

Workshop Title: **PREGNANT TEENAGE GIRLS' EDUCATION IN AFRICA**

Convener's name, organisation : CHRISTINE SEMAMBO SEMPEBWA, FAWE

Main issues, questions discussed:

1.0 Introduction

This report gives highlights of the session that Christine Semambo Sempebwa facilitated during the one day training that was organized under the auspices of the Swiss network for education and international cooperation (RECI) on 21st November, 2023. Christine Semambo Sempebwa was part of the team of panelists and represented Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) Africa. FAWE is a pan-African Non-Government Organization founded in 1992 to promote girls' and women's education in sub-Saharan Africa in line with the Education for All goals. Headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya, FAWE has a network of 34 National Chapters in 33 countries. FAWE's mission is to promote gender equity and equality in education in Africa by fostering positive policies, practices, and attitudes toward girls' education. FAWE envisions a world in which all African girls have access to education, perform well, and complete their studies, and gender disparities in education are eliminated. FAWE's goal is to increase access and retention as well as improve the quality of education for all women and girls in Africa within the school system and in universities.

1.1 Background

Today, Education for girls in Africa continues to be adversely impacted by a variety of socio-cultural, economic, and political factors. Relatedly, whilst the enrolment rates of girls in education have increased over the years, their retention, completion, and transition rates, and in many instances quality, remain wanting. Yet, education remains their most likely path to empowerment and a good quality of life (UNGEI et.al, 2022)¹. A 2022² study by UNGEI, UNESCO and noted that, except for the Syrian Arab Republic, the seven countries where the number of out-of-school girls increased in the last two decades were all low-income countries and all in sub-Saharan African. One of the factors that affects girls' education in Africa is teenage pregnancy. Pregnancy and motherhood have profound impacts on girls' and young

¹ UNGEI, UNESCO, UK AID. (2022). G7 global objectives on girls' education baseline report. <https://www.ungei.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/13102022%20Report%20G7.pdf>

² ibid

women's education (UNESCO, 2023) .According to World Bank (2023)³, 100 of every 1,000 girls ages 15-19 gave birth in SSA in 2021. According to Boateng et al (2021)⁴, in 23 countries in SSA, pregnancy accounts for 18 per cent of female dropouts from secondary school, and in Mozambique and South Africa it has been found to be the leading cause of dropout. It is against this backdrop that the workshop at the RECI meeting was conducted.

1.1.1 Objectives of the workshop

Within the context of the overall workshop theme, the workshop facilitated by Christine was guided by the following objectives.

1. To review pregnancy and school girl drop out and retention and re-entry of pregnant girls in the education system.
2. To explore how the gaps related to school girl pregnancy hinder or slow down progress towards realization of SDG4.
3. To discuss the above gaps and how best to bring to light and address this “forgotten” gap in education.

2.0 Proceedings

2.1 Main Issues Discussed

Despite having some very progressive retention and re-entry policies in Africa, Africa still grapples with pregnancy as a major cause of school-girl drop out. Relatedly, pregnancy is a factor that continues to intersect with other factors such as poverty, conflict and post-conflict situations, cultural norms, religion, lack of information, and lack of services. These factors create a conducive environment for school girl pregnancy to take place, re-occur and renders pregnant girls and child mothers more vulnerable and unlikely to return to school, even with the existing retention and re-entry policies. FAWE has been working in 34 countries, (about 65%) in Africa for over 31 years. FAWE therefore looks at the issue of teenage pregnancy and its intersectional and complex intricacies, drawing upon experiences from across the 34 countries. In so doing, FAWE learns from the lived experiences of the girls, but also from the research and demonstrable models that have been conducted with regard to teenage pregnancy. However, it must also be noted that across the various countries and beyond, even with research and successful models; there are different perspectives towards pregnancy. For example, there are the moralists who feel that retention and re-entry (allowing pregnant girls to stay in school and return after delivery) sets a bad precedent and would, in their view, lead to other girls getting pregnant. There are also the religious perspectives, where the religious leaders say no to retention and re-entry, based on religious values. However, there are also religions which permit marriages at an early age, before national age of adulthood. Such religions are seen as enablers of teenage pregnancy. On the other hand, there are negative cultural practices that perpetuate teenage pregnancies. For instance, some cultures marry off girls early when they are still virgins, in

³ World Bank. (2023). Gender Data: Sub-Saharan Africa. Available at <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/regions/sub-saharan-africa/> Accessed 30 November 2023

⁴ Boateng, P., Sian, H., & Gordon, R. (2021). Assessing the evidence on addressing gender inequality through girls' education in Sub-Saharan Africa. London, United Kingdom: British Council.

order to preserve family honour. However, other marry them off early to escape poverty through the acquired bride-price.

2.2 Some Good Strategies

Amidst the above issue, there have been some good strategies that have been used to address the issue of school-girl pregnancy across Africa. Some of these are:

Age-appropriate sexuality and reproductive health (RH) and reproductive rights education

However, this needs to be designed on a case by case basis that takes into account the specific needs of the targets, for example, the need to have youth-specific services offered in youth-friendly RH corners.

Community support

This can be in the form of support from girls who have a lived experience of teenage pregnancy. They can be agents of change by talking to other girls and explaining to them the challenges that come with pregnancy and the need to avoid getting pregnant or getting another pregnancy. Mother groups/ clubs and parent support groups can also help in raising awareness about the importance of supporting pregnant girls, and also helping them to continue with their education through retention and re-entry. The mother groups/ clubs can also look in the community, for girls who drop out due to pregnancy.

Digital Platforms

These have been used to raise awareness and deliver age-appropriate information that can deter pregnancy. However, as these are being used, it is important to evaluate and address the dangers of cybercrime and step up cyber security.

Stakeholder mapping and analysis

It is important in designing any intervention to address pregnancy to do proper stakeholder mapping. This helps to avoid duplication and make the best use of resources. Additionally, we also need to realize that none of us can do everything and sometimes we need to work in partnerships, or even let others execute certain roles and deliver certain interventions. Finally, we need to understand that Africa is not homogeneous. For instance, on the issue raised about the anti homo-sexuality law; Uganda has a homosexuality law, whereas the Republic of South Africa does not.

2.2 Key take-aways from the session

Networking

Networking is important for various reasons including knowledge-sharing, best use of resources and greater reach and impact.

Research

It is always important to conduct research as it creates an evidence-base which is important for among others: implantation, resource mobilization, policy advocacy, documentation, replication and scale-up.

Innovative Innovations

It is always good to be innovative and try out even those innovations which are seemingly not usual but can address the issue at hand. An example cite was the Pader Girls' Academy in Uganda, where FAWE worked on a project⁵ with MacArthur Foundation. The Academy is perhaps the only school in Africa where pregnant girls and their children live and study in an institutional setting.

Learn from others

This could be from across the FAWE countries or from other like-minded partners like RECI.

Use Information

Use information from all the above to strengthen various area e.g. advocacy, resource mobilization, replication, scale-up, documentation etc.

⁵ Semambo Sempebwa, C., Tukesiga, J., Muhumure, D; & Nabende, F. (2016). Protecting Education for pregnant and parenting students: Lessons from successful interventions in post conflict Northern Uganda. In A. Okwany & R. Wazir (Eds.), *Changing Social Norms to Universalize Girls' Education in East Africa*. pp. 184-205. Antwerp, Belgium: Garant Publishers.