Empowerment in Uganda: An exploration of Women’s SRHR Empowerment in Central Eastern Uganda through Participatory Action Research

Cover Photo: Woman with child walking into Jinja Town (Alexandra Collier 2012)

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Abstract
The Central Eastern region is an area of economic unrest due to an ever increasing younger generation and a severe lack of job opportunities. This thesis will focus on the wave of women’s groups being set up and geared towards women in attempt to overcome the economic difficulties prevalent in this region. The main research question examined in this thesis is: To what extent do women’s groups, within the Central Eastern region of Uganda, empower women in SRHR and what are the challenges and barriers to SRHR empowerment. This question explores if these group are able to achieve more than economic independence by examining the potential repercussions of the groups on women’s Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). To answer this research question, Participatory Action Research (PAR) was employed as 25 participatory focus groups and 18 interviews with women aged 15-45 were conducted with three women’s groups across the Central Eastern region. 11 interviews were conducted with experts in the field of empowerment specifically in the Ugandan context and additional data was obtained through the study of grey literature and observations. In this study, two direct indicators of SRHR empowerment are examined; decision-making and gender relations as gathered from the international discourse on SRHR empowerment. The results show how influential the cultural, social and religious structures are for men and women in this region and inhibit the ability for both to take actions towards SRHR empowerment. There are great benefits from the groups, which give hope to individual empowerment such as self-confidence and the ability to make friendships and these benefits should be combined with the access to SRHR knowledge for a greater chance at achieving varying levels of SRHR empowerment. SRHR is a person-centred form empowerment and by listening and adapting SRHR programs to women’s voices, which are all too often caste aside in the modern world of achieving quick results, the outcomes will be profitable for both men and women.
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Abbreviations

AIDS – Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ATR – African Traditional Religion
FP – Family Planning
GBV – Gender Based Violence
HIV – Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HDI – Human Development Index
MDGs – Millennium Development Goals
NGO – Non Governmental Organisation
PAR – Participatory Action Research
SRA – Strategic Relational Approach
SRHR – Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
STI – Sexually Transmitted Disease
UAC – Uganda AIDS Commission
UAIS - Uganda AIDS Indicator Survey
UNFPA – United Nations Population Fund
UNAIDS – United Nations
UDHS – Uganda Demographic Health Survey
WHO – World Health Organisation
WORI – Women’s Rights Initiative
YEP – Youth Empowerment Program
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Maps of Uganda

Map 1: Uganda in Africa (Google images)

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Chapter 1 Introduction

“If women cannot make free and informed choices about sex and reproduction, gender equality will not be achieved and any sense of empowerment will be stifled” (UNFPA 2010: 8).

Introduction

Let me begin this thesis by this sharing one of my early experiences in the three months I spent living and researching in Central Eastern Uganda between July-October 2012:

As I was walking into town [Jinja] today, I saw three young women sitting by a pile of wood outside the local Born-Again Christian Church. All three had small babies, two babies with bloated stomachs and the other was struggling to open his eyes as they were covered in crust and dirt. All three women outstretched their hands asking me for money as I walked past. I had some pineapple with me, so I offered it to them and they quickly accepted before feeding it to their children. When I got into town, I went to a local clothing stall and spoke to the female shopkeeper about what I had seen: “There seem to be a lot of young women with babies here in Jinja, why is that?” I said. The shopkeeper sighed before turning to me: “Yes there are, because girls are forced here. Their husbands come home late, drunk from the bar and they want sex.” I mentioned to her that the women I had seen by the church were perhaps only teenagers. The shopkeeper leant against her chair, dismissively waving her arms: “They marry very young here, 14 or 15 they get married. They have no choice. Their parents marry them off for land.”

Research Diary, 21st July 2012
1.1 Aim and Relevance

This moment during my research highlights the reality for many women in Central Eastern Uganda at the moment. Married at a young age, with little money or schooling some women resort to begging on the street. This study wanted to look at the possibilities out there for women like these young mothers. The possibilities currently are income-generating groups set up by and geared towards women and I worked with three such groups in Jinja, Iganga and Kamuli. The aim of this study was to discover if these income-generating groups achieved more than economic empowerment. The aim was to discover if the groups positively influenced the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) of their members as a repercussion of economic empowerment. If the groups did empower the women in SRHR, I wanted to discover what could be learnt for future income-generating and SRHR empowerment programs. As this study was researching empowerment it seemed only fitting that the methodology should also be of a participatory and empowering manner. Thus this study attempted to gain a mutually beneficial relationship for both researcher and participant, so that the women could be a very real part of the study process. Thus, I hoped, by implementing Participatory Action Research (PAR), the women involved felt the ability and space to open up and discuss their past, present and future sexual relations and teach me about life as a Ugandan woman.

1.2 SRHR Definition

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) were defined in Cairo at the International Population and Development Conference (IPDC) in 1994. As Mocumbi (2006) states, intrinsic in this definition was how reproductive health become defined as the ability to attain complete well-being; physically, mentally and socially in all circumstances related to the reproductive system throughout your lifetime. Thus, implying that both men and women, should achieve a safe, happy and satisfying sexual life including the capability to decide on family planning matters including how many children to have and to access information on where, how and when to do so. As Barroso and Sippel (2011) state the SRHR framework was integral as it linked health issues related with sex and reproduction, which was a major step in looking at sexual and reproductive issues from a person-centred and holistic perspective instead of a bio-medical perspective. The new person-centred approach shined

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light on the issues surrounding SRHR, such as healthcare, education, mobility and participation of women, just as Amartya Sen’s Capabilities Approach was coming to life and the Human Development Index (HDI) was around the corner (Nussbaum 2003). With the inception of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000, including gender equality and the eradication of HIV, the international community believed through achieving SRHR for women, they had found the way to empower women, whilst at the same time, halt the spread of HIV and AIDS, prevalent at the time in Sub-Saharan Africa. The outcome was not as all had hoped; not only was the HIV prevalence rate increasing, markedly in Uganda which had been the shining ray of hope for HIV prevention schemes, but the supposedly ‘empowered’ women were the main victims. In 2008 for example, eight years since the MDGs were implemented, over 60% of people living with HIV in Sub-Saharan Africa were women (UNAIDS 2008) and currently the HIV incidence rate is 6.7 %, with 8% of women in rural areas and 11% of young married urban women currently being HIV positive (Uganda AIDS Indicator Survey (UAIS) 2011; Uganda AIDS Commission (UAC) 2012).

1.3 The role of gender in SRHR

As Bohmer and Kirumira (2000) state, no discussion on SRHR can shy away from gender and gender relations. Gender is explained as the socially constructed roles and interactions between men and women: “Gender is critical to SRHR and wellbeing because it defines roles, responsibilities, entitlements and behaviour of individuals/couples in most societies” (Otoo-Oyortey 2006: 3). As will be discussed in section 2.3, Uganda has very specific gender norms and relations based on its religious and cultural underbelly. From these gender norms, where women are viewed as ‘lesser’ persons, research has highlighted how these unequal gender power relations lead to women being vulnerable to sexual abuse, as they acquire less opportunity to protect themselves from HIV and sexually transmitted diseases (Weiss et al 1996 as cited in Bohmer and Kirumira 2000; UNAIDS 2009; UNFPA 2010; Muhanguzi 2011). These gender roles result in unquestioned power relations making women believe their lesser worth, thus accepting sexual violence for example, as to do otherwise is considered outside of their available actions (Kabeer 2005: 14). Kabeer’s (2005) statement can be directly linked to this study as the recent Ugandan Demographic Health Survey (UDHS 2011). The study highlighted how the Central Eastern region has one of highest rates of women’s acceptance of gender-based violence (G.B.V) in the country, including 28% belief in G.B.V, if a woman refuses to have sex with her husband compared to only 8% for Kampala (UDHS 2011: 231). Furthermore, the link between G.B.V and contraceptive use can be seen as within Uganda traditional and modern contraceptive use is much lower amongst women who state that G.B.V is acceptable (UDHS 2011),
thus highlighting the connection gender norms and SRHR. In fact seventy per cent of women stated not using any form of contraceptive whether they agreed or disagreed with G.B.V, although 74 % are aware of contraceptive methods and their ability to prevent HIV (UDHS 2011).

1.4 Gender and economic empowerment

The links between economic and SRHR empowerment are growing momentum. Research done by the World Bank (2001) for example, highlights how gender inequality adversely effects economic development. Reducing gender inequality, thus is viewed as a way to increase a country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and so a way of pulling developing countries out of poverty (World Bank 2001). Importantly, in Uganda which is estimated to have 50% of the population under the age of 18, it is argued that combined with the cultural and religious structures, the young age demographic is effecting the economic productivity, and, potentially leading to further restricted employment opportunities for women (UDHS 2011). Furthermore, as highlighted by the UDHS 2011, the Central Eastern region attains only 6.4% of girls completing primary school compared to 30% for Kampala (UDHS 2011), adversely affecting their job prospects even more in the Central Eastern region. Thus with limited future job opportunities, and poverty on their doorstep, Bohmer and Kirumira (2000) have discussed how women utilise their bodies in exchange for monetary gain. However, the exchange of money in sexual negotiations is prominent in Uganda. As discussed by Nobelius et al (2010) the involvement of money begins early for young people as part of courting system. Firstly, gift-giving as a form of transactional sex at the beginning of a relationship, academics argue that this exchange takes place due to a women’s lack of capability financially and not necessarily, want (see Kinsman 2001; Bohmer & Kirumira 2000; Nyanzi et al 2001). Furthermore during marriage negotiations, in the Central Eastern region specifically, the involvement of bride price, where a groom must pay an adequate amount in terms of animals and gifts, before the bride (and her family) would agree for the marriage to be consummated. Although Nobelius et al (2010) conclude that the transaction of money between girl and boy is an agreed arrangement, this study wishes to draw on other research which has highlighted how women lose their ‘power’ once married, as they are effectively no longer able to negotiate, and potentially leaving them vulnerable to varying forms of sexual abuse (Weiss et al 1996 as cited in Bohmer and Kirumira 2000; UNAIDS 2009; UNFPA 2010; Muhanguzi 2011). Although Nyanzi et al (2001) also examined how female adolescents in southwest Uganda felt ashamed if there was no exchange of money, her later work (2005) highlights how women feel that once married, they become part of their husband’s property, unable to refuse sex and limiting their ability to make sexual negotiations with their partner. Thus from Nyanzi et al (2005) and Bohmer and Kirumira’s (2000) work, this study wishes to assess if women attain
economic empowerment and if so, do the ripple effects influence their intimate relationships, or does money not matter, but more the cultural and gender norms are the reason for the structure within sexual relationships. This study therefore, wishes to examine how by promoting economic empowerment for young married women do they attain some form of the ‘power to,’ that they had previously before formalisation of marriage.

1.5 Study Rationale

SRHR empowerment through women’s groups that focus on economic empowerment, within the Central Eastern Uganda was examined for a number of reasons. Firstly, because of the recent interest in SRHR empowerment programs from donor organisations, a clear example being the new SRHR fund opened by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2012. The fund contains €125 million and focuses on four areas for improvement in SRHR including; providing young people with information, promotion resources that promote safe sex practices and more respect for the SRHR for people who do not currently enjoy these rights (SRHR Grants Framework 2012-2015). As Uganda is one of the countries which will be benefitting from this funding, I feel it fundamental to add to the current literature on SRHR empowerment and sexual relations in Uganda (see Bohmer & Kirumira 2000; Nyanzi et al 2005; Wyrod 2008; Do and Kurimoto 2011; Muhanguzi et al 2011; Muhanguzi 2011).

In terms of researching empowerment, there is no one clear definition and academics and research alike, struggle to attain a framework which comprises all varying dimensions (Kabeer 1999; 2005). Thus by researching on two key dimensions; gender relations and decision-making in regards to SRHR, this study hope to add much needed research to a diverse and often debated topic. The link between economic and SRHR empowerment for women, especially in developing countries, has gained much attention in recent years due to the ‘failings’ of the MDGs at their half-way point (see Greig and Koopman 2003; Barnett and Whiteside 2006; Kim et al 2008). Specifically, the connection between economic decision-making and the ability to negotiate sexual conditions such as abstinence, condom use and family planning methods is gaining interest (see Bohmer & Kirumira 2000). I wished to focus on both younger girls and young married women, as young urban married women are currently the group with the highest rate of HIV within Uganda so important to research (UAC 2012). Finally, I hope this thesis can add to literature on how SRHR programmes cannot afford to ignore the socio-economic aspects of sexual behaviour or operate in isolation of action on poverty and gender inequality (Standing and Kisekka 1989; Standing 1990 as cited in Seidel 1993: 178).
1.6 Research question and sub question

With this information and study rationale in mind, this study has attempted to answer the following research question by focusing in the Eastern Central region of Uganda:

**To what extent do women’s groups, within the Central Eastern region of Uganda, empower women in SRHR and what are the challenges and barriers to SRHR empowerment?**

From this research question, the following sub-questions have been designed to assist in the exploration of empowerment from the groups:

**a) What are the SRHR conditions for the women before attending the groups?**

Sub question a) will be discussed in Empirical Chapter 5. To be able to assess the ability of the groups to empower the women, this study had to achieve a background assessment of the women’s SRHR situation before attending. By examining key aspects such as choice of partner, gender relations and contraceptive knowledge, a picture is built of the women involved.

**b) Whose decision is it for the women to join and what are the motivations of the women to attend the groups?**

Sub question b) will be answered in Empirical Chapter 6. By understanding if the women independently decided to attend the groups, or were coerced, this study will examine the context from which they arrived from. In the second part, examining the motivations they had for attending the group.

**c) What are the needs of the women to attend and how do the groups address these needs?**

Sub question c) will be answered in Empirical Chapter 6. To understand what the women wanted from the groups to then be able to discuss how the groups fulfilled these needs from the perspective of the researcher.

**d) What do the women perceive the impacts of the groups on their empowerment and the potential challenges to this empowerment?**
Sub question d) will be answered in Empirical Chapter 6. An important factor in this study is the participatory methodology, so I wanted to demonstrate what the women themselves felt the groups had achieved for them and what they hoped for the future after being a part of a women’s group.

1.7 Thesis structure and overview

In order to help answer the research question, the following chapter presents the research context, introducing Uganda’s political history with a focus on the Central Eastern region. This includes an examination of the religious and cultural structures in place and a discussion on the role of gender in SRHR and women’s empowerment in Uganda. Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework used in this research which will all be highlighted in the conceptual scheme to understand the complexities of SRHR empowerment. Chapter 4 explains the research methodology and will elaborate on the ethical considerations and the scope and limitations of this research. Empirical chapter 5 focuses on participants in three women’s groups examining the resources they have before the groups. There is a discussion on the PAR and its adaptive capacity to bring the women in control of the direction of the sessions. Empirical chapter 6 looks at the women’s motivations and needs to attend the groups and how the groups address these motivations. End of Chapter 6, the sub question regarding the impact on SRHR empowerment will be examined. The concluding chapter will bring theory and my findings together to answer the main research question and present recommendations for future research into SRHR empowerment.
Chapter 2 Context

Bordered by Kenya, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Rwanda and Tanzania, Uganda houses nearly thirty-five million people and was one of the first countries in Sub-Saharan Africa to experience the AIDS epidemic. The current government has been in power for over twenty-five years, with the next election not due until 2016. The capital, Kampala located in the Buganda Kingdom, is a busy, vibrant city with over one million inhabitants. The Central Eastern region, next to the capital and encompasses the three areas where research was conducted: Jinja, Iganga and Kamuli Districts. To introduce the context for this research, firstly, the political history of the Central Eastern region will be discussed. Then the religious and cultural institutions at work in Uganda will be explored including SRHR and gender roles and women’s empowerment response to and current situation of SRHR nationally will be examined, before looking at the current situation in the study region.

2.1. History of Uganda and the Central Eastern region

Most newcomers to Uganda land in Entebbe Airport. During the journey from Entebbe to the Central Eastern region, a keen pair of eyes will see a quickly changing and diverse landscape. Beginning with dusty roads and incredibly red soil and small metal shacks which spring up on the side of the road selling chicken legs and bottles of coke, before coming to Kampala, the capital with tall rise buildings, busy traffic and barefoot children trying to clean car windows. From here, you enter a lush rainforest with tea and sugar cane plantations reminiscent of what the British colonists started when they arrived in 1884. On entering Jinja (a location for this study), a long street, aptly named Main Street, approaches and if you look close enough you can see the source of the White Nile, changing little since the colonialist arrival.

Jinja became the first city to obtain a railway in 1907, which connected Indian traders from Goa with the landlocked Uganda. Jinja’s prominence grew and grew, after the Second World War was described as “one of five centres of growth,” even receiving a rare compliment from Sir Winston Churchill as he referred to the country as “The Pearl of Africa” (Byerley 2011). With the Central Eastern region exporting a great supply of ivory, coffee, rubber, wheat, cotton and gum products, by the 1950’s and beginning of the 60’s this region especially, was a vibrant, lively and booming part of Africa (Barnett & Whiteside 2006; Otiso 2006). However, all was not well after the departure of the British in 1963. At first the transition to Independence was a peaceful one with Apolo Milton Obote
being elected as the first prime minister. Many hoped for true socioeconomic development, but as Otiso (2006) states, Uganda was a pluralist country with over forty ethnic groups, three influential religions and a strong cultural identity, so it would be difficult to please all. Problems quickly escalated as Idi Amin, Colonel of the Army under Obote, became unhappy with his prime minister’s rule, and backed by the British, overthrew Obote in a bloody coup d’état in 1971. With the expulsion of Obote, Amin anointed himself president of Uganda, and within his nine year reign, it is estimated that he may have killed or, through his political and economic mismanagement, starved to death nearly 300,000 people (Otiso 2006). Part of this mismanagement was due to Amin’s declared war on Ugandan Asians in a vain attempt to gain their economic power as they were the backbone of the country’s businesses and held Uganda’s purse strings. From the exiled political group of Ugandans in Tanzania, a movement came together called the Uganda National Liberation Front. Together with the Uganda National Liberation Army and Tanzania Army, Amin was forcibly removed from power and exiled in 1979 (Otiso 2006).

Amin’s dictatorship had a long lasting effect on the Central Eastern region for a number of reasons. Firstly, as discussed, Jinja had close ties with the Indian community due to the railway, so the region was hit hard by the expulsion of the Asians who were heads of businesses and provided jobs to many of the local people. From here, as Barnett and Whiteside (2006) discuss Kamuli District (a location for this study) became intrinsic in the semi-legal and illegal trade routes due to its locality to Kenya, during Amin’s rule when all goods, including essentials were impossible to buy. Therefore due to this ‘risk environment,’ which Amin’s rule created, and the various people and transport which moved through the Central East of the country, it provided a perfect breeding ground for an HIV/AIDS epidemic (Barnett & Whiteside 2006). After Obote’s re-election as Prime Minster, he began to target people he suspected of cooperating with Amin and so leading to further unrest and instability, sparking a resistance movement called the National Resistance Army. Yoweri Museveni, the leader of the rebel movement, gained control of the country through his National Resistance Army in 1986. Museveni has gained loyalty from his people as he has brought rest and relative economic stability to a nation that had seen bloodshed for nearly thirty years. He tackled the AIDS epidemic head on by implementing the Uganda AIDS Commission, which is still in force today. Museveni has also brought universal primary schooling under the pressure of MDGs. Yet there are problems for with this as many schools charge for food and there is little money to buy school uniforms or tools, leading to children engaging in ‘transactional sex’ (the exchange of sex for money) or not attending at all (Bell 2011). There is unrest politically as the next general elections are to be held in 2016, and Museveni who is in his fourth term is meant to step down as leader of the party. However, he and The National Resistance Movement, claim there is no one willing or able to replace
him. This has led the opposition, Uganda People’s Congress, to declare that they may not participate in the elections at all (allafrica.com). Many Ugandans quietly express the desire for change, but are fearful of the repercussions after having experience such detrimental effects from changes in the not so distant past.

2.2. Religion and culture in Uganda and Central Eastern region

Within the Central Eastern region, the main ethnic group is the Bantu, who comprise 60% of the population (Otiso 2006). The Bantu, like many other groups across African, have strong principles in regards to gender and sexuality will affect how people in this region live and build their lives. Otiso (2006) states that some people in the Bantu still relate to the traditional culture in teachings of the African Traditional Religions (ATRs) where they believe physical and spiritual life is a continuum, for which the realities of spiritual and material are not mutually exclusive, but merge into one another. Furthermore ATRs, hail a powerful creator who is most evident in awesome forces such as the sun, moon, stars, and thunder and lightning and can become angry if not satisfied at your behaviour (Otiso 2006). Uganda is a country with three main religious groups including the Christians (beginning from the colonial times), with Catholics accounting for 42% and Protestants at 40% respectively, and Islam constitutes about 13% of the total population (UDHS 2011). Although some of the Muslim cultural and religious traditions fall in line with that of the ATRs, such as polygamous relationships and the belief in a patrilineal society, there is discrimination towards this religious sector. This is due in part to an anti-Muslim backlash after Amin’s fall from power in 1979 as Amin claimed to be a Muslim, although a poor one as he drunk often and married outside of his religion (Otiso 2006: 28). However, he did place many Muslims in prominent positions during his violent reign leading to separation between Muslims and non-Muslims which can be felt today.

With the advent of Christianity via the Europeans, there were many cultural traits which did not sit well with the Christian norms and sexual morals. Due to these contradictions of beliefs, the Europeans believed the Ugandans to be animalistic and ‘hypersexual’ (Tamale 2006: 89) which led to strong attempts to repress and contain traditional sexuality of both men and women. Yet among Christian and Muslim communities, sex was a moral issue, only allowed within a socially controlled sphere such as marriage and “women’s sexuality was reduced to production” (Vaughan 1991; Musisi 2002 cited in Tamale 2006: 89). Christianity introduced monogamy, which African critics such as Njoh and Akiwumi (2012) argue effectively, denied widows the right to be inherited and cared for by their brother-in-laws, whilst Westerners argue it stopped women being thought of as property.
Muhanguzi et al (2011) argue that the religious denominations, including ATRs, represent values that endorse male domination and a patriarchal society, indicating female subservient behaviour in all areas of life, including their sexuality.

2.3. SRHR and gender in Uganda

As discussed in section 2.2, Uganda is a country defined by its cultural and religious roots. African academics such as Muhanguzi (2011) and Nyanzi et al (2005) believe the cultural and religious norms prevalent in Ugandan society pressure women and men to follow specific rigid gender rules. At the same time though, these academics highlight how women are not denied total control within their sexual relations and do negotiate ways through the system. Uganda is a patriarchal society where the mixture of culture and religion has led to clear distinctions between the gender roles. Females are viewed as feminine, with their sexuality controlled and suppressed and thus female sexuality constructed as subservient, emotional and caring (Kinsman et al 2000; Tamale 2005 cited in Muhanguzi 2011). Family members are involved as paternal aunts, or ssengas tutor girls in their specific gender role; remaining feminine, proper ways to sit, walk, respect elders, cook and conduct herself at all times (Tamale 2006). Female African researchers Nyanzi et al (2005) and Tamale (2006) both state how ssengas have contradicting characteristics, as they reinforce the patriarchal beliefs but at the same time they transcend tight gender roles, by advocating for women’s economic independence. Nyanzi et al (2005) and Tamale (2006) do state that, although ssengas are slowly being pushed aside by NGOs, popular media etc., they are useful marker for the expected sexual behaviour of young women in the Ugandan context.

In cooperating Muhanguzi’s (2011) study in Ugandan schools which highlights, how boys, are expected to be masculine and to assert their masculinity they must engage in sexual behaviour which promotes ambition and assertiveness, most obviously highlighted by being the instigator of sexual relations. From here Muhanguzi (2011) claims, in sexual relations boys act in a selfish and self-serving way, which girls in their contradictory role, must refuse but also be submissive to avoid being thought of as masculine, so losing respect. This unequal power balance is well documented in relation to contributing to girl’s vulnerability to a range of sexual and reproductive dangers such as unwanted pregnancies, HIV infection, rape, sexual violence and sexual exploitation (Weiss et al 1996, Rivers and Aggleton 1999 as cited in Bohmer and Kirumira 2000: 270). It is crucial to understand that sexuality also has the ability to influence gender roles:
Sexuality is a site for the production of hegemonic gender discourse, presenting both constraints and opportunities for empowerment...Sexuality is a key site on which women’s subordination is maintained and enforced in Africa. (Tamale 2006: 89)

Gender inequality encompasses the principle that men and women are unequal and the notion that men are innately superior, occupying positions of authority (Wyrod 2008). Sexuality and gender roles reflect onto gender inequality, which UNAIDS (2010) argues is pushing the HIV/AIDS epidemic to catastrophic levels. Women and girls’ social and economic disempowerment has been described as the lynchpin for why women experience the highest infection rate globally (UNAIDS, 2010; King et al 2011). Shaped by gender norms, the HIV transmission rate, decreasing after Museveni successful campaign, is now rising for both men and women due to the construction and mediation of sexuality and gender relations, most notably the perception of men that having many sexual partners equates to masculinity (Wyrod 2008; Muhanguzi 2011). Not only are men in Uganda encouraged to have multiple partners which increases the risk for HIV for their partners, but due to economic hardship, girls are vulnerable to the persuasion of sexual intercourse in exchange for money or gifts (UNAIDS 2003).

2.4 Women’s empowerment in The Central Eastern region

The context in which SRHR empowerment exists today is under reconstruction in the Central Eastern region, due to the influence and influx of international policies and funding streams for example Restless Development, an international organisation which works in collaboration with Dutch agencies such as dance4life based in Jinja Town.

Throughout Uganda including the Central Eastern region, gender roles are being negotiated by modernity and more especially poverty. An indication of this is effects women; marriages structures are transforming in Uganda and cohabitation is rising as couples cannot afford the costs involved in weddings, such as bride price and receptions. There are however still three prominent marriage types in Uganda; traditional, religious (Christian, Islamic for example) or civil. Traditional weddings are based on the customs of indigenous Ugandan culture as marriage is initiated by the boy himself, the parents or the sseng a where an introduction stage takes place involving all parties (Tamale 2006). It is worth mentioning the roots of bride price or dowry, which Ugandans see as integral to the marriage culture. An important note to highlight is Otiso’s (2006) commentary, that
bride price equates as compensation to the bride’s father for the loss of his daughter’s labour, as Uganda is a mainly agrarian society; bride price was in the form of farming tools, goats and cows (Otiso 2006). There are links with bride price to a girl’s sexual and reproductive qualities as a higher price was given for a girl if she is a virgin, has education or comes from a well-respected family (Tamale 2005). A religious marriage where the ceremony is presided over by a priest/pastor is only conducted after the customary bride price is made, as this African tradition has been incorporated into Christian practices (Otiso 2006: 86). Muslim marriages, like traditional marriages are commonly arranged by the parents to achieve compatibility. Muslim marriages, like traditional marriages can be polygamous as the Koran allows men to have up to four wives as long as he can look after them.

In terms of polygamy, the Central Eastern region has the second highest rate for having a co-wife at 27% (UDHS 2011). The rate has declined nationally from 32% in UDHS 2000, to 25% in this recent UDHS. I believe this is due to the socio-economic problems described by Otiso. Civil marriages are administered by government officials and can be undertaken by couples facing opposition from their families. If couples have had an introduction stage and are cohabitating, the community views them as official, but it is not a legally recognized form of marriage (Otiso 2006). Importantly, Uganda is a patrilineal society, so women have limited access to land due to lack of land inheritance rights; they can only attain land through marriage which puts pressure on them to marry.

Although there has been a female Vice President in Uganda (the first across the entirety of Africa) in 1994, and a mandate that one-third of political representatives must be women (Tripp 2001), these political steps have had little effect on the day-to-day lives of women in the Eastern Central region. The most prominent female politician within Uganda is Rebecca Alitwala Kadaga, who is the current Speaker of the Ugandan Parliament, elected in 2011. Kadaga is the first woman ever to be elected into this position, and she was born in the Kamuli District, one of the locations involved in this study. In terms of legislation, there have been partnerships between the government and non-governmental organisations to tackle the SRHR injustices within Uganda. On the other side, an example of legislation which is not implemented properly is the Domestic Violence Act, passed in 2009. Due to the Domestic Relations Bill still being on the shelf for half a century, the Domestic Violence Act is rendered useless as it needs women to have knowledge and specific rights which are founded in the Domestic Relations Bill. Organisations like Women’s Rights Initiative (WORI) based in Jinja fight for women’s’ rights, but it is a long and slow process.

This chapter has given an overview of Uganda and the Central Eastern region specifically, presenting the country’s history in relation to SRHR empowerment. The next chapter will explain the theories implemented to understand SRHR issues in the Central Eastern region for women across three districts.
Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, the concept of empowerment will be explored through Kabeer’s theory of empowerment, constituting of ‘power within’, ‘power to’ and ‘power over,’ using the dimensions of resources, agency and achievements. I interlink Freire’s *Pedagogy of The Oppressed* with Rowland’s “collective” and “personal empowerment” to and the dialectic relationship between the women and their social context through the Strategic Relational Approach. As an example of empowerment, the key dimensions of SRHR and its links with economic empowerment will be discussed. At the end, this study’s conceptual scheme will be explained containing all elements required to analyse the process of women’s SRHR empowerment in the Central Eastern region.

3.1. Conceptualising Empowerment

Empowerment is a complicated and highly debated term in academic studies and especially in the international development arena. In terms of women’s empowerment, Batliwala (1994) believes its roots lie in the feminist movement and the viewing of the construction of gender beginning in the 1970’s. Through to the 1980’s and 1990’s where Bourdieu’s (1985) work examined how actors construct their own representation of the world and in fact ‘perform’ within their specific roles. Batliwala feels that Young’s (1988) argument on making clear the difference between a woman’s *position* and *condition* is imperative in understanding the empowerment process. Young (1988) states that a women’s *condition* is the material aspects of women’s lives including lack of healthcare and education for example. Whereas a women’s *position* is a much deeper term underlying the social and economic differences between men and women, for example the decision-making ability men have over women (Batliwala 1994).

With an array of ideas and definitions of empowerment, for this study it is important to have some clear principles for which to follow:

- Firstly, there is an agreement that empowerment is a multidimensional process involving resources, agency and achievement, where women challenge the subordinate power system around them.
- Secondly, empowerment cannot be ‘given’ to women; the women must be active participants in the empowerment process.
- Finally, empowerment is greatly dependent on the structures and context of the environment i.e. empowerment for women in Uganda will vary greatly to empowerment for women in England. Thus the indicators used for measurement of the women’s
empowerment in the Central Eastern region, must be context specific and may not reused, as such, for other developing countries with a different social, political, economic and religious context (Batliwala 1994; Kabeer 1999; Kabeer 2005).

In order to understand how women in the Central Eastern region are able to proceed along this movement of empowerment, I utilise Kabeer’s (1999; 2005) discussion on ‘power within,’ ‘power over’ and ‘power to.’

3.1.1. Power within

The process of empowerment begins with the resource stage which provides the ability for the women in the women’s groups to achieve their self-worth before challenging the structures around them. As Batliwala (1994) states: “women must first recognize the ideology that legitimises male domination and understand how it perpetuates their oppression” (Batliwala 1994: 131). Drawing from Kabeer (1999), resources refer to the material and financial circumstances available, as well as the varying human and social resources which develop individual’s ability to exercise agency, which will be examined in section 3.1.2. In line with Batliwala’s term ‘oppression’ and the need for knowledge, I employ Freire (1968) and his discussion on education and oppressors. The resource of knowledge is integral to this study, which is where Freire’s Pedagogy of The Oppressed comes into play. This theory came into existence in 1968 after Paulo Freire began to see the potential for education to enlighten impoverished and illiterate peasants in Latin America. Critical Pedagogy, can be seen as a theory for the education of the marginalised, the excluded. This theory is based on the principle that through the resource of knowledge, oppressed groups examine their world through critical eyes. Once provided with these tools, the marginalised are able to build a critical consciousness or conscientization as Freire (1968) describes it, being able to then see and wish to change the structures around them which function to restrict and contain them. I argue that in this study, once the woman gain knowledge from resources available at the groups, they develop Kabeer’s (1999) ‘power within’ to make choices which will be part of their process of empowerment thereby as Freire states, equipping students with self-awareness as well as awareness about the world in which they exist and function (Freire 1968: 32). By doing so, Freire claims, man is able to act upon and transform his world, moving towards new possibilities and a richer, more satisfying life as an individual and as a collective (Freire 1968 as cited in McIntyre 2008: 3). The reason Freire is employed within this study, is because he refers to the essence of education as the practice of freedom through participatory methods, which this study is passionate about. By gaining the women’s full participation, and not just as data to be analysed, I hope to understand the world.
through their eyes. Freire believes students should be able to realise that there are unequal power relations at work and I hope to assess whether the women believe this to be true in the Central Eastern region. Therefore, through education, teacher and student incorporate knowledge of diverse racial and ethnic minorities’ as well as social classes and importantly for this research, gender (Freire 1968: 53). Although this study does not focus on formal educational institutions as such, all women’s groups involved in this study have some kind of a teacher and student type structure and a set of learning objectives are incorporated into the groups. Thus, Freire’s theory is relevant for examining how each group deals with the access of knowledge, and how the groups work with the structures and agency involved in empowerment within this region. In this study, Freire’s reference of ‘oppression’ is used to describe the women involved. This study refers to women as the ‘oppressed’ because the very structure of their thought will have been conditioned by their existential situation and their perception of themselves has been influenced by their adoption of the oppressors guidelines (Freire 1968: 29). In this study, no one specific ‘oppressor’ is named; instead I explore the social institutions and traditions including men and the violence they may enact, which may be embedded into the unspoken structures within the groups.

3.1.2. ‘Power to’ and ‘Power over’

The terms ‘power to and ‘power over’ are intrinsic to women striving for empowerment as a way to challenge the structures around them. Power to and power over are overriding dimension of empowerment which constitute agency (Kabeer 1999; 2005). Kabeer (2005) states, that agency is inexorably tied to power, as “it represents the processes by which choices are made and put into effect” (Kabeer 2005: 14). Kabeer (2005) further explains how there are two faces to agency which, I think is important in combining Freire’s argument of the oppressed and the role of the ‘oppressor.’ On the positive face of agency is ‘power to’ whereby agency is achieved through access to resources such as education and in this study, the self-confidence achieved from attending the groups. Other power to in this study could be gaining of economic independence, which gives the women the ability to act on choices for their life (Kabeer 2005). On the negative face of agency, Kabeer (2005) highlights how certain actors, I employ ‘oppressors’ from Freire’s work here, will negate the agency of the women through authoritarian control, for example the patriarchal rules at play in Uganda which legitimise gender based violence and gender inequality.
3.2. The dialectical relationship between the social context and the women

In order to understand how the social context around the women will affect their actions, firstly I will discuss past thinkers on the topic. Bourdieu’s (1985) discussion is crucial in the understanding of the relationship between social context and actors, as he claims that how agents are defined within the social space thus giving them a particular power position. In line with Freire (1968), Bourdieu claims that knowledge of the social world gives people of lower status/class the power to conform to or transform their world by conforming to and transforming the categories by which the world is perceived (Bourdieu 1985: 729). This study incorporates these beliefs, but adapts them to suggest it is the women who conform or transform their world, as they are categorised as lower status, due to their sex within the Central Eastern region. From here, I interlink Kabeer’s agency dimension of empowerment with the Strategic Relational Approach (SRA) coined by Jessop (2005). Drawing on Hay’s (2002) examination of structure in relation to action and action in relation to structure, SRA views the two as not mutually exclusive entities, but reacting of each other, thus actors person make strategic choices based on free choice as well as structure. By structure, Hay (2002) is referring to political, social and economic institutions which remain mostly fixed over time. Importantly, for Jessop (2005) both structure and agency exist at the same time, and so their interaction cannot be discussed as ineffective of the other. From here, Jessop (2005) states that it is vital to examine how certain structures may privilege some actors or their strategies over others, so creating a strategically-selective context (Jessop, 2005: 48). At this juncture, the ‘strategic actor’ should be explored. Hay (2002) states that the strategic actor behaves intentionally based on an analysis of the surrounding situation. Defining a ‘strategically-selective context,’ implies that each context favours certain strategies over others (Hay 2002: 128). In comparison actors can be described as instinctive and reflexive (Hay 2002). Kabeer (2005) states, that agency is inexorably tied to power, as it means having power in the choices one makes, or having the agency of power to control others. Drawing on Hay (2002) who believes that the choices an actor makes depends on strategies entrenched in the actor’s dreams for the future, as well as their ability to reflect and then make decisive choices made with these tools. The women can be viewed as a “strategic actors.”

Diagram 1. explains how actors within their structural context analyse their possible choices and then make actions based on the context and the possibilities. It also shows how the context itself, adapts to the choices taken.

3.2.1. The strategically selective context

The concept of strategy discussed by Hay and Wincott (1998) describes it as a calculation and decision informed on reflection of the context and the actor’s specific knowledge, or resource. Strategies, like actors do not stand in isolation, but relate to the past situations, present structures and future opportunities (Hay and Wincott 1998). With Hay and Wincott’s discussion in mind, Jessop (2005) states that actors will adapt to the changes which emerge from these strategies, either in a reproductive or reflexive curve (Jessop 2005: 49). Meaning that strategic actors as discussed are reflexive and are critically aware of the situation around them and the possible consequences of their actions and not immune to the context around them. For the women in the groups, my understanding of the strategically selective context by which they live, follows the work of Muhanguzi (2011). Muhanguzi discusses a patriarchal and male superiority, which has dictated the positions of power and control both men and women yield. For example, in terms of sexual activity, Muhanguzi highlights how for young unmarried Ugandans, sexual desire is seen as a “male prerogative,” in the sense that it is men who must initiate sexual relationships. Furthermore, Muhanguzi (2011) cites the religious teachings of The Bible as having a great effect on man’s belief that man is in control of the entirety of the sexual relationship and thus female sexuality is tightly controlled and restricted. Muhanguzi works with Bennett and Muhanguzi (2011) to explore how these religious and cultural constructs effect family formation and determination of number of children. Although, Muhanguzi et al’s (2011) work does not relate specifically to married women, I will use their work to explore if this belief in a man’s right to control of sexual exchanges continues - through marriage.
3.2.2. Women as reflexive actors

I argue then that the women are not static, but reflexive beings, where in a country based in deep cultural beliefs and religious traditions; this context has shaped their being. Drawing on a study by Bell (2011) examining young people’s sexual agency in Uganda, the social pressure and financial constraints will be intrinsic for women to begin sexual relations. In terms of being in a relationship, which I can draw to the married women in the groups, what Bell calls ‘subtle strategies in being able to negotiate contraceptive use as it is not widely accepted or liked. Especially for women, as Nyanzi et al. (2005) discovered in their research on female Ugandan market workers, it is difficult to begin a conversation around contraceptive use or even to refuse sexual intercourse. Furthermore, drawing on work by Muhanguzi (2011) about young girls in secondary schools in Uganda, there is an acceptable appropriate behaviour which is expected from girls due to the African context, involving rigid gender roles. Although neither Nyanzi et al. (2005) nor Muhanguzi (2011) worked with older women, I believe that I am able to utilise their findings to understand the strategically selective context from which the women come. Through Hay’s (2002) discussion, agents are understood as being reflexive and strategic; they can orient themselves and their strategies to the realisation of goals or intentions (Hay 2002). Whilst being reflexive Kabeer (1999) also believes that there are other forms of agency, including bargaining and negotiation, deception and manipulation which may be implemented (Kabeer 1999: 438). Kabeer does not expand of exactly how she would define ‘deception and manipulation’ but for this study one could look at the ‘subtle strategies ‘which Bell (2011) discusses which young Uganda’s use to negotiate sexual relations. For this study then, incorporating Kabeer (1999) and Bell’s work (2011), the strategies which married women use to attend the groups, contraceptive use and how the young girls enter or exit sexual relations can be approached.

3.3. Achievement - Collective and personal empowerment

The final stage in Kabeer’s empowerment structure relates to achievements; the potential for people to attaining the life they desire. “Achievements have been considered in terms of both the agency exercised and its consequences” (Kabeer 2005: 15). At this point, I employ Rowlands (1995; 1998) as she identifies empowered women as demonstrating the product of empowerment processes as opposed to demonstrating the empowerment processes itself. Rowlands (1998), discusses two types of empowerment, “collective empowerment” and “personal empowerment.” Under “personal empowerment” there is a link with Christens’ (2012) work on relational empowerment
and personal empowerment, as Christens’ states relationships, especially sexual and intimate, play a crucial role in the empowering process. Christens’ (2012) claims that relational empowerment gives a feeling of belonging and confidence derived from group solidarity which is then transferred into intimate relationships. In the case of this study, I can apply this to discuss if the relationships between the women, their parents, partners and husbands are affected by relational empowerment attained from the group. So with Christens’ (2012) in mind, one can see the link with relational empowerment theory as “self-confidence, sense of agency and sense of self in a wider context” (Rowlands 1998: 23) as key concepts involved in the empowerment process. Rowlands (1998) discusses group identity, collective sense of agency and group dignity as core concepts of “collective empowerment” and Freire’s (1968) discussion on education is reminiscent of these concepts. Freire’s theory concerns empowerment of the masses through knowledge: “Education [...] becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discovers how to participate in the transformation of their world” (Freire 1968: 67). Freire’s theory and collective empowerment are thus a process of revolution, the ability for all the “oppressed” to open their eyes to the structures around them and demand a change. I argue that Rowlands’ understanding of ‘empowerment in close relationships’ is in line with relational empowerment, and therefore SRHR empowerment in this study will focus on the individual empowerment of the women within both sexual relationships and relationships with parents. Rowlands (1998: 24) discusses the “ability to negotiate, communicate, get support, and defend ‘self’ in relationships” and I believe these elements are imperative for the domain of empowerment which will be explored.

This study will explore collective and individual empowerment through two distinct forms of agency; “transformative and effectiveness” (see Kabeer 2005; Christens 2011). Transformative agency is more in line with “power to” and discusses the agency of the women to suggest a greater ability for them to question, analyse and act on the structures of patriarchal constraint in their lives (Kabeer 2005: 15). This study will examine short term spheres of agency which address immediate issues such as learning money making skills, as well as long term processes, which, as Kabeer (2005: 16) argues “will affect the structure of patriarchy”. As Kabeer (1994) states not all actions and choices that actors make are as equal of indication of empowerment as not all the actions will have the same significance on the actors’ lives. Therefore, I will be aware of actions which I think work to make the women better wives and daughters and those actions which attempt to break free of that prescribed gender role. For the women to gain long term transformative agency, I am aware that they will need collective empowerment. By having collective empowerment, they will be able to make a difference to the patriarchy around them as they will have a more intensive effect on the political as well as...
social structures through coming together. From here, the group would then be able to employ collective strategies to this effect.

3.4. SRHR and economic empowerment

As discussed in Chapter 1, this study is interested in a specific domain of empowerment – SRHR. As discussed in Chapter 2, there are many dimensions to SRHR within the international discourse. This study focuses on two direct indicators of SRHR empowerment; decision-making ability and gender relations (including G.B.V) linked with Kabeer’s stages of resources, agency and achievements. Drawing on Cheston et al’s study in Ghana (2002) the aspect of self-confidence or ‘power within’ must be prevalent from the beginning for agency to exist. Decision-making in SRHR is the ability to negotiate the use of contraceptives, family formation, family size and refusal of sexual intercourse, thus correlating to ‘power to.’ Linked in with the idea of decision-making, I believe is the dimension of “family strategies.” Drawing on Laslett & Brenner (1989), family strategies refer to the decisions a family makes about the timing of marriage, number of children, and which family members should work outside the home. Family strategies are thus shaped by the gender constructs and so women’s roles as agents within the family are shaped by the organisation of social reproduction (Laslett and Brenner 1989). Thus this study examines the processes by which women become sexually empowered; through the strategies, actions and negotiations they make within a sexual relationship and before a sexual relationship begins. Gender relations refers to equality within relationships as the notion that men and women are the same and equal, with no one sex being more superior, and thus more in positions of authority ( Wyrod 2008: 806). Under gender relations, equal relationships with parents and partners will be explored. G.B.V is also linked with ‘power over’ a husband/parent has over their wife or daughter and so will be examined under the banner of gender relations. After Jessop’s (2005) SRA, I would pose that gender relations are based on the structural and religious constructs in Uganda, including who is seen as having a higher power position within the home space.

Empowerment is not just restricted to women’s health but works in many different domains; one such domain which is imperative in this study is economic empowerment. For this study I will draw on Eyben et al’s (2008) work which describes economic empowerment as the participation, contribution and beneficial effect of men and women which value their financial contributions to uphold their dignity and make communication possible for a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth. Economic empowerment is important in this study, because all three groups involved do
not claim to empower their members in SRHR, but rather work towards independent economic empowerment. The link between SRHR and economic empowerment is a mutually reinforcing relation, as first noted over 15 years ago at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo, then reaffirmed under the MDGs when universal access to reproductive health was added in 2007. The belief that SRHR leads to reduction in poverty is prevalent in the international development discourse, and is central to UNFPA and WHO policies (see UNFPA 2010; WHO 2008). Organisations and development agencies believe that by giving women the ability to choose their partner, to have fewer children, more time between births, investing in children’s education as well their food and health needs, less demand will be made on the families’ resources and so helping to reduce poverty (UNFPA 2010). Thus economic development will expand opportunities and increase productivity and raise the GDP for developing countries. This ability for women to decide when and with whom to have children will supposedly generate opportunities for them to gain education and employment, so contributing to the development of their country, as well as attaining economic empowerment for themselves. Greig and Koopman’s (2002) study in Botswana highlighted how economic empowerment can lead to SRHR empowerment; they discovered that Botswana women’s negotiating power in terms of condom usage was increased as their economic independence rose. Their discovery links back to Kabeer’s discussion that the economically dependent woman has ‘power within’, and thus the ability to achieve ‘power to.’ Interestingly, however, the UDHS Survey highlighted how women who are involved in all household decisions desire the most children, whereas women who participated in one or two decisions desired the least (UDHS 2011). From this data perhaps, Ugandan women who are involved in all decisions, are also accounting towards the household income and feel they would be able to afford more children.

Economic empowerment is interlinked with gender equality as highlighted by the patrilineal structures in Uganda where women are not able to obtain land rights. So the link between gender relations and economic empowerment is considered a fundamental human right by international development bodies (OCED 2011: 9-10). This study will analyse the potential impacts of economic empowerment towards SRHR empowerment. As all the groups focus on income-generation for the women and not specifically SRHR empowerment, it would be unfair to examine the group’s ability to achieve SRHR empowerment free standing, and instead it must be looked at through the eyes of the benefits which the groups give them, such as collective feeling as discussed by Christens (2012) and the possible benefits of this form of empowerment on the women’s SRHR empowerment achievements.
3.5. Conceptual Scheme

The conceptual scheme displayed in Figure 2 is based on the SRA described in section 3.2.1, and visualises the theoretical concepts which have directed this study. Drawing on the theoretical framework, the two main concepts in this study are Kabeer’s empowerment framework and SRHR empowerment dimensions of gender relations and decision-making. These concepts are influenced by the Ugandan context illustrated as Structural Factors in Figure 2. The strategically selective context is highlighted as culture, religion, political context, history and economy and greatly effects the ability for women’s’ SRHR empowerment. The context factor shows how structures and actions at the group will be overshadowed by factors such as gender relations or religion. Thus SRA is shows how the strategically selective context, displayed in the text box at the top, will also be affected by the women’s SRHR achievements (indicated by the two way arrow).

Kabeer’s concept of empowerment is displayed as the resources which the groups provide (indicated by in the text box) the potential economic empowerment they attain and the final achievement of SRHR empowerment. Through the stage of ‘power within’ (indicated by the arrow), when women gain self-worth and are then able to work towards economic empowerment. From economic empowerment, this study will examine the ‘power to’ stage (indicated by the arrows) to explore whether the women are able to employ their agency to achieve ‘power with.’ To conclude the conceptual scheme, the ‘power with’ is examined from two direct indicators of SRHR empowerment; gender relations and decision-making (indicated in the text box). These two indicators include self-confidence, gender equality and family relationships and G.B.V as examined in section 3.4. Before discussing the data obtained in order to examine this relationship, the next chapter will give an overview of the research methodology employed to generate aforementioned data.
Chapter 4 Research Methodology

Pictures of Study Locations

Pic. 1 Jinja Group

Pic. 2 Iganga Group

Pic. 3 Kamuli Group
In this chapter, I will explore my ontological and epistemological stance which direct the methodology employed (Sumner and Tribe 2008: 55). PAR and my research methodology will be discussed before an examination of the data analysis system, the challenges, and ethical considerations are undertaken. Importantly, I would just like to make it clear that because of the sensitivity involved in this research and respect for the women involved, all names are pseudonyms and only relevant detail about the location of each groups, such as which district have been disclosed.

4.1 Research Strategy – ontology and epistemology

Due to my ontological stance, which is constructivist rooted in critical realism, this study employs qualitative research methods. Critical realism, as discussed by Sayer (2000), makes a distinction between realities and our accounts of it, but I wish to take my epistemology a stage further and base it in the Strategic Relational Approach (SRA). As discussed in my theoretical framework, SRA is the dialectic relationship between a strategic actor and their context (Hay 2002). Thus, SRA is key to understanding the interaction between structure and agency (Jessop 2005). I utilised qualitative methodology as its flexibility assists in understanding how individuals see their world and how this view is ever changing due to their own actions (Bryman 2008). To gain a true understanding of the respondents’ vision ethnographic methods were employed. For example; observing behaviour; being involved in everyday conversation; managing interviews and collecting documentation to gain a true perspective on the culture and people’s actions with that particular context (Bryman 2008). This study employed methodology that engaged the women so to achieve a better understanding of
the context in which their sexual behaviour and practices exist, as well as understanding their own views of their sexuality, their power and actions in their sexual relationships.

4.2 Study Locations of Jinja, Iganga and Kamuli

Map.3 Uganda; the three districts where the groups were held are marked (mapworlds.com)

The fieldwork was carried out over a period of three months from July to September 2012 in Central Eastern Uganda. The Central Eastern region covers ten districts beginning at the source of the White Nile, ending at Lake Kyoga. This study worked with women's groups in in three of these districts:
Jinja, Kamuli and Iganga. The Central Eastern region has a great deal of internal immigrants as it contains the second largest city in Uganda; Jinja Town, where many people come for work. Ugandans have been reallocated to this area due to the high level of insecurity in the Northern region of the country. Although this region contains the second biggest town, many people do not have electricity or access to a toilet, and in fact I still had regular electric power cuts, although I was staying in one of the more affluent areas of the Eastern Central areas: Jinja Town.

Jinja Town, sits right at the top of the source of The White Nile, which now makes Jinja a hot spot for tourists willing to try their luck white water rafting. Jinja is a bustling busy town with nightclubs and bars to cater to the tired rafters and is only three hours by public transport from the capital, Kampala. Of the three districts I worked in, Jinja has the largest population, with close to 488,300 inhabitants (UCC 2010: 16). The main language spoken between locals is Lusoga, but due to the proximity with Kampala, Baganda is spoken as well as national language English. Living in the town gave me the chance to walk down the one main street and talk with local traders and observe day-to-day life without being noticed or being out of place to distract the action because I was able to build friendships with local shopkeepers, one of whom even invited me around for dinner to meet her relatives and see life inside a middle-income Ugandan family. In contradiction with the tourist and nightclub areas, surrounding the outskirts of the town are slum communities, due to the casual and migrant workers who engulf Jinja desperately searching for employment in a country where only a small percentage of the population find any kind of paid work. It was in one of these slum communities where I worked with the urban Jinja group, under the porch of the women’s homes or under make-shift sheds. Here I truly understand the term; urban poverty. Once you enter the slum community, your senses are immediately overwhelmed with the abundance of children, animals, mud, and alcohol. I have never experienced anything like it, and although the slum is within the town, the presence of a white woman was a shock to most of the community. Children would run up to me and shout ‘muzungo, muzungo’ before inspecting my arms, wondering why they were so pale with funny spots.

Iganga is known as a trading district for many Ugandans in this region, as there is a large commercial centre, Iganga Town Centre; with a regular market, banks, shops and petrol stations. It is in fact one of the most densely populated as, despite being the smallest of the districts in the study, it still has over 482,900 residents (UCC 2010: 15). However, the moment you step out of the trading centre, you quickly realise that you are in arable land. This is where Iganga, the semi-rural, final group was held. The majority of people here rely on subsistence farming as well as a small amount of cash crops. Due to the proximity with Kenya, men also transport goods over the border meaning some women do not see their husbands for weeks or months at a time and must rely on
these small cash crops to survive.

Kamuli district was where the college which held the rural group was located. Kamuli district has an estimated population of 484,400 (UCC 2010: 15). The area is immersed in forests of eucalyptus and pine trees, planted by wealthy investors to earn cash in timber, and plots of land owned by local farmers growing local foods such as bananas (matooke), Irish potatoes and, my favourite, cassava. Kamuli - where I hosted my group - is over an hour way from Jinja by minibus (matatu), if you are lucky enough to find a bus. The road from Jinja to Kamuli is in desperate need of repair, and many an hour was spent banging my head on the roof of the matatu, or standing by the side of the road waiting for the police to pass as the matatu was overcrowded. The group was held at an NGO funded college, which was predominately two outdoor shelters, with a plantation at the back and a shed with pigs and chickens who would poke their heads in to see what we were discussing. Most of the women at this group, I discovered, had to walk over 45 minutes to attend a meeting, sometimes in the blistering heat carrying umbrellas which they had found at the side of the road.

4.3 Sampling

I conducted this study with three study populations; women, men and experts. I did so because I wished to attain reliability and validity, imperative to social science (Boeije 2010). As described by Boeije (2010), ‘reliability is the dependability of measures used in both quantitative and qualitative methods, and validity is how truthful the research carried out is’ (Boeije 2010: 169). The first study population consisted of women of reproductive age 15-45 years across three women’s groups; in Jinja, Iganga and Kamuli. I used multistage purposive sampling to select the required respondents in the first study population as I made a conscious decision for which relevant actors to include in the research (Bryman 2008). I decided to work with women’s groups individuals, to gain a wide study population. I wished to work with women’s groups focusing on SRHR training, only groups I attained were income-focusing groups due to lack of available SRHR groups. For selecting the women’s groups, I had to depend upon organizations working with women in the Central Eastern region. The two most important organisations were Restless Development and Jinja Women’s Association. Restless Development is an international youth-led development organisation and had recently completed a youth empowerment program, (YEP) in the Eastern regions of Uganda. I was in touch with the organisation before leaving for the field and I utilised a desk in their office in Jinja where they assisted with recent SRHR literature. Jinja Women’s Association is a local and much smaller organisation, supported for the last five years by Comic Relief [a renowned British charity started by Lenny Henry, a British comedian] providing girls in Jinja District with school education and assisting
families through income-generating programs. I set out a criterion, which the women’s groups must follow to be included in this study:

1) The group must be within a radius of two hours by public transport from my base, Jinja Town
2) The group must consist of around ten regular members
3) The group must be open to speak about SRHR and topics of a sensitive nature
4) The group must be willing to hold PAR sessions once or twice a week for 2-3 hours.

With the assistance from Restless Development and the criteria, Iganga and Kamuli groups were contacted. Jinja Women’s Association connected me with a women’s group in the slum community of Jinja.

### 4.3.1 The groups

Jinja women’s group was set up by two older women, Jess and Jackie, in the slum community of Jinja. It started by brewing bootleg *waragi* [a gin type alcohol] to assist the women to pay for school fees. Then, when Jinja Women’s Association became involved in 2010, other skills workshops/development such as bead-making began. It costs 5000 shillings [€1.40] to become a member, and everyone helps with finding materials for the beads, which is any type of hard coloured cardboard. They have no external funding and have had no SRHR courses. This group is the most unstructured as they only meet once a week on the porch of Jackie’s house, there is little involvement from Jinja Women’s Association apart from an odd visit to see how things are going. In selecting the male population, I approached women in the groups and asked if their husbands would speak with me. To gain expert respondents, I contacted all the organisations who worked in SRHR, women’s empowerment, HIV prevention and similar development groups in the three districts where the groups were based. Through snowball sampling, institutes in Kampala were placed in contact with this study and interviewed.

The Iganga women’s group was founded in 2008 by Jason and James, two young men from Iganga, one of whom is disabled. The group consists of 30 members, all of whom are women, a minority of whom are disabled. The group is entirely self-funded and self-sustaining; all members pay 10,000 shillings [3 euros] to join, then 500 shillings [14 cents] per class they attend to cover the teacher’s fees. There is an elected chairperson each year and a board including the treasurer, the two directors of the group and the chairperson, who represents the other members’ views. The group works primarily on vocational skills, focusing on tailoring due to their proximity to Iganga Town, where there is a high demand for clothing because of the large market. They also provide vocational skill building such as animal husbandry, house building and recently, in collaboration with Reproductive Uganda to provide SRHR and family planning advice.
Kamuli women’s group is a small women’s group set up by Asha, a student, at a college in Kamuli. This college focuses on vocational skills such as hairdressing, beauty, carpentry. Kamuli is funded by various bodies including Entrepreneurs International and, although it is open both to men and women in the community, 90 per cent of the students are women. The Kamuli group was set up primarily by Asha, a Muslim lady in April 2011. The group wishes to ‘empower’ women by making them more self-reliant and teaches mixed farming, basket weaving and improvements in personal health and diet. Each member has to pay 6,000 [1.70 euros] to join the group, but there is no charge for the sessions when they meet up as they teach each other and no outside person is normally involved. There are currently ten members in the group.

4.4 Data Methods and Research Themes

PAR

In line with Bryman (2008) to gain triangulation, I used a variety of qualitative methods with the women as I employed; PAR and semi-structured interviews. The innovative technique employed was Participatory Action Research (PAR) by linking SRA with Kabeer’s dimensions of empowerment. This method of research has its emphasis on people’s lived experiences and their individual and collective change brought on by the co-construction of knowledge (McIntyre 2008: xii). By seeing the ‘notion of action as a legitimate mode of knowing, thereby taking the realm of knowledge into the field of practice’ (Tandon 1996: 21) the study provided an environment where not only the participants, but also the researcher was able to remodel their understanding of how political, educational, social, economic, and familial contexts direct people’s lives (McIntyre 2008: xii). Critical theory and Freire’s theory of conscientization (see Chapter 3) are major influences in PAR. As I wished to acknowledge how the power of social and cultural structures mediate the way the women act in SRHR situations, PAR fits into these critical reflections. Critical reflection on the part of the participants and the researcher is an essential entity for individual and collective change and, I felt, PAR was the best method for uncovering this critical reflection. I believe PAR provides the data to be more reliable, too, as the women could reveal aspects of their lived histories, which reflected their personal and collective truths and realities. A basic outline of key topics was prepared for the PAR sessions, but PAR is fundamentally about how participants share in the conduction of the research and how important their life experiences are to the study (McIntyre 2008: 15). I was thus open and receptive to their directions, even when at times the participants were less interested in a particular issue which I may have felt important. However this lack of enthusiasm was not ignored, and in fact just like the heated debates which arose when the women became energised over a certain topic, this was noted and analysed.
Background of my PAR experience:

My background as a 3D Community Support Developer gave me the tools to conduct PAR. For two years I worked with disabled and vulnerable adults and children, some of whom did not use verbal communication. My role was to discover who these people were and what kind of future they wanted. To be able to communicate with this group of people in an enjoyable and creative way, I employed PAR techniques. These techniques are person-centred and involve making sure that the person is included every step of the way. To do so, creative tools are implemented such as music, dance and drawing. I felt these tools would be beneficial for working with the groups to achieve as much participation from the women as possible. If PAR can work for groups who do not speak, I thought they could work for groups who speak a different language to me.

Structure of a PAR session:

All PAR sessions began in the same way; I would attach the basic rules to a wall which we had all agreed upon in the first session. By agreeing upon rules before par started it meant that everyone felt that they owned the group as they had decided upon the rules themselves, not me. It also meant that if anyone disrespected the group there was a point of reference to refer which kept some structure and order within the groups. It also formalised the PAR sessions, so the women knew that the sessions would be enjoyable, but that they were also to be taken seriously. All PAR sessions, were held on the days the groups met, but 2-3 hours beforehand, so that the women did not have to come on a different day to the group.

Baseline Survey:

I stated the first session the same, as I conducted a quantative method through PAR methodology involving 50 women: 15 in Jinja; 26 in Iganga and 9 in Kamuli, to gain an overview of respondents background (see Box 5.1 for a full description). I addressed the following themes through PAR: the background characteristics of the respondents in the groups; their previous collective SRHR empowerment; potential impacts of the group on the members’ future and ways forward to improve their current living situation which the groups individually decided. As this is a preliminary study, only a few direct indicators of SRHR empowerment were examined in semi-structured interviews these were; ability to choose your own partner, bride price, education, ability to refuse sex, negotiating power in family planning, family formation and determination of number. The group dynamics were also examined; their motivations for attending the group, how they believed
the group had addressed these motivations and needs, and what future potential impacts the groups could have on their lives.

4.5. Semi structured interviews

Eighteen women were randomly chosen (drawing names from a hat) to be interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire from women who participated in PAR; 9 women from Iganga 5 from Jinja and 4 women from Kamuli. The interviews were conducted in a side office at Iganga, another classroom at Kamuli and under a chicken coup in Jinja. The people involved were I, the interviewee and the interpreter. Voice recording, filming and extensive notes were taken throughout the interviews to compare the three forms of data collections for reliability (Bryman 2008). The background characteristics of the eighteen women interviewed is highlighted by table 4.5.3. From these eighteen women, ten were living with a partner (married/cohabitating), one was a single mother, one was widowed, two had husbands who had left due to HIV, one had a boyfriend and three had no current relationships. All women had at least one child except the four girls who were still attending school. The oldest interviewee was forty-five and the youngest was sixteen. None of the women interviewed had finished secondary school (albeit the younger women were still in school), and only seven had finished primary school. (Please refer to Annex 1 for questionnaire and Annex 3 for a more detailed background summary).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background Characteristics</th>
<th>Iganga</th>
<th>Jinja</th>
<th>Kamuli</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total women</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age range - mean age</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-habiting</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of children:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schooling:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only up to Primary</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Up to Secondary</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of time at group:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 6 months</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 months &lt; 1 year</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;1 year</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1: Summary of background characteristics of women interviewed in the three groups*
Semi-structured interviews were conducted for the study population; men, husbands and partners of the women who attended the women’s groups for their perspective on women’s empowerment. Research themes addressed: background information of the respondents, SRHR of women (the same indicators as first study population) within their own relationships, their view on the groups and its potential impacts on their wives and themselves. The same questionnaire as was used for the women was implemented, only adapted for a man’s perspective.

4.5.1. In-depth Interviews

Eleven in-depth interviews with experts in the field of development, SRHR and HIV/AIDS and women’s empowerment were conducted. The interviews were guided by a topic list, which provided a structure for opening dialogue around central themes, whilst also providing flexibility. Respondents were acquired through contacting local organisations and NGOs were contacted, who practiced SRHR/empowerment programs. To gain a greater scope of voices and opinions, I attended various conferences concerning SRHR and empowerment both within and outside the Eastern region. One such conference was ‘HIV Prevention in Uganda: Are we moving in the right direction?’ held in Kampala. Lot more about what I did! The research themes discussed were: what are the biggest challenges for women’s SRHR empowerment; ways to increase SRHR, what benefits women’s group potentially have on SRHR empowerment and general information on governmental and national SRHR policies.

4.5.2. Document research


4.5.3. Field observations and informal conversations

As I was living and researching in the same area, a field diary assisted in reviewing my actions throughout the study. Any informal discussions that were held with the landlord or the local people who worked at the market were compiled within this field diary. Particular attention focused on information in gaining a better understanding of people’s views about women’s empowerment, and any religious and cultural influences and norms. During the field, a note book in which snippets of
conversations, information from posters, general ideas and thoughts on my surroundings were compiled. These notes were digitalised onto the computer, with clippings from the newspapers which seemed of interest and related to SRHR.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Location</th>
<th>PAR sessions with women</th>
<th>Interviews with women</th>
<th>Interviews with husbands</th>
<th>Interviews with experts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jinja</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iganga</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamuli</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kampala</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Number of sessions/respondents by data collection methods, study population and location.

This table highlights the three study populations and the data collection methods, utilised with each study population and in which location. As noted there is only one interview within the male study population, this will be further explored in limitations

4.6. Data processing and analysis

Notes collected from interviews with experts and PAR sessions were transferred onto the computer each evening, to make sure no key points were missed. All voice recording, photos / films and notes from interviews and PAR sessions were digitalised as soon as possible. I compared these recordings with notes to attain the highest reliability of data. Once back from the field, Atlas. Ti was implemented to obtain a code tree, which assisted with the analysis of the large amount of data collected.

4.7. Ethical issues

Although the groups were eager and willing to be involved in the research, it was stated from the outset that I was a student, not part of an organisation. All stakeholders were fully informed of this
study’s intentions, that is, to explore empowerment, specifically SRHR empowerment within the Central Eastern region. Written consent was obtained from all respondents as I was aware that as we were covering sensitive issues, it may have caused problems with their husbands if I was not clear on the topics we would be discussing from the outset. For interviews and PAR sessions, privacy and safety of all respondents were sought but this was very difficult, especially in Jinja, as there were only a few places where it is possible to discuss matters confidentially. In Jinja there were often drunk men who would try to join the group, and interact during PRA sessions. Although the women ignored them, I did not feel comfortable in the situation and would be aware of their presence during sensitive topics. The women were also affected by the men, as they became more outspoken to intimidate them to leave.

4.8. Challenges and reflections on data gathering

This study was originally focusing on SRHR training programs, as I had connection with Restless Development and their SRHR programs before entering the field. The decision to focus on income-generating groups and not SRHR specific groups was due to Restless Development’s end of SRHR program so, this study adapted to concentrate on SRHR empowerment within available groups. This forced decision has made my research more difficult as I have researched a concept within these groups which is not their main objective.

A second challenge in the field was the language barrier and need for an interpreter. An interpreter was fundamental as I relied on them for translation, building rapport and contributing to valid data. At the beginning of the research, I experienced working with an interpreter who was a volunteer from YEP at Restless Development, and thus supposedly an experienced person in empowerment and SRHR issues. However, I soon discovered that he aired his own opinion and at times was disrespectful to the women. The groups visibly relaxed when I replaced him with Aimee, 21 year old female interpreter, whom I met through Restless Development and had experience in condom demonstrations and sexual health discussions. Aimee became my accomplice though, and a huge benefit to the research as we built a strong relationship, and I involved her in all areas of the research to gain her perspective and to make her feel more than an interpreter. Aimee assisted me with planning the PAR sessions, and on the way back from sessions, she would tell me what she thought had been successful or what could be improved on next time. She was also my second pair of eyes, noting key themes which arose, and small facial expressions and gestures from the women which I may have missed during interviews whilst hurriedly writing down notes. Aimee was a conscientious interpreter, asking me to clarify questions if she did not understand what I meant and reminding me to be patient whilst waiting for a women to answer in interviews. She also clarified
questions for women did not understand the point at first or who gave an answer which made clear that they had misunderstood the question. Aimee also gave me background information on traditions and culture which I may have not known otherwise, and in fact became a great friend and tour guide around Jinja.

The final challenge relates to the language barrier as the majority of PAR sessions were conducted in Lusoga. Although, in the Jinja group, some interviews were conducted in Luganda, the mother language of the Baganda tribe from the Central region, and two from this group were interviewed in English. My interpreter was not mastered in Luganda, and these interviewees had limited English, so some data may be incomplete. Due to my struggles at the beginning of the fieldwork with the male interpreter; relevant data may have been missed here or even mistranslated.

4.8.1. Personal challenges

The main personal challenge refers to the expectations that the women’s groups had of me. As stated by Pippin a participant in Jinja: “we have a white person who is teaching us about how to culture ourselves from getting HIV virus and how to get good funding.” I therefore felt an obligation to give something back to the groups as I had asked so much from them. So I explained that the second half of PAR sessions would be spent on topics they would like to discuss. Kamuli wished to discuss marriage counselling for example, but after consultation with my supervisor, who told me that I should involve an expert on this topic, I contacted WORI and instead, we focused on income generating ideas and advice. In fact, this challenge turned into a major benefit for my research as I believe I achieved a level of trust and respect from the women, which I otherwise may not have acquired if I had not ventured into a reciprocal relationship. This respect was highlighted at the end of my research when the Iganga group staged a lavish party with national reporters, local MPs and a vast array of food which I know would have cost them a great deal. Although after building this close relationship with the women, I did struggle to remain ‘neutral’ and objective when hearing about inequality and G.B.V, at one point having to leave the room to compose myself after a tense PAR session in Iganga on gender equality.

4.8.2. Limitations

This study entails a number of limitations. Firstly, the findings are based on a convenience sample of three women’s groups, within three districts of the Central Eastern region, so limiting the representativity of Ugandan women both within this region and Uganda as a whole. This research is
not intended to be transferable to other African nations or developing countries, as the cultural, social norms and governmental actions in fighting HIV are Uganda specific, but may be useful to other women’s groups in Uganda. As a result, these findings are not applicable to other contexts and relate to a particular group of women at a moment in time. Although a mixed demographic of urban, semi-urban and rural sectors was attempted, some of the women were migrants, so I cannot claim that the data is entirely representative of the Central Eastern region. Due to the limited time frame, the data was restricted to a key choice of direct and indirect variables of empowerment. The very concept of empowerment means measurement and evaluation is incredibly difficult. I do not claim to have found the ‘right’ way to measure SRHR empowerment, but through the women’s guidance, I believe the key dimensions for this study were examined. On this topic, some areas were focused on in later interviews as they arose once I had become more confident and had dismissed my male interpreter. Therefore the research is unable to validate all information discussed in later interviews. A final limitation is the dearth of information from a male perspective. I believe due to the sensitivity of topics discussed, for which the women had been open and honest, perhaps the women were wary of me interviewing their husbands.
Chapter 5 Empirical Data on SRHR preconditions for women in the Central Eastern region

In this empirical chapter, will look at sub question: a) *What are the SRHR conditions for the women before attending the groups?* This question relates to the resources the women had before attending the groups and was answered through PAR sessions and interviews with them. Interviews from experts and informal conversations with local people in Jinja, are also incorporated into this chapter to assist with triangulation of results and background information. When appropriate a description of the PAR session will be given, data from interviews and graphs when required. For reference in graphs and tables, where required to make clear the difference in group findings, the groups will be labelled as such - Jinja labelled blue, Iganga labelled red and Kamuli labelled green.

5.1. Gender Equality

**Box 5.1. PAR Baseline Survey:**

Nr of women = 15 Jinja, 26 Iganga, 9 Kamuli

To gain background information all the women in the groups stood up as I placed three markers on the floor. I had a set of background questions similar to the beginning of the interview guide (see Annex 1). I then asked the questions one by one, which my interpreter then repeated for the women. The women were asked to stand on the marker on the floor depending on their answer. For example, for the question ‘Are you married?’ I pointed to one marker being yes, and one marker as no. The women moved to the appropriate marker. I then asked which type: traditional, religious or co-habiting and indicated which marker represented which answer and the women moved accordingly. The same tools were used for where they meet their partner. I then counted the number of women on each marker and wrote this down to compare with the other groups (please see Annex 2 for Survey questions).
Graph.1 Where did you meet your partner?

To begin the research, a PAR baseline survey was conducted with all three groups. A description for how the survey was conducted is stated in Box 5.1 and the detailed questionnaire is in Annex 2. The first dimension of SRHR empowerment examined in this study is gender equality, especially in sexual relationships. Thus the baseline survey was conducted to discover how many of the women in the PAR groups were married. In Jinja 6 of the women were married, with another 3 stating that they were widows. In the Iganga group 16 of the women were married and in the Kamuli group 4 women were married. The majority of the 50 women participating in the baseline survey were married, 26 in total (6 in Jinja, 16 in Iganga, and 4 in Kamuli). It was important to understand the context of the Central Eastern region and the ability for the women to choose their own partner. For this region I asked the question; ‘Where did you meet your partner?’ As shown by the graph three main answers emerged; arranged, at school and in the village. For all three groups, the two same answers came out as most common; arranged and school. The survey did not ask who arranged the marriages, but from further discussion with the women and informal conversations, the two actors most commonly involved in arranging marriages are parents of both sexes, and ssengas (aunties to girls). It was also not discussed if the girls who meet the boys in school and at the village, had chosen to marry the boys independently, or once the relationship was formalised, normally through sexual relations if the parents suggested marriage (Otiso 2006). The work category was given by the woman who had jobs at a local school as a cook and a woman who met her husband whilst cutting trees down in the community. ‘Other’ referred to a boda-boda driver (a local moped driver) and a woman who met her husband whilst walking into town.
5.2. Interviews

The marriage findings were reflected in interviews, as the majority of women in the survey in Iganga stated the main form of marriage as arranged marriages as shown in Box 5.1 and in the interviews with Iganga women, 5 of the 8 married women, had had arranged marriages. These 5 interviewees with arranged marriages stated their parents and ssengas being the key actors. To discover how much agency the women in arranged marriages had in disagreeing with the arrangement, I normally posed the question; ‘Could you have said no?’ If they were unsure of how to answer, a second question was added; ‘Did you like anyone else?’ Most women stated that there was no one else that they liked at the time and others believed it was the right thing to do because their sisters had been married in the same fashion: “With my other sister they also [parents] got her a husband. I don’t know what it would have felt like. It is normal, that this is the way it is. Why would I want it any other way?” [Sarah, 25, married at 18, attending Iganga for 4 months]. Parents can arrange marriages from an early age, partnering up children from birth. Bea, 20 from Iganga is one of these examples, and when asked if she was able to negotiate the possibility of marriage to someone else, she became very quiet and was asked to repeat her answer. She stated that she would have encountered a ‘misunderstanding’ (as translated by the interpreter) with her parents, but did not expand further on this. The fact that 3 other women also stated ‘complications’ or ‘misunderstandings’ when trying to discuss marriage arrangements, highlights perhaps the difficulty women having in discussing these issues with their parents.

5.2.1 Economics in marriage

From the 13 women interviewed who were married or cohabiting, the families of 7 of the women, received a bride price. For women who had arranged marriages via ssengas, their bride price was one of the reasons that they could not protest, even if they had wanted to, although most interviewed women stated that they were happy to have an arranged marriage. The women stated that they were happy to be ‘set up’ and linked the bride price as part of their reason for accepting: ‘I was fine with it, it was ok, he brought the money and he brought me home’” [Helen, 32, attending Iganga for 1 year]. Jackie 45 group leader at Jinja, further explained the link with acceptance with the bringing of bride price: “I meet my husband in village, my ssenga brought him to me and he brought a dowry. I was happy to be set up. He was not a boyfriend, he straight away married me as he came straight with the dowry.” Thus bride price is not always viewed by the women in a negative light. For example, the leader of the Kamuli group, Asha a Muslim lady in a non-arranged marriage, when asked about her marriage, sat up very straight looking the researcher in the eye and
proclaimed in English: “We are equal the reason is that men are supposed to pay the dowry [bride price] not the women. My husband paid a big dowry.” Asha in facts believes that bride price is a sign of gender equality because the exchange of money to the family of the woman is seen as sign of respect as the husband is following in the tradition for formalisation of the relationships (c.f. Nobelius et al 2010). Other women in non-arranged marriages had used bride price to their advantage to gain their parents approval of the relationship; Bo who has been married for 27 years explained:

“I used to leave home to go to his without them knowing. I denied it. My husband was scared and he convinced me to tell my parents after two years. My parents were happy, they didn’t think about the past. They didn’t care; they just wanted to see him. We took presents; we even had to hire a car as we had so many! We took 3 bags of sugar, salt and in fact we amazed my parents.” [Bo, 45, attending Iganga for 1 year]

Bo said that she had been nervous to introduce her parents to her husband as he already had two other co-wives, and her parents would have been worried that he could not provide for her as she was only 17 when she moved in with him.

5.2.2. Education: PAR

To achieve a high bride price, as mentioned by Asha, it can be based on your family status, a women’s virginity but also her education (c.f. Otiso 2006). Asha had finished secondary school, which would perhaps answer why she had a high bride price, and was proud of both her bride price and the status it insinuates, attending school. However, Asha is a rare example in terms of women in this area completing school, as discussed in Chapter 2; only 6.4 % of Central Eastern women complete primary school education (UDHS 2011). The UDHS 2011 results were backed up by the PAR baseline results, which stated that 15 of the 50 women participating had completed primary school. Not a surprise then, that only 2 of the 50 women in in PAR had completed secondary school. Although what I found interesting was that these two women (one being Asha) were both based in Kamuli, the most rural region as in UDHS 2011, it the rural women who have the least education nationally. Only 15% had reached secondary school and the majority of those were the younger girls who were still attending. These results highlight the limited formal education, which the majority of women had before attending the groups.
5.2.3. Education: Interviews

8 of the women interviewed cited money or more precisely, the lack of parents being able to afford for school fees, as the reason they had not finished secondary school. A nurse at the Kamuli Health Centre reinforced my data: “Poverty affects them and the parents cannot afford for them [girls] to go to school. If the girl has gone big [begun puberty] then they find them a husband. They cannot afford to look after them” [Nurse, Kamuli Health Centre]. The nurse, who was from Kenya and during the interview was slightly condescending of the Ugandan lifestyle, does highlight the link between poverty and lack of education for daughters. The women also discussed the link with lack of education and gender: “normally after a girl finish [school], they do nothing, they get married and they leave,” [Jackie 45, attending Jinja for 4 years]. However, the women themselves were very passionate about education and the opportunities it provides in the future, and all stated in their interviews that they were disappointed they had not continued their studies, but understood the financial reasons behind their parents, at times, fraught decision. The women at times would see marriage as their only means of continuing their studies (see section 1.4). An example of this determination and utilisation of their sexual and reproductive rights to attend was given by Pippin in Jinja, married at 17, one week after meeting her husband: “Because I had my problems, my father died, so after that, after he died we got married because I didn’t have anyone to pay for me, my school fees” [Pippin, 23, attending Jinja for 2 months]. However, she had her first child within a year of marriage and could no longer attend school, making her marriage seem more constraining as she had a baby to look after. She believed that there was no acceptable alternative but to marry the boy if she was to not only continue school, but survive without her father.

5.3. Relationships: PAR

5.3. PAR Session -What makes a Good/Bad relationship:

Nr of women =, 10 Jinja, 24 Iganga, 6 Kamuli

I asked the women in small groups, to write/draw on one side for what makes a good marriage and what constitutes a bad marriage on the other side. For younger girls in all groups, I asked them to write/draw the same but for relationships
The next logical step, once exploring how the women met and married their partners, was to examine from their perspectives, what factors made up a good/bad relationship. This PAR session, about relationships was the turning point for this study and the moment when the groups began to adapt the structure and content of the sessions, as I had hoped. From the PAR session all groups expressed similar factors which helped keep a marriage strong such as love, communication, respect and discipline (given from the wives), money and health. It was the factors which turn a relationship sour, which separated the groups; Jinja for example, stated poverty and money, such as a man not being able to pay school fees. After the women stated lack of money as a concern, they then asked for assistance in developing money making ideas, and as I was utilising PAR and the research was a mutually beneficial relationship, I assisted them to devise a plan of possible ideas, which we continued for the rest of the sessions. From income-generating sessions, they discussed the bead necklaces they had been making and in fact, I then put them in touch with two local shops who agreed to start stocking the women’s necklaces. My actions increased the women’s respect of me and meant our relationship became stronger. As well, one shop had managed to sell four necklaces before I even left Jinja.

In the PAR session on what factors lead to a bad relationship, Iganga emphasised the lack of discipline on the women’s side, drunkenness and polygamy as major causes for unhappiness within a relationship. However, two small groups within the PAR session in Iganga became enthusiastic stating that it was in fact wives infertility which was the biggest factor in a breakdown of a relationship, causing an argument to break out between the other women, who tried to argue that this was not a good enough reason and a man should be patient. (All of this conversation was translated to me, whilst it was happening, and further explained to me on the journey way home). The group’s impassioned demonstration, lead us to discuss infertility in much greater detail in the following session. In the next session, we carried out a role play in Iganga, where I separated the women into small groups, giving them each a character; wife, husband, husband’s parents and village community. I then stated that the wife and husband seem unable to have children; what are the discussions and views amongst the characters and what would be the final result? After some discussion, with the parents of the husband vehemently telling him to ‘chase the wife away,’ the agreement was for the husband to take another wife, which is interesting as Iganga stated polygamy as a major factor for a ‘bad relationship.’ As highlighted in Chapter 2, the Central Eastern region has one of the highest rates of polygamy in the country, yet this data explains the reason for as co-wives and the acceptance due to fertility issues and the pressures men are under to produce. My results add though, that the wives are not happy about the arrangement. Kamuli stated that unfaithfulness and drunkenness were problematic factors, but their most impassioned answer was ‘too much
violence’. At the time, I could not get them to explain, exactly how much violence was seen as unacceptable from their standpoint, as we were coming to the end of the session. However, I was aware that the UDHS 2011 report states that Central Eastern women are one of the most accepting regions in terms of G.B.V (see section 2.4). Kabeer (2005) also discusses acceptance of violence from partners due to a woman’s lack of power in unequal gender relations, so I was interested to see if there was a link with gender equality. Furthermore, the women then asked for advice on how to prevent violence and as I did not have the adequate information, I suggested we explore the issue further in the coming session and that I would obtain an expert in the field of G.B.V to come and talk to them in the future. I am unsure as to why they asked me for advice however, I think it may be because they thought that I had links with organisations locally and perhaps nationally, which they were not privy too. They agreed for us to hold a session based on violence within the home so we discussed reasons for violence and ways to resolve it, which will now be reviewed.

5.4. Gender Based Violence: PAR

The statement above during the PAR session in Kamuli, highlighted what they think is acceptable circumstance for a man to use violence against his wife. The key aspects in the statement for the cause of violence are housework, food and children. From these results, highlight how if the woman does not fulfil her specific gender role than she is likely to receive punishment, which is further expanded on in Figure 3.
The main reasons given for G.B.V in Kamuli are adultery, which in Uganda, is viewed as acceptable for a man, but when asked, the women confirmed they meant adultery on the women’s part (Otiso 2006). Poverty is highlighted as a reason for domestic abuse, and drawing on Cheston et al’s (2002) study on microfinance in Ghana, limited finances can put an incredible strain on already difficult and fraught relationships. Heidi, 24 when interviewed in Iganga further emphasised the link with relationship problems and poverty as she stated: “We argue but he [husband] is not a bad man. It is only because of poverty that we have problems.” The other main reasons for domestic abuse are related to a wife’s household duties and personal hygiene as it states: ‘washing your body.’ This acceptance of gender based violence was also explored by local experts: “One of the biggest issues is there is violence against women. Men will batter you. Women face death if they commit adultery. You can report your husband now, but still it is not enough” [Agnes Towli, Women First]. G.B.V was not restricted only to wives however; as two of the younger girls discussed the violence they suffered at the hands of their parents because of their sex: “My dad used to beat me and call me a prostitute. He said I was useless and that I would never make anything of myself. My mother did nothing. I know it is because I am the only girl in the family” [Faith, 16, attending Jinja for 1 year]. It was not only in Kamuli where G.B.V was discussed but in fact an impromptu discussion began in Iganga, when I asked some women if they could stay after the session to be interviewed. This request was met with a resounding ‘no’, the interpreter translated why this was:

All women have to stay, or have to go. If there is a woman still here, and her next-door neighbour goes home, the husband of the woman still here will ask, “where is my wife?” If the next door neighbour says, “Oh she is still at the group.” The husband will not believe her
and think she is lying, so when the wife does go home, the husband will argue with her and beat her “[Iganga group 7th August, session 7].

Their statement brought home to me how restricted women’s movements are, and that due to the rigid structures surrounding the women, they needed to explain their whereabouts if they intended to be late and ask for permission in advance. If they did not do so, men would be suspicious and would express their higher position of power through violence.

5.5. Refusal of sex: Interviews

G.B.V was linked with refusal of sex in relationships, and was most common amongst women whose marriages were arranged by ssengas or parents. Fran, whose marriage had been arranged by her parents at 19, stated: “He would have kicked me out the house!” If she had refused to have intercourse with her husband. She further linked sexual relations with the teaching of ssengas: “Culturally girls are taught by ssengas, you are taught to behave like this and obey your husband. You can’t forget what ssengas tell you” [Fran, 39, attending Iganga for 2 years]. 7 interviewees revealed having a ssenga, one being Faith, 16 from Jinja who visits her ssenga for a month every year, shows the tradition although dying out, does still exist. This belief that women in the Central Eastern region are not able to say no to sex with their husbands was reinforced by a nurse in the Kamuli District who linked the traditional structures with this power control: “It’s actually their traditions. The culture of Busoga, a lady cannot refuse the sex. She must say yes” [Nurse, Kamuli Health Centre].

5.6. PAR Rights and Duties

After this information about G.B.V and refusal of sex, it was of interest to understand what the women did feel their rights and duties were within a relationship. All groups had very similar beliefs in terms of their rights, the main answers which emerged were: ‘to produce’; ‘to get married’; ‘to have a man”; ‘to education’; ‘the right to do what she wants;” ‘the right to speak when she likes;’ ‘to
wear the clothing that she likes;’ right to eat what she wants.’ My interpretation of these results is that they can be spilt into two sections, for example the first answers: ‘to produce;’ ‘get married;’ and ‘to have a man’ are related to their sexual and reproductive qualities of having children and marriage. Then the next section of answers: ‘to education;’ ‘the right to do what she wants;’ ‘the right to speak when she likes;’ ‘to wear the clothing that she likes;’ and ‘right to eat what she wants.’ I argue this set of answers is much more related to cultural norms. I claim this because of information I gained in discussions with the women and informal conversations in Jinja Town. I was told that women in this study region, are expected to serve their husband and children before themselves, and in a poor family’s home, this can mean that she is left with little or nothing to eat. The women’s group in Jinja stated how some groups within Uganda believe that belief that women should not eat certain foods as they could affect their fertility, for example the eating of chicken and eggs is frowned upon before puberty.

As stated, all groups discussed meeting a man or getting married as an important right, but no group explicitly stated their right to choose their own husband as highlighted by Figure 3. It is also important to point out how ‘deliver babies’ or have babies is the next point on their list of rights before employment. The fact that they state getting married and delivering babies, before employment could be viewed as showing although these women are at an income-generating group, their belief in the gender role of being a wife and mother is stronger than their desire to earn money and adapt their role within their relationships.

Figure 4 Iganga Group PAR Rights & Duties.
5.7. Family Formation and determination of numbers: PAR

Through the PAR baseline conducted, the results for Graph 2 were gathered and, Iganga and Kamuli had high rates of 0 children per woman, due to the young age of girls attending the group. Iganga had the largest percentage of children per head, at 2.7 children each, although Iganga was the largest and oldest group so this might be expected (see Graph 2.). All groups had lower than the UDHS which states an average of 6.69 children per Ugandan woman (UDHS, 2011: 235). The fact that all groups had lower than the national average, could perhaps hint towards how attendance at the groups/economic empowerment had influenced the women’s decision on number of children.

5.7.1 Determination of numbers – Interviews

My belief of a dialectic relationship between economic empowerment and SRHR empowerment was highlighted by women who had paid employment in Jinja. 3 interviewed respondents explained that by generating an income they had been able to discuss family formation with their husband. As an example of economic empowerment influencing number of children; Ann who has three children at the age of 32, stated how her small stand (hotel) selling vegetables influenced her decision to have fewer children: “Yeah we talked about more children. But if I have another child then I cannot do business. When you have a baby, you cannot do business.”
5.8 Contraceptive Knowledge: PAR

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<td>Female condoms</td>
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<td>Moon beads</td>
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<td>Vasectomy</td>
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Table 3 Results of contraceptive Knowledge across all 3 groups

As highlighted by Table 3, the women in all groups were knowledgeable about the types of contraceptives available which support the findings of the UDHS report discussed in section 1.3. The contraceptives which all groups knew were: male condoms, the injection, pills, and abstinence. I will draw on Kamuli’s PAR session as an example of the discussion on contraceptives. This group at first gave parrot contribute greatly. However, one answer they gave was particularly was interesting: “There are all types of herbs, some to make you unable to conceive for a month and some to make
you infertile until you stop taking them.” I believe their usage of traditional methods is because the methods are cheap and easy to make, furthermore modern methods are relatively new in Uganda and I would not be surprised if the women are cautious to use them for fear of future consequences. The two married women said they had taken such herbs but would not discuss any further details. The reason for this reluctance was not I feel due to me. Instead their fear was my male interpreter who was present at the time. When they began talking, he said: ‘Which ones, tell me? I don’t believe you!’ very loudly. Immediately the two women looked away, smiling, and said ‘oh I don’t know, some.’ I realised that this form of birth control was them using their agency and thus having ‘power over’ their reproductive lives and in fact having ‘power over’ the interpreter by not telling him which herbs.

5.8.1 Contraceptive methods: Interviews

As money is tight for families, who barely have sufficient money for school fees, the idea of paying for contraceptives in a country where fertility and a large family is honoured, it can be difficult for women to broach the subject with their husbands. Instead although women as shown knew the various forms of contraceptives available, they were the women unable to buy them. So, the main contraceptive employed was the injection, as firstly they said it was cheap with a one-time cost of 1000-3000 shillings [28-84 cents]. Secondly, three women, one in Jinja and two from Iganga stated using the injection because the husbands were keen to have more children and the women felt they had no choice and instead employed witchcraft beliefs as way to avert suspicion:

It is his choice, not my choice. But for me I want to stop here as I am poor. I would have less children, for we never know where we will get more money. I can’t talk to him, so I have the injection. He can never know, last time I blamed the co-wife of bewitching me so I couldn’t have more children. [Heidi, 24, expecting her second child, attending Iganga for 4 months].

This belief that not all women are bale to discuss family planning with their husbands was repeated by older women at Iganga such as Bo, who has 5 children because Fran, 39, married 16 years: “It is not easy to convince a man into family planning. But if you feel confident as a woman, you can go for it.” Fran was one of the women who had contracted HIV from her husband, which she shared with in the interview. From this study, it was clear that many of the women did not have the confidence to attempt such a delicate conversation. 3 respondents aged around 20, felt they were able to discuss family planning with their partners before attending the group; Asha in Kamuli who had organised her own marriage, Suz from Iganga, and Pippin who used the injection with consent
from her husband. Interestingly, the couples who had decided to stop ‘producing’ more children based their decision on lack of financial resources. To highlight the complex field in which wives must manoeuvre in Uganda and their lack of agency due to cultural traditions, I would like to end this chapter with a statement by Professor Vinand M. Nantulya Head of the UAC:

“It is difficult for women here to negotiate safe sex. In fact I would say that sex workers have more agency in asking a client to wear a condom, than a wife does to ask her husband. Wives are meant to reproduce, if they ask their husband to wear a condom, it can bring all sorts of misunderstandings” [Professor Nantulya, UAC].

This chapter explored the varying SRHR pre-conditions which the women arrive at with the groups. In line with person-centred view of SRHR empowerment, all the women involved were a mixture of ages, religions and marital statuses. Even within the married women section, there were differences as some had arranged marriages and others ‘choose’ their partner freely. Therefore showing individual their SRHR empowerment was before attending, which does make it difficult to assess their achievements in the concluding chapter. However, all groups were highlighted as having a strong degree of SRHR knowledge, yet few utilised this knowledge as there was little space for their agency within their sexual relationships. The religious and cultural structures in place, including key actors such as ssengas and parents, have worked to make women view their role in the home as submissive and their duties very clearly mapped out to fit into the household sphere. The perceptions of women as being subservient and obedient to a man’s rule in the home, have greatly affected their ability to discuss any SRHR matters with their partners. However, this does not mean they are accepting of the situation as highlighted by Kamuli wishing to discuss ways to improve a relationship. The next section will now deal with the specific’ improvements’ or motivations and needs the women had for attending the groups.
Chapter 6 Empirical The process of empowerment: The Group effect

This chapter will begin by addressing research question b): *Whose decision is it for the women to join and what are the motivations of the women to attend the groups?* The answers were found through interviews with 18 women and expert interviews. Next this chapter will examine what the needs of women attending the groups were and if groups were able to fulfil these needs via sub-question c): *What are the needs of the women to attend and how do the groups address these needs?* This sub-question was addressed through interviews with women and group directors. At the end of this chapter, to highlight the women’s belief in the impacts and challenges of the groups I will address sub question d): *What do the women perceive the impacts of the groups on their empowerment and the potential challenges to this empowerment?* The final sub-questions were addressed via PAR sessions and interviews.

6.1 Choice in attending: Interviews

From interviews, the women gave different answers to whose choice it was for them to attend the groups. The majority, 16 interviewees, decided to attend on their own accord but, they still had to adhere to gender roles by asking permission from their parents or partner before they could attend. The women discussed how they were able to gain the permission of their. To attain permission the women had to involve the men at the beginning of the journey, as Asha states: “We come together with our husbands. Sit down and discuss all the ideas. Those whose husbands accepted joined, those who did not left.” [Asha, 24, began the Kamuli group 8 months ago]. Bea also stated how she discussed the idea of the group first with her husband before attending: “I told him that there was a group and it could help ladies build up their finances. They are training them to learn tailoring. You can come home, have your sewing machine, earn some money and still able to do the housework. So my husband said, ‘that is fine.’” [Bea, 25 attending Iganga for 4 months]. Bea highlights how allowance of her attending the group was based on her ability to complete her household tasks. This viewpoint was repeated by a majority of the women interviewed: “He told me I could come, but he said it was very important that I could not forget my duties at home” [Sarah, 25, attending Iganga for 4 months]. The need to include men early in the process and obtaining their permission was reinforced by Reproductive Uganda, who stated that groups would succeed if men were involved:
Encourage male involvement in SRHR issues, and then it will be good. The men are leaders of the home, here in Africa; men are leaders of the home. So if he says this is what will be done, then it is automatically done. When they [men] support in SRHR then it will come out so nice and things will get done.” [Reproductive Uganda, Iganga]

Women’s Rights Initiative (WORI) also who that men must be given the knowledge if they are to understand the rights of women and for empowerment to work from both sides: “When you want to work with the women, the men have to be around and they must hear the discussions that happen, so they know the situation. They then know the women’s rights and they cannot violate them” [WORI, Jinja, 29th August 2012]. Unfortunately, this study failed to gain a wide study population of men, so the male perspective is preliminary based on the women and experts’ opinion. However Jack, a husband of a group member in Jinja, was interviewed and he repeated what the experts had said about men being the heads of the households. In line with Reproductive Uganda and WORI, who have referred to man’s position as higher, or ‘leaders of the home,’ so highlighting the gender relations at play, Jack pointed out the different aspect of gender relations between work and home: “There is a difference between equality and submission. For example, I go to school, and then I work hard. She can do the same, if she studies hard. But at home, there is a role of the husband and she must respect him in that way. Work and home are different.” [Jack, 32, wife has been attending Jinja for 4 months]. Thus expresses that there can be gender equality within the work space, exploring that women can attain economic empowerment and be respected as independent workers. However, within the space of the home, the family, the man will always be the head which can be said to directly affect the potential for women’s SRHR empowerment as they must remain submissive. So before women can begin this journey of economic independence, they must attain the permission of their husbands. Asha, a Muslim from Kamuli highlighted how religion was a reason for this belief in obeying your husband:

“We are not equal, totally. I always grew up on the paradise vision, if I pray to paradise, Kingdom of God then I am under my husband. You cannot disobey him. You are under the feet of the man that is what it says in The Koran otherwise I will go to Hell. I do not want to go to Hell, I want to go to Heaven, so I will obey” [Asha, leader of Kamuli group].
6.2. Women’s reasons for attending the groups: Interviews

When identifying motivations for the women to attend the groups, most respondents expressed a hybrid of reasons, and not one answer only. The main answers which emerged were: ‘to get skills to be able to get a job;’ ‘share ideas;’ ‘to make friends;’ ‘to earn money;’ ‘to develop myself;’ ‘pay for my children’s education;’ and ‘to learn good behaviour.’ From these answers, I conclude that there are two categories of reasons for attending, firstly economic motivations, such as earning money, and learning skills. Secondly, collective reasoning such as ‘making friends’ and ‘sharing ideas.’ The last answer combined under the reinforcement of prescribed gender roles, ‘to learn good behaviour.’

Thus as will be highlighted next, all the women interviewed were motivated to join the group, predominantly to earn money, as the main objective of all groups was income-generation for women. I placed the top 5 answers in Figure 5, which shows that ‘learn new skills’ was the most stated motivation and when probed for further details, the respondents defined ‘new skills’ as income generating skills to gain independence from their husbands and being able to buy things for themselves and for the children which the men are not able to provide: “Men have so many responsibilities; there are some things that men cannot provide; clothing, perfume, Vaseline. Dressing kids, educating them, education, school materials, pens.” The motivation to be able buy something for themselves is reminiscent of section 5.4 on rights, when women discussed the right to wear the clothing they like. Women wished to be able to buy clothes without needing to ask permission:
I am glad that I came to the group, I came in order to have a good life. Then I can afford anything I want. Something that costs 1000 [shillings], I won’t need to ask him [husband] for money, I can buy it myself... Aunty, I will get money, so I can buy a shirt for myself, I only take care of myself’’ [Pru, 21, attending Iganga for 4 months].

Women also stated ‘learn good behaviour, ’the second most popular answer, which the women explained as learning or improving on the duties discussed in section 5.4, such as good cooking skills or being on good terms with neighbours: “When in a group like that, you copy good behaviour from other people. If not on good terms with your neighbours, you learn how they act with their neighbours; they [members of group] inspire you”[Ann, 32 who owns a shop in Jinja]. The motivations involving income-generating are not that surprising as the groups are income-generating focused, what is of interest I feel, is other motivation of learning good behaviour as this has no correlation to economic empowerment and in fact could be said to be reinforcing the gender roles, which economic empowerment perhaps, attempts to break down.

6.3 Needs of the women attending the groups

Sections 6.4 – 6.5 deal with sub-question c): What are the needs of the women to attend and how do the groups address these needs? These areas were answered through interviews with the women and stakeholders as well as observations of the groups. Now that the motivations for attending were clear, this study wanted to understand the needs the women felt had to be meet once they had started at the group and how the groups addressed these needs. The main answers which emerged were not just income-generating based as the top three answers were: vocational skills, such as tailoring due to lack of schooling; sharing ideas with others; and gaining friendships. These needs will be addressed with the groups’ efforts to achieve these under the appropriate need.

6.4. Vocational skills: Interviews

In terms of the Iganga group, six of the respondents interviewed in Iganga felt that vocational skills were their biggest need in an effort to earn money: “To learn tailoring, so that I can get money,” [Bea, 25 attending over a year] “I came here because I thought I could get skills, take care of the kids. Before, I had no money for school fees,” [Fran, 39, attending 2 years] “To learn tailoring, because my partner earns very little, so I thought it was a good idea to come so I can make money,” [Pru, 21, attending 4 months]. All of the answers express the reason for their need for income-generating skills being linked to poverty and their lack of partner’s ability to earn enough to support the family. The majority of respondents believed their lack of vocational skills was due to their lack of school education. Only 3 respondents had finished primary school, highlighting their lack of basic education,
resonating with the results from the baseline survey (see 5.2.2.). The respondents felt that joining Iganga was their only opportunity to gain any form of education as stated by Alice, a single mother, 20 years old, who is currently the chairwoman:

“When I got pregnant, Dad refused to pay my school fees and would not send me to school. By coming here, they let me get some skills for the future. Dad won’t let me marry the man [father of her baby] or pay for my school fees. So mum thought it was a good idea” [Alice, 20, attending Iganga for 1 year].

However, all of the women interviewed at Iganga were over 20 years old, and thus did not represent the younger women who were still attending school. Alice also, is perhaps not the best representative of the group as she is the only single mother at Iganga. Younger respondents in Jinja believed that formal education would not provide the necessary vocational skills and in fact were attending the group as well as school: “I wanted to come so I can learn skills from others and my Mum said it was a good idea. Then with these skills I can make money, have my own business and plan for the future” [Faith, 16, attending Jinja for 1 year]. Experts in the field of development further stressed how the education system does not provide young women with the capabilities required in Uganda to attain employment. As the director of Women First stated: “Currently the education system does not produce job producers, it produces job seekers! We [Women First] train them [women] in business management, how to generate ideas, we give them market research advice” [Agnes Towli, Women First, Jinja]. Thus Agnes’ statement reinforces the younger girls’ view that formal education is not the answer to attaining employment for women.

6.4.1 Iganga’s ability to address vocational needs: Interviews and observations

Due to the group’s proximity of Iganga group to Iganga Town the women, learnt tailoring in an effort to sell the clothes at the local market as well as being able to make their own school clothes for their children to save money. So firstly, with assistance of a male teacher, the women learn how to make school clothes before learning how to mend holes, sew on buttons, so they could mend their husband’s clothes and their own. Young men would come to the group with a t-shirt or a pair of torn trousers and, for 200/300 shillings, the women would mend the article of clothing. The women attained a level of respect from their husbands from this achievement: “My husband is so happy as he does not have to pay anyone to mend his shirt. I can do it when I come to class. He is very happy and respects me for that” [Pru, 21, married at 14]. Now the group leaders realised that not all of the women were up to the same level, but due to lack of funding, they were only able to pay for a teacher twice a week to teach the whole group. This led to issues with use of machines, as I witnessed women patiently queuing for an hour or so just to get on a machine, as there were not
enough machines for everybody to use at the same time. 3 women interviewed complained to me how this situation was limiting their progress:

“There are so many of us. There are not enough sewing machines. When a person uses a sewing machine, they cannot give a chance to the others. You can’t learn when there are so many people; not enough machines. I learn measurements and practice it somewhere else. Here everyone wants a machine, I just give up. Too many people and not enough time” [Bo, 45, attending Iganga for 1 year].

Thus Bo’s statement, I believe highlights the difficulty the lack of resources causes for the participants and how empowerment is stifled by the large amount of women attending the group. Not only were resources and issue in this group, but I believe also from my observations the teacher/student relationship, as I witnessed an interaction near the end of this study. At the end of a PAR session, before the tailoring class began, one of the women in Iganga, Jen, noticed a hole in my bag and offered to mend it. Jen began mending the bag, but seeing this Tim (the teacher) leaned over her shoulder telling her what to do. Tim then physically pushed her aside and took over the sewing machine. This interaction was very telling, as it was Jen who had offered to mend my bag and had been very proud to do so. Jen was unable to protest and I am aware that as a white researcher, and Tim as the teacher, was keen to achieve a good result, but there could be underlying gender constructs which will be explored in Chapter 7.

6.5 Sharing ideas with others and friendships: Interviews

A common need across all groups was identified as ‘sharing ideas’ and working with others. There was a variety of reasons for this sharing of ideas need though. In interviews, 14 respondents wanted to learn from others in terms of sharing skill sets for generating an income, such as tailoring, bead making and weaving. Jinja was the main group which focused on income-generating knowledge through others as they are a collective and not a teacher/student format: “I came to learn different things like the bead-making, the lady told me about the other things they teach which I can learn… I realise at these groups, people share ideas and I can learn from them” [Ann, 32, attending Jinja group for 2 months]. Respondents in Iganga on the other hand, whose marriages had been arranged by parents and ssengas, stated making friends as a major need from the group: “To get known in the community. Maybe when I have a problem everyone knows, so everyone will know and they can help” [Sarah, marriage arranged by ssenga]. Bea’s whose marriage was arranged by her parents also said: “I came to get friends, some really good friends who are really helpful. When I come here and I have a problem, they are willing to help.”
6.5.1 Sharing ideas with others and friendships: PAR

In terms of other women being able to help you as stated by Bea, the younger unmarried women cited learning from elders, to improve themselves and develop as better women. I began to understand the responsibilities and issues for women in this region during our Jinja PAR session on what makes a good and bad marriage (see section 5.3), when a heated debate erupted between the group about why a marriage may not work and a man would want another woman or ‘side dish’:

Respondent 1: If you have too many children and you do not instil in them manners, then they will touch the husband’s food and he may find a side dish.

Respondent 2: But you may not have enough food for them and then the children will touch the food.

Respondent 1: No no, it does not matter even if you give them enough food some children steal food and hide it under their beds, if you do not distil in them good behaviour he will leave.

Respondent 3: It depends on the man, some are womanisers.

Respondent 4: If current wife is not welcoming to visitors, then he may leave.

Respondent 2: Men hate big families; he may just go to someone who is single without kids as he prefers it.

Respondent 1: Or if the wife is no good in bed, he will look elsewhere.

Respondent 3: No some men just have the habit of having lots of sex, that’s why they go.

Respondent 5: Muslims they have more than 5 wives because they want lots of sex!

During this exchange the younger members of group watched and listened intently, and as the many abilities women must provide; teaching children good manners, welcoming guests, and the belief that men in this area are unfaithful, were stated. It was not just the younger women who felt they would acquire more knowledge on how to be a good wife through learning from others, but also the young mothers cited this need. For example, Ann a young mother of three in Jinja explains why she joined: ‘I wanted to get some skills and development. For instance, in a group like this people bring in other ideas in ways to build a home. When in a group like that, you copy good behaviour from other people’ [Ann, 32 attending Jinja group for 2 months]. In terms of the groups addressing the need of sharing with others, except for Jinja, the other groups were much more based on a teacher/student format as limiting the ability to learn from each other as such. However, Iganga from my observations, had a very strong belief in their entity as a group and out of all the groups, had a prominent collective mentality, which although they had limited resources, their belief in the group’s ability to succeed reflected in the amount of women who cited gaining friendships. The impact of the group on collective action will be explored further in section 6.6.
6.6. Potential impacts of groups on the women’s SRHR empowerment

This final section will address the final sub-question d): *What do the women perceive the impacts of the groups on their empowerment and the potential challenges to this empowerment?* This question was addressed through final PAR sessions and interviews with the women.

In Table 4, the women’s perceived impacts of the groups have been separated into three indicators based on Rowlands (1995) and Kabeer (1999; 2005) work on empowerment. The indicators employed are: individual; household; collective and the dimensions are power within, power to and power with.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Statement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Self-confidence:</td>
<td>“I have learnt a lot since I have been here. Like tailoring, I have gained confidence. I used to be too scared to speak in a group of people. I could not stand and speak. That’s why I was happy to have an interview! Now for example, when I have visitors if my husband not there I am to talk to them, serve them. Anything they want I can get for them. We don’t have to wait for him to be there for him to answer their questions” [Bea, 25, in an arranged marriage].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Financial independence:</td>
<td>“Yes I can be independent without a man now; I can earn my own money and not have to rely on my husband” [Hope, 20, attending Kamuli for 9 months].</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Challenging gender relations:</td>
<td>“The group is here to empower women, solve problems of food security, to have self-confidence, self-reliance, change our diets. We do mix farming, practice produce variety of food stuff, we can be independent” [Asha leader of Kamuli group].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household</td>
<td>Autonomy in decision making:</td>
<td>“I can propose to him, about the elder’s son education like he should go to town schools, because they are better than schools around here. He accepted that” [Sarah 25, attending Iganga for 4 months].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perceived contribution to household:</td>
<td>“To learn tailoring, so I would be able to bring in a great deal of money. We can bring in money from both sides” [Heidi, 24, attending Iganga for 4 months].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relationship with parents:</td>
<td>“I have learnt to respect them [parents] more and I listen to them now. I have listened to the women here and have more love for my parents. We are happier” [Gift, 16, attending Jinja for a year].</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relationship with partner:</td>
<td>“There is a change. My husband is proud of what we have done. We [the group] bought material, made clothes and then sold some. We sold a short trouser. I sold it all” [Pru 21, attending Iganga for 4 months].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reduction in G.B.V:</td>
<td>“I have seen a change; we have good speech, no quarrelling every day like before. Now if I am sick, and I need something small I ask him. Before he used to beat me if I asked for things. Now days when I am not well, I tell him and he responds accordingly” [Jackie, 45, leader of Jinja for 4 years].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Collective action:</td>
<td>“We have our time together, more heads are better than one. We talk about issues and we help each other. The group brings people together. We interact and work as a team. We have many people here, we work together, we talk, no quarrelling “ [Jackie, married for over 20 years].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Since joining the group, I can now speak when there are people, but before I couldn’t. Right now I am so popular, they know me at the county level, I even work with the team to help people keep their toilets clean!” [Fran, 39 attending Iganga 2 years].</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*Table 4 Achievements from the groups (Adapted from Kim et al 2007; 1799)*
As shown by Table 4, the majority of women who perceived the groups has having an impact on their SRHR empowerment were the older married women who had attained a degree of empowerment across all three dimensions. There were two younger girls highlighted in Table 4, who believed they had gained vocational skills to gain economic independence, and the other whose relationship improved with her parents, but there was limited effect across the three indicators. However, by voting in a chairwoman in Iganga for example, the younger women were given a chance to build their confidence and gain individual empowerment through the group. The collective action was most prominent for the oldest women in the group, both of whom had HIV and both of whom husband’s had left, although Jackie’s husband returned monthly to pay the school fees. Discussing Fran’s husband’s departure with them, although struggling to bring in enough money, the moment their husbands left had been the time that they had become more active in the groups and the community as a whole. My interpretation of this is because they utilised every opportunity to bring in money to their household, but also because they less restricted, did not need to ask permission for materials and more able to join in on community activities, as highlighted by Fran who is now part of the clean team in the community.

6.7 Challenges: Interviews

There were two main challenges which emerged in terms of the ability of the groups to attain SRHR empowerment, firstly the lack of confidence building chances for younger girls and, secondly lack of SRHR information available, most predominately in Jinja. Although older married women in the groups felt the groups impacted on three indicators, shown in table 6.5, the younger unmarried women did not believe that they gained as much from the groups. For example in Kamuli, the younger girls in fact stated that their group did not provide a confidence building capacity. Instead, they claimed it was through our PAR sessions that they become more confident in their ability to voice their opinion:

“Now some of us are when we are in a group, we tend to be quite shy and have low esteem, we are scared of talking. Only one person speaks but for her [researcher] everyone is given a chance to give a view. So, when you ask the questions you help to build on our thinking as we know you listen to our answers” [Sam, 16 attending Kamuli group for 4 months].

As stated from the beginning of this research, I was aware that SRHR empowerment was not a main objective of any of the groups. However, this did not mean that the women within the groups did not want to learn about contraceptives and knowledge around HIV prevention. This lack of information was especially prevalent in Jinja, where the group had had no outside agency come to give them SRHR knowledge. Pippin in Jinja, in fact told me that she only joined the group when she
heard that I was running PAR sessions as she thought she could: “learn how to culture ourselves from getting the HIV virus” [Pippin, 23, attending Jinja group 2 months]. This lack of SRHR knowledge as a reason why some women had enjoyed the PAR sessions was further highlighted in Kamuli, where the majority of girls are unmarried without children, so have even less knowledge as they would not have attended any health centres. Sam in Kamuli explained to me how her favourite PAR session had been the discussion on SRHR: “Family planning. It was very interesting. It was important to learn about HIV and now I know that abstinence will be the best measure to stop from getting the virus” [Sam, 16, attending Kamuli for 4 months]. I believe by Sam expressing how useful it was to discuss SRHR knowledge in our PAR sessions, she highlights the effect the PAR and the research had on her as opposed to the groups themselves. This was important as part of this study was about how the participants can influence the direction and what affect the PAR was able to have on their lives.

Even with the groups (Iganga and Kamuli) that did provide SRHR knowledge, there were issues around the monetary funds to obtain the contraceptives and consistency of information. For example, the Iganga group had had presentations from Reproductive Uganda and Red Cross explaining where they could access resources and what type of contraceptives were available. However, during our PAR session on SRHR knowledge in Iganga (see section 5.5) women directly asked me various questions in all groups such as: ‘Is it true that if you take too many pills (contraceptive pills) you become infertile?’ “Is it better to use two condoms instead of one to protect from HIV?” and “If children play with used condoms can they catch HIV?” As highlighted in section 5.5, most of the women either used the injection or no contraceptives at all as they could not afford to get transport to the nearest health centre. When asked how the Iganga group leaders tried to tackle SRHR issues, they stated that they encouraged local and international organisations to come, but they could not guarantee how often or if they would come: “We are always asking organisations to come and talk to the women, teach them how to use condoms and protect themselves from HIV. We hope that someone will come along soon, but we cannot be sure when” [James, group leader Iganga]. This makes the dissemination of information uncertain and at times contradictory. Kamuli also attempted to bring SRHR knowledge to the women’s group, but importantly the nearest place where the women could get sexual and reproductive advice was the Kamuli Roman Catholic Health Clinic. Due to their religious base, the clinic stated that they would advise the women, but not provide any forms of contraception, instead direct them to another clinic a bus journey away. Thus I argue that the women are further constrained in utilising their SRHR knowledge attained from the group, and ability to achieve agency in their sexual and reproductive lives by religious institutions which have set principles and agendas.
Chapter 7 Conclusion

To what extent do women’s groups, within the Central Eastern region of Uganda, empower women in SRHR and what are the challenges and barriers to SRHR empowerment?

The final chapter in this study answers the main research question, through consolidating and analysing all the information from the two data chapters. The Central Eastern region has traditionally been a patriarchal society in which gender relations greatly affect home and social space. However, due to the aggression of poverty caused by a low age demographic, with 50% under the age of 18, a high fertility rate and a lack of job opportunities, women’s groups offering income-generating skills have been emerging (UDHS 2011). With the push of the MDGS and the HDI, focusing on gender equality and the belief from organisations such as the World Bank, that women may be able to “bring development” to Uganda, these women’s groups are gaining both international and national focus. Yet the SRHR empowerment levels within this region are relatively low in comparison with the more urban areas, highlighted by this region having one of the highest rates of women’s acceptance of gender-based violence (G.B.V) at 28% (UDHS 2011). Although containing one of Uganda’s few cities, Jinja, the Central Eastern region, is a mainly rural based community and relies heavily on cash crops, which women produce a large percentage of. The belief that women will bring economic empowerment and independence to themselves as well as economic growth to their country, must understand the very delicate balance of structural factors at the heart of Uganda.

7.1. Overview of findings

Let us begin with the first sub question a) What are the SRHR conditions for the women before attending the groups? For the women of Central Eastern Uganda, they gain the majority of their SRHR information from other actors around them. These actors include parents and siblings who greatly affect their individual SRHR empowerment before attending the groups. The majority of women involved in PAR sessions had had an arranged marriage via parents or ssengas, and although a proportion was content with the arrangement, these results highlight the lack of agency the women had in choosing their own partner. Therefore I argue referring back to Tamale’s (2006) work regarding the gender norms expected of women in Uganda, this study highlighted how specific gender norms for both men and women are still very much alive. These gender norms work within the home space predominately as man is viewed as aggressive and domineering, whereas women is perceived as compassionate, caring and submissive (Tamale 2006; Muhanguzi 2011). From here
unequal power relations emerge, which constrain the ability of both man and woman to step outside of their prescribed gender. For women this means you must act in an obedient and respectful way to your husband who at all time as has ‘power over’ you as he is the head of the household. The rigid gender constructs were emphasised in all groups within the Right and Duties session as seen in section 5.6, when their duties consisted of household tasks involving cooking, and taking care of the children, whilst the man must ‘provide each and everything I need.’ The belief in these constructed gender roles, transferred over to the women’s sexual negotiations as it was viewed that woman are predominately there to reproduce. The belief in women’s main capacity as reproduction was highlighted from PAR sessions, where the women stated ‘to deliver’ and ‘to produce’ as their rights. It was also highlighted by experts, that to gain respect from his peers and the community, men must produce as many children as possible, thus having foremost decision on family plan formation. These constructs can lead to arguments and problems within sexual relationships, as if women do not properly fulfil their gender roles, the man is forced to be the oppressor, so reduced to violence, which the women must comply with although many know that this is not beneficial for a happy and stable relationship. If infertility is an issue, and as reproduction is such a prominent trope of a man’s prestige, he can be pressured by the community to marry another woman (see section 5.3). The women at times unable to step outside of the gender constructs, but desperate to control their reproductive lives in a country greatly affected by poverty, they have to take risks by obtaining contraceptives without their husband’s knowledge, knowing this may lead to further ‘misunderstanding’ and potentially further instability within their relationship. However the women are not weak and powerless some felt happy with the structures in place or adapted them to gain what they want. Bride price was an example of this constructed tradition, prominent across all of Africa which was not viewed in a negative light by any of the women involved and in fact was seen as something to be proud of if attaining a high price. Bride price was further adapted by the women to gain parents’ permission on a choice of partner. The discussion on bride price and the economics involved in sexual relationships leads us onto the next sub-question.

The discussion around sub question b) **Whose decision is it for the women to join and what are the motivations of the women to attend the groups?** was useful in highlighting how much agency the women had to attend the groups and how economics had played a decisive hand in their ability to attend. Although, most women stated the decision to attend the groups as their own, they had to ask for permission from their husbands. In asking for permission by stating to their partners that they would manage the household responsibilities and attendance at the group, one could argue in line with Kabeer (1999; 2005) that the gender norms are very much at work within the Central Eastern region. I think it is important to state though, that men cannot be expected to adapt
overnight to the concept of women’s empowerment, especially if they are not involved or been given the tools to understand what is expected of them. Experts highlighted for example, how empowerment can be incredibly successful if men are brought on board from the beginning of a SRHR empowerment journey. This involvement of men was emphasised by the Kamuli group, who stated that both men and women come to the first meeting of the group to discuss together the way forward and what will be happening in the future of the group. The women explained how their husbands were pleased with the work they have been doing and how they have gained respect from them by being able to mend their shirts and make some money from selling their wares. Therefore, I have added Men to the conceptual scheme, Figure 5, as although this study was unable to interview as many as I would have liked, from PAR and interviews with the women as well as interviews with experts, it became very clear that men are fundamental in the women’s process of empowerment.

As Batliwala (1994) states:

A point often missed, however, is that women’s empowerment also liberates and empowers men, both in material and in psychological terms...most important are the psychological gains for men when women become equal partners. Men are freed from the role of oppressor and exploiter and from gender stereotyping which limits the potential for self-expression and personal development in men as much as in women. (Batliwala 1994: 131)

Now turning to sub-research c): What are the needs of the women to attend and how do the groups address these needs? The majority of interviewed women and women involved in PAR sessions, had very limited primary education and no secondary education, to be precise 2 of the 50 women in in PAR had completed secondary school. Thus with this limited formal education in mind one could draw on Nussbaum (2003) who highlights this gap in education as an example of gender inequality. However, this study was unable to obtain results as to whether the brothers of the women attending had been to school, but even if so, experts stressed to me that formal education was not the way to gain employment. This was highlighted by all the younger girls who were attending as well as their normal school program, who stated that they did not learn vocational skills at school. The need for vocational and income-generating skills, unsurprisingly, emerged as the major requirement the women wanted from the groups. What was interesting however, was that the varying learning style prevalent within the three groups. As discussed in the theoretical chapter, the teacher/student environment is integral in reproducing the inequalities in the social world, and the fact the tailoring course in Iganga was taught by a man was I argue, indicative of this reproduction. Being the ‘oppressor’ of a patriarchal society, the male teacher in Iganga, could be said to be regulating the way the world “enters into” the students and thereby adapting them to better fit the male dominated society in which they live (Freire 1968: 76). Drawing on Rowlands
(1995) work it is also impossible for an outside party, such as the male teacher to be expected to provide and produce authentic empowerment, when he himself is an actor within the strategically selective context, and from the women’s standpoint viewed as having ‘power over’ them. Thus supposedly, ‘real’ empowerment can only be claimed to come from the ‘power within’ and the women’s ability to work together in a sharing environment. An environment like the ones prominent in Jinja and Kamuli for example, as the groups ‘learning style was more consistent with Freire’s belief in an equal teacher/student relationship as the women where learning income-generating skills from each other. Yet I argue, even with the learning of others within the groups, the women discussed wishing to learn ‘good behaviour’ such as better cooking abilities and ways to be respectful of neighbours. The need for learning good behaviour was explored amongst younger and older women as a major need from the groups and I argue, drawing on Kabeer, that being able to learn good behaviour, highlights the ability of the groups to make the women have more effectiveness as women within their set gender roles (Kabeer 199; 2005). The women were aware of their social environment, or “conscientization” as Freire (1968) states, but did not intend to overcome the patriarchal rules in place instead they wanted to attain a form of economic empowerment which would benefit, both themselves and their family.

For the final examination of the research question, let us discuss sub question d): **What do the women perceive the impacts of the groups on their empowerment and the potential challenges to this empowerment?** As highlighted in section 6.6, the main impact which the groups had affected on the women was the dimension of self-confidence. As argued by Christens’ (2012) gaining the ability of self-confidence is integral to balancing power relations within intimate relationships. However not all women gained the same level of self-confidence, due I argue to the cultural constructs around the groups. It was as indicated by section 6.6, the older women who attained a level of self-confidence from the groups via the skills they achieved. These skills in fact were related to their ability to perform better within their set role of wife and mother such as being able to mend their husbands’ clothes, be more effective in household tasks and later pay for education for their children. I argue that this meant they became more resourceful wives which is a double-edged sword. On the one hand they are fitting better into their role of wife, and fulfilling ‘effective agency’ as they have “greater efficiency in carrying out their given roles and responsibilities” (Kabeer 2005: 15). Yet on the other side, the women can earn respect from their husbands. This new found respect can lead to a change in the power balance which is imperative as Christens (2012) because intimate relationships and more equitable relations play a key part in the empowerment process.
In Figure 6 The conceptual scheme

7.2 Challenges

As highlighted by the conceptual scheme above the three main challenges discovered in this study were contextual factors including: cultures (encompassing gender), religion in connection with culture and economy (mainly poverty). The term culture has a variety of dimensions. There is the traditional culture prevalent in Uganda which favours men in positions of power, including within the home. This can lead to difficulty in SRHR discussion for women and men feel a great responsibility and duty to their family, as well as feeling overwhelmed to be the breadwinner and provider. Economy, in the sense of poverty as highlighted by Cheston et al’s (2002) study in Ghana, can not only put extra pressure on a relationship but it can lead parents and girls, to choose unsuitable partners or engage early in sexual relations as they feel it is the best action for their daughters, or themselves, in providing a safe environment outside of the family home. In regards to religion, this factor is influential in reinforcing gender and sexuality norms. The women stated how the belief in either Christianity or Islam, had taught them that men were of a higher position and thus to be obeyed and respected all times. All these factors greatly effected not only how the women lead their lives within the community space, but also importantly, within the home space and thus their sexual and reproductive lives. However, poverty has appeared to have given the
women the opportunity to attend groups like the ones studies, and thus give the women possibilities of not only income-generating skills, but self-confidence, friendship, and respect from their partner and parents, which they are restricted to achieve in other spheres due to the factors just discussed.

In terms of the groups’ potential to empower women in their sexual and reproductive lives, the other important factor was the gap in SRHR knowledge, which as stated none of the groups ever attempted to achieve as a main objective, although Kamuli and Iganga did bring in organisations involved in SRHR. Referring back to Freire’s discussion on knowledge and the international discourse on SRHR empowerment, one of the main requirements to achieve SRHR is the availability and access to knowledge. With this integral factor missing from most of the groups, the ability for women to gain achievements in SRHR is severely limited.

However, I would argue that one group was able to move further along the process of SRHR empowerment than the other two groups. Iganga, although was discovered to have the highest fertility rate out of all three groups, it still had an incredibly low rate compared to the Ugandan average of 6.6 per woman, especially considering that this was the group with most respondents, and with the highest age demographic. Although the outside patriarchal world did infiltrate the group, I genuinely saw that the majority of women here helped and believed in each other, and the friendships they built led towards a collective feeling which was more prevalent than within Jinja and Kamuli. The structure Iganga had in place, where a woman from the group was chosen to be chairperson each year, really encouraged the more shy women to speak out highlighted by comments in section 6.6. The achievement of collective action was gained as Iganga was the only group where members had become speakers for other community groups, such as the clean toilet campaign. Thus by drawing on Rowlands (1995) and Kabeer (1999; 2005) by their collective action, this group truly gained transformative agency for some of the women within the Iganga group. The transformative agency was further emphasised as I have kept in touch with the group, after investing a small amount in their tailoring course. The group now has a stall in the market and has already made a small profit, which they have divided equally between all the women.

7.3 Conclusion

Hence this study has examined that the women gained varying degrees of SRHR empowerment through economic empowerment, or more precisely the skills and repercussion they achieved from being part of an income-generating group. As discussed by Christens (2012), the empowerment attained is a very individualistic form of empowerment deriving from the solidarity achieved from collective action of working together with like-minded individuals and building a friendship base in your community. The two direct indicators focused on this study decision-making and gender
relations did become highlighted as being addressed by the confidence and achievements the women gained from being part of the group. Communication lines were opened as women had the ‘power to’ to discuss the future education of their children and with some women, start formal negotiations around family planning methods. However, as discussed by Young (1988) and Jessop (2005) the women were not attempting to alter their condition, but more their economic position. I argue that the crux of my study’s paper’s argument is that SRHR empowerment is possible through these type of income-generating groups, but not only do the women need the necessary resources to be able to begin the journey, but also that it is person-centred and individualistic process as stated by the international discourse on SRHR empowerment. Not only do women need the key resources and time and space to adapt to the challenges which empowerment brings, but so too do the men, and the structures around them must adapt also.

For SRHR empowerment to be more inclusive, a shift in gender relations and the strategic context is needed to achieve long term advances for both men and women. This shift must come from first outside the groups, in government actions such as implementing the Domestic Relations Bill for example, which can then be penetrated down to the groups. The questions for future researchers is however, to what extent are the women and men within Central Eastern Uganda, and accordingly Uganda as a whole, ready and prepared to take that next difficult step in a country griped by poverty and economic instability.

7.4. Reflections and Recommendations

Firstly, I would like to state the benefits to PAR, which added greatly to my research and I think achieved honest information from the women. The structure of the PAR sessions, meant women gained a level of trust and respect for me and this resonated in later interviews when two women opened up about their HIV+ status, in a country which is struggling with discrimination and stigmatism towards this disease. For younger respondents especially, I feel PAR gave them a platform to be able to explore their own ideas, and perhaps as they told me, learn more about themselves along the way. Thus the PAR process was a journey of discovery for both researcher and respondents alike, which as the aim of the methodology, was that the women were able to exercise their agency within the direction of the research. Hopefully the methodology provided lasting effects for the respondents and perhaps even assisted them with the process of empowerment within their communities and the outside world.

However there were limitations to this methodology, as by having a group working
environment, I was unable to ascertain if all participants were contributing in equal measure. A clear example of unequal participation was during the PAR session on contraceptives when the older women took control of answering the questions. This meant that more shy and timid participants were overlooked or got lost within the sessions and so the results cannot be said to be fully indicative of all involved. There were also limitations to this study, firstly due to the choice of participants as the women studied were already attending women’s groups therefore had an advantage in the psychosocial factor of self-confidence which is part of the process empowerment, which many women do not begin with. I would further add to this limitation, that the women researched had a strong enough relationship with their parents and partners to be able to ask for permission to attend. Thus with this in mind, I cannot claim that they are representative of Ugandan women, such as the young mothers discussed in the introduction to this thesis who may not have the ability to discuss such ideas with their partners. Secondly, the participatory methodology of this research was very draining for both the researcher and the participants, so that must be taken into account for future research. Finally, it was difficult to separate the difference between the effect of the women’s groups and the effect of the PAR, on the women’s stages of empowerment. Although, this was a part of the study, it was hard to make clear where the group ended and the PAR methodology began, so I would have prepared better if I had known this was to be the case, as I did not realise the strong effect the PAR would have, especially on the younger women. I would also stress to researchers not to underestimate how integral the part of the interpreter is in the research. As highlighted by my experience, the interpreter played a pivotal role in not only assisting in translation, but her genuine care and attention meant she helped me achieve the answers most in line with what the respondents were attempting to tell me, becoming my eyes and ears to the scene around me, helping me not to lose vital data and importantly guiding me carefully through the new world around me. Thus I would recommend implementing PAR and an insightful interpreter into future research on women’s SRHR empowerment and other sensitive topics, but be aware of the potential limitations and realise that the participation of women is the key to the process of empowerment.
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Annex 1.

*Interview guide for participants in the women groups*

<table>
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<th>Basic background info:</th>
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<td>What is your name?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How old are you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you married?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many children do you have?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What age were you when you had your first child?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you give birth in the hospital/health centre?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship info:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How old were you when you married your husband?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where did you meet your husband?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is your husband older than you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which type of marriage do you have traditional/church/other?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you both take an HIV test before marriage?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you able to discuss family planning with your husband?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you use any family planning at the moment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you the only wife?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group info:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why did you want to join the group?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who did you have to ask for permission from to come to the group?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you tell me what you said to that person to allow you permission to join?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What was your main motivation for joining?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you hear about the group?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How long have you been coming to the group?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effects of the group:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have you seen felt any changes in yourself since coming to the group?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has your relationship changed with your partner?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has the group changed since you joined?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there a group/collective feeling?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General resource questions:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you have electricity?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have a radio?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How far is your nearest health centre?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Annex 2.

Baseline Survey PAR

Q. Age:

Q. Was your 1st child born when you were under 18:

Q. Number of children:

Q. Children attending school:

Q. Who pays school fee:

Q. Women who earn money:

Q. How do you earn money:

Q. Are you married:

Q. Who was married under 18:

Q. How did you meet your partner:

Q. Level of education:

Q. Where did you get your information on boys:

Q. Where did you get your information on you bodies:
### Annex 3

**Detailed background characteristics of all women interviewed**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Interviewee</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Arranged</th>
<th>No of children</th>
<th>Level of schooling</th>
<th>Time at group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Iganga Group</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Senior 2</td>
<td>4 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Traditional wedding</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Senior 4</td>
<td>4 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suz</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Cohabitating</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Primary 6</td>
<td>3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bea</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Christian wedding</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Senior 2</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heidi</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Traditional wedding</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Primary 7</td>
<td>4 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bo</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Traditional wedding</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Primary 7</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Primary 6</td>
<td>Over 1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pru</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Cohabitating</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Primary 6</td>
<td>4 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fran</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Muslim wedding</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Primary 7</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jinja group</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pippin</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Senior 3</td>
<td>2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Boyfriend</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Still in school</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Cohabitating</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Senior 2</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Cohabitating</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Primary 6</td>
<td>3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Traditional wedding</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Primary 5</td>
<td>2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kamuli group</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Still in school</td>
<td>4 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Senior 4</td>
<td>8 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hayley</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Senior 4</td>
<td>7 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asha</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Muslim wedding</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Senior 6</td>
<td>8 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For confidentiality, all names of women interviewed and who participated in PAR are changed throughout study.