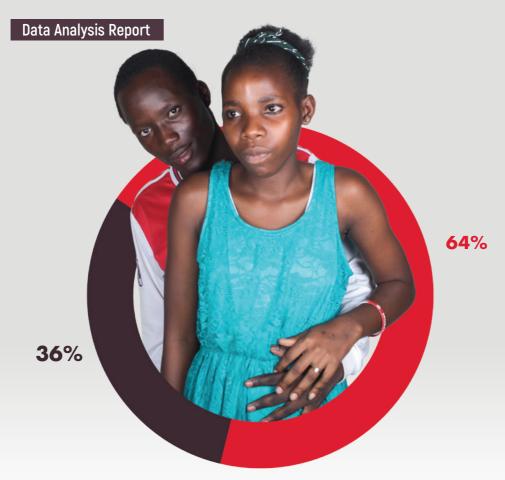




# Teenage Pregnancy in Uganda

Serious Citizens Interactive Radio Campaign. Part 3

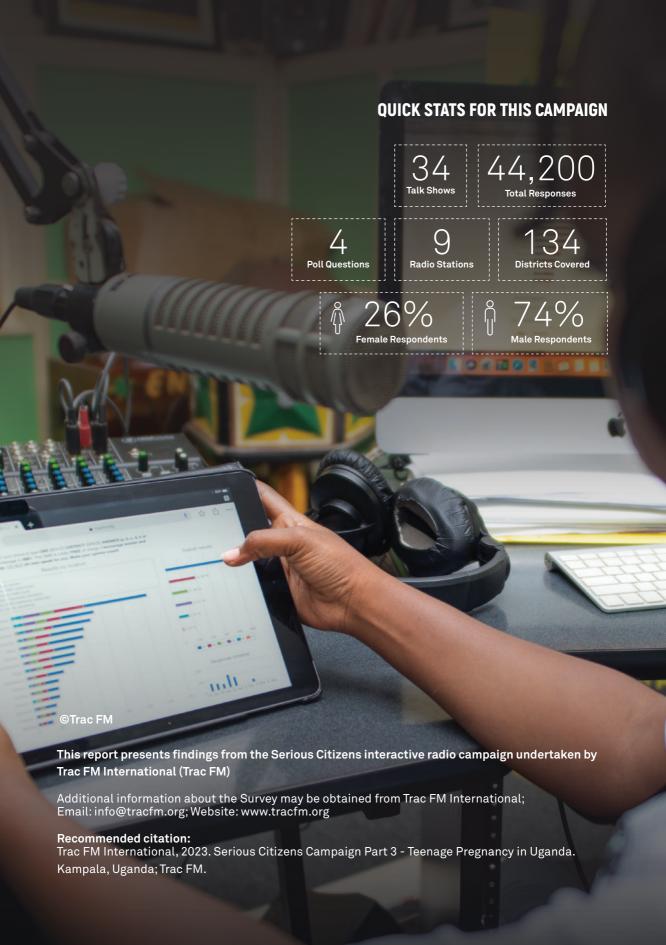












### **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

List of Acronyms	0	
Acknowledgments	0	
Key Findings	0	
Foreword	0	
Background	0	
Poll Findings	0	
Poll 1 - The main cause of teenage pregnancies	0	
Poll 2 - Preventing 'accidental' teenage pregnancies		
Poll 3 - Going back to school after pregnancy		
Poll 4 - How to address shame		
Respondent Profiles		
CSO Partners		
Data-driven Advocacy	1	
About Trac FM		

## i. List of Acronyms

ACP Advocacy Campaign Plan Civil Society Organization CSO Non Governmental Organization NGO

SRHR Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights



#### ii. Acknowledgments

First and foremost, we thank the tens of thousands of Ugandan citizens who contributed to this report. Through their answers to radio polls and surveys, we obtained valuable insights into community perspectives on gender based violence. In three months, we received over 44,000 responses to four poll questions aired on 9 radio stations throughout Uganda. These citizens' perspectives are crucial to a more inclusive and informed debate.

This report was prepared by Trac FM in collaboration with UWONET and Reach A Hand Uganda (RAHU). The core Trac FM team included Innocent Amanyire, Teddy Atim, Wouter Dijkstra and Maurice van Rooden. UWONET staff members consisted of Sarah Agwang, Hilda Nattyaba and Susan Achen. The RAHU team included James Tumusiime, Helen Patricia Amutuhaire, Solomon Muganza Byuma and Patience Nalukenge Kabuga.

Valuable input, thoughts and research papers related to gender based violence in Uganda were provided by Dr. Viola Nilah Nyakato, Senior lecturer of Mbarara University of Science and Technology and Dr. Simone Datzberger, Lecturer in Education International Development University College Londen (UCL). Significant and valuable input in the development of poll questions and input into this report was given by Jamila van Ravenstein and Dr. Patrick Kagurusi, Director of AMREF Uganda. We also thank Dr. Angela Nakafeero for her support of this program by participating as a commentator in our talk shows and taking up the views of participants in her work as commissioner for the ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development. Thanks to the Belgian Embassy in Kampala and their colleagues at Enabel for their input into the campaign content.

This report drew upon data collected through radio polls that were aired on 9 radio stations across the country. We gratefully acknowledge the support of our radio partners Hits FM, Radio West, Radio Simba, Baba FM, Delta FM, Radio WA, Radio Pacis, Mega FM and Akica FM.

Special thanks go to our talk show guests, who contributed by sharing their knowledge and experience during interesting and lively radio debates: Abuko Judith Consy, Daisy Aigi, Florence Kamuli, Marjorie Kansiime, Rosemary Wakesho, Sirina Kyakuwaire Kamya, Prossy Abalo, Angee Agness, Mutabarurah, Dr. Elizabeth Kemigisha, Patricia Sitaraya, Hellen Gasi, Gloria Aduku, Joyce Odongo, Thomas Odelok, Christine Akot, Esther Namboka, Hon. Jimia Musa Ssenkaja Enid Terelepar Imalingat Rebecca, Annah Tukahirwa, Isiaih Kusiima, Asuman Malaala, Joyce Nabwire, Godfrey Odong, Beatrice Apiyo, Zipporah Katusiime, Dr. Elias Kumbakumba, Rev. Sr. Grace Ayoo, James Tumusiime, Dr. Angela Nakafeero, Sylivia Agari, Patrisha Imede, Carol Tuhaise, Gladys Karungi, Rosette Mutesi, Robin Rachkara, Vivian Lanyero, Dr. Viola Nilah Nyakato, Jolly Kabigumira, Caroline Oguzu Diploma, Topista Eyatoru, Rebecca Adur, Sarah Adong, Augustine Olule, Charles Topoth Angella, Teddy Harriet Namara, Mercy Peninah Namale, Matilda Kobusingye Rosset, Gorret Kajumba, Stella Aciro, Brenda Akullo and Shanon Amiya.

Finally, we would like to thank the Directorate-General for Development Cooperation (DGD), which responds to the priorities of the Belgian Minister for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid for financial support through the Civic Space 2021 program.



# iii. Key Findings



## 1.0 Foreword

In Uganda, over a 1,000 teenagers (under the age of 19) get pregnant every day. Most of these girls are not in a stable relationship, have not finished their education and are unable to provide for their child. In the best cases, care for the new baby is shifted to grandparents. In worse cases, the child grows up in an unstable household where neglect looms and chances are high the baby will some day end up becoming a teen mother too.

Teenage pregnancy in Uganda increases poverty, disrupts education, and perpetuates gender inequality. High rates of teen mothers lead to increased school dropouts and limited economic prospects, while health risks strain healthcare resources. Teenage pregnancy is estimated to cost the government of Uganda UGX 645 billion (US\$182 million) annually on health care for teenage mothers and the education of their children.<sup>1</sup>

Every week the teenage pregnancy problem is ignored or addressed with ineffective means, thousands of Ugandan babies get an unfair start in life. Implementation of effective solutions seem to be deadlocked in a web of conflicting norms, beliefs and practices leaving young girls vulnerable to unplanned and unwanted pregnancy. An interplay of three layers of cultural identity can be identified as the main drivers of teenage pregnancy:

First, traditional cultural belief systems expect men to have many children and multiple wives. At the same time, the

primary role of girls and women is to 'produce' babies. Together with its young population, this turns Uganda into a sexually active and often polygamous society. Then there is the strong influence of religion, which often opposes the use of contraceptives and comprehensive sex education as it expects its followers to be in a monogamous and stable relationship before becoming sexually active. Thirdly, popular culture has a strong unavoidable influence on teenagers, where sexual liberty, explicit content commodification of sex lead to casual or transactional activity sexual teenagers.

There is little consensus on how to approach this complex issue, with opposing belief systems and taboos hindering informed debate. This has led to misrepresentations of the main causes of the problem of teenage pregnancy and censorship of effective solutions. If left unaddressed, the challenges for society will grow. Teenage mothers often drop out of school, face stigma and shame, and struggle to provide for their children. This perpetuates a vicious circle of dependence and poverty.

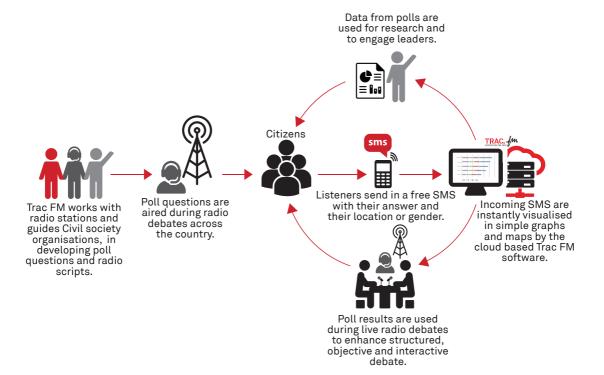
Historical evidence shows that empowering women and girls to control their own fertility is the best way to stop this downward spiral. This requires a breaking down of taboos and realistic debate where progressive thinkers in leadership are heard. This report aims to provide evidence in support of advocacy efforts towards a realistic and actionable solution and pave the way for a brighter future for Uganda's young girls.

# 2.0 Background

#### B. Trac FM Approach and Methodology

Through live radio talk shows and SMS polls Trac FM creates a powerful feedback loop between citizens and their leaders, and among citizens in remote communities. Trac FM offers free participation to the polls in all local languages. Each phone number only gets one vote in the poll. By working with the the most widely favored local language radio stations at the most popular time slots, Trac FM polls and talk shows reach the homes of millions of listeners.

During the live talk shows, The Trac FM software visualizes the responses in real time, making it possible for the talk show host and commentators in the studio to access and discuss live poll results. Nine radio stations took part in the Serious Citizens campaign, each station received an average of 1,000 - 1,500 responses per poll question. In the period October 2022 to February 2023, the Trac FM platform received a total of 44,200 responses on the 4 poll questions presented in this report.

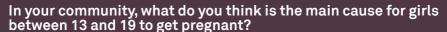


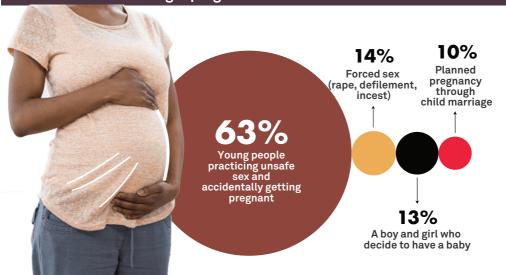
# 3.0 Poll Findings

#### 3.1 POLL 1 - The main cause of teenage pregnancies

During 2020 and 2021, 32,000 teenagers got pregnant every month in Uganda.<sup>2</sup> This makes Uganda rank in the top 10 of highest teenage pregnancy rates in the world.<sup>3</sup> There seems to be disagreement and a lack of data on the cause of teenage pregnancies. To address this gap, the first poll question was about the views of respondents on the main causes of teenage pregnancy.







TOTAL NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS:

12,300

DURATION: 14 to 27 October 2022

- 2 Fact sheet teenage pregnancy, UNFPA (2021)
- 3 Population Division, United Nations (2020)

#### **Analysis**

A large majority of 63% of respondents indicated that the main reason for teenage pregnancy is A: young people practicing unsafe sex and accidentally getting pregnant. 14% believed the main cause was B: forced sex and only 10% believed it was caused by C: Child marriage.

These findings are in stark contrast with the Ugandan governments position described in Ugandan National Strategy to End Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy in Uganda, published in 2022 in partnership with UNICEF.4 While the strategy acknowledge the negative consequences of teenage pregnancy, it only recognises teenage pregnancy as a consequence of child marriage, rape and defilement, and ignores the fact that teenagers are experimenting with unsafe sexual practices. There is an overfocus on child marriage in the strategy, with very little emphasis or recognition of unsafe sex, as well as the importance of contraceptives addressing the issue of teenage pregnancies.5

The focus of the strategy misses important nuances and realities that drive or lead to teenage pregnancy in Uganda. Raising the fact that most pregnancies teenage come from unmarried adolescents experimenting with their sexuality and accidentally getting pregnant would allow for a more realistic approach to challenge teenage pregnancies. Like all around the world, a large number of teenagers in Uganda will experiment with sex before marriage, whether their parents and



leaders like it or not. This calls for a distinction between 'safe and 'unsafe' sex and will inevitably lead to a culturally sensitive approach to comprehensive sexuality education and contraceptives. This is where the narrative runs into taboos induced by the two most powerful institution of Uganda:

- The government may be reluctant to take responsibility for a sexual education system that has failed to adequately address issues related to unsafe sex and teenage pregnancy.
- The government policy is strongly influenced by religious institutions that may resist acknowledging the importance of safe sex practices, as it conflicts with their doctrine and values.

Misconceptions about the cause of teenage pregnancies in Uganda are skewing policies and priorities in both the government and civil society

- 4 The elaborate and national strategy has 326 mentions of 'child marriage' while the word 'unsafe sex' appears only once. The words 'contraceptive or contraceptives' appear only 3 times and there is no mention in the entire teenage pregnancy strategy of the word Condom or IUD. The National Strategy to End Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy in Uganda 2022/23-2026/27 (2022)
- 5 Only 21% of girls aged 15-19 are currently using any modern contraceptive method. (UNFPA, 2021)

organizations. Commonly held beliefs and available statistics overemphasize child marriage and criminal offenses, such as rape and incest, which are reported to the police. Accidental pregnancies resulting from unprotected sex between willing adolescent boys and girls often go unreported and are therefore underrepresented in public debate and policy development.

This skewed perspective has led many policy makers and even CSOs to believe that the solution to teenage pregnancies lies in punishing the so-called perpetrators and providing assistance to the victims. Could the latest poll results allow for a more realistic approach where the main cause is addressed? By shedding light

on the prevalence of consensual but unsafe sex among adolescents, this parents report calls for and policymakers their to change perspective from teenage pregnancy as a 'crime' towards teenage pregnancy as a consequence of ignorance leading to detrimental behaviour.

To address the issue of teenage pregnancies in Uganda, it is crucial to address the root cause of the problem. emphasizing education and prevention measures, such as promoting safe sex practices and educating young people about contraception, parents and policymakers can help reduce the number of unintended pregnancies among adolescents.



Mr. ODEKE (Soroti main market)



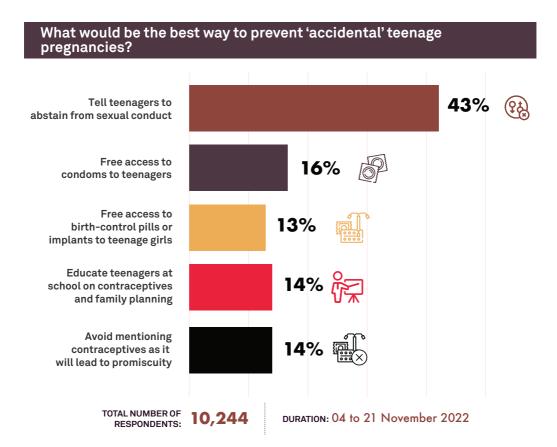
Children of today are watching bad things that they want to copy and test, like a young girl of 13 years can see people kissing or dancing in a way that arouses sexual feeling and she gets attracted and says, I also want to be touched like that then tomorrow someone will touch her, she feels good and they go for sex then accidentally she gets pregnant.



#### 3.2 POLL 2 - Preventing 'accidental' teenage pregnancies

In our previous poll, 63% of the 12,000 respondents agreed that most teenage pregnancies follow from young people practicing unsafe sex and accidentally getting pregnant. Preventing 'accidental' teenage pregnancies should therefore be the first priority to reduce teenage pregnancy numbers.





#### **Analysis**

43% of respondents recommend option A: the promotion of abstinence to prevent teenage pregnancies. Supporting abstinence allows for the acknowledgement of the teenage pregnancy problem and need for family

planning within the confines of traditional culture and religious doctrine where the use or even the mention of modern contraceptives are discouraged by most Christian and Muslim leaders in Uganda.

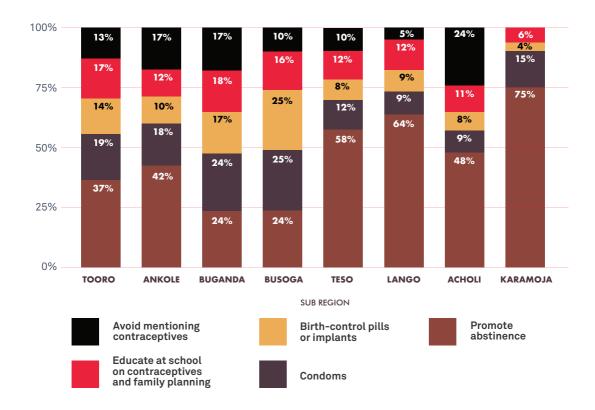
However, an abundance of scientific research suggests promoting abstinence is ineffective in delaying the age for sexual activity, withholds information about human sexuality and in most cases provides medically inaccurate and stigmatizing information<sup>6</sup>. Based on this scientific evidence, promoting abstinence alone is an inadequate approach and could be considered a diversion from seeking effective solutions to address the issue of teenage pregnancy.

Uganda is a nation with contrasting sexual dynamics, exhibiting both a sexually active population and sexually conservative attitudes. The country is marked by one of the highest fertility rates globally and boasts an increasingly youthful and urbanized demographic. This

population shift inevitably exposes younger generations to more liberal perspectives on sex through global cultural influences and digital platforms such as WhatsApp, explicit online content, and role models like Sheeba and Bad Black (Ugandan socialites).



Concurrently, Uganda's social conservatism is deeply rooted in traditional values, religious convictions,



<sup>6</sup> Kohler, P.K., Manhart, L.E., & Lafferty, W.E. (2008). Abstinence-only and comprehensive sex education and the initiation of sexual activity and teen pregnancy. Journal of Adolescent Health, 42(4), 344-351

and policy-making approaches that often inhibit open discussions about sex. There is a fear among conservative voices that engaging the public on the topic could inadvertently promote promiscuity. As a result, public debate around sexual matters are often restricted to conservative viewpoints and are out of touch with the realities most youth live in.

Religious institutions have a strong influence on how people think or view sexuality issues. Most schools and many radio stations in Uganda have religious roots - about 63% of schools in Uganda are church funded. Most of these schools will not allow any information or activity contrary to their religious values and beliefs to go on, especially on the issues of the use of contraceptives.

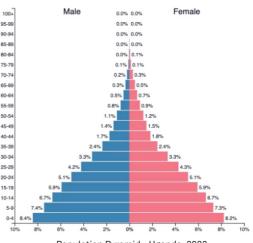
For this particular radio campaign, Trac FM encountered exceptional levels of censorship. At three Catholic radio stations in northern Uganda, poll questions for the Serious Citizens campaign were rejected because of the answer option for listeners to vote for contraceptives as the best way to prevent teenage pregnancy. Only after significant negotiations and agreeing to add poll options in line with Christian values ('don't mention contraceptives') did two of the three stations accept these poll questions. One station refused to run the program even after negotiations.

Many influential Ugandan opinion leaders suggest that to address societal behaviour, beliefs, and attitudes related to teenage pregnancy, the debate should be brought to faith-based and customary spaces. These spaces, traditionally inhabited by an elderly, conservative cohort, are highly influential in shaping societal behaviour from a traditional and cultural angle but often fail in making

justifications from a public health and child protection standpoint. At the same time, in giving the older generation such authority on cultural matters, alternative and progressive views are silenced or given less prominence. Many leaders in positions of authority, such as Members of Parliament, are reluctant to hold a contrary view to their respective religious and cultural leaders because they hold significant electoral influence in their constituencies.

Influential Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are equally reluctant to speak out against the conservative views and influence of the older generation of political, cultural and religious leaders. They echo the view that the best way to change the sexual behaviour of the youth is to provide conservative cultural leaders with a platform and final authority on these matters. Culturally and politically, young Ugandans seem to be grappling with the burden of conforming to the traditional and often outdated beliefs, values, and practices of their elders while living in a transformed society.





Population Pyramid - Uganda, 2022

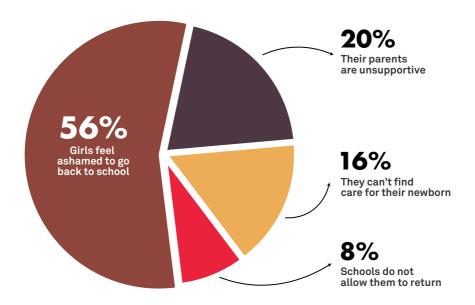
<sup>7</sup> Approximately 65% of primary schools and 57% of secondary schools in Uganda are privately owned, with religious organizations owning a significant portion of those schools (Education Policy and Data Center, 2015).

#### 3.3 POLL 3 - Going back to school after pregnancy

Educated girls become educated women who play an important role in developing Uganda. Many countries in East Africa recorded high numbers of teenage pregnancies during the Covid-19 lockdown. In some parts of

Uganda there was a 50% increase in the number of teenage pregnancies during Covid lockdowns. When schools started again, many teenage mothers did not return to class for various reasons.

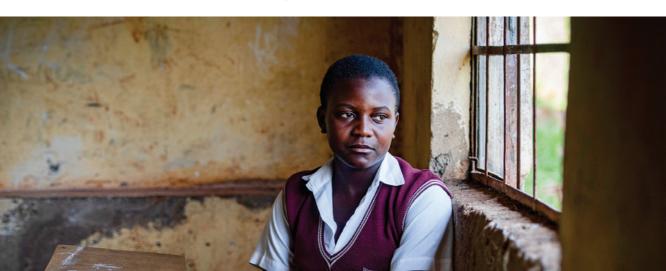
What is the biggest challenge for girls to get back to school after pregnancy?



TOTAL NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS:

12,824

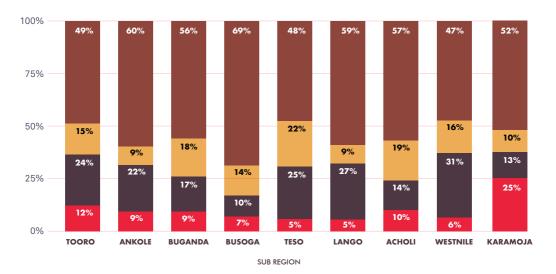
DURATION: 28 November to 9 December 2022



#### **Analysis**

Teenage mothers in Uganda often have to drop out of school during pregnancy, and many of them never return. More than half of the respondents (56%) said that shame is the biggest obstacle for them to continue their education. Many people in their community, including parents and peers, will criticize and look down on teenage mothers.

This can have a long-lasting impact on their lives, as they not only miss out on basic education, but also carry the burden of shame with them, often for the rest of their lives. The psychological impact of such an event on a girl in early adolescence is insufficiently researched and underrated.



Girls feel ashamed to go back to school

They can't find care for their newborn Their parents are unsupportive

Schools do not allow them to return

OYELA PASKA (Adyel Kasubi Lira City West)



..why girls fail to return to school is fear. They fear their friends and the shame they get from those who will be laughing at her.



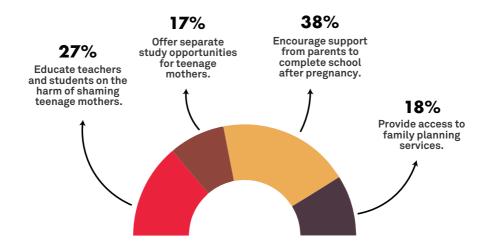
Her mother might not pay for her school fees because of the situation she is in, abusing her, chasing her from home. The boyfriend will persuade her that she does not have to study telling her that 'I'll provide everything for you'. But when the baby comes he will fail her. Something small can kill your future.

#### 3.4 POLL 4 - How to address shame

In our previous poll we have seen that the biggest challenge for girls about going back to school is that they feel ashamed about it. When it comes to

teenage pregnancies, girls carry the heaviest burden compared to boys. Yet, both girls and boys are equally responsible for the pregnancy.

What is the most effective way to enable teenage mothers affected by shame to return to school?



TOTAL NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 8,332

DURATION: 22 January to 5 February 2023



#### **Analysis**

According to the poll results, a significant majority (option A + C: 67%) of respondents believe that the key to getting teenage mothers back to school is social acceptance and positive feedback from their direct environment. This involves acknowledging teenage pregnancy as a societal issue and reducing the burden placed on the young mother. It also involves educating the community and encouraging shared responsibility for the well-being of both the mother and child. An important aspect of this approach is holding the father accountable, both legally and socially, for his role in impregnating the girl.

Only 16% of respondents view separate schooling for young mothers as a viable solution, highlighting the need for a more community-oriented approach. For this, the youth should be actively engaged and involved in shaping policies and cultural perceptions through open, evidence-based dialogue to address the societal problem of unwanted, unplanned, and teenage pregnancy.



ODEKE CHARLES DICKENS (Ngora)



Girls who have been through pregnancy at school become some of the most dedicated and committed students in the classroom. Going back to school after such an experience is something to be proud of, as it shows that they are committed to their education and their future. By returning to school, they can also help to drive off the shame that they might feel if they had not gone back.



It is obvious that Ugandan youth experience challenges reconciling traditional values related to sexuality, marriage, and family life with modern influences such as globalization, individualism, and popular culture, which are becoming more widespread to rapid advancements connectivity. While there may concerns about the slow pace of cultural reform, it is important to acknowledge that change takes time and is often influenced by various political societal and factors. Ultimately, the youth will undoubtedly take its rightful place at the centre of development. They should play a key role in shaping the future of development in Uganda, and their perspectives and ideas should be taken into account as we move forward.



AMONY JENNIFER (Lacor)

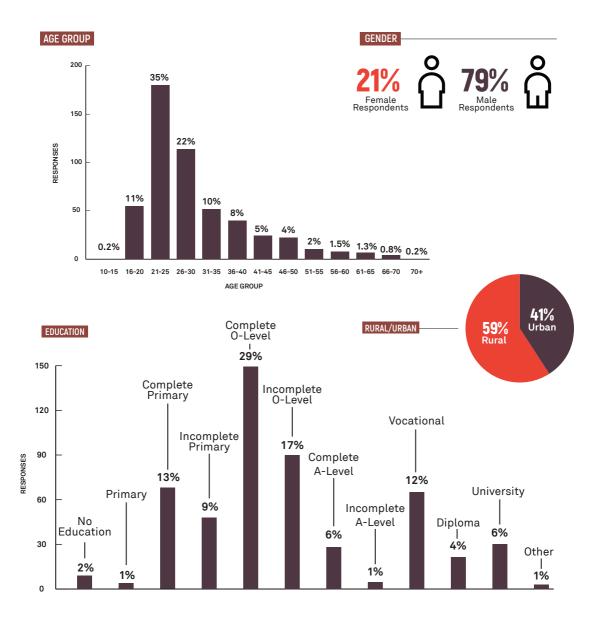


I will pick that child and encourage the mother to go back to school as I take full care of the baby. She shouldn't be ashamed because she could have learnt enough lessons already. That is the best way to help a teenage mother.

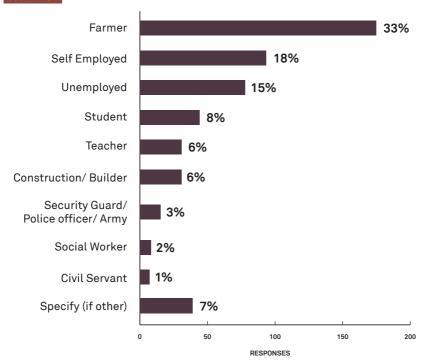
# **4.0 Respondent Profiles**

Trac FM monitors demographic profiles of its listeners to ensure data quality. Following academic practice, a random selection of 500 respondents is made. Through telephone interviews, follow-up answers and demographic data is collected. The study aimed to investigate whether listeners had considered any

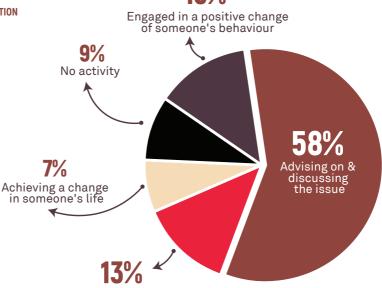
changes or taken any actions in their homes after listening to the radio shows, as well as whether the broadcasts had sparked discussion and provided insights. The typical profiles of the respondents to the Trac FM radio polls were also analyzed.



#### OCCUPATION



DURING MULTIPLE IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS, 194 LISTENERS WERE ASKED TO IDENTIFY CHANGES IN THEIR BEHAVIOUR FOLLOWING THE RADIO PROGRAMS OR PARTICIPATION IN RADIO POLLS.



Being aware of a problem

## 5.0 CSO Partners

The Serious Citizens campaign is a program by Trac FM in collaboration with two CSO partners. Reach a Hand Uganda (RAHU) and Uganda Women's Network (UWONET).

Through trainings on data-driven advocacy and behaviour change communication. Trac FM shares its

vision for demand driven democratic values where constant feedback loops of citizen views builds a more accountable and transparent society.

Partners are involved in creating content, developing advocacy strategies, and providing talkshow guests.





#### Reach A Hand Uganda (RAHU)

Reach A Hand Uganda (RAHU) is a non-profit youth centered organization focused on youth empowerment programs with an emphasis on Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention.

RAHU focus on changing social norms and values that limit access to SRHR services and information through designing effective communication strategies and campaigns to create awareness and mitigate sexual health risks among the young people today.



Uganda Women's Network (UWONET) is an advocacy organization that exists to coordinate collective action among women's rights and gender equality stakeholders for the attainment of gender equality and equity in Uganda. It is an umbrella organization of national women's NGOs and individuals operating in East Africa.

# **6.0 Data-driven Advocacy**

The Serious Citizens campaign advocates for the consideration of popular opinion by people in positions of power. For this, Trac FM and partners set up a data-driven advocacy campaign plan (ACP) where strategic dissemination of data towards relevant changemakers is the main objective. By

involving CSO, academic and public partners from the onset of the campaign, collected data speaks to existing or planned programs related to thematic areas. Key recipients of the reports will be invited for data analysis sessions to identify findings for entry into policy briefs and papers.

	Partners	Role
Civil Society Organisations	Reach A Hand Uganda (RAHU)	Reach a Hand Uganda (RAHU) engaged in the development of poll questions, provided knowledgeable guests for the 1-hour talkshows and disseminated poll results, infographics and reports through their popular online media channels.
	Uganda's Womens network (UWONET)	For this theme, UWONET provided input in the ACP development.
Policy advocacy	Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development & World Bank	Informed thematic content and shared research and future planned activities within the planned national program on national program on Generating Growth Opportunities and Productivity for Women Enterprises (GROW).
	Enabel	Informed thematic content and shared research and future planned activities within the planned bilateral program with a strong component of inclusive development and youth employment.
Academic	University of Amsterdam (UvA), University College London (UCL),	Provided feedback on poll formulation and additional research papers on one or more of the Serious Citizens thematic areas.
	International University of East Africa (IUEA), Mbarara University	Starting in 2023, qualitative research will be conducted with IUEA and UvA Master students collecting data at community level through field visits, in-depth interviews and listening groups.

The design of the ACP happened at the initial stages of development of the Serious Citizens campaign. Clear advocacy objectives and recipients were identified before the radio content was produced. Social media is an important outlet for the dissemination of poll findings towards affiliated

organizations and individuals. Trac FM designs clear infographics and social media messages to stand out from busy information streams. Through a concerted social media strategy with CSO partners, data is shared with relevant audiences on Twitter and LinkedIn.

## 7.0 About Trac FM

Trac FM empowers citizens in Uganda and East African countries to engage in public debate on social development, public policy, and governance through SMS polls and radio talk shows.

Through partnerships with local radio stations and the use of basic mobile phones, free SMS, and local language programming, Trac FM reaches even the most remote and excluded communities. Trac FΜ collects real-time data cultural. on socio-economic, and political trends

from a citizen perspective and disseminates the feedback to assist policymakers and practitioners in developing their policies and programs.

Trac FM is an NGO registered in the Netherlands and Uganda, offering interactive radio campaigns, monitoring, evaluation, and learning partnerships to efficiently interact with the communities it serves.

Contact info@tracfm.org for more information.



