Gender thematic group

Notes from 19th March 2013

Introduction

The Forum for Education NGOs in Uganda is a national coalition of civil society organisations working to bring about education rights in Uganda. This document outlines notes made at the meeting on 19th March 2013

Notes from meeting

The thematic group were welcomed by Christine Semambo Sempebwa, the executive director of FAWEU. She thanked FENU for the work the network is doing bringing girl child issues on the education policy agenda. She concluded her remarks by asking members to think through the issue of child protection – do we all have child protection policies and mechanisms that we follow?

Identifying priorities of the year exercise

The group spent some time reviewing the work the group had done previously and considering what to prioritise this year. John from the FENU secretariat gave an update on the work from last year. He explained that the group had started with a lot of vigour but that there is a concern that the focus on gender issues is currently beginning to dwindle.

The group has previously focused on violence against girls in schools and defilement. The issue of implementation of policies is one of our biggest challenges. There have been some important developments and the Gender taskforce is an important institution working within the Ministry of Education and Sports to work on girls' education.

Josephine from FAWE further updated the group on the fact that it was very disappointing that the gender taskforce were not able to present their paper on girls' education at the last ESSR. The group were also informed that the first day of the girl child was held last year on the 11th October.

The group spent some time discussing what concrete actions could be focused on this year. The below list of suggestions were discussed:

Policy work

- Gender in Education policy - Push for the review, analyse the policy and highlight issues that have not been implemented, campaign for better implementation, work on getting a simple summary of the policy disseminated to schools, parents etc.
- Advocate for a new policy on the re-entry of child mothers into schools
- Strengthen guidelines and implementation of girl child menstruation and hygiene in schools– target DES through implementation BRMS, and the construction unit to ensure all education structures build cater for this

Work more closely with policy makers

- Strengthen relationship with the Gender taskforce in Ministry of Education and Sports – ask whether we can attend meetings, lobby for the taskforce's brief to be presented at the ESSR this year, as the Gender taskforce if they would like to attend FENU meetings
- Engage policy makers in Gender parity meeting and field trips to establish evidence based advocacy

Raise the profile of education for girls

- Share case studies
- Engage in activities to raise awareness of gender issues during international days such as the day of the African child and the international day of the girl child.
- Aggressive media and community engagement around Gender based violence
    1. We can be pro-active – we go out and create awareness
    2. Re-active to events that have happened in the press
    3. (Breakfast with the media/press statements/ press conferences)
    4. We need to look at how we can pull resources together to support media campaigns

Working more closely with each other

- Assess, review, improve and roll out gender programming models by organizations
- Can we have a gender mainstreaming workshop that will enable us all work on the same page?

Teachers

- Advocate for trained senior women teachers in all schools.
- Advocate for training for all teachers to get skills on how to help students during adolescence

Gender taskforce progress summary

The Gender taskforce within the Ministry of Education and Sport were unable to attend the meeting but sent the below update which was gratefully received and discussed:

MOES PROGRESS REPORT

s/n	Activity	Current Status
1	Review of the National Strategy for Girls Education	The process for the review is underway. The Consultant has been identified and is yet to be engaged; CSOs will be key respondents including girls and boys in 5 selected districts of Amudat, Kalangala, Namutumba, Kyenjojo and Pader.
2	Review of the Gender in Education Policy	The process is scheduled for this year. The process for the review will be discussed at the upcoming Gender Task Force meeting scheduled for 1st or 2nd week of April. Invitation to the TFM will be communicated to FENU in due course
3	Gender Audit	The Ministry carried out a gender audit between 7-28th January 2013. The report is ready and a dissemination schedule has been drawn first to the educationsector working groups starting on 20th March 2013 with the Sector Policy

		Management Group, ESCC and TMM respectively. The detailed report will aslo be disseminated at the Gender Task force meeting of April and e-report shared widely with all stakeholders **Principal findings of the audit:** • MoES has made significant achievements. Gender parity has almost been achieved in primary education with substantially increased enrolment showing 50.11 for girls and 49.9% for boys. • MoES has shifted its efforts towards improving quality of education given the high enrolment rates. At primary level, attention was shifted to teacher recruitment to implement the new teacher allocation formula of one teacher per class with emphasis on gender balance. • Despite the achievements, there is a big gap between policy formulation, policy statements and the actual implementation and operationalization of these policies in MoES. • MoES still faces the challenges of inadequate institutionalization of gender in its operations despite the gender in education sector policy and other related guidelines. • There have been notable efforts of integrating gender in programme areas of learning achievement with funding mainly from UNICEF.

<u>Re-entry of pregnant girls into school</u>

FAWEU gave the group an update on their recent survey on re-entry of pregnant girls into school. A summary of this survey is copied in annex . This report was shared with the Gender taskforce, the M&E group and others.

FAWEU is doing work with FBOs, CBOs on the re-entry of girls in school and this agenda is included in all FAWE activities. The PADER Girls academy is a case study for how child mother can continue their education.

Some ways forward on this issue were discussed including the need:

- To scale up good practices
- For advocacy for policy formulation of a separate policy on the re-entry of girls
- To raise awareness
- For more research to get more education based advocacy

- To strengthen the systems that captures the data at the MoES
- To follow the success stories from the region and world as a whole e.g. Zambia that has a separate policy

It was felt that the MoES needs to strengthen data collection on the number of girls who have dropped out due to pregnancy.

Uganda Parliamentary Forum on Quality Education

FENU secretariat informed the group that the new Uganda Parliamentary Forum on Quality Education (UPFQE) was launched on 25th February.

UPFQE is an important new development, especially in relation to the education budget, which has to be voted on by Parliament. Last year FENU made recommendations on the budget to Parliament and although the Parliament accepted all the recommendations, these were not then implemented and the education budget was cut.

FENU secretariat has helped to provide technical support to UPFQE, which is keen to work with NGOs.

AFRI-pads brief

AFRI-pads briefed the group on their re-usable/ washable sanitary towels. AFIR-pads are a business, not an NGO but they work with development partners to provide cheap sanitary towels for schools and girls. Any NGO keen to work in partnership should get in contact.

AOB

The group agreed that it was important to strengthen sharing between partners. Josephine from FAWE made a call to ask members to attend all meetings.

Actions that came out of this meeting

Action points	Responsible person/ organization
Organise a meeting with the gender taskforce to ask: • When the Education Policy review and the National Strategy for girls are going to happen and how CSOs can be involved • If we can have a copy of the summary of the gender policy • When gender taskforce meetings take place and whether CSOs and NGOs can attend them – can FENU circulate timetable? • Whether someone from the gender taskforce would like to come along to gender thematic group meetings	FENU to organize, FAWEU and FENU to attend
Try to get hold of the summary of the Gender policy and circulate it to the rest of the group	Charity, Plan international
Find out more information (especially theme) on the day of the girl child and the day of the African child and circulate to the rest of the group	Charity, Plan international (day of the girl child), FENU (day of the African child)

Next meeting

The group agreed that the next meeting would take place at World Vision, Kisozi House Wednesday 15th May 2013

Annex 1

Summary of research topic: A survey on re-entry of pregnant girls in primary and secondary schools in Uganda, FAWEU 2011.

Findings:

Although Uganda has made deliberate efforts to promote gender equality at national and school level, there are significant gaps in addressing issues of pregnancies in schools. At the national level, no clear policies exist on how pregnancy in schools can be handled or assisting girls who would want to re-join school after giving birth.

Findings also indicate that districts have no established mechanisms to deal with pregnancies in schools under their supervision. There exists no data on pregnancy in schools. Some districts have information on the number of schools, their registered students and on dropouts, but they do not have information on students who drop out due to pregnancy, and how these are followed up.

Furthermore the findings of the same study indicate that while majority of stakeholders support re-entry into school after giving birth, a very tiny minority could visualise a pregnant girl continuing with her studies unless she was in a candidate class and hence only allowed to sit for her exams. Not many still visualized a child mother studying with the baby in the same environment.

According to teachers' views, the leading cause for girls to drop out of school is pregnancy (34%), followed by poverty (28%) and engagement in early sex/marriage (11%). Engagement in early sex is also partly attributed to defilement as well as forced marriages. While community members are key in engaging school girls in early sex, teachers and school staff members too are among the perpetuators despite the fact these staff are charged with the duty of teaching as well as moral upbringing of the children.

Like the teachers, the majority (65%) of the pupils indicated the main cause for dropping out as pregnancy followed by poverty (14%) and then early sex/marriage (8%). The students'/pupils' and teachers' views disturbingly point to pregnancy as a leading cause of girls dropping out of school. This implies that pregnancy is a key issue that needs to be addressed if girls are to complete school.

Inferring from national data, pregnancy accounts for a considerable percentage of school drop out of girls. For example the data of 2000-2009 showed that 20% of girls were married. The percentage of women who gave birth before the age of 18 was 35% and the adolescent birth rate was put at 1,593. Again according to the 2006 Uganda Demographic Health Survey, 12% of the girls aged 15-19 years were pregnant while 19% had even given birth to one child. All these are of primary and post primary education and training.

New Vision paper January 4th 2008 which reported that in Mityana District, 24 pregnant girls missed sitting their PLE after dropping out of school due to pregnancy as some pupils had just given birth and others were still pregnant. Again the New Vision paper Thursday November 26th 2009 reported that during PLE 2009 exams in Kasese, out of the total number of girls who sat PLE exams, 40 girls were reported pregnant.

The 2006 Uganda Demographic Health Survey shows that childbearing among teenage girls starts early. While at 15 years 2% had begun child bearing, this proportion increases rapidly to 59% for the 19 year olds. The proportions are higher for the rural as compared to urban areas and in the poorest families as compared with the wealthier ones, with marked regional variations where the south of the country in general has lower teenage incidences than the rest of the country. It is important to note that high teenage pregnancy rates affects girls who would ordinarily be in primary, secondary and post-secondary education and training.

Recommendations by teachers

Many teachers interviewed, whether female or male in primary or secondary school argue that there is no need for a policy to retain pregnant girls in schools, although the practice is that some schools actually have expectant mothers studying, particularly if they are in candidate classes.

There is fear that lack of consensus and policy direction will make some to retain pregnant girls while many other schools do not accept. Indeed some teachers recommend that a policy on pregnancy should actually prohibit rather than accommodate pregnancy in schools.

Others say that there is need for a retention policy because many teachers cannot allow the girls in class and yet such girls become useful, when they study. It is also argued that the girls need skill so that they are able to look after their children.

However unlike the controversy on the retention policy which is sternly opposed by the majority of teachers, pupils and students across the board, a policy on re-entry is supported overwhelmingly by most of the people interviewed. With no major differences between women and men teachers interviewed, 88% of the teachers interviewed argue that Uganda needs a policy on re-entry of girls into school

Similarly, many pupils, policy makers and community members support the re-entry of girls in school after child birth. However, a preventive approach would be to address factors that facilitate the occurrence of pregnancies in school.

In general, teachers especially say that the pregnancy of girls in schools should be discouraged and avoided. Negative attitudes towards girl child education in society and failure to pay tuition or to meet the financial requirements of schooling are some of the driving factors in sexual relationships by school girls. Therefore there is need to address factors such as: negative attitudes in communities, poverty in families, introducing and teaching sex education in schools so that girls and all pupils and students know how to deal with sexuality matters.

Other stakeholder views on re-entry policy

- A policy should be formulated to enable teachers to allow girls back in school (with a clear resource framework).

- Government should provide sponsorship schemes to the child mothers.

- Massive sensitisation by Local government and NGOs should be prioritised- sensitization should focus on all stakeholders especially - teachers, parents and students/pupils.

- Students in particular have to be able to accept the girl who has had a baby and not to call her names such as ‘mama’.

• Government should extend services like family planning methods in a holistic manner Local government can make a policy to emphasize sex education in schools.

• Spell out tough penalties for the culprits.

• Make re-entry mandatory and reprimand those who block re-entry (family/school)

• On retention- government should invest much in training people that can help these students for example teachers.

• Provision of health facilities, sick bays, resting rooms in schools and child care centres. In build into the policy deterrent measures to prevent pregnancy i.e. the policy should not send a bad signal that it is okay to be pregnant at that age

• Key organisational spaces for women's education such as FAWE, UWOPA, MGLSD should play specific roles in the policy framework.

Study Recommendations

• Emphasis should be placed on the notion that education is a human right and lifelong learning, a prudent way to a good education. As such pregnant students and child mothers should be allowed to enroll or re-enroll in any school of their choice. It is suggested that for pregnant or lactating girls to remain in school, parental support is necessary but if possible the school should take up the support by providing scholastic materials.

• Make the school environment friendly for the retention of pregnant girls or re-entry of the young mothers. This can be through:

- Counseling services to schools to change attitudes of teachers, pupils and students. This should also be targeted at addressing stigma related to school girl pregnancy. Guidance and counseling sessions should be clearly indicated on the school time table where issues of sexuality should be addressed among others aspects. Providing guidance and counselling to expectant girls and mothers to cope with their pregnancy and childcare situations as they study

- Teacher re-orientation and training so that they can handle issues of pregnancy in school appropriately

- Sensitization of the public and especially foundation bodies as some may be too conservative to accept pregnant girls in school.

• Enact a Clear Policy and Bye-laws on Enrolment and Retention to deal with the factors underlying drop outs and poor performance:

- To guard against early marriage of girls, parents who marry off young girls should be arrested.

- Parents who withdraw children (boys and girls) from school to engage them in income generating activities or domestic work should be punished.

- Men who marry young girls should be arrested.

- Children (girls and boys) who, on their own, refuse to go to or continue with school should be identified and appropriate measures put in place.