

Polly Dolan's Statement on Education in Tanzania

Education is fundamental to human development, at individual and societal levels. A certain type of education stimulates critical thinking skills and a sense of empowerment over one's life that once developed continues to influence all decisions and actions thereafter. Only when equipped with a questioning mind can people gain the understanding and tools necessary to address the social, economic and political situations affecting their lives.

I have been working on poverty alleviation and development programs in Africa since 1996 and have seen the impact of quality education in so many ways. The strongest and most influential leaders in the communities, organizations and countries where I have worked are educated. The people who are best able to support themselves financially are those who benefited from education. Women who are educated marry later, have fewer children, and are better able to care for their children. The concept of education being a key element of a happy life crosses most cultures. In Kiswahili the saying "Elimu ni ufunguo wa maisha" (Education is the key to life) sums up the importance of education to most Tanzanians.

In Tanzania, girls and women are especially poor but at the same time have tremendous energy and potential to lead change. When girls are denied education, but rather encouraged or forced to marry early, or due to extreme poverty, sent to work as housegirls in homes far away or find money any way they can to support themselves and their families, they become subject to abuse, oppression and exploitation. They are denied the chance to develop to their full potential.

Our dream is to build a secondary boarding school that will be a haven for poor girls who otherwise would be at-risk of early marriage, pregnancy or exploitative forms of work; where they will be allowed and encouraged to take an active role in their own learning and development. As a part of this, students will help define new curriculum components in areas they find of particular interest and relevance to their lives. Girls will be supported to succeed not only academically, but to develop the self-confidence and skills needed to create happy and meaningful lives for themselves once they graduate. Above all, girls will be encouraged to question and think during the years at our school, setting a foundation and habit for a lifetime.