

Youth Voices in Development Report 1

Introduction

First, I need to state how I see empowerment of women and girls: freedom to pursue whatever they may wish. That means having free time and control over their daily activities, which requires men to assist women and girls in having that freedom.

Canada and Uganda

One major issue that I think gets in the way of women having a free life is the “second shift” of work that many face at home. I do not have access to statistical research about how many women in Canada or Uganda work an eight-hour day and then are almost solely responsible for child care or other family care tasks at home, but I know that literal second shift of work, regardless how common it is, restricts free time and control over daily activities.

I know that I often think I am incapable of child and family care, even if I actually am capable. I can carry a child, and possibly entertain them, but I recall only one time in my school life where I was taught what a child needs. That experience was valuable, but caring for a “flour baby” (literally a flour bag simulating a baby) for a few weeks in one high school semester isn’t enough practice. I barely remember everything I learned in those weeks. It isn’t realistic, either: babies don’t disappear after a few weeks, and sacks of flour don’t cry in the middle of the night.

Equally, I feel like I did not learn enough about making food to confidently create a nightly family meal, nor did I learn about more healthy food choices. I have since developed skills by research and asking persons I know can cook, but not everyone will take that initiative. Relying on parents to pass that information to their children is leaning on hope and guesswork, and presumes all parents know that information themselves.

So, both in Canada and Uganda I think an important entry point for women’s empowerment is in schools, teaching young men and women how capable they can be in sharing the role of child and family care.

Uganda

I think the above entry point is valid here, but education is still not available to all persons, therefore needs additional consideration.

Education in Uganda is not free. Each semester must be paid for. While prices vary from school to school, they are still prices to be paid, meaning that not all persons have equal access to education. This creates a variety of imbalances in knowledge and critical thinking capacity.

Those things can be developed outside of an education system, but my sense is the need for money will always come ahead in a race between needing education and needing money. One will pay bills and put food on the table today, the other will do so later and is a bill to pay on its own.

I also see Western volunteers as an excellent entry point. We come from more gender equal nations, or at least we think we do. Working in my placement at Arise and Shine Uganda I make a consistent effort to work with all parts of the

Youth Voices in Development Report 1

organization, despite my primary roles as a team leader and Marketing & Communications Officer. Not only might this reinforce that men have an equal place in caring for children, but it may also remind university educated office-workers that, if there is no other work for them, daily tasks part of running the care home like washing dishes or folding laundry are not “beneath” them.

Recommendations

Canada and Uganda

The Canadian school curriculum needs to be redesigned to include teaching all persons how to care for themselves and a family. Teaching child and family care skills, such as changing diapers, cleaning a house, choosing nutritious foods and cooking a family meal all need to be part of the grade school curriculum. It needs to be consistent from middle school until graduation, given that caring for oneself or a family is generally a lifetime commitment.

By knowing how to share tasks in maintaining and family and home, women and men can have time to have hobbies and do other things they desire that are not necessarily “productive” work.

Uganda

Learning to share work between men and women, and women having economic freedom are essential to empowering Ugandan women.

Government needs to take a more proactive role in education. Access to education needs to be available to all persons, both in terms of physical access to school and eliminating fees associated with attending school.

Education curricula needs additional focus on critical thinking, which is likely to enable persons to assess their societal assumptions about gender roles and potentially challenge them.

Volunteers coming to Uganda need to be aware of the behaviours they are modeling, choosing to do work that may normally be performed by women or girls. Equally, they need to be aware of how they treat females around them, ensuring that equal status is their normal.