

PREFACE

Various interventions have been undertaken 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, EFA goals are 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 traces the evolution of the re-entry policy in Zambia and emphasizes the seriousness of having in place clear guidelines and a tracking and monitoring system for its implementation. While many countries now recognize the importance of giving adolescent mothers a second chance to continue with their education and pave a future for themselves, only a handful have re-entry policies in place. And among those who have, many have failed to systematically monitor the impact of the policy. The FAWE Zambia chapter (FAWEZA) has successfully worked with the Ministry of Education to develop clear implementation guidelines, disseminate them and assess their effectiveness in improving girls' education.

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

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Forum for African Women Educationalists is grateful to
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for documenting this Best Practice

KEEPING GIRLS IN SCHOOL

FAWE Zambia's Campaign for an Enabling Readmission Policy for Adolescent Mothers

Every now and again the world as a community of nations looks into the future and sets a goal to be achieved by a certain year. The year appears far enough into the future for every country in the world to reach the goal by the stated time. So it was that in 1990, at a conference held in Jomtien, Thailand, the world set 2000 as the year by which it would achieve universal primary education for all and equity in education. As the magical year drew nearer, it was clear that most African countries south of the Sahara were not going to reach the target. But it was not for lack of trying, especially in the area of gender equity. Many countries had adopted strategies to promote girls' education. Many countries had also increased spending on education.

Expenditure on education (as percentage of GDP, 2000)

Angola	5.1 (in spite of the civil war)
Botswana	9.6
Malawi	5.7
Namibia	9.4
South Africa	6.8
Swaziland	8.1
Zambia	2.0
Zimbabwe	8.5

At the Education for All World Conference held in Dakar in 2000, the goal posts were moved to 2005 for the elimination of

gender disparities in primary and secondary education. A second goal was for governments to ensure girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality by the year 2015.

GIRLS' EDUCATION IN ZAMBIA

When missionaries introduced Western education in Zambia in the late 19th Century, only men and adolescent boys were admitted to schools. This was utilitarian education that benefited the missionaries themselves. Only practical subjects such as gardening and carpentry were offered. The Three R's were added to the curriculum later so that the new converts would be able to read the Bible and Christian tracts for themselves.

In 1924, the colonial government took over the running of schools from the missionaries and extended the school period to eight years. In the mid-1930s education for women was introduced. The curriculum for women was different from the men's. Women were offered cooking, baby care, hygiene, sewing and nutrition. Their education prepared them for their roles as wives and mothers.

From the very beginning, therefore, men had a head start, and they were offered education that was superior to that offered to women. This trend continued well into the independence period, when there were more school places for boys, and technical subjects were offered to boys only. In addition, there were, and still are, more barriers for girls to surmount in order to access education. Some of the barriers are school-based. They include:

- School location – long walking distances that tire girls out and expose them to sexual abuse.

- Girls' low levels of achievement, in comparison to boys, which makes parents feel that the time girls spend in school is wasted.
- School infrastructure – poor sanitation that affects girls much more than boys.

Other barriers are community-based:

- Poverty - when parents decide to send sons to school rather than daughters.
- Household chores and other community duties, which keep girls out of school and divert their attention from learning.
- High levels of illiteracy, especially among women – ignorance begets ignorance.

In addition, Zambia continued to spend less on education than other countries in the region. This indirectly affected the education of girls because it meant more dilapidated infrastructure, poor sanitation, not enough school places – all factors that militate against girls' access to education.

One other barrier, as girls grew older, was pregnancy. Girls who became pregnant were expelled from school and were not re-admitted into the school system. (It should be remembered that until the 1970s, teachers who got pregnant outside marriage were also fired and blacklisted.) There were some girls who became pregnant after being raped. In many cases, girls were made pregnant by fellow students. These boys were also expelled, if they were reported to the school authorities. In the majority of cases, the boys were not reported and they continued with their education. There was always the promise that the boy, if allowed to complete his education, would be able to take better care of his child, and probably marry the mother. They rarely did.

In a few cases, the culprit was a teacher. Again, a teacher could be disciplined if reported, but few were reported.

Therefore, while schoolboy fathers stayed on in school, irresponsible teachers continued to prey on children put in their care, and male predators stalked girls, the young mothers were sentenced to a life of misery in the innermost circle of poverty reserved for uneducated single mothers.

When the women's movement in Zambia grew in strength, one of the issues they decided to fight for was justice for girls who were thrown out of school after getting pregnant. In June 1995, the Zambia Association for University Women organized a conference on the situation of the girl-child in Zambia. The conference, which was held in preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women, proposed to government that girls who became pregnant should be re-admitted into school once care for the child was assured.

This was the launch pad for the re-entry policy.

READMISSION OF GIRLS WHO LEAVE SCHOOL BECAUSE OF PREGNANCY

After the Beijing Conference in 1995, the Women's Movement drew up its own priorities and action plan. Under education for the girl-child was a call to readmit girls who dropped out of school due to pregnancy. When the Forum for African Women Educationalists of Zambia (FAWEZA) was established on 8 March 1996, it added its voice to the call for policy change concerning girls who got pregnant.

In September 1997, a conference on girls' education was held at Mulungushi International Conference Centre, Lusaka, at which the Minister of Education, Dr. Syamukayumbu Syamujaye, announced that schoolgirls who became pregnant would no longer be expelled, and that those that had been expelled in 1997 should be allowed to return to school.

Reaction to the pronouncement was immediate, through letters to the Press and interviews in the media. The United Nations Children’s Fund and most women’s non-government organizations supported the policy. The church, the Zambia National Union of Teachers, some parents, teachers and some pupils, both boys and girls, opposed the move.

Between October and December 1997 the Zambia Association for Research and Development (ZARD) carried out an opinion poll on the re-admission of the pregnant child into school.

Views on readmission of pregnant girls into school (2001)

	For (%)	Against (%)	Total (%)
The church	28	72	100
Individual church members	58	42	100
Teachers	31	69	100
Parents	47	53	100
Boys	42	58	100
Girls	52	48	100
Re-entry girls	91	09	100
Politicians	73	27	100

The results confirmed the initial reactions. The church, parents, teachers and schoolboys were against the declaration. Interviewed as individuals, though, church representatives had more people in favour of the policy than against it. Politicians and the re-entry girls themselves had the highest support for the policy.

Reasons For/Against Readmission

Many of the reasons advanced for or against readmission were similar, though a few were particular to certain categories of respondents.

For	Against
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Will reduce women's illiteracy levels ▪ Everyone has a right to education ▪ Will empower women to look after their children ▪ Will bridge the gender gap in education ▪ Will give women the chance to contribute to national development ▪ Re-entry girls will serve as a deterrent to other girls ▪ Punishment will not help girls grow spiritually ▪ Forgive and give them a second chance ▪ Some girls are victims of rape and should not suffer for the criminal actions of other people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Loss of discipline in schools ▪ Will lower the standards of education ▪ Girls will lose respect for teachers – seeing themselves as equal to the teachers ▪ Will encourage immorality ▪ There will be an increase in STI/HIV infection ▪ Girls will not value education ▪ Unfair for the upright to learn with mothers ▪ Parents were not consulted ▪ Sex before marriage is taboo and should not be encouraged ▪ Sex before marriage against Christian faith

The opinion poll also showed that a lot of people were still not aware of the policy. FAWEZA took it upon itself to educate the public about the policy. Drama performances were held across the country to inform people about the policy. However, these were mainly by school children, and were performed at school functions.

Process of Implementation

As the results of the opinion poll were publicized, the Ministry of Education in December 1997 issued a circular to all Provincial Education Officers, District Education Officers and heads of schools. The circular formalized the re-entry policy and called on the officers to implement it without delay. The circular was vague, though, and most of the decisions touching on the policy were left to the discretion of the heads of schools.

The Procedure

On 22–23 October 2001, FAWEZA convened a workshop to examine the procedures being followed by schools, as well as develop uniform guidelines and a tracking and monitoring system for the re-entry policy. This is because one of the things that had led to the poor implementation of the re-entry policy was lack of guidelines or a system to follow. The workshop identified the following points, among others.

1. It is rare that a girl comes up to the school authorities to report that she is pregnant. Usually, the report is made by:
 - Class/school mates
 - A teacher who notices a change in behaviour (withdrawn and taciturn)
 - The sports teacher who notices physical appearance and lack of agility
 - Parents/guardians after a girl decides to stay away from school
 - Hospital/clinic staff who discover pregnancy when pupil is treated for another complaint
 - The matron (in a boarding school) through routine checks on girls

The reports are made to the responsible teacher/counsellor. The teacher will call the girl and ask her if she is pregnant. Some will admit they are, while others will say they are not. In either case, the teacher will take the girl to a health facility for examination. In some schools, the parents/guardians are called at this stage so that the medical report is sought in collaboration with them. In others, the parents/guardians are called to the school after confirming that the girl is pregnant.

2. When the school receives a report confirming the pregnancy, the girl is asked to write a letter “confessing” that she is pregnant.

3. In some schools the girl may be told that she is entitled to go on leave as soon as she feels that she can no longer cope. Other schools decide when the girl should be sent on leave. For example, some schools choose to send the girl away as soon as her pregnancy becomes obvious. A letter is then formally written to the parents/guardians about the girl's pregnancy and exclusion from school. The letter states that the girl is free to resume her studies after the agreed period of leave. In day schools, the minimum period for such leave is six months. For boarding schools, 12–18 months is the recommended period. The school notes the girl's last day of attendance in the school register.
4. Some students request a letter of transfer if they prefer to go to a different school afterwards. Sometimes it is the parents/guardians who make this request.
5. A copy of the letter of exclusion is sent to the District Education Officer. If a schoolboy is responsible, a letter is written to the head of his school, for information only because the boy remains in school. In some cases, the boy is counselled, too.
6. When the girl is ready to go back to school, she applies for re-admission. This is just a formality because school admittance is automatic, if the girl goes back to the same school. If she got a letter of transfer, some schools will assist her to get a place in another school. Others leave it to her to find a school place for herself.

Outcomes and Indicators

At the conference, some weaknesses in the implementation process were identified:

- Before girls were taken for medical examination, they were not counselled; they were not given the assurance that they were free to continue their education afterwards. As a result, some girls ran away from school as soon as the pregnancy was detected. Secondly, girls were not counselled after the medical examination.
- Parents were simply told about the girl's condition. They were not requested to make a commitment that they would personally see to it that the girl went back to school. Nor were efforts made to reconcile the parents/guardians and the girls. Some parents were so angry that the home atmosphere made girls withdraw from school.
- There was no contract between the school and the girl, and no uniformity in implementation practice. Therefore, some school heads continued to turn the girls away.
- There was no financial support to meet the extra cost of bringing up a child. The person responsible was not made to support the child by paying child maintenance. The burden was left entirely with the girl. The situation is the same today.
- If a schoolboy was responsible, he was not counselled, and no action was taken against him. There were a few cases where the boy was counselled.
- No penalty was spelt out for a teacher who made a schoolgirl pregnant.
- The public was unaware of the policy, and had not been adequately prepared for it. Parents, especially, felt that they should be involved when such policies were still under consideration

- The policy's lack of legality made it possible for mission schools to refuse to implement it.

Because of these shortcomings, it was found that the policy had not made much of an impact on girls' education.

The Current Situation

Going round talking to teachers, pupils and parents shows that attitudes towards the policy have changed.

Views on readmission of pregnant girls into school

	2001		2004	
	For (%)	Against (%)	For (%)	Against (%)
Teachers	31	69	84	16
Pupils				
Girls	52	48	66	34
Boys	42	58	44	56
Re-entry Girls	91	09	100	-
Parents	47	53	75	25

Most of the parents talked to were in favour of the policy. One male parent was not sure. Of the teachers who were against the policy, 30% were women. Therefore, only male teachers and boys have remained constant in opposition to the policy. Commenting on this, one girl said the male teachers and the boys who were still against the policy were afraid of facing the mothers of their children everyday. A female teacher said men like to dominate. When they see an intelligent girl, they want to curtail her education. They will do all in their power to frustrate her, including making her pregnant.

The reasons for and against were similar to those given in 1997. Parents felt that the policy has made both boys and girls reckless. There was a feeling that re-entry girls were in a vulnerable position because male teachers and schoolboys

perceive them as having low morals. They are propositioned and are insulted when they turn their advances down. There was an observation that some parents turn girls who become pregnant into whipping boys” (girls!) in the family. They are referred to as failures and bad examples when other children are being chastized.

Some of the male teachers said they are repulsed when a girl stands up to answer a question and there, in front of their very eyes, her uniform gets two wet spots as milk flows from her breasts. They talk about schoolgirls “smelling like mothers” from curdled milk and urine. These are problems that can easily be taken care of if girls stay away long enough. It would help also if girls were counselled on personal hygiene. However, smelling like a mother should evoke tender, loving thoughts; nostalgia in everyone. After all, every man and woman is a mother’s child.

Other teachers, both male and female, said that the majority of the re-entry girls gain maturity. They come back with the sole purpose to study and pass their examinations. Therefore, they become better students.

There is fear among some groups that the policy has led to increased cases of pregnancy. There are no data to back this assertion. Schools have not been sending information to the Ministry headquarters. At the national level, the only figures available are for 2003. What these figures show are the disparities between urban and rural schools, at both primary and secondary levels.

Pregnancy readmission grades 1–7 by province

Province/Grade	*1	*2	*3	4	5	6	7	Total
Central	1	8	6	5	5	10	32	67
Copperbelt	0	0	0	0	0	2	18	20
Eastern	2	11	19	13	13	24	59	141
Luapula	1	0	0	2	2	9	17	31

Lusaka	0	0	0	1	1	14	40	56
North Western	3	14	2	9	9	25	59	121
Northern	0	3	14	3	3	5	18	46
Southern	0	2	8	3	3	14	51	81
Western	7	23	7	10	10	19	45	121

* See explanation below

In Lusaka, the first case is reported in Grade 4. On the Copperbelt, the first case is reported in Grade 6. In rural schools, re-entry starts in Grade 1. * Even though pupils start school at older ages in rural areas, it does not explain a girl getting pregnant in Grade 1. These girls had probably not been taken to school because there was not enough money to take them to school. They may have been married off at an early age and have decided to take advantage of the policy and go to school for the first time in their lives. This could explain the high level of re-entry in the rural provinces.

Pregnancy readmission grades 8–12

Province/Grade	8	9	10	11	12	Total
Central	0	7	6	13	10	36
Copperbelt	33	39	49	57	39	217
Eastern	5	19	19	28	24	95
Luapula	3	5	9	13	10	40
Lusaka	1	1	9	12	36	59
North Western	4	2	16	20	12	54
Northern	1	5	12	23	12	53
Southern	1	12	15	27	8	63
Western	2	12	5	11	10	40

The Copperbelt Province had the lowest number of re-entrants at primary level (20), but the highest at secondary level (217). The Eastern Province has high levels of pregnancy both at primary and secondary levels. Some of the provinces, for example the Western and Central Provinces, have higher numbers at primary than at secondary level. It could be that there are fewer schools in these provinces.

According to statistics, the Luapula and Northern Provinces have the lowest HIV prevalence in the country.

Correspondingly, they have low rates of pregnancy, at both primary and secondary levels. Lusaka, Copperbelt and Southern Provinces have the highest rates of infection, and the highest number of re-entry girls. How many of these are victims of sexual abuse and violence? There is need for research to get answers to the questions that arise when one looks at the presented figures.

Data from Mukamambo II High School for 2003 and 2004 show an increase in the number of re-entry girls, but this is because the school admitted some from other schools. In 2002, the school graduated 19 mothers.

Number of re-entry girls at Mukamambo II High School

Grade	2003	2004	Total
10	4	0	4
11	2	5	7
12	8	4	12
Total	14	9	23

The table above shows that in 2004 the number of re-entry girls in Grade 11 increased by 150%. This means that three of the girls either came from other schools on transfer, or that the extra three students have been out of school for a number of years and decided to take advantage of the policy (note the 27- and 35-year-old women in school). Instead of going to night schools, many girls/women are opting to re-enter the formal education system. It is for this reason that teachers are calling for a ceiling in the age of girls/women readmitted to school.

WHAT MAKES IT A BEST PRACTICE?

Political Will

The government did not capitulate, even when there appeared to be more voices against than for the policy. It maintained that expelling pregnant girls would make gender equality in the education system impossible. Zambia, as a signatory to the Thailand Declaration on Education For All was duty bound to adopt gender-responsive policies such as the re-entry of pregnant girls. That took the fight out of the teaching staff and school authorities who were opposed to the policy.

In 2000, the government adopted a National Gender Policy. The policy states that it will facilitate the readmission of girls who become pregnant back into school as a way of redressing imbalances and inadequacies in the provision of education.

Guidelines

The 2001 FAWEZA workshop made a number of recommendations to improve the implementation of the re-entry policy. The recommendations were sent to the Ministry of Education for approval. Though there was no official acceptance, some of the recommendations were adopted, and that has made the policy work better.

In May 2004, the Ministry of Education held a retreat for stakeholders to at last look at the recommendation. The Ministry's Equity and Gender Component Manager said the new guidelines were going to be sent to schools before the end of the year. This renewed interest by the Ministry will give credence to the policy as a guiding principle formally adopted by government.

Acceptance of Change

In the first year or two, there were newspaper reports of head teachers who would allow girls back only after intervention by

the Ministry of Education. For six years now, schools have been seeing girls get pregnant, go on leave and get back into the education system. Parents/guardians have seen their daughters/wards get pregnant and go back to school. Many families have benefited from the policy. This has led to the acceptance of the policy. The few remaining pockets of resistance are ineffective.

A number of people talked to (teachers, parents, community leaders and members of the public) have benefited from the policy. A sister or other relative had become pregnant and had re-entered the formal education system. There was public sympathy for the girl that was absent before.

Interventions

Schools have come up with strategies to help girls avoid pregnancies. One of them was Kabulonga Girls in Need Association. A teacher who saw the need for girls to talk about the problems they faced started the club. He adopted tactics that helped the girls gain self-confidence. When FAWEZA visited the school, it was impressed by what had been achieved. The school was asked to transform the club into SAFE, an American concept that stands for the Student Alliance for Female Education.

SAFE clubs, which are student networks for the promotion of female education, operate under the auspices of FAWEZA. SAFE aims to use peers or mentors to improve the well-being of the girl-child. The mentors come from institutions of higher learning such as the University of Zambia and the Evelyn Hone College. Girls who volunteer to become mentors are trained in adolescent reproductive health and counselling. They counsel victims of abuse, STI/HIV/AIDS and other related cases. The mentors help the club members to:

- Take responsibility and make informed choices
- Resist negative pressures

- Build their self-esteem
- Discuss issues affecting them openly and freely
- Avoid risky behaviour

The Kabulonga SAFE club has become a national model. SAFE clubs have been opened throughout the country. They now admit boys as supporters. This will help the boys and girls to work together and grow to respect each other. The clubs are helping remove the stigma against re-entry girls.

Another intervention introduced by FAWEZA is the Communication Box. A locked box stands outside the school. Girls drop suggestions or complaints into the box. Only teachers trained by FAWEZA are allowed to open the boxes. If there are allegations against teachers or other students, they are thoroughly investigated before cases are reported to the head of the school for further action. This will reduce cases of verbal and other abuse by teachers and students alike.

Financial Support

FAWEZA has been able to take over the financial responsibility for some of the most vulnerable girls. The support does not cover only the school requirements. A little extra money is given for the girls' toiletries. Some of the girls who have had children fall into this category and benefit from the support, too. Girls who may have stayed away from school for financial reasons have been able to continue their education.

LESSONS LEARNT AND CHALLENGES

- Girls who attend coeducational schools suffer more teasing and taunting than those that attend all-girls schools. Therefore, girls in coeducational schools prefer to go to different schools after having a baby. Only one basic school, out of the coeducational schools talked to, had received its own girls back.

- Students in schools that are situated in residential areas, and draw their students from the locality, also prefer to transfer to other schools. A teacher from Mufulira, on the Copperbelt, gave an example of a school built in a compound for people of the same profession. Everyone knows everyone else. Everyone greets the girl with a child on her way to and from school. In keeping with tradition, they now call her by her child's name, and they must always ask after the health of the child. In the end, she dropped out of school. No amount of coaxing could make her return.

- Poverty contributes to the increase in the number of girls who fall pregnant. Many of the cases involve single or double orphans who found a "good Samaritan" who befriended them and supported them financially. Teachers talked to maintained that the re-entry policy was there before 1997, but only for the rich. Girls from rich families were taken out of school before they were detected. After giving birth they were taken to different schools.

- Counselling before and after medical examination is vital. When girls become pregnant they live in fear. It is important to give them reassurance.

- Girls have become alert and are quick to tell the teachers when they discover that one of them is pregnant. This has drastically reduced the number of abortions and attempted abortions. Therefore, the lives of some of the girls who might have tried to abort have been saved.

- The right interventions will reduce cases of pregnancy. Clubs such as SAFE are giving girls confidence. Girls are becoming more assertive and will not succumb too easily to sexual advances.

- Financial support given to the girls might be seen as encouragement for others to become pregnant. However, poverty, like pregnancy, stigmatizes the girls. They are in an unenviable position.
- In the long term, the number of pregnancies will go down. One parent said a pregnant girl in her daughter's class was teased mercilessly before and after she had her baby. Though she stoically carried on with her studies, everyone could see how deeply she was hurting. Her sadness and fear somehow transmitted themselves to the other girls. They stopped teasing her and each one of them appeared to be frightened of finding themselves in her shoes.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SCALING UP

Can the re-entry policy be scaled up? Can it be replicated? The answer to both questions is "Yes". The problems that schools have had in implementing the policy in Zambia are discussed above so that other countries may prepare more thoroughly than Zambia did. None of the problems are insurmountable. The Ministry of Education may, or may not, have taken care of the issues that are raised below. A policy is not a permanent structure. It improves as it draws from its practice.

For Zambia

The re-entry programme in Zambia, though embedded in a strongly supportive environment with policies such as free primary education, Education For All programmes, policy on gender sensitive school environment, gender training for teachers, HIV/AIDS and life skills education, etc., still has many gaps particularly in its implementation strategies:

- At the moment, only girls are counselled. The boys who are responsible are not counselled. It is important to counsel the boys as well.
- Girls are given only one chance. The girl who becomes pregnant a second time is not accepted back into the formal education system, although it is possible for her to continue her education through night school. Boys, on the other hand, are free to father as many children as they like. The same limit should be imposed on them.
- A bursary scheme should be introduced for teen mothers. FAWEZA is not able to meet the needs of all the vulnerable girls that require assistance. For example, there is one school where FAWEZA supports a total of 47 girls. Schools should create networks with relevant organisations that could support victims by following up child maintenance and helping the girls access scholarships.
- The men/boys responsible should be made to pay child maintenance
- Psycho-social counselling is important. Each school should have a teacher who is able to counsel the girls. It is important to get close to the girls so that teachers know when a girl's attention is wandering because her child is sick, or she has no one to leave her child with.

One teacher at Mukamambo II High School, after learning that a girl was not going to sit her exams because she had no one to leave her baby with offered her own home for the examination period. The girl went on to pass her examinations and is currently in college.

- There should be guidelines on the age of girls that who readmitted. In one school, a 35-year-old married woman

with three children was re-admitted. She was laughed at and called *ambuye* (grandmother). The woman herself feels uncomfortable and sometimes refuses to do certain things (e.g., dancing) because she considers them “too childish”.

- The School Guidance Department should help find school places for girls who wish to transfer to other schools. The Department should keep up-to-date information on cases of re-entrants and submit the information to the Ministry of Education.
- A guideline for collecting data on pregnant schoolgirls and on re-entrants should be developed, as well as an instrument for monitoring re-entry. The Ministry should stress the need for schools to supply data to the Ministry.
- There should be a tracer system in place so that the girls who do not return after their leave are followed up. Girls who drop out a second time should be investigated. What led to their dropping out? Were the reasons school or community based?

One girl, after her leave, used to leave home in uniform, but would never turn up at school. She used to go back home at the right time and even pretend to do her homework after dinner. Her friends told the teachers, who contacted her parents. There could be other cases similar to that.

- There is need to have some training/counselling for teachers, especially male teachers. There are a number of reports about teachers who use derogatory language and verbally abuse the girls in front of the whole class. One girl who reported to her mother the vulgar language used by a teacher received no support. The mother said for the

teacher to have uttered such words to her meant that there was something between the two of them.

It is not the male teachers alone who are insensitive to the girls. Some female teachers condemn them and are perhaps more abusive than the men. This results in children's academic performance dropping and can easily be detected if the girls are closely monitored.

- Stern action should be taken against teachers who make schoolgirls pregnant. They are in a strong position and, as in the cases of fathers or guardians, girls find it difficult to fight them off.
- There is need for a comprehensive study that will come up with comparative data on the policy.

For other countries

For Ministries of Education wishing to introduce or scale up re-entry programmes in their country, special consideration should be given to the following:

Policy Environment

It is important to ensure that the country has an enabling policy environment that is committed to removing all barriers that stand in the way of girls' access, performance and completion of their education. Policies that support an enabling environment include free and compulsory primary education, gender equity with special emphasis on girls' education, HIV/AIDS and life skills education, school health and nutrition, specific strategies to address the issue of orphans, provision of bursaries and school materials, and the kind of school environment that is committed to achieving the EFA goals and targets. Advocating for introduction or scaling up of a re-entry policy must be based on researched data.

Ownership

Ownership of such a programme is essential for effective implementation and sustainability. A participatory approach in the refinement and implementation of this policy will instil a sense of ownership in stakeholders at school, household, community, district and ministerial levels as roles and responsibilities of each group will be clear. This should be based on a careful consideration of the myths, beliefs and cultural practices of the communities regarding adolescent pregnancy.

Process

- There is need to build a strong case based on research information and statistics on trends in dropout owing to pregnancy and re-entry. Such data will support advocacy strategies and efforts to influence policy such as public debates and media activities.
- Guidelines need to be clearly formulated and involve all stakeholders. Dissemination of these guidelines should be systematic and long term.
- Sensitization must continue at all levels including school, community, district and policy making.
- There is need to continue systematic data collection to monitor the effectiveness of the guidelines and undertake necessary adjustments as informed by emerging information. This should be included in the implementation plan right from the outset.

Structures

- Re-entry should be incorporated into the Ministry of Education's programmes and budget by the Directorate of Planning and hence appear at all levels of the ministry down to the local levels.

- Gender units and officers at national, district and local level in the Ministry of Education and other line ministries should be utilized.
- At school level supportive structures should include:
 - ▶ Guidance and counselling desks and trained counsellors
 - ▶ Programmes for girls' empowerment like SAFE clubs in Zambia or Tuseme in Tanzania to help girls avoid pregnancies and STDs.
 - ▶ Special arrangements to help nursing mothers
 - ▶ Bursaries

Human and financial resources

There is need to plan for human and financial resources required for advocacy campaigns and community. With careful planning these could be incorporated into all levels of ongoing initiatives on girls' education

Partnerships

There is need to involve all stakeholders especially community groups such as faith-based groups and community leaders who are known to hold strong negative feelings about such programmes on moral grounds.

CONCLUSION

There is need to carry out a comprehensive study on the issue of girls who become pregnant. The number of girls who are raped or abused by their parents/guardians or other relatives is uncomfortably large. The mistaken and criminal belief that a man can wipe off his HIV status onto a virgin has put girls in more danger of being raped by unknown people. Cases of teachers who make girls pregnant are numerous. These are social problems that need to be addressed outside the school system as well.

Many countries have now accepted the need for gender balancing in decision making bodies at all levels. This cannot happen by accident. It can only be achieved if girls have the same opportunities as boys to attain the education levels that will equip them for such positions. It is only girls who can get pregnant. But boys and men are equally culpable. All the girls I interviewed are looking after their children on their own. Many have not seen the boys or men responsible from the moment they told them that they were expecting their babies. Whatever measures are taken to address the girl's problem should, therefore, be extended to the boy or man responsible. In that way, both will be sensitized to the problems that a baby born to a schoolgirl presents.

All the girls, except one, did not want to have anything to do with the responsible boys or men. The exception was a girl whose mother is a housemaid and cannot meet the cost of keeping her in school. A teacher who helped pay her fees and buy her school requisites made her pregnant. The teacher has not been reported. He is married, and there is a possibility that he is still in touch with her.

It should be borne in mind that the ultimate aim of the re-entry policy is not just to see every pregnant girl back in school. It should be to equip girls psychologically and morally to say "no" to sex so that they complete their education without getting pregnant once. And further, such a policy should aim to instil in men and boys a sense of responsibility for their actions, and insist they show due regard for the rights of the girl-child.

CASE STUDIES

I am 18 years old, and in Grade 12. My parents are both dead. I was left with my maternal uncle. My aunt, his wife, is a nurse. My uncle and aunt were very good to me. I was not the only person they were keeping. My aunt's nephew also lived with us.

One day, I had a bath and went into my bedroom to get dressed. I was alone in the house with my aunt's nephew. Unfortunately, the girls' room did not have a key. My aunt's nephew came into the room and raped me. When my uncle and aunt came back, I told them what had happened. The boy ran away and has not been back ever since. It was a terrible experience for me. I would wash my body, but still feel unclean. When I didn't have my period for two months, I knew I was pregnant.

Pregnancy is not something that you can put somewhere so that you can forget about it for a while. It is with you all the time. It must have been easy for my aunt to know that I was pregnant. She bought me a dress and told me to try it on. She did not leave the room, so I knew it was a trick. I undressed and she told me I was pregnant. She told me to lie back on the bed. She examined me and said I was four months pregnant.

My uncle... He was furious, no, he was terribly hurt and that made me feel worse. He said he was not going to do anything for me ever again. I reminded him that I was raped, but it seems a girl who is raped bears the blame. The following day I did not have the courage to get up and go to school. In fact, I realized that school was over for me.

My aunt went to school and told the Headmistress that I was pregnant and could not continue with my education. The Headmistress asked to see me. When I went to see her she

told me that I could go back to the same school after weaning my baby.

The atmosphere in our home was tense. Finally, my uncle told me to go and stay with one of my aunts. I gave birth in February 2003. Although I was not staying with him now, my uncle bought all the requirements for the baby. He became very supportive. In January 2004, I re-entered school. My uncle has taken me back into his home. I am lucky to get a second chance in life. I admit I used to be playful before. I am very serious now. The school has been wonderful. The teachers and all my fellow students treat me normally. If anyone has said something nasty about me, I haven't heard about it.

What has my experience taught me? Well, to start with, it has shown me what life is like for a girl or a woman. You have to be alert all the time. Boys come up to me and say, "You're beautiful". I look directly at them and say, "Thank you, but no. I know what you want". I have already reported some of the more persistent boys. I'm not going to wait until I'm raped before I shout. My education is my priority now.

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When I was in Grade 9, I got into bad company. My friends and I had boyfriends, mainly among the teachers. Towards the end of the third term, I became pregnant. I was able to sit my exams because I was only one month pregnant. I told the teacher responsible that I was pregnant, and he said he was going to marry me. After I left school, I never saw him again. He got a transfer, and I have no idea where he went, and I have no wish to see him.

Although I qualified to go on to Grade 10, I could not take up my place. All the other girls in my group went back for Grade 10. When they got to Grade 11, I used to see them, and envy them so much. For a time, I used to blame my friends for my

predicament. I no longer blame them. If I had not wanted to do wrong, I would have left the gang.

My father is dead, and my mother has been ill for a long time now. We all live with my grandmother. No one had the means to support me. I decided to earn a little money so that I could go back to school. Our parish priest used to sponsor a number of children. When I asked for assistance, he told me I had to work for it.

I found that I could not save money because everything I earned went to feeding the family. The priest left, and a new one came. He did not pay me the money I used to get, but reduced it. I totally lost hope. The head teacher at a nearby school felt sorry for me. He talked to one of the heads of an all-girls school. I was accepted, and I re-entered school in Grade 10. I'm now in Grade 12. I have not overheard any disparaging words from the teachers, or from my fellow students. I talk openly about my experience in the hope that other girls will learn from it. Unfortunately I still see even girls I have talked to become pregnant. If I had had someone talk to me the way I talk to these girls, I don't think I would have got pregnant.

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I am 27 years old, and I have a three-year-old son. My father died a long time ago. My mother was too poor to support me, so one of my sisters took me. Then she died, and I had to come back home to live with my mother. Sitting at home, doing nothing, led to my getting pregnant.

After I had given birth, I found out the meaning of abject poverty. I could not buy things for my baby. I decided to rear chickens as a way of raising money to go back to school. I was thus able to pay for myself as an Academic Production Unit (APU) student in Grades 8 and 9. In Grade 9, I got the highest marks in the school. The teachers at the school were very

helpful. They explained my situation to the head at the High School where I was accepted. The school put me in contact with FAWEZA. Luckily, FAWEZA adopted me, and supports me.

Perhaps I'm the only person who is teased in the school, not because I have a child, but because I'm so much older than the other students. It hurts me, but it strengthens me at the same time. I know my time is limited, so I work so hard that I beat all those who tease me. I am determined to go to university.

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I became pregnant in Grade 11. I told my mother. She took me to a clinic that confirmed that I was pregnant. We decided that I should not tell the school authorities. I used to tie myself up and I was able to stay up to the end of term without being detected. I gave birth during the school holiday. I could not come back to school immediately because I had a hip injury following childbirth. My mother went to the school and reported that I had fallen down and dislocated my hip.

After three weeks I was able to go back to school. After only two days, the Deputy Head called me to her office and asked me if I was pregnant. I said I was not. She asked me if I had a baby. Again, I refused. Then she told me to take off my uniform and my breasts were bursting with milk. I was told to come to school the following day with my mother.

When we came to the school, we were both told about the re-entry policy, and that there was no need for us to go to all those lengths to hide the fact that I had a baby. I was told to write the school, explaining that I needed to go on leave and come back to school when my baby was eight months old. I went on leave and came back last year. I'm now in Grade 12.