CASE STUDY:

Teachers’ Action for Girls

By Alex Davidson
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KEY FINDINGS:

• Teachers’ Action for Girls (TAG) demonstrates success motivating teachers and school heads to transform schools in support of the girl-child.

• Teacher organizations are important partners in improving girls’ safety and success at school, because of their direct connection with teachers and school heads.

• Gender equality in-service training, using teacher-to-teacher professional development, strengthens the teachers’ agency, or the ability to make choices and act upon them, which is necessary to sustain whole-school change and parental and community involvement.

• TAG creates a foundation for other interventions; complementary organizations maximize effectiveness working in schools with a demonstrated commitment to strong gender equality programs.

• The intervention requires a more focused, results-based approach and stronger data gathering mechanisms.

Introduction

Girls in Ugandan schools are frequently subjected to gender-based violence and defilement, which Ugandan law defines as the act of having sex with a girl under the age of 18. A recent study indicates that almost 78 percent of children in primary school report having experienced sexual abuse at school, with almost 6 percent of children having been subjected to defilement. The number experiencing abuse jumps to 83 percent for girls in secondary school. In many cases this abuse is reported to have been perpetrated by teachers (UNICEF 2013). Girls’ primary school completion rates lag behind boys. Girls’ schooling, especially in rural Uganda, is beset with problems including lack of sanitation facilities, gender bias and stereotypes, teachers’ attitudes, low expectations of girls’ intellectual abilities, and others (Ezati 2011).

When the Uganda National Teachers’ Union (UNATU) emerged in 2003, it wished to establish itself not only as a union protecting and advancing its members,
but also as a professional organization contributing to and strengthening the educational fabric of the country. Teopista Birungi, now Deputy Director of Education, Kampala, was UNATU’s first General Secretary.

She recalls much talk in Uganda about the fact that women were not fairly represented in government, and that more women should be in positions of power. “UNATU heard this call,” she says, “but realized that those raising the issue were looking not at the present, but at the end of the tunnel.” As teachers with direct experience in schools, UNATU leadership understood that much would need to change before a significant number of girls could emerge “at the end of the tunnel” and assume positions of power.

“We brought together those that were already working in this area,” says UNATU Chairperson Margaret Rwabushauh, “and asked them to describe what they have done and what they are doing [to advance girls’ education], and how we could participate and complement this. The Minister of Education and political participants were invited to the first workshop. This was very effective. It brought the government and the union together.” This meeting of stakeholders involved civil society, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the police, teachers’ colleges, and government, and was the genesis of Teachers’ Action for Girls (TAG).

The following provides a brief description of TAG based on the findings of a United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative (UNGEI) Good Practices Study. It describes the program’s approach, evolution over time, and impact. Lessons learned are discussed, along with how these lessons are being incorporated into future plans.

**Intervention**

The overall purpose of the TAG program is “to contribute toward the education of the girl-child by empowering teachers with knowledge, skills, and values to become lead actors in creating gender responsive school environments.” When the program was designed in 2003, it went far beyond discussing relations between boys and girls, which was the norm at that time. It introduced a girl-focused approach designed specifically to advance girls’ education and to challenge the impediments to girls’ success at school.

Because UNATU represents teachers, the perspective inherent in TAG is a teacher’s perspective. It asserts that teachers have agency and as such are potential agents of change at the very centre of the learning process, which occurs in the pedagogical relationship between the child and the teacher. The TAG project reflects this assumption in its name: “Teachers’ Action for Girls.” The project focuses on teachers inspiring and empowering other teachers to take action on behalf of the girl-child.

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1 Empowerment in this document refers to providing or receiving the necessary motivation, understanding, knowledge, and skills to effect change that addresses school-related gender-based violence and improves girls’ learning conditions at school.
As a program, TAG has evolved to meet changing societal realities and has benefitted from lessons learned. At the beginning, the in-service training at the centre of the program prioritized breadth, in order to raise awareness throughout the country by reaching as many teachers in as many districts as possible. In 2016, the in-service training is more focused, emphasizing whole-school change and community involvement, and is designed to provide the skills and resources necessary for teachers and school heads to bring about change in their schools. It links the social justice of gender equality with the professional obligation teachers have to provide the best education possible for all pupils. It also draws on UNATU’s teacher code of conduct, which includes an obligation to protect and advocate for members, particularly women teachers.

The professional learning comes primarily in the form of an intensive five-day workshop for teachers by teachers. The inclusion of those outside the teaching profession (government, police, students, relevant civil society agencies, and others) is an important part of the professional development approach and creates the links, relationships, and understanding essential for successful program implementation. However, because the facilitation is undertaken by teacher leaders through their union, the workshop is seen by participants as a service to the profession rather than something imposed from outside. TAG facilitators have found that a teacher-led program is most effective since teachers tend to have more confidence in the potential effectiveness of a new practice when the facilitators demonstrate a practical understanding of what they as teachers face on a daily basis.

Through the TAG approach, girls’ safety and equal opportunity at school is treated as a teacher’s professional responsibility and the TAG workshop provides teachers with important understanding, skills, and resources that not only improve girls’ experiences at school, but also teachers’ efficacy and success in the classroom.

It is important to note that the role of a teachers’ union is to provide services to members, including professional services. TAG focuses on strengthening teachers’ understanding of girls’ experiences at school and building the professional dedication and will to act on this understanding. This is critical to bringing about changes in teaching practices and in the treatment of girls in school. It also paves the way for acceptance and sustainability of other changes and interventions introduced by the government and NGOs on behalf of the girl-child. A core part of the five-day TAG workshop is the TAG manual which contains 8 modules and numerous related resources and activities. It serves both as a guide for workshop facilitators and as a reference for participants when they return to their schools. One participant stated she would like to see the manual translated into local languages and distributed not only to schools, but also to communities “because TAG applies to communities as well and many community members are not literate in English.”

From 2003 to 2009, TAG workshops were offered in districts throughout the country. As well as using TAG facilitators, these workshops typically included the following as presenters:

- A female student
- A local police representative from the Child and Family Protection Unit

And were attended by the following participants:

- Representatives of the school management committee from each school
- Representatives of the board of governors from each school
- Teachers and school heads from district schools
- District education officers

In 2009 the TAG program went through an extensive review, leading to the revision of the TAG manual. Baseline data was also gathered from the participating schools in
In anticipation of further monitoring of the program. Following the review, UNATU revised its approach to TAG to focus exclusively on schools in the Gulu and Amuru districts in order to bring about whole school change. Each of these schools sent the school head, as well as the senior female and male teachers, to attend the TAG workshop. Centre coordinating teachers (CCTs) assigned to participating schools from local teacher colleges also participated and in some cases co-facilitated sessions.

Unfortunately, in 2010 changes in Canada undercut support from the Canadian Teachers’ Federation and due to the global financial crisis, support from Irish Aid also ended. This left participating schools largely on their own with little or no follow-up, and has affected data gathering. However, funds are beginning to return and future plans, which are further discussed below, link TAG with other UNATU PD services for teachers and to a community mobilization program for schools.

Impact

**TAG before 2010:** TAG workshops prior to 2010 were offered in districts throughout the country and drew upon teachers and schools from various parts of the district in which the workshop was held. As well as providing skills and knowledge to participants, they served to raise awareness generally. This was partially accomplished by marches and rallies held at the end of the workshops by participants. For instance, during this time the current General Secretary of UNATU was a school head. Following the workshop, he led his teaching staff in a march with others through the streets in support of girls’ education. These marches and rallies attracted press coverage, further raising awareness of the issues surrounding girls’ education in Uganda.

While awareness raising was an important part of the early TAG program, it also had a direct effect on schools and on the lives of girl pupils, as illustrated by the following stories from St. Joseph Mixed Primary and King’s College.

**TAG in Northern Uganda (After 2010):** Since 2010, girls in Uganda’s Gulu and Amuru districts have benefited from TAG in a variety of ways, including increased safety and a more positive experience of schooling. Because of TAG, girls report they enjoy being at school and girls’ enrolment has increased. Claims of increased enrolment and other positive benefits have been substantiated at the sub-county level. In Pabo sub-county for instance, the county chief attributes increased girls’

### Saint Joseph Mixed Primary, Naggarama Parish, Makano District

Josephine Nabuyungo is head teacher at Saint Joseph Mixed Primary. Accompanied by the school’s senior female and male teachers, she attended and co-facilitated one of the first TAG workshops.

Upon returning to their school, the workshop participants introduced classroom teachers to topics from the TAG manual and organized children into “families” of students divided by gender. Among other topics from the manual, they discussed such things as changes in the body and how they are managed, such as menstruation and puberty.

The children were encouraged to bring the information learned at school to the home so that their parents were aware and could take part through such things as providing local materials for sanitary cloths and generally supporting their children’s gender activities at the school. The school found that including parents increased their acceptance and understanding of the program, which led to active support.

Changing rooms for girls at school were built through the support of the community. Parents and the community worked with the school in teaching girls to prevent early pregnancy. According to Josephine, promotion of early marriage was reduced at home and in the community.

In one dramatic case a girl was raped and, because of what she had learned, went directly to her parents without removing the signs of the assault. The parents, who had also learned from the school TAG program, took her to a hospital and immediately involved the police. The violator, who was arrested, attempted to provide money to the parents so that he would not be prosecuted, but they refused.

TAG was the first intervention at the school on behalf of girls, and the results began to be noticed. The school attracted UNICEF support and separate latrines for boys and girls were built in different parts of the school compound. Wash basins and soap were provided for girls’ changing rooms and washrooms.

General parent meetings took place which focused on the needs of the school, particularly with regard to facilities and safety for girls. These expanded and became a form of parent and community mobilization in support of various school needs.
enrolment in schools to TAG training that took place in Amuru District in 2013:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2015</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pabo Okuture</td>
<td>189 girls</td>
<td>220 girls</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pabo Ogwera</td>
<td>108 girls</td>
<td>144 girls</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pabo Labala</td>
<td>321 girls</td>
<td>355 girls</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pabo Agole</td>
<td>704 girls</td>
<td>722 girls</td>
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Following the TAG training, the sub-county noticed changes in the reports they received from head teachers, who began identifying challenges affecting girls. The sub-county is now working to respond to the needs these schools are articulating. For instance, reports indicated that girls were dropping out because of a lack of sanitary supplies, so the sub-county now includes the provision of sanitary pads to all schools in their planning budget. Also, in 2015 the sub-county constructed a block of high standard latrines in one of the schools and in another school 500,000 shillings have been set aside for girl-child health care for one year. The sub-county chief also reports that increased retention, achievement, and completion rates are noted in some of the school and sub-county records.

It must also be noted that since the TAG program was introduced in Gulu and Amuru, a number of other interventions have come to the same schools. While this makes attribution of some results difficult, it is also an indication that TAG training creates a school climate and professional understanding that is conducive to other interventions that bring improved resources and infrastructure for girl-friendly schools.

### Challenges

The challenges facing TAG can be grouped as internal challenges that come from within UNATU or within the TAG program itself and external challenges that come from other people or groups, or from social and cultural realities.

**King’s College, Budo**

In 2004, a female student studying at King’s College, Budo, a rather prestigious secondary school, was asked to provide the pupils’ perspective in a TAG workshop. She was one of nine girls in a class of 49 at the school. Regarding the workshop, she says, “I came as an informer and left as a resource person.” The TAG workshop showed her that there were things she could do that would improve girls’ experiences in school, and she said that the greatest single thing she left with was a sense of empowerment that changed her expectations of teachers.

Armed with the TAG manual and other resources from the workshop, she was determined to be an agent of change. “Before the TAG workshop, I did not know how to approach teachers. None of the girls did. But the project empowered me and I gathered some friends together and we were able to go to teachers and talk about problems and ask for advice.”

This changed the way the teachers interacted with the girls and the school community. It started out with the lower grades and then moved up. One early change was the introduction of a “Talking Compound,” which involved posting signs throughout the school yard with supportive messages encouraging girls in school. These messages “reached all that came to the school and made things friendly and welcoming, and the messages came from the TAG manual.”

A deputy principal was assigned to address issues around girls and harassment. A schedule was arranged for girls from particular classes to go and meet with her on particular days. Boys became aware of this arrangement and also wanted to be able to have talks with teachers. Once a term, teachers meet with boys and girls together.

The school used the TAG training manual to help determine what they would do. The activities they undertook also attracted the attention of NGOs, who worked with the school to provide hygiene facilities for girls.
Okum’s Market

At a TAG Training session held in 2013, the timing of a large market and auction was thoroughly discussed. The market took place on Monday and Tuesday once a month very near Pagah Primary School, Amuru Municipality. The market was a magnet for students and an opportunity for boys and men to take advantage of school girls. It also caused a large drop in the school attendance rates for two days every month.

As a result of the issue being raised during the training session, the head teacher, Peter Okum, looked further into the matter. He approached the organizers and proposed that the days of the market be changed to a weekend. This met with strong resistance, but with Okum’s tenacious and very public insistence, the market days were finally changed.

The result was more than a reduction in the school absenteeism. Parents, who were now very aware of the reasons for the change, began to accompany their daughters to the market on the weekend, thus reducing the number of incidents of abuse or defilement. The market’s name was also changed to Okum’s Market, to honour the wisdom and courage of the head teacher.

Internal Challenges:

**Ensuring TAG has priority in union planning:** TAG is the undertaking of a teachers’ union. While this brings more advantages than disadvantages, UNATU must include the TAG program within a wide range of other member services and must respond to emergent social and government issues concerning teachers as they arise. UNATU’s financial and human resource capacity must be shared with other needs that are equally compelling.

**Defining the Union’s role in development work:** The mandate of teachers’ unions is to provide services to teachers and support quality, publicly-funded education for all. TAG, as a program of UNATU, has no mandate to build infrastructure such as changing rooms or latrines, or to provide material resources. It is necessary therefore to determine and implement the mechanisms that will allow TAG and UNATU to work easily in harmonization with the government, NGOs, and other civil society organizations whose mandate it is to provide infrastructure and resources.

**Building in flexibility to sustain temporary loss of funds:** TAG structure needs to change in order to be flexible in scope. In 2010, TAG improvements were undercut by a severe loss of external funding brought on by the global recession and related factors. The TAG structure was not flexible enough to scale down accordingly and much of the momentum built by the 2009 review was lost.

**Strengthening monitoring and evaluation and sustainability:** Although there is some compelling evidence of TAG’s success, there are insufficient monitoring and evaluation structures in place. Also, more consistent follow-up and support to teachers and school heads after training is necessary to ensure sustained change.

Girls’ comfort, enjoyment and participation at school

A Gulu girl from Kasubi who is attending Central Primary in P7 reported, “Before TAG, girls were made to feel ashamed of menstruation, and the boys would ridicule them when they knew they were having their period. Girls felt alone and were afraid to talk to teachers about their bodies.” This has changed and “we now go willingly to meetings with counsellors to solve our problems.” She also reported that girls used to be ashamed and would drop out, but now they do not.

She also reported that after the school became involved with TAG, the teachers spoke with the boys. There were girl meetings where female teachers spoke with girls, and boy meetings where male teachers spoke with boys. The boys learned about menstruation and were also taught not to abuse girls. This resulted in much less ridicule, and made a big difference in many ways. In fact, the boys now help the girls make sanitary towels from local materials. She also pointed out that writing inappropriate “love letters” among girls and boys has been reduced. In fact, she says, the separate meetings have helped both girls and boys to do better and to complete P7. “TAG taught girls and boys that if you put education above all else, things will work out.”

Due to the changes, girls are now allowed to participate and are accepted by the boys in many more activities such as debates, teams, and drama.
External Challenges

Harmonizing work with others: The TAG program provides “soft” resources and plays an important role in preparing and motivating teachers, schools, and communities, but relies on others for the “hard” resources, such as changing rooms and bore holes. This creates a challenge for UNATU to bring key actors together in order to harmonize and complement each other’s work.

Social and community challenges:
- Politicians who see people gathered to meet on the topic of girls’ safety and schooling take advantage of the situation for political purposes or for campaigning, usurping the meeting.
- Businessmen who use money to take advantage of girls, especially if there is poverty.
- Soldiers stationed near schools who abuse their power and authority to defile girls and are reluctant to defer to teachers or school heads.

Teaching conditions:
- Lack of female teachers, especially in under-endowed rural schools, is a challenge. Women are more vulnerable there, may not be able to find accommodation, and often assume there are more and better prospective husbands in larger centres.
- Teachers transferring out of a school can mean a loss of expertise that undermines the sustainability of efforts to improve girls’ education.

Lessons learned

The overarching lesson learned through the UNGEI research and reflection is that TAG requires a clearer long-term plan that includes measurable goals and objectives related to activities that can be supported and monitored, and outcomes that can be measured. This includes:

- Ensuring sustainable ongoing support:
  - All CCTs in the catchment area where TAG is working should be trained;
  - CCTs who attend the training should be used more effectively as support for those who are not trained. In addition to having CCTs attend the training, ongoing communication between the district CCTs and the UNATU Regional Directors is required to develop and implement plans for ongoing support;
  - Inclusion of TAG in the CCT continuous PD program would be useful in order to train all teachers.

- Building in monitoring and evaluation from the outset by:
  - Gathering baseline data for any new school and community that is included in the project;
  - Gathering additional data to measure success and make adjustments as needed in the implementation of the project.

- Focusing on whole-school change in order to enhance acceptance and support of changes within the school and to ensure sustainability.
- Including TAG as part of a suite of UNATU services provided to clusters of schools. This should include professional development for literacy and numeracy, and a community mobilization program.
- Continuing the focus on creating a professional environment in schools conducive to addressing the needs of the girl-child and expanding regular meetings with others working in this area to harmonize efforts and share perspectives so that contributions are complementary.
To this end, CTF and UNATU engaged in a week of planning in October 2015 and drafted a long-term plan supported by both organizations. The plan, which is now in the early stages of implementation, includes activities and strategies to meet the challenges described above in the following ways:

### Acknowledgement

We would like to acknowledge the research undertaken by Dr. Jane A. Mulemwa in the development of the case study and wish to thank so many at the Uganda National Teachers’ Union for their tireless and creative energy in establishing and implementing the TAG project.

### Challenges

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<tr>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>TAG going forward</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ensuring TAG is a priority in union planning</td>
<td>Embedding TAG in an overall UNATU project that brings together a variety of professional services, including professional development in-services and community mobilization.</td>
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<td>Building in flexibility to sustain temporary loss of funds</td>
<td>The project will work with selected clusters of schools in two regions for two years before moving to another two of UNATU’s ten regions, and continue for at least 5 cycles. Should there be a sudden reduction of funds or capacity, the number of schools in a cluster could be reduced or work could be suspended with little likelihood of impacting previous work done or of jeopardizing the long-term future of the project.</td>
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<td>Defining the union’s role in development work</td>
<td>Clusters of project schools and communities will be determined in consultation with the Ministry of Education, district education offices, and regional teacher colleges, and the role of the union will be clearly described.</td>
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<td>Harmonizing work with others</td>
<td>As each cluster is chosen, a stakeholders’ meeting for NGOs and others active in the districts will be held and hosted by UNATU. Partner forums that bring the school and community together with organizations and agencies that provide infrastructure and material support are planned for schoolclusters.</td>
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<td>Ensuring sustainability</td>
<td>Schools will receive on-going scheduled follow-up from the CCTs assigned to them. The CCTs will also serve as co-tutors in the professional development workshop, and participate fully in both the TAG in-service and community mobilization component. Further follow-up and support will come from the UNATU regional coordinator and the district education officer. School inspectors will be part of the program and will attend both the professional development and TAG workshops.</td>
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<td>Social and community challenges</td>
<td>Involving various sectors of local society in the TAG in-service program, either as resource persons or as participants, is planned. This will include businessmen, the police, and local military leaders. TAG will also work with local politicians, particularly to bring them together with community leaders who have been mobilized in support of the girl child.</td>
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<td>Teaching conditions</td>
<td>Both the lack of women teachers in rural schools and transfers out of project schools are issues related to teacher welfare. As part of its ongoing work, UNATU advocates for better working and teaching conditions and fair treatment regarding transfers. Work with district education officers may also help in these issues.</td>
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### References
