



## **A FIELD STUDY REPORT**



# **EFFECTS OF COVID-19 AMONG SCHOOL ADOLESCENTS IN KWEEN DISTRICT**

**Study by**

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## 1.0 Background

The ISPHD programme (Heros4GTA) is a joint district-based programme implemented by the consortium of Amref Health Africa in Uganda, Cordaid, MIFUMI, and the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) for the period 2020-2024 in the 9 High Burden Districts<sup>1</sup> of Uganda with funding from The Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands Kampala. The program participants include young adolescents (age 10-14) and women (age 15-49), hardly introduced to information on SRHR and the need to have gender equality. Key to the intervention is the gender-transformative education (GTE) to enhance access to SRHR/SGBV services and to work with the communities they live in to reject cultures and norms that cause SGBV. It is against this this study was undertaken to find out how Covid-19 and the lockdown has affected young people especially those in school in order to inform relevant interventions, planning and implementation through solicitation of stakeholders at individual, community and service points. The findings from this study will form the basis of setting modalities of strengthening approaches to protect young people particularly girls from the vulnerability registered as a result of Covid-19 and the lockdown. It therefore provide evidence for better decision making and further advocacy.

## 1.1 Overview of the Project

The **ISPHD** is a four -year programme that will specifically address the lack of empowerment of young girls, boys and women regarding SRHR and SGBV decision making by educating and providing information to enhance their decision-making skills to make healthier SRHR choices and stand up against SGBV. The programme further addresses low quality of SRHR and SGBV service provision through system strengthening and integration and tackle the lack of action by gatekeepers and communities regarding unequal gender norms and practices by empowering communities and gatekeepers to reject cultures and norms that are root causes of SRHR violations and SGBV and strengthening SGBV response systems and promote access to justice in nine selected hard to reach districts of Uganda. Throughout the programme, a gender transformative approach and a socio-ecological model will be applied to enable a synergistic diffusion of SRHR and SGBV interventions at individual, relational, communal, and institutional level.

The programme builds on recent work done by consortium partners, including empowering young people with comprehensive and accurate SRHR information implemented by Amref between 2013-2015, strengthening health systems to deliver rights-based SRHR services implemented by Amref and Cordaid since 2015 and engaging communities to reject harmful practices in Uganda implemented by MIFUMI in eastern Uganda from 2018-2020.

This collaborative community-based program has interventions aimed at various segments of the community, adolescents, young people parents, teachers, traditional leaders, religious leaders, health workers and community leaders. ISPHD is a community gender transformative SRHR-SGBV integration which is made up of four key components namely: (i) adolescent and young people education on SRHR and SGBV issues and related services (ii) community mobilization for action against harmful SRHR and SGBV norms, and (iii) improvement of community structures to prevent and respond to SGBV (iv) health systems community strengthening. There is an overlapping component on norm transformative evidence to practice collaborative learning.

This report therefore provides and in-depth understanding on how Covid-19 has negatively affected adolescents especially girls in the community. It presents various dimensions that help assess the

magnitude of the problem, the perpetrators, the influencing factors, other SRHR/SGBV issues and the possible recommendations.

## 1.2 Purpose and Objectives of the Study

### 1.2.1 Purpose

The purpose of the study was to investigate the effect of covid-19 in education. It intended to discover the magnitude of impact of the lockdown on the enrolment rate, teenage pregnancy and the level of teachers' awareness on the revised guideline on the management of teenage pregnancy in school setting in Uganda and finally examine the gender and vulnerability analysis in relation to availability, access/utilization of improved Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and Gender Based Violence (GBV) services in schools.



#### ***Their future is important***

- ➔ It assessed the enrolment of both boys and girls before and after lockdown to compare the two for better understanding of the effect of covid-19 on education. It is upon this that the program may address the practices and attitudes to inform interventions and policy development that promote school retention, gender equality, sexual and reproductive health, and Gender Based Violence prevention in school as well as efforts that involve working with the community structures to curb any violations against girls and boys in and out of school. The study findings will therefore aid us to understand norms and practices related to SRHR and S/GBV that the program can alter positively.
- ➔ The study assessed the level of teachers' awareness on the new guidelines on the management of teenage pregnancy in school settings and the relevance and appropriateness of these guidelines.
- ➔ The study findings will be used to make appropriate interventions in response to the proposed solutions in addressing issues of SRHR/SGBV in and out of school. This will benchmark the

impact of community interventions that help in creating a safe environment for the boys and girl within the school setting as well as at the community setting.

- The findings from this study will help inform another set of studies to improve the attainment of the program indicators and also adjust indicator targets and milestones as needed, guide technical strategies and intervention approaches which will eventually feed into the HEROES 4GTA Theory of Change (ToC).

## **2.0 Methodology**

### **2.1.1 The Study**

This study used mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative). It included extraction of secondary data from the school records especially of the enrolment, the years of establishment and numbers of learners affected in different ways according to sex and age. The study further engaged individual sampled teachers which lasted for approximately 45minutes to 1 hour.

The study sites and populations, research design, sampling strategy and methods are equally described below.

### **2.1.2 Study Sites and Geographical Scope**

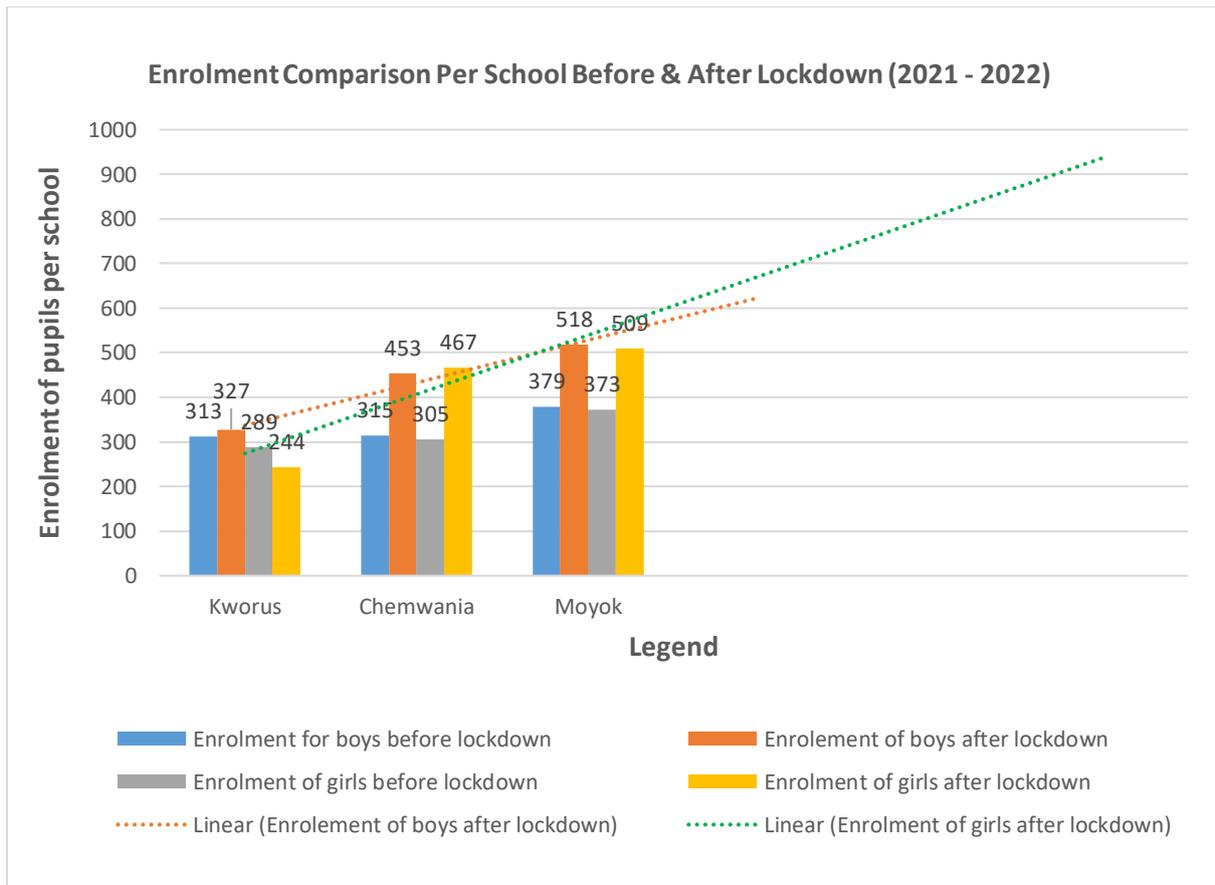
The study questionnaire included indicators on the enrolment before lockdown in 2019 and after lockdown in January 2022 among boys and girls. It further included an assessment on the number of girls who got pregnant during the lockdown and finding out whether they reported back to school or not. Furthermore, the study was seeking to establish if girls who had delivered were able to report back to school while breast feeding. Relating to boys, the study including finding out how Covid-19 affected both boy and teachers. On the other hand, the study involved finding out the level of teachers' awareness on the revised guideline for the prevention and management of teenage pregnancy in school setting in Uganda.

### **Sampling procedure**



The study used purposive sampling where in each school, 3 teachers were interviewed including the head teacher to provide information relating to enrolment, awareness on the revised guidelines for the prevention and management of teenage pregnancy in schools setting. They further provided information on the girls who got pregnant and are in school or out of school and also details of whether they are breastfeeding and in school or breastfeeding but out of school. At this point, the identified girls who were either pregnant or breastfeeding were interviewed. A total of 18 girls (10 in Chemwania, 7 in Kworus and 1 in Moyo primary schools) in just three schools were pregnant although some of them were already breast feeding.

The findings indicated that there was a general increase in enrolment across all the schools interviewed. More girls enrolled after the lockdown as seen in the graph below. This therefore means that schools received more pressure as the learners drastically increased at the re-opening of the schools. By the time of this study, not all the learners had reported giving an indication that more may enrol afterwards. Against this enrolment are effects of Covid-19 which are discussed in the collections that provide an insight of what requires to be done in order to address the situation. However, in the upper primary, we see a general increase in the dropout rates of girl child against that of boy child.



In Kworus primary school, out of the 7 girls who got pregnant, 1 lost her child and returned to school, 1 was breastfeeding but had not returned to school, 2 got married within the community. At least 2 of the affected girls were in P.7 candidates were back in school.

In Chemwania primary school, all the 10 girls who got pregnant had not yet returned to school. 4 were already breastfeeding and the other 6 were still pregnant. 2 were at the husbands’ places with their parents at the forefront of negotiating for dowry while the remaining four at the homes of their parents but not returned to school. 6 girls were in P.6 while 4 were P.7 candidates.

In Moyok primary school, the girl who got pregnant had declined school and could not be traced as parents’ concealed information on her whereabouts thus next plans for her could not be ascertained.

**Qualitative data on teenage pregnancy and other SRHR/SGBV issues**

**The major factors contributing to teenage pregnancy**

Discussions with the teaching staff provided several critical factors responsible for teenage pregnancies in schools. Although covid-19 has perpetuated the vice much as other factors as stated below played a critical role.

- Alcoholism among parents in the community. There is a lot of communal drinking and most of the drinking ends late in the evening/night. There are instances where these drunk men take advantage of the young girls to lure them into sexually enticing environments. Addressing these may require enactment of some bylaws to regulate the hours of drinking.
- Lack of parental care. Children are left alone with none to guide them on the basic live skills and sexuality. During the lockdown, parents were busy looking for what to eat while the young ones were left at home alone taking care their siblings. The perpetrators then got an

opportunity of distorting the minds of these young girls sometimes with petty gifts which consequently ended up in to coerced unprotected sexual intercourse.

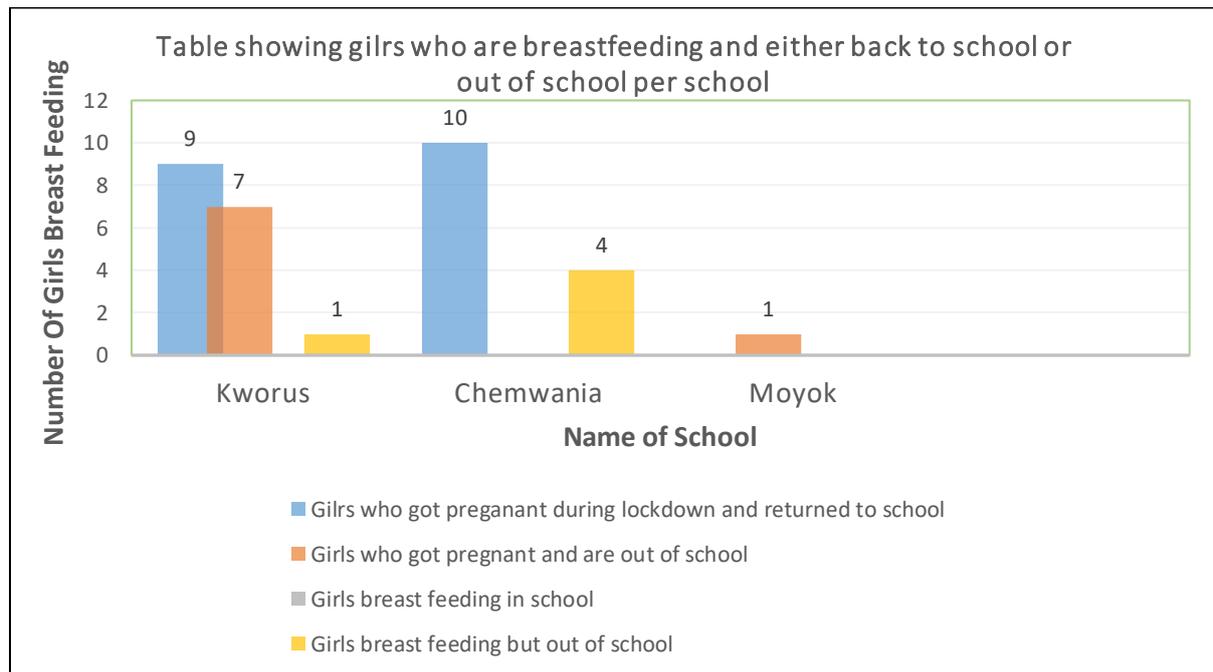
- Child labor – children are involved in casual labor to get some income in order to meet both their personal needs as well as making a contribution to the family. Boys were particularly involved in firewood collection, providing labor in the building sites and boda-boda riding vis-à-vis school attendance.

### **Schools' interventions in supporting girls who dropped out as a result of teenage pregnancy during the Covid-19 lockdown period**

The discussion with schools was directed at probing further what schools are doing in providing the basic support to teenage mothers who may have reported back to school to ensure they attend classes. In some schools, there were already planned mechanisms to ensuring a supportive environment to these mothers while others were still battling with how to ensure that this is done. The following were the interventions presented at the time of the interview;

- Providing counseling and guidance. The schools are providing emotional support to the teenage mothers and also addressing the trauma resulting from their experience. This is also involving sensitizing the classes where the young mothers are to embrace them and provide a friendly atmosphere to their friends in class, within the school and even in the community.
- Tracing those who got pregnant and have not yet reported back to school. This is happening in liaison with the SMCs, parents and the LCs. In Chemwania, the head teacher narrated how they were able to follow up with one the girls who got pregnant in P.7 and was able to seat for her primary leaving examinations.
- Providing guidance and encouragement to the child mothers to join vocational school for practical skills that will help them earn a living and support their children. The teaching staff further proposed that most the young mothers prefer getting to do some hands-on skills training. What they needs urgent is something that enables them to generate some income to take care of their children. The fathers of the children may not be readily available as some of them ran away leaving the teenage mothers along struggling to the time of delivery. Providing them with practical skills is equipping them to provide for their families. Among these skills include tailoring, catering, weaving, crafts making and hair dressing among others.

**Breast feeding teenage mothers in school with their babies and how they are supported to attend classes**



Some of the breast feeding teenage mothers have not yet returned to school due to fear of being laughed at by other pupils. They keep hiding and feel uncomfortable breast feeding in school. However, with continuous follow ups and counselling, at least a number of them had accepted to return to school. Out of 19 girls in the three schools who got pregnant during lockdown, majority are out of school. This therefore indicates a need to continue following them up. Further discussion with the respondents showed that little had been done about the perpetrators to bring them to book. Parents prefer negotiating with the culprits and the matter is sorted out within the community. It is therefore critical that HEROES 4GTA strengthens its legal, psychological intervention. These data therefore provides a starting point upon which a more detailed follow up as well as investigation can root from.

Scaling up our collaborative approach will help in addressing this problem jointly with other partners. This however requires identifying key stakeholders and implementing partners in the respective district so as improve both linkages and referrals. In a long run, this will enhance the sustainability as well as improve the quality of our program interventions.

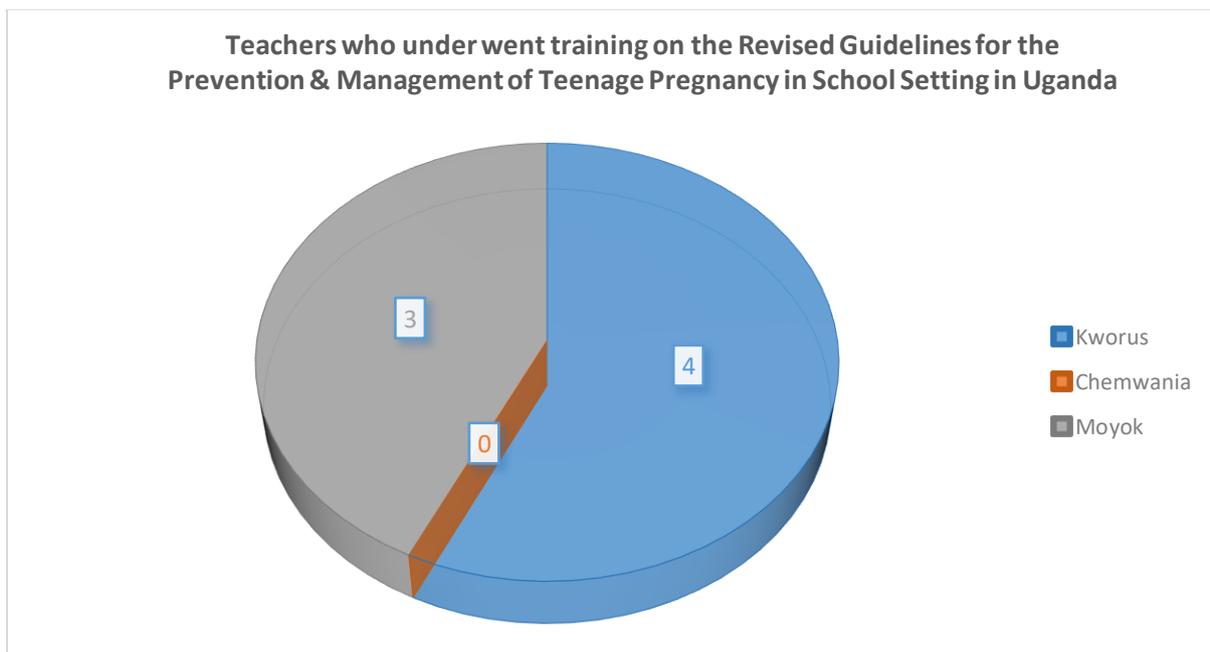
**How boys were adversely affected by Covid-19**

Covid-19 did not affect girls, it equally affected their counterparts – the boys although the magnitude of the effect differed. The following were some of the major ways covid-19 affected boys in Kween district;

- From the discussions with the respondents, it was pointed out that the boys were so much triggered to think of how to support the family and raise incomes especially as the culture provides locally in the region that boys at a certain age for instance 16 years are old enough to provide for themselves as well as the family. This therefore twisted their minds from thinking of school to thinking of survival. Once they realized that they can actually make some money within their communities, school was therefore rendered less important and hence they dropped out of school.

- Most of the boys have been involved in drug abuse. They leave their homes to join peers in other areas where they engaged in un-productive activities.
- Some of the school boys dropped out of school to engage in petty and casual businesses including boda-bodas, working in building sites (mixing building materials) to earn some incomes to meet their own needs as well as those of the family. These incomes later is used to lure girls into sexual acts thus fueling teenage pregnancies further.

**The level of awareness of teacher on the “Revised Guidelines for the Prevention & Management of Teenage Pregnancy in School Setting in Uganda” and their general views on guidelines**



The pie-chart above indicates a clear need for the training of teachers in the Revised Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Teenage Pregnancy in School Setting in Uganda. If teachers are not trained, it becomes very difficult to enforce and implement the guidelines in schools. Out of the three schools sampled in Kween district, it is quite sad to note that only 7 teachers have had some training yet none in Chemwania has had any. This therefore requires urgent attention to ensure that teachers are taken through these guidelines in order to effectively manage the complexities caused by teenage pregnancy in schools.

A deliberate yet swift action is required to identify schools not trained across all program districts as this will improve the handling of the teenagers and adolescents thus improved learning environment.

**Other SRHR/SGBV issues existing in schools**

- Teenage pregnancy. As evidenced by the numbers of who got pregnant during the lockdown, these cases continue to undermine the future of girls.
- Most girls prefer to get married when still young. Some of the respondents pointed out that there is a tendency of girls saying it's better to get married at a young age so that they can watch their children grow and also avoid over delaying at home. This is where social norms and cultural/tradition practices come in to play. These are myths that young girls grow up hearing and taking action under influence of traditional practices that led girls to into an early

marital indulgence. Changing this may require a systematic sensitization for the change of mindset.

- Sexual harassment. In Chemwania primary, the teachers narrated how some men were caught a previous week trying woo girls using music behind the school latrines. These are indications that there is need to engage the community to collectively protect school girls.

#### **Interventions schools are proposing in addressing the above stated SRHR/SGBV issues**

- Continuous counselling and guidance. Within the schools, there are designated days when both senior women and men teachers counsel the pupils. They are taken through issues of relationships, personal hygiene, and life skills among others. The effectiveness of these services however remain wanting. There is need to further train these teachers to effectively support the learners using the program curricular.
- Sensitization of both children and parents on child rights. In some schools, there is already an ongoing engagement with the local leaders especially the LCs and religious institutions to have an opportunity to raise awareness among the community members about children's right, teenage pregnancy, early marriages among others.
- Using school family initiative. One of the respondents suggested that a teacher could be given for instance 3 children among those with challenges so that he does direct mentorship and follow up closely.
- Provision of child friendly services including talking compounds. A majority of the respondents pointed out a need for more communicative materials in schools to back up talking compounds. Among these would include posters and fliers. These will help pass relevant information to the pupils and help them appreciate knowledge and hence transform.

#### **The major ways Covid-19 has affected teachers in the district**

- Some of the teachers contracted the virus and were directly affected in terms of personal health.
- As a result of mounted pressure at home, some of the teachers sought other alternative ways to earn and meet the needs of the family and so, some of these teachers are still involved in business and therefore have not yet caught up with teaching. This extra sources of income are seemingly taking their attention as they are a sure way of generating daily incomes to supplement their monthly salaries.
- There is a divided mind set among teachers on the vaccine they were "forced" to take. These teachers lacked adequate information on the vaccine since there were divergent views about it especially on social media. At the moment, most teachers are just living on the last hope in life for they are worried on the next possible effect of the vaccine in their lives. Some of them think they are going to die in the next 2 days as was portrayed by many media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp etc. This has therefore reduced on the concentration of these affected teachers and may equally affect the results.
- There is a lot of uncertainty among teachers with the thinking that maybe there is going to be another lockdown. Teachers are still scanning the environment to see how much concentration they need to put in place, otherwise uncertainty negatively affects performance.

### **Recommendations to address teenage pregnancy and other SRHR/SGBV issues in schools**

- Provision of vocational skills. In instances where a girl got pregnant in school and may not be willing to continue with formal classes, then there could be an option of equipping them via practical skills to enable them earn income in future and live a meaningful life in society. This may also demand for a continuous sensitization of both the learners (pupils) and parents on SRHR/ SGBV.
- Holding informative radio talk shows to promote dialogues aimed at creating awareness on the raising SRHR/SGBV issues and also seek to intensify collaborations and partnerships among stakeholder at different levels.
- Formation of child rights clubs (planting trees, music-dance-drama, and debates). These clubs provide an empowering opportunity for the pupils and also provide an avenue for mentorship, peer to peer support among other benefits.
- Support the school to put talking compounds in place. Moreover, these would reinforced with posters and other communicative materials.
- Facilitate the teachers for exposure/learning visit to other places. Most teachers had not got any opportunity to interact with their colleagues elsewhere and so were locked up into the local perspective which retards innovation and creativity. HEROES 4GTA may take up this task to enhance exposure and learning in order to trigger a new way of addressing local and contextual issues in the community and within the schools.
- Training teachers on SRHR/SGBV. This areas remains so critical to the HEORES 4GTA program if any change has to be registered in the supported schools. Most of the respondents had never attended any training on SRHR/SGBV abut rather just apply common knowledge in supporting the pupils in school. Although this provides a basis of engagement, there is an urgent need to go beyond these and begin to equip the teachers with appropriate skills.
- Training teachers on the Revised Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Teenage Pregnancy in School Setting. Some of the respondents had never even seen how the guidelines look like. In Chemwania primary school, none of the teachers had under gone the training while in Kworus and moyok had only 3 and 4 teachers trained respectively. If these are the persons who are meant to administer the guidelines, then it's not clear how the impact will be measure. These findings therefore recommend that an urgent training be organized for teachers in order to appreciate the content and hence cause a relevant and measurable change.
- Finally, it is imperative that this same study be rolled out to all the program schools in the nine districts. These findings were only generated is a few schools which may not be representative enough of the 90 schools the program is supporting. It would be much better if a comprehensive study of the kind is conducted in all the 90 schools and in some control schools to get a comparative feel of the exact magnitude of the problem and how HEORES 4GTA is impacting learners.