

# Together we can!

In this Edition:  
Girls Say No To Early Marriages  
and  
Chiefs Taking a Stand Against  
Child Marriages



Centre for Human Rights  
and Rehabilitation  
*'The Noble Cause is Evident in People Themselves'*

Rutgers

For sexual and  
reproductive health  
and rights

## About Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation

The Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation (CHRR) is one of the leading human rights non-governmental organizations in Malawi. It was founded in February 1995 as a non-profit, apolitical, voluntary organization registered under the Trustees Incorporation Act of 1962. The organization was founded by former students exiles who returned home to the promises of a new democracy in 1994. The organization is authorized to provide its services anywhere in Malawi. Its registration under Incorporation Act 1962 provides the basis that defines the organization's mandate and scope of work. Currently programmes are carried out in all the (3) three regions namely Southern, Central and Northern Regions.

### Vision

A vibrant Malawi culture which embraces the values of democracy and human rights

### Mission

To contribute towards the protection, promotion and consolidation of good governance by empowering rural and urban communities in Malawi to be aware of and exercise their rights through research, advocacy and net-working in order to realize human development

### Core Values

Respect for Human Rights  
Equality  
Impartiality

### Objectives

- To empower rural and urban communities on issues of democracy, good governance, and citizens' rights, roles and responsibilities
- To advocate or the promotion and protection of the rights of sexual minorities.
- To mobilize marginalized communities and increase their voice on public policy
- To enhance communities' capacity to realize as well as define issues relating to community safety
- To conduct research on specific human rights as well as publicize policy issues and disseminate findings thereon
- To monitor, investigate and document issues of human rights infringement, with particular regard to violations of the same
- To provide training to professional and special groups in communities relating to democracy, good governance and human rights
- To lobby and advocate for necessary policies and legal reforms
- To net-work with other organizations espousing similar values and objectives at national, regional, and international levels
- To enhance CHRR's organizational capacity for effective and efficient programme delivery

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## CHRR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S NOTE



It is with utmost pleasure that I welcome you, dear reader, to CHRR's comic book. The book is part of CHRR's advocacy work against child marriages under the 'Unite Against Child Marriage' project the organisation has been implementing in Mangochi district with financial support from our partner, Rutgers.

Mind you, the title 'comic book' could be somewhat deceptive if all one is looking for in this book is comedy. There is more than just comedy in the book.

Most significantly, the book exposes cultural practices that

infringe upon the girl child's right to education. Most girls in poverty-stricken households of Malawi have fallen victim to early and forced marriages as one way of escaping the poverty trap.

However, as the book tells, early marriages don't just violate the right to education for the girl child. The scourge also leads to an increase in child and maternal mortality. Even worse, early marriages breed and sustain a vicious poverty cycle at a household, community, and national level. The list could be long and worse.

In light of the foregoing, it is refreshing to note government's efforts towards combating child marriages. Under the newly-enacted Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Act, minimum marriage age has been raised from 16 to 18. That's commendable. The age raise is a giant stride towards ensuring the girl child remains in school.

However, cognizant of the age's inconsistency with Section 22 (7) of the Constitution of Malawi, CHRR urges government to consider amending the marriage age section in the constitution to validate the age in the marriage act.

Beyond amending the constitution on marriage age, government, civil society organizations and all stakeholders need to start getting right answers to other factors such as culture, poverty and high levels of illiteracy that force the girl child into early marriage. Time for action is now. Enjoy the read.

### Editorial Team

Produced within the unite against child marriage programme

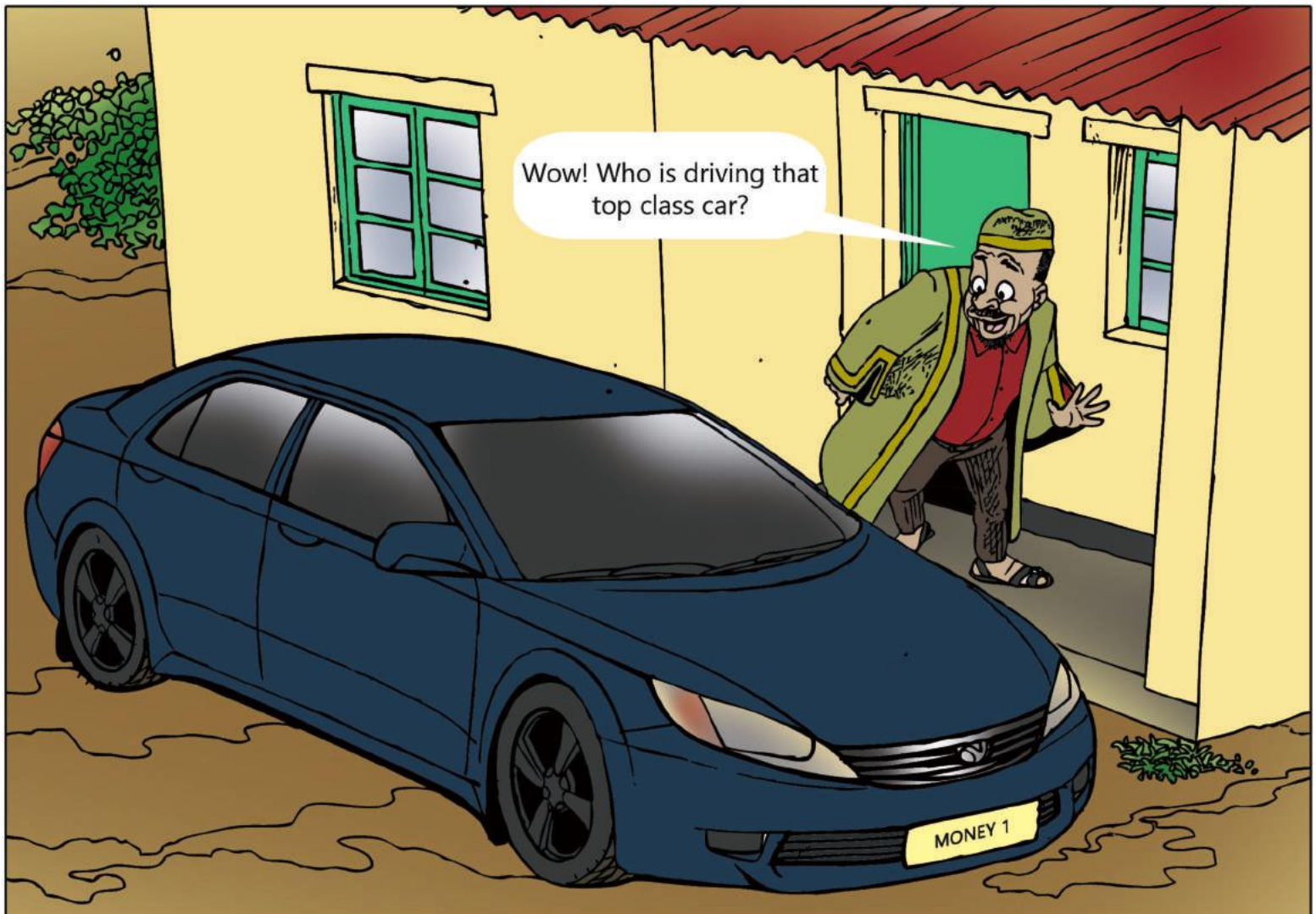
**Text:** Thandizo Mpwiyo, Michael Kaiyatsa, Nyatuwe Phiri, and Kidwell Chipwatali (CHRR)  
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Dennis Lupega and Deborah Lupenga (Depicture Media)

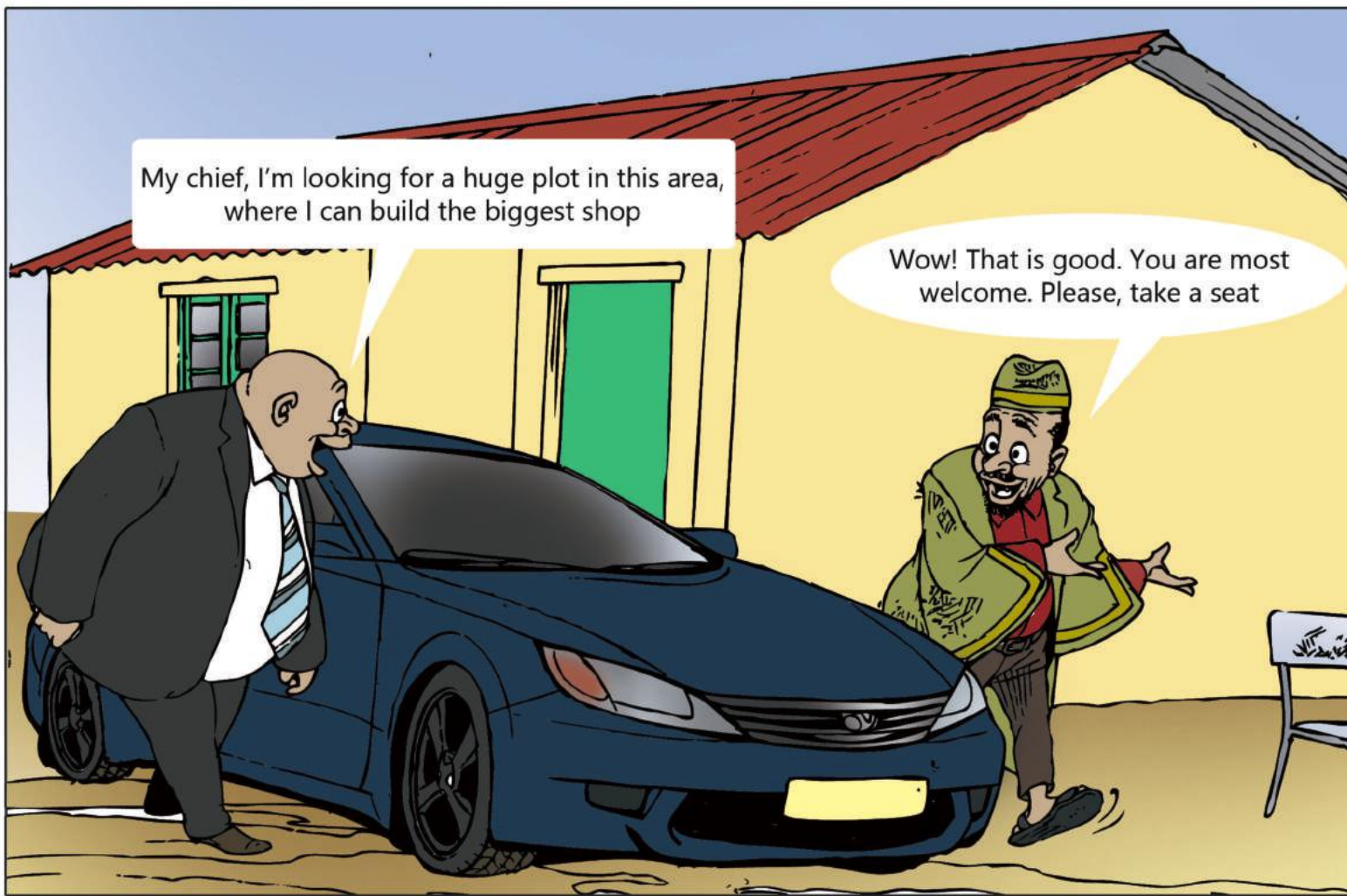
**Editors:** Thandizo Mpwiyo, Joline Schelfhout and Marieke Bootsma

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# CHIEFS TAKING A STAND AGAINST CHILD MARRIAGES





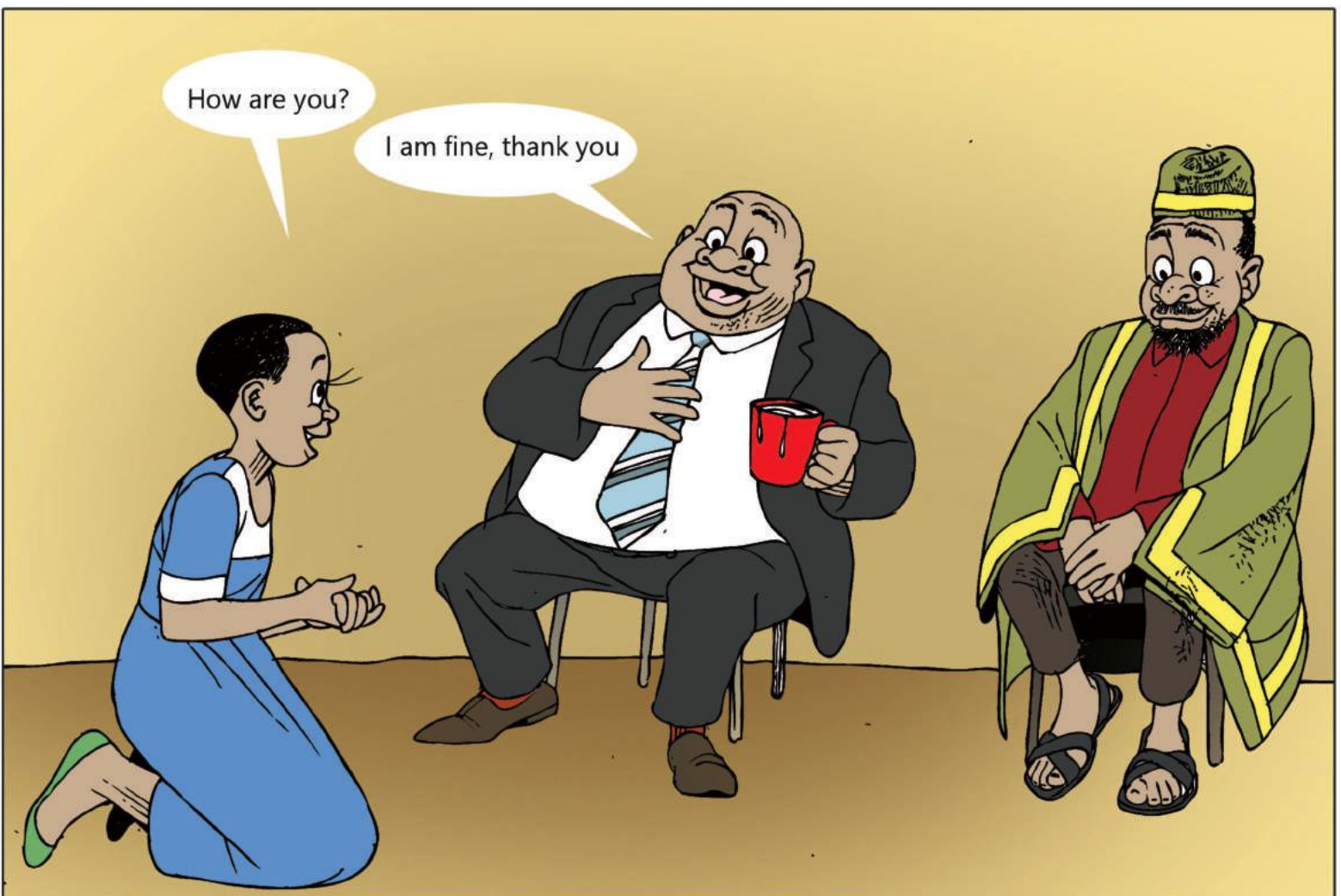


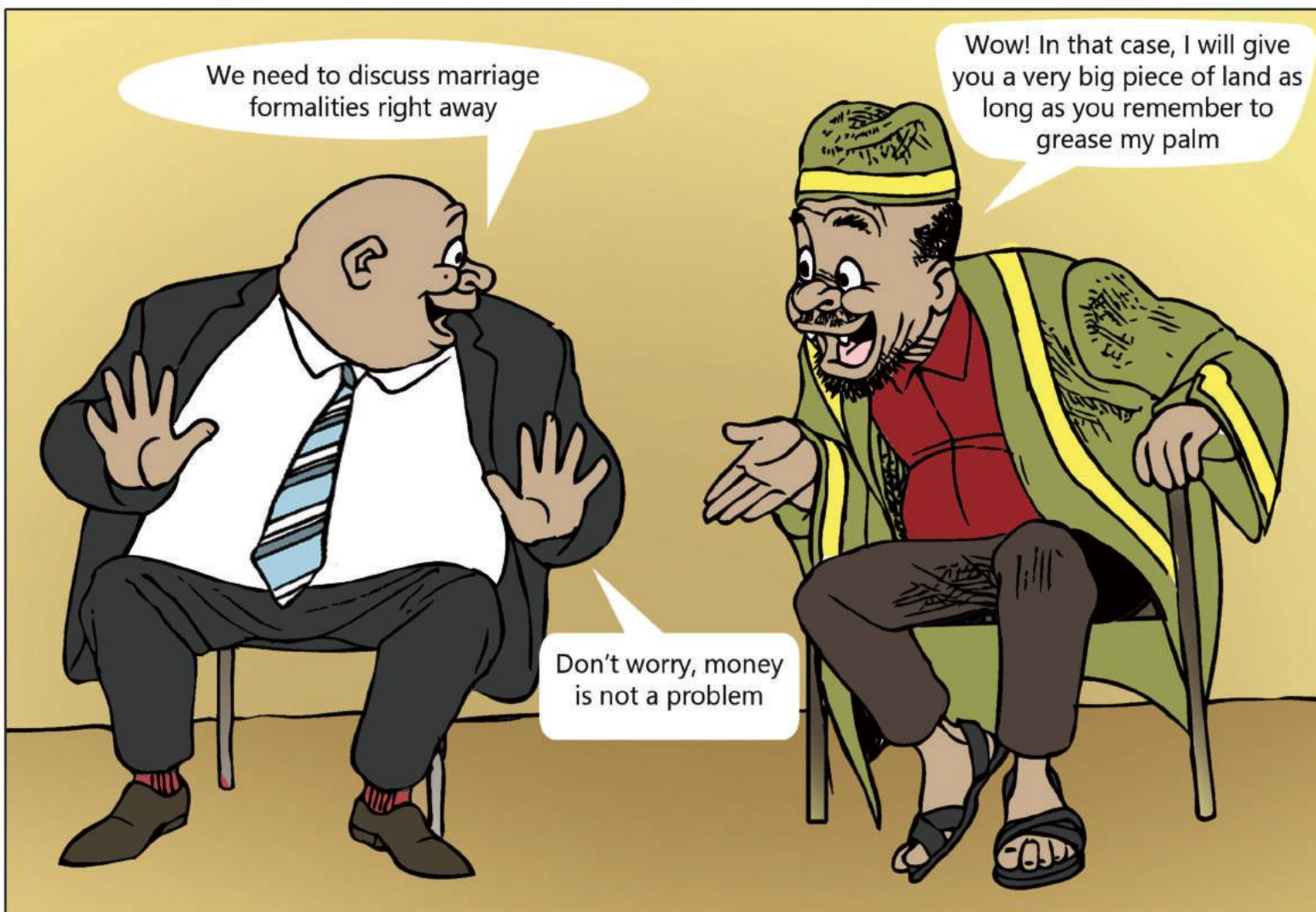
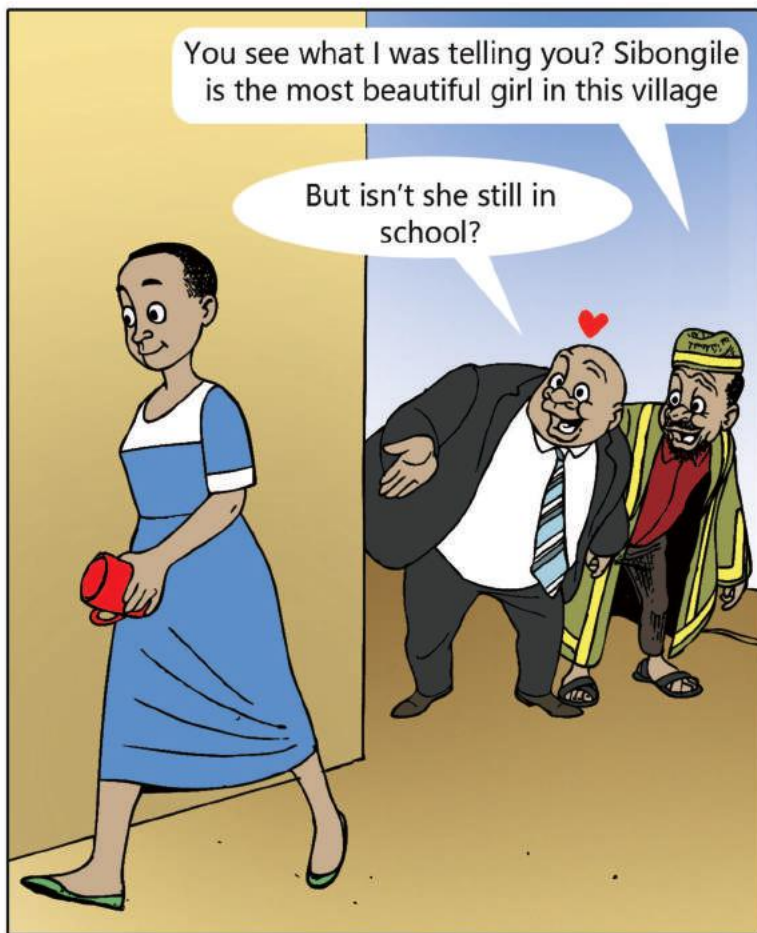
My chief, I'm looking for a huge plot in this area, where I can build the biggest shop

Wow! That is good. You are most welcome. Please, take a seat

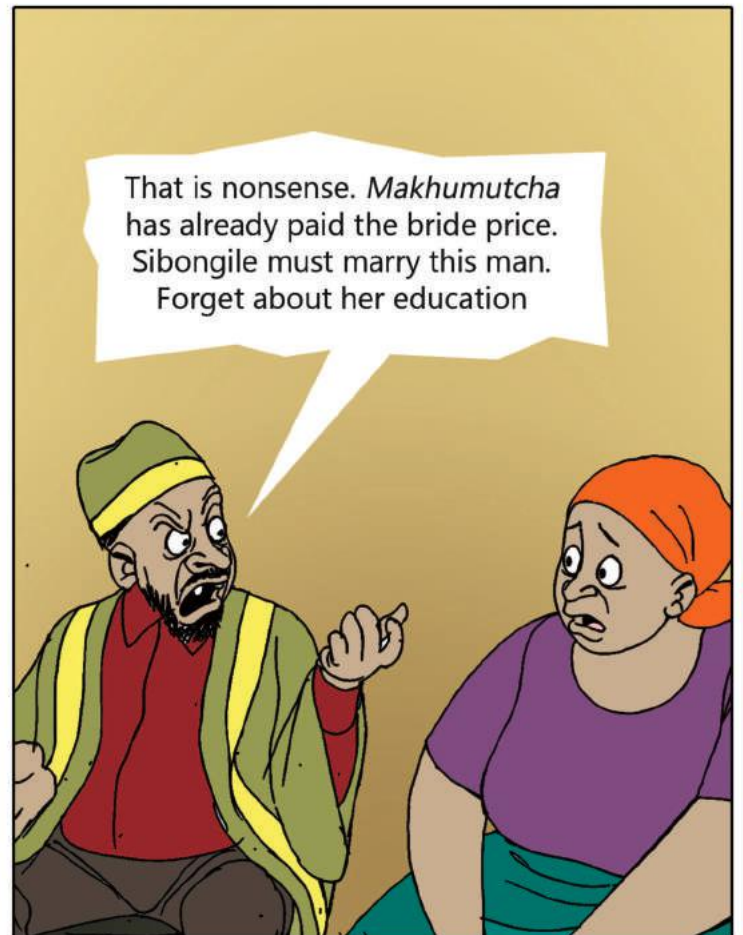
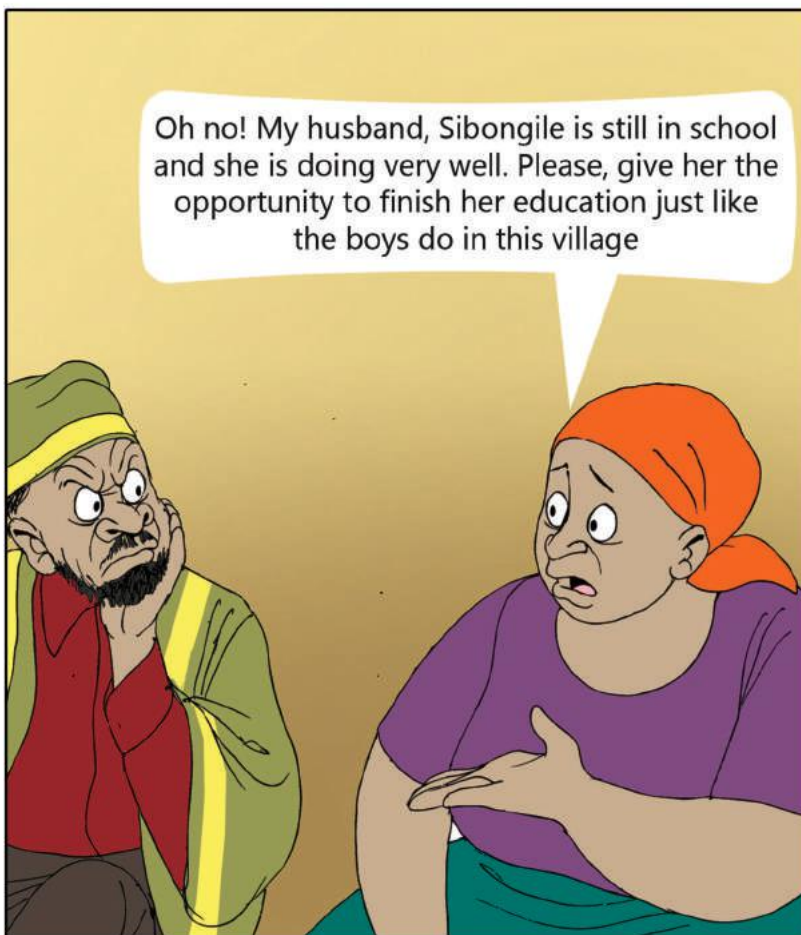


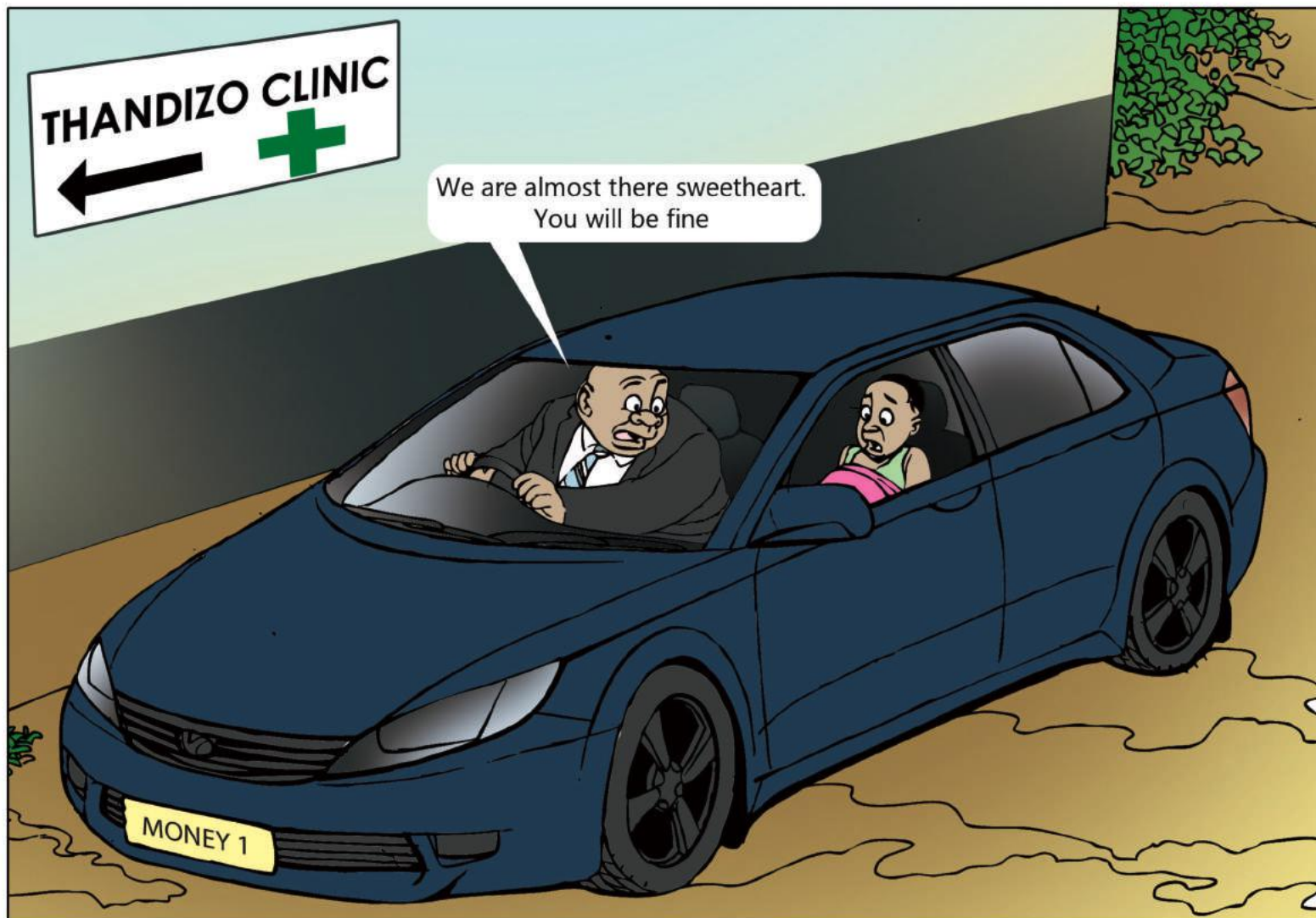
Counsel, tell Sibongile my daughter to bring a cup of water for our distinguished gentleman here

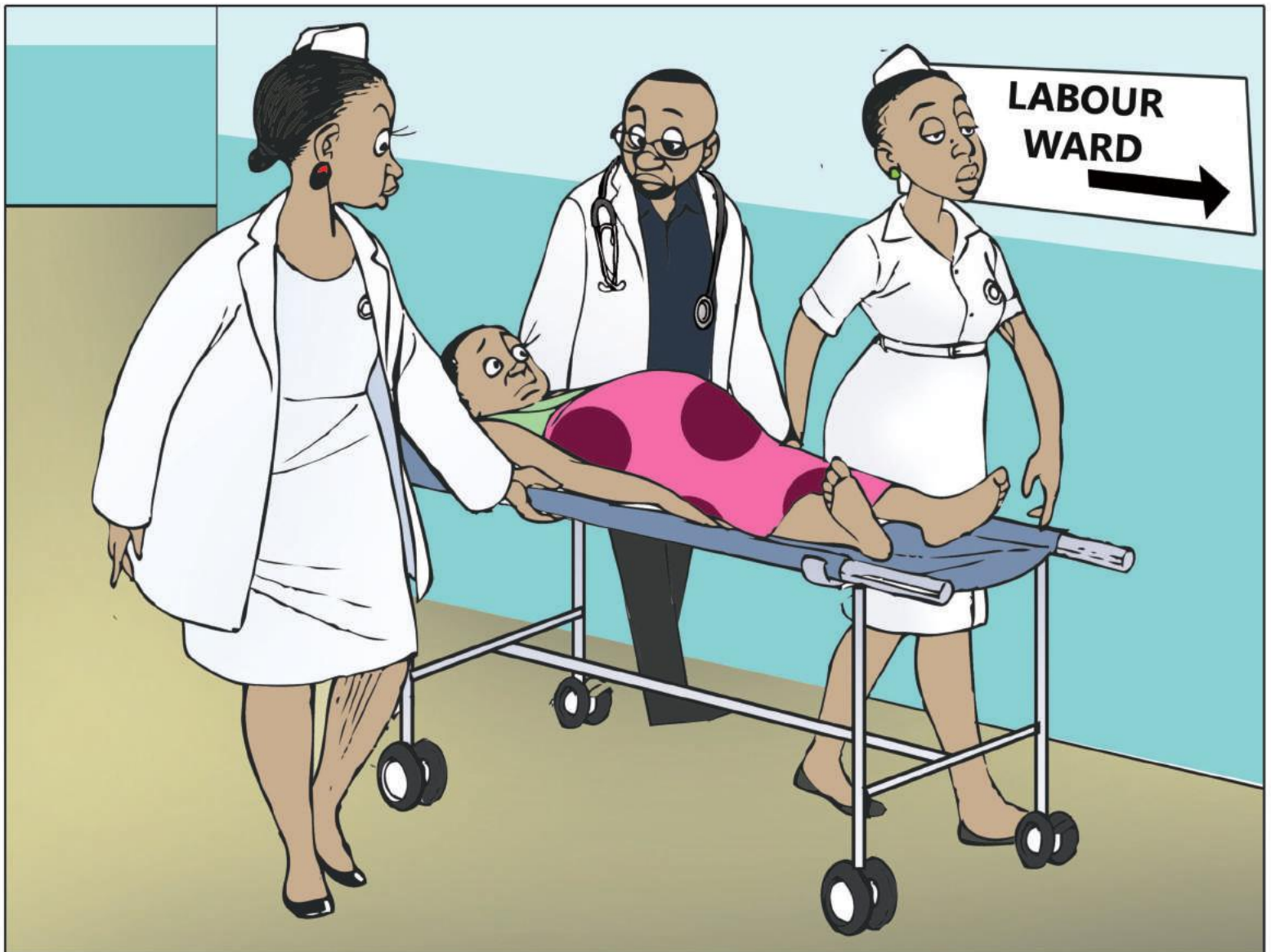




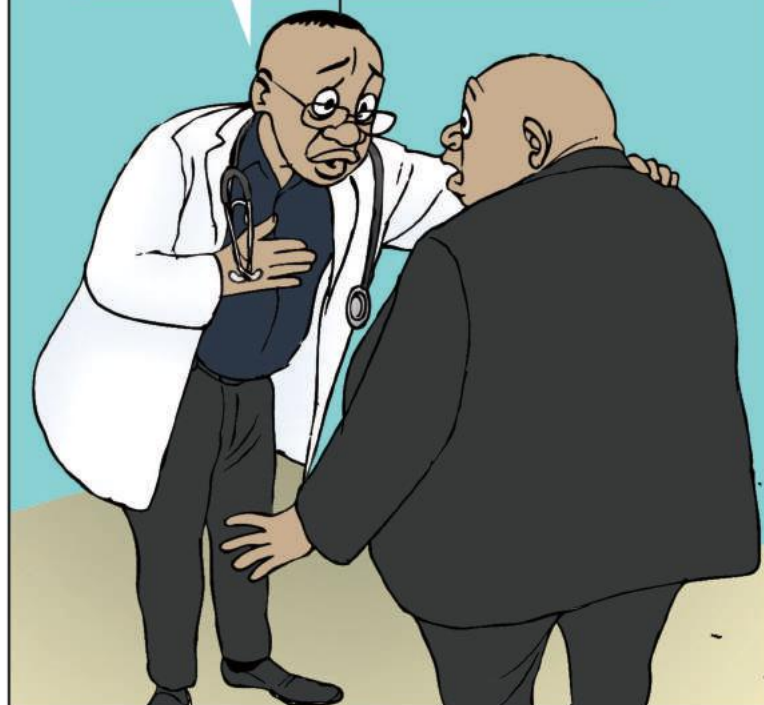






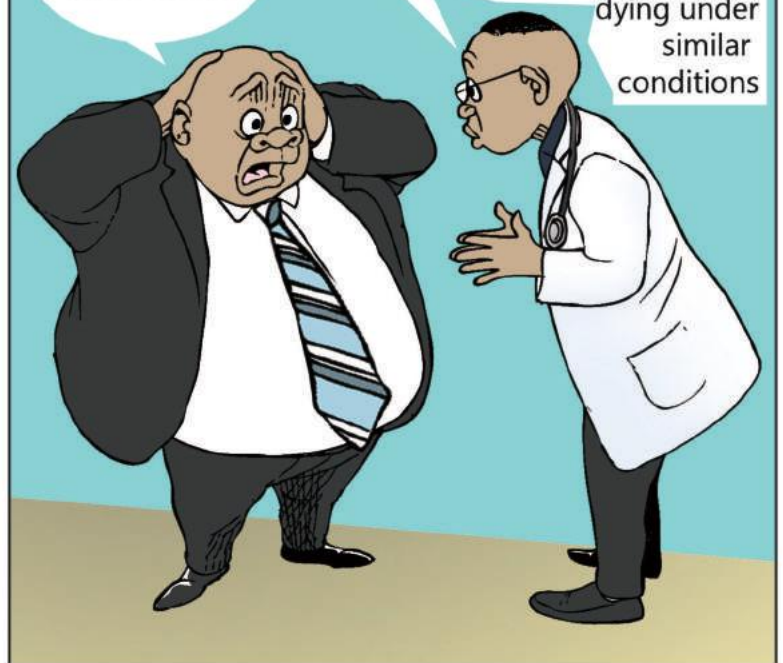


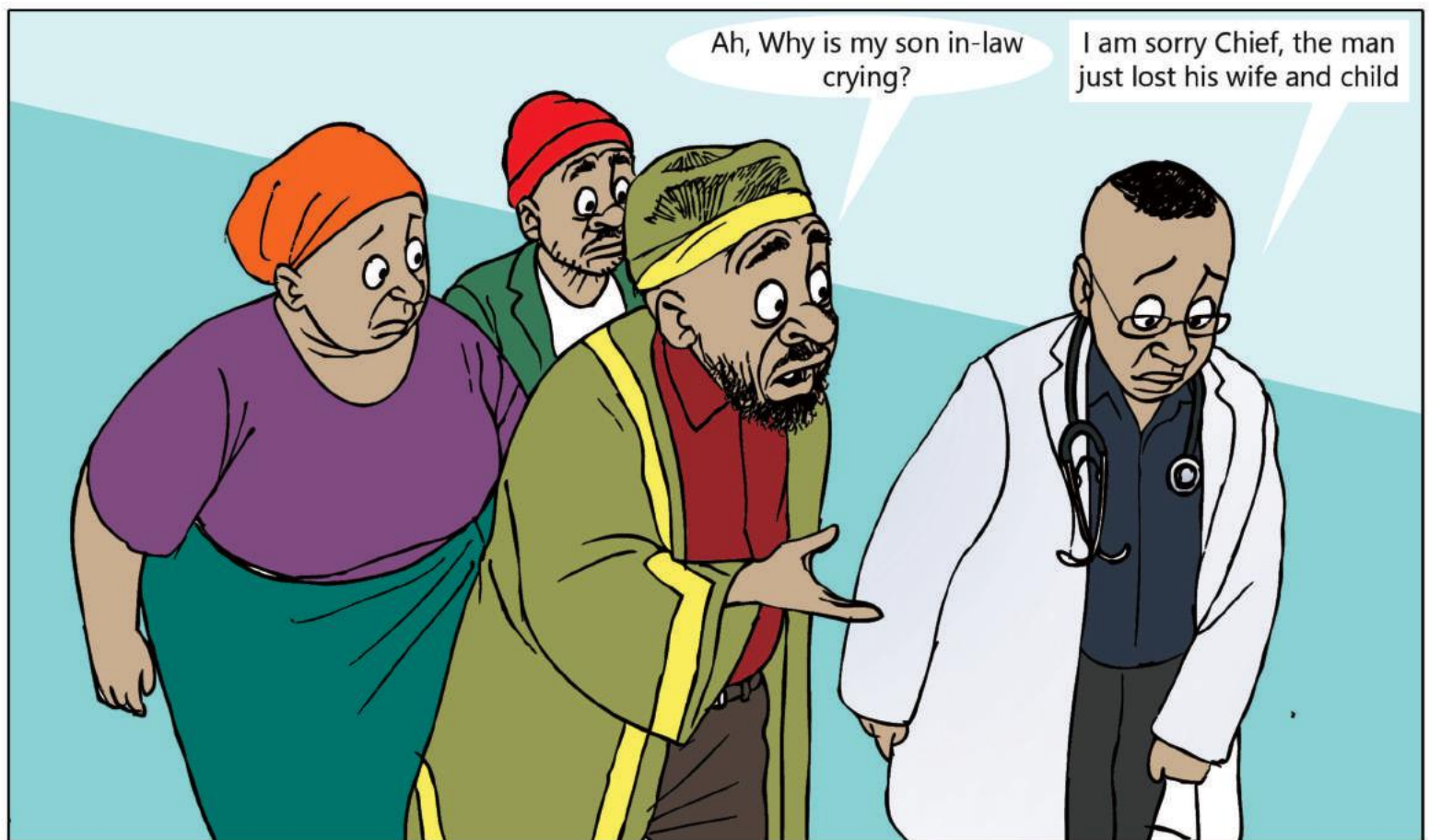
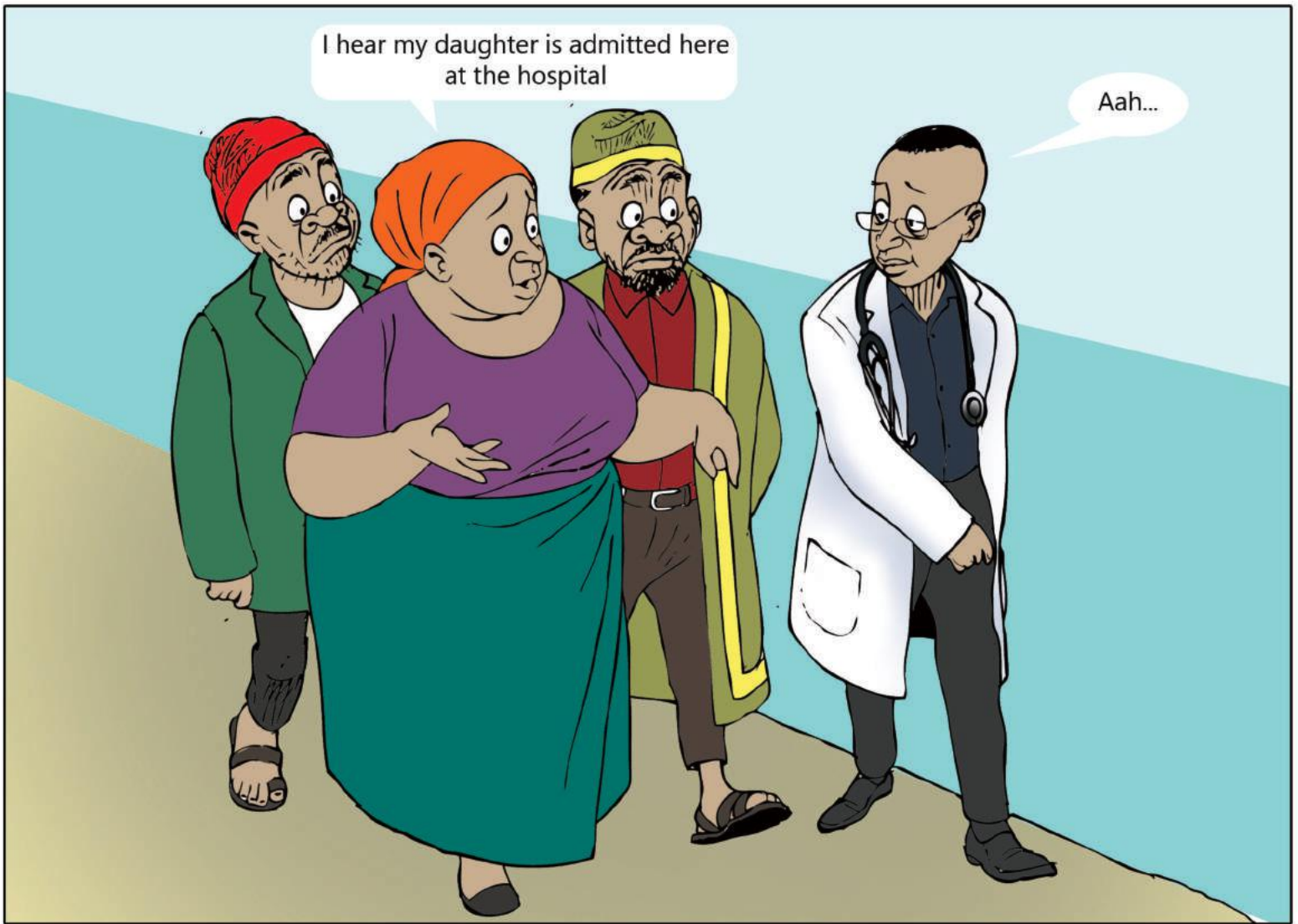
I am sorry, Mr Makhumutcha. We tried our best to save both your wife and the child but unfortunately we lost them

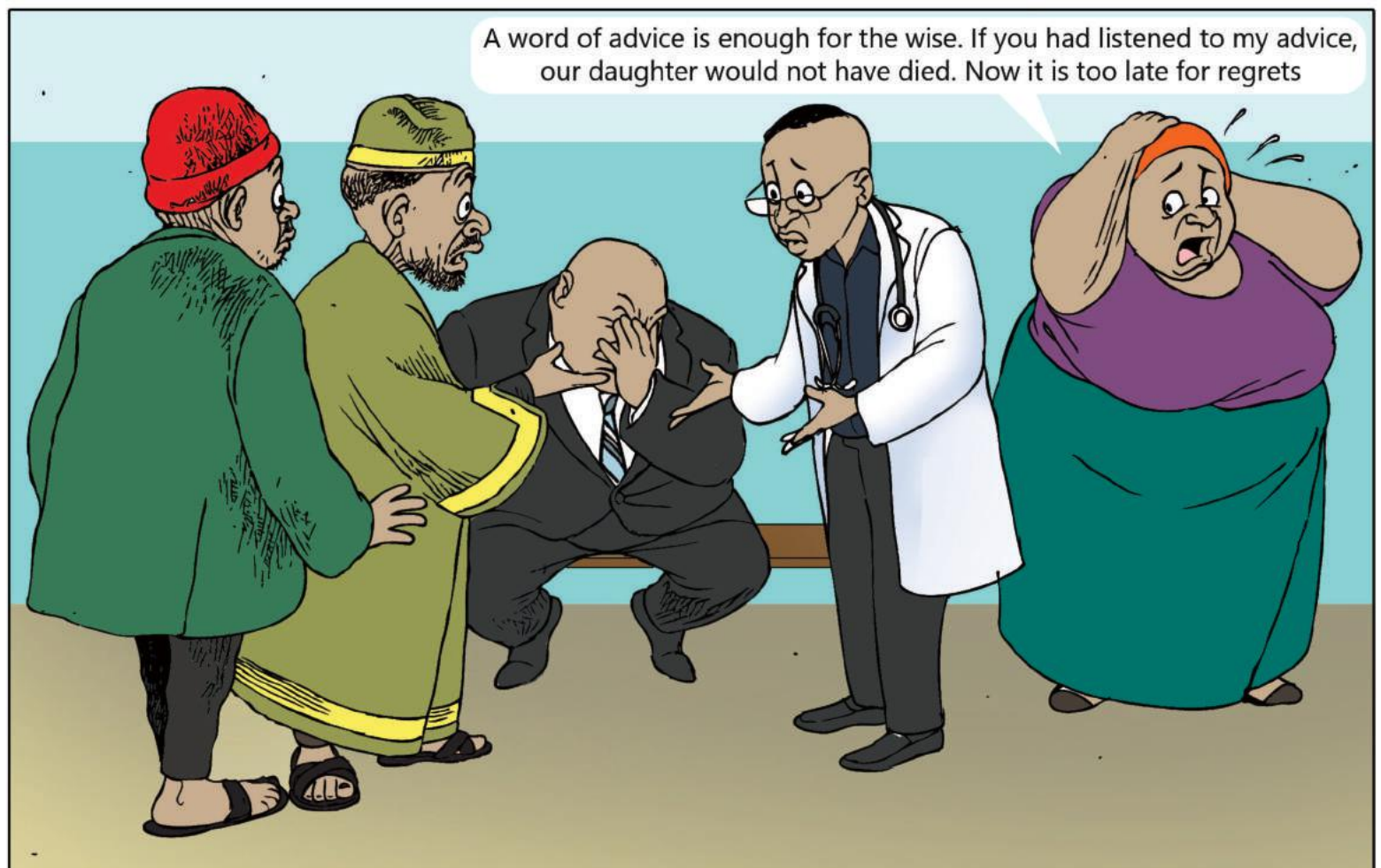
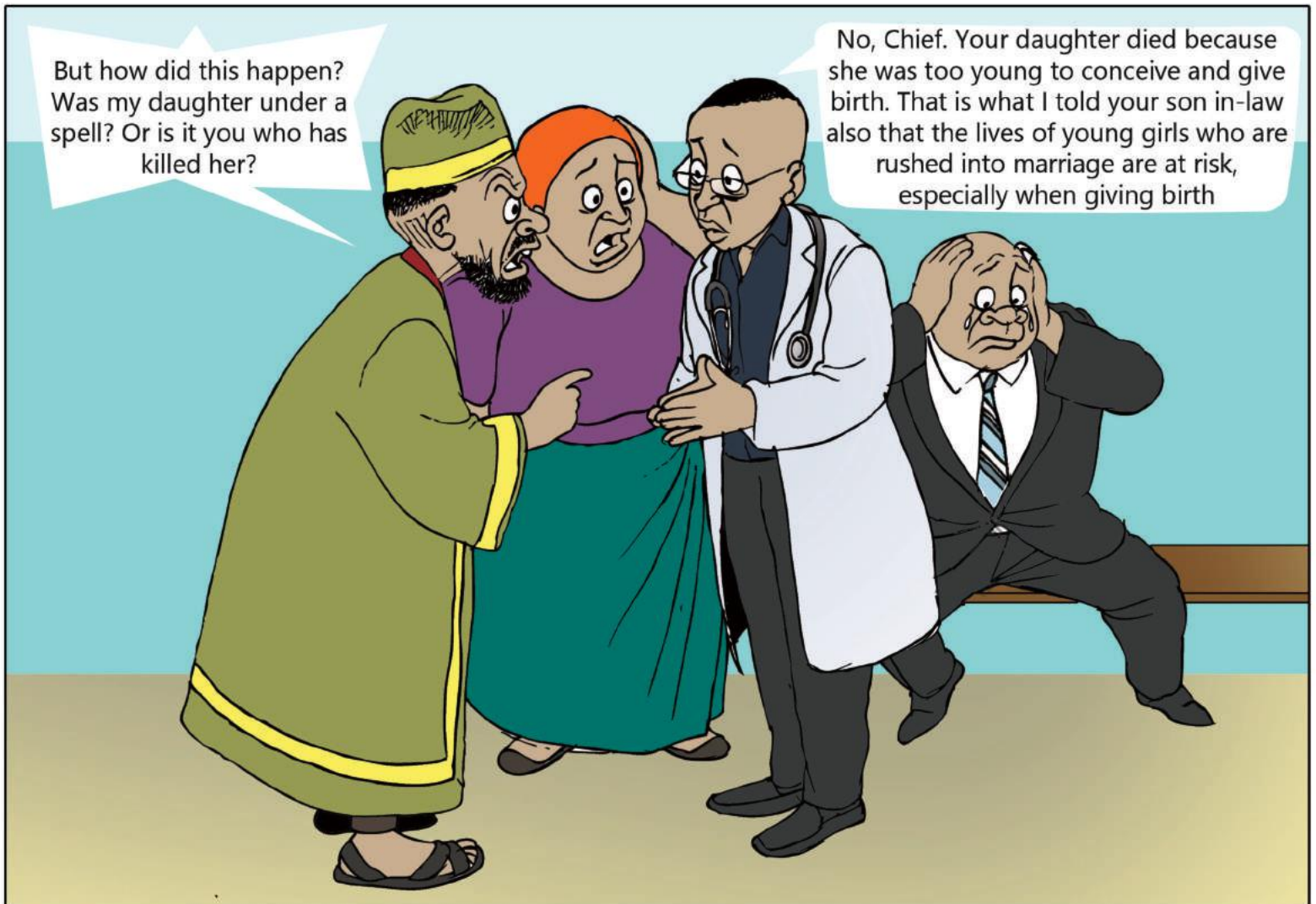


MY WIFE! GONE!  
WHY? HOW?

The girl died because she was too young to give birth. She was even young to get pregnant. Many girls in this village are dying under similar conditions





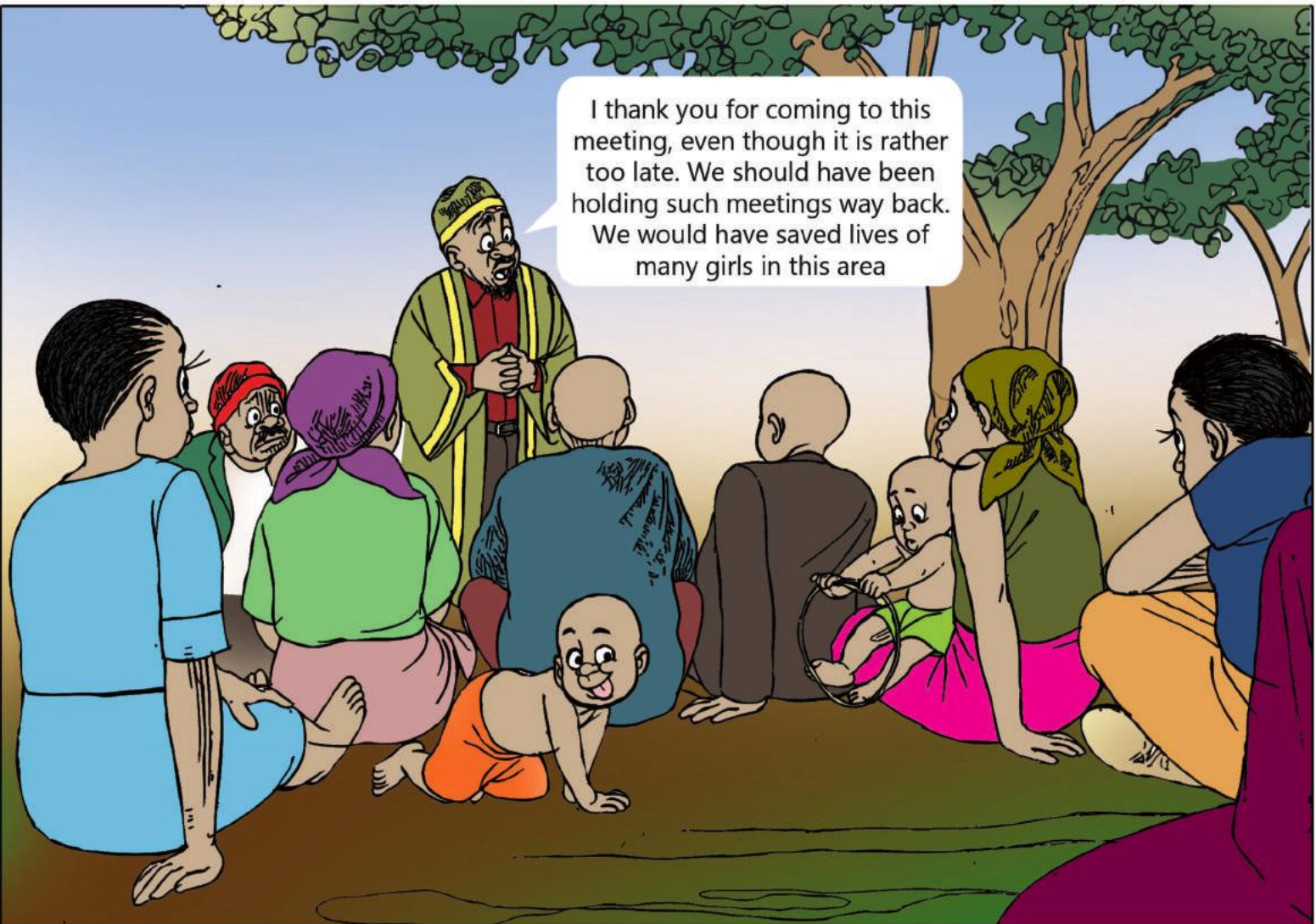


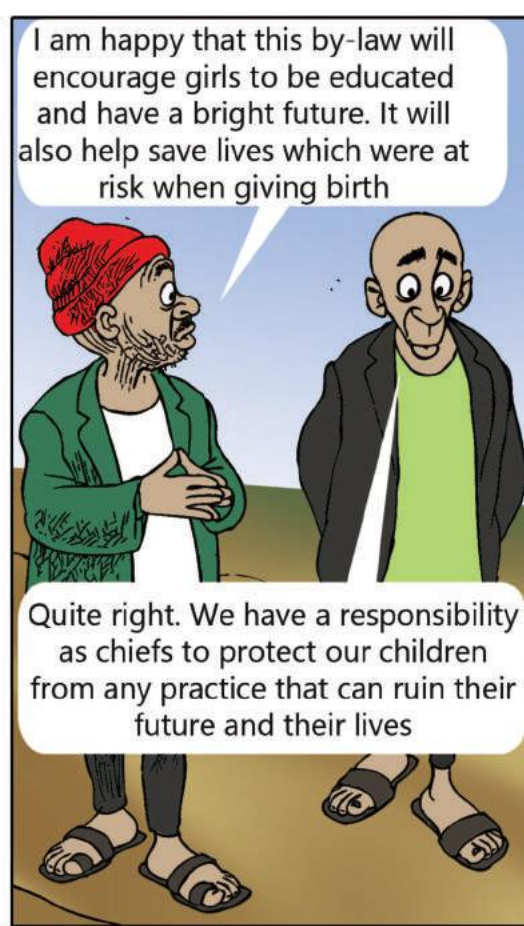
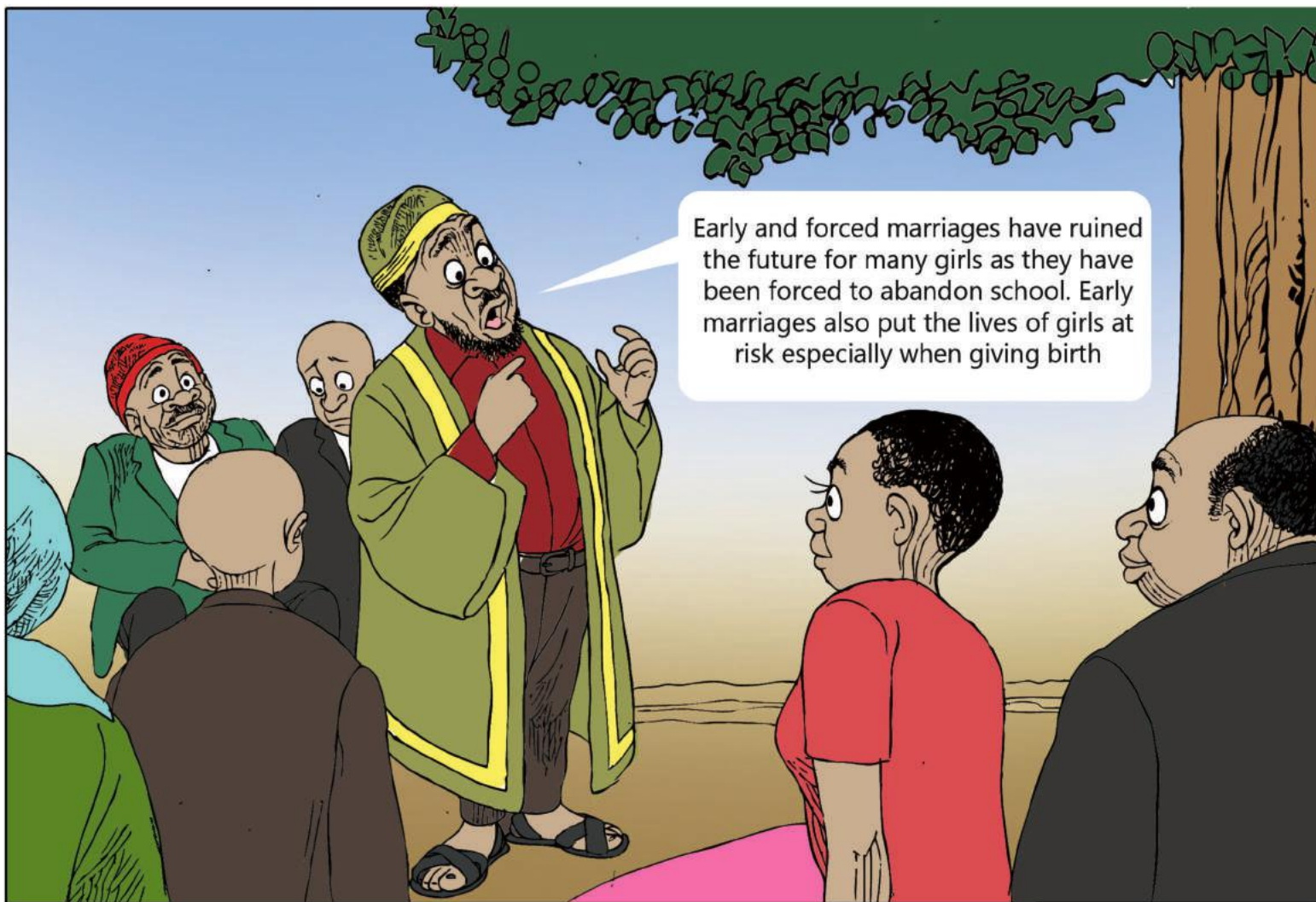
My condolences, Chief. As I have been saying, we need to stop early and forced marriages for girls. Apart from ruining their future, early marriages put the lives of girls at risk. Instead, we need to encourage girls to stay in school so they can have a bright future

You are quite right. I have been a fool! If I had allowed Sibongile to stay in school, she would not have died like this. We need to put an end to this ridiculous culture



I thank you for coming to this meeting, even though it is rather too late. We should have been holding such meetings way back. We would have saved lives of many girls in this area





## Facts about Child Marriage:

- Many girls leave school at an early age and not find decent work
- Many young girls do not marry a rich man and end up living in poverty
- Many girls get pregnant when their bodies are not mature enough
- Many teenage pregnant girls have health problems during pregnancy or even die during delivery, together with the baby
- Many girls are forced to marry

### On a positive note:

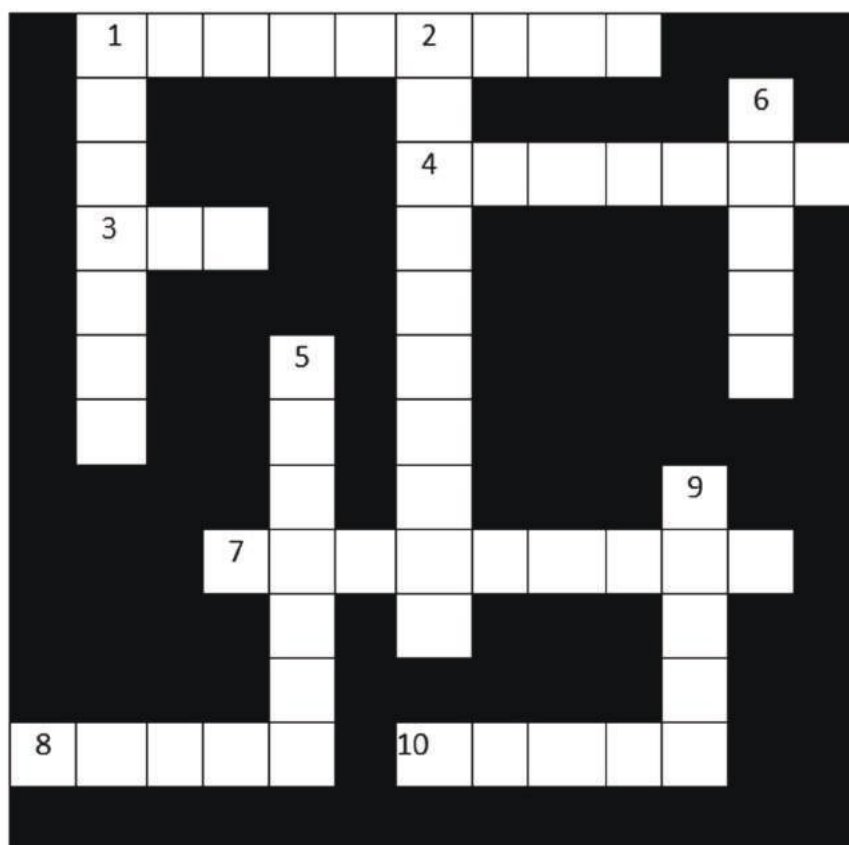
More and more adults (chiefs, parents and teachers) are now protecting their children from child marriage.

### The New Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Law of Malawi

The Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations law among others, address the issues of child marriages as it raises the age of marriage to 18 years old. This law keeps the girl child safe from the countless risk factors and human rights violations that child marriages entail.

## Cross Word Puzzle

(Finish in 22min)



Across	
1.	Result of having unprotected sex
3.	Put a stop to early marriage
4.	Having protected sex
8.	What we need to achieve a dream
10.	Materials which aid studying
Down	
1.	Financial reason for young people to get married before the age of 18
2.	Not having sex until marriage
5.	What we need to be educated
6.	In order to be knowledgeable
7.	What we need to get a decent job
9.	To achieve a desired dream

### Cross Word Answers

BOOKS END EDUCATION SAFESEX ABSTINENCE GOALS PREGNANCY STUDIES LEARN POVERTY FOCUS



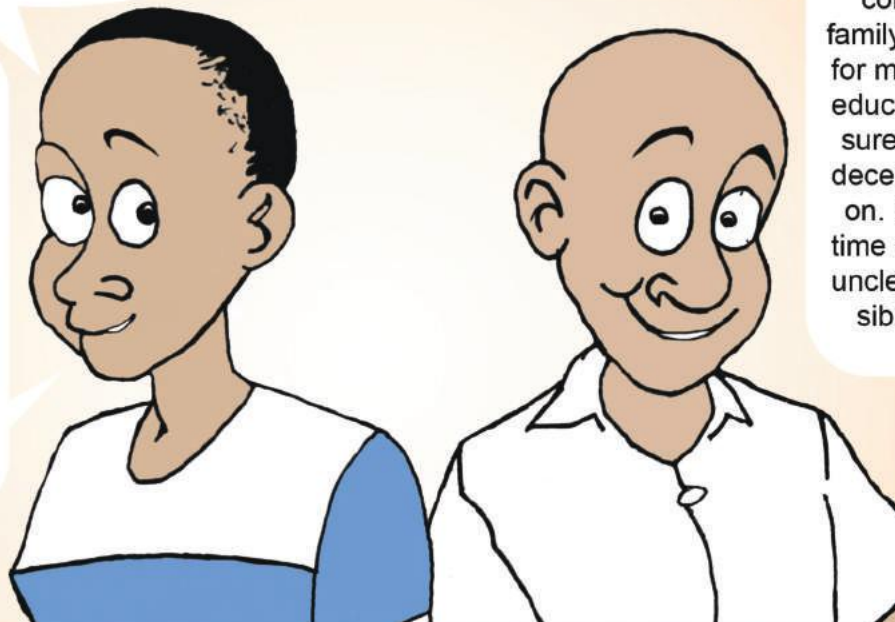
## MEET MADALO AND JOHN WHO WAITED FOR MARRIAGE UNTILL AFTER 18 YEARS OLD DESPITE FACING SOCIAL ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

My parents wanted me to get married with an older man as they could not afford to pay for my school fees. I told them I want to finish my education to make sure I can look after myself later on in life. Through a local NGO, my dad is now working some extra hours to pay for my school fees.

I have a girlfriend but we both have decided to wait for marriage after we finish our education and find decent jobs. We make sure we don't get pregnant by always using a condom when having sex.

My parents passed away when I was 12. My family wanted me to quit school and find a job to look after my siblings. Luckily, I convinced my family that it is best for me to finish my education to make sure I can earn a decent salary later on. In the meantime my aunts and uncles care for my siblings while I study.

I have seen girls my age having babies and struggling to deal with all the responsibilities of being a mother. I want to become a mother when my body is mature enough and I am old enough to offer my children a stable and safe home.

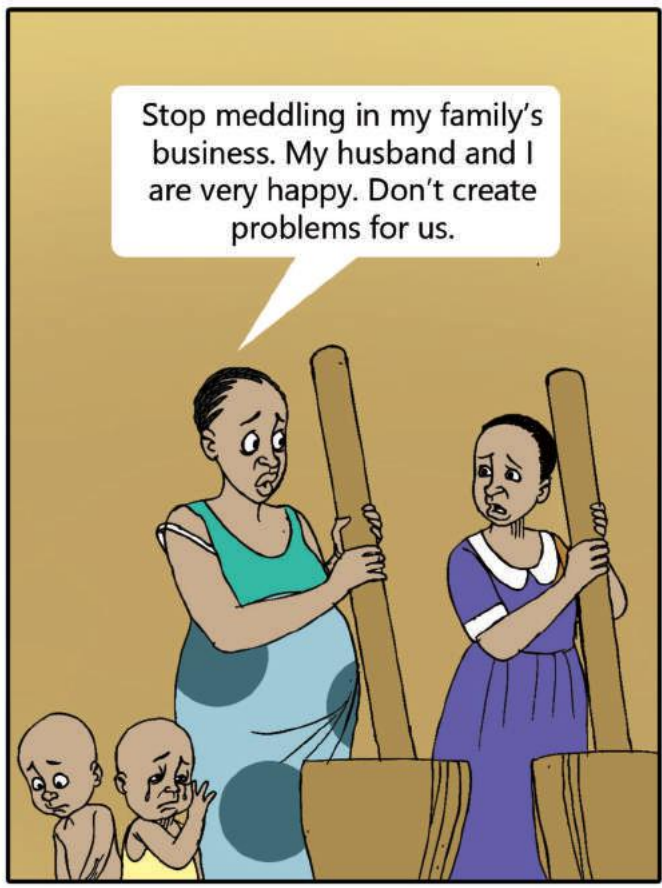
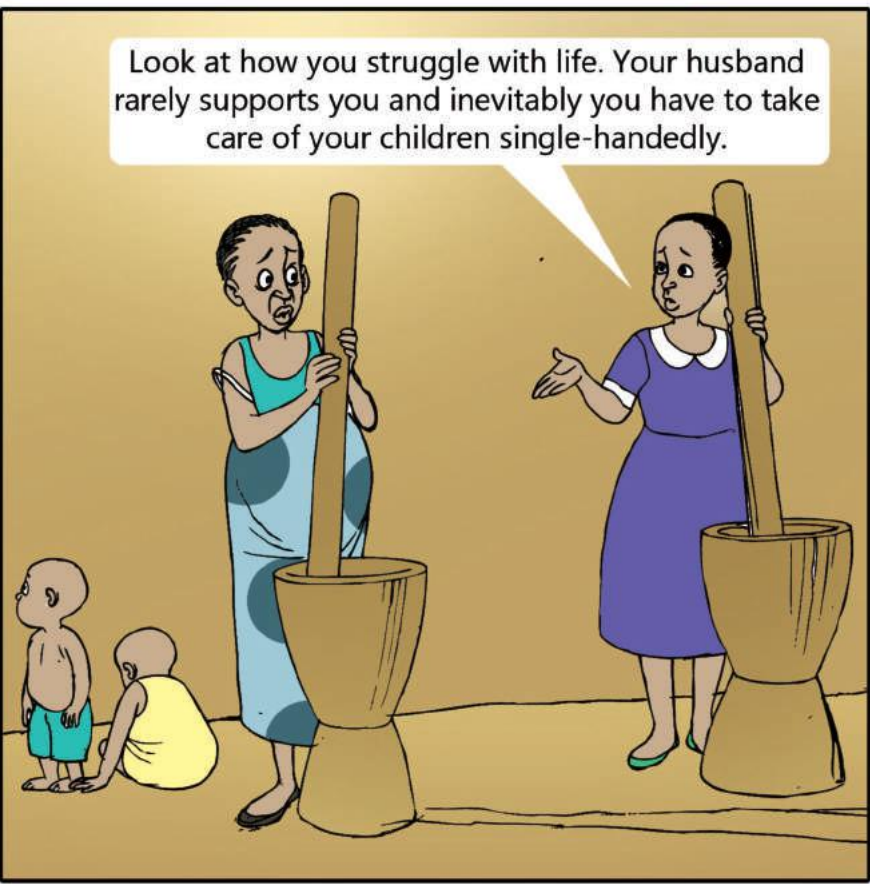


### Game: What is the solution?

(Aim of the game: Think of where to go for help by drawing a line)

Problem/Situation	Possible Solution
<u>Robert, 16 years old:</u> I had unprotected sex with my girlfriend. Now she is pregnant. Who can we talk to discuss our options as we don't want our parents to force us into marriage?	Village/ Community elders/School management/Chiefs
<u>Thandie, 13 years old:</u> My parents want to marry me off to an older friend of my family. They don't understand that it is against the law. Who can I talk to?	Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation
<u>Suzy, 15 years old:</u> My parents are poor and can't afford to pay my school fees. I want to finish my education. Who can help me to think of a solution?	Doctor, nurse or councilor at a community clinic/School management
<u>Moffatt, 12 years old:</u> My aunt and uncle do not want to look after me anymore. They want me to get married so I can stand on my own two feet. What are my rights? Who can help?	School teacher/Head teacher/Chiefs/CHRR

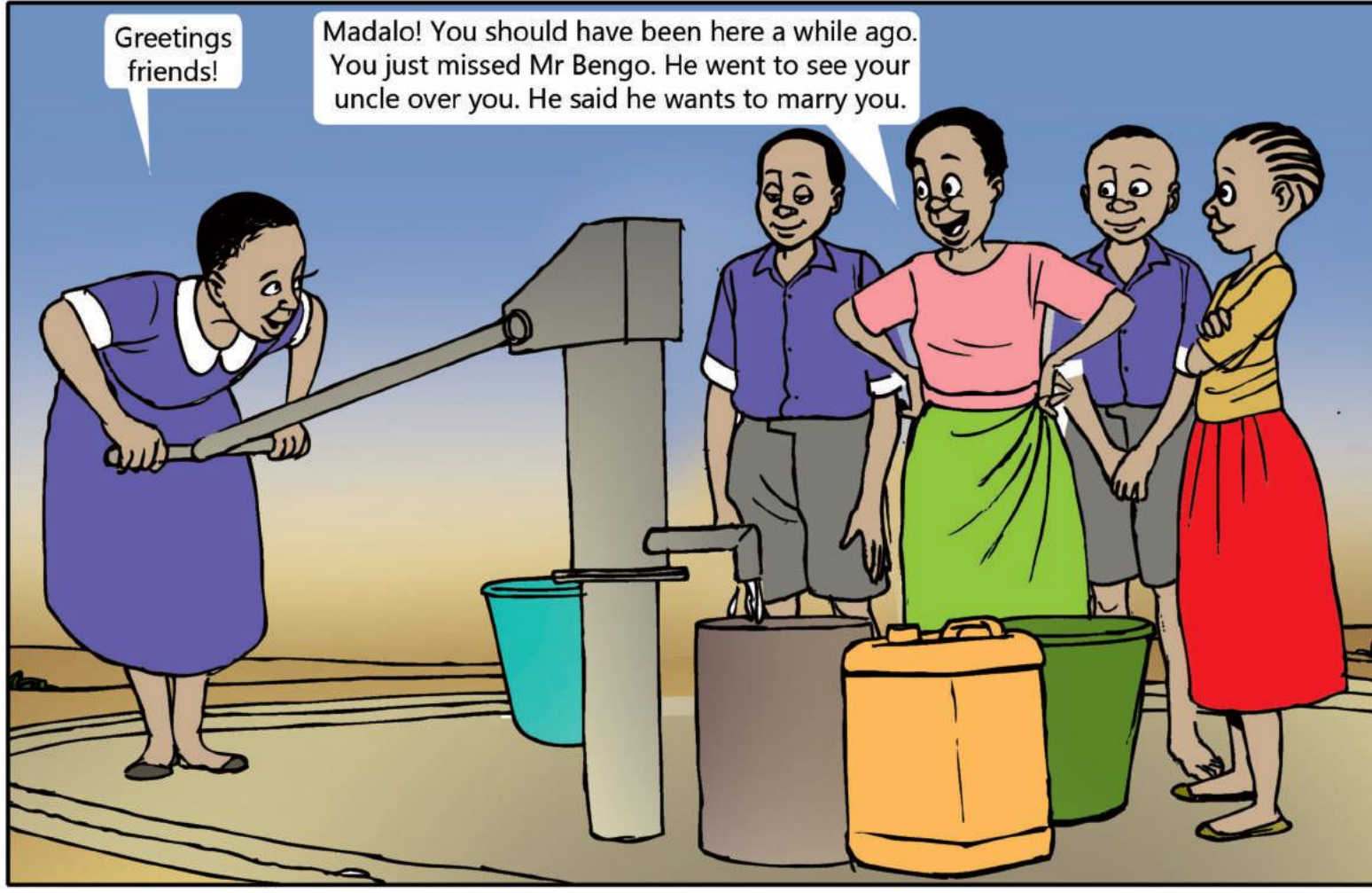
# GILRS SAYING NO TO EARLY MARRIAGES





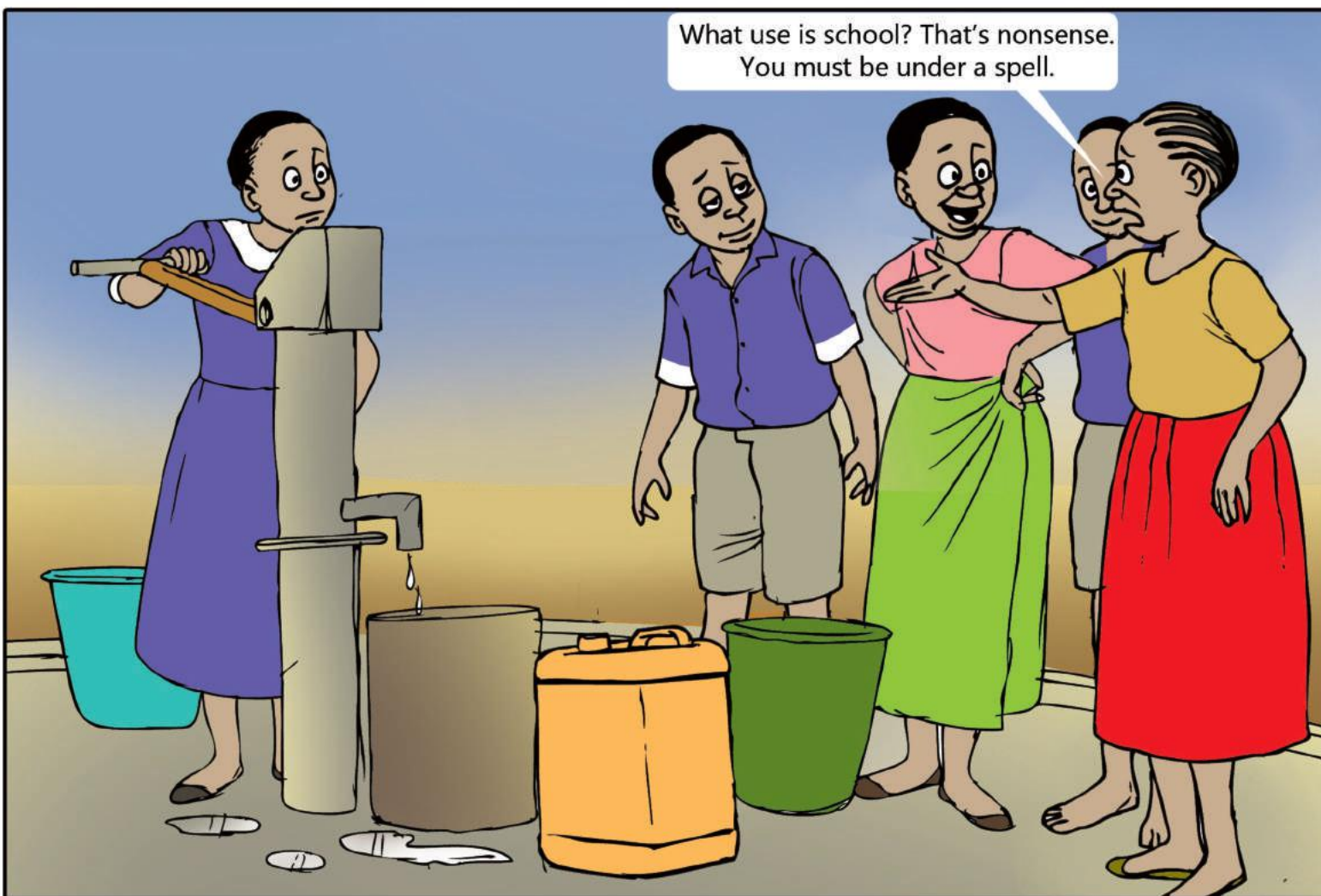
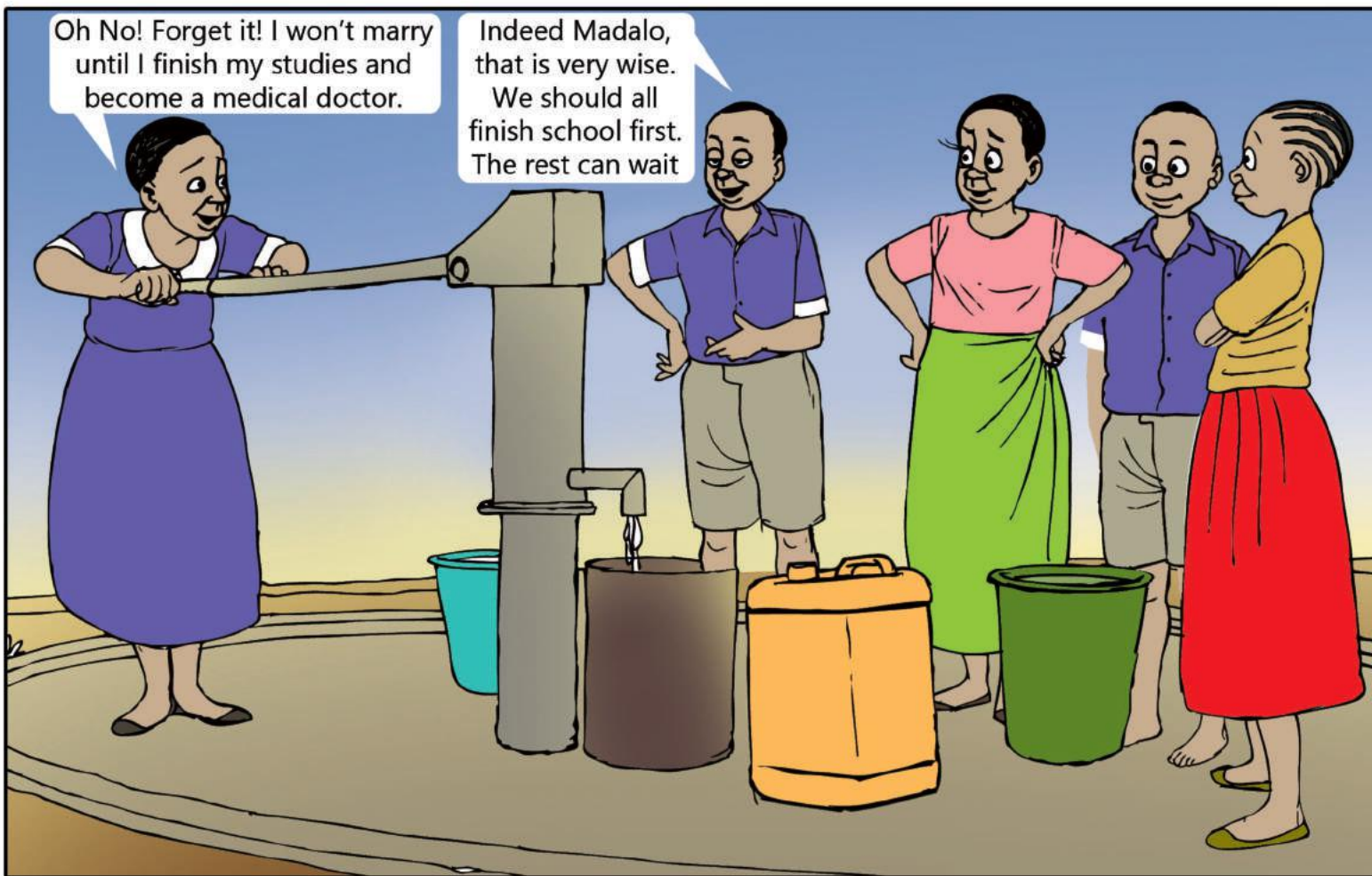


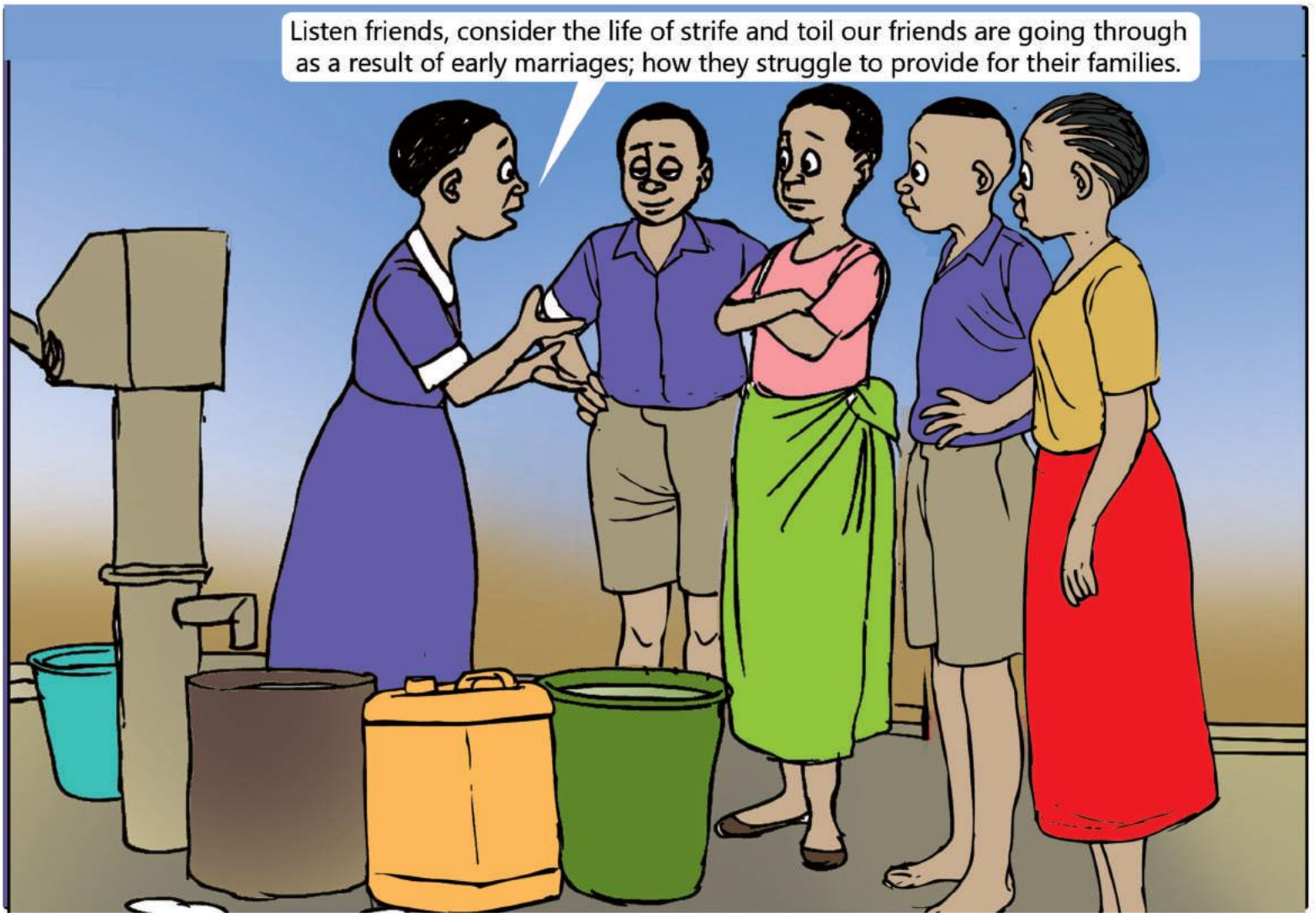
Education is important for both boys and girls. One day we will all appreciate its benefits if we all get educated.



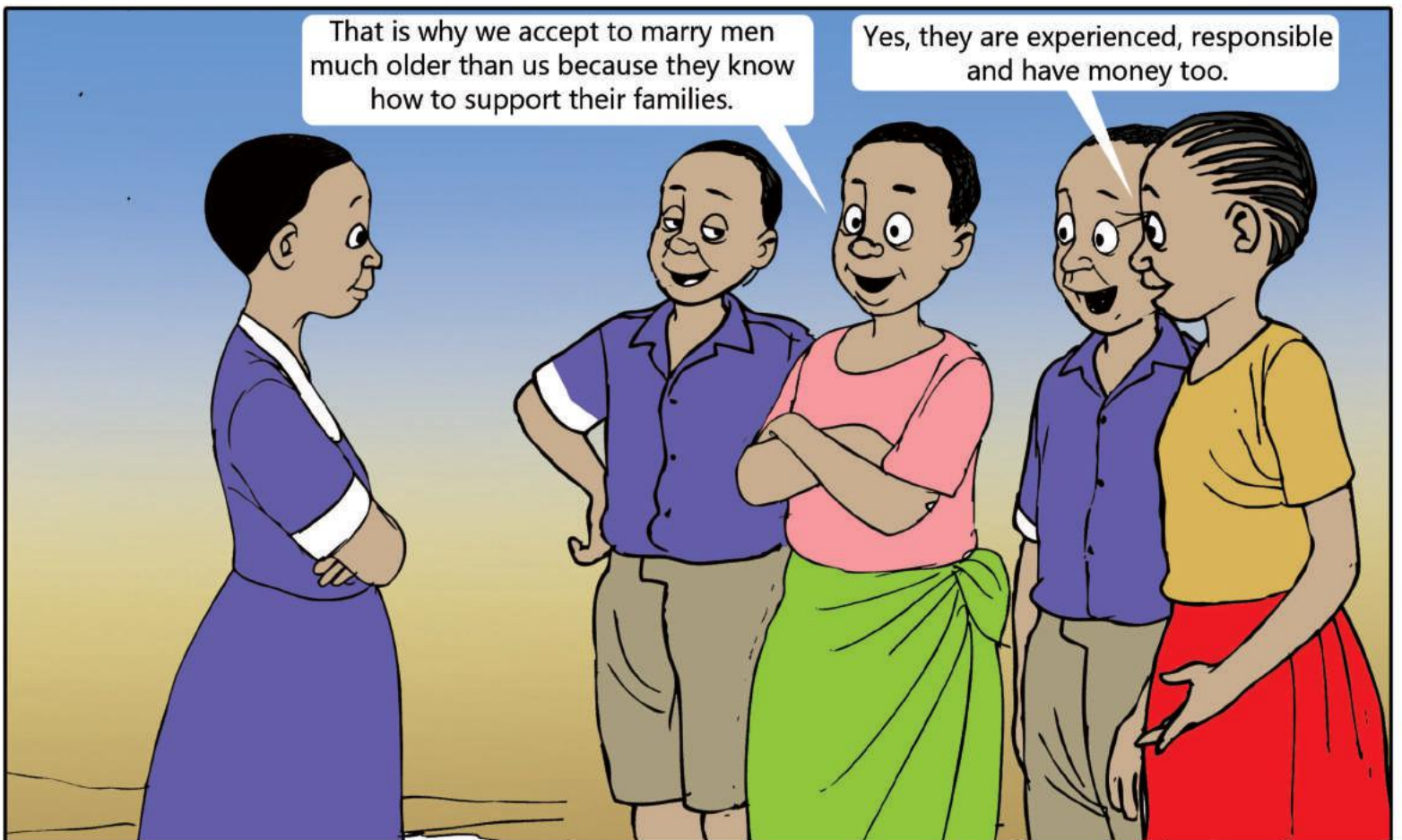
Greetings friends!

Madalo! You should have been here a while ago. You just missed Mr Bengo. He went to see your uncle over you. He said he wants to marry you.



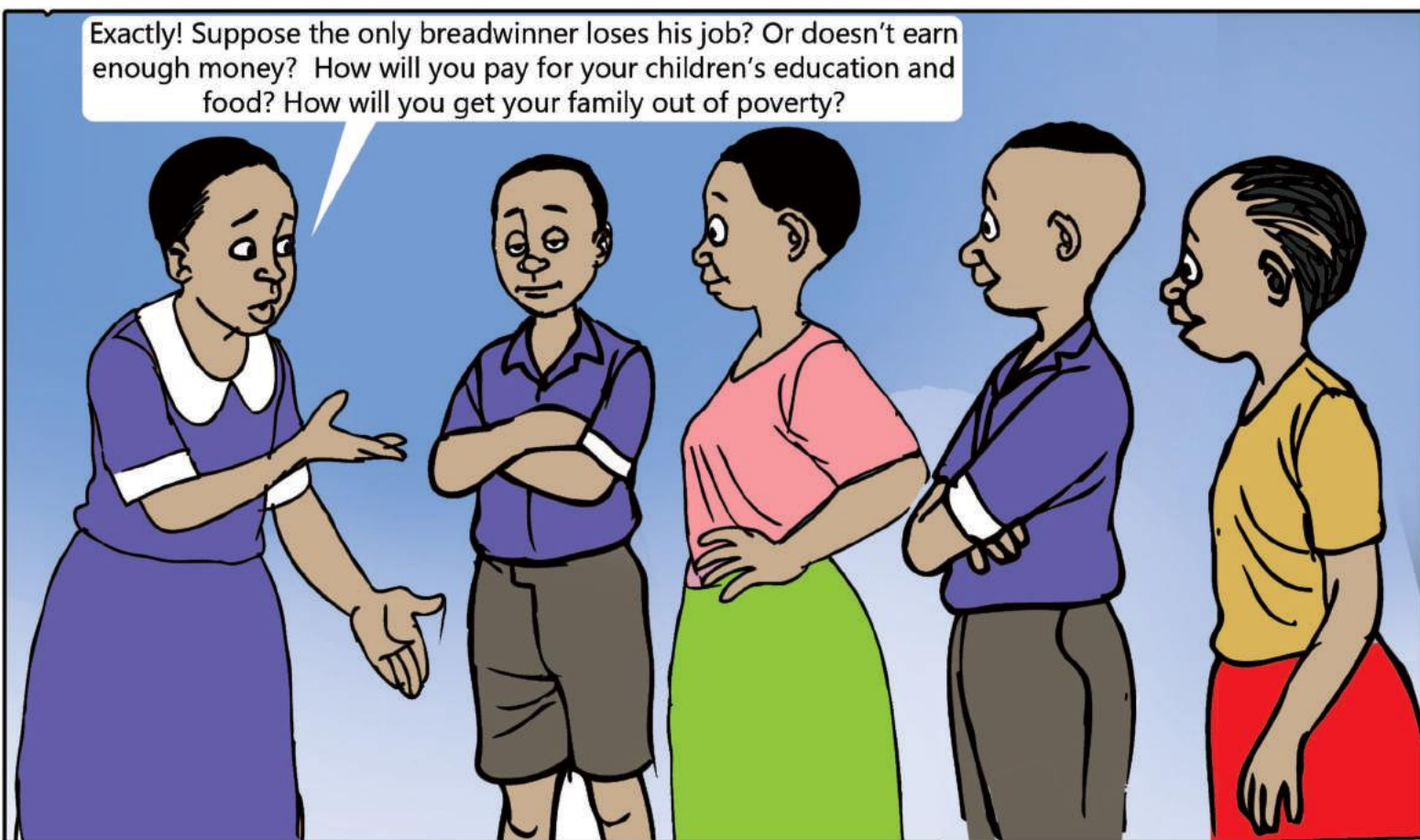
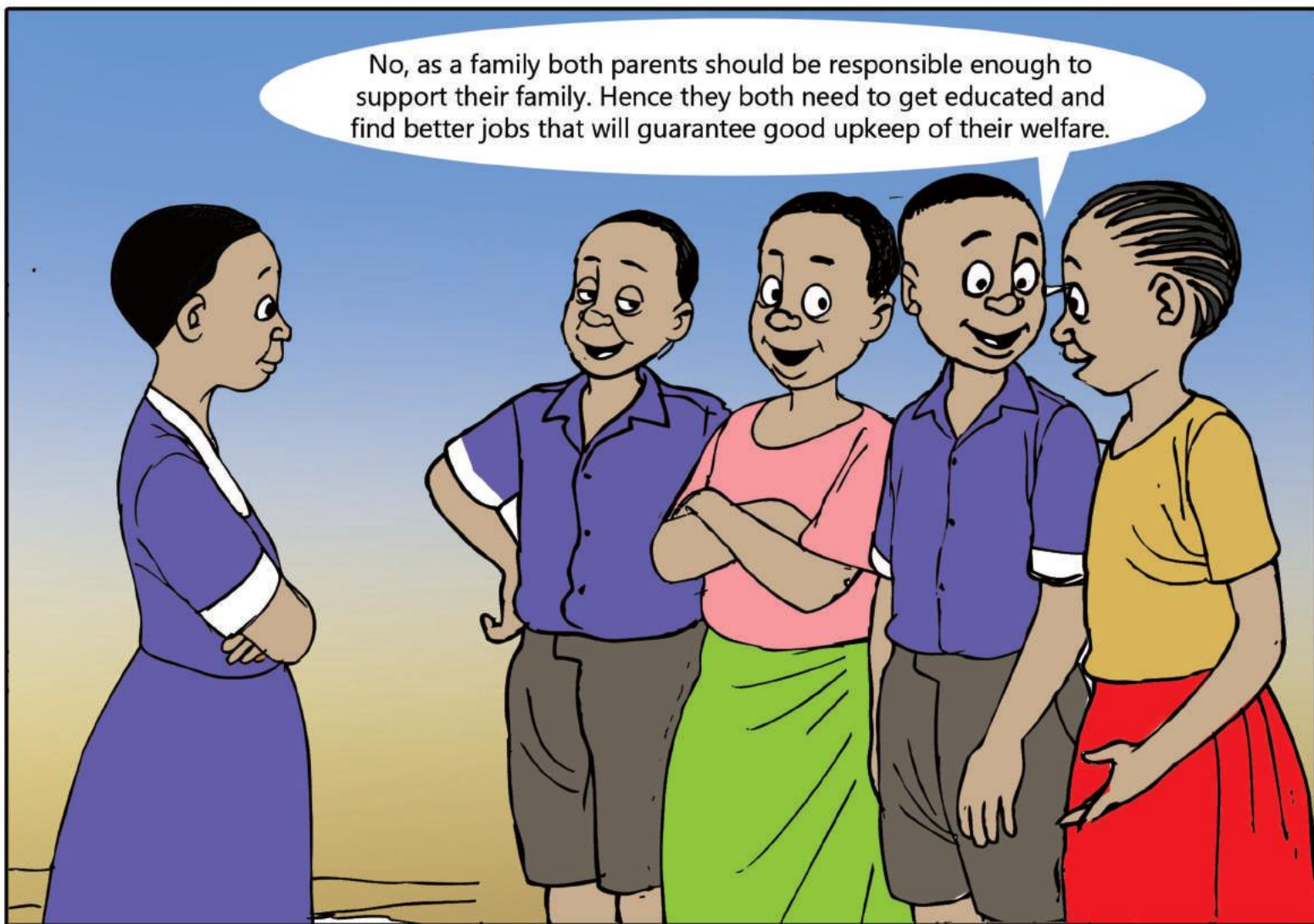


Listen friends, consider the life of strife and toil our friends are going through as a result of early marriages; how they struggle to provide for their families.



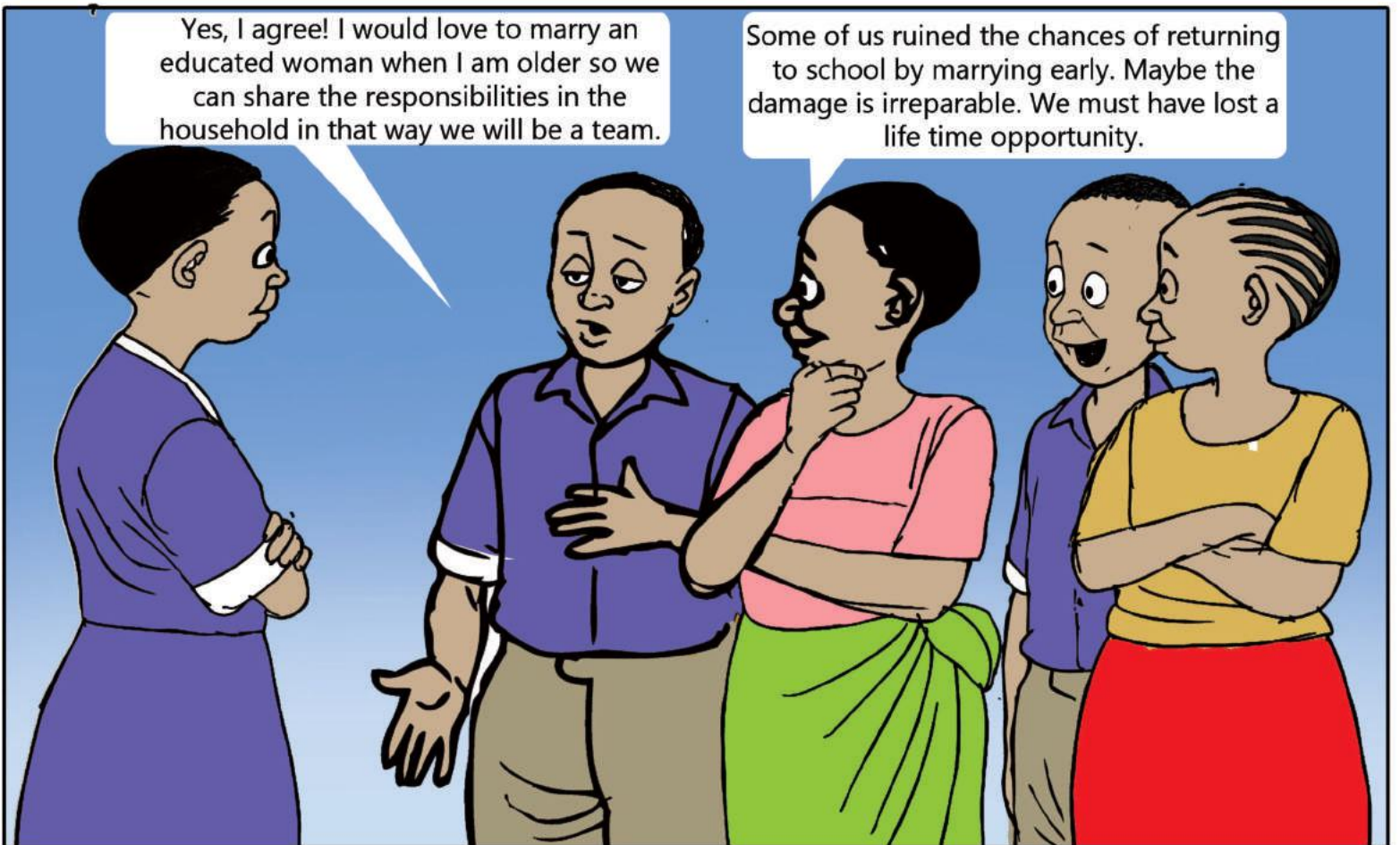
That is why we accept to marry men much older than us because they know how to support their families.

Yes, they are experienced, responsible and have money too.





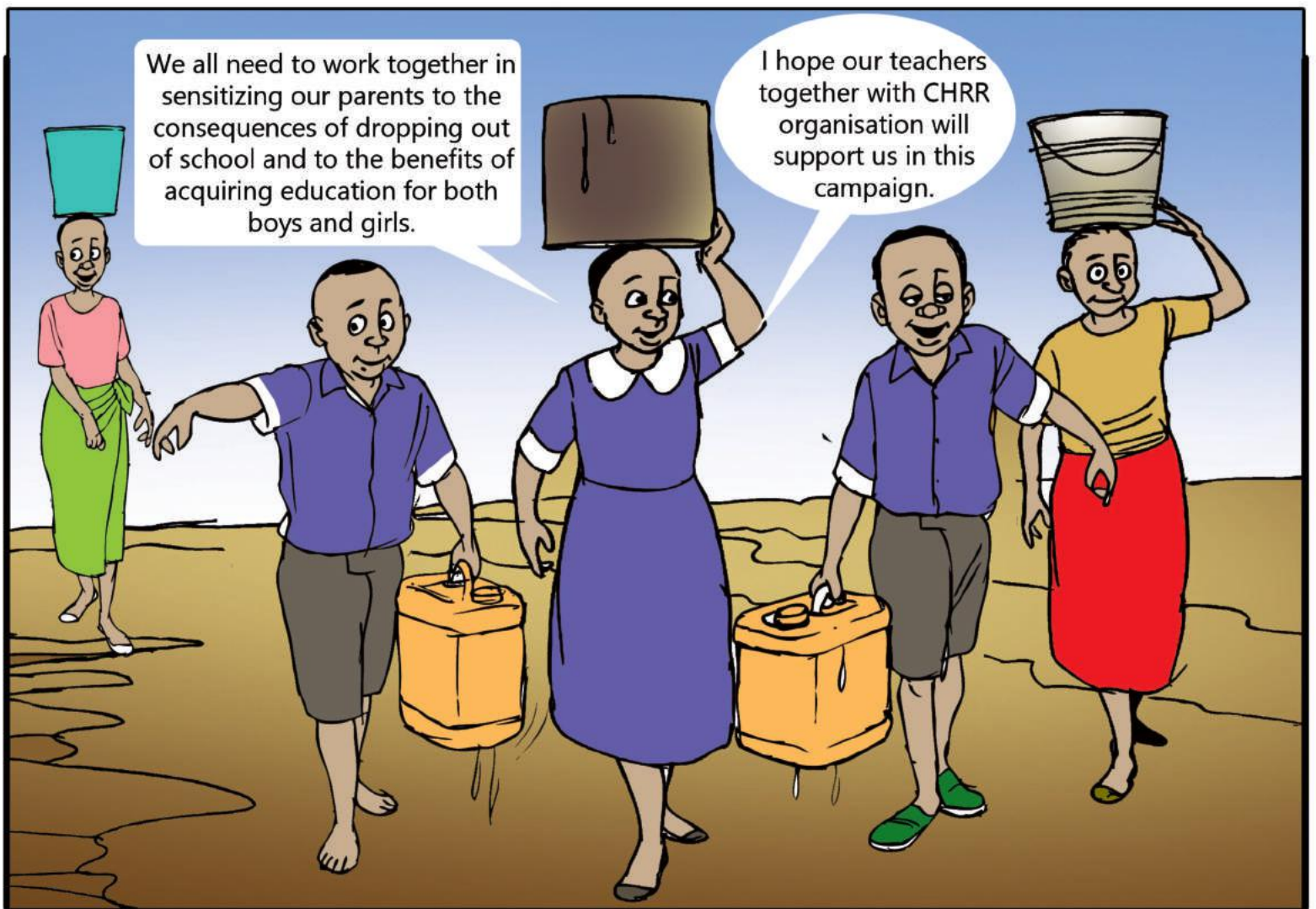
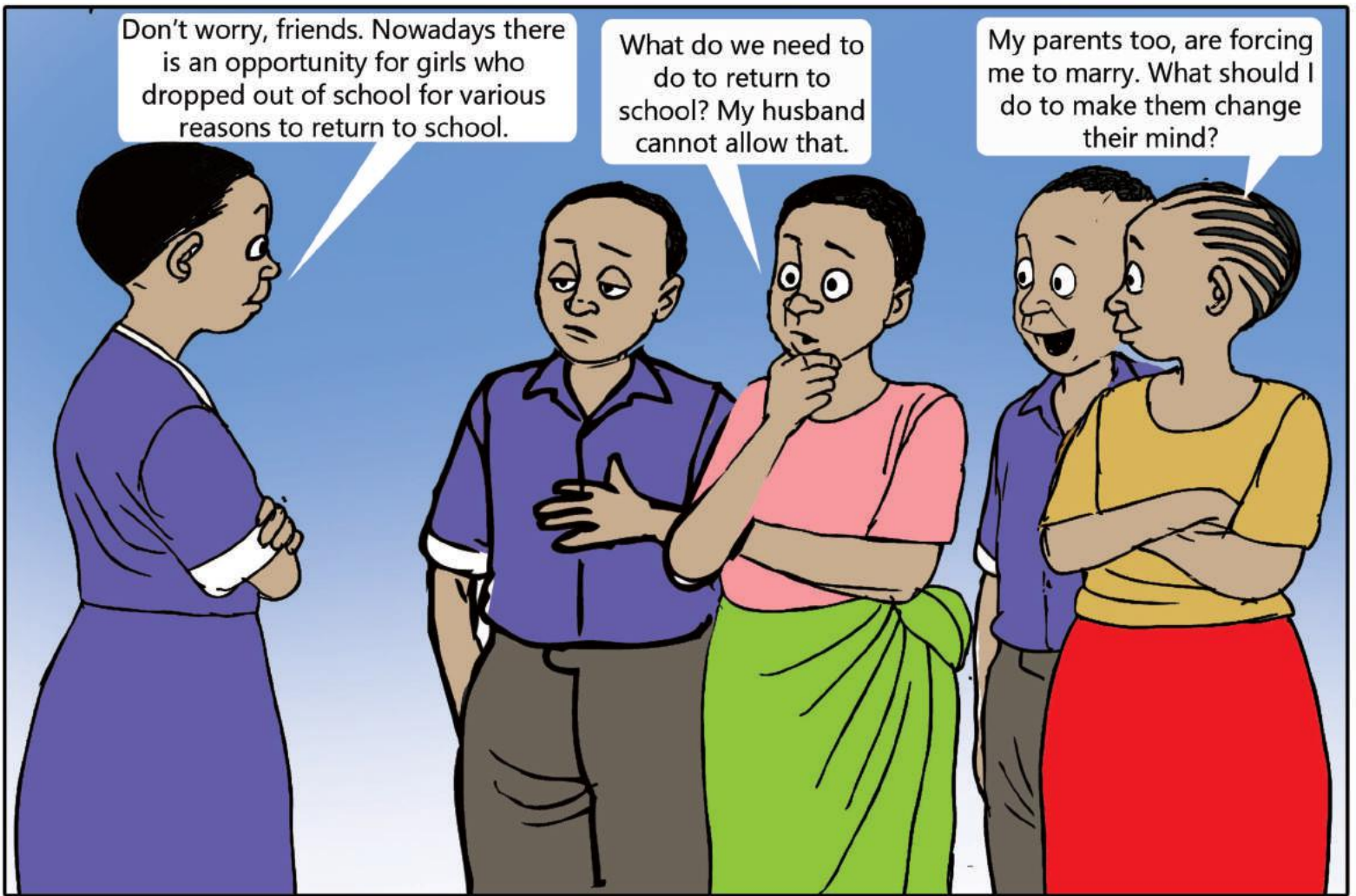
It is unwise to count on one person's income. Instead, we should focus on education for both girls and boys. Once married we can then both earn money and create a stable and prosperous home and future for our children.

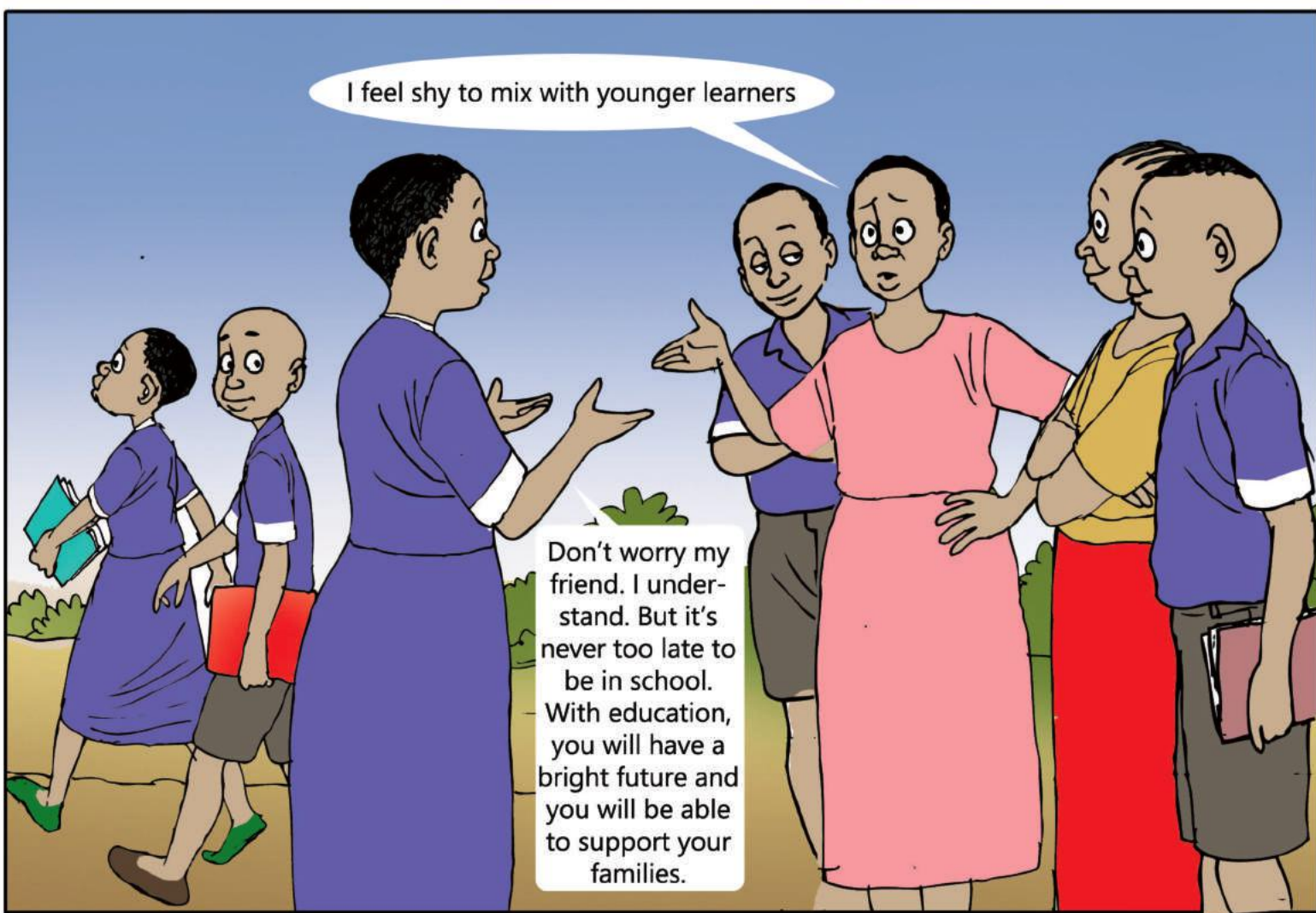


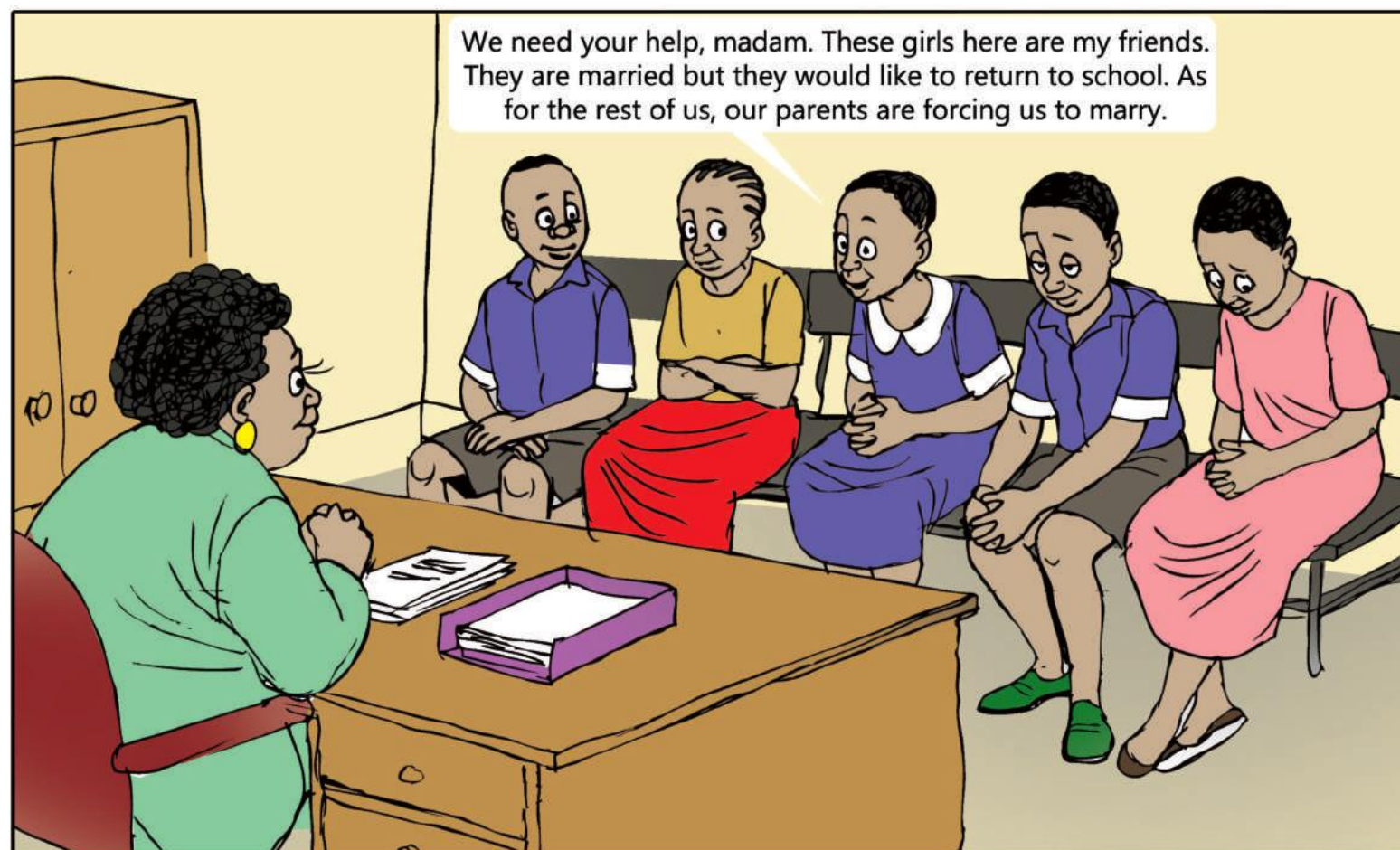
Yes, I agree! I would love to marry an educated woman when I am older so we can share the responsibilities in the household in that way we will be a team.

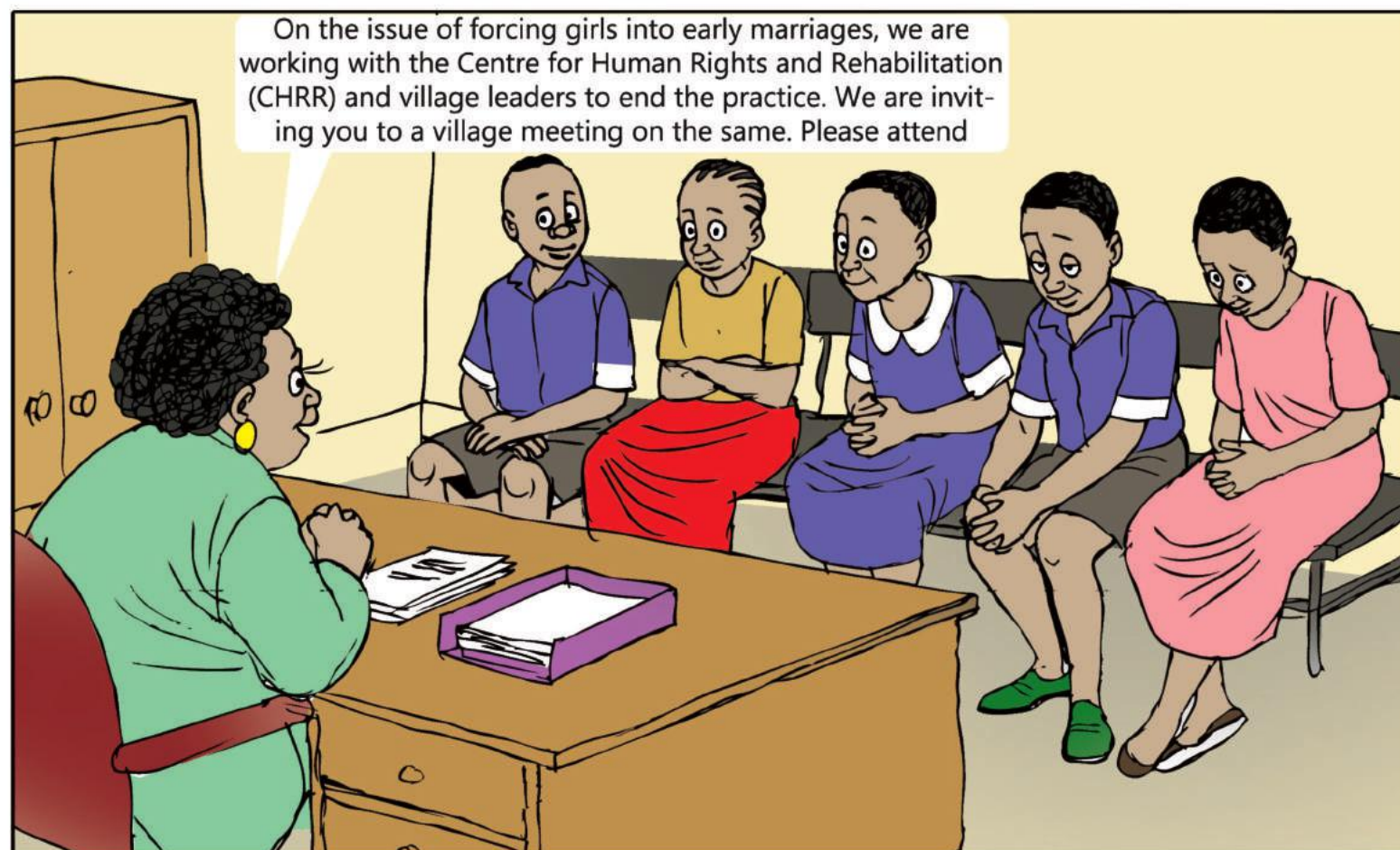
Some of us ruined the chances of returning to school by marrying early. Maybe the damage is irreparable. We must have lost a life time opportunity.











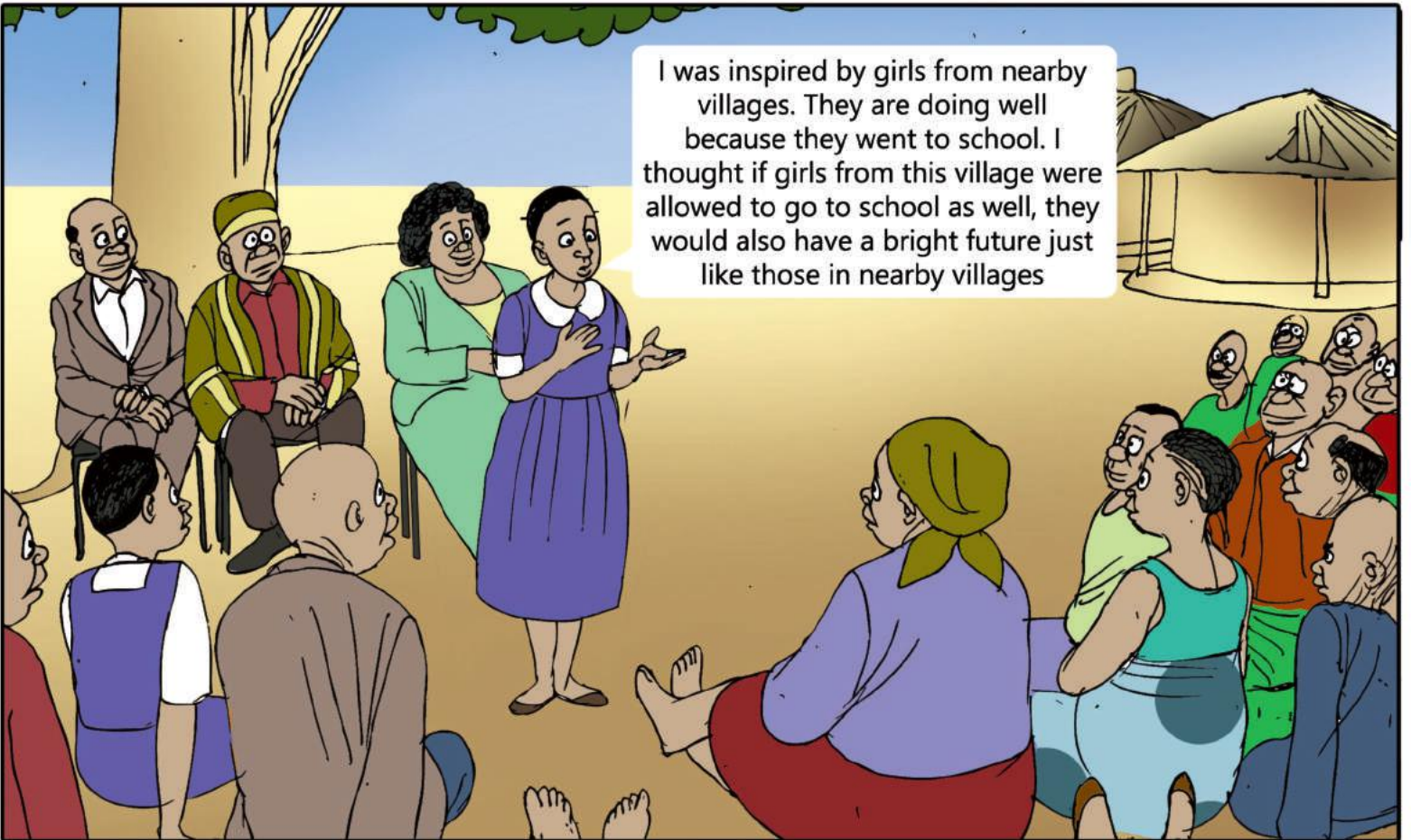


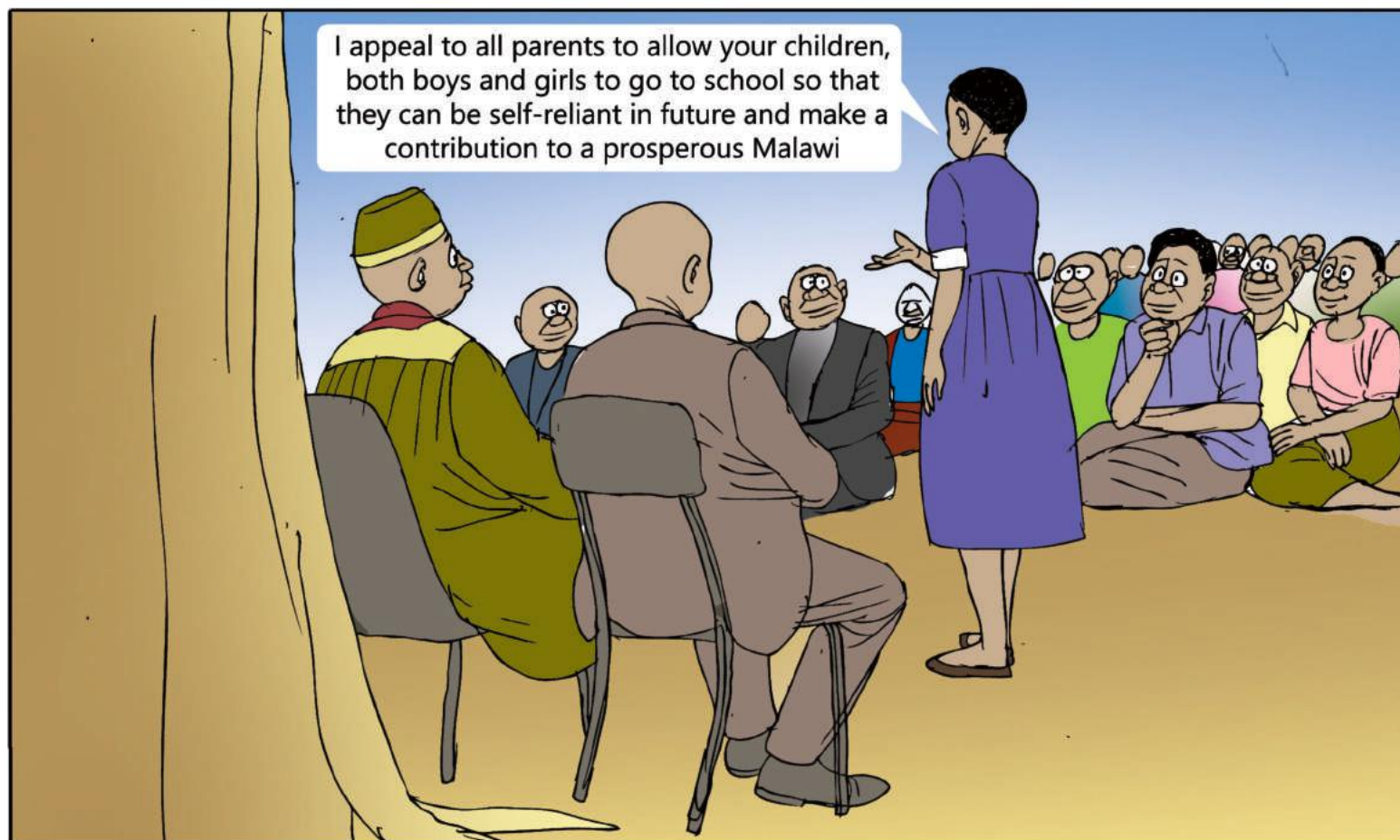
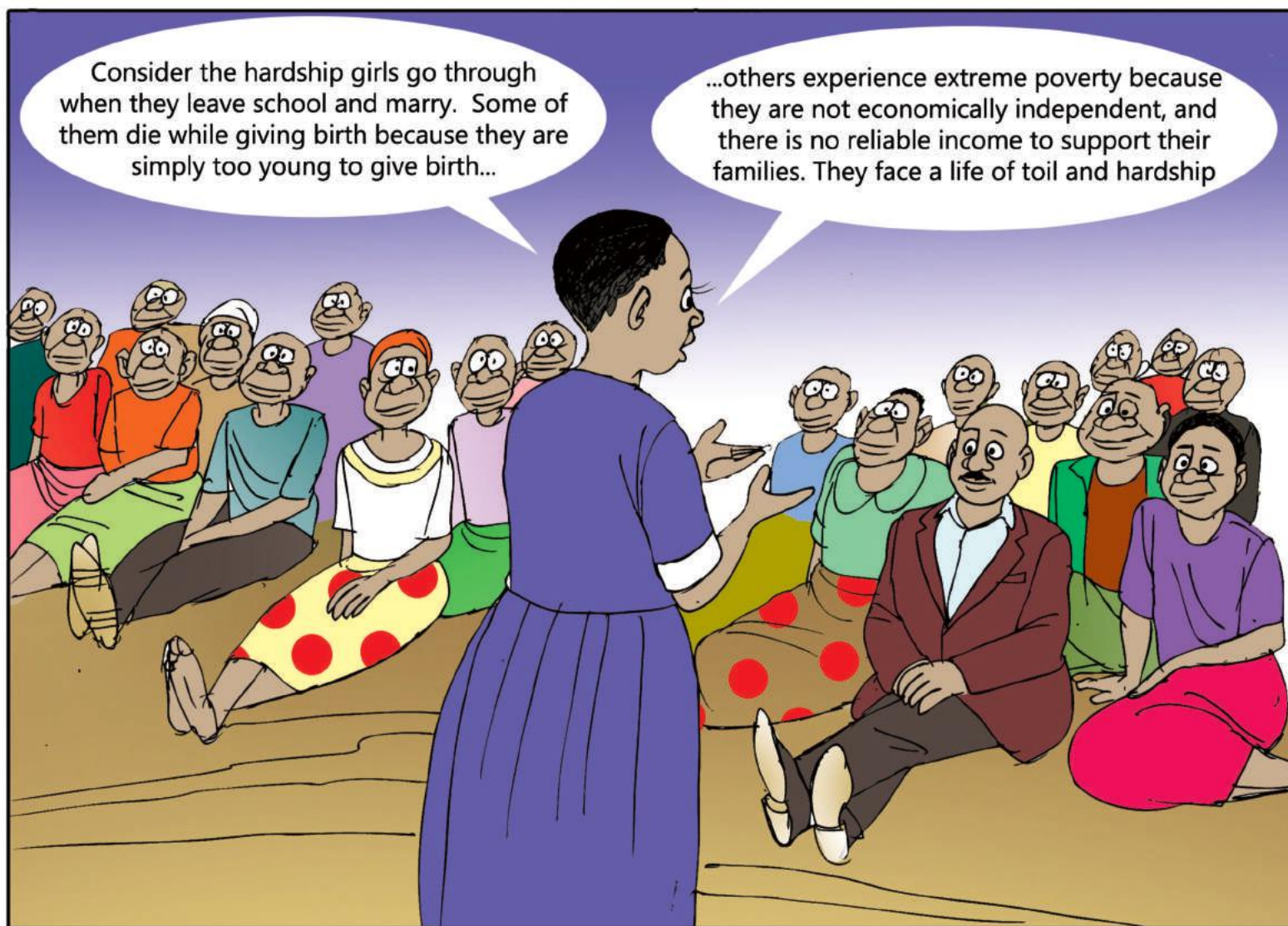
**At CHRR Community Awareness Meeting**

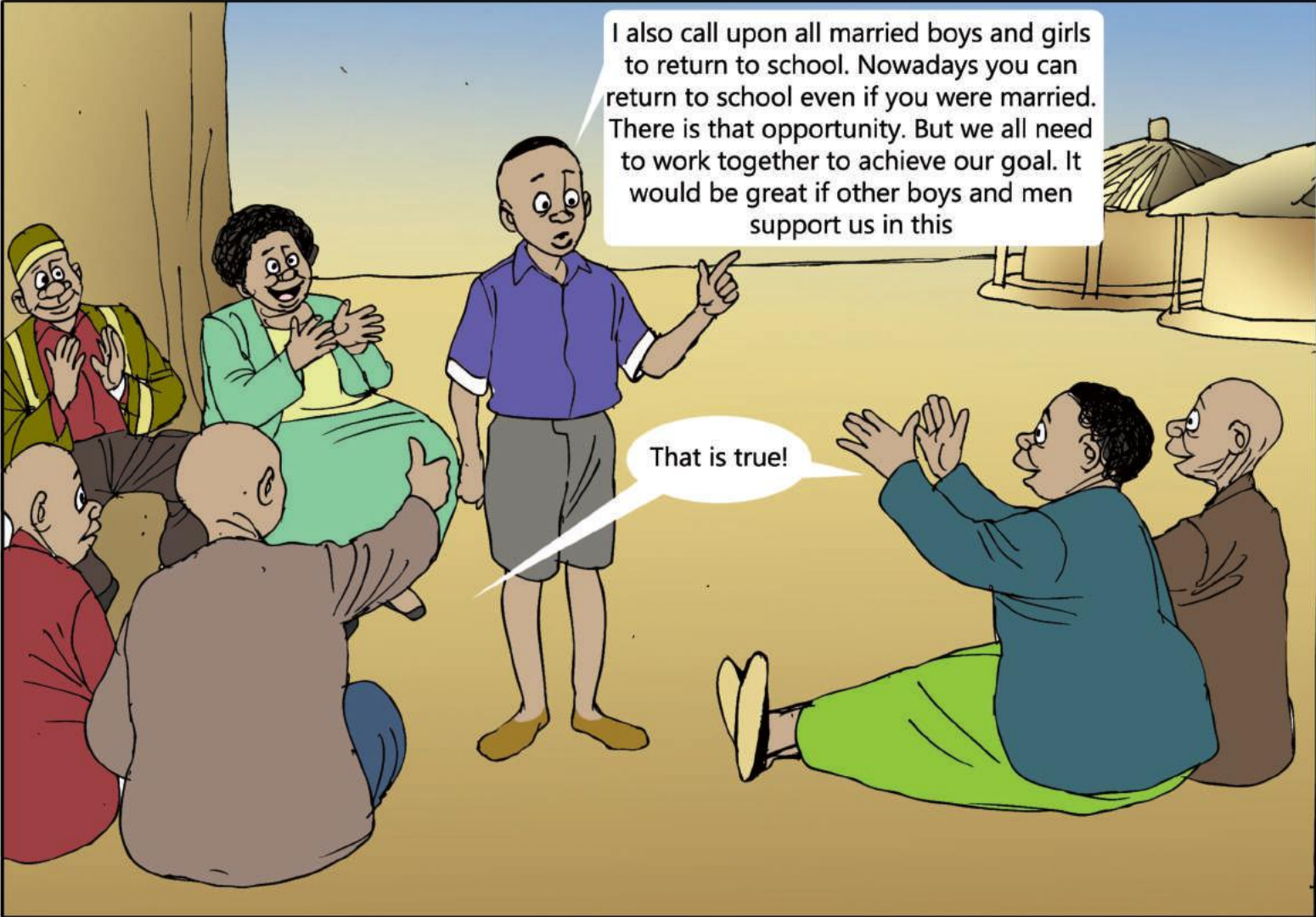
Welcome all. Our main concern is the culture of forcing girls into early marriages, which forces them to abandon school. Meet Madalo, a young girl who has stood up against child marriages. She is exemplary and encourages other girls to go back to school. Pay attention to what she has to say



I was inspired by girls from nearby villages. They are doing well because they went to school. I thought if girls from this village were allowed to go to school as well, they would also have a bright future just like those in nearby villages

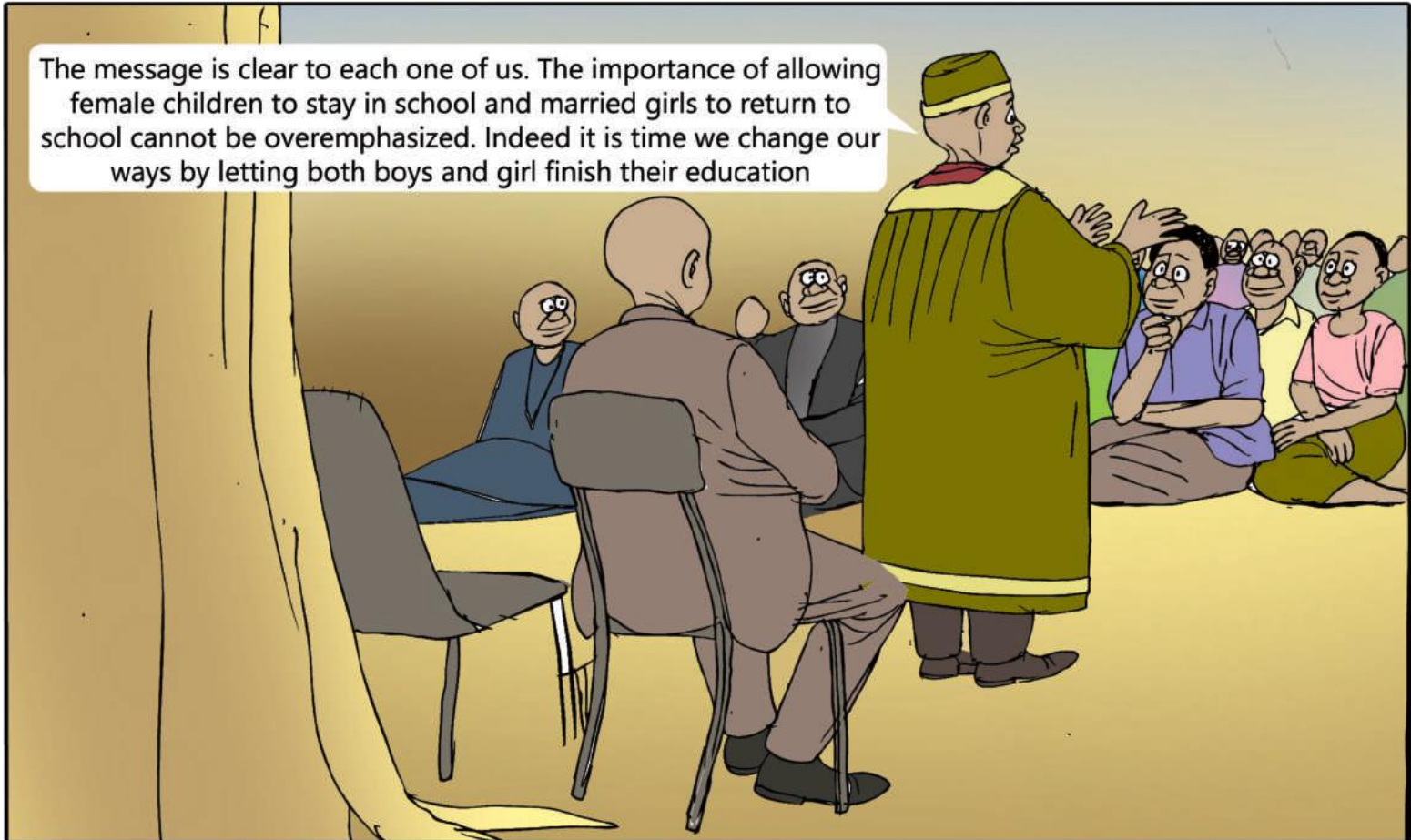




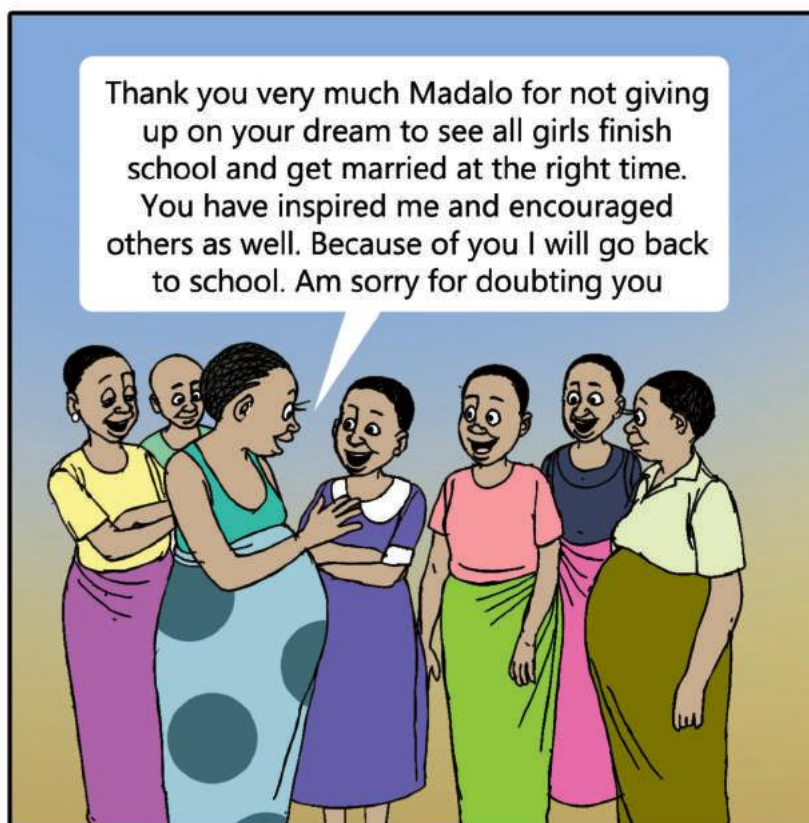


I also call upon all married boys and girls to return to school. Nowadays you can return to school even if you were married. There is that opportunity. But we all need to work together to achieve our goal. It would be great if other boys and men support us in this

That is true!



The message is clear to each one of us. The importance of allowing female children to stay in school and married girls to return to school cannot be overemphasized. Indeed it is time we change our ways by letting both boys and girl finish their education



- THE END -





## Quiz: You know how to act assertively?

Take this quiz and choose the most assertive response in every situation. Write the answers in your Top Tip Peer Book (number and letter)

\* Being assertive means express what you think and feel in a clear and positive way.

### 1. You're talking to someone. How can you show that you're assertive?



A.) By looking at the ground while speaking



B.) By making eye contact in a friendly way



C.) By dominating someone with my gaze, and show them I am very confident

### 2. You're talking to someone. How can you show that you're assertive?

- A. By speaking softly [=passive]
- B. By speaking clearly [=assertive]
- C. By speaking very loudly [=aggressive]

### 3. When you're in an argument, what would be the most assertive reaction?

- A. Giving in [=passive]
- B. Expressing what you think and feel in a positive way [=assertive]
- C. Trying to put the other down, by saying unfriendly things [=aggressive]

### 4. What is your body language if you act assertively?

- A. I make myself small, bow my head and withdraw [=passive]
- B. I stand up straight, am relaxed and inviting [=assertive]
- C. I cross my arms, strain my muscles and look angry [=aggressive]

### 5. What would you think of yourself and the other person?

- A. I'm worth less than the other, the other is better [=passive]
- B. We're equal [=assertive]
- C. I'm the best, the other person is worth less [=aggressive]

**What is your score? Are you passive, aggressive or assertive?  
See the next page for the answers...**

## Results:

Please count how many A's, B's and C's you have.

**Mostly A's?** You tend to be quite passive in communicating with others. You may think your opinion isn't that important or you should always give in to other people.

It is a quality of yours that you respect the opinions of others so much. But don't forget that you are important too! Every human being has the same rights and same value, so you too. You don't need to be afraid that people will disrespect you when you share your opinion. On the contrary, people will respect you for it in the end! You can use the tips in this lesson to gain confidence and speak up more.

*Check the B-answers, so you can learn to communicate assertively instead of passively.*

**Mostly B's?** You tend to be assertive in communicating with others, well done! This means you often feel confident to share your opinions in a clear and positive way. This means that the people around you know what you think and feel, so they can respect your opinions and feelings. You may even be a role model for people in your class. Continue this way!

Didn't you score 5 B's straight? Check the B-answers if you want to be a master in communicating assertively.

**Mostly C's?** You tend to be quite aggressive in communicating with others. You may think your opinions to be better than those of the people around you, or when you talk to someone you may express yourself in a dominant way.

It is a quality of yours that you can express what you think and feel. So that's good. But you may try to give some space to the opinions of other people too. Learn to listen and respect others, then they will respect you more too.

*Check the B-answers, so you can learn to communicate assertively instead of aggressively.*

### **So now you know:**

1. How you can be assertive and express what you think and feel in a clear and positive way;
2. That communicating is not only talking, but also showing a message with your body language.

## PARTNERSHIP WITH RUTGERS

CHRR in partnership with Rutgers have been implementing a one year project that focuses at eliminating child marriages by providing a social, policy and legal protective environment for vulnerable girls and children in Mangochi district.

The main objectives of the project were;

- (i) To ensure that girls and adolescents in Mangochi district are empowered to make sound SRHR decisions and choices by 2015
- (ii) To ensure that girls in Mangochi district have access to formal education by 2015
- (iii) To ensure the involvement of local communities in Mangochi district in the combat of child/early/forced marriage by 2015
- (iv) To ensure the development and implementation of legislation and policies to prevent child/early/forced marriages by 2015.

## **CHIEFS TAKING A STAND AGAINST CHILD MARRIAGES**

Dyeratu, a senior chief, loves money so much and is so greedy that he encourages men to pay a bride price for young girls whom he forces into marriage as soon as they reach puberty. He perpetrates this culture because he is the biggest beneficiary as the most senior chief. His greed drives him into marrying off his young daughter to a rich man. Unfortunately, the girl dies while giving birth. Dyeratu, angry, accuses his son-in-law, for killing his daughter, but he is rebuked by the junior chiefs and his wife who are not pleased with his behavior. The junior chiefs reason with their senior about the dangers of forcing girls to marry early on the one hand, and about fruits of education on the other. Dyeratu's eyes open. He changes his mindset and institutes a by-law banning child marriages for girls and accords girls the same opportunities enjoyed by boys. Like boys, girls can also decide their own future by mostly pursuing education.

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## **GIRLS SAYING NO TO EARLY MARRIAGES**

Madalo, a young girl, is concerned with the gravity of her older sister's suffering as she struggles to cope with the consequences of an early marriage. She decides to take a stand by mobilizing other girls and boys to fight against and end the culture of early marriages. In spite of facing resistance from their parents and other elders, the girls and boys fight on and eventually manage to convince other leaders and teachers who become supportive, and who in turn persuade the entire village to abandon the culture of forcing girls into early marriages. The girls and boys celebrate their victory and look forward to their bright future.

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### **Disclaimer**

The photographs in this magazine are for illustrative purposes only. They do not imply any particular attitudes, behaviors, or actions on the part of any person who appears in the photographs.



**Centre for Human Rights  
and Rehabilitation**

'The Noble Cause is Evident in People Themselves'

**Rutgers**

**For sexual and  
reproductive health  
and rights**

**Produced under the Unite Against Child Marriage (UACM) Programme**

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