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### The Role of Community Leadership in Combating Child Marriage for Promotion of Girl-Child Education in Jonglei State, South Sudan: A Case of Dinka Bor Community

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and Dinka-Bor.

Child marriage remains pervasive in many African societies and is strongly linked to culture and religion. It involves any marriage where one or both parties are under 18. Even though it refers to both girls and boys, an overwhelming number of informal and formal child marriages in Africa involve girls. Child marriage is a frequent and widely prevalent phenomenon in South Sudan, which occurs mainly in post-conflict settings. Statistically, 52% of South Sudanese girls are married before age 18, and 9% are married before age 15. The study adopted a qualitative case study design and focused on understanding the role of Dinka Bor community leaders and how they act in combating early marriage. The research techniques employed included observation, key informants, and in-depth interviews with community leaders. The study finds that girls are often denied school because of the cultural view that they are considered marriage materials necessary to acquire wealth in the form of bride prices. In addition, rural areas are worst affected, with few schools available located very far. Thus, it leads to frustration and school dropout. The study also establishes that it is not only culture that deters girl-child education, but poverty and social media are among the factors that drive child marriages in Jonglei State, South Sudan. Also, in the study, although legislations prohibit child marriages, the consent of the parents or guardian appears to be an undeterred factor that drives child marriage. In conclusion, community leaders appear to be playing a significant role in supporting government policies concerning child marriage and education in recent years.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Child marriage remains pervasive in many African societies and is strongly linked to culture and religion (UNICEF, 2020). It involves any marriage where one or both parties are under 18. Even though it refers to both girls and boys, an overwhelming number of informal and formal child marriages in Africa involve girls. Given that one or both parties are not able to express their free, full, and informed consent, child marriage is also considered forced marriage (Plan International, 2016), which is a violation of human rights – child rights in particular. International and regional laws prohibit the marriage of girls and boys below the age of 18, and many African countries are state parties to these laws. However, child marriages persist with impunity. UNICEF (2020) states that child marriages remain a tenacious challenge in Africa - intricately linked to socio-cultural and religious factors. Bengesai et al. (2021) and Mwambene (2018) suggest that in Africa, child marriage is intertwined with destructive practices that are entrenched in culture – compounded by the fact that for many people, drifting from culture could result in ostracization. Accordingly, research also suggests that in Africa, there are approximately 125 million child brides, with about 39% of young girls from sub-Saharan Africa married before the age of 18 (Sherriff, 2018; Mwambene, 2018; UNICEF, 2015), while 13 percent are married before their 15th birthday (Mwambene, 2018; UNICEF, 2015). Research also suggests that 75% of girls in the region start primary school, but only 8% finish secondary school (Sherriff, 2018). Sherriff (2018) further contends that in many Sub-Saharan African countries, girls get married at a very young age – which often traps them in a cycle that is almost impossible to escape. Child brides

find themselves trapped by sexual and domestic violence, social stigma as well as poverty.

Child marriage is a frequent and widely prevalent phenomenon in South Sudan, which occurs mainly in post-conflict settings. Statistically, 52% of South Sudanese girls are married before the age of 18, and 9% are married before the age of 15 (Human Rights Watch, 2021a). According to the UNICEF findings, South Sudan has the seventh highest rate of child marriage in the world.

In Jonglei State, the rates of child, early, and forced marriage (CEFM) among the Dinka Bor Community are likely to be much higher than the national estimates (Oxfam, 2020; UNICEF, 2020). In Bor, Jonglei State, reports were made that early marriage is a critical threat facing women and girls in the area. While the research was not able to provide quantitative evidence on whether the conflict has led to more women and girls marrying young or being forced to marry in Bor specifically, rates of child marriage in this community are much higher than national pre-conflict statistics, with 71% of surveyed women aged 20–49 married before the age of 18. The research also revealed that 10% of girls and women in Bor are married before age 15.

Child marriage is deeply rooted in gender inequality and harmful social norms. South Sudan is among the countries with deeply entrenched cultural practices and social norms linked to child marriage. Poverty and illiteracy are the main driving forces behind child marriage (Human Rights Watch 2021a). Girls who marry young are often denied a range of human rights: many must discontinue their education, face serious health risks from early and multiple pregnancies, and suffer sexual and domestic violence. Agenda 2063, the African Union's 50-year action plan for development, recognizes that child marriage is a

major impediment to regional development and prosperity.

### **Legal Frameworks on Child Marriages in South Sudan**

South Sudan does not have well defined and strong Legislative Instruments that support combating child marriage (Save the Children and UNICEF, 2020). Most marriages in South Sudan are executed based on the parent's consent, even under 18. Article 15(c) of the Transitional Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan 2011, as amended in 2015, guarantees the right to find a family. It states that

*"Every person of marriageable age shall have the right to marry a person of the opposite sex and to found a family according to their respective family laws, and no marriage shall be entered into without the free and full consent of the man and woman intending to marry".*

But the constitution does not provide ages for marriage. Although the same is stated in Article 17(4): *"A child is any person under the age of 18 years". The Child Act 2008 defines a child as "any human being below the age of 18"*. Still, the constitution is not very strong on child marriages because parents or guardians may give consent to an underage child to marry.

Beswick (2021) contended three ways marriages in South Sudan can be constituted: Statutory Law Marriages, Customary or Traditional Marriage, and Common Law Marriage. The first two are the most common and celebrated, while common law marriage is rare and not celebrated due to its nature and validity. In these marriages, the only age limit provided that may restrict marriage to the latter is eighteen years of age, as provided in the Juveniles Act.

Research indicates these legislations have constantly been ignored and have little impact in protecting children's rights (Beswick, 2021). Customary law also contradicts national law: for example, unmarried girls and women that are raped are often forced to marry the perpetrator (with the rapist just charged with paying the bride

price (Mwambene & Sloth Nielsen, 2019). Notably, customary law has also been 'greatly shaped by people's experiences during decades of war', altering familial structures and giving rise to new customs, such as an 'increasing reliance on bridewealth as a source of family income. Marriage is also part of culture and is critical for human existence as it is a back-bone route to recreation (Mwambene & Sloth-Nielsen, 2019). However, Non-Government Organizations have always warned that young people should not rush into marriage because it is their social duty to perpetuate the institution of the family in future; rather, they should wait for the right time to come (UN Women, 2020; Plan International, 2016; Save the Children and UNICEF, 2020). Community leaders and traditional marriage counsellors are there to prepare young people and not rush them into marriage (Sambala et al., 2020). This article, therefore, looks at, in part, how the community leaders of Dinka Bor can work with the governments and other agencies to implement public policies on ending early marriages and encouraging girls to go to school.

### **Policies on Education in the Republic of South Sudan**

In the last few years, the Government of the Republic of South Sudan, through the Ministry of General Education, has developed and adopted policies that aim to promote equity and equality in education in the country (UNICEF, 2020). The Education policies are founded on both national and international standards that acknowledge the right to literacy and basic education as fundamental to human rights (UNICEF, 2020). South Sudan acknowledges the universal human right to education and is working to achieve the Education for All (EFA) goals and objectives by 2022. The policy was developed using a conflict-sensitive approach and considered the INEE Guiding Principles on Integrating Conflict Sensitivity in Education Policy and Programming in Conflict-Affected and Fragile Contexts. The challenge has been the implementation of such policies.

In the National Strategic Action Plan (SNDP), the government has highlighted measures aimed at improving child education across South Sudan, including in villages. At the primary level, from Grades 1 to 8, education has been made free to all children in South Sudan (Oxfam, 2020).

This is to allow a girl child and rural pupils to access education. The government has also embarked on a community engagement strategy to promote girls' education, especially in rural areas. The community should be involved in supplying teaching and learning materials such as books, desks, chalk, and other facilities that enhance learning (UNICEF, 2017). The policy reads,

*"The communities, through the existing traditional and local administrative structures, chiefs, elders, etc., shall be approached and sensitized to the value of education to encourage learners to enrol in AES programmes. The communities shall be encouraged to own, actively support, and manage the programme by forming relevant committees (Parent Teacher Associations, School Management Committees) and receive training to assist them in managing the programme. The communities will mobilize local resources in cash and/or in-kind for the programme's sustainability".*

Despite all of these efforts made by the government, there have been a lot of challenges in promoting girl-child education in rural areas of South Sudan. One of these challenges is traditional and cultural practices in different parts of rural areas. UNICEF (2020) reported that over 60 percent of children in Jonglei State are not in school, and girls account for 80 percent of this number because of early marriages. In response, the Government of South Sudan instituted measures to promote girl-child education and end early marriage. This is reflected in policies by the Ministry of General Education.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE INDIGENOUS STANDPOINT THEORY**

The theoretical framework underpinning this study is indigenous standpoint theory, which

espouses that when local people experience a problem, they are better placed to deal with it. Sambala et al. (2020) stated that:

*The indigenous standpoint theory purports that, when working or researching in a community, there is a need to involve and respect the ethos of local people culturally, socially, spiritually, and morally, and that indigenous people should do actions for their own benefit.*

The theory is linked to Sambala et al. (2020) work that spelled out that the theory is a method of inquiry, a process for making more intelligible, 'the corpus of objectified knowledge about us' as it emerges and organizes understanding of our lived realities. In Indigenous Standpoint Theory, it is expected that the ontology and epistemology of the work or research must reflect the beliefs of the local people. In this study, the theory is applied to the understanding of the support of local people, chiefs, and community members to work together to resolve early marriage issues. In other words, the local people among whom early marriages take place are better placed to understand the causes and, therefore, they can address the problem better.

Therefore, this study seeks to get empirical answers to the following questions:

- Where is a girl viewed in the practice of Dinka Bor Customs?
- How have customary and traditional practices promoted child marriages?
- What steps have the community leaders of Dinka Bor made in addressing issues of child marriage as a response to implementing government policy on combating child marriage?
- What were the challenges and prospects of implementing the Early Marriage Policy in the Community of Dinka Bor?

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopted a qualitative case study design and focused on understanding how Dinka Bor community leaders act in combating early marriage. The research techniques employed included observation, key informants, and in-depth interviews with community leaders. In this case, local chiefs, community leaders and headmen were interviewed. To ensure ethical consideration, consent forms were given, and research participants were permitted to opt out of the interview whenever they wanted. All interviews were audio-taped.

The observation method was used to understand the cultural practices of the Dinka Bor Community that promote early marriage of children. Finally, audio data were transcribed verbatim, constantly compared with specific and relevant themes, and then supported by data from observation.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings and discussions of the study were presented thematically according to the research questions.

### How is a Girl-Child Viewed within Dinka Bor Cultural Practice

Under this question, the study finds out that in the Dinka Bor community, girls had different responsibilities from boys. Their duties were cooking, fetching water, cleaning and washing dishes, among others. One of the respondents stated:

*A long time ago, I would see my sisters working as hard as my mother was. They used to go long-distance fetching water firewood. Whenever there was a community occasion, they would cook and wash dishes. The only work they were not doing was building houses, hunting, fishing, or wrestling.*

Another respondent also stated:

*"Girls were not allowed to do sports work, give speeches in the gathering or inherit property. I had sisters older than me. I was the*

*only boy. By virtue of being the only boy among girls, I was constantly reminded I would be hired. My sister had no that privilege because the customs do not allow that."*

Considering the above statements, it is clear in the customs of Dinka Bor that girls had restricted roles confined to domestic work. Girls were not allowed to have access to education; it was only boys who were given that privilege. One female participant added:

*"It is true girls were never allowed to go schools because they were constantly reminded that they would be married off at a certain point, and their work would be to produce children. Only boys would be allowed to attend school, and girls would be restricted. This is still happening today to a certain extent".*

It is increasingly clear from the data that cultural practices are against girls' education. These cultural practices promote inequality and inequity among girls and boys in terms of accessing education. This is what a participant had to say:

*"Nowadays, there is reform among families. A good number of girls are attending schools; the only complaint is the challenges of affording school fees".*

The responses above are consistent with Oxfam. (2020) report that explained that initiation rites and ceremonies provide avenues of orientation and indoctrination through songs, dances, and speeches where girls would be oriented to accept naturally they are girls and would play certain roles confined to domestic work. Sherriff (2018) also echoed the same report that the cultural and traditional practices of the Dinka Bor community play a role in influencing girls and boys through initiation ceremonies. For instance, when a girl experiences menstruation for the first time, they undergo a ritual to signify they are ready to become mothers and contribute to the expansion of the clan. This is done as soon as a girl reaches puberty. During the ritual, older women, known as counsellors, offer advice to the girl on issues

including body hygiene, fertility, childbirth, and so on to prepare her for adulthood. On the other hand, Boys go through initiations when they reach puberty stage. They are taught how to fish, hunt, build houses and become fathers. Therefore, it is through these initiation ceremonies that boys are indoctrinated as superior and girls as inferior.

### **How do Dinka Bor customary Practices Promote Early Marriages**

In addressing the second question, the study finds that cultural beliefs among the Dinka Bor community were not favourable to girls' education. Boys were given priority over girls to go to school. This provides an incentive for girls to seek early marriage. One participant indicated:

*Most families here in Bor do not see the benefit of letting girls go to school. They only believe that only boys are fit to be in school because when they get educated, the benefit comes back to the family. For the girls, their education does not benefit the family. They are looked at as marriage material. So, girls grow up thinking their work is to reproduce when they get married.*

In addressing the second question, some respondents expressed displeasure with the belief that girls and boys should be treated differently. So, one participant stated:

*That early preparation that girls should only do all the domestic work leads girls to think that education is of no value to them and marriage is more important than education. However, I am glad things are changing today. Parents are beginning to realize that a girl child's education is equally important.*

The above assertion by a respondent matches the assertion made by Sherriff (2018) that all children be given equal treatment. But we have to understand that traditional cultures and beliefs are very important because there are norms that are favourable to girls and social relations. However, we have to acknowledge that a girl child is mostly a victim of negative cultural practices such as forced marriage, gender-based violence and rape. Boys are always given preference regarding other

privileges such as education (Human Rights Watch. (2021).

### **Measures Taken against Girl-Child Marriages and Promotion of Access to Education**

In the third question, the findings indicate that the Dinka Bor people were not so absolute in their culture and tradition. They appear to be responding positively to modern changes and beginning to accept that girls need to be educated, too. There are international legal instruments that provide for education for all (Human Rights Watch, 2021). The Dinka Bor community recognizes those instruments as a part of the larger South Sudanese society. South Sudan practices a dual legal system that gives recognition to customary laws. Customary laws have been codified in a manner that does not contradict statutory law (Oxfam, 2020). As already explained in the previous sub-sections, the constitution of the Republic of South Sudan guarantees the rights of every person, including children. The constitution prohibits child marriage. The study finds out the measures taken by the Dinka Bor community to combat child marriage. They include the following:

#### ***Waging Campaigns Against Child Marriage***

Dinka Bor community is increasingly aware of the international instruments that discourage child marriage across the globe because South Sudan ratified some of those instruments. Therefore, community leaders such as chiefs, headmen, community elders, and youth and women leaders have taken a twist and begun preaching against child marriages in any public gatherings. One key informant state:

*Community elders started talking against children after our governor convened a meeting with the council of chiefs, explaining to the government that she respected and communicated properly for the civil population to understand. So, from campaign against child marriage has been effective.*

Another key informant echoed the same statement and stated:

*Yes, nowadays, it seems the message of "taking all children to school" has gotten across. Elders, chiefs, and government officials have aggressively spoken against child marriage and in support of girl-child education.*

The study establishes the message has got across, and that is why during funerals, for instance, chiefs, headmen, and elders preach against child marriage and in support of girl-child education. In most of the events organized by schools, like the graduation of nursery kids, parents, chiefs, and community leaders are invited, and when they speak, they speak against child marriage. Community leaders have adopted retributive measures against child marriage. Parents who allow their daughters to be married off at an early age are reported to the authorities and receive punishment. Anyone found guilty of defilement is given a harsher punishment, like life imprisonment. Some punishments are given in the form of fines; the traditional leaders administer that.

#### ***Campaign Through Media in Collaboration with Relevant Ministries***

The study finds that media campaign is one effective measure that has been used to discourage child marriage and promote girl-child education. In Jonglei State, Dinka Bor Community leaders were using their radio, known as Radio Jonglei, to propagate messages against child marriage. This community radio is well known for making talk shows on issues of child marriage, teenage pregnancies, and girl-child education. The show hosts influential community leaders and government officials weekly to discuss the importance of girl-child education. As a result, responses from across the community have been positive. The number of enrolments of girl children in recent years has increased (UN Women, 2020).

#### ***Increased Collaboration with Local and International NGOs***

The findings indicate that the Dinka Bor Community leaders have realized that it is crucial

to promote girl child education and eliminate child marriage in the community. For this reason, various local and international NGOs have been allowed to operate within the community with a mission to support the fight against child marriage and promote education for girls (Save the Children and UNICEF, 2020). The most notable NGOs among many include Save the Children, CONCORDIS, Community in Need of Aids (CINA) and Plan International. These Non-Governmental Organizations have played different roles. For example, Save the Children has aided the formation of the village committee at the grassroots to conduct meetings with community members regularly to discuss the dangers of child marriage and teenage pregnancies (Save the Children and UNICEF, 2020). They also discuss the importance of education to girl-children in general. On the other hand, they meet teenage boys to discourage them from seeking early marriage and encourage them to work hard in school and become responsible adults later. Also, this local NGO called CINA works with the Stromme Foundation to give girls financial support in schools to keep them studying. All these NGOs work in collaboration with community leaders. International organizations such as Plan International and Save the Children have gone as far as distributing bicycles, school bags and so on to children. UNICEF has also worked with the Ministry of Education in Jonglei State to fund girl-child education. When you move into town, you can see posters promoting education for all and combating early marriage.

#### ***Waging Campaign Against Initiation Ceremonies among the Dinka Bor Community***

Looking at the traditions and cultures of Dinka Bor, the practice of initiation in adulthood is done yearly with guidance from the council of elders (Gurtong, 2015). Initiating boys from age 15 into adulthood, known locally as *rek*, usually takes about a month, and it requires the full commitment of everyone, including girls and elders (Iyaa & Smith, 2018). This leaves both girls and boys with no chance to go to school. Missing school for one month is against the implementation of school

curriculums. Thus, community elders have started a campaign against initiation ceremonies that distract learners from attending school. The community leaders made a policy that no such initiation ceremonies should be allowed until schools are closed.

Additionally, the community leaders have emphasized creating youth and women groups that discuss education issues so that children are oriented toward schools and become responsible adults. In these discussions, children are allowed to share their perspectives on teenage pregnancies, sexual harassment, and the punishment to be instituted against such evil acts. Nowadays, parents respond positively by limiting their children from participating in those initiation ceremonies. Young school girls who have become pregnant unexpectedly are taken back to school after delivery.

When everyone within the community takes individual responsibility, negative cultures get discouraged, and education for all the children is promoted. Here is the statement from one parent:

*You know, culture is good because there are moral values such as generosity, care, and respects that it promotes. But culture can change with time; it is not static. Today, the world has become globalized and welded as one, and we have to be responsive to the changes that come with globalization. Education is one major tool that empowers. We want all our children, including girls, to be empowered. I personally discourage my children from attending those initiation ceremonies because they are anti-formal education.*

Another participant has echoed the statement. Here is what she said:

*As you can see, we are living in a different world. According to most international instruments, education is compulsory for all children, including girls. We have to send our girls to schools and discourage them from developing a notion that they are marriage*

*material. They should be taught hygiene and how to use sanitary pads.*

### ***Adjusting the Age Group for Initiation to 18***

According to Dinka Bor Customs and traditions, when a girl experiences her first menstrual period, rituals are performed through initiation (Human Rights Watch, 2013). The practice pays no attention to age. Once a girl gets her first menstrual cycle, she is considered mature and oriented to issues of womanhood. Because of this, girls begin to consider themselves mature enough to have their home. This promotes early marriage and discourages schooling. While on the one hand, boys between the ages of 10 and 15 years get oriented the same way through these initiation ceremonies, and they consider themselves mature enough to own a home. So, the age group for initiation needs to be revised to 18 years and above. One participant stated:

*The age for initiation for both girls and boys needs to be revised. When a child is below 15, he or she is still young, and they are unfit to find a family. In girls, menstruation begins as early as nine. Can a nine-year-old really be considered a woman? Of course not! Girls should wait up to the age of 18 to be considered mature to get exposed to the discussions of womanhood or manhood for the case of boys*

### ***Working in Collaboration with Teachers in Schools to Combat Child Marriage***

Teachers play a significant role in combating child marriage and teenage pregnancies. They have also been involved in punishing learners absent from school. They hold assemblies and preach against unhealthy sexual relationships and cultures that could easily derail learners from schooling. They form Parents Teachers Associations to discuss pertinent issues related to the promotion of girl-child education and denunciation of negative cultures that promote child marriage. Additionally, counselling and guidance are introduced in schools, where senior women teachers act as counselors. Teachers also help in counseling on reproductive health, hygiene, and



sexual harassment. In Jonglei State, schools must give such lessons. One respondent stated:

### ***Use of Cultural Leaders Such as Chiefs to Implement Government Policy***

The government uses cultural leaders to enforce rules, policies, and regulations on issues of child marriage and girl-child education. In Jonglei state, the local administration has always communicated its education policies to the council of chiefs, who will communicate and enforce them to their subjects. That is known as the top-down approach. In case any community member goes against the law or policy, they are reported and punished. This action, thus, promotes girl child education and ends child marriage in the community. One respondent stated:

*Traditional leaders are embedded in people and are always with people. They resolve disputes, promote cultures, and are mainly the intermediaries between the government and the people. Most of the activities undertaken by the local chiefs are to distribute land, judge cases, settle disputes, and communicate government policies to the people clearly and simply.*

### **Challenges Faced when Implementing Measures against Child Marriages**

The Dinka Bor community in Jonglei State faces a lot of challenges in combating early marriage and promoting education for all children. These challenges include lack of funds, poverty, and insecurity. You may find that a girl may perform very well in the national examinations but will have nowhere to push her education next because of lack of money or schools; she ends up getting married at early age. This section has two categories: challenges in promoting girl child education and ending early marriage.

### ***Challenges in Promoting Child Education***

#### **Poverty and Lack of Family Support**

In South Sudan, about 80% of the rural population is poor, and the Dinka Bor ethnic community is no exception (African Child Policy Forum, 2019). This clearly shows how poverty remains a big challenge in promoting education for all children in the Dinka Bor community. It has been noted that most of the families are extremely poor; rural people depend on seasonal farming to make money. The poverty level gets high when there is no rain in a season or when cases of insecurity have risen. One community leader stated:

*it is not that people do not like taking girls to school, but lack of money to pay school fees is always the problem. For example, I have ten children. I am not working. So, it is difficult to educate all the children. We prioritize some children to go to school and leave some out, especially girls.*

The statement was echoed by another key informant, who stated:

*Because of the cattle raiding by Murle and flooding, our means of livelihood are not steady. We keep cattle, when they get stolen by Murle<sup>1</sup>, we remain with nothing making it difficult to survive and pay school fees.*

The main economic activity is cattle keeping; when a neighboring community raids them, poverty sets in, making it difficult for parents to take their children to schools. Also, the orphaned children often lack the funds to go to school as no one is there to support them. The study finds that some families do not value education much as they may be poor. They simply ignore it because of their ignorance. Dinka Bor is a cattle-keeping community; they value cattle more than education. They send their child to cattle camps to keep cattle. In some families, because of poverty, some do not provide food and money to their children to keep them in school; this discourages

<sup>1</sup> Murle are a cattle keeping tribe in Jonglei State close to the border of Ethiopia. They mainly known by the

Dinka Community as cattle raider and child kidnapers.

a child from being in school, and they eventually drop out.

### Distance and Lack of Schools

The study finds that most rural areas' schools are far from certain villages, and children have to walk a long distance to access those schools. You can find that a school is located 5 kilometers away, making it difficult for a child to arrive on time, and they reach it when exhausted. According to research findings, it isn't very encouraging for a child to get interested in school, especially when they are young. The result is that children drop out of school; absenteeism or irregular school attendance would be the norm. A respondent stated:

*In rural areas, settlements are scattered, and schools are in some settlements, making it difficult for children from faraway settlements to move to school. The school where my children go is located six kilometers away from my home. That makes it hard for children to move there. It is bad during the rainy season.*

The above statement realms with a statement from another community leader who stated:

*Yes, we value education, even for girls. But the problem is there are very few schools here. I think in Dong<sup>2</sup> here, there is only one school. Every child from far places is expected to learn from here. But it is far; some children get frustrated and drop out. This is terrible, really!*

A study finds few schools in rural areas of Jonglei State, according to the report by UNICEF (2020). Some areas do not even have secondary schools. So, pupils finish primary and have no secondary school to go to. For a child to get a secondary education, they must be taken to urban centres, depending on whether parents can afford their education. In most cases, children drop out

because their parents or guardians cannot afford to pay for their education.

### Challenges in Ending Early Marriages

#### Poverty

The study finds that poverty is one of the drivers of early marriage among children in Dinka Bor community. One community leader stated:

*I think in our community, most of us are poor because the level of illiteracy is very high. We still stick to the tradition of keeping cattle. One of the common ways of acquiring cattle is by having your daughter married off.*

Another respondent shares the same perspective. This is what he had to say:

*This thing called early marriage will never end because it is a means of acquiring wealth in the form of cattle and getting connected to other networks of families that are better off. For example, when your daughter is married to an educated working person, you benefit from that relationship because your in-law can extend their helping hands. Sometimes, they give you money to meet your daily needs.*

Most of the families struggle to get their daily bread. So, sending children to schools becomes secondary. This is compounded by illiteracy, in which parents do not see value in their children's education, and as a result, they do not encourage them to go to school. Uneducated people generally in Africa see their wealth in information about the expected bride price when their daughter gets married (Belinda et al., 2015). They use the bride price from a marriage to reduce their financial burden. In most extreme cases, children get involved in sexual relations to get money for their daily needs. This dynamic increases the rate of child marriage among children in Dinka Bor Community.

<sup>2</sup> Dong is a village located in Twic East County of Jonglei State located near the bank of White Nile.

### Lack of Compliance with Measures on the Practice of Initiations

The study also finds that community members from Dinka Bor were disregarding government policies, regulations, or rules against child marriage. Most of the marriages have taken place with consent from parents or guardians without any consideration of the government's regulation on child marriage. Some community members believe that cultures and traditions are important and should not be abandoned. All the initiation rites are still intact in some parts of Dinka Bor. One community elder stated:

*Marriages have been taking in this community, and I have never seen government officials coming to say something against any form of marriage or practice of initiation here. It is the elders in charge, and they follow their marriage traditions without any regard for government policy or regulation on children's marriage. Here, many prefer young girls, even at the age of 15. What is important is not the age but whether the girl has reached puberty stage and is menstruating.*

Another respondent made the same statement, and this is what he said:

*We have always performed rituals here. A few oppose them, but the majority get engaged in those rituals periodically. But for these practices to end, it will take them. It may require strong legislation prohibiting them from completing because they are barbaric. I am a member and elder in this community. I do not see any value in them, especially in this modern era where the world changes quickly.*

### Social Media

Today, the use of social media is rampant. This study finds that social media is another driver of child marriages. Parents have reported that phones and social media have become a platform where young boys and girls meet and get into unnecessary sexual relationships. One parent stated:

*What irritates me most is seeing my daughters on smartphones all the time. They hardly do anything because they associate with boys on social media. They will be married off early.*

Another parent echoed the same statement. She stated:

*My 16-year-old daughter was impregnated recently. I think social media played a role in her influence on marriage. So she was lucky she was at school. This is a disaster. We are no longer in control of our children.*

Most community leaders reported that it is from this social media platform that they access pornographic materials, and it leads to immoral sexual behavior. And with social media, it isn't easy to monitor a child. It was reported that such things as pornography in African cultures were not there, and children could not be exposed to sexual behavior before they came of age (Sherriff, 2018).

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The paper shows that community leaders play a big role in supporting government policies concerning girl-child marriage and education. This is because community leaders are on the ground with the people, and possess the language required for effective policy implementation. In the community, there are councils of chiefs and elders who are crucial for information dissemination and enforcement of policies.

Considering the findings above, the author makes the following recommendations that include the following:

- The community elders should keep the government informed on the challenges they face in implementing government policies on child marriage and education for all
- Community leaders must devise forms of punishment to be given parents or guardians or anyone who goes against government policy that prioritizes education for all. Therefore, if a parent allows his/her to marry

off at an early age, they should be regarded as perpetrators and brought to book.

- The government should involve traditional leaders in the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of the policy performance
- Legislator should make provisions in the Constitution of South Sudan that bars children from getting married below the age of 18.
- Non-Governmental Organizations, which are crowded in the urban should extend their visibility and services to the rural and help different communities in needs.

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