

Global Action Week 2011

Women and Girls' Education

We know that girls and women face particular obstacles that hinder them from getting an education. They are vulnerable to violence on the way to school and in and around schools, early pregnancy, early marriage, poor health, HIV infection and gendered discrimination in the wider community and at schools.

Below is a story written to illustrate just one of the few challenges many woman and girls face when trying to get a quality education. It was written by *Fhulufhelo Jessica Mamelasigidi*, a South African grade 10 student.

"A day in the life of a young South African girl is not an easy task at all!

I wake up to a new day- with what I hope and aspire to accomplish that day. I get out of bed and wake up my younger brothers and sisters and try to motivate them for the day ahead. Being the eldest girl in my family, it is my duty to prepare a healthy breakfast for all and make lunch for school for everybody. (Playing the role of caregiver). I walk my younger brother and sister to crèche and only after that, when I am finally on my way to school, can I play the role of Jessica, "The Learner".

I sit in my seat striving to receive the education my parents were deprived of, knowing I am a girl and it is against my tradition for a female to attend school and be educated. However I sit in class holding my future in my heart, trying to overcome society and the prejudice that still exists against a young girl being educated. I try to show that I as a young South African woman am just as worthy to an education as the boy sitting next to me. My school is a good source of encouragement especially when it comes to its female learners.

I go home to play the role of 'sis' Jessica, in the late afternoon. I clean the house, fetch my younger brother and sister from crèche and make sure I have started dinner before my mother gets home. I am always wanting to lash out at her and express what I really feel, wanting to tell her: "NO I do not want to become an employee at this age!"- Why doesn't she just leave me to be educated and develop into the empowered women I want to be?

Tired, energy-drained and fatigued, I go to bed and pray to thy Father in Heaven. I get into bed and close my eyes, I listen to the sound of drums beating in the distance and to the ancestors singing "Mosadi wa nnete o aga lelapa" (a real woman should create a family) and slowly, slowly I drift into a deep sleep...."

That essay was part of a UNICEF-sponsored Voice of Youth writing competition on gender, lifeskills and HIV and AIDS and highlights the plight of many girls in the developing world who face challenges in completing their education:

http://www.unicef.org/southafrica/SAF_resources_gembrief.pdf