

Expert's thoughts>

RHITAH KIRUNGI, STATE ATTORNEY, ARUA

"Girls are so vulnerable and call for special attention if they are to stay in school longer. It is because of these small basic needs that they lack that has made them liable to being deceived by men, especially boda boda men, with simple gifts and they end up being impregnated and dropping out of school. I hope if they are provided with these basic needs they will stay longer in school."



POLICY/PRACTICE

ESSENTIALS AND ALTERNATIVE IDEAS

Every day, girls of school-going age in Uganda face barriers in education caused by poverty, cultural norms and practices, poor infrastructure, violence, and fragility.

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Former US president Barack Obama once said: "When women succeed, nations are more safe, secure and prosperous." The onus is on the countries therefore, to end the high rate of early girl-child pregnancies, child marriages and school dropouts.

According to Greg Lavender, the head of programmes at Plan International, there are many barriers affecting girl-child education in Uganda. There is, therefore, a call for increased funding in education such that a certain percentage is allocated to cater for some basic needs for girls.

"All children need to access quality education. However, we need to agree that girls of school-going age are more vulnerable in Uganda. A number of girls do not go to school during their menstruation period because they lack sanitary towels. Many are prone to early pregnancies and due to that, the rate of school dropout for girls is high compared to boys," he says.

He says child marriages are also a critical challenge, noting that these child brides are more likely to drop out of school and spend fewer years in school than their peers who marry later.

He observes that this affects the education and health of their children, as well as their ability to earn a living.

Lavender adds that Uganda will not achieve gender equality without a fully-financed education system that empowers girls and boys equally.

He observes that gender transformative education will equip girls with the skills, knowledge and competences they need to be able to claim and exercise broader social economic, cultural and political rights and empower them to be leaders and decision-makers.

Inclusive education

According to the State minister for Primary Education, Rosemary Sseninde, government is committed to ensuring that all children receive education, girls inclusive.

She says though the money allocated to the Education sector according to the national budget is still low, the ministry of education is working hard to push and endeavour that more funds are given to the sector in the next financial year.

She also observes that girls, especially those in rural schools are faced with many challenges among which scholastic materials which have

Girl-child education needs more funding



Some of the students of Viva College during the expo. Education is one way of uplifting the status of the girl-child in society. FILE PHOTO

in most cases led them into dropping out of school. "When a girl stays in school, we delay her chances of getting pregnancy," she observes.

Sseninde adds that though there are still some few challenges in education which she hopes will get addressed soon, there is notable progress in the education sector evidenced by increased enrolment, new schools and training institutions, and the expansion of existing facilities

THE NUMBERS

A 2010 report from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) dubbed, 'School Dropout: Patterns, Causes, Changes and Policies' indicates that some of the major causes of school dropouts are lack of interest, pregnancy, early marriages, hidden costs at school and family responsibilities. More so, teenage pregnancy stands at 25 per cent and 49 per cent of girls are married before they make 18 years.

In 2013, Uganda was ranked 16th among 25 countries with the highest rates of early marriages, with 46% of girls marrying before 18 years, and 12% before they are 15 years (World Vision, 2013). In regions where girls are married before the legal age of 18, female secondary education is lower (OECD Education at a Glance 2015).



"Increased funding for girl-child education is a good cause. Girls are faced with so many challenges compared to boys. Too much poverty in homes has made it hard for them to get scholastic materials which they need to have in order to stay longer in schools."

SARAH AYESIGA
AG. ASSISTANT
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that has contributed greatly to improvement in education.

However, Irene Kagoya of Plan International advises that girls' education should go beyond getting girls into school. She says though government has played a big role in ensuring that there is free education for all, it needs to also ensure and monitor that girls stay safe in schools and complete all the levels.

Voices matter

"Girls' education should not only stop at enrolling them in school, it should also ensure that girls learn and feel safe while there; complete all levels of education with the skills to effectively compete in the labor market; learn the socio-emotional and life skills necessary to navigate and adapt to a changing world; make decisions about their own lives; and contribute to their communities and the world," she says.

Kagoyi notes that girls' voices matter, reason the country needs to support the power, leadership and activism of girls and young women.

She also adds that girls need to be at the heart of an investment in the future and education is one of the key strategic areas for ensuring that girls live up to their potential.

"The only way we can achieve the goal of activism of girls and young women at large is by providing them with materials such as sanitary pads, medication during that time of the month are able to attend school daily," she advises.