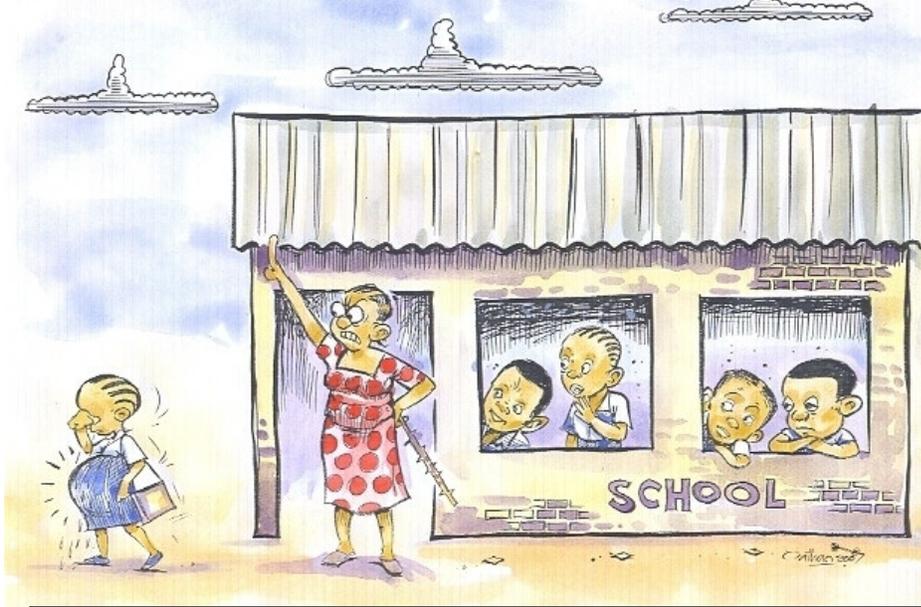


Should Pregnant Girls be Expelled from School?

In late May 2007, our President Jakaya Kikwete expressed serious concerns over the number of pregnant girls dropping out of school. According to official figures, 30 percent of girls enrolled at standard one in primary schools never made it to standard seven. In secondary schools, 20 percent of girls fail to complete four years of education. The current policy contrary to popular belief, does not call for the explicit expulsion of pregnant schoolgirls. The Minister of Education in 1996 had announced in Parliament that such girls will be allowed to continue with their education, but subsequently the government has backtracked and girls are expelled if pregnant.



However, this debate has three views



The 1995 Education and Training Policy categorically states that the education will be relevant to our cultural values. To have pregnant girls in school is against our cultural values that promote girls' abstinence from sexual activity until they are adults and can take up the associated responsibilities? By listening to those who think that pregnant girls should return to formal schools, we begin to compromise our moral values. Pregnancy does not only affect the individuals concerned. Allowing pregnant girls to appear at school teaches other children that early pregnancy is allowed. If we are concerned about rights, what about the rights of the community that will also be affected by the pregnancy? I strongly believe that the society will not benefit from this regulation



1 The Head Teacher

Denying education to girls who become pregnant deprives them of their fundamental right to education under the Constitution, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child which Tanzania has signed, denies them a chance to reach their full potential and condemns them to a vicious cycle of poverty. Government statistics show that 95 percent of school girls who become pregnant belong to poor families. By denying these girls an education we not only punish the girl but the family as well by adding to their burden and reducing their chances of emerging from poverty



2 The Activist

Because it is costly to the nation to have uneducated girls who have missed out of school due to pregnancies, few as they may be, the solution need not be re-entry into the formal education system but rather a policy in place to support access to education through the non-formal Adult Education System. This is the appropriate system for those who have taken on adult responsibilities such as child bearing and rearing through early pregnancies. It provides the flexibility to do both and separates those who are mothers from those who are not yet mothers, thus promoting upright moral behaviour

Our Policy: The government of Tanzania has made it clear that it wants to see all school-aged children in primary school. This plan has been in place since 2002 when the Primary Education Development Plan (PEDP) began. Here, the planned enrolment of 1,500,000 children was not only reached, but exceeded. However, according to the Ministry of Education and Culture more than 3,000 primary school girls are expelled every year due to pregnancy. If we accept that a well educated nation is necessary for our development, what should we do about this problem?



WHO IS RIGHT?

Is our current policy right? What do you think is the best way to ensure that we have a nation that is educated; both boys and girls? Should we expel or allow girls to continue? Does your choice go against our culture and values or against human rights? Is there an alternative?

Share your views

Email us

maoni@policyforum.or.tz.



3 The Parent

Send us your
comments!



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Jukwaa discusses a public topic. Three fictional people's points of view on the issue are presented, and the reader is encouraged to consider all three of them to see if their own opinion is represented. If your opinion is not here, let us know what you think! Readers are encouraged to discuss the issue and respond to Policy Forum by email, by post or through the website. Readers are also encouraged to ask questions if they would like to find out more information about the issue. Finally, readers are encouraged to use Jukwaa to stimulate dialogue in their community and with their leaders.

About Policy Forum: Policy Forum is a network of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This growing network currently has over 50 member organizations, all of which are registered in Tanzania. The aim of Policy Forum is to make policies work better for the people of Tanzania, and especially for Tanzanians living in poverty. As a member-led network, Policy Forum strives to enhance and augment the voice of ordinary citizens in national policy processes while advocating for poverty reduction, equity and democratization in Tanzania. Policy Forum's work has three main areas of focus: local governance, public money and active citizen voice.

Making Policies Work for People in Tanzania!