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### Efforts of the Office of Religious Affairs in Reducing Underage Marriage Rates

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Abstract: This study aims to examine the role of the Office of Religious Affairs (Kantor Urusan Agama or KUA) in reducing underage marriage rates and to identify the factors that hinder the execution of its duties. The research employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with KUA officials, community leaders, parents, and underage marriage participants, while secondary data were gathered from official documents, annual reports, and relevant literature. The findings reveal that KUA has implemented various measures to prevent early marriages, such as stringent administrative document verification, community outreach, and premarital counseling. However, KUA faces several challenges, including limited human resources, cultural resistance, and a lack of cross-sectoral collaboration, which hinder its effectiveness in combating underage marriages. This study recommends strengthening institutional capacity, enhancing cross-sectoral collaboration, and leveraging digital technology to support education and prevention efforts. With a holistic strategy and strong support from various stakeholders, underage marriage rates can be significantly reduced.

Keywords: Office of Religious Affairs; Early Marriage; Underage Marriage.

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### 1. Introduction

Marriage is one of life's sacred phases, not only in Indonesia but also across many parts of the world. However, marriage is not solely about adhering to cultural or religious norms; it is equally about the physical, mental, and social readiness to build a stable and prosperous family life. In this context, the Indonesian government has regulated the minimum marriage age through Law Number 16 of 2019. This law stipulates that the minimum age for men and women to marry is 19 years. The objective is straightforward yet critical: to protect children from reproductive health risks, ensure their emotional maturity, and help them build harmonious families in the future.<sup>1</sup>

However, the reality on the ground often tells a different story. In certain areas, such as Biau Subdistrict in Buol Regency, child marriages remain a challenging issue to address. Despite clear legal prohibitions, these practices persist for various reasons. Many cases are driven by social and economic factors. For instance, financially struggling parents often view marriage as a solution to ease their burden. Moreover, local cultural norms that still perceive child marriage as acceptable pose a significant challenge to prevention efforts.

Another exacerbating factor is the public's lack of awareness of applicable legal regulations. Many families, especially in rural areas, are unaware that the minimum marriage age has been raised to 19 years. This ignorance often leads them to overlook the risks associated with marrying off their children at a young age. For example, early marriages can lead to various reproductive health problems for young girls, as their bodies are not fully prepared for pregnancy and childbirth. Additionally, child marriages frequently end in divorce because the couples lack the maturity to face the challenges of married life.<sup>2</sup>

In this scenario, the role of the Office of Religious Affairs (Kantor Urusan Agama, KUA) becomes pivotal. As an institution responsible for marriage registration and premarital counseling, the KUA is tasked with ensuring that every recorded marriage complies with legal requirements. In Biau Subdistrict, the KUA has undertaken various efforts to curb the prevalence of child marriages. For example, they conduct stringent checks on the administrative documents of prospective couples. If either or both individuals are underage, the KUA rejects their application and directs them to seek a dispensation from the Religious Court.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Viona Aulia, "Peranan Kantor Urusan Agama (KUA) Dalam Mengatasi Pernikahan Di Bawah Umur Di Kecamatan Pariangan Kabupaten Tanah Datar" (diploma, FAKULTAS HUKUM, 2023), http://scholar.unand.ac.id/199885/.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Fajar Nessa, Asni, and Zulhasari Mustafa, "Peran Kantor Urusan Agama (kua) Dan Tokoh Masyarakat Dalam Mencegah Pernikahan Dini Di Kecamatan Libureng Kabupaten Bone Tahun 2020-2021:," *Qadauna: Jurnal Ilmiah Mahasiswa Hukum Keluarga Islam* 4, no. 3 (August 22, 2023): 704–16, https://doi.org/10.24252/qadauna.v4i3.30401.

Furthermore, the KUA actively engages in public outreach. They often organize activities such as Friday safaris to villages to educate communities about the dangers of child marriage and the importance of adhering to the minimum age requirements. They also seize specific moments, such as wedding ceremonies, to directly communicate with the community and raise awareness on this issue. Another effort includes educating school-aged youth about the importance of physical, mental, and economic readiness before entering marriage.

Despite these initiatives, challenges persist. One significant obstacle is the limited human resources within the KUA. In Biau Subdistrict, the KUA operates with only two civil servants who must handle various responsibilities, from marriage registration to community outreach. Additionally, the remote location of Biau Subdistrict makes it difficult for the KUA to reach all communities, particularly those in rural areas with limited access.<sup>3</sup>

External factors also pose considerable barriers. For example, many parents are reluctant to apply for dispensation at the Religious Court due to embarrassment or fear that their application might be denied. However, obtaining this dispensation is a crucial step to ensure that marriages comply with legal requirements. Noncompliance with these regulations often stems from a lack of understanding of the benefits of official marriage registration. Without official documentation, married couples and their children lack adequate legal protection, which could pose significant problems in the future.

Moreover, local cultural norms that view child marriage as acceptable further complicate the issue. Interviews with community leaders in Biau Subdistrict reveal that many parents marry off their children at a young age out of fear that their children might engage in socially stigmatized behavior, such as premarital pregnancy. In some cases, this fear even outweighs economic factors as the primary motivation for child marriage.

To overcome these challenges, the KUA needs to collaborate with various stakeholders. For example, partnerships with the Health Office could help raise public awareness about the reproductive health risks associated with child marriage. Collaboration with the Education Office is also crucial to ensure that children stay in school and do not drop out due to the pressure to marry. Additionally, community organizations and religious leaders can play a vital role in changing societal perceptions of child marriage.

It is important to note that child marriage is not merely a legal issue but a complex social problem. Therefore, a holistic approach is essential. One way to address this problem is by strengthening character education in schools and families. Children

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Fairuz Gunawan, "Peran Kantor Urusan Agama (Kua) Dalam Meminimalisir Pernikahan Di Bawah Umur (Studi Kasus Di Kua Kecamatan Bantarbolang Kabupaten Pemalang)" (undergraduate, Universitas Islam Sultan Agung Semarang, 2023), https://repository.unissula.ac.id/31545/.

need to be instilled with strong moral and ethical values to make wise decisions in the future. Parents must also be more proactive in supervising and guiding their children, especially in the digital era, which presents its own set of challenges.<sup>4</sup>

Innovation in outreach approaches is also necessary. The KUA in Biau Subdistrict has started utilizing social media to disseminate educational messages about the dangers of child marriage. This initiative is a positive step, given that the younger generation spends a significant amount of time in the digital world. However, this effort needs to be bolstered with engaging and relevant content to ensure that the messages resonate with the community.

The phenomenon of child marriage in Biau Subdistrict reflects the challenges faced by many regions in Indonesia. Although the law sets a minimum marriage age, its implementation remains far from perfect. Factors ranging from public ignorance to cultural influences make this issue difficult to resolve. However, with strong cooperation between the government, the community, and relevant institutions, the prevalence of child marriage in the area can be significantly reduced.

The KUA in Biau Subdistrict holds a strategic role in this endeavor. Despite numerous challenges, they continue to strive to perform their duties to the best of their abilities. By strengthening institutional capacity, enhancing cross-sector collaboration, and adopting more innovative approaches, the KUA can play a more effective role in preventing child marriage. These efforts are crucial not only to protect children's rights but also to ensure they have a brighter future.<sup>5</sup>

Child marriage is an issue that requires serious attention from all parties. With the right approach, we can foster a society that is more aware of the importance of adhering to legal regulations and ensuring the well-being of future generations. Ultimately, success in reducing the incidence of child marriage will reflect our collective commitment to protecting children and providing them with opportunities to grow and thrive.

### 2. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive<sup>6</sup> method to explore the phenomenon of child marriage in Biau Subdistrict, Buol Regency. The focus of the research is to examine the role of the Office of Religious Affairs (Kantor Urusan

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Nurhidayah Nurhidayah, "Efektivitas Pemberian Dispensasi Perkawinan Terhadap Perkawinan Di Bawah Umur Di Makassar," *El-Iqthisady: Jurnal Hukum Ekonomi Syariah*, June 1, 2019, https://doi.org/10.24252/el-iqthisadi.v1i1.9904.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Noer Azizah, "Implementasi undang-undang nomor 16 tahun 2019 tentang batas usia nikah perspektif teori efektivitas hukum: Studi Di Kantor Urusan Agama dan Pengadilan Agama Sumenep" (masters, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim, 2021), http://etheses.uin-malang.ac.id/31274/.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Ika Atikah, "Metode Penelitian Hukum," 2022, http://repository.uinbanten.ac.id/9155/1/P%20Metode%20Penelitian%20Hukum.pdf.

Agama or KUA) in reducing the prevalence of underage marriages and to identify the challenges encountered in carrying out this effort.

# 3. The existence of the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) in suppressing underage marriage in Biau District, Buol Regency.

The Office of Religious Affairs (Kantor Urusan Agama or KUA) in Biau Subdistrict, Buol Regency, plays a pivotal role in reducing the prevalence of underage marriages. As a frontline institution overseeing marriages, KUA is responsible not only for registering marriages but also for providing guidance and education to the community. The presence of KUA in Biau Subdistrict is particularly significant, given the high number of child marriages in the area. Data indicates that over the past three years, 35 cases of underage marriages have been recorded in the subdistrict. These numbers reflect the complexity of the issues at hand, including social, cultural, and economic factors that influence families' decisions to marry off their children.

One of KUA's efforts to curb child marriages is the implementation of strict administrative checks. This process involves verifying the ages of prospective spouses using official documents such as birth certificates or identity cards. If one or both individuals are found to be underage, the KUA rejects their application and directs them to seek dispensation from the Religious Court. This procedure aims to ensure that marriage decisions are not made hastily while giving families time to reconsider their plans.<sup>7</sup>

However, enforcing these regulations is not without challenges. Many families feel ashamed or reluctant to apply for dispensation due to the perceived complexity and time-consuming nature of the process. Additionally, a lack of public understanding of the importance of adhering to the minimum age requirement often hinders KUA's efforts. To address this, KUA actively conducts outreach to the community. These efforts include various activities such as Friday community visits, premarital seminars, and direct engagements with local communities. During these events, KUA not only explains legal requirements but also educates people about the negative impacts of child marriages, including reproductive health risks, emotional immaturity, and potential household conflicts.

A personalized approach is one of KUA's strengths in carrying out its duties. KUA staff often act as mediators, helping families understand the risks of child marriage and explore alternative solutions. For instance, they advise families to prioritize children's education or encourage them to enroll in skill development programs to

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Supriyanto Supriyanto, Muhammad Kurniawan Budi Wibowo, and Baehaqi Baehaqi, "Efektifitas Penerapan Undang-Undang Nomor 16 Tahun 2019 Tentang Perkawinan Di Kantor Urusan Agama Kecamatan Bendosari Kabupaten Sukoharjo," *Tasyri' : Journal of Islamic Law* 3, no. 1 (January 21, 2024): 1–24, https://doi.org/10.53038/tsyr.v3i1.105.

improve their future prospects. In many cases, such personalized approaches have successfully shifted families' perspectives on early marriage.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, KUA collaborates with various stakeholders to strengthen its child marriage prevention efforts. Partnerships with the Health Office, for example, allow KUA to provide comprehensive information on reproductive health risks. Meanwhile, collaboration with the Education Office focuses on keeping children in school. Initiatives such as educational scholarships or skills training programs are also part of the strategy to reduce child marriages. By involving multiple parties, KUA aims to create an ecosystem that supports children's optimal development without the pressure of marrying at a young age.<sup>9</sup>

Nonetheless, KUA's existence in combating child marriage also faces structural challenges. One of the primary issues is limited human resources. In Biau Subdistrict, KUA operates with only two civil servants who handle a wide range of responsibilities, from administrative tasks to community outreach. This limitation often hampers the effectiveness of child marriage prevention efforts. Additionally, the geographical inaccessibility of some rural areas poses challenges in reaching communities that require education and support.<sup>10</sup>

Local cultural factors also pose significant challenges. In many Biau communities, child marriage is still viewed as a solution to social issues such as premarital pregnancy or economic hardship. Interviews with local leaders reveal that cultural norms often conflict with existing legal regulations. Thus, KUA needs to adopt more persuasive and inclusive approaches to change societal mindsets. Engaging religious and community leaders in outreach efforts can be an effective strategy to bridge the gap between legal requirements and local traditions.<sup>11</sup>

Innovation is also a crucial aspect of KUA's efforts to curb child marriages. One of the initiatives involves leveraging digital technology to reach more people. Digital campaigns on platforms like Instagram and Facebook are used to share information about the importance of adhering to the legal minimum marriage age. These campaigns often feature infographics, short videos, or inspirational stories that are

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Muthiazahro Ulya, Amrullah Hayatudin, and Yandi Maryandi, "Peran Penyuluh Kantor Urusan Agama Kecamatan Bandung Kulon Terhadap Pencegahan Pernikahan Di Bawah Umur," in *Bandung Conference Series: Islamic Family Law*, vol. 3, 2023, 8–13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> S. Sanduri, Muhammad Kurniawan Budi Wibowo, and B. Baehaqi, "Efektivitas Dispensasi Perkawinan Di Bawah Umur Untuk Keharmonisan Rumah Tangga Di Wilayah Kantor Urusan Agama (Kua) Kecamatan Nogosari Kabupaten Boyolali," *AL HUKMU: Journal of Islamic Law and Economics*, March 30, 2024, 1–5, https://doi.org/10.54090/hukmu.291.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Ira Indrianingsih, Fitri Nurafifah, and Lusi Januarti, "Analisis Dampak Pernikahan Usia Dini Dan Upaya Pencegahan Di Desa Janapria," *Jurnal Warta Desa (JWD)* 2, no. 1 (May 11, 2020): 16–26, https://doi.org/10.29303/jwd.v2i1.88.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Muhammad Khoiri, "Pengaruh Pandemi Covid – 19 Terhadap Pernikahan Dibawah Umur Di Kantor Urusan Agama Kecamatan Banjarsari Kota Surakarta," *Mamba'ul 'Ulum*, October 5, 2022, 137–45, https://doi.org/10.54090/mu.62.

easy for younger audiences to understand. Although still in the early stages, this initiative demonstrates significant potential to broaden public awareness.

Despite the challenges, KUA in Biau Subdistrict remains a cornerstone in efforts to reduce child marriage rates. By strengthening collaboration, increasing institutional capacity, and adopting innovative approaches, KUA can play a more effective role in protecting children's rights and ensuring brighter futures for them. The success of these efforts will not only benefit individuals and families but also create healthier, more stable, and prosperous communities.<sup>12</sup>

From all the discussions above, the role of the KUA is very important in reducing the number of early marriages in Biau Sub-district, although it is not easy. With various efforts made, ranging from administrative checks, socialization, to cross-sectoral cooperation, the KUA has demonstrated its commitment to creating positive change. However, to achieve more optimal results, support is needed from all parties, including the government, community, and related institutions. Only with strong synergy can early marriage rates be reduced, and the younger generation can grow and develop according to their potential.

# 4. Factors that hinder the Religious Affairs Office Institution in suppressing underage marriage in Biau District, Buol Regency

The factors hindering the Office of Religious Affairs (Kantor Urusan Agama, KUA) in reducing child marriage rates in Biau Subdistrict, Buol Regency, reflect the complexity of social, cultural, and structural challenges faced by the local community. One of the main obstacles is the limited human resources. With a very small number of staff, the KUA must manage a variety of responsibilities, ranging from marriage registration to public outreach, monitoring, and community guidance. This heavy workload often limits the effectiveness of child marriage prevention efforts.<sup>13</sup>

Additionally, the remote geographical location of Biau Subdistrict presents significant challenges. Many areas within the subdistrict are difficult to access due to poor road conditions and inadequate communication networks. Consequently, efforts to disseminate education and awareness about the negative impacts of child marriage fail to reach rural communities. This lack of understanding about legal regulations and associated risks leads many families to continue the practice of child marriage.

Cultural factors also play a significant role in hindering KUA's efforts. In many communities within Biau Subdistrict, child marriage is still considered an acceptable solution to social issues such as premarital pregnancy or economic pressures. These

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> N. Nurjianti, B. Baehaqi, and Joko Sarjono, "Analisa Tingkat Kesejahteraan Keluarga Pasangan Menikah Usia Dini Kantor Urusan Agama (Kua) Kecamatan Baki," *AL HUKMU: Journal of Islamic Law and Economics*, March 28, 2023, 32–40, https://doi.org/10.54090/hukmu.137.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Gunawan, "Peran Kantor Urusan Agama (Kua) Dalam Meminimalisir Pernikahan Di Bawah Umur (Studi Kasus Di Kua Kecamatan Bantarbolang Kabupaten Pemalang)."

cultural norms often conflict with existing legal regulations. For instance, many families see child marriage as a way to preserve family honor, despite the long-term negative impacts on the future of their children.<sup>14</sup>

Non-compliance with legal regulations further exacerbates the issue. Many young couples marry without officially registering their union with the KUA. This practice not only violates the law but also deprives them of legal protections they should have. Interviews with community leaders revealed that such non-compliance is often due to a lack of knowledge about the benefits of official marriage registration and the necessary legal procedures. Additionally, some families feel hesitant or embarrassed to apply for dispensations at the Religious Court due to the perceived complexity and stigma associated with the process.<sup>15</sup>

Another significant barrier is the lack of collaboration between KUA and other relevant agencies, such as the Health Office, Education Office, and community organizations. Partnerships with these institutions could greatly enhance child marriage prevention efforts. For example, the Health Office could assist in providing comprehensive education on reproductive health risks, while the Education Office could focus on programs that encourage children to stay in school. Without strong collaboration, KUA's efforts often operate in isolation, limiting their overall impact.

Community resistance to change is another significant challenge. Many parents feel that the legal age requirement for marriage is irrelevant to their situation. They argue that as long as their children have reached physical maturity, there is no reason to delay marriage. This viewpoint highlights a gap between legal norms and prevailing social norms within the community.<sup>16</sup>

A lack of adequate facilities and infrastructure also hinders KUA's operations. Limited technology and communication tools make it difficult for KUA to reach wider audiences. In today's digital era, leveraging technology such as social media and webbased applications could help KUA deliver educational messages about child marriage. However, without sufficient infrastructure, the potential of these technologies remains largely untapped.

<sup>15</sup> Yuli Adha Hamzah, Arianty Anggraeny Mangarengi, and Andika Prawira Buana, "Analisis Yuridis Perkawinan Dibawah Umur Melalui Kewenangan Kantor Urusan Agama (Studi Kasus Di KUA Kabupaten Bantaeng)," *Pleno Jure* 9, no. 2 (October 2020): 119–28, https://doi.org/10.37541/plenojure.v9i2.431.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Tomi Jaffisa and Mirja Huwanji, "Peran Penyuluhan Agama Islam Kantor Urusan Agama Dalam Program Meminimalisi Pernikahan Dini Di Kecamatan Medan Barat," *PUBLIK REFORM* 8, no. 1 (September 29, 2021): 89–94, https://doi.org/10.46576/jpr.v8i1.1475.

Neng Poppy Nur Fauziah and Aliesa Amanita, "Pelaksanaan Undang-Undang Nomor 16 Tahun 2019
Tentang Perubahan Undang-Undang Nomor 1 Tahun 1974 Tentang Perkawinan Terkait Perkawinan
Di Bawah Umur Di Kantor Urusan Agama Kecamatan Cipatat, Kabupaten Bandung Barat," *Jurnal Dialektika Hukum*: *Jurnal Ilmu Hukum* 2, no. 2 (December 1, 2020): 129–47, https://doi.org/10.36859/jdh.v2i2.513.

Economic constraints are another significant issue faced by families in Biau Subdistrict. Many families marry off their children at a young age due to financial pressures. Interviews with parents revealed that child marriage is often viewed as a way to reduce financial burdens on the family. Additionally, the lack of adequate job opportunities in the area leads many adolescents to drop out of school and choose marriage as an alternative. These economic challenges underscore the need for a more holistic approach to addressing child marriage, including providing educational opportunities and vocational training for young people.<sup>17</sup>

Fear of the legal process also serves as a major barrier. Many parents are reluctant to apply for dispensations at the Religious Court due to embarrassment or fear of social stigma. In some cases, they are unaware that a dispensation is a required procedure for underage marriages. This fear underscores the importance of a more persuasive and educational approach from KUA to help communities understand the necessity of complying with legal regulations.

Despite these challenges, KUA remains committed to its mission. One of its strategies is to strengthen persuasive approaches through direct dialogue with the community. During these interactions, KUA staff often explain that child marriage is not the best solution for social or economic problems. They also share real-life cases where child marriages have resulted in divorce or reproductive health issues, hoping to raise awareness of the associated risks.<sup>18</sup>

KUA is also exploring innovation by leveraging social media to increase public awareness. Digital campaigns on platforms like Facebook and Instagram are being used to disseminate information about marriage regulations and the negative impacts of child marriage. Although still in its early stages, this effort shows great potential to engage younger audiences who are more familiar with digital technology.

Collaboration with religious and community leaders is another crucial strategy for overcoming cultural barriers. Religious leaders, for example, hold significant influence over community decisions. By involving them in child marriage prevention efforts, KUA can foster more meaningful changes. Religious leaders can deliver sermons emphasizing the importance of adhering to the minimum legal marriage age, while community leaders can help integrate these values into local cultural norms.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Rizqi Abdul Latif and Fatimatuz Zahro, "Peran Kantor Urusan Agama Dalam Meminimalisisr Pernikahan Dini (Studi Di Kecamatan Ponggok Kabupaten Blitar)," *Mahakim: Journal of Islamic Family Law* 4, no. 2 (2020): 153–67, https://doi.org/10.30762/mahakim.v4i2.119.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Fitria et al., "Peran Kantor Urusan Agama (Kua) Dalam Menanggulangi Tren Nikah Dibawah Umur Di Kecamatan Telukjambe Timur Karawang," *Al-Afkar, Journal For Islamic Studies*, June 13, 2022, 202–14, https://doi.org/10.31943/afkarjournal.v5i2.294.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Slamet Arofik and Alvian Riski Yustomi, "Analisis Ushul Dan Kaidah Fikih Terhadap Implementasi Dispensasi Perkawinan Di Bawah Umur Di Kantor Urusan Agama (Kua) Kecamatan Perak Kabupaten Jombang," *USRATUNA: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Islam 4*, no. 1 (December 22, 2020): 111–37.

Overall, the factors hindering KUA in its efforts to reduce child marriage rates in Biau Subdistrict reflect a complex and multifaceted set of challenges. From limited human resources to cultural resistance, each obstacle requires specific and strategic approaches to be effectively addressed. By enhancing institutional capacity, strengthening cross-sector collaboration, and adopting innovative technologies, KUA can play a more effective role in protecting children's rights and fostering a legally aware society. Only through strong cooperation between the government, the community, and various stakeholders can child marriage rates in Biau Subdistrict be significantly reduced, offering hope for a brighter future for the younger generation.

### 5. Conclusion

From the discussion regarding the role of the Office of Religious Affairs (Kantor Urusan Agama, KUA) and the factors hindering its efforts to reduce child marriage rates in Biau Subdistrict, Buol Regency, it can be concluded that KUA plays a crucial role as the frontline institution for monitoring and preventing early marriages. Through stringent administrative checks, community outreach, and premarital counseling, KUA strives to educate the public on the importance of adhering to the minimum legal marriage age. However, these efforts are not without challenges, including limited human resources, difficult geographic accessibility, cultural norms, and non-compliance with existing laws. Cross-sector collaboration with relevant agencies, technological innovation, and the involvement of religious and community leaders are strategic steps that must be optimized to create more significant change. With strong support from all stakeholders, KUA can more effectively fulfill its role, safeguard children's rights, and foster a legally aware society, ultimately achieving a sustainable reduction in child marriage rates in Biau Subdistrict.

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