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

ZIMBABWE

ONE STEP FORWARD,
TWO STEPS BACK

By Sandra Nyaika

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

Sticking faithfully to the prescription offered by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund that was expected to catapult developing countries into economic prosperity, governments across Africa happily cut spending on social services such as education and health, only to find themselves saddled with huge debts that were brought about by economic recovery policies and bad governance, in some instances, governments in sub-Saharan Africa increasingly began to fail in their resolve to provide education for all by the year 2000,” said Blessing Wakabikwa of the ministry of education.

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

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

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

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

Ill-equipped classrooms, lack of relevant books and materials and a shortage of trained and motivated teachers means that their education is cut short and little is achieved in terms of learning outcomes.

System flaws and indifference to the needs of learners, particularly the underprivileged and underdeveloped, have increased the wastage rates and resulted in huge losses in the returns on investments.

If education is a basic human right, an estimated 130 million children and 880 million adults are being denied justice every day. According to the GCE, which brings together aid agencies, non-governmental organisations, child rights activists and teachers’ and public sector unions, one in three adults across the world is illiterate.

THE DISABLED ALSO MATTER

The disabled also matter

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

In Zimbabwe, the Campaign for Female Education (Camfed) – which claims sub-Saharan Africa is the only region in the world where access to education is falling drastically – is steering efforts to make sure education becomes a priority in the rural communities, where the majority of the people live.

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

Ghana

So much goodwill, but it may come to nothing

By Golda Armah

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

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

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

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

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FOOD FOR LEARNING KEEPS GIRLS IN SCHOOL – PAGE 3
TIME WELL SPENT: Free education has opened the floodgates to many children out of school. But can the education system cope?

KENYA

By Betty Muruki

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

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

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

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

Despite the hiccups, Kenya is now well on its way to achieving its goal of universal primary education by 2005 and basic education for all (RFA) by 2015. In January, Education Minister George Saitoti released Sh519 million (approximately US$57 million) to schools for books, pens, chalks, chalkboards and other learning equipment to enable them to cope with the influx of students. The British government, Unicef and the World Bank have also stepped in to support the free education programme.

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

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

But quality of education is as much about content as it is about the environment in which that education is provided, and by whom. The government froze employment of teachers five years ago and there were no new teachers. There are unemployed teachers in the country last year, despite the fact that there was an estimated shortage of 31,000 teachers in public schools.

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

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

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

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

—Ruth Omukhango, Kenya
**UGANDA**

Food for learning scheme keeps girls in school

By Nabusugye L. Wamboka

**WHEN**

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

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

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

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

“Even in this situation, we realised girls were still lagging behind. We wanted to fill that gap,” said Syed. “Girls who attend school for five days consecutively take home some food for their parents,” he said.

The enrolment has dramatically increased and this is very encouraging,” he said.

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

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

Now their parents say nobody will help them with work at home and they want the rations increased.”

A kilogramme of posho costs Sh100 (US$1 is equivalent to Sh1,850). Known for being warriors and cattle rustlers, the might of the Karimojong is crumbling under famine and loss of cattle. But they still prefer to send their children to the forests in search of wild fruits and firewood than send them to school. “There are many girls in school now but they keep going and coming back,” said Nyangan Peace Deborah, a teacher at Moroto Raining Bow School. “They love to study but, because their parents are becoming weaker because of the famine, it is the girls who have to do the domestic chores.”

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

The mud-and-wattle school was built by the local community and most of the teachers are volunteers. Said Timo Teko, the chief who donated the land: “We did not start it as a school. We wanted a centre where children could be collected and controlled. Because most of their parents are herdsmen, the children would roam the streets and villages in search of food. Something positive has come out of this. WFP is feeding the children and they are learning new things all the time.”

At Lumuno Primary School, 311 children were registered by the end of February. The attendance register shows that girls top the number in a school with primary seven, however, there are seven boys and no girls.

The Alternative Basic Education for Karamoja project has been more successful in educating children in Karamoja without completely cutting them off from their lifestyle. According to Margarita Foca Licht of Save the Children, 95 percent of the population is rural and the children’s progress and learn a few things themselves. Instruction is in their own language and the teaching methods are active and involve traditional songs and dances.

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

By Eunice Mensah, Ghana

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

A year earlier, Akenpe’s illiterate mother, who had been left to rear four children after her husband took to drinking, had weighed the immediate benefits of getting some money from her daughters’ labour in Accra against her long-term stay in school.

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

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

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

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

In areas where firewood is the fuel used for cooking, the duty of fetching firewood falls on girls, sometimes keeping them away from Elass or making the trip back to the kitchen. The same situation prevails where water is limited or must be fetched from long distances. And then there is the task of looking after younger siblings.

The gross enrolment ratio for boys in primary school in Ghana was 86.7 percent in 1990, compared with a rate of about 72 percent for girls. In Nigeria, the national literacy rate for girls is only 56 percent compared with 72 percent for boys.

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

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

The report finds that girls who have received a great deal of attention in recent years, there is slow progress in implementing programmes to get more girls to benefit from at least basic education – due mainly to traditions and poverty.

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

The Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantees children’s right to be protected from work that can be described as exploitative and hazardous to their health, education or development. Ghana’s 1992 constitution reinforces this position.

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

Designers of Afnicawoman and many other fine newspapers around the world

April 2003

Send our girls to school and keep them there

E ducation is a basic right. It is also the cornerstone of poverty eradication. More than half a century after this was enshrined in the UN Declaration on Human Rights, however, education is still a luxury for the world’s poorest countries.

According to UNICEF, 125 million girls, nearly 60 percent of them, are out of primary school. All too often, even those children who are in school receive an education so curtailed that they acquire few of the tools they need to escape poverty.

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

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

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

Aid flows to developing countries did not prosper during the last decade of the twentieth century. Statistics show that they peaked in 1991 and declined thereafter. By 2000, grants and concessional loans to developing countries had fallen from US$80 billion to approximately US$50 billion. Most of this money has been directed to the wars, diseases and drought that continue to ravage Africa. Education has had to take a back seat, even though it is the best solution to the ills that afflicting Africa.

Donor programmes in Africa are usually fragmented and incoherent, and often reflect donor priorities at the expense of country needs. This special edition is about African girls, whose access to education is compromised by high poverty levels in many African countries. Yet according to Ghana’s Situation Analysis of Children and Women, 1999, more to the child labour pool and other factors that impact on the education of girls is compromised by high poverty levels in many African countries. Yet it is a fact that when girls are educated they develop skills and acquire information that have a wide-ranging impact on social life.

It is, therefore, imperative that educationists, policymakers and donors make a conscious effort to focus greater attention and resources on issues and factors affecting the education of girls. An educated woman is more likely to be an asset to her community but is more likely to take steps to maintain her own health and that of her family.
ZIMBABWE

Courage under fire

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

By Ropafadzo Mapimhidze

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

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

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

Mujuru was born to a peasant family in Mt Darwin. She was one of 12 children and was determined to go to war against her parents’ wish. She opted out of school in 1973, aged 18, and joined the liberation movement that would ensure gender equality in Zimbabwe, especially in education.

Joyce Mujuru: “War experiences changed my life.”

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

One of her main duties as secretary for education in the new politburo was to ensure that the ministry of education carried out the education policy. Some of these programmes included adult literacy, non-formal education and sport and recreation. She has also been minister for information, posts and telecommunication and acted as minister for defence following the death of Moven Mahachi in a car crash.

It was a befitting job for a woman who carried automatic submachine guns and hand grenades during the war. She rose to the rank of commander of a camp in Chimio, Mozambique that grew to become the largest camp in the territory. The women’s movement was greatly disappointed when she was not appointed to become officially the minister of defence.

Mujuru is a bold woman who speaks openly about her life. She is also very modest about her achievements. Her current position as minister for water resources and rural development is just the latest of many accolades won due to her commitment to the war of liberation.

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

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

Tough and down to earth, Mujuru believes all women should work in leadership roles and be accepted by men as leaders. Now aged 48, Joyce ‘Teurai Ropa Mujuru has proved that there is nothing to stop Zimbabwean woman making it to the top.

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

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

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

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

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

Mujuru knows that formal education is important, but she also believes that non-formal education and adult education should be encouraged. She has also been minister for community development and women’s affairs. She has also been minister for information, posts and telecommunication and acted as minister for defence following the death of Moven Mahachi in a car crash.

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

On February 17, 1974, the group she was assigned to had an encounter with Rhodesian Forces and scattered, leaving Mujuru to her own devices. She stumbled over a wounded colleague, who gave her his gun and told her to run. She recalled: “A helicopter crew saw me. They were coming down for me and I fired. Incredibly, I hit the machine and there was a lot of black smoke and it crashed. A big explosion followed.”

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Joyce ‘Teurai Ropa Mujuru has proved that there is nothing to stop Zimbabwean woman making it to the top.
Donkeys help to change women’s fortunes

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

By Sifanelile Nlilo

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

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

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

Donkeys are one of the women who defied age to take advantage of the opportunity to return to school. At the age of 48, Moyo decided to enrol for evening classes at Donkwe Donkwe Primary School – her children’s former school. She scored better results than some of the young pupils who sat the Grade Seven public examination the same year. She went on to register for “O” level examinations in 2000. “My success in the Grade Seven examinations gave me the courage to continue with my education,” she says. “I made a resolution, then and there, to pursue my education.”

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

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

Women often drop out from school either because parents prefer to use their scarce resources to educate boys, or because they fall pregnant before completing their education. “In all the districts where we have established libraries, 75 percent of the women who become members have enrolled for adult literacy classes,” says the secretary-general of the centre.

Women are the majority in adult literacy classes, according to the Adult Literacy Organisation of Zimbabwe. They are also the majority of those involved in income generating projects, which non-governmental organisations use to promote literacy. According to Unesco, there has been a shift in the approach to literacy in the past few years from merely emphasising the ability to read and write to “functional literacy”, which provides useful skills for survival in today’s changing world.

“Africa needed women to become literate because the definition of education has changed. Women need to be literate to be able to participate in their families, in their households, in their communities, in their workplaces and in society,” says the UN agency.

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

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

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

By Sibongile Ncube

By Mildred Barasa

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

The very excitement that comes with the ceremony, says human rights activist Ololo Habib, often means the beginning of the end for girls and schooling. Just as male circumcision is usually accompanied by merrymaking, girls’ circumcision is attended by celebration in the absence of the girls.

As the fasting season continues, girls now considered adult engage in premature sex. Many full preg- nant and have to drop out of school.

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

Of the 52 ethnic groups in Kenya, only four do not practice FGM. Although the government has outlawed what is also described as female cutting or circumcision, it is still practiced in secret. Uneducated sex may expose the girls to diseases such as syphilis, gonorrhea and HIV/AIDS as well as premature motherhood.

“Among the Maasai, once a girl is circumcised at the age of 12 to 13 she is considered a woman ready for marriage. Most of these girls are withdrawn from school (nor- mally at standard five or six) to undergo the ceremony. They are then married off to suitors identified by their parents,” says Ololo.

Ironically, this distorted perspective that circumcision girls feel superior after the initiation. “Girls who have been circumcised and have undergone seclusion nor- mally have this aura around them. They consider themselves superior and more often than not hang out in cliques,” Ololo adds.

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

“With full knowledge that some of our female teachers, especially those that are not from the Kisi community, are not circumcised, girls develop disrespect for them. It has been the mistaken belief that the circumcised women are not full grown women that brings about the problem.”

Moraa dropped out of school just after the initiation ceremony. According to her aunt, Josephine Kerubo, the girl had just joined standard eight when she was expelled from the school because the teachers of her rural school described as the girls’ “misconduct in school and disrespect for teachers”.

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

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

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SPECIAL ISSUE – EDUCATING GIRLS IN AFRICA

It takes Sambulo Khumalo two hours to walk the seven kilometres to school each morning. More often than not, she leaves home with- out breakfast and she is tired and sweating by the time she arrives.

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

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

Asked how she feels about the likelihood of being married off at such an age, Sambulo is quick to point out that this is the norm in the village. Girls marry early here and, anyway, her three brothers will continue with school. She tells Africanwoman, with a wry smile: “I wanted to be a nurse when I finish school so her male class- mates are not encumbered by such concerns.

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

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

According to the United Nations Fund for Children, 59 percent of primary school age boys and 45 percent of primary school age girls are out of school in sub-Saharan Africa. The organisation’s State of the World’s Chil- dren report says that not only do fewer girls than boys enrol in school but more girls than boys dropout of school, repeat grades or do not finish school.

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

A non-governmental organisation working with rural communities on the education of the girlchild, CamFed, has revealed that an ever-growing number of families are forced to make the choice as to which of their chil- dren should attend school. Boys win hands down because they are considered to have a better chance of future paid work crucial to the survival of poor families. The situa- tion could be even worse for girls in secondary school, where the cost of schooling is consid- erably higher. CamFed supports girls in 10 rural districts. All direct costs are met, in- cluding school fees, uniform and stationery, alongside a social programme designed to build confidence and self-esteem.

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

Girls live in two-person bunks set in a fenced area with a guarded gateway. There are communal washing and toilet facil- ities as well as a kitchen where they can prepare their own food from home along with the produce they grow in the vegetable garden on site. Best of all, they are able to study in the night in their new home away from home — far from the poverty, household responsibilities and shortage of paraphernal that would make evening study virtually impossi- ble.

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

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

ZIMBABWE

Beginning the end for girls in school

By Mildred Barasa

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

The very excitement that comes with the ceremony, says human rights activist Ololo Habib, often means the beginning of the end for girls and schooling. Just as male circumcision is usually accompanied by merrymaking, girls’ circumcision is attended by celebration in the absence of the girls.

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

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

Of the 52 ethnic groups in Kenya, only four do not practice FGM. Although the government has outlawed what is also described as female cutting or circumcision, it is still practiced in secret. Uneducated sex may expose the girls to diseases such as syphilis, gonorrhea and HIV/AIDS as well as premature motherhood.

“Among the Maasai, once a girl is circumcised at the age of 12 to 13 she is considered a woman ready for marriage. Most of these girls are withdrawn from school (nor- mally at standard five or six) to undergo the ceremony. They are then married off to suitors identified by their parents,” says Ololo.

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

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

“With full knowledge that some of our female teachers, especially those that are not from the Kisi community, are not circumcised, girls develop disrespect for them. It has been the mistaken belief that the circumcised women are not full grown women that brings about the problem.”

Moraa dropped out of school just after the initiation ceremony. According to her aunt, Josephine Kerubo, the girl had just joined standard eight when she was expelled from the school because the teachers of her rural school described as the girls’ “misconduct in school and disrespect for teachers”.

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

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KENYA

An improvised classroom for a primary school built by resettled villagers at Solusi Farm, about 100km south-west of Bulawayo.
The GCE is asking governments to address the inequalities in education, with priority going to schools in rural areas to ensure more people are educated. The coalition is also working with other NGOs in the region to ensure the goal for education for all is achieved.

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

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

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

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

Pregnant girls have their day in school

By Lilian Juma

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

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

Girls can go back to school after pregnancy, “says Education Minister George Saitoti. “This is important, particularly in recognition that majority of girls who are in that situation do not like it; they are forced into it by society. We are not encouraging pregnancy among girls, but we can’t afford to sideline some segments of society if we hope to achieve education for all.”

Mercy Meliyio, a standard eight pupil at AIC Kajiado Girls Primary School, says she has become accustomed to seeing expectant girls in class. Although Mercy believes such girls are irresponsible, she appreciates the fact that the new government is committed to promoting girls’ education. “The only problem is that most of the girls who are pregnant cannot concentrate in class as they have lots of problems with their condition and some find it difficult to mingle with others,” says the 13-year-old.

A survey done by Africa Woman indicates that many headteachers in Kenyan schools are receptive to taking back girls who have had babies. Eunice Abade, principal of Nyanomye Secondary School in Bondo district to the west of the country, says she has had to readmit many girls back to school in recent years. She encourages parents not to give up on educating their daughters, even if they are pregnant. “We are losing so many bright and intelligent girls to school dropouts, violence and expulsion from home,” he says.

Education Minister George Saitoti

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

But Maria Namutebi, who gave birth at 14, wishes all countries had such a policy. “It’s not just enough for girls to be in school. Efforts must be done to ensure girls stay in school for the complete cycle of their studies in order to achieve their potential.”

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By Margaret Ziribaqwa

UGANDA

Give teenaged mothers a chance

By Lilian Juma

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Dalia Nannyange Kibalama says alongside the rest. Headmistress Kampala, the kindergarten is open in Kyambogo, just outside dan. disability. Most schools do not have that are suitable for children with disabilities. They may be kept indoors all the time, treated in much the same way as a guilty secret. They do not know what she has to do it. She works hard to help others. Once each child's special needs are identified, she or he is helped to develop skills in writing or more challenging activities — according to their needs. “We don’t make les- sons plans,” she says. “We ask the children what they want to do.” The school has 13 children, seven of them disabled. Because children with hearing problems are taught in sign language, many of the other children have learnt to communi- cate this way. But many parents are slower to accept the disabled and feel distressed when their children use sign language.

Attitudes are changing gradual- ly, however, and experts say chil- dren with special needs should be allowed to attend mainstream schools unless they are very seriously disabled.

“If the children with behaviour problems are isolated, they become very aggressive,” says Kibalama. “They will not learn any good man- ners because they have no exam- ples.”

Some children have arrived at the kindergarten unable to crawl, but they can walk months later, having learnt from seeing others do it. The kindergarten admits chil- dren aged between three and sev- en, but special cases are allowed to stay until they are 10. Where they go to next poses a major dilemma for the education system. Most of the schools willing to take on children with disability are too expensive for the average Ugandan.

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

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

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

The government gives an alloca- tion of Sh150,000 (about $83) per term, which is too much for some. The school has made arrangements to accept pay- ment by instalments and some par- ents pay in kind, bringing beans and maize flour to the school. Cost notwithstanding, the school has to turn away pupils for lack of space.

At the National Institute for Spe- cial Education Needs, facilities meant for 45 teacher trainees are now being used by at least 90 stu- dents.

Public Relations Officer Godfrey Obwol says that attempts to inte- grate special needs education in the main curriculum in teacher training colleges have been thwarted by districts that have not taken it seriously, even though the sub- ject is examineable. Teachers who take the specialisation are frustrat- ed because they are not promoted after their training.

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

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

Following in the footsteps of the great and the good

By Elizabeth Kameo

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

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

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

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

Women of Distinction are select high profile women leaders in Uganda, including international women living in Uganda, nominated as goodwill ambassadors to highlight the cause of education of girls in Uganda to their day to day work. Models of Excellence are Ugandan women who have excelled in their careers against numerous odds.

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

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

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

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

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

Her trailblazing achievement in graduating with an honours BA from Oxford University in 1964 has made her a role model par excellence. The theme of the mentoring programme is “Footsteps to Excellence… mentoring girls to excel against odds”.

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

It has had a special impact in the eastern and northern parts of the country because the two regions are disadvantaged vis-à-vis the rest of the country. Kanyike is enthusiastic: “The women are an inspiration to the girls; they have boosted the self-esteem and confidence of the girls. Cultivating self-esteem and confidence through exposure to great and successful people is a key contribution to mentoring. That is why the programme is very successful and beneficial to the girls.”

Through their comments and correspondence, over 200 girls who are part of the programme have expressed their appreciation.

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

Other Women of Distinction include Jose- phine Namboze, who graduated as the first female doctor in East and Central Africa, and Specieza Wandira Kasiwbe, the first African female vice-president.

The Models of Excellence are Margaret Ba- da Diru, who is a graduate, a member of parliament and blind; Gladys Kalema, a wildlife veterinary surgeon and Victoria Mwaka, a university lecturer. Fawe Uganda’s role models project proves one of the best. At the end of the day, everyone needs a pair of footsteps to guide them in the right direction.

KENYA

Cattle first, then children can go to school

By Ruth Omukhango

BAWA is one of the few primary schools where learning takes place only in the afternoons. The children in this school 35 kilome- tres south of Maralal in Kenya’s Eastern Province are expected to herd livestock, fetch water and collect firewood in the mornings. Only then can they attend classes.

The school programme has been designed to fit in with the pastoralist way of life. In South Maralal, where education pro- grammes known as Lechekati – meaning shepherds – are being implemented, they operate in har- mony with the local socio-econom- ic and cultural lifestyle.

Still, the programme has not brought as many children into the classroom as desired, according to Edward Loneserui, a teacher at Bawa. Even an attempt by the Ministry of Education and the World Bank to help bring and keep those children in school has not achieved much.

Through a World Bank project in 1984, the government established boarding schools in six arid districts to keep nomadic children in school, but they operated for a few years only. Despite the fact that the fees in those days was only Sh60 ($US0.87) per term, the number of schools started dwindling within two years as there were no children. They eventually closed down.

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

Loneserui believes radical poli- cy interventions will be required if the afternoon class scheme is to work. The key issues, he says, are hunger and lack of critical facili- ties such as classrooms, desks and textbooks. Besides, insecurity due to cattle rustling often means that families must seek refuge in cen- tres far away from their children’s schools.

At Kipeto Primary School in Kajiado District, home to the Maasai community, free education has in- creased the number of children out of class that they have no time to do their homework.

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

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

Norton District Education Offi- cer Margaret Gitau says address- ing cultural issues and the need for basic learning facilities is cru- cial if the academic performance of schools in arid and semi-arid lands is to improve.

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

“With this kind of beliefs, it is very common to find schools closed as children, especially girls, accompany their parents to other parts in dry seasons. Boys can be left behind to continue learning.”
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LIVING IN AFRICA
– A woman’s perspective

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