

## PRECONFERENCE PAPER (CRC Bangkok 2013 preparations)

TITLE: ENHANCING CHILD RIGHTS IN SCHOOLS THROUGH EMPOWERING STUDENT LEADERSHIP

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PURPOSE:

The project was aimed at empowering student leadership by changing their attitudes towards enhancing rights of the child at school level.

Specifically the intervention sought to:

- Reduce the social distance between school administrators and students/learners.
- Promote freedom of expression among school community members.
- Promote recognition of rights and obligations of students.

The intervention was prompted by the discovery by the country team, themselves professional teachers and education administrators for a long time, that student leaders are meant to be a link between the school administration and student body but often, they act as an enforcement arm of the administration. That student leaders, despite being elected by fellow students rarely protects the rights of their fellow learners. They tend to ensure that school rules and instructions from the school administration are obeyed to the letter and hardly defend rights or the students. The student leaders are mostly used by school administration as institutions of coercion of students into total submission to the school regulations/policies.

It's common in Ugandan schools to find students running away on site of a student leader to avoid being instantly punished or reported to the administration for disciplinary action in case one raised a concern about their welfare as students.

The project therefore sought to appeal to the student leadership to be tolerant and make school environment welcoming to all school community members. This was hoped to enable students have a say in the school affairs pertaining to their stay at school.-make school a friendly place.

### Status:

Follow-up visits to the project schools have revealed the following:

#### a) Successes:

- There is increased self esteem of the girl- child and children with Special Learning Needs (SNE)
- Active child Rights clubs in all project schools and others in their neighborhoods.
- Increased students' participation in decision making.
- Incidences of child abuse and exploitation have been tremendously reduced.
- Messages on promotion of child rights are placed in strategic places in the school compounds.
- Friendly interaction between students and school administration.
- Levels of punishment have gone down and replaced by guidance and counseling sessions for deviant students.
- Meeting places have been introduced in schools- under trees- for free interaction of school community members.
- Student leadership has become more learners friendly and tolerant.

#### b) Challenges:

- The change agents are still few and therefore their coverage is not big enough to cause impact on a large scale.

- There is resistance from some communities which protest abolition of corporal punishments.
- Some religious leaders express fears of moral degeneration if students are not strictly controlled.

#### Way forward

All CRC fraternity batches in Uganda have formed and registered an umbrella organization called “CRC- Lund University Alumni in Uganda Ltd”. The coalition has a constitution and has a management structure. The constitution stipulates the activities the coalition plans to engage in and partnerships to be entered into to enhance Child Rights crusade in Uganda.

The coalition hopes to link CRC change agents in Uganda to the rest of the East African countries, and globally.