

SOUTHERN LUBOMBO

How Complicated is it? – Reflections on Womanhood in Rural Swaziland



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After singing and prayers, our morning assembly was dedicated to celebrating the Day of the Girl Child. A male teacher began by asking the female students, followed by the female staff, to stand in commemoration. He then introduced the first International day of recognition and gave praise to the accomplishments of women – citing distinguishable figures in Swaziland’s academic, political and business spheres, as well as notable women in sport, arts and entertainment worldwide. He then turned to the floor over to a Form 4 student to read a poem she had written in tribute to women and girls. (See text and photo above.)

After lessons ended for the day, the entire Form 4 class met to discuss the topic of the International Day of the Girl Child. After a brief introduction, students were broken into small groups to explore ideas on the importance of having a global day of recognition for girls. The gathering provided an opportunity for students to develop and voice their opinions, as well as practice English language and presentation skills.

Four students gave summaries of their group discussions, followed by a facilitated conversation by the larger group. Most of the comments were offered in praise of women, focusing on the many contributions of mothers (i.e., provider, caregiver, protector, and mentor). One group included critical remarks, saying that girls had a tendency to be gossipy and quarrelsome. During

the debrief, I shared key stats on the status women/girls worldwide: 70% of out-of-school youth are girls, 70% of those living in poverty are female, women earn only 10% of the world's income – yet girls who manage to stay in school earn considerably more money and have significantly healthier families than their counterparts.

At the end of the discussion, students were asked to vote on the topic. A total of 80 votes were tallied, with 59 girls participating (as represented by corn kernels) and 21 boys participating (as represented by sugar beans). Eighty-eight percent of girls thought it was important to honor girls with a global day of celebration, while only 52% of boys thought so – underscoring the importance of including males in efforts to promote girls empowerment.