WE STRIVE FOR A JUST WORLD THAT

ADVANCES CHILDREN’S RIGHTS
AND EQUALITY FOR GIRLS

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Welcome to this issue of Mapya News!

I would like to address two significant areas in this Mapya News. To begin with, I am pleased to say that on 20th September, Plan International Kenya joined millions across the world in making Global Climate Strike. Even though Sub-Saharan Africa produce the least amount of Greenhouse Gases (GHG), this part of the African Continent is experiencing prolonged seasons of drought and flash floods.

Disasters impact children in many ways such as disruption to access of basic needs, education, vulnerability to abuse, separation from family and friends and in severe disasters, they may lose family members. As an organisation, we are conscious of the fact that vulnerable children and especially girls bear the greatest brunt in such situations.

You may ask how climate change affects the lives of children and in particular girls? In periods of stress or crisis, girls are often the first to drop out of school to help their families with house chores, look after younger siblings or even work to supplement the household income. When a household’s income and ability to survive is threatened, child labour and child marriage becomes an option to reduce the financial burden of taking care of girls. When girls are out collecting firewood and water or when staying in temporary shelters, they face the risk of sexual and physical abuse as well as trafficking.

Despite the impact on their lives, girls and young women are not normally included in decisions, they influence and strategies around climate change. It is therefore paramount for the Government of Kenya, Civil Societies and Kenyans alike to acknowledge and address the increased risks faced by girls due to climate change.

To be it; they must see it. Film and music producers must develop stories that make female leadership visible and normal. There is also the need to stop sexualisation and objectification of women and girls on screen and raise a generation that believes in women leadership in order to achieve gender equality. It is time to #RewriteHerStory. The young men and the fathers are great allies in developing the new script where girls are empowered, dignified and heard.

West African girls are clear that they need role models on screen. To be it, they must see it. Film and music producers must develop stories that make female leadership visible and normal. There is also the need to stop sexualisation and objectification of women and girls on screen.

Additionally, Plan International Kenya is going through a period of reflection. We are reviewing Country Strategic Plan 2016-2020; drawing out what we have seen, heard and valued ever before and that girls everywhere are equally seen, heard and valued.

Country Director’s Remarks

Kate Maina-Vorley
Country Director

The Conference was themed ‘Early childhood Education: A foundation for Human Capital Development and improving the wealth of Nations’. This presented an opportunity for stakeholders to highlight the value and urgency of scaling up investments in Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Africa to support the continent’s human capital development and boost economic growth.

Dr Lynette Okengo, Executive Director for Africa Early Childhood Network, emphasized the need to have a holistic approach in ECE. “60% of Sub Saharan Africa, children are less likely to survive and thrive in their first 1000 days. Children are affected by poverty, conflict and disaster or are living with disabilities. The organisers and participants agreed to adopt a number of recommendations to protect the rights of children’s education. Governments need to ensure proper coordination of multi-sectoral approaches that are gender responsive and guided by multi-sectoral ECD policies at all levels. The two day training attracted high profile government officials sector from Africa in the areas of Education and WASH. Representatives from World Bank Group, UNICEF and Japan-AU also attended.

The Tubonge for Safety was officiated by the Assistant County Commissioner Mr. Wambugu and OCS Juliana Wanyama.

The initiative arose based on the need to increase security within the area and have youth as catalysts of reporting incidents and promoting security within area. “We are agents of security in this community. We ought to care for one another by reporting any cases of insecurity that arise. We are here for you and not only as officers but also as parents too in this community.” Simon Wanyama, a police officer said during a dialogue session. The dialogue also addressed various reporting mechanisms as well as channels of reporting.

The energetic youth emerged victorious during the matches. The Safe and Inclusive Cities is a Project funded by Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) and targets young women and men aged 15-25 years. The project focuses on strengthening civil society organisations to be able to influence urban governance and development processes and contribute to making cities safe and inclusive for young women and men. The project’s three key intervention strategies are safe communities, safe public transport and access to decent income.
PROJECT UPDATE

PROMOTING READING CULTURE AMONG LEARNERS

Banga Primary School in Kinango Sub-county in Kwale County, has grappled with low interest in reading by learners. This has significantly contributed to the low grades exhibited by learners in their restructured examinations as well as the scores in National examinations. Board of Management (BoM) committee in charge of child welfare during their monthly meetings identified the need to design methodologies that would ignite positive reading culture among the learners.

The institution approached the Tulinde Tusome project for support with the initiative. The learners, together with the teachers identified a list of written material that included storybooks that are approved by Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD). The project collaborated with the Kenya Library Services to enhance teachers' and learners' basic book-keeping skills. Tulinde Tusome supported schools in purchasing identified reading materials and mobile boxes to facilitate safekeeping and portability.

The books aroused the learners' reading interest as they continually borrow the books during their free time and always seek the assistance of teachers in defining lexical items that they are not familiar with. "The storybooks are good and have enabled me to write good composition. My Swahili and English teachers are happy with me as my grades in the two subjects have greatly improved," Paul Class Eight pupil.

"Some books have stories that show me how to live well with my friends and family," said Kupha Nzao class eight pupil.

Additionally, the storybooks have contributed significantly in improving the teacher-student relationship. The students freely seek the teachers' support in providing moral meaning of the stories they read. This has contributed to positive behavior among the students. "The learners are free with the teachers and always ask questions about the stories they read. Most learners have improved in their English and Swahili scores and this is greatly attributed to their improved reading culture," Tyron Library teacher.

A storybook by the name 'The Journey' was highlighted as one that resonated well with the learners. "The storybooks are good and have enabled me write good compositions. My Swahili and English teachers are happy with me as my grades in the two subjects have greatly improved." Paul Class Eight pupil.

INTEGRATING YOUTH FRIENDLY SERVICES IN HEALTH FACILITIES

An assessment conducted by Plan International Kenya established that only about 25% of the health facilities in Tharaka had a provision for youth friendly services. Further, only 22% of the health facilities had any form of young people Information, Education and Communication Materials (IEC), entertainment and recreational facilities. However, the services did not meet the key dimensions of youth friendly services established by World Health Organisation: Acceptable, Acceptable, Appropriate & Effective.

Youth-friendly services are services that all adolescents and youth are able to obtain, and these services should meet adolescent and youth expectations and needs as well as improve their health.

To address the issue of youth-friendly services, a needs assessment was conducted at Marimanti Level 4, renovation works and procurement of the equipment for use at the youth friendly centre was implemented with close monitoring from both Plan International and the hospital managements.

The facility is currently offering both curative health services and preventive health services on youth sexual reproductive health. It also provides a safe space for youth and young people to congregate and hold their meetings, discussions and also seek guidance and counselling on issues that affect them including relationships issues, health issues, personal fears among others. The facility manager who was trained on youth friendly services is carrying out continuous medical education with other health care workers so as to popularise the youth friendly centre.

"Faith Ndubi a health care worker said, "I would like to express my gratitude to Plan International for their overwhelming support to the facility in ensuring that the Youth friendly centre is functional. I can attest that before the upgrade of the facility; the number of youth and young people accessing services was minimal as they felt that the area was not a safe space and that services were integrated with general services and no special rooms were provided for adolescents and young people. Since upgrading the facility, 142 youth have been served at this centre. Additionally, 48 youth have also accessed HIV testing and counselling services.

Kennedy Munene, a peer educator and chairperson of Guardians of Life youth group said, "The youth friendly centre is about reducing barriers to young people and the adolescents. Kindness brings out the best out of people, especially the youth and the adolescents, this is exactly what we find in the youth friendly centre."
Andrew has a calm, infectious smile that warms the hearts of the people around him. We could not hide our joy during our visit to his home. He is surrounded by a loving family - grandmother, mother and 3 siblings. Born in 2009, Andrew is a third born in a family of 4 boys. His mother, Sharon 33 years was anxiously expecting a healthy baby. This was not to be the case because her joy did not last long. After birth, she noticed something strange with the baby but could not point out what it was.

At 7 months, Andrew was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy and delayed milestones. His mother asked herself several questions; “Why me, why can’t I have the other children.” Hoping that God could turn his condition around and make Andrew healthy again. Her visits to several hospitals and counselling sessions helped to calm her down. Unfortunately her husband would hear none of it, in fact he thought it was a curse and he wanted to bury him alive when he turned 5 years old. This came as a huge shock to Sharon who called her mother (Teresa Allen) to get help on what to do. Her mother quickly travelled and took Elisha and his siblings with her to safety. She has since supported Sharon to take care of the children.

During one of the community meetings in 2018, a conversation on disability awareness was held at Sinogo Primary School. This meeting was organised by Plan International in Homa Bay county has focused on Education project with a special focus on girls and boys aged 3-14 years including children with disabilities. The main aim is for children with special needs to attend schools that provide safe and healthy learning environments and offer relevant and inclusive curriculum. For children with disability, some of the key activities include disability awareness, assessment and referrals, medical support, support with assistive devices, placement and educational support.

Councilor Persons with Disabilities (ICPNWD) as a child with disability.

Plan International supported Andrew with a wheelchair to aid his mobility and interaction with other children. His grandmother could not hide her joy. “I am so happy for my grandson. Carrying him around has not been an easy task, this wheelchair will now allow him to move freely and even interact with other children better.” His household has been earmarked for cash transfer for persons with disabilities. The main aim is for children with special needs to attend schools that provide safe and healthy learning environments and offer relevant and inclusive curriculum. For children with disability, some of the key activities include disability awareness, assessment and referrals, medical support, support with assistive devices, placement and educational support.

Andrew’s case is about societal misconceptions and beliefs about children with disability and giving hope to the hopeless. “I want him to be alive, and I will take care of him the best way I can” adds Tesia.

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The Girls’ Advocacy Alliance is a 5-year advocacy programme aimed at contributing to gender equality and equal rights and opportunities for girls and young women, with a focus on the elimination of gender-based violence and the economic empowerment of girls and young women.
M y journey with Akili Dada has been the most transformational experience I have ever had. Akili Dada brought the world to me and showed me the free possibility playground that I could explore. There are a number of opportunities that I acquired through Akili Dada while growing and defining who I really am or want to be.

It is through Akili Dada that my decision to study Mechanical Engineering became firmly ascertained. The low participation of women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) activities has been a long standing, international phenomenon, because even in countries generally regarded as progressive, women are still underutilised in STEM activities. For such a long time there have been a universally accepted ‘truth’ about women and STEM careers; they are socialised as progressive, women are still underutilised in STEM activities.

As a way of pushing it forward, I initiated a project, Badili Zone. It is through Akili Dada that my decision to study Mechanical Engineering became firmly ascertained. The low participation of women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) activities has been a long standing, international phenomenon, because even in countries generally regarded as progressive, women are still underutilised in STEM activities.

The main objective of C4D is to act like a media house which documents any activities that takes place under the Safe and Inclusive Cities project. However, the documentation in this case is solely done by us (Youth).

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What drew you to digital media and which platforms are you active on? The love for digital media grew out of the desire to connect with friends. I loved the ease it created when it comes to passing information. My first interaction with digital media was through Facebook and I liked how I could share lots of information over the internet. In addition to Facebook, I also use WhatsApp, Instagram and of course email.

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The Safer and Inclusive Cities project has engaged youth from Mukuru, Mathare, Kibera in Nairobi and Nyalenda and Kondele in Kisumu. The project has incorporated the use of Communication for Development (C4D) which has given youth an opportunity to act as agents of change by using digital media to advocate for safety in their communities. The C4D has since stimulated engagement with online audiences to advance safety in city spaces mostly in informal settlements.

23-year-old Sarah from Mathare is a C4D youth who completed a Diploma in Journalism at Kenya Institute of Mass Communication. She sat down with her to get more insight on how she hopes to make a change in her community through digital media.
In 2017, National media broke the news that Godisilin Faluya, a 14-year-old girl living with albinism had died in the Kenya Certificate Primary Education (KCPE) exam. It sent a powerful message of encouragement and possibility to many young girls, especially those living with albinism.

However recently (September 2019) it was sad when another 14-year-old Jacqueline Chappingeno, a pupil at Kapingach High School, following what was reported as humiliation from her teacher after she soiled her dress when she started her menses. This is just a sample of what appears in the prime time news involving girls and young women. Girls are portrayed as victims and victims. Unfortunately, most times they are portrayed as victims.

How we girls and young women portrayed by our media? What kind of images are they watching and how is it shaping their future? Girls often want to see positive role models that are rarely highlighted in our media. “Unfortunately, popular media has been selling us a certain story and mindset, says Nicole Victoria, a University student working to set up an online African Jewellery Startup. Nicole recently graduated from Akilah Africa Entrepreneurship Programme. We are unable to say what we need to be watching because our realities are heavily being manipulated. After attending the enterprise class, I was surprised to come across many young business role models that are rarely highlighted in our media.”

Abdi Nicola.

Robi Koki, says girls and young women are portrayed as victims. The entertainment industry is often a culprit in reinforcing damaging gender stereotypes and cast girls, young women in roles. Young women continue to be objectified especially in music videos where they dance half-naked beside fully dressed males. Young women are especially objectified and sexualized even in advertising. Often even when the product is a car or cooking oil, we see women sexualized.

Girls also are not adequately heard or represented in the media. According to the Global Media Monitoring Report female voices globally are less than 24 percent and in Kenya the (GMMP), it sent a powerful message of the absence of representation, or underrepresentation, of some group of people in the media often a means of maintaining social inequality.

Gaye Tuchman (1978) further divided these phenomena as Symbolic annihilation. This term describes the absence of representation, or underrepresentation, of some group of people in the media often a means of maintaining social inequality.

Greta Thunberg, a young Environmentalist who shot to global visibility with her “how dare you” speech to power at the climate conference but also with her previous efforts in environmental conservation showcase the potential of young people with passion.

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This is not the case for Young Greta Thunberg, a young Environmentalist who shot to global visibility with her “how dare you” speech to power at the climate conference but also with her previous efforts in environmental conservation showcase the potential of young people with passion.

Members invisible through the explicit lack of representation in all forms of media ranging from film, song, books, news media and visual art. Certain categories of girls are completely invisible in powerful roles.

Young girls need special safeguards. Young women need to be mentored to tell their stories.
What drives you to do what you are doing? It’s the people who randomly walk up to me and share their stories and experiences about NCDs and about how they were able to benefit courtesy of our programmes. It’s the youth who now have a stronger sense of belief that they can do it and that they can make it in life with their dreams because they have seen me do it. It’s the joy (get it? I see more young people talking health-conscious behaviors and getting the bodies they want courtesy of one of our projects, PROJECT SUMMIT. It’s the stories like Daughtry’s, a young lady who we were able to raise 1.3m for her to travel to India for stage one cancer tumor removed after she was part of one of our projects, project ALPHA in addition to many other success stories. It’s this impact that we have already created under the time that we have been in existence that keeps me going. It’s what drives me and more than that it’s the fulfillment that I get from all of this. This is my life’s work; this is how perhaps I will leave a mark in history.

What awards have you won so far? Whoa! This is an amazing question. I have won several awards in the recent times here are some of the few I have received over the last two years as a result of my work in Stowelink.

- 2019 July Quality Healthcare Kenyan Awards – Student Innovation Category – 2nd Runners Up
- 2019 June 254 Youth Entrepreneurships Awards – Health Category Winner
- 2019 March Kusa Awards Humanitarian Award2018/2019
- 2019 March Kusa Awards Contribution to Technology 2018/2019
- 2019 February Amref Young Researchers Scholarship Award
- 2018 July Winner – Africa Sustainability Innovation Challenge
- 2018 July Winner – Kanyakta University Students Association Awards

What are some of the achievements you have made since you founded Stowelink? The biggest achievement that I have had so far in 2019 is the launch of the national wide project the NCDS Youth Champions which has witnessed 27 institutions and Community Based Organisations (CBOs) join into the movement. The movement involves using youth to create a coordinated series of events around the country to educate individuals on various aspects of non-communicable diseases.

Recently I also launched my first book called the Drug Free Youth which focuses on disruptive approaches of making health sensitisation programmes interesting with specific focus on use of poetry for health communication as we did in one of our projects. These are just but a few achievements that really warm my heart.

What advise do you have for Young people who have dreams and ambitions? I’d advise all young people with dreams and ambitions to identify who they are first and know where they are at the moment. Self-awareness and awareness of our current situation is what will give us the road map to where we are supposed to go. I’d tell them to stop the negative self-talk that waters down their dreams and ambitions, that inner voice that always talks about insufficient resources, inadequate funds and lack of knowledge. I’d advise them to shun that and instead start anyway. I’d advise them that it’s not easy and that they will want to quit sometimes but when this feeling comes I’d recommend that if it were easy everybody would be doing it, that they were gifted with that vision with the sole aim that they could be able to bring it to life. I’d advise them to practise self belief so strongly that every day they wake up and every air they breathe, they dream and work on their dreams.

What does the future look like for you? I am working on a new book called Practical Skill that will be out mid next year. I am excited that I will be attending the One Young World Summit that will be happening in London. For Stowelink, I look forward to have its work all over the country because I want to see a generation of youth more aware of their health and wellbeing. Stowelink is not going to just be a local brand, I believe we could go global if we put all our works and energies in making that happen. And with the right partners like Plan International this could not only be a dream for the future but actually a plan that must and will be achieved. In the end I guess all this can be summarised in one thing. I want to keep transforming and empowering lives. I strongly believe more than ever that my life’s work is dedicated to seeing no one die of non-communicable diseases because of preventable causes.
PERSON OF INTEREST

The fight against FGM/M and child marriage has seen various stakeholders getting involved, including our very own president H.E Uhuru Kenyatta who took a pledge to eradicate it by 2022. We highlight an unsung hero who has taken a personal initiative to see to it that his community eradicates FGM practices, child marriages and teenage pregnancies.

TITUS RETETI

Titus Reteti is a teacher of Mathematics, Sciences and Christian Religious Education at Olentoko Primary School. A school with over 500 students is located up a hill overlooking the scarcely populated area.

Titus comes from a polygamous household which he describes as a norm within the Maasai Community. His father had 4 wives and as a result ended up with twelve brothers and 18 sisters. Despite the large family, he is the only member in his family to go to college.

“I always knew I wanted to be a teacher and for me it was more of a calling and a passion. I always wanted to do something for my community as a way of giving back.” He said.

When Titus started his teaching profession ten years ago, he noticed a worrying trend in his local community. For girls, there were a number of reasons. To start with, in our community, it is believed that educating a girl is of lesser priority and value as compared to educating a boy. This exposed girls to child marriages where girls as young as twelve years old were married off in exchange for the dowry price. They would then go through the cycle, get pregnant when they were very young and even after delivery nobody was willing to re-enroll them back to school. Unfortunately, this is still a huge concern to date.” He goes on to say.

Having seen all this happen within his community, he was strongly convinced that he had to do something about the situation. He believed that education would break the cycle of poverty and hardships. That if the children were educated, they would change their lives and their community.

His observation caused him to find out why the children in his community weren’t able to access a fundamental need in every child’s life – education.

“I realised that the cases of school drop out for boys were significantly low however, it affected them purely because of financial constraints in their households. For girls, there were a number of reasons. To start with, in our community, it is believed that educating a girl is of lesser priority and value as compared to educating a boy. This exposed girls to child marriages where girls as young as twelve years old were married off in exchange for the dowry price. They would then go through the cycle, get pregnant when they were very young and even after delivery nobody was willing to re-enroll them back to school. Unfortunately, this is still a huge concern to date.” He goes on to say.

“I had to be very tactile when it came to convincing the families to re-enroll their children to school especially in cases where the girls are teenage mothers. This is because the families of the girls would argue that they were already overwhelmed with taking care of the other children and taking back the girl to school would mean extra costs.”

This was how Titus started paying for the fees of children he knew nothing about, he offered to take one back to school and before he knew it, he was educating many other children.

“In cases of child marriages, it gets a bit complicated since some of the children are married off to village elders or chiefs who already have two or three wives and wanted the fourth. These are highly respected people in the community hence reprimanding them of their actions is not an easy task. I have to either link up with local authorities such as the police to intervene so that the girls in these situations might be taken to school.”

He draws his phone and shows a photo of a case he handled recently of a girl who had scored a mean grade of A minus in her recent end term examinations but had dropped out because of teenage pregnancy.

Unfortunately, her family felt that she would be better off getting married than going back to school.

“It is cases like this that motivate me to keep doing what I am doing regardless of my limited resources. It’s because I can see potential being left to wither away.” He says with vigor.

But have there been challenges along the way, one might ask? He states that it hasn’t been easy, despite his selfless passion, starting this noble course wasn’t easy because he got negative feedback and a lot of discouragement along the way mostly because he dedicated almost all of his income to support children who are not related to him.

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Titus Reteti

He started by identifying the children in his area who were not in school, he then proceeded to find out who their parents were and then made attempts to meet them and convince them to allow their children to return to school.

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In addition to this there is slow response from authorities and even institutions when he asks them for the help. He states he is a man who prefers tangible results and the bureaucracy of various institutions has made him shy away from seeking help from them.

“Despite all the challenges I face, I am glad that my wife is very supportive and understanding. She encourages me to keep supporting the dreams of the young people. There are times when I have used all my earnings to pay school fees for ‘my children’ as he calls them and my wife has had to cater for the house for that particular month.” He adds.

Titus currently has two children though still young and yet to enrol in school. However, to keep the question, what happens once they grow up? Unbothered by the future, Titus is determined to work on the present and not worry about the future that is uncertain.

In 2017, Titus ‘linked up’ with Plan International through the Yes I Do project which was training teachers on the need to advocate against FGM, child marriages and teenage pregnancies. The partnership was a training that would offer more insight on how to manage and curb such cases. The teachers were trained to monitor cases such as class absenteeism, and school drop outs and on how to take action.

The Yes I Do project focuses on building economic resilience in families and building sustainable community based child protection structures to protect adolescent girls and boys.

Titus Reteti with at Olentoko Primary School

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Manager is deliberate to empower GUEST WRITER the event in question. You see, joining high school at Form one at a modest nearby high school. (CPE) at the end of the previous year, I joined high school at Form one at a modest nearby high school. As we celebrate International Day of the Girl, I support, Girls Get Equal (GGE), the global youth-led social change campaign. GGE is about ensuring every girl and young woman has power over her own life and can shape the world around her. As we celebrate nine (9) months since GGE launch on the eve of the International Day of the Girl in March 2019, I applaud the great achievements launched on the eve of the International Day of the Girl in March 2019, I applaud the great achievements.

SOMETIME IN THE TAIL END OF THE 1970S, I BECAME A TEENAGER. NO, PROFOUND AS THIS WAS, BECOMING A TEENAGER IS NOT THE EVENT EITHER, BUT IT WAS THE TRIGGER TO JOINING HIGH SCHOOL AT FORM ONE AT A MODEST NEARBY HIGH SCHOOL. (CPE) AT THE END OF THE PREVIOUS YEAR, I JOINED HIGH SCHOOL AT FORM ONE AT A MODEST NEARBY HIGH SCHOOL. This is my sister. My sister is just but one of millions of girls around the world discriminated against or simply ignored over the years and denied an education, a basic human right. Millions of girls are at school today. These girls have the same hopes and dreams as boys. They want to learn, fulfill their potential, work and help their families and communities too. But too often, the same communities treat the girls as second-rate and inferior.

There are numerous reasons why girls are not in school. Discrimination, poverty, emergencies, culture, early marriage, child marriage, pregnancy, violence at school, lack of funding, child labor, domestic labor, dangerous learning environments, lack of water and poor sanitation, lack of female teachers and role models, natural disasters, disabilities, living in war zones, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), lack of sanitary pads. The list is endless. Because they are girls, the challenges are huge but there are solutions. Educating girls has huge benefits for the health, prosperity and security for whole communities. There has been progress. However, there needs to be more work to break down barriers that prevent girls from going to school. We must make it a priority to support girls’ education.

WHY I MAKE NO APOLOGIES FOR EMBRACING FEMININITY

As a boy child, the issue of my sister’s dropping out of school for my sake caught me in a vicious private trap. Even at my tender age at the time, I could discern that a gender-based injustice had been done against my sister. No one had sought her view. Any, her view would have been completely ignored even if she had she expressed it. ‘A female child should be docile and timid, and accept decisions for and about her without question,’ my mother expected my sister accepted the decision and even expressed her happiness for me, as she happily settled in her new role of watching over younger siblings, fetching water and tilling the land. Did she behave contrary to the expectation, she would probably have been shamed by being labeled ‘Wanja kihii’ (tomboy in my local dialect), a repressive expression used to describe a girl of ‘unfeminine behavior’. That had benefited because of the gender oppression of my sister was painful. I utterly and totally hated myself for it. I wanted to cry loudly for my sister but some man reminded me that tough men don’t cry. I was helpless and lacked the means to get out of it at the time. I had to suck it up. I vowed it then and there that I would do something about it some day. When the time came, I decided I would be someone who supports equal rights for women. I concluded I would join movements that support the advocacy of women’s rights on the ground of the equality of the sexes. I believe that women should have the same political, social, and economic rights as men. Yes, I am a shameless feminist! I believe human rights are universal, and civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights belong to all human beings, including children (girls and boys) and young people. I champion and advocate human rights for the girl child because girls are particularly vulnerable to certain human rights violations, and therefore require additional protections. I believe in raising the level of consciousness among the largest number of people by way of questioning and rejecting traditional gender ideologies and stereotypes.

I believe people who appear to reject feminism because they are against gender equality or believe that the world has already achieved gender equality, I wish to remind them that from a global perspective, one of the biggest challenges facing women is educational inequality. Despite the many gains of modern feminist movements in Africa and beyond, many ignorant people still believe that women are less worthy of the same educational opportunities afforded to men. While there is no denying that poverty, geography and other factors contribute to huge disparities in education, patriarchy is a reason for this denial of opportunity. It feeds the message that man should wield the power and women should primarily make a subordinate position in all areas of society. This outdated, yet persistent, point of view fuels educational inequality and a host of other disparities along the lines of gender on national and international levels. I commit to fight this view.

GIRLS GET EQUAL: UPHOLDING A NEW ERA FOR GIRLS’ RIGHTS

I support, Girls Get Equal (GGE), the global youth-led social change campaign. GGE is about ensuring every girl and young woman has power over her own life and can shape the world around her. As we celebrate nine (9) months since GGE launch on the eve of the International Day of the Girl in March 2019, I applaud the great achievements at the data. At the heart of GGE is the spirit of girls not holding back because of what stereotypes dictates. It is about power, leadership and youth-led action to advance girls’ rights.

Advancing rights for children and especially girls is a worthy, wonderful, and difficult cause. As Annie-Rita Abrechsen, CEO for Plan International, reminds everybody, in a recent workplace post, the cause “requires networking, speaking skills, listening skills, diplomacy, stamina, patience and an important equal measure, courage, humor, compassion, empathy and an infinite sense of purpose”.

In addition, the CEO recently shared a ‘common discussion points’ that have been thrown around lately to portray the pathetic weakened deprived boy... All apparently because past efforts to ensure equal access for all boys and girls have tilted to the side of girls too much. However, this is true! Hardly Girls are particularly vulnerable to certain human rights violations, and therefore require additional protection. What is true is that in parallel to looking issues that marginalise girls, we know there is a need for and there have been efforts for more focus on the harmful gender norms that disadvantage both girls and boys. A lot of people due to their own unconscious biases choose to be blind to the scale of gender equality and to the patriarchal and its detrimental impact on girls.

The National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC), a Government of Kenya commission established through the National Gender and Equality Commission Act No. 15 of 2011. The Commission has stated its core mandate as to promote gender equality and freedom from discrimination. NGEC posted its 2015 report “THE STATUS OF THE BOY CHILD IN KENYA: A Report of emerging perspectives on the exclusion of the boy”. The report concluded that “...the perception that the boy child is being excluded in the gender equality agenda is valid while the patriarchal society places a high premium on the boy child, over-focus on the girl child through selective programmes and interventions was pushing the boy to lose confidence and develop low self-esteem...”

It is important to put the record straight. It is all perception. Nowhere in the report does it concludes that the equality problem for girls has been resolved. The boy child debate is a reaction to the empowerment of the girl child and the misplaced marginalisation of boys. Clearly, ignorance has dominated a good portion of the marginalised this debate. The empowerment of women is a simple human rights issue. The systemic oppression of women is historical with roots in an oppressive economic order. Marginalising girls and shutting them out of school is simply because it is not the cultural norm and they are girls. Their chances of getting a quality education are even smaller if they come from a poor family, live in a rural area or have a disability. Girls are four times more likely to be out of school than boys from the same background are. The poorest girls also have the least likelihood of completing primary school. There are often legal, religious and cultural norms that disadvantage girls having the chance to get an education.

As we celebrate International Day of the Girl, what is an irredeemable fact is that the most marginalised boy is more advantaged than his sister is.

Michael Warui is the Country IT Manager for Plan International Kenya.
BEE KEEPING
FOR SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD IN BONDON

The practice of bee-keeping offers a large potential with minimal investments since it does not require land ownership or rental. It can be started with equipment and tools that can be sourced locally and in many instances, skills and knowledge required for such an enterprise are found within local populations. As a business enterprise it offers not only diverse products, for example honey and wax among others, which can be sold in local markets and become an important source of regular income for farm families, but can also provide complementary services, such as on-site education.

In 2013, local youths came together to form Bondo beekeeping self-help group. In 2014, the new group of enthusiastic beekeepers had their first contact with Plan International after learning about an outreach report of the livelihood project through the local Ministry of Agriculture extension officer. A local carpenter was trained on how to make improved Kenya Top Bar Hives. After training, the group collectively purchased trees, which they sawed up to make timber. “Making their own hives was much cheaper than purchasing expensive factory beehives, it also enabled them to be self-reliant”, explains Edwin Olima.

“In addition, Plan International supported the group with 45 more hives. The young people were also taught on how to make their own beehives. “We also received practical onsite training on beekeeping skills, honey processing, business leadership and how to train others through a Training-of-Trainers (ToT) modality,” adds George Pambo one of the youth. Bee products provide for improved nutrition and consequently better health for farm families and others in local communities. Honey is a useful source of high-carbohydrate food, and commonly contains a rich diversity of minerals, vitamins and others, adding nutritional value to human diets. Honey provides for improved physical performance, resistance to fatigue and improve mental capacity.

Honey, if appropriately extracted and processed can become nonperishable, providing sales of the product well beyond the main harvest times. This can provide a more constant and regular income for the farm family.

Project Update

The Nyamira hub staff (Homa Bay, Kisumu and Bondo) held their team building and staff enhancement activities between 9 - 13th September at Kamel Park Hotel in Kisii County. The team building focused on promoting staff cohesion, effective communication and structured feedback.

The team interacted with Plan International Country Management Team (CMT) led by Kate Maina-Verley, the Country Director.

Staff were also recognized for putting organisation’s values into practice while undertaking their duties.

Staff who received awards were:

- Catherine Senelwa - Award for Working Well Together
- Frederick Roche - Award for Working Well Together
- Raphael Aoko - Award for Being Inclusive and Empowering
- Pauline Karisa - Award for Working Well Together

This course of action provided staff with chances to showcase milestones in their respective projects and departments. This included best practices and key accomplishments which was done through a gallery walk and open discussions for feedback & learning. The presentations also touched on how the sponsorship model works and some of the components that helped in the retention of girls in schools such as menstrual hygiene. There is a need to embrace the latest technological trends in the effective implementation of the sponsorship communications. The measures geared towards integration of sponsorship and programs was also highlighted showing how it is positively impacting the lives of sponsored children and their families by enhancing their family incomes.

Plan International Kenya provided fund custodians Zanara group, took the staff through financial literacy sessions. This was important since it was a cross cutting need expressed by the staff.
Plan International is an independent global child rights organisation committed to supporting vulnerable and marginalised children and their communities to be free from poverty. By actively connecting committed people with powerful ideas, we work together to make positive, deep-rooted and lasting changes in children and young people’s lives.

Plan International has been operating in Kenya since 1982 and to-date continues to work in 9 counties: Nairobi, Machakos, Kajiado, Tharaka Nithi, Siaya, Busia, Kilifi, Kwale, Homabay and Kisumu.

We place a specific focus on girls and women, who are most often left behind. For over 80 years, we have supported girls and boys and their communities around the world to gain the skills, knowledge and confidence they need to claim their rights, free themselves from poverty and live positive fulfilling lives.