

COMMUNIQUE: National Dialogue meeting on creating an enabling environment for Girls in Education.

19th February 2015

Hotel Africana, Kampala



Figure 1 The participants who attended the National Dialogue on Increasing participation and Learning for Girls in Uganda

Introduction

This communique highlights the deliberations from the national dialogue meeting convened on the 19th February 2015 at Hotel Africana. The meeting attended by various players from government institutions, students, civil society organisations, the media and children. The meeting was convened by the Girls Not Brides Uganda Alliance and ActionAid International Uganda. A total of 78 People attended the meeting. The dialogue was officially opened by the coordinator for the Girls Not Brides Uganda Alliance to end child marriage in Uganda who emphasised the fact that education is not a privilege but a right. Girls should get quality education. Mission is to engage different stake holders and provide practical steps to achieve this. The Girls not Brides Uganda Alliance is a coalition of various CSOs working together to end child, early and forced marriages in Uganda and all over the world. The **overall objective** of the meeting was to lobby and enhance CSO's and government participation in creating conducive environment for girls to participate in education and increase performance in final examinations.

Background

Today, we stakeholders gathered here at this national dialogue meeting, recognizing that education is a right to all children. Various international policy and legal frameworks have committed to the realization of children's rights and specifically access to quality, free and compulsory education- and this has not been fully realized. The Universal primary of education in Uganda was meant to allow equal opportunity for both girls and boys to stay in school has not sufficiently addressed the challenges girls go through at school such as the absence of adequate sanitary facilities, negative cultural attitude towards girls' education among others.

One in three women and girls experience abuse in their lifetime, more than half of sexual assaults are committed against girls under 16 years of age and globally, more than one in three young women aged 20-24 years are married before the age of 18. We also recognize that over time, girls have continuously performed poorly compared to boys- even when girls perform better, the difference is negligible.

State of girls' education and access to education in Uganda

This was framed with an analysis on the general access to education for girls including the enrollment ratios, a distinction between access and retention was made, the barriers to girls' education were discussed and possible policy and program interventions recommended. *'Let's task our government to walk the talk. Everybody must play their role and responsibilities' is what continuously came through the discussions from the panelists and presenters.*

Members recognized that the introduction of the Universal Primary Education was a political pronouncement and so there is need to depoliticize education and related government policies. The Universal Primary Education Program increased enrollment level to over 90% although this is not followed by the same retention and completion levels. Currently, the completion level is 54% for boys and 42% for girls leaving 46% boys, and 48% of the girls who enroll for education unaccounted for. It is clear that the situation is worse for girls.

Emotional and Psychological violence were highlighted as having long term effects, on the growth and performance of children especially girls. This follows the abolition of corporal punishment and as a result, for example kneeling down for long hours and use of the abusive language have been adopted. Research shows that girls who were affected by violence were performing three times worse than boys and worse than how they performed before. . Girls perform badly when exposed to violence than boys.

Challenges making it hard for Girl children to stay in school

Looking at both the internal and external environment, it was agreed that the factors hindering girls from staying in schools are found at home, schools and communities. For example, infrastructure in schools is alarming and sanitation is very poor, there are limited toilets and in some cases children and sometimes teachers use bushes as toilets. Most of the schools don't have enough sanitary facilities and changing rooms for girls' infrastructure is a problem. The teachers are overwhelmed teaching all subjects and thus have less time and motivation to support the girls. The privatization of education with no clear government regulation of the sector and regulation of school dues charged by private schools has equally negatively affected the girls and access to quality education.

Non Gender responsive school environments. The other factors identified include the non-gender responsive school environment, shortage of female teachers to act as role models (in Upper primary, most teachers are male teachers), gaps in the leadership structure and not involving girls in decision making for example heading clubs and discrimination on the subjects taken and co-curricular activities to be done by girls and boys

Limited parental involvement and support. Today, a big number of parents have neglected their cardinal role of looking after children and this must be corrected.

Violence at schools and in communities. The survey conducted by Raising Vices in 2014 established that marginalized girls experiencing multiple forms of violence against children/girls. 98.7% reported physical violence (caning, making children kneel for long, slapping, kicking, pinching), 98.2 mentioned sexual violence (unwanted touches, harassment, coerced sex), 97.8% mentioned experiencing economic violence, 95.85 reported having ever experienced violence in form of teasing bullying, shouting. This has implications on schools and communities.

In the view of this, the question on why all this is happening kept occurring. The CSOs and stakeholders present also confirmed that they need to do things differently to respond to the changing contexts and issues affecting children especially girls. Effective coordination amongst CSOs needs to be done and the GIRLS NOT BRIDES UGANDA ALLIANCES is expected to fill this gap on issues of child, early and forced marriages. Members further agreed that the Alliance need to spread to rural areas and mobilize parents and all other stakeholders to speak against the challenges of girl child education.

Policy and program recommendations

From the discussions, the following recommendations have been drawn

1. **Institute comprehensive child centric legislations that are gender responsive** . This should be reflected in the three levels of education that include early child hood and development, basic education and higher education.

2. **Budget analysis, advocacy- and financing.** Recognizing the increasing budget allocation to the education sector, CSOs should consider effective participation in the budgeting process and ensuring that the issues of the girl child are addressed. This too should be based on research and policy analysis
3. **Lobby the Government and Ministry of education to issue a policy directive prohibiting Violence against Children especially girls.** This should focus on promoting gender equality and periodically monitoring adherence to the policy guidelines that have been put in place to address negative practices that affect the girl child. The monitoring role should involve the various stakeholders including parents, teachers and the community.
4. **Re- emphasize the importance of School feeding in schools.** Based on the various studies and interventions that have been piloted by both CSOs and government, the war on ensuring that children access meals at school must be reawakened. Children cannot learn while yawning because even adults will sleep when they are hungry. This mostly affects the girl children as in most cases they drop out of schools to look for food to support their siblings and families. Recognizing that the MOES recently made commitments on school feeding, this is an area that the Alliance and all stakeholders should prioritise
5. **Enforce the role of teachers in supporting girls especially at school.** Teachers are the first point of reference for the children both at home and schools. While there are gaps with the number of female teachers in most public schools, skills deficiency among these schools, and absence of facilities like changing rooms for girls, the teachers remain a key point of advice for the girls and all other children in schools. Deliberate interventions must be directed towards this area. For example, train teachers to support the girls make re-usable sanitary pads from local materials (being cautious of hygiene).
6. **Life skills Development and empowerment for Girls.** Government, CSOs and Development partners must develop life skills development for girls at all education level basic and higher levels. This will contribute toward reducing the higher population growth rate that is partially contributed to by early and forced marriages among other factors- and enable girls to be resilient to life's threatening socio-economic situations arising out of poverty and inequalities.

Conclusion

The members recognize the diversities with challenges of girl child education and call up on the government of Uganda as a cardinal duty bearer to popularize and implement all the existing policies and guidelines meant to address this problem. The issues of corruption in the education sector needs to be addressed and CSOs and citizens must actively participate in monitoring the government interventions and seek for consideration of the girl child in all programs. Educate a girl, save a nation.

Annex 1: Participants List