firelight

Tanzania child marriage

September 5, 2022

This time we want to share the experience of a different set of grantee-partners as they worked with their communities to explore and act on child marriage in Tanzania.

As we have said throughout this series, it is important to note that Firelight's support for systems change for children and youth has been transforming over the past few years – from what might be called "community-based" to true "community-driven" and from what might be called support for "community programming" to support for true "systems change." As such, not all of the examples we will share reflect 100% community-driven systems change. But that's our fault – not the fault of the communities themselves. And we wanted to share what happens when communities DO have agency so that we can all begin to see how powerful true community-driven systems change can be.

A reminder – what is community-driven systems change?

Community-driven systems change is an approach to development and social transformation that emphasizes the insight, leadership, and ownership of the people who are living and experiencing issues at the community level, and their work to create lasting change in the systems and root causes that underlie the critical issues they seek to address.

You can read more about what community-driven systems change IS and what it IS NOT here - https://www.firelightfoundation.org/cdsc

Community action to reduce child marriage in Shinyanga, Tanzania

From 2015 to 2020, Firelight supported twelve community-based organizations (CBOs) to reduce child marriage in Shinyanga Region, Tanzania. At the start of the initiative, statistics showed that child marriage was estimated to be at 59% in the Shinyanga region (data from TDHS 2010, as compiled by UNFPA-Tanzania 2013).

Firelight's initiative in Shinyanga began with a series of "community dialogues" which supported the CBOs to work with children, youth, families and community members to express their own perspective on child and youth rights, safety and protection in the community. One of the major challenges identified by internal and external informants was the high levels of child marriage in the community.

These qualitative participatory exercises enabled the CBOs to engage the community, children and adolescents, to inform their programming and – because they continued throughout the initiative – to inform and help guide adaptation of their collective work.

firelight

capacity building.

Firelight's 12 community-based grantees deliberately varied in their strategies and approaches, forming a complementary, integrated attempt to drive out child marriage from the region. The approaches that the CBOs employed were both preventative and responsive and ranged from individual girl rescues, education, economic livelihood promotion, to cash transfers to skillful parenting training for parents. They also included training for adolescent girls and boys (both in and out of school) on sexual and reproductive health so that they can make informed decisions that safeguard their futures, creating safe spaces for girls and supporting girls with social and emotional counseling that is critical to their increased agency. CBO grantee-partners also strengthened community child protection systems by training child protection teams at village, ward, and district levels and engaged the government on many levels to support child protections and reductions in child marriage. CBO grantee-partners also developed a great deal of traction in positively influencing the institutional structures that surround children and adolescent girls - those that are critical in the fight against child marriage - from local child protection committees to district officials to the national level debate about child marriage.

The results were substantial. An independent evaluation of the work, along with Firelight's own data collection showed –

- Decreases in the rate of child marriage
- Important positive gains in the perspectives and practices of different stakeholder groups
- Critical changes in parental, family and community behavior
- Increased sensitivity to child marriage and child abuse
- Increased numbers of girls going to school
- Increased numbers of children passing standard seven and continuing to secondary school
- Decreased rate of teenage pregnancies
- Reduction of defilements of girls which used to occur during traditional dances, at water wells, bushes and on the way to school and homes
- Increases in the number of girls - who had left school for marriage or other reasons - returning to school
- Increased overall school enrolments and completion by girls and boys in ward level government schools
- Community members taking on new and increased roles as child protection service providers
- Increased reporting and action on child marriage and abuse
- Better agency and awareness amongst adolescent girls
- Increased family and community economic security
- Enactment of bylaws at ward level to protect children against sexual abuses

firelight

- Strengthened community child protection structures for the future
- Strengthened Child Protection Information Management Systems for Social Welfare Department

We invite you to read the full report on the work that the communities did and what they achieved here – Community action to reduce child marriage in Shinyanga, Tanzania – Impact and Learnings (2021)

PREVIOUS

Community-driven systems change: where is the evidence? A guest perspective from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation

NEXT

Solidarity over charity: prioritizing long-term shifts over band-aid responses

Firelight Foundation
216 Mount Hermon Road
Box 103-E
Scotts Valley, CA 95066
USA

T +1.831.429.8750
info@firelightfoundation.org

EIN: 27-2795006

Sign up to receive news and updates from Firelight.

First Name

Last Name

Email Address

SIGN UP

privacy policy and terms of use