

NAMIBIA

Reducing the Drop-Out Rate: A Pilot Study in Eputuko Combined School in Ohangwena Region

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1. Introduction

After team Namibia, batch 17 was introduced to Child Rights in Sweden during phase 1 of the International Training Programme Child Rights, Classroom and School management, Team Namibia chose to carry out a pilot study in one of their remote schools in Ohangwena Region with a high problem in drop- out rate as per statistics and embarked upon a project on it.

2. Frame of Reference

Namibia ratified the Child Rights Convention in 1990, immediately after it was passed by the UN in 1989. Currently the content of the CRC is not well known. Article 28 (1) (e) of the CRC states that “State Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular: Take measures to encourage regular attendance at school and the reduction of the drop-out rates.

The government of the Republic of Namibia passed the Education Act that emphasised the regular attendance of the children in schools. The state further came up with the social grant that is given to orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs) as well as the children whose parents are pensioners. This grant is used to pay for the school fees and uniforms. The Ministry of Education came up with the pregnancy policy that encourages learners who became pregnant to attend school until close to delivery and also to return to school after delivery as long as there is a proof that the baby is being taken care of. The Ministry also came up with a school feeding programme whereby learners in primary school learners of some schools with a high number of OVCs and marginalised learners are attending: still to encourage learners' attendance. The beginning of 2013 academic year marked the introduction of free universal primary education, whereby the government took over the responsibility of the payment of the school development fund for all learners from pre-primary to grade 7 in all state schools

In Namibia, in general and in Ohangwena Region in particular, drop-out rates are very high despite the government's efforts to reduce it. In the first trimester of 2012 alone 746 learners dropped from Ohangwena Region schools; 327 gave up 100 dropped due to pregnancies and 44 for unknown reasons. Being the first Namibian Change Agents team from Ohangwena we were moved by these trends of drop-out rates hence our decision to carry out a project in drop-out rates. A school with the highest drop-out rate was identified and our pilot study will be based on such a school. This school has 5 % of its learners having dropped in the first trimester of 2012.

3. Purpose

The overall purpose of the project is to create awareness of the Child Rights Convention (CRC) and how it relates to drop-outs among stakeholders and target groups. We will further solicit suggestions for possible remedies from parents, teachers and learners. We expect the participants by the end of the project to have a clear understanding of the CRC, the effect of learners' drop-outs to themselves as well as to the development of the country.

The aim of the project is to investigate and analyse the causes of the drop-out among learners in the selected school, Eputuko Combined School. Our focus will be to bring down the drop-out rate in the selected school by 50 % minimum. We will mainly focus to the two causes that rob us the majority of our learners, i.e. tired of failing and pregnancy. We are also curious about the unspecified reasons for pregnancy which

represents 6.3 % of all drop-outs. We think that some of these drop-outs might just not have been well followed up and might be either of the main causes also.

Our main targets groups of this project are the teachers, learners and parents of Eputuko Combined School in Ovamashaka dominated community in Ohangwena Region.

However, Inspectors of Education are important in passing this knowledge to the other schools in their respective circuits therefore the project will also target them. Planning and Development (PAD) Section will also be included as a stakeholder and we will send our final project report to them. Regional Councillors (Politicians), traditional leaders, Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, Ministry of Youth as well as the Women and Child Protection Unit in the Namibian Police Force will be part of us during the time of carrying out this project.



4. Methodology (Activities)

Team Namibia embarked upon sensitization activities during December, January as well as the first week of February 2013. First of all the team gave feedback to the Deputy Director of Education in the region in a form of a written report dated 17 December 2012. In such a report the team enlightened the Deputy Director about the training programme in Sweden that consists of five phases and the activities that was carried out or is to be carried out during these phases. The Deputy Director vowed to render his unwavering support to the project.



After briefing the deputy director the team requested him (deputy director) to invite stakeholders on their behalf. The stakeholders identified were Inspectors of Education, Regional Councillors, Representatives of the Ministries of Gender and Child Welfare and Youth, Representatives from the Women and Children Protection Unit, Namibian Red Cross and local Church Leaders. At the same time the team informed the Inspector of Education under which the selected school falls, about the envisaged project. In his turn, the Inspector further communicated the project to the school as well the visiting dates of the team to the school.

*The team visited the school on the 17th January 2013. On this day the team introduced themselves and the project to the principal, teachers, learners and parents. Points for discussions included inter alia the following:

- a) Project rationale
- b) Project plan
- c) Brief discussion of the CRC with particular reference to Article 28
- d) Roles of targets and stakeholders
- e) Drop-out rates in Namibian schools and its relation to CRC – Article 28 thereof
- f) Causes of drop-out

In general, the attendance of the school community members was really promising.



*On the 1st February 2013, CRC was introduced to the Inspectors of Education during their monthly briefing. Emphasis was put on the CRC, the 3 Ps and the roles of Inspectors in the realization of the Child Rights Convention in their schools. Six of the 9 Inspectors, which represent 67%, attended the sensitization session.



*The Inspectors session was followed by other stakeholders on February 5, 2013. This session was meant for Councillors, Representatives of Ministries of Gender and Youths, the Red Cross, Churches representatives in the locality and the Women and Children Protection representatives. Red Cross and Protection Unit representatives failed to send representatives and only 4 of the 11 Regional councillors made it to the sensitization session.

*The following activity was a workshop for parents, teachers and learners. The team divided the target group in three groups of parents, teachers and learners. Team members allocated themselves to groups; Likius to parents, Paulus to teachers and Olivia to Learners. The sessions took place simultaneously. Parents did not attend the workshop well compared to their attendance during the sensitization session.

Workshop sessions took place more in the form of lectures. Parents were however keen to pose questions as well as to air their views regarding the dropout of learners.

The mentor's visit also increased the trust in the stakeholder for the team to take the project ahead. There was the distribution of the information regarding the CRC and the dropout of learners.

The project questionnaire was distributed amongst the learners, parents and teachers, and then the interview was also done thereafter.

5. Results

Awareness of the drop-out problem at Eputuko Combined School

All those that were interviewed, parents, teachers and learners indicated that they knew one or more learners who dropped out from Eputuko Combined School. From interviews it came to light that drop-out was prevalent in grades 3 through 9 and the age of drop-outs ranges between 10 and 20 years.

Causes of drop-out as suggested by respondents

All respondents have suggested the following as main causes of drop-out at school:

- Poverty
- Pregnancy
- Corporal punishment
- Indiscipline
- Lack of motivation
- High teacher turn over
- Long distances

Both parents and learners said that the *unhealthy teacher-learner relationship* at school could also be a contributing factor to dropout of learners.

Parents on the other hand added *peer pressure and alcohol abuse* as some of the causes.

Teachers also cited *relocation of parents and tired of failing* as other causes of dropout.

Learners cited *traditional marriage, bullying among learners, cattle post and overage* as causes of dropout as well.

Both teachers and learners indicated illness as one cause of dropout.

Problem faced as a result of drop-outs

The interview revealed that as a result of dropout the following problems are experienced in the school and community:

- Overcrowding as a result of readmission of learners who dropped out.
- Bad influence – learners who remain in school see those who have left the school well off and choose to drop out as well.
- Loss of talented and disciplined learners.
- Tension between parents and teachers; parents and children (learners) as well as teachers and parents.
- Bullying – teachers bullying learners; learners bullying one another, etc.
- Alcohol abuse.

Suggested solutions to the dropout at school

Parents

The parents suggested the following as possible solutions to the problem:

- Stringent actions to teachers who use corporal punishment as a means of disciplining learners.
- Establishment of relaxed school climate.
- Provision of teachers' accommodation to ensure teacher retention.
- Regular visit by outside officials.
- More education of child rights to all stakeholders is urgently necessary.

Teachers

- The school to enforce the code of conduct on corporal punishment
- Creation of sound and healthy teacher-parent relationship
- School to follow-up on drop-outs (school authority)
- More emphasis to life skills teaching

Learners

- Equal and respectful treatment of learners by teachers
- Encouraging learners to work hard at school and to stress the importance of schooling
- Peer support both morally and academically
- Clinic establishment in the vicinity
- Boarding provision to cut long distances
- Increased awareness of pregnancy policy and full implementation
- Establishment of sound and relaxed school atmosphere which promotes regular communication between school community members.

Motivational Strategies

When asked to suggest ways to motivate learners to want to stay at school till they finished, the respondents suggested the following:

Parents

- Regular motivational talk by both insiders and outsiders of the school
- Regular visit by regional officials to render support when needed
- Reward to performing staff members.

Teachers

- Talking to learners with emphasis on learners' potentials and peer pressure
- Awarding regular attendance of both staff members and learners

Learners

- Motivational talk by both outsiders and themselves (learners)
- School to adopt open door policy and clear ways to register grievances

- Inclusion of learners in decision making on issues pertaining to them
- Recognition and awarding good work by learners
- Provision of safe and inviting school environment (clean water, accommodation, power, library)
- Peer coaching

Support needed by learners from different stakeholders

During interview and through questionnaires the three groups indicated that they need support from other stakeholders in order to bring down or, alternatively, eliminate dropout at Eputuko CS. They indicated to be in need of the following support. We will focus to the learners as we regard them as the main target group of our project.

- Learners expect humane treatment, respect and acceptance from parents and teachers as well as fellow learners.
- The demand to be accorded chance to take part in decision making platforms where issues pertaining to their well-being are discussed.
- They expect teachers to act in loco parentis.
- They demand regular communication with both teachers and parents.
- They need protection against inhumane treatment, bullying and assault.
- They expect parents to make provision of their basic needs. (food, clothes, love, care, etc.)
- They expect to be taught life skills by teachers.
- They need the school head to enforce laws that prohibit the use of corporal punishment as a disciplinary measure.
- Learners expect to be counseled.

6. Discussion and Reflection

We team Namibia believes that our results are relevant and we surely hit the nail on the head. The topic of CRC might be abundant in the media but is “unknown” to the majority. With the passage of time our stake holders will have a clear understanding of the concept and link it to the threatening dropout phenomenon of learners in Namibian schools. At this stage of collecting data both parents, teachers and learners have indicated awareness about the drop out at Eputuko Combined School. Both parents, teachers and learners took time, were willing and provided the

team with more or less similar reasons on the actual causes of drop out at Eputuko Combined School. The Headman, parents, the principal, teachers and the learners have grasped and have shown an understanding of the link between Child Rights and the drop out. Moreover parents, teachers and learners have provided the team with some doable/workable solutions, motivational strategies to motivate learners and constructive supports needed in order to reduce drop-out rate which is likely to transform the situation at Eputuko CS into a child friendly school/ environment if these solutions, motivational strategies are implemented effectively and efficiently. From the responses of the target groups it also became clear to the change agents that regular dialogue between target groups is needed. The drop - out rate has also reduced at the school. The team presumes that the project has also changed the mindset of the learners because the results/performance of the school has improved.

Challenges

A challenge of 'blame shifting' is one of the cumbersome hurdles the Namibian Team has to find ways to overcome. In our briefings, a tendency was: Parent blaming teacher/child/state (laws); teachers blaming parent/child/government; learners blaming teacher/parent; etc. This blame shifting is tantamount to blocking finding a common solution to the problem.

At this stage of data collection, there were still some of the responses which shows the lack of understanding of other stakeholders roles by the target groups, as supports (responses) needed by the target groups from other stakeholders, to a certain extent were not in line with Child Right Convention.

Time constraint was one of the challenge when the team was planning and arranging to meet the target groups for data collection, to meet for data analysis, discuss the way forward and to finalize the final report.

7. Way Forward

At this phase the team have established the ground for improving/reducing drop - out rate at the school. The team has sensitised both stakeholders in the region which might result in institutionalising child right approaches at homes, at school focusing on learning and teaching approaches.

There will also be a continued need to approach the Ministry of Education and Policy Makers to effectively implement this Chapter of Child Rights as per The Namibian Constitution.

The team will continue schedules for conducting meetings and interviews with the target groups in order to get feedback whether a child friendly environment is being established at the school.

8. List of References

Education Act; (Act 16 of 2001), of the Republic of Namibia

Education Sector policy on Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy: Summary and Guidelines (2010).

Manual for school feeding programme in Namibia

Programme Guide – Child Rights, Classroom and School Management – Lund University Commissioned Education (2012).

The Conventions on the Rights of the Child (1989).

The Constitution of the Republic of Namibia (1990).

Contact Information

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Appendix A

Project Plan

OUTCOME 1	Indicator/ Monitoring	Time
Participants in this project understand the connection between CRC and the causes of dropping out.	Interview and questionnaires	
1.1 OUTPUT	Indicator/ Monitoring	Time
School with the highest drop-out rates in the region identified	statistics	
1.1.a Activity		
Collecting statistical data from Planning and Development (PAD) Section and securing permission from the Regional authorities to visit the school.		November 2012
1.1.b Activity		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeing the IoE and present the pilot study • Introducing the change agents and the project of change to the school authority and agree of the number of target group member. 		December 2012

1.2 OUTPUT	Indicator/ Monitoring	Time
<p>The teachers, learners and parents in the xxx school are aware of the connection between CRC and drop-out rates due to reasons such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners were tired of failing (gave up, laziness/lack of interest) • Pregnancy • Unspecified 	80 % participation	
1.2.a Activity		
Meeting target group to introduce the pilot study as well as to sensitize them about CRC.	<p>Happy faces</p> <p>Participants ask lots of questions</p> <p>Showing interest</p> <p>Demand for material</p>	January 2013
1.2.b Activity		
Workshops about the connection between CRC and drop-out causes. The intention is to workshop parents, teachers and learners in different venues at the same time.		February 2013
1.2.c Activity		
Collecting data about the causes through interviews and questionnaires		March 2013

OUTCOME 2	Indicator/ Monitoring	Time
The parents, teachers and learners suggest possible remedies that include CRC.		
2.1 OUTPUT	Indicator/ Monitoring	Time
The target groups understand and analyze what is the hidden agenda behind these three causes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners were tired of failing (gave up, laziness/lack of interest) • Pregnancy • Unspecified 		
2.1.a Activity		
Meet and show result of the interviews and questionnaires for the principal, parents, teachers and learners.		April 2013
2.1.b Activity		
Workshop on soliciting suggestions for possible remedies from parents, teachers and learners.		June 2013
2.2 OUTPUT	Indicator/ Monitoring	Time
To put these remedies into practice		
2.2.a Activity		
Send the final reports to the principal as well as to the stakeholders.		March 2014

Appendix B

Questionnaire

Questionnaire on the change project to be completed by the target groups (principal, teachers, and learners) and other stakeholders.

Purpose of the research:

- (i) To create awareness of the Child Rights Convention (CRC).
- (ii) To investigate and analyze the causes of the drop- out among learners at Eputuko CS.
- (iii) To solicit possible remedies and/or find solutions from both target groups and stakeholders

Please we are appealing to you to take time to complete this Questionnaire.

Part A: Personal information of respondent

Please tick the appropriate box next to the correct information in the tables below:

Principal	Male	<input type="checkbox"/>	Female	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teacher	Male	<input type="checkbox"/>	Female	<input type="checkbox"/>

Learner	Grade	7	<input type="checkbox"/>	8	<input type="checkbox"/>	9	<input type="checkbox"/>	10	<input type="checkbox"/>	Male	<input type="checkbox"/>	Female	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Parent	Male	<input type="checkbox"/>	Female	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Other Specify:	Male	<input type="checkbox"/>	Female	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Part B

In this part provide the team with more details on the various reasons which contribute to learner's drop-out rate at Eputuko Combined School.

1. Do you know any learner/learners who had dropped out of Eputuko CS?

Tick the appropriate box.

YES	<input type="checkbox"/>
NO	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. If Yes:

How many boys? _____

How many girls? _____

Age: _____ Grade _____

Age: _____ Grade: _____

3. Do you know why this /these learner (s) has/have dropped out? Tick the appropriate box

YES	<input type="checkbox"/>
NO	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. If Yes:

Please describe with your own words why you think this/these learner/learners has/have not completed school. Please do not mention any name (s) of the learner/learners! _____

5. Would you like to tell us more about the problems you are facing with dropping out at Eputuko Combined School? Please provide the team with true evidence and in-depth findings. _____

Part C

The Convention of the Right of the Child can be explained in three parts referred to as Three Ps as it follows below:

Provision: This part entails that learner's physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing is of utmost importance. The learners need to be provided with all their physical, emotional and psychological needs.

Protection: This entails that learners should be protected. The state is responsible to ensure that it prevent all forms of violence against children.

Participation: The last part deals with children into many activities which helps them to develop holistically. It the right of children's to participate in a free, relaxed, child-friendly school where learners express their thoughts and participate in school activities, establishment of school rules and problem solving.

1. Reflect on the three Ps above (Provision, Protection and Participation):

Do you have any solutions/suggestions on how to solve the problem of dropping out at Eputuko CS?

2. Do you have any suggestions how to motivate learners to finish their schoolings?

3. What kind of help or support do you need to reduce the dropout rate at Eputuko Combined School?

(i) from teachers/ principal (ii) from parents (iii) from learners (iv) from the community (v) from Ohangwena education directorate (vi) from the ministry of gender equality and child welfare (vii) from the ministry of safety and security; child protection unit division (viii) from the church leaders (ix) from the head man (x) from the ministry of labour (xi) from the office of the counsellor