

Women's group urges family life education

By NATION Correspondent

Parents, teachers and policy-makers need to be sensitised on reproductive health issues affecting girls.

The national chairperson of the Maendeleo ya Wanawake, Mrs Zipporah Kittony, said yesterday that such awareness will help curb increasing cases of school dropouts.

She was speaking during the launch of a pilot project aimed at establishing causes of girls' dropout from primary schools in Nairobi yesterday.

Mrs Kittony said any of the barriers which face these girls are either directly or indirectly related to reproductive health, sexual behaviour and maturation.

The one-year "the girl child education project" will primarily focus on reducing reproductive health barriers that impact directly on girls, leading to their terminating studies.

It will be financed by USAid through John Hopkins University's Population Communication

Services at an initial cost of Sh4 million.

The Maendeleo Ya Wanawake organisation will implement the project which will initially cover Marakwet, Kuria, Kilifi and Bungoma districts and Nairobi's slum areas.

Speaking during the project's launch at the Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organisation headquarters, the Resident Director of Johns Hopkins University/Population Communication Services, Mr Dan Odallo, said the five districts were chosen due to the high school dropout rate of girls.

A recent study by the Forum for African Women Educationalists, he said, had shown that despite a high enrolment rate of girls in primary school in the areas, there was more than 20 per cent dropout at the Standard Four level while a 65 per cent dropout was recorded at the Standard Eight level.

"This means that only 25 per cent of all the girls who initially enrol in Standard One complete their primary education," he said.

She cited early marriages, pregnancy, harassment from male teachers and pupils and low self-esteem and aspirations on the part of the girls as some of the reasons that contribute to the problem.

"My organisation hopes to strengthen the ability of primary school parents-teachers' associations and the communities to analyse the reproductive issues outlined and identify viable solutions as well as implement activities which will address the dropout rate," she said.

The Kanu nominated MP said the project will also encompass community mobilisation activities identified by each community, a role model activity, the existing Kenya youth variety show radio programme and any opportunities provided by the mass media to achieve some of these objectives.

The function was also attended by the Zambian High Commissioner, Ms Wendy Sinkala, Ms Caryn Danz, the US cultural attache and a Kanu nominated MP, Mrs Gladys Mwewa.