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By Norah Mwaiko[1]

Abstract

Despite the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations Millennium Project, having its third goal as promoting gender equality and empowering women, and even with all new progress in equality, Kenya is still lagging behind when comparing the educational opportunities of boys and girls. In most cases where cultural beliefs are involved, the girl-child falls victim to violation of her rights, including her rights to education and freedom of expression. Many girls are forced into early marriages, experience Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and sexual exploitation, among many other concerns and at some point they all lead to her inability to achieve her education. The purpose of the study was geared towards exploring the socio-cultural and economic factors and activities that hinder girls from accessing education in Kenya and toward overcoming the obstacles. The research was conducted in Taita Taveta, Nairobi, Kwale and Samburu Counties in Kenya, in different areas within these counties. The study employed qualitative data collection and purposeful Sampling was used to select individuals and sites, involving 72 participants' i.e. students, teachers and principals, community leaders, Government officials and parents. Sampling occurred through a combination of two strategies including snowball and homogenous sampling methods from the various study locations. Focus group interviews, one-on-one interviews were conducted, and students filled out questionnaires. Data was then transcribed following the participants' responses. The findings indicate that socio-cultural and economic factors contributed to girls being out of school especially in Samburu and Maasai communities where cultural practices including FGM, early forced marriages, among many others were persistent. Another factor was poverty which participants mentioned affected their education because of high drop-out rates to find jobs to sustain their needs. The majority of the participants desired more women's empowerment programs in and out of school.

Keywords: Kenyan girls, girls' educational access, educational inequality

List of Abbreviations:
> **AIDS** Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
> **ASAL** Arid and Semi-Arid Lands
> **D.E.O** District Education Officer
> **EFA** Education for All

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FGM Female Genital Mutilation
HIV Human Immune Virus
MDG Millennium Development Goals
MOE Ministry of Education
NGOs Non-Governmental Organizations
UNESCO United Nations Environmental Scientific and Cultural
Organization
UNICEF United Nations Children's Fund
UNO United Nations Organization

Background to the Study: My Story

Despite multiple policy initiatives, and notwithstanding repeated promises of "education for all," significant inequalities in educational attainment persist across Kenya's citizens (Kramon, E. et al. 2012). Growing up in Kenya as a girl has given me many reasons to pursue research on the girl child and education. Kenya is made up of 42 tribes, with significant cultural variation including family organization and language. There is significant variation with respect to world view and self-perceptions among girls, impacted by family and cultural variables. For example, I grew up in a village and where we used to go to church, and there was always a row for men where women could not sit and vice versa. As I grew up, I would never sit in the so called "men's row". These kinds of divisions greatly influenced the perspectives of many of us about life in these different communities in Kenya, and while I give this example as just a minor one, we have additional cultural taboos that separate the two genders in terms of roles, education and power. My perception about life has been influenced positively by how I was brought up and the community around me since I was little. After coming out of my village and having a taste of the city, and meeting different people from many tribes I became aware of the many differences. We all did things differently, and this is when I realized how important it is to sometimes just get out of your comfort zone and see what life looks like from other perspectives. I went to the University of Nairobi, and during my four years of study, I had a great opportunity to meet different people with both positive and negative life experiences. but I learnt a lot from all these. I had friends from the Maasai and Samburu communities and their life experiences really inspired me. They were at the University against their parents' wishes. Their parents never felt the importance of them going to school; rather, they wanted them to get married and, at the time the young women decided to pursue their educations, they had already found a man for them. My curiosity about these cultures is also what shaped my interest in carrying out this study.

Since education is a key factor in determining development trends, national governments have embraced the idea of equal education for all as a matter of priority. Even as nations continue to grapple with the need to provide equal education for all, it is important to understand that their struggles are located within broader historical and cultural contexts that explain discrepancies in the development of women's education relative to men's. Of great relevance is the development of education from traditional contexts, through the era of missionaries in the colonial period, to the post-colonial period whereby the construction of gender, gender identities and relations based on patriarchal ideologies, has resulted in fewer women and girls benefiting from education (Sifuna 2014). Kenya being a patriarchal country, there are various places where only the men can decide what is right for members of their particular families. This is one of the stories from one of my participants that could relate to this claim. She explains to me why she dropped out of school:

> I dropped out of school when I was an eighth grader for two reasons that I can say have affected my decisions today—it was not out of my will but unwillingly because my father wanted me to get married to a certain man in my village whose father joked about giving my father herds of cattle if only he let his son marry me. A joke as it sounded turned my whole life miserable, first dropping out of school and secondly getting married off to someone I didn't even like, well that happens with organized marriages, most of the times it's always what you don't like. In my community, the number of livestock determines how wealthy you are and for that reason you gain a higher status in the community, so my dad couldn't let this slip out of his hands. He secretly arranged for this marriage and after my first term of my 8th grade he asked me to drop out of school because it was getting expensive and he couldn't afford to pay school fees for both of us, and so I had to give up my chance, for my elder brother who was then in 10th grade to complete his secondary education. Then I would join afterwards. Well he's the head of the house and my mother cannot change what my dad said because she is a housewife and depends on my dad to do everything for her. So after about two months of staying home with no school the story of me getting married pops up, and when this happened, usually you cannot say no.

This decision was final because her father was responsible for paying her fees so her mother was unable to object.

Feminist studies aim to expose and eliminate sex differences in education rendering education blind to gender and replacing sex roles with androgyny. This is because "sex-appropriate roles" are stereotypes and "sex role socialization" is discriminative. That is why, in our societies, there is a general misplaced perception that girls have to be socialized to be wives, homemakers, dependents, and secretaries, while boys are to be husbands, breadwinners, defenders and pilots. Thus, the argument goes that the boy has to be exposed to a different 'curriculum' than the girl. It is this kind of argument that postulates that you do not need a degree in engineering or medicine to be a good wife. Such thinking has percolated into the curriculum, textbooks and teaching-learning approaches in schools and universities (Sifuna 2014). These are things that are still happening: people tend to get shocked when a girl is majoring in Computer Science for instance, and questions about how they ended up in that major. I myself held such beliefs, stemming from socialization and the games parents encourage children to play, mimicking future gender roles.

Research location and participant demographics

The research was carried out in Taita-Taveta County, Kwale county, Samburu county and part of Nairobi County. Apart from Nairobi count where I collected data from the Kibera slums, there were three tribes which I worked closely with: the Taita, Samburu and the Maasai. In the slums, there was a mix of all these groups. The Kibera slum is one of the largest slums in sub-Saharan Africa with lots of different tribes and very many challenges that have affected girls in particular. During my interactions with most of the girls from the Sarangombe village in Kibera, I learned that most of the girls are out of school due to lack of school fees. In the homesteads I visited, parents were drug addicts so that maintaining the family was a problem. The HIV/AIDS pandemic is part of the problem, where girls had to drop out of school to take care of their ailing

parents. There were also issues of sexual violence where girls are abused by their relatives. With all these issues in hand, the research was focused on identifying the social-cultural and economic activities that hindered access to education by the girls and how to overcome the obstacles they faced in the above mentioned counties.

As part of the Strategic Plan of the Kenyan Government (2013-2017) by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics to promote equity and gender equality in education programs, a re-entry policy was enforced to address dropout cases of young mothers who conceived while in school. In addition, a sanitary towels program was introduced during the previous strategic planning period to enhance girls' participation in the learning process. A total of KES 1.03 billion was awarded to students in 210 constituencies in 2013 up from KES 500m in 2011-2012 financial years. A total of KES 50m has been sent to 156 schools in 210 constituencies in 2013 as Pockets of Poverty Grants. The bursary schemes are meant for the vulnerable groups including girls and children from poor families. Even after all these measures being put in place, in these regions where the research was carried out, it seemed to me that the communities were yet to benefit from these programs. Thus, I explore below those factors that lead girls to drop out of school, to low female enrolment in the first place, as well as poor performance by girls who were enrolled.

The Importance of Education and Factors limiting Girls' Access
Kenya has always placed education as a priority at all levels, promoting it as a key indicator for social and economic development. In 1963, the country gained independence and a commission was set up to make changes in the formal educational system. The focus of the commission was to build a national identity and to unify the different ethnicities through subjects in school such as history and civics, and civic education for the masses (Kinuthia, 2009). The education system in Kenya maintains the 8-4-4 system which was launched in 1985 and is still effective to date. It was designed to provide eight years of primary education, four years of secondary, and four years of university education. According to Kinuthia (2009), emphasis was placed on Mathematics, English, and vocational subjects. The focus on vocational education was aimed at preparing students who would not continue on with secondary education, those who would be self-employed, and those who would be seeking employment in the non-formal sector. I witnessed the importance of vocational education during my field studies when I met boys and girls who dropped out of primary school, but who were nonetheless earning a living. Some had invested in agriculture, others had painting jobs and some worked in small businesses. The reasons as to why they dropped out or rather didn't proceed to secondary level varied greatly.

Socio-cultural Factors
Research indicates that socio-cultural factors tend to affect the girl-child's access to education more than other factors (Graham Brown, 1991). In the pastoral communities for instance, cultures accommodate customary values and laws that the community lives perpetuating social reproduction. However, certain rituals practiced in the community, strictly adhered to, are major obstacles for girls in accessing education.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)
This is recognized internationally as a violation of the rights of girls and women (UN, 2007). The practice reflects deep-rooted inequality between men and women and constitutes discrimination against women (Wito, 2011). According to the Maasai and Samburu communities,

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it is considered an important rite that marks the transitional stage from childhood to adulthood. The seriousness of FGM as child abuse to girls is portrayed in the following statement:

> The impact of all types of FGM on girls and women is wide ranging and the practice comprises the enjoyment of human rights including the right to life, right to physical integrity, right to highest attainable standard of health including maturity, reproductive and sexual health as well as the right to freedom from physical to mental violence injury or abuse. The practice is also a violation of the rights of the child to development, protection and participation" (UNICEF 2005; 15)

UNICEF (2006: 57) suggests the following key essentials that can help in the abandonment of this practice including: increasing awareness of human rights and empowerment of girls and creating an environment that enables the change required.

Early Marriages

Early marriage, refers to marriage or cohabitation with a child or any arrangement made for cohabitation (NCCS, 2007: 15). This practice affects girls' education in numerous ways. It exposes girls to trauma that makes it difficult for her to study well. The National Council of Children's Services (NCCS, 2007), reveals reasons for early marriage as preservation of virginity, control of promiscuity, and for economic reasons such as acquiring bride price. I think with this kind of thinking it makes it hard for girls to access education, especially in communities where these goals shape peoples' perceptions of girls. This mentality makes it difficult for girls to access education, since they are viewed as being owned by their husbands, are removed from their families and face physical ailments through associated mutilation practices. There is also a lack of female mentors to help guide these girls on alternatives. The government should sensitive these communities about gender violation of the girl child rights through print and electronic media. The law enforcement agencies such as the police and provincial administration should be trained to investigate and enforce law where early marriage has taken place. NGO's and CBO's and local administration should play a role of educating the conservative communities of the dangers of marrying off children.

UNICEF (2010) asserts that early marriages deny girls the right to their education. Female students are too frequently victims of turbulent circumstances that lead them to either drop out of school or perform low quality academic work. When girls are sexually coerced, have unwanted pregnancy and early marriages their academic performance suffers and forces them to drop out of school (Yara, 2010, Bunch 2005). Moreover, stereotypic gender role disposition is among the major cultural factors that lead to girls' underperformance and negatively influences girl student academic achievement. While at home girls say that they are given so much work to do while boys simply loiter about.

Socio-Economic Factors

The major economic factor identified was poverty. According to Ombati et al (2012), poverty is the single largest factor that causes disparities in education. He explains that poverty is pervasive across the sub-Saharan African region where a significant percentage of the population live on less than $1 per day. A strong association between poverty and gender inequalities in education has been established. In most cases this has led to gender favoritism about whom to

educate because of limited resources. This relates to what some of my participants in the Maasai and Samburu communities explained as they have fallen victims of this process. In most cases where the family faces financial constraints, parents preferred educating the boys as they tended to believe that educating the girl child is expensive as she requires more than just books, uniforms and some personal items like sanitary towels. Moreover, many parents believe a girl will at some be married and will leave the family; therefore, her education would not benefit her family of orientation.

The Kibera slum is an example of such areas where pupils' access to education is still remains a mirage as compounded by several socio-economic factors (Andrew et al, 2014). My field experience introduced me to many children who had dropped out of school for various reasons, poverty high among them, impacting housing. The slum is crowded and studying conditions are not favorable due to the lack of electrical lighting, tables and chairs. With no physical supports, students lose encouragement to continue their education. Poverty has also led to child labor as children seek to help support their families. As a result, many school age girls are employed as house girls and babysitters in both urban and rural areas in order to meet their own and their parent's economic needs (Ouma 2013). I came across a good number of girls who are not in school because they had to gain employment to help generate income for the family. Some were still in school but others complained of how they left school early or did not attend at all so that they could find the hourly jobs famously known as *vibarua* in Swahili, so as they can at least get money to buy their basic needs like sanitary towels and toiletries among other basics. And because of poverty, most girls I spoke with explained that girls often got involved in prostitution. Some of my participants pointed out that their friends are engaging in prostitution for a living.

Cases of sexual violence were also reported as a reason for girls not being in school. In Kibera girls face regular sexual harassment from neighbors and family members, lowering their self-esteem, and creating a general atmosphere of fear. In rural areas there are other factors contributing to sexual violence: in a Maasai village in Kwale County, children had to walk long distances to get to school making it risky for the girls as they could meet strangers and get raped on their way to school or home. I had to a chance to interact with a victim of sexual violence by a family member in Taita County who was rescued and brought to the Mwatate children's Home. She lived with her parents but when her dad passed away, due to the conditions at home and her mother's unemployment, she and her siblings moved to live with her uncle who decided to pay for her education. He began to ask her for sex and when she said no, he raped her and kicked her out of his house. She had to discontinue school. Fortunately, she met a well-wisher who rescued her and took her to the children's home.

Research Methodology

The study involved a total of 72 participants who included students, teachers and principals, community leaders, Government officials and parents from the different study locations. The participants were sampled through a combination of two sampling strategies that included snowballing and homogenous sampling methods from the different study locations involved. Within a shortened three-week time frame due to lack of funding, I was nonetheless able to accomplish the interviews in these different counties. Focus group and one-on-one interviews were conducted and students filled out questionnaires. One-on-one interviews were conducted with students based on their background and life experiences related to this issue and community leaders, parents and government officials. Focus group interviews provided information about a

range of ideas and feelings that individuals have about the above discussed issues—gender role divisions, FGM, sexual violence, early marriage, as well as illuminating the differences in perspective between groups of individuals (Rabiee 2004).

The interviews varied in duration, as some participants were more eager to share information and knowledge. The questionnaires had both open and close-ended questions (Creswell 2012). The Questionnaires and the interview questions are available in the appendices.

Case Studies: Participants
Participant 1: Kibera Slums, Nairobi County

> "*I was born and raised in the Sarang'ombe village here in Kibera slums. To anyone who has an idea of Kibera slums understands the kind of life here. Growing up here is something I would not want for my kids because of too much pressure that we find ourselves subjected to. It's here in this slum that everything happens, drugs, sexual violence too much peer pressure and it's upon we the youths especially to choose what's best for us, but in most cases that doesn't happen. The reason is lack of role models. I'm the third born girl in a family of six, and currently am in form one. My elder brother and sister both dropped out of school in class eight and form one respectively. My brother decided to drop out after my parents struggling to pay his school fees and most of the time he was out of school due to lack of school fees. My sister was pregnant and had to stay out of school too. Throughout their school years I cannot count the amount of times they have stayed home because of lack of school fees. Well this wasn't a discouragement for me, because I value education despite coming from a poor background, am still in school with the hope that, as much as I work hard, I believe I will be able to find scholarships that will help me pursue my education. The reason I am saying this is because, I had a friend who only lived with her mum and they were not well off, because her mum owned a small groceries kiosk as form of earning a living and currently she is in the University as she secured a scholarship from the government. I believe education will help me change my family situation in far better way, because I look at my elders and I feel like, if only they had the education, they would have changed my family situation because they would get better paying jobs but now it's hard for them to get those jobs because they have no qualifications. What I would advise my fellow colleagues who have currently lost hope in accessing education that, It really doesn't matter where you are, or what your background looks like rather if you work hard in school and get better grades, we can all reach to the top levels as scholarships are available only if you choose to work hard and excel"*

The above participant believes that education is for all and opportunities are available to anyone who is determined to seek them out and work towards achieving success. However, this wasn't the case for all my participants. The family-economy model and resource-dilution thesis both maintain that limited resources, due to family size or income, constrain parent's abilities to pursue altruistic goals for their children. The family-economy model distinguishes between immediate and future needs of their family and stresses that poor families cannot afford to act on calculations of future returns to education if doing so jeopardizes the family welfare (Buchmann,

2000). This claim relates to what my second participant, who is a parent from the Maasai community and this is what he had to say about the importance of education.

Participant 2: East Bachuma gate, Tsavo National Park

> *"As an old man who did not get a chance to go to school, I really have nothing much to say what the value of education is. But as time keeps changing and new generations come to existence I am still not convinced about how important education is, well I might be ignorant of the reality but the fact is I have made my own estimations and reasoned out logically. I am the breadwinner of my family. I have eight kids whereby I have five girls and three boys and I have two wives. This makes a total of eleven members in my family that I have to feed with my own ways of income. We the Maasai are a polygamous community and thus I have a right to marry as many wives as I want. I remember my grandfather had nine wives and this explains I have relatives that I don't even recognize. I am self-employed. I don't have a salary but my source of wealth is my herds of cattle. I have two Manyattas (traditional Maasai house) where my two wives live. I have introduced all my children to their mothers and I ensure they live together as a family. One question that makes me lose the value of education is when I ask myself, "I have never gone to school but I can still afford to sustain my big family?" meaning it's not important because I survived. Out of my five girls, four are now married and one is still at home with us, and of the boys one has married and two are not. They all went to primary school because we had this free primary education, and I said since I don't have to pay for education you can go. But again it wasn't free at all especially when you have girls. They need so much to go to school. Not all completed eighth grade because as time moved by it became expensive and hence we had to prioritize some other things first, which in this case was the family welfare. Well, most of us in this community value the idea of our daughters getting married and sometimes we look at the idea of educating the girl child as a waste of resources because she is going to be taken away from us at some point in her life, thus we believe, wherever an opportunity for education comes our way, we prefer educating the boy child first because again when the girl stay home she can help with quite a number of household chores unlike when the boy stays home. Currently they are all in school, but when they are sent home because of lack of school fees, I tend to prioritize what's important for my family like for instance I pay school fees or buy food for the family? Definitely family affairs come first, and even though my children insist on how important education is I still motivate them by letting them know am sustaining my family needs and didn't have a chance to be in school, yes it's important but not all we need, we can still do without it and survive".*

It is evident here that familial and parental perspectives can either benefit or harm the chances of children receiving an education and excelling in a scholastic environment. According to Okwara (1992) as cited by Ouma (2013) observes that, those girls whose parents had received formal education tend to have positive attitudes about participation in secondary education in contrast to those girls whose parents did not go to school at all.

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Education is also an extremely important determinant in earnings. This is why education has become increasingly important for many. The job opportunities once available to less educated individuals are becoming scarce as more employers are raising their employment standards (De serf, 2002). This is the story of my third participant who is a girl from the Taita community.

Participant 3: Mwatate Children's Home, Taita Taveta County

"I have learnt the hard way and to me, being here today is because of my value towards education and what I am hoping education will transform my life to. I am the first born in the family of five, that is my mum who is mentally ill and my three young sisters. I have never seen my father. I lived with my mother until I went to pre-school and my aunt took me and my two sisters and enrolled us in grade one whereby she paid for our school fees and we lived with her. My mum's mental situation was on and off and that's why my aunt decided to take us and left our young sister who was still breastfeeding with my mum. As young as I was, I went through a lot of struggles that have sharpened me to view life with positivity and in a hope that I will be able to go and take care of my mum when I can. The situation at my aunt's wasn't that good too, as I was subjected to doing too many household chores with my sisters, and when we went to school we were very tired especially me, and I kept dozing off in class all the time, I didn't have a chance to complete my homework and the teacher would summon me. This continued for quite a while and when I got to grade 2 the second term, my teacher decided to talk to me and asked what the problem was, as I could not finish my homework, I was sleeping in class all the time and such issues. So I decided to explain to her my situation and out of her kindness she said she will have to help me and my sisters out of this. The teacher happened to know a representative in Mwatate Children's Home, and she explained our story and therefore decided to make arrangements with the community Chief and my aunt so that we can be transferred to the Children's Home. So they finalized the plan and we were taken to the center and enrolled in school in the third grade. I am very appreciative of my teacher to date, to have come to rescue me and my sisters, and as much as I feel terrible because of my mum's condition, I still believe that I will be able to help her through me getting education. As the elder sister am determined to work extra hard in school and pursue my dreams. I want to become a doctor someday and this career is something that has been influenced by my mum's condition, seeing her like that makes me wish I could be able to find some sort of treatment to cure her. I understand that for this to happen, I must have some qualifications and it's all through education. I am currently in ninth grade, and I take my education very serious. I don't know what is my fate after I complete high school and that's why I am working extra hard to get good grades so that I can qualify for some government scholarships to the University. To me the sky is the limit, and I believe Education will get me there, I want to be a good role model to my sisters and help them when they need me".

In my research I also analyzed socio-cultural factors which hindered the girls' access to education and participants shared some life experiences and how they were affected by their economic conditions. There are myriads of social and cultural constraints that bring about the

gender gap in education in sub-Saharan Africa. The major cultural activity that hinders girls' access to education was Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). This was the case in the Samburu and Maasai, which are nomadic pastoral communities and FGM is common in these communities. The study explored the importance of this activity to the Maasai and Samburu communities and its impact on girls in terms of accessing education. The following is one story of a girl from this Maasai community, in Kwale County. She is a victim of FGM but still goes to school and was in the eleventh grade when she shared her story with me. Here is what she had to say concerning the importance of FGM in her community and why they do it:

> *"I had undergone the FGM practice when I was in 7th grade and since then my life changed drastically in ways that I sometimes cannot explain. I am the second born in a family of six, the eldest daughter in my family, and I have one sister and two brothers. My community still holds a very strong cultural belief which tends to be biased in favor of the boys rather than the girls. The reason I am in school today is because of my educated brother who helped me out. After he finished his secondary education, he worked hard and got a job in Bamburi Cement factory, and he was able to establish his life. Well primary education was free and that's why my parents let me study until the eighth grade. But afterwards because I had completed my studies and they had no money to take me to high school they silently found a suitor for me to get married without my consent. Well I had two choices ether elope from home or get married. I didn't want to get married then, and not just that I didn't like the man my parents wanted me to marry, so I found a way and called my brother who lives in town and told him of my predicament. So he decided to send me bus fare to go and visit him, but the plan was me staying there with him so as he can take me to school without my parents' consent. After that happened, my parents got so angry with us, and I remember we did come to the village at least after one year so that they calmed down. To us in this community, FGM is considered important in a way that, the girls gets to be respected, the girl gets to be married to a fellow Maasai man, and also it's believed that the girl is able to respect her husband and stick to one man throughout her life. Well apart from these so called "advantages" we tend face a lot of ridicule especially in school where everybody understands the Maasai culture. This is something that has always affected me and lowered my self-esteem to a wider extent because my peers who are not from my community tend to make fun of me. Not only in school do I get ridiculed but even here when I came to the village, the girls and women around kept mocking me, saying that I am using contraceptives and that's why I am not getting pregnant, and for sure this did not make my parents nor me happy, in fact my family at some point was the talk of the village and my father had to attend to a meeting with the council of elders to explain what was going on. I was termed as a source of shame to my family but later on my parents came to understand why I did that and somehow they appreciate education and working towards educating my younger siblings".*

Again the disadvantage of this practice and its impacts to education continues to outshine the importance of it. Once the girls undergo FGM, they were made to feel that they had become adults and mature. In school they become shy and uninterested and most of them get married and

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others simply drop out of school and stay at home awaiting marriage. In Kenya initiation/circumcision ceremonies are scheduled to take place during the school holidays but the process begins earlier, leading to absenteeism from school. The circumcised children also take longer to heal before they can go back to school. Initiation ceremonies involve both boys and girls but the expectations after the ceremony are more on girls than on boys because girls are engaged for marriage after initiation in some communities (Ouma, 2013).

Reflections

As I visited the Maasai community in Kwale County, first getting to this village involved a protocol based on my agenda. My dad drove me there and before we could even get a spot to park the car, there was a group of men waiting to see who the guests were. Based on their rich culture, this village was among the most visited by tourists from all over the world. My dad went out first to explain what our agenda was and the men agreed to let us in. Among my team, I had a German friend and her presence helped us to be allowed in. Three issues were significant in this scenario. First, they were concerned about me as the researcher, a young woman going to school for my Master's degree in the United States; secondly was the issue of gender roles that I was interested in learning about, and thirdly there was the issue of race and privilege.

I have long been interested in the impact of perceptions that others have on researchers when we study abroad. During my undergraduate years of study, I remember how my professors would talk about their various degrees from abroad, but I had not thought about how this might be something that would impact on me some day. Even though I was returning to my country of origin, I returned with new ideas and an education. So as I visited this village, I understood how the men made a big deal out of me, to such an extent that one of them asked my father how he could let his daughter go to the United States to study? He said this as a joke but again as a researcher at that point I was keen on understanding what exactly they were thinking of me. I made no comment at that point as I didn't want to interrupt but again he went ahead and told my dad,

> "How many cows do you want from me, so that I can marry your girl? I have herds of cattle, and based on how your daughter is educated, I understand I will have to pay more than expected."

It was still said in a joking way, and I didn't take it as an offense and neither did my dad, but it was really interesting to see how they perceive the girl in this community. To them at that point I should have been married and not been in school. The idea of dowry price was interesting too because a girl's bride price varies depending on how educated the girl is. Although the men were talking about me, in my presence, and directly not to me, and although they were talking about brideprice, I still realized this was a point of positivity: at least this showed that the education of girls will be appreciated when it comes to marriage.

I was then received to this village by a group of men, and as we walked in, the women were sitting under a tree at a far corner of the compound making jewelry from beads and weaving baskets; some girls were cementing the floor. The women were watching from far and couldn't get any closer. I turned to the old man walking by my side, and I asked him, "Are the women having a meeting over there?" And he said "no, they are making the jewelry for selling." I asked "and do men do that too?" The answer he gave me summed up this conversation. This is what he said:

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> A Maasai man is responsible for grazing the cattle and hunting so he can bring food to the table for his wife or wives and the children. But the women have to stay home and take care of the kids and other household chores and most importantly make sure the man has something after a long day grazing in the sun."

Whether this gender division of labor is true for all Maasai communities, I do not know; however, the positivity drawn from this scenario was seeing women having ideas on how to generate income by making jewelry and baskets for sale.

Racial stereotypes were another issue that emerged. As I mentioned, I had a German friend on my research team who came along with me. First, the mentality that people tend to associate the white people famously known as *mzungu* by Kenyans, is that they have money. And in most cases they tend to get charged higher when purchasing something, because they have varying prices for the locals and foreigners. Racial stereotypes still exist, and I remember when I told one of my research supervisors that my German friend was coming to that particular village with me, he responded thus:

> "I don't think that's a good idea based on the fact that when the villagers see the *mzungu*, they will tend to assume that we have money and would want to charge us to be able to talk to the girls and even sharing their information about their culture."

However, going with her was an added advantage because the villagers were more willing to participate in the research. I, a Kenyan woman, was nonetheless given greater leeway because of a white, German girl's presence. In addition, my father's presence was also significant because, he used to work with the tourist company and this was among the villages he brought the tourists. The men were shocked to see how my dad was supportive of my education and one of the old men cracked a joke which was very communicative in a sense that, it showed his perception of what he thinks about women and education. This was the joke: "Sir, how would you let your girl go all the way to the USA to study? A girl at her age in my culture should have been married long time ago and have kids to take care of instead of being at school. But if you talk nicely to me, I can give you a good amount of cows and goats then let me marry your daughter" and he laughed hysterically. These were some of the mindsets that parents had in this community that deter them from educating their girls.

Summary

From the discussions with the participants, it is clear that socio-cultural practices such as FGM, early marriages and pregnancies, child labor and exploitation affect girl's participation in education. Gender favoritism in education and high levels of parental illiteracy also contribute to girls being out of school. Some parents tend not to look at education in positively based on the fact that they personally have never been in school and thus look at it as less important. Economic factors such as high poverty rates contribute to child labor including female prostitution, lowering rates of school attendance. In most cases, girls drop out of school especially when the parents cannot afford some of their basic needs like sanitary towels. Poverty makes it difficult for parents to afford school fees, uniforms and textbooks; children are told they can't attend without proper

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uniforms and in the long run they give up on school and instead seek casual jobs to make some little money for survival. Cases of sexual violence are rampant in some parts of Kenya and the girl child falls the victim in most cases. Sometime the schools are located very far from home and girls have to walk long distances to get to school, and this increases likelihood of rape.

Recommendations
The following recommendations emerge from the study:

  a. The government should promote a gender sensitive curriculum for the schools and teachers should be trained to avoid gender stereotyping while in class so as to motivate the girls to work hard and achieve their academic goals.
  b. Mentorship programs needs to be created to help empower both young girls and women in their communities.
  c. Female role models should be encouraged to reach out to schools and talk to girls to help motivate them to continue with their education.
  d. The government should build more boarding schools for girls especially in the remote areas and this will help reduce rape cases.
  e. The government, Non-Governmental Organizations and other well-wishers, should keep the sanitary towel program very strong to help keep our girls in school, because girls tend to be out of school during their menstrual period because some say they cannot afford to buy the sanitary towels.
  f. Efforts to eliminate early/forced marriages, prohibited under international law, should be increased. The same is true for FGM. Some Samburu communities are replacing FGM with other rituals including educational attainment as a rite of passage. This should be encouraged.

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