

Call to Action: Ministry of Education and Sports and School foundation bodies should prioritise continued access to learning for pregnant girls and adolescent mothers in Uganda

As we commemorate the Day of the African Child 2024, the Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER) would like to echo African Union's declaration of the 2024 as the year of education. The theme: 'Education for all children in Africa: the time is now' compels us to confront the critical issues of access to education and sexual reproductive health and rights of pregnant girls and adolescent mothers in Uganda.

Despite notable progress in expanding education access over the past two decades, with completion rate rising notably across primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education, Uganda continues to grapple with a buffet of challenges. Teenage pregnancy, at an alarming rate of 24% - the highest in East Africa, severely undermines the sexual and reproductive rights as well as access to education opportunities of countless adolescent girls. The 2022 Uganda Demographic Health Survey, reveals a stark reality: 80.1% of girls who become pregnant, 97% of these girls drop out of school. This is unacceptable.

Uganda has made strides in addressing the issue of continued access to education for Pregnant Girls and Adolescent Mothers (PGAMs) by for example putting in place Guidelines on Prevention and Management of Teenage Pregnancy in School Setting. The Guidelines allow PGAMs to do promotional examinations and provides for ways of assisting them to re-enroll after giving birth among others. However, the same Guidelines contain unfair and retrogressive provisions on PGAMs' continued access to learning such as forced testing of pregnancy, and mandatory leave of one year. The

learner can only re-enroll in school six months post birth.

Therefore, the Guidelines do not comply with regional and international human rights standards that Uganda committed itself to. For example, Article 11 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) requires States such as Uganda to take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates; and adopt special measures in respect of female children, to ensure their equal access to education.

In September, 2022, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child ruled against the Government of Tanzania for its policies that subject girls to forced pregnancy testing and expulsion of those found pregnant from attending school for being discriminatory insofar as they denied pregnant girls their right to access education.

In Commemoration of this year's Day of African Child, we urge the Government of Uganda (Ministry of Education and Sports) and other key stakeholders such as School Foundation Bodies, School Management Committees and Board of Governors to;

- Comply with the African human rights law and revise the law, policy and practice and abolish mandatory pregnancy testing and expulsion of pregnant learners from school or subjecting them to mandatory leave of one year.

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