

World Bank: Tanzania loan should promote all girls' education

New Q&A on discrimination against pregnant students, young mothers.

HRW (24.04.2020) – <https://bit.ly/2Sd8WUM> – The World Bank should work with the Tanzanian government to ensure that all pregnant girls and adolescent mothers can attend public schools, Human Rights Watch said in a question and answer document released today. The World Bank should not disburse the initial tranches of an education 19901990 loan to Tanzania planned for 2021 until the government guarantees equal access to free and compulsory primary education and equal access to secondary education for all girls.

On March 31, 2020, the World Bank's Board of Executive Directors approved a US\$500 million loan to Tanzania for its secondary education program. In doing so, the World Bank ignored a government policy, supported by President John Magufuli, which prevents pregnant students and adolescent mothers from attending the country's regular public schools. The World Bank has issued inaccurate information that dismisses the existence of this policy and disregarded the findings of nongovernmental groups that have documented the harm it causes.

“The World Bank, Tanzania's largest multilateral donor, is in a great position to help ensure that every girl in Tanzania

gets education without discrimination,” said Agnes Odhiambo, senior women’s rights researcher at Human Rights Watch. “The World Bank should ensure that its investments improve, not undermine, the human rights of all Tanzanian girls.”

In approving the loan, the World Bank did not address the concerns about the ban, leaving questions about its commitment to work to end this policy, Human Rights Watch said.

On April 6, Tanzania’s Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology issued a statement about the World Bank loan and said that its Secondary Education Quality Improvement Program (SEQUIP) would be carried out “without discrimination and shall include girls who drop out of school for various reasons, including pregnancy.” However, the ministry did not state that pregnant girls could return to regular public schools.

SEQUIP allows girls to study in so-called “alternative education pathways,” or parallel education centers, which the World Bank has characterized as a viable secondary school alternative. But the program faces challenges around low quality of education and access even for those who were trying get into them and is fee-based.

The Tanzania government should immediately end the school ban. President Magufuli should publicly retract his destructive comments against allowing pregnant girls to stay in school and direct his government to adopt a human rights-compliant policy to support all pregnant girls to go to school.

The World Bank should ensure that pregnant girls and adolescent mothers are not forced to choose a parallel, inferior education system. They should ensure that every girl is included in the formal education system. Girls should have the option to attend public primary and secondary schools or alternative learning pathways such as SEQUIP, if they choose, when they have been out of school for long periods.

“By approving this loan, the World Bank has endorsed inadequate measures, such as inferior parallel education options, that discriminate against girls and support abusive government policies,” Odhiambo said. “The World Bank should examine the evidence and listen to the many voices saying that while it is important to expand secondary education in Tanzania, it should not be at the expense of girls’ futures.”

SIERRA LEONE: Discriminatory ban on pregnant girls attending school is lifted

Amnesty International (30.03.2020) – <https://bit.ly/3bGXJmq> – Following today’s ministerial statement to overturn with immediate effect the ban on pregnant girls attending schools, Marta Colomer, Amnesty International’s Acting Deputy Regional Director for West and Central Africa said:

“Today we have cause to celebrate as thousands of pregnant girls across Sierra Leone will be allowed back into classes

nationwide when schools reopen after COVID-19.

“This inherently discriminatory ban which was formalized for almost five years now has already deprived too many young women of their right to education, and the choice as to what future they want for themselves. It has now rightly been consigned to the history books.

“Indeed, pregnant girls are given back their dignity and we welcome the government announcement to overturn with immediate effect the ban on them attending school. It’s a victory for all those who campaigned tirelessly to make such a great change happen.

“We now hope that authorities in Sierra Leone will develop strategies to address the negative societal attitudes and stigmatization that pregnant girls have been facing for years. This decision gives also hope to other pregnant girls in Africa who have been stigmatized, discriminated against and, in some countries, also banned from school.”

Background

Today, Sierra Leone’s Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education issued a statement announcing that the 2010 government decision preventing pregnant girls from attending school and sitting exams was overturned with immediate effect. It is to be replaced by two new policies focused on the ‘Radical Inclusion’ and ‘Comprehensive Safety’ of all children in the education system. President Julius Maada Bio made it

clear that his 'New Direction' Government makes decisions based on both evidence and constitutional due process.

On 12 December 2019 the regional Economic Community of West African States' (ECOWAS) Community Court of Justice ruled that the ban should be revoked. The case challenging the ban was brought by Sierra Leonean NGO (WAVES) in partnership with Equality Now and the Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa (IHRDA). Amnesty International intervened as an amicus curiae ("friend of the court").

The organization has previously documented how the ban put the rights of thousands of girls under threat. The ban was formally issued in April 2015 during the Ebola crisis. Due to Ebola, there was a sharp increase in teenage pregnancies and government should put measures in place to ensure this doesn't happen in this time of COVID-19.