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Valley View Primary School, Mathare: The Government has the primary obligation to protect these innocent girls from sexual abuse

Commentary

SEX ABUSE IN SCHOOLS: HOW SAFE IS THE GIRL CHILD?

A joint report by the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) and the non-profit making organisation Centre for Rights Education and Awareness (CREAW) has revealed that 12,660 girls were sexually abused by male teachers over a five-year period. The report captured data between 2003 and 2007.

According to the document, some teachers molest girls from school to school because whenever they are caught, they would be transferred to other schools where they continued to molest many other girls instead of facing disciplinary action. This means the Ministry of Education's Quality

Assurance and Standards Department is not doing its work effectively.

According to the report, only 633 teachers were charged with sexual abuse in the five years covered by the study, while the other cases went unreported. The report has warned that the actual cases of abuse are quite high because some teachers abused as many as 20 pupils. TSC has been faulted over punishment given to guilty teachers. All that the Commission does is to dismiss and remove the culprit from the register irrespective of the number of girls he has molested. This is unfair and encourages such teachers to go on molesting young girls. Such teachers should actually be taken to court and prosecuted.

According to the report, 90 per cent of sexual abuse cases never reach the TSC, which means that the actual number of cases are higher than reported. This happens due to several reasons. Some of these teachers collude with their colleagues who end up covering up for them. In other cases, parents hide such information for fear of their daughters being stigmatized. In the informal settlements, where most power is exercised by local councillors, chiefs and village elders, the abused girls and their parents are given cash as compensation or the offenders offer to marry the girls.

The report further states that the low rate of reporting has led to more and more teachers taking advantage of the kangaroo courts and the ignorance of parents. Parents have also been blamed for being negative in most cases about proceeding with the cases. Head teachers and education officials, on the other hand, are said to discourage the cases from proceeding to TSC or having the case reported to the police.

When the culprits are reported to the TSC they seek leniency saying that they are the sole bread winners of their families, hence need to keep their jobs. Others argue that they are good teachers producing good

results in their schools. Thus, many cases go unpunished which has resulted in impunity.

Education is a basic human right. Education for All was launched specifically to ensure that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, those in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality. With the current trend of teachers molesting girls in schools, this will not be achieved. TSC should revive its disciplinary committee and effectively address these cases. Based on the report, TSC's disciplinary committee should be held accountable for having contributed to the delayed or denied justice in sexual abuse cases. The Commission is now calling on parents, teachers, religious leaders, community leaders and civil society to help fight child abuse in schools.

The Government has the primary obligation to protect these young girls from sexual abuse. Indeed in its Concluding Observations on Kenya's country periodic report, the Committee urged the government to strengthen the enforcement of the Children's Act and the Sexual Offences Act prohibiting child labour and sexual exploitation of children.



All children, including girls from poor, disadvantaged families are entitled to education



Light and Hope for the Disabled School, Korogocho: Children with special needs lack learning facilities and teachers

SPECIAL EDUCATION: MORE AID REQUIRED

Universal primary education is one of the key Millennium Development Goals. The focus has mostly been on normal children with very little attention being paid to those with special needs. Thousands of children with special needs, especially those from poor families, do not have access to proper education either because disabilities prevent them from going to school or their families sideline them.

Government statistics have showed that only 15,000 out of 750,000 pupils are enrolled in schools for children with disabilities and in special units in regular schools. Most public schools with special units have inadequate learning facilities and teachers. In addition, not all the teachers and support staff have the relevant qualifications and in some cases parents

have been known to dump their children in schools and forget about them. By 2007, the Kenya Institute of Special Education had trained only 9,000 teachers. In 2006, the Government disbursed a grant of Sh 192 million to special schools for learning materials and allocated Sh 200 million for food and expansion.

Special needs education targets vocational and literacy training to equip students with vocational skills. Due to limited Government funds, public schools like Kilimani Primary depend on the goodwill of donors, especially non-governmental organizations. Most public special schools are able to handle those with physical rather than mental disabilities.

City Primary is the only public school in Nairobi with an autistic unit that was established in 2002. According to the school's



Children with disabilities require more attention which translates to higher costs

physiotherapy equipment are insufficient. The unit struggles to provide meals for the children who have special nutrition needs. Recently, the Teachers Service Commission posted six teachers to the unit, but learning aids remain inadequate. Another challenge faced by the special education sector is transition of the disabled pupils after they reach age 13. The greater problem is where to take the boys since the visually impaired girls can be admitted at Moi Nairobi Girls High School.

Meanwhile, plans to sign a memorandum of agreement between the Government and two international non-governmental organizations to revamp special education are at an advanced stage. The agreement between the Ministry of Education, Sense International and Hilton Perkins will set the stage for advanced training for teachers specializing in deaf-blind education and provide specialized learning materials such as Braille machines. "It will enable the Government to deploy adequate staff and learning materials to all deaf-blind education units," says Mr. Edwin Osundwa, the Development Manager of Sense International.

Once implemented, the Government will send out quality assurance inspectors to monitor

head teacher, Amos Muiruri, the special unit runs on a limited budget and the requirements are so many that the Sh 2,000 per pupil allocation is not adequate. He adds that retention of disabled pupils is difficult because the unit lacks a feeding programme. The pupils have different disabilities including mental disabilities, cerebral palsy, Down's syndrome, hearing impairment and autism. Parents are supposed to pay the assistants but most of them come from poor families and are hence not able to raise the fee. Basic teaching aids including pictorial charts and



Not many schools can afford the special facilities required to cater for the needs of children with disabilities



Above: Two disabled children playing with blocks

Right: A braille machine used to type text for the visually impaired. Most special schools cannot afford such equipment



the quality of education being offered to deaf-blind pupils. Teachers will receive training on changing trends and new technology in the sector to make them more effective. Vocational institutions where deaf-blind children transit to after obtaining basic education will also be provided with appropriate equipment.

The organizations are also working with the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) on a new curriculum for deaf-blind children. The special education curriculum was last revised ten years ago. The revision is based on a countrywide deaf-blind education survey by Sense International and KIE, which was done through questionnaires and focus group discussions.

Currently, education for deaf-blind students is offered at Kilimani, Maseno and Kwale primary schools. Kabarnet School for the Deaf-blind is the only school that offers education solely for children with the disabilities. There are two vocational institutions for deaf-blind children, Sikri Vocational Institute in Homa Bay for boys and St Angela Mumias for girls.

Activists are lobbying the Government to increase its monetary allocation for the education of deaf and blind children. Sense International has facilitated referrals to hospitals and schools, giving many deaf-blind children their first access to professional support.

The Kenya National Examinations Council will start administering examinations for sign language next year (2010). The move is aimed at providing a fair assessment to the hearing-impaired students. Students who wish to develop a career in sign language will benefit a lot from this new move. Indeed this is a matter that is being pursued by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights since in its Concluding Observations it called upon the Government to take immediate and targeted measures to cater for the special needs of children with disabilities.



Naioth Education Centre, Mathare: Overcrowding in classrooms has had a negative impact on the quality of education

FREE BUT NOT QUALITY

As a signatory to the Millennium Development Goals, Kenya is duty bound to ensure that by 2015, all boys and girls will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. We applaud the Government for introducing free primary and secondary education. However, the question that must be asked is: What is the quality of this education?

Out of the 330,000 candidates who sat for the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examinations in 2009, approximately 50 per cent will score mean grades of D+ to E. Last year, 151,712 students, representing 50.3 percent of the total candidature scored grades in that bracket while over 7,000 candidates scored E grade. Most of these candidates were from public schools. This is an indication that a lot needs

to be done to improve the quality of education in public and informal schools in the country.

The high rate of failure is largely attributed to lack of facilities, qualified teachers and a conducive environment for learning. Some parents and teachers have in the past said that most of the students are intelligent and would perform well if schools were adequately equipped and staffed. Most of the public schools under-perform due to lack of textbooks, laboratory facilities, adequate

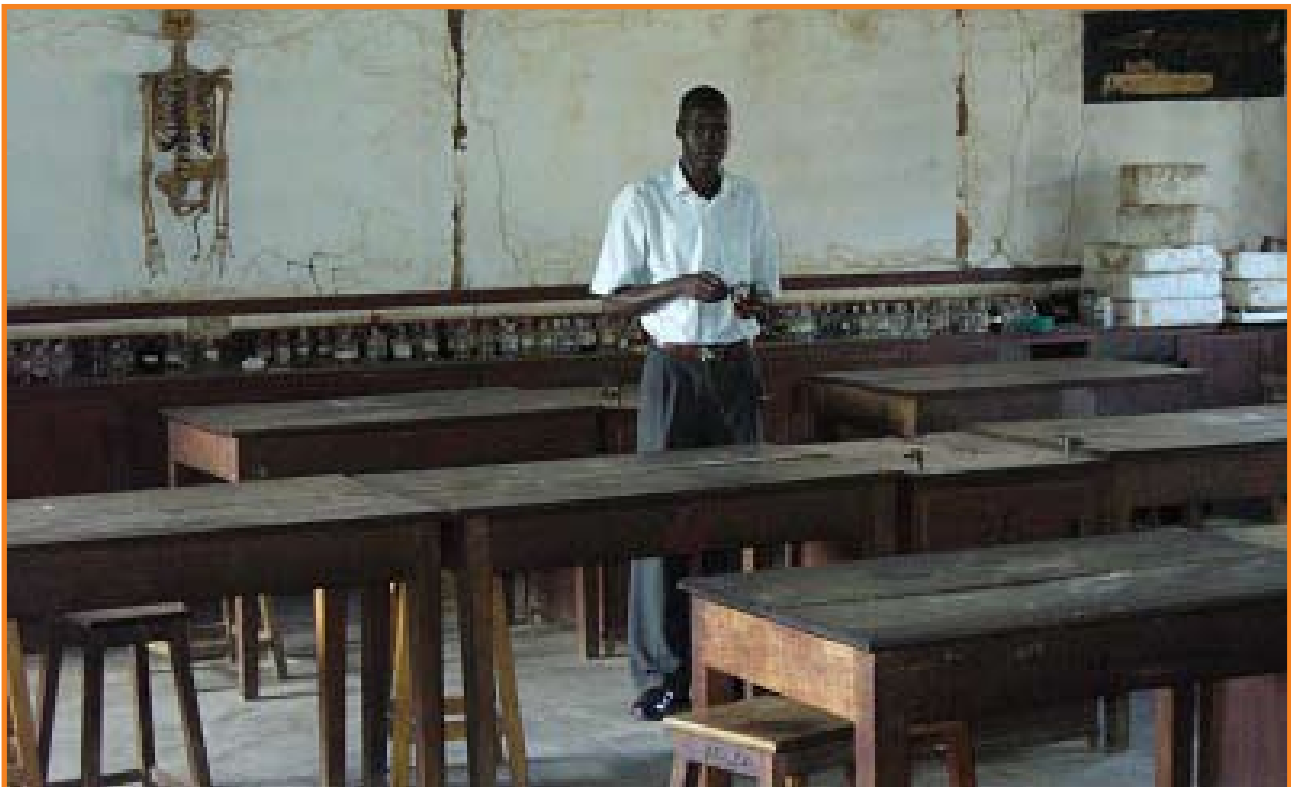
The high rate of failure is largely attributed to lack of learning facilities, qualified teachers and a conducive learning environment

and qualified teachers, overcrowding in classrooms and overworked teachers. According to the state-owned think-tank, Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA), the country has very few secondary schools and cannot cater for the rising population. On average, there is one secondary school per 139 km² compared to one primary school every 30 km². Even then, schools with adequate facilities are too few and most students are in institutions without basic learning facilities. As a result, students in such institutions perform poorly in both KCPE and KCSE as compared to their counterparts in well-equipped private schools.

The curriculum has also been faulted for the poor performance. There are plans to revise the curriculum to offer less practical-oriented science subjects and a simpler form of mathematics which is set to start next year (2010). According to the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) the alternative curriculum is designed to prepare students who will pursue further studies in courses that do not require intensive use of science

and mathematics. However, the changes are targeting mainly students in public district and low-cost schools. This may be a good move but does it address the quality of education in Kenyan public schools? As long as this issue is not addressed then revising the curriculum will not solve the problem. Students who choose the less practical-oriented science subjects may not require the laboratories but they still require enough/qualified teachers and learning facilities. Assuming that a larger number of students choose these sciences; will the Government have enough teachers for them? Statistics from the Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) indicate that national provincial and high-cost schools outperform public and low-cost district secondary schools in

The alternative curriculum is designed to prepare students who will pursue further studies in courses that do not require intensive use of science and mathematics



Many public schools have poorly-equipped or no laboratories, thus the need to offer less practical-oriented science subjects



With the high number of pupils in classrooms, teachers are overstretched and are thus unable to give each student adequate attention

all subjects examined in KCSE. Apart from getting poor results in mathematics and science subjects, such schools also post poor results in English and Kiswahili. According to one of the studies carried out by the Ministry of Education, most of the small schools do not have a building they can call a laboratory. The report reveals that during KCSE, students are taken to neighbouring schools for practical papers. It further states that many laboratories from these small schools are just containers without contents and that even before the new diluted curriculum was introduced, some schools had stopped offering physics, a subject considered too difficult by students in the lower-end category of schools.

Lack of discipline also plays a key role in the quality of education in these schools. Unrest and riots in schools are major causes of absenteeism among teachers and students. Other students who score in the D+ and E brackets do so because of physical and sexual abuse in these schools.

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There appears to be a total collapse of quality assurance in our schools. Reports show there is shortage of quality assurance staff, which could have serious implications on the quality of education in Kenya's schools. According to the Ministry of Education's Quality Assurance and Standards Department, at least five (5) officers are needed at the district level headquarters, but the reality on the ground is different. In some provinces there are only about 10 officers. "Previously there were 76 districts, now Kenya has over 200 but the number of quality assurance officers has remained the same," says the Director of Quality Assurance and Standards, Enos Oyaya. According to him, while the move to take services close to the people by increasing districts has good intentions, it has strained the department's operations where Quality

Assurance Officers are now doubling up as District Education Officers. Decentralization, without proper planning and adequate resources, will simply result in decentralized mediocrity. "The current number of Quality Assurance Officers is not adequate to serve the increased administrative units. The few that we have are now acting as Examination Officers besides carrying out other duties," says the Kenya Union of Post Primary Education Teachers (KUPPET) National Chairman, Mr. Akello Misori.

He states that quality assurance is now more reactive, with officers rushing to institutions pinpointed by stakeholders. Misori adds that given the burden Quality Assurance Officers are shouldering, it is likely that schools will suffer in the critical area of assessing their management, learner to teacher ratios, and curriculum

Unrest and riots in schools are major causes of absenteeism among teachers and students

implementation, which are critical in ensuring that quality standards of education are upheld. In some cases, teachers have embezzled funds and gotten away with it because the Quality Assurance Department's hands are tied given that it 'has no teeth' and cannot take action due its limited mandate as stipulated by the Education Act.

According to Mr. Oyaya a Public Health Officer at the divisional level has the power to order a school closed if sanitation standards are wanting, but a Director of Quality Assurance, Permanent Secretary or even Assistant Minister of Education cannot do the same.

Quality education is a key component of the right to education and should never be compromised. The government must therefore develop a comprehensive implementation framework for the free education primary education program by developing clear and realistic indicators and benchmarks as well as participatory monitoring systems.



Unrest and riots in schools are major causes of absenteeism among teachers and students



UPCOMING EVENTS

NAIROBI PEOPLE'S SETTLEMENT **RIGHT TO EDUCATION THEMATIC GROUPS** INTENSIFY **COMMUNITY-LED ADVOCACY CAMPAIGNS**

In order to strengthen and sustain community monitoring of and participation in the Government's implementation of free primary education in urban informal settlements, the Nairobi People's Settlement Network Education thematic groups have lined up a number of activities in all the eight constituencies in Nairobi and other relevant Government agencies. The following activities are planned for the next two months:

- Visits to Constituency Development Fund (CDF) Offices, Local Government Transfer Fund Offices, District Education Offices, and Department of City Education and District Education Offices. The major objective is to seek specific information relating to the current plans, allocation and use of resources and agree on future engagement with community groups with regard to the formulation and implementation of plans and programs on primary education in the informal settlements.

- Two public hearing sessions in Makadara and Kamukunji constituencies aimed at bringing together the local leadership and community members to discuss what they are doing, activities that have been undertaken, their achievement so far and the plans that have been put in place to improve primary education in the informal settlements.

Community-led actions are vital if the community is to seriously engage in decision-making. These actions are also meant to inculcate the practice of accountability and transparency on the part of leaders and generally contribute towards the domestication of democracy and minimize corruption, as well as ensure proper use of public resources. It is only through such community actions that true and sustainable transformation will be possible and the country will be able to achieve Vision 2030.



A crowded and poorly lit classroom at St James School, Mathare. Such schools can be equipped through the CDF kitty if the the local community engages with the government

QUOTES on EDUCATION

The principal goal of education is to create men who are capable of doing new things, not simply of repeating what other generations have done

Jean Piaget (1896-1980) Swiss cognitive psychologist

Education is not filling a bucket but lighting a fire

William B. Yeats (1865-1939) poet

Education is what remains when we have forgotten all that we have been taught

George Savile, Marquis of Halifax (1633-1695) English statesman and author

Education is a progressive discovery of our ignorance

Will Durant (1885-1981) U.S. author and historian

The whole object of education is... to develop the mind. The mind should be a thing that works

Sherwood Anderson(1876-1941)
American novelist and short story writer

Education is that which discloses to the wise and disguises from the foolish their lack of understanding

Ambrose Bierce (1842-1914) U.S. journalist and writer

Only the curious will learn and only the resolute will overcome the obstacles to learning. The quest quotient has always excited me more than the intelligence quotient

Edmund S. Wilson (1895-1972) U.S. author, literary and social critic

The great aim of education is not knowledge, but action

Herbert Spencer (1820-1903)
English philosopher

VOICES FROM THE GRASSROOT



INTERVIEW WITH **JANE WANJIKU MWANGI,** A HEADTEACHER OF PANIEL JUNIOR SCHOOL IN EMBAKASI CONSTITUENCY

The government has tried to address/seal loopholes in the education sector; however, the same government has been criticized for failing to improve the quality of education in public schools as well as not doing much to support special education.

Question: As a head teacher how would you define quality education? Do you think the free education is of quality? If not what should the government do to improve the quality of education?

Answer: Quality education is education that should bring about human development. It should bring positive changes in the lives of the children so that when they finish school, they are the forces driving the economy of a country. The free education provided by the government is not of quality due to a number of issues.

The teachers are too few and the classrooms too overcrowded in public schools. In the informal settlements, there are no qualified teachers and the schools only depend on volunteers who leave as soon as they secure employment elsewhere. Most of the public schools and those in the informal settlements lack adequate learning facilities. The government should therefore provide teachers to the informal settlement schools if it is committed to providing education for all. The government should also assist parents by providing school uniforms, especially to those from poor families.

Question: *Are the children with special needs being attended to properly? What are the challenges that special education is facing in Kenya and what would you want done to improve it?*

Answer: The children with special needs are not catered for due to various reasons. In most special schools, the learning facilities are inadequate. In addition, the special schools are too few and cannot accommodate all the needy cases. Some of these children come from very poor families, hence even getting transport to their schools is next to impossible. In some cases, children with disabilities are discriminated against. Some parents, on the other hand, hide children with disabilities in their houses instead of taking them to school.

The government should provide facilities for these children and also educate parents who hide their children on the importance of education for all children.

Question: *The government has announced plans to revive the current curriculum in secondary schools. What is your take on this?*

Answer: Changing the curriculum will not really have a positive impact on education in secondary schools. Most of the children will opt for the simpler subjects even though they can tackle those in the previous curriculum. This, in my opinion, will reduce the quality of education in secondary schools. What the government needs to do is to hire more teachers and provide learning facilities, e.g. laboratories, instead of reviewing the curriculum.

Question: *What problems does the girl-child face in school?*

Answer: The girls, especially those in the informal settlements, are faced with many problems. In most poor families, the girls have to wake up very early to assist their younger siblings prepare for school while the parents go to work. In addition, the girls are left to wash clothes, cook and clean the house after school, hence they do not get time to study or do their homework. Others are forced to accompany

their parents to work to ensure that the family earns more income. This has had a negative impact on the girl-child since many of them fail to perform well in their studies.

Other girls are lured into sexual activities by men who promise to change their lives or marry them, hence they end up getting pregnant and dropping out of school.

The government should assist poor families to start businesses so that they can get sources of income. This will enable parents to allow their girls to go to school instead of going to work, hence neglecting their studies.

Question: *Do you think CDF is being used properly? What do you think should be done to make CDF/LATIF more responsive to education needs in slums?*

Answer: CDF is not being used properly because the communities in the slums are not involved in the planning process, hence they are not in a position to monitor how the funds are distributed and utilized. The government should ensure that the community is involved during the formation of the committees in charge of CDF. Informal schools should receive support from the CDF funding.

Question: *Are you aware that education is a right of every child?*

Answer: Yes I am. Education is a right and both the girl-child and the boy-child should have equal opportunities. In addition, those with special needs should be given special attention to ensure that we achieve the 2015 goal of Education for All.

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