

Girls team up to champion gender, health rights

From DEUS NGOWI in Same

FIFTY girls from Same and Mwanga districts have teamed up to champion gender and reproductive health rights.

The girls, some of whom are secondary school dropouts due to early pregnancies, said here over the weekend that they rued opportunities they lost and now were finding it difficult to resume studies or lead a decent life.

The girls were undergoing a special training on gender and reproductive health rights which was conducted by officers from the Kilimanjaro Women Information Exchange and Consultancy Organization (KWIECO).

KWIECO Human Rights and Gender Education Officer, Ms Elizabeth Mushi, and Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, Mr Peter Mashingia, said after their training the girls would act as its ambassadors and would go to train others in wards they come from.

One of the girls, Mariam

Mganga (29), from Same district who dropped out of school while in Form II nine years ago, said she now lives with her parents after failing to get along with her partner.

She said the training equipped her with the guts to confront her partner's parents so they could look after their child.

She called on the ministry of Education and Vocational Training to develop a curriculum designed with gender and reproductive health skills in mind, adding that the skills will go a long way to saving girls from an uncertain future.

Amina Msuya (25), who got pregnant aged 17 years while in Form II in Mwanga district, said after delivery she could not cover her child's needs, so KWIECO gave her legal help and the father of the child was summoned by village leaders and up to now he cares for the child.

In turn, she said, she was going to educate others about

their rights.

Ms Mushi said the girls discussed openly things that would have otherwise remained secret and hurtful.

She said they are now determined to go out and spread the gender and reproductive health and rights to their peer groups in Njoro, Mwanga, Lembeni, Stesheni, Mwanga Urban, Msangeni, and Shigatini wards. She said it was discouraging to see how premature pregnancies and dropouts were increasing in a number of secondary schools for various reasons, one of which was schoolgirls having to walk long distances between their homes and schools.

The seminar comprised two groups: one which consisted of school dropouts, and the other of girls who completed Form IV and were willing to assist their younger sisters make it to that level or above.

KWIECO's objective is to improve human rights and gender issues in the area by reaching out to marginalized people in need of their services.