

Boys Network Campfire Conference Ask Government to stiffen punishment perpetrators of violence on girls.

By Nelson Banda



Members of the Boys Network discussing how to end violence on girls during the first Boys Network Campfire conference

The war against gender injustices rages on as the Zambia National Women's Lobby launches the Boys Network to engage boys in schools to be role models and fight sexual violence on girls. The Boys Network has been conducting campfire conferences at night to share experiences and design strategies of ending violence against girls. The first Boys Campfire Conference was held during the 16 Days of Gender Activism at Kasaka Camping Site in Kafue 45 Km south of Lusaka. The aim of the campfire conference whose theme was ***'working with Boys to end Sexual Violence against Girls in schools'*** was aimed at equipping boys with information and skills to mobilize boys support on issues affecting girls in schools.

At the two days campfire conference, the Boys Network whose members comprises of students between the ages of 14 to 19 years called on government to pass strong laws to punish perpetrators

of violence. The Boys Network members noted with concern that sexual violence against girls is rampant in schools and it hinders their development and participation in national development. They further added that girls are not safe at home and schools. The Boys conference feel there is need for boys to get involved and speak out against sexual violence on girls.

The conference resolved to actively participate in the struggle to end sexual violence against girls in schools and gender based violence in general. *'We commit ourselves to report cases of sexual violence that we shall come across both at home, in the communities and in schools. We also encourage parents to be open to their children and speak about sexuality.'* Zambia being a Christian nation, we appeal to the public to abide by the Christian values to promote good morals and advancement of the girl child'.

'We further call on the government to partner with other stakeholders to set up funds to sensitize communities on the dangers of sexual violence against girls as well as establish rehabilitation centers for survivors of violence'.

The Boys Network campfire conference, the first of its kind to be held in the country, further added that Non-Government Organization should work with schools to enlighten pupils on their rights adding that *'Government should also stiffen punishment against perpetrators of sexual violence against children'.*

The Boys Network also developed a petition in which they asked Government to enact legislation to prevent sexual violence on girls. In the Petition, the Boys Network demanded among other things that there should be Victim Support Centres in the community to offer counseling services to girls. They further demanded that those found responsible for harassing girls should be punished. They urged teachers to avoid calling girls with demeaning names as this discourages them from attending classes

'As boys we are happy that a programme for boys has been taken into schools because most of the projects that come to our school are for the girls. We are happy that we have been remembered because we also have needs. We have learnt a lot on sexual harassment, how it is committed and we shall report the culprits to the police'. 'I have learnt to be supportive to girls and my sisters at school and at home. 'I will encourage girls to report any one who touches them in inappropriately.

Since the project started it has received an overwhelming response from both the teachers and the students. *'Am happy with the Boys Network campfire conference way of talking about gender violence because it is traditionally unique to most of the people. Very few people would take such an initiative to deal with Gender Based Violence'* said one of the teachers. *As long as I remain patron of the Boys Network, it would be strong'.*

A teacher from Kamulanga High School, Longwa Kalombo, said he was happy with the way the Boys Network is conducting its programmes as they are *'very appealing to the boys because they are given a chance to speak out and it has taken a cultural arrangement as this was the way boys were taught long ago'.*

The government was represented at the Boys Network Campfire conference by an official from the Lusaka District Education Office, Mr. Andrew Ngwenya, who addressed the boys to be open and discuss issues affecting them and girls in the community so that they could make good choices in life. Mr. Ngwenya pointed out that he personally decided to come to the conference to see what the boys were learning as some of the organizations are claiming to be working in schools and nothing much is being done

The Boys Network is implemented by Zambia National Women's Lobby as part of the Tisunge Ana Akazi Coalition (TAAC) and supported by the UN Trust through Equality Now. It is implemented in five schools namely Kamulanga, Munali, Kamwala High Schools and Chongwe and Chazanga Basic.

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