

Inter schools gender equality debates



School debates finals at Keveye Girls High School. Musingi Boys High School emerged the winners of the competition.



The Usawa trophy

By Alternative Team

Western Kenya inter schools gender equality debates were held on 24th July 2010, marking a climax of informative gender discussions among 16 schools from Emuhaya, Hamisi, Vihiga, Kakamega and Trans Nzoia. Musingu Boys High School emerged the winners, followed by Vihiga Boys High School, Bunyore Girls High School and Keveye Girls High School, in that order.

The best speaker was Brian Mutila of Vihiga Boys High School, followed by Stephen Ochieng, and Phillip Mutin.

The winning school received a trophy, certificates and assorted supplies of motivation books from East Africa Oxford University Press. The best speaker received a certificate, textbooks and a cash reward of Kshs.5,000.

District preliminaries were held on June and early July in Hamisi, Vihiga, Emuhaya, Kakamega South, and Trans Nzoai Districts. The competitions reached 20 schools, 400 students and 52 teachers with gender equality messages directly. Cumulatively an estimated 5000 students

were reached indirectly through the approach.

While closing the school debates competition, Ms Alice Kirambi, CPDA executive Director urged students to embrace gender equality to achieve sustainable development.

“As an organisation, we are excited working through schools to create a future generation that appreciates roles of both men and women in development. We hope to expand the debates to cover other areas,” said Kirambi.

The teachers and students who participated in the debates expressed optimism that the approach will demystify gender equality and change societal attitudes that are discriminatory. They added that such competitions not only provided avenues for learning and sharing, but also contributed to students’ development in languages.

“Through the competitions, our girls and boys have gained confidence in articulating gender issues. We are happy that both teachers and students now

appreciate the use of gender sensitive language,” said Mr. Rao, teacher, Keveye Girls.

When CPDA began the competition, both teachers and students had minimal information about gender issues. But as the competitions progressed, they got enlightened and were eager to learn more.

The debaters for one had no idea about gender sensitive language. Women were constantly referred to as prostitutes, but after much sensitization it was realized that one could debate effectively without necessarily being abusive to another sex. Students became wary of using discriminatory language.

At the beginning most of the students’ language and grammar was wanting. Teachers used the opportunity to mentor and advice on identified grammatical weaknesses. The result was improved command of language and confidence among the debaters during the finals. Students debating skills and knowledge on gender improved tremendously.

“We are so grateful to CPDA through *Usawa* for supporting such initiative. We are looking forward to great opportunities to improve students’ language and understanding of gender,” said Mr. Kulali, a teacher at Vihiga Boys High School. “Such programmes should be held on annual basis and expanded to cover all parts of Kenya.”

Furthermore, dormant debating clubs in most schools were revived as a result of the gender equality debates. Similarly, debating clubs were established in other schools and there was overwhelming interest shown by the students in these new outfits.

CPDA received funding from the Gender and Governance Programme (GPP) umbrella fund to enhance women’s participation in governance and decision-making processes at national and local levels and actively lobby for women’s issues.

CPDA works through schools to raise awareness on gender equality and governance and women participation in decision making processes. School debates help to demystify skewed societal and cultural perceptions on gender and women empowerment. They also serve as a platform for networking and learning among different schools in the region.



Best Speaker, Brian Mutila, Vihiga Boys



Musingu Boys High School, won the competitions

Student speak: participating in gender equality debates

By Moraa Mellen, Keveye Girls High School

A larger part of a student’s life revolves around academic work. Often, there is little time spent in co-curriculum activities that help to mould an all round individual. However, I got a chance to break the monotony of academic work and participate in gender equality debates.

CPDA brought forth such a chance through organizing inter-schools gender equality debates and competitions. I took part in the competitions and emerged among the best debaters. I have learnt to pay attention to leadership, gender equality and women empowerment.

Since time immemorial, society always embraced gender stereotypes due to ignorance and patriarchal nature of society. The role of men and boys has always been directed towards achieving leadership while women perform chores that are discriminatory and shy from taking on leadership. However, this is changing greatly. Non governmental organizations and institutions have come out to emancipate women.

Questions like “Why should men only be leaders? why can’t a girl inherit her father’s property?” will arise no more. The small innocent boy will never wonder why he is told never to shed tears simply because is a man. The young girl in Wajir and Turkana will never wonder why she seldom goes to school like her twin brother. Boys and girls will have equal chances to be their parent’s heirs.

The girls from Kuria, Kisii, Pokot, Samburu and Maasai will never suffer the ogre of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). This dream will come true if all Kenyans learn to appreciate the work of human rights organizations and capitalize on opportunities provided by the new constitution that has laid a clear framework for gender equality.

At last I can see light at the end of the tunnel. I have great hope in our country. I have a dream of peace, of an equitable and just society. This has just just began. It will never be a bed of roses but always an uphill climb to reach the desired destination. I see such a dream coming true through the noble interventions of CPDA.

Congratulations for taking the bull by its horns. As you soldier on, may you find prosperity and victory in attaining you goals. I pray for CPDA to continue empowering communities.