

# Teenage pregnancy involving girls with disability: **Are we doing enough?**

**POLICY  
BRIEF<sup>2</sup>  
2023**

The issue of teenage pregnancy involving girls with disability is currently recognized as a development concern in Uganda, despite the established legal and policy frameworks that create protective environments for children with disabilities. The National Comprehensive Action Plan on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (NAPPD 2020-25) guides interventions towards fulfilling Uganda's commitments under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The National Policy on Disability in Uganda (2006) emphasizes the need for multi-sectoral collaboration in undertaking the responsibility of mainstreaming disability concerns especially in building and strengthening partnerships and networks for sustainable service delivery to persons with disability including children at all levels. However, gaps in law enforcement, inconsistent policy implementation, uncoordinated operational procedures, limited participation and limited accountability remain and continue to increase risks and vulnerability of teenage girls with disability, with many of them getting pregnant and ignored by the societies.

## **Key Recommendations:**

### **UCRNN calls for the Government of Uganda to:**

1. Prioritize the development of strategies that strengthen partnerships and stakeholder engagement at all levels to effectively address teenage pregnancy among girls with disabilities.
2. Enhance the implementation of existing programs, policies, and regulations related to teenage pregnancy among children with disabilities.

### **Current Situation of teenage pregnancy among children with disability .**

Anecdotal sources from Bunyoro region indicate that pregnancy among teenage girls with disabilities has been on the rise but there is no reliable data on the subject. According to UBOS, 2018, 25% of women have given birth by the age of 18. However, statistics on sexual activity among teenage girls with disabilities in Uganda is scarce or not known.

Women and girls with disabilities experience combined disadvantages associated with gender and disability, such as sexual and gender-based violence, abuse, limited access to

socio-economic opportunities, and majority have been subjected to poverty (UNFPA disability strategy, 2022-25). Girls and young women with disabilities have limited knowledge about their sexual and reproductive health and rights, and limited access to services. Girls and young women with disabilities are not seen as needing information about their sexual and reproductive health and rights or capable of making their own decisions about their sexual and reproductive life, and general wellbeing (UNFPA, disability strategy, 2022-25). According to the National Action Plan for Children with Disabilities 2016/17-2020/21, MGLSD), 5.82% of Ugandan Children are estimated to be with disabilities. In Bunyoro region, for example with an estimated population of 1.963,100 million (UBOS, 2020) this translates to 63,981 children with disabilities in the region. In the majority of cases, disability manifests through dysfunctions in seeing, hearing, talking, walking, intellectual, and mental or self-care among the disabled children. There is no readily available data on the numbers of teenage girls with these disability characteristics, notwithstanding those who get pregnant or get married

Teenage girls with disability are vulnerability and

have been exposed to sexual exploitation and many have been made pregnant<sup>1</sup> .

In addition to exposure to sexual exploitation and abuse, teenage girls with disability have also been exposed to the following:

- Lack of access to education and employment. Many dropped out of school due to multiple stigma and discrimination at school and at the workplaces
- Limited Parental care: Limited care and support
- Limited mobility on overall well-being and access to services
- Limited access to health care:
- Social stigma and discrimination:
- Physical strain during delivery
- Post-delivery care challenges:

### **Response to teenage pregnancy Issues in regard to girls with disabilities**

The Government has demonstrated its commitment to protecting and promoting rights of children with disabilities through established instruments that have pro-active provisions for guiding the response and implementations of issues on rights of children with disabilities, e.g. Ratification of UN General Assembly Convention on the rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2008, the 1995 Constitution, the National Development Plan (NDP III) and National Comprehensive Action Plan on the Rights of Persons Disabilities (NAPPD 2020-25)

Also there are established institutions, e.g. National Council for Disability, Equal Opportunities Commission, Uganda Human Rights Commission, Department of Disability and Elderly in MGLSD, and the Community Based Services Departments at district local government level

However, the level of protection is limited to a few children with disabilities due to budgetary constraints and limited technical capacity. CSO actors have integrated CWDs in their programming. However, issues on teenage pregnancy has been limited, depending on the availability of funds which many of them are struggling to sustain UCRNN has supported a number of districts, particularly in Bunyoro

region, in policy formulation and development (byelaws) particularly against all forms of abuses, and also supported various platforms and local structures to advocate for total inclusion and safeguarding of children with disability

### **Capacity to deliver services and support to teenage pregnancy involving children with disabilities.**

- a. Human resources at various levels on children with disabilities: This is limited due to lack of technical knowledge on handling children with disability, especially pregnancy among teenage girls with disability
- b. Infrastructure and structures for supporting children with disability, is limited to a few public schools where there is some support but this is still minimal. More needs to be done, especially for children with disability
- c. Institutional capacity: The capacity in institutions/organizations to effectively handle and provide effective services on pregnancy among CWDs is still low. Most institutions have limited understanding of the policies, have inadequate human resource, limited equipment and technology to equitably serve programs on CWDs.
- d. Community Engagement: Many engagements continue to be made at community level mainly through CSOs on children generally. However, the issues of pregnancy of children with disabilities are usually ignored or not prioritized.

### **Gaps and challenges in the Existing Protection System for teenage girls with Disability**

Gaps exist in the current system, both at national, regional, district and community level, limiting full and effective protection of pregnant teenage girls with disabilities.

NGOs that support children with disabilities still have limited input into the development of policies, laws and strategies on preventing

pregnancy among children with disability (NAPPD, 2020-2025)

National Council for Persons with Disability (NCPD) still lack the necessary human, technical and financial resources to fulfill its coordinating roles (NAPPD, 2020-2025).

Coordination between the MGLSD and district levels do not prioritize issues of pregnancy among children with disabilities. Limited funds allocated for children with disabilities

The District Community Based Departments (DCBDs), have inadequate funds to fulfill their mandate, and are often unclear on their roles and responsibilities, with most personnel of having limited capacity on disability issues. Limited enforcement of national laws and policies, for example, approximately 25% of girls and boys experience sexual abuse in childhood (Uganda Police Force Annual Crime Report, 2022). However, no follow-up was reported.

There is general lack of awareness and clear understanding of the policies and frameworks on children with disability in both rural and urban areas (IRUCOBI CSO, 2023).

## Recommendations

The Government should

1. Review, design and/or develop appropriate strategies to enhance partnerships and stakeholder engagements at all levels in promoting and strengthening response on teenage pregnancy in respect of children with disabilities

a) Strengthen strategies for interventions by all stakeholders at all levels to promote and strengthen awareness creation on teenage pregnancy in respect of girls with disabilities

b) Strengthen strategic partnerships to lobby for the mainstreaming of disability concerns in sectoral programs and services among all public and private stakeholders concerning teenage girls with disabilities

c) Strengthen strategies for collaboration with strategic partners and relevant stakeholders at national, regional and international levels to establish and/or strengthen efforts and initiatives on early identification, prevention and management of teenage pregnancy and child marriage in respect of children with disabilities at all levels

2. Improve strategies for implementation of programs, policies, standards, regulations and participation in regard to teenage pregnancy among children with disabilities

a) Strengthen efforts and programs on knowledge, skills and capacity for rendering appropriate services on teenage pregnancy and child marriage in respect of children with disabilities

b) Scale up and/or strengthen strategies that promote, create platforms that open up opportunities for children, parents, communities and other stakeholders to express their views with an emphasis on issues of teenage pregnancy and child marriage in respect of children with disabilities.

c) Establish and/or strengthen strategies for evidence-based and enabling learning environment for data collection and evaluation as a basis for effective reporting on pregnancy and marriage among children with disabilities.

## References

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