



WOMEN STUDENTS MENTORSHIP ASSOCIATION (WOSWA)

P.O.BOX 30197 -00100, Nairobi, Kenya

| Email: info@woswa.org | Website www.woswa.org | +254 712 112 732 |

REPORT FOR GIRLS BACK TO SCHOOL CAMPAIGN THAT TOOK PLACE IN KENYA

In our attempt to roll back substantial gain to girls' education, we give great attention to girls who are marginalized from remote and rural communities because they are in that quintile that is delicate and needs special concern since they are more vulnerable and unlikely to fulfill their right to education, health and protection, among other rights.

Through our partnerships with Community Based Organizations and faith based groups, we mobilized the launch of girls back to school campaign on 31st October 2020. We approached community grassroots mobilizers from Busia County who helped us in engaging community leaders, school head teachers, parents and pupils from different schools who attended our launch at Bukhuyi primary school in Busia County. Bukhuyi primary school is located in a remote village (Elukongo village) in Butula sub location, Marachi East Ward in Busia County.



Bukhuyi primary school in Busia County - 850 girls attended from different schools

Activities of the Girls back to school campaign were:

Sensitization of the community members and all stakeholders (parents, girls, community leaders, schools community) on the importance of girls' educational rights and the rooted benefits of girls' education in communities' especially rural areas and marginalized groups.

Discussed the disruption of education caused by COVID 19 pandemic in Kenya looking at how the female students were majorly affected, if they were able to access home schooling facilities and the conditions of home schooling if it was favorable for students to learn. We also sort to find out if there are female students who have not resumed studies with the schools reopening in Kenya.

Among the areas we visited with the campaign was Busia County, Muranga County and Nairobi County.

In Busia we convened at Bukhuyi Primary school on 31st October 2020, whereby we engaged 850 female students on a mentorship session on girls rights to school and girls educational benefits. During this engagement, schools in Kenya had partly opened and the girls who attended the meeting confirmed that by that time some of their classmates' girls had not returned to school. We followed up with one school Bukhuyi primary school head teacher on the girls who had not reported from her school and she confirmed that the two girls had sort transfer to other schools that's why they did not report back.

OUTCOME OF THE ACTIVITIES IN BUSIA COUNTY

Bukhuyi primary school head teacher was our key informant. Mary Ojuang who is the team leader WOSWA interviewed her to understand reasons as to why girls drop out of school and contributing factors; she mentioned the following challenges being of key contribution.

- Parental negligence/poor parenting; Mrs. Odongo cited a case of a girl who reported her discomfort with staying with a foster father. The girls' mother who is a single parent and young at age would have sexual relationship with several different men in their single roomed house and in some instances, her mother seeing her developing body as a woman would introduce men to her which made the girls student life disrupted as she had to seek several other alternatives like staying with her grandmother who would rather have several needs making her the new bread winner for her and the grandmother. Other cases of abuse including brutality by parents and guardians have been the key reason for girls' absenteeism in schools.



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In attempt to seek for safer places when homes are unsafe, girls end up losing their educational rights. With covid 19, girls were mostly affected as they had no alternatives from staying away from their homes deemed somehow unsafe following the explanation given above.

- A shared story of what happened in year 2016, where imposters who pretend to be minor / young adult about 17years enroll in the schools pretending to seek sympathy to get enrollment to school for a chance to attain their postponed educational rights, the imposters use the platform to influence girls to join their prostitution business. This specific imposter girl introduces several girls secretly to prostitution, trafficking them in their network whereby they are lured by monetary needs like money for their sanitary towels and other girls' needs and as a result most of the girls drop out of school to fully engage in the prostitution business. The teacher cited that the Imposter girl has been moving from one school to the next and when she is caught she moves to the next school in the neighboring county.
- Menstruation needs has been a contribution to girls absenteeism in schools and poor performance which result to girls getting discouraged from schooling and drop out sometimes and mostly get married.
- Long distance from school to home
- Social threats especially from Motorcycle riders who take advantage of girls exploiting them sexually and getting them pregnant and some go as far as marrying the girls.
- Boys who are drop out of school intend to influence girls to drop out as well to be married to them.
- Mental distress e.g. the older girls who are in the same class as the young ones feel discouraged by their physical appearance and age which arouse critics from other students as well as villagers who presume they are grown and should be married or comments about their ages that doesn't motivate them to go to school. For instance comments like "Girls of your age are married or in secondary schools or even employed and you are here swinging your big body doing nothing". Body shaming is mostly experienced by adolescent girls and this is a contribution of girls dropping out of schools.
- Night Cultural Burial festivals have been a contribution to irresponsible sexual activity between minors. "The devil dells in darkness" says the school head teacher. Most of these minor pregnancies occur especially when schools are closed and the

lock down and schools' closing from the impact of Covid 19 is leading to increasing numbers of teenage pregnancies among minors. Pregnant girls are mostly ashamed to go to school and leads to them dropping out.

- Poverty has been a key contributor as most families due to financial incapability send their girls to work as maids and house helps in urban centers to be able to contribute to the families' income for other kids educational needs support.
- In the villages within Busia, most school girls' body neatness involves hair cutting. In Busia 99% of barbers are men and boys who tend to take advantage of the girls as they seek hair neatness and further exploit them redirecting their attention out of their educational needs to feeling the need to be married for a better life.
- Community challenges attributed to by cultural activities and practices like female genital mutilation, early marriages among others also lead to girls dropping out of school.

We also sort to find out why girls dropped out of school before Covid and after Covid 19 emerged. We found out that before emergence of Covid 19, most girls were out of school due to poverty related reasons; minor pregnancies and menstruation stigma. With emergence of Covid 19, the girls who were present from different schools stated that 15 girls who are their classmates had not returned to school two of them being from Bukhuyi primary school where we hosted the group. The girls attributed the following reasons as to why other girls were out of school sighting that some of the girls are pregnant and ashamed to come to school while their pregnancy is showing, some subjected to child labour given out to work as house helps in urban settlements, child marriages, lack of basic needs like school uniform, books, exam registration fee and abuse at home. They also stated that they would be discouraged to go to school due to long distances from homes, disturbance by local groups of community members who dropped out of school and some cited sexual harassment as a threat.

With the capacity building session at Bukhuyi Primary School on 31st of October 2020, by providing the 850 girls with relevant information and support on menstrual hygiene management, and increasing their understanding of girls rights to education among other rights, our impact goes further to addressing the rampant issue of period poverty that would be a contributing factor to girls dropping out of schools. We understand that poverty is a great limitation for these girls in marginalized areas like Busia and therefore purchased some books, pens, masks and pads for the girls.



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MURANGA COUNTY-21 ST NOVEMBER 2020

In Muranga county we went to Mbari ya Hiti Primary school where we met with 50 parents and 350 girls from different schools in Muranga County. For the success of the event in Muranga County we partnered with Make a Girl Child Smile CBO whose CEO Ms Esther Muthoni Irungu, helped us with coordinating community mobilization including local leaders participation. The area chief and a representative from county government office of the women member of national assembly Kirinyaga County were among key officials who attended the session. Their involvement in the meeting would mean that our feedback would reach the county government with our call to action on ensuring girls rights to education are given priority.

The 350 girls were engaged in mentorship session on importance of girls education. The parents were made aware on the need to support girls to achieve their education needs despite the challenges they may encounter like teenage pregnancies. At the end of the session, the girls received sanitary pads and knowledge on menstraul health and hygiene management. In the local local dialect, Mr Titus Wairati who was sent by the office of the Women Rep kirinyaga County streded to the girls that their future is within their capacity to fulfill their educational needs and discouraged them from engaging in activities that would result to them getting pregnant or dropping out of school. The chief who was in attendant also mentioned habout his commitment towards discouraging issues of sexual violence that leads to girls teenage pregnancies.



Muranga County Girls Back to school Campaign at Mbari ya Hiti Primary school- November 21 2020



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PARTNERSHIP WITH SCHOOL HEALTH TEAM EMBAKASI SUB COUNTY -NAIROBI

November 10th 2020 Mary Ojwang team coordinator engaged with Ministry of Health officials in charge of Embakasi North and East in Nairobi, built a partnership to implement the Girls Back to school campaign in cooperation with the existing School health program platform that address school girls health issues. The impact of this collaboration would see that health issues that would lead to girls dropping out of school within the county are addressed by intervention of health bosses within the subcounty. With this partnership, our focus would be geared towards ensuring girls education rights in slum areas in the subcounty are achieved. The school health program agreed to offer all health support free to school girls within the region and ensure girls health is not a limitation towards attainment of their educational right.



Consultive meeting with Embakasi East MOH officials – November 11th 2020

GIRLS BACK TO SCHOOL CAMPAIGN-(WOSWA)



Having motivational talks with school girls at Bukhuyi Primary school in Busia County

As big sisters to these girls we are obligated to empower them with the right information and motivate them to work hard in school. We are the lens of our communities' development and as the girls' role models; we look after them to ensure they all attain their basic right to education. Sisterhood is our main value and we can only call each other sisters when we ensure the success of each other. We have been in their place and understand the right motivation they need to keep their focus in schools. The image of a beauty queen (Ms. WOSWA) is to show the girls that it is possible to become and achieve your dreams as a girl despite your humble background. Beauty is not just in physical appearance but the elegance in intellectuality of a woman who has overcome all the life's barriers to achieve her dreams and goals in life. Sharing our education and leadership journey gives the girls hope and inspiration to work hard and smart in school. From our interactions we can observe great inspirations the girls attain as we speak to them. We build their expectations of a better future when they are educated. We give them inspirations to attain the highest level of education and be able to solve society's problems of which some of them have been victims of.



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Within ourselves and with the help of well-wishers, we contribute to support girls' needs.

Due to poverty, education basic needs have been a problem to most of the girls living in Villages and marginalized areas.

Menstruation has played a factor in girls' absenteeism in schools. Girls have resorted to dubious means to source for sanitary towels that render them vulnerable to sexual exploitation. We can change the narrative by adopting means and ways of supporting the girls through innovation, inventions and kind donations of basic needs that the girls need.

IMPACT

We received a live streaming of the event on National TV KBC with a repeat as news items for 3 consecutive days. KBC TV channel has active subscription of 193,000 people. For the 3 days including live coverage during the Busia County launch our information reached about 600,000 Kenyans nationally. Thereby creating a wider impact on how girls in Kenya are in dire need of support and protection as Covid 19 increased gender disparities putting school girls at a more vulnerable position, thereby calling for joint support to help secure future of the Kenyan Girls through advocating for equal access to quality education by girls post Covid19.

Directly we impacted 1200 girls from different schools in Busia County and Muranga County

CHALLENGES

The main challenge we encountered in the implication of the project is lack of finances. Most of our volunteers financed their transportation and accommodation.

The incentive spirit, being part of charity culture here in Kenya meant we had to carry gifts for the meetings. Mostly we used books, pads, and masks which had financial implication although already we were facing financial challenges. This limited us from going to most places in the country as the cost of travel, accommodative and incentives were high and unmanageable.

Fundraising for the event was faced with a lot of challenge because we were implementing the project when COVID-19 pandemic was core and most well-wisher were financially incapable and mostly the economy of the country was performing poorly with most income opportunities shutting down for most people.

SUCSESSES

Girls who attended our mentorship sessions performed well in school and in the national exams.

Information about our campaign inspired national intervention as Cabinet Secretary for Education Prof George Magoha in a press statement in January 3rd 2021 stated that upon schools reopening, all girls whether pregnant or not including teenage mothers should be allowed to go back to school. In his speech he gave a commitment that the government will support girls with menstrual hygiene items specifically pads to girls in all public government schools.



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Girls who were beneficiaries, some became champions within communities

During the 16 days of activism 2020 the Nation group writers inspired by Mary commitment and published on their news magazine featured Mary including photo captioned during the Girls back to school campaign in Busia. <https://nation.africa/kenya/life-and-style/saturday-magazine/my-story-i-share-the-teenage-mothers-pain-for-i-too-was-once-one-3212232>

Our intervention took the form of community sensitization, engagement with people in authority, and media coverage as well as social media.



We intervene by giving the school girls basic needs like pads, masks, books and other facilities to keep them in school.



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Mentorship is the only way for giving the girls hope for a better future by sharing insightful stories of girls who overcame all the barriers and limitations to girls' educational rights and from a village just like them. They are able to succeed through education.

CAMPAIGN COORDINATORS PERSONEL

- 1. Mary Ojuang- Team leader WOSWA**
- 2. Mercy Onyando- Miss WOSWA Kenya**
- 3. Joy Sharmah- Director Footprints of Hope CBO- Busia County**
- 4. Esther Muthoni Irungu- Make a Girl Smile CBO**
- 5. Dr Anne Assey- Patron WOSWA**

COLLABORATORS FOR THE CAMPAIGN



ALL-AFRICA STUDENTS UNION
UNION PANAFRICAINNE DES ETUDIANTS (UPE)
الاتحاد جميع الطلاب الأفريقي