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Girl-Child Empowerment and Socio-Economic Welfare in Urban Southwestern Uganda: A Case of Kanungu Town Council, Kanungu District

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GIRLCHILDEMPOWERMENTANDSOCIOECONOMIC WELFAREINURBAN SOUTHWESTERN UGANDAA CASEOFKANUNGU TOWN COUNCILKANUNGU DISTRICT

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Girl-Child Empowerment and Socio-Economic Welfare in Urban Southwestern Uganda: A Case of Kanungu Town Council, Kanungu District

Byoonanebye Ian [α] & Adebayo Tajudeen Sanni [σ]

Abstract- The study aimed at establishing the nature of socio-economic welfare of girl-child empowerment interventions in urban Kanungu District through a case of Kanungu Town Council. More specifically, it intended to identify the forms of girl-child empowerment in Kanungu Town Council from 2005 to 2015, to establish the extent to which girl-child empowerment has improved the socio-economic welfare in Kanungu Town Council from 2005 to 2015, to identify and explain the challenges faced by stakeholders in their efforts to empower the girl-child in Kanungu Town Council, and to generate strategies for enhanced girl-child empowerment in Kanungu Town Council. The study adopted a case study research design using a cross-sectional survey. The study population was composed of 15,138 people. Out of the sampled population, the sample size included 332 respondents. Census, systematic random sampling techniques were used to select respondents. Data collection methods included; interviews, questionnaire administration, and documentary review. Data was analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively whereby quantitative data were entered in EPIDATA version 10 and then exported to excel for analysis. The study found out that forms of girl-child empowerment in Kanungu Town Council included; access to education, reproductive health services and income generating. In addition, it was found out that, the performance of girl-child interventions included formal education for girls through universal primary and secondary education has enabled them to advance their education career, being aware of family planning services. Challenges faced by stakeholders in their efforts to empower the girl-child included; poverty, negative cultural norms, ignorance and traditional gender roles while on the strategies for enhanced girl-child in Kanungu Town Council, it was found out that programmes have been introduced to promote girl-child through formal education. The study concluded that, the town council has been implementing interventions that seek to empower the girl-child and improve her welfare and these included legal framework and policies, and access to education. However, there are still challenges hindering girl-child empowerment and these included early marriages, teenage pregnancy and gender based distribution of domestic work. The study recommended that the town council should continue to promote programmes that lead to empowerment of the girl-child. For instance allowing girls to go to, and stay in school, have access to all the resources, including shelter and food on the same footing as boys.

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I. Background

This section presents the conceptual, the historical, the theoretical, the contextual, the political, the cultural and the economic perspectives of the background of the study. While the conceptual dimension covers the key concepts underpinning the study, such as girl-child, empowerment and socio-economic welfare, the theoretical dimension dwells on the theories that link the key variables in the study, such as those linking girl-child empowerment and socio-economic welfare. For its part, the contextual dimension provides an overview of the spatial and socio-economic contexts within which the relationship between girl-child empowerment and socio-economic welfare were examined.

Conceptually, one is considered a 'girl-child' if she is a biological female offspring aged 18 years or less (ICMNCH, 2013), normally under the care of adults. Girl-childhood is made up of four successive developmental stages: infancy, childhood, early adolescence, and late adolescence. Infancy lasts from birth to around two (2) years of age; childhood extends from two (2) years to around seven (7) years of age; early adolescence lasts from ten (10) to around fifteen (15) years of age; and late adolescence covers the period from sixteen (16) to eighteen (18) years of age.

While commenting on the importance of girl-child education, Kofi Annan (2001) said that, educating the girl-child is the best strategy for promoting human welfare. And yet girl-children are often denied their rights, such as free access to education. Bennett (2002) defines empowerment as the enhancement of assets and capabilities of diverse individuals and groups that engage, influence and hold accountable the institutions which affect them. For its part, UNICEF ESARO (2000) views girl-child empowerment as collective action undertaken to overcome obstacles of structural inequality which have previously placed girls in a disadvantaged position.

Elsewhere, Kabeer (2001) states that, resources and agency are among the basic components of empowerment because they enable individuals to reach achievements that they would not otherwise have been able to achieve. In Kabeer's opinion, resources are the pre-conditions for empowerment. That is why many

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empowerment programmes provide or facilitate access to such resources. Kabeer adds that resources include not only food, shelter and financial assets but also information and social resources, which can be accessed through various institutions, such as the family, the school, the market and the broader community.

In addition, Kabeer (2001) defines agency as the ability to define one's goals and act upon them. Agency is so fundamental to empowerment that Malhotra et al (2012) view it as the essence of empowerment, partly because for resources to be empowering, an individual must have the freedom and ability to choose to utilize these resources to achieve his or her desired goals; and this ability is the essence of agency. Therefore, while self-efficacy is the foundation of agency, agency is the foundation of empowerment which leads to achievements. Achievements, such as staying in school, utilising health services, voting, delaying marriage until adulthood or influencing household decisions, are the outcomes of the empowerment.

Besides, Kabeer (2001) views empowerment as explicitly valued as an end in itself, and not just as an instrument for achieving other ends. The term 'empowerment' has been used to explain different ideas and notions about different individuals and group power between nations, classes, races, sexes and individuals. In essence, empowerment can mean equalising or near-equalising. However, Makoni (2012) asserts that, where there is war and conflict, girls are the primary victims when they are forced into sex by the youth militia. In Makoni's opinion, school-girls are not safe either where many girls are forced to marry teachers who impregnate them. She also observes that menstruation is hard to manage during school, especially for rural girls 80 per cent of whom miss school an average of 3 months a year during their menstruation periods. She adds that more girls than boys are HIV-positive. According to Psacharapoulos and Patrinos (2002), every year of schooling lost represents a 10 – 20% reduction in girls' future incomes, and countries could raise per capita economic growth by about 0.3% percentage points per year, or 3% in the next decade, if they attained gender parity in pupils' enrolments. Therefore, unless a solid foundation is made for the girl-child through empowerment and education programmes, the future of the girl-child, and implicitly of humanity, shall remain in the balance.

Moreover, Herz and Sperling (2004) asserts that girls who acquire education are better able to resist practices such as female genital mutilation, early marriage and domestic abuse by male partners. However, education alone is not enough to overcome the multiple causes of girls' deprivation and oppression: young women, including educated ones, face embedded disadvantages in labour markets, property ownership and sexual reproductive choices.

Historically, while World Health Organisation (2014) contends that, the issue of the girl-child was first placed on the international agenda by the 1990 Declaration of the World Summit for Children which accorded priority attention to the girl-child's survival, development and protection, CEDAW (1979) indicates that, the girl-child issue was already on the international agenda in 1979. At the 1990 summit, the international community acknowledged equal rights of girls and equal participation of women in the social, cultural, economic and political life of societies as being a prerequisite for successful and sustainable development. But before that, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1989, contain mutually reinforcing principles to ensure protection and fulfilment of the rights of girls and to end gender-based discrimination.

In September 2000, promoting gender equality and women's empowerment was the third of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that were set. Twelve years later, on October 11th 2012, the United Nations inaugurated the first International Day of the Girl-Child, giving global and national advocates of girl-child empowerment a focal day on which to highlight girl-child issues (ICMNCH, 2013).

Theoretically, the study was based on Mohapatra's (2009) theory of feminism and tribal women. According to Mohapatra, feminism is a set of ideas and concepts that stands for a distinctive and established socio-political ideology developed during the second half of the 20th century. As Mohapatra (2009) reveals, the term "feminism" has become common in everyday language, and it implies a diverse collection of socio-political theories, political movements and moral philosophies largely motivated by a concern for gender equity in society. However, Mohapatra (2009) laments that crimes against girls, such as female infanticide and domestic violence, including rape, continue to increase.

According to Colley (1998), despite all the social changes in recent decades, traditional definitions of masculinity and femininity are still widespread in areas of education where there is male dominance, and in ways in which male supremacy has been maintained. Similarly, Stan worth (1983) asserts that, traditionally, less females than males have been going on to further and higher education.

Contextually, the challenges hindering girl-child empowerment include child marriage which is defined as any formal or informal conjugal union where one or both parties are below the age of 18, and it is a human rights violation and an impediment to global development. According to the International Centre for

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Research on Women (ICRW, 2011), there were nearly 70 million child brides in the world in 2011, and more than 15 million girls were married each year in spite of the many programmes and organisations working to prevent child marriage and provide support to married girls.

According to the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW, 2007), Uganda ranks the 9th globally, with 54.1% of girls in the country marrying before the age of 18. Similarly, the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS, 2009) reported that one in every four (4) girls aged between 15 and 19 becomes pregnant, and nearly half of the girls are married off before the age of 18 years. In addition, Kasente (2003) asserts that, poor families, especially rural ones, commonly use girl-child marriage as a strategy to raise income for the rest of household members, and that many girls in poor families perceive marriage as an escape route from family poverty. Moreover, poor girls sometimes withdraw from school, especially if their parents or guardians cannot meet their needs for supplies like shoes and dresses. Worse still, most societies define femininity in relation to marriage, and girls have been socialized to accept that perspective, thus lowering their aspiration for secondary and higher education. That is why organisations like Joy for Children, Girls Not Brides Uganda Alliance, and the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) Alliance are implementing initiatives to empower the girl-child through raising awareness, economic empowerment, and supporting girls' education by providing scholastic materials and forming Girls not Brides School Clubs.

In 2009, the New Vision (a Ugandan leading newspaper) declared Kanungu as one of the poorest districts in Western Uganda, with 19.3% of the people living in dire poverty. The district is also reported to have one of the highest levels of teenage pregnancy in Uganda (Uganda Bureau of Statistics report (2009), partly attributable to poverty. These facts are confirmed by a UNICEF report (2011) according to which 62% of girls in Uganda's poorest quintiles are married before the age of 18, compared to 26% of girls in the richest quintile. And all this is happening in spite of the governmental and non-governmental interventions in favour of the girl-child in Uganda in general and in Kanungu District in particular.

It is against this background that the study sought to identify the forms of girl-child empowerment, establish the extent to which girl-child empowerment had improved socio-economic welfare, identify and explain the challenges faced by stakeholders in their efforts to empower the girl-child, and generate strategies for enhanced girl-child empowerment in Kanungu Town Council, Kanungu District.

II. Statement of the Problem

The status of the girl-child is critical to achieving women's quality and dignity which is in many ways a litmus test for the maturity of a society. However, girls face various forms of discrimination, attitudes and practices which include female genital mutilation, son preference, early marriage, teenage pregnancy, sexual exploitation and abuse. In addition, pervasive patriarchal, gender biases and stereotypes, and narrowly defined gender roles place girls on the lowest rank of the social and family hierarchies, rendering them marginalised and sometimes socially invisible.

In order to eliminate girl-child discrimination, gender-based violence, exploitation and abuse, governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, have undertaken interventions to empower the girl-child. For instance, the Government of Uganda, through its Universal Primary Education Policy, increased the participation of girls in formal primary education, and completion and achievement rates in primary education, thus lowering the barriers to girls' education. Similarly, non-governmental organizations, like Straight Talk Foundation and Restless Development Uganda, are implementing projects to empower the girl-child. Moreover, through education, schools and other educational institutions are transmitting knowledge and teaching girls essential life and livelihood skills, such as financial literacy, sexual and reproductive health as well as critical thinking.

In spite of all these interventions, the girl-child still faces significant barriers in life. These barriers include poverty, child labour, lack of easily accessible schools, teenage pregnancy and unequal access to education due to gender and cultural factors. Therefore, one wonders whether the interventions to empower the girl-child have had any impact on the social welfare of the girl-child, and if not, why not? Similarly, one wonders whether there are better ways of empowering the girl-child than those tried so far.

III. Objectives of the Study

a) General Objective

The general objective of the study was to establish the nature and socio-economic welfare impact of girl-child empowerment interventions in urban Kanungu District through a case of Kanungu Town Council.

b) Specific objectives of the study

To achieve the above general objective, the study sought to achieve the following specific objectives:

i. To identify the forms of girl-child empowerment in Kanungu Town Council from 2005 to 2015.
ii. To establish the extent to which girl-child empowerment has improved the socio-economic

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welfare of girl-children in Kanungu Town Council from 2005 to 2015.

iii. To identify and explain the challenges faced by stakeholders in their efforts to empower the girl-child in Kanungu Town Council.

iv. To generate strategies for enhanced girl-child empowerment in Kanungu Town Council.

c) Research Questions

The following research questions were used to guide the study:

i. What are the forms of girl-child empowerment in Kanungu Town Council from 2005 to 2015?

ii. To what extent has girl-child empowerment improved the socio-economic welfare of the girl-child in Kanungu Town Council from 2005 to 2015?

iii. What are the challenges faced by stakeholders in their efforts to empower the girl-child in Kanungu Town Council?

iv. What strategies can be adopted to enhance girl-child empowerment in Kanungu Town Council?

d) Scope of the Study

i. *Content scope*

The study mainly focused on girl-child empowerment and socio-economic welfare. It specifically sought to identify forms of girl-child empowerment in Kanungu Town Council from 2005 to 2015, establish the extent to which girl-child empowerment improves socio-economic welfare in Kanungu Town Council from 2005 to 2015, identify and explain the challenges faced by stakeholders in their efforts to empower the girl-child, and generate strategies for enhanced girl-child empowerment in Kanungu Town Council, Kanungu District.

ii. *Geographical scope*

The study was carried out in Kanungu Town Council, Kanungu District, in south-western Uganda. Kanungu District borders the districts of Rukungiri to the north, Kabale to the south- east, Kisoro to the south and the Democratic Republic of Congo to the west. It is composed of 9 sub-counties, 4 town councils and 515 villages. Kanungu Town Council is within Kinkiizi East Constituency and borders with Kirima Sub-county to the west, Rugyeyo Sub-county to the east, Kambuga Sub-county to the north and Rutenga Sub-county to the south. The town council covers a total land area of 3,072 hectares (30.72 square kilometres), inhabited by about 15,138 people, 7,229 males and 7,909 females (Kanungu District Population and Housing Census 2014 – provisional results). The town council is divided into four (4) wards (Eastern, Western, Southern and Northern) which are further sub-divided into 39 cells. The town council is mainly inhabited by Banyankole and Bakiga; two culturally and linguistically related ethnic groups (Kanungu TC Development Plan, 2011 – 2016). The main economic activity of Kanungu District is mixed farming, involving mainly tea production and coffee growing as the major cash crops and banana, cassava, sweet potatoes, rice and millet as the main food crops some of which also double as cash crops. Mixed farming practitioners keep mainly dairy cattle, poultry and some goats while others practice fish farming and bee-keeping. The district is densely populated (203.53 per square kilometre) and land is increasingly becoming scarce due to population pressure. The main economic activities of Kanungu Town Council include brick-making, mixed farming and small-scale businesses.

iii. *Time scope*

The study covered a period of 10 years, from 2005 to 2015. This period was selected because it was during this decade that the issue of girl-child empowerment was firmly placed on the international agenda during the Millennium Development Goals Summit of world leaders. Of the eight Millennium Development Goals, it was Goal number three (03) that focussed on promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

e) Significance of the Study

It is anticipated that the study will be of great benefit to a good number of stakeholders, and in a variety of ways.

The findings of the study are likely to be of great use to international, national and local government development policy makers and civil society workers in the general areas of community development and poverty reduction as well as in the specific areas of gender equity and the girl-child.

Secondly, the residents of Kanungu Town Council, especially girls, are likely to benefit from this study, particularly if its recommendations for enhancing girl-child empowerment are implemented by both the district and Town Council authorities. The benefits could be in the form of a reduction in the violations of the rights of the girl-child, and improved access to education, health care and general welfare facilities by the girl-child, leading to enhanced physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual growth and development.

Finally, the findings of the study are likely to constitute a valuable source of reference in form of a dissertation for students and other scholars interested in development studies, especially gender equity and the girl-child. Moreover, the study may also inspire other researchers to undertake similar research in other areas of Uganda and beyond, thereby further extending the frontiers of knowledge.

f) Operational Definitions of Key Terms

For purposes of this study, the following terms are used to denote the meanings indicated below.

Girl-child: A socially constructed category around female persons between 0 and 18 years. The term 'girl-child'

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also refers to girls who are between 10 and 24 years of age and thus, encompasses adolescents.

Girl-child empowerment: The process of providing, facilitating and instilling the means of addressing issues which impend the full growth and development of the girl-child in all spheres of the home, the school and the community. More specifically, it is the expansion of a girl's current and future ability through access to education, reproductive health and information, removal of cultural norms and practices, such as male dominance, in order to make her act on strategic life choices. In short, it the process of enhancing the girl-child's capacity to participate in her owns development and that of her community or society.

Socio-economic welfare: The state of social and economic well-being in a society, measured using indicators such as gross domestic product (GDP), per capita income, and improved life expectancy due to improved health, improved literacy levels as well as increased levels of employment.

IV. Literature Review and Conceptual Clarification

a) Introduction

This chapter reviews literature on girl-child empowerment and socio-economic welfare in the world, with a particular focus on Uganda and Kanungu District. The review is presented according to themes derived from the research objectives. The first part covers literature on forms of girl-child empowerment that lead to socio-economic welfare, followed by literature on the impact of girl-child empowerment on socio-economic welfare, and then on the challenges faced by stakeholders in their efforts to empower the girl-child, and finally on the strategies for enhanced girl-child empowerment.

b) Forms of Girl-Child Empowerment

i. Girls' access to education

According to Tuyizere (2007), education is an essential tool for achieving the goals of equality, peace and development, and it is a useful tool for addressing the religious and cultural impediments that deny girls access to education. In her view, non-discriminatory education benefits both boys and girls, and ultimately contributes to the establishment of more equal relationships between men and women. That is why she concludes that equal access to, and attainment of, educational qualifications is necessary if more women and girls are to become agents of change. Tuyizera's views are echoed by those of Ahunna (2013) who opines that, the education of the girl-child is a vital factor in dealing with the root causes of poverty and underdevelopment. Ahuma adds that a girl's education directly contributes to sustainable development and it is one of the most important investments that yield maximum returns for development. That is why it is important for girls to be able to access education. In Chibiko's (2009) view, access to education refers to the availability, convenience, and ability of a girl to be educated and it translates into enjoyment of the right to education.

According to Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in December 1949, education is one of the fundamental rights of individuals, and everyone has a right to education. In the words of the Declaration, "This shall be free at least in the elementary and primary stages; elementary education shall be compulsory while technical and professional education shall be made generally available; higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit"

The World Bank (2001) states that education of the girl-child contributes to a decline in mortality and fertility rates, and improves the health and education prospects of the next generation. It was perhaps in recognition of this fact that the UN Millennium Development Goals included commitments to universal primary education and to gender equality. As a matter of fact, Africa has made some progress towards achieving this goal, and as a result, enrolment figures are improving and the enrolment gap between boys and girls is narrowing. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa, the World Bank found that, in 2005, 83.6 girls were enrolled for every 100 boys in primary school. However, primary school enrolment figures do not tell the whole story. As Mason et al (2001) indicate, the gap in higher levels is more dramatic and, for many women, the lack of leadership capacity is due to discrimination in access to education and training.

According to Article 30 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda (1995), "all persons have the right to education." In addition, according to Article 34 of the same Constitution, "a child is entitled to basic education which shall be the responsibility of the state and the parents of the child." The Constitution further emphasises that, there is need for affirmative action in favour of groups marginalised on the basis of gender, among other social categories, for the purpose of addressing imbalances which exist against them. In this regard, the Uganda Gender Policy (2007) is the national guiding framework for gender mainstreaming.

Fredrick et al (2007) states that the provisions in the Bill of Rights, the national objectives and directive principles of state policy, provide that the state shall promote compulsory education and take appropriate measures to afford every citizen equal opportunity to attain the highest educational standard possible. However, despite the existence of a policy on primary education in Uganda, there is no law that provides punitive measures against parents who do not ensure that their children are in school.

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ii. *Policies on access to girls' education*

The Government of Uganda, through its Ministry of Education and Sports, gives considerable support to the education of the girl-child. For example, in 1997, the government launched the Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme following the recommendations of the Education Policy Review Commission (EPRC, 1989), the subsequent relevant stipulations of the Government of Uganda (GoU) White Paper (1992) and the development of the Children's Statute (1996). The key policy objectives of UPE are:

i. Establishing, providing and maintaining quality education as a basis for promoting the necessary human resource development, transforming the society in a fundamental and positive way, and providing the minimum necessary facilities and resources to enable children enter and remain in school and complete the primary cycle of education;
ii. Making basic education accessible to the learner and relevant to his/her needs as well as meeting the national goals;
iii. Making education accessible in order to eliminate disparities; and
iv. Ensuring that education is affordable by the majority of Ugandans.

The policy further emphasises equal opportunity for both boys and girls, and it focuses on promoting gender equality in enrolment, retention and performance in primary education. From the 1990s, the Ministry implemented the Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy, and as a result, the enrolment of girls in primary schools increased from 46% in 1997 to 48% in 1999. Overall, 87% of children aged between 6 and 12 years were enrolled in primary school. However, Namaganda (2009) argues that girls' enrolment has consistently lagged behind that of boys by about 20%. For her part, Nyanzi's (2002) report echoes that of the Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development (MoGLSD, 2000) which asserted that the dropout rate for girls fell from 11% in 1995 to 5.6% in 1998 and that repetition rates among primary school girls reduced from 17.7% in 1995 to 6.3% in 1998.

According to UNICEF (2002), the gross enrolment increased at the introduction of UPE in 1997 and 16.6% more pupils of both sexes were enrolled. However, Fredrick et al (2007) points out that while the free primary education introduced in 1997 resulted into increased enrolment in terms of numbers, it did not necessarily translate into higher retention rates of either boys or girls; and neither have building structures matched the number of pupils enrolled.

Elsewhere, Muhwezi (2003) opines that the UPE programme has led to a number of gender parity achievements, especially where more girls are currently enrolled in school and fewer girls drop out of school. However, gender disparities persist, especially in performance, classroom participation, access to school facilities and general educational attainment. In addition, gender disparities at the secondary school level have not received as much attention as at the primary level. Muhwezi (2003) concludes that there is evidence that more males than females are enrolled in secondary schools although repetition rates for males seem to be higher than those of their female counterparts, and this could be attributed to the greater numbers of male enrolment.

According to Namaganda (2009), Universal Secondary Education (USE) was a government initiative to fulfil its commitment to the Dakar Education for All (EFA) declaration and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) aimed at attaining parity between girls' and boys' enrolment in primary and secondary levels by 2005 and gender equality at all levels of education by 2015. In addition, the MoES Sector Performance Report (2006), in conjunction with Uganda Educational Statistics Abstract 2006/2007 on the status of USE Head Count in 2008, states that there has been a remarkable increase in enrolment of students, including girls, into secondary education. Furthermore, the Uganda Gender Policy (2007) recognises education as an essential human development indicator. Similarly, according to the Uganda Population and Housing Census (2002), the illiteracy rate for Uganda stands at 32%. However, gender disparities still exist, with 23.6% of males compared to 37.6% of females being illiterate.

Ryan (2009) and MoES (2005) state that education for all can only be a useful tool if its policies are gender-sensitive to ensure equal opportunities and benefits. Reflecting on the views of other scholars and practioners, Ryan opines that many studies have shown and continue to show that, in spite of an education policy that makes a provision for equal opportunities for all, girls have continued to lag behind boys in education enrolment, though the gap is getting narrower. For their part, Musisi and Muwanga (2003) observe that, in 1991, the Government of Uganda instituted a policy where girls entering university were given an extra 1.5 points to address the persistent gap in enrolment of girls in higher institutions. This measure resulted in a surge in girls' enrolment so that female students now numerically dominate some university programmes. Additionally, the policy has been revised to provide that any disadvantaged sex should have a minimum enrolment, a move that has been supported by many institutions, including Busitema University which specialises in engineering courses.

iii. *Increase in girls' access to education*

In 1999, the Government of Uganda adopted the National Action Plan for Young Women, aimed at achieving equal opportunities for young women by empowering them to participate in, and benefit from,

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economic, social and political development. Therefore, the girl-child's education, poverty and economic empowerment were among the major areas covered in advancing the girl-child's position. In this regard, Cartley-Carlson (1994) asserts that keeping girls in school is one way to break into the vicious cycles of underdevelopment. Moreover, girls' retention in school serves the national development goals of creating a population that is educated, healthy, economically active and secure.

According to the UN Millennium Development Goals Report (2010), there has been an increase in the number of girls accessing education at the level of entry, particularly for primary schooling which is almost reaching parity. In Uganda, access to UPE increased from 2.5 million pupils in 1997 to 7.5 million in 2008, thus reaching a level of 82% of all eligible pupils enrolled. In addition, the National Strategy for Girls' Education (2000) states that there are many societal dividends that result from educating girls. These include, but are not limited to, higher family incomes, greater economic productivity, better nutrition, delayed marriage and improved maternal outcomes, improved survival rates for infants and overall improvement in education outcomes for children.

According to Lucas et al (1988), since the 1980s, both macro- and micro-economists have stressed the importance of education for economic growth and development. Lucas's views echoes that of Schultz (2002) who opines that, some of the benefits of education include increased earnings potential, better health, a higher probability of adopting new technologies, and reductions in fertility. In addition, countries may particularly benefit from investing in girls' education because diminishing returns to education imply that the marginal return of investing in girl's education is higher than that of investing in boys' education, given that ability is evenly distributed between boys and girls and that girls are less educated in most countries of the world. Moreover, as girls mature, there is a closer relationship between mothers' education as opposed to fathers' education, health and schooling of children.

Furthermore, to effectively empower girls, it is important to invest in their education, especially at primary and secondary levels. This is because education is critical in achieving gender equality and empowering girls to contribute to social change in their communities. The Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC) and the Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) established education as a basic human right. Although gender inequality in education and other sectors affects both boys and girls, girls are at greater disadvantage than boys, which prevents girls from realising their full potential. Moreover, investing in girls' education not only benefits them, but has multiplier effects that benefit the community and the nation at large. Girls who complete school are more likely to marry later in life as well as have fewer and healthier children. As Nattembo (The New Vision 23rd March, 2016 pg. 21) points out, statistics show that a girl who stays in school is six times more likely not to get married at a young age.

Atekyereza (2011) argues that, it is very important for girls to have the same (or, logically, even greater) access to education as boys. This is because, as grownups, girls fend for the family in both good and bad times. Moreover, girls are often responsible for the economic well-being of their families and for primary health care. In addition, because a mature lady is the manager and decision-maker of the home, she needs all the necessary skills to make a successful and happy home enterprise. Besides, a household with an educated woman is better off than one with an uneducated wife and mother.

c) Girls' economic empowerment

According to Girls' and Young Women's Empowerment Framework Report (2014), economic empowerment is a critical lever for change in adolescent girls' lives, helping them to gain financial independence, establish good saving habits, and improve their future prospects for participation in the labour force. Moreover, economic empowerment can provide girls with more mobility, promote their confidence, strengthen their social networks and improve their health outcomes. In addition, promoting a girl's economic empowerment facilitates the achievement of other important public policy goals, such as economic growth, improved human development and reduced violence.

According to Morcos et al (2011), evidence shows that providing girls with economic opportunities and means to build financial assets can improve their health-seeking behaviour, reduce their risk of violence and delay their onset of sexual activity. In addition, formal financial education, combined with social and livelihood interventions, is one way to address the issue of violence. Similarly, financial inclusion and education are essential to help adolescent girls build a sustainable economic future. According to the Women's World Banking Report (WWB, undated), financial education contributes to asset building and helps girls build an understanding of principles around good money management. Moreover, it also promotes awareness of personal financial issues and choices and develops knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours to manage day-to-day expenses, prepare for life events, set financial goals and develop strategies to achieve them.

OECD and G20 (2013) states that children and youth are considered both current and future social and economic actors, and financial capability is not only a relevant 21st century life skill but also a great opportunity for creating a more skilled and

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knowledgeable generation. However, adolescent girls often lack social support and social skills. But, as Morcos et al (2011) reveal, girls who learn how to gain financial independency, combined with social and managerial knowledge, are more likely to participate in the labour force and save their money for future benefit. Such girls can be a powerful economic and societal force. According UNESCO (2013), every dollar spent on reducing malnutrition can result in a return of up to US $30 to the global economy.

Horton (1996) asserts that economic activity of girls is a means of enhancing their autonomy and participation in household decision-making. Kanbur et al (1994) concur when they assert that increasing female participation in the labour force can positively impact young women's freedom and attainment in other areas, such as education and health, and have a favourable impact on education and health outcomes for their children. Recent studies have shown that the economic participation of girls can have a profound impact on their choices as well. For example, Kanbur et al (1994) argue that economically active girls are more likely to postpone marriage and child bearing, which leads to better socio-economic and health circumstances.

Marcus (2014) argues that carefully designed interventions that target girls' economic empowerment, in tandem with other programs, can also positively impact their risk of specific forms of gender-based violence (GBV). In addition, such interventions mitigate economic insecurity and improve decision-making by giving girls increased access to, and control over, assets and resources. Similarly, combined programming has also shown increase in parents' and brothers' sense of girls' competence, and thus contributes to a positive shift in thinking about adolescent girls in general. It is also suggested, though not yet proved, that girls' economic empowerment can have a positive effect on shifting discriminatory gender norms which are among the key drivers of gender-based violence against girls.

Fewer et al (2013) affirms that integrated programming is one approach for taking into account adolescent girls' unique needs and capacities, through building a more holistic set of assets that can help girls improve their economic prospects while at the same time protecting them from risks they may face. This view echoed by Austrian et al (2014) who assert that provisions like the safe spaces concept should be considered as a platform to deliver integrated program models and multidisciplinary interventions for the economic empowerment of adolescent girls. The same authors add that economically empowering adolescent girls can lead to positive outcomes, including helping them improve decision-making through increased financial knowledge and practical money skills, establishing good savings habit, and improving their future prospects for participation in the labour force. However, UNICEF (2013) argues that economic empowerment programmes can inadvertently cause harm when investment in girls' livelihoods and girls' participation in those programmes are not fully monitored and evaluated to see how they affect child labour, school attendance and girls' care-giving and other domestic responsibilities. UNICEF (2013) further reports that recent studies of several sub-Saharan African programmes have suggested that building economic assets can expose girls to new risks of gender-based violence as they change their patterns of movement and time use.

i. *Access to reproductive health services and information*

According to UNFPA (2015), access to safe, voluntary family planning is a human right, and family planning is both central to gender equality and girl-child empowerment and a key factor in reducing poverty. UNFPA adds that some 225 million girls globally who want to avoid pregnancy are not using safe or effective family planning methods for reasons ranging from lack of access to information or services to lack of support from their patterners or communities. It is thus not surprising that the International Conference on Maternal, New born and Child Health in Africa Report (2013) states that a focus on the health of the girl-child is essential for reproductive, maternal, new born and child health efforts. The same report adds that girls under the age of 15 are five times more likely than older women to die in childbirth and that infant are 60% more likely to die in their first year of life if their mothers are under 18 years. This explains why among female adolescents, maternal conditions are responsible for 15% of all deaths in sub-Saharan Africa.

The reproductive health rights of adolescent girls are enshrined in international human rights law; and the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD, 1994) states that everyone has the right to attain the highest standard of reproductive and sexual health, the right to make decisions concerning reproduction free from discrimination, coercion and violence and the right to have information and means to make such decisions.

UNFPA and UNICEF (2011) report that, globally, up to 50% of sexual assault cases are committed against girls under the age of 16 years. Moreover, 1 in 5 girls under the age of 15 experiences sexual abuse worldwide (WHO, 2005). In addition, the World's Youth Data Sheet (2013) of the Population Reference Bureau states that nearly 10% of adolescent girls give birth each year in emerging countries, compared to less than 2% in developed countries. That is why comprehensive sex education not only presents abstinence as a positive choice, but also teaches minors how to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. In the process, it also helps to reduce the rates of maternal

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mortality, abortion, adolescent pregnancies and HIV/AIDS. Furthermore, a non-governmental organisation, Save the Children (2016), emphasises that comprehensive sexuality education and contraception are part of life planning, and adolescents need the knowledge and skills to delay and space pregnancies as they become sexually active and plan for their future. That is why Save the Children has integrated family planning programming capacity within its long-term programmes for young people. For similar reasons, Save the Children focuses on clinic and community-based strategies to make contraception and comprehensive sexuality education more accessible to unmarried people, through schools and community groups.

ii. *Access to contraceptives*

The UNFPA Report (2015) asserts that increasing access to modern contraception among adolescent girls is a crucial starting point for improving their long-term health. The report adds that access to modern contraception among adolescent girls is equally essential for improving maternal and newborn health. Moreover, in low- and middle-income countries, pregnancy and childbirth complications are leading killers of adolescent girls. In addition, their babies also face a higher risk of dying than the babies of older women. And yet enormous barriers prevent adolescents from accessing reproductive health information and services. However, according to the Family Planning 2020 Report (2015), the number of girls with access to modern contraception has increased by 24 million since a landmark family planning pledge in 2012 to improve availability, although progress remains slower than projected and risks leaving millions of girls behind. The report further states that an unprecedented 290 million young women and girls in the poorest countries were using modern methods of contraception by July, 2015. It adds that the increase in access to contraception in the previous year had helped prevent 80 million unintended pregnancies and 111,000 maternal deaths in the FP2020 partnership's 69 focus countries.

According to Adenike (1994), the International Women's Health Coalition reported that in Nigeria, Girls' Power Initiative, a non-governmental organisation, equips adolescent girls between the ages of 10 and 18 with information on sexuality, human rights and reproductive health. The same report stated that meeting once a week, girls learn new skills in leadership and economic management to help them cope with growing up, and this is done in conjunction with parents, teachers and health workers who help girls to improve their communication skills and increase their understanding and support. In addition, the programme offers counselling and health service referrals. Moreover, to bring about wider change throughout the society, this same non-governmental organisation established a Gender Development Institute to conduct research and foster greater awareness and policy changes for equality.

iii. *Girl-child empowerment and socio-economic welfare*

According to Young Women's Empowerment Framework Report (2014), empowering girls is essential to achieving gender equality, where females and males have equal enjoyment of their rights, resources, opportunities and benefits. The same report rightly states that reaching girls in early adolescence offers an opportunity to guide their development, self-discovery and identity in positive ways. Moreover, reaching their families and societies offers an opportunity to reflect upon, and redefine, prevailing gender norms so that a wide variety of girls' and young women's aspirations and contributions are valued, including and extending beyond motherhood and domestic labour.

While speaking at the International Day of the Girl-Child (IDGC) celebrations in Geneva, Switzerland, Bustreo (2014: pp.113) said,

> "It is time to celebrate the enormous potential each young girl has to help build a brighter future. But she can only do this if she grows up in the right conditions, with the right support and in the right environment, and her potential needs to be carefully nurtured and promoted……together, we [all stakeholders] can unlock every young girls' future potential for generations to come".

For its part, WHO (2014) reports that, adolescence is a critical time that can determine the entire trajectory of a girl's life: with the right care, investment and environment, she will become educated and grow into an adult who can take key decisions that will lead her to be an agent of change and contribute to economic growth in her community and in the society. In addition, an informed and empowered girl is better able to exercise agency over her own life, to be an actor rather than a recipient of rights and services, and to become a visible and active member of society. However, the human rights of girls, enshrined in international instruments (CRC & CEDAW), cannot be attained without the empowerment of girls themselves. According to Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination and Violence against the Girl-Child report (2006), empowerment is an active and inclusive process centred on the girl that engages all stakeholders, including parents, guardians, teachers, elders, the community and the state at large. The same report states that effective empowerment results into girls who are transformed through the acquisition of knowledge on their rights and their bodies, and the skills and tools they need to develop a strong and proud sense of their own identity.

The United Nations Population Fund (2009) asserts that educating girls is a powerful lever for girl-

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child empowerment, as well as for reducing poverty. The Fund adds that girls who are educated are likely to marry later and to have smaller, healthier families because education helps girls to know their rights and claim them for themselves and their families. That is why the organization believes that education can translate into economic opportunities for girls and their families. The views of UNPFA are echoed by Namaganda (2009), a Ugandan female writer, according to whom education empowers girls to think critically and to increase their democratic participation (at school level) and later as grownups, which may bring about positive changes through instilling positive values and character. Namaganda cites the example of girls with at least a secondary education who, in her opinion, are less likely to fall victim to crime, are less vulnerable to exploitation, and will instil the same values in their children. She adds that girls' empowerment may also enable them to say no to male teachers' advances and other men who aim at exploiting them sexually through giving gifts or asking them to take books to their staff quarters for marking. In Uganda there is a local (Runyakitara) saying, '*washomesa omwana womwishiiki noba washomesa eihanga, konka washomesa omwojo, noba washomesa omuntu nyabuntu*', meaning that when you educate a girl-child you educate the nation, but when you educate a boy, you educate an individual.

The above ideas are shared by Watkins (1999) according to whom education is the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalised adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities. Watkins sees education as playing a vital role of empowering girls, safeguarding children from exploitative and hazardous labour and sexual exploitation, promoting human rights and democracy, protecting the environment and controlling population growth. He concludes that, increasingly, education is recognised as one of the best financial investments states can make.

A report by FAWE-Uganda (2006) shows that educated girls can become income earners and business entrepreneurs in the near future, which improves the livelihood of families. The report adds that children who are born to teenage mothers tend to be underfed are unlikely to be immunised and are likely to die before the age of five. These views are echoed by those of May (2006) who states that education reduces infant mortality, increases childhood immunisation and nutrition, reduces children's stunting and lowers fertility and unwanted pregnancies. In addition, May states, education offers a valuable opportunity to catch girls when they are most vulnerable, when they can and must learn healthy behaviours. That is why she believes that education can mitigate HIV/AIDS, especially given that over half of the 40 million people globally affected are girls and young women. She concludes by arguing that the longer girls stay in school the lower their fertility becomes and the more qualifications they get to enable them compete in the labour market.

In May's (2006) opinion, there exists a relationship between quality education attainment for girls and poverty reduction. She argues that education empowers girls as well as women socially and economically, and provides them with a key to poverty alleviation through provision of high returns with regard to wage growth. She adds that family health problems, which drain the economy of a family and a nation, are largely alleviated through secondary education. In her view, uneducated women seek to compensate for higher infant mortality rates by delivering eight or nine children in the hope that five will survive, which lowers their economic productivity while at the same time increasing complications from child birth, besides further straining a poor family. But according to Shafiq (2009), an Egyptian writer, girl-child's empowerment is also affected by the fact that girls attain sexual maturity earlier than boys. At school, this may reduce their concentration on studies and even lead to their eventual abandonment of education. Additionally, it is likely that changes in the marriage market have contributed to reducing the pro-male education gap since educated girls fetch more returns upon marriage than uneducated ones.

As a report of the International Day of the Girl-Child (2014) affirms, when adolescent girls are empowered, everybody benefits. This is because empowered girls will grow into empowered women who can care better for themselves and their families, increase their earning potential, serve as active and equal citizens and change agents, and spur economic growth for communities and nations. For her part, Namaganda (2009) views government policies of affirmative action, for example reserving seats for women in the local and district councils and in parliament, as an encouragement for more girls to aspire higher. In addition, Namaganda believes that the many ministerial positions assigned to women in the government of Uganda have also raised the status of women.

iv. *Challenges to girl-child empowerment*

Many girls face tremendous challenges that prevent them from achieving their full potential. For example, the theme of the year 2014 on the International Day of the Girl-Child highlighted violence against girls as a major challenge because it is a universal phenomenon that has persisted worldwide, jeopardizing the human rights, health and wellbeing of too many young lives. According to WHO (2014), much of this violence is rooted in gender inequality and poverty, with lack of education compounding the problem. Therefore, as long as violence against girls, poverty and lack of education persist in the world, girl-child empowerment will be curtailed.

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While lack of education affects both boys and girls, girls are more adversely affected than boys. For example, Muto (2015) cites the revelations of the District Education Officer (DEO) of Gulu District in northern Uganda, Rev. Vicent Oceng-Ocen, according to whom 15% of girls in primary schools, as compared to only 10% of boys, drop out before completing Primary Seven. Similarly, Namaganda (2009) reports that dropout rates get higher in rural schools and as girls grow. She attributes this to the fact that, the puberty stage disturbs girls a lot, and many of them end up with pregnancies. Implicitly implicating poverty, Namaganda adds that, in rural areas where parents cannot afford to give their daughters money for food, boys and men buy lunch for girls in exchange for sex. When they drop out of school, such girls are forced to turn to providing cheap labour to support themselves. Therefore, UNICEF (1996) was right when it stated that, the high dropout rate of girls affects the economic empowerment of girls when they become adults through gainful employment. But girls and young women face even more fundamental challenges than these.

Significant barriers to education in Uganda include poverty, child labour, long distances from school, teenage pregnancies, child marriage and unequal access to education due to gender and cultural factors. A survey conducted in Uganda by Forum for African Women Educationalist (FAWE) in 2001 revealed that the school dropout rate of girls was increasing due to teenage pregnancies at 34% per annum, poverty at 28% per annum and engagement in sex at 11% per annum (FAWE, 2001). Child labour, which is closely related to poverty, is a leading cause of school dropout among both boys and girls. A report by UNICEF (2002) revealed that the death of parents due to HIV/AIDS has further aggravated the situation, leading to an increase in the number of girl-headed households. And when parents die and school girls assume responsibility for their siblings' welfare, such school girls have to leave school. Under such circumstances, education for the girl-child is a low priority. No wonder therefore, that in Uganda, girls' exhibit lower literacy and skills achievement levels than boys.

As UNICEF (2002) reveals, there are more boys in schools than girls in most of the developing countries. It attributes this to the fact that, in science and mathematics lessons, teachers prefer to involve boys rather than girls because boys raise their hands enthusiastically whereas girls tend to raise their hands timidly. Often, the same report adds, when the teachers try to involve girls, the latter contribute reluctantly and they often fail to solve science and mathematics problems. Worse still, instead of encouraging girls, teachers sometimes ignore them, make derogatory remarks that are linked to their personal appearance, sex or background, and eventually the girls give up. To make matters even worse, when a girl performs well, instead of motivating her positively, some teachers will make sexists comments, such as "She has a woman's body, but the brains of a man."

While Universal Primary Education increased girl-child enrolment in Ugandan primary schools, that quantitative increase was not matched by similar increases in the infrastructural facilities, human resource capacity or quality of education provided. Moreover, going to school has its attendant hazards for the girl-child. These hazards arise mainly from the girl-child's increased exposure to sexual harassment and exploitation. As Tuyizere (2007) indicates, girls who are in school are seduced by men of all types, some of whom are HIV-infected. To make matters worse, Tuyizere adds, there are too few female teachers or guidance counsellors, especially in rural areas, and some schools have no female teachers available to deal with girls' problems. And yet girls face physical and sexual threats from male teachers and other men who make them feel unprotected, especially when there is no trusted adult that girls can approach for advice at school. Moreover, when a girl is raped, she will hesitate to inform her parents for fear of being harassed. The same author rightly states that education represents one of the largest investments that most governments make in the children of their countries, and that the potential of schools and other educational institutions to transmit knowledge and teach girls and boys essential life and livelihood skills, such as financial literacy, sexual and reproductive health and critical thinking is immense. However, she also observes, and rightly so, that this potential often remains unfulfilled.

That unfulfilled potential is partly attributable to what Kwesiga (1998) called lack of gender awareness among educators at all levels. In Kwesiga's view, this lack of gender awareness has strengthened the existing inequalities between boys and girls by reinforcing discriminatory tendencies and undermining girls' self-esteem. She adds that Science curricula, in particular, are gender-biased, and science textbooks do not relate to young women's and girls' daily experiences, and fail to give recognition to women scientists. Kwesiga also laments the fact that girls are often deprived of basic education in mathematics, science and technical training subjects that could provide the kind of knowledge girls can apply to improve their daily lives and enhance their employment opportunities. For his part, Carasco (1996) argues that because girls prioritize privacy and cleanliness highly, lack of latrines and water in schools easily causes them to drop out of school. This view is supported by RUWASA (1998), a newsletter, which observes that in order to retain girls in school; there have to be sufficient and separate toilet facilities for girls.

According to a report by Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination and Violence against the Girl-

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Child (2006), all these violations of girls' rights emanate from underlying patriarchal attitudes and behaviour as well as discriminatory gender norms and structures. It is these discriminatory gender norms and structures that favour boys and in national forums and in legislation, in places of work, schools and vocational training institutions, on the streets and in homes. As a result, millions of girls are adversely affected in a diversity of ways. While boys and men may also have their rights violated by rigid gender norms, and while efforts should be made to address this, young women and girls are the most adversely affected according to the same report. Negative traditional beliefs and practices expose girls to extreme forms of violence, including female genital mutilation and female foeticide and infanticide. Moreover, systems of dowry and bride price objectify girls and treat them as property. Addressing these issues requires identifying and bringing attention to these harmful behaviours perpetrated at all levels. There is need for international, national and local legislation and policies in every day practices of families and communities to socialise both girls and boys.

Prabhat et al (2006) argues that sex-selective abortions of female foetuses and female infanticide as a result of son preference are prevalent in many societies. For example, a study conducted in India, estimated that prenatal sex selection and infanticide resulted in approximately half a million missing girls per year for the previous two decades. If allowed to continue, these practices will have serious repercussions on gender balance in some populations, which may result in further violence against girls in the not-so-distant future. Emerging evidence can be seen for example in trafficking young women and girls as brides-to-be from Viet Nam to rural China, where many young women live in virtual slavery.

Brady et al (2006) also argue that girls often lack access to girl-friendly, safe and supportive spaces, including at school. And yet, the same authors reveal, studies have established that girl-friendly spaces are often among the best platforms from which governments, international organisations and non-governmental organisations can protect and promote the human rights of girls. In the same authors' opinion, as a result of discrimination, indifference, ignorance and the hidden nature of widespread abuses against them, girls continue to suffer serious rights violations, often outside the public consciousness, and are therefore left behind in development.

As the report by Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination and Violence against the Girl-Child (2006) indicated, the girl-child's situation is further aggravated by lack of political will on the part of governments to adopt and fully implement international standards. For example, while some governments have ratified key international conventions concerning children, such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 138 on Minimum Age for Admission to Employment and Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, others have not. Moreover, many of those that have ratified such international standards have not fully implemented them, partly because of lack of political will to allocate enough resources for girl child-specific programmes. This impedes progress on the empowerment of girls and on the achievement of national, social, economic and development goals. According to the same report, the situation is further complicated by the fact that current international instruments and policies are not specific enough to protect, promote and fulfil the rights of the girl-child. As a result of this lack of specificity, two of the most important international instruments for girls' rights, CRC and CEDAW, are not being adequately implemented to effectively protect and promote the rights of the girl-child. The same report concludes that there are insufficient linkages between the two conventions and their monitoring bodies.

Goonesekere et al (2006) reveal that the very duty bearers charged with protecting and supporting the rights of girls, such as parents, siblings, guardians, teachers and law enforcement officers, have often been implicated in various forms of violence against girls as well as in the neglect of their responsibility to protect them. In most cases, attacks on girls' physical and mental integrity have been sanctioned as elements of culture, laying a powerful foundation for the denial of girls' rights.

Bruce and Judith (2006) observe that the reproductive health needs of adolescents as a group have been largely ignored by existing reproductive health services, which has led to many girls being at risk of unwanted pregnancy and HIV/AIDS infection. The same authors add that in both developing and developed societies, adolescents, especially girls, face pressures to engage in sexual activity. Ali et al (2006) express similar opinions when they state that sexually active adolescents of both sexes are increasingly at high risk of contracting and transmitting sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, and they are typically poorly informed about how to protect themselves. In the same vein, the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women (1995) observed that sexual violence and sexually transmitted diseases have had a devastating effect on children's health, and girls have been more vulnerable than boys to the consequences of unprotected and premature sexual relations. The same conference participants agreed that girls often face pressures to engage in sexual activity, and that, due to such factors as their youth, social pressures, lack of protective laws or failure to enforce laws, girls are more vulnerable to all kinds of violence, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, trafficking, possibly the sale of their organs and tissues, and forced labour.

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Similar observations are contained in the Gender and Women Empowerment Policy 2010-2020 of Gambia, which states, inter alia, that adolescents continue to become vulnerable to sexual and reproductive health-related problems, and that inter-generational relations (young girls having sexual relationship with older men) have exacerbated their vulnerability to STIs and HIV/AIDS. However, as the same policy document stated, in the same age group, HIV prevalence is higher among females than it is among males. Moreover, because many adolescent pregnancies are unwanted, they contribute to the growing number of induced unsafe abortions. Many of the pregnancies and STIs among adolescents arise because of ignorance and lack of life skills to negotiate safer sexual behaviour.

Namaganda (2009) states that girls are often portrayed as domestic helpers and subjects of marriage, and that household poverty makes it difficult for parents to meet the requirements of their daughters. She adds that these factors force girls to look for alternatives to sustain themselves. Often, Namaganda continues, girls face problems when they reach puberty because some parents find reasons to end the schooling of their daughters. Moreover, bad peer groups and lack of role models also lead girls into early marriage. Worse still, sometimes, parents chose marriage for their daughters. Namaganda further observes that poverty is the underlying factor for girls' poor performance and dropping out of school. It is estimated that about 35% of households in Uganda live below the poverty line. Because of this, parents and guardians in such households cannot meet the costs of their children's education, and when the children are girls, marriage is seen as the only alternative to education. Moreover, the fact that early marriage is sanctioned under both customary law and Islamic norms and practices is a widespread problem that keeps girls out of school. This is partly because girls are primarily associated with, and viewed in terms of, their reproductive roles. In addition, girls are seen as a source of bride wealth to the family and the clan, and eventually girls are married off when they should be in school.

According to Uganda's Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (1992), the country's economic challenges revolve around widespread poverty due to limited sources of income besides poorly motivated or trained teachers. This view is supported by both the World Bank (1996) and Pons (1996). According to the former, Ugandan families find the cost of education, including primary education, prohibitive; and in the opinion of the latter school fees constitute one of the most pressing financial demands on family budgets, and are constant sources of anxiety at all social levels. This anxiety found dramatic expression in the words of a parent in Kanungu District, western Uganda, who, on seeing school children coming home for the school holidays, said, "The thieves have come back."

The Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development Report (MoGLSD, 1999) asserts that addressing gender issues and concerns in national policies and programmes are in most cases culturally determined. The same report rightly states that culturally, people are taciturn about sex and sexuality, which hinders openness about sex education in schools. Moreover, this denies girls vital information through proper counselling and guidance during puberty, sometimes leading to their dropping out of school. Therefore, such norms and their associated practices are partly responsible for girls' sexual promiscuity. At the same time, Namaganda (2009) informs us that some do not care about what they say to, or do for, their children while others do not care about what time their children get home or the kind of friends they associate with. Moreover, Namaganda adds, some parents are reluctant to provide basic needs for their children. In her view, it is these failures that have led girls to seek for love elsewhere.

Tuyizere (2007) opines that girls, especially in rural schools, do not have access to sanitary towels, and as a result, they do not go to school during their menstrual periods. Furthermore, when menstruation begins, poor and uninformed parents regard this as a sign that their daughter is ripe for marriage, which is also an occasion for them to earn some much needed money and livestock in the form of bride price. At this stage, some parents remove their daughters from school, on the pretext that the young girls have to help their mothers with household chores when actually the parents are looking or waiting for a son-in-law. In some parts of Uganda, such as in southwestern districts of Kabale and Kisoro, girls are frequently married off between the ages of 12 and 15 years, meaning that by the age of 18 years, few girls are still unmarried.

UNFPA (2009) aptly states that social expectations often put pressure on girls to marry and begin bearing children before they are ready. The same agency observes that despite a shift towards later marriage in many parts of the world, 82 million girls in developing countries are married before their 18th birthday. Child marriage jeopardizes the health of the married children and limits the opportunities afforded to girls; and it usually disrupts their education and often violates their human rights. Married adolescent girls often find it difficult to access reproductive health services and, in some countries, marriage to older men makes girls even more vulnerable.

Bustreo (2014) asserts that, globally and annually, more than 14 million girls marry before their 18th birthday. Moreover, early marriage is most prevalent in rural and impoverished areas of sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, but the practice is by no means limited to these regions, and poverty often

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triggers this practice. In addition, families may hope that an early marriage will secure a young girl's financial future and honour. However, these unions have too often resulted in disempowerment, abuse and early pregnancy, all of which lead to serious health consequences. UNICEF (2005) also states that some families view their daughters as a source of wealth. As a result, such parents send their daughters to school to simply pass time until they are old enough to be married off for dowry or to be used as sources of free household labour. Therefore, for UNICEF, early marriage and parenthood prevent girls from going to school.

According to Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination and Violence against the Girl-Child report (2006), globally, unequal trade and economic policies aggravate poverty and income inequalities. In the same vein, global advertising campaigns frequently commercialise girls' sexuality. Moreover, this can exacerbate sexual exploitation and violence against girls, and narrow girls' own sense of their value and humanity. Mugerere (1996) argues that teenage pregnancy is now a reality: worldwide teenage pregnancy rates are high and continue to rise, and Uganda's teenage pregnancy rate of 43% is the highest in sub-Saharan Africa. The same author cites two telling examples: at St. Katherine Secondary School, Boroboro, Lira District, 15 girls were found to be pregnant, and expelled from school, in November 1996; and a girl from Arua Public Secondary School was not allowed to sit for her Ordinary Level examinations because she was pregnant although she had studied for four years and had paid all the school fees. Elsewhere, the Daily Monitor of April 13th, 2016 reported that in Bukedea District, many girls became pregnant before their bodies were ready. As a result, most of them abandoned school while others ended up contracting HIV/Aids (Daily Monitor, April 13th, 2016, pg.12).

A study conducted by World Health Organisation (WHO, 2013) indicated that, early marriage and resultant pregnancies are the biggest causes of death among Ugandan girls aged 15 to 19 years, and they account for 20% of maternal deaths. According to the National Strategy to End Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy Report (2015), ignorance of the risks of child marriage, limited access to education for girls, cultural norms that dictate that girls marry while still young, and poverty have contributed to this trend of child marriage in Uganda (The New Vision, April 19th, 2016 pg. 28).

For her part, Cecilia Okot (2016) opines that one year into the 2030 agenda for achieving Sustainable Development Goals, emphasis should be put on improving data on girls, and addressing the issues that are holding them back which are critical for the fulfilment of these global targets.

The International Conference on Maternal, New Born and Child Health in Africa (2013) states that because gender equality is fundamental to attaining human rights, an approach that emphasises accountability and seeks to assist participatory policy formulation is critical. Moreover, the lack of a human rights-based approach prevents the promotion of mutually empowering relationships between boys and girls both in the public and private sphere.

d) Strategies for enhanced girl-child empowerment

Strategies for enhanced girl-child empowerment include reducing in the violations of the rights of the girl-child, improving access to education and health care (social services), improving the general welfare facilities as well as observing gender equity in resource allocation and distribution. These strategies constitute the subject matter of the following sub-sections.

i. *Improving access to education and health care*

Stakeholders are expected to increase the school participation, completion and achievement rates of girls in primary education, by addressing the barriers to girls' education, such as sexual and gender-based violence, poor sanitation and poor management of menstruation. This view is shared by Nsubuga (2015) who asserts that the Ministry of Education and Sports should re-engage all stakeholders on issues of skills for out-of-school children and the need for non-formal education, teenage pregnancies, re-entry of child mothers, and menstruation management. The same author rightly states that "Ugandans must ensure that all school-age children are in school, stay in school and complete school. He concludes that children should be taken to school, girls that have given birth should be supported, and the vice of child and forced marriage should be ended. In his view, "girls are too young to marry before attaining University education."

Tuyizere (2007) opines that a clear girls' education policy, incorporating the goals of gender equality and human rights, would indicate that government recognises the need for, and is committed to, planning appropriate strategies for achieving education for all. Moreover, such a specific education policy is a critical step for mainstreaming gender into the educational system. In addition, some countries, including Uganda, have started developing and implementing gender policies, leading to an increase in the number of girls in school. For example, in Uganda, of the four children from every family that are eligible for universal primary education, two must be girls. This is complemented by the affirmative action policy at Makerere University where female applicants are awarded an extra 1.5 points to increase the intake of female students to the University.

Other countries have adopted slightly different affirmative action approaches. For example, in South Asia, UNICEF declared 1992 the Year of the Girl-Child

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(Margaret, 1998). One of the many activities supported that year was a media campaign, using a cartoon character named Meena, that demonstrated ways in which educating girls was beneficial to girls, their families and society as a whole. Elsewhere, since the late 1980s, USAID projects in Mali, Malawi, Bangladesh and Guatemala have adopted social marketing campaigns to influence parental attitudes concerning girls' education (Margaret, 1998).

Nattembo (The New Vision 23rd March, 2016, pg. 21) maintains that, to ensure investment in girls' education, there is an urgent need to provide equal access to education by developing a gender-sensitive learning environment for girls. She adds that there is need to educate boys and men about gender equality and engaging them in promoting the rights of girls and women as an important strategy which has not been effectively employed. Nattembo also recommends that the Ministry of Education should monitor the implementation of the menstrual hygiene guidelines, especially separation of toilets for girls and availability of water. Additionally, she recommends that the Ministry of Education should eliminate all hidden costs to ensure that all children, especially girls, attain free and quality skills. She concludes that emphasis should be put on supporting girls to develop life skills to enable them to negotiate safer and healthier options, and speak confidently about the issues that concern them. Similar views are expressed by the United Nations Fourth Conference on Women Report (1995) according to which policies and programmes should be developed, giving priority to formal and informal education programmes that support girls and enable them to acquire knowledge, develop self-esteem and take responsibility for their own lives. The report adds that such programmes should focus specifically on programmes to educate women and men, especially parents, on the importance of girls' physical and mental health and well-being, including the elimination of discrimination against girls in food allocation, early marriage, violence against girls, female genital mutilation, child prostitution, sexual abuse, rape and incest. Finally, while the report acknowledges that some schools now allow girls who have given birth to return to school, it recommends that a policy should be made that allows girls to return to school after giving birth, because many schools do not allow such girls to resume their education.

Chege and Fatuma (2006) argue that while the education of girls has received much attention in recent decades, including being listed as a key goal in the Millennium Development Goals, how and when education empowers girls has remained a complex process. The same authors rightly state that experience has shown that despite successful efforts to enrol more girls in primary school, girls in many settings are more likely than boys to repeat classes or to drop out of school altogether. They conclude that, alone, schooling will not empower girls unless the current focus on enrolment in schools is expanded to give more attention to the quality and content of education and the social structures that reinforce schooling and reward a schooled girl. In a similar vein, Tuyizere (2007) asserts that, in addressing unequal access to education and inadequate educational opportunities, governments and other role players (stakeholders) should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes so that, before decisions are taken, an analysis should be made of the effects of gender imbalances. This would produce more educated girls that, some men fear, would be unmanageable.

However, Namaganda (2009) states that men's fear that educated girls will be unmanageable can be mitigated by more education and an expanding economy which can give more opportunities to young women without taking away from what men already have. The same author rightly states that contraceptives should be made easily accessible in schools and that girls need to understand what their sexual role in society is and could be. In Namaganda's view, girls need to know as much as there is to know about their reproductive health and their sexual rights. She adds that girls need to know how to prevent unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases, and how to avoid sexually transmitted infections, especially HIV/AIDS.

The New Vision of 30th July, 2009, reported that early childhood education has been a life-long investment that has laid a strong foundation to build on. The same paper reported that more emphasis should be put on early childhood education to develop interest and vision, and to be able to influence girls' aspirations in education. It added that since time immemorial, education has been, and still remains, the key to national development and personal emancipation. Therefore, the same paper argues, governments and other stakeholders should step up their efforts in fighting inequality in access to education. In this effort, the paper recommends, parents should be supported to take an upper hand in investing in girls' education, and they should groom their boys early in life to value girls as fellow human beings. The New Vision concludes that the social, economic and political development of any country is largely dependent on the investment made in girls, with particular emphasis on education.

Obina (2016) opines that the government of Uganda needs to strengthen laws, especially on the girl-child, because most of the issues related to teenage pregnancy, dropping out of school and other girl-child problems are fuelled by poverty, inappropriate laws and limited projects meant to support and retain girl-children in school. The same author notes that when you educate a girl-child you educate a nation. Moreover, as

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the Gender and Women Empowerment Policy 2010-2020 report of Gambia revealed, it is important to address the teenage girl's vulnerability to sexual and reproductive health-related problems and to promote and support the empowerment of girls empowerment, especially regarding unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STI). That is why Ssetumba (2016) was right to say that stakeholders, including the government through the Ministry of Internal Affairs, should work with foreign non-governmental organisations such as Vital Voices Global Patternship to raise awareness among girls about the dangers of early marriage and teenage pregnancy, through plays in schools.

ii. *Improving general welfare facilities of the girl-child*

Bruce et al (2006) opine that, like boys, girls have a basic right to a community and to spaces that are safe. They add that personal safety is essential if girls are to have meaningful access to the most basic rights or needs, such as the right to life, shelter, food and water, and that the safety of girls in their homes, communities and schools is the basis for all other efforts at citizenship building and empowerment. These ideas are shared by World Health Organisation (undated), which views a safe and supportive environment as part of what motivates young people to make healthy choices. The same agency adds that 'safe' in this context refers to the absence of trauma, excessive stress, violence (or fear of violence) or abuse, and that 'supportive' means an environment that provides positive close relationships with family members, other adults (including teachers, the youth and religious leaders) as well as peers.

A report done by Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination and Violence against the Girl-Child (2006) states that safe girl-friendly spaces are not only essential social platforms through which programmes can be delivered, but they can also act as venues in which girls can develop protective friendship networks, explore their problems, learn about their rights, develop strategies to protect their safety and health, practice team-building, and eventually develop leadership skills and learn how to play. The views of this report are echoed by those of Bustreo (2014) on the International Day of the Girl-Child who asserts that infrastructure, services and technology should be made accessible to girls in order to effectively meet their needs of safety, connectivity and mobility enhancement.

Nomdo and Christina (2006) observe that building girls' social assets should include informing them about their rights and helping them acquire the skills to exercise their rights. In their view, this entails helping them to build connections with same-sex friends, developing safe spaces to meet friends, having adults in their lives to whom they can turn in times of need, and mentors who should help them aspire to their future goals. The same authors add that building social assets means giving girls opportunities to experience being part of a team that helps them to develop leadership skills. However, in the opinion of Nomdo and Christina, girls' social assets can only be built if they find their own voice and recognize their ability to identify their own needs and to act on them as full members of the society. They conclude that, in order to enter into decent work, girls must learn to identify themselves as economic actors and to acquire basic financial literacy.

A report by Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination and Violence against the Girl-Child (2006) affirms that girls have the right to participate in matters that affect them, their families and communities. The same report states that participation is both an individual and a collective concept whereby, at the former level, a girl must feel that she is able to express herself, and has a forum in which to do so while at the latter level, there is need for organised channels through which girls, especially the least visible and girls at greatest risk, articulate their needs which are often different from those of more privileged girls. In addition, the same report rightly states that governments in both developed and developing countries must take responsibility and be held accountable for the impact of global and national policies and trends on the poorest of the poor who are often young females.

According to a report by National Women's Association for Social and Educational Advancement (NWASEA, 1997), while girls' counselling used to enlighten girls' view about their body changes, this noble duty has now been left to peer groups, and parents no longer have control over their children. The same report laments that children are now influenced more by peers, films and cross-border culture than by their parents or elders. Therefore, the Association concludes, there is need to go back to our African family values, where parents used to control children and children would listen to them. For her part, Namaganda (2009), a female, Ugandan writer opines that there is need to improve the welfare of girls by providing privacy for adolescent girls in schools. She adds that sex education should be provided to male and female students and teachers so that girls are not harassed by male students and teachers. She also recommends that Head teachers should endeavour to have more female teachers and to reduce gender inequality in their schools so as to better manage girls' welfare. In her view, more female teachers can also be a motivation to school girls. In addition, the same writer recommends, appropriate facilities should be built at schools and more Universal Secondary Education (USE) schools should be built in rural areas to take schools closer to children, and reduce the exposure of girls to the risk of being lured, raped, assaulted, abducted or sexually harassed by men, and thereby exposing them to

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HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

iii. *Gender equality in resource allocation and distribution*

Tuyizere (2007) asserts that discrimination against girls as a result of son-preference has led to unfair distribution of food and access to health care services, thus endangering the girls' current and future well-being. She laments that counselling and access to sexual and reproductive health information and services for adolescents are inadequate or completely absent and that the girl's right to privacy, confidentiality, respect and informed consent is often ignored. To make matters worse, Tuyizere adds, adolescent girls are both biologically and psychologically more vulnerable to sexual abuse, violence, rape and prostitution and to consequences of unprotected and premature sexual relations than boys are. She attributes this to the fact that early sexual experience, combined with a lack of information and services, increases the risk of unwanted and early pregnancy, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases and unsafe abortions. She concludes that early child-bearing continues to impede improvement in educational, economic and social status of girls in developing countries like Uganda.

iv. *Reduction in the violation of rights of the girl-child*

According to a report by Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination and Violence against the Girl-Child (2006), there is a growing international consensus on the need to engage boys and men in improving the well-being of girls and redress discriminatory gender socialisation. The same report also states that there is a growing base of programmes which include group educational activities (involving men and boys in questioning traditional gender norms), and community outreaches (engaging gatekeepers, community leaders, and local religious leaders among others) that seek to engage men and boys in questioning traditional gender socialisation. In addition, the same report states that all actions to eliminate discrimination and violence against the girl-child should focus on the protection and promotion of girls' human rights. International human rights instruments, the report continues, provide the framework and accountability mechanisms for the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl-child. The report specifies that these instruments include the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and its two Optional Protocols, the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and its Option Protocol, ILO Conventions No. 138 on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment and No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Conventions against Transnational Crime. It concludes that there is an urgent need to challenge, and take collective action to address, patriarchy and power imbalances, through action by all stakeholders, including governments, communities, individual women, men, girls and boys.

The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women (1995) asserts that the elimination of all forms of discrimination against the girl-child should be pursued alongside their root causes, such as son preference, which result in harmful and unethical practices, including prenatal sex selection and female infanticide which has been compounded by the increasing use of technologies to determine foetal sex, resulting in abortion of female foetuses. The same report adds that governments, the United Nations, civil society organisations and public and private institutions should join forces and reaffirm their commitment to end the scourge of violence against girls. In this connection, Namaganda (2009) asserts that girls should be encouraged to learn what is acceptable and what is not from the information and advice they hear or receive from their parents, community leaders, counsellors, books and straight talk as well as from observing good people's behaviour. She maintains that girls should be able to know why some children go wrong and end up dropping out of school. Namaganda recommends that girls should be protected from abuse, exploitation and violence, and that people who commit crimes against girls should be brought to book. She recommends further that children should be stopped from doing work that exposes them to danger and poses risks to their health and education, and that girls should move in groups composed of responsible people who should take care of one another. She concludes that girls should take it upon themselves to avoid situations that can lead them into danger.

FAWE-U (2009) views parents as major contributors to the high school dropout rates of girls, and it recommends that laws should be put in place to hold parents accountable if they marry off their daughters, or withdraw their children from school for domestic work. In this connection, the Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES, 2005) proposes that harmful traditional practices and attitudes which inflict physical and physiological damage on girls like early marriages, bride wealth payment and initiation ceremonies, like female genital mutilation, should be abolished. This proposal is particularly pertinent today when the negative impacts of globalisation, poverty and social vulnerability can reinforce cultural fundamentalism, with negative consequences for women's and girls' rights. Already, in some parts of the world, limited advances in women's rights are leading to fundamentalists reactions that hinder the advancement of girls. These negative and fundamentalists movements must be recognised and challenged.

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V. Methodology

a) Research Design

The study adopted a case study design, using a cross-sectional survey in which both qualitative and quantitative techniques were applied. The study used both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques in a methodological triangulation framework in order to collect both quantifiable and non-quantifiable data.

b) Population and Sampling

Kanungu Town Council is composed of 7,909 females and 7,229 males, adding up to 15,138 people (Kanungu District Population and Housing Census, 2014). The study population consisted of all girl-children and governmental and non-governmental agencies or organizations working in the general area of community development within Kanungu Town Council, the study area.

The researcher used a sample of 260 girl-children (0 – 18years especially from O-level) from selected secondary and primary schools within Kanungu Town Council. This implied that an average number of twenty six (26) girl-children were selected from each school.

Therefore, the researcher selected a sample size of 332 respondents to represent the total population of study.

A total of ten (10) head teachers comprising of three (03) head teachers from selected secondary schools (Kinkiizi High School, San Giovanni Secondary School and Mark Hill Girls School) and seven (07) head teachers of primary schools (Nyakatare, Makiro, Karuhinda, Makiro Model, Mother Care, Kirima Parents and Bishop Mazzoldi) were selected. In addition, two hundred and sixty (260) girl-children were selected from the above mentioned secondary and primary schools meaning an average of 26 girl-children were selected from each school. Eight (08) political leaders (elected local council chairpersons - LC I – LC IV, counsellors and religious leaders) and 208 parents were selected from all the four wards of Kanungu Town Council, one (01) District Community Development Officer and one (01) District Education Officer were as well selected using appropriate sampling procedures.

VI. Data Collection Methods

The researchers used various methods to obtain data. Both primary and secondary sources of data were used. The researcher obtained primary data through questionnaire administration, interviews in the field. On the other hand, secondary data was collected by means of documentary review involving text books, archives, government publications, dissertations, journals and the Internet.

a) Validity and Reliability

i. *Validity*

For purposes of this study, the researcher pre-tested the data collection instruments on a group of respondents to determine whether the instruments could produce the anticipated results. The content validity index was established by establishing the percentage of items that were found to be valid in each tool, and when that percentage was found to be above 80%, the tool was declared valid and the invalid items were reformulated to render them valid.

ii. *Reliability*

The reliability of an instrument is the consistency with which the instrument measures the same phenomenon or variable under constant or similar conditions but at different times. To ensure that the questionnaire and the interview guide were reliable, the researcher used the "test-retest" method. The tools were administered to the same people twice on two consecutive occasions under more or less identical conditions. When the results obtained on both the occasions were found to be similar, the instruments were declared to be reliable. Items that were found to be unreliable were fine-tuned, re-tested and found to be reliable.

b) Data Analysis

For this study, data collected was analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative data were entered in EPIDATA version 10 and then exported to Excel for analysis. Quantitative data was also analyzed using content and thematic approaches. The researcher reviewed field data on a daily basis, beginning with data collected through interviews, and questionnaires. This involved reading interview notes word by word and underlining key ideas that were mentioned repeatedly and also assigning codes to each idea in particular paragraphs. The findings of the study were presented in expository and descriptive prose supplemented with graphs, tables and pie-charts to facilitate explanation and comprehension.

c) Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in full compliance with the basic principles of social research ethics. Throughout the study, the researcher endeavoured to conduct his work in such a way that no harm befell any respondent as a result of his or her participation in the study.

VII. Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation of Findings

a) Background characteristics of the respondents

The social characteristics examined included sex of the respondents, age bracket, highest level of education and marital status. These were captured from all the categories of the respondents that included girl-

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children, head teachers, parents, political leaders and district focal persons.

i. *Sex of the respondents*

The people of Kanungu District, like their counterparts elsewhere, have culturally determined gender roles, and a person's sex influences what his or her society or community expects of him or her. Moreover, traditionally, access to, and control of, household resources in Kanungu District, are at least partly, if not largely, determined by gender. Therefore, a person's sex is a major factor in his or her empowerment and welfare, and it was for this reason that the study was interested in the sex of the respondents.

Table 4.1: Sex of respondents by category

S/N	CATEGORY	GENDER		TOTAL	PERCENTAGE
		Female	Male		
01	Girl-Children	260	00	260	78
02	Political leaders	03	05	08	2.4
03	Parents	22	30	52	16
04	Head teachers	04	06	10	03
05	DEO	00	01	01	0.3
06	DCDO	00	01	01	0.3
TOTAL		289	43	332	100

Source: Field Data, 2017

According to Table 4.1 above, all the girl-child respondents (260 or 100%) were, of course, females because the researcher specifically wanted to obtain primary data from the girl-children whose empowerment and socio-economic welfare were the subject of the study.

In addition, Table 4.1 above indicates that most (05 or 62.5%) of the respondents in the category of political leaders were males while females accounted for only (03 or 37.5%) of the membership of that category. This distribution reflects the patriarchal nature of the study population, characterized by male dominance, especially in the political and the economic spheres of life.

Similarly, Table 4.1 above indicates that most (30 or 58%) of the parent respondents were males as compared to only (22 or 42%) females. This is partly because most households are headed by men who, therefore, are expected to speak on behalf of their wives, and partly because most mothers were too busy working in their gardens to be available for interviews.

Table 4.1 also indicates that most (06 or 60%) of the head teacher respondents were males compared with only (04 or 40%) females, again reflecting male dominance in the education sector. Lastly, Table 4.1 above indicates that the two district focal person respondents (02 or 100%) were both men, highlighting male dominance in government administration as well.

ii. *Age of the respondents*

Age not only influences one's ability to understand reason and act, it also influences a person's attitude to ideas. For example, it is widely believed that the older people become, the less receptive they are to new ideas. Therefore, it was deemed important to know the age of the respondents as such knowledge would help the researcher to better interpret the responses of the respondents.

Table 4.2: The age of respondents by category

S/N	CATEGORY	AGE BRACKET								TOTAL	PERCENTAGE
		10-15	16-21	22-26	27- 32	33-38	39-44	45-49	50+		
01	Girl-Children	-	257	03	-	-	-	-	-	260	78
02	Political leaders	-	-	-	-	-	-	05	03	08	2.4
03	Parents	-	-	-	-	02	04	14	32	52	16
04	Head teachers	-	-	-	-	-	-	03	07	10	03
05	DEO	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	01	01	0.3
06	DCDO	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	01	01	0.3
TOTAL		00	257	03	00	02	04	22	44	332	100

Source: Field Data, 2017

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According to Table 4.2 above, most (257 or 99%) of the girl-child respondents were aged 16-21 years while those aged 22-26 years were only (03 or 01%). This was expected because most of the respondents selected were from Senior One to Senior Four where most of the girl-children are found, especially those below the age of 18 years which is the researcher's working definition of a girl-child.

Table 4.2 above shows that most (05 or 63%) of the political leaders in the sample were aged between 45 and 49 years while the rest (03 or 37%) were aged 50 years and above. This was expected because most people in responsible positions are adults in their prime.

The same shows that most (32 or 62%) of the parents in the sample were aged 50 years and above while the rest (14 or 27%) were in the age bracket of 45-49 years. This was expected because parents of senior secondary school-going children are normally over 40 years of age. Similarly, Table 4.2 above shows that most (07 or 70%) of the head teachers in the sample were aged 50 years and above while the rest (03 or 30%) were in the 45-49 years age bracket. Lastly, Table 4.2 above shows that the two respondents in the category of district focal persons were 50 years or older suggesting that they had been in government service for long enough to attain their senior positions.

iii. *Highest level of education of the respondents*

A person's level of formal education often determines his or her ability to comprehend complex issues and to express his or her ideas correctly and communicatively. Therefore, in a study of this nature, knowledge of the highest level of formal education of the respondents assists the researcher in his or her assessment and interpretation of the responses elicited. It is for this reason that the study was keen to establish the highest level of formal education of each respondent.

Table 4.3: Highest level of education of the respondents by category

S/N	CATEGORY	HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATON								TOTAL	PERCENTAGE
		None	PLE	O-Level	A-Level	Dip.	Bachelor's degree	PGD	Master's degree		
01	Girl-children	00	00	257	03	00	00	00	00	260	78
02	Political leaders	00	04	02	01	01	00	00	00	08	2.4
03	Parents	00	34	10	04	01	03	00	00	52	16
04	Head teachers	00	00	00	00	00	06	02	02	10	03
05	DEO & DCDO	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	02	02	0.6
Total		00	38	269	08	02	09	02	04	332	100

Source: Field Data, 2017

The level of education of the girl-children was established. According to Table 4.3 above, most (257 or 99%) of the girl-children were 'O' Level students meaning that their highest level of education was PLE. While 'A' Level students were only (03 or 01%) and their highest level of education was 'O' Level. The researcher focused on the 'O' Level girl-children because that is where the majority of the girl-children below the age of 18 years, and outside primary school, are found.

Table 4.3 above also indicates that most (04 or 50%) of political leaders in the sample had attained only primary level education, (02 or 25%) had attained 'O' Level, while (02 or 25%) had attained advanced and diploma levels of education respectively.

The same Table 4.3 above indicates that most (34 or 65%) of the parents in the sample had attained the primary level of education, (10 or 19%) had attained 'O' Level while (04 or 08%) had attained the 'A' Level. On the other hand, (03 or 06%) had attained a Bachelor's degree and only (01 or 02%) had the diploma. This implies that the level of formal education of the majority of the parents is relatively low, which has implications for their awareness of girl-child empowerment issues.

According to the same Table 4.3 above, (06 or 60%) of the head teachers in the sample had a a Bachelor's degree, (02 or 20%) had a Master's degree, while only (02 or 20%) had a post-graduate diploma. This reflects the requirement of at least a Bachelor's degree for one to become a secondary school head teacher.

Finally, Table 4.3 above indicates that both the district focal persons in the sample had a Master's degree. Again, in this case, this was because it is a local government requirement in Uganda that a head of a local government department must be a holder of at least a Bachelor's degree.

iv. *Marital status of the respondents*

Marital status affects a person's awareness of the challenges associated with empowering children in general and girl-children in particular as part of improving their welfare. It was, therefore, important to know the marital status of each respondent as such knowledge enabled the researcher to better interpret the respondents' responses.

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Table 4.4: Marital status of the respondents by category

S/N	CATEGORY	MARITAL STATUS					TOTAL	PERCENTAGE
		Single	Cohabiting	Married	Separated	Divorced		
01	Girl-Children	260	-	-	-	-	260	78
02	Political leaders	-	-	07	01	-	08	2.4
03	Parents	-	-	50	02	-	52	16
04	Head teachers	-	-	10	-	-	10	03
05	DEO	-	-	01	-	-	01	0.3
06	DCDO	-	-	01	-	-	01	0.3
TOTAL		260	00	69	03	00	332	100

Source: Field Data, 2017

According to Table 4.4 above, all (260) the girl-children respondents were single because, being school girls largely below 18 years of age, they are legally minor and, therefore, not expected to be married. The same table indicates that most (07 or 70%) of the political leaders in the sample were married while only one (01 or 30%) was unmarried. Therefore, apart from their being key informants by virtue of their political leadership positions, they are also parents and thus familiar with issues related to girl-child empowerment and welfare from the perspective of parents.

In addition, Table 4.4 above indicates that the majority (50 or 96%) of parent respondents were married while (02 or 04%) had separated; and they all had parenting experience, making them appropriate respondents for purposes of the study.

Regarding the head teachers in the sample, and as Table 4.4 above shows, all (10 or 100%) of them were married, and therefore likely to have children, including daughters. Therefore, apart from their vantage point as head teachers, they had the added advantage of also being parents, with experience as both head teachers and parents.

Lastly, Table 4.4 above also shows that (02 or 100%) of the district focal persons in the sample were married, and therefore likely to be parents as well, with both parenting and administrative experience.

VIII. Analysis of Results

a) *Forms of Girl-Child Empowerment in Kanungu Town Council*

The first objective of this study was to identify the forms of girl-child empowerment in Kanungu Town Council from 2005 to 2015. The corresponding research question was*: What are the forms of girl-child empowerment in Kanungu Town Council from 2005 to 2015?* Questions pertaining to this objective were put to, and answered by, girl-children, parents, political leaders, head teachers, the DEO and the DCDO, and their respective responses are presented, analysed and interpreted below.

b) *Forms of girl-child empowerment according to girl-children*

When the girl-children were asked whether there were any interventions that are meant to empower the girl-child in Kanungu Town Council, all the 260 (100%) girl-children in the sample answered the question affirmatively. Further asked to name the different types of such interventions, they agreed that the interventions were available and they include among others access to quality education, reproductive health services, and income generating activities. Moreover, access to education is provided for by both the government and non-governmental organisations, reproductive health services is provided for by Reproductive Health-Uganda, while income generating activities is provided for by the government through its programmes like the Youth Livelihood Programme.

c) *Forms of girl-child empowerment according to parents*

When they were interviewed about the forms of girl-child empowerment in the town council, many parents observed that girls had been socially empowered through programmes that work to end the discrimination of girls based on their sex. For example, some noted that girls like boys, are allowed to go to school, and have access to all the resources, including shelter and food on the same footing as boys. Parents also noted that girls now have their privacy rights respected, especially through provision of sanitary facilities in schools like Kirima Parents Primary School, Kinkiizi High School, and San Giovanni as well as other public places which are separate from those of boys. It was also noted that in terms of employment, girls have had equal access to employment opportunities with their males' counterparts.

In the words of one parent,

> *"In Uganda in general and Kanungu district in particular emphasis has been put in gender equality and equity in terms of access, control and ownership of resources and programmes geared at increasing life expectancy of girls, through reproductive and health services, promotion of proper nutrition, and fighting of domestic violence and other forms of*

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discrimination against the girl-child" (Interview, Kanungu Town Council, 6th May 2017).

d) Forms of girl-child empowerment according to political leaders

The political leaders interviewed indicated that in Kanungu Town Council, girls have been encouraged to participate in income-generating activities, including farming in their homes, which have enabled them to generate income. In addition, the respondents noted that some girls have been employed in restaurants, hotels, guest houses, bars, public offices, banks among others. It was further noted that economically empowered girls are less dependent on men and their family members. Some of the activities in which girls have been involved have resulted into self-employment initiatives by girls.

As one of the political leaders noted,

> *"Government has introduced some programs to alleviate poverty in this town council. A case in point is the youth livelihood program which among its principles is equitable distribution of resources and gender balance. This principle states that, for any youth project to receive funding, it must have 30% of membership being female. This was put in place specifically to promote the socio-economic welfare of girl-child. In addition, the government has also introduced the Women Empowerment Fund also through the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development".*

e) Forms of girl-child empowerment according to head teachers

It is often argued that education is a powerful tool in the emancipation and empowerment of the girl-child. The respondents in the category of head teachers observed that policies to make quality education accessible have been implemented in Uganda and Kanungu District in particular. They noted that, since the introduction of Universal Primary Education and Universal Secondary Education, many girls have been enrolled into primary and secondary schools. This has translated into girls joining tertiary institutions, including universities. In addition, the respondents noted that some girls have even benefited from the affirmative action of 1.5 points given to girls at entry into tertiary institutions like universities. As one of the head teachers observed, "Within schools in Kanungu Town Council, there are even more girls than boys enrolled. Also retention of girls has increased and this is likely to lead to better welfare, especially when girls complete their studies and join the world of employment."

f) Forms of girl-child empowerment according to the DEO and the DCDO

According to the study findings presented by the DEO and the DCDO, legal instruments for the protection and promotion of girls' well-being have been put in place. For instance, the policy of Universal Primary Education and Universal Secondary Education has allowed all children, including girls, to benefit primary and secondary education free of charge. In addition, deliberate legal measures, such as the affirmative action of 1.5 additional entry points accorded to female applicants to tertiary institutions, including universities, have promoted the access of girls to tertiary education. The respondents mentioned that girls are protected internationally and the Government of Uganda has domesticated such legal instruments to suit its conditions and context. A case in point is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against the Girl-Child. In effect, Uganda after ratifying these conventions, put in place the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995 as amended, the Children's Act, the Equal Opportunities Commission which was established by an Act of Parliament. Finally, respondents argued that all these have been put in place to protect and promote the rights and well-being of girls.

g) Summary of the forms of girl-child empowerment

As the foregoing account indicates, various forms of interventions to empower girl-children in Kanungu Town Council have been put in place. These include programs geared at ending gender-based discrimination in access to resources such as food and shelter, such programmes include Girls not Brides Alliance through a non-governmental organisation called Mend the Broken Hearts-Uganda. Similarly, and as indicated by political leaders, girls have been encouraged to participate in income-generating activities, such as agricultural production in their homes, from which some girl-children have derived income.

For their part, head teachers observed that girl-children, including those whose parents cannot afford the cost of formal education, have been given a chance to go to school through the policy of universal primary and secondary education. This has significantly increased the enrolment of girls in both primary and secondary schools. At the national level, Uganda has domesticated international legal instruments that favour the girl-child's empowerment. These instruments include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against the Girl-Child. In effect, after ratifying these conventions, Uganda put in place the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995, as amended, the Children's Act, the Equal Opportunities Commission which was established by an Act of Parliament and all these has been geared towards protection and promotion of girls' rights. All these are certainly significant forms of girl-child empowerment, but how effective have they been?

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h) Performance of girl-child empowerment interventions

The second objective of the study was to establish the extent to which girl-child empowerment had improved the socio-economic welfare of girl-children in Kanungu Town Council from 2005 to 2015. The corresponding research question was*: To what extent has girl-child empowerment improved the socio-economic welfare of the girl-child in Kanungu Town Council from 2005 to 2015?* This research question was also put to, and answered by, girl-children, parents, political leaders, head teachers, the DEO and the DCDO, and their respective responses are presented, analysed and interpreted in the following sub-sections.

i. *Performance of girl-child empowerment interventions according to girl-children*

When the girl-children were asked about the performance of girl-child empowerment interventions, they noted that they foresee the benefits associated with having formal education, since most of them want to become doctors, lawyers, teachers or nurses, among other professions. The optimism raised by these empowerment interventions was vividly expressed in the words of one girl-child according to whom*, "Education will make me acquire knowledge that I will bring to bear on issues related to my health and nutrition, unwanted pregnancies, domestic welfare, the environment and sanitation".* In the words of another girl,

> *"Having seen the case of this girl who as a result of her education got a good marriage and was able to help her brothers who are now residents in Kampala and her immediate family members life has changed for the better. Thus, I see it as motivation factor to also send my girls to school in the future."*

ii. *Performance of girl-child empowerment interventions according to parents*

According to the parents in the sample, the performance of girl-child empowerment interventions, they noted that formal education for girls forms an important aspect in human development and this can be developed through investment in education and training. However, through awareness and sensitisation campaigns, by different organisations including the government within Kanungu Town Council, some parents see the benefits associated with education of their daughters. For instance, when probed about the importance of sending her daughter to school, a parent respondent responded, "*Sending my daughter to school would make her learn basic knowledge and skills that will help her improve her health, livelihood and also empower her to take her rightful place in the society."*

In addition to the above, as a result of sensitisation programmes on the importance of education of the girl-child, another parent informant had this to say when probed about the benefits of educating girls rather than marrying them off by saying that,

"Illiterate girls marry prematurely whilst some do not get a happy marriage due to poverty. The roles of women have changed and boys and girls nowadays prefer educated partners and for that matter, if girls are given the opportunity of education, it would enhance their marriageability".

iii. *Performance of girl-child empowerment interventions according to political leaders*

The political leaders interviewed observed that Universal Primary and Secondary Education means that girls can advance their education career and many have joined leadership positions in schools. They further stated that education plays a significant role in equipping an individual with skills, like reading and writing as well as enhancing their ability to seek rightful information. For instance, the proportion of girls in Kanungu Town Council attending public secondary schools increased from 10.6% in 2005 to nearly 15% in 2009. However, poor quality of education, insufficient teachers and equipments to meet the growing classroom population still persist, an indication that free universal secondary education has yielded mixed results. Similarly, pupils' enrolment more than doubled with the introduction of universal primary education in Uganda in general and Kanungu district in particular. However, this has been affected by hunger and poverty which disrupts the retention rates of most pupils. For instance, a 2014 out of school report showed that for schools that provide breakfast and lunch, the enrolment and retention rates more than doubled while those that did not lost many children to other schools.

iv. *Performance of girl-child empowerment interventions according to head teachers*

The study findings also indicate that, according to the head teachers, girl-child empowerment has led to awareness of family planning methods due to reproductive health services provided by Reproductive Health-Uganda, a non- governmental organisation and this has led to a reduction in unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. In the long run, this has led to a reduction in maternal mortality rates in the town council because young girls can now use family planning services available, which prevents them from unwanted pregnancies and their resultant unsafe abortions that eventually culminate into high maternal mortality rates. For instance, in 2014, there was a slight drop of abortion cases in the district from 351 to 331 in the previous year and by mid-2015; only 251 cases had been recorded. All this is attributed to awareness campaigns on sexual and reproductive health education, radio talk shows as well as improving up take of family planning services in the town council that prevents unwanted pregnancies.

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v. *Performance of girl-child empowerment interventions according to the DEO and the DCDO*

The district focal persons argued that empowering girls starts with educating the girl-child and this increases education levels of the girl-child, reduces maternal mortality rate, increases advocacy for human rights as well as political civil services. Similarly, the DEO and the DCDO argued that performance of girl-child empowerment interventions further reduces sexual harassment of the girl-children in schools by male teachers, dropout rates as well as limiting the parents to educate their daughters. Thus, any intervention that helps a girl-child to develop and expand her personal and intellectual ability and improves her potential for participation in the society, the economy and in the family is a source of empowerment.

vi. *Summary of performance of girl-child empowerment interventions*

As the above account indicates, on the performance of girl-children empowerment interventions, the first performance identified (by the girl-children) is that they foresee the benefits associated with having formal education in the near future, since most of them want to become doctors, lawyers, teachers, nurses to mention but a few. The second performance identified (by parents) is that formal education for girls forms an important aspect in human development and this can be developed through investment in education and training of their daughters. Similarly, the third performance identified (by political leaders) respondents is that, universal primary and secondary education means that girls can advance their education career and many have been able to join leadership positions in schools.

Furthermore, the fourth performance identified by the (head teachers) is that girl-child empowerment leads to awareness of family planning methods due to reproductive health services provided by Reproductive Health-Uganda, a non- governmental organisation for this has led to a reduction in unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS among others. Finally, the DEO and the DCDO identified that, empowering girls starts with educating the girl-child. For this increases her education levels, reduces on maternal mortality rates, increases advocacy for human rights and political civil services. Moreover, they conclude that girl-child empowerment interventions further reduce sexual harassment of the girl-children in schools by male teachers, dropout rates as well as limiting the parents to educate their daughters.

i) Challenges faced by girl-child empowerment stakeholders

The third objective of this study was to identify and explain the challenges faced by stakeholders in their efforts to empower the girl-child in Kanungu Town Council. The corresponding research question was: *What are the challenges faced by stakeholders in their efforts to empower the girl-child in Kanungu Town Council?* This research question was answered by girl-children, parents, political leaders, head teachers, the DEO and the DCDO, and their respective responses are presented, analysed and interpreted in the following sub-sections.

i. *The challenges according to girl-children*

The girl-children respondents were asked about the challenges that hinder stakeholders in their efforts to empower them and they responded that early marriage, teenage pregnancy and dropping out of school were among the leading consequences to the challenges that curtail the efforts of stakeholders to empower the girl-child. Moreover, these phenomenon are a clear manifestations of poverty and its negative effects that leads to dropping out of school, negative cultural norms and practices of marrying off girls at an early age by some parents/ guardians and ignorance of some girl-children that engage into sexual behaviours at an early age. For instance, as a result of negative cultural norms and practices in Kanungu Town Council, the girl-children respondents mentioned that many girls get married or are married off before they complete their school cycles. In addition, they lamented the fact that many girls and a small number of boys enter marriage without any chance of exercising their right to choose their spouse. Thus, early marriage inevitably denies girls of school-going age their right to education, which is crucial for their personal growth and development and eventually their effective contribution to the future well-being of both their families and the society in general.

ii. *The challenges according to parents*

When asked to state the challenges they encounter in their efforts to empower the girl-child in Kanungu Town Council, the parents in the study sample cited traditional gender roles as a major hindrance to the promotion of girl-child empowerment. According to one parent some households delegate certain tasks to girls, and these include childcare, collecting firewood and water, cleaning and washing which are traditionally within girls' domain. In addition, girls help in almost all domestic work, though boys can be asked to do some work when there no girls around. However, the same parent noted that as girls and boys grow older, they share more workload of their mothers and fathers respectively. Most parents observed that the work burden of girls in the study area does not allow girls to attain higher levels of education. For example, according to one parent,

> *"It is the girl-child, for example, who does cooking, sweeping and fetching water which are the preserve of the girl-child in most households in Kanungu Town Council. She further narrated that, by virtue of being girls, they must be taught how to do these domestic chores so that when they get married, the*

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do not bring disgrace to their families for not knowing how to do domestic work which renders them complete women".

In addition, most parent respondents noted that poverty is yet another challenge they encounter in their efforts to empower the girl-child especially raising school fees and other scholastic materials besides meeting other family obligations such as providing food, buying clothes, footings medical bills to mention but a few. Thus, parent respondents stated that the lack of enough resources both financial and material curtails their efforts to empower their children the girl-child inclusive.

iii. *The challenges according to political leaders*

For their part, the political leaders in the study sample noted that girl-children lack access to formal education which means that they are denied the technical know-how and professional skills that are a pre-requisite for formal employment. It was observed that illiterate girls who are abandoned are later widowed or divorced, or are victims of growing urban poverty which forces them into commercialized versions of their work as housewives: cleaning, cooking, and taking care of children. Moreover, they even stand the risk of entering into commercial sex which is a common phenomenon in many towns and cities. The researcher probed the respondents as to why girl-children lack access to education and they stated that in most cases, parents/guardians cannot afford to take them to school due to poverty and lack of support from stakeholders [government and non-governmental organisations].

iv. *The challenges according to head teachers*

According to the head teachers in the sample, early marriage is the main hindrance to efforts to empower the girl-child because it forces them to drop out of school, thereby putting to an end their chances of career advancement? Girls are either taken out of school or not even given the opportunity to attend so that they can be married off early. In an interview with a secondary school head teacher, he lamented the low retention rates of girls in secondary schools in the town council. Early marriage inevitably denies girls of school-going age their right to education which is crucial for their personal growth and development and eventually their effective contribution to the future well-being of both their families and society as a whole. In addition, the head teacher respondents argued that most parents cannot afford the indirect costs of education, like school uniform, books, pens, sanitary towels and even lunch for primary school pupils.

v. *The challenges according to the DEO and the DCDO*

The DEO and the DCDO observed that although there is universal primary and secondary education, indirect costs of education, like uniforms, books, and sanitary towels, are beyond the means of most parents, forcing many students, especially girls, to drop out of school. The same respondents further argued that the school fees burden and other school requirements make it difficult for poor families living at the margins of the society and in the informal economy to afford. In their view, the worst affected are the rural poor families that rely on crops that do not command high or stable prices. They noted that most parents in the town council are subsistence farmers with little or no surplus to sell for basics, let alone school fees. For this matter, the respondents observed, most families cut back on their expenditure by removing their children, especially daughters, from school.

vi. *Summary of challenges faced by girl-child empowerment stakeholders*

As the above account indicates, stakeholders trying to empower the girl-child in Kanungu Town Council face many challenges. The first two, and related, challenges identified (by girl-children and head teachers) are early marriage and teenage pregnancy which force girls to drop out of school. Early marriage and teenage pregnancy are attributed to poverty, cultural norms and beliefs of some parents marrying off their daughters at an early age, as well as ignorance of some girl-children that engage into sexual behaviours at an early age. The third challenge identified (by parents) is the persistence of traditional gender roles according to which girls are supposed to do most of the household chores, including cooking, cleaning, fetching water and firewood and taking care of babies, all of which limit the amount of time a girl-child can devote to her education. Moreover, according to the same traditional gender roles, girls are expected to grow up into hardworking housewives, implying that formal education is not a priority for them. The fourth challenge identified (by political leaders) is the girl-child's lack of access to formal education which arises from poverty and lack of support from stakeholders [government and non-governmental organisations]. Finally, the DEO and the DCDO identified the high cost of formal education as a major challenge for those trying to empower the girl-child in Kanungu Town Council. In their opinion, the combined cost of school tuition, stationery and sanitary pads is beyond the means of many parents and forces parents to either not to send their children, especially daughters, or withdraw them from school, thereby hindering the empowerment of the girl-child through education.

j) Proposed Strategies for Enhanced Girl-child Empowerment

The fourth objective of this study was to generate strategies for enhanced girl-child empowerment in Kanungu Town Council. The corresponding research question was: *What strategies can be adopted to enhance girl-child empowerment in Kanungu Town Council*? This research question was

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answered by girl-children, parents, political leaders, head teachers, the DEO and the DCDO, and their respective responses are presented, analysed and interpreted in the following sub-sections.

i. *Strategies proposed by the girl-children*

According to the girl-children in the study sample, the best way to empower the girl-child is by enabling her to go to, and stay in, school for as long as possible. They cited the example of some programmes that have been introduced to promote and empower them, especially through formal education. They argued that, organizations like Brac-Uganda and Girl Education Movement-Uganda both non-governmental organisations, are helping girls to attain education, by providing scholarships to girl-children at the lower and tertiary levels. Similarly, some of these programmes support girls who have given birth to go back to school. According to one girl-child, *"the government and other stakeholders should conduct sensitization and awareness creation campaigns on reproductive health and more organizations should come in to support girl-child education.*

ii. *Strategies proposed by the parents*

Similarly the parents in the study sample proposed that the best way to empower the girl-child is to promote her formal education so that she becomes a knowledgeable and skilful citizen, capable of self-reliance and contributing to the welfare of her family and society. The parents also proposed the intensification of poverty-alleviation programmes to enable poor households to afford the cost of educating their girl-children. When probed as to why their proposed strategies would work better than the current ones, one parent replied,

> *"I did not have any hope of sending my child to a nursery school which was her dream. Thanks to Kanungu District Local Government and the UNFPA programme, my child was given a scholarship, all her fees and upkeep paid for. She was later given a job and she is now helping me pay school fees for her siblings."*

In the opinion of another parent,

> *"Government programmes for socio-economic empowerment of households do not segregate. For instance, as a woman, I applied for a heifer and it was granted to me. It already has a calf and I sell milk and I am able to meet some household expenses, including school fees for my children"*

iii. *Strategies proposed by the political leaders*

In the opinion of the political leaders in the study sample, the best way to empower the girl-child is by continuously sensitizing the general public about the rights of the girl-child which need to be protected, promoted and respected just like those of any other human being. Furthermore, political leaders proposed that the policies and laws that promote the welfare of the girl-child should be enforced more strictly, for instance, by punishing those who violate the rights of the girl-child in any way. In their view, if all those who abuse the rights of the girl-child, such as defilers and rapists, were justly punished instead of being corruptly mismanaged by both parents and law enforcement officers, the rights and empowerment of the girl-child would be promoted. The political leaders further proposed the promotion of reproductive health as well as advocating for the rights of the girl-child through workshops and seminars because reproductive health knowledge and skills would empower the girl-child to protect herself from potential abusers of her rights.

iv. *Strategies proposed by the head teachers*

Similarly, the head teachers in the study sample also proposed that the best way to empower the girl-child would be by strengthening the existing legal framework on the promotion and protection of girls' rights. In their opinion, cases of early marriage, forced marriage, defilement, rape and domestic violence are still commonly retarding the empowerment and welfare of girls, partly because the relevant laws have loopholes and partly because their enforcement is inadequate. The head teachers further reasoned that if the offenders were more severely punished than they are currently, the welfare of the girl-child would be significantly improved. Finally, the head teachers proposed that religious leaders, who are generally respected, should do all in their power, including the use of radio talk shows, to sensitise the public on the importance of the life and welfare of the girl-child.

v. *Strategies proposed by the DEO and the DCDO*

For their part, the DEO and the DCDO proposed that pro-equality and pro-equity programmes should be instituted to empower the girl-child and promote her welfare. In their opinion, if government initiated and implemented such programmes, especially those focusing on gender issues, the girl-child would be empowered and her welfare would be improved. In support of government-led initiatives, the DEO and the DCDO cited the example of government-led youth livelihood and women empowerment programmes which have helped to raise the income levels of many households, thereby enabling them to meet household needs, including paying school fees for the children.

vi. *Summary of strategies proposed by all respondents*

In all, the five categories of respondents generated ten strategies for the enhancement of girl-child empowerment in Kanungu Town Council, and these strategies can be categorised into four types. The first type of strategies consists of those focusing on promoting the formal education of the girl-child as a means of empowerment. These strategies were proposed by girl-children themselves and parents who

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proposed that girl-children should be enabled to go to school and stay in school until they acquire enough knowledge and skills to be self-reliant.

The second type of strategies was that focusing on sensitization and awareness creation among all people, especially regarding the rights of the girl-child and reproductive health, and these were proposed by girl-children, political leaders and head teachers. The head teachers particularly suggested that religious leaders should exploit the respect that they command in their communities to sensitize the general public on the importance of life and the welfare of the girl-child.

The third type of proposed strategies focuses on empowering the girl-child through pro-equity, pro-equality and poverty alleviation programmes meant to increase household incomes so as to enable poor parents and guardians to afford the cost of educating their girl-children. This type of strategies emanated from parents, the DEO and the DCDO.

The fourth type of proposed strategies came from political leaders and head teachers, and it focuses on strengthening the legal framework and improving the enforcement of policies and laws relating to the protection and promotion of the rights of the girl-child.

IX. Conclusions

On the basis of the above discussion of findings, the study concludes that:

1. Kanungu Town Council has been implementing interventions that seek to empower the girl-child and improve her welfare. These are mostly government interventions through programs, legal frameworks and policies. Other interventions are being implemented by other non-governmental organizations and private individuals.
2. Girl-child empowerment interventions have helped in improving the welfare of the girl-child. For instance, girls now have access to education, and more of them are staying in school for longer, some have received sponsorship and joined higher institutions of learning, they are working for pay and their general standard of living has improved. Moreover, organizations like Brac-Uganda and Girl Education Movement-Uganda both non-governmental organisations, are helping girls to attain education, by providing scholarships to girl-children at the lower and tertiary levels.
3. There are still challenges hindering girl-child empowerment and these are related to individual girl-children while others are attributable to the culture of the communities in which the girl-child finds herself. These include early marriage, teenage pregnancy, gender-based distribution of domestic work, and the high cost of formal education.
4. Various strategies have been adopted to enhance girl-child empowerment. These include programs geared at promoting the rights of girls and meeting their socio-economic needs, and strengthening the existing legal framework for the protection of the girl-child. These have enhanced girl-child empowerment and they need to be strengthened.

X. Recommendations

On the basis of the above conclusions, the following recommendations emerge:

1. First and foremost, it is recommended that Kanungu Town Council should continue to promote programmes that lead to empowerment of the girl-child. For instance allowing girls to go to, and stay in school, have access to all the resources, including shelter and food on the same footing as boys.
2. Families, communities and nations should strive to reject violence against the girl-child and to provide a supportive and nurturing environment in which girls are valued and respected as equal partners. Moreover, this can be done through awareness and sensitization campaigns by various stakeholders over the media like radio talk shows, awareness of family planning methods due to reproductive health services provided by Reproductive Health-Uganda, a nongovernmental organisation and this has led to a reduction in unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.
3. Negative cultural norms and practices of marrying off girls at an early age should be abolished because this leads many girls to drop out of school before completing their education levels. Therefore perpetrators should be dealt with in accordance with the law.
4. In Kanungu Town Council, various strategies have been adopted to enhance girl-child empowerment. However, there is need to strengthen the existing legal framework and policies for the protection and promotion of the welfare of the girl-child in order to meet their socio-economic needs and enhancement of girl-child empowerment.
5. Last but not least, in Kanungu Town Council, various programmes have been introduced to promote and empower the girl-child especially through formal education. For instance, organizations like Brac-Uganda and Girl Education Movement-Uganda both non-government al organisations, are helping girls to attain education, by providing scholarships to girl-children at the lower and tertiary levels. Therefore, these and many more organisations should be encouraged to come up and keep on improving the status of the girl-child through promoting education of the girl-children.

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