Girl-Ed Newsletter

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Enabling positive change for Girls’ Education
The Kenny Family Foundation pays FAWEU a courtesy call

The Kenny Family Foundation, a private family foundation based in Canada, has for the past ten years maintained a cordial relationship with Forum for African Women Educationalists Uganda (FAWEU). This relationship dates back to 2006 when the Canadian family owned philanthropic arm expressed interest to work closely with FAWEU in offering education scholarship opportunities to Ugandan girls from economically challenged backgrounds. To date, over 50 girls have benefitted from the sponsorship.

On 18th March, the Foundation’s founder, Paul Kenny paid a courtesy call to both the FAWEU Secretariat and successful beneficiaries, to track the progress of the ongoing scholarships and their general impact to the girls’ lives. According to Paul, a fulltime food safety and distribution consultant in Canada, the scholarship opportunities moulds the girls to be “agents of change through imparting them with skills they can use to grow society.”

Today, some of these girls reap the fruits of their labour as job holders in different sectors in the country while others have successfully ventured into entrepreneurship. One of the former scholars Grace Nanyonga is now an astute business woman in the food production industry, having started her own fish production company, dubbed Grana Fish located in Mukono, Central Uganda.

Excitement filled the air at Lubiri Primary School in Kampala as learners curiously watched the Forum for African Women Educationalists Uganda (FAWEU) Mobile Library truck make its way into the compound in what would signal the marking of National, Drop Everything And Read (DEAR) Day celebrations at the school. Children of all ages mulled around the school’s pavilion ready to meet the guests and take part in the much anticipated DEAR activities for the day.

The guests, comprising FAWEU and Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) officials, alongside the school’s teachers, took a few minutes to sensitize the learners on the importance of developing a reading culture. Thereafter, the children with the assistance of the KCCA librarians picked books of their choice from the Mobile Library and embarked on observing 20 minutes of reading through the books they had selected. Other activities carried out concurrently included; learners dramatizing of the content they had read and internalized, small group’ discussions and individual presentations by the children.

The DEAR Day is a literacy day nationally marked on the 17th of March every year in Uganda, to promote a reading culture and love for Lifelong learning among individuals, communities, learners and families at large. On this day, children, parents, guardians and career people spare 20 minutes between 11.00a.m and 11:20a.m to read a book, or any written publication in a bid to encourage readership and boost literacy levels among children and adults.

This is the third time DEAR celebrations are being marked nationally after the Government of Uganda through the Ministry of Education, Science Technology and Sports (MoESTS) first launched the activity in March 2013. This year, FAWEU partnered with KCCA and Lubiri Primary School to provide books that learners could explore for the day under the Mobile Library Project.

The Mobile Library Project is an initiative by FAWEU, KCCA, Ecobank and supported by Book Aid International that seeks to promote a reading culture among pupils in Uganda. At the moment the pilot programme is targeting ten selected schools in Kampala District with intent of expanding to various districts in the country.
Technology Company Microsoft in partnership with the Pan African Non-Governmental Organization Forum for African Women Educationalists Uganda (FAWEU) held its first ever DigiGirlz event in Uganda at Kitante Hill School in Kampala, opening doors to fervent and determined young women for the DigiGirlz Tech’ Camp. The event under the theme Enhancing Girls’ Capacities in STEM for Development saw 104 high school girls from Kampala and Wakiso districts in Uganda immerse themselves in the latest innovations in technology.

Throughout the day, the girls participated in a number of activities including hands on training on computer games, safe internet use among other ICT skills. The girls were also mentored on building their capacities in STEM by successful career women in Science, Engineering and Mathematics fields from both Government and the Private Sector.

Through the DigiGirlz Camp, Microsoft and FAWEU hopes to significantly increase the number of young women involved in technology-focused careers, and to set an example for other corporations to pursue avenues of inclusion in the workplace. DigiGirlz High Tech Camps’ purpose is to dispel myths of what it means to have a career in the high-tech industry and give girls a chance to experience firsthand what it is like to develop cutting-edge technology.

“Microsoft’s DigiGirlz Camp strives to provide young women with the necessary expertise and direction to succeed in a world becoming more dependent on the latest technologies and innovations,” said Microsoft’s Corporate Citizenship and Public Affairs Manager in East and Southern Africa, Mr. Alex Nyingi. “We believe that the camp will help dismiss any stereotypes of the high-tech industry catering solely to men,” noted Nyingi.

While pitching the importance of building capacities of girls in STEM careers FAWEU Executive Director Christine Semambo Sempebwa, noted that DigiGirlz will help bridge gender disparities in performance in math and science by instilling positive attitudes among girls towards the subjects.

“Gender stereotypes, cultural barriers and low quality of education continue to affect girls’ career choices and opportunities in STEM fields. This training lays ground for secondary school girls to acquire hands on experience of the relevant skills needed to not only meet the technological manpower of the nation but also explore better ways of influencing the rest of their peers into considering careers in STEM,” said Sempebwa.

More than 23,500 students from Kenya, Ethiopia, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe have attended the Microsoft DigiGirlz Technology Programs (both camps and one-day events) since they began in the year 2000.

Through DigiGirlz Microsoft and FAWEU continue to live up to their shared commitment on bringing up a new generation of innovative women leaders and helping girls change their future through the use of technology.

First DigiGirlz Technology Camp launched in Uganda
A lot has been documented on the famous Lord Resistance Army (LRA) war in Northern Uganda that according to a 2004 BBC News report left 1.5 million civilians displaced and an estimated 100,000 others dead. For close to three decades over 1.7 million people lived in camps under squalid conditions, the back and forth insurgence of the army would leave no room for innocent civilians to start nor rebuild a living, a perfect scenario of a conflict zone. But among the greatest victims are children who were subjected to all forms of physical violence among them rape, neglect, mutilation, torture, slavery, abduction, the use of child soldiers, and a number of massacres. The outcome, a traumatized society with heavy laden. Today, a lot of the women and girls exposed to the war were forced to relinquish their dreams and instead focus on raising of children whose fathers are long gone or nowhere to be seen. They have had to stop schooling and instead provide for their babies and other family members. It has taken the philanthropic efforts of Christian Counseling Fellowship (CCF), a Community Based Organization (CBO) to support pregnant girls, child-mothers, their children and other categories of vulnerable girls to access secondary and vocational education in the post-conflict period. In particular, the organization in 2002 established a center to offer psychological and spiritual counseling child mothers, orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) and other vulnerable members of the community who had been affected by the war. The center would then progress into a school – the Pader Girls Academy (PGA) - that would facilitate the enrolment of pregnant girls and child mothers with their children for secondary school education and vocational education. So while the mothers study in classrooms their children are left with care givers in Early Childhood Centers set aside in the compound. Acknowledging the tremendous role CCF has played towards bettering the lives of these vulnerable girls, and cognizant of the importance of educating the girl child irrespective of their backgrounds, FAWE Uganda in partnership with Mc Arthur Foundation in October 2013 rolled out a two-year project for war-affected girls in post-conflict Northern Uganda and the West Nile Region. The FAWE-Mc Arthur led Programme dubbed the Secondary and Viable Empowerment (SAVE) Education Project covers six districts within the Acholi Sub region among them Pader, Gulu, Nwoya, Kitgum, Agago and Amuru districts. In a bid to improve the PGA model FAWEU Since 2013 has constructed three classroom blocks for the school, trained 80 child mothers and 40 community members on Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health and recruited 4 secondary school teachers and 2 Early Childhood Education support staff. Acknowledging the need for psycho social support for the girls, the SAVE project established referral lines were child mothers and girls who need further health treatment are linked up with special health centers to undergo treatment. In addition FAWEU has developed a Sexual Reproductive Health Manual and curriculum for the School. At least 150 girls have received full scholarship in secondary and vocational education. To better address the incumbent and future needs of the pregnant girls and child mothersFAWEU has conducted two needs assessments in areas of Early Childhood Education and Sexual Reproductive Health to find out how best the child mothers can reclaim their place in the society. By 2017 the organization intends to have more child mothers access the center for education and hopefully reach out to more girls in conflict zones of northern Uganda.
Women’s Day celebrations 2016

It was all glitz and glamour at the annual International Women’s Day Banquet held at Kampala’s Serena Hotel on the 3rd of March 2016. The event, that offers the ideal platform for airing of issues surrounding women and girls, attracted women from all walks of life, thereby setting the momentum for International Women’s Day celebrations that are nationally marked on 8th March every year. The colorful occasion featured live red carpet interviews, food delicacies, drinks and mind blowing entertainment that soothed the souls of the guests present.

This year’s auspicious event was graced by among other high profile guests; Honorable Rebecca Kadaga, Speaker of Uganda’s Parliament, Lady Justice Julia Sebutinde, Government officials in the Ministry of Gender and Social Development alongside other esteemed career women and women affairs enthusiasts. Also present to celebrate the woman were key Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), among them, Forum for African Women Educationalists Uganda Chapter (FAWEU), Government institutions, and key Private Sector players.

Whilst echoing this year’s Women’s Day theme; ‘Pledge for Parity’, the Chief guest Honorable Rebecca Kadaga stressed the need to sensitize women on the opportunities available for them to explore. “We need to find ways to get information to the population. To make women understand what is available and how they can access it,” said Kadaga. The renowned Speaker of Parliament, who has previously graced FAWEU’s annual advocacy event dubbed Girls’ Education Week, also noted that girls lacked basic facilities that would plow up a conducive learning environment for them to perform well in schools. An issue she strongly emphasized needed urgent attention. In her brief speech, FAWEU Executive Director Christine Semambo Sempebwa called for a gender responsive approach to curbing Gender Based Violence, a vice that has seen hundreds of girls across Uganda face detrimental health and social repercussions and in some instances drop out of school.

“We need to conduct massive sensitization on women and girls rights at family, community, school and national level. At the same time, we also need to equip teachers and school administrators with the necessary gender-responsive skills to enable them better address the needs of both girls and boys. It is through this inclusive empowerment will we stamp out this heinous crime.’ said Sempebwa.

FAWEU’s Sempebwa went on to underscore the magnitude of gender-based violence, an issue that is especially harmful to the lives of women and girls in the country. “What is even disturbing is that the most common perpetrators of physical violence include partners, parents and teachers. The very same people who we entrust with our children’s care and guidance and with even ourselves as women are the leading perpetrators of these heinous acts,” Sempebwa pointed out.

The event also saw FAWE Uganda receive a prestigious accolade for its endless support for Gender Equality in the Education Sector in Uganda. This is the second year in a row that FAWE Uganda has participated in the annual event.
FABA ‘cleans up’ for Women’s Day celebrations

The FAWEU Alumni and Beneficiaries Association (FABA) members on 7th March 2016 joined Makerere University Business School (MUBS) students in a cleanup exercise dubbed Keep MUBS Clean campaign, aimed at sensitizing students on the importance of bridging gender gaps in education while at the same time, giving back to the university community.

During the exercise FABA members got to socialize with continuing students and encouraged them to diligently take up various roles both in and out of campus irrespective of their gender.

According to Bridget Akurut, a Makerere University graduate and new FABA member, the event marked the beginning of the Association’s array of efforts towards eliminating gender stereotypes, cultural barriers and negative perceptions leveled against girls’ and women education in higher institutions of learning.

“I am one of those lucky girls who have been empowered through education. This campaign marked the starting point towards addressing issues in the social economic and education sectors that bar women and girls from fully exploring their potential. There has been a lot of discouragement on the part of girls to join institutions of higher learning and they instead opt to get married off either due to lack of school fees or because of cultural beliefs” said Akurut. “This exercise gave us the opportunity to dispel these myths and negative beliefs on girls and women education among Makerere University continuing students,” noted Akurut.

The Keep MUBS Clean campaign is the first outreach activity under the Association’s 2016 work plan, which seeks to build capacities of the continuing students from higher learning institutions to make informed decisions on their career paths.

FABA on January 30th held a meeting to deliberate on the Association’s key strategies and activities for the 2016. Among the key features of the 2016 action plan include: digital branding of the association, national sensitization on policy issues affecting women and girls, fundraising and community outreach activities, and Youth mentorship on employment and entrepreneurship opportunities.
“Let us adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels”

Christine Semambo Sempebwa, Executive Director, FAWE Uganda

“We need not just focus on encouraging women into leadership but also equip them with skills to fit in those leadership positions”

Ms Agnes Asiimwe Konde, Managing Director, NTV Uganda

Cake cutting ceremony at the MUBS international Women’s Day Forum

(L-R) MUBS international Women’s Day Panelists Ms. Kiskyamaria Kevin, Ms. Ninsiima Margaret and Dr. Mary Nampawu posing for a photo outside MUBS library