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**THEME: BRIDE PRICE AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

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**1. Introduction**

In Africa, Bride price is as old as traditional cultures hence as old as humanity itself. Having it as a strong African cultural norms/ values until the early nineties, social development polices and programmes frequently overlooked the affected party in either ways.

The linkage of bride ideally as it relates to the emanation of domestic violence, chronic poverty and other social domestication and adulteration was ambiguously neglected. Harmonizing and transcending these traditional ideologies based on cultural values with the social footing has actually been challenging at different levels hence a slow pace of trends in safeguarding the children and family.

Gender inequalities vividly or un vividly as per traditional perception remains the order of the day of which bride price was a very great subscriber in influencing the trend of the road to man's ownership of the family (wife, children and relatives).

Consequently the consistency in traditional domestication gap and actions to safeguard the children and the family remains too wide. This is because the practice is always reflected in the new generation hence has a big bearing in terms of philosophy, ideology, power relations decision making and planning at the individual, household level and the societal level.

This paper tries to look at the challenging experience of bride price and domestic violence as it relates to safe

guarding the children and the family and the wave it carries on the development process. It looks at the current reality of the state of affairs and also suggests the new approaches to strategically tackle the problem.

**Note: ``However, much cultural practices desired or undesired they may be, are influenced by the adaptation of the changing trends in form of ideology, philosophy and not a gift to our new generation rather loan that must be paid absolutely by whatever means though not all but visionary approach`` and he who commits him/herself to animal trapping bears responsibility to check and monitor the effectiveness of the trap``**

## **2. Definition of the key concepts**

- **Bride price**

According to equity and vulnerability: Situation analysis of women adolescence children in Uganda 1994. Bride price is the package of resources in form of materials in kind or cash paid by the man to the parents of the woman so as to marry her.

However, Bride price in most cases is referred to as Bride wealth or dowry. It can refer to the couple of things or experiences that one has to give in especially to the parents of a girl so as to get a spouse

- **Domestic violence**

Is a physical, psychological and emotional anti social behaviour that destabilizes the well-being of the family members. It can also be more of extreme illegal action/ harmful behaviour adopted and applied to any member resulting from the conflicts of the family members to harm one another

## **3. Historical/Traditional perspective of Bride wealth**

In Africa, culturally as seen in the introduction bride price was considered paramount in the determining from where, who, and how to marry hence with a lot of influence in the marriage.

In the first case one was seen to be a man when he had a wife and the woman was respected too when she was married.

Given that marriage was a highly valued practice was very much focused on by emphasizing its associated norms and the factors that influenced it of which bride price was a paramount. Therefore historically some values and practices at the strength of the man as having the wife. Such strengths were in form of producing the children, in-laws increase labour and production and also it was hoped that it manifested real manhood. A single man didn't even take part in the village's decision making because he was believed to be ideally bankrupt and not fit to join other men even though he was intelligent enough there was no place for him. A single woman was regarded as cursed.

Traditionally, customary marriage was more than union of two individuals. It was a joining of two families; parents even arranged and negotiated the marriage, sometimes without the knowledge of either party (couple) and most often without the knowledge of the consent of the girl. Marriage was such a deeply held value and tradition especially in Uganda that almost all adults are supposed to marry. According to UDHS by 1988/98 only less than 2% of women were not married. Marriage controlled sexuality where it was assumed to give the husband exclusive sexual rights to the wife and the reverse is true which is less often expected to be true (Olowo -Freers and Barton 1993).

Given the strength of marriage as perceived in customary it precipitated the negotiation about the change between the two families. This was nothing else but to change the bride price with the girl the so-called quid-pro-quo. (something for something). The amount varied by ethnicity and region. Among many western tribes, North-eastern Uganda bride wealth was paid highly and in cows and local beer. If the marriage ended in divorce the bride price was re-paid. Where as in some regions like central bride price was usually more modest, it consisted of gifts including locally brewed beer to the bride's family. However for the case there

was no case of repayment of bride price in case of divorce.

Historically the people argued that bride price custom is not the purchase of females but simply remembered the bride's family for the loss labour. They also argued that bride price makes the family stable because the families will intervene and negotiate to solve the conflicts. Others argued that bride price connects the relationship between the families meaning that the husband has loved the wife that is why he paid dowry. A husband manifested that he was able to look after the wife and please the wife's clan members though he stole the cows to pay they didn't mind where the resources were coming from so long as they got their share. Therefore looking at the historical representative of marriage and family there is a very great close linkage with bride price because as seen it determines a lot in the family building. It reached an extent of preparing what to pay. In advance for their boys likewise the parents of the girl would begin planning for their bride price they are expecting from their daughters. So it was automatic that bride price was to be paid no doubt and those who failed meant misfortunes and delegate of the couples by the parents or even some girls would be ex-communicated from the clan.

Given that bride price had an influential stake in determining the type of the family to be created ahead deeply into determining the affairs of the family in terms of planning, administration hence a close linkage to domestic violence social political gender inequalities.

#### **4. Gender concern, strength and the general impact of bride price in reflection to domestic violence in the family**

The influence of bride price especially at family levels is far reaching cross cut almost all categories of people in the family i.e. women, children and the relatives. However its linkage with domestic violence has all along been undermined but which ever there is a great close relationship as discussed bellow.

Bride price catalyses the social inequalities between the two core member heads of the family both (man and woman). This is reflected in various gender roles and authority over resources.

In the first instance a man marries a wife and pays bride price with a diverse expectations leads to a thinking that the woman is an investment or property that is expected to produce profits in terms of bearing child children, rise the productivity / income and also provide respect to the husband and other relatives of the husband.

The implication being that the role of the husband is just to command her to do whatever he wishes. It is as if he bought her like he can buy the motorcycle that he uses for boda boda, making for him business so the wife is. Therefore once charged bride price even though it is what ever much he doesn't mind after all he knows the return is there instead he pays rushingly to begin off.

But what happens, when the woman's productivity goes down lets say, she does not bear well, she falls sick occasionally and can't work effectively or the family remains poor to the extent that the man's expectation are not fulfilled then it becomes the war and chaos is created. A man now looks at a woman as the one who brought poverty at times the wealth the boy had before marrying is not realized and he attributes the blame to the woman as being of a bad omen. This results into fluctuations, constant quarrels and at times battering / beatings, a woman is in some cases chased from the house, begin sleeping out side and at times may end up divorcing with its associated challenges also.

Distribution of the workload at the family level becomes so the woman will always perform challenging in the matter that heavier workload. This is in the man paid for her therefore she had to work. Women perform productive and domestic work. They normally work long hours in the field and in addition perform their traditional tasks like preparing meals for the family collecting water, and washing in addition to the bed work to mention the few. Though men do some domestic work women do most of the daily routine. Surprisingly despite women's heavier work load and working for long hours it is usually carried with smaller resources, few opportunities and low rewards. This continuously weakens them physically and psychologically as they are tortured by the work and the influence they are subjected to. It is not by their own will but the fact that

they need to register the returns for what the husband paid bride price and have no alternative. The alternative could be divorcing but they fear that the parents may fail to repay the in-law hence she will always be committed to harsh conditions. According to UN statistics (1995) women counted for more than 50 % of the world's population but women perform 67 % of the world's working hours (promoting change book one).

So bride price means that the woman belongs to the husband and his clan whatever case may be in good or bad faith. People believe that bride price entitles the man to the woman's labour, her obedience, her sexual availability and her fertility. It is also revealed in inequity and vulnerable (situation analysis of women, adolescents, and children in Uganda 1994).

Sexual relations in marriage become so tricky in the way that women are not supposed to negotiate for sex, they must always be available on demand. So upon paying bride price it becomes the right of the husband to want sex from the wife at whatever time he wishes and the woman has to agree without any excuse. It is (Ssali and Barton 1992) revealed that sex is expected for both partners but it is obligatory for a woman. Women have no voice in influencing the premarital sex in the family.

The custom violently domesticate women because some time men come back home too drunk and demands sex forcefully which erodes the peace of the woman. This has actually accelerated HIV (AIDS) a result of a woman being viewed as a mere object that was bought to solve all the problems of the man.

Looking at the leadership in the family and the control of the resources its believed that the property can't own another property / resource in that women are bought as a chattel / property and belong to the husbands so how do they begin to control resources while they also belonged they are bought like any other property that's why the word 'price' is joined to bride to be bride price.

The control and ownership of resources like land is further segregative to include women's rights besides harsh and heavier labour in the family women are restricted to production for domestic consumption. The man may decide to use the land for some cash crop but the money he gets is not brought to the family to be planned for together instead he uses it for his own consumptions

This has an implication that the woman should not follow up because if she does she may succumb to problems, she risks being battered / beaten or chased from the home for she will have intervened in issues of her less concern since the money came from the land that belongs to the husband. Harassment is hoped in case of women intervention is determined for their rights of property attached to their land. Since she had no right to own and control the land and she cannot do much and worse it is at times women can't cultivate anywhere they find unless they first get permission from the husbands. This may lead them to plant late or miss the season leading to poor production hence less food security in the family and starvation becomes the order of the day. Poor land ownership in the family results from perception adopted land since they bought and paid in form of bride price hence in quality. (Promoting change book one 1994) Gender inequalities and meaning of gender roles.

The area of acquiring skills and information women still remain undermined in that women do not directly access information and not even enough avenues to undertake or acquire skills. This is because its not what they were brought for therefore they need to be home doing domestic work. That is why when a woman goes for her certain function, party, workshop/ seminars and she delays there for a while she may not survive the husband. There are many changes of being battered and fewer changes of being welcomed by the husband possibly ask how what transpired in the workshop. In most cases women are not released to go far for information and skills as men freely go hence deny them the right to information and movement (Annotated bibliography 1991-1992).

Leadership in the family varies according to the life setting of an areas and exposure. Much as bride price is influenced. This is the field of power relations. Urban and educated women will experience less subjection to torture since they always struggle for their rights. In addition the society looks at the category when paying bride price not as an investment say a person. But worth her status. At the end of the day there will erupt conflicts of influence in the family to fight for space. Who dominates and who is managing who and how? Becomes the situational order. This may involve violence in that the man will not accept to be commanded

by the wife because he paid his something and brought her to his home while the wife will not accept to be mistreated because she knows her rights.

At times such a woman tell the husband that if you want the money you paid, I can pay it to you. This may result in divorce which affects the children and others may go with the woman or remain with the father.

The children end up missing some parental love and others drop out from school. Whereas educated women will to some extent struggle for their rights due to the common/ local women because so complacent with head low because they have no alternative. If they decide to divorce the parents can't afford to pay back so they perceive the situation.

Bride price at times breaks the social relationship among the members of the family and relatives especially where misunderstandings erupt in the family. The relationship is viewed at in the angle of the children, in laws and the parents of the exchange families (husbands family and wives family). The children will tend to ignore the parent who has lost the space and go with the one with influence. At times children combine hands with the Mother to batter the father at times they charm him or ignore him mistreat him beyond his expectation in terms of respect and love as his children at times if the husband has less influence in the family or if one didn't pay enough bride price he will always be despised at time has no say before the in-laws. In some cases when such a man follows the wife in cases of misunderstandings they beat him up saying after all we didn't eat any thing visible from you. The same way the girl may be instead by both the husband after being chased from husband's parents chase her too that after all they didn't eat anything from her hence may lose relationship. When relatives of the wife come the man will mistreat them no eating, supper, shift them from the visitors' room because of revenge for the sister was brought expensively.

Payment of bride price in most cases exorbitant especially youths. Denies some people's rights and choices to marry. Some youths fail to marry because they can't get the hundreds of thousands for bride price. This increases sexual immorality that is looked at as the cheapest alternative, girls begin selling themselves on streets, begin producing on the courtyard hence increasing children without fathers. Such children are always harassed and domesticated where the father of the girl demands so much money and the youth perseveres and pays it off sometimes instalments, he will be strict to her in any activity and movement if she mistakes a bit she will be beaten like a cow because the man will look at it as if he is wasting his money he paid though other traditions say it is a sign of love what if he beats her and removes her teeth, or breaks the rib, is that love? (Olowo-Freers and Banton 1992). Rukungiri focus group (1994).

These hard attachments of bride price sabotage the youths marriage choices leading to development of sugar mummy and sugar daddy concepts, as the young girls will go with old men because they have the money and goats to pay for bride wealth. The young boys will go with the old rich women price in form of money or property apart from their lives. These categories of young people will always be mistreated, have no say in decision making, since they didn't contribute a lot in that family's development early on, (they found resources already available).

Widow inheritance is obvious and rampant especially where the bride price was heavily paid. The implication behind this is that once the woman is paid for she automatically becomes the property of that family and has to adhere to its principles. In case the husband dies she must be taken over by the brother-in-law or father-in-law. Failure to adhere implies the woman's parents must pay back the bride price (Uganda gender resource centre 1996) "even before the funeral of deceased husband some widows are mistreated by the in-laws who take all the property, including the children".

The property ownership rights in this case of orphans and widows are frequently denied in the absence of protection, they are often chased away from the late parent or husband's property (Odembos Maloba. 2002-03), (ASAWUCU 1994).

Bride price has a great influence on the status quo in social family setting that end up into social domestication and adulteration that violently and consistently leads to subsequent societal challenges that are likely to be reflected in the future generation. This has a great impact on social institutions as core

programmes of the government.

## **5. Influence of Bride Price/Impact on other social institutions and government programmes:**

When we talk of social institutions we are talking of those other institutions that pull together different kinds of people to share common interest or for a cause. What I am trying to stress forward is that each of us is very much defined by our social relationship and our cultural traditions in the institutions distinctively in our society. Hence the freedom of the individuals is clearly subordinate to the interests of the family, clan and the community.

Social relationships are established and cultural traditions maintained through formal social groups and beliefs (Fuglesang 1982). However, individuals are indoctrinated with these beliefs to lead to consistency of the violence.

Much as domestic violence could be looked at briefly with the perception limited at the family level but in my view it is easy to spread and expand its scope of influence to the societal (National) level hence global impediment, violence as seen below.

When viewing Bride Price's influence on domestic violence and its subsequent transition to influence global programmes, I will tackle issues of education, economy, health, and government decision making / other policies.

In the education aspect children's rights especially the girl child have been violated which takes place at the family levels but the impact is felt at the social levels. Girls are removed from school since they come to the village to get married so as they get money in form of bride wealth. Sometimes girls are commanded to get married to men who are not of their choice simply because the parents want them to get married to rich old men where they expect wealth hence forced to drop out of school since some of them are less aware of their rights and can't refuse the command from the parents. This sabotages the government policies and wastes the government money and other resources for example if a girl in UPE was removed from school while in P.7 the government loses all the resources that was spent on her while still in school which would have been used to finance other programmes.

At times in the same way boys are removed from school to marry in which during the process of marriage of which they pay great sums of money other resources by paying bride prices, organizing extravagant marriage celebrations at times borrow large sums of money from money lenders. This often puts them in debt for life. This indebtedness makes the government revenue collection too difficult hence low service delivery and the order of the day becomes blaming the government for having failed to perform. Others will resort to engaging in robbery, drug selling, rebel activities because they think they will get the money to pay back the debts that were accumulated during the process of marriage. This threatens the National Security from just a mere thing from one domestic mistake. Hence leads to so many people to lose their lives on the expense of other people's hoped benefits. This analysis can also be backed by (De Silva et; 1979 ) changing marriage customs, case study 1 where the Tarun Mandal in Bhoomi Sena area reached an extent of becoming the bonded labourers for the "Sawkars" (money lenders) even at times for life in a bid to pay back the debts.

Which was Used to buy materials from these sawkars shops, feed them with that food but soon as marriage is over start working tirelessly for them .

- Once girls are blocked right from the family level to access skills, information and knowledge as seen previously then the nation runs short of skilled human power hence continuity to rely on the few men. This does not only reflect the imbalance in the labour market but also gives a clear picture of what the county is in terms of understanding what the freedoms and rights are, illiteracy rates and other social stratification aspects.
- The way these children are huddled right from the start at the house hold level such as being removed from schools, finding a lot of misunderstandings in the family such as untrustworthiness, mistreatment,

they will automatically carry them on forward and these bad elements shall be reflected even when they secure offices if it so happens that few of them study. This is where you find that ethics at work are always very poor and every body thinks of “every person for himself and God for us all” that’s why some people even though they are officers still don’t mind forcing their children to school when they neglect it its not their mistake but its because of what they used to see earlier before in their families.

- Decision-making is complicated even at the national level and has a lot of inequalities. Its not because its supposed to be, but because the female children are not empowered right from the family level. How does this come about? This comes about in manner that when a man marries a wife as earlier said she is used as a property and mistreated like nothing. In this situation the children will be seeing how inferior the mother is and how the father is taking his own decisions without consulting the wife. This inferiority complex is manifested or reflected in the children especially girls. These girls therefore will always even though they are educated find it difficult to oppose men in a bid to influence certain policies. That’s why most of the government policies have looked to be unfavourable because when debating on them women are either not fully represented in number or have less say to influence due to inferiority conflicts. The strings attached to the movement of such categories of persons limits them in terms of skills, information and knowledge and to them they think they can’t do much. (Kinyanjui and Mburugu –1989). To move needs to first apply for letters of permission. This has a lot of influence on ultimate beneficiaries of the politics of the custom where the poor females, orphans are colonised by the policy decisions and are final but males are highly privileged to extract or the female resources to be under the males control even without their will.
- The continuous men’s claiming women as property reduces production for market since women are always restricted to the production for domestic consumption. They can’t access chance to engage in the cash crop then staple food crops. This is due to the fact that woman’s rights over land are limited. Yet the children need to go to school, need to eat well, and eradicate poverty which makes, the government lose because the family may not afford to depend on the little staple food produced by the wife for school fees, home consumption and at the same time sell to pay tax. Yet the higher the income bases the higher the government revenue. Economically the government programmes will be sabotaged hence subsequent vicious cycle of poverty. Women have not been able to effectively access loans simply because they have nothing like a mortgage, they can’t put land as security because its not theirs it’s for the husbands, or even if she secures the loan it’s a man to control it of which he may end up swallowing the funds. This limits the level of capital accumulation and subsequent consistent burden to the government to always intervene (Daddiel 1989).
- People will not have time to work when they are running up and down in courts of law to demand back the Bride Price in case of divorce in addition to spending a lot of time in hospitals and clinics when hacked, production will go down. Bride Price to mention but a few as seen above directly or indirectly has a great implications to influence operations of the social institutions in any country and begins right from the family / house hold level but goes on expanding to influence the whole society.

## **6. Relationship of the theme with other foreign cultures and then the current trend**

Unlike in most African states and communities where the vitalness of marriage was determined by the payment of heavy bride price in form of cash, kind or both; at least the developed world has tried to liberalize the noun by freeing the choice making than imposing a lot of strings.

That why even in some countries like UK, Netherlands and other European countries people marry in contracts where one has the right to divorce at whatever time he/she wishes. A woman is not tied up by the bride price business that the parents will fail to pay back. The children are given their liberty to determine their own destiny unlike for instance here in Uganda where parents determine the men to whom the daughter has to be married due to money hunger.

However, its imperative to recognize that most forms of domestication of women and children have been widely practiced world wide though at different levels. In that gender inequality has been in most countries in the world only that for the developed countries its at a small scale because of different factors like, improved technology empowerment of women is very high, women and men education gap is very minimal if not non. So when women are already empowered it because had to domesticate them. For instance in around 2 decades by 1992 official development plans in Thailand either ignored women or considered them as wives and mothers (Thailand development newsletter 1991) it is revealed that there was exceptionally high percentage of working women in their land in those decades but their livelihood was based on labour-intensive and worked on only farm family owned.

Whereas in Thailand is that way the life in Medieval world is different, women worked along side their husbands in their traditions and the daughters were apprenticed in the same way as brothers. If a husband died a woman carried on his business or craft and such women were respected than being respected because of Bride price paid but because of what they do. However, the inequality still remained when it came to wage payment. Women were paid less than men but this was not basically based on values of what they have invested in the women (Book of word cultures)

Whereas here in Africa and Uganda in particular when the children fall in love with each other it's the boy to process the taking of the girls by paying Bride price, building the house, and things of the sort. In India the story is different it's the girls to pay the Bride price and the whole process is the reverse of the African one . Domestic violence in this case may come from other channels than bride price itself.

### **Current trend / perception**

Whereas in early days where bride price had its specific attachment like it was used to be paid in kind such as cows and food stuffs in most societies for example central region in Uganda where it included gifts and local beer, western Uganda and Eastern , northern tribes the bride price was high and paid in kind in form of cows including locally brewed beer (Nzita and Mbaga-Niwampk 1993 ) this normally complicated the affair but today the system is changing where it is basically paid in cash and at the brides' group choice others have called it ' Akasiimo' just an appreciation where its absence cannot make marriage null and void as it used to be in case of failure to pay it so it's no longer forced but a brides own will.

Trial marriages are increasing it is because historically trying a woman meant marrying and hence meant paying bride price so in case of any problem with the woman one would lose or begin the war of demanding back the bride price. But today a man can easily first test or try a woman if he finds her not productive he chucks her after all he knows he will lose nothing or less.

### **7. Recommendation /Way Forward**

To my own view I would suggested the following so as to bring the problem to at least a reasonable level

Bride price should not be a price otherwise it's a wrong concept or even scrapped off completely so as to avail the children with autonomy independent to make their own decisions if we are to have better families and to safeguard them.

Be critical to gender roles and gender biases need to critically be addressed and the women should be empowered in political and economic and social aspects in the same way men need to be empowered and let both know their rights.

The Ministry of Gender and Ethics needs to critically make enough research on what is actually leading to immorality in different sects such as corruption in offices, prostitution nude dancing 'EKIMANSURO'. This will help them to draw a strategic approach to solving the problem other than keeping shouting about those practicing it. Move from problem solving orientation to visionary approach.

More consciousness raising approach and organizational programmes for young children should strongly be invested in. This can be done through the review of education curriculum and enabling children to sensitize their own parents in various developments (parents workshops). Equip them with enough of the national values. This will help the future generation to build a national state that caters for all categories of people “they say you bend the tree when it is still young” these children need to grow while knowing what to do in common (common values, interests and philosophy).

There’s a great need for the government to empower the youth in the consciousness raising and also their economic capacity so that they can avoid involvement in immoral acts search of money and avoid streets and a destination of their problems. The government should put a special fund for the youth and provide special loans for the youth because there are few youth who benefit from these other liberalized loans neither do they benefit from women loans.

However, it is imperative to acknowledge and recognize the initiatives by the government to come up with the domestic relations bill that is hoped to cater for the solutions of the bride price. Hopefully the Parliament shall proportionately, objectively debate it for the benefit of the future generation.

## **Conclusion**

Now that it has been realized that bride price has got a great impact on the development at different levels in a society; it is important to recognize, understand and acknowledge that institutional culture and practices have strengths as well as weaknesses depending on the perception, philosophy.

This requires a visionary holistic approach where the key greater equity for improved well being of all the lies in the adaptation and promotion of strategic common values as the road to safeguarding the children and the family. This is better than focussing on the maintaining of the first forms regardless of the benefits or risk and if it is to be maintained needs to be revised and polished. Nevertheless it ideal to recognized the shift in perception, philosophy, practice, and the general current trend.

## *Abbreviation*

UDHS: Uganda Demographic Health Survey  
URDT: Uganda Rural Development and Training Programme

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