Youth Clubs in Tanzania Train Girls and Boys to Speak Out

Student-led Youth Clubs in Tanzania are providing girls and boys with the skills they require to speaking out on the challenges that hinder their successful schooling and integration into society.

The initiative is part of the UNESCO, UNFPA and UN Women Joint Programme on “Empowering Adolescent Girls and Young Women through Education in Tanzania”.

In Tanzania, students find challenges to complete their education in school such as corporal punishment and gender-based violence. Girls face more serious challenges such as teenage marriage, early pregnancies, and social-cultural norms. A lack of support from parents and pressure to help with housework is an example. Abused students find it difficult to report on cases of abuse due to lack of safe reporting mechanisms, such as guidance and counselling support, leading to them discontinuing their schooling.

Recognizing existing challenges, the project has been working closely with students, teachers, parents, and community members to create safer learning environments, with a focus on girl students, so that they can complete their schooling and make a successful transition to higher education and productive adulthood, as members of their communities. Training and awareness-raising activities provided include “student-friendly guidance” and “counselling training for teachers”, “community sensitisation on existing legal and regulatory framework that support girls education”; and, “gender-responsive pedagogy for teacher training”.
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Establishing youth clubs is a key component of the effort to respond to the challenges facing a girl child. In partnership with the Forum for African Women Educationalists Tanzania (FAWETZ) and Zanzibar Chapter (FAWEZ), training in the establishment of youth clubs was conducted in 30 primary and 15 secondary schools covered by the project in Sengerema, Kasulu and Mkoani district. The training adopted the concepts of "Safe Space clubs, developed by UNESCO and TUSEME (‘Let’s speak out’ in Swahili) clubs, developed by FAWETZ. Both concepts emphasize students-led platforms to enhance adolescent girls’ self-confidence and determination in remaining in school.

135 safe space clubs, involving more than 3,201 students and 255 teachers, were established. Student members of the safe space clubs were provided with training on gender equality; where to report or seek guidance and counselling support; and how to undertake collective action. Through the training, students were inducted on how to create diverse forms of art, such as drama, poetry, songs based on critical issues that students face, as well as, an open discussion with parents and teachers.

The effect of the training was immediate. In Kasulu, a boy that suffered from child abuse at home reported the abuse to a guidance and counselling teacher in his school, a day after the training. Other abuse cases were reported in the Sengerema district. Lylian Luca Rushambila, a guidance and counselling teacher, shared that students had started going to her for advice, sometimes, even in the presence of their parents.

The safe space-TUSEME clubs led sensitisation and training appears to have motivated students to speak out and to pursue their dreams. Sarah Daniof Fungo, Chairperson of youth club at the Nyampulukano secondary school, put it “I came to have a self-understanding about who we are, where we come from, what we want to achieve, and how to make our dreams come true. As girls, we learnt how to overcome different types of challenges.” Established youth clubs will continue to function as “safe platforms” for learners in Tanzania. Students like Sarah will become agents of change with peer students, teachers, and the community.

In a recent visit to the Mkoani district in Pemba, Zanzibar Island, with the Republic of Korea Embassy, the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) Tanzania Office, and UN Women, Safe Space-TUSEME youth club found in action. All expressed their satisfaction in the way girls conducted sensitization activities to their peers, teachers and community members. Grounded in the collective commitment of three UN agencies, UNESCO, UNFPA and UN Women, the Joint Programme addresses the needs of adolescent girls, teenage mothers and young women to have quality educational opportunities through a holistic approach. Supported by KOICA, the programme is set to benefit over 52,000 girls and boys in Tanzania.

More information:
- Video broadcasted on Zanzibar TV
- UNESCO-UNFPA-UN Women Joint Programme
- UNESCO’s work on education and gender equality