

Education

"Advocate for conducive environment for learners"

Educationists have called for stronger advocacy to ensure a safe and conducive learning environment for students following increasing cases of abuse in learning institutions. The call was made during a four-day Training of Trainers programme aimed at discussing effective ways of implementing the operations of the Forum for African Women Educationists (FAWE) in Uganda and across Africa, writes **Geoffrey Serugo**.

Dr Martha Muhwezi, the executive director of FAWE Africa, said the organisation exists to promote gender equity and equality in education across the continent.

"We have been exploring how best we can support young women and men through mentorship. We have also been discussing how to induct students as they join higher institutions of learning, especially those from marginalized communities," she said.

Muhwezi noted that while bursaries and scholarships are important, they are not sufficient on their own.

"Providing financial support is not enough. Walking the journey with these young people is very important. We focus on safeguarding



Dr Martha Muhwezi addresses the audience

learners by ensuring institutions provide a protective and supportive environment," she explained.

"We have been discussing how to safeguard young people, protect them from abuse, and ensure they study in safe environments. If we do not walk this journey with them, some of them especially girls are likely to face abuse and eventually drop out of school," she said.

Programme, FAWE has been promoting TVET among young people for the past seven years, aiming to equip them with practical skills.

"With rising unemployment, TVET offers young people better

opportunities to transition into the world of work. Many can become self-employed while others find jobs in different companies," she said.

She revealed that FAWE has implemented the programme in Uganda for the last eight years, with about 98 percent of beneficiaries either self-employed or employed in various sectors.

Calvin Okello, FAWE Uganda's Education Coordinator, explained that the programme relies on three key models designed to support students.

He said the Extended Orientation Model prepares newly enrolled students for life in higher institutions

of learning, while the Innovation Model equips them with practical skills such as entrepreneurship, financial management, computer literacy, and life skills.

"These models help students build confidence and leadership skills. Many of our beneficiaries have gone on to take up leadership roles because they are encouraged to speak up and express their ideas," Okello said.

He added that safeguarding remains a core part of the programme to ensure learners study in a friendly and protective environment.

"Every learner we support must be safeguarded. Our goal is to ensure that the girl child and every student in the programme studies in a safe and conducive environment," he said.

Okello urged participants in the training to share the knowledge gained with their communities to strengthen support systems for learners.

Meanwhile, Eunice Masika, a FAWE alumna who joined the programme in 2018, said the initiative gave her a second chance to pursue her dreams.

"FAWE picked me from a point where I had lost hope and gave me the opportunity to continue with my education," she said.

Masika explained that through the programme's extended orientation, participants received training in entrepreneurship, leadership, communication, and personal development.

"We were empowered as young women to stand up for ourselves and break the stereotype of being treated as minors," she said.

Masika later enrolled at Jinja School of Nursing and Midwifery, where she graduated as a registered nurse and is currently working.

"I became the first female in my family to graduate. That would not have happened without FAWE's support," she said.

She added that the programme also helped participants build social networks and gain financial literacy.

Masika is now mentoring other young people, saying she wants others to benefit from the same opportunities that changed her life.