

# THE INFLUENCE OF CONTEXT AND NORMS ON ADOLESCENT GIRLS SRH EXPERIENCES AND CHOICES IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

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**BACKGROUND**

Nigeria's high total fertility rate has declined only slightly over the past 30 years, with the highest fertility and lowest contraceptive prevalence rate in northern Nigerian states. This is due to economic hardship, cultural norms and religious practices. Adolescents 360 (A360) launched Matasa Matan Arewa (MMA), 'Adolescent Girls from the North' in January 2018 to serve the unique needs of married girls in this region. In 2020, A360 contracted with a local northern Nigerian organization, the Centre for Girls Education, to conduct an independent assessment of MMA.

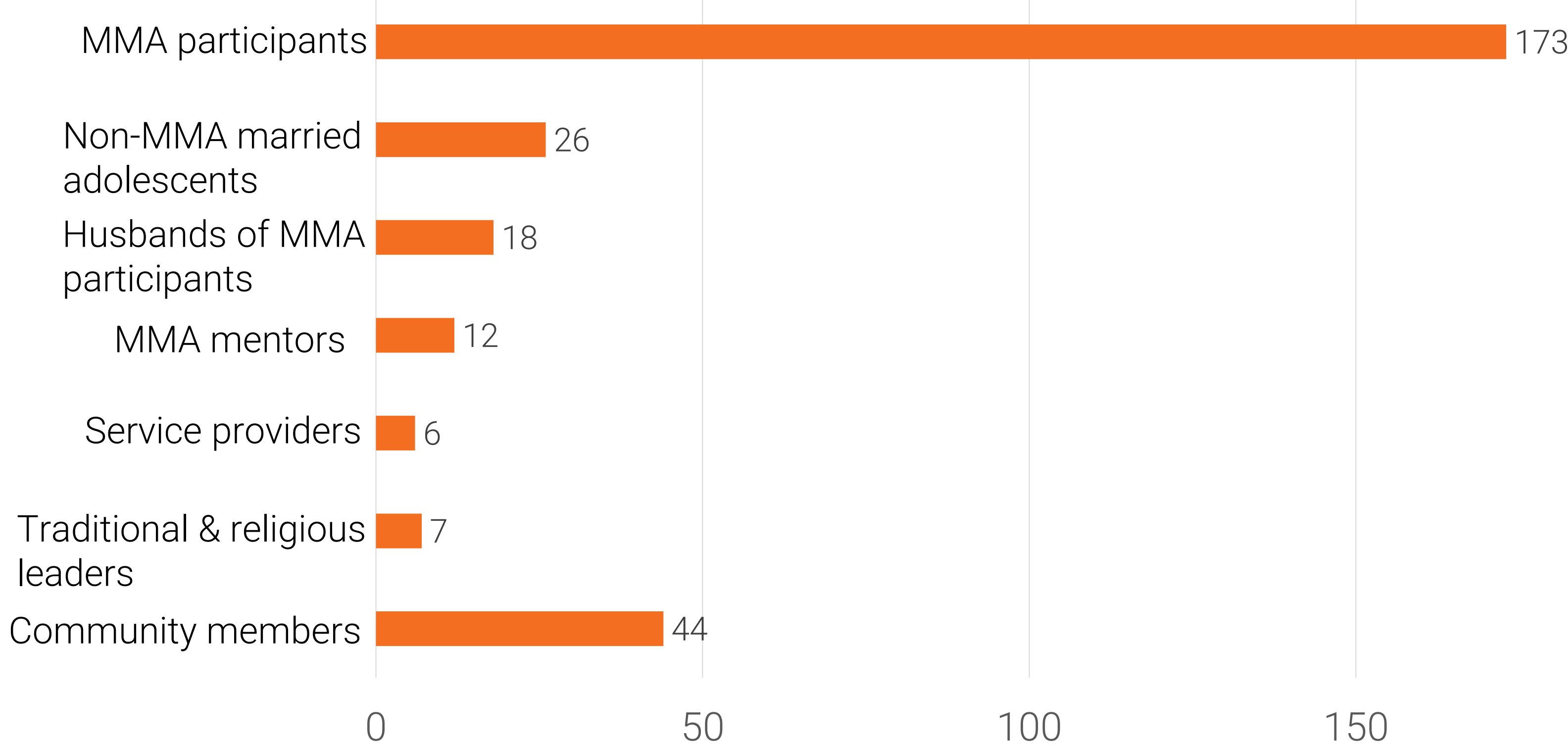
The study aim was to assess the relevance and effectiveness of MMA's mentorship groups and to understand how married adolescent girls in Kaduna state were experiencing MMA in light of the gendered context that influences their lives.

**METHODS**

This study included three components:

- Ethnographic research was conducted in two communities in Kaduna state. Researchers lived in these communities for 24 days conducting interviews, observing, and engaging in informal conversations.
- Researchers assessed the effectiveness of LFH mentorship groups through structured observation of 15 sessions.
- The study explored and documented girls' 'user journeys' with MMA, which aimed to describe the sequencing and common experience of girls along each stage of their interaction with MMA.
- 286 individuals were engaged across 10 MMA implementation communities in Sabon Gari and Zaria Local Government Areas (LGA) and near Jaji town in the Igabi LGA. More details in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Study Participants**



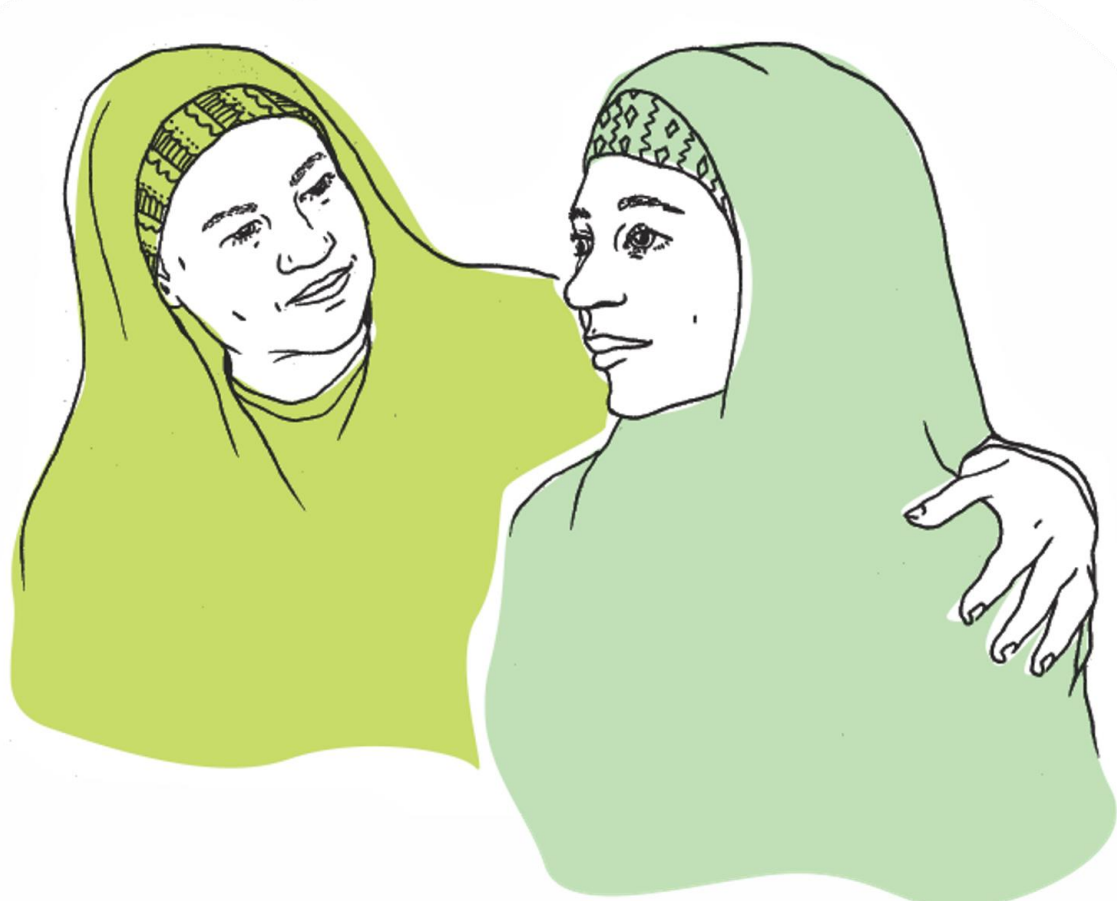
**PROGRAM INTERVENTION**

MMA is implemented in two northern Nigerian states, Kaduna and Nasarawa. The program includes mobilization of girls and husbands, skills-sessions, and contraceptive counselling

**1.** Using one-on-one outreach, MMA engages married adolescent girls through female mentors. Girls are invited to attend four 'Life, Family and Health' (LFH) group sessions, which provide a curriculum of soft and vocational skills content, and/or to visit a health center for voluntary one-on-one counseling and contraceptive service provision.



**2.** Girls' husbands are reached through male interpersonal communication agents, who speak to men about the benefits of the program.



**RESULTS**

**Girls' limited decision-making:** Decisions about a girls' participation in MMA were most often made by her husband. Respondents felt that as the one responsible for the needs of the family, he should decide the timing and number of children. Traditional and religious leaders were critical in gaining men's support.

**Skills-building appealed to girls and their influencers:** Girls wanted to gain marketable skills for additional income-generating opportunities. Girls struggled to apply the skills gained due to insufficient time to learn, mismatch between the skill and market needs, and a lack of capital. Although dissatisfied with this component, nearly all girls remained in the program and expressed satisfaction with the other topics.

**Contraceptive uptake:** There was strong contraceptive uptake linked to program participation (See Figure 2). Health personnel providing services through MMA were viewed by girls as trusted. However, the program saw high rates of discontinuation, with many citing side-effects as the reason.

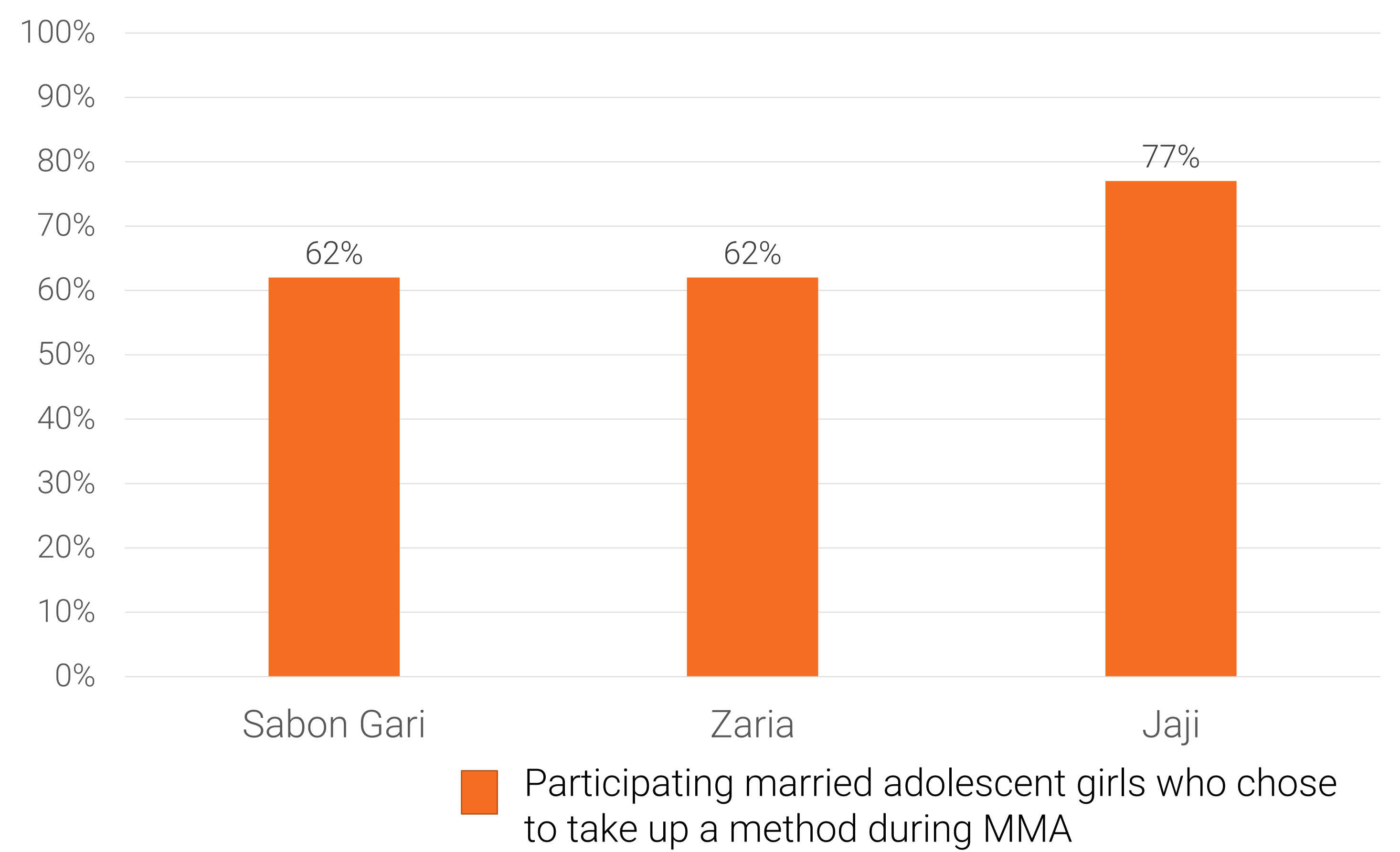
"My husband was uninterested in birth spacing but after he met with the IPCA, he changed his mind. It would have been difficult for me to convince him."

"My mother-in-law is progressive. She didn't hesitate to allow me to go. She has a small business and is more exposed to these things."

"My husband allowed me to attend because the ward head allowed his daughters to enroll."

"We learned things that others do not know. I'm now able to tell on how to take care of themselves and their children by spacing their births."

**Figure 2. Contraceptive acceptance rate among participants was high across all three communities surveyed**



**CONCLUSION**

- MMA's skills components were critical to girls' curiosity and support from their influencers.
- Within the MMA sessions, girls trusted the MMA mentors and built a connection to peers.
- MMA married girls shared what they learned with their husbands however, they want more help to speak with husbands.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Increase engagement with traditional and religious leaders to improve support from the community.
- Enhance the vocational training components and increase touch-points with girls to make sure programs are being responsive to girls' and their influencers' expectations, thereby increasing project relevance.
- Strengthen community health systems for better collaboration and improved program outcomes.

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