

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.”