

**Mbale Area Federation of communities (MAFOC)** is a child and youth development organization operating in the six districts in Eastern Uganda including; Mbale, Sironko, Budaka, Butaleja,

Kibuku and Bulambuli. MAFOC with funding from PATH is implementing a 4 year's USAID Advocacy for Better Health Project in the two districts



*L-R: Teenage mother waiting with her baby at one of the OPD Clinics in Sironko District while a young mother breast feeds her child at their home.*



*"Some parents force their children to get married once they fail to perform well at school while in some instances parents have staked their daughters as baits for quick cash to enrich themselves through clandestine arrangements with wicked members of the community to trap financially sound men who are in turn arrested on cramped up charges of defilement but inevitably would be willing to settle the matter out of court".*

*Gerosomu Lajja Namengo Village Sironko District says regretfully.*

of: Mbale and Sironko. The project aims at improving accessibility, availability and quality of health and social services in Uganda.

## *Culture and parental negligence fueling teenage pregnancy and child marriages in Eastern Uganda.*

As Uganda joins the rest of the world to Commemorate International Women's Day on March 8<sup>th</sup> 2016 under the theme: **"Women's Economic Empowerment a vehicle for sustainable Development"**. And in consideration of the strides Uganda has made in promoting the rights and empowerment of women in the recent times, it is depressing to note that teenage pregnancy and child marriages remain a **salient public health challenge**.

According to the 2011 UDHS statistics ranks Eastern Uganda, as top on the list with prevalence of teenage pregnancy and child marriages standing at 30% and 52%, respectively.

Among the most common factors responsible for the growing phenomenon (Teenage pregnancy and child marriages) in Eastern Uganda include cultural norms, wrong perception among innumerable ethnic community that consider a girl child as source of wealth as in terms of dowry. Other cultural practices responsible for the vulnerability of a girl child in eastern region include; the circumcision ritual among the Bamasaba ethnic community held every leap year.

The culture aimed at initiating male youth into man hood has by far been responsible for vulnerability of girl children as often circumcised male youth have been tempted to indulge young girls into sex in guise of experimenting their virility.

Prevalence of teenage pregnancy and early marriage has also been linked to lack of parental support, family separation, abject poverty and weak legal and policy actions.

*"During "Kadodi" most parents leave their children to dance up to late in the night while drinking sachets of pure waragi. This predisposes them to engaging into risky sexual behaviors". Mrs. Margaret Khakasa Champion Nyondo Sub-county Mbale District.*

The two social evil (Teenage pregnancy and Child marriage) considerably wreck all aspects of a child's life, hence violation of children's rights.

Girl children are exposed to immeasurable trauma and most significantly suffer acute depression arising from immature bodily features to permit conception and normal delivery of the baby.

In the circumstance, pregnant adolescent girls are more susceptible to childbirth-related complications. Among other common problems associated with adolescent pregnancy include: obstructed labour, eclampsia, fistula, low birth weight, stillbirths, and neonatal death.

## **Call to action:**

1. The Bamasaba cultural leadership, civil leadership of Mbale and Sironko, among other stake holders have a duty to formulate ordinances to regulate involvement of young children in circumcision rituals (Imbalu).
2. Sale of alcohol to minors should be burned forth with.
3. The District health officers should facilitate access of girls and married adolescents to friendly adolescent health services by;
  - Equipping health workers with adolescent counseling skills to promote adolescent health friendly services and rights in health facilities.
  - A wing for adolescent friendly reproductive health services ought to be established at every health Centre III.
4. The district Local Governments need to allocate adequate resources to promote and support the establishment of community child protection structures to prevent child marriage through awareness raising and counseling.