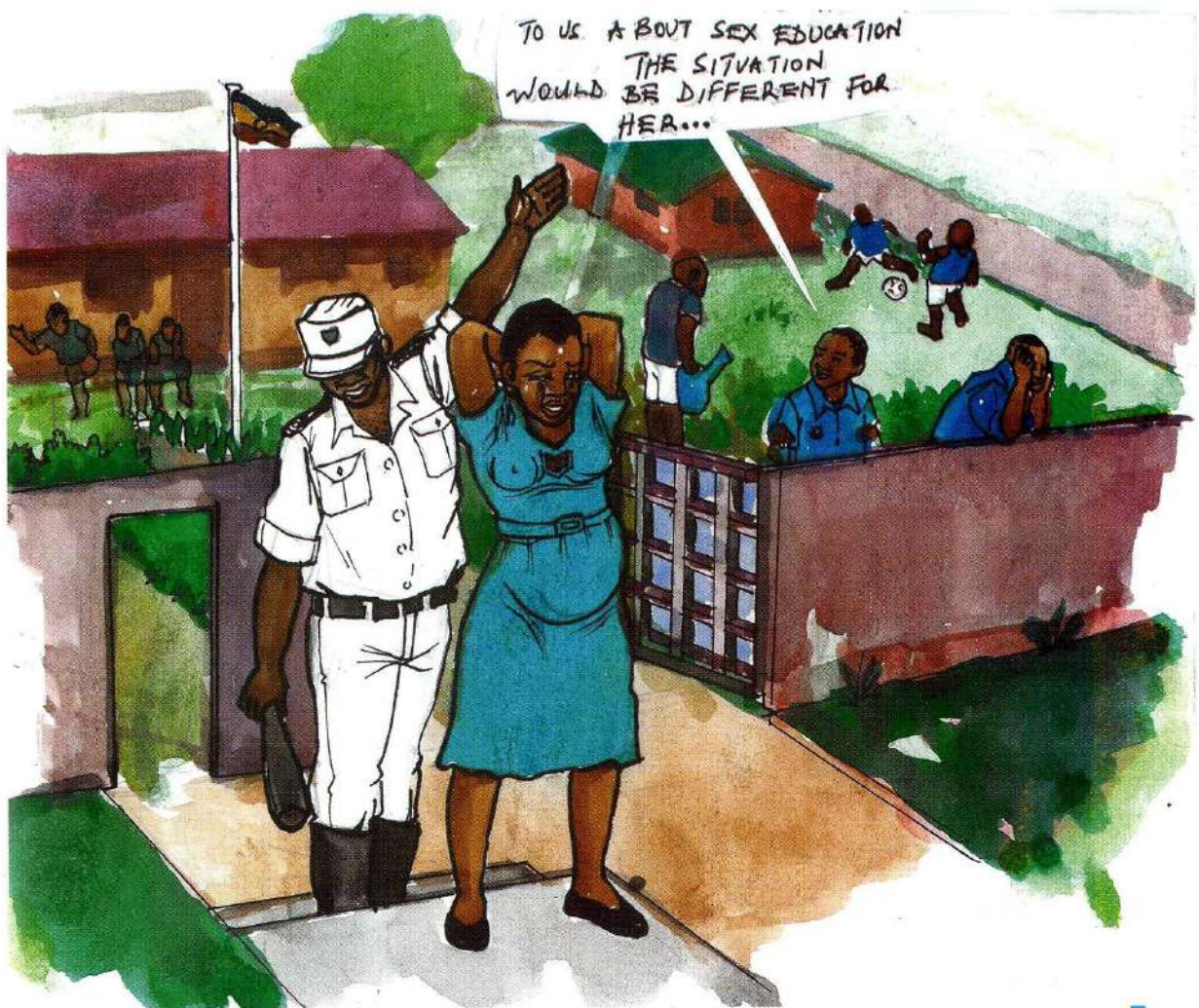


**A SURVEY ON RE-ENTRY OF PREGNANT GIRLS  
IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN  
UGANDA**



Source: FOWODE 2010: *Advocating for Equitable Distribution of resources*

**REPORT**

**By**

**Josephine Ahikire, PhD & Aramanzan Madanda, PhD  
Women and Gender Studies  
Makerere University  
P.O.Box 7062  
Kampala**

**Commissioned by**

**FAWE Uganda  
P.O. Box 24117, Kampala.  
Tel. 256-41-236863  
Fax: 256 -41-252258  
E-mail: [fawe@faweuganda.org](mailto:fawe@faweuganda.org)  
Website: [www.faweuganda.org](http://www.faweuganda.org)**

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## Executive summary

The right to education is a fundamental human right. Every individual irrespective of race, gender, nationality, ethnic or social origin, religion or political preference, age or disability, is entitled to equitable and successful completion of education. However at primary and secondary school level, most of the children who enrol do not realize their right to full basic education as most of them drop out. Today, 54 out of 100 children who enrol in primary one complete primary seven (2009/10). This, when further disaggregated by gender, indicates that only 51 girls out of 100 complete primary education as opposed to 56 out of 100 boys. Factors contributing to school drop outs are social, economic, physical and psychological, among which is early pregnancy.

### ***State of Girls' Education: the Global Picture***

- *104 million children aged 6-11 are not in school each year – 60 million are girls. Nearly 40% of these out of school children live in Sub-Saharan Africa, 35% live in South Asia (UNESCO)*
- *Across the developing world, the gender gap between boys and girls in Primary school completion is greater than 10 percent points*
- *In Sub-Saharan Africa, more than half of the girls – 54% - do not complete primary education*
- *At least one in three girls completing primary school in Africa and South Asia cannot effectively read, write or do simple arithmetic (Source: Knapp, 2004).*

There is evidence indicating that the proportion of girls enrolling in school has increased in sub-Saharan Africa over the past two decades. In Uganda, enrolment of girls and boys at primary school level has almost reached the 50/50 mark. Since the introduction of UPE, Uganda has registered unprecedented increase in enrolment in primary school. Secondary school enrolment for girls has also increased. At tertiary level the affirmative action policy that accords 1.5 extra points to every qualifying female has seen a substantial increase of female students from 20% in the 1980s to 47-48 percent in the current period (FAWE, 2010).

Although these significant achievements have been registered, girls' education still faces an uphill task. There are noted cases of girls dropping out of school especially as they progress to higher classes. One challenge is girls getting pregnant while still in school and failure to re-enter school after delivering. In a survey conducted in 20 districts of Uganda, it was established that; the leading cause for girls to drop out of school is pregnancy (34%), followed by poverty (28%) and engagement in early sex/marriage (11%). In Uganda the challenge of girls dropping out of school due to pregnancies has been explained by a mix of socio-cultural views, perceptions and practices surrounding early pregnancy.

In most cultural settings, pre-marital pregnancy among girls is stigmatized both in school and in communities mainly on moralistic grounds, without addressing factors that lead to pregnancy among school girls. A girl who gets pregnant while still in school is “victimised”, seen as a “waste”, “a curse”, “a bad omen” and “a gone case”. Most times school careers of many girls are cut short because of pregnancy either by the girls withdrawing themselves from school or through expulsion with little or no chance of re-entry after delivery. The situation is worsened by an absence of a coherent national policy on pregnancy in school and on re-entry after delivery. This in many situations schools almost all schools expel pregnant girls and as child mothers, they often fail to return and complete their education.

Discussions with the different stakeholders placed the key drivers of girls’ pregnancy in schools under four main categories:

1. The socio- economic situation that the girls find themselves in;
2. Lack of parental and school guidance;
3. Men’s abuse of their power and masculinity;
4. Lack of life skills on the part of the girls.

The survey noted that although Uganda has made deliberate efforts to promote gender equality at national and school level, there are significant gaps in addressing issues of pregnancies in schools. Challenges of high dropouts and teenage pregnancies have continued to disrupt and affect girls’ education thereby blocking the celebrated achievement of increasing female enrolment in school. At the national level, no clear policies exist on how pregnancy in schools can be handled or assisting girls who would want to re-join school after giving birth. Findings also indicate that districts have no established mechanisms to deal with pregnancies in schools under their supervision. Some districts have information on the number of schools, their registered students and on dropouts , but they do not have information on students who drop out due to pregnancy, and how these are followed up.

Practices that exist in addressing cases of pregnancies in school but these vary from school to school, with no comprehensive legal framework to address the issue. Some of these practices include; allowing pregnant girls in candidate classes to do UNEB exams, engaging the police to trace the man responsible, expulsion; suspension; regular pregnancy checkups; regular monitoring by senior woman/man, matron and school nurses. At the community level, pregnant girls are often rejected at home and sent away, they may go the men responsible and get married, they are labelled as useless, a burden, perceived as sinful, abominable, outcasts, a waste; they are isolated and denied assistance even when the family has resources while others are assisted by parents to abort.

Given the scattered practices that threaten gender equality in education, this assessment explored the possibility for education stakeholders in Uganda to come up with a comprehensive policy and implementation framework to address pregnancies in schools. Key recommendations from the assessment are as follows:

1. A clear policy and regulations on pregnancies in schools, which first of all targets prevention and then provides mechanisms to deal with pregnancy when it occurs.
2. A gender responsive school environment for retention of pregnant girls where possible and mandatory of young mothers.
3. Mechanisms to decisively and systematically deal with defilement rape and generally sexual abuse, punish culprits especially in the school setting
4. Assistance for girls who get pregnant while in school
5. Massive sensitization on education for girls and boys- for parents, teachers, students and general community
6. Formal and well clarified partnership mechanisms among key stakeholders
7. Bye-laws by local governments to address context specific issues

## **1.1 Introduction**

The right to education is a fundamental human right. Every individual irrespective of race, gender, nationality, ethnic or social origin, religion or political preference, age or disability, is entitled to equitable and successful completion of education. The right to education is stipulated in a number of human rights documents including the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) Article 28, the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, (Article 11), which Uganda is committed to. At the national level, Uganda has domesticated these international provisions to education in the Constitution (1995) and the Education Act, 2008.

Uganda is party to international goals that facilitate the right to education such as the Education for All declaration (EFA), the declaration of UN Literacy Decade 2003 -2012, the MDGs 2 and 3 for achieving universal primary education and gender equality and empowerment of women. Based on the above, Uganda declared Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1997 and universal post primary education (UPPET) in 2007 signifying the right of all to education.

In terms of girl child education, Uganda has registered some achievements. Enrolment of girls and boys at primary school level has almost reached the 50/50 mark. Since the introduction of UPE, Uganda has registered unprecedented increase in enrolment in primary school. Secondary school enrolment for girls has also increased. At tertiary level the affirmative action policy that accords 1.5 extra points to every qualifying female has seen a substantial increase of female students from a mere 20% in the 1980s to 47-48 percent in the current period (FAWE, 2010).

However at primary and secondary school level, most of the children who enrol do not realise their right to full basic education as most of them drop out, today 54 out of 100

children who enrol in primary one complete primary seven (2009/10)<sup>1</sup>. This when further disaggregated by gender indicates that only 51 girls out of 100 complete primary education as opposed to 56 boys<sup>2</sup>. Factors contributing to school dropouts are social, economic, physical and psychological. Among the social factors is early pregnancy. The girls concerned are accorded different labels such as teenage mothers, adolescent mothers, child mothers or a combination such as adolescent school girl mothers, but all pointing to the undesirability of the phenomenon.

The magnitude of dropouts due to early pregnancy has been documented. According to the 2006 Uganda Demographic Health Survey (UDHS), 12% of girls aged 15-19 years were pregnant, while 19% had ever given birth to a child. Almost 20% of girls compared to 2% of boys aged 15 -19 were married or living together in marital unions with the median age at first marriage below 18.5 years. All these girls are within the school going age (primary and secondary) and are very likely to have failed to realise their right to education.

According to the Ministry of Education reports, pregnancy is a major reason for school dropouts, especially among upper primary and O' level students. For example, in 2002, a total of 8,116 girls countrywide, dropped out of school due to pregnancy. Of these, 6,229 were upper primary pupils while 2,353 were O' level students. The year before, 8,201 girls had dropped out for the same reason shooting up from 3,966 in the previous year. Again, in both cases, the majority were either P5 - P7 pupils or O' level students. The 2006 Demographic and Health Survey indicated that 25% of teenage girls in Uganda have had children, while other sources suggest even higher percentages. The situation is noted to be even more tragic in regions such as Karamoja and the war affected areas of Northern Uganda and Kasese district.

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<sup>1</sup> The Republic of Uganda (2010) the Education and Sports Sector Annual Performance Report(ESSAPR), 2010

<sup>2</sup> ESSAPR, 2009/2010

Re-entry of pregnant girls continues to be a salient issue. Several countries across Africa are grappling with the question of re-entry. A few such as Zambia, Botswana and South Africa have policies in place to ensure re-entry of pregnant girls. In Neighbouring Kenya, a recent press report was as follows:

**Kenya: Schools told to readmit girls after giving birth**

School heads have been directed to readmit girls who became pregnant once they deliver. The Ministry of Education has warned of stern disciplinary action against head teachers who defy the directive. Education assistant minister Ayiecho Olweny said hundreds of pregnant school girls in different parts of the country end up getting wasted after being denied admission. He said the ministry wanted all girls who dropped out over pregnancy allowed back without conditions to complete their education. Prof Olweny, however, asked the girls to maintain discipline (Daily Nation 29/10/2011).

In Uganda the challenge remains the mix of various views and practices on pregnancy in schools that many times victimise the girls. In principle, there is no legal or policy position that prohibits pregnant girls or child mothers from continuing with education. Yet the practice is that most girls who become pregnant in schools are expelled and as child mothers they fail to return to complete their education. Inadequate/ lack of mechanisms to ensure pregnant girls/ child mothers to complete education, denies them the right to education. Within Uganda's Ministry of Education and Sports there exists a 'silent policy' that allows pregnant girls to return to school, but its enforcement by schools is questionable as by virtue of its silence, it is neither known to the girls, parents, or community leadership. As a result the girls are left at the whims of society- the parents, teachers and school managers.

This report contains results of the survey conducted to establish views of the various stakeholders on the question of re-entry of pregnant girls in schools. It outlines the existing status as seen by the various participants in the study- teachers, students and pupils, parents, CSO actors, community leaders and local government officials, MOES officials and MPs. It also outlines existing practices, perceptions around retention and re-entry of pregnant girls as well as a number of policy proposals as obtained from the participants and

a general understanding from other experiences on the continent. The overall impression from the survey across the country was that society is changing. There is more receptivity of the community on the education of the girl child and the preference for boy child education is no longer the norm. Many examples are cited where educated girls have looked after their aging parents. There is also a general realisation that teenage pregnancy is largely accidental as girls are often victims of rape, defilement and other coercive acts to lure them into early sex. Hence, the ground for a policy on pregnant girls in schools is fertile and in the words of some participants in the study - 'the policy is long overdue'.

## **2 Rationale of the Survey**

The idea underlying the survey was that pregnancy of young girls should never mark the end of their education. Early pregnancy is a societal problem and should be treated as so with the appropriate interventions, as opposed to victimising the girls concerned who are already victims of the lack of societal protection. The survey therefore aimed at establishing the views of key stakeholders on retention and re-entry of pregnant girls in primary and secondary schools. The results of the survey contained herein will provide a firm basis for the relevant policy formulation actors to assess the level of acceptability as well as to identify key areas for advocacy and intervention.

### **2.1 Broad Objective**

To collect views of all stakeholders on how re-entry of pregnant girls needs to be addressed.

#### **2.1.1 Specific Objectives**

- I. To assess the situation of pregnancy of girls in primary and secondary schools.
- II. To collect and compile data on views of different stakeholders on re-entry policy and how it should be effected at local, regional and national level
- III. To generate practical recommendations based on concrete data, for drafting of a re-entry policy for pregnant girls and lactating adolescent mothers in an informed manner.
- IV. To provide a basis for strong evidence based policy advocacy on re-entry of school girls

### **2.1.2 Scope and limitations**

This survey was mainly about views on re-entry policy of girls in primary and secondary school after delivery. Re-entry however assumes that the only option for school girls when pregnant is to drop out which is not entirely true. Thus questions were asked regarding the possibility of preventing dropping out by retaining pregnant girls in school. While it was not the major focus, the study also looked at the explanations or drivers for school pregnancies in order to make possible suggestions for a policy on re-entry. Existing national policies or lack of them was explored and also how the schools are practically dealing with the issue of school pregnancies.

## **2.2 *The Approach and Participants in the Survey***

The survey was conducted in 20 districts of Uganda which were selected to represent seven regions of the country. The districts were selected to include urban, rural and other diversities such as having a history of instability, marginalisation and varied livelihoods which impact on the schooling of girl children, pregnancy and re-entry into school. The districts are itemised in the Table 1 below:

**Table 1: Districts selected and Justification**

Region	Districts	Justification
Central	Kampala, Luwero, Kalangala	Kampala is the capital, as well as cosmopolitan and its central location provides unique experiences. Luwero is rural and was a locus for a vicious guerrilla war which brought the NRM to power an event that has significantly shaped the area to date. Kalangala represents isolation. It is an area with enormous potential but severely constrained by the migrant nature of its population as well as limited transport connections with the mainland.
Northern	Gulu, Amuru, Apac	Gulu is a key commercial and political centre in northern Uganda that alongside Amuru was affected immensely by the 20 year Kony war with government of Uganda. The two represent the Acholi sub region. Amuru is a new rural district. Apac is largely rural was relatively less directly affected by the Kony insurgency and was a place of refuge of those who wanted to run away from direct warfare.
West Nile	Arua, Adjumani, Yumbe	Arua represents the most urban part of West Nile. Adjumani was selected for its predominantly Muslim population which may present unique challenges and opportunities for the girl child. Yumbe represents a new and more rural district in West Nile.
North Eastern	Kotido, Nakapiripirit	Kotido is an old district while Nakapiripirit is new. The two districts have differences in livelihoods with the former being more pastoral while the later has some form of settled agriculture. Both districts represent a severely neglected area in terms of development in Uganda.
Eastern	Mbale, Katakwi, Kamuli	Mbale is a regional commercial centre in Eastern Uganda. It is fairly urbanised. Kamuli is one of the poorest districts in Eastern Uganda with a high population growth rate while Katakwi is a relatively new rural district. Each of the districts has a different ethnic group with a diversity of cultures which impact on the girl child education
South Western	Kabale, Mitoma, Kasese	Kabale is an old district with severe land shortages which has significantly influenced livelihoods. Kasese is known as an old mineral mining district in Uganda famed for copper. Mitoma is a new district and largely rural. This choice captures the rural-urban diversities as well as resource exploitation experiences.
Western	Masindi, Buliisa, Hoima	Masindi is a more developed district in the region with significant natural resources and tourism. Hoima and Buliisa are key in the emerging oil industry in Uganda which naturally impact livelihoods.

The participants in the survey were selected among pupils (primary schools-) and students (for secondary schools). For primary level, the pupils were selected mainly from upper primary namely primary 5 to primary 7 because these are deemed mature enough to understand the issues under discussion. From each district, pupils and students were selected from four schools (two being primary and two secondary), where except for

Kampala which is entirely urban, one was urban and another rural. The schools were selected to ensure that varied categories are catered for including mixed schools, single sex schools, day and boarding schools, rural or urban schools.

From each school, administrators, teachers, members of the board or school management committees and parents were selected for interview. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with community leaders, religious leaders and representatives of CSOs. At the local government level discussions were held with District Education officers, (DEOs) District Inspector of Schools (DIS), the Secretary in Charge of Education/gender, and probation officers. To get more insights into the government perspectives and the national outlook, representatives of the central government were interviewed. These included officials of the Ministry of Education and Sports and MPs. Accordingly, analysis used SPSS for the Quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative information. The table below presents a summary of the participants in the survey:

**Table 2: Participants in the Study**

Category	Male	female	Total	Method
Students and Pupils	383	771	1,154	Survey
Teachers	167	140	307	In-depth Interview/survey
District Education Officers	9	2	11	In-depth Interview
District Inspector of Schools	11	3	14	In-depth Interview
NGOs, CSOs/FBOs	15	13	28	In-depth Interview
Local Government	11	9	20	In-depth Interview
Parliament	1	1	2	In-depth Interview
MOES	1	1	2	In-depth Interview
Donor Agencies	1	1	2	In-depth Interview
Community members	172	159	331	FGDs
<b>Total</b>	<b>771</b>	<b>1,100</b>	<b>1,871</b>	

### **3 Status and Perceptions on Girls' Pregnancy in Schools**

The scope and timing of the assignment did not allow for collection of data to show the magnitude of the problem of girls' pregnancy at present in the districts visited. The district records have amalgamated drop out rates and do not show those that drooped out due to

pregnancy. Schools too do not have such records. However the disruptive role of pregnancy has been established as one of the leading causes of girls' drop out and low achievement levels. According to Kasente (2003) the DHS EdData Survey (2001) indicated that marriage or pregnancy was an important factor for girls aged 13-18 years dropping out of primary school especially in the Eastern and Northern regions.

Inferring from national data, pregnancy accounts for a considerable percentage of school drop out of girls. For example the data of 2000-2009 showed that 20% of girls were married. The percentage of women who gave birth before the age of 18 was 35% and the adolescent birth rate was put at 1,593. Again according to the 2006 Uganda Demographic Health Survey, 12% of the girls aged 15-19 years were pregnant while 19% had even given birth to one child. All these are of primary and post primary education and training.

Read critically, this data indicates that these girls are all of school going age and therefore in one way or another pregnancy becomes a key factor in keeping them out of school. Boys drop out for different reasons such as child labour or indiscipline (Kakuru 2003) but the effects of circumstances for dropping out differ where early marriage and pregnancy tend to be more disruptive with lasting impacts.

The situation of teenage pregnancy in schools cuts across the African continent - East, West and South Africa. For instance Eloundou-Enyégué (2004) found that although pregnancy was not the source of all dropouts among girls in Cameroon, it was the greatest contributor to the gender gap in educational attainment, particularly at the secondary level. The Tanzanian example presented below shows that pregnancy alongside teenage marriage child labour and truancy led to school dropouts in that country.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.unicef.org>

### **Case: Tanzania - Early marriages and pregnancies hinder girls' education**

Women's rights activists have expressed concern over the large numbers of pupils, mostly girls, who drop out of school because of pregnancy, teenage marriage, child labour or truancy. President Jakaya Kikwete said the number of primary school drop-outs rose to 44,742 in 2006 from 32,469 the previous year. A total of 7,734 students abandoned secondary school in 2006, up from 6,912 in 2005, the president said in his monthly address to the nation. (*IRIN via WUNRN, 22/6/2007*)

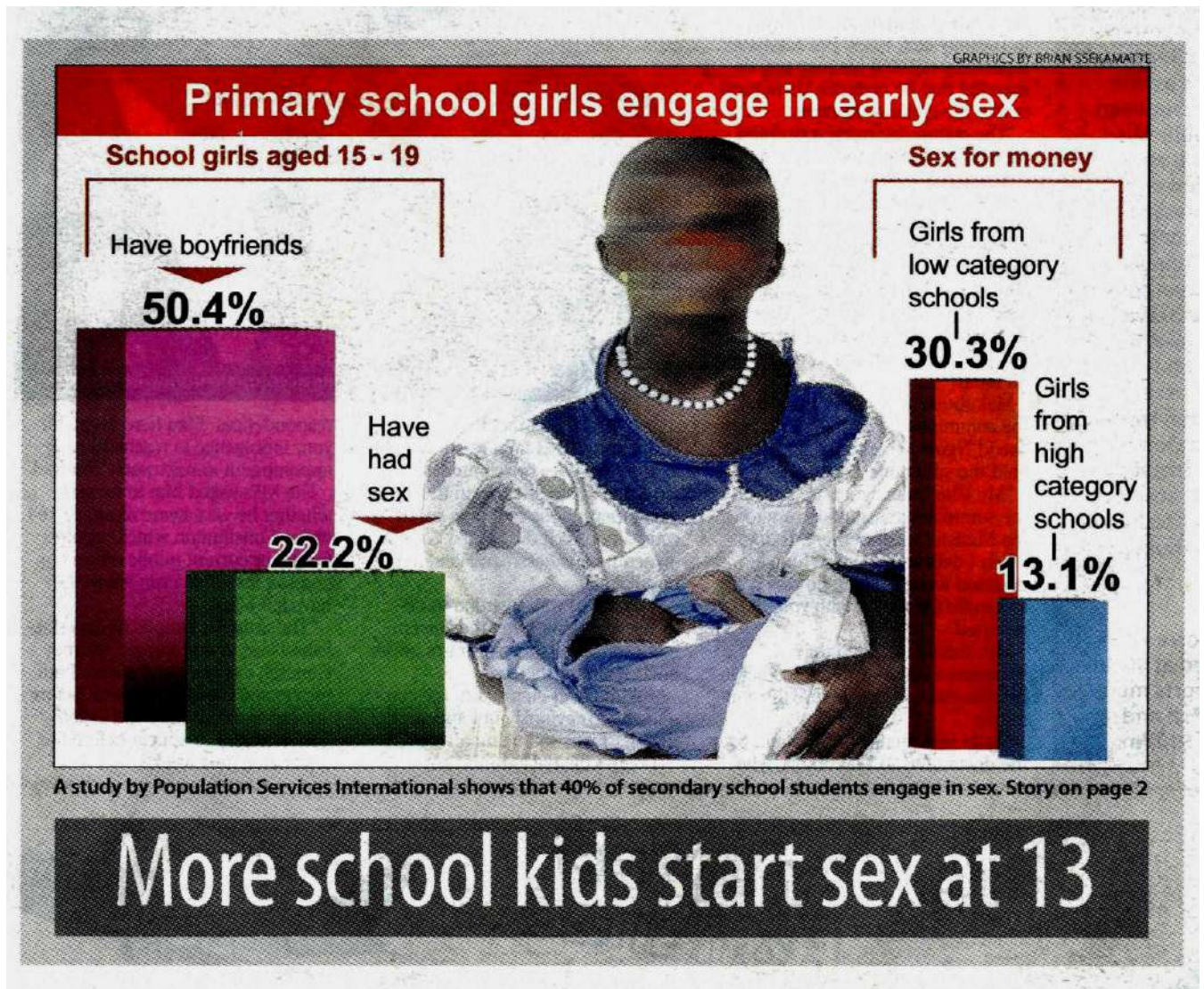
In South Africa, it is noted that although girls advance more quickly than boys through primary school, they begin to falter at the secondary level. Most school delays were attributed to economic constraints; however, among 20–22-year-old females who experienced a school delay, more than one-fourth attributed their delay to a pregnancy (Hallman and Grant 2006).

### **Case: South Africa**

Although in many settings having a child marks the end of schooling for girls, a policy formalized in South Africa in 1996 but informally upheld previously by some school principals allows pregnant girls to stay in school and also allows young mothers to do so if they can manage logistically and financially. This policy, although not universally enforced, is credited with the observed lack of gender differences in total educational attainment and is believed to contribute to the observed long delay before the birth of a second child to adolescent mothers in South Africa. In 2000 it was found out that approximately 35 percent of African girls aged 19 and younger who had given birth at least once were currently attending school. A study using 2001 data from KwaZulu-Natal found that 32 percent of 14–19-year-olds who had ever been pregnant were currently attending school (*Hallman and Grant 2006*).

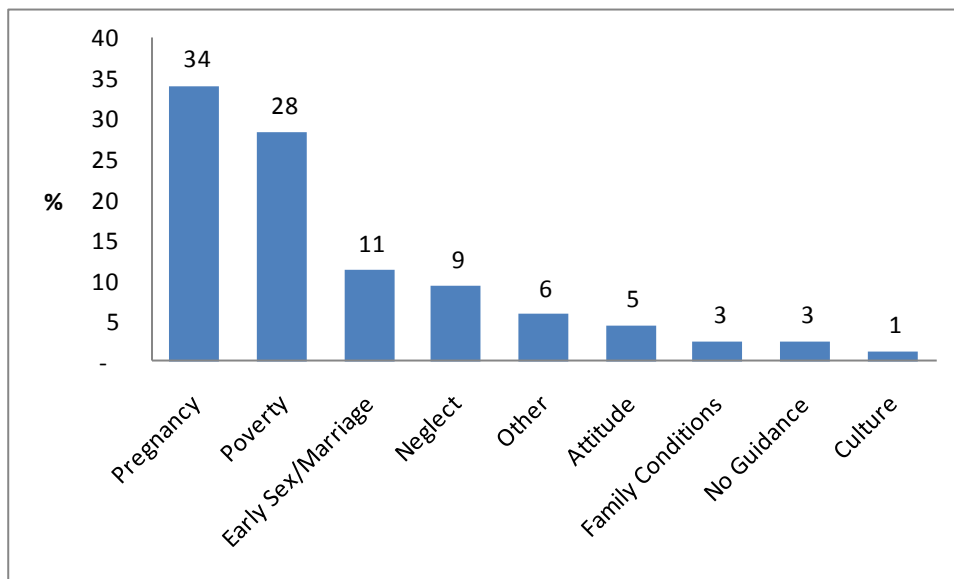
Throughout the fieldwork, it was established that indeed pregnancy is a big problem although most of it goes unreported. A story carried in Uganda's daily newspaper, *The New Vision* of Thursday November 24<sup>th</sup> 2011, the phenomenon was highlighted. Below is a figure showing the engagement in early sex by school girls.

Figure 1: Engagement in Early Sex by School Girls



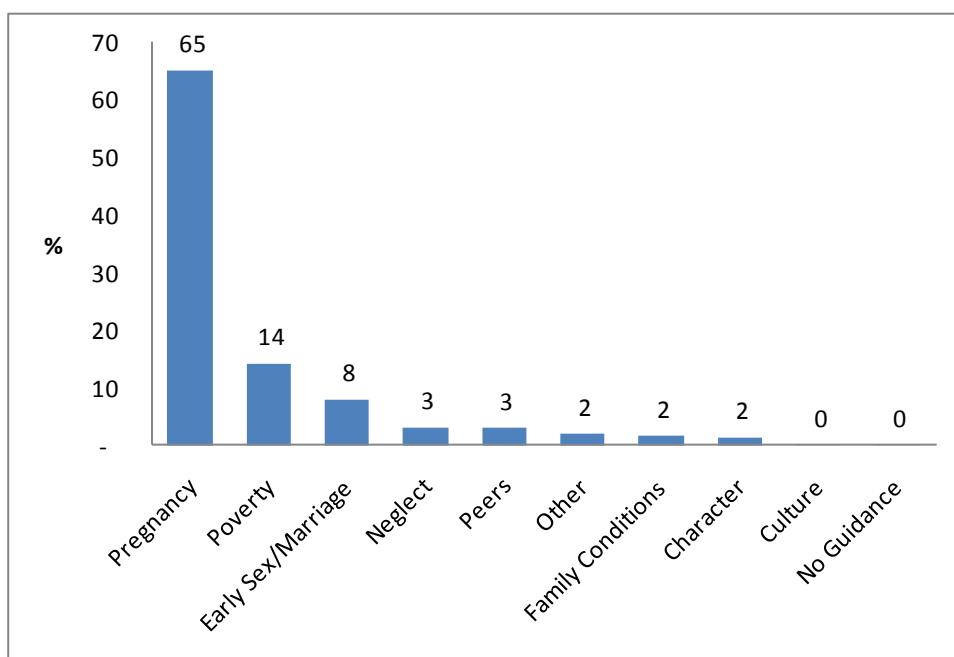
The fact that school girls engage in early sex is not under dispute. The survey thus sought the explanations. Figures 2 and 3 below indicate the views of pupils, students and teachers interviewed, on pregnancy as one of the leading causes of girls' school dropout.

**Figure 2: Main Cause of Girls' Dropping out - Teachers**



According to teachers' views, the leading cause for girls to drop out of school is pregnancy (34%), followed by poverty (28%) and engagement in early sex/marriage (11%). Engagement in early sex is also partly attributed to defilement as well as forced marriages. While community members are key in engaging school girls in early sex, teachers and school staff members too are among the perpetrators despite the fact these staff are charged with the duty of teaching as well as moral upbringing of the children.

**Figure 3: Main Cause of Girls' Dropping out - Pupils and Students**



Like the teachers, the majority (65%) of the pupils indicated the main cause for dropping out as pregnancy followed by poverty (14%) and then early sex/marriage (8%). The students'/pupils' and teachers' views disturbingly point to pregnancy as a leading cause of girls dropping out of school. This implies that pregnancy is a key issue that needs to be addressed if girls are to complete school.

#### **View from Selected education managers**

Pregnancy of school girls in this country is very rampant particularly in rural areas. Take the New Vision paper January 4th 2008 which reported that in Mityana District, 24 pregnant girls missed sitting their PLE after dropping out of school due to pregnancy as some pupils had just given birth and others were still pregnant. Again the New Vision paper Thursday November 26th 2009 reported that during PLE 2009 exams in Kasese, out of the total number of girls who sat PLE exams, 40 girls were reported pregnant. "Men are like bees on our teenage girls" (**Gender Desk, Ministry of Education and Sports**).

There are many cases of pregnancies though not reported. Majority of the cases appear as rumours and parents usually stop these cases in preliminary stages and have informal arrangements with the men/boys responsible (**DEO, Mitooma**).

The main cause of girls school drop out is pregnancy and early marriages. It is funny that these marriages are secretly done (**DIS, Katakwi**).

The prevalence of pregnancy is very high though many go unreported (**DIS, Gulu**).

Pregnancy rates are worrying. Last term GEM found 26 girls had dropped out as a result of pregnancy in different schools within the district. There are no proper record (**Deputy DEO, Patron Girls Education, Gulu**).

We are not sure of the situation because we have been hindered by cultural practices. The two families involved organise early marriage secretly. However, there are a few cases where the families are not in agreement. In such cases, the girls' family will come and take everything of value from the boys family until the latter agrees to pay dowry (**DEO, Kotido**).

It is really hard to tell the situation because a number of girls who get pregnant in the district run away, some to the mainland like Masaka and others migrate to other islands (**DIS Kalangala**).

Girls who become pregnant tend to run away from school. The completion rate for girls is 11% and the drop out rate for girls is still as high as 89% (**DIS Nakapiripirt**).

These views below from the education managers at school level were also similar to the ones expressed above.

Many cases of pregnancy went unreported as girls just stopped schooling. When we move around in the village we hear that some girl dropped out because of pregnancy or other reasons but those of pregnancy are not many (**Ibumba Primary School, Kabale**).

Most of the girls get pregnant after completing P7 (**head teacher, Bumagi Primary School, Kalangala**).

The situation was very bad during the war with many girls getting pregnant. The situation is improving (**Deputy Head teacher, Gulu Senior Secondary School**).

The mistreatment (at home and school) of girls who get pregnant is worsening. This leads some of the girls to opt for abortion. They abort and leave school without notice (**Senior Woman Teacher, Kasese**).

On the part of the community, information from group discussions in urban and rural areas also indicated that pregnancy in schools is one of the thorns in the flesh of girls' education which also hurts the respective parents.

There are many cases of early pregnancy and they lead to "LEEWICH" which means shame. One cannot continue with school (**FGD, Palenga Gulu**).

Pregnancy of girls is a very common occurrence especially in Kasese town (**FGD, Kasese Town Council**).

The rate of pregnancy in schools is very high. This is due to the high poverty levels of parents (**FGD Kotido**).

If you look carefully at the islands, there are many people with bad morals. They impregnate girls and run away. The culprits are normally not arrested since they easily run to other islands and thus the vice continues unabated (**Youth Councilor, Kalangala**).

On the whole, there were more reported pregnancy cases in secondary than in primary schools partly because the majority of girls reach the age of puberty at secondary school level. There are also many cases of pregnancy in rural than in urban based schools.

### **3.1 Key Drivers of Teenage pregnancy**

The understanding of key drivers was important in terms of informing response to the problem. Although the major aim of the study was to consult stakeholders on the re-entry of pregnant girls, those who participated in the discussions emphasised the need for a holistic approach which includes a target to reduce and eliminate teenage pregnancy.

Discussions with the different stakeholders placed the key drivers of girls pregnancy in schools under four main categories: One is the socio- economic situation that the girls find themselves in; two is the lack of parental and school guidance; three is men's abuse of their power and masculinity and four is the lack of life skills on the part of the girls.

### 3.1.1 The socio-economic Situation

One of the reasons that came instantly on the question as to why girls get pregnant was poverty. In many cases it was noted that the lack of basic requirements tends to expose girls to risks of pregnancy. In Gulu one headteacher noted:

Some girls are living in child headed households where they do not get anyone to cater for them hence exposing them to the risk of pregnancy.

In Kalangala it was emphasised that the high death rate due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic has led to the increase of orphans who lack basic needs thus specifically making girls vulnerable. The poor housing structures where parents share the same room with children was also indicated as a key factor in this district. Day scholars were said to be more at risk which also depends on the parents' ability to put their children in boarding schools.

Day scholars are also known to be more at risk than those in boarding schools where for example *boda boda* riders lure them with transport offers (**male teacher, Hoima**).

Also, the distance between the school and home is full of temptations- full of bars, idle youth, *boda boda* riders and all categories of men. Girls' vulnerability tends to be aggravated in situations such as landing sites along the Lake, areas near the border and war affected areas.

### 3.1.2 Lack of Guidance at Home and at School

Participants pointed to the fact that the majority of parents do not talk to their children, especially girls of issues of sex. Parents are apparently increasingly failing on the responsibility to provide the basic necessities and so the girls who are not strong hearted end up exchanging sex for money. Apparently, parents are not guiding children through the stages of life. Children end up being educated by their peers including those who left school and this hurts girls more as they become vulnerable to sexual abuse and hence premature pregnancy. Most teachers were of the view that the majority of the girls get pregnant during holiday time which indicates neglect and lack of guidance by parents.

On the other hand, parents felt they have lost the grip on their children. One parent expressed frustration thus:

There is too much freedom, and at times girls do not listen to their parents. For example in the second term holiday, my daughter told me to give her a break when I advised her to stop running after a *boda-boda* man (**female FGD, Hoima**).

There is also a lacuna noted at school level. There is no clear structure for guidance and counselling, and sex education in schools. In most cases guidance and counselling is done in a haphazard manner, depending on the interests of the head teachers and the senior woman/man teacher. Consequently such guidance is not able to consistently guide young people, girls in particular in making life choices.

### 3.1.3 Men's Abuse of the Power and masculinity

Girls are at risk of sexual abuse- rape, defilement and enticement- by males of all kinds; fellow students, teachers, neighbours, relatives (including biological parents) and men in the community such as traders, shopkeepers, politicians, religious leaders and *Boda boda* (Motor cycle) riders. In the majority of cases, the pregnancy involves men that are much older than the girls and in positions of authority. Consider the following cases:

A former head teacher of Kotido Senior Secondary School was involved in using girls sexually and one girl got pregnant because of him.

Some girls are impregnated by male teachers and *boda boda* men. The *boda boda* men seduce girls using simple enticement such as biscuits and mandazi while teachers promise marks and give pens and books (**CDO Kabale**)

Apart from students who may be their peers all other categories of men either use persuasion or force but all of which is tantamount to defilement since they are using their power over the young girls as females.

Rape and defilement are particularly common in societies that have experienced disruption such as war affected areas in northern Uganda, Kasese and parts of Karamoja region. This essentially means that men are abusing their power as people of authority to lure young girls into premature sex. This is why many respondents emphasised the fact that there should be stern mechanisms to bring the culprits to book, since they are ruining the future of the young girls hence violating their right to education.

### **3.1.4 Girls' Lack of Life Skills**

Simply put, life skills are social competencies necessary to help children to reach their full potential. These include among others: high self esteem, assertiveness, decision making, communication and generally relating with others to achieve greater success in life. Life skills are necessary especially for young girls who, due to the gendered socialisation lack essential skills to negotiate through life's challenges. It was noted that girls are normally lured with money and other material things from older men who take advantage of them. They end up engaging in sexual activity at an early age. In a discussion in Kabale district it was noted that girls normally like to eat sweet things such as sweets, soda and sugar cane. They end up falling prey to men. Similarly, in an FGD in Kalangala it was noted that 'these girls have high love for material things which exposes them to risks'. This implies that many girls have been socialized in a way which makes easy for them to fall prey to petty things while losing the larger picture of their life, body and education.

## **4 Existing Policies and Practices: the national and School**

### **4.1 National level**

Several reforms have been made to ensure that both females and males benefit from education. Kakuru (2003) for instance traces these reforms as early as 1963 with the foundation for equality in education, a goal being pursued up to today, which specifically highlighted the need to expand girl's education in the country. Further progress was registered in 1991/92 Government White Paper which acted as a roadmap to achieving certain goals. The White Paper has led to a scaling up in the number of primary school, secondary schools, and University and tertiary institutions in the country.

Uganda is one of the countries that have made deliberate efforts to achieve gender equality in all aspects of life. These efforts are manifested in the guarantee of equality in the *Constitution of the Republic of Uganda 1995*, the establishment of the Ministry of Women in Development in 1987, the formulation of a National Gender policy in 1997 (revised in

2007),, the design of the National Action Plan on women (1999), implementation of the universal primary and later on secondary education programmes, affirmative action in favour of marginalized categories and establishment of a gender desk at Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) among others. Within the education sector, various measures have built on this overall favourable policy and legal environment to provide for promotion of girls' education in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. Central to these are the 1995 Uganda constitution that provides for the right for education, the children statute of 1996 (article 28) that emphasizes state responsibility to ensure that primary education is free and compulsory, the 1.5 additional points for females entering public universities and Uganda National Examination Board (UNEB) regulations which indicate that no candidate should be prohibited if registered to sit for UNEB examinations. The last provision in particular has been the country's central point upon which registered girls who get pregnant have been allowed to sit for exams. Also, accordingly the committee of Parliament on Social Services made a recommendation that MOES should put special interventions to keep such girls in school (Interview with Male MP on social Services Committee).

Other measures taken by the government have been focused on increasing enrolment of girls and boys at different levels of education as well as attempts to retain them once in school. Some of these are summarised in the box below;

**Box: Gender Equality measures by Government of Uganda**

- The Universal Primary Education [UPE] program, which was launched in 1997. A major requirement here was that each family take four of their school children to school, two of which had to be girls.
- Awarding additional 1.5 points to females entering public universities beginning with the 1990/91 academic year. This was done as a measure to increase females' access to higher education.
- The National Strategy for Girls Education (NSGE); as a 'master' plan to foster gender parity in education.
- The Promotion of Girl's Education (PGE) scheme operational in a few selected districts. This programme is expected to roll out to the entire country to facilitate girl child retention and performance at the primary level of education.

- The Equity in The Classroom (EIC) program aimed at facilitating equal participation of girls and boys in the classroom.
- The Complementary Opportunity for Primary Education (COPE) and the Alternative Basic Education for Karamoja (ABEK) to cater for marginalized communities in Uganda.

Although all the above creative measures have been put in place, there is no clear strategy to deal with issues of school pregnancies which account for majority cases of school drop outs for girls, apart from allowing a pregnant girl already registered in a candidate class to sit for exams.

The state of girls getting pregnant while in school has been noted across all the districts surveyed in Uganda. Although some respondents especially in schools noted that cases of girls getting pregnant were rare, respondents at the community level acknowledged that there were many cases, most of which go unseen by school administration. A number of schools also lacked periodic checkups for school girls to find out who gets pregnant but only waited to see, especially when the pregnancy is in advanced stages. This meant that girls who usually discover themselves pregnant before the school administration does are likely to have options of withdrawing from school before the school records this case of pregnancy or even abort and resume school without anybody noticing.

Lack of adequate data on girls who are getting pregnant while in school at district and school level meant that the issue of pregnancy is probably underestimated in terms of the likely effect it has on girls education. At the community/family level where pregnant girls are more likely to be noticed, the attitude towards pre-marital pregnancy especially for a school going child is seen negatively almost across all the districts surveyed. In Kabale for instance, a girl who gets pregnant is seen as useless and the pregnancy perceived as a taboo. This is closely similar to communities in Mitooma district where a pregnant girl is seen as one who has committed *ekihagaro - abomination*. In Kotido, Kalangala and Gulu, a pregnant girl is seen as a *shame* to the family, one whose marriage must be arranged quickly before she gives birth. All these negative views about pregnancy while in school inform the ways in which a pregnant girl can be treated, and consequently whether the girl can remain or re-join school system.

According to FAWE (1994), school careers of many girls are cut short because of pregnancy either by the girls withdrawing themselves from school or through the national policies that ensure that pregnant girls are expelled from the education system with little or no chance of re-entry after delivery. Pre-marital pregnancy among girls is stigmatized both in school and most African communities mainly on moralistic grounds, without addressing factors that lead to pregnancy among school girls. This was re-echoed by one of the key respondents as thus;

Most girls are too young to understand the implications of early sex. They end up in involuntary ways of getting pregnant. So if you deny them the opportunity to remain in school, you would have cheated them. I usually ask myself, if boys were also to get pregnant, what would happen? How many would we send away from school? I also ask myself, most schools will tell you the girl will have to be expelled because it is considered immorality, but what have schools achieved in sending girls away? Has it reduced pregnancies? If this strategy is not working, why not change it? (Agaba Victor, Programme officer; Mitooma Women Dignity Foundation)

Although these and many other practices have been core in promoting gender equality in schools, a lot remains to be done in addressing issues of pregnancies in schools. Challenges of high dropouts and teenage pregnancies have continued to disrupt and affect girls' education thereby blocking the celebrated achievement of increasing female enrolment in school. No clear policies exist on how cases of pregnancy in schools can be handled or assisting girls who would want to re-join school after giving birth.

For a long time the MOES policy was that girls should be expelled from school. However in 2009 MOES issued a directive to allow pregnant girls in candidate classes to sit their examinations. As exemplified by the cases presented in the section on school practices, allowing pregnant girls in candidate classes to sit their examinations can be looked at as the first step in the right direction but there needs to be a more comprehensive policy framework for retention and re-integration.

## **4.2 District level**

Findings indicate that districts have no established mechanisms to deal with pregnancies in schools under their supervision. Although some districts had information on the number of schools, their registered students and cases of dropout, they did not have cases of students who dropped out due to pregnancy, and how these are followed up.

In a few cases where the district has been involved, cases of pregnancy in school are referred to police for investigation. In Kotido for example:

When cases are reported, the police come in to investigate and at most, arrest the boy responsible. However, some parents make their arrangements (both families) and have the girl married off for dowry.

This is closely similar to other areas where the local government is involved. In Mitooma district:

if there was any case, we would get a report from head teachers and we make a follow up with the police. At least our working relationship with the district police is good.

Although the police was seen as one of the ways to arbitrate between the aggrieved parties, some parents saw taking the case to police as more embarrassment in addition to the pregnancy. Some families therefore end up settling the matter among them or with local councils to preserve the image of the two families from more shame.

## **4.3 Practices at the school level**

At the school level, a number of practices exist regarding how to address cases of girls who get pregnant. Some of these are; automatic expulsion, Suspension, periodic checkups of girls for pregnancy, pregnant girls running out of school especially when school authorities have not yet noticed her, aborting and reappearing in school as well as giving birth and re-joining the same school or a different school altogether. The table below gives an overview of the responses of teachers and students/pupils on what happens at school:

**Table: A mapping of what Happens at school: views of Teachers and Students/Pupils**

Action	Students/pupils		Teachers	
	No.	%	No.	%
Suspension	439	27.1	112	27.8
Expulsion	576	36.6	103	25.6
Keep in school	81	5.0	23	5.7
Rejoin	472	29.2	107	26.6
Don't know	49	3.0	58	14.4

#### **4.3.1 Relative Accommodation of Pregnant Girls in Candidate Classes**

In several schools when a girl is pregnant and she is approaching PLE, UCE or UACE exams, school authorities often leave her until she completes her exams on “humanitarian grounds”. Consider the cases below:

### Case 1: PLE Candidate gives birth, six others pregnant

New vision, Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2011



WHEREAS most of the PLE candidates across the country today dedicate their full attention to PLE exams, a 15 year-old pupil is having divided attention between her baby and the PLE papers.

“I am going to leave him with my mother while I write my papers, but I have to breastfeed him during break time before getting back for the next paper.”

Another pupil of one of the primary schools in Soroti district gave birth to a bouncing baby boy weighing 4.2 kilograms on the eve of the PLE exams at Soroti regional referral hospital.

### Case2: Kobusinge gives birth in UNEB Exam<sup>4</sup>



- According to the Daily Monitor, Friday 28<sup>th</sup> October 2011, Harriet Kobusinge, the 16-year-old student gave birth to her first baby as she prepared to sit for Physics Paper II exams at Rusekere Secondary School in Kabarole District.
- The Senior Four candidate says her experience did not break her resolve to succeed and help young mothers in future. *I want to become a nurse and offer health education especially about reproductive health which will help teenagers in future. If I had got this education, this would not have happened to me.*
- I am not having any problem, I rush to school, do my papers and come back home to look after my baby. I am not bothered about the students. I do not have time for them, I just go in the examination and after I move out straight home
- She says the school management treated her well. “They would have disallowed me from sitting the paper,” she added.

- When Kobusinge developed labour pains and was rushed to Kijura Health Centre where she gave birth to a bouncing baby girl.

<sup>4</sup> 2009. Fiona Bbaale, 18, delivered as she sat for her Primary Leaving Examinations at Kiryandongo BCS Primary School, Kiryandongo District. 2008. Rukia Dawa, 19, a student of Midigo SS in Yumbe District delivered shortly before sitting for a Biology Senior Four exam.

- After delivery, Kobusinge returned to school, sat for History Paper IV in the afternoon as health workers took care of her baby. She returned to school the following day and apparently left her new born baby under the care of her aunt, Ms Kajoina.
- Ms Kajoina said their family is happy with the birth of the baby and promised to support the teenager. *“I am happy for my daughter for coming from labour alive at her age. I will support her education and the baby. This cannot kill her dream.”* Ms Kajoina said
- The head teacher said the school has tried to fight pregnancy through sex education and sometimes dismisses those found pregnant to deter others, adding that they were unaware of Kobusinge’s condition because she stopped coming to school.

The above cases represent some positive change at school level, some level of considerable accommodative approach, which is different from say the last 10 years or so where a girl becoming pregnant was a total outcast. It is also generally noted that attitudes towards girls’ education are positively changing, though at a slow pace. The cases also point out the role of family support and the level of assertiveness of the girl involved. All these are pointers into what comprehensive re-absorption of teenage mothers into school would require.

#### 4.3.2 Expulsion

Instant expulsion is the most immediate practice for girls who get pregnant while at school. Irrespective of the location of the school (urban or rural), or type (religious based, mixed, single, day, boarding, primary or secondary), the immediate response to pregnancy is sending the student back home. (though some schools may accommodate those in candidate classes). In one of the mixed schools visited, this is what the head teacher had to say;

It’s our school Policy; if we get anyone pregnant, you are expelled. There is no question about that; this is not a school for women.

In another school,

When one is got pregnant, the school regulation is indefinite suspension. We also consider it as a disciplinary matter. So when a student is confirmed pregnant, we call her parents, and send her home. After that we hold a meeting of disciplinary committee where the discussion to expel the student is confirmed. After this meeting, we communicate to the entire school about the expulsion of the student and the reason for the expulsion. Everyone comes to know because it acts as a preventive measure to deter others from getting pregnant. [Male D/Head Teacher in a girls’ school]

### 4.3.3 The Public send off

Most cases of expulsion are made public in school as indicated in some of the schools surveyed. According to one of the key respondents we talked to;

When we get a pregnant girl she is normally expelled from school and embarrassingly expelled, the child is packed on the school car, in the vicinity of all students; we call for assembly, to inform the whole student community on how one of them is pregnant and is to be expelled. They even put a notice on the notice board publicizing the victim's fate (girl) (name of school withheld).

Schools use this public send off as a disciplinary measure to deter other girls from getting pregnant. As most teachers noted, it serves as a lesson to the one who got pregnant never to repeat the practice but also to save the innocent ones from being caught by the same trap. In other instances like mixed schools, it was also noted that once the boy responsible for the pregnancy is discovered to be in this school, he too is sent off in the same way to maintain a certain level of morals among students/pupils. However in many of the cases the girls do not have the space to name the person/boy responsible and the boys hence continue with their education uninterrupted.

Although this practice had good intentions of instilling discipline among students/pupils, and serving as an accountability measure to students who could keep asking the whereabouts of the girl who is sent off secretly, it has its own challenges. The shaming process to the girl sent off may determine whether the girl will rejoin school most especially the same school where she was, it also has the potential to drive the pregnant girl into other alternative ways of coping with pregnancy in case she discovers it before the school administration.

### 4.3.4 Regular Check-ups

In some schools, particularly secondary schools, it was mandatory for girls to undergo periodic checks for pregnancies. For some schools checkups are done once a term for instance in the middle of the term, while others did two checkups, both at the beginning and at the end of the term. There are other schools who only check the girls that are suspected to be pregnant. All these are precautionary measure to make sure the girls remain safe. In the two selected cases, this is what happens;

When we get one pregnant, we first do all tests to confirm its true. The nurse does palpation and also tests the urine for pregnancy. When the case is confirmed, we call the girl's parent and tell them that your daughter is now a mother. We then request them to go with their children.

We check girls twice a term. We get a senior nursing officer to do the checking. Check up of girls is normally done while classes are on –going and girls miss the lessons. The check up notice is never public; communication is passed verbally by use of the mouth, from the senior woman to all the girl students in the school...

In both cases, the intention may be clear and indeed mandated by the school administration but the manner in which it is implemented may create stigma to the girls and also portray every one as “potentially pregnant” unless exonerated by the school nurse/matron<sup>5</sup>. According to some female teachers talked to, the exercise is very traumatising especially in mixed schools where the girls are withdrawn from the class as the boys gear them, but also proceed with the lesson in plan.

#### **4.3.5 Pregnant Girls Running away from School**

In some of the schools surveyed, it was common for the girls to withdraw from school once they established, before the school, that they are pregnant. Although this was a common practice in all districts, it was most experienced in Luweero district. In other districts, respondents especially at school level noted considerable numbers of girls withdrawing from school but no information was readily available on those who withdrew due to pregnancies. According to one local council chairperson in Luweero;

When girls get pregnant in school, they are suspended but most of them do not wait to be identified by the school administration, they chase themselves.

Respondents who noted this practice argued that girls fear to be embarrassed in schools in front of others while others noted that the punishment in school is clear – expulsion. As a result, girls find their own way of handling the situation.

In all the cases it was noted that schools never follow up on the girls who have dropped out due to pregnancy. The belief is that they either are married off or they join other schools after giving birth. Many teachers believed that their schools were admitting some of the

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<sup>5</sup> This is akin to ‘being presumed guilty until found innocent’.

girls from other schools who had dropped out due to pregnancy. But all this is speculation since there is no system for follow up and monitoring.

#### **4.4 Practices at the community level**

Most practices at this level involved the pregnant girl, her parents, the local councils, and sometimes the man/boy responsible for the pregnancy

##### **4.4.1 Chasing the girls from home**

Most respondents noted that parents chase their daughters away when they are sent away from school due to pregnancy. This was one of the aggressive ways of dealing with pregnancies at the community level. In areas where this was noted, respondents argued that parents are usually poor, they sacrifice to send children in school and once a girl gets pregnant, it becomes too hard for the parent to comprehend. In a tone of anger, one male respondent noted thus;

First and foremost the girl has to leave my home. I cannot take care of my wife and my daughter, two wives!

The many years I have, experience shows that a pregnant girl is looked at negatively. Even if the family has resources, giving such girl money is not simple- "okugirenda nokukora ekihagaro [Male focus group discussant]

Most of them run away from homes. It is normally hard for parents to look after the girl and also the baby.

It was also noted in group discussions that most parents are not tolerant with children and once pregnant a girl is seen useless. This has led to majority of the girls to lose out the parental support and consequently failure to re-join school. Most of the girls who are chased away end up looking for the father of the child or odd jobs to look after their babies as teen single mothers. Most of these girls end up as housemaids, hotel or bar attendants, occupying risky and precarious situations likely to perpetuate their further exploitation. Some parents were noted to even refuse to pay for the other girls in the family. One female MP had this to say: 'My Father refused to pay for me because my sister got pregnant while in school. I was taken up by some relative'.

#### 4.4.2 Marrying off the girl

Another common practice is when the families of the pregnant girl and the man responsible agree to marry off the two. This is usually done to keep the image of the two families. As some respondents noted;

Most times parents marry off these girls especially when boys who impregnated them are old. They usually have a local arrangement with the man responsible so going back to school is not possible.

Some families especially of the girls will force the girls to mention the boys responsible and the two families' will negotiate for the dowry if the boys are from capable families. Some are even arrested depending on how serious the girl's family is about education.

In Kotido, Amuru, Yumbe and Katakwi, such kind of family arrangements were said to be very common. In an attempt to reduce public shame, families usually agree on the price that needs to be paid by the boy/man responsible and a marriage is sealed. In such cases, the option of a girl returning to school becomes limited. However it was noted that some families are strict on the girls' education and would go a long way to force the men responsible to look after the girl until she gives birth and also educate her when she delivers.

Some strict parents force them to go to the boys responsible for the pregnancy after which the two families agree on the conditions set by the girl's family. Others have ended up re – educating the girl after giving birth.

As a result of the stigma and ostracism around pregnant girls, abortion (safe and unsafe) was among the practices that respondents noted to be on increase. In most cases, pregnant girls who are not discovered while in school end up aborting in order to resume school without any challenge. Cases of abortions were also noted by some senior women in secondary schools to be on the increase.

We have at times detected cases of abortion during check up [Senior woman].

Most girls, once they are sent away by parents get abortions, get killed by those responsible or even die while aborting [Inspector of schools].

It was also noted that some parents assist their daughters to abort once they have been discovered pregnant to avoid chasing them out of school. This was apparently more common in urban schools where the reports of pregnancy are also reported to below:

**Table 3: Summary: Existing practices on pregnancy in schools at different levels**

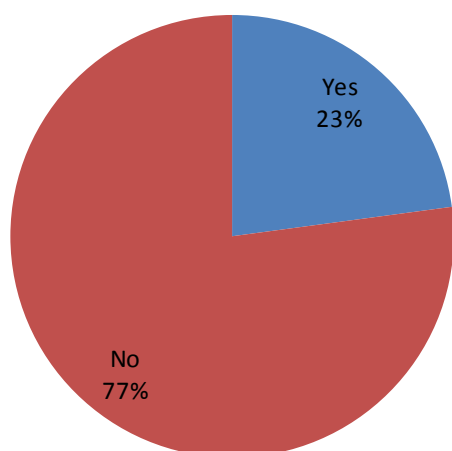
SN	Level	Practice
1.	National/District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Policies and programmes on promoting education for all, education as a human right, promoting girls education through UPE, USE, additional 1.5 points scheme, allowing pregnant girls in candidate classes to do UNEB exams</li> <li>- Engage the police to trace the man responsible</li> </ul>
2.	School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Relative accommodation for girls in candidate classes</li> <li>- Expulsion;</li> <li>- suspension;</li> <li>- Regular checkups of girls for pregnancies;</li> <li>- Regular monitoring by senior woman/man, matron and school nurses;</li> <li>- Girls withdraw from school,</li> <li>- Give birth and go to another school, a minority re-enter the same school</li> <li>- abortions</li> </ul>
3.	Community level (family, religious institutions, local councils)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- girls rejected at home and sent away</li> <li>- Girls run to the men responsible and get married</li> <li>- Labelled by parents as useless, a burden</li> <li>- Pregnancy perceived as sinful, abomination</li> <li>- Girls called an outcast, a waste</li> <li>- Isolated and denied assistance at home even if the family has resources</li> <li>- Pregnant girl usually married off</li> <li>- Some girls assisted by parents to abort</li> <li>- After giving birth they look for casual work to look after their babies; e.g. bar attendants, housemaids, saloon maids</li> <li>- Parents connive with the LCs to settle cases out of LC courts with family of culprit</li> </ul>

## 5 Views on Retention and Re-entry of Pregnant Girls in School

### 5.1 Teachers' Views

These include views of head teachers, teachers, senior women/men teachers, matrons and wardens. Teachers are overwhelmingly opposed to the idea that pregnant girls should remain in school, with 77% saying no as compared to 23% who said yes as shown in the figure below.

**Figure 4: Should Pregnant Girls Remain in this School? Teachers**



Further analysis, as shown in the table below, indicates that there was proportionately more female teachers (83%) that opposed retaining pregnant girls in school than the proportion of male teachers (72%).

**Table 4: Views on whether Pregnant Girls should Remain in this School by Sex?**

	Female		Male		Total	
	No	%	No	%	NO	%
Yes	24	17	46	28	<b>70</b>	<b>23</b>
No	115	83	121	72	<b>236</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>306</b>	<b>100</b>

A female teacher at one of the primary schools visited argued that girls should not remain in school when pregnant. Her argument was that the girls should first produce before they continue with school because they cannot concentrate well in their studies when pregnant.

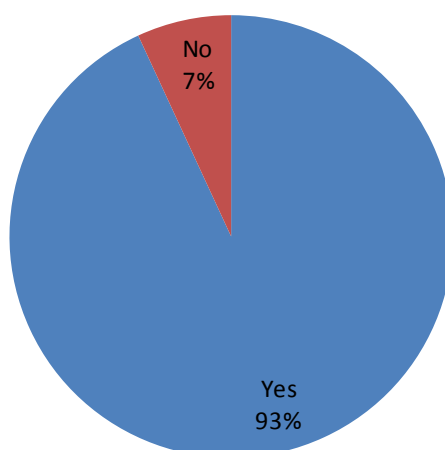
Variations are however not just according to the sex of the teacher but also their religion, type of school and the nature of the foundation body which introduces serious complexities if a policy on retention of pregnant girls in school has to be designed. For example, there were proportionately less born again Christian teachers who opposed retention of pregnant girls in school (71%) as compared to catholic (76%), protestant (77%) or Muslim teachers (89%). The proportion of teachers opposed to retention in primary schools was lower (71%)

than in secondary schools (86%, implying that teachers in primary school were more receptive to keeping pregnant girls in school, than those who taught in secondary school. Teachers in private schools were in general more receptive to retention (27%) as compared to government aided or public schools (18%). Similarly, teachers in day schools were more receptive to the retention of pregnant girls (24%) than those in boarding schools (18% or in schools that were both day and boarding (23%). Furthermore, teachers in girls only schools were more opposed to the retention of pregnant girls (69%) than those in boys only schools (50%), while those in mixed schools were the most opposed to retention represented by a proportion of 79%.

Since the overwhelming view is that pregnant girls must not be in school, the practice therefore is that often primary and secondary school girls who get pregnant while at school are suspended from school, many times indefinitely. A minority re-join after giving birth, but rarely into their former schools.

If teachers are overwhelmingly opposed to retention of pregnant girls in school, their views on re-entry are the exact opposite. As the figure below shows, 93% of teachers are in support of girls' re-entry into school after giving birth.

**Figure 5: Should Girls Re-enter School After Giving Birth – Pupils and Students?**



Further analysis shows that there are slightly more women (9%) opposed to the girls' re-entry in school than the men teachers. One female teacher at a primary school visited in Mbale district was supportive of re-entry because she argued that concentration is possible since the girl will have given birth already. Another female teacher argued that the girls should be allowed re-entry because they will have gained good experience never to repeat the mistake of getting pregnant. Re-entry is supported because "most of the pregnancies are accidental and occur to adolescents who can become better people" stated a male teacher in one of the secondary schools.

This view however ignores the fact that child upbringing and breastfeeding can equally be unsettling to the young mother probably more than a pregnancy. Even then there are very few girls who re-join the same schools because of stigma and as put by one teacher in a Primary school "they fear the teachers and pupils." In general, pregnancy is seen as shameful and such girls hardly return to the school.

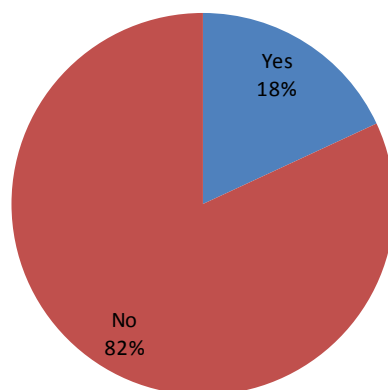
There is however some variations on a number of factors including sex, religion and school foundation among others. Born Again teachers lead in receptivity as 100% of those interviewed supported re-entry compared with 91% Catholics, 95% Protestants and 93% Muslims. Teachers in primary schools are proportionately ahead of their secondary counterparts to support re-entry at 95% and 90% respectively. There were no major differences between teachers in government aided schools or private schools as over 92% supported re-entry. However, teachers in day schools are more receptive at 94% as compared with those in boarding schools at 90% while those in both day and boarding schools that supported re-entry were 90%. Again, teachers in boys only schools were 100% supportive of re-entry while those in girls only schools were at 85% and those in mixed schools at 94%. It appears teachers in girls only schools are more conservative both in relation to retention and re-entry policy. Surprisingly 100% of teachers in NGO founded schools support re-entry compared with 99% in community founded schools and 90% in religious founded schools as well as 93% in private schools.

## **5.2 Students and Pupils Views**

Like the teachers, students and pupils are overwhelmingly opposed to the idea that pregnant girls should remain in school, with 82% opposed while only 18% were supportive

of the retention suggestion. The figure below highlights the opinion of students and pupils visited in the twenty selected districts of Uganda.

**Figure 6: Should Pregnant Girls Remain in This School?**



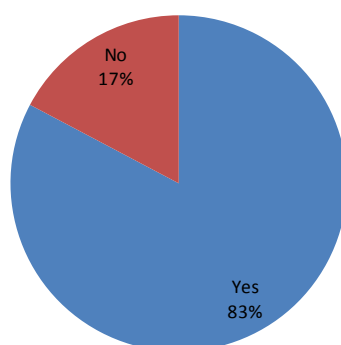
Unlike for teachers, there were no significant differences in the opinions by the sex of the student as both girls and boys were equally opposed in larger proportions with very limited quantitative differences of only two percentage points.

While in general, pupils and students opposed retention of pregnant girls in schools in high proportions, there were some variations worth noting. For instance, unlike the teachers, there were proportionately more Muslim pupils and students who are supportive of retention (27%) as compared to the born again (25%), the Catholics (17%) and the protestant (15%). Furthermore, students in secondary school were more receptive to the idea of retention (21%) than the pupils in primary schools (16%). Surprisingly, pupils and students in private schools were less supportive of retention (i.e. only 9%) as compared to those in public schools (18%) or government aided schools (20%). Day students and pupils were also slightly more supportive of retention (19%) as compared to boarding ones (17%) of those who are in schools that are both day and boarding (18%). Those in boys' only schools are more conservative as only 6% support retention as opposed to 12% on those in girls' only schools and 18% in mixed sex schools. Pupils and students in community schools lead the category of those in support of retention (20%) followed by those in schools with a religious foundation (19%) and then NGO founded schools (11%), It is clear that while teachers in

private schools are more liberal on this issue, the students and pupils are more conservative on the idea of retaining pregnant girls in school

With regard to re-entry, 83% of pupils and students support the ideas that girls should re-enter school after giving birth. The Figure below shows this general overwhelming picture amongst pupils and students.

**Figure 7: Should Girls Re-enter School After Giving Birth?**



However as shown by the table below, there were proportionately more support for re-entry by girls (85%) than boys (79%).

**Table 5: Should Girls Re-enter School After Giving Birth?**

	Female		Male		Total	
	No	%	No	%	NO	%
Yes	651	85	298	79	<b>949</b>	<b>83</b>
No	117	15	81	21	<b>198</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>768</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>379</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1,147</b>	<b>100</b>

Beyond differences on the basis of sex, there are other variations. There is more support for re-entry by pupils and students in urban schools (86%) than in rural areas (79%). Muslim students and pupils proportionately lead the support for re-entry (88%) followed by the born again (84%), the protestant (83%) and then Catholics (81%). As expected and on the basis of experience, more students in secondary schools support re-entry policy (91%) than

pupils in primary school (75%). Both governments aided and privately owned schools had 84% of the pupils and students who are supportive of re-entry, but those in public schools trailed on this aspect with 74%. Pupils and students in boarding schools lead in supporting re-entry (90%) followed by those in both day and boarding schools (86%) and then the day ones (80%). Those in girls' only schools have stronger support at 93% followed by those in mixed schools (82%) while those in studying in boys only school come last at 75%. This is complicated as teachers in girls' only schools were found to be more conservative amidst their more receptive students and pupils. With respect to the foundation body, community schools lead (86%) followed by NGO schools (85%) and religious (83%) and lastly students and pupils in private schools (79%). Another observation to note here is that students and pupils in private schools were more conservative as compared to their teachers on the aspect of re-entry.

### **5.3 Policy Makers and Community Views**

Interviews with policy makers indicate that there is no clear government policy on pregnancy in schools though the practice varies considerably. Different schools depending on their orientation and foundation as well as teachers in charge, parents, governing bodies and communities seem to devise various means to address the challenge. As indicated by a key official in the Ministry of Education and Sports:

Although there is no legislation or policy in this country that prohibits pregnant girls or child mothers from continuing with education, when a girl gets pregnant she is expelled from school. However after delivery the parents are free to take her to a different school **(Interview , Gender Desk Officer MoES)**.

Some policy makers indicate that it is acceptable for girls to stay in school even when pregnant provided they are in good health and can easily be attended to by medical personnel. They should also be allowed to re-enrol in a school of their choice after six months after delivery to allow for adequate breast feeding. Some teachers even indicate that appropriate facilities could be availed in school to allow for lactating girls to attend school as well. Some suggest that schools could have appropriate facilities including sickbays or day care centres to cater for such girls if they were to be in school as mothers.

## **Why Girls should not remain in School When Pregnant: Selected Field Views from males and females**

### **Teachers**

- The bad influence will spread to the rest of the girls
- The girls cannot concentrate well in their studies
- It encourages the rest to get pregnant and they need special attention. Above all we don't train mothers.

### **Pupils and Students**

- The school is not able to look after pregnant girls
- Staying in school will encourage other girls to get pregnant

### **Community members**

- At that stage, the [girl] child is in a delicate situation. So, I think they should remain home till they give birth and later they can return to school.
- These girls to remain at school wouldn't be a bad idea but can the school system accommodate them in that condition? I don't think so.
- Pregnant girls are a bad example to the rest
- Teenage pregnancies are very complicated. I don't think it would be a good idea for these girls to remain in school while pregnant.

A member of a community FGD in rural Mbale indicated that pregnant girls, who are in candidate classes, are allowed to sit for their exams but have to commute from home, if they were initially in boarding school.

Opinions are however divided. Those in support of girls remaining in school, whether female or male, argue that it is not a bad thing stating that a policy should be made to define the right for the girls to remain or return to school after they have given birth. As stated by a woman FGD participant "that is good and in fact these girls should return to school because they usually learn from their mistakes and it teaches them how to become better citizens. In most cases they always concentrate on their education".

Both the ideas of girls remaining in school or returning to school draw mixed responses in communities. Some members say the girls can return to

the previous schools while others vehemently disagree, and these diverse opinions run across the various categories of men and women who participated in the study. Two views from FGD members presented below show the rift:

### **View One**

Those girls should be allowed to go back to school but not the same schools because I don't think they would fit in that school community again. They are always laughed at by their fellow students and called names.

### **View Two**

No, for me I disagree, it is okay for those girls to return to school after giving birth but they should return to the same school because this is where they are known best and I think teachers will give her attention knowing what she went through but if she is taken to a different school, she may pretend to be what she is not.

While there seems to be some degree of consensus that girls should return or remain in school when pregnant, community members worry about if the schools can or are ready to keep the pregnant or lactating girls. Obstacles range from negative attitudes and absence of facilities and support mechanisms, to outright fear and perception of such girls as spoilt and not fit to be in school. Other challenges are at family level where parents reportedly force their daughters to marry as soon as they get pregnant even when still young in return for financial benefits in form of fines to the offending men or dowry.

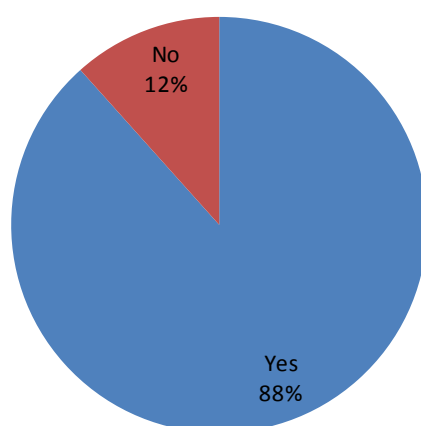
## **6 Policy Directions and Proposals**

The idea that keeping girls in school has huge dividends on the country's development is non-contestable. Education of girls and women has the beneficial impact of lowering infant mortality and morbidity, of improving family health and nutrition, lowering fertility rates and generally improving household welfare. In exploring the question of re-entry policy the research team paid particular attention on exploring the issue of if pregnant girls could be retained in school in the first place. In general, there is no agreement on the issue of retention of pregnant girls in school and enormous controversy surrounds this aspect. Many

teachers interviewed, whether female or male in primary or secondary school argue that there is no need for a policy to retain pregnant girls in schools, although the practice is that some schools actually have expectant mothers studying, particularly if they are in candidate classes. An absence of a particular policy on this issue and the question of pregnancy in school leave a significant policy gap that needs addressing. There is fear that lack of consensus and policy direction will make some to retain pregnant girls while many other schools do not accept. Indeed some teachers recommend that a policy on pregnancy should actually prohibit rather than accommodate pregnancy in schools. Others say that there is need for a retention policy because many teachers cannot allow the girls in class and yet such girls become useful, when they study. It is also argued that the girls need skills so that they are able to look after their children.

However unlike the controversy on the retention policy which is sternly opposed by the majority of teachers, pupils and students across the board, a policy on re-entry is supported overwhelmingly by most of the people interviewed. With no major differences between women and men teachers interviewed, 88% of the teachers interviewed argue that Uganda needs a policy on re-entry of girls into school as the figure below illustrates.

**Figure 8: Do you think Uganda Needs a Policy on re-entry into school after giving birth?**



Similarly, many pupils, policy makers and community members support the re-entry of girls in school after child birth. However, a preventive approach would be to address factors that facilitate the occurrence of pregnancies in school. The 2006 Uganda Demographic Health

Survey shows that childbearing among teenage girls starts early. While at 15 years 2% had begun child bearing, this proportion increases rapidly to 59% for the 19 year olds. The proportions are higher for the rural as compared to urban areas and in the poorest families as compared with the wealthier ones, with marked regional variations where the south of the country in general has lower teenage incidences than the rest of the country. It is important to note that high teenage pregnancy rates affects girls who would ordinarily be in primary, secondary and post secondary education and training. In general, teachers especially say that the pregnancy of girls in schools should be discouraged and avoided. Negative attitudes towards girl child education in society and failure to pay tuition or to meet the financial requirements of schooling are some of the driving factors in sexual relationships by school girls. Therefore there is need to address factors such as: negative attitudes in communities, poverty in families, introducing and teaching sex education in schools so that girls and all pupils and students know how to deal with sexuality matters. There is also need to enforce the law on defilement meticulously. Despite the existence of this law in Uganda, the phenomenon of child pregnancy and marriage is still high in Uganda.

Essentially keeping breast feeding mothers in school like retaining those who are pregnant are perceived by policy makers, teachers, managers and even pupils and students as tricky. This is seen as a very sensitive issue in schools. Proponents suggest that there is a need to sensitize the parents, school administrators, teachers as well as students to avoid stigmatizing the child mothers.

Facilities like rest rooms and day care centers should be provided in schools to ease the situation of young mothers. The mothers should also be financially supported to meet their new responsibilities.

There is also need to make the school environment friendly for the retention of pregnant girls or re-entry of the young mothers. This can be through:

- Counselling services to schools to change attitudes of teachers, pupils and students. This should also be targeted at addressing stigma related to school girl pregnancy. Guidance and counseling sessions should be clearly indicated on the school time table where issues of sexuality should be addressed among others aspects.

- Providing guidance and counselling to expectant girls and mothers to cope with their pregnancy and childcare situations as they study
- Teacher re-orientation and training so that they can handle issues of pregnancy in school appropriately
- Sensitization of the public and especially foundation bodies as some may be too conservative to accept pregnant girls in school.

As argued by one policy maker interviewed, emphasis should be placed on the notion that education is a human right and lifelong learning, a prudent way to a good education. As such pregnant students and child mothers should be allowed to enrol or re-enrol in any school of their choice.

It is suggested that for pregnant or lactating girls to remain in school, parental support is necessary but if possible the school should take up the support by providing scholastic materials.

#### **Stakeholder Views on re-entry policy**

- A policy should be formulated to enable teachers to allow girls back in school (with a clear resource framework).
- Government should provide sponsorship schemes to the girls.
- Massive sensitisation by Local government and NGOs should be prioritised-sensitization should focus on all stakeholders especially - teachers, parents and students/pupils. Students in particular have to be able to accept the girl who has had a baby and not to call her names such as 'mama'.
- Government should extend services like family planning methods in a holistic manner
- Local government can make a policy to emphasize sex education in schools.
- Spell out tough penalties for the culprits.
- Make re-entry mandatory and reprimand those who block re-entry ( family/school)
- On retention- government should invest much in training people that can help these students for example teachers.
- Provision of health facilities, sick bays, resting rooms in schools and child care centres.
- In build into the policy deterrent measures to prevent pregnancy i.e. the policy should not send a bad signal that it is okay to be pregnant at that age

- Key organisational spaces for women's education such as FAWE, UWOPA, MGLSD should play specific roles in the policy framework.

The recommendations are itemized in the matrix below which also provides some tentative strategic Actions and spells out centres of responsibility.

### MATRIX on Recommendations, Key Aspects and Actors

Key Recommendation	Key Aspects	Actors
Develop a policy on pregnancy in schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide for prevention of the occurrence of pregnancies</li> <li>- Clear policy on pregnancy tests</li> <li>- Define criteria for retention of expectant girls in school where applicable</li> <li>- Establish re-entry policy defining the criteria and systems of financing, monitoring and evaluation</li> <li>- Provide for dissemination of policy guidelines to all stakeholders: schools, students, parents and communities</li> <li>- Provide for addressing negative attitudes on pregnancy of school girls in communities and amongst parents, students and staff</li> <li>- Provide for addressing stigmatization of pregnant girls and child mothers.</li> <li>- Provide for sex education in the school curriculum</li> <li>- Make re-entry mandatory and reprimand those who block re-entry (family/school)</li> <li>-</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ministry of Education and Sports,</li> <li>- Lower local Governments</li> <li>- CSOs</li> <li>- Schools</li> </ul>
Provide a gender responsive/friendly school environment for the retention of pregnant girls or re-entry of the young mothers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Developed benchmarks for defining what a gender responsive school and disseminate to all institutions</li> <li>- Raise awareness in schools and the community on school girls pregnancy and education</li> <li>- Have gender responsive champions in the school</li> <li>- Develop an information system to track progress at school level</li> <li>- Guidance and counseling in schools to: change attitudes of teachers, pupils and students and address stigma related to school girl pregnancy; . to expectant girls and mothers to cope with their pregnancy and childcare situations as they study</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development</li> <li>- Ministry of Education and Sports,</li> <li>- Local Governments</li> <li>- Academic and Research</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Guidance and counselling sessions should be clearly indicated on the school time table where issues of sexuality should be addressed among others aspects.</li> <li>- Teacher re-orientation and training so that they can handle issues of pregnancy in school appropriately</li> <li>- Sensitization of the public and especially religious foundation bodies as some may be too conservative to accept pregnant girls in school.</li> <li>- Build capacity of teachers in understanding gender relations in school environment</li> </ul>	<p>Institutions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Schools</li> </ul>
Decisively deal with defilement, rape and generally sexual abuse in the school environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enforce the law on defilement meticulously</li> <li>- Sensitize communities, schools and law enforcement agencies on existing law on defilement</li> <li>- Hold schools accountable when sexual abuse occurs within the school environment</li> <li>- Develop and enhance a mechanism for CSO follow-up on issues of sexual abuse in school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lower Local governments,</li> <li>- Uganda Police and other law enforcement agencies, school management</li> </ul>
Provide assistance to girls who get pregnant while in schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide facilities such as rest rooms</li> <li>- Provide day care centers in schools to ease the situation of mothers.</li> <li>- Financial support to meet the new responsibilities of young mothers.</li> <li>- Scholarships and scholastic materials alongside proper counseling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ministry of Education and sports,</li> <li>- Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development</li> <li>- CSOs</li> </ul>

	and guidance	
Massive sensitization on education as human right for girls as well as boys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Promote education as a Human right for all</li> <li>- Provide education as important in poverty reduction and empowerment of girls, women and the poor</li> <li>- Develop IEC materials on pregnancy in school and widely disseminate them</li> </ul>	MOES, CSOS. Media
Partnership of key stakeholders to promote retention of girls in school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mobilise human, technical skills, financial and other resources of key partners towards addressing pregnancy in schools</li> <li>- Undertake research in line with promoting girl child education</li> <li>- Share research evidence to influence policy, planning and legislation and implementation.</li> <li>- Design training and educational programmes on gender and empowerment of marginalised categories of pupils/students.</li> <li>- Influence government planning and budgeting processes to advance a gender responsive education system</li> <li>- Develop and implement programmes that address key issues in enrolment and retention of girls in schools.</li> </ul>	MOES, FAWE, UWOPA, MGLSD Academic and Research Institutions, Donor agencies
Monitoring the implementation of policies and laws promoting gender equality in education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ensure collection of sex disaggregated data in schools</li> <li>- Comply with the Set standards and guidelines on how to handle pregnancies in schools.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- MoE</li> <li>- MoGLSD</li> <li>- School Authorities</li> <li>- Research institutions</li> </ul>
Bye-laws by Local Governments to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support local councils to develop appropriate mechanisms and legislate of pregnancy in schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Local Governments</li> </ul>

address context specific issues		
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