



Main Menu

- [Home](#)
- [About us](#)
- [Bride Price](#)
- [Articles](#)
- [Bride Price Conference](#)
- [Makomere Radio Drama](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [Reports](#)

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Password

Remember Me

- [Forgot your password?](#)
- [Forgot your username?](#)
- [Create an account](#)

Online Poll

Should Bride Price be abolished?

- Yes
- No
- Not Sure

Bride Price

Written by Brian  
Tuesday, 18 January 2011 12:07



Bride Price : African Pride or Prejudice?  
"Bride Price is the cultural practice of paying for the bride with cows"

**MIFUMI** is a leading women's rights and development agency with a large constituency of grassroots women's organisations. We run an integrated Domestic Violence intervention programme that encompasses provision of services, protection of women and the prevention of violence through public education.

In 2004, the people of Tororo, Uganda held a referendum on the reform of Bride Price, following a two-year campaign process organised by the Mifumi Project. The question was whether Bride Price should become a non-refundable gift. The referendum was won with 60% in favour of reform. The need for this intervention arose out of our work with women, which highlighted the fact, that Bride Price is a major contributing factor to Domestic Violence and poverty.

Bride Price and Domestic Violence

Bride Price is the cultural practice of paying for the bride with cows. The practice requires that the cows be refunded if a marriage breaks down. This often ties women to abusive relationships because they cannot afford the refund. The practice also reduces women and girls to the status of chattel or property and leaves them open to Domestic Violence and abuse with far reaching social, economic and human rights implications. Since the referendum, the Mifumi Project has seen changes in attitudes of the people of the region about Bride Price. For one thing, the referendum sparked off a healthy debate on the practice of Bride Price both by those for and against reform. Radio discussions and newspaper articles have recorded voices demanding an end to Bride Price from various parts of Uganda. Local people have begun to experiment with alternative forms of marriage appreciation such as allowing the new couple to use the gifts to start their new home. It is clear that the issue of Bride Price has reached a turning point and there can be no turning back to a practice that is now highly commercialised, having lost all its cultural values of protecting women.

Effects of Bride Price

The campaign and referendum raised public consciousness about the negative impact that Bride Price has on different categories of society including the following:

- The promise of Bride Price encourages parents to force young girls out

Photo Gallery



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We have 2 guests online

of school in order to be married off for Bride Price. This discriminates against girls in education.

- Many young couples begin their married life poorer, with the groom having paid the little income he had on Bride Price. This contributes to poverty and Domestic Violence.
- Many young men who cannot afford Bride Price simply co-habit. This makes them forfeit many rights and entitlements, which can be particularly detrimental for already disadvantaged and vulnerable women.
- Many parents often sell their land, a vital resource, to refund Bride Price.
- Bride Price reduces women to the status of chattel or property and exposes them to all sorts of abuse, widow inheritance and the risk of HIV infection.

The challenge: NO REFUND OF Bride Price.

Following the successful results, the MIFUMI made comprehensive presentations of the issues to several law making bodies in Uganda including the parliament, the Ministries of Justice and constitutional affairs, The ministry of Gender and Social Welfare, Ministry of Education, the law reform commission, the constitutional review committees, the human rights commission and NGOs working in the field of human rights.

We are continuing our campaign and our challenges are two fold:

- To translate the successful referendum verdict into meaningful legislation for all who are affected and
- Secondly, to institutionalise the practice of NOT REFUNDING Bride Price

Even where laws exist, the day-to-day experience for many is different. Despite the fact that there is no law providing for the refund of Bride Price (a local byelaw only sets a limit), parents still get arrested and punished for not refunding Bride Price.

The payment of bride price reduces a woman's status to that of property so that she is not entitled to own anything in the home. If the relationship is violent and she is attempting to leave, culture demands that she returns the bride price paid for her yet she cannot afford the refund since she cannot own any property. Bride price is a critical issue of our time because the majority of poor people in Africa are subject to customary law whose main tenet is the subordinate position of women and nowhere is this more apparent than in marriage. This subordination is underscored by the practice of bride price and yet marriage is the primary site for women's struggle for self determination and equality.

- MIFUMI held the world's first bride price referendum in 2001.
- MIFUMI held the first international conference on bride price in 2004. [Click Here for details](#)
- MIFUMI was crucial in lobbying for Uganda's first Local ordinance on Bridal Gifts in Tororo.
- MIFUMI currently has a case before the constitutional court seeking to declare bride price unconstitutional.

"She becomes in effect like the man's property and he can treat her in any way

he likes"  
"Bride Price reduces women to the status of chattel or property"

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