Beat: News

SUNDAY 11 OCTOBER 2020 INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE GIRL CHILD

UNICEF THEME- “˜MY VOICE,OUR EQUAL FUTU

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UNICEF THEME- “˜MY VOICE, OUR EQUAL FUTURE´
Every year on 11th October the day of the girl child is commemorated to raise awareness of the basic rights for girls to access education to the highest level wherever they are in the world.
Here in Zambia, various factors stand out as obstacles to girls pursuit of higher education both in urban and rural areas;

âž¢ Poverty: Many girls from low income groups face extreme poverty and their families believe that once the girl reaches puberty the option to give her away into marriage can alleviate some of their economic harddhip through the payment of lobola/bride price and additional financial benefits from the family of the husband after the marriage. The girl also views marriage as a quick option to financial independence and is therefore willing to leave school.

âž¢ Adolescent pregnancy: Due to the stigma attached to being a single parent some girls choose to discontinue their education due to an unplanned pregnancy in their teen years. The idea of raising a child as a single mother seems challenging when combined with scholarly duties and this sometimes results in dropping out of school to pursue small scale economic ventures.

âž¢ Lack of parental care due to death of parents: The misfortune of death of parents often results in children being placed under the care of guardians within the extended family network who may or might not be in a financial position to sustain the education of additional children to a higher level. Orphans and in particular girls finding themselves in this situation are particularly vulnerable and may be encouraged to marry early and discontinue their education.

International evidence indicates that keeping girls in school positively affects their life and benefits the well-being of future generations. When girls are exposed to quality education they build numeracy, literacy, cognitive and social skills leaving them better prepared to participate in the labour market and earn an income for themselves and their families.

Zambia has one of the fastest growing populations in Africa with a projected 10 million adolescents by 2050, therefore educating this growing number of youths requires well-planned investment in the education sector to reach those who are most vulnerable to dropping out of school. On a positive note the overall school enrolment has been rising for both girls and boys in Zambia. Additionally, the disparities between boys and girls has been reaching parity at Primary level but widening during the adolescent years due to high numbers of drop-out in the rural and peri-urban areas. The main reasons for dropping out remain poverty, economic hardship and early marriage.

The Zambian government has introduced various measures to mitigate the disturbing trends which result in girls dropping out from school; this includes allowing pregnant girls to resume their education after the birth of the child, the government has also embarked on creating awareness about the dangers of teenage pregnancy to the life of a young girl and has discouraged the traditional practice of allowing girls to marry after completing the initiation ceremony at puberty. And following the restrictions of movement caused by the COVID 19 pandemic the Ministry of Education has provided for secondary school syllabus online to facilitate home learning in the new normal.

Despite these positive measures, girls are still socialised to consider themselves as brides first and business women later, as brides first and scientists later, brides first and farm or mine owners later.

On behalf of the INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION, I would like to appeal to every parent of young girls in Zambia to change this negative perception. Let us put a STOP to this trend and begin a new trend of allowing the girl child to achieve her dreams through education. Education is the passport to a better future. Education is a basic human right must be enjoyed by both girls and boys to alleviate poverty, improve the standards of living of families and communities and ultimately the entire nation.

On this INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE GIRL CHILD, join me and the Zambian girls in saying, "˜MY VOICE, OUR EQUAL FUTURE´ through education!

Said : Michelle Manda
IHRC- Zambia Representative

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