

Good Neighbors and Jinja District in the fight against high teen pregnancy rates



Commissioner Gender and women Affairs, Ms Angela Nakafeero and the Country Director Good Neighbors International Uganda Ms Sunyoung Shin arrive at the Inauguration of the Girl Friendly Space (GFS) at St Theresa Primary School- Kakira Town Council. PHOTOS/DENIS EDEMA



The Girl-Friendly Space at Wansimba Primary School in Jinja District

The Busoga region has an average prevalence of 28.4 percent in teenage pregnancies.

BY DENIS EDEMA

According to the Uganda Annual Health Sector Performance Report 2023/24, the Busoga Region bears a disproportionate burden of teenage pregnancy.

With an average prevalence rate of 28.4 percent across most districts, higher than the national average of 24 percent, teenage pregnancy remains a critical concern in the sub-region.

District leaders note that Teenage pregnancies, poor menstrual health management and school dropouts have for years denied many girls the opportunity to complete their education. This has significantly contributed to Child Marriages, heightened maternal and child health risks, and the Economic cost in the region.

District leaders note that Teenage pregnancies, poor menstrual health management and school dropouts have for years denied many girls the opportunity to complete their education. This has significantly contributed to Child Marriages, heightened maternal and child health risks, and the Economic cost in the region.

Leaders applaud interventions

Good Neighbors International Uganda (GNIUG), supported the construction and equipping of five Girl-Friendly Spaces in 2025 at the primary schools of Wansimba, Mu-

guluka, Buwala, Buweera and St Theresa-Kakira.

To date 17 Girl Friendly spaces have been constructed and equipped in 15 public primary schools and 2 health facilities reaching 60,072 pupils (38,431 girls and 21,883 boys with SRHR service in Jinja district (Data for FY 2023 – 2025).

Against this backdrop, leaders in Jinja District have praised Good Neighbors International Uganda (GNIUG) and the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) for their sustained efforts to promote the education, wellbeing and the rights of the girl child through community-driven and school-based interventions since the beginning of the project in 2019.

Restoring hope and dignity for schoolgirls

The Gender and Women affairs' Commissioner, Ms Angela Nakafeero commended GNIUG and KOICA, saying the intervention is renewing dignity among adolescent girls in underserved rural communities.

"This intervention is both humanitarian and developmental in nature. By providing girl-friendly spaces (GFS) and promoting menstrual hygiene management in schools, Good Neighbors is helping to restore dignity, confidence and equal learning opportunities for adolescent girls," she said.

Ms Nakafeero added that teenage pregnancy rates in the Busoga sub-region remains worrying and requires the involvement of all stakeholders to sustain sensitisation of parents on the importance

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

The head teacher of St Theresa Primary School- Kakira, Ms Janet Ajilong, said the new facility is expected to attract more pupils, especially girls who previously stayed away from school during their menstrual periods due to a lack of sanitary pads. She noted that Good Neighbors International not only constructed and equipped the building but also supported the school with five sewing machines and materials for making reusable sanitary pads.

of girl child education and called for continued support for teenage girls to go back to school after giving birth.

During Inauguration of GFS at Wansimba Primary School, Mr. Daniel Butamanya, ACAO said the integration of Reusable Pads making initiative is restoring hope among school-going girls, particularly those who struggle to access sanitary pads during menstruation because they come from households where parents are unable or unwilling to provide basic menstrual hygiene materials.

Comprehensive facilities and community ownership

The Girl-Friendly Spaces are equipped with conference and learning rooms, examination rooms, resting rooms, waterborne toilets and bathrooms.

The school authorities said the nurses will be facilitated by parents as resolved during the Parents Teachers Associations (PTA) meetings - a move aimed at promoting community ownership and sustainability of the facilities.

Inclusive approach to sexual and reproductive health

Ms Hellen Aketch, Project Manager at GNIUG, said the interventions are being implemented under the Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights Improvement Project for girls in Jinja 2025 to 2027, that aims to keep girls in school through deliberate and sustainable measures to reduce teenage pregnancy and child marriages by supporting their educational success.

Ms Aketch emphasized that the initiative does not only focus on girls alone, noting that boys are also actively involved in life skills education for social empowerment to promote a healthy and inclusive learning environment.

She revealed that more than Shs 5.1 billion has been invested in girl-friendly spaces in the 15 primary schools and 2 health facilities across Jinja District, 585 girls, 360

Boys, 300 parents were trained in making liquid and bar soap, Reusable pads, uniforms and were provided with startup materials for production.

Shared responsibility for keeping girls in school

Mr Ayazika Peter Simon, PAS - Jinja affirmed the commitment and support for Jinja towards ensuring sustained interventions and girls stay in school, and committed to support and monitor the proper utilization of the Girl friendly spaces.

The District Education Officer, Mr Eria Kisambira, praised GNIUG for its inclusive and community-centred approach, noting improved school retention and increased community involvement.

"Involving parents in addressing menstrual hygiene management is very important," he said. "It creates awareness and helps communities understand that keeping girls in school is a collective responsibility."

Child protection and community safety

Meanwhile, Mr Muhairwa Joseph, Chairperson of the School Village in Polota Ward, Kakira Town Council, described the intervention as timely, saying it will help curb negative behaviors that often lure young people away from school.

He observed that many crimes reported in the area are linked to peer pressure and adolescent stress, with some suspects being as young as 13 years old. He said preventive initiatives such as the Girl-Friendly Spaces are essential in guiding children towards positive activities, strengthening discipline and keeping them focused on their future.

Policy support strengthens impact

GNIUG has extended the efforts to strengthen systems, policies and laws. As highlighted by Mr Kyegobola Robert, the Project Coordinator, the initiatives come amid strengthened child protection effort.

The approval of by laws against teenage pregnancy and child marriage by Jinja District council on 25th September 2025 marked a significant milestone in promoting and protecting children's rights.

GNIUG continues to support the district in drafting ordinances, implementing the Jinja District Local Government action plan to end Child marriage and teenage pregnancy 2024/2025-2026/2027 in partnership with the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development.

A call for partnership and collective efforts

The Country Director - GNIUG, Ms Sunyoung Shin appreciated KOICA for the generous support in ensuring quality Sexual Reproductive Health Rights services and information for girls in Jinja is provided.

She appreciated Jinja District for the enabling environment and called upon all Civil Society Organizations, Donors and Development Partners to join efforts to end teenage pregnancies and child marriage in Busoga region.