

“Promotion of Child rights Approaches to Education with Particular Emphasis on Child Participation in Selected Schools in Kampala and Mityana Districts”

Mukasa George Stephen – Merab Kariisa - Hannington Senogaa Majwala

Team Mentor: Agneta Wångdahl Flinck

Batch 6

Summary of the project

The team chose the topic for their project as a result from abuses committed by parents, schools and the general community against the children’s right to participation. In the majority of Ugandan schools, the traditional teacher-centred methods of teaching are still the norm in many classes. A teacher is regarded and conducts himself as the “all knowing” whose only task is to give knowledge to a large number of docile and passive learners. The learners fear approaching the teacher when they encounter a problem or face challenges. So frightening is the teacher and so tense is the school environment that the learners fear to freely express themselves and to participate in all aspects of the learning process.

The project addressed child rights abuses that inhibit children’s full development and undermines their confidence. Out of the three selected schools, two are primary schools (in Kampala District, one in the slum) and the other one is a secondary boarding school (in Mityana District). The team members ran workshops in the schools for students, teachers, principals and representatives of other stakeholders. The objective was to raise the awareness of child rights and to focus on making students more active, responsible and participatory in school activities.

Challenges on the personal and professional levels

All three members of the team are educators, serving from different locations and with under different capacities. During the implementation of the Project, the team members experienced similar professional and personal challenges and issues. Being full time employees, all the team members were faced with the challenge of inadequate allocation of time in their respective locations and with their busy schedules. They all also had meet with the challenge of privately mobilizing the necessary resources for the implementation of the project.

There are also challenges the participants experienced as a team. A case in point is the negative attitude of the majority of teachers who were opposed to child rights advocacy because they fear that it will cause indiscipline and truancy. The issue of overcrowded classes in many schools in Uganda, the team noted, makes it difficult for the willing teachers to change the sitting arrangement from the traditional placing to a group oriented one.

Individual team members had unique experiences and issues both at personal and professional levels. Merab reports a change of attitude allowing her to become a child rights advocate. She does it by seizing opportunities wherever and whenever she is addressing head teachers, leaders, teachers, parents and pupils in the course of her official duties. Hannington reports a change on his teaching methods; going from a lecture-centred approach to a student-centred one by using discussions and discovery methods. As a lecturer of the teachers in the making, he has also used this opportunity to sensitise his students about the child rights. He is optimistic that when they eventually go out in the field they will pass on the Gospel of child rights. Steven reports of a personal struggle he went through when trying to change his attitude and practice of using the cane when disciplining errant students. He is also trying to convince his fellow teachers to abandon the practice of using the cane and start employing other disciplinary methods. He says that he has also used staff meetings and parents meetings to pass on the Gospel of Child Rights.

Challenges on the organizational level

Our project was carried out in the three sample schools. It may be too early to effectively evaluate the impact in these schools; nonetheless, there are a few visible aspects and spin-off effects. In many of the schools where we implemented the project, the majority of teachers now get some time to teach children rights and in some children rights clubs have been formed. Teaching is now more child-centred than before and the use of the cane has greatly decreased. Child participation and self-confidence levels show some improvement, although there is still work that needs to be done. Other stakeholders, especially the parents, are slowly realising the need and importance of being more supportive of their children and according them more freedom to participate in aspects that concern them.

Challenges on the country level

Nothing much has been done at the national level by our group. However we are planning to reach out to the other change agents of the earlier batches to form a network so that we can spread out our net of child rights advocacy countrywide. We have also identified other actors in the field of children rights in Uganda and we plan to reach out to them to seek collaboration in the pursuit of the protection and promotion of Child Rights.

In conclusion, the challenges and issues expressed above have been experienced by individual members and as a team during the implementing our Project.

THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES!