
BACK TO SCHOOL PROJECTS FOR DROP-OUT GIRLS AS AN ESSENTIAL TOOL TO ELIMINATE GENDER DISPARITY IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

The international community's efforts to achieve Education for All (EFA), especially in poor countries like the Republic of Tanzania, inspired me to choose '*Back to School Projects*' as an intervention tool and effective mechanism for eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education. The dropping out of girls from primary and secondary education as a result of pregnancies is a worldwide phenomenon, the understanding of which has been clouded by moral considerations. I believe that the right time has come for IFUW members to strongly address this issue in order to influence policy makers at all levels, national and international, on this issue. Remember the IFUW motto is WOMEN: AGENTS FOR CHANGE'.

GOAL

To advance Gender balances advocated in the Millennium Development Goals by eliminating Gender Disparity in Primary and Secondary Education, preferably at all levels by 2015.

- To test whether Back to School Projects for teenage girls who have dropped out of primary and secondary education can be effective interventions for promoting gender equality and empowerment within the education system?
- To examine whether consequent empowerment and accountability result in good public policies and the achievement of one of the Millennium Development Goals, which is to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education at all levels, by 2015?

STUDY BACKGROUND

Aim:

- To test the effectiveness of back to school approaches in improving gender imbalances in education for girls, who are dropping out of many schools around the World especially in Less Developed Countries, (Africa, Asia and Latin America).
- To foresee the need of Government policies in various countries to reinforce one of the twelve areas listed in the Platform for Action at the Beijing Convention in 1995; the need

to Protect Girls and address the issues of teen mothers being able to resume their schooling as the way forward to achieving Millennium Development Goals.

- To raise awareness on Human Rights. The right to education is so fundamental for human beings. Investing in the education for underprivileged girls is an investment for the future. “When you educate a girl, you educate her whole family”, as well as future citizens of the World.
- To evaluate the evidence that sustainable Back to School Projects as education policy interventions improve youth development both dropped out of schools girls and the teenage boys who father children; that they result in self-development, realisation, individually and contribute to the countries’ economic development.

WHY CAN THE BACK TO SCHOOL PROJECTS WORK?

- Back to School projects designed to enable teen mothers to resume their schooling after giving birth constitute a development program.
- Back to School projects empower girls through their gaining knowledge and a sense of autonomy. They have widespread effects through the involvement of family and other caring adults, males, and cultural issues in the community at large.
- Their focus on fundamental social norms contributes substantially to improving individuals’ employability and reducing the level of poverty. Through access to reproductive education or services they also reduce the chances of teens engaging in risky behaviours, including unprotected sex.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS:

- Disentangling the effects of disadvantages on access is difficult.
- Limited information on Back to School Projects exists in some countries, especially poor ones.
- Family perspectives in relation to culture norms and values can limit such programs. This is most likely to happen in poor countries where some families are totally against girls’ education either for cultural reasons or because the labour of the girls is needed to support the family.
- Absence of social concern is a big challenge, a humanitarian question, a violation of human rights and it is a serious question of economics. People in poor countries, including top Political Figures (men and women), don’t see any problem with the dropping out of education of teenagers who normally turn into child labourers and work in particular areas such as prostitution and domestic employment. They now and then have been overheard saying, “Girls who have dropped out of school should not go back to school again as a punishment, and this is a way for them to earn their keep”. The issue here is why political leaders are not promoting education for girls rather than trying to rationalise the present situation? We need to ask ourselves whether, if we had daughters who dropped out of education, we would be content to have them work as domestic servants or prostitutes.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS:

- Back to School projects are very successful in diminishing the gender disparities in primary and secondary education by enabling underprivileged girls to resume schooling.
- Back to School projects can help girls who have dropped out of primary and secondary education
 - to acquire life skills and knowledge necessary for their own well-being and that of their children,
 - to realise their potential – that they are capable of more than serving others ,
 - to see that they have a right to education and a right to fulfil their own dreams and increase their self-esteem and independence, to achieve empowerment and full control of their own destiny.

In these ways Back to School Programs would be part of any nation's achievement of Millennium Development Goals 2 and 3, as set up by the United Nations.