by the community and by senior officials.

What pieces of advice would you give other civil society organisations considering implementing a similar project?

- 1. Engage parents in child marriage and FGM/C interventions** as this will help you succeed in the long term. They are the decision makers so are the ones who need to be convinced if these practices are to be stopped.
- 2. Engage traditional leaders/local leaders and influential community members from the start of the project.** These people will be key supporters when things start to change, e.g. decisions which are related to child protection. For example in this project one traditional leader agreed to stop FGM/C and declared “there will be no practice of FGM/C in my clan”. So conducting awareness raising sessions can really help transform communities and prevent practices such as FGM/C and child marriage
- 3. Strengthen child protection systems from the local level to the district level** as this helps in the coordination of cases. Training officials and the gender desk of the police on how to deal with gender based violence cases, child protection and rights is also critical. Doing so will help them to manage cases in an efficient and effective way in accordance with the law.