

## Background

The TANESA Project, funded by the Netherlands Ministry for Development Corporation, was implemented from 1994 to 2002 with the aim of reducing HIV/STDs in Tanzania. During research workshops, female students identified sexual exploitation as an issue, leading to the creation of the *mlezi* program.<sup>1</sup>

## Description

The *mlezi* program was “a school-based initiative involving parents and communities [that] aims to reduce the exploitation of school girls from sexual harassment, forced sexual relationships and rape.”<sup>2</sup> Other objectives of the program were reducing pregnancy rates and preventing the expulsion of pregnant students.<sup>2</sup> Since its inception, the program has trained 185 *mlezi*, who are female “teachers chosen by their colleagues and trained to give advice in cases of sexual violence or harassment and other matters related to sexual and reproductive health.”<sup>2</sup> Trainings lasted for one day and covered issues including sexual and reproductive health, counseling techniques, and reporting procedures.<sup>1</sup> Trainings cost \$7.13 per *mlezi*, inclusive of transportation, materials, and facilitator allowances.<sup>1</sup> Each primary school in the two pilot districts designated at least one *mlezi*.<sup>2</sup> Though the program is focused on schoolgirls, boys may also consult the *mlezi*.

## Results

Reviewers rated this practice as featuring the following gender transformative characteristics:

- Take measures to end impunity for perpetrators of sexual harassment and other forms of gender discrimination (*critical criterion*)
- Provide information and education about discrimination or rights.

A 1996 evaluation comparing schools with a *mlezi* to schools that did not have a *mlezi* found that no girls in schools without a *mlezi* said that they would report a case of sexual harassment by a teacher, even to a female staff member, whereas 52% of girls in schools with a *mlezi* said they would report such a case.<sup>1</sup> Girls were also willing to consult *mlezi* about sexual harassment, or for information on preventing STDs, HIV, and pregnancy<sup>2</sup>, though the girls were more likely to consult with their mothers regarding pregnancy.<sup>1</sup> For sexual harassment, though, this practice acted to end impunity for perpetrators by ending girls’ silence on their experiences of sexual harassment.

## Summary conclusions

This practice has potential to assist girls to find the information, resources, and support needed to deal with incidents of sexual harassment. By providing a mechanism to end victims’ silence, the presence of *mlezi* signals the school’s commitment to progressing toward ending impunity for perpetrators. However, more evidence is needed on the effects of the *mlezi* program on preventing and managing incidents.

**Reference(s) and source(s)**

1. Guedes, Alessandra. May 2004. Addressing Gender-based Violence from the Reproductive Health/HIV Sector: A Literature Review and Analysis. The Population Technical Assistance Project. <http://www.prb.org/pdf04/addressGendrBasedViolence.pdf> (accessed June 17, 2011).
2. Mirsky, Judith. 2003. Beyond Victims and Villains: Addressing sexual violence in the education sector. London: Panos Institute. [http://panos.org.uk/wp-content/files/2011/03/beyond\\_victimsOIwmGw.pdf](http://panos.org.uk/wp-content/files/2011/03/beyond_victimsOIwmGw.pdf) (accessed June 16, 2011).