

“Initiatives to Eliminate Corporal Punishment in Kibaha District –Mlandizi”

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Batch 2

Summary of the project

Our project was based on article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which concerns the ‘Child’s right to protection from all forms of violence’. The article requires States Parties to take a variety of legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect children from all forms of violence. The title of the project was ‘**Initiatives to eliminate corporal punishment in Kibaha District –Mlandizi.**’ We selected two primary schools as our pilot schools, Mlandizi and Azimio Primary Schools.

Prior to the implementation of our project, through questionnaires and interviews, we conducted an investigation on teachers’ and pupils’ knowledge of the CRC articles. 86% of the respondents affirmed having heard of the CRC and 14 % were unsure or unaware of it. Our investigation showed that 90% of the disciplinary methods in the two schools were violent in nature; corporal punishment was the most prevalent. The investigation also revealed that most of pupils were against corporal punishment whereas most teachers supported its use.

With the above findings we starting to conduct awareness seminars to teachers and pupils to remind them that research has shown that the prevalence of violence against children has a direct connection with anti social behaviours in childhood and adult life. We convinced them that according to ‘Article 28(2) school discipline should be administered in accordance with the child’s human dignity and in conformity with the convention, thus, respecting the obligation to protect children from ‘all forms of physical or mental violence.’ We advised teachers to employ educational and other measures to promote positive and non-violent forms of discipline, care and treatment of child.

After the initial workshop and our return from Sri Lanka in 2005, we visited the two pilot schools. It was encouraging to know that 97% of the exercise was successful and that teachers’ attitude, except for some cases where they were new or had been transferred to other schools, had changed. The head teachers were and are still supportive of implementing this practice.

Impact on the personal and professional levels

The training programme brought a great change in my perception of child rights. I started to view children differently from the image that had been implanted for quite long time in my life. I believed that children were mere recipients of

information and orders and were to conform to societal values. Their lives were to be decided for them at tender age and without the opportunity to share their views before the elder. They had to be disciplined with canes as a corrective measure every time they made a mistake. It never occurred to me that without corporal punishment children would be self-controlled in schools. Now it is different, I have become a zealous advocate of child rights and an activist against the use of corporal punishment in schools and in our nation at large. As a teacher, I made my personal mission, to convince the Headmaster of the school where I work to outlaw the use of corporal punishment. This became a reality in Benjamin Mkapa High School Dar Es Salaam Tanzania and was displayed in an article I wrote for a magazine.

In my passion to raise awareness among children about their rights and potential, I am currently working with a Christian Organisation that advocates to free children from poverty and to promote their rights. I have conducted several seminars to partner churches in relation to child protection from abuse.

Since I attended the training on Child Rights, I became interested in issues related to children rights. One of my duties became the implementation of good practices related to the CRC in the classroom. I have participated in discussions to ensure that teachers in my district are able to promote children's rights in their classrooms. Having learnt that children learn best when they are actively involved in the learning process and free from fear of punishment, we ensured that in the schools directly involved in our project children are not scared of their teachers. Children are interested in learning things that are relevant to their lives and without fear. On the professional level, I realized that regardless of their differences, all children have an equal right to education and there should not be any form of discrimination. In line with article 2 of the Convention: "there shall be no discrimination based on race, ethnic origin, religion, gender, disability, social groups or any other grounds," I strongly believe that all children can learn.

Impact on the organization level

The awareness we initiated at Mlandizi Kibaha District has had spreading effects on the nearby schools. This was corroborated by one of the participants, who is a district Education Officer, when she monitored the progress and development of the project. The project continues and we expect to hold seminars in several schools by August 2008.

Initiatives, debates on practices that violate children's rights such as corporal punishment and readmission of pregnant girls, have taken place. Despite the challenges experienced, teacher education and curriculum reforms are now in favour of schools free of corporal punishment. Teacher colleges are now using methods of teaching that are learner centred. Furthermore, there are discussions

about how to tackle the worst forms of child labour.

Impact on the country level

Because the opinions of parents and teachers are divided, the eradication of corporal punishment has been a sensitive issue. However, our campaign, together with other non-governmental organisations such as Kuleana Mwanza, Haki Elimu, has led to high improvement compared to previous years. The following are among the noticeable countrywide impacts:

- There have been changes in our National curriculum; human rights and children's rights are included in the syllabus of general study and civics from primary school to high school. The Child rights syllabus has also been included in the teachers training syllabus.
- There is increased awareness of the importance of implementing child rights in connection to a holistic development of the community.
- Together with the efforts of non-governmental organizations that advocate for child rights, children have received not only adequate information about their rights but they have also been able to demand them. In our country, a parliamentary session for children is happening right now.
- The myth that the implementation of child rights has a hidden agenda to infiltrate foreign ideas in the behaviour of our youth is slowly fading away.

We believe that soon, children will be valued and treated equally as adults and society will sing the song of justice, fairness, peace and solidarity, regardless of age, gender, colour and religion.