

# **Slum Dogs or Millionaires? Personal Reflections of Early Child Bearers: The Case of Unmarried Teenage Mothers Living in Slum Communities in Uganda**



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**Cover photo:** Nekesa, 14 years, lives in a hut a few meters away from her grandmother's mud-and-wattle house in a remote village in Budadiri, Sironko district, eastern Uganda.<sup>1</sup>

**Slum dogs or Millionaires** paraphrases the award winning movie *Slum dog millionaire*. The movie tells the story of a young man, Jamal, from the slums of Mumbai who appears on the Indian version of 'Who wants to be a Millionaire?'<sup>2</sup> and wins against people's expectations, because despite lacking formal education, Jamal has a life experience that enables him to answer every question. I paraphrase the movie title to express the need to voice the 'slum dogs' who, due to their life experiences, may be potential 'millionaires'.

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<sup>1</sup>Retrieved from <http://www.newvision.co.ug/D/9/31/619564> on 31st March 2008

<sup>2</sup> This was a Television game show, originally from Britain that offered large cash prizes for correctly answering 12-15 consecutive multiple choice questions of increasing difficulty. The maximum cash prize was one million pounds.

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to my family, especially my mother – Mrs. Sarah Kiwanuka and father – Mr. Sulaiman Kiwanuka who have encouraged me to achieve the highest level in academics.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

CLO – Community Liaisons Officer

ECOSOC – United Nations Economic and Social Council

IPU- Inter Parliamentary Union

KCC – Kampala City Council

MDGs- Millennium Development Goals

NGO- Non Government Organization

SAP- Slum Aid Project

UBOS- Uganda Bureau of Statistics

UNDP - United Nations Development Program

UNICEF- United Nations Children’s Fund

UNIFEM- United Nations Development Fund for Women

UPE- Universal Primary Education

USE – Universal Secondary education

UWONET- Uganda Women’s Network

## **PART ONE: PRELIMINARIES**

### **Chapter One: Introduction and Background**

*'If motherhood is a tremendous challenge for well-educated women with reasonable incomes in the world's richest countries, what must it be like for some very young girls with little or no education and meagre resources in the poorest areas of the world?'*  
(Roberts Cokie, *State of the World's Mothers*, 2004, p 3).

#### **1.1 Introduction**

The Millennium Summit of September 2000 marked a new global partnership (Millennium Development Goals, MDGs) that developed from the ratification of the United Nations Millennium Declaration to reduce extreme poverty by 2015. One of the MDG goals is to promote gender equality and empower women. The indicators to monitor progress in achieving this goal include closing the gender gap in education at all levels, increasing women's share of wage employment in the non agricultural sector and increasing the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments and improving maternal health (UNIFEM 2008, Kabeer 2005,). In developing countries, complications related to pregnancy and childbirth are the leading causes of mortality for girls aged 15–19, accounting for 70,000 deaths each year (UNICEF 2009, Save the Children 2004). In this way, the goal to improve maternal health, especially of teenage mothers, is inextricably linked to gender equality and women's empowerment.

In Uganda, women's empowerment through education, employment and political participation has been propagated by state actors, civil society and the academia. This discourse propagates the ideal of delayed motherhood for women, after studies or getting a regular job. It is also assumed that women who follow this ideal will be able to contribute positively to their families. At the same time, teenage pregnancy and motherhood have been a major health and social concern in Uganda for some time. It is singled out because of its association with higher morbidity and mortality for both the



mother and child (UBOS, 2007). Uganda's mortality rates are among the highest in the world. For the period 1995-2000 maternal mortality of Uganda stagnated at about 505 deaths per 100,000 live births, but has slightly improved to 435 deaths per 100,000 live births (UNDP, 2007). This puts Uganda far from achieving certain Millennium Development Goals by the year 2015.

Although Uganda is endowed with natural resources and has been posting impressive growth rates over the last decade, poverty is wide spread and the standard of living for many is low.

Out of the 24,442,082 inhabitants of Uganda, adolescents aged 10-24 years make up 34.3%. Of these, 126,377 are mothers below 18 years (UBOS, 2002). Over years Uganda's total population has increased to an estimate of 31,367,972 people in July 2008, and a young population with a median age of 15 years (CIA, 2008). A large section of the population is therefore at risk concerning teenage pregnancies and the problem demands serious attention.

In Uganda, the Local Government Act 1997 defined certain areas as urban. Kampala<sup>3</sup> is the only city, while other areas are defined as town councils or municipalities, making a total of 75 urban areas. All district headquarters are urban areas, because they are located in town councils (UBOS 2007).

The urbanization<sup>4</sup> rate in Uganda is estimated at 12% of the population. This estimate considers only the major urban areas in the country, among which Kampala is expanding faster than any other urban area. Kampala is administratively divided into 5 divisions, 99 parishes and 802 villages. The population in Kampala is 1,208,544; and it continues to grow. Kampala accommodates 45% of all urban residents and this impacts much on

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<sup>3</sup> Kampala is the capital city of Uganda. It was the capital of Buganda, the largest of the traditional kingdoms of what is Uganda today. It was named Kampala after being a breeding ground for impalas-a species of antelopes (*Aepyceros melampus*). It was the favorite hunting ground for antelopes by Buganda's king at that time, Muteesa I.

<sup>4</sup> Urbanization is the process through which the proportion of a country's population that lives in urban areas increases. An urban area is an area with increased density of human created structures in comparison to areas surrounding it. Urban areas include towns, cities, and municipalities (UBOS, 2007).

urban standards. The rate at which the population is growing has a negative impact on the city's capacity to plan and deliver services. The population concentration is very high, at 7,378 persons per square km of land in 2002 (UBOS, 2002).

There are several drivers of urbanization in Uganda, including population dynamics like high fertility rate (7.1), reduced mortality and internal and international migration, in addition to rural urban migration and policies of economic transformation which make Kampala city in particular the major industrial and commercial centre in the country (Lwasa, 2007). Some features of urbanization include annexing of adjacent townships and rural areas to Kampala Township, the proliferation of the informal sector, which is an expression of the need for employment in Kampala, and also has serious environmental and health implications since many activities occur in residential neighbourhoods. In addition, there is increasing commoditization of land and informalization of land acquisition processes, which has led to exchange of environmentally sensitive land to urban uses with social and health consequences, mainly at the fringes of the city (UBOS, 2007). Kampala is composed of several slums, usually situated in low land areas which were previously swamps, and these are characterized by poor sanitation and drainage, high population density, and near total absence of organized infrastructure (SAP, 2006). This is also representative of Kibuli, the setting of this study.

Although poverty in Uganda to a large degree has a rural face, the urban poor in Kampala are much more disadvantaged. Most of the population of Kampala (54%) live in one roomed, poor shanty houses usually called 'muzigos', and they lack access to supportive social networks. Access to health services is functionally low, since people cannot afford the costs. The majority of people residing in Kampala are job seekers, which puts a low dependency ratio of 31%. The overall literacy level in the city has increased to 88.4% since the advent of the national policy of Universal Primary Education (1997), but there are no figures on literacy levels in slum areas. The total fertility rate in Kampala is 5.1; contraceptive prevalence rate is 34 and teenage pregnancy rate is 18.5 (UBOS, 2002).

## ***1.2 Status of women in Uganda: Women and power<sup>5</sup>***

The status of women in Uganda today is difficult to describe. I explore it here through highlighting issues like the women's movement, women's position in education, their political and economic participation, as well as through an examination of some of the laws defining the women's position in Uganda.

The women's movement in Uganda represents women's activism<sup>6</sup> throughout the country, as women try to overcome patriarchy and making their voice heard at all levels. The women's movement in Uganda shows the impact of women's powerful role as they try to advocate for change in various sectors like education, health care, politics, and women with disabilities, the economy, agriculture, conflict resolution, land issues, religious issues, the media, and literature among others. The women's movement in a very short period became one of the major societal forces in Uganda and has played a significant role in improving the status of women. It has also addressed more general social justice issues, and has worked to advance the interests and rights of the poor, the disabled, children and other vulnerable groups (Tripp and Kwesiga 2002).

Historically, women's roles were clearly subordinate to those of men despite the substantial economic and social responsibilities they had in Uganda's many traditional societies. They had responsibility for childcare and subsistence cultivation, and also made substantial contributions to cash-crop agriculture in the twentieth century.

Women were taught to agree to the wishes of their fathers, brothers, husbands, and sometimes other men as well, and to demonstrate their subordination to men in most areas of public life. Nevertheless, they also had traditional rights that exceeded those of some western women. They were recognized as important religious leaders, they could own land, influence crucial political decisions made by men, and cultivate crops for their

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<sup>5</sup> Women and Power is also a title in a book by Janet Townsend et. al. It is a book on self empowerment of women, as they deal with power in everyday lives, and it also prolematizes power in development.

<sup>6</sup> Activism generally depicts an intentional action to bring about social or political change. In this case it is opposition to patriarchy, advocacy and support for gender equality and equity.

own profit. However, with the introduction of cash crop growing, women lost their rights to land through protectorate courts (Byrnes, 1990). This deterioration of women's economic situation was made worse by the violence that swept Uganda in the 1970s and 80s, which inflicted a heavy toll of economic hardships on women and children. Women's work became more time consuming than it had been, there was erosion of public services and infrastructure, reduced access to schools, hospitals and markets; even travelling to nearby towns became impossible. However, Byrnes (1990) states that some Ugandan women believed that the war years strengthened their independence as the disruption of normal family life opened new avenues for acquiring economic independence.

A new generation of autonomous women's organizations emerged in Uganda around the time of the 1985 United Nations Women's Conference. These groups were heterogeneous. Some operated on local levels, including multipurpose clubs engaged in savings, farming, income generating projects, handicrafts, sports, cultural events and other functions depending on the needs and priorities of members. Others were national level associations like professional associations of women doctors, engineers, scientists and entrepreneurs. There were national groups focusing on specific issues like reproductive rights, and those focusing on particular sections of the population including disabled women, widows and even second wives in polygamous marriages. Some provided women with credit, legal aid, publishing assistance or education to address the historic neglect of women in the mainstream institutions. At the other end of the spectrum, the national organizations were often linked to Africa-wide associations like Forum for Africa Women Educationalists (FAWE) and international associations like International Federation of Women Lawyers (Tripp and Kwesiga, 2002). There have been many gains, however small, which are indicative of broader transformations that are taking place throughout the society, and the widespread impact of the women's movement in Uganda.

Politically, there have been growing numbers of women in politics. Politics is probably the field where women have scored the most or at least achieved most public visibility. Uganda had the first woman vice president in Africa; Dr. Specioza Wandira Kazibwe

(Tripp and Kwesiga, 2002). The constitution provides that the parliament shall consist of one woman representative for every district. One third of local council seats are reserved for women. Out of 332 seats, women occupy 102 making a 30.7% of women in national parliament. This places Uganda at the 21<sup>st</sup> position worldwide (IPU, 2009). Of the total number of women in parliament, 80 represent districts, 16 are on constituency seats where they contest directly with men and the rest represent special interest groups such as the army, persons with disabilities, workers and youth (Parliament of Uganda, 2009; UNIFEM, 2008). According to UBOS (2007), 19.4 per cent in government at ministerial level are women.

In education, Uganda approaches gender parity in primary education (ECOSOC, 2008). However, this has not been mirrored in secondary and tertiary levels of education where there is still a significant underrepresentation of girls (UNDP, 2007). Girls also continue to be underrepresented in science and technology studies.

Data on progress on the proportion of women in wage employment in the non agricultural sector are inadequate. Economically, women have scored worst. Many are employed in the informal sector, and many remain trapped in insecure, low paid positions. Very few women own property. The Domestic Relations Bill which could have removed the barriers to women's property ownership has not been passed since the 1960s. Women are still largely excluded from the use of formal financial institutions because they lack collateral security, have low levels of education and no knowledge of financial transactions relating to loans. The majority of finance institutions are inaccessible to women except for micro finance institutions, which are also largely unregulated and charge high interest rates (UWONET, 2006).

The laws of Uganda also define and stipulate the position and status of women. As regards my study, I chose to limit myself to a few laws that I find particularly relevant to my study such as the laws governing the family. According to UWONET (2006) the laws governing the family in Uganda are gender biased. For instance, the Marriage Act that came into force in 1904. This law makes provision for marriages and basically provides

the procedures for entering into civil marriages including Christian religious marriages in Uganda. The Act recognizes four different marriage statutes in Uganda, that is the Marriage and Divorce of Christians Act applying to Christians, the Hindu Marriage and Divorce Act which regulates marriages among Hindus and persons of allied religions, the Mohammedans marriage and Divorce Act which applies to Muslims; and the Customary Marriages Registrations Act that provides for registration of customary marriages entered in accordance with the customs and traditions of various communities in Uganda.

However, the Hindu, Mohammedan and Customary statutes on marriage do not provide for the rights and obligations of parties during marriage. They also provide for varied minimum ages for entering into marriage. In particular, the Marriage and Divorce of Mohammedans Act has no provision whatsoever about the age of marriage, meaning that once the parents have consented, girls as young as 13 years can get married. In general, the Act does not provide for ages of marriage except in cases where either party to the marriage is less than 21 years of age, where the written consent of the father is required. The Act therefore legalises marriage for minors below the age of 18 years if his/her father- or in his absence, his/her mother or other legal guardian- consents to the marriage. In this respect, it is contrary to the provisions of the constitution and the defilement law which allow only parties above the age of 18 years to marry and found a family. The Act does not address the issue of rights and obligations in marriage which are governed by common law. Although the common law of England has been evolving and changing in its country of origin, the law applicable in Uganda is that which applied at the date of inception of the Marriage Act in Uganda. The rights and obligations of parties to civil/Christian marriage in Uganda are therefore difficult to discern, which tend to relegate women to a subordinate position in relation to men (UWONET, 2006).

The divorce Act, which also came in 1904, applies only to people that are domiciled in Uganda. It also has several gaps which reflect the low position of women in Uganda. It permits a husband to petition for dissolution of marriage on sole ground adultery<sup>7</sup> of the

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<sup>7</sup> The penal code Act Cap 120:154 is the law on adultery. It states: 1. Any man who has sexual intercourse with **any married woman** not being his wife commits adultery and is liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or to a fine not exceeding 200ug.shs.; and in addition, the court shall order any such

wife only, while the wife is only allowed to file for divorce on grounds of adultery coupled with either cruelty or desertion (Section 4, Divorce Act 1904). Section 5 of the same Act requires a husband petitioning for dissolution of marriage on the grounds of the adultery to name the alleged adulterer as co-respondent, except in prescribed circumstances, but the wife is not required to. The husband is also allowed to petition for damages against the alleged adulterer while the wife does not have that option.

All in all, although women have had a number of achievements in some spheres like politics or in primary education, they are still facing greater challenges in other spheres including the economy, family and the law. This shows mixed progress for the status of women in Uganda.

### ***1.3 Status of teenage mothers in Uganda: A brief profile***

Not much has been written about teenage motherhood in Uganda. The 2002 census revealed high teenage motherhood. Out of 24 million people, 18 percent of females aged 12 to 19 years had at least one child; and adolescent fertility was slightly higher in rural areas, at 18 percent, than in urban areas, at 15 percent.

According to the last census report, education serves to reduce the level of teenage fertility. Among females at school, only 5 percent were mothers compared to 41 percent of those who left school; and among those out of school, the proportion of adolescent mothers decreases as the level of education increases.

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man on first conviction to pay the aggrieved party compensation of 600ug.shs., and on subsequent conviction compensation not exceeding 1200 ug.shs as may be so ordered.

2. Any married woman who has sexual intercourse with **any man** not being her husband commits adultery and is liable on first conviction to a caution by court and on subsequent conviction to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months. Uganda's law on adultery was scrapped in 2007 because it was too sexist. It treated women and men unequally. The divorce law still stands.

### ***1.4 Main objective and research questions***

Against the backdrop of the above described context, my study set out with the main aim of exploring perceptions of unmarried teenage mothers of their own lives and also to extract what they think should be done for them in order to further their empowerment.

The specific objectives of the study were:

1. To gain access to the girls' understanding of their own situation.
2. To investigate the views of authorities/ NGOs and their strategies in dealing with this phenomenon.
3. To study the gap between the girls' understanding of their situation and the views of authorities, and the strategies the authorities take in dealing with this phenomenon.

My guiding research questions included:

- a) What are the characteristics of the teenage mothers interviewed?
- b) How do they define their situation in terms of the causes, conditions of living (shelter, food, clothes, access to education, access to health, ways of earning income, their political participation, among others), and consequences or challenges faced?
- c) Do they see being an unmarried teenage mother as a problem or not? What - if any - are the main problems?
- d) What do the mothers think should be done to improve their condition?
- e) What policy measures are in place to help teenage mothers? Are the measures operational and effective?
- f) Do adolescent unmarried mothers feel empowered?

### ***1.5 Structure of the report***

This report is divided into two parts: 1. Preliminaries part, and 2. Empirical, discussion and analysis part. The Preliminary part contains four chapters. Chapter one, the introduction and background, covers the general context and information about Uganda that is relevant to the study highlighting issues like urbanization and growth of slums, status of women in Uganda, status of teenage mothers in Uganda, the objectives and research questions. Chapter two is a review of related literature, exploring the concept of



teenage motherhood, incidence and magnitude, causes of teenage pregnancies, and the consequences of teenage pregnancies. Chapter three, the theoretical framework, presents and discusses empowerment and power as the relevant theory that has guided my study. It discusses concepts like resources, agency, achievements, power, and power over, power from within, power with, power to, personal power and relational power. Chapter four describes the study methodology I employed. It presents the study population and selection of informants, the study area, research design, research instruments, data analysis and presentation, reflexivity and positionality, ethics and the challenges faced during the study.

The part containing empirical findings, discussions and conclusions covers five chapters. Chapter five presents the historical setting of the informants, highlighting the profile and education of the teenage mothers including challenges faced. Chapter six covers their reasons for getting pregnant including pragmatic choices, abuse and deceit. Chapter seven looks at their current life situation exploring the undertakings of teenage mothers and challenges faced. Chapter eight explores their survival mechanisms and expectations. Chapter nine, the conclusion, presents final thoughts, remarks and recommendations.

## **Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature**

### ***2.1 Conceptualizing teenage motherhood***

The teenage period or adolescence is a transition period from childhood to adulthood. There are around 1.2 billion young people between 10-19 years, making it the largest generation of adolescents in the world (UNICEF, 2002). Different studies indicate that at this age, adolescents consider themselves mature enough to have sex (Nzioka, 2001; Nyanzi, et. al., 2001; Donnellan, 1998). In Uganda, girls become sexually active earlier than boys and this puts them at a high risk of early pregnancies and consequently adolescent motherhood (Atuyambe, 2005). However, adolescence being a time of rapid change and transition, it can be stressful and difficult, and pregnancy can complicate this period further.

Young mothers or teenage mothers are difficult to study. In part, this is because they have been a poorly defined group. It is also a problem that relatively little research has examined the experiences and characteristics of the youngest mothers (Phipps and Sowers 2002).

Holgate, et al (2006) state that there are a number of inconsistencies in the terminology used to describe a young mother. Among the terms used is 'young mother', 'adolescent mother', 'children who have children', 'schoolgirl mother', as well as 'teenage mother'. They continue to argue that the abundance of terms contributes to the lack of clarity and general confusion surrounding the issue, but language is important since the choice of labeling terminology is significant to the way in which the described issue or person comes to be interpreted. To them 'adolescent', 'teenage', 'child' and 'schoolgirl' mother more clearly suggest an age related and developmentally related interpretation, whilst 'young' mother is more open to interpretation, allowing for appreciation of differentiation in all aspects of maturity, and studies that have applied this definition incorporate mothers between 13-24 years.

Phipps and Sowers (2002) argue that studies characterizing adolescent childbearing typically limit their scope to mothers aged 15-19 years. The Health Systems Trust (2002), of the United States, defines teenage mothers as women aged 15-19 who are mothers or who have ever been pregnant. However, Phipps and Sowers (2002) suggest that if we are to improve the experiences of young mothers and their children, we must better understand the social, biological and medical circumstances surrounding this high risk group. They therefore set out to determine which maternal ages should be included in the definition of early adolescent child bearing on the basis of birth outcomes; that is, age at which medical outcomes are worse for early adolescent mothers than for older adolescents and adults in terms of infant mortality, very low birth weight and pre-term delivery. Their analysis suggests that the definition of early adolescent child bearers should include mothers 15 years and younger since this is the age at which poor birth outcomes are higher, while this begins to stabilize at 16. Most studies nevertheless regard young adolescent or teenage mothers to be aged 19 years and below.

In Uganda, young persons are defined as those in transition from childhood to adulthood with sub categories of adolescents (10-24 years), teenagers (13-19 years) and youth (18-30 years) (2002, Census Population Report). According to Article 1 of the International Convention on rights of the child (1989), a child is any human being below the age of 18 years. Similarly, Article 2 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, of which Uganda is a signatory, defines a child as a human being below the age of 18 years. According to Article 2 of the Children Act, Chapter 59 of the Laws of Uganda (1997), a child is a person below the age of 18 years. These definitions imply that teenage mothers are children. I therefore limit my study to mothers of 18 years and below, and I employ the term “teenage mothers” in my report to depict the age and developmentally related status of these mothers.

## ***2.2 Incidence and magnitude***

According to Singh and Darroch (2000), adolescent pregnancy occurs in all societies, but the extent of teenage pregnancy and childbearing varies from country to country.

According to UNICEF (2001), teenage pregnancy rates and birth rates have gone down in the 1990s in developed countries, while the U.S teen birth rate still remains highest in the developed world. The highest rate of teenage pregnancy in the world is in sub-Saharan Africa with 143 pregnancies per 1,000 girls aged between 15-19 years per year (Treffers, 2003). Girls in sub-Saharan African countries tend to have the highest rates of early marriage and early motherhood as well as the highest mortality rates for young mothers and their babies. Thirteen million children are born to women under age 20 worldwide each year, with more than 90 per cent of these being in developing countries(Save the Children, 2004).

According to Westoff (2003), in sub-Saharan Africa the proportion of teenagers who are mothers or currently pregnant is generally high (20-40 per cent), although the range extends from 7 per cent in Rwanda to 43 per cent in Niger. According to Locoh (2000), in Niger, 87 per cent of women surveyed were married before age of 18 and 53 per cent had given birth to a child before that age. Uganda is ranked 5<sup>th</sup> among the 10 highest risk countries of children having children, with about 50 per cent of women aged 15-19 ever married (Save the Children, 2004).

The 2002 Uganda Population and Housing Census Analytical Report on Gender and Special Interest groups shows that 18 per cent of females between 12-19 years in Uganda had a child. For those aged 15-19 years, 30 per cent had had at least one child (ibid, p.36). These figures include young mothers who are married. Data specifically on unmarried teenage mothers are not available. Out of the total population of 24,442,082 people, 126,377 are mothers below 18 years (UBOS, 2002).

### ***2.3 Causes of teenage pregnancies***

Generally, empirical studies on causes of teenage pregnancies are scanty. Most of the available literature related to teenage fertility is on the developed world, particularly the USA; while there is paucity of studies based on Africa (Were, 2007). However, there are many explanations given to the prevalence of teenage pregnancy in society:

Zavodny (2001) shows that in the US, the characteristics of teenage women and their partners appear to play a role in the occurrence of non marital teenage pregnancy and its outcome. She shows that the likelihood of non marital pregnancy reduces as the woman's age at first intercourse rises, and that women who are younger than their first partners are less likely to fall pregnant than teenage women who are about the same age as their first partner. Teenage women who are older than their first partner are significantly more likely to fall pregnant than teenage women who are of the same age as their partners. She also states that women's religious background does not appear to affect the likelihood of a non marital teenage pregnancy; and that the likelihood of teenage pregnancy seems to decline as the education attainment of the girls' mothers rises.

Multiple pathways to teenage pregnancy and child birth exist including the pursuit of autonomy along with the romanticized notion of an economically well-off male partner. Teenage girls in abusive relationships tend to view pregnancy as an opportunity to change the negative patterns in their relationships (Rosen 2004).

Chibuzo (2007) states that in developing countries teenage pregnancies are related to traditional roles and early marriage where pregnancy is seen as a blessing and proof of fertility, while in developed countries it is different in the sense that it typically takes place outside marriage and carries a lot of stigma. This, she explains, happens due to adolescent pre marital sexual behavior, intake of drugs and alcohol, sexual abuse such as rape or defilement, as well as big age discrepancy between the girl and her partner, where the girl may fail to resist sex outside marriage.

Were (2007) reveals that early pregnancies in Kenya are perpetuated by lack of access to educational opportunities, peer pressure, inappropriate forms of recreations - like unmonitored night parties or discos - and poverty. Contrary to Chibuzo (2007), Were states that teenage pregnancies are due to a deterioration of traditional African morals, among other factors. This is similarly reflected by Morrell et. al. (2008), who states that early pregnancy and parenting have been pathologised by invoking moralist arguments in

which teenage pregnancy, teenage sexuality and indeed any sexuality outside of a marital, nuclear family context is considered deviant and a taboo.

The above indicates a contradiction in the understanding of teenage pregnancy or even teenage sexuality within cultures or traditions. On the one hand, it is a blessing and proof of fertility, while on the other, it is a deterioration of traditional African morals. This also shows why there is need to hear from the teenage mothers themselves, so that we understand it from their own view and context.

#### ***2.4 Consequences of teenage pregnancies***

Childbearing in early adolescence is considered socially problematic in most cultures. In addition, many people believe that young adolescent mothers are at high risk for poor health outcomes during pregnancy and childbirth (Phipps and Sowers, 2002).

An adolescent mother, especially those under age 15, have higher rates of birth complications, and due to this early motherhood is often a death sentence for the girl and her child, and involves enormous health risks like obstructed labor, fistula and HIV/AIDS (Save the Children 2004). In developing countries complications related to pregnancy and childbirth are the leading causes of mortality for girls aged 15–19, accounting for 70,000 deaths each year (UNICEF 2009; Save the Children 2004).

According to Atuyambe, adolescent mothers in Uganda face family and community problems related to being sent away from home, being rejected by their partners as well as being treated negatively by community members including health workers. They lack economic capacity to run their families as well as to ensure good feeding practices (Atuyambe 2008). Morrell, et. al.(2008) also show that many girls have been discriminated in and out of schools on the basis of pregnancy. Limited education is both a cause and an effect of teenage motherhood and young mothers often struggle economically, and their children are likely to repeat the cycle of poverty (Save the Children, 2004).

Other documented salient social consequences of teen pregnancy are: school drop-out or interrupted education, risk to deliverance of unhealthy babies, vulnerability to or participation in criminal activity, abortion, social ostracism, child neglect and abandonment, rape, abuse, incest, adoption, lack of social security or becoming long term welfare recipients, poverty, repeated pregnancies before age 20, and negative effects on domestic life, among others (Collins et.al. 2000; Coley and Chase-Lansdale 1998; Moore et. al.1995).

Despite what has been written on teenage pregnancy as shown above, studies focusing on the girls' own perceptions/ reflections on their own lives are largely missing. More often than not, the studies focus on consequences (mostly health related) of the pregnancy, more so in developed societies. The causes of teenage motherhood are also double edged due to cultural interpretations. This research therefore is a step towards filling the gap that exists in relation to understanding how the involved girls themselves see their situation, and sets the ground for more informed research on the lives of teenage mothers in a Ugandan slum setting.

## **Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework.**

In this chapter I discuss **empowerment** as the theory that has influenced my thinking about teenage motherhood. I focus particularly on the concepts of **agency** and **power** because I find their interrelatedness appropriate for my study. I will focus mainly on Kabeer's notion of empowerment, particularly her understanding of agency (1999/2005); and also explore the concept of power as put forward by Townsend et al (1999). In this study, I wish to investigate how teenage mothers exhibit signs of empowerment, and what in their view is empowering/ disempowering to them. I focus on some specific points in their narratives, namely critical moments of disempowerment and empowerment in their life stories.

### ***3.1 Empowerment***

Empowerment is a framework that has been developed in relation to women's advancement in the developing world. It was at first used as a concept for movements or women in groups but the concept changed its focus to individuals. In Gender and Development, the focus of empowerment is on power relations between men and women in development processes, plans and programs. This concept is imperative to my study because I explore whether teenage mothers experience any form of empowerment. Although it may be problematic to use the concept of empowerment on children, the teenage mothers are in a period of transition to adulthood, with which comes complexity in their lives. By the Ugandan law, they are perceived as children because they are below 18 years. But their families and neighbors see them as adults because they have children. This makes empowerment an important tool to use in this regard.

Empowerment as a concept is not easily defined. It has been used widely in a number of ways, for example by Chambers (1983), when describing enabling and empowering processes of poor clients. Literally, empowerment can mean to add power, or, as Rowlands (1997) suggests, the term can be used merely to communicate good intentions, and to imply some unspecified recognition of the need for changes in the distribution of power.



According to Kabeer (1999), central to the idea of empowerment is power, and this is also the starting point of clarifying how empowerment can be used. However, Rowlands (1997) states that power is one of the most contested concepts in the social sciences, and this contributes to a general failure of understanding empowerment. Kabeer provides one way of thinking about power, as ability to make choices. To be disempowered implies to be denied choice. Empowerment therefore refers to “the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such ability” (Kabeer 1999, p.2).

Using Kabeer’s notion of empowerment requires that the notion of choice also has to be understood. This is because choice has to support the wellbeing of those making choices rather than express, reinforce or reproduce inequalities in society that violate the rights of others or even devalue the self, which goes against the notion of empowerment as used in this study. But is choice a universal concept? What about bad choices? Kabeer nevertheless states that choice implies alternatives; the ability to choose otherwise. She adds that:

*“There is a logical association between poverty and disempowerment because an insufficiency of the material means for meeting one’s basic needs may impose painful tradeoffs between important dimensions of choice. However, even when the survival imperatives no longer dominate choice, there is still the problem that not all choices are equally relevant to the definition of power, because some choices have greater significance than others in terms of their consequences for people’s lives” (ibid, p.2).*

Kabeer (1999, 2005) defines such choices as strategic life choices or first order choices, which are critical for people to live the life they want. These choices can help frame other, less consequential choices that may be important for the quality of ones life, but do not constitute its defining parameters.

Kabeer further states that the ability to exercise strategic life choices can be thought of in three dimensions: **Resources, agency and achievements.**

**3.1.1 Resources** here include material and various human and social resources that enhance the ability to exercise choice. These are acquired through various social relationships in spheres like the family, market, community and state. Imperative to note is that embedded in the social relationships are rules and norms by which distribution and exchange occur. These rules and norms can be seen as enabling or disabling and demarcate boundaries of choice for different categories of individuals.

**3.1.2 Agency** on the other hand refers to the ability to define one's goals and act upon them. Agency in relation to empowerment implies not only actively exercising choice, but also doing this in ways that challenge power relations (Kabeer, 2005). Kabeer states: "Agency is more than an observable action. It also encompasses meaning, motivation and purpose that individuals bring to their activity"... what the feminists call *power within* (1999, p.3). In this way, empowerment is rooted in how people see themselves - their sense of self worth (Kabeer, 2005).

**3.1.3 Achievements** refer to the outcomes of investment of resources and agency together. According to Kabeer (2005), the term achievements refer to the extent to which people realize or fail to realize their potential for living the lives that they want. Achievements here relate both to women's greater efficacy within their prescribed gender roles or to being transformed to another level.

The notion of empowerment as discussed by Kabeer and described above provides a lens through which I am to observe the lives of the teenage mothers: to see what is empowering/enabling and what is limiting to them. I explore the **resources** available to the teenage mothers and how they get these resources, including the challenges they face. The resources that I find pertinent for consideration in my study include *material resources* in terms of basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter and scholastic materials like books, pens, among others; *Human resources* such as level of education and life skills learnt like vocational training; and *Social resources* such as family, school or friendship.

Using empowerment as a lens, I look out for meaning, motivation and purpose of their actions, in order to understand their actions and their **agency**. However, I focus on both ‘passive’ and ‘active’ forms of agency as highlighted by Kabeer, who states that passive agency is action taken when there is little choice and active agency relates to purposeful behavior (2005, p.15). I will also give attention to greater ‘effectiveness’ of agency and agency that is ‘transformative’, which respectively as defined by Kabeer refer to, women’s greater efficiency in carrying out their given roles and responsibilities, and, their ability to act on restrictive aspects of these roles and responsibilities in order to challenge them (ibid, p.15).

I explore **outcomes** from the teenage mothers’ investment of resources and agency; although these outcomes are hard to measure. The outcomes that can be traced in the findings of my study relate to situation specific perceived control, freedom from humiliating situations, status, autonomy, and self efficacy<sup>8</sup>. In general, teenage motherhood probably leads to change in the self, in the relationships within family and household, and also an alteration in the position of the teenage mothers in the hierarchies of the economy and the society; these changes that have great consequences on lives of these young mothers.

I hope this understanding of empowerment helps to investigate how teenage mothers manifest empowerment, in what dimensions, at what levels and through what processes; and also how the teenage mothers perceive their lives.

In addition, I also consider using Huyer’s understanding of the notion of empowerment as a tool to understand the teenage mothers’ behavior. I choose to use Huyer’s understanding of empowerment because I find Kabeer’s notion too materialistic. Beyond the material structure on empowerment advanced by Kabeer, there is evidence drawn from my data showing disempowerment of the girls from a psychological angle. I find it appropriate to consider this dimension of disempowerment, specifically related to their

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<sup>8</sup> Self efficacy as used here refers to the belief that one is capable of doing certain actions to achieve certain goals or manage certain situations.

self esteem, depression, and mental illness. Huyer (2006) states that there are several streams of approaches to empowerment, but all hold several concepts in common: options, choice, control and power. Huyer (2006) states that these pertain to women's ability to make decisions and affect events and circumstances around them, benefit from resources and opportunities, exercise control over one's own life, body and resources, and have a say in public life and decision making; all with the result of increasing or achieving autonomy and improving health and well being. In this statement I particularly find control over one's life and body and improvement in health and wellbeing vital, as it is evident from the field work data that ill health contributes to disempowerment of teenage mothers directly or indirectly, through their parents or guardians. Health is also reflected as relevant in Nussbaum's (2000) theory about human functioning. With her list of central human functional capabilities, Nussbaum includes bodily health<sup>9</sup> as one aspect central in human life, in the sense that its 'presence or absence is typically understood to be a mark of the presence or absence of human life' (ibid, p.72).

Huyer (2006) further explores agency in the same vein as Kabeer (1999, 2005), as consisting of the ability of women to define self interest and choice, and, importantly, to consider themselves able and entitled to make choices. Agency therefore involves thinking outside the system or challenging the status quo. It is also clearly evident in my data that the girls go beyond the ideal of society and challenge the status quo. It is therefore helpful in explaining and understanding the daily lives, activities and work that the teenage mothers participate in.

### **3.2 Power**

As mentioned earlier, employing empowerment theory implies an explicit understanding of power. In this study, I will employ Townsend et. al. (1999) understanding of power.

Townsend et. al. define power mainly in its traditional sense, as 'a force exercised by individuals or groups' (ibid, p.23). They identify four forms of power which include

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<sup>9</sup> Bodily health: being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter. (Nussbaum, 2000, p.78)

**power over, power from within, power to and power with.** They also highlight three levels from which these forms of power operate, which I give some attention to.

**3.2.1 Power over** is obvious power, what people think of as they imagine power. It is, for instance, the power of one person or a group to get another person or a group to do something against their will. It may be enforced through violence or fear, or there may simply be social rules which force the weaker to accept the will of the stronger. '*Power over*' may be a matter of strength and even force, physical, economic and social. In some cases it is established through force or threats, but often it is more subtle. As quoted in Townsend et. al. (1999, p. 26), Steven Lukes states "...for the exercise of power not only prevents people from doing things but even from thinking them." Submission, sacrifice and silent suffering are virtues. Additionally, Srilatha (1994) in Townsend et. al. (1999) states that power is about control over ideology which sets rules and ideals. Much 'power over' is oppressive, divisive and destructive. So is patriarchy, which takes many forms and too often pervades even ideology and ideals of femininity (Townsend et. al. 1999).

**3.2.2 Power from within**, on the other hand, arises from recognition that one is not helpless, not the source of all one's problems, that one is restricted in part by structures outside oneself. Townsend et. al. state that this power is central to empowerment. Quoting Caroline Moser (1989), Townsend et. al. state that "the empowerment approach...seeks to identify power less in terms of domination over others...and more in terms of the capacity of women to increase their own self reliance and internal strength" (ibid, p.30). They argue that power from within must be self generated and is the fundamental power on which women must build, the beginning of an answer to the power that patriarchy and capitalism have over them. They suggest that women have to realise both what they can do and what holds them back.

**3.2.3 Power with**, Townsend et. al. (1999) suggest, is the capacity to achieve with others what one could not have achieved alone. It puts participation at the centre of empowerment, and creates awareness that the whole is greater than the sum of individuals, especially when a group tackles a problem together.

**3.2.4 Power to** involves gaining access to a full range of human abilities and potential. The ‘power to’ is creative and enabling as women reconstruct and reinvent themselves. This power is often used to mean political power, a power to influence others, to have a say in decisions. To Townsend et al, this power relates more with women’s skills - the power to do new things.

In this study, I give particular weight to three forms of power i.e. ‘**Power over**’, ‘**Power from within**’ and ‘**Power to**’. The ‘**Power over**’, for instance, is helpful in understanding the ways in which teenage mothers have this form of power exercised and abused over them by their parents, guardians, their spouses, among other people. It may also explain the way people like parents or spouses exercising such power to subordinate, degrade, force the actions of, exercise control over, assume the right to punish, seize material property from and dominate them. There is ‘**Power over**’ also internalised within the mothers in the form of the tension arising out of what they wish to do or be and what they are supposed to do or be. It is linked to the construction of patriarchy which controls ideology.

‘**Power from within**’ is equally helpful in explaining some of my empirical findings. For instance, I will use it to understand the background situation of the teenage mothers and also the factors that pushed them to get pregnant. I employ this form of power in analysing the context, specifically the ‘homes’ of the teenage mothers of which homes are assumed to be supportive and protective of children. But as it is evident in the data, some of the teenage mothers for example challenged their fear for parents, guardians or the community and did what they thought was right for themselves. It can be said that the ‘home’ for instance is not necessarily supportive to children. Some of the mothers I interviewed resisted the brutality, broke down the shame and destroyed the guilt bestowed on them. Some engaged in roles and activities that society deems deviant for ‘Muslim girl children’, such as *karaoke*<sup>10</sup>. In all, they ‘challenged the status quo’. Thus,

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<sup>10</sup> Karaoke is a form of entertainment in which amateur singers sing along with recorded music using a microphone and public address system

this kind of power is important in order to look at how and why the teenage mothers lead the lives they do.

The '**Power to**' is also useful in explaining some of the data. 'Power to' embraces forms such as ability to work, study, the skills the teenage mothers have, and also their resistance to disturbances which can be highlighted here. This form of power is a useful lens in explaining how the teenage mothers carry on their daily lives, more so their activities and the challenges they face. Some of the mothers, for example, work outside their homes to make a living on top of raising their children, which is power to do things they want. One mother was going to a vocational school and playing netball for an income, employing the skills she has. The '**power to**' enables them to be or do what they want. However, there is need to recognise the challenges the teenage mothers face as they exercise this form of power, such as the fragility of their '**power to**' and '**power from within**' due to the '**power over**' them.

On the other hand, Townsend et. al. (1999) state that power cannot be studied as an isolated phenomenon, only in relations. They provide three levels from which power operates. I wish to explore how the above aspects of power come together in the teenage mothers' lives. The dimensions or levels of power highlighted include: **personal power**- where women develop a sense of confidence and ability and overcome internalised oppression; **relational power** or power in relationships- where women improve their abilities to negotiate and influence the nature of a relationship; and **group power** where women work together for goals they could not achieve alone.

In this study, I am inspired primarily by two levels at which power operates, that is, **personal** and **relational power** that seem useful for explaining and understanding some aspects of my research.

### **3.2.5 Personal power**

The '*personal power*' that I find useful in explaining my data relates to the teenage mothers' ability to organise their lives on their own. Some work as well as look after their children. They are able to act on a given situation and also feel that they are in control of some aspects of their lives. They can break away from brutality and fear, and express what they want for themselves and their children. They pull away from what is oppressive and what undermines them and stand up for what is supportive and what strengthens them.

### **3.2.6 Relational power**

The '*relational power*' that is particularly significant in my study is that between the teenage mothers and their family or guardians, the fathers of their children and society. In other words, this dimension of power is useful in analysing their relationships with other people around them and probably also the structures that seem to be beyond them. There is evidence in the data that the teenage mothers have conflicts with immediate family members, who seem not to love or care for them. There is this dimension of power also between them and their spouses. Their families and spouses exercise and abuse '*power over*' them. The society also ignores them, and these mothers are isolated, out of family and school, and left with no social protection.

## **3.3 Conclusion**

The theories and concepts as explained above are interrelated and provide a lens that shows how the teenage mothers experience and exhibit empowerment. The theories indicate forms and levels of power that cannot be ignored in an analysis of teenage mothers' lives and the power relations involved in their lives. These power relations bring to light that the challenges that the teenage mothers face are largely situated outside their own person. The concepts also highlight that empowerment is a process that begins with oneself; this is partly evident from the lives that these mothers are living. This is related to what Townsend et. al. (1999, p.151) imply that empowerment is: "a process that begins with the person and enables her to value herself, change herself, grow and reach more autonomy."



## **Chapter Four: Study Methodology**

### ***4.1 Introduction***

This chapter is devoted to describing and explaining how I went about the field work. It includes an explanation of my study population and selection of informants, study area, methods by which data was obtained, instruments of data collection, limitations/challenges met and ethical considerations.

### ***4.2 Study population and selection of informants***

To accomplish the purpose of this study, that is, exploring perceptions of unmarried teenage mothers living in slum communities in Uganda of their own lives and also to extract what they think should be done for them in order to further their empowerment, it was imperative to choose as informants people well related to the core topic of the study.

This study focuses specifically on unmarried teenage mothers living in slum communities, and their perceptions were vital to my study and therefore a prerequisite for their inclusion. I followed these guidelines when selecting informants, implying that the sampling method used was purposive. I decided to focus on unmarried teenage mothers below the age of 18 years. This cut off other girls like married teenage mothers and those between 18-20 years who according to some studies and definitions also are considered as teenage mothers. A main reason for this choice was that according to the Ugandan Constitution, any person who reaches 18 years and above is an adult.

I also decided to interview older mothers, between 30-45 years. The justification for this was mainly to get the perspective of older mothers who have experienced being a teenage mother before in order to compare their experiences to those of the young unmarried teenage mothers. This was, however, not a core concern in my study.

### **4.3 Study area**

My field work was based in Kibuli, a slum area. Kibuli is located in Uganda's capital city, Kampala. Administratively, Kibuli is a parish with several village zones including Kitoro, Wabigalo, Agip, Mosque and Market zones<sup>11</sup>. It is under Makindye Division, Kampala District.

Kibuli is believed to be predominantly Muslim, due to the location of the second biggest mosque in Uganda. However, the picture on the ground suggests a more culturally and religiously diverse population.

I chose to study Kibuli slum firstly because it was more accessible for me than the other slum areas, and secondly, because according to my gatekeepers - Slum Aid Officials - Kibuli slum is more organized than other slums in terms of having very committed key community volunteers who were knowledgeable about all happenings in the area and available to assist in accessing the area and my target populace in the shortest time possible. Therefore I would save time setting my study in Kibuli rather than going to other slums where I would have needed to start from scratch.

According to a report on gender based violence and development based needs in Kampala slums, the majority of slum residents are women and children, and the number of single mother households is generally higher than in other communities (Slum Aid Project, 2006). This supported my choice to study unmarried teenage mothers from slum areas.

I also assumed that women's achievements vis-à-vis empowerment are difficult to realize in slum communities, which also supported my choice to study unmarried teenage mothers from Kibuli. The area had a large potential when it comes to providing information for my study.

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<sup>11</sup> The names of the zones reflect different characteristics of the zones, like religious (Mosque), the market (Market), petrol station (Agip), tribe (Kitoro). Kitoro zone is dominated by Batoro immigrants from the Toro Kingdom, located in the Western part of Uganda.

## **4.4 Research design**

In the data collection for my study I employed qualitative methods. Qualitative methods are believed to provide a deeper understanding of social phenomena, and attempt to document the world from the point of view of the people studied (Silverman, 2000). I mostly used primary methods of data collection. My main methods were *interviews* and *observation*. Primary methods are necessary when the data needed cannot be found in secondary sources and also when looking at needs of certain groups (Duval, 2005). I collected the data myself. I did not need an assistant because I was conversant with the language and well prepared for the work load ahead of me.

### **4.4.1 Interviews**

In this study I employed life story interviews as a method of interviewing. According to Atkinson (1998), life story interviews are qualitative methods of data collection on subjective essence of a person's entire life. They are narrative accounts of events, feelings, experiences or any other kind of happenings that bring out a deeper meaning of one's life. They focus on how events are sequenced; how the past shapes perceptions of the present, how the present shapes perceptions of the past, and how both shape perceptions of the future. The in-depth interviews were carried out on two main categories of informants, i.e. teenage mothers and older mothers between 30-45 years. I interviewed 13 teenage mothers and 3 older mothers.

According to McAdams (1995), a life story is selective to a few key events, relationships, and themes among other key aspects in one's life. Therefore, this method entailed collection of memories such as family background and childhood, everyday life at home, work experiences and challenges within, current and future hopes related to marriage, children, work and general wellbeing/life.

I used the life story interview because my main interest was the 'personal reflections of unmarried teenage mothers...' Personal reflection calls for individuals to tell their stories in their own words. It also calls on them to reflect on and convey what they think of a given situation, in this case what the teenage mothers think about their own situation. The life story interviews therefore in a way helped my informants put together their

experiences and relate them to other events in life. In this way, informants also get the chance of exploring what is important in their lives, and this can be a validation of their real experiences, and also an exploration of what they desire to be or do in life. This method is therefore empowering in the sense that it gives opportunity to the teenage mothers to articulate their 'voice', and thereby increase the chance that their voice will be heard.

In addition to the above reasons, the life story interview was used because it is a very helpful method in uncovering the connection between an individual life and social structures. In my study, for example, I can dwell on the life stories of the teenage mothers to understand the cause of their behavior - it could be personal or due to societal pressure or both. Therefore, the life story method is useful in linking personal life to its social environment, which is essential in my study. This is also highlighted by Atkinson (1998) when he states that the life story is an approach to understanding not only one life across time but how individual lives interact with the whole. He also adds that life stories bring us into accord with our selves, others, the mystery of life and the universe around us; and can also provide a researcher with better understanding of how the teller sees his or herself within and in relation to these domains.

Yet another reason for using life story interview was to evaluate cross and intergenerational patterns of behavior or actions, judgment and attitudes. For example, if the girls' mothers and grandmothers gave birth or were encouraged to give birth when still young, then it is likely that these teenagers followed in those footsteps. If, on the contrary, it is a new mode of behavior, the method will reveal that too. This trend of comparison is vital in my study.

The interviews were conducted on one-on-one basis and were conducted at an agreed location. At times interviews also took place spontaneously due to an observed act or event about which I wanted more detailed information.

I interviewed fewer older mothers than teenage mothers because they were not the main targets of the study. Their role was to share their experiences so that I could compare their experiences to that of the teenage mothers.

I also involved informants of secondary knowledge. I carried out such interviews in order to obtain background information on the topic and area of study. I had interviews with the following informants who I considered significant to this study: The Slum Aid Project (SAP) officer for community development, two key community volunteers of SAP, three Local Council members from Mosque, Market and Wabigalo zones of Kibuli slum, the vice chair person of Local Council three (L.C.3), Makindye division, under which Kibuli is a parish; the Gender officer of Kampala City Council; the Community Liaisons Officer - Kabalagala police station, male youths at a local video hall and older men at a local beer stall. These people know the slum area in question, some live there. They also provided information on government policy, among other things, which is central to my study.

#### **4.4.2 Observation**

I also employed observation as a method. During my stay in Kibuli slum, I observed lots of things, activities and situations, both during the day and night time. The observation of the respondents was undisguised. In other words, they were aware that I was observing them, although they thought it was only day time observation. I observed the general community and daily life activities and some events, although I was not able to inform the whole community that I was observing them.

I observed the living conditions of people in the slums, especially those of my respondents, the older mothers and key community volunteers where I used to retire after a long day of investigation. I also observed the working environment where my respondents earned a living.

Last but not least, I made observations of some facial expressions and hesitations and other body movements of my informants, especially during the interviews. The tone of the respondents' voices and emphasis in speech were also recorded. The body movements and tone of voice or emphasis in speech were closely coordinated and

conveyed the emotional state of my informants about an aspect explored during the interview or also about the interview - whether they were tired of the interview or in need of a break.

The observations are important to the study in that I use them to check the validity of some of the information I was given in the interviews, and I also gained insights to the conditions of the young girls' lives.

#### ***4.5 Research instruments***

The main research instrument I used was an in-depth interview guide. It was designed for my key informants, that is, the unmarried teenage mothers and also the older mothers. For the other informants, like Local Council members, officials from Slum aid Project and the police, I had a more semi structured interview guide that I followed during the interviews I had with them.

My interview guide solicited information on various themes including normal day, childhood, education, work, marriage, children, community perceptions as well as empowerment/achievement, among others. The guide helped me to gain detailed information but also to remind me on what to cover and where I need to follow up. This relates to what Kvale (1996) highlights when stating that an interview guide indicates the topics and their sequence in the interview, and also relates thematically to the topic of the interview, the theoretical conceptions at the root of an investigation, and to subsequent analysis.

The interviewing was not structured. I started with some general questions that encouraged the informants to talk more freely. The course of the interviews was usually determined by the first response, then I would request for elaboration; and like that I would reach the particular information I was looking for. I started with introducing questions such as "Can you please describe your typical day here?" These were followed by follow up questions, depending on response; as well as probing questions. I also used direct questions, especially when I approached a new topic or theme that I needed to

cover. In addition, some questions on my interview guide were indirect, especially those relating to future projections or certain other issues.

I also translated the interview guide to my local language, Luganda, since the respondents were not very conversant with English. This was also because I needed to have the same phrase of the questions so that answers were not influenced by differences in phrasing. This facilitated the comparison of responses.

I also used a tape recorder to facilitate my interviews, so that I simultaneously could keep track of what was said and make my own observations. It was also convenient not to have to spend time on writing. However, I had to seek permission from my informants to use the recorder. Most of them agreed, while some did not, so I had to write down their responses.

#### ***4.6 Data analysis and presentation***

Atkinson (1998) suggests that there are two major steps in the data analysis process: transcription and interpretation of interviews according to predetermined objectives. All the interviews were transcribed in the Luganda language, and then translated into English for easy analysis of interpretation. After reading through several times, I identified themes for further analysis. The major themes were: the mothers' background, causes of pregnancy, education, their occupations, challenges, survival mechanisms, and future aspirations. Then I collated text from different interviews under identified themes. I looked for relationships between the various individual texts on a number of aspects such as level of education, age, number of children, parental characteristics, challenges faced, among others. Then I made interpretations on basis of theory, literature and the broad social context. After the interpretation, the information is presented according to major themes, and according to the sequence of the life story method, organized in various chapters.

#### ***4.7 Reflexivity and Positionality.***

As I reflect on the interviews, I am not able to state that my respondents told the 'truth'. However, the *narratives* I have from them reflect on their situation and experience. This

is in line with Kvale's (1996) description of post modern construction of knowledge. Kvale (1996) states that the qualitative research interview is a construction site of knowledge. Knowledge generated by interviews is related to features of post modern construction of knowledge: the conversational, the linguistic, the narrative, the contextual and the interrelational nature of knowledge. Kvale explains knowledge as narrative to be an open interview where people tell stories or narratives about their lives. He notes that it is a shift from modern formalized knowledge systems to the narrative knowledge embodied in storytelling. Here, "truth" has to be worked out locally in small narrative units and with the collective stories contributing to uphold the values of the community, in this case my informants' values.

Concerning my position in the field and possible effects on the informants' responses, as a student, I was ignored by government officials, who possibly thought I was wasting their time, and in the end I didn't even opt to interview some of those I intended to talk to. I also introduced myself as a student to the teenage mothers, so that I did not look so much of an outsider. I was satisfied with how it made them freer with me. However, it may have impacted on some of their responses, especially with regards to questions relating to education.

Also the place where I interviewed the informants may have had impact on the responses. An example that illustrates this is that I interviewed one informant at the play ground and by the road side, because she was uncomfortable to have the interview at home.

#### ***4.8 Ethics***

Silverman (2006) states that at every stage of the research process, from study design to data gathering, data analysis and writing a report, one needs to be aware of ethical issues. It is good to adhere to ethical norms because some of these norms promote the aim of the study such as proper knowledge production rather than fabrication and misinterpretation of data. They also promote trust, accountability, mutual respect, and fairness in research. In addition, these norms also promote moral and social values such as social responsibility, human rights, compliance to law, among others.



In my case, before leaving for field work, I sought to safeguard the ethical issues which concerned my study. First, I applied to the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD), which advised and approved my research proposal as ethically sound. Reaching the field country, I also had to respect the national laws of Uganda so I applied for a research permit from National Council for Science and Technology; and my project was approved.

However, this was no guarantee that all ethical issues were covered. I also had to gain informed consent from the intended informants. They were fully informed of the aims of the research, and I stated clearly that they could freely withdraw from my study at any time. This is what Silverman (2006) regards as central to most ethical guidelines, that research subjects should be given a detailed but non technical account of the nature and aims of your research. It was not so easy to win the confidence of the informants but after some time they got freer with me and then they disclosed and shared their life experiences.

To further maintain confidentiality and protect the identity of my informants I have coded their interviews. I have used pseudonyms. This is in line with Silverman's statement that 'when we report our observations or interviews, it is common sense to protect the identities of the people we have researched and to ensure that they understand and consent to our research' (ibid, p.319). Participants were further assured that data would be securely stored and no one but me would have access to the data.

During the field work, I gave some money to some of my informants due to their conditions of life. For example, I found some teenage mothers hungry yet pregnant, with no energy to talk. However, I had to be cautious about any unwarranted cash give outs, to avoid bribes which might impact on the responses. I therefore tried to devise other means. For example, where I found a hungry teenage mother I would at times buy food and we would eat together.

#### ***4.9 Challenges during the study***

During my field work, I faced a number of challenges. Studying people's lives is not easy, especially when the topic is sensitive. Some experiences are hard to talk about so some informants cried during the interview, and it became hard to continue and cope with the interviews. Some of their experiences also overwhelmed me, yet I had to keep my composure.

In addition to the above, follow-up of informants was not so easy, given that it depended on their activities and schedule.

In depth investigations, especially night observations became uncomfortable to some of my informants and indeed one informant avoided me and later declined to continue with the study because I found out that she turned her unit of residence into a kind of brothel during night times.

Language was also a problem in relation to some of my informants. This was because Luganda was not their first language, and they were not conversant with English either. This probably made it difficult for them to understand my questions, and also for me to really understand their responses. So I tried to use the simplest vocabulary in Luganda so that I convey what I wanted to get informed about. By doing this I got the information I wanted.

Some informants, like government officials, did not keep their word. I kept making appointments with them but they kept breaking the appointments. In the end I failed to interview some of them.

My study area is located on a hill. Walking up and down the hill was physically straining. The weather was very hot, too, which was a challenge for me particularly since I was coming from Norway where the temperatures at that time were still low.

Personal interruptions from relatives also took some of my time off the study. This is because my field work was based in my home country, and I could not ignore some of my family responsibilities, which required my presence, time and money.

**PART 2: EMPIRICAL FINDINGS, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS.**

## **Chapter Five: Background of the Teenage Mothers**

### ***5.1 Introduction***

This chapter is devoted to the early days of the teenage mothers' lives. It highlights their personal and family profile, education level and past challenges. This I hope will bring out some useful insights to questions such as: Who were these teenage mothers? How many children do they have? What was their family status like? How do they understand their educational situation and challenges they faced during school time?

### ***5.2 Profile of the teenage mothers***

In this section I briefly present the teenage mothers whom I interviewed and followed up during field work. I provide a description of their family background entailing who they are in terms of age, religion, birth order, where they were born, and whether they moved to the area of study and the reasons why, the age of their children, their parents' or guardians' occupations, education level and housing status.

I first met all these girls, as a group, in one of the Slum Aid project volunteer's home in Kibuli, where we agreed on all the terms and conditions under which the study was to be carried out and made appointments for the interviews. For purposes of protecting their identity I have used pseudonyms.

**Claire:** I met Claire in her mother's house<sup>12</sup> at around 10:30 am. She was feeling a bit weak that day, but she insisted we do the interview. Claire is 17 years old and she has a three months old baby boy. She is Christian. Claire is small sized, but appeared to be a self assured girl. She was born in 1991 at Nakasero<sup>13</sup>. Her family moved to Kibuli slum around the same time she was born. She is a third born of six children. Her mother is a casual worker in a produce store/factory in Kibuli industrial area, where she sorts and packs coffee beans. At the time of the interview, her father was unemployed and staying with a friend. Further inquiry on her family background revealed that the father finished

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<sup>12</sup> One roomed house with curtains dividing it into three; one space occupied by her mother's bed, the second with Claire and her child's bed, and the other occupied with the beddings of her siblings.

<sup>13</sup> An upper class area in central Kampala.

advanced level of secondary education and was employed as a secretary at the Tanzanian High Commission, but he at some point fell sick and lost the job. Apparently he had been staying with a friend since the family moved to Kibuli. He just comes by for brief visits to see his family, then leaves. Claire's mother finished Primary seven and stopped there. Claire dropped out at level three of secondary schooling (S.3). During later follow ups, I found out that Claire's father is back at the Tanzanian High Commission, where he previously had worked as a secretary.

**Shamim:** Shamim is a small sized girl who is 17 years old. She has a two year old baby girl. She is Muslim. I met Shamim for the interview at her house<sup>14</sup> and she looked eager for the interview. She was born in Kibuli slum and raised there. She is second in a family of four children. Her parents are still together. The mother is a house wife while the father recharges car batteries for a living. However, Shamim does not stay with her parents. She stays in one room which was provided by the boyfriend's family. At the time of the interview, Shamim was a student in a tailoring vocational school; but subsequent follow-ups showed that she dropped out of school because the organization (Slum Aid Project) that was sponsoring her ran out of funds for that particular program. Her father studied up to primary six, while her mother stopped in primary four. Before she joined the vocational school, she had stopped at Primary Five (P.5) level of education.

**Barbra:** Barbra, who usually addresses herself as 'maama Zurah' meaning 'the mother of Zurah', is 16 years old. She has a two year old baby girl. She is Christian, but her baby is Muslim. I met her for the interview first at her aunt's house<sup>15</sup>, then at her shared room<sup>16</sup>. She is the last born of five children from her mother. She does not know the number of children from her father. Both parents are alive; her mother is a hair dresser and the father is a casual worker. The parents do not stay together. Her father stays close to the grandmother's house in Kibuli, while the mother stays in Gaba<sup>17</sup>. At the time of the interview, her aunt was temporarily Barbra's guardian, but Barbra was renting a room

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<sup>14</sup> One roomed house, with a bed, a TV set and a cupboard with a few cups, plates and saucepans.

<sup>15</sup> One roomed, with just a bed and a cupboard full of clothes.

<sup>16</sup> Very small room with beddings on the floor, a few cups and plates in the corner. The roof is so old and with big holes that the sun beams through during the day.

<sup>17</sup> An area 13km out of Kampala city center.

with another friend who also had a child. But later follow ups show that she had started renting a room alone because her friend moved out. She helps out at the aunt's restaurant. She did not know the level of education of her parents. Barbra stopped schooling at Primary Five (P.5) level of education.

**Sandra:** She is 17 years old and a mother of two children, aged 1<sup>1/2</sup> years and one month old baby (at the end of field work). Sandra is a Christian. I met Sandra for the interview at a play ground<sup>18</sup> about 1km out of the Kibuli slum residential area. My appointment with her delayed for an hour because I did not find her at home, her paternal grandmother's place, where she stays and where we had agreed to meet. This was because her boyfriend had sent for her the night before and she spent the night there. When I reached the boyfriend's house, she declined having the interview from there and suggested we do it at the nearby play ground. I inquired why she refused to have the interview at the boyfriend's place and she said that the boyfriend is very tough and an easily angered person who did not like visitors. During the interview, Sandra was looking so frail<sup>19</sup>. She was 8 months pregnant with her second child. She is the last born of two children from her mother. Her father had ten children with different women but only five are living. She was not sure of the education level of her parents as she stated, "*I don't think they went to school....*" Her father died in 1997. Her mother is a small scale farmer in a village Mityana<sup>20</sup>, married to another man. Sandra believes that her mother might have given birth while still young. At the time of the interview, Sandra was unemployed, but later she started vending food. Sandra stopped schooling at secondary level three (S.3).

**Bridget:** I met Bridget at her employer's house<sup>21</sup> in Kibuli. She is a quiet and polite 16 years old, with a 1 year old baby. She looked humble most of the time, but was very

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<sup>18</sup> We sat under a tree shade, and at a distance some young men were playing football.

<sup>19</sup> She had very dry lips, yellow sunken eyes, with a very dry skin; her body was too small and the stomach was the most visible part of her body.

<sup>20</sup> Mityana is a district, 70km from Kampala City.

<sup>21</sup> Two roomed house. I sat with her in a sitting room with three sofas.

audible during the interview. She is a Christian girl born in Fort Portal<sup>22</sup>. She is the first born of three. Both parents died in a bus accident when she was a young girl. She said they were coming from Kampala. She did not know the education level of her parents. Her aunt became her guardian after their death. She described her like this, *“My aunt is a lame<sup>23</sup> person. So she was not so able like other normal people, but she used to do everything for herself. But we were poor people.”* Bridget moved to Kampala to work. She is currently employed as a house maid in one home in Kibuli slum. Bridget stopped going to school at Primary Seven (P.7) level of education.

**Linda:** I met Linda in a room<sup>24</sup> she shares with a brother and a sister. She is 16 years old and she is a second born of four. Linda is of Christian faith. She is a medium sized girl with a lot of eagerness. At the time of the interview, she had lost her baby 3 months earlier. Her mother was also dead and she suspected the father to be dead too because she had never met him and did not know his whereabouts. Her uncle became her guardian after her mother’s death. Linda describes her uncle as his head having a ‘*sot*’ implying ‘short circuit’<sup>25</sup>. She added that *“...he is not mad but some of his wires don’t work”*. With this she meant to say that her uncle was a bit mentally disturbed and that this was on and off. Therefore, the wife of the uncle, who she now considers as her mother, has taken over responsibility for her. The wife of the uncle is a small scale urban farmer who cultivates maize behind her house, which she sells for a living. Linda’s family also sells boiled cow hooves and skin in the evening, which is a common delicacy among the people staying in Kibuli slum. Linda stopped going to school in Primary Seven (P.7).

**Anisha:** Anisha is 17 years old with a 2 year old baby. She is Muslim. She is a slender, tall and always smiling girl. She is a third born of five. I met Anisha at her place of work

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<sup>22</sup> Fort Portal is a district in western part of Uganda, 317 km out of Kampala. It is a municipality which the British colonialist, Maj. Sir Gerald Portal claimed to have discovered in the 1880s. It was named after a British imperial Fort that was built in the area during the colonial era.

<sup>23</sup> Lame is a term used to refer to a limb disabled person.

<sup>24</sup> Small room, with one bed and a spare mattress which she stated she shared with the sister on the floor. There is a wooden box which has their clothes. There are no windows and no ventilators; the door is the only opening to the house.

<sup>25</sup> This is a term usually used locally to refer to people who are mentally disturbed.



and we went back to her brother's home<sup>26</sup> where we had the interview. As we were leaving the factory where she works as a waitress in a restaurant, one male worker in a group with others shouted at her, "Karaoke!<sup>27</sup>" and the other men laughed. Then we left the area. Anisha's father died when she was a young girl. Her mother stays in Bunyoli<sup>28</sup>, Butalejja district. Anisha stayed for 2 years with her mother's sister in Bugiri<sup>29</sup> because, as she says, "*My mother was with the other siblings and so she decided to give me over to my aunt because she could not take care of us all; and my aunt was a woman who could not give birth....*" However, her aunt died some time before she gave birth and then she went back to her mother who looked after her during the pregnancy and after the birth. At the time of the interview, her big brother was her guardian, in Kampala. He is occupied with weaving baskets. Anisha doesn't know the education level of her parents. Anisha stopped studying in Primary Four (P.4) level of education.

**Sarah:** Sarah is 17 years with a 2 year old baby. Sarah is a Christian girl. She is a first born of five. I met Sarah at her one roomed, almost empty house. There was only something that looked like a mattress on the floor and her baby was sleeping on it. She pulled the baby to one end of the mattress then we sat on the other part for the interview. She also had two pans and three small plates in the corner on the floor. Sarah's father died and she never knew her mother. Before she got pregnant she was working as a house maid. She had moved from Mukono<sup>30</sup> to Kampala to look for a job. In Mukono she was staying with her grandfather who took care of her after the death of her father. At the time of the interview, she was not employed. She did not know the level of her father's education. Sarah stopped attending school in Primary Three (P.3).

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<sup>26</sup> Two roomed house. One room is full of big baskets. The other room has a curtain that separates the room into two spaces; one occupied by the brother's bed and the other occupied by the beddings of the brother's children and Anisha.

<sup>27</sup> Karaoke is a form of entertainment in which amateur singers sing along with recorded music using a microphone and a public address system. In this case, the men shouted because she was a member of such a group.

<sup>28</sup> Bunyoli is in Eastern part of Uganda, close to the border of Uganda and Kenya about 240 km from Kampala.

<sup>29</sup> A District about 160 km from Kampala in the Eastern part of Uganda.

<sup>30</sup> A district about 25 km out of Kampala.

**Hadija:** I met Hadija at her work place, too. She works at the same restaurant as Anisha as a waitress in a factory of plastic water pipes and tanks. We then went to her father's home for the interview. Hadija is 17 years old with two children aged 3 years and 2 months. Each child has a different father. She is also Muslim. She is a second born of four. Both parents are alive. Her mother is not employed and the father is a casual worker at the local taxi park where he carries luggage. She said that her mother had not studied while her father tried to reach primary seven. She said that she thinks her mother gave birth when still young. Hadija stopped schooling in Primary Five (P.5).

From the above narratives, the following can be noted. The teenage mothers I interviewed were all aged 16 to 17 years. This is in line with how I define teenage mothers, as those below 18 years. Although they now approach the age limit, 16 and 17 years is not the age at which they got pregnant. They got pregnant earlier, when they were 14 or 15 years. This reflects the early age at which children are exposed to sex and at which they first engage in sexual activity. Literature indeed shows that Ugandan adolescents 13-15 years consider themselves mature enough to have sex (Nzioka 2001; Nyanzi et al 2001). Other teenage mothers I saw in Kibuli and other near-by slum communities like Katwe<sup>31</sup> were also very young. Teenage motherhood therefore often starts quite early, between the ages of 12 to 15 years.

In addition, all the teenage mothers were unmarried. They had one or two children, with the exception of one who lost her baby a few months before the interview. Their children were all toddlers or babies under three years. Some of these teenage mothers were staying with their guardians while some were staying alone. This corresponds well with what Donnellan found in the United Kingdom, that "Living with their parents is not always possible or satisfactory, especially in the long run" (1998, p.16); and, "most single lone mothers live in rented accommodation" (ibid, p.17). The mothers were also from the two leading religions in Uganda as three of them were Muslims while six were Christians.

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<sup>31</sup> Name of another slum in Kampala.

Looking further at their family background, this group of informants is from low class homes. This corresponds to Brindle's observations in the United Kingdom as cited in Donnellan (1998) that teenage mothers are more likely to come from families with low socio-economic status and financial hardships. The informants' parents or guardians are either not employed or they are working in poorly rewarding jobs without protection. Their parents had little, if any, education. The families from which most of them come also seem to be disintegrated. Either their parents/ guardians are separated, or one partner is dead, while some have not met one of their parents. Most of them had mothers who they thought had started having children before the age of 18. This trend is supported by the statements of older mothers that I interviewed. They said they gave birth when still young, at least below 18 years. The teenage mothers I interviewed also seem to come from large families, some not even knowing the number of their siblings. The families of some teenage mothers moved to Kibuli to search for opportunity, while the families of others have been in the area for generations. Some teenage mothers also left their families in other regions and moved to Kampala to find jobs.

The features and social characteristics of the girls' family correspond with typical findings in studies on single teenage mothers such as Donnellan (1998), thereby supporting the assumption that family background may be one significant factor behind what they are - unmarried teenage mothers.

### ***5.3 Education***

Education<sup>32</sup> is one of the indicators used to monitor progress in achieving Gender equality and women's empowerment, the third Millennium Development Goal (Kabeer, 2005). Education is also a human right, commonly understood as entitlement to free compulsory primary education for all children, an obligation to develop secondary education accessible to all children, as well as equitable access to higher education (UNICEF, 2007). Education is generally considered to provide a main avenue to making life better for oneself. The girls' earlier access to and experience of education is therefore

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<sup>32</sup> Refers to any act or experience that has a formative effect on the mind, character, or physical ability of an individual. In its technical sense education is the process by which society, through schools, colleges, universities, and other institutions, deliberately transmits its cultural heritage-its accumulated knowledge, values, and skills-from one generation to another (Kneller, 1971).

an important aspect of their early life when it comes to assessing the resources the girls have to bring into a future life.

Uganda's education system is both formal and informal, and is offered by both public and private institutions. Under the formal system the four-tier<sup>33</sup> educational model is followed; organized as seven years of primary education, four years of ordinary level education, two years of advanced level secondary education and the tertiary level of education. In 1997, Universal Primary Education<sup>34</sup> was introduced, while Universal Secondary Education was introduced in 2007. Vocational and technical education also exists to serve all those persons who did not receive formal education or those who have partially gone through the formal system.

There are clear differences in the level of education that the girls have attained. The highest level reached was level 3 of secondary education, while the lowest level attained was grade 3 of primary education. Accordingly, two of the mothers stopped in Senior 3. The other teenage mothers had studied different classes at primary level including primary 3, 4, 5, and 7. Only one reported to have studied from a UPE school. Although they had attained some education, by the time they got pregnant, most of them were already out of school. Pregnancy disrupted school only for one. It can be stated that isolation from school puts girls at a high chance of getting pregnant. Lawson (1998) finds that in the United Kingdom girls who become pregnant in their teens tend to be ill educated similar to what pertains elsewhere in the world.

For instance, one informant, Claire, was in senior three when her parents ran out of money and she was advised to leave school and stay at home. By the time she got pregnant she was not in school. The rest of the teenage mothers stopped in the lowest levels of primary education, and at the time of the interview, they were not engaged in any type of education. At the time of the interview, only Shamim was going to a

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<sup>33</sup> However, Uganda also has a pre primary and nursery education, especially for the urban upper class.

<sup>34</sup> Under UPE, the Government of Uganda abolished tuition fees and Parent Teacher Association charges to enable children from poor families to get education. However, parents were expected to provide pens, exercise books, clothing, even bricks and labor for construction of classrooms (Bategeka, 2005, p.1).

vocational school though later follow ups revealed that her schooling had stopped because the organization that was sponsoring her did not have the funds to continue that project. This points directly to some of the challenges the girls said they faced during time in school. All the teenage mothers reported lack of both school fees and scholastic materials.

Shamim mentioned another challenge of being left at her boarding school without being visited<sup>35</sup> by parents. Her boyfriend, by contrast, would visit her, bringing her things to use at school. That's how the teachers found out about him and called her parents. On top of these problems she faced, she stated that *"In school I used to give in a lot to study. Even people at home knew that I loved reading books, but no matter how hard I tried, I always failed the exams.... With that failing and not understanding I don't think I can go back to that type of schooling because I can't manage it."* This highlights the fact that at times, children find certain types of education hard, and this may lead to frustration which in turn leads to loss of interest. It also suggests that children are not consulted on the type of education they would like to pursue. In Shamim's case, the frustration she got from the loneliness at boarding school, failing and not understanding, impaired her performance.

Hadija, another teenage mother, stated that because her parents did not have money, they failed to pay her school fees and she usually missed out on school trips, although her friends would be going almost every term.

Some mothers faced problems of a different kind during their school time. For example, Sarah stated that her step mother used to deny her to go to school. She said, *"Whenever I used to go to school, she would insult my father and also say, 'why do you let your child go to school yet mine are seated here?' But, her children were not of school going age!! (She frowns) And if you add this to father having no money, then I had to stay home"*.

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<sup>35</sup> Visitation days are always given in boarding schools, for parents to visit and check on their children's wellbeing and monitor their study progress. Parents, on such days, are urged to provide school utilities such as toilet papers, toothpaste, books, pens, and foods that supplement the diet given at school to their children, among other stuff.

Anisha, another mother, said, *“I used to fall sick every time and then. I used to get wounds on my legs and I failed at times to go to school. And at times I used to go there but the teachers would send me back because of the wounds on my legs, but yet I loved studying.... One time, I was seated on a chair and a kid came and hit me with a stick on the head. She was a class monitress. When she did that I went mad<sup>36</sup>. I was told that my mum tried to help but the teachers told her to leave me home... But also, I did not have books and pens, because my mum did not work.”*

Bridget and Linda stated that their parents had died, which made them stop attending school because they could not afford the fees as well as get what they need for school.

Barbra had this to add about her own school experience; *“School used to start when I don’t have books, pencils or brooms. I started washing clothes for people so that I could get money to buy what I needed to take to school. Then I would wake up quite early to go to school. All this happened as if I don’t have parents! ... because of the washing, I finished the day so tired...”*

In pursuing their education, these girls faced various problems which included lack of school fees and scholastic materials to use at school, parental neglect in terms of not visiting or caring for their children when in school and not taking them to school, and child sickness which prevented one to stay in school. One girl also suffered serious physical abuse in school that made her mad/ insane, while another had to take on paid labor in order to ensure her stay in school. Two of the girls lost their parents, which made them stay out of school. Each girl had an individual experience that revealed the factors which made them stay out of school.

Further analysis of these factors reveals other embedded issues that usefully can be seen in relation to Kabeer’s analytical categories on resources. Kabeer states, “...it is the social relationships that govern access to the resource in question that will determine the

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<sup>36</sup> ‘Mad’ referring to a mental disturbance which she suffered due to the head injury she got from being hit on the head.

extent to which the potential is realized” (Kabeer, 2005, p.13). This implies that resources- material, human or social- that enhance people’s ability to exercise choice are acquired through various social relationships in spheres like the family, market, community and the state. Moreover, embedded within the social relationships are rules and norms by which distribution and exchange of resources occur, which enable, disable and demarcate boundaries of choice for different individuals. In this case, education - a resource - of the teenage mothers is enabled, disabled or demarcated by rules and norms in their social relationships. These aspects are discussed further in the following sections.

### **5.3.1 State provisioning and individual resources**

A further analysis of the girls’ perceptions on the challenges they faced in education reveals that they are partly structurally<sup>37</sup> caused problems. The lack of school fees and scholastic materials, for example, should not have been a problem since there is Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Uganda, which is free to all school going pupils. At the time UPE was introduced in Uganda in 1997, my informants were around 5-6 years, the age to start school; but they missed out on the opportunity. I inquired about it and some reported that they did not know about UPE at that time as they do now, simply because they were too young to know such issues.

UPE only catered for tuition of the children and only for some time. Other costs such as meals and scholastic materials were not addressed and this made the whole thing unattractive to the poor. In other words, the poor do not stay out of school due to school fees alone. They can be hungry too; or as in Barbra’s case, she had to wash people’s clothes so as to buy books, pens and the like which she needed to take to school. Hungry children would find it very hard to stay in school. In this way, UPE provided an insufficient coverage of the costs of education for the poor.

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<sup>37</sup> By structure, I refer to the government. Structure can also be a pattern of relations or social organizations or arrangements that in one way affects human thought and behavior. Structure also refers to aspects like gender, social class and customs, among others which enhance, limit or influence opportunities that individuals have in life.

It is also quite clear that UPE was not considered a serious alternative given that the girls' parents simply refused to take them to school or were not so sure about UPE. For example, during an interview/ discussion with some elder men in Kibuli about children's education in their community, they revealed that they do not trust the education that children get from UPE, because, as one of them put it with agreement from others, "*... the children do not know what they should know when they finish primary seven. They do not know even how to speak English or even how to write...and they come with very poor grades...*" This corresponds with Shamim's complaint that she did not understand what was taught to her, even when she put in much work reading her books. The elder men also added that they got concerned about the big numbers in class without any quality care for the education their children were receiving. With such perceptions of this kind of education, it would not be surprising to find that they don't send their children to UPE schools. In addition to that, they couldn't afford private schools.

In general, it's the role of the government to implement policies or programs, in this case UPE, with proper prior preparation including effective dissemination of information about the intended programs so that all stakeholders are well versed with what they are given as well as stakeholders' responsibilities in relation to the policy or program under implementation. It seems most of the teenage mothers missed out on school because their parents/ guardians were poorly informed about UPE or doubted the policy.

It also shows that UPE is not the optimal individual educational resource, given that parents do not enrol children to the UPE schools and continue to give it low priority while children continue to get insufficient education. Children attending such schools therefore have fewer resources to cope with challenges in life like becoming single mothers, and they are also more exposed to pregnancies.

### **5.3.2 Community violence and individual resources**

Violence and power also come out as issues that limit many pupils' ability to attend or continue school. For example, Anisha was hit on the head by a class representative, which made her go "mad" and in turn limited her from continuing in school. I associate



this to community leverage of power where children are given power and authority to punish other children on behalf of their teachers or even the school, through positions of power given to them such as class monitors or prefects, among others. This is an example of how these girls' lives are characterized by other people's 'power over' them, understood in line with Townsend et. al. (1999) statement that 'power over' tends to be enforced through violence.

In this way I agree with Morrell (2002) that schooling as a practice and schools as institutions have been and still are associated with violence. Context here is vital because, as Morrell (2002) also observes, learners and teachers operate within schools which are in turn located within communities and they receive, contribute to and make discourses. Secondly, it also illustrates the worrying degrees of violence against children and violence against women and girl children<sup>38</sup> in particular. This power structuring exposure to 'power over' in the form of violence is problematic for the child, and is likely to be so also in the future, as a mother or as wife.

### **5.3.3 The Family and individual resources**

From the teenage mothers' reasons for not attending or completing school, it seems clear that their families had a significant role in disabling their attainment of education. Firstly, I note that generally the teenage mothers' families completely neglected the girls, which disabled them from attending and completing school. In other words, parental or guardian neglect disabled the girls from schooling. This is shown in the following ways:

Poverty within the family is generally noted as one aspect that underlies parental or guardian neglect. Parents could have had more pressing problems to look at than their children's education, for example their immediate survival in terms of shelter or food. This can relate well with what Levine et al (2008) state that worldwide, children from poor households are more likely to be out of school, and among those children, girls are

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<sup>38</sup>Violence Against women and girls is a problem of pandemic proportions and it's perhaps the most pervasive human rights violation known today that devastates lives, fractures communities and stalls development (UNIFEM, facts and figures on VAW). Retrieved on 25<sup>th</sup> march 2009 from [http://www.unifem.org/campaigns/vaw/facts\\_figures.php](http://www.unifem.org/campaigns/vaw/facts_figures.php).

more likely to be out of school. The number of children to keep in school could also have been a problem, and also the sickness of some of the parents which impaired them from sending their children to school. For example, Claire's father who was a secretary in the Tanzanian High Commission was weakened by sickness, and this disabled him from continuing to work, which in turn made him unable to send his children for further education. This coupled with a poor social protection system in the country meant that the children could not find alternative help, and hence dropped out of school.

All teenage mothers reported a lack of money for education as one of the challenges they faced while still in school, and it disabled most of them from attending or even completing school. Lack of money for education is reflected in lack of school fees, lack of ability to pay for school trips, lack of scholastic materials, and taking up of paid labour by some of the girls so as to meet school costs. All these reflect lack of material resources needed to enhance education - a human resource. This lack of money for education could also be due to the general poor conditions of life that people are living in.

There is also the fact that my informants' parents were lowly or not at all educated and hence this could have lowered their interest in education as they could not envisage any value in it, thus not sending their children to school. Some of the parents might not have seen the relevance of their children attending school. For instance, Barbra's parents who did not bother sending her to school.

Preference for new children and wife within a family or home is also another factor that limited one from attending school. Sarah's narrative shows that her father stopped her from going to school because of the step mother's advice and preference for her siblings' schooling. Preference for new children may lead to parental neglect of the older children.

Lack of parental attention and consideration of girls in boarding schools is also an aspect of parental neglect. This is shown by Shamim's narrative that her parents would leave her at a boarding school without checking on her or even monitoring her progress. Parental

attention here is a social resource, without which Shamim felt abandoned and disabled to stay in and continue with school.

All in all, the girls' ability to access education has been greatly dependent on and limited by their social relationships in the spheres of the state, the community and the family. It is reasonable to argue that the family had the greatest influence in limiting their education. Issues like poverty, ignorance of the importance of education, dissolving family units and neglect of care responsibility for one's children seem to have been central in the girls' dropping out of school.

#### ***5.4 Conclusion***

All the teenage mothers interviewed are basically from a low socio-economic background. Their parents were of low class as well. Opportunities offered by the state such as education, have been useful, but insufficient to meet their special needs. The community and the family have offered some support, but simultaneously seem to contribute to the girls' disempowerment by neglecting them and providing an unfavorable environment. Overall, the familial background of the girls seems to have been contributing significantly to their difficult situation, in addition to external factors.

## Chapter six: Getting Pregnant

### 6.1 Introduction

In order to gain access to the girls' understanding of their own situation, it was necessary to explore their reasons for getting pregnant. The explanations were revealed during narrations about their childhood and also when they were asked about the father of the child or the children. This chapter presents the girls' narratives on why they got pregnant, grouped under 2 sub themes: a) getting pregnant as a pragmatic<sup>39</sup> choice; b) getting pregnant as a result of abuse/deceit.

### 6.2 Getting pregnant as a pragmatic choice

There were teenage mothers who found it rational<sup>40</sup> to get pregnant. Their choices seem to be based on conditions at home that convinced them to get pregnant as a problem solving strategy. This corresponds to Lawson's (1998) statement that the teenage girls' prior circumstances significantly influence the likeliness that they become pregnant. This is what the girls in this category narrated about their home situations:

*Shamim said: "You know my life has not been easy. During my childhood, when I was still with my parents, enjoyment was too little. My parents were so strict on us. We used not to play much or move out like other children. We had to be in the house by 8 pm. That time I was in Primary 5. One day during the big days in December I went out with my boyfriend and delayed coming home. I came back at 10 pm. I knocked on the door; they refused to open for me and told me to go back where I was. I tried to explain but they refused. So I went to my boyfriend's place. The next day when I came back, my siblings told me that father said he is going to beat me. I got so scared; I went back and told my boyfriend to give me some advice. Then he told me to be patient. He went to work and left me at his place, when he came back, he told me that we should go to the lady chair<sup>41</sup>, maybe she can help talk to my parents. We went to that lady and she took me home and tried*

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<sup>39</sup> Pragmatism here implies a consideration of consequence.

<sup>40</sup> In this case, being rational implies being reasonable (having sound judgment and practical implementation) or justifiable (on the basis of reason) (Seidman, 2002).

<sup>41</sup> By Lady Chair, she is referring to a female representative at the Local Council Level (I).

*to explain to my parents. My parents accepted me back home. But as soon as she had gone, my father got a big cane and started beating me!! I ran out of the house! He told me that since I have run, I should stay out there. I stayed outside the house. Later on, I came to the door step and slept there. I had nowhere to go. I had told my boyfriend that I had gone back home, so I could not go back there either. So I slept out there! The next day, they asked me where I had slept. I told them, but they could not believe! I feared going back to the house because my father is so tough; if he beats you, you move away with either a broken arm or at least he strains the arm.*

*So I went back to my boyfriend and told him that I couldn't sleep home, so he let me stay over. He would check on me every morning, go to work and then come back in the evening, check on me, and then he would go and spend the night at his parents' home. After some time like one month, my family started looking for me. They asked people to find me. My father had gone to the police and made a report that I ran away from home and went to stay with a boy. So when they found me, they locked up my boyfriend. All this time I was not pregnant...Then my family and his mother talked things through and the boy was released. I remember it was Friday, when they were about to take him to court. I think they made an agreement with his mother, but I don't know what they said. At that time I was home but my father said he was not going to buy any thing for me to take to school. You know I was studying for free in my school because I played for the school netball team. All that my parents had to do was to provide other things to use at school. So I stayed home, because I didn't have what to take to school. Things changed to the worse. Even if I had not done anything wrong, my father would quarrel and beat me. One time, I did not do anything at all, then my father was about to beat me, I ran off. I came to my boyfriend and he gave me a place to stay. I stayed for three days then my siblings told me that my father said that he was going to beat me and cut me to pieces and put me in polythene bags!! That I should not go back home since I ran away from there, or else they would have to lock him up!!! Still, I went back home. My mother tried to talk to me that why do I stick to that boy? Whenever my father saw me he came out with a cane, so I went back to my boyfriend. But I think the plan he was up to was to make sure the boy is locked up again because they had refused him to be seen with me at anyone time. So I came back and stayed at his place. He told me that we should move away from their*

*home. We moved, but where we moved to I stayed indoors for 4 months so that no one would notice me in the new place we had gone to. He stayed with me that time. At that moment, he told me that the way to make our parents give up was for me to give birth. I accepted. This is the time I got pregnant. Then my parents gave up. My father cooled down and even became my friend after some time.”*

Barbra, another teenage mother, declared that it was conditions at home that made her get pregnant. She stated that, *“What I remember when I was young is that I used to fall sick almost every time. All the time I was in hospital. I suffered from ‘emeeme<sup>42</sup>’. It really disturbed me so much. You know, my mother dropped me here with my father when I was still very young, and she left. At that time she brought me when my foot was sick. It was swollen. So they took me to hospital. So one time she came back, and found my father on the road and asked whether I was ok. My father told her that I died long time ago! My mother just went back. She sent her friends to come and visit. They visited and saw me. They went back and told her that I was alive, so she came and asked my grandparents and my father if she could take me to stay with her for some time. This time I was about 7 years. My grandmother refused. The next time she came home straight, and she told me to escort her to the corner house stage. When we reached there, she told me that we should go together, and that she will bring me back. She never brought me back. After some time I came back here. This is when the situation got bad!! [Shaking her head]. They all did not want me around here. Up to now, they don’t. This is why I got pregnant. I thought that if I get a man, I will stay peacefully with my child and him.... They refused also to take me to school. I even started washing for people, clothes, so that I get money to buy books, broom and pencils...So I thought if I give birth I will stay well with my family rather than being here.”*

Sarah, another mother, named conditions at home as well as giving in to societal pressure as the cause of her pregnancy. This is part of her story: *“Nze ndi mwana munaku!”* (Meaning *“I am a poor child!”*) Then she continued, *“It was last year when I gave birth*

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<sup>42</sup> This is a local Luganda word used to describe a chronic lower intestinal infection. At times it is linked to childhood malnutrition.

*to my child and my man was just gotten for me. There is a woman who got him for me. She stays in Nsambya. By then I was working since I didn't have parents to fend for me, apart from my grandfather. I really got to be with this man because of the problems I have gone through in life. But I wasn't ready. You know, at home I did not have anyone ready to look after me if I got problems or for any demands. I was told that my mother abandoned me when I was so young, and my grandfather took care of me. Father married another woman who treated me so bad. Father died and then I came to Kampala and started working. I started working in Kasubi for a certain lady, and then I left because of very low payments. When I was about to leave, that's when they got me this man. It was another woman who got me the man. So due to my situation, I accepted. I thought the man would really look after me and our home. But the man started drinking, especially when I told him I was pregnant. He always wanted to fight with me. Indeed we fought once. Then I left and went back to the village because I could not bear this. So after giving birth, I came back but the man had gotten another wife."*

Linda also stated that it was the situation at home that pushed her to get pregnant. She said, *"...you also see how it is here. There is nothing I get from here. Mother is also very harsh to me. She has always been that way. ....I was not getting most of what I need to use daily and the man was giving me food and clothes; and some money. So whenever he wanted to have sex I accepted. I found myself pregnant after some time...and the man also declined providing for me...."* Linda wasn't getting enough basic things so the man was giving her some of them and in return she accepted to have sex with him whenever he demanded it. That is how she ended up getting pregnant.

The narratives of Shamim, Barbra, Sarah and Linda communicate their reasons for getting pregnant. It appears from the narratives that the mothers had a tough life when growing up, and they justify their getting pregnant mainly with this. The tough life is well reflected in Shamim's statement that when she was still young and with her parents, enjoyment was too little, with her parents being too strict, without play or movement like other children. Also, Sarah stating that she was a poor child reflects the hard life she

faced when she was growing up. However, this is not the only reason indicated in their narratives. There are other issues worth exploration.

The girls' stories also reveal that there was a lot of tension and fragility between the girls and their families. For example, Shamim was exposed to cruelty by being beaten and threatened to be killed by the father. This shows the tension in the relationship between father and daughter. Barbra was abandoned first by the mother, and later denied staying with her mother and father by both father and mother simultaneously. Sarah was abandoned by her mother first, and then mistreated by her step mother. Linda on her side did not get her basic needs covered by her family. All these stories show tension and fragility in their life situations prior to getting pregnant.

There was also inadequate care for these children by their families, as highlighted by Sarah and Linda, who stated the lack of basic needs and a person to take care of them when they were still young as the main reasons for becoming pregnant. This further indicates dissolution of family relations and cultural ideals. Failure by the family to take care of children, brutality in the family - declaring a living child dead to its mother to mention one example - are issues that indicate dissolved family structures and norms.

There is also an aspect of dependency - culturally conditioned psychological dependency. This is highlighted for example by Sarah, Barbra and Linda who stated that when their guardians failed to take care of them, they turned to men for care. They are dependent first on their family, which is normal for children. However, when the family does not provide sufficiently for them, they turn to men thinking that they will give them what they do not have. Their dependent positions make them less able to abstain from sex that confers material benefit, whether cash or kind. But why would they turn to men at an early age? Is it because they are unable to imagine an independent life, or is it an issue of lack of access to resources? The fact that several of them are economically independent wage earners – as shown in the next chapter – indicates that this is in fact a status obtainable for young girls, and the dependency is more psychological in nature than practical.



Further assessment of their narratives reveals other aspects. For instance, Shamim's story reflects that she was rational and careful in her affairs. She seeks help from a councilor when she has problems, someone she expects her parents would listen to on her behalf. In addition to this, she played netball for a school so that she could study for free. I also find Shamim as a girl who looks out for her interests to the point of using pregnancy as a strategy to get away from her parents' torment. Moreover, when she gave birth, the child enhanced her social value, and she regained her father's recognition as a daughter and a friend. In this way, her choice to get pregnant was constructive – she is the only girl in this category of rational choice who actually obtained what she wanted from her pregnancy.

The narratives indicate that cultural ideals may be dissolving – or changing - in Uganda. For example, in Sarah's case, getting her a man at such an early age indicates a lack of acknowledgement of the girls as children in Uganda. Her story suggests a form of sexualized violence leading to manipulation of children. This development or process was partly confirmed also by the gender Officer of Kampala City Council who, during an interview, stated that “there is no government policy directly focusing on teenage mothers in the country.” The narratives presented in this section also point towards government failure to protect children. There are provisions in the Constitution and Penal Code Act which protect children, but they do not seem to be put into practice, or do not make sense to Ugandans. Therefore, the legal and political regime, possibly because of popular ideas or cultural norms, does not cover the teenage mothers' needs, including their education, their reproductive health, and material needs among other issues.

### ***6.3 Getting pregnant as a result of abuse and deceit***

#### **6.3.1 Rape**

Bridget and Anisha stated that they got pregnant as a result of rape. Bridget, working as a maid in one household in Kibuli, stated “*I did not know the father of my child. In fact I don't know him that much. I had gone to the well one evening to fetch water. I did not*

*even know that such a thing would happen to me. Even where he came from, I don't know. He got me and pushed me hard into the nearby bushes! [She waves to show the act and frowns]. After I went back home and told the people there. They took me to the hospital, but they did not say that I was pregnant. But after a while I saw myself getting bigger and bigger. I saw the pregnancy when I was here working, because my employer told me that I was pregnant but I refused to believe it. She then took me to Naguru [health centre]. That's when the doctors said that I was pregnant. My boss allowed me to stay until I gave birth. Then after I went back to the village.”*

Anisha stated that, *“In getting me pregnant, he did not love me. He had never told me. One time we were coming from the club with my friends, as you know, I was walking to go home, then he pulled me aside and raped me. Some people saw what happened and went and told the police. I was taken to hospital and the doctors said that maybe I would get pregnant... At the police, he accepted the crime and promised to look after me. That's how I got pregnant.”*

Anisha and Bridget's narratives reveal the bad environment the girls were in which exposed them to dangerous situations, thus getting pregnant. Anisha was not in school at that time, she was partying with her friends late in the night, and then she got raped as they were coming from a disco. Bridget was fetching water in the evening and she was raped. None of these incidences of rape did in fact occur in Kibuli, the study area. They occurred in the girls' birth places located quite far from the capital, Kampala. This reveals that the rural environment is also not safe for girl children, and also points to the presence of sexual abuse as a form of violence which puts girls at a risk of pregnancy. This also negates a major strategic life choice - whether and when to have children-which is advanced by Kabeer (2005) in her analysis of empowerment. It also points to community level of violence where the girls reported the crimes but still ended up pregnant. This pregnancy would have been prevented, for example, by an emergency contraceptive. Anisha and Bridget's case reveals a lack of protection from crimes of rape, and a lack of adequate health cover. It also shows the girls' exposed position in relation to the many agents that are able to exercise 'power over' them.

### 6.3.2 Deception

Deception was also advanced as a reason for getting pregnant. For example Claire, who dropped out of school in S.3, said that she became pregnant after being deceived by her boy friend. She stated that, *“The father of my baby! I don’t know him that much, because I don’t stay with him and I don’t usually see him. It was about a year after I had dropped out of school. He started enticing me with money, like shs.20, 000, and you know how men lie. I thought he was serious about everything. After sleeping with me he left me. After some time, I found myself pregnant.”*

Sandra, the only mother who dropped out of school due to pregnancy, also stated the same reason: *“My boyfriend used to give me pocket money for school so I felt obliged to him...His money convinced me to sleeping with him, and I ended up pregnant and out of school. He even convinced me to go with him to Kenya where he comes from. I ran away from school and went with him ... But they were all lies. I was mistreated by him and his family, until I decided to run back home. My grandmother was shocked to see me and the child because I ran away from school and everyone tried to look for me including the police and they all thought I was dead...”*

Hadija stated, *“There was a time our father was bankrupt and so he sent me to stay in Jinja<sup>43</sup> and maybe make some money. A brother to my grandfather stays there. I stayed there some long time and I got involved with a man who lied and deceived me about looking after me. After sleeping with me he left me. The second man stays here in Kibuli. He also promised to look after me and my child but after I got pregnant, he started changing. He no longer comes to see me, and when I go over to his house he hides. But I know that he gave up on me because he told his sister to come and tell me... I feel I have been deceived by both men and that’s why I am pregnant.”*

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<sup>43</sup> A district about 60km from Kampala.

Claire, Sandra and Hadija disclosed that they were deceived by their boyfriends through gifts of money, and ended up getting pregnant. But important to note first is the fact that Claire and Sandra who got pregnant by deceit are the two who achieved highly in education compared to the other teenage mothers. In these two cases, the generally assumed role of education as a resource that brings about positive changes in girls' cognitive ability and is essential to their capacity to question, reflect and act on the conditions of their lives and to gain access to knowledge, information and new ideas that will help them deal with the outside world (Kabeer, 2005) – does not seem to apply. The girls did not see the deception; they did not question or reflect on the consequences from the little money that they got from their boyfriends. They only felt obliged to receive the money.

This could, however, also be related to the girls' self esteem. Self esteem is not mentioned by most theories on empowerment, but I think this had a lot to do with the way the girls felt about the money and their own worth, and the fact that they gave in to their boyfriends who got them pregnant.

It also points to the issue of dependency – culturally sanctioned psychological dependency - in that Claire, Sandra and Hadija accepted gifts of money thinking that men were the only source of income, and the security of being looked after.

#### ***6.4 Conclusion***

Central topics in this chapter are agency or lack of it, and consequences for the girls of the many people who have 'power over' them. Also, it builds on the previous chapter's discussion of (lack of) resources. It shows clear limitations of the girls' agency and choices due to a vast lack of resources, and the existence of power exercised over them by their parents or guardians, the deceivers and rapists. The narratives show two main scenarios that put these girls at risk of getting pregnant at an early age: rational choice/pragmatic decision to get pregnant, and getting pregnant as a result of abuse or deceit. Both these scenarios reflect lack of resources including material (such as basic needs), social (family care, or school) and human resources (such as good education). They also

reflect abuse of power in terms of subordination, degradation, exercise of control, punishment and force exercised over the girls. Rape, on one hand is 'power over' displayed over the girls which can be interpreted as an extreme form of patriarchy which pervades ideals of femininity as highlighted by Townsend et. al. (1999). Deception on the other hand, could also have been avoided if the education that the girls received was empowering enough in terms of life skills and personal development which would enable the girls to control events around them.

The girls' pragmatism, rationality or agency is reflected when they get pregnant as a solution to their problems in life, in their cases, conditions at home. The conditions at home are characterized by their families' dissolution in terms of being brutal and uncaring for their daughters, among other aspects. However, the dissolution of their families and social relations reflects a crisis of economic insecurities in terms of lack of basics like food, clothing, housing, and lack of school fees for the children, disease among other factors. This impacts directly or indirectly on families' nuptiality<sup>44</sup>, children schooling, or even how they conceptualize children. In this case the crises (above) have disabled the girls' continuation and stay in school, as already shown in the previous chapter, which in turn affects their well being and prospects for the future. So they leave their families and unite with men/boys, thinking that this will solve their problems. The crises also changed their family composition, abandoning the girls with one parent, and the crises changed their family livelihoods, for instance failure in access to jobs due to disease. The crises also impacted on family functioning in terms of failure to provide food, clothing or things to take to school; upon which the girls within such families develop their own way of coming out of these crises, by getting pregnant. Apparently, the problem therefore is beyond the individual and the family, back to the structure.

On the other hand their rationality shows agency (ability to act). For example, Shamim's actions that involved seeking help from a councilor, running away from the father's beatings, sleeping at the door step, siding with the boyfriend throughout the torments among others can be referred to as constituent to empowerment. Kabeer (1999, p.3)

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<sup>44</sup> The way union formation is either accelerated or delayed as a result of crises. Union stability is affected.

states, “The second dimension of power relates to agency - the ability to define one’s goals and act upon them. Agency is more than just an observable action; it encompasses meaning, motivation, purpose, which individuals bring to their activity, their sense of agency, or the power within. While agency tends to be operationalized as ‘decision making’ in the social science literature, it can take a number of other forms. It can take the form of bargaining and negotiation, deception and manipulation, subversion and resistance, as well as more intangible, cognitive processes of reflection and analysis”. Against this backdrop, Shamim’s attempts to negotiate with her parents through a councilor and to resist the pain which the father bestows upon her may reasonably be described as demonstrations of aspects of agency, and even empowerment.

The agony which Shamim’s father exposes her to clearly reflects Townsend et al (1999) concept of ‘power over’, which they associate to patriarchal power. Power is the capacity to impose one’s will over the will of others, and to make others submit to the will of the one who imposes, or else they face violence. Power also operates in two ways that is, enforcing and resisting power. Shamim’s father’s power over her as a parent was obvious, but he abused this power when engaging in violence as an expression of his power. In this way, the father abuses power while Shamim resists this power. In other words, Shamim resisted and successfully fought patriarchal power, which is an indicator of empowerment.

In getting pregnant as a pragmatic or rational choice therefore, I find the girls far from being passive victims of unawareness. They clearly chose to get pregnant or to get involved with men at an early age. However, was this good or constructive choice? Choice is not so much questioned in Kabeer’s analysis of empowerment, but she deals with it as one way of thinking about power, as the ability to make choices. She also adds that some choices are strategic, such as whether and when to have children and how many, and these help frame other choices that may be of importance for the quality of ones life (Kabear, 2005). Does this imply that the girls in this chapter have made strategic life choices that have great framing significance in their lives? For all the teenage mothers who chose to get pregnant, the fact that they have children will frame their lives

forever. The question of whether this will be good or bad in the long run is hard to answer now. In the short run, it does not seem to have benefitted them much, apart from Shamim, perhaps who avoided the father's agony.

## **Chapter seven: Present Situation**

### ***7.1 Introduction***

In an attempt to capture the lived realities of the teenage mothers, I sought to find out through questions and observations what they do on a daily basis, given that - as shown in the background chapter - hardly any of them goes to school. This is to help discover their ways of making a living and the challenges they meet. This chapter also partly explores whether they see teenage motherhood as a problem or not. This chapter seeks answers to questions such as: What do you do on a normal day? What problems do you face on such a day? How do you meet your expenses?

The analytical focus in this chapter will be on **agency, resources, choices, power and challenges**. I will dwell on their undertakings in search of signs of empowerment or disempowerment; as also acknowledged by Townsend et. al., ‘women’s undertakings are the vantage points for describing their processes of self empowerment’ (1999, p.110).

One aspect that I need to highlight at the onset of this chapter is that none of the teenage mothers mentions what they do particularly for their children. They did not address their motherhood roles towards their children explicitly. Rather, they take their children as part and parcel of their daily undertakings.

### ***7.2 Mothers’ undertakings/ Labour on a normal day***

In all the interviews that I made with the teenage mothers, domestic chores were extensively discussed as part of what the teenage mothers engaged in on a normal day. All of my key informants recounted that they did household chores such as cleaning the house, cooking food, washing clothes, washing dishes, fetching water, looking after their babies and other children in the household, among other things. Even the mothers who worked for wages did work similar to the work at home, but elsewhere, and under different conditions and arrangements.

In listening to my interviews, I found that there were some main differences in the teenage mothers’ life situations in connection to their undertakings or occupations. I have



divided these life situations into four main categories based on their occupations. These include: 1) mothers busy with family work, 2) mothers working for family without pay 3) mothers working for wages and 4) the one mother who goes to school. In other words, the categories reflect that there were those who engaged only in domestic work, there were those who worked for their families in income generating activities but with no pay, there were those who worked for pay, while there was one who was going to school. These categories will structure the presentation of the girls' daily lives and the challenges they struggle with.

### **7.2.1 Mothers busy with family work**

The teenage mothers who were busy with only family work described a typical day as follows:

Claire, who lives with her mother, stated that *“I wake up and I wash the dishes, clean the house, I cook, then that’s it. I sit till the evening, then I cook supper, after that I sleep...At times when my mother comes home early, she brings maize with her, so we prepare it and she sells it at the road side.”*

Sarah, living alone, had similar days: *“I wake up every morning and I say my prayers. After, I wash clothes. If I have some money left with me, I cook some food. Then I sit and wait until it gets dark. Then I sleep.”*

Sandra, living with her grandmother, also said she does all the normal domestic chores like cleaning the house, washing clothes and cooking lunch during a day and that’s it.

### **7.2.2 Mothers working for family without pay**

The teenage mothers who worked for their family without pay had slightly different days:

Barbra, who stays with a friend, narrated that, *“I wake up every morning, and leave where I sleep then I come here at my grandmother’s place, I wash clothes, clean the*

*house, take tea, then go and help prepare lunch at my aunt's restaurant. When it's ready, I serve it out. Then I prepare supper. In the evening I bathe the children, and then when supper is ready I serve it and then go back to where I sleep.... I do all this to get food for me and my child and also to be accepted back home, especially since I won't be able to pay the rent anymore..."*

Linda who stays with her uncle's family stated that, *"I wake up every morning and help mother<sup>45</sup> with house work and also with what she has to sell in her business. We peel food, cook the cassava, and boil fish, beef, and cow hooves which mother sells at the stage<sup>46</sup> at night. I also fetch water for home use...I have to do this if I am to get food or where to sleep from mother."*

### **7.2.3 Mothers who work for wages**

Some teenage mothers revealed that they did paid labour outside the home in addition to household chores at home. As already mentioned, the work they did was similar to their work at home, but it was done under different conditions and arrangements. Anisha, staying with an elder brother, stated, *"I wake up early around 6am, and then I go to work. I prepare and serve tea at the canteen. I also take tea and serve it at Agip<sup>47</sup>. After, I wash the dishes and clean the canteen. After I peel the food and help in preparing it. The older girls cook it. I cook the sauce. When it's ready, we serve it over lunch, and then I wash the dishes. We clean up the place, and then we leave work at around 6pm. At times I stay at home and wash my clothes. At times I go for karaoke<sup>48</sup> training... I get some money from karaoke too."*

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<sup>45</sup> This is not her biological mother. She is a wife to the uncle who helped raise her after the biological mother died.

<sup>46</sup> Stage here refers to a taxi stop/ stage. However, the area has no demarcated taxi stops. I was shown where the mother sold the food stuffs and it was at the road side of a busy trading centre in the area.

<sup>47</sup> Agip is a name of an administrative village zone in Kibuli Parish. It was named after a petrol station which was operating in the area. It is about 500 meters away from the Mosque zone where Anisha was working.

<sup>48</sup> Karaoke is a form of entertainment in which amateur singers sing along with recorded music using a microphone and public address system

Hadija, who stays with her mother, said, *“When I wake up, I take a bath, clean the house then go to work. At work, we cook food and serve the food to the employees. When I get home at around 7pm, I have to care for my child. I make sure that he has showered and eaten...I also rest, as you see I am pregnant.”*

Bridget, on the other hand, stays where she is employed as a house maid. She stated that she does all the work in the house apart from cooking the food, because, as she says, *“my boss thinks I can’t cook the food from this area because I am of another tribe!”*

#### **7.2.4 The mother who goes to school**

The last category of occupations relates to the one who goes to school. Shamim, who lives alone, stated that she also goes to school besides engaging in domestic chores. She said, *“I wake up each morning at around 6 am, then I get ready. I take my baby to my mother, and then I go to school. They usually let us out of school at 7:30 pm, I pass by my mother’s place to pick my child, and then I reach home around 8:30 pm or later. When I reach home, I wash my uniform and other dirty clothes, after I do other house work like washing dishes, cleaning my house; among others...I go to a vocational school. I do tailoring.... On weekends, at times, I go to the field to train netball. There is a netball team that I play for. When we win, I earn something from it. They give me some little money. At times I get basins or a bag, among other things.”*

#### **7.2.5 Implications**

The above are descriptions of what the teenage mothers I interviewed do on a normal day. They reveal more issues pertaining to their lives that need to be highlighted. First, as already shown, the teenage mothers I interviewed are not a homogeneous category. They perhaps seem to be engaged in similar work such as cooking, cleaning, washing dishes, among other activities, but this is under different arrangements and conditions. While some are being paid for it, others do it as pay for food and lodgings, while others just do it for themselves. The different conditions and arrangements in activities and work bring about differences in access to and utilization of resources for the teenage mothers.

For instance, those living with guardians or working for their families seem to get some resources like food and shelter from such relations, while those living alone have to provide these for themselves.

Those who work for family without pay get some resources for sustenance but their statements such as, “.... *I do all this to get food for me and my child, and also to be accepted back home especially since I won't be able to pay the rent anymore...*” reveal the conditions attached to what they get. This may be understood in relation to Kabeer's statement that the resources that enhance the ability to exercise choice are acquired through various social relationships, and that embedded in the social relationships are rules and norms by which distribution and exchange occur. These rules and norms can be seen as enabling or disabling and demarcate boundaries of choice for different categories of individuals (1999). It is clearly evident from Barbra's statement that in order for her to get food, which is a resource that she needs to ensure the well being of her baby and herself, she has to do domestic chores for her relatives. In addition, it seems fairly clear that the work that Barbra does is not voluntary, but a consequence of lack of choice or alternative which comes from her lack of resources or poverty. This illustrates Kabeer's statement of there being a logical association between poverty and disempowerment because an insufficiency of the material means for meeting one's basic needs may impose painful trade-offs between important dimensions of choice (2005).

The teenage mothers' occupations also reveal power relations operating in their lives. There is, for instance, power exercised over the mothers who work for their families without pay. Barbra and Linda in a way have to accept the will of the stronger, in this case to do all domestic work at their guardians' homes and work places without pay, so that they get what they need to maintain life and also in order to be accepted at home, as in the case for Barbra. This further reflects marginality in their conditions of life. The absence of food or housing in this case does not merely represent an absence of resources but also reflects absence of choice and thus lack of power. The lack of power can be best understood in Kabeer's thinking about power as the ability to make choices (ibid, p.13); so lack of choice reflects lack of power.

The mothers who worked for wages also revealed some aspects of power operating in their lives. Bridget's account shows, for instance, that her employer limits her work based on tribal affiliation. Her 'power to' perform in cooking, for example, is played down by her employer on the basis of a tribal stereotype. Her tribe therefore contributes to limiting her chance to do what she likes to do.

Anisha, another teenage mother who works for wages, shows a different strategy to diversifying her income. She does both canteen work and karaoke, which probably contributes to her financial security. This shows her power to perform and work despite her situation. However, being a Muslim, canteen work would be acceptable, but not karaoke, which is usually done in bars and night clubs and with 'unacceptable' dress codes. In this case, she displays signs of agency or empowerment by going beyond the Islamic religious confines. Religion also reflects an aspect that can empower or disempower an individual, which is not explicitly problematized in Kabeer's discussions on empowerment.

The narrative of the mother that goes to school brings to light the skills that she has. Shamim can do tailoring. On top of this, she plays netball for a team in the area and she is earning something from this. This can be understood in relation to the concept of 'power to' as reflected by Townsend et. al. when they talk of this form of power in connection with acquiring skills, learning and making money, which makes a difference to women's lives (1999, pp.109-118). Shamim has skills which reflect personal growth and drive. The work she is engaged in is also respected by the parents who stay with her child when she is at school. Participation in these activities seems to give her a certain status in her family. This further reflects how 'personal power' can affect 'relational power' and vice versa. In this case, her 'power to' participate in school activities and play netball earns her respect from her parents who accept taking care of her child when she is busy. Note that these were the same parents who earlier brutalized her, as described in chapter Six. Despite the above described differences in what they do, the teenage mothers shared a number of challenges, which are explored in the following section.

### **7.3 Challenges faced**

There were several challenges related to the teenage mothers' life situation. These are discussed in this section. In all the teenage mothers' narratives, I find two main challenges mentioned: a) lack of food and worry over health (starvation) and, b) work over load. Challenges identified by the different girls relate to their situational category. That is, challenges faced by the mothers busy with family work, teenage mothers who work for family without pay, teenage mothers who work for wages and the one who goes to school are similar but are experienced in different constellations by the different categories of mothers.

#### **7.3.1 Mothers busy with family work**

The teenage mothers who were engaged only with domestic chores experienced challenges on a normal day which were related to the fact that they were staying at home. They notably identified lack of money for food and health care and verbal insults from guardians as their main challenges.

Sarah, the mother living alone, for instance, stated that she lacked money to keep her and her baby going. She said, *"...at times I need to eat something but I fail to do so because I have no money. Because I don't eat, my breast milk is also not enough for my child. He keeps on crying throughout the night because he is hungry, but I don't have anything to offer. I am scared because my child might fall sick yet I don't have money for treating him. He is already weak and he at times gets tired of crying due to hunger. I don't have anything to offer him."* This narrative reflects minimal living. This can be best understood with reference to Nussbaum's statement that absence of certain functions that are particularly central in human life, in this case lack of food and bodily health, is absence of life. Worry over her health and that of her child due to starvation or lack of food resources further indicates a lack of choice.

Sandra, another mother who lives with her grandmother and does not do paid work, also stated a lack of money to buy food and for emergencies<sup>49</sup> as challenges faced in a normal day.

### **7.3.2 Mothers with unpaid family work**

The teenage mothers I categorized as working for their families but with no pay mentioned almost similar challenges. For instance, Barbra said, *“There are times when I don’t have money, especially when my aunt does not leave any for me. We stay without food to eat... I also don’t have clothes to wear...I am also worried about where to stay, especially since my friend is leaving me in the house we rented. She is moving to another area. I don’t think I can manage paying for the house alone... My father and grandmother told me to go away but I come and stay here by force, but also with the help of my aunt. I had to go to the Local Council so that they let me stay here. They are always insulting me and telling me to go back to the man who made me pregnant, that when a girl gets a child she is no longer a child who needs to stay with guardians. But I don’t want to go back there. [To the place of the child’s father] I was really mistreated when I was there, especially by his mother. ... There are days when they really verbally insult me. Those are the problems I find in such a day.”* In this narrative, lack of food is mentioned as a challenge. In addition, Barbra wishes to stay alone with her child by renting but she cannot afford it. This would limit the verbal insults she gets from her family, but she can’t exercise that choice because there is no money, which is a resource. In addition, there is power misused over her, especially through verbal insults and being forced out of her guardian’s home and made to go and stay with her in-laws who mistreat her. In this way, the family is not a resource to depend on. Barbra has tried to resist this form of power by going to the Local Council to settle the case, and through doing domestic chores as ‘required’ of her so that she stays in peace with her family. She has the wisdom and courage to bargain with the power imposed on her by seeking redress from the Local Council members. This shows that despite her quite marginal position,

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<sup>49</sup> She mentions money for emergency in terms of falling sick or when her child falls sick. There should be money to pay for treatment.

she has a degree of agency and 'power to' act. This indicates a certain level of empowerment.

Linda, who also does unpaid work for her family, stated the lack of money to buy food, clothes and for medical treatment as the challenge that she faced most often. However, she highlighted another stressing challenge for her: attempts to force her to get married to a man she did not like. She stated that, "... mother brought a very old man for me, about one year ago, that I should get married to him. He is always coming here most of the time, but I refused to go with him. Whenever he comes, I go away to my friend's place. One time I got fed up of his advances and I verbally insulted him. He told mother of the incidence; and since then mother is always verbally insulting me. When I got pregnant from another man it got worse. Since then Mother quarrels and insults me most of the time.... The man used to give her money but now I don't know... When my baby died, the man started coming again and continued coming, till now. But I refused to go with that man. I hate the man because if you see him!! He is so old." This story indicates that the teenage mothers are exposed to abuse of power even from their guardians. The guardians are assumed to protect children's priorities and rights; instead they commoditize the girls to the extent that they start feeling insecure at home. On the other hand, it also shows that Linda exhibits personal power. She has agency which enables her to resist advances from a man her mother tries to force her to marry, and she chooses to throw off the fear and guilt she could have for disobeying her mother. She seems to describe a break-down of internalized oppression in terms of obedience to parents. This partly reflects Townsend et. al. statement that 'empowerment has to include the processes that lead the individual or group to being able to perceive themselves as able to occupy that decision making space' (1999, p.65). This story can also be read from the perspective of Kabeer, when she describes empowerment as involving people acquiring ability to make choices. This specifically concerns strategic life choices which are critical to one's welfare such as whether to marry and who to marry (Kabeer, 1999, p.3). In this way, it could be stated that Linda is somehow empowered.



### 7.3.3 Mothers working for money

In contrast to the above categories of teenage mothers, whose main challenges were absence of food and verbal insults from guardians, the teenage mothers who were working for wages complained of work overload, such as long days of work with multitudes of tasks performed, heavy work, low wages or cuts in them, as well as poor conditions of work. These were the challenges faced by them on a normal day, rather than absence of food.

For instance, Anisha had this to say: *“I carry a heavy load of food, tea and porridge to Agip daily. I do this almost three times a day for breakfast, lunch and evening tea. It is usually very heavy and hot... Ha!! They don’t see us as young. If you say that, they can send you away and employ another person...I carry the load without help from anyone. When I reach Agip, I serve the food, tea or porridge, and then I take the dishes back to the canteen for washing... Also making posho<sup>50</sup> is hard. It is usually tough to mingle because you are making it for many people and yet the boss needs it ready.... I get tired by all this work.”*

The teenage mothers who worked for wages also showed dissatisfaction in the amount of money they received as payment, both in terms of the total amount being too little and being deducted upon any problem or laziness the teenage mothers showed at work. For instance, Hadija expressed that *“First, there is cutting off my money, yet I go very early to work, at 6 am, and come back very late. I work a lot and the work is very difficult!! But you find at the end of the week that the money is cut...They cut the money, sincerely, based on small issues. For example, at times it is people from the company who delay to come for tea. Then the lady says that it is us who delay doing our work. Then she cuts the money. We earn 2000/= per day. But at the end of the week she can give you 6000/=; yet you are supposed to earn about 12000/= a week unless we work on a Sunday. The money is little, and then you get a cut off, the little money. You end up almost with nothing!!”*

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<sup>50</sup> Posho is a dish prepared by mixing hot water and corn, millet or cassava flour. In her story she refers to one made with corn flour. It is usually mingled in a pan, over very hot fire.

The teenage mothers who are working for pay also revealed other difficult conditions associated with the work that they do. For instance, Hadija and Anisha stated that where they work, the kitchen is stuffed with a lot of smoke, and that the big fire and heat coming out of the big charcoal stoves make them hate their work. They complained that they don't get out of the kitchen, especially when their employer is around, because their money would be cut. In addition to these hostile conditions of work, Anisha narrated that, *"At times, when I go for karaoke, the audience, especially the men, are usually drunk. They shout at us and throw empty bottles and cans of beer or soda at us when we are on stage, especially when a song bores them, yet we have to stay on stage and present...I leave karaoke quite late and at times I don't know what to tell my guardians... so I stay at a friend's place for the night."*

The teenage mothers who work outside the home for a pay did not only face challenges at work, they faced others at home too. For example, Hadija stated that, *"...here at home, the major problem is verbal insults. My mum insults me so much. May be at times there are things which make her so angry, so she quarrels and insults me. She starts from something so small then she makes it too big. This hurts me because at least my mother should be my friend. ...I also worry about falling sick. Some time back, whenever I fell sick, I would go to Slum Aid Project for help. They would send me to a doctor and pay the bills. Now, that project ended. Whenever I fall sick, I have to find my own means of treating myself and my child. I can't think of falling sick, or else I will lose my job and my child will be helpless. But also when I bring my money home, it's usually stolen. There is no other place I can keep my money. But even when I hide it so far in this house, still they get it and take it. "* In this narrative, health is again highlighted as vital for one's wellbeing, which if not catered for jeopardizes agency. However, as long as she is strong, money does not seem to be her biggest problem- as long as she is able to keep it. Theft of her money by her guardians portrays exploitation which also illustrates a vulnerability of agency and resources despite her engagement in paid labour. The people who take the money do not consider or realise its importance to Hadija and her child.

### **7.3.4 The other mothers**

Shamim, the only teenage mother who was going to school at the time of the interview, revealed that *“There are many problems that I usually find in such a day. I have to wake up quite early every day to go to school. Before I leave for school, I have to prepare my child and drop her off at my parents’ house. And when I come back from school I have to do household chores. I finish very late and am usually so tired. I go to sleep very tired and at times I wake up late yet where I go to school is far and I usually walk there. I have to be there, on time, at least by 7am because we have to clean the school before we start. It is so demanding.... I don’t get enough time to be with my daughter.”* Shamim experiences too much work as a challenge. Although her work portrays her multitasking abilities, she found her activities stressing and quite tiring. This can reasonably be understood in Townsend et. al. perspective that too much work load is an obstacle to obtain ‘power to’, especially when ‘women have to rush from task to task leaving them with no time to think or take a wider view which harms the work done’ (ibid, p.124).

However, there were also mothers who reported that they found no particular challenges on a normal day. For instance, Claire said, *“I don’t usually find any problems in any day as long as I am fine/ healthy, not sick; and as long as I can do what I am supposed to do.”* This reflects the importance that Claire attaches to her bodily health and well being. To her, she finds no problems with the domestic work she does but her concern is on her health. The narrative shows that probably she faces health problems. Health here is a resource that she finds vital in her life.

Bridget, another teenage mother working as a maid and staying at her employer’s house also affirmed that nothing was so hard for her in a given day that she would call it a challenge.

### **7.3.5 Implications**

The challenges the teenage mothers reported to face on any normal day depended on how they live, who they live with and how they work. In the first instance, the mothers who performed only domestic chores and those who worked for their families without pay

faced more economically related challenges, such as lack of money for basic needs like food, clothing, treatment and housing. Their situation illustrates Kabeer's (1999) statement that lack of material resources in a more conventional economic sense can serve to delimit people's ability to exercise choices. These mothers merely do chores expected of them and utilize resources given to them. This is unlikely to add up to better choices, especially for those who work for their families without pay.

The mothers who do only domestic chores and simply 'sit' at home after their chores seem to have more control over their time as a resource than those engaged in waged work or school, but suffer from lack of other vital resources like food. 'Sitting at home' or not being in action limits and fails them, because they get no resources, and this probably deprives them of opportunities and resources outside the domestic sphere. This lack of agency is likely to imply a lack of capacity to define one's choices and pursue one's goals. Lack of agency and resources in this case, brings fourth a double jeopardy which could imply lack of capabilities. This appears to support what Sen states in Kabeer (1999, p4) that 'resources and agency constitute capabilities, the potential that people have for living the lives they want, of achieving valued ways of being and doing.' In this case, it would not be wrong to state that the teenage mothers are not living the lives they want or achieving valued ways of being and doing.

Those who work for pay seem to be better off than others in terms of getting the material things they need. According to their narratives, they do not complain of lack of food or clothes but they face other fragilities in their work situations such as work over load, lack of control over their work situation, low pay and bad work conditions. The work they do seem to enable them to acquire other resources, but resources which do not guarantee a significant change in their life situation. Their choice to work may be described in term's of Kabeer's description of 'less consequential choices that may be important for the quality of ones life, but do not constitute its defining parameters' (1999, p.3). For instance, having empty bottles and cans of soda and beer thrown at you at work indicates a 'bad or unfavorable choice' of work which could help in meeting survival needs but not contributing to a sense of liberty or empowerment. But perhaps it also implies that even

in the presence of agency, knowing what to choose may not be easy. Knowing of choices is not problematized by Kabeer in her analysis of empowerment. It is probable that people make an unfavorable choice even in the presence of agency and resources. Work that is neither dignified, well paid nor in good environment is equally not empowering.

The teenage mother who goes to school complains of having a multitude of tasks to do but it seems that she achieves more out of what occupies her than the others. In the first place, there is value attached to what occupies her, which is also approved by those around her, especially her family. Secondly, she has skills that she can use to get other things that she needs in life. Choices seem to exist for her or seem to be attainable, which further enhances her ability to choose. Her schooling seems to be a strategic choice that probably will have greater significance in terms of better opportunities in life.

#### ***7.4 Conclusion***

All in all, the difference in life situations and occupations of these girls reflects a difference in level of empowerment. Living with family can be a resource for some to a certain extent, but can also be a challenge in terms of passive agency. The double nature of family as the reason why many survive and where they experience most difficulties, proves that family may be a dubious resource.

In addition, the level of resources probably determines conditions of living and vice versa. For instance, lack of food affects bodily health. Nussbaum (2000) partly defines bodily health as being adequately nourished. This implies that the absence of food is a typical mark of absence of life, thus some of the teenage mothers live a marginal life. Another view is that of Marx as highlighted in Nussbaum (2000) that a starving person does not use food in a fully human way, implying a way infused by practical reasoning and sociability. Food is also an aspect of freedom and general social ethics as highlighted by Sen (1987). The lack of food here implies lack of freedom and ethics. Sen argues that the freedom people enjoy such as leading a decent life, including freedom from hunger, from avoidable morbidity, and from premature mortality is quite centrally connected with

the provision of food. Further compulsion to acquire enough food can force people to do things that they resent doing and may lead them to accept lives with little freedom.

On the other hand, other resources like some teenage mothers' jobs are too minimal to guarantee any transformation, but are valuable for effectiveness of one's life. Work is one aspect that is generally encouraged as an avenue to women's empowerment, if it is dignified and in good environment. It does not necessarily apply to the kind of work these mothers do. Lack of resources might limit exercise of choice, but might not limit agency. Agency and resources themselves do not guarantee transformation but can probably enhance effectiveness and sustenance in one's life. However, even in the presence of resources, choice is not something you will always know. In this case, the teenage mothers have a tiny scope of agency and resources within which they operate. This does not facilitate transformation, a fact that is shown by the absence of discussions of long term challenges in their narratives. Their horizons are short, and their focus is on daily survival. Ideas for long term improvement of their living conditions are scarce, as will also be discussed in the next chapter.

## **Chapter Eight: Coping with Life and Future Aspirations**

### ***8.1 Introduction***

Despite the challenges that the teenage mothers face in their daily life and activities, they keep on going. This chapter discusses how the mothers cope and what they aspire to do or be in the future. This chapter has two parts. Part one, coping with life covers the strategies the teenage mothers use to survive. Part two, future aspirations explores the future hopes of the teenage mothers.

### ***8.2 Coping with life***

This section discusses how the teenage mothers cope with life, and how they find solutions to the challenges they face. The section seeks to answer questions such as: How do you meet your expenses in terms of food, health, clothing and accommodation? These necessities are considered a central part of the teenage mothers' resources in this study. The girls' narratives revealed that they ensure their survival through public support systems, close networks, and personal initiative. But these mechanisms were of poor quality and therefore inadequate in fully addressing the needs of the teenage mothers, given that they were temporary, giving short term remedies, not exclusive to teenage mothers' core problems, and not addressing the broader structural issues such as poverty, neglect, lack of respect for women and girl children among others. These issues will be analysed in this section. I start by examining the three mentioned support mechanisms for survival: Public support systems, Proximal/ Close networks and Personal initiative.

#### **8.2.1 Public support systems**

In Uganda, there are some public services in place to support teenage mothers and from the interviews I learnt that the teenage mothers used these public support systems. These may not be specific to teenage mothers, as stated during an interview with one Kampala City Council (KCC) Officer<sup>51</sup>, but are general programs which are provided by

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with the Gender officer Kampala City Council on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2008. Kampala City Council is the government body responsible for all affairs of the City. Its mission is to provide and facilitate the delivery

government and some Non - Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and which support vulnerable children. The KCC officer identified Universal Primary Education (UPE), free health services from government hospitals and skills trainings provided by some NGOs as some of the services provided to vulnerable children, including teenage mothers.

While UPE has brought more poor children into school and increased literacy levels among children of school going age, many children have not benefited fully from the program. For instance, seven of the teenage mothers in this study dropped out of school at very low levels of primary schooling due to associated costs in UPE for scholastic materials and food or due to ignorance and lack of trust in that kind of education by parents, among other factors, which are already highlighted in Chapter Five.

In relation with health services, one mother, Sandra, reported to have utilized the free health services provided by the government. She stated that, “...*When I fall sick, usually I go to Mulago hospital<sup>52</sup> at the government section, where they give free services. But it's also hard because I don't have money for transport to get there, so at times I walk to the place. I also usually find a long queue and the medicine is not always there, you have to buy it yourself... and the doctors are so rude that at times I fear going there and I even ask myself why I went there.*” Sandra's story supports the claim of the KCC Gender Officer that vulnerable children get free health services from government hospitals. However, Sandra complains of lack of money for transport to get to the hospital because she has no income, the long queues which almost certainly indicates that many people opt for these services because they cannot afford to pay for private treatment, the lack of medicine at the hospital which makes it worthless to go there in the first place, and the rudeness of the doctors which further scares her from going there. The rudeness of the doctors may indicate either a frustration of the doctors about their work or a frustration against the teenage mothers due to their situation. Sandra's complaints also correspond with findings from a study done by Atuyambe (2008) in Uganda about adolescent

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of quality, sustainable, customer oriented services, efficiently and effectively. It is mandated by the Ministry of Local Government, whose mandate comes from the Executive.

<sup>52</sup> This is the largest hospital in Uganda and it is the National Referral hospital. It is government owned and operated.



mothers and their health seeking behaviours. Atuyambe found that health workers were not responding adequately to adolescent maternal needs which discouraged them from seeking professional medical care. The health workers were reportedly harsh and abusive; always blamed and intimidated the teenage mothers; were careless in terms of attending to the teenage mothers, lacked professional ethics, especially confidentiality, and that some teenage mothers experienced physical violence from health workers. These factors discouraged the girls from seeking and utilising public health care, and they ended up seeking help from unprofessional people like traditional herbalists or simply stayed at home. Atuyambe found that access to transport was another obstacle in the process of seeking health care, because the most available means of transport were bicycles and motorcycles, which were seen as inappropriate for sick, pregnant adolescents and more so for a woman in labour. These appeared to be cheapest, but still not affordable for most adolescents since they did not have an income. All these aspects, as highlighted by Sandra as well, seem not to make government health services ‘free’ as claimed by the KCC official. These issues also depict the wider structural factors that make this coping mechanism hard to utilize, such as poverty, neglect, and the socially constructed disrespect for women and girls.

One of the NGOs providing support to vulnerable children is Slum Aid Project (SAP)<sup>53</sup>, which was also the gate keeper to my study area. In the interview I had with one SAP officer<sup>54</sup>, she stated that SAP, at that time of the interview, was running two key thematic programs on domestic violence and child sexual abuse and exploitation. The focus of the programs was on HIV and reproductive health as well as rehabilitation of young girls involved in prostitution. Through the domestic violence program, SAP provides counseling and mediation to domestic violence victims, providing referral services for legal aid to other line NGOs like FIDA Uganda and emergency relief in terms of money for transport, and referral to medical services through the SAP contact doctor at Rubaga

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<sup>53</sup> SAP is a local NGO whose vision is to ensure that slums are communities where people live and enjoy dignified lives; and the Mission is to strengthen the capacity of slum dwellers to challenge and effect sustainable positive change in life through research and documentation, capacity building and advocacy.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with the Program Officer Community Development- SAP, conducted on 15th July 2008. SAP is an NGO that operates in seven Slum communities including Kibuli.

Hospital<sup>55</sup> who attends to victims. SAP's programs, she stated, were for all vulnerable people in slum communities, not specific to teenage mothers, but facilitated teenage mothers' wellbeing in some ways. For instance, in the child sexual abuse and exploitation program, SAP has been trying to rehabilitate some girls at a risk of prostitution through sensitization seminars, workshops, and vocational training skills of the girls' choice. Shamim, one of the teenage mothers, was part of this program, as a student in a vocational institute, but later dropped out because the NGO did not have enough fund to support her program. In the last chapter we saw how being part of this training increased her resources in terms of respect, family support, and marketable skills, and we can only imagine the negative impact of having to terminate the course prematurely. This reflects on the limitations of NGOs in solving people's problems in the sense that the NGOs do not have money and the problem is too big for them to handle.

The police, as noted from the interview I had with the Community Liaisons Officer (CLO) of Kabalagala<sup>56</sup> Police Post, also provide remedy to teenage mothers but usually in cases relating to child neglect rather than defilement. The police try to reconcile the partners, guide them and educate them on how to have their homes properly run, to ensure that the child grows up properly. For those who refuse to oblige, the law is then considered and these are further advised or punished by court. If the partners are completely unemployed, the Police usually involved their parents, especially the boy's parents. This is acknowledged by Sarah, another of the teenage mothers, who said that she got some kind of help from the Police. She stated, "...*Different people feel pity and give me some money. Like Jaja's*<sup>57</sup> *relatives. They can give me shs.1000 to live on. But most of the time I stay hungry. I only take tea and sleep. For clothes, I still have the old clothes I bought when I was working. This man has not bought me any clothes...He is the one who pays the rent but only because I reported him to the police...*" The narrative re-emphasizes the marginality in Sarah's life situation, especially when she says that most of the time she stays hungry, with tea as the only food for the day, yet she has a child to

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<sup>55</sup> This is the oldest Catholic hospital in Kampala, Uganda.

<sup>56</sup> Kabalagala is a name of a Parish. Here, it refers to a police post that ensures law and order in Kabalagala and Kibuli Parishes.

<sup>57</sup> Jaja is a Luganda word for grandparent. She refers to her landlord as grandfather because of his old age not because he is a family member.

breast feed. However, she seems to get help from her child's father because of police involvement. This supports what the CLO of Police stated. The Police try to force the spouse to provide the basics needed by the child. This also highlights how the police handle such cases when reported. The attention is given to the welfare of the baby, not the teenage mother, who is also a child. It further reveals how teenage mothers are perceived by the society, as adults. This is also illustrated by the case of Barbra, who is sent away to go and stay with the man who made her pregnant, because due to pregnancy she is thought to be old enough to fend for herself. On the other hand, involvement of the spouse or parents of the boy (if not employed) also reflects cultural gender stereotyped roles or responsibilities that portray women or girls as required to be supported, and then primarily by men or their in-laws, not the government. Kabeer's concept of 'effectiveness' of agency (2003, p.15), may be used to shed light on this situation. Involving the child's father to provide for the child does not solve the woman's underlying problem of dependency, it just makes her more efficient in carrying out 'given' gender roles and responsibilities of motherhood. This solution does not lead to 'transformative' agency, in terms of enhancing her ability to challenge the position she is relegated to.

In an interview<sup>58</sup> with the Vice Chairperson Makindye Division<sup>59</sup> who is also a Court Clerk, it was stated that the government has no clear policy for teenage mothers, but that they are protected under other laws like law against defilement and children's statute. He stated that at the Division level, there was only a probation office which ensures that the partner of the teenage mother takes care of his child. But as already shown, the police receive many child neglect cases, and cases of defilement are ignored. A probable reason for this is, as suggested during an interview with the Vice Chairperson Makindye Division, that the defilement law does not make sense to many Ugandans and is considered elitist. He stated that defilement is a capital offence, tried by Grade one Magistrate, but if it involves transmission of HIV, it is taken to the High court. The Vice chairperson added that due to poverty, parents drop such cases when the defilers pay

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<sup>58</sup> Interview conducted on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2008.

<sup>59</sup> It is one of the five administrative divisions of Kampala District, The capital city of Uganda. The other divisions are Central, Rubaga, Nakawa, and Kawempe Divisions.

them some money, thereby neglecting the consequences for their children. Evidence to present to court is hard to extract in such cases and the cases take so long to be heard that they come to court when the girl is fully grown and it seems that nothing can be done, and when the people involved have given up on the case, given the costs involved. He stated that at times the suspects become hostile and threaten these girls, so they deny the case. Also many people fear hatred from fellow villagers so they do not report such cases, and others simply do not know the procedures. This shows how hard it can be for vulnerable teenage mothers to seek public redress. It further shows the broader social or cultural structures in which the legal system is embedded, and which makes it hard to pursue redress.

All in all, public networks may not be as supportive to problems faced by teenage mothers. UPE, free government health services, police and NGOs have limitations which have made it hard for teenage mothers to utilize the services they provide. In other words, although the public networks are in place to support poor people, it does not lead to empowerment.

### **8.2.2 Proximal networks**

Most of the interviews with the teenage mothers show that it is proximal or closer networks that they draw on most for survival, such as their parents or guardians, spouses, friends and neighbours. For instance, Sarah, the one who utilised the police for redress, also gets some help from *Jaja* - her land lord - who sees her hungry and gives her money for food. She also stated that, “...*At times, I go to my grandfather’s place and I dig. There was a time when I went and dug, that was after I had delivered. I spent some time in the village. My friend had asked me how I would manage without having any money on me. She told me that we should go and start digging. So we woke up early, around 5am. We dug till 2 pm, in that scorching sun!! We got money out of selling our produce and it kept me going for some time...*” Sarah’s narrative reflects ‘power with’ at work which is ‘the capacity to achieve with others what one could not have achieved alone’ (Townsend, et. al., p.31). She joined her friend to dig and this made them earn money out of selling their produce.

Sandra, the one who goes to a public hospital for treatment, also relies on her proximal networks: *“The father of the child brings some money to me. But he does not give me every time, but I plan with the little he gives me, and I save some. I stay with my grandmother and it is her house...”*

Claire stated, *“It is my mother who is helping me but it’s not much because she is not earning enough. She works in the coffee beans factory. When she comes back, at times we sell Maize at the road side...but, she has lots of things to cater for- she pays for the house, school fees for my two younger siblings and buys the food. In other words, she is stranded, she is just there... she tries a lot to get someone to lend her money so that she can start a business to help her get enough money which will help all of us through... the father of the child does not help me with anything. I hate going there to ask him for anything because whenever I go there we end up quarrelling and it’s me who gets ashamed. I gave up on him.”* In this narrative, it is clear that her mother provides her with what she can. Her spouse does not help and she gets ashamed when she tries to go to him for help. This indicates the psychological consequence of teenage pregnancy which in this case makes Claire quite powerless in relation to her spouse as well as in relation to access to resources.

Barbra stated, *“I don’t have where to get most of the things that I need to use. At times when my aunt sees me and the baby starving, she gives me some food. At times the father of the child brings for us some money. But he does not stay here and he works quite far away. But when he comes to town, he at times brings us some little money... But I think I am going to give the child to her father because I can’t handle looking after her and myself.”* In this narrative, her aunt provides her with some food. It seems her spouse also provides some money, but it is insufficient to the rather extreme degree that she thinks of giving the child to the father, because she can’t take care of both herself and her child.

Linda, another teenage mother, stated: *“When I help mother with work here at home, at least I can get food. At times her son brings something home. But if there is no food, we drink tea and that’s it. Then we sleep and see whether we can get some food the next*

day... *We have this room<sup>60</sup>, it is where I sleep with my brother and sister. That is how I survive.*” Also in this case, it is the relatives who provide the teenage mother with some of what she needs in life, but on the condition that she works for them. In addition, a small room shared by three is far from ideal living conditions. Apart from reducing their privacy it puts the occupants at a risk of poor health. This may have been a contributing factor to the death of her child, as already revealed in the first empirical chapter.

Shamim, the one who goes to school, stated that her family and her spouse help her to meet her expenses. She said that *“I don’t pay for the room where I stay. It belongs to my boyfriend and his family. My child is always looked after by my mother who stays with her most of the time when I am at school. At times my boyfriend gives me some money but not all the time. He got a job recently, so I get some money from him. Most of the time, I get the food from my family. My mother sends me cooked food. At times my father also gives me money for my well being here because he also started working.”*

From the above narratives, it is clear that proximal networks provide the teenage mothers with some resources such as shelter and food. However, the provisioning is pre conditioned to aspects such as working for family without pay, among other issues. The pre conditions indeed limit the teenage mothers’ agency and achievements in one way or another.

### **8.2.3 Personal initiatives**

Some of the teenage mothers also take personal initiatives to support their survival. For instance, Anisha, one of the teenage mothers working for pay, stated: *“When I fall sick, I look after myself...except when I don’t have anything, then my brother helps to take care of me. For clothes, I buy them myself. Even food I buy for myself, because at home they run a restaurant so they eat there, but me I have to buy it myself.”*

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<sup>60</sup> Small room, with one bed and a spare mattress which she stated she shared with the sister on the floor. There is a wooden box which contains their clothes. There are no windows and no ventilators; the door is the only opening to the house.

Hadija, who works in a restaurant, stated, *“The food, I get it from work. I leave work with something for my child as well. The house was my grandparents’, so I don’t pay rent. For treatment, I pay for myself. I buy my own clothes and any other things I need.”*

Bridget, *“I stay here with my employer. I eat with them and sleep in their house. They help me too with some work. They also pay me 20,000/- at the end of the month. At least I have where to stay and what to eat. I just save the money to help my child and also to buy things that I might need in the future.”*

Barbra stated that, *“...I also know how to plait hair. At times people call me to plait their hair, so I make some money which helps me through...”*

Linda, stated that, *“When I fall sick, I use herbs. But at times you can’t find them or you need to go very far to get them...”* Here Linda exhibits a sense of agency when she searches and uses herbs for treatment. This form of agency can be best understood in Kabeer’s perspective of passive agency, which means action taken when there is little choice. But it also indicates an option/alternative in her health seeking behaviour, which connotes choice. Ability to make choices is having power or being empowered as suggested by Kabeer (2005). Linda’s choice, in this case, can further highlight either the lack of knowledge on available professional health services provided by the government, or lack of access in terms of time or money for payment or transport to those services. Her choice of using herbs for treatment may provide a short term remedy to a simple illness but may result into serious complications, given that she has not got any professional help in terms of treatment.

In general, many of the teenage mothers seem to take personal initiative to get what they need in life. However, the way they do it reflects minimal agency. The teenage mothers use public support systems, nearby networks and personal initiatives as means through which they survive. Proximal networks and personal initiatives seem to be the main sources of their survival. However, there seems to be ambiguity in both public support systems and proximal networks in ways of providing support to the teenage mothers.

UPE, as observed in chapter five, was not attended by many of the teenage mothers as their parents were suspicious of the whole program, and yet the associated costs were high. Public hospitals have long queues, lack medicine, and have harsh and abusive health workers, among other issues which limited teenage mothers from getting professional treatment. The Police also ignore some issues like defilement and focus on welfare of the babies only, not redressing sexual violations against teenage mothers. The nearby networks, such as the teenage mothers' families, are also not very supportive. Other kinds of proximal networks like friends, spouses and neighbours are temporary and floating. There does not seem to be any reliable, long term mechanisms supporting the teenage mothers in their efforts to cope with their situation. The mechanisms illustrate a lack of resource, which are dependant on limiting social relationships. The teenage mothers' agency is also minimal or passive, and indeed they achieve less for their mechanisms.

### **8.3 Future aspirations**

This section discusses the future aspirations of teenage mothers, what they hope to be or do. I focus on their future aspirations towards work, children and marriage because these themes are what they mostly discussed.

#### **8.3.1 Work**

Some selected views on the future work aspirations of teenage mothers are:

*"... I wish I can start my own saloon. I know how to plait hair but I need to learn hair dressing and styling, but it's so expensive...With only plaiting hair, I can't get enough for the baby and me..."* (Barbra)

*"I wish I can learn cookery and catering because I love cooking. I would work in a hotel or make my own restaurant. Then I would save and I could have my own house, and then look after my children..."* (Bridget)



*“In future I want to run a business, selling women’s expensive clothes and shoes...I would like to do tailoring and design but I did not study enough and I have no skill... but I can start by selling fried cassava, but still no money for capital...” (Sarah)*

*“... given my situation, I feel I can do anything that comes my way as long as am making good money. For all work most employers need people who have gone to school, but I have not gone to school. So, I can’t say I want this job or that...” (Linda)*

On a whole, the teenage mothers’ work and career choices are more vocational. They do not aim for work attainable after academic or theoretical schooling through primary, secondary and university levels. Two aspired for tailoring, design and embroidery, three for saloon hair dressing and styling, one for nursing, while two aspired for hotel management and cookery. One was unsure but open to anything that would come by. However, most of the teenage mothers were sceptical about getting such work because they lacked qualifications such as certificates of vocational courses<sup>61</sup>, skills and experience. All the teenage mothers said they wanted to go back to school to achieve the minimal requirements needed for entry to courses in which they wanted to develop their mentioned careers. However, six of the teenage mothers seemed not to have any clues on how they can acquire the minimal requirements needed for the courses, because they had very low educational qualifications and had no hope of getting back to study because of associated costs.<sup>62</sup> But the two that had reached a higher level of Senior three (S.3), had much hope of completing the Ordinary level in secondary schooling so that they can attend their career courses of choice. For instance, Claire, who stopped in S.3, stated, *“I want a job when I have finished school. I want to be in a medical field. I want to be a nurse... because I am interested in only that. All these other jobs, the way I see it, they are just a burden and a waste of time, and just to continue disturbing parents... I pray mother gets enough money, then I might be able to go back to school and finish just one year, the ordinary level, and then I will be able to go for a nursing course...I wish I can*

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<sup>61</sup> Vocational courses are non academic career specific courses related to a specific area of employment, vocation or industry sector. These tend to be practical and skills-focused.

<sup>62</sup> Although primary education is ‘free’ in Uganda, there are associated costs to be met for scholastic materials, time, among others. However, given that the mothers do not have even food, and have a child now, they may be not in position to attain this.

*get a sponsor for at least one more year.” Sandra stated that, “I want to do a course in hair dressing and styling. This will support me and my children in the future. I probably need to go back to school and finish just one year of O’level, and then I will be able to do that course.”*

Shamim also seemed to be definite of her career choice. This is because she was already attending a vocational school of tailoring, design and embroidery. She stated, “... *With the course I am doing, I can get a sewing machine and make money, but this is not all I wish for because this money might not be enough. I wish I finish this course with a very good grade, and then get a job in those big companies making student uniforms and sportswear, or I will get a government job. This will make me get enough money for me and my child...*” However, she did not actually have the minimal requirements expected of her to join this course because she had not reached or completed the ordinary level of secondary schooling. In fact, she had not even finished primary level schooling. Probably, the vocational school accepted her to attend because she was part of a project that aimed at supporting girls in slum communities to acquire some skills which they can use to enhance their well being. This partly portrays that power to do or to be, and that empowerment may be enabled by outsiders as well as the individual itself. In this case the Non Governmental Organization funding the project can ensure what Shamim can do through provision of funds and by foregoing institutional rules that otherwise would have barred her from attaining her skills if she had applied for it single-handedly or unaided.

The girls’ work choices show that the girls have modest, vocational training related plans and dreams. In addition to the low level of education of most of them, other factors may also help explain the modesty of their plans. Negative experiences from academic schools as stated in Chapter 5 - such as being beaten at school, failure to attend or complete school due to poverty and parental neglect and also their social economic situation as shown in chapter 7 may be such explanatory factors. In addition, because of their meager resources, it makes sense to aim for reasonably priced, short term engagements which provide skills that could easily get them jobs, since such training can be a quicker

solution to their everyday needs. In this way, their choice of vocational careers seems realistic.

The teenage mothers' choice of careers in tailoring, catering, hair dressing, design and nursing also depicts a gender inequality in division of roles in the education system, curriculum, and society at large which is likely to encourage girls to consider themselves, as suitable for subjects pertaining to reproductive roles in society. This Kabeer (2005, p. 17) calls "gender stereotyping in the curriculum which reinforces traditional gender roles in society and acts to limit the kind of futures that the girls are able to imagine for themselves". While in some developed countries these divisions may not be visible, in the Ugandan context, the gender divide in roles is highly visible. These teenage mothers imagine and hope to do courses and careers related to their reproductive roles in society, hopes that may be derived from processes Kabeer describes as "equipping girls to be better wives and mothers, or increasing their chances of getting a suitable husband. These are legitimate aspirations given the realities of the society. However, they do little to equip girls and women to question the world around them, and the subordinate status around them" (ibid, 17).

Their choices also illustrate the fact that vocational education and careers are mostly known as a preserve for and associated with activities of the lower classes, who are meant for hard physical labour, or those who have failed to comprehend academic knowledge. Kabeer comments on this fact when stating that "the less hidden content of the educational curriculum also mirrors and legitimates wider social inequalities, denigrating physical labour (largely the preserve of poor people) and domestic activities (largely the preserve for women)" (2005, p.17). It also reflects what Tamale (2002) and Okou (2002) have observed that, vocational schools in Uganda tend to be joined as last resort, because vocational/ technical education historically has been considered education for those students who fail to make it through the straight path, i.e. from primary to secondary to university. They claim that the general public sees this type of education as cheap, patronized by intellectually inferior students and associated with non-prestigious blue-collar employment. Okou (2002) states that even the parents who regard their children as

failures and a disappointment ‘dump’ them into vocational institutions as a last resort to keep them in school. The situation has been made even worse by the fact that technical and vocational education has been terminal, with no vertical mobility and access to higher education.

Although the career plans of the teenage mothers thus clearly reflect very modest aspirations, even these plans in practice may seem hard to realise. Follow-ups of Shamim revealed that she dropped out of the vocational school due to lack of funding. Shortly after our interview, several others will have to do some studying in ordinary school before they are able to embark on vocational training. This coupled with care for and upbringing of their children and their very poor economic situations, make even their modest plans seem more like dreams. Because some of the teenage mothers see such plans as unrealistic, they choose to be passive agents – taking on what comes their way. Those with most schooling are the most hopeful ones, which indicates that schooling increases agency and the possibility to achieve one’s aims or goals. But, in general it seems that all the teenage mothers will have to depend on external sources to realize their plans. Will this be possible? On what terms? The external sources also seem short termed and therefore unreliable.

### **8.3.2 Children and marriage**

Some of the views regarding bearing children and marriage were that:

*“...I wish to have two children in the future; but this time I need to have a good job and good life so that I can care for them because I don’t want to lose another child [through death]...”* (Linda)

*“I hope to have two children in the future... I just wish they do not find life so tough. I wish they study and pass highly, and then they will be able to help me in the future...”* (Anisha)

*“...sincerely I don’t know, but I have two already... I wish God gives me life to see them through school. I don’t want them to live a life like mine... I need them to be good mannered children...”* (Hadija)

The teenage mothers discussed the number of children they wanted to have and the kind of life they wished for them. In terms of the number of children, four wished to have two children in total, three wished to have only one, one wished to have three and one was undecided, but she already had two.

The teenage mothers hoped they could provide the best for their children, apart from Barbra who stated that if it all does not go well, she will give the child to the father (her spouse) because she did not have enough resources to keep the baby. All the teenage mothers hoped their children study and get a better life than the lives they live. They hoped their children would be, when summarized, “*good mannered, obedient and God fearing.*” The mothers also hoped that their children will help them in the future.

In view of their narratives, the teenage mothers show that they aspire for fewer children than what most Ugandan women have, where the average number of children a woman produces in her lifetime is seven (UBOS, 2007). Ability to choose the number of children to have is a sign of empowerment, in terms of taking a strategic choice. Ability to reflect on a limited number of children given their life situations also illustrates empowerment. However the possibility to have that limited number of children in the future is ambiguous – with the existing male dominance which made some pregnant through rape or with the poor health services which can not even provide an emergency pill to prevent pregnancy. On the other hand, the narratives show a sign of vulnerability, an indication that they are not able to support their children or themselves. For instance, Babra is considering giving the child to the father, Linda attributes the death of her child to a lack of material resources like money, and the rest hope their children will not live a tough life like they have. Therefore, the relationship between the choice or aspiration to limit the number of children and empowerment of teenage mothers seems to be double – edged, given their vulnerable situation, presence of patriarchal power and poor health systems.

The narratives further reveal that their hope for children is a form of insurance. On one hand, it is a reflection of their poor social economic status. It is also a reflection of failed state policies and social security systems. For instance, the mothers have an experience of

being frustrated by the poor quality public health and public education services. Additionally, although the teenage mothers missed out on good educational opportunities, they see it as a form of empowerment and a path to a secure future for their children.

Marriage, as discussed by the teenage mothers, was understood in terms of a union of a man and a woman traditionally or religiously, in a church or mosque. Traditionally, they mentioned a man paying bride price while religiously, they mentioned weddings happening in churches or mosques. They also showed knowledge of polygamy and other forms of unions that are considered as marriage, specifically cohabitation that they see much in their community. Although they have children, and some stay with the baby's father now and then, none considered themselves married or cohabiting. Shamim was the only one staying in a room provided by her partner's parents.

In relation to marriage, the teenage mothers were hesitant to join marriage in their current status. I expected that they would seek to get married as soon as possible, and I was surprised by their hesitance. Instead, they all wished to join marriage at a later stage, after they have secured a future for themselves and for their children in terms of having a good career and livelihood. This hesitation could be due to frustrations in their past and current relationships which showed that such liaisons can be "empty" after all. This may indicate, as Townsend et. al. (1999) state that real empowerment is from within rather than from without. Additionally, it points to a view that inter-dependence in marital or spousal relationships is most easily achieved after independence, self development and self empowerment.

Some teenage mothers stated that the men who made them pregnant are not there to help them in their time of need, and this makes them hesitant to joining marriage. For instance, Sarah stated, *"I don't want to get married...ok, not now. Looking at my situation, the father is not here to help me. He does not even like his child. I think all men are like this... I can't get married now..."*

Barbra said, *“I like marriage because you get respect because you are a married woman and at least you are assured of spouse support, but not now. The father of this child left me for his elder wife who I did not know existed. I thought he would at least care for me but he did not...he only helps once in a while...I will get married after setting up a good life for myself...”*

In addition to reflection of their own situation, some teenage mothers were hesitant to join marriage because of what they saw happening around them, where a lot of married men were not supporting their families as well as the problems they saw other marriages going through. For instance, Claire said, *“I don’t want to get married ... I see many problems in people’s marriages and with that I can’t get married except when I have finished studying and I have settled down with a good job. Many women surrounding us here are in and out of their marriages, they are battered and their children are also not well. There is no point in living such a life...I also see my mother, she used to be a fat woman but now she is too slim because my father is no longer there to support us. He does not even stay with us...so marriage will come later, after I have settled down.”*

Hadija stated, *“Most women in this area are married but lamenting at how their husbands are treating them. They tell you all horrible things men do to them, then it makes you think twice... but even me, I have seen what men can do. I have these two children from two spouses, but they all left. They are very nice at first, and then they let you go in a second... so for me, marriage has to wait.”*

In relation to the above narratives, they show that what the girls hope for from the men, they never achieved. The psychological dependence on men for love, care, and material support that was indicated in their stories of how they got pregnant is, it seems, completely out of the picture. Some of the girls saw pregnancy as a source of resources at first, but later realized that this was not the case, and now they are mentally more independent of men.

#### ***8.4 Conclusion***

The teenage mothers have different ways of coping with life, including public support systems, proximal networks, and personal initiatives. Of these, personal initiatives – or the girls' own agency – is what they rely on more. With respect to future aspirations, the expressed hopes about work, children and marriage demonstrate a mixture of empowerment and vulnerability. For instance, they have modest plans of vocational careers, fewer children, and later marriages which reflect choice and agency. At the same time, the plans reflect their vulnerability because of the overbearing broader social economic situation characterized by poverty, patriarchy and vast lack of social security systems and services.



## **Chapter Nine: Conclusions and Recommendations**

### ***9.1 Conclusions***

This chapter is a summary of the most important aspects of this study, which focused on teenage mothers from one slum in Uganda's capital, Kampala. The main objective of this study was to explore the perceptions of unmarried teenage mothers of their own lives, and their thoughts about what should be done for them to enhance their empowerment. The main research questions concerned what the characteristics of the teenage mothers interviewed were; how they defined their situation in terms of causes, conditions of living, consequences, and challenges faced; whether they perceived teenage motherhood as a problem; what needed to be done to improve their condition; whether there were operational and effective policy measures in Uganda to help teenage mothers; and whether the teenage mothers felt empowered.

Gender equality and women's empowerment or emancipation is one of the MDGs, supposed to be reached by 2015. It has monitoring goals anticipating: closing the gender gap in education at all levels, increasing women's share of wage employment in the non agricultural sector, increasing the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments and improving maternal health. In a way, empowerment of women should make it possible for all women to live human dignified lives. It should break all barriers to their freedom, and should ensure that women do and be what they wish to be or do without losing their sense of self. In this study I employed empowerment theory concepts of agency, resources, choice, power and achievements in exploring the idea of empowerment in relation to the experiences of teenage mothers.

Essentially, the study revealed that these teenage mothers were not empowered. They have achieved little in terms of material resources, like coverage of basic needs, human resources like education, life skills or self esteem, and in social resources like family, work situations or government support. This lack of resources further limited their agency – the ability to do or be what they wanted to be or do. In turn, their agency - which usually tended towards the passive and minimal - was reflected in their choices,

which were effective rather than transformative. Their choices defined who they are and what they can be or do. Their agency or ‘power to’ and ‘power from within’ was also limited by diverse overarching ‘power over’ them by family, community and the state. Some indeed lost the sense of self and hope as a result of the marginal, vulnerable position they found themselves in.

Considering perceptions of their own lives, the teenage mothers felt that they were living difficult and vulnerable lives. However, they also felt that they could break out of this situation if listened to and provided with some external sources. But such kind of help seemed to be unforthcoming in the foreseeable future. To echo the title of this study, these mothers are indeed “slum dogs”, who can be ‘millionaires’ if given due priority. Taking into account the views of authorities and NGOs, the teenage mothers are a vulnerable group, without particular measures put in place for them. The legal policy regime does not cover the specific reproductive and psychological health and education needs of teenage mothers.

In terms of their age profile, the teenage mothers were between the ages 16 to 17 years, and the age at which they first conceived was around 14 years. This is relatively similar situations described by studies carried out in a range of countries about young mothers. Girls this age are considered children in the Ugandan constitution, and they are considered a risk group biologically, medically and also socially – a group that can least cope with stresses of pregnancy and motherhood.

Socially, the teenage mothers were unmarried and came from diverse family backgrounds, characterized by large size, low social class families which were disintegrated by distance, poverty, separation and death of family members. Their parents or guardians had little if any education, were either not employed or were working in poorly rewarding jobs without protection; and some had started having children before the age of 18 themselves. Their housing was poor and often congested. They also seem to belong to all major religions. Thus, the view that teenage mothers are more likely to come from families with low socio-economic status and financial hardships as observed

by Brindle (1998) is supported in the study. In terms of education, most had dropped out of school in the early years of primary schooling due to various problems such as parental neglect, poverty, violence, ignorance, disease and death of parents. Pregnancy disrupted school for only one. Absence of government support to the education of pregnant girls or teenage mothers may have compounded their situation. The lack of education indeed left them ill equipped to face challenges of the future, as all initiatives to improve their material situation depend on a significantly higher level of education than most of them had.

Examination of reasons for getting pregnant shows that it was mainly due to three reasons: pragmatism, abuse or deceit. Several of the mothers decided to get pregnant as a pragmatic solution, while a minority got pregnant due to abuse and deceit. As a pragmatic solution, pregnancy was a response to crises. It was a solution for safety, food, shelter, love and protection from brutality, fragility, and family instability. Those who got pregnant as a result of deceit or abuse have not been protected by the government or the community from dangerous environments subjecting them to even rape. Neither have they been given enough medical care and attention. Isolation from school and family seems to have played a large role in exposing the girls to teenage pregnancy. The girls' families had failed because of crises related to economic hardships, disease, ignorance, poor policies and a weak or inefficient state.

The present life of the mothers showed that their situation exposed them to different challenges which made teenage motherhood problematic. Teenage mothers could be categorised into: those performing domestic work only, those doing domestic work without pay, those with waged employment, while only one was going to school. Those not earning an income lived a far more marginal life with severe food and health related challenges. Working mothers were stressed by the work overload, multitudes of tasks, long working hours, poor working conditions, poor pay and uncertain earnings. Other challenges included worries and verbal abuse, probably because they were young and vulnerable.

To overcome their challenges the mothers took advantage of public support systems, proximal networks and personal initiatives. But these mechanisms were of poor quality and therefore inadequate to fully address their needs, given that they were often temporary, short term, and not exclusive to teenage mothers' core problems. The solutions were also not addressing the broader structural issues such as poverty, neglect, lack of respect for women and girl children.

In reference to future aspirations, the teenage mothers discussed what they wished to be or do to enhance their empowerment. They focused most on their aspirations towards their work, children and marriage. As regards work, their choice was in realistic and attainable vocational related careers, which training were quick and provided marketable skills. However, because of their social economic situation, even such modest dreams seemed hard to realize. In relation to children and marriage, the mothers looked forward to having a few more children, but were hesitant to marry. Their views on marriage were coloured by their experiences with the men who had abandoned them. They were positive about marriage after securing themselves a future, which seemed to them to be a safer choice.

All in all, these early child bearers from Kibuli slum community perceived themselves as poor and in vulnerable positions, in need of support from the government or any other external source in order to be able to live a life they can cherish. There is not much empowerment in their lives in terms of education or skills, employment or good family life. This seriously limits their agency, more so, transformatory agency, which in turn limits the making of choices, more so, strategic life choices. Early motherhood seemed to have compounded them in a web of poverty despite the fact that the majority of them chose to get pregnant in order to solve exactly problems related to vulnerability and poverty.

## ***9.2 Recommendations***

As I have shown that research on teenage mothers in Uganda is scanty, it should not be surprising that services for this category are under developed. The majority of programs

that exist have emerged as part of comprehensive services for vulnerable children or other vulnerable groups in society such as Universal Primary Education (UPE), free health government provided services, NGO vocational trainings among others. Some of these services have been directed towards the girls' childhood, especially before pregnancy or at most during pregnancy. In view of the foregoing conclusions I recommend the following:

1. Teenage mother oriented programs and services should be developed; and these need to take a life course perspective. For instance, programs that focus on life planning or development of self esteem. The services need to take a family perspective, to involve parents as allies and focus on functioning's of the family as whole. These should include services that take a two generational approach to mother and child as well as their care providers such as their guardians (grand parents, aunties etc.).
2. There is need to evaluate the existing comprehensive service programs to examine their efficiency and effectiveness in helping teenage mothers, their children or even their care givers/ guardians. In other words, public institutions should be accountable to teenage mothers, more so, they should ensure that teenage mothers from poor households or areas obtain a fair share of and access to services and programs.
3. There is need for further study on the children of teenage mothers; and evaluation of any interventions available to their children. There is also need to develop specific programs intervening in the lives of their children so that we do not rely on assumptions that mothers' improved life courses automatically benefit those of their children.
4. There is need to develop prevention programs (of early child birth) based on extensive research knowledge of adolescent behavior and development, with regards to the context in which it takes place.
5. There is need for programs for impoverished neighborhoods like slums and Uganda would benefit from developing a relevant urban policy which caters for the dynamic factors of urban development processes in Uganda such as restructuring the national economy, population shifts, role of private sectors in

- urban affairs, decentralization, and land legislation; all of which put emphasis on both urban and rural planning to reduce the influx of people to urban areas.
6. Policy makers and service providers need to be fully informed about women's/ girls' needs and preferences. There is also need for institutional changes in places where public decisions are made, for instance, from ministries to schools. Institutional change can be normative, procedural or in relation with attitudes. Normatively, there can be a formal remit to ensure that institutional actors answer to women/ girls for the impact on their policies in terms of gender equality or empowerment. For instance, changing laws in education to allow education of pregnant girls or teenage mothers, strengthen laws against all forms of violence against women, passing timely laws on crimes such as defilement or rape so that they are prosecuted on time. Procedural changes can involve removing barriers to access to services, market opportunities and justice. Attitude changes are long term but can help. These can include changing the gender based attitudes in public and private institutions. More gender training is also needed for women and men who are in offices of authority.
  7. Overall notions and goals like 'Empowerment' should be accountable to young girls and people in general. Security to women, power and resources should also be advanced to even the young girls, and more so to the youngest of mothers.

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## **Annex 1. Interview Guide/ Data Collection Plan.**

In my study on *Personal reflections of early child bearers: The case of single teenage mothers living in slum communities in Uganda*; I wish to explore perceptions of these young mothers on their own lives and also to extract what they think should be done for them to walk the talk of empowerment. Specifically, I wish to gain access to the girls own understanding of their own situation; to investigate the views of authorities/ NGOs and their strategies in dealing with this phenomenon; and lastly to study the gap between the girls understanding of their situation and the views of authorities, and strategies they take in dealing with this phenomenon. I hope to be able to understand who young single mothers in slums are in terms of social or age descriptions; their situation; and, their experience and understanding of empowerment.

To do this I chose to employ life stories/ narration as my major method of getting information from my respondents. According to Reissman (1993), the life story method of narrative analysis involves interviewing a subject and then retelling their story as if written by them. Therefore by using the life story method, I will interfere with the stories as little as possible. Conducting the interview, I wish to use an interview guide because it is less structured than a questionnaire; it will give me a lot of latitude to explore and also learn more from my informants. This interview guide is developed for young single mothers 18years and below.

This interview guide has been thought out to cover the main and specific objective as already shown before; as well as the theoretical themes/ concepts to assess and capture. It will be in three parts including the face sheet, Actual questions sheet, and the post interview comment sheet.

The face sheet will cover factual information on time, date and place of the interview as well as any kind of specific conditions or circumstances that could affect the interview

The Actual Questions sheet includes my probing questions and statements; as well as anticipated follow up questions. I wish to divide my questions into theme guides which I suppose are important to my study. These include themes on normal day, childhood, education, work, marriage, children, community perception and empowerment.

Questions on normal day are intended to gain data on their daily activities and challenges they face regularly in their ordinary activities. These questions can also act as filter questions to more categorized themes. They can also help the respondent to gain confidence in the process.

Questions on childhood are aimed to cover their experiences in their early days and how they perceive it now; as well as their family background. . It will also involve demographic information of the interviewee. Demographic information such as age, marital status and number of children is very important to my research because this information will allow me to assess the category of mothers am dealing with as well as the situation I will be observing and studying.

Questions regarding education are intended to explore how far they have gone with formal education, challenges faced in education and whether they see education a resource or not.

Questions related to work are aimed at covering what they do, how they feel about what they are doing, the problems they face in doing what they do; and what they look out to do in the future. More so, these questions are about how they meet their expenses.

Questions related to marriage are aimed to explore what they feel and think about marriage; whether they would like to be married and to whom, possible challenges they see in marriage, among others.

Inquiry on children is aimed at investigating their perceptions on giving birth to children, challenges they face whether they are happy or not, among others.

Questions about the community are intended to extract how the community reacts to the issue of early child bearers. This can also give ideas on how the community defines children (age related or development related), teenage mothers, among other groups in society..

Questions related to empowerment are meant to find out how they define being empowered; the specific things in life that they wish should be for them to feel that they fully live a life they want to live. Empowerment is difficult to define and translate in local language but I choose to make it operational by using the terms agency, resources and achievements. It is also worth noting that some resources are hard to materialize yet they could be vital to one's life. However, agency covers their ability to act or not to act; resources refers to the things they need to get by with life; and, achievements measure what they expect out of their efforts in a given area/ aspect in life. All these will be explored within the themes.

In addition to the above, I will observe the respondents to capture feelings/emotions on a given issue and modes of behavior. All this will be noted in the post interview comment sheet.

### **Face sheet**

Date of interview:

Time of interview:

Place of interview:

## **Actual Questions**

### **1. Normal Day**

Can you please describe your typical day here?

What do you find more challenging in a day? Why? *Probe for challenges related to time, money, among others.*

### **2. Childhood**

Tell me about your childhood.

Where were you born? When?

What was your family status like? Have they moved?

Have you lived here long? How long? Where did you live before? How come you came here?

Are there family members helping you out? How? If not, why? What do you think about that?

### **3. Education**

Tell me about your education.

Are there problems you face or faced while in school? How do/ did you solve the problems faced?

Do you see education as vital in one's life?

### **4. Work**

How do you meet your expenses?- Food, health, clothing, accommodation.

Do you work? What kind of work do you do? Where do you get money from? *Probe for challenges faced.*

Are you happy with the income you earn?

Do you have a plan for your work?

What businesses do you look forward to?

### **5. Marriage**

Are you married?

Do you prefer to be married? Is it good being married?

Are most women here married?

Are there problems you find in marriage?

Tell me about the father of the child/ren? *Probe for age of partner at first conception; his reaction towards pregnancy; if there is help from him, where he is staying.*

### **6. Children**

Tell me about your child/children. *Probe their perception on giving birth to children and the challenges they find. Also place and conditions of delivery. Not forgetting parents'/ guardian's reaction to pregnancy.*

How many children do you have? *Probe for the age of the first born; if of school going age, how the mother meets school expenses.*

How many more children would you like to have? *Probe reasons for their choice.*

What do you expect from your children?

### **7. Community perceptions.**

How did people around you react to when you gave birth? *Probe for any stigmatizing terms or age related names, if any and the embedded meanings. If no reaction, why?*

Have you been involved in any crime? Which one? How was it resolved?

Are there organizations that have tried to help you in one way or the other?

### **7. Empowerment/ Achievements.**

Do you make decisions in your life on your own?

What do you think you have achieved in life?

What do you think is good for one's wellbeing?

Do you have any more to say about your life?

What would you tell a girl who thinks should have a baby at an early age?

Thank you.