

EDUCATING GIRLS: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF KEEPING GIRLS IN SCHOOL INITIATIVE, PETAUKE, ZAMBIA

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Abstract

In 1997, the Minister of Education in Zambia then, Dr. S. Siyamujaye announced that schoolgirls who become pregnant would no longer be expelled. The girls who had been expelled in that year were allowed to return to school. The directive showed serious commitment towards the education of girls. Hence, the Re-Entry Policy mandates schools to allow girls who fall pregnant or left school due to early marriages back into school system (MOE,1997).

Further, in the pursuit to educate girls, the Government of the Republic of Zambia is working with cooperating partners to eradicate the vices and borrowed funds from World Bank in 2016 to support the 'Girls' Education and Women's Empowerment and Livelihood. Through 'Keeping Girls in School (KGS) initiative' the government has been providing bursaries to girls whose parents/guardians were identified to be vulnerable and who were beneficiaries of the Social Cash Transfer Programme.

The project objective is to support the Government of Zambia to increase access to livelihood support for women and access to secondary education for underprivileged adolescent girls in extremely poor households in selected districts, and Petauke is among the benefiting districts in Zambia.

Despite all these efforts to educate the girl-child, mitigate teenage pregnancies and child marriages, the ministry has continued receiving reports of dropouts due to covid-19, high poverty levels, tradition and culture, teenage pregnancies and early marriages.

The findings revealed that the KGS initiative has positively impacted on girls' education as Memory Lungu, a learner at Petauke Boarding Secondary School states, "The KGS initiative is good. This is because some of us, our parents cannot manage to pay for us in school. The Government is helping us through KGS and we are grateful" (MOGE Magazine 2021).

The investigation involved 32 out of 53 benefiting schools; sampled and interviewed 100 out of 2,767 beneficiaries. The researcher used mixed research methods. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected using the automated google form, one-on-one phone call interviews and also analysed some data using Microsoft excel.

Therefore, in order to keep pregnant dropouts and out-of-school girls in the education process, government should consider investing in open schooling as it provides access to distance and online methods which can support self-directed learning of Girls anytime and anywhere while on maternity leave or out-of-school.

Key words: *Girls, education & bursaries.*

INTRODUCTION

The Girls Education and Women's Empowerment and Livelihood Project (GEWEL) is one unique program attempting to decrease the rate of child marriage. Its focus is on expanding access to secondary school for young girls, and more specifically, young girls from poor families through the Keep Girls in School bursary. Some girls are forced to drop out due to financial constraints. The KGS initiative assists by providing funds to continue girls' education. (Haidet, 2019).

Further, the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative found that female literacy measures at 67%, while male literacy measures at 82%. The difference suppresses girls and women's economic advancement and liberation against males. Moreover, around the world, approximately 132 million girls are out of school and a million more are in school, but not learning (UNGEI, 2020).

This study, therefore, investigated the impact of Keeping Girls initiative on girls' education, and proposes alternatives on what can be done differently and ends with recommendations to stakeholders.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In 2018, for example, Eastern Province alone recorded 24, 731 teenage pregnancy cases with Petauke District recording 3,972 girls (Zambia Reports, 2019). Poverty, peer pressure, tradition and culture are among the reasons attributed to dropouts and the escalating cases of teen pregnancies and child marriages (Thelwell, 2019)

Moreover, the Ministry of Education recorded a national total of 15,222 pregnancy cases in 2017 with Eastern Province topping on the list with 2,168 and seconded by Southern Province with 2, 126 (Educational Statistical Bulletin, 2017). This data clearly indicate that the problem is real and requires urgent attention.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study is significant as it informs policy on open schooling and girl-child education. It also provides feedback to stakeholders involved in the Keeping Girls in school initiative. The paper also serves the purpose of knowledge creation and transmission. It also influences academia and research to explore further in the area of girl-child education.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- Chiefly, to solicit financial support for girl-child education in Zambia, particularly Petauke district.
- To influence open schooling policy and give feedback to stakeholders involved in KGS intervention.
- To lobby for inclusion of other requisites for girls in addition to school fees.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Background

The Government of the Republic of Zambia has been making effort to put in place policies, interventions and strategies that ensure that every person be it, a child (girl or boy), youth or adult will be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs. The Government's fundamental aim in this regard is to provide education and training that will serve individual, social and economic well-being, while enhancing the quality of life. (MOE, 1996).

Why Keeping Girls in School Initiative in Zambia?

Many years ago, King and Hill (1993, p.2) investigated the state of women's education across regions and discovered that "... the level of female education is low in the poorest countries, with just a handful of exceptions, and by any measure, the gender gap is large in these countries".

A follow-up study by Lewis and Lockheed (2006) based on data for the year 2000, revealed that even though several countries have made good gains with regards to gender equality in terms of enrolment, and a few now have more girls in school than boys, the general outlook remains the same where too many children are still not in school and generally, most of these children are girls.

Similarly, the Keeping Girls in School Initiative exists in Zambia because there are more boys in secondary schools than girls. It focuses on girls because they need more support than boys to attend secondary school. A close analysis of schools in Zambia, indicates that there are many girls in primary schools than boys, but more boys than girls in secondary schools because as they move into higher grades and reach puberty stage, girls drop out of school due to teenage pregnancies and early marriages (MOGE,2021a).

Global and National Efforts and Barriers to Educate the Girls

Zambia launched the campaign against child marriage which was being spearheaded by the Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs (MOCTA) in close collaboration with Ministries of Health, Gender and Child Development, Community Development, Mother and Child Health, UNFP and Civil Society Organisations. Zambia and Canada sponsored the UN resolution to end child marriages which has since been passed. Zambia's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Dr. Mwaba Kasese-Bota led this effort (MOCTA, 2013).

Moreover, Government then identified traditional leaders as one of the key drivers to the successful elimination of child marriages; hence, World Vision Zambia has been seeking to broaden collaboration with specific traditional leaders who are champions against child marriages and sensitise the ones who are not seriously engaged through training and peer to peer visits with traditional leaders who are champions in the area of child marriage and other issues that affect girl-child well-being.

Although strides have been made in the fight against child marriage and teenage pregnancy, one of the major challenges is lack of a specific policy and law on child, early and forced marriage which could go a long way in ensuring that it supports the activities that are currently being undertaken by civil society, government, traditional leaders and other key stakeholders. Currently, marriage can be contracted both under statutory and customary laws.

Harmful Traditional Practices that Promote Child-marriages

'Lobola (dowry)' is considered as a compensation to the family for the lost services of the girl and it is this same lobola that has made several parents to withdraw the girl-child from school, regardless of age and take her into marriage in order to gain a dowry.

Furthermore, the Nsenga people, just like most ethnic groups have an initiation ceremony known as 'Cinamwali' for girls to mark an individual's entry into adulthood and official acceptance into the village. A girl is expected to stay in a secluded room for weeks or more than one month also. While in seclusion, the girl is not expected to speak to anybody except for those that have paid money to the girl for her to speak and even then, the girl does not speak to that person immediately. The ceremony involves rituals that teach girls about hygiene, customs, sexual related matters, and the responsibilities of being an adult or wife. It is usually right after these ceremonies that girls attempt to apply the skills and knowledge acquired. As a result, the ceremony affects learning of the girl as she is not allowed to go to school and is endangered of being raped as she cannot shout nor report since she doesn't speak to anyone.

Challenges Schools are Facing

Additionally, many day secondary and primary schools with Grade 8-9 classes in Zambia lack weekly boarding facilities hence girls have to find rented accommodation in the villages for rural schools and compounds for urban schools. This arrangement makes it difficult for teachers to monitor girls' social activities.

Moreover, the Statistical Bulletin revealed that between 2007 to 2009 the ministry recorded over 17,000 cases; in 2010, over 11,000 and in 2011 it recorded over 15,000 cases (MOGE 2013). In 2017, the number of pregnancy cases rose to 15,222 (MOGE Statistical Bulletin, 2017).

Efforts and Measures by Government and international bodies

Further, the new dawn government enhanced and implemented free education from ECE to Grade 12 and learners who were in government boarding schools who were not vulnerable, were required to pay K1000 boarding fee per term and identified vulnerable learners had their boarding fees paid through the Constituency Development Fund Secondary School Bursary Scheme. Government was also paying a subsidy for user fees pegged at K600 per learner in all grant-aided secondary schools to reduce the cost of user fees. Government also abolished PTA fund, and payment of examination fees for all Grade 12 internal candidates was a responsibility of the government of Zambia (MOE, 2021).

Moreover, the law prohibits marrying off a learner (Education Act, 2011:435) However, this law is still toothless and as it is still sleeping in the 2011 Education Act.

Further, Article 21 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1999), places strong obligations on the state to eradicate harmful customary practices. The obligation emphasises the responsibility of the state to "eliminate" harmful customary practices.

However, Article 21 (2) of ACRWC further prohibits child marriages (marriages where one of the parties is under 18) and the betrothal (engagement) of children under 18. (ACRWC, 1999).

Impact of KGS on Girl-child Education

Evidence indicates that 2,767 girls have benefited from the GEWEL Project through the Keeping Girls in School initiative in Zambia. Girls' overall enrolment rates have also increased. Some girls who completed secondary education are now in colleges and universities.

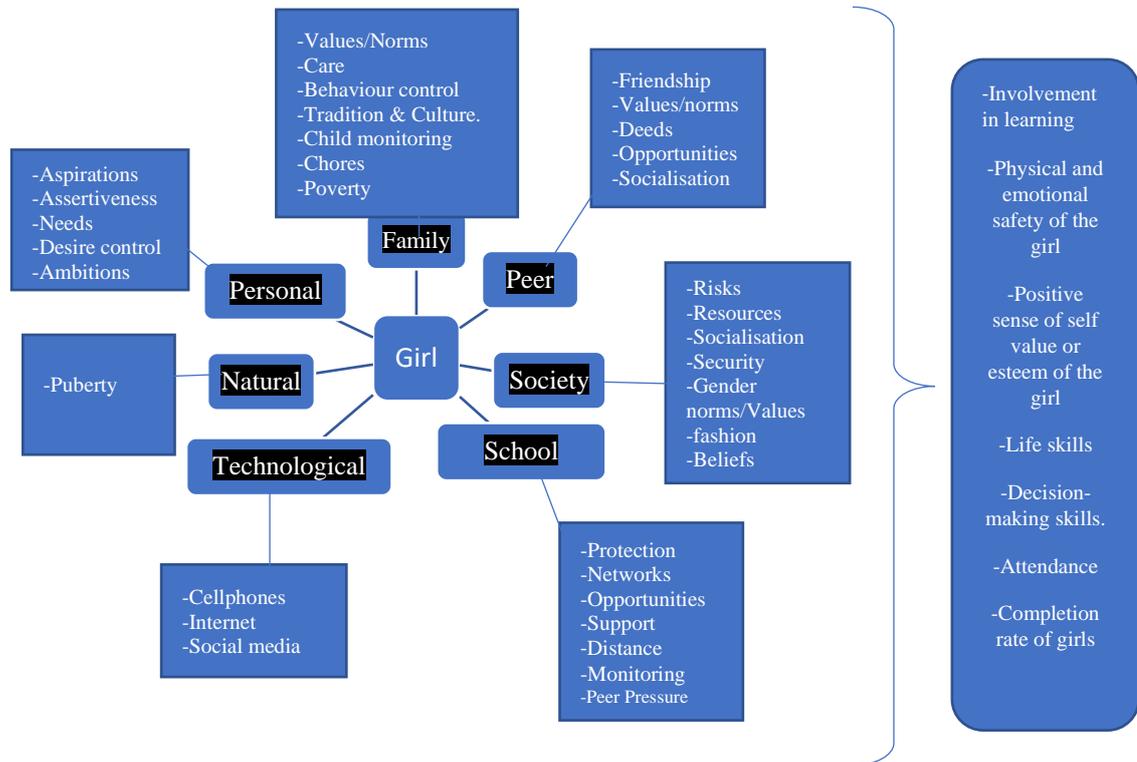
Therefore, initiatives like KGS by World Bank and many other programmes are assisting to create a more supportive school environment for the girls.

However, the fast-growing adolescent population in Zambia needs targeted investments with adequate support mechanisms to keep girls in school and complete a quality education (McConnell & Mpuwaliywa, 2016b)

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR ADOLESCENT PHASE

There are several factors that we need to consider for a girl to be educated. There are both internal and external factors that positively or negatively affect the girls' education including family, societal, peer, natural, personal, school and technological factors.

The model classifies the major areas where today's adolescents grow, then it defines aspects of those areas that are protective and those that can leave adolescents vulnerable. Even though the researcher suggests these factors as risks or protective, he is fully aware that what is protective in one setting may not be protective in another setting.



METHODOLOGY

The researcher used descriptive approach and mixed research methods in this study. Contrary to other approaches, descriptive approach allows the researcher to collect comprehensive data from different suitable participants to appreciate all forms of variables. Also, different methods were used to collect data from individuals, small groups of population including events (Wingkvist & Ericsson, 2011).

The researcher used mixed research methods because rich data is gathered using a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods like observations, interviews and case studies. For instance, case studies are, "often intensive evaluations of small-scale entities such as groups, organisations, individuals, systems or tools" (Yin, 2003). Data was collected in form of reports, ministry bulletins available on the website, photos of beneficiaries, statistics of beneficiaries, video and audio recordings.

Typical Case Sampling was used to select the interview participants who were believed to be suitable and reliable for the study (Kombo & Tromp, 2010). Participants included KGS beneficiaries like in-school girls, school leavers, school managers and selected key departments involved in data management and implementation of GEWEL project at district level and sought consent of all participants.

DATA ANALYSIS

The investigation involved 32 out of 53 benefiting schools; sampled and interviewed 100 out of 2,767 beneficiaries. By means of a combination of methods, the researcher collected and analysed quantitative data involving bar charts, pie charts and statistical calculations; and qualitative data involving quotes from interviews and recorded interview audios. Results were analysed by the automated google form and Microsoft excel. Hence, the results below represent the beliefs of respondents:

Figure 1: Below shows statistics of girls who have benefited from the GEWEL Project through KGS initiative and those girls who have been receiving bursaries but have dropped out of school in the district due to various reasons.

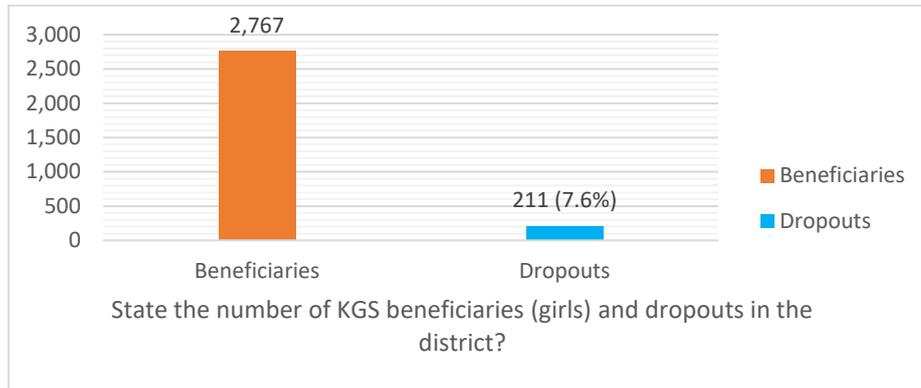


Figure 2: Indicates the various reasons for those girls who dropped out of school.

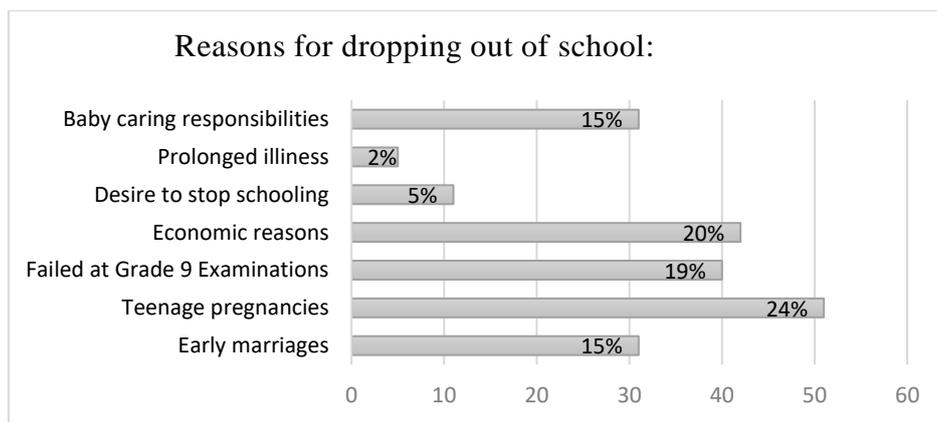
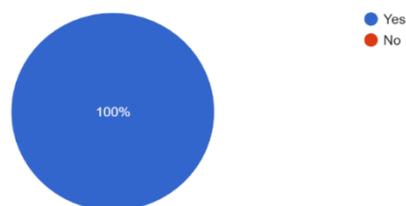


Figure 3: Illustrates the belief of the participant on the impact of GEWEL Project through KGS initiative.

Do you think GEWEL project has created any impact on girl-child education and the community?
1 response



Quote 1: Represents the views of the girl who benefited from the GEWEL Project fund through KGS initiative. Question: Without the support of GEWEL Project through KGS initiative, do you think you would have completed your secondary school education? Response: “No, I don’t think so, because it was very difficult for my parents to find money for school fees as they are just peasant farmers”.

Figure 4: Represents the belief of the respondent on whether the support provided to girls in GEWEL project through KGS is adequate or not.

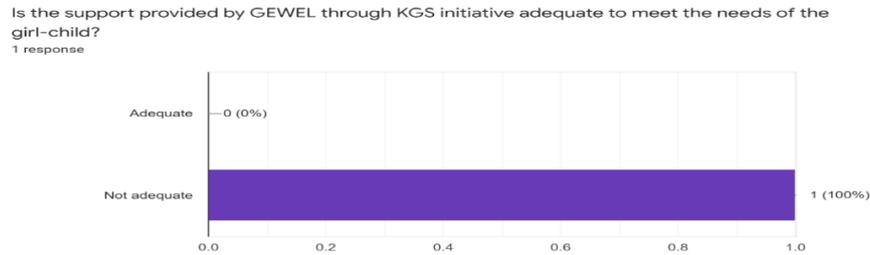


Figure 5: Illustrates the views of the girls on what kind of support they need for them to concentrate on education and avoid engaging themselves in illicit activities initiated by boys and men.

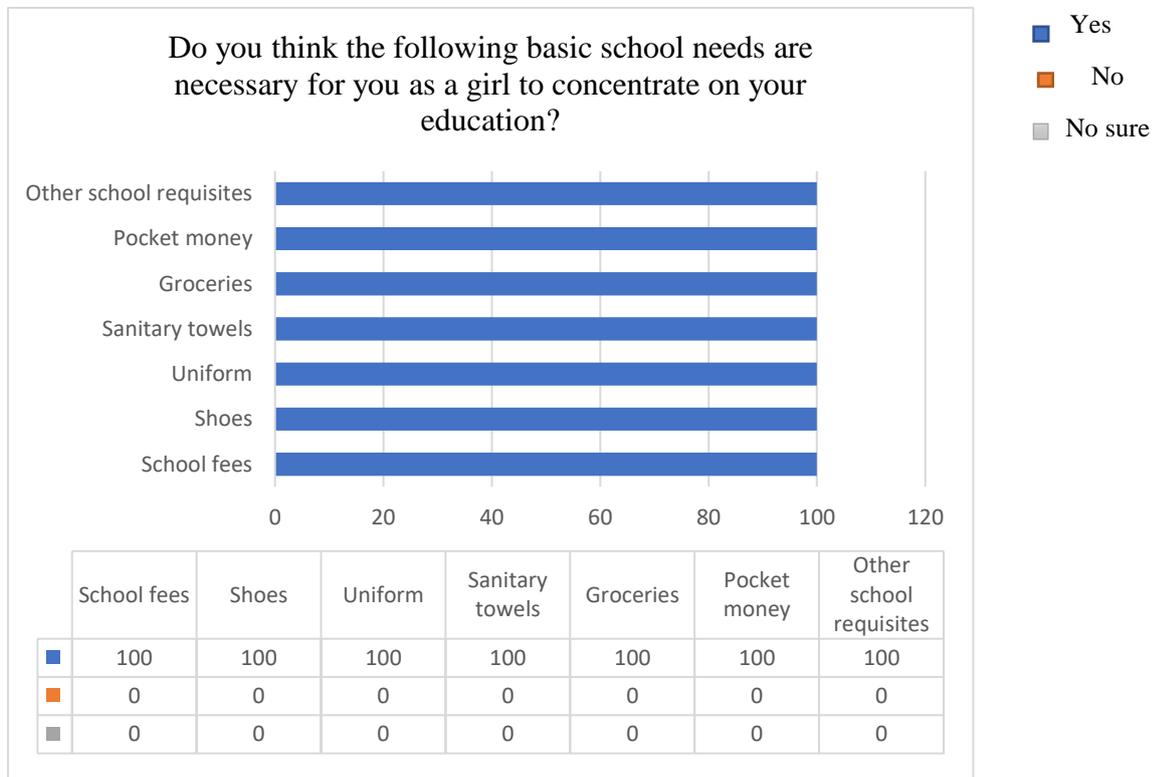


Figure 6: Illustrates the message from the girl who is a beneficiary to GEWEL project funder. What is your message to the GEWEL Project funder and the Government of the Republic of Zambia as a beneficiary?

Q12- I really appreciate to world Bank which is the funder of JEWEL project to accept for lending our government the money to help & motivate us as girls in school by paying our fees to enable us to focus on academic activities or works not engage in early marriages because some girls they stop school coz they lack money from their parents to pay for school fees. Mostly, this happen in rural areas where there are many peasant farmers so because of that they takes girls to early marriages for them to be helped in the way that they reduce or decrease in number of people for that particular family.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The study reveals the impact of Keeping Girls in School Initiative in Petauke District and, it brings out several issues that can be done differently. For instance, based on fig.1; 2,767 girls in various schools in the district have benefited from the bursaries through school and examinations fees. Also, the initiative had helped many girls to go back to school as demonstrated in fig.3 and quote 1, where a district official confirmed that the project had impacted positively on girl-child education. One of the benefiting girls pursuing a Diploma in Finance and Accounting at North End University in Lusaka, Zambia explained when she was asked if she was going to complete school if she was not sponsored through KGS initiative as she responds, *“No, I don’t think so, because it was very difficult for my parents to find money for school fees as they are just peasant farmers”*.

A phone call examination with another beneficiary disclosed that, *“I almost went into early marriage because my guardians didn’t have money to take me to school and they were also ready to formalise my marriage. However, because of KGS, I am now in Grade 11, and I hope to finish school and train as a teacher, and that will give me chance to educate my young sister and brother.”*

The study also brings out the bad news of 211 girls who dropped out school for various reasons which include, teenage pregnancies, early marriages, prolonged illness, economic reasons or lack of funds to buy other school requirements, failing national examinations at Grade 9 and others just decided to stop schooling by justifying themselves as not intelligent as illustrated in fig.2 of the data analysed above. Hence to address this setback, there is need to enhance guidance and counselling services; provision of boarding or weekly boarding facilities as some beneficiaries lament, *“Owing to lack of teachers monitoring us where we stay, and insecure and unavailability of boarding facilities in day and basic schools, some of us rent huts in the villages and compounds hence boys and businessmen take advantage of us, worse – we don’t have any source of income to buy what we want”*. This also tells us that creating projects that aim at empowering and providing girls with financial literacy would help girls to have access to funds and use it prudently.

In addition to that, poverty, early marriages and teenage pregnancies remain the crucial challenges that promotes gender disparities in Low Developed Countries. For instance, one of the beneficiary states her take home message to World Bank, *“I really appreciate World Bank for accepting to lend our government some money to help and motivate us as girls in school by paying our fees to enable us focus on academic activities and not to engage in early marriages because some girls stop school due to lack of money from their parents for school fees. So, because of that they take girls into early marriages for them to be to be helped and to reduce the number of people in that particular family.”*

Further, the study also shows that the sponsorship is inadequate to meet the basic needs of a girl as illustrated in fig.4 and respondents who are beneficiaries suggested that for them to concentrate on their education they need other basic school requisites apart from school and examinations fees (fig.5) in the foregoing discussion.

The findings, therefore, informs stakeholders and policy on open schooling. The study also informs policymakers. The academia and research need also to enhance research activities for governments to make well informed or evidence-based decisions.

CONCLUSION

Considering the issues raised by respondents will really help the GEWEL project through Keeping Girls in School Initiative create a great impact on lifelong learning among girls. The fact is that there are still many girls who are out of school due to teenage pregnancies, early marriages, covid-19 pandemic, and high poverty levels. It also clear that the GEWEL Project is assisting girls through school and examinations fees whereas their families are also helped to improve their livelihoods through Social Cash Transfer. However, the study revealed that girls from these vulnerable families need additional support such as sanitary towels, uniforms, shoes, pocket money, books, groceries and other school requisites.

As revealed from the study, the 211 girls who dropped out of school for various reasons other than school or examinations fees would have remained in school if the proposed additional support was provided to the girls. While the girls are in school, they need guidance and counselling, academic support, need to be engaged in co-curricular activities, behaviour regulation, boarding facilities, sensitisation on sexual reproductive health issues, comprehensive sexuality education, protection and close monitoring at dormitories and during class attendance. The existing policies and guidelines on girl-child education such as the Re-entry Policy need to be strengthened and implemented properly for girls to come back to school and keep them in school.

Therefore, we need to support the girls' education agenda to adequately address the gender disparity in education and in decision-making positions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher strongly recommends:

- Government and cooperating partners should consider investing in open schooling as it provides access to distance and online methods which can support self-directed learning of Girls anytime and anywhere while on maternity leave or out-of-school.
- Increase funding to support basic school requirements for girls.
- More boarding or weekly boarding facilities for girls are needed.
- Enhance programs that aim at ending harmful practices, early marriages and teenage pregnancies.
- More schools are needed to reduce distance between home and school.
- Need to strengthen integration of Comprehensive Sexuality Education in the main curriculum of institutions.
- Need to revise the null curriculum implementation by initiation ceremony counsellors.

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