

Africa *woman*

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THE JOY OF LEARNING: Even though more girls are enrolling in school, the dropout rates remain high in much of Africa.

GHANA

So much goodwill, but it may come to nothing

By Golda Armah

EVEN as African countries step up efforts to educate girls, there are those who are sounding the alarm that it will be difficult to sustain such projects in the long term. "We are doing these programmes within a specific time frame and funding," says Augustine Agu of Unicef Ghana.

African governments have left the education of girls in the hands of donors, he argues, and this is just not good enough. "When such donors end these projects, sustainability becomes a problem," he adds. The challenge is for African governments to take the bull by the horn and commit resources to the education of girls.

Says Agu, who is the human resource director of education at Unicef: "This is a worthy cause. Given options, African families will always educate the boy instead of the girl. They are yet to accept the benefits of an educated woman to the society. Nothing stops African governments from giving scholarships to girls to the university level, providing them basic needs like sanitary pads, food items and clothes to retain them in school."

This will cost a great deal, but the benefits are immense. "We need African leaders who are innovative and will work within their limited resources to educate girls."

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ZIMBABWE

ONE STEP FORWARD, TWO STEPS BACK

By Sandra Nyaira

EDUCATION for all by the year 2000, the rallying call of the 1980s and 1990s, has been thoroughly discredited – thanks to the much-vaunted structural adjustment programmes of the Bretton Woods institutions.

Sticking faithfully to the prescription offered by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund that was expected to catapult developing countries into economic prosperity, governments across Africa happily cut spending on social services such as education and health, only to find themselves more ill than they ever had been.

Gabriel Machinga, a one-time minister for education in Zimbabwe, told *AfricaWoman* the country had taken a major leap ahead by providing free primary education, building schools across the country and training thousands of teachers. And then it started feeling the effects of the structural adjustment programmes.

Free education for all was

130 million children are being denied their right to education

scrapped not only in Zimbabwe but also in most African countries that were under the IMF-backed programmes, resulting in a drastic drop in the number of children going through the schooling system.

"Weighed down by international debts that were brought about by the economic recovery policies and bad governance, in some instances, governments in sub-Saharan Africa increasingly began to fail in their resolve to provide education for all by the year 2000," said Blessing Wakabikwa of the ministry of education.

Due to the economic and political meltdown, low morale and poor funding for the education sector, most of the trained teachers in Zimbabwe have left for greener pastures in countries like the United Kingdom, dealing a major blow to a system that once looked promising.

According to the Global Campaign for Education (GCE), one in two children in Africa and one in three children in South Asia fail to complete primary school, with girls accounting for the majority of the children out of school.

Ill-equipped classrooms, lack of relevant books and materials and a shortage of trained and motivated teachers means that their education is cut short and little is achieved in terms of learning outcomes. System flaws and indifference to the needs of learners, particularly the underprivileged and underdeveloped, have increased the wastage rates and resulted in huge losses in the returns on investments.

If education is a basic human right, an estimated 130 million children and 880 million adults are being denied justice every day. According to the GCE, which brings together aid agencies, non-govern-

mental organisations, child rights activists and teachers' and public sector unions, one in three adults across the world is illiterate.

The campaign was founded in 1999 by a group of NGOs and teachers' unions, including Education International, Oxfam International, Global March Against Child Labour, ActionAid, and national NGO networks from Bangladesh, Brazil and South Africa.

In Zimbabwe, the Campaign for Female Education (Camfed) – which claims sub-Saharan Africa is the only region in the world where access to education is falling drastically – is steering efforts to make sure education becomes a priority in the rural communities, where the majority of the people live. Ann Cotton, the organisation's executive director, says Camfed is dedicated to extending girls' access to education in Africa.

Camfed has gone into partnership with chiefs in Zimbabwe, Zambia and Ghana to help ensure girls go to school in rural communities

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So much goodwill

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Ghana's efforts to boost the education of girls indicates that the country depends on donor aid. ActionAid Ghana provides girls with mattresses and bunk beds. Unicef runs a project called Childscope, which works in four districts to improve rural primary education, particularly for girls.

The organisation also funds the African Girls' Education Initiative, operating in 30 African countries. Beneficiaries include 7,600 Algerian girls and women, part of a project integrating literacy lessons into income-generating activities. In Benin, the Girl-to-Girl project matches girls in upper primary school with those who are just entering school and are considered to be at risk of dropping out.

The Girls Education Unit was established within Ghana's Ministry of Education in 1997 to not only increase the enrolment of girls but also reduce the dropout rate and increase the transition rate from junior to secondary school. The unit also focuses on improving girls' performance in science, maths and technology.

The unit is in the process of establishing the Female Education Scholarship Scheme, which will provide needy girls with enrolment fees, uniforms, footwear, stationery and a stipend. It is also looking into incentive packages to encourage female teachers to work in remote hardship areas, primarily to act as role models for girls.

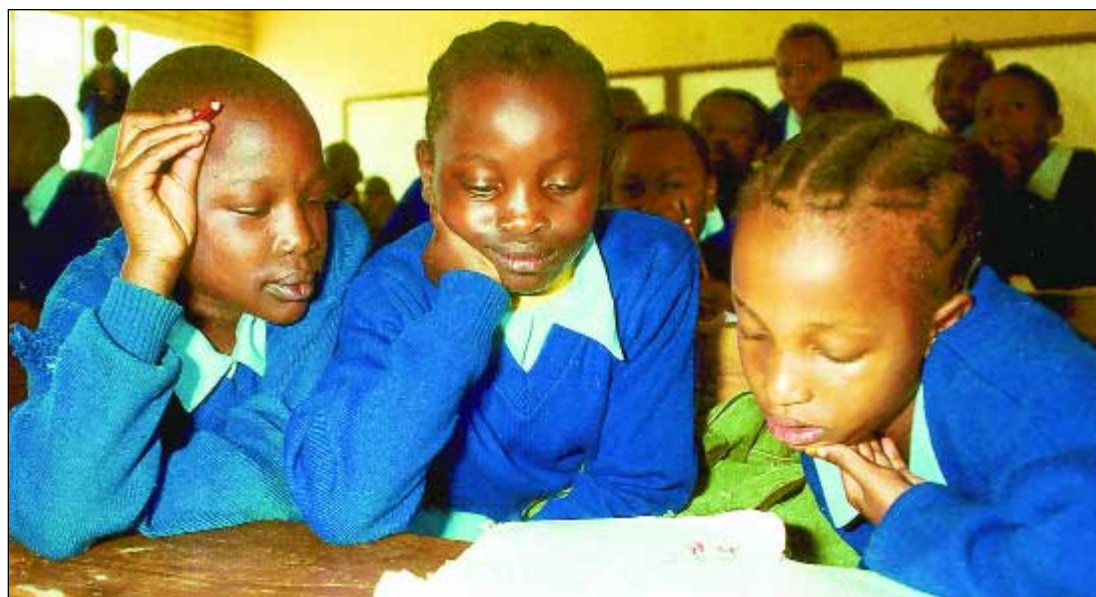
"This is our headache," says Christine Churcher, Minister of State for Basic, Secondary and Girl-Child Education. "There is so much goodwill, but unless direct steps are taken to eliminate all forms of inequity and exclusion in education, socio-economic development and international co-operation will remain unattainable."

Recent research by the Forum for African Women Educationalists Ghana identified major factors affecting girls' education as poverty, parental and community attitudes due to gender-stereotyping, the opportunity costs of sending daughters to school, lack of girl-friendly school structures, pregnancy, early marriage, gender-insensitive curriculum, and gender insensitivity in classroom environments.

"These are issue that should be handled on the policy level and requires a high level of political will," said the report.

Amina Raman, a 14-year-old who used to be a porter at the Makola Market in Accra, has been sent back to school under the "Back to School Programme".

She said: "I am happy to be back in school. I have been given a new uniform and my school fees will be paid for two years. But I wonder whether my parents can afford to pay my fees afterwards."



TIME WELL SPENT: Free education has opened the floodgates to many children out of school. But can the education system cope?

KENYA

It's not just quantity, quality also counts

By Betty Muriuki

PARENTS had every reason to rejoice when the new government elected in Kenya last December kept its word and honoured one of its key election pledges – providing free primary education. When schools opened after the Christmas break, there were stampedes as children who had been locked out of education for lack of fees turned up in their thousands.

In Rachuonyo, in the lakeside province of Nyanza, 27-year-old George Ouma, who had dropped out of school in 1990 after his father died, joined standard three, where most of his classmates were eight- and nine-year-olds. And in Busia, in the western part of the country, 13-year-old Alex Wandera joined the early childhood development class, popularly known as "baby class", where four- and five-year-olds are given basic lessons in counting and in reciting the alphabet.

Head teachers were overwhelmed. A directive from the Ministry of Education headquarters had warned that no child should be turned away, and they were obliged to accommodate all. Chaos reigned in the first week of school, with little learning going on as teachers went about trying to sort out the new arrivals.

The huge influx only aggravated an already bad situation, with many public schools already short of teaching staff and learning facilities. Home Affairs Minister Moody Awori said the government had miscalculated the number of pupils who would need primary education, basing their plans on five million children, while eight million turned up.

Despite the hiccups, Kenya is

Chaos reigns in first week of school under new system of free primary education

now well on its way to achieving its goal of universal primary education by 2005 and basic education for all (EFA) by 2015. In January, Education Minister George Saitoti released Sh519million (approximately US\$7 million) to schools for books, pens, chalks, chalkboards and other learning equipment to enable them to cope with the influx of students. The British government, Unicef and the World Bank have also stepped in to support the free education programme.

The quality of education has been a thorny issue in Kenya in the past decade, especially with regard to 8-4-4 education system. When the system was introduced in 1986, it was primarily meant to equip students with life skills.

A major criticism of the system, though, was that it laid too much emphasis on examinations, and the curriculum content was too heavy for the time allowed, resulting in unhealthy competition and stretching of learning times to evenings, weekends and school holidays. A commission was appointed to review the system, and it is currently being reformed.

But quality of education is as much about course content as it is about the environment in which that education is provided, and by whom. The government froze em-

ployment of teachers five years ago and there were about 40,000 trained unemployed teachers in the country last year, despite the fact that there was an estimated shortage of 31,000 teachers in public schools.

Quality learning demands, for example, that teachers have reasonably sized classes. The Ministry of Education recommends a teacher-pupil ratio of 1:35, which would give the teacher adequate time to give personalised attention to each pupil, to supervise class work and to mark books and examinations.

Overwhelmed by large numbers, many teachers resort to having pupils mark books and examination papers for each other — a system that can easily be abused.

Then, of course, teachers should be paid well enough to motivate them to do their job effectively.

A long-running tussle over a pay award pitted teachers against the previous government and has spilled over into the new establishment. Poorly paid teachers are unlikely to be in the frame of mind to give their best if they have to keep worrying about making ends meet, and they are likely to put their time and energy into projects that enable them to make an extra shilling.

But the greatest challenge will be to provide adequate physical facilities such as classrooms, laboratories, toilets and playing fields. While many achievers have passed through schools that had the barest facilities, often learning in run-down buildings with no desks, or out in the open with stones for chairs and trees for a roof, there is no denying that students with facilities that protect them from the vagaries of the weather are likely to learn better.

Back in school, this time she'll stay

For Cynthia Nyamuto, Kenya's free education policy is more than just a timely blessing. It is a new lease of life. She has returned to school one year after dropping out due to lack of fees. During that time, Nyamuto helped take care of her young siblings.

The 12-year-old was in a small private school in Kianda village in the sprawling Kibera slum of Nairobi. Her fees came to Sh1,000 shillings (US\$ 12) per month, but it was too much for her parents to raise. Nyamuto is now enrolled in class five at the nearby Ayany Primary School, a public school. "I am so glad that I can now go on with my education," she told *Africawoman*.

Her mother, vegetable vendor Jane Nyaboake, confided that due to levies in schools in Nairobi, she had planned to take her three children upcountry where she felt the fees were lower.

According to statistics from the Ministry of Education, there are 5.8 million children in the 18,000 primary schools in the country. A total of 3.3 million children were out of school for a myriad reasons. They included the children roaming in the streets, Aids orphans and those involved in various forms of child labour. Two-thirds of these children were girls, according to the local chapter of the Forum for African Women Educationalists.

Said Shiprah Gichaga, the national coordinator of FAWE Kenya: "This is a brave yet very important decision by the government. The achievement of education for all by the year 2015 will definitely benefit the girl-child."

Margaret Ngao of Unicef adds: "This will involve a lot of lobbying and sensitising the community on the importance of educating especially the girl-child, taking advantage of free education. It is important that children have access to education and that they are retained in school and offered quality basic education to enable them proceed to higher levels."

While Kenya is still grappling with teething problems in implementing free education, neighbouring Uganda is a veteran five years into its Universal Primary Education initiative. The UPE is credited with getting more girls into schools: Four children, two of whom must be girls, are entitled to free primary education.

—Ruth Omukhango, Kenya

April 2003

UGANDA

Food for learning scheme keeps girls in school

By Nabusayi L. Wamboka

WHEN Glorida Kiyonga turned up for her first class at Moroto Rainbow School, it was an experience that changed her life and brought joy to her parents.

The daughter of pastoralists in northern Uganda, Kiyonga was only allowed to go to school on condition that the World Food Programme (WFP) rewards her attendance with one- and-a-half kilos of maize flour and half a kilo of beans for each of the five days a week that she had to be there. "Sometimes I just come and get the food because I need to help my parents, but I also love to be at school," she said. "Maybe in future, I will go to a much better school."

She wants to be a teacher. Her enthusiasm has been fired by the WFP's school feeding programme designed to attract a higher enrolment of girls in primary school. Education is not a priority for parents in Karamoja. But poverty, insecurity, famine and drought have affected their way of life – making them more amenable to the WFP's use of food in exchange for allowing their children to attend school. The UN agency also has an adult literacy project and the Alternative Basic Education for Karamoja initiative.

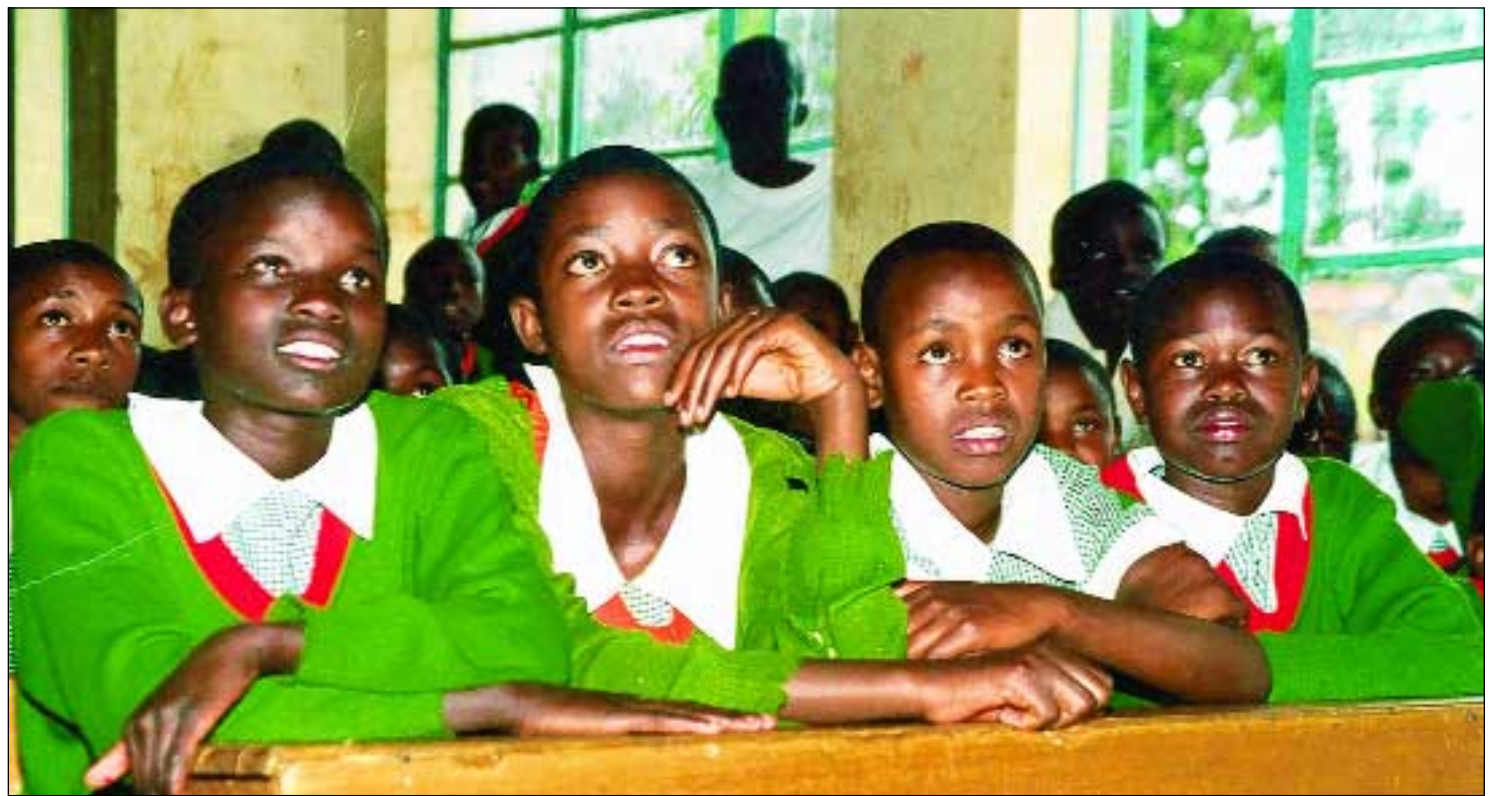
According to the head of WFP in Moroto, Saifuzzaman Abu Syed, the organisation supports schools with food for two meals a day. The morning porridge is for children aged five and below while the lunchtime meals are for all children.

"Even in this situation, we realised girls were still lagging behind. We wanted to fill that gap. Girls who attend school for five days consecutively take home some food for their parents," said Syed. "The enrolment has dramatically increased and this is very encouraging."

But the pastoralists are now using the girls as a bargaining chip. According to Namer Hellen, a teacher at Lumuno Primary School in Bokora County, the parents have threatened to withdraw their daughters if the rations are not raised to three kilogrammes.

She said: "The girls are very excited and are enthusiastic about school, many have been brought to school because of the hunger ravaging the district but, once here, they take an interest in school and want to stay."

Now their parents say nobody will help them with work at home



EXCITED AND ENTHUSIASTIC: African girls may love to study, but domestic chores often interfere with their schooling.

and they want the rations increased."

A kilogramme of posho costs Sh300 (US\$1 is equivalent to Sh1,850). Known for being warriors and cattle rustlers, the might of the Karimojong is crumbling under famine and loss of cattle. But they still prefer to send their children to the forests in search of wild fruits and firewood than send them to school. "There are many girls in school now but they keep going and coming back," said Nyangan Peace Deborah, a teacher at Moroto Rainbow School. "They love to study but, because their parents are becoming weaker because of the famine, it is the girls who have to do the domestic chores."

One of her pupils, Losika Anna, said her parents sent her to school so that she would not starve at home. "They give food at school so I eat every day. I love going to school because we sing songs and I play with my friends. They give me food to take to my parents," she said.

The mud-and-wattle school was built by the local community and most of the teachers are volunteers. Said Timo Teko, the chief who donated the land: "We did not

start it as a school. We wanted a centre where children could be collected and controlled. Because most of their parents are herdsmen, the children would roam the streets and villages in search of food. Something positive has come out of this. WFP is feeding the children and they are learning new things all the time."

At Lumuno Primary School, 311 children were registered by the end of February. The attendance register shows that girls top the number of new pupils at primary one, with 105 girls to 88 boys. By primary seven, however, there are seven boys and no girls.

The Alternative Basic Education for Karamoja project has been more successful in educating children in Karamoja without completely cutting them off from their lifestyle. According to Margarita Focas Licht of Save the Children Norway, ABEK is a joint project of the Ministry of State for Karamoja Affairs, the district education authorities and Save the Children Norway. The Karimojong took the initiative to develop an alternative way of learning for their children.

Karamoja is an arid, remote region in northeastern Uganda. The

people depend on livestock for their survival. Growing crops provides an uncertain source of food in this harsh, dry environment. Until recently, the Karimojong lifestyle left little room for literacy. Only an estimated 11.5 percent of the people are literate.

According to the Save the Children Norway Enabling Education NETWORK newsletter, the pen has a special history among the Karimojong. During World War II, the British came to Karamoja to recruit young men. With a pen, they wrote down the names of the men. Many did not return. As a result, the pen was cursed and symbolically buried. Nevertheless, the Karimojong recognise the need for literacy. In a symbolic ceremony in 1995, they lifted the curse their grandfathers had put on the pen.

In a country full of overcrowded classrooms, Karamoja's classrooms are nearly empty. Considering formal schooling largely irrelevant to their lifestyle, most parents don't send their children to school. Schools have been geared to formal learning for children aspiring to the urban life and a departure from traditional society.

The Karimojong see ABEK as

their own initiative, and the participating communities are the driving force behind the project. Ten learning areas have been selected, including livestock education, crop production, peace and security, human health and other relevant subjects. Basic reading, writing and arithmetic are integrated in these learning areas in a context familiar to the children.

The facilitators conduct lessons under trees before the workday begins and also when it has ended. Girls bring younger siblings, for whom they are responsible, and boys can learn to read and write while watching their goats graze nearby. Parents and elders also attend the lessons to follow their children's progress and learn a few things themselves. Instruction is in their own language and the teaching methods are active and involve traditional songs and dances.

The elders also act as facilitators for specific subject areas such as indigenous history and survival skills within their community. Started in 1998, ABEK is still in its pilot phase, with an enrolment of approximately 7,000 children. "There is still a lot of hard work ahead to ensure the sustainability and growth of the programme," said Licht. "But its success has exceeded all expectations and can be measured by the children's own enthusiasm."

"Girls who attend school for five days consecutively take home some food for their parents"

EDITORIAL

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Africawoman is produced by 40 women journalists from Uganda, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Ghana who meet in a virtual newsroom once a month. The information produced is then linked to community radios throughout Africa to reach grassroots women.

Send our girls to school and keep them there

Education is a basic right. It is also the cornerstone of poverty eradication. More than half a century after this was enshrined in the UN Declaration on Human Rights, however, education is in crisis in the world's poorest countries: 125 million children, nearly 60 percent of them girls, are out of primary school. All too often, even those children who are in school receive an education so curtailed that they acquire few of the tools they need to escape poverty.

At the Millennium Summit of 2000, the governments of the world promised concrete steps to tackle this education crisis. This commitment was reaffirmed at the Special Session on Children last May and the World Summit on Sustainable Development in the same year. In effect, the world's leaders endorsed gender equity in primary and secondary education by 2005 and universal completion of primary education and a 50 percent reduction in adult illiteracy by 2015.

Subsequent experience has demonstrated that without concerted action by both donors and the governments of developing countries, these promises might as well have been made to be broken.

We at *Africawoman* believe that donors and rich countries are renegeing on their promise to see to it that all children, especially girls, get good quality education. Of the G8 members, only the Netherlands has made a concrete commitment by offering US\$125 million. The rest simply pay lip service to a cause that would change the course of history.

Aid flows to developing countries did not prosper during the last decade of the twentieth century. Statistics show that they peaked in 1991 and declined thereafter. By 2000, grants and concessional loans to developing countries had fallen from US\$60 billion to approximately US\$50 billion. Most of this money has been directed to the wars, diseases and drought that continue to ravage Africa. Education has had to take a back seat, even though it is the ultimate solution to the ills that afflict Africa.

Donor programmes in Africa are usually fragmented and incoherent, and often reflect donor priorities at the expense of country needs. This places an enormous burden on developing countries, and undermines their capacity to plan and budget for education.

Though the new Kenyan government has lived up to its election pledge of free education, it faces an enormous task providing the facilities required to turn this into a meaningful strategy. The country has not received any serious aid for more than a decade, and the reservoir of resources is so depleted that the free education campaign is jeopardised by lack of classrooms for the new entrants, lack of books and even a critical shortage of teachers.

It is not entirely a tale of misery: Kenyan citizens abroad have set up their own fund for educating deserving but needy children. They may not be able to rescue all the three million-plus children who were out of school for lack of fees, but it is these self-help initiatives that opened up education to the poor in the immediate post-independence era.

This special edition is about African girls, whose access to education is often limited by culture, poverty, war and HIV/Aids. In these pages, you will read all about the impact of backward attitudes and beliefs on the lives of African girls and, by extension, African women. You will also read about the personal and community efforts that are being made to overcome some of these handicaps. You will learn of community efforts to take girls out of the burden of domestic chores and keep them safe in boarding facilities; we also have stories on international efforts to entice parents to send their daughters to school and keep them there.

The main challenge, of course, is to scale up these case studies into policies and direct interventions that can benefit girls en masse. And this is where the donors come in. It would help a great deal if African countries were not overloaded with unrealistic and counterproductive commitments without a corresponding undertaking by donors to improve the quality of their aid campaigns.

It is time for the international community to deliver on its promises to the world's children.

POINT OF VIEW

Where are they when the roll call is made?

By Eunice Menka, Ghana

Akpenne Agudey lost her youth during the three-hour drive from her rural home in Kpando district in the Volta region to the capital, Accra. She was going to the city to assist her rich aunt, who was enjoying a boom in business.

A year earlier, Akpenne's illiterate mother, who had to single-handedly bring up four children after her husband took to drinking, had weighed the immediate benefits of getting some money from her daughters labour in Accra against her long-term stay in school.

The only girl among her four children, Akpenne dropped out of primary six at the age of 11 and became the family's sacrificial lamb. Having had to grow up overnight, she joined Ghana's teeming population of child labourers who jostle each other on the busy streets of Accra.

From a quiet rural background, she was suddenly thrust into an environment peopled by reckless drivers, dangerous criminals and hazardous conditions – all the while trying to sell wares ranging from dog chains, drinking water to sweets.

With over 70 percent of Africa's population living below the poverty line, girls are often pulled out of school and sent into child labour to help generate an income for their families. Little consideration is given to the hazardous circumstances in which they often work.

Girls are also less likely to be enrolled in school in the first place, and are more likely to be withdrawn from school when the household requires unpaid labour for its domestic chores, or when parents have difficulty meeting the costs of their children's education. Even when they are fortunate enough to go to school, they must also contribute to domestic chores traditionally assigned to girls.

In areas where firewood is the fuel used for cooking, the duty of fetching firewood falls on girls, sometimes keeping them away from class or making them late for lessons.

The same situation prevails where water is limited or must be fetched from long distances. And then there is the task of looking after younger siblings.

The gross enrolment ratio for boys in primary

school in Ghana was 86.7 percent in 1990, compared with a rate of about 72 percent for girls. In Nigeria, the national literacy rate for girls is only 56 percent compared with 72 percent for boys. The net enrolment in Sokoto, one of six states targeted by the Unicef African Girls' Education Initiative, is 15 percent to 59 percent for boys.

A 1998 report by Alan Guttmacher Institute, a US-based organisation involved in reproductive health research, policy analysis and public education activities, says that fewer than half of young women all over the world, especially in developing countries, are able to get basic education.

In Burundi, the Central African Republic, Mali and Niger, fewer than 10 percent of girls receive at least seven years of schooling; in eight other countries, the proportion is no more than 25 percent. In Ghana, Kenya and Tanzania, it rises above 60 percent, but only in Botswana and Zimbabwe do 75 percent or more of girls receive basic education.

Although the education of girls has received a great deal of attention in recent times, there is slow progress in implementing programmes to get more girls to benefit from at least basic education—due mainly to traditions and poverty.

According to Ghana's Situation Analysis of Children and Women 2000, girls contribute more to the child labour pool than boys, with 12.3 percent of girls in contrast to 9.8 percent of boys who were economically active in 1997.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantees children's right to be protected from work that can be described as exploitative and haz-

ardous to their health, education or development. Ghana's 1992 constitution reinforces this position.

Though unquestionable, the political will to enforce child labour laws and other factors that impact on the education of girls is compromised by high poverty levels in many African countries. Yet it is a fact that when girls are educated they develop skills and acquire information that have a wide-ranging impact on social life.

It is, therefore, imperative that educationists, policy-makers and governments make a conscious effort to focus greater attention and resources on issues and factors affecting the education of girls. An educated woman is not only an asset to her community but is more likely to take steps to maintain her own health and that of her family.

Girls are also less likely to be enrolled in school in the first place, and are more likely to be withdrawn from school when the household requires unpaid labour for its domestic chores, or when parents have difficulty meeting the costs of their children's education.



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ZIMBABWE

Courage under fire

Celebrated Cabinet Minister and war veteran Joyce Mujuru goes back to class, proving that it's never too late to learn

By Ropafadzo Mapimhidze

WHEN Joyce Mujuru became Zimbabwe's first and youngest woman Cabinet minister soon after independence in 1980, she had nothing in terms of academic qualifications. What she had was courage and determination to steer the women's movement that would ensure gender equality in Zimbabwe, especially in education.

Twenty-three years later, Mujuru boasts six 'O' levels and has registered for an accounting degree at the recently launched Women's University in Africa that is based in Marondera, Zimbabwe.

This is no mean achievement for a woman who went to war with no high school qualification and became a wife and mother of two small children during the liberation struggle. Her busy schedule as minister meant that she would be busy meeting her constituency and traveling. Studying had to be squeezed in somewhere.

Mujuru was born to a peasant family in Mt Darwin. She was one of 12 children and was determined to go to war against her parents' wish. She opted out of school in 1973, aged 18, and joined the liberation army — and soon discovered that war was deadly business. But rather than run home to mama, she adopted the name Teurai Ropa, which literally means to "spill blood".

On February 17, 1974, the group she was assigned to had an encounter with Rhodesian Forces and scattered, leaving Mujuru to her

own devices. She stumbled over a wounded colleague, who gave her his gun and told her to run. She recalled: "A helicopter crew saw me. They were coming down for me and I fired. Incredibly, I hit the machine and there was a lot of black smoke and it crashed. A big explosion followed."

It was the beginning of a whole new way of life, especially after two members of the company, who had seen her bring down the helicopter, spread word of her bravery.

"My war experiences changed my life," said Mujuru, who went on to become the secretary for education in the ZANU-PF politburo. "I became very strong and learned to make decisions and not to wait for men to decide."

Mujuru is a bold woman who speaks openly about her life. She is also very modest about her achievements. Her current position as minister for water resources and rural development is just the latest of many accolades won due to her contributions in the war. She was first named minister for youth, sport and recreation soon after independence and a year later became the minister for community development and women's affairs. She has also been minister for information, posts and telecommunication and acted as minister for defence following the death of Moven Mahachi in a car crash.

It was a befitting job for a woman who carried automatic sub-machine guns and hand grenades during the war. She rose to the rank of commander of a camp in Chimoio,



Joyce Mujuru: "War experiences changed my life."

in Mozambique that grew to become the largest camp in the territory. The women's movement was greatly disappointed when she was not appointed to become officially the minister of defence.

During one of her military missions to command a group of women operating around the Kanyemba area in Mount Darwin, she met Tapfumaneyi Rex Nhongo Mujuru. They later married and he went on to become the first commander of the Zimbabwe National Army. She would have loved to work in the army but she decided to delve into politics and leave her husband run the army.

One of her main duties as secretary for education in the new politburo was to ensure that the ministry of education carried out the education policy. Some of these programmes included adult literacy, non-formal education and preschool. Mujuru, who was then 25, realised that because of lack of that formal education, it would be difficult for her to deal with issues she would come across as a cabinet minister.

Having left school with hardly any high school qualification, she had to pursue much of her education after independence. Her ministerial position did not deter her from humbly sitting down in class at the University of Zimbabwe in the evenings to pursue the schooling she missed as a result of her commitment to the war of liberation.

Much criticised for not being fluent in English in the early days, she retorted: "How come it is acceptable when the Chinese, Germans and all other foreigners speak in broken English? English is not my first language."

These days, she is so fluent in the language that it comes as a shock to Zimbabweans who knew her as a young minister. But then courage and determination might as well be Joyce Mujuru's other names. She won the 2000 parliamentary elections with a landslide in her Mt Darwin constituency.

Tough and down to earth, Mujuru believes all women should work for leadership roles and be accepted by men as leaders. Now aged 48,

Joyce Teurai Ropa Mujuru has proved that there is nothing to stop Zimbabwean woman making it to the top.

She also is one of four ministers appointed at independence who still remain in the Cabinet — proof that she definitely is an asset to the government. Zimbabwe's ministry of education, sport and culture was set to slash adult literacy from more than 30 percent to below 20 percent by 2000. An education policy document to year 2000 was drawn up to give a fresh approach to the battle against illiteracy by upgrading the quality of education and increasing the number of tutors.

"The strategy and targets are the reduction of adult illiteracy rates from 38 percent in 1992 to under 20 percent in 2000 through improvements in quality and quantity of adult education, improved quality and quantity of materials," said a spokesperson of the ministry. The Literacy Organisation of Zimbabwe has described Zimbabwe as having one of the highest literacy rates in Africa.

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ZIMBABWE

Donkeys help to change women's fortunes

A rural library scheme offers a second chance to women denied an opportunity to go to school while they were young

By Sifanele Ndlovu

FOR decades, women in Zimbabwe and most of sub-Saharan Africa were permitted to stay in school only long enough to learn how to read and write. Then it was time to get married. With the men expected to move to towns and cities in search of work and women expected to stay home and till the land, all that women needed to know was how to write letters to their husbands and read the replies.

As a result of this historical disadvantage, women constitute the majority of the illiterate in most countries in Africa. Unesco estimates that sub-Saharan Africa has an estimated adult illiterate population of 141 million, 61 percent of them women. In addition to the gender gap, there is a gap in terms of access to education between rural and urban areas. Urban centres, which have better facilities – such as libraries, computers and other technology – retain girls in school for longer periods.

It is just the kind of challenge that the Rural Libraries and Resource Development Centre rose up to when it started donkey-drawn mobile libraries in remote areas to bring books to groups long left out of the learning loop. Started in 1990, the centre now runs more than 300 community libraries. Says the secretary-general of the centre, Obadiah Moyo: “Most of our rural librarians are women. Because our project had a gender training programme attached to it, a lot of women rose to the occasion of and took advantage of their improved access to reading material to go back to school.”

Jesta Moyo (61) of Matobo district in Southern Zimbabwe is one of the women who defied age to take advantage of the opportunity

to return to school. At the age of 48, Moyo decided to enrol for evening classes at Donkwe Donkwe Primary School — her children's former school. She scored better results than some of the young pupils who sat the Grade Seven public examination the same year. She went on to register for ‘O’ level examinations in 2000.

“My success in the Grade Seven examinations gave me the courage to continue with my education,” she says. “I made a resolution, there and then, to pursue my education as far as I could. The fact that I was the local community librarian made it easy for me to access books and guaranteed my success.”

In Nkayi, one of the women community librarians, Sihle Mloyi, has since been employed to run the first council run library. She also continues to coordinate all mobile libraries in the district. “

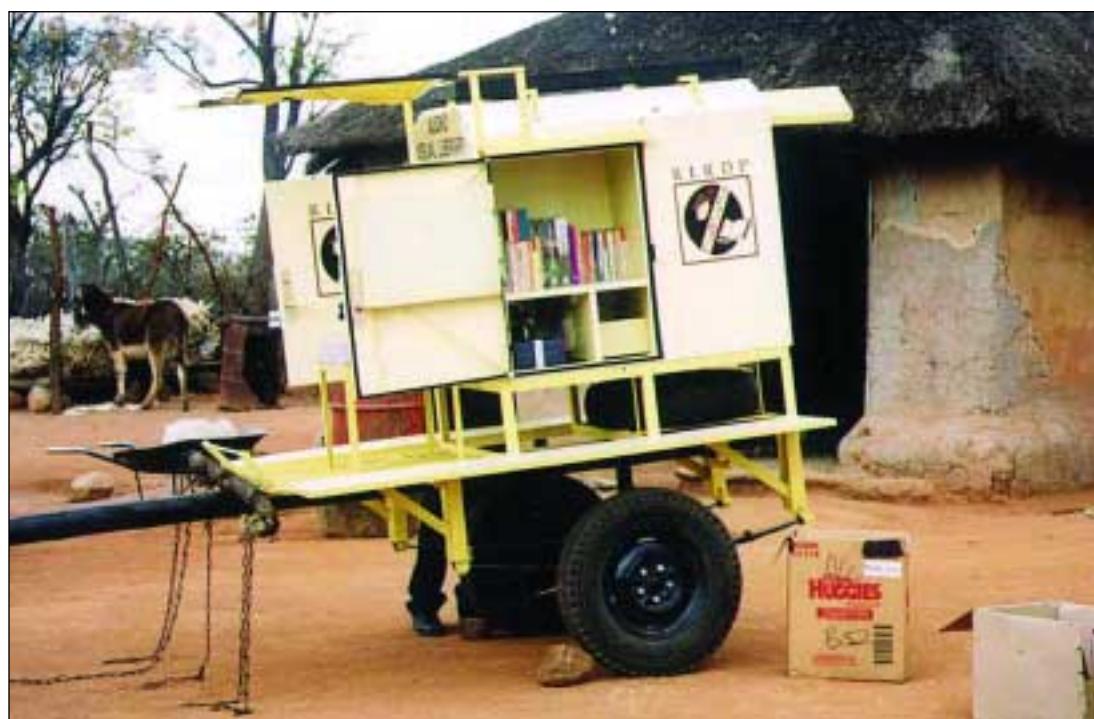
Before the library project that she now runs, Nkayi District had no library at all. She has become an inspiration to many other women in the district who see her as an example of how it is possible to go back to school after dropping out and still be a success,” says Obadiah Moyo.

Women often drop out from school either because parents prefer to use their scarce resources to educate boys, or because they fall pregnant before completing their education, “In all the districts where we have established libraries, 75 percent of the women who become members have enrolled for adult literacy classes, with others later branching out to pursue formal education and write public examinations while others opt to go for skills training,” he adds.

This is bound to have an impact



WHERE THERE IS A WILL: Donkey-drawn mobile libraries take books to readers in remote areas



COMMUNITY EFFORTS: Zimbabwe has more than 300 rural libraries, many of them managed by women.

on the education of children as women who themselves are empowered are more likely to encourage their children to remain in school. “The women are not just motivated to pursue an education themselves but also emphasise the importance of education to their children and other women. They have become beacons of inspiration to other people in their communities where education is concerned,” said Moyo.

Women are the majority in adult literacy classes, according to the Adult Literacy Organisation of Zimbabwe. They are also the majority of those involved in income generating projects, which non-governmental organisations use to promote literacy. According to Unesco, there has been a shift in the approach to literacy in the past few

years from merely emphasising the ability to read and write to “functional literacy”, which provides useful skills for survival in today's changing world.

“Being able to read, write and calculate in today's complex world is not enough. Skills training, health and environmental education, and computer literacy are increasingly considered part of the literacy endeavour,” says the UN agency.

As part of the UN's Education For All project, the world's governments made a commitment at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, to reduce the world's adult illiteracy rate from the current level of 21 percent to 10 percent by the year 2015. They will have to work with civil society to increase the literacy rates in their countries to at

least 90 percent, up from the current 68.7 percent.

A review of education in nine African countries lauded Zimbabwe, Botswana, South Africa, Lesotho, Namibia, Cape Verde and Tunisia for having high gross female enrolment rates. But they still have a long way to go to achieve the goals set in Dakar.

The African continent remains the poorest in the world despite being one of the richest in terms of resources. It has been argued elsewhere that this is directly related to its high rate of illiteracy. A senior World Bank education adviser told a conference held to mark World Literacy Day that, “Poverty is most important worldwide problem today, especially in African countries, and literacy is one of the keys to overcoming it.”

April 2003

ZIMBABWE

It takes a village ... to educate a girl

Discrimination against girls begins in the early stages of life and continues through childhood and into adulthood

By Sibongile Ncube

It takes Sambulo Khumalo two hours to walk the seven kilometres to school each morning. More often than not, she leaves home without breakfast and she is tired and sweating by the time she arrives.

The 40 other pupils in Sambulo's class are no better off. Their classroom is dilapidated and some pupils either squat on the floor or share the chairs and broken desks. In front of the class stands a teacher who can barely summon the energy to attend to the needs of the children.

At nine, Sambulo looks far older than her age: Life is tough in her village in Mtshabezi area, in the southern region of the country (about 120km south of Bulawayo) and she has had to combine schoolwork and domestic chores like fetching firewood and food for her family. So grown up is her world view that her father is even contemplating pulling her out of school and marrying her off to a headman in the village.

Asked how she feels about the likelihood of being married off at such an age, Sambulo is quick to point out that this is the norm in the village. Girls marry early here and, anyway, her three brothers will continue with school. She tells *AfricaWoman*, with a wry smile: "I wanted to be a nurse when I finish school so that I will help those who are sick, but all that is a dream now. I have to follow what my father says. My friends dropped out of school some time ago. My father would rather I helped my mother with the domestic chores."

Fourteen-year-old Catherine, a second form pupil from Mawane Secondary School in Gwanda, is lucky to have come this far. But the going is tough as she has to balance her school work and household duties. "I do all the housework when I come home from



An improvised classroom for a primary school built by resettled villagers at Solusi Farm, about 100km south-west of Bulawayo.

school. I finish around nine o'clock. I then have to wash my school uniform. I will start studying at half-past nine, when everyone is asleep. I won't even understand a single thing this late," she says. Her male classmates are not encumbered by such concerns.

African girls are often the victims of gender discrimination rooted in traditional and religious practices, and they are often denied education and a meaningful role in the development process. For these children, the springtime of life is wasted in idle dalliance and misadventure and the opportunity to develop and improve their capabilities and skills remains a distant dream.

The discrimination begins in the early stages of life and continues through childhood and into adulthood. They are the victims of harmful attitudes and practices such as son preference and discrimination in food allocation. For rural girls, walking long distances to school often leads to drop out.

According to the United Nations Fund for Children, 39 percent of primary school age

boys and 45 percent of primary school age girls are out of school in sub-Saharan Africa. The organisation's State of the World's Children report says that not only do fewer girls than boys enrol in school but more girls than boys drop out of school, repeat grades or do not finish school.

In Zimbabwe, girls' access to education has been further limited by the drought ravaging Southern Africa. At least 7.8 million people are in need of drought relief food throughout the country, according to government statistics. Minister of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare July Moyo told the local Press that an estimated six million people who live in rural areas and another two million in urban centres have been seriously affected by last year's drought. School fees have become a luxury for families unable to meet their needs through subsistence farming.

A non-governmental organisation working with rural communities on the education of the girlchild, CamFed, has revealed that an ever-growing number of families are forced

to make the choice as to which of their children should attend school. Boys win hands down because they are considered to have a better chance of future paid work crucial to the survival of poor families. The situation's even worse for girls in secondary school, where the cost of schooling is considerably higher. CamFed supports girls in 10 rural districts. All direct costs are met, including school fees, uniform and stationery, alongside a social programme designed to build confidence and self-esteem.

In Nyaminyami, local communities have partnered with a local NGO in building a hostel to cut the distance girls have to travel to school. The hostel, built on land donated by the local chief using locally made bricks and the traditional grass thatch, provides secure term-time accommodation for 60 girls.

Girls live in groups of 12 in round huts set in a fenced area with a guarded gateway. There are communal washing and toilet facilities as well as a kitchen where they can prepare the food they bring from home along with the produce they grow in the vegetable garden on site. Best of all, they are able to study in the night in their new home away from home — far from the poverty, household responsibilities and shortage of paraffin that would make evening study virtually impossible.

Schools have yet to be built in the newly resettled farms occupied by more than 300,000 families, but some communities have come up with makeshift structures. Despite a government commitment to building schools and access roads, however, student and teacher morale is low. There are also proposals for satellite schools, but these may have to be put on hold as attention is diverted to feeding the starving population.

The Girl Child Network Trust argues that the education of girls can go a long way in alleviating the major crises faced by families in rural Zimbabwe in the face of the scourge of HIV/Aids, hunger and poverty. The challenge for Africa in the new millennium will be to find the means to help the continent's children develop their power to live creatively.

KENYA

Beginning of the end for girls in school

By Mildred Barasa

CAMPAIGNS against female genital mutilation have focused mainly on health and social considerations. Now add to the list concerns over the education of girls.

The very excitement that comes with the ceremony, says human rights activist Oloo Habil, often means the beginning of the end for girls and schooling. Just as male circumcision is usually accompanied by merrymaking, girls' circumcision is attended by celebration — at the expense of the girls.

As the feasting season continues, girls now considered adult engage in premature sex. Many fall pregnant and have to drop out of school.

During the period when the girls are instructed in traditional family life, they are exposed to information that may encourage early sex among adolescents. "Among the Meru of Eastern Province, the girls are taught that sex with circumcised boys is okay as long as the boys demand it decently," says Oloo, who is a programme officer with the National Focal Point on FGM Eradication.

Of the 52 ethnic groups in Kenya, only four do not practice FGM. Although the government has outlawed what is also described as female cutting or circumcision, it is still practiced in secret. Unguarded sex may expose the girls to diseases such as syphilis, gonorrhoea

and HIV/Aids as well as premature motherhood.

"Among the Maasai, once a girl is circumcised at the age of 12 to 13 she is considered a woman ready for marriage. Most of these girls are withdrawn from school (normally at standard five or six) to undergo the ceremony. They are then married off to suitors identified by their parents," says Oloo.

Ironically, this distorted perspective means that circumcised girls feel superior after the initiation. "Girls who have been circumcised and have undergone seclusion normally have this aura around them. They consider themselves superior and more often than not hang out in cliques," Oloo adds.

Alice Moraa, a form two student in Don Bosco Secondary School in Nairobi, admits that she once suffered the same attitude. "The kind of teachings during the initiation period cannot allow one to pursue her education in a smooth way. During the process, girls are told that they are now adults, unlike those who are uncircumcised.

"With full knowledge that some of our female teachers, especially those that are not from the Kisii community, are not circumcised, girls develop disrespect for them. It is the mistaken belief that the uncircumcised women are not full grown women that brings about the problem."

Moraa dropped out of school just

after the initiation ceremony. According to her aunt, Josephine Kerubo, the girl had just joined standard eight when she was expelled from school due to what the teachers of her rural school described as the girls' "misconduct in school and disrespect for teachers".

Moraa is one of the lucky few. After intense counseling, her aunt managed to get her into a school in the capital, far away from the negative influences at home. According to the National Focal Point on FGM Eradication, 85 to 114 million girls and women worldwide suffer the ritual.

In Africa, it is estimated that more than two million girls are mutilated each year.

PLACE

One step forward, two back

From Page 1

where children walk long distances to the nearest institution. Said Cotton: "Girls' educational success is relatively rare and chiefs can play a vital role in creating the social framework in which they are encouraged, and in which their success can be celebrated. We need to bring chiefs to the centre of discussion on development issues."

Chief Mutekedza of Zimbabwe has been working with Camfed for the past seven years. "Culture has been one of the major problems leading to the under-development of the girl child before we even start talking of problems related to national planning in terms of education," he said. "From the time I first got in contact with Camfed and learnt how we could work together with NGOs to improve and ensure the goal for education for all, I have never looked back."

Chief Mutekedza is now working with other chiefs from most parts of Zimbabwe and Zambia and sharing experiences and lessons as to how they can play a crucial role to promoting the enhancement of the girl child and children in general through education.

Also contributing towards education and development in sub-Saharan Africa is the Cannon Collins Educational Trust for Southern Africa (CCETSA). The organisation notes that girls and women's participation at all education levels is falling fast, hence the need for them to continuously work in partnership with other NGOs in the region to ensure more people are educated to eradicate poverty, ignorance and related issues.

Chief Mutekedza notes that free, basic education is essential and urges governments the world over to reduce spending on the military and focus instead on eradicating poverty and diseases and promote economic growth.

The GCE is asking governments to involve citizens' groups, teachers and communities in developing strategies for free quality education, especially at the primary level. It wants governments to increase spending on basic education, with priority going to schools and teachers serving the most disadvantaged groups. The coalition is also urging the World Bank and rich Western countries to increase aid and debt relief for basic education and establish a mechanism to back national plans. Civil society organisations, says the GCE, must hold their governments and international institutions accountable for upholding children's right to education and delivering on Education for All goals.

ZIMBABWE

Five head of cattle for every girl plucked out of school

Bride price an economic issue for fathers who get wealth and prestige – courtesy of daughters

By Grace Githaiga

THE board is quite clear. It reads "Rumbek Girls Primary School – Educate Girls for Better Future". Rumbek is the administrative town of the Sudanese Peoples Liberation Movement (SPLM). In the midst of war and hardship in Southern Sudan, there is still some semblance of normalcy here.

The SPLM, which is the de facto government in the south of the country, has made conscious efforts to encourage free primary education for girls. You would then expect the schools to be jammed with girls thirsting for knowledge and education, but the well-intentioned move has not exactly borne fruit.

Schools continue to attract very few girls, mainly because of early marriage. A girl may be in school and then she starts her menses. In the Dinka culture of yesteryears, this would call for a celebration and the girl would be forbidden to eat or drink until a feast was held. Some people still celebrate the fact that now the 13- or 14-year-old has become a "woman". Even those who do not feast acknowledge the "fact" that the girl is now mature and ready for "her duties of life".

Soon, the men start competing to marry her. The competition can be so stiff that suitors raise their bids to 120 to 200 head of cattle, particularly when the girl is deemed to come from a good family. And these are the white bulls with extremely long horns.

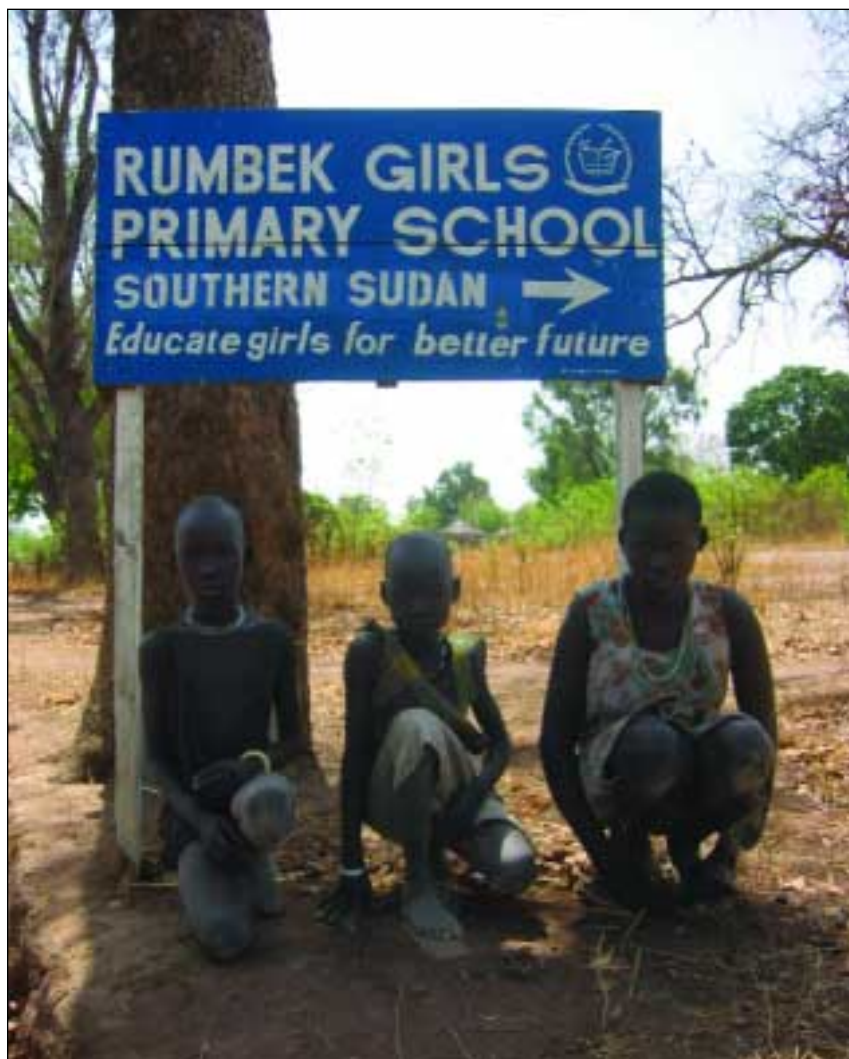
At this point, the Dinka girl has no identity of her own and it is taboo for her to disobey her father. Bride price is an economic issue for the father who, in no time, acquires wealth and prestige – courtesy of his teenaged daughter. No matter her age and the bride price, she cannot go back home when she is mistreated. Few parents are willing to return the cattle.

Some girls have started resisting early marriage. This has not helped the cause of primary education, for the simple reason that parents now seem to think that education for girls makes them "big headed", says Deng Arok, who works for Operation Lifeline Sudan.

But women have decided to be proactive and have come together as mothers and put a proposal to the authorities: For each of their daughters plucked out of school for marriage, the father has to pay five heads of cattle to the government.

It would be a very painful thing for any South Sudanese man to part with five head of cattle since cows are regarded as a source of wealth, prestige and pride. Families strive to have as many cattle as possible.

This proposition was made in a recent workshop organised by Unicef and Unifem in Rum-



FAIR DEAL: Southern Sudanese mothers are determined to keep their daughters in school at all costs.

bek to take stock of the effects of war on Sudanese women. It is anticipated that the New Sudan will take the proposition into consideration once the peace agreement between the government of Khartoum and the SPLM is signed in June this year.

The proposition was received well by the governor and the lawmakers. But some women are pessimistic, perhaps with some justification. Since men make the laws, they are not so sure it will be taken very well.

They hope to continue lobbying and believe that if they keep up the pressure, they will get somewhere.

The number of girls enrolling in schools in Southern Sudan is quite high, but the statistics begin to drop at standard four. The rate of dropout rises with the class levels. Besides early marriage, high levels of poverty contribute significantly to the poor representation of girls in school.

Some have to leave because they cannot afford

It's a clash of cultures as parents weigh the "benefits" of marriage vis-a-vis going to school

uniforms. A 14-year-old wearing a skirt and no top shyly said that she preferred to stay at home than go to school in that condition. Her breasts have started growing and boys used to tease her by touching them. She felt humiliated and, since her parents could not afford to buy her the complete uniform, she opted out.

Some of the girls mature early and have their menses while still in primary school. Most parents cannot buy them sanitary pads. Indeed, one elderly woman disclosed that they themselves use "pieces of old cloth". Rather than be made fun of, many girls choose not to go to school.

Grace Dairo, who is training Sudanese women on life skills in health and HIV/Aids, argues that there are few role models for the girls. "The war has created migrations and displacement. The cultures and norms have faded and the levels of poverty are high," she says.

Due to insecurity and frequent raids, some parents have opted to keep their children close. Enrolling them in school in such circumstances is out

of the question. Both girls and boys have little or no guidance and counseling on their developing bodies and parents need to be encouraged not to shy away from their responsibilities. Some see no incentive for enrolling their daughters in school, despite the fact that it is free, because they have an eye on the cows they will bring to the family when they are finally married.

The education system is in crisis, says Heather Benoy, who had developed a life skills curriculum on behalf of Unicef. She points out that there are not enough teachers; even those who are in schools are volunteers.

"No one is willing to give incentive to teachers. This is pushed to the community, which cannot afford it," she says.

John Maker Paul, a form one student at Rumbek Senior Secondary School, says that they are supposed to be taking 12 subjects but are only able to study for two because they have no teachers.

The students are well aware that there is no money to pay their teachers. Life is difficult for boys, who have to pay for their own fees. Maker had to farm and sell the produce to raise his fees. At 15, he is wise for his age and tells me his six sisters – all younger than him – are in school. "Even if we get wealth through girls, the cows may die," he points out, "but with a good education, my sisters will have a good life."

April 2003

KENYA

Pregnant girls have their day in school

By Lilian Juma

It is one of the most vexed question in the education system: Should girls who have had babies be allowed back in school? Though they have theoretically been able to do so in Kenya since a policy change in 1997, girls seeking to do so have had to contend with reluctant teachers and contempt by fellow students. Many have simply not had the courage to face up to the moral judgment passed on girls who fall pregnant while still in school.

This is set to change, however, in the new regime that has led to free education, with a special focus on making it possible for girls to start and remain in school.

"Girls can go back to school after pregnancy," says Education Minister

George Saitoti.

"This is important, particularly in recognition that majority of girls who are in that situation do not like it; they are forced into it by society. We are not encouraging pregnancy among girls, but we can't afford to sideline some segments of society if we hope to achieve education for all."

Mercy Meliyio, a standard eight pupil at AIC Kajado Girls Primary School, says she has become accustomed to seeing expectant girls in class. Although Mercy believes such girls are irresponsible, she appreciates the fact that the new government is committed to promoting girls' education. "The only problem is that most of the girls who are pregnant cannot concentrate in class as they have lots of problems with their condition and

Education Minister George Saitoti

Principal Joyce Owandi

Mary Meliyio

some find it difficult to mingle with others," says the 13-year-old.

Forum for African Women Educationalists Executive Director Peninah Mlama considers education for girls critical for development.

She says: "It's not just enough for girls to be in school. Efforts must be done to ensure girls stay in school for the complete cycle of their studies in order to achieve their potential."

A survey done by *Africawoman* indicates that many headteachers in Kenyan schools are receptive to taking back girls who have had babies. Eunice Abade, principal of Nyamonye Secondary School in Bondo district to the west of the country, says she has had to readmit many girls back to school in recent years. She encourages par-

ents not to give up on educating them and instead allow them to return to school after childbirth.

"Some girls refuse to go back to school after delivery and to save them from any humiliation, we offer counselling and also place them in different schools to save them from embarrassment," adds Abade, who is also the Fawe representative in the district.

Many of the girls who drop out of school are "very bright" and that it is not fair to deny them a chance to complete school. "I cannot chase them away because I believe that every child has a right to continue learning," says the principal. "Everybody makes mistakes and no one should condemn such innocent girls to illiteracy."

The main problem with having pregnant girls attend classes,

Abade adds, is that the many of them suffer psychological trauma and embarrassment, which affects their concentration in class.

For Joyce Owandi, the principal of Huma Girls in Kisumu District, the policy stretches back to her own house.

She recently sent her 16-year-old househelp back to class three after learning that the girl's parents had sent her into domestic labour after she dropped out of school due to pregnancy.

With the government's support, many girls who have made it back to school after pregnancy no longer feel ashamed. In Kenya, gender gaps persist in favour of boys, especially towards the end of primary school. The gap widens in high school and is gross at university level.

UGANDA

Give teenaged mothers a chance

By Margaret Ziribagwa

LILIAN Acen has what she considers the perfect solution to the dilemma posed by girls returning to school after childbirth: They should move to a new school and resume study as if they did not have a past.

The deputy district education officer in Jinja in eastern Uganda argues that an "open" policy allowing teenaged mothers to return to school will "promote indiscipline" among fellow students. "They can change schools and not mention anything about having a child and then they can continue their education," says Acen. "This is what has been going on."

But Maria Namutebi, who gave birth at 14, wishes all countries had an open policy about the education after childbirth. "You can change school or hide the child, but people still treat you as a outcast," she told *Africawoman*. Namutebi is back in school but does not want her schoolmates to know that she has a child.

The Population Secretariat has

launched a campaign to get girls who drop out of school due to pregnancy back in the classroom. According to Hannington Burunde, head of the information and communication department at the secretariat, the campaign is targeted at all stakeholders — from parents to communities to policy makers in the relevant ministries. "Teenage pregnancy is one of the leading factors for girls dropping out of school," he says. "We are saying this must not be the end of a girl's education."

Burunde adds: "Indeed, many girls have overcome this hurdle, returned to school and gone on to become capable leaders. We want this to be a policy at every level. Girls must not be stigmatised because of pregnancy."

Teenagers are living at a time when traditional practices that limited adolescent sexual experience are breaking down. Aunts and uncles no longer discuss matters relating to sexuality with young people. Instead, youth explore their bodies and feelings on their own,

relying on foreign media and peers for information.

In Uganda, sexual activity generally begins at 16, although some teenagers begin as early as 14. By the age of 15, 30 percent of women have had sexual intercourse; this proportion rises to 72 percent by age 18. Seventy percent of women of childbearing age are either married or living in some form of union with a man, 16 percent have never married and 12 percent are divorced or separated.

The minimum legal age for sexual consent is 18 years; any activity below that age is regarded as defilement and the maximum punishment for this is the death penalty.

The introduction of Universal Primary Education has encouraged parents to take their children to school, but the question of allowing girls who have dropped out because of pregnancy to return to school remains "itchy".

"There is a misconception that if you allow girls back in school after a pregnancy, it will encourage other girls to be 'indisciplined'," says

Eberu Esther, senior education officer at Jinja municipality said.

As far as Eberu is concerned, the dilemma lies in a different direction. "What happens to the child? At that age a child needs its mother around. To encourage them to return to school would be encouraging them to abandon their children. While we are encouraging girls to get an education, there should also be a strong policy against boys impregnating girls and getting away with it."

Pregnancies aside, HIV/Aids is a major issue of concern as it is one of the leading causes of illness affecting young people in the reproductive health age bracket. Coupled with high fertility and complications of unsafe abortion, this puts young people at greater risk of early death.

Statistics from Mulago national referral hospital indicate that nearly half of women who die as a result of abortion and its complications are adolescents aged below 20. High rates of maternal illness and death have been associated with in-

duced abortion, increased school dropout, violence and expulsion from home.

"We are losing so many bright brains because of leaving the girls out; if we don't do anything about this now, we will have only ourselves to blame," says Were Abraham, the district education officer in Jinja, referring to the lack of policy to readmit girls who drop out of school due to pregnancy.

Were has a relative who conceived in senior two but returned to school with her family's support. He says: "She is now a bank manager in Kampala. Why should we deny girls this opportunity? We need a policy but we also need sensitisation. It is primitive to think that girls who get pregnant encourage others to get pregnant also. People should look at what comes out of an individual in future should they be given a chance. It is not by choice that some young people get pregnant. They suffer a lot and many of them never do it again because they realise it is a mistake."



WHOLE NEW WORLD: There are very few schools that can provide for the special needs of children with disability.

KENYA

The disabled also matter

By Edith Kimuli

FOR the fun of it, the other children join Sarah as she is taken to school in her wheelchair every morning. Not that Sarah minds. She is mentally retarded and does not really understand what's going on around her.

Sarah's mother has a hard time persuading the children to make way for her. "Get out of my way, I will beat you," she keeps telling the children, who envy Sarah her mode of transport. In their innocence, they do not know what she has to go through to get her daughter safely to school.

Not many parents have the courage of Sarah's mother. In Uganda, it is considered a curse to have a child who is handicapped in any way. Physical disability is better tolerated but mental, hearing and seeing handicaps are still treated as a curse.

Most parents who have children with disabilities tend to hide them. They may be kept indoors all the time, treated in much the same way as a guilty secret.

There are very few schools here that are suitable for children with disability. Most schools do not have facilities to cater for their needs, and those who have them are too expensive for the ordinary Ugandan.

At Special Needs Education Institute in Kyambogo, just outside Kampala, the kindergarten is open to children with special needs alongside the rest. Headmistress Dalia Nannyange Kibalama says

they first assess the children to establish what they can or cannot do. Some children have behaviour problems and some have problems settling down to learning. Some are violent and yet others are slow learners.

The Early Childhood Development and Assessment Centre, which is a demonstration school for the institute, has a wide variety of activities and the children can get help for whatever they want to do.

Once each child's special needs are identified, she or he is helped to develop skills in writing or more challenging activities — according to their needs. "We don't make lesson plans," she says. "We ask the children what they want to do."

The school has 13 children, seven of them disabled. Because children with hearing problems are taught in sign language, many of the other children have learnt to communicate this way. But many parents are slower to accept the disabled and feel distressed when their children use sign language.

Attitudes are changing gradually, however, and experts say children with special needs should be allowed to attend mainstream schools unless they are very seriously disabled.

"If the children with behaviour problems are isolated, they become very aggressive," says Kibalama. "They will not learn any good manners because they have no examples."

Some children have arrived at the kindergarten unable to crawl, but they can walk months later,

having learnt from seeing others do it.

The kindergarten admits children aged between three and seven, but special cases are allowed to stay until they are 10.

Where they go to next poses a major dilemma for the education system. Most of the schools willing to take on children with disability are too expensive for the average Ugandan.

Some of the children would gain nothing by joining the mainstream schools, but have the potential to do well in vocational training. Schools that offer such skills are few, however, and most of the children miss out on further education.

At Kireka Home for Children with Special Needs, children with disability are isolated and taught separately. Seventy eight children from all over the country attend this boarding primary school. Though the government funds it, parents must pay fees.

Headmaster John Erasu says it is not advisable for children with disability to be isolated, but those he has in his school are extreme cases that need to be handled specially. "It is not good to isolate these children because they will later go back to the community, but here we are handling severe cases that cannot be handled in ordinary schools," he says.

The government gives an allocation of Sh48,000 (about \$30) every month, besides a block allocation of Sh400,000 per term, but this depends on whether the ministry of education has the funds. And this

despite the fact that children with special needs require more funding than usual. Pupils pay Sh150,000 (about \$83) per term, which is too much for some. The school has made arrangements to accept payment by instalments and some parents pay in kind, bringing beans and maize flour to the school. Cost notwithstanding, the school has to turn away pupils for lack of space.

At the National Institute for Special Education Needs, facilities meant for 45 teacher trainees are now being used by at least 90 students.

Public Relations Officer Godfrey Olwol says that attempts to integrate special needs education in the main curriculum in teacher training colleges have been thwarted by districts that have not taken it seriously, even though the subject is examinable. Teachers who take the specialisation are frustrated because they are not promoted after their training.

Even though equipment, such as Braille machines for the blind, are readily available, many disabled children in Africa continue to suffer needlessly because of traditional beliefs and a reluctance to invest in institutions for the disabled.

If education is to achieve its goal, no child should be left behind. Even those who have learning problems can be taught enough to make them independent. Hiding them at home does not only imprison their spirits but also makes prisoners of those they must depend on for the rest of their lives.

KENYA

HIV/Aids takes a heavy toll on schooling

By Kwamboka Oyaro

HIV/Aids toll has hit education the hardest as it continues to ravage the continent. In Kenya, the rate at which teachers succumb to Aids is far much higher than the rate at which they can be replaced. This means that education standards continue to dwindle as fewer teachers handle more students hence lack of individual attention.

In some specialised subjects, like sciences and languages where the number of teachers is limited, children miss out because no other teacher can handle the subjects.

In December 2001 it was reported that 18 teachers die from Aids related complications every month, which translated to 6,570 teachers that year alone. It would be higher now as teachers infected earlier die from Aids-related ailments.

Aids has contributed to low enrolment, truancy, absenteeism and high dropout, said Japheth Kiptoon the then education Permanent Secretary.

In a report released last year entitled, "Education and HIV/Aids: A window of Hope" teacher death rates in Kenya increased by 300 per cent in just four years - from 450 in 1995 to 1,500 in 1999.

Apart from deaths of their teachers, Aids orphans are faced with struggles and roles too heavy for their ages. Michael Mbithi, 17, has been parenting himself and his three younger sisters for the last two years after his parents died of Aids related illness. He was left with the huge task of parenting at the tender age of 15. Combining parenting and schoolwork is not easy.

He wakes up early and walks to school, about four kilometres away. The distance, lack of food and the thought of where the next meal will come from worries him - he cannot favourably compete with his classmates who have parents.

Other children miss school in order to take care of family members dying from Aids. This adversely affects their performance. Yet, others get married with the belief that effort by two will make it easier for them to take care of their siblings.

With about 75 per cent of young people becoming sexually active by age 20 and the universities described as sexual hubs of immorality, the pandemic continues to affect education in the country.

April 2003

UGANDA

Following in the footsteps of the great and the good

By Elizabeth Kameo

ANXIOUS to ensure that girls make the best use of free primary education, Uganda's women of substance are weighing in with their own lessons on how to get a meaningful education.

Thanks to the local chapter of the Forum for African Women Educationalists, the girls are linked up with role models who have excelled against the odds and are well placed to serve as examples to girls that they too can make it.

Says Florence Kanyike of Fawe Uganda: "We believe that the girls need advice and support to make right choices in their lives. Sometimes they end up the way they do because they do not have examples. One way this can happen is through interaction with role models and mentors."

The organisation launched the Women of Distinction and Models of Excellence initiatives in 1999 on realising that free education alone would not ensure a rise in the number of girls in school or inspire them to take up subjects once considered to be male domains.

Women of Distinction are select high profile women leaders in Uganda, including in-

ternational women living in Uganda, nominated as goodwill ambassadors to highlight the cause of education of girls in Uganda to their day to day work. Models of Excellence are Ugandan women who have excelled in their careers against numerous odds.

"They have committed themselves to working directly with Fawe Uganda as mentors to girls in schools so as to motivate them, offer guidance and counseling and encourage them to excel," Kanyike says. The mentors invite the girls to their homes and provide them with books and clothes.

Kanyike adds: "Because they are Women of Distinction and Women of Excellence does not necessarily mean they are very highly educated. We select them based on their impact and their willingness to give something to the girls. We look at the areas where girls need real examples in their daily lives, especially those from disadvantaged regions such as the East and North."

Girls get realistic advice and guidance from women who have suffered in their own way and experienced phases of low self-esteem before excelling; the models not only encourage girls in similar situations but also point out solutions.



Some of the formerly abducted children at the new academy.

"The girls know that they too can overcome their problems and excel," says George Piwang Jalbo, who works on the programme. "This is a more affirming approach that guarantees success."

Fawe's first recruit as chief mentor was Sarah Ntiro, the first Ugandan woman graduate. Ntiro is both an icon and a living legend in Uganda and was recognised as a Woman of Distinction in 1999.

Her trailblazing achievement in graduating with an honours BA from Oxford University in 1954 has made her a role model par excellence. The theme of the mentoring programme is "Footsteps to Excellence... mentoring girls to excel against odds".

Fawe chapters in other countries, such as Zimbabwe, have already expressed an interest in the mentoring programme, which has opened a new vista of opportunities and resources that can be trapped locally for girls' education.

It has had a special impact in the eastern and northern parts of the country because the two regions are disadvantaged vis-à-vis the rest of the country. Kanyike is enthusiastic: "The women are an inspiration to the girls; they have boosted the self-esteem and

confidence of the girls. Cultivating self-esteem and confidence through exposure to great and successful people is a key contribution to mentoring. That is why the programme is very successful and beneficial to the girls."

Through their comments and correspondence, over 280 girls who are part of the programme have expressed their appreciation.

"Girls have started to identify with some of the mentors and today we hear many say 'I want to be like so and so' and these are the women who have made themselves available to the girls. The success so far is enormous."

Other Women of Distinction include Josephine Nambooze, who graduated as the first female doctor in East and Central Africa, and Specioza Wandira Kazibwe, the first African female vice-president.

The Models of Excellence are Margaret Baba Diri, who is a graduate, a member of parliament and blind; Gladys Kalema, a wildlife veterinarian surgeon and Victoria Mwaka, a university lecturer. Fawe Uganda's role models project proves one thing: At the end of the day, everyone needs a pair of footsteps to guide them in the right direction.

KENYA

Cattle first, then children can go to school

By Ruth Omukhango

BAWA is one of the few primary schools where learning takes place only in the afternoons. The children in this school 25 kilometres south of Maralal in Kenya's Eastern Province are expected to herd livestock, fetch water and collect firewood in the mornings. Only then can they attend classes.

The school programme has been designed to fit in with the pastoralist way of life. In South Maralal, where education programmes known as *Lechekuti* – meaning shepherds – are being implemented, they operate in harmony with the local socio-economic and cultural lifestyle.

Still, the programme has not brought as many children into the classroom as desired, according to Edward Loneseuri, a teacher at Bawa. Even an attempt by the

Ministry of Education and the World Bank to help bring and keep these children in school has not achieved much.

Through a World Bank project in 1984, the government established boarding schools in six arid districts to keep nomadic children in school, but they operated for a few years only. Despite the fact that the fees in those days was only Sh60 (US\$0.07) per term, the number of schools started dwindling within two years as there were no children. They eventually closed down.

Other programmes, such as school feeding programmes meant to entice children in arid and semi-arid lands to attend and remain in school, face problems too. They are heavily dependent on donors and suffer major hiccups when such support is unavailable.

Loneseuri believes radical policy interventions will be required if the afternoon class scheme is to work. The key issues, he says, are hunger and lack of critical facilities such as classrooms, desks and textbooks. Besides, insecurity due to cattle rustling often means that families must seek refuge in centres far away from their children's schools.

At Kipeto Primary School in Kajiado District, home to the Maasai community, free education has increased the number of children from 67 to 100. But the school cannot cope with the increase due to a shortage of desks, blackboards and teachers. Although some parents have allowed their children to go to school for fear of retribution from the government, they are not comfortable with the scheme of things.

For one, the move shifts to them

activities once the responsibility of their sons and daughters. Since the lack of facilities means a double shift, with some children attending class in the mornings and others in the afternoons, parents have resorted to ensuring the children work so hard when they are out of class that they have no time to do their homework.

Ann Selempo, a standard four pupil at Kipeto, says that her parents have now taken advantage of her being at home due to the shift-learning programme to overwork her.

"They will always ensure I run all my domestic chores within the time we are at home, looking after the cattle, walking about six kilometres in search of water and fetching firewood, leaving me too tired to walk another four kilometres to school. I arrive at school too tired to fully concentrate on

my class work."

Ngong District Education Officer Margaret Gitau says addressing cultural issues and the need for basic learning facilities is crucial if the academic performance of schools in arid and semi-arid lands is to improve.

According to Amina Ibrahim, an education coordinator at Action-Aid who comes Mandera, also a hardship area, children must break through the vicious cycle of poverty and culture to join schools. "Boys are considered as future bread winners, girls are looked at as future mothers and are given a suitor as early as 13 years," says Ibrahim.

"With this kind of beliefs, it is very common to find schools closed as children, especially girls, accompany their parents to other parts in dry seasons. Boys can be left behind to continue learning."

LIVING IN AFRICA

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