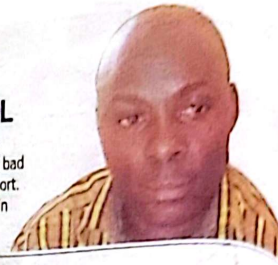


Expert comment >

CRISPUS KAZIBWE, THE DEPUTY HEAD
TEACHER KAZO SUMMIT PRIMARY SCHOOL

"We introduced the Family Initiative Programme that allows each teacher talk to pupils about their sexuality in groups of 15. We teach them about the dangers of bad touches, HIV, rape, over trusting family members, accepting gifts and free transport. The 'Peer Say' programme introduced by government to aid sexuality education in schools still lacks that punch yet the challenge is real."



POLICY/PRACTICE

ESSENTIALS AND ALTERNATIVE IDEAS

Time to lift ban on sex education in schools

While the Ministry of Gender registered credible concerns regarding how sex education was conducted in schools, completely banning it is not a solution.

BY DENIS BBOSA
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In 2016, the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social development banned comprehensive sexuality education in schools. The ministry's motivation came from the discovery of sexual reproductive health books in 100 schools that included sexual orientation and a non-negative portrayal of masturbation. Their argument was that "sexuality education was leading to decline in children's moral values". Sexuality education is teaching and learning about topics related to sex and sexuality, exploring values and beliefs about those topics and gaining the skills that are needed to navigate relationships and manage one's own sexual health.

The nation is still recovering from the mindboggling revelation that a deceased educationist allegedly sired children with some students at the schools he owned.

Following the scandal, a concerned mother wrote on a popular Facebook group about the need to revamp sexuality education in our schools. "I think this saga should reignite the debate about sexuality education and reproductive health in schools. A toll free line should also be put in place and popularised in schools to help students who find themselves in compromising situations with their teacher and school administrators. We need to empower our children to have the skills and stamina to say 'no' and if by bad luck it happens, they need to have the knowledge to seek immediate help," the post read in part.

Tightening the noose

The modern trends, dictated by the advent of the uncontrolled yet easily accessed social media, call for a vibrant, proactive and practical empowering sex education system that will grant school-going children a conducive studying environment.

According to Patrick Muyinda, the assistant commissioner for communication and information management in the Ministry of Education and Sports, the teachers who are convicted for abusing their students sexually are heavily penalised.

"The ministry gets many indiscipline cases but if any head teacher is convicted by court of impregnating their student, they immediately lose their post," he said.

Henry Ssemakula, the senior education officer in charge of guidance



Parents need to revive their sexuality chats with their children. NET PHOTO

and counselling in the Education ministry, says schools should instead employ professional counsellors to guide students about sexuality issues. "Most schools do not have professional counsellors but we have given some teachers basic tips and written materials for them to equip students with sexuality education," Ssemakula said.

SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE

Henry Ssemakula, the senior Education Officer in charge of guidance and counselling in the Education Ministry, faults the increased sexual abuse on some media that publish pornographic content and exalt indecent celebrities which pass a bad example to the youth for the increased abuse of sex in schools.

Schools devise means

Some schools are managing the crisis internally. Crispus Kazibwe, the deputy head teacher Kazo Summit Primary School in Wakiso District, reveals they have invented the Family Initiative Programme (FIP) that allows each teacher talk to pupils about their sexuality in groups of 15.

"We start right at Primary One to Primary Seven teaching them about the dangers of bad touches, HIV, rape, over trusting family members, accepting gifts and free transport. We have 10 senior women but with FIP, the children view the teacher as a parent because they even share their family issues with them," says Kazibwe.

"The 'Peer Say' programme introduced by government to aid sexuality education in schools still lacks that punch yet the challenge is real," Kazibwe noted with concern.

Police concerned

Police spokesperson, Asan Kasingye, says students should be empowered with defensive means to fight off possible sexual offenders. "Students, mostly girls, must be trained to fight back using their bodies (karate), raising alarms, given whistles. We also encourage students to make use of our known official hotlines to report any case of sexual abuse," Kasingye said. He stressed that police has the powers to apprehend any sex offender regardless of status adding that they have assigned their community liaison officers to visit schools across the country to preach the dangers and repercussions of sex abuse.

At St Mary's Kitende on Entebbe Road professional counsellors are brought to speak to students. "We have moral talks on a term basis. We bring in counsellors and encourage our students to be open. We even allow one on one session between the student and counsellors," says Annet Kisomose, the school's senior woman teacher.

Parent's role

Muyinda says the curriculum for teaching reproductive health is in place but needs to be accompanied by the willingness of parents to perform their initial grooming roles.

"The ministry encourages parents not to abdicate their primary responsibility of raising children in a morally upright way because our (ministry's) major role is the teaching and learning of students," Muyinda says.

Similarly, a concerned mother says parents should get concerned about equipping their children with sexuality education. "We should know the need to talk about sexuality with our children because people like the deceased educationist are everywhere. The houseboy in the next house, the garbage collector who comes to your home, the milkman who delivers milk at home, the online friend that interacts with your child, the unsuspecting uncle, that boda boda man that picks and drops them school, the salon boy who knows how to give the latest hair cut to the child, the choir leader in your church and many more. Let us invest much more in mother/father child conversations."

CLARIFICATION

In our story "The fall of academic giants" published on July 3, Page 18, we wrongly listed St Henry's College, Kitovu in a category of schools that did not reflect its true academic standing. This is to clarify that Kitovu is among the top ranked schools in the country. We regret the error.