

Campaign Against Sexual Abuse of Girls in the Education

Re-setting the Public Agenda

By Milton Machel, August 24 2006

If, assumingly, NGO's and Civil Society in Mozambique have a role in redefining Agenda Setting by Government and Media, one can take the official launch of the Campaign Against Sexual Abuse of Girls in the Education, as a statement.

August 18 and 19 2006 testified the very first step to achievements in terms of denouncing, condemning and penalizing the criminals, to reduce the number of girls abandoning school because of it, and gender-wise re-balancing the rates of girls and boys in school.

That very first step took two moments: one can be described as the statement day, Friday 18, and other as the marching day, Saturday 19.

The Statement Day

Friday morning, a press conference was held by the principal voices and faces of the campaign: Action Aid International Mozambique and partners such as Oxfam GB, Movement Education For All (MEPT), Forum of African Women Educators in Mozambique (FAWEMO), National Teachers Organization (ONP), organizations Network of people living with HIV/AIDS (RENSIDA), Save the Children and others.

The presence of just three media was notable, but it was not a damage to campaign's public impact: RTP-África, the national delegation of Portuguese public broadcasting company, which has a network television for portuguese-speaking countries; Mozambique News Agency (AIM); and an electronic fax sheet Diario de Noticias.

“We registered less than 30 cases of sexual abuse since the launching of the campaign” (two months ago), numbered Benilde Nhalivilo, the campaign coordinator and Action Aid Mozambique staff member.

That's and indication of the envisioned success of this campaign, by which **“Until the end of this year, we intend to create a Database to register and follow up the cases”**, added Nhalivilo.

Emphasizing the role of this campaign, Nhalivilo underlined the findings of a Save the Children's research last year: in Gaza, Inhambane, Sofala and Nampula provinces. The research revealed that, out of 117 identified and mostly not resolved cases of abuse, more than 64 percent were sexual.

The sample represented 53 percent of girls enquired, out of 1000 selected from 82 schools in primary and secondary schools.

The Action Aid campaigner said her organization conducted other research which unveiled disparities between south, center and north regions of the country.

According to the enquiry, in Maputo city and province teachers account for 51 percent of the abusers, whilst in center and north side of Mozambique relatives top the black list, between them fathers and schoolmates.

Paula Vera Cruz, from ONP, stated that **“One cannot presume the campaign is against the teacher, but against the abusive teachers. Teachers with high moral and ethical standards want to be part of this assumption, they want to rescue teacher’s role as an educator”**, ensured.

“Other aspect we want to unveil with the campaign is the frailty of a teacher’s career”, pointed Vera Cruz, for whom another part of violence against girls occurs on the way to or back from school.

As so, **“If this campaign is focused in the education, all of us are educators, in the school, in the community, at home, therefore we are all called to set an example and fight it”**, concluded.

ONP has a definite goal for the campaign: reinstate confidence on teacher, in order to ensure parents and community that their children are in safer hands, when they let them go to school.

In other words, the campaigners declared zero tolerance against abusive teachers, but appealed not to stigmatize the teacher.

A girl, especially invited as a voice of the pupils, raised an unnoticed but well known practice within some traditions or regions, which leads to sexual abuse, in the end of the day.

“There are fathers who offer their daughters to traditional healers, as a guarantee for witch work, to be successful in business. That’s an abuse not just of girls human rights, but also sexual, because when the girl is in the healer’s hands she is forced to serve him sexually or whatever”, claimed.

Benilde Nhalivilo firmly took this denounce to stress that the campaign **“is against every practice which assaults the girls right to Education, even if the practices are branded cultural habits or are part of any local tradition”**.

The Marching Day

Let the Girls Learn, Let the Girls Grow

Saturday 19 September 2006, Maputo city literally stopped to let “meninas” (girls) and “mamas” (old ladies) go, stride towards the eradication of Sexual Abuse on Girls In the Education.

Once upon a time, when slavery deprived black people lives, they used to sing the classic “Let My People Go”, crossing many rivers to achieve freedom. Nowadays, in times of an escalating violence and sexual abuse against girls, we shall voice ourselves, united and loudly: “Let The Girls Learn, Let The Girls Grow”.

In that spirit, at the early hours of Saturday 19, campaigners, pupils and ladies, marched for the cause. Gathered in Francisco Manyanga secondary school’s front, their smiles, chants and appeals in banners and yellow t-shirts, rigorously and vigorously expressed “No to Sexual Abuse Against Girls in the Education.”

Before they march on, a group of pupils offered themselves as faces and voices of the campaign. Marizela, a 17 years old student of Chemistry in May 1st Industrial School, blamed some of her schoolmates for seducing teachers by wearing allegedly sexually inviting clothes. She pointed also fingers to some teachers who wink at girls within the school, as an example of sexual harassment.

Her colleague Natércia Ilda, 16 years old, denounced some teachers who in the classroom act like educators, in discipline manners, but outside the school have the opposite attitude towards the girls.

From Tsalala Primary School, 13 years old Esperança Dinis, declared herself aware of sexual abuse but could not know closely a particular case, only by news from the radio.

Michel, a 16 years old boy from Tsalala Secondary School, revealed the case of a girl raped in a classroom by “comrades” – how they call hooligans who terrify them around the school -, out of lesson time.

It is an indication of a clear lack of security delivered by school authorities, ensuring outsiders cannot enter in the school.

Michel condemned vehemently girls who leave home dressed with uniforms, but on the way to school change it to indecent clothes in an effort to attract men attention.

If there is a miseducation from girls, teachers should play their roles as educators, not to condone but to condemn it.

8.45 a.m., hundreds of campaigners started walking on avenues at the heart of Maputo city, stopping the traffic, capturing attention from viewers asking themselves what is happening, to find quickly the answer from the t-shirts, chants and calls.

10.10 a.m., the demonstrators reached Josina Machel Secondary School, where the minister of women and social action, Virgília Matabele, the deputy minister of education and culture, Antónia Xavier, and officials from various organisms awaited them in a platform.

Ana Chando, member of Girls Club in Machava Secondary School, was the first to speech from the platform. She warned her colleagues, **“I reached here, having the privilege to speak in the name of many girls, because I belong to an organized group.”**

“I want to appeal every girls and boys to organize themselves for a better participation in the development of the country”, invited Chando, thereafter declaring **“We girls, want to be free of violence, sexual abuse and violation of our right to education”**.

ONP President, Beatriz Monjane addressed that **“The Campaign shall not be a mere dream, it might come true, and because dream drives life”**, she ordered every one to drive its life to fulfill the dream of education for all.

Noel Chicuecue, from United Nations Education and Science Conference (UNESCO), considered education for all, **“Is a quality education, without no exclusion”**.

As we are celebrating 25 years of teacher’s organization in Mozambique, and 40 years of the teachers universal status, **“The United Nations are willing to support Government and Civil Society in this campaign”**, ensured Chicuecue.

Benilde Nhalivilo, campaign coordinator, showcasing natural ability to mobilize people for causes, invited every one to sing an old revolutionary chant: **“O Povo, Organizado/O Povo, Organizado/O Povo, Organizado/Sempre Vencerá (The People, Organized /Will Always Prevail)”**.

According to the Action Aid Mozambique staff member, **“This campaign is an indicator of our will to participate”** in governments plans to fight poverty, HIV/AIDS and sexual abuse of girls. She called for an attitude to prevent, diminish and condemn this crime.

Nalivilo disclosed the goals of the campaign, and recalled that the same march was taking place in Cabo Delgado, Nampula, Zambezia, Sofala, Manica, Tete and Maputo provinces.

Leader in an old Samora Machel style, Nhalivilo finished her speech calling “**A Luta Continua (The Struggle Continues)!**” followed by every one, joyfully repeating the revolutionary saying.

Dinis Macaule, representing the Movement Education For All (MEPT), rode the Campaign Manifest, which demands national and regional governments to bring the issue of Sexual Abuse Against the Girl in the Education as a public agenda and address it politically, legally and criminally.

A ladies group from the Ministry of Women and Social Action exhibited a song screaming “**Nyandayeyo**” (Help us!) to “Mamana” (Mother) Guebuza, The First Lady, against so-called entrepreneurs who (driving luxury cars) go to schools pick their children.

The higher state official in the gathering, Minister Virgilia Matabele answered with an instant remake of the song “**O Povo Organizado**”, before reinforcing in her discourse government’s commitment to fight sexual abuse, girl exclusion, and guarantee gender equity in education.

Minister Matabele invited to sing, altogether: “**A Família, Organizada/A Educação, Organizada/A Sociedade, Organizada/A Nação, Organizada/Sempre Vencerá (The Family/The Education/The Society/The Nation, Organized/Will Always Prevail).**”

According to official data, 2006 enrollments gross rate of 115 percent in Primary Education, were 16 percent unfavorable to girl. The same data showed, for 2005, a finishing rate of 31 percent from Second Degree Primary Education, 14 percent unfavorable to girl.

Surely, songs, chants, appeals and a manifest will not eradicate sexual abuse in the education, and establish gender equity in access to it. Yet, hopefully are arms to fight those crimes.