

Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE)

P.O. Box 21394 - 00505

Ngong Road, Nairobi, KENYA

Tel: (254-20) 574205, 573351, 573359, 573131, 574199,

Fax: (254-20) 574150

Email: fawe@fawe.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface . . . . .	.3
Background: Barriers Girls' Education in Sub Saharan Africa . . . . .	.4
About the Project . . . . .	.6
The Objectives . . . . .	.6
The Process of Implementation . . . . .	.7
Impact . . . . .	.12
What Makes it the Best Practices? . . . . .	.21
Policy Environment . . . . .	.21
Ownership . . . . .	.22
The Process . . . . .	.23
Human and Financial Resources . . . . .	.25
Stakeholders/ Partnership . . . . .	.26
Challenges . . . . .	.27
Lessons Learnt . . . . .	.27
Implication for Scaling up . . . . .	.28
Conclusion . . . . .	.30
Bibliography . . . . .	.31

The Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAW) is grateful to Mr Noah Nsubuga for the compilation of this best practice

Preface

Various interventions have been undertaken to try to address the gender gaps in the education sector. Significant achievements have been scored through these initiatives towards improving girls' access, retention and performance. However, the gender disparities are still wide. It is clear however, that unless quicker and strategic action is taken to address these gaps, the Education for All goals is unlikely to be achieved.

One strategy that is being proposed is to take successful interventions to scale in order to ensure that a higher number of girls are reached. This has so far not been adequately undertaken. As a first step towards scaling up best practices, it is necessary to identify and document the most successful interventions in a way that can be taken up by education policy makers and other stakeholders.

One of FAWE's strategic objectives is to influence replication and mainstreaming of best practices. FAWE has undertaken to document its best practices with the aim of disseminating them to education policy makers and influencing mainstreaming of these interventions into education plans and programmes. FAWE, with its partners, will be holding a Ministerial Consultation in June 2004.

This booklet summarizes the experience of the FAWE Centres of Excellence in creating a conducive school environment for girls' education. The Centres are a holistic intervention undertaken in public schools aimed at making the physical, academic and social environment gender responsive. The Centres of Excellence model has been successfully undertaken in the Gambia, Kenya, Namibia, Rwanda, Senegal and Tanzania.

FAWE hopes that this experience will inspire the replication of this best practice far and wide in sub Saharan Africa to the benefit of the continent.

Penina Mlama
Executive Director

FAWE CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE

1. BACKGROUND

a. Barriers to Girls' Education in Sub-Saharan Africa

There is no denying that the galvanization of efforts caused by the declaration of Education For All (EFA) at the 1990 in Jomtien has led to tremendous gains in the enrolment of girls in education in sub-Saharan Africa. This is particularly true of the 32 FAWE member countries, which have undertaken various interventions to improve the education of African women and girls. The EFA Global Monitoring Report released in November 2003 once again confirmed that access to education for girls in sub-Saharan Africa has increased significantly by 38% in the last ten years or so. However, despite dramatic upsurges in enrolment, statistics continue to indicate that there are persistent barriers to the quality of education for the girl child. Globally, of 11 developing countries whose girls have 20% less chance of starting school than boys, seven are in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Half of the countries with a net enrollment ratio (NER) between 60% and 80% are African while a further 14 countries in SSA have NER below 60%. With 23 million girls out of school, SSA has more girls out of school than any other region.

It should be further pointed out that statistical parity indicators viewed in isolation could be misleading. A focus on quantitative balances may fail to reveal the processes that lead to such strides as well as the qualitative changes that would be needed if gender parity is to subsequently lead to the attainment of EFA's ultimate goal of gender equality. The gender gap persists and major improvements are required particularly in terms of the quality of education offered.

Extensive research has demonstrated that any one (or a combination of) factors may be at play not only to keep vast numbers of girls out of the classroom in sub-Saharan Africa but also to militate against the quality of education available to girls. Such factors include:

- Poverty
- Long-held negative attitudes about women's intellectual capabilities
- Poor management of sexual maturation
- HIV/AIDS
- Teenage pregnancy
- Early marriage
- Insensitive school environments
- Examination failure in mathematics and science
- The traditional division of household labour.

A significant proportion of such negative forces transcend the borders of educational systems, institutions and processes and would therefore call for more holistic and integrated interventions to be effectively tackled. This approach is at the core of FAWE's idea of Centres of Excellence as a means to quality education for the girl child.

The purpose of this booklet is to document the model of FAWE's Centre of Excellence (COEs) to facilitate scaling up. It is believed that replication of the COE model would lead to reduction in gender disparities in education. The experience that backstops this report is mainly that of the four pioneer Centres: the AIC Girls' Primary School, Kajiado District, Kenya; the FAWE Girls' School, Gisozi, Rwanda; Grand Diourbel Junior Secondary School, Diourbel, Senegal; and Mgugu Secondary School, Kilosa District, Tanzania.

b. What Problem Were the COEs Trying to Address?

The challenges that led to the birth of the idea of COEs manifest in three school-related environments, namely:

- The Physical Environment
- The Academic Environment
- The Social Environment

(i) Challenges in the physical environment

The physical environment generally refers to the infrastructure of the school which includes such things as school buildings, the compound of the school, fences, toilets, water, power supply, boarding facilities, first aid and medical facilities, amenities for games and sports, laboratory and library. Research has demonstrated that inadequate or poor (or in some cases non-existent) physical facilities adversely affect the quality of education. It has also been proven that in such environments, the girl child always comes off the worse because the tendency has been that the poorer the physical facilities the less gender responsive they are. The special needs of the girl child especially at puberty tend to get ignored.

(ii) Challenges in the Academic Environment

The academic environment refers to the curriculum content and its relevance, the teachers and their attitudes, the school management system, teaching methodologies and approaches, teacher/student interaction, the students and their attitudes, the teaching and learning materials. The teaching environment if not gender responsive can lead to poor academic performance and drop-out.

(iii) Challenges in the Social Environment

The social environment refers mainly to the community and cultural surroundings of the school. It normally includes parents and other relatives of the girls, the District Commissioner, Village leader, the chiefs and assistant chiefs, local religious leaders, local educational leaders, other stakeholders as well as other residents of the area near and around the school. Research has shown that cultural practices such as the female genital cut (FGC), early marriages, improper attitudes, and the economic status of the community are factors that influence girls' enrolment and retention in school. On a more global scale, the country's gender policies are an important part of the social environment.

2. ABOUT THE PROJECT

A FAWE Centre of Excellence is simply a school in which the physical, academic and social environment is gender responsive. It is one that has all the ordinary school facilities and in addition gender-responsiveness in all its aspects including the physical infrastructure, the social environment and the academic environment. It should be a showcase that clearly and effectively demonstrates how to create a gender responsive school environment. It adopts a holistic, integrated approach towards addressing the problems in girls' education by creating an enabling learning and teaching environment in the school and ensuring community involvement in the promotion of girls' education. The Vision is that girls who graduate from a COE are expected to be life-long learners with capacities to be:

- Best academic and social achievers
- Confident and able to express themselves adequately
- Active participants in diagnosing and solving problems and actualizing their ambitions
- Knowledgeable in historical, cultural and current events and aware of their rights
- Physically and psychologically fit
- Part of society at the grassroots, national and possibly international levels

It is thus clear that a COE can only be defined in terms of its gender responsiveness.

a. Objectives

The objective of this intervention is to provide access to education to girls in disadvantaged areas as well as to ensure that once they are in school the gender constraints that can lead to their dropping out of school or poor performance are minimized or eliminated.

The COE intervention consists of a holistic package that addresses constraints emanating from the community and the school. The package includes interventions targeting the parents, community leaders and community members, the teachers, school management, boys and girls, as well as ministry of education officials at the local, district, regional and national level.

The overall intention the COE intervention is to transform the school and surrounding community into an environment, which physically, academically and socially gender responsive.

The key strategies underlying the COE intervention include;

- Involvement of all stakeholders -- students, parents, communities, teachers, school management, and ministry of education in the processes on transforming the school and its surrounding community into a gender responsive environment physically, academically and socially.
- Capacity building of all stakeholders, individually or in groups, with gender sensitization and skills training.
- Provision of the basic requirements in terms of gender responsive infrastructure, teaching and learning materials.

Today, there are 8 FAWE Centres of Excellence:

1. Grand Diourbel Junior Secondary School, Diourbel, Senegal
2. AIC Girls' Primary School, Kajiado District, Kenya
3. Mgugu Secondary School, Kilosa District, Tanzania
4. The FAWE Girls' School, Gisozi, Rwanda
5. Athwana Secondary School, Kenya
6. Hage Geingob High School, Namibia
7. Sambang Upper Basic School, The Gambia
8. Lufilyo Secondary School, Tanzania

One of the major challenges of FAWE is to come up with new and vital measures for sustaining and expanding gains in girls' education. Clearly the FAWE Centre of Excellence model addresses this need. This very successful model has proved to be an effective way of holistically addressing concerns in girls' education with clearly identifiable impact on the ground. It is therefore planned for this programme to expand to cover a total of 14 countries by the year 2006.

b. Process for implementation

Some of the activities of the holistic package include:

The COE intervention package consists of the following components:

- Gender sensitization of parents, community leaders, community members, teachers, boys and girls
- In-service training for teachers into gender responsive pedagogy
- Empowerment of girls into skills for self confidence, assertiveness, speaking out, decision making and negotiation
- Training in reproductive health with attention on sexuality and protection against HIV and AIDS
- Establishment of counselling desks and training of teachers and students into the relevant skills
- Provision of scholarships and support to needy girls
- Provision of gender responsive infrastructure including boarding facilities in cases of long distance from school, separate toilets for boys and girls
- Activities to promote the participation of girls in Science, Mathematics and Technology (SMT) subjects such as science camps as well as support for science and computer laboratories and equipment
- Establishment of a gender responsive school management system and training of school management teams
- Activities to involve the community and other stakeholders in the school operations, monitoring and taking action to ensure attendance and performance of the girls, including persuading parents against practices that can negatively affect girls' education such as early marriage or reluctance to take girls to school

Implementation of the intervention package at the COE is undertaken in a participatory manner. It involves all stakeholders: students, parents, the larger community, school administrators, development partners and policy makers. Stakeholders are involved in all stages of development of the centres, from identification of the site through their construction/rehabilitation to their running and management, monitoring and evaluation.

Capacity building of the key actors is emphasized at all stages of the Centres' development to ensure sustainability. It targets: teachers, female and male students, non-teaching staff, the local community, Ministry of Education, religious leaders and sponsors.

Centres of Excellence - Step by Step

Step 1: FAWE National Chapter consults with MOE and FAWE Secretariat

The first major action point is to agree on the need for a Centre of Excellence. The Country writes to the FAWE Regional Secretariat stating the desire to have a Centre of Excellence

Step 2: Joint consultation and agreement between FAWE Regional Secretariat and National Chapter and the Ministry of Education (MOE) to:

- Work out the objectives, programmes, activities and operations of the COE
- Demarcate the roles and responsibilities of the Chapter and the Secretariat
- Sign a Memorandum of Understanding for the agreed operations of the COE

Step 3: Identification of Schools to be transformed into COE and demarcation of roles and responsibilities

A major component of the third step is the collection, and analysis of gender disaggregated quantitative and qualitative data on the status of education, socio-economic parameters, cultural, political and policy related factors. The basic intention of such data collection and analysis is to identify the disadvantaged areas in which the COE can be established. The selection is a participatory exercise between the FAWE Secretariat, the National Chapter and the MOE. A collaborative agreement that spells the roles and responsibilities of the various partners--the school, the community, the MOE, the National Chapter, and the FAWE Regional Secretariat--is then drawn and signed by both FAWE and the MOE.

Step 4: Conducting a Vision Workshop for all stakeholders

Collective ownership and implementation of the COE programme can best be attained when the various partners are convinced about the vision. The fourth step is therefore to conduct a vision workshop to share the vision of the COE with all the stakeholders and the local community to marshal support for the intervention. It is therefore important that the workshop includes representatives from the following:

- the school (including teachers, students, support staff, administration and parent association),
- the local community leaders (including men, women, youth, local NGOs and CBOs),
- the local government (chiefs, District Commissioner and others),
- the MOE at the national, regional, district and local levels,
- FAWE National Chapter members, and
- FAWE Regional Secretariat

At the vision workshop, it is important to encourage the school community to freely express their fears, views and opinions on the education of the girl child, felt needs, expectations and potential benefits to create a sense of commitment to the COE model among the various stakeholders. As a result of this intervention not only do communities become aware of the issues that affect girls education and the mission of the COE programme but they also develop a sense of ownership of the schools. The vision workshop should produce an action plan on steps to be taken to convert an ordinary school into a Centre of Excellence.

Step 5: Collection of quantitative and qualitative data on the COE and its community

The idea of this fifth step in the process is to identify the specific problems and needs of the school and community in relation to the education of the girl child. The country should undertake to collect and assemble gender segregated data on socio-economic, cultural, political and policy related factors affecting and impacting on access retention and performance. The end result would be a Needs Assessment of the school. This should include the school management system, the physical infrastructure, teachers' qualifications, learning materials, status of the students in terms of income levels of parents, skills, life skills, counseling, empowerment and bursaries; surrounding community and its cultural practices and impact on girl' education and community involvement in the school.

Step 6: Development of monitoring and evaluation indicators

Continuing the participatory process monitoring and evaluation indicators that will be used to determine the impact of the interventions on girls' access, retention and performance in school. The indicators should be based to the needs' assessment report of step 5.

Step 7: Monitoring and evaluation of the implementation process

The monitoring and evaluation of impact is a continuous process involving all the stakeholders.

c. Outcomes

Table 1 summarizes the outcomes of the intervention programme at the four pilot Centres of Excellence.

Table 1: FAWE Pilot Centres of Excellence at a glance

COE	School Type	Challenges	Numbers Mobilized	Positive Trends
AIC Kajiado, Kenya	Primary girls' only boarding	Poor, nomadic community, entrenched practice of early marriages, poor community support for girls' education	660 girls 1320 parents 32 teachers 21 MOE staff 75 chiefs 66 lobby women	High retention, rescued 52 girls from early marriage, 12 reconciled, pass rate moved from 65% to 85%, Chiefs participated in 4 workshops and are actively involved in advocacy for girls' education. 12 computers from community and 2 from FAWE Girls involved in school activities and government. On request of MOE second COE set up at Athwana, Meru District. Active bursary scheme for the needy including HIV/AIDS orphans
Diourbel, Senegal	Junior secondary, day coeducational	Islamic community with low expectations on investment in girls' education, poor Sahelian rural, low value attached to education	415 girls 600 boys 2030 parents 22 teachers 18 MOE staff	Girls' enrolment improved significantly, Drop out rate lowered, Girls' performance improved, community involved in advocacy, Policy support at highest level, Govt. built classes and provided tax exemptions, and bought books Bursary scheme, COE concept adopted in 10-year educational plan
Mgugu, Tanzania	Secondary coeducational boarding for girls, day for boys	Few schools at secondary level, poor community, historical non-enrolment	100 girls 60 boys 240 parents 7 teachers 42 MOE staff 48 councilors	Dramatic improvement in girls' enrolment, Teenage pregnancy not experienced though rampant in other schools, dropouts followed up,

		of girls beyond primary level due to distance, parents discouraged due to lack of returns and success	501 religious and other community members	improved participation in class, increased community support, bursary scheme, database to track academic and social performance of students. Support from highest level. On MOEC request COE replicated at Lufilyo Secondary Sch. Mbeya.
Kacyiru, Rwanda	Secondary girls' only boarding	Poor, mostly orphaned children due to 1994 genocide, no secondary school for girls in the area	720 girls Over 800 guardians and parents 18 teachers 13 MOE staff	Girls' trauma contained, girls empowerment, excellent class participation and performance (6 students among top 20 in national exam in 2003) Tuseme clubs replicated by MOE, Local authorities actively involved, labs, database, bursaries, sick bay, partnership with other schools

d. Impact

One only needs to walk into a COE to witness the aura of transformation and the impact. COEs have shown impact in demonstrating how to achieve gender responsive quality education in the following eight areas:

- Empowerment of students
- Gender responsive teachers
- Gender responsive teaching methodologies
- Adequate infrastructure and teaching and learning materials
- Gender responsive school management
- Community involvement in supporting girls' education
- Adequate resources
- Positive policies

A recent study on how the schools, involved in the COE model, are being transformed from an ordinary school into a Centre of Excellence highlights the impact the project has had in each of these areas.

(i) Empowerment of students, both boys and girls, to participate in academic processes

Being the main beneficiary and object of education, the student is the primary target of empowering efforts. The idea of the COE model is to empower the student especially the girls to perform well both academically at school and in their social surroundings.

Among the initial interventions used is the TUSEME (Kiswahili for "speak out") process. Through Tuseme, students learn how to identify and speak out about problems that affect them, analyze the root causes, identify solutions and take action to solve the problems. This process is further fortified by creating TUSEME clubs in the schools, which assist in monitoring girls' progress both academically and socially. These clubs facilitate the implementation of activities such as reading circles, science camps and others. Girls' progress is also tracked through a database and support given to girls where needed. For example, needy girls are assisted with bursaries. In the COEs, guidance and counseling desks are established and various workshops and training are undertaken to impart life skills such as leadership, assertiveness, decision making, and critical thinking.

Girls' empowerment has been visible through improved academic performance as shown in table 2 below.

Table 2. Academic Performance at the CEOs

Centre of Excellence	Improvement in academic performance
AIC Girls, Kajiado, Kenya	The average scores on national exams improved from 66% in 2000 to 75% in 2002. In 1997, 67% girls passed while in 2001 the number went up to 85%. By 2003 100% went to secondary school.
FAWE Rwanda Girls School, Gisozi Rwanda	The 2 top girls in the 2002 national exams and 6 out the 10 top students in 2003 were from FAWE Girls' School
CEM Grand Diourbel, Senegal	In 2001 for the whole school, 56% boys and 47% girls passed. In 2003, 66% boys and 69% girls passed
Mgugu Secondary School, Tanzania	Average pass mark in 2002 was 27.62% and rose to 54.9% in 2003

Girls' empowerment is also manifest through increased self-confidence of students and involvement in leadership duties around the school. For example, in

Mgugu Secondary School, Tanzania the students are actively involved in running the school, and actively monitor each other's participation and behaviour. The head teacher of the school has stated that this pro-activity has lightened the burden of school management for her. . For example, where the head of the school is a boy, the deputy is a girl. At the class level, whereas all class prefects used to be boys, all classes now have two class prefects--one boy and one girl. This enhances leadership skills amongst the girls. In Senegal, girls are now active in leadership positions in the school

The number of pregnancies in the schools has reduced significantly over the past three years (2001-2003), indicating that the empowerment process is contributing to equip girls with life skills. The pregnancy statistics were as follows for 2001-2003.

- AIC Girls' Primary School, Kajiado, Kenya - 3 out of 499 - 0.6%
- FAWE Rwanda Girls School, Rwanda - 2 out of 740 - 0.3%
- Mgugu Secondary School, Tanzania - 1 out of 195 - 0.5%
- CEM Grand Diourbel, Senegal - 0 out of 275 - 0%

This is an average percentage of less than 1% in all the Centres.

(ii) Gender responsive teachers

Teachers play a key role in improving the quality of the educational experience for both girls and boys. Most of the teacher-training institutions do not include training into gender responsiveness. This results in teachers not addressing the specific needs of students, especially girls, since they are largely unaware of the issues facing them.

FAWE's interventions with teachers have focused on ensuring that teachers are gender responsive. The activities have included gender sensitization, Tuseme workshops, training in guidance and counseling, training on HIV/AIDS as well as exposure and exchange with teachers in other Centres of Excellence.

This training has empowered teachers as agents of change. This has resulted in attention to gender issues within the school plans and processes, and support to needy girls. A recent study conducted in the Centres acknowledged that the girls confirmed that they were getting support from the teachers towards improving their academic performance.

(iii) Gender responsive teaching methodologies

The FAWE experience has shown that it is not enough to give gender sensitization training. In order to be effective, gender training must include training into gender responsive teaching methodologies. Participatory teaching methods tend to allow all students, but especially girls, to participate more effectively in class.

Therefore the teachers at the COEs have received training in the use of interactive teaching methodologies with a gender focus, teaching SMT and IT in a gender responsive manner and school self evaluation from a gender perspective.

All indications are that these gender responsive methods are being put to use in the classroom, thereby enabling girls to participate more in class. For example, in Kenya, the classroom arrangements have been changed to enable participatory learning and discussion in small groups. Overall, interaction between students and teachers is significant. This has resulted in the improved academic performance noted above.

The results from the study on Students' Perception of the teachers' attitude about girls ability in education is shown.

According to the girls, the majority of teachers think that girls' ability in science is comparable to that of boys.

(iv) Infrastructure and teaching and learning materials

A major drawback in many schools is the lack of adequate infrastructure and teaching and learning materials, taking the needs of girls into account. It is clear that when resources are scarce, the girls tend to miss out on opportunities. Due to their socialization, girls are unlikely to fight for the meagre resources. Lack of gender responsiveness in teachers also means that they may not ensure that resources (such as textbooks, science equipment and library books) are shared equally between boys and girls.

Another barrier to providing quality for girls' education is distance to school. In cases where the school is located far from the homestead, the girls have a lower chance of attending school due to lack of safety and security on the way to and from school. It is therefore important to have boarding facilities for girls. Boarding facilities are not complete however, without ensuring that there are dining facilities as well as a matron's house and sick bay to take care of girls' needs.

All COEs are ordinary government-owned schools. Therefore the government is expected to provide the basic elements such as infrastructure, teaching and learning materials, and teachers' salaries amongst other things.

FAWE has sought to supplement efforts by parents and the government in the provision of teaching and learning materials. FAWE has also pushed for the owners of the schools to provide the physical infrastructure as shown on the table below. FAWE's interventions have included additional textbooks, science equipment, computers and library books.

For example in the COE, despite the additional textbooks provided by

FAWE, the texts books are not enough for 1:1 ratio. However, with the sharing system established at the Centres, books are available to the majority of the students in the ratio of 1:3 or less. In Kajiado, Kenya - 93% of the students affirm that textbooks are available for sharing while in Mgugu, Tanzania the percentage is 70% for Girls and 73% for Boys. In Grand Diourbel, Senegal 68% of the girls and 95% of the boys say that they have access to textbooks. Table 4 summarizes the several interventions in terms of infrastructure and teaching and learning materials and the specific problems they have addressed.

Table 3. Infrastructural interventions at the COEs (2003)

Country	Problem	FAWE Intervention	Community & MOE intervention	Additional MOE Intervention
Kenya	Early marriage	Hostel for girls rescued from early marriage	Water tanks, toilet block. Hostel mattresses and blankets	Water tanks, latrines, roofing materials
	Poor performance	Library, IT and SMT laboratories, textbooks and library books, computers, teaching materials	Teachers' houses. Library books, computers	Textbooks, Library books
Rwanda	Poor performance	Textbooks, Library books, Teaching materials	Generator and School bus, Beds, desks, computers, fence	Teaching materials and equipment, Computers, Boarding facilities
Senegal	Poor performance	Library/Resource Centre, Guidance and counseling facilities, Textbooks and Library books, Teaching materials	Fence, trees	Textbooks, Library books, Classrooms, Desks, Teaching materials
	Distance to school (children cannot go home for lunch)	Cafeteria, Toilet block	Water, Electricity, Telephone, Nursing services	Renovation of toilets

Tanzania	Distance to school	Dormitories with dining facilities, Matron's house, Toilet block	Renovations of old buildings, Matron's house, Water bore hole	Generator, Water tanks
	Early pregnancies and sexual harassment	Resource centre	Classrooms, Teachers' houses, Library building	Textbooks, library books, Science equipment
	Poor academic performance	IT and SMT Laboratories, Teaching materials, Textbooks, Library books, Science equipment, Computers		

It is noteworthy that although generally governments are reluctant to spend more, partnerships act as catalysts. As FAWE and other stakeholders chip in towards the financial burden, the action has had the interesting impact of catalyzing government involvement. For instance the MOE in Senegal built four classrooms as a result of the establishment of the COE programme. This kind of sharing leads to sustainability.

(v) Gender responsive school management

A key element in transforming an ordinary school into a COE is the institutional management. The existence of a gender responsive school management system in the COE plays a significant part in ensuring quality education in the school.

FAWE has developed a module on how to make the school management system gender responsive in terms of the management of the core curriculum, management of activities relating to students personal and social development and management of administrative issues.

In all the COEs, subject's panels for teachers are operational and have enhanced teamwork amongst teachers and management. Head teachers have also had international exposure through the forums for head teachers of COE organized regularly.

The gender responsive management system also enables the school management to take care of students' personal needs such as incorporating systems to support girls on sexual maturation issues. The system has also helped maintain discipline in the school, while maintaining a child-centred approach of involving students in school management.

Head teachers have also contributed significantly to resource mobilization especially for bursaries and additional infrastructure in the schools.

Annual programme review meetings are held to fine tune the system, monitor progress in implementation of work plans and chart the way forward. The system has also proved helpful in establishing and maintaining school-community links as well as resource mobilization for school activities.

(vi) Community Involvement

Schools have often become isolated enclaves having few links with the community. However, a majority of the problems faced by girls in school stem from the home set up. If strategies for improving girls' education are not anchored in the grassroots, that is, in the community that the girl is part of, then these strategies are not likely to yield sustainable results. Thus, the idea of COE is to improve quality in schools by changing the practice and understanding of the roles played by different communities in the empowerment of girls and boys.

Above 60% of the community members interviewed in a recent FAWE study reported poverty as a major factor hindering growth of girls' education in their areas. In such circumstances a bursary scheme becomes imperative. In terms of supporting needy girls' to date (2000-2003) the number of bursaries given in the COEs by both FAWE and the community is: 75 in Kenya, 94 in Rwanda, 78 in Senegal, and 58 in Tanzania.

It is by now obvious to the reader that one cannot provide quality education without the community being part and parcel of the intervention. The first intervention in the Centres of Excellence package is a Vision Workshop with the community to agree on the objectives, strategies and outcomes of the Centres. As a result, communities develop a sense of ownership for these schools. For example, 83% of the community in Mgugu and 66% of the community in Senegal say that the community owns the school. From the Vision workshop, an action plan is developed by the community to guide the implementation of the COE programme. Through other deliberate interventions the communities become increasingly aware of the issues that are more likely to affect girls than boys.

As a result the communities have contributed significantly to the retention of girls in school. In Mgugu in 2001, the community members (especially the Secretary of the Division) played a key role in follow up to ensure that 42 girls who had been given places in the school and had not reported on time. The committee was also instrumental in drastically reducing the drop out in the school. The community took on the role of monitoring girls' attendance and ensuring that they do not drop out. In Kajiado, the chiefs have played a significant role in reducing early marriage. Since the Centre started, 52 girls have

been rescued from early marriage. In Senegal, the community has been active in the school programme through the Advisory Committee which has mobilized resources (in cash and in kind including labour for construction of infrastructure) and ensured that issues related to attendance of girls and school management are addressed. In all the Centres, the communities are playing the role of watchdog for girls' education in their locations.

The Community has therefore been fully involved in ensuring girls' access, retention and performance in the Centres of Excellence. This has been made manifest through involvement in school activities, support for infrastructure and equipment as well as a deep sense of ownership for the schools.

(vii) Resources

The implementation of the COE programme has acquired different kinds of resources--financial, human and material. Partnership at all levels has been a major theme in COE programme. Ministries of Education are the main education providers and are bearing the main costs of the COEs which are government schools. Communities where the Centres are located have contributed significantly as shown above in terms of resource mobilization. Donor partners have contributed to the FAWE work programme thus enabling FAWE to undertake interventions on the ground. Seen within the context of partnership with the national education system, the FAWE contribution is therefore minimal in terms of resources but significant in terms of impact on girls' education.

Table 4. Calculation of the Unit Cost of the Centres of Excellence

		2001	2002	2003
Kenya	Number of students	650	535	507
	Infrastructure	\$26,000.00	\$24,000.00	0
	Unit cost	\$4.0	\$4.48	0
	Gender responsive package	\$26,000.00	\$29,289.53	4,257.63
	Unit cost	10.00	13.68	2.09
Rwanda	No of students	450	650	740
	Infrastructure	0	0	0
	Unit Cost	0	0	0
	Gender responsive package	\$32,000.00	\$25,000.00	7,605
	Unit cost	15.27	9.61	2.59

Senegal	Number of students	615	764	900
	Infrastructure	24,551.00	38,500.00	-
	Unit Cost	3.99	5.03	0
	Gender responsive package	27,965.00		
	Unit cost	\$11.36	\$7.50	\$6.37
Tanzania	Number of students	240	240	240
	Infrastructure	\$26,000.00	\$46,000.00	\$8,400.00
	Unit cost	\$10.83	\$19.16	\$3.5
	Gender responsive package	\$29,000.00	\$26,562.00	\$9,230.00
	Unit cost	\$30.20	\$27.66	\$9.61

(viii) Positive policies

All these interventions could not have taken place without a supportive policy environment. The COEs have mobilized support from the highest level.

President Kagame of Rwanda officially opened the Centre and donated computers while former President Moi of Kenya officially opened the Centre at Kajiado. In Tanzania, President Mkapa laid the foundation stone and donated funds for the renovation of the library for which the First Lady Mrs. Anna Mkapa donated books. In addition, the Office of the President recently made another donation of beds and mattresses for the newly built dormitories. The following positive government policies and programmes have supported the Centres of Excellence:

- Free primary education
- Re-entry policy for adolescent mothers
- Bursaries for needy girls
- Appointment of more female teachers
- Inclusion of separate toilet blocks for boys and girls
- Inclusion of life skills in the curriculum

Alongside these policies, the Centres of Excellence have also benefitted from many opportunities for policy dialogue at the national, district and local levels.

3. WHAT MAKES THE CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE A BEST PRACTICE?

The operationalization of the COE programme is a multifaceted undertaking. It involves issues of the ambient policies, ownership of the project, the various processes, the various organizational structures, the human and financial resource base and the various stakeholders and partnerships. This section records the experience of FAWE in these areas.

a. Policy environment

The Dakar Framework for Action and the Millennium Develop Goals (MDGs) place gender equity and equality high on the agenda. African governments have all shown their support to these initiative. Thus most national education policies and plans have make provision for gender equity and equality in the quest for education for all. Presence of political will and support from the ministries of education at all levels has contributed greatly to the success of the Centres of excellence.

The support of the Ministries of Education visible through the promulgation of positive policies such as:

- Free primary education
- Re-entry policy for adolescent mothers
- Boarding schools for girls
- Bursaries for needy girls
- Appointment of more female teachers
- Inclusion of separate toilet blocks for boys and girls
- Inclusion of life skills in the curriculum
- HIV/AIDS related policies
- Gender balance in the teaching profession

The governments in general and MOEs in particular have also made available many opportunities for policy dialogue at the national, district and local levels. At the national level, memoranda of understanding have been signed between FAWE and MOE on the implementation of the COE programme. As mentioned elsewhere the government has also allocated additional resources to support the project. Governments have at times also replicated some of the best practices emerging from the model. For instance, the Government in Rwanda has replicated the Tuseme Empowerment programme in 36 schools. Kenya and Tanzania governments have replicated the COE programme as well as the Tuseme programme in other districts while Senegal has used the COE model as a pilot for the school project within its 10 Year Education Plan.

The Centres have therefore attempted to mobilize support from the highest levels. In Rwanda it was President Kagame who opened the COE and gave a donation of computers while former head of state Daniel arap Moi opened the one in Kajiado, Kenya. Similarly in Tanzania, President Mkapa laid the foundation stone and donated money to renovate the library for which the first lady Mrs Anna Mkapa donated books. In addition the Office of the President recently donated beds and mattresses for the newly built dormitories at Mgugu.

In all the countries where Centres of Excellence have been established the basic policy framework is in place for ensuring gender equity. This also furnishes the potential for mainstreaming.

b. Ownership

To draw the attention of school communities is a painstaking process. Fortunately, however, the experience of the COE programme has demonstrated that communities become supportive when they realize the value of educating their children in a wholesome environment. It is indeed long-established wisdom that when poor communities are involved in analyzing their own situations and realities, and making decisions to alter those realities, change is inevitable. For FAWE the challenge in relation to community ownership of COE has been two-pronged. For one, the education of girls is no less than a revolutionary concept in many societies. Secondly, even where the education of girls is valued, a community may not appreciate that they have a personal role to play in ensuring that it happens.

The Vision workshop for stakeholders which is held at the onset of the establishment of the COEs develops a sense of ownership of the Centre of excellence from the very beginning. Since all the participants participate in the drawing up of the Action Plan, they become part and parcel of the process. Community involvement in the day to day activities of the school, establishing in supporting monitoring the attendance, supporting the access, retention and performance of all students, especially girls.

All stakeholders are encouraged to be involved in school activities which develop a sense of ownership. This sense of ownership has greatly contributed to the success of the intervention.

C. Processes

(i) Consultation: It is a consultative process with all stakeholders right from the beginning. Actual pragmatic practices come when all stakeholders are con-

vinced and FAWE is just a partner. One of the factors that has led to the success of the Centres of Excellence is the constant consultation at all levels from the vision workshop with stakeholders held at the very beginning, through to continuous involvement of stakeholders in the activities of the Centre.

ii) A Shared Vision: A Central theme of the COE has been the sharing of a common vision. From the beginning all stakeholders are involved in developing a vision for their COEs. This vision is what guides the implementation of the programme which is done guided by an action which includes the views of all stakeholders

This visioning is also coupled with annual meetings of the Headteachers of the COEs during which they share their challenges, achievements and experiences in implementing the COE vision.

At the school level, annual programme planning meetings are held to ensure that the school community is still adhering to the concept.

Most recently in April, 2004, a workshop where all the COEs were invited revisited the COE concept of the Centres of Excellence in line with the current experiences and challenges. This constant visioning has led to a shared vision on the COEs which has consistently aided implementation of the programme.

iii) A holistic approach: It has been noted that girls' education problems are multi-faceted and therefore a number of different interventions are required to deal with the barriers to girls' education. The package intervention which the Centres of Excellence promote, have indeed shown that a multi-pronged approach dealing with the school environment, the community, the girl herself, boys, the teachers and the school management are all empowered to promote the education of girls.

Some of the aspects are

iii) A focus on Girls and their empowerment: By virtue of its focus girls are the main stakeholders that the COE is trying to reach. A variety of activities are designed to empower girls to effectively participate in education and development. This focus on girls as a target audience has helped to ensure that attention is paid to the problems that affect girls, while also benefitting the entire school community. The use of the theatre for development methodology through the TUSEME approach, has also ensured that all girls are part and parcel of the empowerment processes on a continual basis.

iv) A focus on Teacher Capacity Building: Capacity building among the teaching staff is a very important component of the COE model. Research has proved that traditional teaching methods as well as teaching materials are not gender sensitive. Therefore teachers and other school staff would need to be reoriented for gender sensitivity. In this regard the COEs have conducted seminars and workshops to sensitize the teachers. This focus on gender responsive teaching has helped to ensure that girls' academic performance has greatly improved since the inception of the Centres of Excellence.

d. Structures (National, Regional/District, School, Community) The Centres of Excellence have used existing ministry of education structures to support the activities. At the national level, a focal point has been appointed to deal with the Centres of Excellence as stipulated in the Memorandum of Agreement that is signed between FAWE and the Ministries of Education.

The Ministry of education has been involved at the region, district and local levels as a stakeholder in COE activities and processes. The local administration eg chiefs and village leaders, have also proved to be very helpful in supporting the COEs and have demonstrated the political will to support girls' education in their areas.

At the level of FAWE, coordinators have been appointed to deal with the day to day issues of the Centres of Excellence.

At the school level, the existing structures of school boards, and bursary committees have helped support girls' education. *Structures to Support Girls' Empowerment* is another major component of the COE equation. Of special standing in the empowerment of girls in COEs are girls' clubs popularly known as the Tuseme (Kiswahili for "let us speak out") Clubs. In all cases, TUSEME clubs have been set up to support the girls' empowerment processes.

These clubs that have emboldened girls to stand rather than coil in the face of life's challenges have helped both girls and boys to develop skills for identifying their own problems, analysing the root causes and taking initiatives to solve the problems.

Finally at the school level, the gender responsive management system has played a role in raising awareness on the school management issues affecting girls.

e. Human and Financial Resources Framework

The FAWE Centres of Excellence are government schools and as such, the government has provided the infrastructure and equipment, staff and maintenance costs for the school. All other partners have contributed in one way or

another to the development of the COEs. The community has mobilized additional support for various needs such as water and electricity, buying of equipment such as computers, building of classrooms and teachers house. FAWE has supplemented these efforts by bringing in the aspect of the gender responsiveness of the facilities.

The practice of FAWE has been to attract and convince all stakeholders to contribute. For instance, at the AIC Girls' Primary School the Semi-Arid Region Development Project (SARDEP) joined hands with FAWE and the parents to purchase books to ensure that each girl has the required textbooks. At the same school the Community Development Trust Fund has provided 89% of the funds for the water sanitation project. Of the 14 computers in the school FAWE bought only two; the community paid for the rest. FAWE has provided a purpose-built physical facility that consists of a hostel for up to 50 rescued girls. The hostel has sanitary facilities, a kitchen and a dining area that also serves as a training area. Since the rescued girls cannot go home the programme has to cater for them even during the school holidays. Such collective efforts have had a catalytic influence on other stakeholders including the government to participate. For instance in Senegal the MOE has built four classrooms following the catalytic initiatives of FAWE. This sharing is likely to lead to sustainability of the COE.

In Mgugu, for example, FAWE erected two dormitories with a capacity to accommodate 80 girls, as well as a kitchen, a dining hall and a science laboratory. FAWE also renovated one building into a library and donated 60 core curriculum textbooks, science equipment, seven computers and other learning materials. The number of computers has since grown to 17 through donations from other partners. The Ministry of Education and Culture contributed 40% of the textbooks and learning materials and also helped to install water tanks and solar power while the country's President and First Lady supported the library and also donated beds and mattresses for the dormitories. Other contributors to the Mgugu COE included World Vision, the Rotary Club and the Chairperson of the school board. Similar collective efforts to provide what should be basic government-sourced school infrastructure have also been witnessed in other COEs otherwise the main challenge in COEs is capacity building.

This joint collaboration of partners has contributed to keeping the unit cost at a minimum.

f. Stakeholders/Partnerships

The importance of stakeholder involvement and partnerships in the success of

COEs cannot be overemphasized. The stakeholders include the girls, the boys, the parents the teachers and school managers, the MOE, religious leaders, donors, chiefs, district officers, education providers, the media, local opinion leaders and other leaders. All have contributed towards the success of the programme.

However, the synergy created by having all these groups working together has proved to be the greatest advantage for the Centres of Excellence.

LESSONS LEARNT AND CHALLENGES

Experience has been a good teacher to FAWE in the endeavor to implement the COE intervention package. A number of lessons have been learnt. The major challenges and lessons are reported in this section.

a. Challenges

- Cultural practices such as FGM and early marriage are deeply rooted among many of the communities in sub Saharan Africa. In the medium term these will continue to be in conflict with the message of the Centre. Changing attitudes toward such practices is a mammoth, long-term task that will require combined efforts of many organizations.
- Poverty continues to be the overriding factor which impacts on girls' education. When families are faced with the issue of scarce resources, it is usually the girls that lost out. Mobilizing sufficient resources for the upkeep of girls is a big challenge. Most girls are unable to pay tuition fees or buy a school uniform.
- Most of the teachers have not been trained into child-centred approaches. This means that they require additional skills, which they may not have picked up in their teacher training. This continues to be a setback as they deal with the specific problems facing girls.

b. Lessons learnt

- From the FAWE experience, the reality on the ground is that most of the schools do not have the basic infrastructure that an ordinary school should have. They are therefore "below ordinary" and would need additional support as a pre-requisite to transforming the school into a gender-responsive institution.
- Involvement of all stakeholders -- the ministry of education, the local authorities, the school management, the community, the teachers, the girls and the boys greatly contributed to the success of the ventures.
- As an NGO working in girls' education, the collaboration with Ministries of education from the very initial stage has yielded dividends for the FAWE

-
-
- Centres of Excellence and has contributed to success and sustainability.
- A supportive and active stakeholder is a key ingredient to the success of a COE. Efforts to sustain their commitment must be inbuilt in the Centre' management systems.
 - Success of a programme that has to advocate against cultural issues that hinder girls' progress in education, such as early marriage and FGM, is greatly enhanced by active community participation and involvements in schools
 - Finally, the joint development and sharing of the Vision of the Centres of Excellence is an important component which ensures sustainability.

5. Implications for Scaling Up

a. Policy environment

All Ministry of education policies and plans contain the intention to improve the quality of education in general and to promote gender equality. Many of the policies that are already in place can support the establishment of Centres of Excellence. What is required now is to put the existing policies that urge for gender equity in education in to practice.

It must, meanwhile, be underscored that the big challenge in sub-Saharan is moving away from enrolment or access to retention and provision of quality education. The policy environment must therefore put emphasis on retention

If sub-Saharan Africa is to achieve EFA goals, the gender issues must be addressed centrally not at the margins. FAWE experience is that the Centre of Excellence model works and provides a practical avenue for enhancing quality of education of both girls and boys. The Centre of Excellence model is a package intervention of best practices that can be replicated as a whole or in part.

Political will is necessary to ensure the implementation of this proven model of the Centres of Excellence.

b. Ownership

The experience that led to the success story of COE model demonstrates that unless all the stakeholders develop a sense of ownership to the development and sustainability of the Centre, the project will be jeopardized. Although the initiative must be taken by someone, among the first steps to take is to sensitize stakeholders and awaken in them enough sense of ownership to empower them to take responsibility and play their role.

c. Processes

The Centres of Excellence is a holistic intervention. All aspects of the package should therefore be addressed simultaneously for maximum success.

The Centres of Excellence focus on the empowerment of all students and especially the girls. Inclusion of this aspect is key to the success of the Centres of Excellence.

Intensive in-service teacher training for gender responsiveness is part and parcel of the package. This could however, be incorporated by Ministries of education in existing pre-service and in-service training programmes.

The school can no longer operate as an island. Community involvement and participation in the Centres of Excellence activities is crucial to its success and proves beneficial for girls improved access and retention.

Many of the things such as classrooms, toilets, running water, electricity, boarding facilities, library and security fences that had to be initiated or strengthened in these Centres are actually what an ordinary school ought to have. It is therefore important for MOEs to at least develop the infrastructure and systems required for an ordinary school.

d. Structures (National, Regional/District, School, Community)

For scaling up COE structures at all levels must be appropriate to the task. At the Ministry of Education, a focal point such as an appropriate individual, unit or department should be appointed to deal with issues regarding Centres of Excellence.

Centres of Excellence should be mainstreamed into existing programmes of the Ministries of Education aimed quality improvement and reducing gender inequities. The TUSEME(Speak Out) Girls' empowerment programme should also be incorporated as a support to the Centres of Excellence.

At the school level, the incorporation of a gender responsive management system will be an added advantage.

e. Human and financial resources framework

The Centre of Excellence use existing personnel as they are government schools. However, Ministries of Education should consider incorporating additional resources towards training teachers and school managers in gender responsive teaching and management.

The issue of gender balance in the teaching staff should be looked into and where possible more female teachers hired.

Ministries should consider using the available existing resources in a more gender responsive fashion eg ensure separate toilets for girls and boys, boarding facilities in cases of long distance from school and adequate teaching and learning materials to allow for equal sharing of resources.

f. Stakeholders involvement/partnerships

It is beyond doubt that stakeholder involvement and partnerships are a critical ingredient of the success of the COE model. In its endeavors with the pilot projects FAWE has benefited tremendously from the support of the Ministers of education. Scaling up the COE model would point to more intensified collaboration and partnerships among the current and potential stakeholders. The role of the community in particular should not be ignored.

FAWE is appealing to Ministers of Education to:

- Replicate the Centre of Excellence model as a way of improving quality at the school level for both girls and boys
- Endeavor to develop the infrastructure of its schools to at least the required level of an ordinary school.
- Take on board that quality enhancement cannot be achieved without taking a gender perspective
- Review their education plans and policies for their gender responsiveness and include strategies that will enhance quality of girls' education
- Allocate specific and additional resources to ensuring a gender responsive environment in all schools.
- Take on board that teachers and school administrators should be trained in gender responsiveness. In the short run special seminars can be conducted for them from time to time but in the long run an appropriate module should be incorporated in all teacher training curricula.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

- As a concept, it is tempting to think of the idea of the Centre of Excellence as elitist and utopian. It is not.

So far 8 schools in six countries have been transformed into gender responsive institutions where there is increased access, retention and performance of both boys and girls. It can be done!

-
-
- As the basic policy framework is in place in most sub-Saharan African countries, each country should endeavor to have at least one Centre of Excellence. That one COE will undoubtedly demonstrate the benefits of a holistic approach in targeting girls' education problems.
 - As mentioned earlier, the EFA Global Monitoring Report released in November 2003 has once again confirmed that access to education for girls in SSA has increased significantly in the last ten years. However, the gender gap is still growing wider and major improvements are required in terms of the quality of education offered. These issues are threatening the achievement of EFA Goals. If Africa is to achieve the EFA goals, the gender issues must be mainstreamed in every country. This battle will not be one if attention is not paid to making schools gender responsive institutions that lead to improved access, retention and performance of girls. The COEs offer a ready answer to this.
-
-

References

Challenges of Converting an Ordinary School into a Centre of Excellence: a Case Study of Pilot Centres (Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Senegal).

FAWE. Experiences in Creating a Conducive Environment for Girls in School: FAWE Centres of Excellence. Case Studies from Kenya, Rwanda, Senegal and Tanzania. Nairobi: FAWE, 2001.

FAWE's Revised Strategic Direction 2002-2006.

Gender and Education for All; the Leap to Equality: EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003/4. Paris: UNESCO, 2003.

In Search for an Ideal School for Girls. Nairobi: FAWE, 2001.

Proceedings of a Follow-up Chiefs Management Workshop at AIC Kajiado 9 -10 May 2002.

Quest for Quality in Girls' Education: Transforming an Ordinary School into a Centre of Excellence--The FAWE Experience

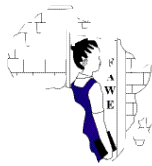
The Questfor Quality in Girls' Education:FAWE Centres of Excellence--AIC Girls' Primary School, Kajiado District, Kenya. Nairobi: FAWE, 2003.

The Quest for Quality in Girls' Education: FAWE Centres of Excellence--Grand Diourbel Junior Secondary School, Diourbel, Senegal. Nairobi: FAWE, 2003.

The Quest for Quality in Girls' Education: FAWE Centres of Excellence--The FAWE Girls' School Gisozi, Rwanda. Nairobi: FAWE, 2003.

The Quest for Quality in Girls' Education: FAWE Centres of Excellence--Mgugu Secondary School, Kilosa District, Tanzania. Nairobi: FAWE, 2003.

UNICEF. Education for All: No Excuses. New York: UNICEF Division of Communication, 2000.



yy

