

# Empowering Girls and Young Women through the GIRLS Inspire Project

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## Abstract

Tanzania has one of the highest child marriage rates in the world with two out of five girls married before the age of 18. This paper focuses on the GIRLS Inspire project, which, since it began in 2015, has worked to both create awareness about child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) and to help affected girls as well as young women overcome associated challenges by facilitating their participation in economic activities. More than 3,000 participants, aged between 15 and 24 have benefited from the project in Bahi and Kongwa, Districts in Dodoma Region; Kalambo and Nkasi Districts in Rukwa Region; and Ruangwa and Kilwa Masoko Districts in Lindi Region. The paper, which is based on 272 in-depth interviews conducted with project staff and participants between January 2018 and October 2018 in eight selected learning centres, namely, Bahi Mission, Nagulobahi, Mlima Gata, Msunjulile (Dodoma), Msanzi, Katuka, Chala and Londokazi (Rukwa) discusses the current status of child marriage in Tanzania. It highlights that one of the major effects is to deny girls and young women's education opportunities, something that has a long-term impact on their livelihoods. Attention is then turned to the GIRLS Inspire's origins, how it operates, and how it involved distance learning that it developed to tackle these issues. The paper shows that the project provided a platform for girls to tell their stories, acquire basic literacy as well as pre-vocational skills in food processing, soap and batik making, and has helped them access to financial support so as to continue their education through open distance learning.

**Keywords:** Women and girls, empowerment, skills development, employability, open distance learning.

## 1.0 Introduction

A report by Research on Poverty Alleviation (REPOA, 2017) defines child marriage as a civil, traditional, religious or informal union where either the bride or groom, or both, are under the age of 18. Human Rights Watch

(2014) defines forced marriage as any marriage, which occurs without the full and free consent of one or both of the parties or where one or both of the parties are unable to end or leave the marriage, including as a result of duress or intense social or family pressure. Within these definitions, many marriages in Tanzania can be described as either child marriages, forced marriages or both.

It is worth briefly considering the legal situation that allows this situation to occur. Tanzania is a signatory to many international conventions and human rights treaties, which oppose these practices. They include the UN World fit for Children (2002), the Dakar Framework for Action (2000) and the African Charter on Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990). Additionally, at national level, mainland Tanzania adopted the Child Act (2009) and Zanzibar introduced the Children's Act (2011). Regardless of these efforts, UNICEF (2017) explains that the country still faces many challenges related to child, early and forced marriage (CEFM). Crucially, customary laws run parallel to statutory laws. Local Customary Law (Declaration) Order, GN 279 of 1963 allows each ethnic group to follow and make decisions based on its customs and traditions. Thus, the minimum age of marriage is not provided in the constitution. Additionally, the Marriage Act of 1971, which defines marriage as a voluntary union of a man and a woman stipulates that girls can marry at the age of 14 with parental consent.

As indicated by Loaiza and Wong (2012), despite progress made globally on the fight against child early and forced marriage (CEFM), like Tanzania, many countries still lack clear domestic laws against child marriage. Equality Now (2014) suggests that effective domestic laws against child marriage must establish 18 as the minimum age of marriage with no exception for girls. It is important to observe that in Tanzania, the National Action Plan for the Prevention and Eradication of Violence against Women and Children (2001-2015) has highlighted the need to amend the Marriage Act of 1971, suggesting a minimum age of 18 for girls. In July 2016, the Constitutional Court ruled that marriage under the age of 18 was illegal. The matter was a subject of an appeal from Tanzania's Attorney General. However, in October 2019, in a landmark ruling, the Supreme Court upheld the ruling. While laws and policies are crucial in ending child early and forced marriages, it should be noted that attitudes that have made it acceptable in Tanzanian communities also need to be changed.

As it stands, according to Agape Aids Control Programme (AACP, 2014), Tanzania has one of the highest child marriage prevalence rates in the world, with two out of five girls married before the age of 18. Due to local customs, in areas such as Shinyanga, marriage can start as young as 12 for girls and 15 for boys. However, UNICEF (2012) explains that child early and forced marriage prevalence rates vary from one region to another.

**Table 1: CEFM Prevalence Rate**

<b>Region</b>	<b>Percentage of (%)</b>
Shinyanga	59
Tabora	58
Mara	55
Dodoma	51
Lindi	48
Mbeya	45
Morogoro	42
Singida	42
Rukwa	40
Ruvuma	39
Kagera	36
Mwanza	35
Mtwara	35
Arusha	27

As indicated in the Girls Not Brides website, this is due to a variety of factors, ranging from lack of awareness (e.g., Lindi and Mtwara region), parental force (e.g., Mara, Tabora and Shinyanga region) and demand for house-help, which is primarily found in Iringa region. According to Tanzania Demographic and Health Survey (TDHS, 2012), major causes of CEFM include lack of education, poverty and outdated traditional values. Loaliza and Wong (2012) urge that less educated girls from poor or rural areas are most likely to marry as children. REPOA (2017) points out that CEFM often results in girls being denied access to education and health care, leadership roles and economic opportunities. Consequently, it has increased the literacy gap between men and women. Swai (1988) argued that extra attention should, therefore, be given to women to reduce the gap.

## 2.0 Child Early and Forced Marriage Project

In 2015, the Institute of Adult Education (Tanzania) secured funds from the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) to implement the GIRLS Inspire project. It was established to mobilise the power of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) so as to provide schooling and skills training for girls and young women who are prevented from attending school in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Mozambique and Tanzania. Additionally, it addresses barriers to education and economic participation that many women and girls face (*ibid.*). They include early marriages, distance to schools, cultural values, security concerns and costs for schooling (*ibid.*). Central to the project is the recognition that girls have the ability to inspire their peers to grasp opportunities for learning (*ibid.*).

The project had the following objectives:

1. To raise awareness of child, early and forced marriage;
2. To address barriers that prevent girls' economic and social participation;
3. To promote girls' empowerment through skills development; and
4. To provide a platform for girls to tell their stories to a wider audience, encouraging dialogue that will lead to positive action and inspire positive transformation in families and communities throughout Tanzania (*ibid.*).

The project set out to provide schooling and skills development to some of the most vulnerable and hard to reach girls in Dodoma, Lindi and Rukwa regions. The Institute of Adult Education (IAE) implemented the project in Dodoma and Rukwa regions, with KIWOHEDE (a local NGO) running it in Lindi. The IAE conducted a 'training of trainers' (TOTs) exercise in Morogoro, which included key technical representatives from ward, district and regional levels targeted for project implementation. Thereafter, the TOTs went back to their districts to establish learning centres, register learners, identify as well as train centre facilitators in collaboration with IAE regional resident tutors in their respective regions. To create awareness about the GIRLS Inspire project in the targeted communities, awareness campaign meetings were held. They were attended by ward councillors, village elders, religious leaders, street leaders, District Commissioners, District Administrative Secretaries, District Executive Directors, District Adult Education Officers and District Development Officers. Also, capacity building exercises were undertaken by regional training coordinators and centre facilitators to help stakeholders understand the project's objectives and to share information with the project team.

In the project, teaching and learning materials were adopted from other alternative learning programmes. They were taken from Integrated Post-Primary Education (IPPE), a programme, which targets people with diverse educational backgrounds such as primary school leavers, adults and learners with special education needs. A total of 13 modules were used in 24 established centres in Dodoma, Lindi and Rukwa regions. The materials included self-instructional modules on subjects including basic literacy, mathematical operations, communicating in English and Kiswahili, life-skills, sexual and reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, gender, entrepreneurship and financial management skills as well as environmental and civic and human rights education. Additionally, there were modules available on pre-vocational skills such as batik making (tie and dye), soap making and food processing. Also, IAE produced audio and audio-visual programmes that beneficiaries used in their training on topics such as how to make juice and nutritious flour, entrepreneurship (audio) and gender, soap making as well as batik making (video). Hence, girls and young women used technology as part of the learning process under supervision of their facilitators during the training.

Learning was in two phases with each centre registering 64 girls and young women. The first phase was between January and April, 2018 and the second phase started in May and ended in July, 2018. It is important to observe that there was no standardised assessment such as taking examinations because the project focused on basic knowledge and skills. However, an evaluation form was developed to track their performance on a daily basis. Thus, facilitators were able to collect information on the learning progress in each centre. However, on Technical Vocational Education skills development, the beneficiaries undertook practical assignments to ensure that they were sufficiently competent to be able to produce quality products to sell in their local markets.

In the project, mobilization and advocacy approaches were used as an entry point to the communities and to create awareness as well as influence their perception on effects of child early and forced marriages. To achieve this, the Institute of Adult Education (IAE) Regional Resident Tutors, Ward Executive Officers, Ward Councillors, religious leaders, street leaders, facilitators, District Adult Education Officers and District Community Development Officers were all used as project focal people at the village, at both ward and

district levels. The focal people at ward and district levels were instrumental in assisting the Resident Tutors in organising meetings with parents and the public as well as in identifying and registering learners, establishing learning centres and identifying centre facilitators. This is because of their familiarity and influence on their communities. During the meetings, the community was educated on effects of CEFM, the importance of educating girls and abandoning the outdated traditional as well as cultural practices, which lead to CEFM. At the learning centre level, facilitators recorded human-interest stories and sent them to the IAE project team. Such information was shared with the Commonwealth of Learning, other project implementing partners and the public through media and social networks. At all levels, the IAE project team conducted bi-monthly visits to the learning centres, grass-root leaders and government district officials.

### **3.0 Methodology**

The GIRLS Inspire project used a bottom-up approach model, informed by locally formulated challenges, and needs. Based on this approach, the project was developed after a survey study was done by the IAE in Dodoma, Lindi and Rukwa regions. More than 3,900 girls and young women excluded from formal education were reached in the survey. They were grouped into five categories, namely, never attended school, dropped out of primary school, completed primary education, dropped out of lower secondary school and failed at lower secondary school. The methodology used was mainly qualitative. Then 30 focus group discussions (FDGs) were conducted in Dodoma and Rukwa regions. Each group consisted of six to eight participants. Questions were designed to reflect the need for the project and showed prevailing situation before project implementation.

During field visits, in-depth interviews were held with key informants comprising parents, project coordinators and facilitators, ward councillors, village elders, religious leaders, street leaders, District Commissioners, District Administrative Secretaries, District Executive Directors, District Adult Education Officers and District Development Officers in Bahi, Kongwa, Kalambo and Nkasi districts in Dodoma and Rukwa regions, respectively. The interviews were conducted between January, 2018 and October, 2018 and they were of a conversational style rather than a formal question to answer format. Purposive sampling was used to identify key stakeholders. Participants were selected because of their suitability for the project. Additionally, telephone

interviews and social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook were used. This component was primarily used to capture information. For example, to take pictures, record videos and to seek any clarification from regional coordinators as well as facilitators at the 16 learning centres in Dodoma and Rukwa during project implementation.

Data collected from the study were analysed using descriptive and interpretative techniques. Responses from focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were translated from Kiswahili to English and transcribed. The findings were organised and coded into themes. Similar views were grouped and recorded together, while different views were recorded separately. The transcripts were analyzed with regard to objectives of the project. Participation was on a voluntary basis and no data were collected without consent. Participants had a right to refuse to answer any question and they were allowed to ask for any clarification they might need.

## **4.0 Findings**

### **4.1 Cultural Bias**

This study found out that child early and forced marriages are still common practices in communities in which GIRLS Inspire has been operating and they affect girls who are both in and out of school. Interviewees maintained that for those who were in school, CEFM was a major cause of dropping-out among girls, supporting the claim that CEFM denies girls the right to education and increases the literacy gap between boys and girls. One of the implications of this finding is that girls affected by CEFM will be far more likely to lack the necessary skills to seek jobs and be competitive in the job market. Other implications that respondents noted included lack of negotiation power in their families (which can lead to verbal, physical or even sexual abuse at hands of either their husbands or relatives), difficulty in handling their family roles as mothers and wives, and problems in dealing with medical issues including pregnancy as well as childbirth. Besides, interviewees noted that child marriage does not only affect girls but also impacts on families and the wider community. As a result, girls without education are likely to remain within a cycle of poverty, which affects development of their community.

**Table 2: Regional profile**

<b>Dodoma Region</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Literacy rate</b>
Kongwa District	309,973	149,221	160,752	61.7%
Bahi District	221,645	105,975	115,670	57%
<b>Rukwa Region</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Literacy rate</b>
Nkasi District	281,200	137,041	144,159	67.8%
Kalambo District	207,700	100,474	107,226	69.1%

## 4.2 Voice for girls and young women

To sensitise the community about the GIRLS Inspire project, a number of awareness activities and campaigns were conducted. They included public meetings (see Table 3) and use of media such as community radio, television and newspapers (see Figure 1). The IAE Resident Tutor, with assistance from street leaders, Ward Executive Officers, Ward Councillors and District Adult Education Officers held public awareness campaign meetings in their respective regions. In the meetings, issues addressed were mainly dangers of CEFM, the importance of educating as well as protecting girls and the ways that traditional values can hinder girls' progress in the community.

**Table 3: Type of Meeting**

<b>Type of meeting</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>Percentage of total meetings (%)</b>
Public meetings	19	14.6
District meetings	12	9.2
Ward meetings	17	13.1
Parents	24	18.5
Girls	58	44.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>100</b>

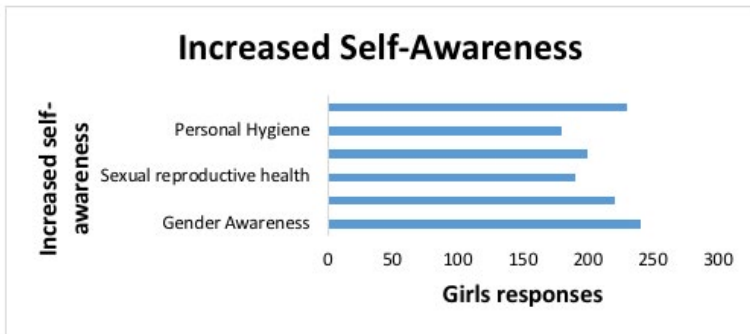
It is important to observe that meetings were conducted in participatory manner and community members were allowed to give their views or ask questions. One community leader described the process as follows:

“After receiving information about the project, I presented it in the leader’s management meeting. Then, leaders went to their respective communities and used platforms such as school, churches and community meetings to create awareness about the project and encourage girls including young women to enroll for the project.”

### 4.3 Awareness creation among community members

Media embody a vital tool in creating awareness about CEFM because many people's opinions are at least partly based on information they receive through it. Therefore, communication through the media is critical for facilitating shifts in attitudes, beliefs, perception and behaviour. To achieve this, local community radio stations such as Dodoma FM, Mwangaza FM in Dodoma; and Chemi Chemi FM in Sumbawanga were used to create awareness. Beneficiaries were interviewed and programmes were made from their stories.

**Figure 1: Number of times project covered media coverage**



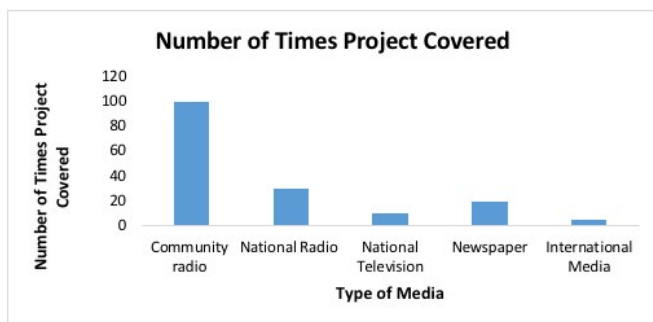
Such moves attracted attention of both local and international mainstream media, namely, Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation (TBC), Independent Television (ITV), Star TV, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Deutsche Welle (DW) Radio. As a result, the project was featured in the BBC special documentary on African child rights and DW's weekly edition of women documentary. Furthermore, information captured by IAE resident tutor and project facilitators through photographs and videos was shared with the public on the Institute of Adult Education against CEFM Facebook page, Twitter and Instagram accounts. The captured stories portrayed different experiences of girls and young women before, during and after the project. The facilitators began to act as advocates for the girls and young women because their stories were heard by a wider audience.

### 4.4 Increased self-awareness

Findings from this study suggest that literacy and life-skills classes helped to increase awareness among girls and young women on various cross-cutting issues (see Figure 2). For example, they learnt about gender equality. In

Tanzania, girls tend to be given a lot of domestic works such as washing clothes, cooking and looking after their siblings, while boys are more likely to go to school and have time to study, play or rest. Findings from this study further showed that most of the girls and young women in the project became confident, compared to the past. Initially, they had difficulty in talking and mixing with people in public. When describing this change, one participant said: “Before I joined the project, I had difficulty in talking and mixing with people in public. Now, I can confidently express myself.” Additionally, they have become role models in their communities by speaking against child early and forced marriages.

**Figure 2: Increased self-awareness**



The findings showed that community leaders and community members gave good cooperation to IAE resident tutors in identifying girls and young women who were affected by CEFM and they encouraged them to enrol in the project. Such measures led to high participation level. Also, participants explained that the community has changed its perception on girls and young mothers because of their newly acquired skills in soap making as well as batik and food processing. All gave chance to rebuild their lives through their newly acquired skills and to participate in income generating activities. One participant explained that, “The project has broadened our understanding on how to identify business opportunities. For example, I make soap, batik and peanut butter and tailor clothes too from the batik fabrics we make.” As a result, the community is happy with the project and they hoped that it can spread to other parts of the country.

## 4.5 Financial and Marketing Opportunities

Skills development is a primary way by which economically and socially marginalized girls as well as young women can lift themselves out from poverty and participate in income generating activities. The study showed that beneficiaries came together and formed women's groups, namely, Bahi Women's group (Dodoma) as well as Mwadimata, Msanzi and Mwanguta (Rukwa). The groups were registered and others were in the final stage of the registration process. Each group consists of at least 30 beneficiaries guided by a group constitution that was developed with the help of the Community Development Officers in their respective districts. With formation of the groups, the beneficiaries can access the 10 percent of the Municipality Council Development fund (revolving fund) allocated to support women, youth and disabled groups in every council as directed by the government. As one participant explained on the impact of the groups that it was significant: "I didn't have any job and I was fully dependent on my husband but now I make soap, batik and nutritious flour to sell as well as earn some income. Now, I also contribute to the family income."

The groups can receive loans at low interest rates from other financial institutions such as banks, micro-finance organisations and community village banks commonly known as Village Community Banks (VICOBA). For instance, Msanzi women group received a soft loan of one million Tanzania shillings from Small Industries and Development Organization (SIDO), Rukwa branch. This is an important development for sustainability of the groups because the groups increase their capital base and enable them to produce more products to sell in the market. To expand and seek new markets, the groups have participated in regional and national events to showcase their products. For instance, Msanzi women's group took part in the zonal Nane Nane Day exhibitions in Kalambo district, Rukwa region. It is important to mention that Nane Nane Day is a national holiday celebrated every 8<sup>th</sup> of August in Tanzania to acknowledge farmers' contributions to the Tanzanian economy. After good performance at the exhibitions, the group received another invitation to participate at a similar exhibition but at the regional level in Mbeya. They represented Kalambo district as a model group during an eight-day long fair. The creativity in design and quality of the group's products are impressive. The batik fabrics have different prints and patterns. Consequently, the demand for batik fabric has increased. Bar and liquid soaps are also still in high demand from the public.



*Msanzi women's group shop*

#### **4.6 Open and Distance Learning**

Agatha became pregnant while in form one (grade eight) and that marked the end of her formal schooling. In Tanzania, many girls like her have their dreams cut short and lose the chance to acquire necessary skills to compete in the job market. According to Human Rights Watch report (2017), at least 8,000 girls like her are expelled from formal schooling each year. GIRLS Inspire believe that education should be a fundamental basic right for everyone in Tanzania. As a result, they were able to offer the opportunity for some of its beneficiaries, such as Agatha, to register at the Institute of Adult Education centre in Sumbawanga. She continued her secondary education through Open and Distance Learning mode of delivery while selling soaps, batik fabrics, flour and peanut butter at the local market to earn incomes during the daytime. Agatha summarized her involvement in the project as follows: "I attend classes in the evening after finishing my normal duties. This allows me to engage in income generating activities but also to pursue my dream to get education. This is a good thing and it has changed my life."

It is worth noting that beneficiaries were divided into groups – from those who had never attended school at all to those with some secondary education. It enabled each group to be taught according to their learning needs. For example, those who had never attended school were taught

how to read, write and do simple arithmetic. All groups were taught sexual and reproductive health as well as environmental, gender, civic and human rights education, entrepreneurship and financial management skills. The classes were conducted between 4 pm and 6 pm to allow beneficiaries go about their daily duties before going to class. In the project, learning modules used in teaching were competence-based and self-instructional. The modules enabled learners to study on their own at home, in presence of their facilitators and in group discussions. Additionally, multimedia learning materials were produced to assist learners during the learning process under the supervision of their facilitators. Thus, learners had the opportunity to use technology.

## **5.0 Discussion of Findings**

The purpose of this study was to prevent child early and forced marriage and equip girls as well as young women with basic literacy and pre-vocational skills. The study revealed that child early and forced marriage is a reality still faced by girls as well as they live within their communities and can stop them from achieving their dreams. Majority of girls and young women dropped-out of school mainly because of poverty and marriage. From the study, it is evident that the project imparted basic literacy and pre-vocational skills to girls and young women. They gained new skills in making soap, batik fabrics and food processing. Also, they noted that the project changed their communities' perception on them due to their newly acquired skills. The study noted that girls and young women were eager to take part in economic activities and demonstrated good marketing skills in selling their products. Such measures earned them respect in their communities and increased their confidence because they can earn incomes. By empowering girls and young women with development skills, they are encouraged to take active steps in securing their independence and to improve their livelihoods.

Role modelling has proved useful in attitude and behaviour change processes. In the project, some girls and young women have become champions of change in their community. As a result, they can engage the public in dialogue on various issues such as gender equality and social rights. This has showed their increase in self-awareness. The study indicated that the girls and young women sort information on sexual reproductive health, human rights and gender equality. Moreover, some who dropped-out of school returned to continue with their education through open and distance

learning. The study observed that from the start, community members were involved in the project and learnt about effects of child early and forced marriage together with importance of girls' education. The bottom-up approach model informed by locally formulated challenges and needs has led to change in attitudes, norms and behaviour of the community. Such new behaviours include speaking out against child early marriages together with encouraging as well as motivating the girls and young women.

## **6.0 Conclusion**

In general, the community agreed that the GIRLS Inspire is a good project because it provides a second chance to girls and young women to rebuild their lives. Rather than breaking up families, it supports girls and young women to get basic literacy skills including pre-vocational and life-skills to overcome barriers that prevent them from participating in economic activities. It is clear that keeping girls in education helps to reduce the literacy gap between boys and girls. The concept of alternative education is the second chance for girls and young women to acquire skills and continue with their education through open and distance learning mode. Child early and forced marriage is human rights violation and denies girls' right to education as well as opportunities to take part in economic activities. Therefore, continuous community education on effects of child early and forced marriage is also necessary to protect girls in communities.

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