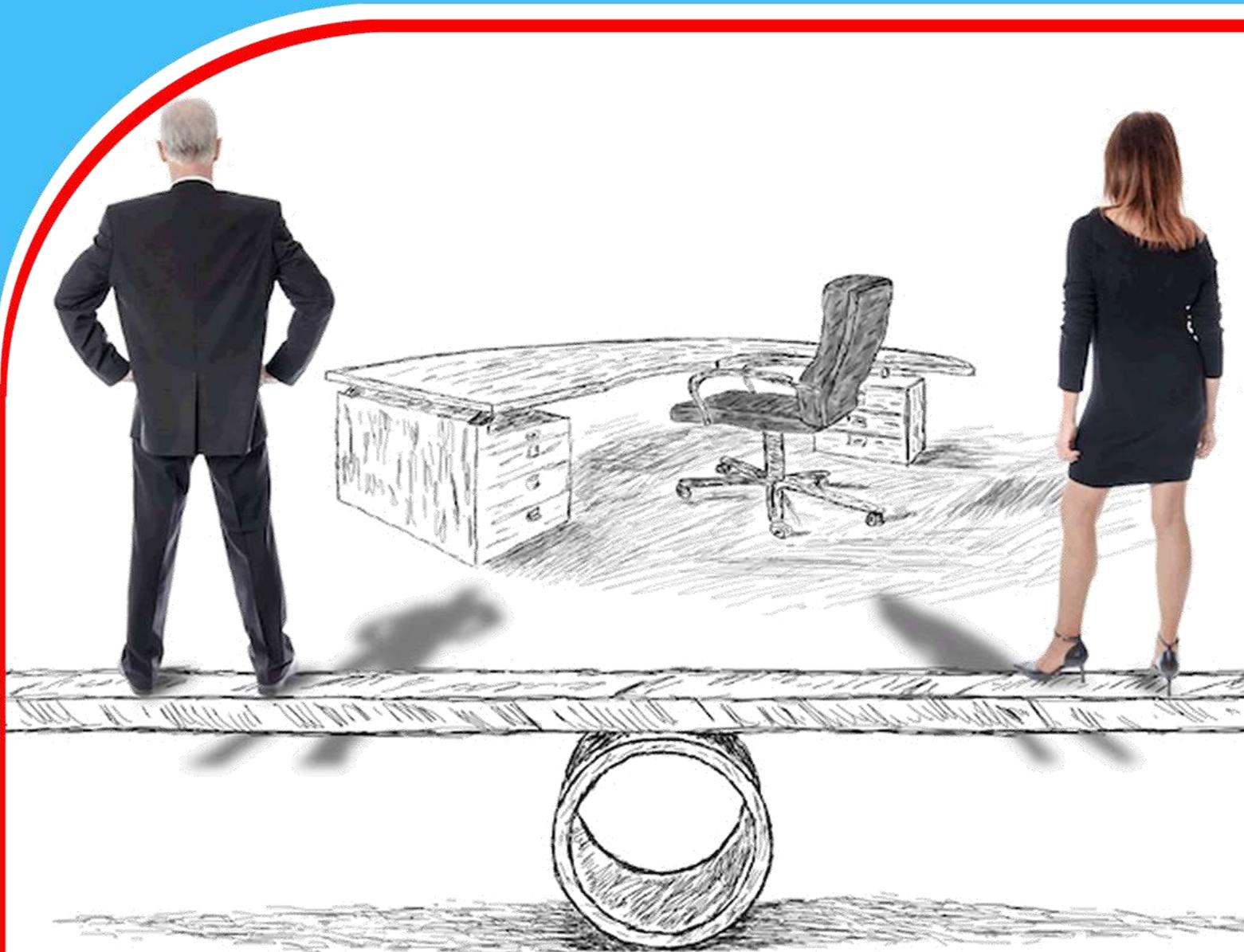


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## LOCAL VIEWS OF THE CONSTRAINTS FACING GIRL'S EDUCATION

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study was to establish the local members' views of the constraints facing girl's education as compared to that of boys.

**Methodology:** The sample was drawn from form two, form three and forms four secondary students. Data was generated from both secondary and primary sources. Purposive sampling was applied to get the division and the district in which units of observation have the required characteristics. The three schools in Chuluni division purposively selected were Kaluva Mixed day and boarding secondary school, Mbitini mixed day secondary school and Mbitini girls' secondary school. Snow ball sampling was used to reach girls out of school. The study targeted specific girls within the secondary schools and those who dropped out of school aged between 14-24 years in the last four years. It also targeted, teachers, parents and education officer in the secondary schools in Chuluni Division The tool for data collection was a set of questionnaires specifically designed for the students in and out of school.

**Findings:** The community members articulated that they perceived education as important for both boys and girls. They also highlighted that girls faced more constraints as compared to boys in the course of their study and therefore boys were favored incases of parental low incomes. These constraints included child labor, baby seating among other household chores. In general, it is evident that parents would like to educate their daughters but they lack means of providing for their education. Kitui district is an ASAL area and many residents are poor and lack meaningful source of livelihood. Therefore as much as they would like to put their children in school, they may lack income to meet their basic needs besides putting their girl child at school.

**Unique contribution to theory, practice and policy:** The government should expand early childhood education, particularly for girls, thus ensuring that more will enter and benefit from secondary schooling. Additionally, it is important to encourage girl-friendly schooling by making sure that schools are good places for girls to be secure, healthy, affirming and encouraging. There should be massive campaigns to rid of stereotypes that show women as the weaker sex. For instance, when designing textbooks and other materials, girls and women should not be shown in limited roles, for instance merely as mothers or providers of food.

**Keywords:** *views, constraints, girls, secondary school, education*

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Education is perceived as the cornerstone of economic growth and social development, as well as a principal means of improving the welfare of individuals (Orodho, 1997). It is also a key social service through which people identify the scope for spending and greater efficiency in meeting the needs of the poor children and their families. Subsequently, educating the youth plays an equally important role in economic and social development of poor countries (MDG, 2005). The World Bank is committed to fighting poverty and helping developing countries invest in their education systems. In light of this, it has embraced the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals as its main priority and particularly "eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education". The World Bank has recognized that there is no investment more effective for achieving development goals than educating girls.

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), every child has a right to education and the States' duty is to ensure that primary education is free and compulsory. Further, it encourages accessibility to different forms of secondary education to every child and makes higher education available to all on the basis of capacity. Education is a powerful tool for accelerating development. It is however pathetic that, 140 million children in the world still do not attend schools, two-thirds of them being girls (Howley, et al., 2000). Educating girls has been repeatedly shown to increase their self-esteem and influence over their own lives as well as family and community decisions. To add on, it helps in decreasing environmental degradation, lowers fertility, improves maternal and child health. Unfortunately, considerable resistance still exists in developing countries to educating girls (Fishel, 1998, Joshi, 2005).

In Africa, out of the 44 million girls out of school, at least 20 million live in Sub-Saharan Africa (DFID, 2004). The total number of children out of school in SSA has gone down but only 89 girls to every 100 boys are enrolled in school (Ibid). According to UNESCO (2006), most African governments spent less than 20 percent of their budgets on secondary education; "Households are spending the highest proportion of their incomes on secondary education, compared to primary and university level education". Retention and completion rates of girls in the secondary level continue to be affected especially in most countries of Sub-Saharan Africa (USAID, 2005). Due to the limited secondary school opportunities, boys outnumber girls.

### **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

More than ten years down the Beijing commitment to eliminate gender disparity in both primary and secondary education, millions of children especially girls are not making it to school (Fishel, 1998). Over the years, the girl child has been grossly neglected (Oleribe, 2002). UNESCO (2003) observes that after primary school, girls' participation plummets further and that only 17 percent of girls in Africa are enrolled in secondary school.

Of the 862 million illiterate adults in the world, two thirds are women (UNESCO 2002). These disparities justify global consensus on the compelling need to enhance girls' education and promote equity in education, especially in those countries where the gender gaps are wide, in order to provide girls and boys with equal opportunities and life choices. The UN has incorporated a fast track initiative for girls' education under UN Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI).

Despite concerted international efforts to eliminate gender disparity in education, the gender gap is still widening and discrimination continues to permeate the educational systems in some African countries. Literacy levels in Africa are still low; only 46 per cent of women are literate as compared to 60 per cent in Asian countries and 85 per cent in Latin America (Fishel, 1998). Secondary education receives about 22 per cent of the total education budget. Household burden in financing secondary is also high. Whereas families meet only 20 per cent of primary education costs and 8 per cent of university education costs, they shoulder 60 per cent of secondary education costs (UNESCO, 2006). Thus makes financing a key barrier to transitioning to secondary school for the poor, who form the majority in the sub-Saharan Africa.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, over 40% of young girls are married by the time they reach 18 years of age. In contrast, the women in developed countries marry in later ages. It argues that early marriages of girls are caused by poverty (UNICEF 2003). Only 12 percent of children entering Form one make it to Form 4 (UNICEF 2006). The majority of those who do not complete this level of education are girls.

Girl -child education is essential to the realization of total women empowerment and emancipation across the globe and involves the formal and sometimes informal training of a girl child in knowledge and skills of daily living (Oleribe, 2002a. and 2002b). Denial of GCE is the commonest manifestation of neglect of child education- the most retrogressive of all forms of child neglect (Oleribe, 2002a, 2002b).

Analytical Report (Vol.8), on education indicated province with lower progression rates are Eastern Province (37%), Coast (40%), north Eastern (41%) and Rift Valley (42%) as compared to Nairobi (68%). Males had higher progression rate (51%) than females (49%). The Traditional rural urban pattern indicated higher progression rate (60%) than rural areas 40%. District levels analysis of schools indicated Kitui and Mwingi recorded lowest rates of 29.4% and 29.2%.

Education is the responsibility of governments, and when governments fail to invest in education, the system fails and quality education suffers (DFID, 2004). Numerous school levies make accessibility to education unaffordable e to most parents. This has impacted negatively on the girls, leading to low participation in education and high illiteracy levels. This is particularly the case in Kitui District whereby dropout rates at the secondary level is 16.3% for boys while for girls is 21.3%. There are 66 secondary schools with a total enrolment rate of 11.8%, and the boys' average years of school attendance is 3.8% while that of girls is 3.5% (KDDP, 2002-2008). This implies that girls are not getting equitable access to education as compared to boys in Kitui district.

According to PRSP (2001-2004) the low-income households find it increasingly difficult to keep girls in school. Consequently the girls are asked to drop out of school in favor of their brothers in order to enable the latter to continue with education. Many rural parents prefer to educate boys arguing that girls will eventually marry and therefore need to be prepared for that marriage role. Some parents have been under the impression that it's the government's elusive responsibility to provide all the necessary resources to support the education sub sector. In Kitui District, girls have not been fully participating in high school education and there are serious gender imbalances as aforementioned.

Despite the fact that educated girls have better opportunities to earn higher wages, participate in community life and decision making and are better informed about health risks that may be relevant to both themselves and their families such as HIV and AIDS (DFID, 2006). HIV-AIDS course has also contributed significantly to girls' dropout rates as they are left orphaned and as family heads, hence impacting negatively on the girls' education. The girls also bear the responsibility of fending for their siblings.

There has been previous government education policies, like EFA, allocation of bursaries and even NGOs supporting education programs, yet attaining secondary level education is still a challenge to many girls and dropout rates among girls is still higher than for boys (GoK, 1997). In many cases, gender disparities in education sector is still abound in primary, secondary and tertiary levels in Kenya hence, participation and retention of girls in education and career opportunities is hindered. According to UNESCO (2004), the challenges of implementing Education policies indicate that there is passive participation of parents and communities in the education sector. Research specifically on the gender factor in girls' education and their participation in high school education in Kenya is scanty. Therefore there is need to undertake the study to provide more information on the gender factor in girls' education, and participation of girls in high school education Kenya.

The study was conducted in Kitui District, because low levels of gender equity awareness and high poverty levels characterize the area. It is also an ASAL region with erratic rainfall, which cannot support meaningful farming practices to supplement family incomes. This further impedes girls' participation in education due to limited family incomes. It is in the light of the above a forementioned background that this work sought to local views of the constraints facing girl's education in Chuluni Division in Kitui District.

### **1.3 Objective of the Study**

To identify the local views of the constraints facing girl's education

### **2.0 Literature Review**

#### **Socialist Marxist theory**

Marxists argue that every aspect of social life is shaped by how those material needs are met in society and social life is always organized around such basic aspects of economic life. Further, they look at how families accommodate themselves to different economic conditions and as result, survive within different systems of inequality and class relations. Schools will socialize children to accept their position in class structure and perform appropriately, whether as obedient or take charge as managers.

Karl Marx is one of the proponents of this theory. Marxists believed that the most distinguishing characteristic of any society is its form of property, the crucial determinant of an individual's behavior is his relation to means of production. Classes are determined on the basis of the individuals to means of production and property divisions are the crucial breaking lines in the class structure.

The Marxists believe that gender oppression is just a variation on class oppression, with men being the ruling class who control the most important resources while women (girls) remain the

subordinate class. Child rearing and other domestic labor is dedicated to women and hence exploited for men's benefit. They also argue that women's oppression is primarily as a matter of economics.

However women nowadays are challenging the male monopoly that has existed for a long time. According to Johnson (1997), justice for women involves more than changing how men think, feel and behave in gendered relationships. It applies to other institutions such as law, state, religion, education and mass media that support and reflect both economic and patriarchal interests.

The Marxist economic thoughts can also be used to understand the phenomenon why girls' dropout rates in education are higher than for boys. The Marxists analyses class in terms of patriarchy and women are considered as inferior intellectually hence lack quality education, leading to lack of equal opportunities and chances in life. Patriarchy enhances universal oppression of women because of the thought that men are more powerful; sexually and materially and in perpetuating acts of violence, exploitation and excessive control over women (Chelser (1994); Bunch (1987); Atkinson, 1974).

This theory focuses on the occupation, income and education level that will place a person in a particular class, therefore, making it impossible for people in the class to possess certain things in a society. In the case of this study, girls are likely to dropout due to the low levels of their parental incomes, education and occupations in Chuluni Division hence necessitating girls' failure to complete education.

The above theoretical perspectives are important in supporting the ideas that, education of women and girls improves the productive capacity of societies and their political. Economic and scientific institutions as well as a powerful tool for poverty:-education (Lockheed et al., 1991). It is therefore vital to empower them through education in order to improve their productivity as well quality of their wellbeing.

## **2.2 Empirical review**

In most societies, there are pervasive cultural stereotypes and imageries about the girl child (Ogidi, 2000). A number of studies refer to them as "social and economic burdens" (Ghosh, 1995; Sharma, 1995). This was further described by an Indian proverb that says "raising a girl is like watering a shady tree in someone- else's courtyard" (Mosser. 1993).

Similarly, there is a belief that girls do not need formal education and are deprived of the opportunity for skilled work. Many parents consider girls a liability to them and educating them as a disadvantage since they will stand to benefit the families they will be married to. It can be said therefore, that the socio-cultural environment in which the girl-child operate does not motivate her to attain her full potentials (Aderinto, 1991).

There is a world of disparity between a boy child and a girl child, which has been to the detriment of the girl child (The Nigerian woman, 1997). In Africa, if a man only has female children, he has no other alternative than to marry another wife who will bear him male children. This emanates from customs and traditions of the African society who sees it as a way of replacing the position of the father after death. According to the Nigerian Woman (1997), girls are educationally at a disadvantage since the society believes that they will eventually end up in their husbands' house or

kitchen, therefore, parents nurture girls to attract prospective suitors. Who pay high bride price to them.

In the traditional society, women and girls are perceived as properties of husband, rather than partners. This is further reinforced by the patriarchal concept of the household. Hence women (girls) experience restrictions in cultural, social and recreational facilities. The rural area is worse off than urban areas as far as survival and development rights are concerned, where women are the integral part of farming households. Similarly, there is a belief that certain tasks are regarded as "males" or "females". In some settings, a rigid division of labor exists between men and women, household members have separate incomes and expenditures. Women tend to have wider range of activities and enterprises than men. Women's agricultural activities are changing as a result of mounting pressure on land, environmental degradation, increased rural poverty, male emigration; which sometimes lead to female headed families. Despite this fact, women and girls are not considered as farmers.

### **3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The sample was drawn from form two, form three and forms four secondary students. Data was generated from both secondary and primary sources. Purposive sampling was applied to get the division and the district in which units of observation have the required characteristics. The three schools in Chuluni division purposively selected were Kaluva Mixed day and boarding secondary school, Mbitini mixed day secondary school and Mbitini girls' secondary school. Snow ball sampling was used to reach girls out of school. The study targeted specific girls within the secondary schools and those who dropped out of school aged between 14-24 years in the last four years. It also targeted, teachers, parents and education officers in the secondary schools in Chuluni Division. The tool for data collection was a set of questionnaires specifically designed for the students in and out of school. A key approach adopted by the study was Focus Group Discussion (FGD) supplemented by in-depth interviews and also the study made use of direct observations that were guided by observation guide or checklist. Furthermore the inferential and descriptive statistics were used for data analysis. Data was coded and entered into the computer for analysis using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

### **4.0 DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS**

Members of the community were interviewed to get their views on girls' education. The members of the FGDs comprised one education officer, three principals. Counseling teachers and other class teachers. Other members included the clergy men from the neighboring churches, three retired teachers, and the available parents of some of the girl dropouts.

A parent in a focus group discussion admitted that:

*"Some of the community members encourage their daughters to get married in order to get wealth and educate their siblings. Some cultural beliefs are held by some community members that marrying a girl to wealthy men is better than educating her to the highest level since she will become a prostitute. "*

When asked on the community's views concerning girls' education on relation to the boys,

Half of the girls in school strongly agreed that the community is positive and practices equality of opportunity regarding access to education of both boys and girls. A further 34% responded to the affirmative, whereas 11% disagreed and 3% strongly disagreed. This however didn't mean that they paid fees for girls more than boys due to social, economic and cultural constraints, boys were more favored than girls.

### **Parents' aspiration towards girl's education in relation to boys**

The researcher sought to identify the views of the parents towards education of the girl child. Findings from the girls in school indicate 54.7% of the girls felt that their parents have similar educational aspirations to their brothers while 33.3% of the girls indicated that their parents aspire more to their education as opposed to their brothers. The remaining 12% felt that their parents peg their aspirations on their brothers. On the other hand, 20% of the dropouts acknowledged equality of aspirations of parents, while 16% aspired to their boy's education as compared to the girls. The other 64% felt that girls were less paid attention to compared to the boys. In general, it is evident that parents would like to educate their daughters but they lack means of providing for their education. Kitui district is an ASAL area and many residents are poor hence lack meaningful source of livelihood. Therefore as much as they would like to put their children in school, they may lack income to meet their basic needs. This underlines the fact that the community has changed its views towards the biased provision of education to the girl child only.

One counseling teacher asserted that, *"girls are seen as sexual objects and the biggest problem is that poverty levels are high. Poor parents' consent cohabiting of girls and during drought; they are encouraged to join rich families. Even if they reach home late, they are not questioned as long as they come with something, especially food."*

## **5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION**

### **5.1 Summary of Findings**

The community members articulated that they perceived education as important for both boys and girls. They also highlighted that girls faced more constraints as compared to boys in the course of their study and therefore boys were favored in cases of parental low incomes. These constraints included child labor, baby seating among other household chores. In general, it is evident that parents would like to educate their daughters but they lack means of providing for their education. Kitui district is an ASAL area and many residents are poor and lack meaningful source of livelihood. Therefore as much as they would like to put their children in school, they may lack income to meet their basic needs besides putting their girl child at school.

### **5.2 Recommendation**

The government should expand early childhood education, particularly for girls, thus ensuring that more will enter and benefit from secondary schooling. Additionally, it is important to encourage girl-friendly schooling by making sure that schools are good places for girls to be secure, healthy. Affirming and encouraging. There should be massive campaigns to rid of stereotypes that show women as the weaker sex. For instance, when designing textbooks and other materials, girls and women should not be shown in limited roles, for instance merely as mothers or providers of food.

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