



WOMEN EMPOWERMENT



Tuwezeshe Program: Empowering young women to be the change they want to see

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In the efforts to improve women's wellbeing and reverse gender inequality, breaking down the patriarchal system and engaging men is simply not enough.

What we are missing is the perfect model that would groom young women into becoming future leaders, decision makers, business women and the change makers they wish to see for themselves and their communities.

Children's Dignity Forum (CDF) appreciates the potential of empowered girls and young women, therefore it introduced the Tuwezeshe Akina Dada Fellowship Program which caters to creating a cadre of young women leaders to drive social change to end Gender-Based Violence (GBV). The program supports fellows to conduct social action projects in their communities to drive social change against GBV.

The Citizen sat down and held a roundtable discussion with CDF staff including Communication Officer, Winfrida Makuru, Tuwezeshe Program Officer, Nancy Minja, Girls' Empowerment Officer, Amina Alliy, Program Manager, Wilbert Mchunguzi and some of the Tuwezeshe fellows to explore more about this program.

Girls' empowerment concept

Amina Alliy says, "This is simply a social action that unleashes the power within girls over their own lives, society and in their communities. Girls' empowerment, as a global concept, focuses on enabling girls to reach their potentials in all aspects of life: socially, economically, politically and culturally; and most importantly, being freed from any form of violence and discrimination."

Why empower girls

Amina explains, "There is no better story told of humanity than that of empowering girls. Doing so translates into transforming their life experiences from an encounter of atrocities to one of serenity. Of course, girls' empowerment has a number of benefits to be unfolded; to mention a few:

Empowered girls are economically, socially, politically and culturally emancipated. These girls can have unlimited access to political spaces more often, participate in decision-making in all stages of their lives and contribute to the economy by active engagement in continuous income-generating activities."

She elaborates that as a self-advocacy social action, empowering girls redefines gender roles and allows girls to access their rights and entitlements as human beings. Empowered girls are agents of change that bring about equal and just systems within the socie-



Cohort 2 Tuwezeshe fellow, Celina Baragwiha (second from right), leads a discussion on safe and effective use of social media platforms with the beneficiaries of her "Kigenge Chetu" project.



Cohort 1 Tuwezeshe fellow, Jesca Mtoi, (centre), poses with some of Jangwani Girls Secondary School students who she works with in her Sanzuka Project during school sessions.

ty. When girls are confident and resilient, they are able to influence changes within their peers too.

Situation on the ground

Amina further adds, "Women, specifically girls and young women, are afforded limited opportunities to make choices with regard to their lives, especially in the political sphere and in making decisions on matters that affect their lives and wellbeing. For instance, during the Tanzania Civic Polls of November 24th, 2019, only 3 percent of women across the country showed up and filled the election forms to compete for political seats during

the local government elections. Over the years, women and girls have been encouraged to only participate in the elections by voting, but not inspired to contest for top positions along with the male candidates."

"It is easily observed that there is an upsurge of teenage pregnancies in our society and with it an increase in school dropouts. In accordance with the Tanzania Demographic Health Survey (TDHS), the rate of teenage pregnancies has increased from 23 percent in 2010 to 27 percent in 2016.

Child marriage is another persistent challenge. Despite the relentless measures taken to counter this vice, over the

span of 5 years we have reduced the rate by only 1 percent. Currently, the rate of children married below the age of 18 is 36 percent," said Amina.

She continues, "Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) also joins the list of the hindrances of girls and women's emancipation. Due to counteractive measures taken by the Government, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and other stakeholders, statistics show that FGM has been reduced from 18 percent in 1996 to 10 percent in 2016. However, at village level the stakes are still on the rise.

Often times, child marriage goes hand in hand with other harmful tra-

ditional practices, such as FGM, which are prime factors that deprive girls and women of opportunities to make progress.

Alternatively, a myriad of interventions to empower women and girls are implemented everywhere, but they are constantly obscured by society's perception towards the matter. With majority of society members mistaking these interventions for misogyny. If that perception is retained, men automatically flee, making it hard for girls and women to associate men as their allies in their drive."

Changing models

Communication Officer, Winfrida Makuru says, "It is agreeable that there is a need for a strategic model that would deal with individuals before coming to community level. That is exactly what CDF's Tuwezeshe Program does. The program focuses on what young women aspire to be and looks at how her surrounding community and country as a whole perceive her. The Social Action Projects conducted under the Program are aimed at inculcating knowledge to girls and young women as individuals to help them find their ways, so that they stand on their own feet without depending on anyone."

Tuwezeshe Program

Nancy Minja, who is the respective program officer, defines the program saying, "This is a young women's lead-