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POLICY BRIEF ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF

RE-ENTRY FOR TEEN MOTHERS IN FORMAL EDUCATION IN TANZANIA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy brief highlights critical gaps and provides recommendations for improving the implementation of the re-entry policy for girls who drop out of school due to pregnancy in Tanzania. Despite recent revisions to the Education and Training Policy (2023), aimed at enabling young mothers to re-enter formal education, significant challenges remain in ensuring the effective implementation of this policy. Tanzania lags behind some of its regional counterparts, such as Zambia and South Africa, which have more established and better-supported re-entry frameworks.

The brief presents findings from field survey , which reveal that while the policy exists, cultural stigma, economic barriers, and lack of infrastructure prevent its full application, particularly in rural areas. Schools lack essential facilities such as lactating rooms and teachers often lack the necessary psychosocial support training to assist re-admitted students effectively.

A core recommendation is to address these gaps by building the capacity of teachers, increasing resources for infrastructure improvements, and establishing psychosocial support mechanisms within schools. Additionally, the brief calls for national and local-level advocacy to ensure that adequate resources are allocated for the construction of hostels, lactating rooms, and other critical facilities.

This brief aims to draw the government's attention to these gaps and recommend actionable steps that will ensure the full practical implementation of the re-entry program, empowering young mothers to continue their education and contribute to the nation's development goals. A successful implementation of this policy will not only reduce dropout rates but also improve gender equity in education and support the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly **SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality).**

One of the girls supported by Msichana Initiative to re-enter the formal education leading discussion during the psycho-social support meeting for girls who have returned to school

CHAPTER
One

Introduction

Around the world, the journey of girls returning to formal education after dropping out is one marked by hope and challenges. Re-entry into the school system is often seen as a pathway to empowerment. The program is bound to the United Nations Sustainable development goals number **1: No poverty, 4: Quality education, and 5: Gender equality.** Globally, **over 129 million girls** remain out of school, according to UNICEF. Many factors contribute to this, including child marriage, teenage pregnancy, poverty, and gender discrimination (UNICEF).

In Tanzania the circular for re-entry was released in November 2021 and subsequent guideline in February, 2022, which marked a significant government progress in providing education for girls who dropped out from school due to various reasons including child marriages and teenage pregnancy. However, the re-entry program is yet to be provided in the Law but progress has been made since its incorporation on the National Strategy for Gender Development and Education and Training Policy of 2014, as revised in 2023.

This brief, analyses the progress and challenges of the implementation of the re-entry program, a case study of Msichana Initiative's "ARUDI SHULE" program implemented in Kongwa District, Dodoma region and Nzega district, Tabora region, in Tanzania. The program supports 400 girls who have dropped out for different reasons including pregnancy to re-enter the formal education system. the brief therefore, highlights the quality of support provided to re admitted students including facilities and psychosocial support, the best school practices and analyses resources allocated by the government to support this program.

Background and Context

As of March 2024, 22,844 girls in Tanzania have returned to school under the new re-entry guideline which was introduced in November 2021, where 5,142 have returned in formal education system and 17,702 in non-formal education system[1] Approximately 60% of girls aged 15-19 are out of school, with many having dropped out due to early marriage and pregnancy, which affect nearly 30% of girls in the country.[2] Moreover, poverty accelerates the problem, as families often prioritise boys' education over that of girls, resulting in a dropout rate that can be 2.5 times higher for girls than boys. Additionally, child marriage, teenage pregnancy and health-related challenges, such as inadequate menstrual hygiene management, lead to chronic absenteeism, significantly hindering educational attainment.[3]

[1] *Omary Kipanga, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. (November 5, 2024), when responding to the question raised by Hon.Fatma Toufiq on current statistics for girls who have returned to school since the implementation of the Guideline*

[2] *National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) & ICF International. (2021). Tanzania demographic and health survey and malaria indicator survey 2020–2021: Final report. Dodoma, Tanzania: NBS. Retrieved from https://www.nbs.go.tz*

[3] *UNICEF. (2022). Ending child marriage and empowering girls: Progress in Tanzania. Dar es Salaam, Tanzania: UNICEF. Retrieved from https://www.unicef.org/tanzania*

CHAPTER
Two

Findings and Discussions

The survey observed various challenges, impact, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of the re-entry program. It also observed the gaps of implementing the program and comparison to how other countries implement this program

Gaps found in Re-entry Policy and Implementation

While the 2023 Revised Education and Training Policy of Tanzania has made significant strides toward supporting the re-entry of girls, particularly teenage mothers, into formal education, there remain several gaps that hinder its full and effective implementation. These gaps include:

i. Limited Implementation Guidelines

Although the policy promotes re-entry for girls, there is a gap in the practical guidelines for implementing these provisions at the school level. Many schools, particularly in rural areas, lack clear instructions on how to operationalize the re-entry policy. This can lead to inconsistent application, where some schools may fully support re-admitted students while others may fail to accommodate their needs effectively.

ii. Insufficient Infrastructure and Resources

The policy mentions the need for supportive facilities like lactating rooms and daycare services for teenage mothers, but there is a lack of clear strategies and funding commitments to ensure these facilities are built. Many schools, particularly in under-resourced areas, lack basic amenities, making it difficult to provide the necessary physical infrastructure to support re-admitted students. Without financial backing, the policy's goals may remain aspirational. A case study of Kongwa district explains that 73% of girls mentioned that schools have no lactating room for teen mothers while 90% of girls in Nzega mentioned that there are inadequate toilets and lactating rooms to accommodate them during their time at school.

iii. Stigma and Behavioural Barriers

Despite the policy's emphasis on inclusivity, there is insufficient focus on changing society and teacher attitudes toward re-admitted students. Teenage mothers often face stigma from teachers, peers, and even the community. The policy does not strongly address the need for nationwide awareness campaigns or mandatory teacher training programs to change perceptions and create a more supportive environment for these students.

iv. Psychosocial Support Gaps

The policy encourages psychosocial support for re-admitted students, but it lacks details on how such support should be structured or delivered. Many schools do not have trained counsellors or support systems in place to address the emotional and psychological needs of teenage mothers returning to school, leaving them vulnerable to dropout once again. In Nzega and Kongwa district an estimated value of 57% girls have not received counselling services. Moreover, the districts lack enough counsellors to support the number of girls that return to school.

v. Monitoring and Accountability Mechanisms

While the policy supports re-entry, there is a lack of clear monitoring and accountability mechanisms to track how effectively schools are implementing it. Without robust systems to collect data on the number of girls who re-enter and their retention rates, it is difficult to measure the policy's success or identify areas for improvement.
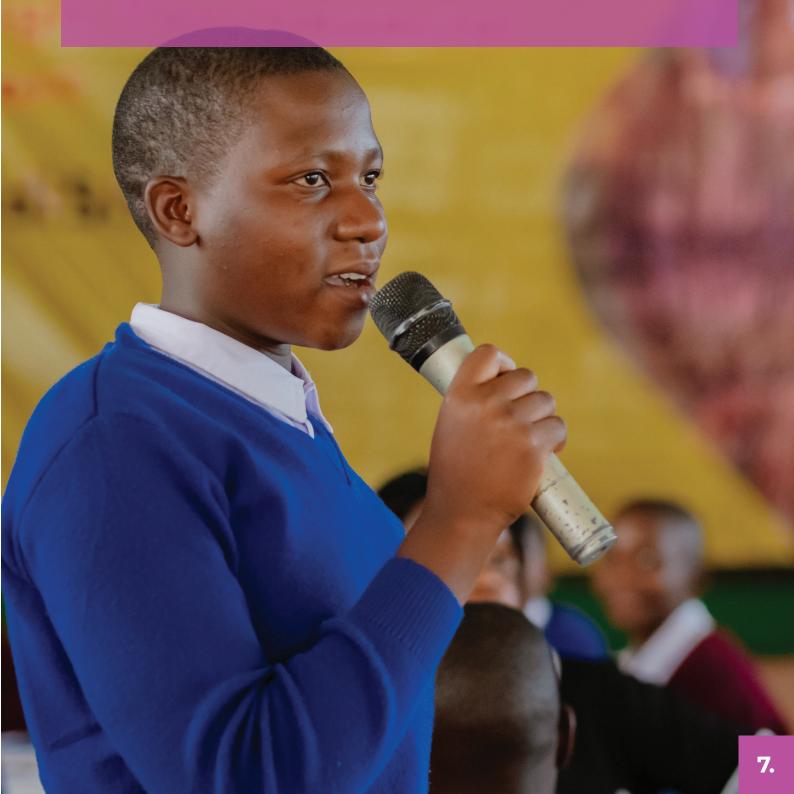
Re-entry comparisons to other countries.

In Africa and other parts of the world, re-entry has been an essential element to ensure quality education is provided to young mothers. There are various countries which have adopted re-entry at their own pace. For example, in 1997, Zambia adopted the re-entry policy and has been a pioneer in implementing this program to allow girls to return to school after giving birth. Moreover, Zambia's policy has indicated the provision of support services such as community sensitisation programs and allocated financial aid that will be received from stakeholders to support this initiative.

Malawi has also been part of this program whereby it adopted in 1994 a readmission policy to permit girls to return to schools after pregnancy. It emphasises on community engagement to address cultural barriers to ensure smooth re-entry.

CHAPTER

Three

Recommendations

i. Development of Lactating Rooms and Improved Facilities

Field observations and interviews with re-admitted students reveal a strong need for dedicated lactating rooms within schools. Many young mothers reported feeling uncomfortable or unsupported while trying to balance their responsibilities as students and mothers. Currently, the lack of such facilities often forces them to miss classes or disengage from the learning process altogether. Establishing lactating rooms would provide a private and secure environment for breastfeeding, ultimately enhancing their ability to participate fully in school.

ii. Enhanced Psychosocial Support and Communication

Stakeholder engagement surveys indicate that communication between parents, students, teachers, and school administration is often inadequate. Focus group discussions revealed that many re-admitted students feel their voices are not heard in school decision-making processes. Enhancing psychosocial support systems—through counselling and mentorship programs—can foster a more inclusive atmosphere. Students emphasised the importance of feeling supported by school staff, indicating that such support is crucial for their academic success and emotional well-being.

iii. Consideration of Dormitories and School Feeding Programs

Field data collected from interviews with re-admitted students highlighted challenges related to housing and food security. Many reported long travel distances and inadequate meals at home, which affect their concentration and attendance. Establishing dormitories would alleviate travel burdens, particularly for students from remote areas, while school feeding programs could ensure that all students receive at least one nutritious meal a day, thus improving overall engagement and academic performance.

iv. Improvement of Physical Infrastructure and Resources

On-site assessments revealed that many schools lack the basic infrastructure needed to accommodate re-admitted students effectively. Inadequate classrooms, sanitation facilities, and learning materials were frequently cited as barriers to a conducive learning environment. School visits conducted as part of the research indicated that improving these physical resources would significantly enhance the educational experience for all students, particularly those returning after a break.

v. Teacher Capacity Building for Psychosocial Support

Feedback from teachers suggests a lack of training in providing psychosocial support to re-admitted students. Many educators expressed uncertainty about how to address the unique challenges faced by teenage mothers in their class-rooms. Re-admitted students reported feeling judged or misunderstood by their teachers, which negatively impacted their academic engagement. Implementing targeted training programs for teachers to build their capacity in providing support and fostering understanding could create a more positive and accepting school environment.

vi. Lobbying and Advocacy for Resource Allocation

Interviews with school administrators revealed a consensus on the need for increased advocacy at both national and local levels to secure funding for facilities that support re-admitted students. Many administrators indicated that while they recognized the importance of supporting these students, financial constraints often limit their ability to implement necessary changes, such as constructing hostels and lactating rooms. Lobbying for dedicated resources could lead to more significant improvements in educational access and retention for re-admitted students.

Conclusion

The re-entry policy for girls who drop out of school due to pregnancy is a critical step towards achieving gender equality in education and ensuring that every girl has the opportunity to complete her studies. However, despite its introduction in Tanzania, the implementation gaps including insufficient resources, cultural stigma, and logistical challenges continue to hinder its success. As seen in countries like Zambia, addressing these gaps requires comprehensive support systems, including psychosocial services, teacher training, and improved infrastructure such as lactating rooms and transport provisions for rural students.

For Tanzania to realise the full potential of its re-entry policy, it must commit to improving the practical application of this policy at all levels of government and in collaboration with communities. By doing so, the country can significantly reduce dropout rates, enhance the quality of education, and advance its progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to quality education (SDG 4) and gender equality (SDG 5).

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