The right to education of pregnant girls and young mothers

TANZANIA
In Tanzania, girls are often expelled from school when they are found to be pregnant. According to a 2013 report by the Centre for Reproductive Rights, [V] over 55,000 adolescent girls were either forced to drop out or were expelled from schools because of pregnancy between 2003 and 2011. [VI] Although their research "revealed no national-level law, regulation, or policy explicitly requiring the expulsion of pregnant students", [VII] they found a widespread belief among teachers, school administrators and education officials that this practice is required by law. [VIII] Expulsion from school has a big impact on the lives of these girls. It decreases their likelihood of earning a good income. Besides, they are also often faced with stigmatization by their peers, parents and wider communities.

Advocacy for re-entry of pregnant girls and young mothers into schools
The Tanzania Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) Alliance – also known as Pamoja Tunaweza – is a collaboration between five civil society organizations. [IX] The Alliance is working to improve young people's SRHR in the following districts: Iringa Municipal, Iringa Rural, Kilindi, Iramba, Mkalama and Same (hereafter referred to as the districts or the districts of focus). As part of this work, since 2013 they have advocated for the right to education of pregnant girls and young mothers. The main focus of this advocacy has been to end the practice of expulsion of pregnant girls from schools, by giving pregnant girls and young mothers the opportunity to continue their education (re-entry).

Analysis on re-entry of pregnant girls and young mothers
The Alliance started its advocacy in 2013 by undertaking an analysis, in order to gain more insight into the existing policy environment on re-entry. [X] This concerned in particular the draft revised Education and Training Policy, as this policy contained a component on enabling school girls to continue with their studies after delivery (hereafter referred to as re-entry component), but which had not yet been fully approved. Besides, the aim was to learn more about the specific situation in their districts of focus, among others by establishing the pregnancy rate in primary and secondary schools and the number of girls expelled from school because of pregnancy. Another aim was to explore the opinions of different groups, such as male and female students, heads of schools and parents, on the re-entry component in the draft revised Education and Training Policy.

This analysis consisted of a desk review of relevant documents and of data collection in the districts where the SRHR Alliance is working. For the data collection in the districts, qualitative methods were used. Key informant interviews, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with young people, adults, community leaders, education officials and other stakeholders.

The findings include:
- Data on school dropout due to pregnancy showed a small number of girls who drop out for this reason. This can be explained by many girls dropping out before the school administration finds out that they are pregnant.
- Only a small number of school girls returned to school after delivery, these were all secondary school pupils. They returned to private schools or institutes of adult education.
Concerning the policy environment, the analysis found that the process of ensuring re-entry of pregnant girls already has a long history in Tanzania. One of the factors that has hampered this process was the delay in the approval of the revised National Education and Training Policy.

Many respondents showed support for the re-entry component in the draft revised Education and Training Policy. However, some of them expressed concern that this would increase sexual activity among students.

Some of the respondents advised raising the awareness of communities on the importance of the re-entry component.

Advocacy towards decision-makers at different levels

The SRHR Alliance presented the findings of the analysis to relevant decision-makers and to other civil society organizations, both at national level and in the districts. At national level, the SRHR Alliance managed to include the right to education of pregnant girls and young mothers on the agenda of a number of relevant national meetings/forums. An example is the Breakfast Debate, which was organized by the Policy Forum – a network of nongovernment organizations – in collaboration with the SRHR Alliance on the 30 January 2015. This meeting was dedicated entirely to the re-entry into schools of young mothers, and brought together policy-makers from the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training and the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, and representatives of UN agencies and different civil society organizations. The findings of the analysis proved a useful entry point for opening dialogue on some of the recommendations of the SRHR Alliance on how re-entry could be improved. [XI]

The Tanzania SRHR Alliance recommended the Tanzanian government, and in particular the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, to prioritize:

- The launching of the new Education and Training Policy, as this was the first policy containing a re-entry component, and thus is vital for convincing schools not to expel pregnant girls but instead accept re-entry of these girls.
- The development and dissemination of guidelines on re-entry of girls into schools after delivery. For the re-entry component in the Education and Training Policy to be implemented, for example by schools, it needs to be translated into guidelines, explaining how pregnant girls will be supported in returning to school.

In the districts, relevant decision-makers, such as education and legal officers, head teachers, teachers, community and religious leaders, were contacted as well. Some examples of the recommendations given to these different decision-makers include:

To schools
- To welcome pregnant girls and young mothers back to school and to give these girls the option to choose in which schools they would like to continue their education.

To communities and community leaders
- To formulate local laws – so called bye-laws – in relation to the right to education for girls.
- To create a conducive environment for girls and their babies.
More conducive policies

Good progress was made in the policy environment, both at national level and in the districts. At national level, the new Education and Training Policy was launched by Tanzania’s President in February 2015. Furthermore, important steps were made in 2015 to develop the guidelines explaining how pregnant girls will be supported in returning to school, by reviewing draft guidelines which were formulated in 2009. The SRHR Alliance has contributed to this process by organizing – in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training – a technical review workshop with representatives of the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Tanzania Institute of Education, UNICEF, UNFPA and civil society organizations. It is hoped that the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training will soon approve the guidelines, so they can enter into force.

Simultaneously, the Alliance has been supporting communities in Kilindi District and in Iringa Region in the formulation of bye-laws, to support the right to education of pregnant girls. In eight wards in Kilindi District, the community has amended the existing bye-laws to include re-entry, thus stimulating parents to take their girls back to school after delivery. This amendment is currently waiting for approval from the new full council.

In addition to these developments in the policy environment, there were also positive developments in schools. Even though schools are still hesitant to actively accept girls after delivery, because the re-entry guidelines have not yet been issued, some schools have already expressed their willingness to allow re-entry of these girls. This includes eight schools in Iringa Region.

Continued efforts are needed

Continued efforts are now needed, both by civil society organizations and decision-makers, to ensure that all girls in Tanzania, including pregnant girls and young mothers, will be supported in continuing their education. Attention needs, in particular, to be given to:

- The finalization of the re-entry guidelines as well as the dissemination of the guidelines to schools.
- Improving access to comprehensive sexuality education in schools, as this will build the skills of both girls and boys for making responsible choices on their sexuality and relationships.
- Reducing the stigma faced by pregnant girls, in schools and in their communities.
SRHR Alliance
What would your life look like if you had not received any comprehensive sexuality education, had no access to contraception, or if you, or your partner, had been pregnant or given birth without support? The Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Alliance, consisting of Rutgers, Amref Flying Doctors, CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality, dance4life and Simavi, works with 52 organizations in nine countries to address these issues.

The five-year international programme 'Unite for Body Rights' strengthens southern civil society organizations in the promotion of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for all. The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs made 44 million euro available for the period 2011–2015. The SRHR Alliance aims to reach 2.5 million people in nine countries in Africa and Asia, including Tanzania. In each of these countries, organizations have joined forces in SRHR Alliances. The programme combines and strengthens three crucial aspects of SRHR: SRHR education, sexual and reproductive health services, and an enabling environment to seek health services. In order to work towards an improved enabling environment, advocacy is an important strategy. Capacity building of civil society organizations to advocate is therefore part and parcel of the UBR programme.

Rutgers in Tanzania
Rutgers strengthens the capacity for advocacy of the SRHR Alliances in seven countries. Tanzania is one of these countries. Rutgers has provided technical support to the Tanzania SRHR Alliance in the development and implementation of the advocacy strategy on the right to education for pregnant girls and young mothers.
Rutgers’ advocacy mission

Everyone should have the opportunity to experience sexuality voluntarily, safely and pleasantly. And we pursue this aim with great passion. For several decades, the name Rutgers has been synonymous with open, candid and positive sexual education in the Netherlands. Nowadays we mainly support professionals in the care and education sectors in discussing sexuality with their target groups. We acquire knowledge and develop effective methods on the basis of research. Furthermore, we utilize our knowledge and expertise to influence policy-makers.

Rutgers’ success is also evident in other countries. This inspires us to cooperate with organizations throughout the world in improving sexual health and offering people freedom of choice in relationships, sexuality and the decision whether or not to have children.

References


[ii] Ibid.


Note: Teenage mothers who have had children or are currently pregnant.


[vi] Ibid. p.17.

[vii] Ibid. p.46.

[viii] Ibid. p.42.

[ix] The Tanzania SRHR Alliance consists of the following organizations: African Medical and Research Foundation (AMREF), Restless Development, Health Actions Promotions Association (HAPA), National Institute for Medical Research (NIMR) Mwanza Centre, and Medico Del Mundo.


[xi] For more information about the Breakfast Debate, see the website of the Policy Forum: http://www.policyforum-tz.org/should-pregnant-girls-return-school-after-giving-birth.