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dissertation entitled

UNDERSTANDING EXPERIENCES OF GIRLS IN A CENTER OF EXCELLENCE IN KAJIADO DISTRICT, KENYA: AN EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY

presented by

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has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Ph.D. degree in K-12 EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

Major Professor's Signature

5/7/2008

Date

UNDERSTANDING EXPERIENCES OF GIRLS IN A CENTER OF EXCELLENCE IN KAJIADO DISTRICT, KENYA: AN EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY

By

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of K-12 Educational Administration

2008

ABSTRACT

UNDERSTANDING EXPERIENCES OF GIRLS IN A CENTER OF EXCELLENCE IN KAJIADO DISTRICT, KENYA: AN EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY

By

Mary Mokeira Ombonga

Education is considered a bedrock upon which the social, economic and development agenda of any country rests. It is regarded as a pivotal force capable of eliminating social and economic injustices inherent in many communities. The education of women in general and girls in particular provides a meaningful and inextricable link in the reduction of maternal deaths and disabilities, delayed early marriages, and prevention of unsafe sex and its consequences. It is against this background that the campaign for Education for All (EFA) was initiated. The establishment of intervention programs such as Centers of Excellence in rural and marginalized areas is one step in attempting to tackle some of the underlying socio-cultural barriers to girls' education.

This study sought to explore and understand experiences of girls in a Center of Excellence in Kajiado district, Kenya. Some of the girls were those who escaped or were rescued from early marriages or female genital mutilation (FGM), socio-cultural practices prevalent in the community around Kajiado. Utilizing a qualitative case study design, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of girls prior to and after their involvement with the Center of Excellence?

2. In what ways does the Center influence the girls' current and future educational goals?
3. What strategies does the Center employ to support the girls?
4. What is the nature of the relationship between the Center and the community within which it is located?

Data for this study were collected for a period of 3 months using face-to-face open-ended interviews. The respondents included the Center's principal, 2 teachers, one female and one male and 4 student respondents in a focus group. The findings indicate that the Center, through its programs, was shaping the lives of the girls as well as empowering them to transform their lives and that of their families and communities. The study also uncovered girls' palpable dreams and aspiration to excel academically and change the perception that girls are only good as homemakers.

While the girls in the Center embodied the challenges the community was experiencing, the study garnered that the Center had started programs meant to sensitize and enlighten the community on issues such as HIV/AIDS prevention and poverty reduction. This study presents an imperative and meaningful literature that is critical to establishing innovative, culturally appropriate and gender-friendly educational interventions and programs that can benefit girls in rural and marginalized communities. Policymakers, planners and practitioners will find it invaluable in illuminating the challenges and opportunities that can be capitalized on to address issues of gender and education, poverty and cultural practices that hinder the implementation of Universal Primary Education.

This dissertation is dedicated:

To my parents,

The late Samson Nyamwega and Wilkister Kwamboka who believed in my potential from early on and inspired me to reach for the stars

And

My loving husband, Dr. Kennedy Ombonga Ongaga and our children, Momanyi, Mogaka and Kemunto for their love, support, prayers, and understanding during my many years of schooling.

---Don't Stop Trusting.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I feel greatly indebted to the loved ones and friends who held my hand, supported and cheered me through this journey. My deepest gratitude goes to my dissertation director, Dr. Reitumetse Mabokela and my advisor, Dr. Christopher Dunbar Jr., two gracious mentors whose guidance, support, and patience, provided me with the skills and tools to reconstruct and rediscover myself as an aspiring scholar. I also thank my dissertation committee members, Dr. Francisco Villarruel and Dr. Susan Printy for their wisdom, thoughts, encouragement, time and attention to my work amid their busy semester schedules.

I cannot forget the invaluable support of my family. My loving husband, Dr. Kennedy Ongaga, who stood by me and endured the highs and lows of my doctoral program, his love, encouragement and constructive criticism, enabled me to survive the hurdles of this journey. Our beloved children, Brian, Adams and Anne for their unwavering love, understanding and cheers that saw me through the dissertation writing process. Pastor Daniel Nyamwega and his beloved wife, Joan Nyamwega for their hospitality and assistance during my data collection phase. My sisters, Eunice, Rebecca and my brothers for their prayers and support. To my cousin Sheba Onchiri and her children, Sylvia, Abigael and Maureen for their encouragement.

I cannot forget my network of friends who were not only supportive and enthusiastic about my work, but also generous and loving. My very sweet Barbara Dickman, Barbara Powers, Eleanor Smith, Maggie Pollock and Sally McClintock.

My church family, Bethel Seventh Day Adventist Church, for their spiritual guidance and support.

My special gratitude goes to MSU Graduate School, especially Dr. Yevonne Smith for her words of wisdom and generous financial support without which I would never have been able to finish my doctoral program on time. I would also wish to express my deepest appreciation to the staff and many courageous girls at Kajiado Girls Center of Excellence who shared their hearts and part of their lives with me. If I have done it, you can do it girls. Believe in yourselves and train your eyes on that brighter star.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS:	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CDF:	Constituency Development Fund
CEDAW:	Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CRC:	Convention for Rights of the Child
DFID:	Department For International Development
EFA:	Education For All
FAPED:	Forum for African Parliamentarians for Education
FAWE:	Forum for African Women Educationalists
FEMNET:	The African Women Development Communication Network
FGM:	Female Genital Mutilation
FIDA:	Federation of Kenyan Women Lawyers
FPE:	Free Primary Education
GCE:	Global Campaign for Education
HIV:	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IBRD:	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ICRW:	International Center for Research on Women
IMF:	International Monetary Fund
KCPE:	Kenya Certificate of Primary Education
KDHS:	Kenya Demographic and Healthy Survey
MDG:	Millennium Development Goals

MOEST:	Ministry of Education Science and Technology
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organization
SAP:	Structural Adjustment Programmes
SEBF:	Secondary Education Bursary Fund
SMT:	Science Mathematics and Technology
STI:	Sexually Transmitted Infections
UNAIDS:	United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS
UNESCO:	United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA:	United Nations Population Fund
UNGEI:	United Nations Girls Education Initiative
UNICEF:	United Nations International Children's Education Fund
UN:	United Nations
USAID:	United States Agency for International Development
USAID:	United States Agency on International Development
WEF:	World Education Forum
WFP:	World Food Program
WHO:	World Health Organization

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

A comprehensive report commissioned by UNESCO/ UNICEF (2002) on the state of the world's children paints a grim picture on the plight of girls and women in developing countries. The report shows that two of every three children in the world who do not attend school are girls. More than 130 million 6–11 year-olds are out of school of which 81 million (60 percent) of them are girls. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the report indicates, girls make up to 60% of the 42 million children who do not attend school. Obura (1991) further attests that in spite of an increase in the average level of education in Sub-Saharan African, completion rates for girls still remain low.

As the starting point to narrow gender disparities in education, the provision of universal basic education has continued to gain prominence in the development agenda of many governments in developing countries. The education of women and girls in particular has been cited as the single most important investment that developing countries can embrace in order to realize benefits that can translate to better health for families, increased productivity and lower fertility rates (Summers, 1992; Coclough, 1994; UNICEF, 2000; UNESCO, 1991). However, current research conducted in developing countries reveal alarming gender disparities in the provision of and participation in basic education for boys and girls (UNICEF, 2004; UNESCO, 2005: UN 2000). This trend is more pronounced in rural areas[1].

[1] Rural areas as used herein to denote regions that are characteristic of high adherence to cultural norms and limited levels of development as in infrastructure, education, basic services and other social amenities.

Rural areas are considered tenacious embodiments of deep-rooted cultural beliefs and practices that are detrimental to girls' education. Leach (2003) views rural settings as "culturally sensitive ground, embedded with a multitude of traditions, norms, and values relating to gender roles and relations, and to status and power in what remain heavily patriarchal social systems" (p.6). This kind of system often perpetuates girl-unfriendly practices such as early marriage, female genital mutilation, sexual violence, excessive domestic chores and male domination, all of which combine to disadvantage the education of girls (Mlama, 2005; Sultan, 2004; UNESCO, 2006; FAWE, 1996; Obura, 1991; FAWE, 2001, UNESC0 2003; Eshiwani, 1985; Mirsky, 2003; Kiragu, 1994; Leach et al., 2003; Hyde, 1994; Gordon, 1995; UN, 2000; UNICEF 2001; Stromquist, 1994; Davidson & Kanyuka, 1992; Herrera, 1992). While these practices are pervasive both at home and societal level, some of them are manifested within school systems.

At the school level, impediments to girls' education are reflected in lack of gender sensitive facilities such as separate toilet facilities for boys and girls, bullying and sexual violence, teachers' attitudes and stereotypes as well as insensitive curriculum (Gordon, 1995; UN, 2000; UNICEF 2001; Stromquist, 1989; Davidson & Kanyuka, 1992; Herrera, 1992). It is unfortunate that much of the educational reforms initiated to address these retrogressive cultural practices and institute aspects of social justice "remains at the level of rhetoric and paper statements, and is not integrated into the actual design and implementation of reforms" (Leach, 2003, p.7). A review of some of these cultural practices and their effect on the education of girls is worth exploring.

In Kenya, which was the focus of this study and particularly in rural settings, a large percentage of girls who enroll in schools often drop out before they complete their

basic education (Chege and Sifuna, 2006). A myriad of obstacles are said to impede their participation in education. A plethora of literature point out that deeply entrenched socio-cultural practices are leading obstacles to girls' education (Leach et al., 2003; FAWE, 2001; UNESCO, 2003; Hyde, 1994;.UNICEF, 2001). These obstacles include: families' preference for boys to girls, early marriages for girls, female genital mutilation (FGM), and household responsibilities that deprive girls of valuable school time (Obura, 1991; UNESC0 1993; Eshiwani, 1985; Mirsky, 2003; Kiragu, 1994; Gordon, 1995; UN, 2000; UNICEF 2001; Stromquist, 1989; Davidson & Kanyuka, 1992; Herrera, 1992: Obermeyer, 1999). At the school level, these obstacles might be seen in lack of gender sensitive facilities such as separate toilet facilities for girls, bullying and harassment by boys, and teachers' attitudes and stereotypes. Further literature view school environments along gender inequality and gender gaps, which emanate from the structural gender roles as perceived and understood by the larger society (Obura, 1991; Eshiwani, 1985; FAWE, 2000; UNICEF/UNESCO, 2002).

A review of literature on women and girls' education in developing countries focus mostly on identifying and describing general constraints that impede girls' access and success in education (Mulugeta, 2004; FAWE, 2000; Kane, 1995; Leach, 2002; Swanson & Bendera, 1998). While this literature has helped to design relevant interventions in context specific environments, there is paucity of data that speaks to the success and meaning of such intervention strategies. It is upon this premise that I undertook this study as an attempt to explore and understand experiences of girls who were enrolled in a FAWE Center of Excellence in Kajiado District, Kenya. A majority of these girls were those who had been rescued or escaped from early marriages and female

genital mutilation (FGM), socio-cultural practices that are prevalent in communities around Kajiado. I specifically sought to understand ways in which the Center influenced the girls' current and future educational goals, strategies the Center utilized to support the girls' educational goals in addition to understanding the relationship between the Center and the community in which it was located.

Statement of the Problem

Education is the backbone of any country's economy and therefore it can be used as an indicator of a better and quality life for her citizenry (UNESCO, 2000). While this assertion might be true for boys, research cutting across the globe show that girls are less likely to be enrolled in school and even less likely to complete their basic education (UNICEF, 2003; UNESCO, 2000; World Bank, 1999). In the developing world, girls face many barriers to access school and even once in school, they continue to face insurmountable challenges that hamper their full participation, retention and academic success. Entrenched traditions that relegate girls as passive actors in education; poverty, unconducive school environments and inadequate facilities within schools are some of the hurdles that disproportionately affect girls in school (FAWE, 2001; Mlama, 2005; Leach & Machakanja, 2000). I believe that unchallenged socio-cultural norms within society, its communities, families and schools will not only continue to negatively impact on the social and economic wellbeing of its members but also aggravate the already fragile state of women and girls' education.

When 189 heads of states signed the Millennium Declaration in Dakar, Senegal in 2000, they recognized that educating girls is a powerful and necessary first step towards ending poverty and achieving human rights. They made gender parity in primary and

secondary education their priority in the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) by promising to get as many girls as boys into school by 2005. However, recent research reveals that these goals have not been actualized in many developing countries (UNESCO, 2003/ 2004; UN 2005; ECA 2004; FAWE, 2004). Challenges in meeting these goals are compounded by high levels of poverty, burgeoning impact of HIV/AIDS, which affects more girls than boys, and the practice of retrogressive cultural norms.

According to World Bank, (1999) and FAWE, (2001), closing the gap between boys and girls' education would not only help women, their families, and their communities, but will also boost the social and economic development of the countries they live in (Subbarao & Raney, 1995). Thus, societies that prefer not to invest in girls pay a higher price in terms of slower growth and reduced income.

Based on the foregoing, it is logical to postulate that as long as girls are left behind, the goal of providing education for all children and promoting social, economic, and political development will remain elusive to many governments in developing countries. It is therefore imperative for governments and development agencies to deliberately design, implement and evaluate programs and interventions that increase girls access, participation and success in education.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of girls in a Center of Excellence in Kajiado District, Kenya. Specifically, I sought to understand the Center's fundamental role in influencing the girls' current and future educational goals. Pertinent to the Center's role was my desire to understand the strategies employed to support and inspire girls to achieve their educational goals. Since I believe that school programs may

directly or indirectly affect communities around them, I found it imperative to further understand the nature of the relationship between the Girls' Center of Excellence and the community within which it was located. By examining these variables, I hope that the findings of this study will assist policymakers and education stakeholders to design appropriate and gender responsive programs that are suitable in promoting and enhancing education for all children especially those in rural settings.

Research Questions

In this study I used a grand question and four sub-questions to guide my investigation. According to (Spradley 1979), "the purpose of grand tour questions is to obtain a preliminary survey of the meaning system your informant is using as well as to acquire many different category labels. Grand tour questions encourage the informants to ramble on and on" (p.87). Spradley's view is congruent with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) conviction that at first, the researcher approaches the study"... not knowing what is not known" (p.235). Hence, my grand question was:

What are the Experiences of Girls in a Center of Excellence in Kajiado district, Kenya?
To focus my study, I utilized the following four guiding questions:

1. What are the experiences of girls prior to and after their involvement with the Center of Excellence in Kajiado?
2. In what ways has the Center influenced the girls' current and future educational goals?
3. What strategies does the Center employ to support the educational goals of the girls?

4. What is the nature of the relationship between the Center and the community within which it is located?

Significance of the Study

Observation from the literature show that gender equality and equity in education is a global concern and educating women and girls is critical to social and economic well being of democracies worldwide (Rousso and Wehmeyer, 2001). In 2002, the government of Kenya introduced Free Primary education in order to address gender disparities in education and ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling. While this is a positive step towards increasing students' enrollment, there is lack of systematic intervention programs that address challenges girls face both in school and in the community. There still exist significant underlying socio-cultural challenges that continue to plague the education of women and girls in rural and marginalized areas. The establishment of intervention programs such as FAWE Center of Excellence in Kajiado district, Kenya is one step in attempting to tackle some of these underlying socio-cultural barriers to girls' education.

This study will be significant in articulating the quandary of girls in Kajiado Center of Excellence, which is a reflection of the experiences of most girls in rural and other marginalized areas. It is my hope that this study might provide policy makers and other education stakeholders with some helpful insights to enable them to review, acknowledge and change inherent school-based and socio-cultural impediments that hold girls back from participating and achieving academic success. The findings of this study may also serve as a springboard for policy makers to design, implement, monitor, and evaluate policies meant to create safe schools and increase educational resources for the

girl-child and indeed for all children. Only then can school organizations in rural areas to be meaningful and act as radiating centers of change for marginalized students and their communities.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, I utilized a Gender and Development (GAD) theoretical framework to explore and understand experiences of girls enrolled in a Center of Excellence in Kajiado, Kenya. Specifically, I sought to unpack the Center's fundamental role in influencing the current and future educational goals of the girls as well as the supporting strategies used to inspire them to achieve such goals.

GAD assumes that gender conceptions and roles are the product of a broad network of social influences operating interdependently in a variety of societal subsystems (Bussey and Bandura, 1999). It also postulates that people contribute to their self-development and bring about social changes that define and structure gender relationships through their swift actions within the interrelated systems of influence. In this regard, I found it critical to understand experiences and aspirations of girls who escape socio-cultural environments that impede their potentialities and how they thrive in a FAWE Center of Excellence in Kajiado, Kenya. Proponents of GAD framework portend that empowering women with education is moving them from the status of passive victims to that of active decision-makers (Young et al. 1981; Moser 1989; Elson 1992). In this context, I asked my secondary informants about the strategies that they employ to ensure that girls, who attain the highest grade level that center offers, transition to environments that continue to empower them.

According to Sen and Grown (1987), GAD also recognizes that women are deeply affected by the nature of patriarchal power in their societies at the national, community, and household levels. Moreover, women's material conditions and patriarchal authority are both defined and maintained by the accepted norms and values that define their roles and duties in a particular society. FAWE's Center of Excellence in Kajiado is an example of a deliberate response to the social and cultural practices of the communities that see no value in educating a girl. In this case, GAD framework enabled me to put into context the social and cultural background of my student respondents (girls) in order to understand their circumstances prior to their enrollment in the Center of Excellence.

GAD's focus is on relationships between women and men, not on women alone. According to Parpart, et al., (2000), "Gender relations are seen as the key determinant of women's position in society, not as immutable reflections of the natural order but as socially constructed patterns of behavior - the social construction of gender, which can be changed if this is desired" (p.11). Moser, (1993) contends that GAD approach focuses on the interconnection of gender, class, and race and the social construction of their defining characteristics. Women, in his view, experience oppression differently, according to their race, class, colonial history, culture, and position in the community and its economic order.

From a GAD framework standpoint, girls who were rescued from their communities' harmful cultural practices and placed in safe havens such as Centers of Excellence can be categorized into two gender interests, practical and strategic needs. Advancing this rationale, Molyneux (1985) says that while practical gender needs arise

out of immediate perceived needs, such as the need for food, shelter, education, and health care, strategic gender interests arise out of an analysis of women's subordination and require changes in the structures of gender, class, and race that define women's position in any given culture. Strategic interests include the goal of gender equality. This formed part of my interest to explore if and how practical and strategic gender interests of girls are met in a Girls Center of Excellence in Kajiado.

A critical tenet of GAD approach is the call for formulation of more gender-sensitive interventions and empowerment policies that require the involvement of both men and women as beneficiaries and agents. Empowerment as used herein denotes achievement of equal participation in and control of the development process and its benefits by men and women (Leach, 2003). This further means that women girls in this case have an enabling environment to take greater control of their own destiny. According to Leach, empowerment encourages gender awareness in development projects and specifically helps women to develop the ability to recognize issues affecting them, be it in projects involving their gender or those where both men and women are involved.

Although often considered passive recipients of assistance, girls in intervention programs such as the FAWE Centers of Excellence are hoped to become agents of change and development in themselves, their families and communities through empowerment. I found GAD an appropriate framework upon which my respondents voiced their concerns, frustrations and dreams.

Organization of the study

This dissertation is organized into six chapters. Chapter I comprises of introduction to the study, the problem statement, purpose and significance as well as a descriptive conceptual framework. Chapter II consists of the literature review that served to highlight the rationale for studying the unique phenomenon of girls experiences in a Center of Excellence. Chapter III describes the methodology for this study while chapter IV is the presentation of data in which the setting of the study and respondent profiles are described. Chapter V is a thematic analysis of the data in which three themes emerged in response to the research question: What are the Experiences of Girls in a Center of Excellence in Kajiado district, Kenya? The themes include: Education and empowerment, Hopes and dreams, and the Maasai a vulnerable community. These themes are reflective of the respondents' experiences, stories/narratives as well as challenges and opportunities. Chapter VI includes the study's implications, recommendations and conclusions.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The provision of universal basic education has continued to gain prominence in the development agenda of many governments in developing countries. The education of women and girls in particular has been cited as the single most important investment that developing countries can embrace in order to realize benefits that can translate to better health for families, increased productivity and lower fertility rates (Summers, 1992; Coclough, 1994; UNICEF, 2000; UNESCO, 1991). However, current research reveals alarming gender disparities in the provision and participation in basic education for boys and girls in developing countries (UNICEF, 2004; UNESCO, 2005: UN 2000). This trend is more pronounced in rural areas.

In Kenya, which was the setting of this study and particularly in rural settings, a large percentage of girls who enroll and participate in schools seldom complete their basic education (Obura, 1991). In the rural areas, deeply entrenched and retrogressive cultural practices are said to deny girls an opportunity to acquire basic education. Some of these practices are manifested in the preference for boys to girls, early and pre-arranged marriages for girls of school-going-age and female genital mutilation (Obura, 1991; FAWE, 2001; UNICEF 2004; Mirsky, 2003; Kiragu, 1994; Leach et al., 2003; UNESCO, 1993; Hyde, 1994). At the school level, these practices are evident in lack of gender sensitive facilities such as separate toilet facilities for girls, bullying and

harassment by boys, and teachers' attitudes and stereotypes (Gordon, 1995; UN, 2000; UNICEF 2001; Stromquist, 1989; Davidson & Kanyuka, 1992; Herrera, 1992).

A review of literature on women and girls education in developing countries mostly focus on identifying and describing general constraints that impede girls access and success in education (Mulugeta, 2004; FAWE, 2000; Kane, 1995; Leach , 2002; Swanson & Bendera, 1998). While this literature has helped to design relevant interventions in context specific environments, there is paucity of data that speaks to the success and meaning of such intervention strategies. Utilizing a cultural lens, this study will attempt to understand experiences of girls, who are students, in a Center of Excellence in Kajiado, Kenya. A majority of these girls are those who have been rescued from early marriages and female genital mutilation (FGM), cultural practices that are prevalent in communities around Kajiado. The Kajiado center of excellence is said to be a formal education intervention strategy that is gender responsive. My study will seek to understand the meaning of this center to the girls and how it empowers them to navigate their social and cultural environments.

Education and Girls

As a bedrock upon which the social, economic and development agenda of any country rests, education is considered a pivotal force in eliminating social and economic injustices inherent in many communities (Mlama, 2005; Dakar, 2000). A surfeit of literature reveal that education is an essential ingredient in breaking barriers and empowering disadvantaged groups and individuals in society (Psacholopoulos & Patrinos, 2002; Chimombo, 2000; World Bank, 2004; Swanson, 1994; Psacholopoulos,

1995; Bellamy,2004). In the context of developing countries, education is a pillar for individual, regional as well as international development (World Bank, 2004).

Researchers suggest a strong link between primary education and non-formal training programs that broaden participants' horizons, raising their aspirations and familiarizing them with relevant modern concepts and institutional frameworks (Floro & Wolf, 1990; Summers, 1992; Coclough, 1994; UNICEF, 2000). It further enriches and opens their horizon through life skills, and provides avenues for economic, civic and political involvement, which in turn strengthens communities and families (FAWE, 2000; &Hill 1991: UNICEF, 2002: UNESCO, 2004; Schultz, 1989).

Further studies indicate that women's education, compared to that of men, is linked directly to the delay in marriage, lower fertility rates, the desire for fewer children, and the increased practice of effective methods of contraception as well as improved health care (Nafula, 2000; Mirsky, 2003; Kiragu, 1994; Leach et al., 2003; Hyde, 1994; Gordon, 1995; UN, 2000; UNICEF, 2001). In my view, well resourced gender-sensitive educational interventions are much needed in the rural settings to awaken girls' educational prowess in order for them to develop a critical understanding of their circumstances and social environment geared towards taking control of their own lives.

A comprehensive study conducted by UNESCO and UNICEF (2003) on the state of the world's children, indicate that 104 million children aged 6-11 do not attend school every year. Of these, 60 million are girls and 40% of them live in sub-Saharan Africa. These findings corroborate other research, which shows that a staggering 150 million children currently enrolled in school will drop out before completing primary education, a level essential for the acquisition of basic literacy (World Bank, 2002a; Herz et al,

2004; UNICEF, 2002; Bruns et al., 2003). Although the average level of education in sub-Saharan Africa has generally increased in recent years, completion rates for girls still remain low starting at the primary school level (Obura, 1991; FAWE, 1999; UNICEF, 2001). A UNESCO (2003a) report discloses that after primary education, girl's participation declines sharply (17%) at the secondary level. Common in rural and hard-to-reach areas, this trend is detrimental to women and girls who play crucial productive roles that immensely contribute to the social and economic well being of their families and societies (Floro & Wolf, 1990).

The education of women in general and girls in particular provides a meaningful and inextricable link in the reduction of maternal deaths and disabilities, delayed early marriages, and prevention of unsafe sex and its consequences such as STIs and the dreaded HIV/AIDS (ID21, 2003; UNICEF, 2003; UN, 2004; WHO, 2001). It is against this background that the campaign for Education for All (EFA) was initiated (World Bank, 1999; FAWE, 2001; UNICEF, 2003; UNESCO, 2000). Hence, one cannot underscore the critical importance of designing and implementing gender-sensitive intervention strategies meant to boost the social and economic well being of the girl child.

Overview of Education in Kenya

Like in other developing countries, progress in the education sector in Kenya can be garnered from a review of national, regional and international frameworks that call for equal participation of all citizens. Notable among these are the United Nations Charter on Human Rights (1948), African Nations Declaration (1961), Mexico (1975), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Jomtien (1990), Beijing (1995) and the

recent Dakar Framework (2000). Amongst the fundamental objectives of these declarations and frameworks is the requirement of governments to implement universal free primary education and pay specific attention to the plight of the girl-child. The United Nations Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI), Forum for Africa Partners in Education (FAPED), Global Campaign for Education (GCE) and Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) are some of the organizations that coalesce to put pressure on governments to enact free education while articulating the critical needs of women and girls (FAWE, 1995 & WEF, 2000).

In line with these declarations, the government of Kenya has in the recent years initiated educational reforms with a view to accelerating the country's socio-economic development (MOEST, 2004). Many of these reforms have been undertaken to address existing regional and national disparities in terms of access and enrollment. The recent introduction of free primary education in 2003 typifies one such initiative by the government of Kenya to ensure access and participation of all children of school going age. This progress notwithstanding, there still exist substantial regional, geographical and institutional differences in the acquisition of basic education between boys and girls. In rural and marginalized areas, which are hubs of retrogressive social and cultural adherence, education is considered a preserve of a few and sometimes a threat to the status quo. It is therefore pertinent to understand how institutional interventions set up in the heart of entrenched cultural practices such as early marriages and FGM make sense not only to the victims (girls) but also the communities around them.

Girls' Education in Kenya

The current system of Education in Kenya can be understood based on three levels known as 8-4-4. While primary level (inclusive of early childhood education) takes 8 years to complete, secondary and university education each take 4 years for one graduate. Since the country has a national curriculum, which mandates national exams at each level, students who do not meet the cut-off points to advance to the next level are absorbed into competitive vocational /technical training institutions.

Although Kenya's current system of education was designed after independence, 1963, it has evolved over time and its linkage to the progressive marginalization of women and girls must be understood in the context of history, tradition and emerging global trends (Ochwada, 1997). While the national education policy does not discriminate against girls and women, their participation in all levels is marked by a myriad of impediments (Obura, 1991; Eshiwani, 1985; MOEST, 2004, Government of Kenya, 1964). Girls and especially those in rural areas continue to be left behind in education due to the prevailing cultural environment in which some communities are more accommodative of gender inequalities (Mlama, 2005; FAWE, 2000). According to Chege and Sifuna (2006), girls' low participation in education varies widely at provincial and district levels and it mirrors regional variations in economic and political development in the country. The vast rural settings in marginalized areas in Kenya characterize this developmental trend.

The provision of good quality primary education in Kenya has continued to face considerable challenges and disruptions. For instance, the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPS) by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World

Bank in the 1980s greatly hindered the advancement of primary education through the introduction of cost sharing in the form of school fees, which increased the cost of education especially for poor households. In this case, one can argue that the drive for gender equality is not a local initiative but one that is largely driven and determined by the international donor agenda. In the reign of SAPS, most girls in rural areas were left behind educationally as most parents made choices that favored boys.

While the introduction of free primary education in Kenya in 2003 has increased the general enrollment of pupils in schools, the limited structural facilities and insensitive school environments have not changed to favor the girl-child. I believe that educational policies that emphasize access alone but lack insight on academic performance and success are bound to fail. Thus, "getting more girls into school does not guarantee equality of opportunity or outcome" (Leach, 2003, p.7). It is plausible to say that in rural Kenya, policies devoid of the local socio-cultural environment are likely to impede instead of advancing girls education. FAWE (2003), Mlama (2005) and UNESCO (2005) say that the prevailing socio-cultural conditions of rural life radically reduce the chances for girls to stay in school long enough to acquire the knowledge, values and skills necessary to enable them play positive roles in their societies in a rapidly changing world.

In an effort to address the deficiency inherent in the education of girls, most education related international, regional and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in Kenya have a component on gender and girls' education in their programs (Mlama, 2005). This is a campaign strategy geared towards garnering support to form a basis upon which communities, individuals, private sector and other non-government organizations can coalesce to ensure equal participation of boys and girls as

well as men and women in education (MOEST, 2005). Interventions in girls' education such as FAWE Centers of Excellence can be viewed as deliberate efforts meant to give currency to the education of girls in rural areas. It is upon this premise that I will seek to explore the experiences of girls in a FAWE center of Excellence in Kenya.

Girls' Education in Rural Kenya

Since independence, the government of Kenya has shown commitment towards ensuring education for all her citizens. The inception of several education commissions such as the Ominde report (1964) instituted immediately after independence and others such as Gachathi (1976), Mackay (1981), Kamunge (1988) Education master plan (1998) and Koech (2000) is a clear manifestation of such a commitment. Pertinent in all these reports and master plans is the reference to the need for acceleration and improvement in the education of girls (Elimu Yetu Coalition, 2003).

In the context of rural and marginalized areas in Kenya, it is imperative to understand the historical, social and political context under which education occurred. In pre-colonial Kenya, children belonged to the society and as such any kind of training and preparation for societal roles and adulthood was a preserve of the family and the community (Mensch &Lyold, 1998). Adolescence was a period often marked by a barrage of communally understood and sexually segregated rituals crowned by celebrations. This was a crucial period in children's lives that signaled their initiation into adulthood, boys to men and girls to women. It is during this time that critical information regarding sexuality, reproduction, and adult roles were shared by designated persons (between men and boys and between women and girls). Like elsewhere in Africa, colonial rule in Kenya left behind permanent legacies that greatly influenced gender

relations and heavily eroded women's power base within their society (Obura et al, 1992; Kinyanjui, 1974; Sheffield, 1973; Eshiwani, 1985 and Egbo, 2000).

Rural areas are considered epitomes of deep-rooted adherence to cultural and traditional practices that are detrimental to girls' education. Leach (2003), views rural settings as "culturally sensitive ground, embedded with a multitude of traditions, norms, and values relating to gender roles and relations, and to status and power in what remain heavily patriarchal social systems" (p.6). These areas often perpetuate practices manifested in early marriage, initiation ceremonies such as female genital mutilation, sexual violence, excessive domestic chores, male superiority and domination of women all of which combine to disadvantage the education of girls (Mlama, 2005; Sultan, 2004; UNESCO, 2006; FAWE, 1996; Obura, 1991; FAWE, 2001, UNESC0 2003; Eshiwani, 1985; Mirsky, 2003; Kiragu, 1994; Leach et al., 2003; Hyde, 1994; Gordon, 1995; UN, 2000; UNICEF 2001; Stromquist, 1994; Davidson & Kanyuka, 1992; Herrera, 1992). It is unfortunate that much of the educational reforms initiated to address these retrogressive cultural practices and pursue equality "remains at the level of rhetoric and paper statements, and is not integrated into the actual design and implementation of reforms" (Leach, 2003, p.7).

In their comprehensive review on girls' education in developing countries, Herz and Sperling (2004) reveal that rural and poor areas of sub-Saharan Africa form the bulk of regions where millions of children grow up without receiving basic education. They contend that education imbues in women a sense of empowerment to not only improve their own welfare but also that of their families and society. On the economic sphere, education leads to higher wages hence higher returns for women which in turn lead to

economic growth (Psachoropoulos & Patrinos, 2002; Shultz 2002; Dollar & Gatti, 1999). On the cultural front, education can reduce the risk of female genital mutilation and early marriages that are prevalent in rural areas. This is because women with education are less likely to subject their daughters to such practice (WHO, 1998).

In another study, Brock and Cammish (1998) conducted research in 7 developing countries with a view to finding factors that affect female participation in education. Their findings reveal a number of interrelated social, economic, religious and other factors that influence the extent of female participation in formal educational institutions. These include:

- Geographical location of the school (may adversely affect girls' access more than boys).
- Socio-cultural factors that reflect patriarchal (male-dominated) ideas, e.g. early marriage and girls' heavier domestic and subsistence workload.
- Religious factors (indirect but overall positive effect on female participation in education).
- Education factors such as lack of resources, low teacher quality and morale, lack of female primary teachers in rural areas and gender bias in teaching materials.

Similarly, Colclough et al., (2000) conducted case studies in Ethiopia and Guinea that sought to determine causes of gender inequalities in primary schooling. Their study also reveals that a wide variety of cultural practices as well as poverty negatively affect girls' educational participation, relative to boys. They further found out that household work, cultural practices of early marriage of girls, as well as gendered division of labor

limit girls' available time for school. Both Brock and Cammish (1998) and Colclough et al., (2000) studies suggest that without specific intervention strategies to address these adverse cultural practices, the gender gap between boys and girls in education as well as qualitative inequities in school outcomes between girls and boys are likely to last for a while.

These pieces of research document and underscore the vitality of girls' education as critical and inevitable resource in the elimination of culturally oriented and gender-based obstacles that impede their social, economic and political progress. However, there seems to be a general commitment to the goal of gender equality without concrete translation of these commitments to benefit girls. There is need to understand how FAWE Centers of Excellence improve girls access to education, awaken the commitment and participation of communities embedded within their institutions to support their overall goals and objectives. In this study I specifically seek to understand the socio-cultural factors that impede girls education in rural Kenya and FAWE's intervention in addressing these factors.

Female Genital Mutilation: Its Impact on Girls' Education in Rural Kenya

> *Even though cultural practices may appear senseless or destructive from the standpoint of others, they have meaning and fulfill a function for those who practice them. However, culture is not static; it is in constant flux, adapting and reforming. People will change their behavior when they understand the hazards and indignity of harmful practices and when they realize that it is possible to give up harmful practices without giving up meaningful aspects of their culture*
> *(UN, WHO &UNFPA, 1997).*

The above quote reveals an intricate yet complementary relationship between education and culture. While culture signifies the beliefs, values, customs and behaviors characteristic of a given group of people in society, education shapes the development of

individuals and communities. Cultural practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM), are prevalent in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, a few countries in the Middle East and South Asia (WHO, 1996; UNICEF, 2005; Shell-Duncan, et al., 2000). FGM has been defined as the intentional removal of part or all of the external genitalia, or other damage to the female genitalia, for cultural or other non-therapeutic purposes (WHO, 1996).

According to the WHO (2000) estimates, 3 million girls undergo FGM practice annually in sub-Saharan Africa and as many as 100-140 million girls and women worldwide have undergone the practice. It is estimated that at least two million girls are at risk of being cut each year, translating to about 6,000 girls a day (UNICEF, 1996; WHO, 2000; Mackie, 2000). Although regional and international conventions such as CRC (1989) and CEDAW (1979) have and still continue to widely condemn FGM as a human rights violation, it is deeply entrenched in communities that practice it and consider it a necessary cultural rite. It is said to imbue a sense of pride and ultimate initiation to womanhood and it is believed to raise a girl's social status, which increase chances of marriageability, chastity, health, beauty and family honor (Mackie, 1996). Failure to conform to this practice stigmatizes and isolates girls and their families, a situation that results in the loss of dignity and social status (UNICEF, 2005). On this note FGM is a complex social convention that requires multiple, complex and interwoven approaches to tackle.

According to the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (1998) and UNICEF (2003), about 32 % of women and girls in Kenya have undergone FGM. Although the specific form of FGM and the age at which the practice is performed varies widely from one ethnic community to another, it is usually rife in pre-puberty and adolescent girls

(UNICEF, 2005). The meaning of FGM practice is crystallized in the preservation of virginity to dignity, cleanliness to marriage prospects as well as being a community's long standing tradition that has never been questioned (USAID, 2003; DHS, 2003). Although FGM is constitutionally banned in Kenya, it is still rampant in rural areas.

Research indicates that FGM has long-term physiological, sexual and psychological effects on girls (Sarkis, 2003). The practice inflicts immediate physical pain, severe trauma and it is often conducted in unhygienic conditions especially in rural areas where there is limited access to sterilized medical tools and professional help. It also makes girls vulnerable to the risks of infection and possible transmission of the dreaded HIV virus, hemorrhage or septicemia (WHO, 1998).

The practice of FGM can compromise other human rights, including the right to education. Well intentioned grassroot intervention measures can be taken to promote universal access to quality education, encourage regular attendance at school and reduce drop-out rates, while promoting the child's development to reach her fullest potential. According to a UNICEF (2005) report, FGM is "increasing indicated as a factor in school drop-out rates for girls. The health problems, pain and trauma experienced by girls concerned can lead to absenteeism, poor concentration, low performance and loss of interest" (27)". Since it requires long preparation, ethnic communities in Kenya that practice FGM, withdraw their daughters from school to undergo this ritual. This makes it difficult for girls to catch up in their schoolwork or even go back to school, since they are considered to have become adults ready for marriage. This not only has "a serious impact on a girls' personal development, but also on her community, since girls' education and informed participation in social life is a key to reducing discrimination and promoting

development and social progress" (UNICEF, 2005, p. 27). Intervention programs embedded within communities that are known to practice FGM are needed to increase awareness of a girls education and the health issues related to 'cutting' girls. It is my intention to seek to understand how FAWE centers of excellence, embedded within communities where FGM practice is rampant, involve these communities and create a working relationship that ensures the girl child's human rights including those of education are respected and upheld.

Early and Pre-arranged Marriages

Like FGM, early marriages deprive millions of girls around the globe their childhoods and limit their social, economic and educational opportunities (UNICEF, 2005). This practice is often conducted for girls ranging from 8-17 years and usually the marriage is with strangers and often without the girls consent (UNICEF, 2005; FAWE, 2001). Conventions and agencies such as CRC (1989) that champion the rights of children consider early marriage a harmful traditional practice that is a threat to childhood. Like child labor, early marriages deprive children of their freedom and right to education (ICRW, 2003/2004; CRC, 1989).

According to a UNICEF (2005) report, the practice of early marriage is common among most communities in sub-Saharan Africa, Middle East, North Africa and parts of South East Asia. This practice is attributed to communities with strong religious or traditional lifestyles. The underlying causes for early marriages are numerous and many of them are context driven. In their study entitled, *Too Young to wed: the rights, lives and health of young married girls,* Sanyukta et al., (2003) reveal that family honor, gender roles and lack of alternatives, value of virginity and fears about pre-marital sexual

activity, marital alliances as well as poverty are the \leading causes of this trend. The study, which covered parts of south and East Asia, West, Central, Eastern Africa and Latin America, further indicate that early marriage is an important means for securing critical social, economic, and political alliances in addition to security for the family, clan, or lineage. This study echoes similar findings from other studies that link early marriages to poverty, dowry pressures, parental concerns about premarital sex and pregnancy, security of daughters and cultural requirement (UNICEF, 2005; UNFPA, 2004; Amin, 2006 et al; FAWE, 2001; ICRW, 2003).

In recent years, societal pressures such as the fear of HIV/AIDS infection have been blamed for promoting early marriage. This is based on the belief that young boys and girls are likely to be virgins and therefore likely to be uninfected. In the context of global development, early marriage stands in direct conflict with the objectives of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), such as the promotion of basic education, child survival, and the prevention of HIV/AIDS (ICRW, 2003).

In Kenya, the practice of marrying off young girls is not a new phenomenon. It is an age long cultural tradition that has withstood the test of time in some rural communities. Among the Maasai community, there is a tradition of betrothing girls at a very young age, sometimes at birth and marrying them off in early to late adolescence (Kakonge, 2001; Mlama, 2005). In most cases, these girls are married off as second, third or even fourth wives often to men over 50 years old. While some parents disregard the education of girls due to its direct costs, others view early marriage as a way of protecting their daughters from the dangers of sexual assault, and pregnancy before marriage, which stigmatizes the family (Kakonge, 2001). In other instances, parents consider formal

schooling as a springboard that influences their children, especially girls to embrace foreign styles of behavior and mode of dress (FAWE, 2000). The education of girls, therefore, is not a priority or even a necessity. In my view, educating girls in rural areas especially in communities that practice both FGM and early marriage is like 'watering a neighbor's garden' because girls get married to another family.

The consequences of early and prearranged marriages in rural and marginalized areas are enormous. In Kenya, these young brides find themselves in new homes with greater responsibilities, without much autonomy or decision-making power, and unable to negotiate sexual experiences within marriage (ICRW, 2003; Mlama, 2005). This often exposes them to higher levels of domestic violence, higher rates of unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease, including HIV/AIDS (Heise, et al., 2002). These impacts take a vicious cycle that negatively affects their children, families, and societies.

In the face of these consequences, education is critical to provide hope especially for disadvantaged children in poor and inaccessible communities. Acquiring education will enable them to gain knowledge and life skills that will empower them to make informed decisions, exploit income-generating avenues where they can freely contribute to the socio-economic and political development of families, communities and country.

In their comprehensive book on the education of women and girls in Kenya, Chege and Sifuna (2006) argue that the huddles in changing some of the harmful traditional practices that negatively affect the education of women and girls are embedded within the mindsets of practicing communities. In particular, issues of gender are perceived as a threat to prevailing male hegemony and normally elicit explicit resistance from all its beneficiaries regardless of their sex. Hence, they advocate that a

genuine step forward, lies in enlisting girls and women, as well as boys and men, in strategic partnerships, whose objective is to jointly challenge human inequalities, including those that are founded on gender stereotypes.

While it is important to reckon with the fact that there are no easy solutions in tackling existing gender disparities in education in Kenya, it is imperative to maintain a sustained focus, renewed commitment and energy in advocating for girls' education in rural areas (UNESCO, 2005). Given the underscored importance of girls' education, there is need to understand how FAWE's educational interventions such as centers of excellence work with communities to give girls a voice to articulate their experiences.

Girls Education: Community and Parental responsibility

Education and community have been recognized as two interdependent and interrelated elements in the education of children in both urban and rural areas (Cotton, 2000; UNICEF, 2000). The collaboration between schools and communities develops a long lasting symbiosis between stakeholders. This relationship is more crucial for rural areas, where local communities create and develop connections with children (World Bank, 2002). In his study, *breaking the barriers to girl students' poor academic achievement*, Ifelunni (2000) articulates the role of communities in the education of girls. He says, "Community participation in girls 'education is very crucial aspect for societal development. The way the community views female performance in education either encourages or discourages girls' participation" (p. 96).

Similarly, Caffarrella (2002) contends that extensive community support of any project makes its implementation effective. According to him, if all stakeholders are involved at all stages of policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation,

the involvement cultivates a sense of reciprocal responsibility and accountability between the school and the community. He further postulates that participation of the community draws attention to the various dimensions of culture and allows its effective review. Based on my frame of reference, families, communities and schools share overlapping spheres of influence that directly impact children's learning and development. Hence, schools need to work together with families and communities as partners who share responsibility for the education of all students.

However, according to Sifuna and Chege (2006) the case of the girl-child requires community responsiveness and involvement in their education both as a prerequisite to sustainable development and a safeguard to social injustices and inequalities. They argue that many of the factors, which contribute to girls' low school enrolment, poor participation and achievement, are a complex display of interwoven realities ranging from the school system, the education sector and the community. They recommend a complex, multi-dimensional, holistic and participatory approach by all stakeholders to curb the legacy of gender inequality and achievement in education. I believe that such recommendations, which span a lot of studies that have been done on gender inequality are achievable if educational policies and other reforms intended to benefit the girl-child are reviewed at the implementation stage. This is where stakeholders; the community, parents, opinion leaders, schools and religious organizations need to connect to deliver any meaningful services.

For instance, the role of parents in the education of their children has been underscored by decades of research studies (Nyati-Rwamalho &Mabuse, 2000; Davies, 1991; Epstein, 1995; Henderson& Berla, 1994). Research has shown that parents

determine a child's chances of getting education. Since they are the decision makers, they influence the manner in which their children participate in school (Chimombo et al, 2000). Avotri et al (1999) and Kasonde-Ng'andu (1999) support the argument that the level of parental formal education has a very positive influence on their children's participation in education. In his research on parental involvement in girls' education in Malawi, Mingat (2003) found out that children whose mothers had formal education had an attendance rate of 71% compared to 47% for those children whose mothers did not attend primary school.

Given the literature of parental support, I believe that parents make a difference in the school-based lives of their children especially when their role is meaningful, empowered and sustained. It is along this line that I will seek to understand how FAWE centers of excellence meaningfully empower and sustain parental support in the education of their children. Besides communities, schools and parents, civil societies are instrumental in pushing for the education of girls especially in rural areas.

The role of the church in girls' education

Churches and faith-based organizations are able to reach into the heart of communities in a way that no other organizations can. Besides spearheading religious awareness in developing countries, faith-based NGOs have been in the forefront in establishing educational infrastructure facilities for disadvantaged groups (FAWE 2001). These infrastructure facilities are manifested in building girl schools, middle level colleges and other institutions of higher learning. In Kenya for example, schools such as AIC girls primary school in Kajiado, Maasai girls school, and Kajiado Adventist Education and Rehabilitation Center comprise some of the religious establishments meant

to foster the participation and success of girls in school. The overall objective of such facilities is to create a conducive learning environment for girls. In addition, the church and its affiliates rehabilitate victims of harmful practices by providing them with social support services such as health services to meet their health-care needs, emotional and psychological counseling and skills training aimed at making them self-supporting in order to facilitate their reintegration into their families, communities and in other sectors of the society.

In addition to increasing educational access for all children, the church provides educational sponsorship (bursaries) in terms of scholarships to disadvantaged children especially girls in rural areas. The church uses some of these successful students as beacons of change within their communities. As role models, they help to sensitize their communities to change their socio-cultural beliefs and practices that are perceived as impediments to girls' participation and success in school. For instance, Kajiado Adventist Education and Rehabilitation Center uses its senior girls to create public awareness regarding harmful practices through information, formal and informal education, communication campaigns and outreach programs targeting all stakeholders (Ray Dabrowski, 2001).

Within communities that are believed to be ardent practitioners of socio-cultural rites such as FGM and early marriages, the church-initiated community based organizations are instrumental in initiating and encouraging alternative rites of passages for girls (Mlama, 2005). The 'alternative rites of passage' simply calls for the respect and retention of traditional initiation rites and accompanying teachings on the role of women without having to endure the agony of the 'cut'. "It is an example of a culturally sensitive

approach – one that respects the value of the tradition, but rejects the violence associated with it" (UNFPA, 2005). Ideally, girls are 'cut' through words, since in their seclusion, they are educated about reproductive health issues, HIV/AIDS, communication, self-esteem and how to deal with peer pressure. This procedure is being tested in several communities around the world and has registered some success.

Illustrative of the viability of alternative rites of passage is Tasaru Ntomonok Girls Rescue Center, in Maasai community, Kenya. *Tasaru ntomonok* means 'rescue the woman' in the local Maasai language. The Center caters for girls who have been thrown out of their homes for running away from FGM or forced marriages. It provides the girls with shelter, protection, education and skills training. According to Ms. Pareyio, the center's director, "UNFPA funded the construction of the building where the girls receive training. It also pays school fees for the girls and supports outreach and advocacy activities. The project leases a 100-hectare farm where the center grows wheat and runs a maize mill to provide income for women who formerly earned money by performing FGM. Proceeds from the farm help make the center more sustainable" (UNFPA, 2005). Beyond protecting and offering educational and vocational training opportunities to the girls, the rescue center also tries to reconcile them with their parents and communities.

In collaboration with other civil societies to fight for the social justice of the girl-child, the church is credited for establishing the initiative to 'buy back' girls who are married off for socio-economic reasons. Those girls who are bought back are placed in specific educational environments believed to be conducive for their learning. Kajiado Adventist Education and Rehabilitation Center in Kenya is one such educational safe haven for such girls and vulnerable children. The center is a response to the government's

program to change the custom of forcing children to enter marriages at an early age. The Kajiado Center organizers believe, "the establishment of this project will not only have an impact on its immediate beneficiaries, but that it is also an example of fulfilling the Adventist Church's mission among the most vulnerable, abused children" (Ray Dabrowski, 2001). Acting as a home and school for rescued girls, the center "provides food and shelter, along with education, counseling services, and spiritual nourishment. It also provides social and community services that extend to the families of the children and the community as a whole" (ANN Staff, 2006).

Liaising with other human rights organizations such as FIDA and FAWE, the church also provides counseling programs and connects abused girls to free legal services. Many girls who are abused suffer silently, either unaware that legal recourse is available, unable to access it, or they lack confidence to report it to the justice system. A lack of awareness and understanding of legal provisions and limited understanding of the procedures required to report cases of violence, also hinders girls from taking action against abuse. A number of women's organizations offer legal services, but they are primarily in urban areas and their resources are strained. The church counsels and connects abused girls in rural areas to such organizations.

In essence the church utilizes the facilities it establishes in rural communities as a springboard to provide social amenities such as water, health centers, electricity and roads to win the hearts of the communities they are trying to change. By so doing, it is plausible to argue that the church is a critical component in alleviating poverty and highlighting social injustices that inhibit girls' education.

While the church can be viewed as a fundamental instrument in mitigating and influencing socio-cultural factors that hinder girls education in rural areas, some of the religious doctrines and policies in the context of fighting HIV and AIDS among school going children can be viewed as a barrier. For instance, religious leaders in Kenya wield enormous influence in schools but a deafening silence permeates religious communities with regard to sexuality and HIV/AIDS (USAID, 2005). Further, Bennell et al. (2002) suggest that the church appears to play comparatively little role in disseminating information about prevention of HIV/AIDS among young people. Their emphasis lie on 'abstinence only until marriage' as the only prevention strategy.

It is indisputable that encouraging abstinence has an important part to play in HIV prevention. However, it is plausible to argue that failure to talk about other methods of prevention such as condom use excludes the youth who are already sexually active or inclined to have sex and limits access to potentially life-saving information, which could make a difference between life and death. Research findings have offered little evidence to support the claim that the use of condoms by sexually active youth increases their sexual activities (Kirby, 1994; Boler et al, 2005; Gachuhi, 1999). On the contrary, the same studies have shown that good quality sex education can actually decrease the likelihood that young people will have sex and increases condom use among those who are actually sexually active.

Role of Civil Society in Girls' education

The plight of girls has been the center of focus in regional and sub-regional affiliations of women in Africa. Most of these affiliations are in the form of national, regional and international non-governmental organizations. These NGOs have in recent

decades concentrated their efforts in examining and addressing a variety of factors that hinder the participation of girls in education. According to Mlama (2005), most education related international, regional and local NGOs operating in Africa have a component on gender including girls' education in their programs. Further, Mlama says that some NGOs have initiated innovative, culturally appropriate and girl-friendly educational programs as a strategy to benefit girls in rural areas.

In the context of Kenya, organizations such as Federation of Kenya women lawyers (FIDA), African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), Global Campaign for Education (GCE) the Association of African Women Entrepreneurs (AFWE), and the Forum for African Women Educationists (FAWE) continue to act as pressure groups advocating for the plight of women and girls especially in rural communities. Their support is manifested in increasing and improving educational resources and infrastructure such as classrooms, bursaries, food, healthcare and other learning resources through training seminars and workshops (Kakonge et al., 2001; Cotton, 2000). For purposes of my study, I will focus on one of these NGOs and specifically FAWE and its intervention strategy of initiating a Girls' Center of Excellence in Kajiado, Kenya.

Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE)

The Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) is a pan African non-government organization with chapters in 33 countries in Africa. According to Kakonge (2001), FAWE was started in 1992 to counter the slow pace of implementation of Education for All goals (EFA) in sub-Saharan Africa. FAWE challenges some of the cultural attributes that negate girls' educational attainment. To ensure that girls have

access to school, complete their studies and perform well at all levels of development, FAWE established educational Centers of Excellence that provide girls with full educational sponsorship (FAWE, 2000).

FAWE works in partnership with local and national levels, with the ministries of education and other agencies such as USAID, DFID, FEMNET, African Academy of Sciences and Rockefeller foundation. Their core objective is to create positive societal attitudes, policies and practices that promote equity for girls in terms of access, retention, performance and quality (Kakonge, 2001). Kakonge frames FAWE's mission into a threefold agenda:

1. Supporting innovative action and experimental strategies for overcoming obstacles to female education.
2. Mobilizing civic associations and society as whole to pay more attention to the needs of girls and women in the planning implementation of national education policy.
3. Encouraging dialogue within governments to improve investment in female education.

In 1992, FAWE came up with an initiation report to guide its mission. The specific and strategic objectives of this report included:

- To influence the formulation and adoption of educational policies on girls' education in order to increase access, improve retention and performance.
- To build public awareness and consensus on the social and economic advantages of girls' education through advocacy.

- To undertake and support demonstrative experimental and innovative programs to increase girls' participation in education.
- To empower girls through education for effective participation in the creation of an equitable society.
- To create and sustain partnerships with governments, donors, universities, NGOs communities, and other partners in education for effective implementation of programs to improve education.
- To strengthen organizational capacity to effectively implement programs that promotes girls' education.
- To monitor policies, practices and programs that impact on girls' education.

FAWE's activities in Kenya are concentrated within the Maasai[2] community, a conservative ethnic group that is well known for its cultural tenacity. Located in the heart of rural Maasai community, FAWE's model school, Kajiado Girls Center of Excellence is said to act as an educational intervention center intended to serve and empower girls who escape or are rescued from gender insensitive cultural practices such as early marriages and Female Genital Mutilation (Kakonge, 2001).

Gaps and Conclusion

In the foregoing review, I focused on the general status of girls' education and attempted to utilize the status of girls' education in rural Kenya to illuminate some of the cultural practices that hinder their educational progress. The literature outlines cultural practices such as female genital mutilation and early marriages as part of the rituals that have left many girls behind in education. There is limited research that talks on how

[2] Maasai is one of the ethnic tribes in Kenya

interventions can use those cultural practices considered retrogressive as launching pads to meaningfully educate communities that practice them to bring about change.

On the other hand, there is paucity of data to understand the meaning of interventions such as FAWE Centers of Excellence both to the clients (girls) and their communities. In my review of research, I hardly came across studies that have focused on the experiences of rescued girls placed in safe havens, such as Kajiado Center of excellence. Even those studies that focus on girls as their primary respondents within schools, rarely consider the gendered nature of the communities in which schools operate. It is upon the scarcity of such data that I launched my study. Specifically, I sought to explore the experiences of girls in Kajiado Girls Center of Excellence in Kenya. My focus will be:

1. The experiences of girls prior to and after their involvement with the FAWE Center of Excellence in Kajiado.
2. The ways the Center influences the girls' current and future educational goals.
3. The strategies the Center utilizes to support the educational goals of the girls.
4. The nature of the relationship between the Center and the community within which it is located

. The Methodology used in this study to explore the Experiences of Girls in the Center of Excellence is presented in chapter III.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN: ASSUMPTIONS AND RATIONALE

My primary goal in this study was to understand the experiences of girls enrolled in a FAWE Center of Excellence in rural Kajiado district, Kenya. I sought to investigate, analyze and situate the girls' personal and academic experiences at the Center before and after their involvement. I grounded my study along the tenets of qualitative study.

Qualitative study seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific setting and in the case of this study, the experiences of girls in a FAWE Center of Excellence in Kajiado District, Kenya. I believe that girls who either escape or are rescued from the indigenous practices of early marriage and FGM and placed in the Center of Excellence have their own personal and culturally driven dispositions. These dispositions sometimes dictate the way they view their world and understand themselves as well as circumstances around them. On this ground, I chose to utilize a qualitative case study approach to allow me to listen and draw from the insights and wisdom of those who live and have experienced transition from their rural lifestyle to an education-oriented Center of Excellence.

According to Denzin & Lincoln (1994 and 2000) qualitative research is multi-method in its focus, involving an interpretive and naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Patton (1985 and 1990) adds that qualitative research manifests an interest in understanding how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world. He further argues that qualitative research strives for a depth of understanding

as an end in itself, not as an attempt to predict what may happen in the future. Sherman and Webb (1988) also contend that qualitative inquiry tries to show a direct concern with experience as it is lived or felt or undergone.

Maxwell (1998) enumerates five research purposes for which qualitative studies are particularly useful. They include:

1. Understanding the meaning, for participants in the study, of the events, situations, and actions they are involved with, and of the accounts they give of their lives and experiences
2. Understanding the particular context within which the participants act, and the influence this context has on their actions
3. Identifying unanticipated phenomena and influences, and generating new, grounded theories about the them
4. Understanding the processes by which events and actions take place;
5. Developing causal explanations

Strauss and Corbin (1990) broadly describe a qualitative research design as, "any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (p.17). Qualitative research therefore, provided a particularly appropriate choice for this study considering that I sought answers regarding the "how" and "what" of my topic. It provided a mechanism for exploration into an uncharted question on a detailed level (Creswell, 1998). Instead of using quantitative methods, which impose meaning or experiences of a group of participants, I used qualitative methods to elicit and explore experiences of girls in a FAWE Center of Excellence in Kajiado district Kenya. The Center served as my case study and respondents were my unit of analysis.

Case Study Approach

This qualitative study employed a case study approach to understand the experiences of girls at Kajiado Girls Center of Excellence. The defining characteristic of a case study is the boundaries that establish the parameters of the unit of study. Merriam (1998) contends, "by concentrating on a single phenomenon or entity (the case), the researcher aims to uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon" (p.29). Merriam further states characteristics that distinguish case study methodology from other types of qualitative designs. Case studies are "particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic and rely heavily on inductive reasoning" (p. 16). Inductive reasoning arises from the new understandings, concepts, and relationships that occur from studying the data.

As a well established method of inquiry in qualitative research, case study tends to be particularly responsive to research questions of "why" and "how" (Winegardner, 1999). Hence, choosing to utilize a case study approach hinges on the desire to bracket the main research question regarding the experiences of girls enrolled in Kajiado Girls Center of Excellence and how the Center influences their current and future educational goals. According to Stake (1995) and Feagin (1991), case studies must have boundaries and always strive towards providing a holistic understanding of culture. Given the contextual cultural richness that gave rise to the Center of Excellence, the case study approach provided me with a flexible yet integrated framework for which I holistically examined the respondents' experiences in their natural context. According to Winegardener (1999) the flexibility of a case study approach lies in its customization to address a wide range of research questions and types of cases that incorporate a variety of

data collection, analysis, reporting techniques, epistemological orientations, and disciplinary perspectives, all of which provide their own standards of scholarship

Because gender issues are considered sensitive, I preferred a case study because its tenets made it suitable for the exploration aspect of my study since it calls for tolerance in matters of ambiguity and the willingness to respond to emerging data, refining the design of the study even as it is underway. I found it particularly relevant and meaningful since it can accommodate different epistemologies and can provide application to a wide range of disciplines. My aim in utilizing a case study was to give my respondents, especially students, a voice to speak out about issues that affect their lives. Significant in their voices was a re-discovery of a horde of underlying socio-cultural challenges that continue to plague the education of girls in rural and marginalized areas and the importance of interventions meant to stem such challenges. Unlike many social surveys, which tend not to include the truly disadvantaged as respondents, and even when they do, the surveys are typically pre-tested and standardized in terms of the knowledge base of the privileged group (Feagin et. al, 1991), the case study stood to be an appropriate vehicle through which my respondents discovered their voices.

Yin (1994) asserts that the distinctive need for case studies "arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena. The case study approach allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" (p.3). Hence, a case study was appropriate for this study because I sought to investigate and understand from my respondents how their participation in the center has directly affected their personal, social and academic aspirations. To get a rich description of the respondents' stories, I incorporated their voices in the data analysis process since "a case

study is done in a way that incorporates the views of the 'actors' in the case under study" (Tellis, 1997, p. 2). I included the voices of the respondents in the study in reporting the research rather than relying on my voice only.

Therefore, drawing on the works of Merriam (1988), Yin (1994), Feagin (1991), Stake (1995) and Tellis (1997), my study fell well within a qualitative case study framework. It focused on girls who were enrolled in Kajiado Girls Center of Excellence from whom I sought to understand their lived experiences, perceptions and lives in the Center. This makes my study largely descriptive since it involved listening to the respondents' personal stories.

Sampling

For this study, I utilized purposeful sampling. According to Patton (2002) the logic and power of purposeful sampling "lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research" (Patton, 2002, p.169). Purposeful sampling fits well into the strategy of participant selection in qualitative research, which "rests on the multiple purposes of illuminating, interpreting, understanding – and on ones own imagination and judgment" (Glesne, 1999, p.30).

The sample of my study comprised of primary and secondary respondents. The primary sample consisted of 4 girls. Due to the emotiveness of the subject under discussion, I chose to interview them in a focus group. The rationale of doing so was to encourage them to open up and share common experiences, which might be difficult to talk about if I interviewed them individually. Through focus group it was possible to observe the phenomenon as respondents were constantly stimulated by others to

articulate their perspectives, opinions, ideas and lived experiences during this group session. I wanted to create an everyday-like social conversation environment where respondents could support each other in sharing and discussing perspectives and experiences related to my questions. All respondents in this category were selected because they were in senior classes (grades 7 and 8), had stayed in the Center since their 2nd and/or 3rd grade and were aged between 14-18 years. My assumption was that they had reasonable exposure living in the Center for several years and so they were well versed with the programs and operations of the Center. The Center's principal and the boarding mistress, who also served as my secondary respondents were helpful in assisting me to identify primary respondents who were willing to share their perceptions and experiences in the Center.

My secondary sample comprised of the Center's principal and 2 teachers, one male and one female both teaching at the Center. Upon my arrival at the Center I made known to the principal the nature and purpose of my study. With his permission and help, I provided potential student respondents with assent letters stating the purpose of my study and ethical considerations that were in place to ensure their privacy and confidentiality. I provided consent forms to my secondary sample. I was in touch with the potential respondents and arranged for a briefing of the study as we planned on the time and venue where individual and/or focus group interviews were to take place.

Data collection procedures

Interviews

In this study, I used interviewing as a technique of gathering information from my respondents. Research shows that three data-gathering techniques dominate in qualitative

inquiry: participant observation, interviewing, and document collection (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Interviewing is widely believed to be the mainstay of many different kinds of qualitative methods, from case studies to ethnography. It is among the most challenging and rewarding forms of measurement in research.

Qualitative studies indicate that the purpose of research interview is first and foremost to gather data, not to change people (Patton, 2002; Kvale, 1996). Since this was a case study, I utilized unstructured and open-ended interview questions in order to "understand how other people see their experiences" (Spradley, 1979). Emphasizing the goodness of open-ended interviews, Mills (2002) observes that this technique allows the researcher and the researched to establish a link of openness and engagement that "speaks to the difference between gaining mere data and understanding a person's life experiences" (p.107). Therefore, rather than studying my participants, I was learning from them.

I interviewed female students who are currently enrolled in FAWE Girls Center of Excellence in Kajiado District, Kenya. My aim was to understand their educational experiences before, during and after their exposure to the Center. I also interviewed 2 teachers and the Center's director with a view to understanding how the Center is beneficial to the girls, their families and the community.

Prior to the interviews, I provided my respondents with a description of my study objectives to raise their awareness and to address any concerns or questions from them. Research indicates that since respondents, "grant access to their lives, their minds, (and) their emotions," it is important to provide respondents with a straightforward description of the goals of the research

(Lofland & Lofland, 1984, p. 25). By using interviewing technique, I wanted to provide my respondents a springboard on which they could express their feelings, opinions and their knowledge (understanding) of their culture, school, families and communities besides their goals and aspirations.

All interview conversations were audio taped with prior participant consent. Patton (1997) notes, "no matter what style of interviewing you use and no matter how carefully you word your questions, it all comes to naught if you fail to capture the actual words of the person being interviewed" (p.380). By tape recording the interview conversations, I was less distracted and paid most attention to the respondents' stories. I transcribed verbatim all interview responses and that laid the foundation for my analysis.

Given that matters of gender especially as relates to women are controversial and can provoke strong reactions presumably due to the inherent cultural beliefs of even those being aggrieved, I made efforts to build rapport "on the ability to convey empathy and understanding without judgment" (Patton, 2002, p.366). I believe the confidence level of my interviewees developed as the interviews evolved and this enabled me to get the information that I sought. Patton (2002) reminds us, "sensitivity to and respect for other people's values, norms and worldviews is as needed at home as a broad" (p.394). I respected my respondents' stand on sensitive issues by heightening my sensitivity.

Observation and Document Analysis

In addition to using open-ended face-to-face interviewing technique, I used observation and document analysis to gather data. According to Patton (1990), observational data can be used for the purpose of description of settings, activities, people, and the meanings of what is observed from the perspective of the participants. It

is through observation that I was able to account for the knowledge of the site and its happenings, which I believe enabled me to see things that participants themselves were not aware of. I attempted to take the role of a passive participant observer in order to avoid being obstructive. While observing my respondents within their environment, I wrote field notes to supplement my data. The field notes were later handy in data analysis.

Document analysis offered me a chance to understand the historical and contextual dimensions of the Center that I could not have acquired through interviews and observations. According to Peshkin (1992), documents enrich what the researcher sees and hears by supporting, expanding and challenging the researcher's portrayals and perceptions. In particular, I examined the Center's policies, objectives, newsletters, brochures and School Board and Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meeting minutes as well as workshop and seminar reports. These documents helped me to understand the modes of communication utilized by the Center to build a link between the students, their families, the community and donors.

Methods for Verification

Studies show that issues of validity and reliability are different for qualitative research than for quantitative research (Patton, 2002). Glesne (1999) adds that qualitative researchers must attend to the process involved in interview data collection by critically questioning and corroborating observations and participant observations. Critical in this process is how closely research findings match reality. Since the researcher is the prime instrument of data collection in qualitative research, "interpretations of reality are accessed directly through their observations and interviews" (Merriam, 1998, p.203).

I anchored the validity of my study on Merriam's 6 tenets, which include:

1. Triangulation: using multiple sources of data to confirm findings.
2. Member checks: taking transcripts of interviews and interpretations of data back to the participants for verification of intent and conception of findings.
3. Long-term observation: repeat observation of the same phenomenon over time insures that the finding was not a one time occurrence
4. Peer examination: review of the findings by colleagues to assure logic of findings
5. Participatory or collaborative modes of research: involvement of the participants in making sense of the findings throughout the study
6. Researcher's biases: upfront clarification of the researcher's assumptions and theoretical orientation (Merriam, 1998, p.204-205).

Due to the emergent design of qualitative research and the role of the researcher in obtaining data, reliability in the traditional sense appears inapplicable to qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) instead suggest thinking about "dependability" and "consistency" of the results obtained from the data. For this study, I constantly questioned and ensured that the study's findings emerged from and were consistent with the data.

Ethical Considerations

It is no secret that ethical issues in qualitative research may be touchy and can create dilemmas especially when conducting interviews. However, since ethical dilemmas tend to be deeply embedded within the contexts of the situations in which they arise, what may be ethical behavior in one circumstance may not be ethical in another. According to Patton (2002), "because qualitative methods are highly personal and

interpersonal, because naturalistic inquiry takes the researcher into the real world where people live and work, and because in-depth interviewing opens up what is inside people – qualitative inquiry may be more intrusive and involve greater reactivity than surveys, tests, and other quantitative approaches" (p.407).

This study was approved by Human Research Protection Programs at Michigan State University (Appendix A). In an attempt to minimize ethical challenges, I made explicit, to my respondents, the objectives of my study. I sought an informed written consent from the Center's principal, student respondents and teachers. Through the principal, I asked students to voluntarily assent to participate in the study. I explained to the respondents that their participation in the study was strictly voluntary and that they could reject and/or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. To all my respondents, I attempted to communicate in clear terms the nature of and purpose of my research and made it a process of unfolding rather than a once-and –for-all declaration.

In the course of the interview process, I endeavored to ask culturally relevant questions in a relevant manner. To protect the identity of my respondents, I used pseudo names that would make it difficulty for any one to associate the study findings with them. The data is in a locked cabinet and a password protected computer and consistently I have used the pseudonyms in its collection, analysis and writing the findings of the study.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher is a critical factor in qualitative research. The researcher provides the primary instrument for data collection and analysis in the field. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) point out, "a reflective section on who you are as researcher and the lenses through which you view your work is now an expected part of qualitative research

studies" (p.109). As such, my role as a researcher became crucial as I entered into the world of the respondents to investigate and understand their experiences. I acknowledged my research biases and situated myself as the researcher in the study.

In making my biases explicit, I ensured that my respondents understood who I am and the purpose of my study. I shared my experiences of growing up and going to school as a girl in Kenya. This was a boost to my interview process since it encouraged my student respondents to be comfortable to hit a cordial rapport that made them open up and share their experiences without holding back critical information. Dunbar Jr. et al. (2001) acknowledge this kind of disclosure to be critical since it is foundational work and it tells the interviewee where the researcher is coming from. During the interview process, I attempted to listen to each account of my respondents as if it were the first time I heard it. This way, I could not allow myself to jump to conclusions that would exclude other possible themes or interpretations of the findings.

Data Analysis

According to Glesne and Peshkin (1992), data analysis is the process of organizing and storing data in light of increasingly sophisticated judgments. This process includes writing memos and reflective passages, developing analytic files, applying rudimentary coding schemes, displaying data in tables, figures, and flowcharts, establishing patterns of categories, interpreting themes from the patterns, and developing naturalistic generalizations are some of qualitative data analysis procedures (Creswell, 1998; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rudestam & Newton, 2001).

In this study, I categorized data based on the respondents' responses to the interview questions. This is in line with Lincoln and Guba (1985) views, that data

analysis must begin at the very first phase of data collection because continuing analysis can facilitate "emergent design, grounding of theory and emergent structure of later data collection phases"(p.242). Hence, my data analysis began at the time of data collection and I coded the data using identifiers, which enabled me to classify the categories under which the responses fell. Category construction is considered the heart of qualitative data analysis (Merriam, 1998). In Chapter IV, I present the data, which includes the setting of the study and participant's profiles.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Setting

I conducted my study in Kajiado District, Kenya, which is about 2 hours drive from Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya. Kajiado is a rural district located approximately 100 kilometers south west of Nairobi. It borders Tanzania to the south and serves as the western wall of the Great Rift Valley to the west. Kajiado is part of 18 administrative districts of the Rift Valley province of Kenya and commands 7 administrative divisions, which include, Mashuru, Central, Magadi, Isinya, Namanga, Loitokitok, and Ngong.

Kajiado is home to the Maasai tribe who form part of the 42 ethnic groups in Kenya. The Maasai are a pastoral/nomadic community with deeply entrenched unique way of life. With a population of about 400,000 people, Kajiado district lies geographically within the semi-arid to arid zones, which support limited crop farming due to insufficient rainfall. For the most part, livestock farming (cattle, sheep, camels and goat) serves as the dominant regional economic activity and source of livelihood for the Maasai community.

Kajiado is considered an economic hardship area. Due to long spells of drought and unpredictable insufficient rainfall to support farming, the Maasai community mainly relies on nomadic pastoralism. This trend however, is gradually diminishing due to government efforts that encourage the Maasai to live a sedentary lifestyle since much of the vast grassing land is utilized for construction and wildlife conservation projects. Despite increased levels of development that characterize many parts of the country, Kajiado district is one of the regions in the country with low numbers of student

enrolment and retention rates in primary and secondary schools. It is also known for gender disparities in education and other aspects of social life. For instance, girls' education is not valued, boys are preferred to girls, and most prevalent is the practice of FGM and early and prearranged marriages for girls of school-going age (Mlama, 2005; Kakonge, 2002). Minimal trends of modernization in this region can be explained in part by the fact that the Maasai people have remained largely conservative and partially resistant to pressure to modernize and change their way of life.

As one drives along the winding and bumpy stretch of the Nairobi-Arusha highway en route to Kajiado, vast open savannah grasslands with occasional acacia shrubs unfold with lovely scenes of giraffes, zebra and camels basking in nature's serenity. As one descends to the Kajiado plains, littered with thin savannah grassland browning from the relentless heat from the sun, a desolate atmosphere strikes from the surrounding as if giving testimony of the wildly nature of this country side.

With no visible human settlement around, clusters of flocks of sheep, goats and cattle catch my eyes from a far horizon foraging on the browning grasslands with scattered flora. Filled with occasional gaping potholes and speed bumps, the road to Kajiado calls for a careful drive to give way to frequent crossing of animal traffic, which can stretch for a ½ kilometer down the road. While the animal traffic was one of the contributing factors that slowed us down, it was spectacular to watch. Barely visible in the slowly moving herds, were young boys (probably 8 to 9 years old) clad in bright red sheets barely covering their behind. Each carried at least 2 wooden clubs, a spear and a box of arrows and bows hung on their shoulder. They seemed ready to protect their animals from any harm.

After nearly 2 hours of drive from Nairobi, a huge welcome sign on the road-side with writings, "welcome to the AIC Kajiado Girls Center of Excellence", reminded us that our destination was drawing near. Located midway between Nairobi and Namanga, near the Tanzanian border, Kajiado Girls Center of Excellence lies across the road on the isolated Maasai steppe. No sign of human settlement or activity is visible in the vicinity. We pulled off the highway a few meters ahead and stopped in front of a huge steel-walled gate that stood high amid concrete walls on either side. The writings and drawings on the concrete walls bore the Center's name, logo and motto, which read in part: *Determination and Dedication to Excellence* on one side and *Safe School Zone* on the other. Finally, it dawned on me that we were at the Kajiado Girls Center of Excellence. Two security guards clad in navy blue uniforms allowed us into the compound after stating our purpose and signing in the visitors' log book, our names and car registration.

Once in the compound, I realized that the Center is an accumulation of old and new buildings isolated from the rest of the Maasai steppe by an enclosure of clustered desert cacti and woodland shrubs along edges of barbed wire fence. Most of the buildings were inscribed with different writings on every wall, clearly spelling the Center's vision, mission and motto. For instance, on the modern administration building were writings, **Motto:** *Determination and Dedication to Excellence*; **Mission;** *To Encourage the Holistic Development of the Girl Child* and lastly, **Vision:** *To Establish a Center of Excellence for the Girl Child, Incorporating High Standards of Achievement, Discipline, Responsibility, Integrity and Gender Responsiveness.* A tour around the Center's compound including classrooms later that day revealed more catchy writings, which I

learned were a strategic reminder of what the Center symbolizes and a source of inspiration to the students.

Behind the administration building was a clear view of clustered buildings on the background with observable groups of girls dressed in green uniform with light green collars strolling elegantly as they exited one building only to enter another. Noticeable a top one of the buildings was a large tank and below it was a humongous underground tank that seemed newly built and whose purpose was clear to me, a reservoir of water for the Center's use in this dry countryside. Standing by the only acacia tree visible behind the administration block was a set of girls who wore white shirts and checkered skirts. I later learn that these girls were pioneers of the secondary school section that had been established three years earlier.

At the extreme east corner of the school compound, a group of girls in green uniforms could be seen queued towards what seemed to be a small structure, which I later learned was the pit latrine for the girls from the primary section. To the west side, was a stretch of barbed wire fence that seemed overwhelmed by loosely hanging parade of wet clothing, mattresses and towels of different colors. The view to the south revealed a magnificent building whose front elevation was engraved with picturesque murals embellished with art carving of what seemed to be a group of women or young girls engaged in a variety of tasks. Written in a bell curve form around the mural, the Maasai words, *Emparnat Naisula Center of Excellence* meaning 'home for the rescued girls' captures the poignant meaning of Kajiado Girls Center of Excellence. A school bus, with one flat tire lay as if on display at the center of the field between the classrooms and the

administration building. The overgrown grass from under the bus was an indication that it had not been driven for some time.

In the following section, I provide profiles/portraits of respondents in the study. Using data from personal interview conversations, I paint a portrait of each of the respondents. The profile of the first respondent, the principal of the Center of Excellence is a little bit lengthy since it sets the ground for subsequent respondent profiles.

PORTRAITS OF RESPONDENTS IN THE STUDY

Mr. Muniu: Compassionate and wholehearted

Mr. Muniu is the principal of Kajiado Girls' Center of Excellence, a position he said he has held for two years. Prior to his appointment as the Center's principal, Mr. Muniu had served as the deputy principal for 9 years. Mr. Muniu is married and has one child, a son in high school. I learned that his wife is one of the 19 female teachers in the Center and doubles as the head of Special Education Unit.

A devout Christian, Mr. Muniu believes that his being in the school for many years is no accident. In his words, "I feel what I do is like a calling, and I also have teachers who do it just like that, as a calling. They don't complain." Although Mr. Muniu comes from a different ethnic community, he considers Kajiado his home. He was proud of the Center's achievements and transformation albeit the challenges. According to him,

> In fact me I have always lived here, even when Mrs. Nangurai was the head. You know when you are the deputy, even the watch men (security guards) they would not go to the head, they would come to my house, if there is a girl who is sick, even before she (the principal) knows what is happening I have taken the girl to hospital and am back. And I never complained. Infact, God has given me the grace and I have never complained. Infact it is very difficult, because sometimes

> you might be much into the school that your family duties are neglected. Because I have to be here even on Saturdays (Muniu, Personal Interview, June 2007).

Mr. Muniu's description of his commitment to the Center was profound and characterized by his emotion, passion and compassion. His reference to the students was captured in phrases such as "my girls", "my daughters", "my children". The student population in the Center comprised of 650 girls with a majority being boarders. About 100 girls, whose parents supported the education of the girl-child, operated from their homes. For Mr. Muniu this was a huge achievement, knowing that there were parents whose daughters went home at the end of the school day, and they (parents) allow them (girls) to come back to school the next day.

Mr. Muniu became very emotional when he talked about the change of heart of some parents to support their daughters' education. He recounted his understanding of most girls background experiences and once again reiterated the need to love them, show compassion and encourage them to overcome the trauma they had undergone prior to coming to the Center. With deep empathy, he described the girls;

> We have some girls in our Center we call *rescue* (we are trying to get a better term because I feel rescue is a label) I have been trying to see whether we can maybe call them *needy* girls but we are still yet to come up with a better term. We have girls here who have been married a day, a week or a month. Remember these girls have I want you to picture such a girl who has stayed with her husband and carried all the chores of a wife, and then she runs away or is brought here to learn with the children. We also have young mothers, not married but have got children they are here with us. We also have some girls who were forced to undergo female genital mutilation against their will. We have some cases of girls who have been abused sexually, but those ones still do not want to talk, they are still trying to come to terms with the trauma (Muniu, personal interview, June 2007).

Although Mr. Muniu's vivid description of the girls they serve made me emotional at first, I was later overjoyed to realize that their being in the Center was in itself a sign of triumph over tribulation. They had overcome

insurmountable cultural and social barriers to wring excellence from the Center of Excellence.

His Story (success)

Mr. Muniu believes that both girls and boys need to be given equal educational opportunities in order for them to grow up to be dependable citizens. He emphasized that although some communities in the country still preferred boys education to that of girls, his experience in the Center had confirmed his belief that if girls are given a chance to get an education, "the sky is the limit, for their lives are bound to change for the better". He shared:

> But we are saying, these girls also need to be respected. Men need to be sensitized, that there is no difference between a girl and a boy and educating them both. Here [in Maasai community], they have been taking boys to school and leaving girls are home. You know that is our main objective, we are saying can you please give them equal chances. They need to respect people, not because of their gender, not because of their position but because they are people. And a man and woman are equal—they are people (Muniu, personal interview, June 2007).

As a testimony to the girls' success in the Center, Mr. Muniu pointed to an array of different academic and sports trophies that were on display and housed in a huge glassy cupboard in his office. He said, "these trophies here I was given last year for admission and retention and completion. We are a school that admits and retains most of our girls. Our girls who start from class one here, they don't drop out."

In a community riddled with retrogressive cultural practices that hinder girls from accessing education, the exemplary performance at the Center was not only a milestone for themselves but also for their families and community. Cognizant that the Center's success in academic and extra-curricular activities does not come on a silver platter, Mr. Muniu acknowledged the hard work and commitment of both his staff and students to the

school's vision and mission. He further emphasized the vitality of having all stakeholders on board to make success a reality. He said, "For us to achieve success, we have to involve everybody. The community has to own the school. These girls have to know why they are here in the first place". He referenced many top cream national schools in the country where girls from the Center had qualified to pursue their high school education. He proudly shared, "Because of their good performance, if you go to schools like Alliance Girls, we have our girls there, Limuru Girls, we have our girls there, Mary Hill, we have our girls there, Moi Girls Eldoret, we have a girl".

If there is an aspect that Mr. Muniu expects from a leader in an institution such as the Center, is leadership by example. Leadership by example, according to him, "plays a role in changing the attitudes and opinion of girls regarding their capabilities". He commends his staff for their endless efforts to encourage the girls to believe in God, themselves and to love and accept one another regardless of their background and problems. The establishment of *Girl Take Care of Girl* policy at the Center stems from his belief in love and leadership by example. He shared:

> I am always what I say. So when I talk about love, the love of God, I love them whenever and deep within my heart. I feel like these kids are just like mine. Me I have a son. I only have one son. I do not have a daughter. Whenever we are talking, I normally tell my girls that I see them like my son. I always want the best for my son and that is exactly what I want for them. (Muniu personal interview, June 2007)

I realized that Mr. Muniu was living his values, the values of love and being an example to those who look up to him for love. His description made me think that there is no substitute for a leader who leads by example. Leadership as I learned from Mr. Muniu is about attitude not position. Mr. Muniu worked with girls who had been deeply traumatized. He had to be "the example I want my girls to experience". He explicated

that a loving, caring and nurturing relationship that is cognizant of individual students' needs was a key ingredient in the Center's success story. He explained that his fatherly love and connection with the girls and his concern for their welfare is what he believes gives the girls a sense of belonging and boosts their performance and self esteem. He stated:

> You have to be very close with these girls, very close. They refer to me not as their teacher but as their father. I go to class one [1st grade] every morning. When am passing by, my arms are open. I have to be really close to them, they have to really see me as a part of them. Like this morning I was in class one, I don't teach class one but I was there, to talk to them and let them have a chance to hug me and that makes their day. (Muniu, personal interview, June 2007)

I realized that Mr. Muniu's unselfish leadership and love for the students had led the teachers and the whole school community to discover the overwhelming joy of developing and empowering girls.

Empowerment programs

Besides giving education to the girls in the Center, the concept of empowerment is a central component to their holistic growth and development. Echoing the words of FAWE's Executive Director, Mr. Muniu emphasized that no meaningful gender transformation can be achieved unless the efforts to eliminate gender inequalities include the empowerment of women from the time they are young girls. According to him, "empowerment is giving voice to the voiceless and strength to the powerless". He was very enthusiastic to share some of the empowerment programs in the Center that enabled the girls to become aware of their subordination and acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to overcome their marginalization. He singled out programs such as *Tuseme*

(Let us speak out) clubs, Debating club, Drama, Science, Math and Technology (SMT) and Girl Take Care of Girl policy. In his words:

> Our girls have been so sensitized that even when they go home over the holidays and they know of girls who are threatened for marriage or FGM, they advise and encourage them to come here. What we have agreed is, when a girl comes, then the local chief should come and we start working to meet the parents of the girl. (Muniu, personal Interview, June 2007).

When I asked Mr. Muniu to elaborate how *Tuseme* programs work, he grabbed a brochure on his desk and had the following to say:

> *Tuseme* program is a concept we adopted from FAWE. According to FAWE *Tuseme* is a complete concept and an answer to many concerns. It is an original human right-based approach, gender responsive and inclusive. Because of its inclusiveness, the *Tuseme* process is persuasive and effective for social mobilization, which offers distinct advantage in the effort to promote girls education. (Muniu, personal interview June 2007).

Listening to Mr. Muniu, I learned that *Tuseme* programs, under which Debating and Drama clubs fall, aim to empower girls to identify and analyze problems that hinder their academic and social development, to speak out and express their views about the problems and take action to solve them. I attributed the assertiveness and self-confidence the girls showed during the interview to *Tuseme* programs. Indeed as Mr. Muniu had put it, "the girls no longer have to walk with their heads down or dig the ground with their toes when they talk to men or their parents". The variety of activities in *Tuseme* programs was effective tools that empowered girls to Speak Out and say NO!

Other programs that Mr. Muniu attributed to the girls' empowerment process included Guidance and Counseling, Peer Counseling, FAWE sponsored seminars and workshops, student-family reconciliation programs and the integrity and devotion of his teaching staff. Underscoring the critical role FAWE plays in the lives of students in the Center, Mr. Muniu said:

> You know FAWE has and is really doing quite a lot. If there is money that is not wasted, it is money that goes to FAWE. FAWE pays fees for most of the girls here in the Center. I don't know where they could be if FAWE were not in their lives. (Mr. Muniu personal interview, June 2007).

Mr. Muniu's accolades for FAWE further puts stress on their role in capacity building programs including gender sensitization workshops and seminars as well as in-service training for teachers. He states:

> I want to say that this school has been made what it is largely by FAWE. What they are doing now is on capacity building for teachers and pupils. Like now the workshops and seminars, they [FAWE] are the ones who are organizing and funding it. Even empowering teachers to stop thinking like ordinary teacher, it is FAWE. In fact I can say FAWE has done a lot to me as a person. You know we are Africans and sometimes we can behave like Africans, you know they have been hammering....women, women, girl-child until now we have opened up. (Muniu, personal interview, June 2007).

I also learned that FAWE helps to train the teachers in the Centers of Excellence to acquire gender responsive pedagogy skills, which are seldom part of the teachers' training curriculum.

It is worth noting that FAWE had helped teachers in the Centers of Excellence in Kenya, Rwanda and Tanzania to develop a gender responsive pedagogy. Mr. Muniu shared that all teachers including the heads of the three Centers had participated in the processes, which were conducted in each country. The teachers used their own school experiences to identify what the issues that needed to be addressed were. Then they participated in developing a gender responsive handbook for teachers, which was piloted in each Center for all the subjects offered. The piloted manual consists of units dealing with various aspects of a gender responsive pedagogy including how to create a gender responsive:

- Lesson planning
- Teaching and learning materials
- Language use in the classroom
- Classroom set up and
- School management system as well as addressing issues of combating sexual harassment and management of sexual maturation.

I was curious to understand how teachers in Mr. Muniu's Center had integrated the teachers' Gender Responsive Pedagogy Manual into their teaching practice. He lectured me how this model was taking root in his Center. He asserted that the model was producing very encouraging results in terms of the following:

- Raising the awareness of the teachers on the gender constraints to learning.
- Equipping the teachers with concrete skills on how to eliminate the gender based constraint to the teaching and learning processes.
- Equipping the teachers with skills for new teaching methods, which apply not only to gender but to the overall improvement of the quality of their teaching.
- Equipping the teachers with the skills to identify gender stereotyping in teaching and learning materials such as textbooks and visual aids and the skills to produce gender responsive materials instead.
- Promoting innovation and creativity in the teachers in the bid to come up with gender responsive teaching methodologies, teaching and learning materials.
- Introducing a gender friendly atmosphere in the school among teachers and students, both inside and outside the classroom.

- Improving the quality of teaching and learning overall leading to better performance by both boys and girls.

It was clear that FAWE, through the Centers of Excellence was reducing gender disparities in education with a view to having more girls access school, complete their studies and perform well at all level. At the same time it was encouraging capacity building programs to continue building stakeholders' awareness and consensus on the overall advantages of girls' education through advocacy for action at all levels with emphasis on the grassroots level. A critical program that FAWE sponsored to narrow the gap between rescued girls and their families was a series of workshops and seminars meant to reconcile the rescued girls and their families.

Reconciliatory Forum

Besides his administrative duties Mr. Muniu's acquaintance with the community through FAWE sponsored seminars and workshops had made him "visible and more of an insider than an outsider in the community". According to him, reconciling the rescued and/or run-away girls with their families is a critical piece for the survival of the girls and the continuity of the Center. He believes that getting the community on board the Center's programs and activities make communication and partnerships easy and helps the Center to achieve its solemn goal. Getting parents involved in their children's lives and education in particular is in line to changing parents' attitudes and opinion regarding the girls' education. With the help of FAWE, Mr. Muniu shared that he had organized and facilitated a number of reconciliation seminars and workshops for the local community. Through these fora:

> We have been able to change the attitudes of some people. And I have also seen a very big change in the community. You know I have been the deputy for quite

> some time and deputies are very close to the students and the community, so I can see now men are seeing some of these things in a more positive manner than when a lady was heading this school. This made me know that Maasai men lowly regard women regardless of their position in society. The men now can associate with me. If they see it is a man telling them that a girl should not be circumcised, they see there is a point. Like last December, last year when we had a workshop, most of the parents, men confessed that they have seen the reasons why girls should not be circumcised and why they should get education. (Muniu, personal interview, June 2007).

Mr. Muniu takes pride in the reconciliation program since its inception. According to him, there was widespread antagonistic relationship between girls who had been rescued or run-away and their families. Before, some parents and 'husbands' could storm the Center and demand the release of their daughters and 'wives'.

> We have had some hostile parents and 'husbands'. When these girls come here, there are those (parents and 'husbands') who come here with bows and arrows that we want our daughters and 'wives'. But we don't release them, that one I cannot. It does not matter how they come, we cannot give them back. (Muniu, personal interview, June 2007).

With such account, I could not help to infer that while the Center was a safe haven for the girls, its existence in the heart of the Maasai community was a sour reminder of its intrusiveness to their way of life. Mr. Muniu, therefore grounded his role in reconciliation workshops arguing:

> Yes, I organize for these workshops and seminars. We are doing reconciliation. Before when we rescued these girls, there was a rift between the school, the girls and the parents and families. So the school was coming in between the girls and the parents and I didn't like it. As the principal, those are some of the changes I decided that I should have, because we need the community and the community needs us but they have to know. (Muniu, personal interview, June 2007).

I asked Mr. Muniu what exactly happened in the reconciliation workshops and sensitization seminars and how the parents respond. He told me that in these fora, parents and other members of the community are encouraged to participate in the education of girls. Girls who have been empowered perform skits and recitations. He continued, "This

is a good chance for the girls to voice their concerns, communicate the issues to the members of their community and provoke their involvement in the discussion and persuade them to take action". On the other hand, he stated that they had to involve the local administration officials such as the chiefs, district commissioner (DC) and divisional officer (DO) in order to penetrate the closely-knit community. He revealed that some local chiefs were known to either marry young girls or give their own away. Hence:

> In the year 2001, 2002 and 2003, we had workshops for the chiefs. All the chiefs in the district were sensitized. We had even the DC who talked to them on the roles of chiefs in the girl-child education. The context this time was the girl child—what is the role of a chief in the girl child education. So he came and he talked to them for the three workshops. (Muniu, Personal interview June 2007)

Mr. Muniu's argument to include the local administration, especially the chiefs was plausible since such partnerships had led to increased enrolment of girls and a reduction of female genital mutilation (FGM) and early marriages. He said that since 2004, all local chiefs were required by the provincial administration to sign declaration forms declaring that they will:

- Enforce the Children's Act of 2001, which is an act of Parliament to ensure the rights of a child are not violated.
- Sensitize parents, especially fathers, on the importance of girls' education and the disadvantages of FGM and early marriage.
- Analyze the status of girls' education in their areas and the negative impact on the development of their areas.
- Formulate their own areas' work plan on how they wished to address the gender constraints to girl's education.
- Take legal action against parents who were in defiance of protecting the rights of the girl-child as enshrined in the Children's Act of 2001. (Muniu, personal interview, June 2007).

I further learned that reconciliation programs also involved officers from the Children's Rights Office. Their involvement was to ensure that parents as well as other community members understood and respected children's rights as required of the 2001

Children's Act. Two months before I went to Kajiado Girls Center of Excellence, Mr. Muniu told me that he had organized for a forum that included the newly appointed local chiefs and children's officials.

> Two months ago, the district officer (DO) was here and then we had to call the children' s office to speak on the children's rights. That is a chance that we never forget to give. Whenever we call parents here, we have to call the children's officer to come and talk about the children's rights. They [parents] understand now that children have a right. Because previously, the man, this lion, has always thought he owned everything. The destiny of the children is in his hands. He is the one to decide who to go to school, what should happen to you, who to get married...we are now telling them from the 2001 Children's Act, children have a right. You have to give back to a child their rights, you have to give them food, shelter, clothing, education, and you have to protect them. So it is now moving. The chiefs have also now been sensitized. So whenever they have a baraza [community meeting], they talk about children's rights. That is why are saying we now have a change of attitude. (Muniu, Personal interviews June 2007).

In Mr. Muniu's view, reconciliation programs had increased parental involvement in the girls' education. Some parents were willing to reconcile with their daughters as well as allow those who had not yet been in school but were of school-going age to join their sisters. For instance, of the 49 parents who had given their girls for marriage and who had attended the reconciliation meeting in December 2006, 36 had gone home with their daughters and brought them back the next day. "And 3 of the men asked for vacancies to bring some of their other daughters who were at home", conveyed Mr. Muniu. He was upbeat that the community was;

> Now trying to understand what the Center is all about. Now we tell them, it is their turn. We are not against their culture, we tell them their culture is rich, good but there are some things in the culture that we need to get rid of. They are now seeing sense of what we are doing but it has not been easy. (Muniu, personal interview June 2007).

While the initiatives I have attempted to discuss in the forgoing depict potential and hope of succeeding in bringing about gender equity and equality in education in rural areas, Mr. Muniu acknowledges that his Center is challenged in many ways.

Challenges

When I first met Mr. Muniu, he was hurrying up to get to his office with a group of students, as I waited by the bench outside his office. Close to where I was seated, were two men, probably in their late 40s clad in bright red *shuka* (textiles) each carrying two well-carved wooden clubs, as is traditional of Maasai men. A brown dog wagged its tail around them. Later, Mr. Muniu revealed to me that one of the men was looking for his 'wife', who had run away two days earlier. "Of course the girl is here and we are trying to have her processed. But you see, we cannot give her back", said Mr. Muniu. I further learned that the girl in question was 11 years old and had been given away for marriage and in both times, she had managed to run away.

I realized how technical and difficulty it is for Mr. Muniu to navigate such complex terrains but at the same time, I admired the ease with which he handled such cases. He recounted that once a girl runs to the Center, the first thing they do is to give her a uniform so that it becomes difficult for anyone to identify her. Then they inform the chief who in turn informs the district education officer who registers such girl in the government register. "The girl now belongs to the government, not the school. No parent or 'husband' can access her. But the chief hunts the parents down and institutes investigation with a view to prosecute them", recounted Mr. Muniu. According to him, gender-based constraints to education are to blame, especially around the locality of the Center since its community tenaciously display strict adherence to traditional cultural

values, attitudes and practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and early marriages.

Gender Inequality

While Mr. Muniu believes that women have got a role to play in the development of their families, communities and country, he bemoans the position of women in the Maasai culture. He stated that in Maasai tradition women are considered children and;

> A woman's place is in the kitchen. It doesn't matter how educated a woman is or what position she holds, she is counted as a child. In fact, the word they use for a woman is the same word they use for *nagera* [children]. When I meet a Maasai man, even with me, we will discuss about ourselves, our cows, goats then eventually children, women included. In fact Maasai men would respect an uncircumcised boy than a woman. (Muniu, personal interview June 2007).

In his view, once a Maasai girl is born, she goes through 3 major phases. "Once a girl is born, she waits to get circumcised, get married and bear children". Mr. Muniu uses the analogy of a lion to stress that a man, in the Maasai community is the first and final say in the culture.

> The Maasai community is a man's world. In this community when food is cooked there is the man, he is served first, he eats, then the children and finally the women. Do you know that is how lions behave, the lioness will hunt, the lion will kill and the male [lion] will feed first. (Muniu, personal interview June 2007).

As if what Mr. Muniu had just said was not disturbing enough, he further revealed:

> Let me say, because I share with men, and we really talk, you know it may not be important but let me say this. When a man is having intercourse with any woman, the woman is not supposed to show feelings at all. If she does, she is considered a prostitute. So sex is for the man, he can enjoy. (Muniu personal interview, June 2007).

During school programs that require the involvement of parents such as reconciliation meetings, parent teacher association (PTA) and visiting days, Mr. Muniu

encourages women to talk and give their ideas and opinions, something that their culture does not allow them to do. In the Maasai culture, "Girls don't talk to their fathers. Even when they are greeting their parents you know they give the heads and they are touched. That includes women and boys who have not been circumcised", conveyed Mr. Muniu. I remembered the generous hugs in America and the right to express views and thought how such acts often go unnoticed.

HIV/AIDS

The devastating impact of HIV/AIDS in education did not escape the list of challenges that Mr. Muniu feared was likely to beleaguer his Center. While he reported that incidents of HIV infection among students were minimal, he was worried about the emerging high number of HIV/AIDS orphans in the Center. His characterization of the orphans in the Center is as follows:

> So now we have total orphans (those who have lost both parents) who are with us. We have a majority who have lost one parent but most of them they have lost their fathers. As of now, I am aware of 78 cases that have lost their fathers then we have like 36 who have lost their mothers. But you know within the Maasai community the father is everything. The fact that most of the women in the Maasai community never went to school, it is a man who has been doing everything for the community. Almost all of these cases contract HIV due to ignorance. (Muniu, personal interview June 2007).

As much as Mr. Muniu was concerned about these orphans, he was much more worried with what was happening in the community. He reiterated that some cultural practices in the community had predisposed most innocent people to HIV infection and this situation was complicated by experiences of endemic poverty. He said:

> What I am worried about are the several cases of parents in this community who are dying due to HIV/AIDS complications. Sex in the Maasai community is not an issue. There is no such word as rape in this community. When you are circumcised you are supposed to have sex in order to become a woman. By the

> age of 8 and 12 circumcision is the key. After circumcision a mother can chase her daughter from the house to go get a man, 'you are a woman, why don't I see men here'? (Muniu, personal interview, June 2007).

Being a semi arid area, Maasai people's investment is in livestock. As I have said earlier in the setting section, the land in this part of Kenya is not suitable for farming due to insufficient rainfall. Hence, drought is a natural disaster for them since they cannot get enough pasture and water for their cattle. This situation is exacerbated by their reluctance to embrace education as the one and probably only key to break the cycle of poverty.

All girls who attend the Center are either paying little tuition for their upkeep or an individual or organization sponsors them. However, due to poverty, parents of most girls are not able to support their daughters financially. Mr. Muniu discovered that a few parents had specifically brought their daughters to the Center because there was no food for them at home. Such parents' intent in this case is food not education. Mr. Muniu emphatically said:

> There is also poverty. This is a boarding institution, parents have to pay tuition fee but because of poverty, many parents are not able to. So, they come looking a place [vacancy] for their children –what do you do, do you turn them away? That is the question. So these girls are here with us and we have to take care of them. We have to even go out of our way. Like today, I have to meet someone at Kenya Breweries [local beer-brewing company], who wants to purchase some uniforms for these girls, so you have to move out. (Muniu, personal interview June 2007).

Sponsorship for the girls in the Center was a challenge to Mr. Muniu. He had to move out and reach to well-wishers and ask for food, clothing and other supplies that are very essential for girls. For instance, he shared:

> In the Maasai community things like sanitary towels is not an issue even to women in the community but now these girls are here, do we continue with what they do at home? Or you change. So I have to go out. I am always out there looking for funds (Muniu, personal interview June 2007).

Mr. Muniu therefore spent most of his time 'out there', either with the students or seeking help for the girls. As leader, he said he had to be a good listener and a genuine friend with a lot of networks both in and outside the country. He was hardly an office principal.

One other challenge that worries Mr. Muniu is lack of physical space to accommodate the ever-growing number of girls who keep rising by the day. He said that the Center's dormitories were operating twice their normal capacity. On the other hand, while the rescue center within the Center is a pivotal symbol of hope for the rescued girls, it poses more challenges to Mr. Muniu's leadership. The rescue center serves as a home for those girls whose parents refuse to accept them back. With such girls in mind, Mr. Muniu described his predicament:

> These girls are there yes. Sometimes we have over 100 girls who remain here. One of the greatest challenges is that in this Center, the head teacher is on duty throughout. The teachers are on duty throughout because it is a school that is on from 1st January to 31st December. Teachers have to be here. We need to have at least 2 teachers on duty everyday over the holidays. Sometimes you have to tell the teachers that they cannot go because we need them. (Muniu, personal interview, June 2007).

I learned that those girls who use the Rescue Center as their 'home' were not just idle. They were involved in vocational skills programs such as bead making and sewing. In addition, they also received remedial help with their school work and this meant that teachers were always needed to supervise them and ensure their safety.

Going by the pressures and challenges Mr. Muniu navigated to ensure that his Center lived up to its name, a Girls' Center of Excellence, it is my view that his role was stretched beyond that of a regular principal. He wears many hats for deserving girls in a challenging environment with minimal resources.

Mr. Wario: A Passionate Music and Math Teacher

Mr. Wario is married and has a one-year-old daughter. Like Mr. Muniu, Mr. Wario's wife teaches Special Education to visually impaired girls in the Center. Mr. Wario has been a Math and Music teacher in the Center for the last 13 years. While he does not hail from the Maasai community, Mr. Wario considers himself part of it since he too refers to the girls at the Center as his daughters. He is a member of the Center's Guidance and Counseling team and also serves as one of the teachers involved in piloting Science, Math and Technology (SMT) project in the Center. He believes in challenging the stereotypes that hinder the participation and performance of girls in education especially in Math and Science oriented subjects. Expressing his contentment over the girls' exemplary performance in these subjects, which are traditionally considered a preserve of male students, Mr. Wario shared:

> For a long time, girls have been thought not to do well in Math. I have been here for some time and I have seen girls rise up. Because like last year in terms of As of course they were not many, like English had the most number of As, I think they had about 16As which we still consider small and then Math had 9As. These are some of the things that I see as a driving force for my being here. When I see girls performing well in Math I feel encouraged (Wario, personal interview, June 2007).

Mr. Wario was ecstatic that despite what the girls who come to the Center have been through, they are a joy to teach. The girls' stellar performance in national exams was a major motivating factor for him and most teachers to remain in the Center. I asked him to share with me what he considered was a cause for the girls good performance. He said:

> Let me say this, it is a combination of factors. One thing that really encourages is when I see these girls perform well in Math. The reason why I say this is because there are other stakeholders who have come in, like FAWE. FAWE has really encouraged us through training, in Science, Mathematics and Technology (SMT). We have had workshops and in-service training in SMASSE (Strengthening Math

> and science education). And the girls are ready to learn, and our principal is very understanding. (Wario, personal interview June, 2007).

Mr. Wario's description of the teacher's commitment and students' willingness to learn was a mirror of the school motto: *Determination and Dedication to Excellence*. Viewing his students as his own sisters who had stable jobs and decent income, Mr. Wario stated that like boys, girls can achieve their dreams and contribute to the welfare of their families provided they are given a chance in education.

Science Math and Technology (SMT)

Remembering how, during my primary and secondary schooling, my teachers discouraged me and other girls from pursuing science oriented subjects, I asked Mr. Wario to elaborate on the SMT project, which I thought was a noble enterprise. My curiosity was heightened by the fact that during the interview, there was an SMT on-going pilot class in standard five (5^{th} grade) that was using the SMT model.

According to Mr. Wario, SMT was introduced by FAWE with the aim to encouraging girls to appreciate science related subjects by developing positive attitudes early in life. In the long run, its objective is to enable teachers, students and the community to tackle barriers that perpetuate the poor performance of girls in science-oriented subjects. FAWE, which Mr. Wario said is very supportive in the Center, funds the facilitation of SMT activities including in-service training for teachers to make the science curriculum gender responsive. Hailing the support of FAWE, he says:

> FAWE has been here for quite a while and has been encouraging girls either directly or through us to pursue Math and to perform well in Math and other Science subjects. As we talk now, there is a pilot class next door, and they have tried to pump in some resources to kind of assess the performance (Wario personal interview, June 2007).

Under the umbrella of SMT, Wario said that FAWE continues to set up laboratories, computers and science workshops for students to encourage them to engage in sciences. In essence, as Mr. Wario put it, "...they are trying to provide a conducive learning environment that will make a difference in the girls performance in Math and Science".

Echoing the Center's Mission on its influence on the girls educational goals, Mr. Wario strongly believes in the holistic development of the students since, he argues, they cannot isolate education from other social aspects. He said:

> Our mission is to ensure the holistic development of the girl child. That one we believe in besides our motto: determination and dedication to excellence. We believe that their holistic development is important. Using our assemblies, we do give a lot of pastoral (spiritual) care, the teacher in charge allocates one or two people to talk to them either from the AIC church or anywhere to come and talk to them especially on Wednesdays, We have assemblies in the dining hall on Mondays and Wednesdays. In these assemblies we talk to them, teachers using the Holy Scriptures teach them on virtues like love, caring and forgiveness (Wario, personal interview, June 2007).

Mr. Wario further shared, "My girls also learn and gain skills that prepares them to take care of themselves. They also gain spiritual nourishment, which adds to their kit in being responsible, caring and as well as skills that enable them to survive hardy environments". Based on the elaboration of Mr. Wario, I realized that they were not just giving the girls an education, but empowering them to change values, attitudes and practices in which they are always the underdogs.

Girl Take Care of Girl Policy

Girl Take Care of Girl policy was introduced in the Center as one way to encourage girls to support one another. While most girls had homogeneous background experiences that resulted in their being in the Center, they needed help to unlearn some social aspects and relearn what is expected of them while in the Center. The policy therefore is meant to encourage girls to care and share their resources with needy and new arrivals since a girl who runs to the Center comes only in the clothes she is wearing. Explaining about this policy, Mr. Wario said:

> We also try to develop that sense of caring. We have, *Girl Take Care of Girl* policy. You see, when we receive rescued girls, most of the time they don't have anything, so we encourage this girls to contribute voluntarily, things like soap, uniform or clothes even sanitary towels. In other words they share what they have and this really helps them when they go out there they already know what it means to share and care for one another. (Wario, personal interview June 2007).

Mr. Wario's explanation is a depiction of hope and despair. While the Center 's nerve of existence resides in helping rescued girls find a footing in life, the challenges that come with this gallant mission embody some elements of despair on the immediate service providers. Mr. Wario singled, trauma, inadequate parental involvement, occasional pregnancies and the difficulty for some girls in transitioning from being a mother or 'wife' to being a student.

Trauma

Invoking his role as a guidance and counseling teacher, Mr. Wario declared that trauma among students was one of the profound challenges that the Center faced. Much of the trauma emanated from some of the girls' background experiences. He explained that a number of the girls had been sexually abused/molested, forced to concede to

undergo FGM or early marriage against their will prior to their rescue or escape to the Center. Mr. Wario further cited HIV/AIDS deaths or infection, instability in families due to divorce or separation as major sources of trauma besides early marriage and FGM. Due to the differing circumstances and degree of their trauma, Wario noted that it took along time for the traumatized girls to heal and integrate well to the school routine. He said;

> It is trauma, and as I said we have children from different backgrounds. Some children here have come here because the parents have separated, some maybe the parents have divorced, some have been sexually molested, some are orphaned due to the HIV/AIDS so we have all this diverse reasons why this children come here. So trying to bring them back this children is not easy, because some already have deviant behavior. So we have to be patient with them, we have to counsel them, through peer counseling and have peer counselors within the school amongst the students who are selected. In fact we have peer counselors amongst the students (Wario, personal interview, June 2007)

Mr. Wario was optimistic that the individualized counseling services that the Center provides coupled with the introduction of peer counseling among students was helping most affected girls to cope with the reality.

Pregnancy

Mr. Wario narrated of a few cases of pregnancy among girls in the Center, which he considered heartbreaking not only to the teachers but also to other students and stakeholders. He shared a story of a girl in his class who had dropped out of his class due to pregnancy.

> Like now as we talk, there is a girl who dropped out. Unfortunately am the class teacher, she was in class 8. I understand she is pregnant but I don't know what happened. She was supposed to be here over the holidays but she dropped out quite recently because of pregnancy. It is even sad to talk about this one because, her sister is at Alliance Girls, one of the best national school as you know. The sister was hardworking and in fact she was index one. She scored very good

> marks and we helped her and we determined to see that her sister joins her. Both of them were rescued. This girl had dropped out earlier because of pregnancy, but because her sister at Alliance loves education very much, she convinced her to come back to school. She gave birth and left the baby at home. She came back to class six. We decided to apply the re-entry policy and she came back to school and all along she has been doing well only to receive this news this term that she is pregnant for the second time. Her performance was good. (Wario, personal interview June 2007).

Efforts to encourage girls such as the one Wario talks about in this excerpt to take advantage of the re-entry policy to complete their studies was overshadowed by lack of self-esteem, shame and disenchantment from peers. An element of optimism that such girls are welcome to complete their studies is captured in Mr. Wario views:

> We are still trying to follow up. We are hoping that she can come back. We are still in the process of inquiring and see what happened. Right now she has not given birth and the other baby may be big. As a class teacher, I would have wanted her to come back after she has given birth, learn a bit and do her exam so that at least she can have her class 8 certificate. So we are still pursuing because this just happened recently (Wario, personal interview, June 2007).

Despite his optimism, Mr. Wario understood well the stigma that comes with such pregnancies. Besides pregnancy, Mr. Wario stated one other challenge that he believes continues to beleaguer the Center in providing a conducive environment for the girls to realize their dreams. He cited the difficulty with some girls transitioning from being 'wives' or 'mothers' to being students.

From being a wife/mother to being a student/child

Given that a number of the girls in the Center were those who had either run away or been rescued from early marriages or FGM, they had little experience and knowledge with formal schooling. Hence, in Mr. Wario's view, it was difficulty to orient such girls to the formal school programs. He explained:

> Many of these girls have been married, you are trying to bring them back from being a mother or wife to being a child [student]. It is difficulty because some of them may have been married for a month or week and so it is hard to get them from mother to child, it is hard for them to realize that they are in school and not being a mother or wife (Wario, personal interview, June 2007).

Mr. Wario revealed further that a number of rescued girls either had one or two children, which made it difficult for them to separate from them and their home life and concentrate in their education. Although many of them gradually get used to school and eventually embrace it as their liberating force, Mr. Wario recalled of a case where one of the rescued girls could not cope with life at the Center and eventually had to drop out. He shared:

> I remember there is this girl we rescued. She had been married for some time and had stayed with her husband. We brought her here, we counseled her and thought it was ok, and then one day when she was outside and she saw cattle passing and she started telling other students that she misses her cattle and her goats. That one did not stay for long, she dropped out. That was a very challenging case. She was not fully engaged into the school system. I think she had attachment to her animals, just like all those who come the way she did. (Wario, personal interview, June 2007).

After probing Mr. Wario about the counseling staff in the Center, I realized that it composed of teachers who had been sensitized on the social issues most girls who came to the Center experienced. There was no professional counselor trained to handle the psychological, physiological, and emotional needs that the rescued girls were experiencing. This deficiency notwithstanding, Mr. Wario along with the rest of the staff members, did their best to provide the girls with physical safety, which they needed first before all else. His work, especially in the sensitization and reconciliation workshops, together with other staff members was giving hope and redefining the place, role and capabilities of the girl-child in the Maasai community.

Rhoda: The Rescued who became the Rescuer

I met Rhoda when she came to the principal's office in the morning of my first visit to Kajiado Girls Center. After a brief introduction from the principal, Rhoda agreed to talk to me after class hours. Rhoda comes from the Maasai community and has been a teacher at Kajiado girls Center for 13 years. She teaches social studies and English in grades, 4, 6 and 8. In her late 30s, Rhoda is a single mother of 3 children, 2 daughters and a son. The oldest daughter is in college. The second born, a son, is in high school, while the last daughter whom I learned was 10 years old, is in class 5 at the Center. Like Mr. Wario, Rhoda is also a member of the school's Guidance and Counseling team. Besides teaching, she is in charge of the Center's food stores.

Personal Story

In our interview conversation, I realized that Rhoda was not only an embodiment of what most girls in the Center had experienced, but also an epitome of hope for their future. Rhoda's information throughout my interview was her own life experiences. I asked her to share with me how she had ended up in Kajiado Girls Center of Excellence. She narrated:

> I came to this school in 1995. The reason why I came here is because I had quarrels with my parent [father]. I went to the District Education Officer (DEO) to get me somewhere to stay with my children, where I could be comfortable and where I could avoid threats from my father who by then wanted me to marry someone that I never wanted to marry (Rhoda, personal interview June 2007).

At age 10, Rhoda had undergone FGM and like any Maasai girl, she was waiting to be given away for marriage. Her few years in school before she underwent FGM was a

profound experience. She believes that her father loved her and since she was bright in school, she was spared to continue with her education instead of being married off.

> After completing my secondary education, I was employed as an untrained teacher (UT). Where I was working, I befriended a man from another *tribe* and my father was really against it. Unfortunately, something happened, I conceived and my father was very upset with me for befriending a man outside of my tribe. I gave birth and left my child with my mother and I went to college. After college, it happened again (I became pregnant) with the same man and my father didn't want to see me anymore. He said he could not accept it and he could not talk to that man. And because of that he said he wanted to give me to somebody for marriage because I had defiled his order and had become pregnant by someone from a different community (Rhoda personal interview, July 2007)

According to the Maasai tradition, Rhoda, who then had 2 children was considered an outcast. Rhoda's father was therefore compelled to give her away quickly to escape the shame Rhoda's actions had brought to the family. According to Rhoda, she had transgressed her family and community in 3 ways: (1) she gave birth before marriage (2) her boyfriend was from a different *tribe* and (3) she had refused to obey her father by marrying a man of his choice. Consequently, Rhoda was forced to move out. "When I told my father that I was not interested in marriage at all, he told me to pack my things, get my kids and move out of his home." Rhoda 23years old by then did not envision herself, a teacher marrying a 56 year old man just because that was her father's choice. "I didn't know him", she added.

After moving to the Center as a teacher, Rhoda stayed for two years without communicating with her father. Rhoda was independent and the fact that she was working and living a decent life, her father could not afford to continue his hatred for her. One day, "He said that we cannot afford to stay like this, I want to forgive you and I want to talk to you, and I want you to come home without conditions", said Rhoda. She loved her father and she wanted to put to an end their frost relationship. It did not take long

however, before Rhoda realized that her father was still determined to see her married to the same man she had refused. It was evident that Rhoda was caught between her own wishes as an educated Maasai teacher and the complexity of her culture.

The Power of Culture

While Rhoda was not willing to give in to relentless pressure from her father and extended family to live up to the expectation of her culture, the idea of being an 'outcast' was more troubling. "Now my neighbors, my uncles, everybody was coming to me and telling me to listen to my father, if I didn't want to get a curse. Your father loves you so much that is why he wants you to get married to this man..." The family pressure was weighing down on Rhoda's spirit, her determination to remain single was waning and the silent and lonely moments cut deep into her life. She had to find a middle ground to rest. She explained:

> My father used to love me so much and maybe that is the reason why I never wanted to let go. I was really touched when everybody could talk to me and tell me why I needed to obey my father and our customs. I could be called at home and whenever I went there the topic was about my marriage. I was always angry until one time I said I had had enough of it. And so I agreed and I got married to the man they wanted. (Rhoda personal interview, June 2007)

Despite her education and status in the community as a teacher, Rhoda's resolve could not stand the power of culture. She was entrapped by her culture by falling to the wishes of her father and her community. She consented to her father's pre-arranged marriage and became the second wife to a man who was more than twice her age. Although Rhoda's family was delighted about her marriage, happiness for her was just but an illusion. She shared:

> Everybody was happy when I agreed to get married but it was hard for me. My father wanted me to be married to this man and for me I just followed

> instructions, but I was never happy, not even one day I was happy. Most of the time I stayed in my room crying and thought to myself why I was trying to make people happy while I was miserable everyday. I realized that my personal happiness was most important (Rhoda, personal interview, June 2007)

Comparing her matrimonial relationship to a "cold war", Rhoda said, " We had nothing in common. I told my father I was tired of the cold war—we were not talking—we were not quarrelling but I didn't like it that we didn't talk to each other." Recalling the anguish and frustrations she suffered due to lack of communication, connection and love in the relationship, Rhoda retorted:

> There was nothing in common whatsoever, even intercourse was the biggest barrier, the age difference was so big, if anything he was supposed to be my father. I could not discuss my feelings to him. Maybe I was too hyper for him or he was too slow for me. So I couldn't handle it any more. I was tired of feeling miserable and worthless. (Rhoda, personal interview, June 2007).

To end her misery, Rhoda walked out of the marriage much to the shock and dismay of her family. She told her family, "I know you wanted us to be happy but we are not and I cannot force myself to stay with somebody I have no feelings for." To her father, Rhoda candidly put it to him:

> I don't want to die young, I need to live a happy life and if you truly love me, you should release me to be myself. For the short time we have stayed together, it was enough—you should return his cows. I requested that neither you nor my uncles should sit anywhere discussing about my marriage or me. (Rhoda, personal interview, June 2007).

Rhoda said that she was craving for freedom, the freedom that is devoid of cultural prescriptions that imprisoned her. She wished the same for all human beings and specially her children. Since she firmly stood before her father and asked him to let her free, she considered herself a rescued person. "I consider myself a rescued girl now involved in rescuing others". Once hopeless, Rhoda further considers herself as an epitome of hope and model for the rescued girls who end up in the Center.

Giving Voice to the Voiceless

Despite her tribulations, Rhoda has continued to stand tall as an icon of change both within the Center and in her community. She believes that her challenges had made her resilient and stronger. Working in the Center had shaped and redefined her resolve to be a voice to the voiceless in her community. She said, "if it were not for this Center, I could have undergone so much trouble that probably could have broken me. This has been my security and I will make it a security to the rest who need it". She felt obligated to become a rescuer through active involvement in grassroots' campaigns meant to enlighten and empower girls in her community. It is ironical that Rhoda is considered a threat to the very culture that once held her captive. She said:

> I know I have become a threat to my community, whoever wants to have their daughter undergo FGM or given away for marriage, they first ask if I am going home (to my home village) or if anybody knows of my well about before they can do anything. It is because they know I will call the police. They know that if they are known they will be reported and they will be prosecuted. (Rhoda, Focus Group Interview, July 2007).

Speaking specifically of FGM, which is still rampant in her community, Rhoda narrated how her own brother and sister in-law had arranged to sneak their two daughters from the Center to secretly undergo the ritual. Aware of their ill plans, Rhoda intervened and foiled their plans but provoked a bitter family feud. She recalled:

> I had a problem with my brother. When I came here [Center], my brother brought his 2 daughters. One December, his wife came here and told my daughter that her two cousins were going to undergo FGM, and if she could hide and come over to the village they will go together, since she knew I was against it. So my daughter told me and I called my nieces and asked them if they were aware that they would undergo FGM. They said that they did not want to but they didn't know what to do. They sought for my help and I told them to write a note to the District commissioner (DC) about their feelings. Because I knew the moment they could

> go home they will be forced to undergo FGM, I personally took them to DC's office where I got a letter barring them to be taken away from school by anybody, including their parents. One of the letters was for my brother, the Center's principal and the local chief. When my brother came to the Center to get the girls he was served with the letter barring him from accessing the girls. He went back home and came with my father, and the same was told them. He was really upset with me because he knew that I was behind it (Rhoda, personal interview, June 2007).

Although Rhoda explained that her actions saved her nieces from undergoing the ritual, her relationship not only with her brother but also the community was frosty. People in the village were afraid of her because they knew that she could not stop at anything to involve government authorities to save the girls from retrogressive cultural practices. She however lamented of high levels of poverty in her community that deprived many children of education. Education, according to Rhoda, is not an immediate need for many families in Maasai community especially during drought season.

Poverty

Echoing what Mr. Muniu and Mr. Wario had said regarding poverty, Rhoda reiterated that poverty was a major impediment to girls' education and general development in her community. She shared that poverty had pushed some parents in her community to give away their daughters in acts of desperation.

> There is this case, one that really touched my heart. There is this girl who was given away for marriage because of drought. The man was so poor that he gave away this girl in order to get some grazing land for his few animals. There was this old man who had a piece of grazing land, he told this other man (the girl's dad) that if you give me your daughter, I will allow you to graze your animals in my piece of land. The girl was 10 and she was exchanged for grass, you can imagine. So she was rescued, and this girl now is in form one, she did very well in her grade 8 exams. (Rhoda, personal interview July 2007)

Rhoda was emphatic about this act of desperation, but indicated that there were many

more cases that go unnoticed in the community. She was optimistic that the inroads reconciliation programs and FAWE sponsored sensitization workshops had made in the community was paying dividends as some culturally ardent *wazee* (old men) had given in and embraced the values of girls' education.

Literature is replete with research that shows the value of educating girls to break the cycle of poverty. There is credence in the view that educated mothers will almost always want their children, both girls and boys to acquire better education than they themselves received (Shultz, 1989). As Rhoda put it, "if these girls are not educated, they will end up like our mothers and do as our culture demands. Undergo FGM, marry early, and just manufacture children." It is plausible to argue that the cycle of poverty does not stop in one life cycle. According to UNICEF (2001), "A girl born in poverty is more likely to marry early and have a child while still an adolescent. A malnourished girl becomes a malnourished mother, who will give birth to an underweight baby' (p.33). I am of the view that an educated girl is able to negotiate her rights and is aware of her responsibilities.

Focus Group Respondents

The girls enrolled in Kajiado Girls' Center of Excellence were my primary respondents. My access to them was heavily reliant on the three teachers I had interviewed. I had asked each of them, the Center's principal, Mr. Muniu, Ms. Rhoda and Mr. Wario to identify at least 5 girls, who were likely to agree to participate in a focus group. I explained to the teachers that the purpose of my focus group interview was to understand the girls' experiences along the thematic concerns that I had covered with

them. Thus, their experiences prior to joining the Center, perception of the Center and their future educational goals after the Center.

From the list of names I received from each of the three teachers I interviewed, I selected four girls based on their ages, duration spent at the Center, and the grade level. My target was to select girls who were between the ages of 14-18 years, had stayed in the Center for at least 5 years, and were enrolled in grades 6 to 8. I thought that girls, who met these measures, were more likely to articulate their experiences than those from lower grades. I therefore sampled a focus group comprising of four girls, namely: Faith, Naomi, Hope, and Lydia. Faith and Lydia were in class 7 while Naomi and Hope were in class 8. All the four respondents had been in the Center for over 5 years and their ages ranged from 14 to 18.

Three of the student respondents hailed from the local Maasai community while one was from a different community. In order to protect the respondent's identity, I used pseudonyms. In the sections that follow, I give brief background information for each focus group respondent and later present their responses, opinions and ideas regarding their experiences at the Kajiado Girls' Center of Excellence. With the help of Rhoda, who coming from the immediate local community understood the plight of most girls joining the Center, I created rapport with the girls by taking lunch with them for all the time I visited the Center. I gained their trust by sharing with them my own experiences, growing up in another ethnic community as a girl in Kenya.

Faith

Faith was a 14-year-old Maasai girl in class 7 at Kajiado Girls Center of Excellence. She comes from Ngong Hills, one of the divisions that make up Kajiado District. She was into her 6th year since she joined the Center. Faith shared with me about her family, " I am the last-born in the family but I have 2 sisters who are older than me and one brother. My father has 3 wives and my mother is the first one. There is a second one and a third one, who has many children. All of us are 13 in total." When I asked Faith how she had come to the Center, she took a deep breath and answered, "My sister and my mom took me away from my father and brought me to this Center." I wanted to know the reason(s) that had made her mom and sister take her away from her father.

I probed Faith further to explain the circumstances that had led her to be brought to the Center. She gave a lengthy response:

> My father used to drink alcohol a lot and he could come home and beat my mom. One day my mom ran away. She went to Nairobi, to stay with her sister who helped her to get a job as a cleaner. She left us behind. My father planned a circumcision ceremony for me and my sister. My father was planning to give my sister away to another old man, who had a lot of cows. My father loved cows. He was given animals and I was taking care of them. When my mom heard that my sister had been circumcised and was to join her *husband*, she came home to take her away from my father but my father refused to let her go. So my mom went to the local chief, who came with the policemen and took her away. But my father kept saying that if she refused to be married, he would curse her. He was hiding me. Because now my sister went away, my father wanted me to marry the same man. I did not want to be circumcised or go with that man. My mother came for me and my father said that if I go I will not be his child. He would curse me. After a month, when schools opened, my mother brought us here [Center] (Faith, Focus group interview, July 2007).

Despite her family experiences, especially her father's threats, Faith was thankful to be in the Center where, unlike her sisters, she had been spared of female genital mutilation (FGM) and early marriage. She shared that besides the sense of security and belonging

that the Center provides, she has an opportunity to do well academically and hopes to become a pilot.

Lydia

Like Faith, Lydia was in class 7 at Kajiado Girls Center of Excellence. She was 17 years old and comes from Magadi, another division of Kajiado district. Her background experiences echo those of Faith and Rhoda. Her father has three wives and her mother is the second wife. Lydia revealed that prior to coming to Kajiado Girls Center of Excellence, she had undergone female genital mutilation and had been given away for marriage by her father. She disclosed:

> You know my father, he loves cattle more than people, more than girls. One day, he called my sister and me and he told us "I can see that you have grown up, now I want to circumcise you and give you away for marriage." At that time I used to stay with my grandmother. When I heard that we were going to be given away I kept quiet because I didn't know what to do. I asked my sister if she wanted to be married, especially because she was going very far and she said she would go because she also didn't know what to do. The following day, we saw the men coming to our home. I asked my mom if they were the men my father had said would take us for marriage. My mom said 'yes, they are going to be your husbands.' I tried to tell my mom I didn't want to be married but she told me not to worry. She said we should just agree and go, since she didn't have anything to tell my father to spare us from being married. (Lydia, Focus group interview, July 2007)

Lydia and her then12 year-old sister were given away for marriage at the same time. While Lydia's sister did not want to oppose her father's decision to be married, Lydia managed to run away from her *husband* the next day and sought refuge at her grandmother's house. She recalled:

> The next morning, my sister and me prepared and we went with our *husbands*. My sister is still married but me I stayed there for one day, and I ran away because I had told my cousins I wanted to go to school. I pretended that I was going outside to the toilet and I ran away to my grandmother's place. I walked in the night. It was very dark. I was not scared of animals more than I was scared of

> the man, my *husband.* My grandmother told me to hide because if people knew I was there, they will be angry with her. In the evening, I heard my uncle talking. He was asking my grandma if she had seen me. Grandma said, no. Later she went to my uncle's house. She was pretending and only wanted to know what those men who were there had come to do. She went and asked them what they were doing and they told her they were looking for their lost *wife*. (Lydia, Focus group interview, July 2007).

Lydia's story was strikingly similar to that of Rhoda and Faith, which clearly depicted girls and women as passive decision makers in matters that directly affected their lives.

All my female respondents seemed to have been trapped in the culture of arranged marriages and their fathers had the final say as to who and when they married. For instance, they were all given away to men who were much older than them. In the case of Lydia, she revealed, "That man was about 48 years and I was just 10 years old." Lydia was voiceless in expressing her views about the age difference. She said that she watched helplessly as her hopes and dreams were shattered. However, "the spirit inside me did not betray me. I wanted to be in school, just like some girls I had seen in my village".

I realized that Lydia's determination to wear shoes and plait her hair as she had seen all girls who go to school do, invigorated her inspiration to run away. With the help of her uncle, grandma and the local police, Lydia was eventually brought to the Center to pursue her dreams. Her father was jailed for three months and for the 7 years Lydia had stayed in the Center, she had not seen eye to eye with her father. "I have never seen my father since I came to this school. My mother used to visit me in the first year but she stopped. Now, this Center is my school and my home. I hope one day they [parents] will accept me". Lydia hopes to become a doctor so that she can treat sick people in her village. "My dreams are to be a doctor and when I finish my school, I want my village to realize that a Maasai girl can be anything a human being is capable of".

Hope

Hope was 16 years old and came to the Center when she was 10 years old. She was enrolled in class three (3rd grade). Unlike Faith, Lydia, and Naomi, who hail from Kajiado district, Hope comes from the Samburu community, which is outside Kajiado district. Hope was in class 8 and was preparing to sit for her standard 8 national exams, Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE). In addition to being the head girl at the Center, Hope shared that she originally came from a Muslim background before she converted to Christianity. She revealed that she was so indebted to her rescuer that she had dropped her really name and taken her rescuer's name. When I asked her to share how she came to the Center, she revealed:

> I was brought here by a friend, a good Samaritan. It was the time when my mother was sick. My 2 older sisters and me did not go to school. I was disturbed and I used to say hi to a lady who was a teacher around my grandpa's house. She liked me and one day, she asked me if I could stay with her. I was glad. I stayed with her and I decided to get saved. She was a Christian and used to go to a local church. When my parents heard that I had gotten saved, they were not happy. They were against it and my dad said that he would even kill me. All my family members were Muslims, but I didn't like being a Muslim because as a girl, you don't have many chances of going to school or even asking anything as boys do. With the help of my teacher friend, I ended up in this Center 6 years ago. (Focus group interview, July 2007).

Hope spoke highly of the Center, as "it has given me a second chance in life". Like Lydia, Hope had not seen her parents for six years. She confessed that she sometimes breaks down and cries a lot when she remembers her mother and siblings.

While Hope missed her parents and siblings, she was very categorical when I asked her if she would want to see them had she a chance. She strongly said, 'NO' to my surprise. She explained that she would want to see them when she's completed her school and gotten a well-paying job that would enable her to help them. "I want to complete my

school and realize my dreams first then I can be able to see them and help them where I can", she said. Hope's explanation was augmented by her teacher, Rhoda, who said that Hope spoke with pain whenever she shared about her family but it was to her best interest to keep off them [family] until she is done with her school.

> Hope's case was a bit difficult for us to handle, coming from the Islamic background. Her parents had already made up their mind to give this girl away and were even threatening to kill her because she converted to Christianity. So we thought it was not going to be safe for Hope to keep in touch with them [her parents]. You might be wondering why she has not written to them or even visit with her. When she gets out of this place and she is old enough to protect herself and realizes her dream of becoming not only a human being, but also an engineer, they will appreciate her more than they see her now, as an object. (Focus group interview, July 2007)

In the discussion that ensued after Rhoda spoke, Hope made it clear that even though her parents were not supportive of her, had threatened to kill her for converting to Christianity and even arranged to marry her off, she had no ill feelings for them. She said, "When I complete my school and get a good well-paying job, I will help my parents. I will not neglect them." Her goal was to succeed in school and have a good career so that her parents would come to understand the meaning of education. Once she completes her education, Hope aspires to become an engineer.

Naomi

Naomi was the oldest of the four girls I interviewed in the focus group. She was 18 years old and enrolled in class 8. Like Hope, she was preparing to sit for her class 8 national exams, Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE). She was quiet and reserved, but very eloquent when she spoke. She had come to the Center at the age of 11 and enrolled in class 2. She had undergone FGM and given away for marriage by her father. She had 2 children, who were being take care of by her mother. Whenever she

talked of her children, tears welled up in her eyes and she struggled to hold them back. While she did not seem to regret to have given birth to her children, Naomi was critical of the Maasai culture that had led to "my present problems. I don't know why I had to be married off at the age of 9. I knew nothing. I suffered and it pains me to remember. Not my mother, not my father, not any of my relative cared about me. They love cows".

Naomi felt like marriage and cows in the Maasai community are synonymous to life:

> For my people, marriage and cows is all that make up good life. They value cows so much that they can exchange anything for them. As a Maasai girl, I now realize that we are so oppressed to the extent that a man had rather talk to a cow than a woman. Since I came to this Center, I have realized that I don't have to take all that comes from a man. I am also a human being before I am a girl. (Naomi, Focus Group interview, July 2007).

Naomi's rescue was instigated by a local nurse who attended to her during her second child's birth. She had developed complications and the nurse was worried that she would die if she did not receive specialized medical attention. In the process the nurse got to know more about Naomi's plight. She was later rescued and brought to the Center by a local church through the local District Education Office (DEO). Her father was arrested but later released for old age.

Echoing other girls in the focus group, Naomi underscored the significance of the Center and revealed her dream to become a teacher and role model for many young girls in her community. " I want to become a teacher after finishing school. I like my teachers very much because they have taught me many things that I did not know. I want to be a role model for my children and in my village." Naomi at times viewed her situation as a blessing in disguise since she "maybe I could not have come to this school if I did not suffer. I see my pain as good".

From the four student respondents, I garnered that school had taken the place of what they had all along been told matters in their communities such as cows, husbands, and unquestionable obedience to the parents, especially the fathers. Their view, since they joined the Center seemed to have dramatically changed. They seemed to be more assertive, inquisitive of cultural practices that hinder their educational progress and impede their social economic development. They singled out the program, *Tuseme,* which in their view had helped to empower them to say "NO" at the same time free them from the bondage of repugnant cultural practices. They all unanimously concurred that the Center had helped them with boarding facilities that enabled them to participate in educational activities. Their views are in line with one of FAWE's objectives, which seek to undertake an intervention package of effective strategies to address concerns in girls' education through the creation of girl-friendly environments in the FAWE Centers of Excellence. An analysis of the Experiences of Girls in a Center of Excellence is provided in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

ANALYIS

Introduction

In this chapter, I provide a thematic analysis of the data. The themes emerge from synchronized data of the voices and nuances, perceptions and aspirations, challenges and opinions of the respondents as well as the contexts upon which they live and operate on a daily basis. Upon the backdrop of the objectives of Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), I provide a descriptive analysis of the contexts, *Center of Excellence* and local *Community*. While the views of student respondents serve to uncover the challenges and complexities of their past experiences and opportunities of their present and future dreams, those of teacher respondents serve to reflect on the Center's potential to transform the girl's experiences into a future full of hopes and dreams.

This analysis was guided by an overarching research question and four sub questions. What are the Experiences of Girls in a Center of Excellence in Kajiado district, Kenya? A majority of these girls are those who either escape or are rescued from cultural practices such as female genital mutilation and early and prearranged marriages. The sub questions were:

1. What are the experiences of girls prior to and after their involvement with the Center of Excellence in Kajiado?
2. In what ways does the Center of Excellence influence the girls' current and future educational goals?

3. What strategies does the Center of Excellence employ to support the girls' educational goals?
4. What is the nature of the relationship between the Center of Excellence and the community within which it is located?

Based on these research questions, three themes emerged from the data. The first theme, Education and Empowerment, briefly outlines the contexts upon which this theme is enacted. The contexts include the *Center of Excellence* and the *Community.* These contexts are part of primary jurisdictions that shape and transform girls' personal, social and academic lives. It is here that the girls' hopes are nurtured, dreams unveiled, taboos broken and conflicts awakened as they trek through complex and often-uncertain tension packed terrain in search of education. The second theme, Hopes and Dreams, attempts to reveal the girls' aspirations and career goals. The third theme, The Maasai a Vulnerable Community, unveils the Maasai community's socio-cultural and economic aspects such as their resistance to girls' education, poverty and HIV/AIDS and their implication for the Center of Excellence.

Education and Empowerment

This theme is premised on the role of the Center of Excellence and the Community as major environments that inhibit or empower girls' personal, social and academic lives. I use the term empowerment in this study to denote all manner of self-actualization, self-confidence and awareness that girls achieve by virtue of their exposure to the Center's programs. According to Leech (2003) empowerment not only encourages gender awareness in development projects but also helps women and girls develop

abilities to recognize issues affecting them as well as men. The Center of Excellence serves as an educational catalyst that awakens girls' consciousness to understand and tinker with forces of their marginalization with a view to breaking free.

Center of Excellence

According to the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE, 2001), a Center of Excellence (COE) is an educational institution that clearly and effectively demonstrates a holistic and integrated approach towards addressing problems in girls' education. This constitutes creating an enabling teaching and learning environment in the school and ensuring community involvement in female education. The Centers of Excellence mode of intervention is premised on the conviction that given access, safe and secure environment to study, girls can truly excel in school just like boys. This belief is enshrined in FAWE's mission to:

1. Support innovative action and experimental strategies for overcoming obstacles to female education.
2. Mobilize civic associations and society as whole to pay more attention to the needs of girls and women in the planning implementation of national education policy.
3. Encourage dialogue within governments to improve investment in female education.

Formerly known as Africa Inland Church (AIC) primary school, Kajiado Girls Center of Excellence acquired its new name and status in 1999 when FAWE identified it to serve as a model school to address the gendered, social, economic and educational

disparities that characterize most marginalized communities in Kenya. Using it as a demonstrative intervention model, FAWE's purpose for the Center was to provide safety and education not only to girls rescued from socio-cultural practices such as FGM and early marriages, but also to all girls from regular and needy families in the community.

At the time of this study, the Center was home to 650 girls, a majority of whom hailed from the local community. Of the 650 girls, 150 were day scholars (commuted from their homes each school day) while the majority, 500 were boarders (lived in the Center when school was in session). According to the school principal, the majority of these girls were those who had escaped or been rescued from FGM and/or pre-arranged marriages. Some of the girls' backgrounds were characterized by poverty and HIV/AIDS.

To address the plight of girls from these adverse backgrounds, part of FAWE's strategy for the Center of Excellence was to provide an intervention package whose objectives included but were not limited to the following:

- Introduction of a gender responsive pedagogy in relation to teaching methodologies, curriculum, teacher-student interaction and student participation.
- Gender sensitization of teachers, students [boys and girls], parents, and community members.
- Empowerment of girls for better learning including self-confidence, assertiveness, and active participation.
- Impart life skills for personal development and preparedness to combat gender-based constraints such as violence and HIV/AIDS.
- Establishment of guidance and counseling desks and services including peer counseling.
- Establishment of TUSEME [speak out] clubs for both boys and girls.
- Provision of additional teaching and learning materials where required with emphasis on libraries, science and computer laboratories.

- Improve participation of girls in Mathematics, Science and Information Communication Technology (ICT).
- Provision of boarding facilities for girls where necessary in cases of long distance walks to school
- Establishment of gender responsive school management systems
- Provision of bursaries for needy girls
- Linking the provision of school infrastructure to performance.
- Active involvement of the community in the operation of the school and combating community based constraints to girls' education
- Involvement of Ministry of Education at national, regional and district levels for facilitation of the process and dialogue on policy implications.

These objectives were to be integrated into the regular school curriculum. The aim was to increase girls' levels of knowledge, self-confidence and assertiveness as well as enable them to claim their rights, control their lives and actualize their ambitions in life. A holistic approach to girls' education is cognizant of the community as an integral partner in education affairs.

The Community

Research has shown that communities play a critical role in the education of their children (Caffarrella, 2000; Epstein, 1995 & 2001; Davies, 1991). As partners and stakeholders, family and community involvement in schools bring unique strengths, skills, perspectives and knowledge to the educational process. In some cases, they pose challenges and constraints to the education of their children. Based on my frame of reference, structures that churn out barriers to girls' education and foster gender inequalities are deeply entrenched in the community.

The Maasai community, in which Kajiado Girls' Center of Excellence is located, is known for its tenacity to preserve their culture. According to Rhoda, one of the teacher respondents, educating and empowering girls in the Maasai community is a challenge since, "girls and mothers are socialized to perform culturally mandated gender roles linked to the household. For example, girls are taught how to be good wives and make their husbands happy". Despite government efforts, through free primary education, to ensure that all children have access to education, respondents revealed some disquieting incongruence between parental attitudes and girls' educational aspirations.

Initially, the community was opposed to the existence of the Center for fear that it could interfere with and erode their children's way of life. Rhoda, a female teacher in the Center who hailed from the Maasai community shared:

> At first, there was tension between the school and our local parents. When some of the parents realized that their daughters whom they had given away [married off] were rescued and brought here, we became enemies. Many of these parents were men and the so-called 'husbands'. Sometimes their resistance became confrontational. There was a time when some men came armed with *rungus* [clubs] and swords and we had to look for policemen to protect the Center. They were demanding to be given their daughters and 'wives' back (Rhoda, Personal Interview, June 2007).

According to Rhoda, this initial resentment and opposition to the Center and particularly to girls' education was the Maasai's way of protecting, preserving and perpetuating the role of girls and women in the community. I garnered that girls in the Maasai community are socialized to be obedient to their fathers and husbands and must accept the fact that after circumcision, they will be given away to their father's choice. Like children, girls and women are voiceless in all matters that affect their personal lives including their bodies.

All respondents unanimously concurred that the Maasai community prefers boys to girls. One girl captured the other respondents' disdain for this preferential treatment, "I don't like our Maasai culture. Boys go to school and girls remain at home to work with their mothers in the house, take care of babies or look after the animals and wait until the day they will be married. I don't think it is fair for us, girls" (Faith, Focus Group Interview). Literature has shown that families and communities are trajectories of children's knowledge and the socialization they receive forms the basis of their knowledge acquisition and often shapes how they learn, their ambitions and goals in life (Epstein, 2001; Davis, 1991). Along this line of thought, it is plausible to suggest that the Maasai's cultural preference of boys to girls socialize their boys to continue patrilineal descent and girls to believe and accept that this is the only way of life.

The girls' encounter with the Center of Excellence provided a conducive and empowering environment upon which they not only questioned their community's preferential treatment of boys, but also other cultural beliefs and practices that disadvantaged girls. Their responses indicated that education was the best liberating tool that answered their questions and concerns. They fell in love with the Center of Excellence because it provided them with formal education and empowered them to speak out and make informed choices on matters that affected their lives.

Gleaned from the data, I present below an analysis of some specific strategies the Center utilizes to educate and empower the girls. These strategies include: Tuseme, Rescue center, Holiday program, Reconciliation programs, Gender responsive pedagogy (Guidance and Counseling and Inclusive learning), hard work and faith and community sensitization and reconciliatory programs.

Tuseme (Lets speak out)

Respondents considered the Center's programs key in equipping girls with knowledge, skills and self-esteem they so much needed for survival in and out of the Center. Mr. Muniu viewed the Center beyond just being a formal educational institution. According to him, the programs the Center provided were meant, "to educate, empower, fight and transform gender inequalities". It is out of this view that Tuseme program thrives. I gathered from the respondents that Tuseme created a process that sensitized girls about their marginalization and subordination and enabled them to acquire the knowledge and skills to analyze and take action to overcome their marginalization.

Student respondents said that Tuseme program was an effective strategy that had helped them build their confidence, assertiveness and self-esteem. It had significantly enhanced their ability to analyze situations, challenge the systems and decisions that impact negatively on their welfare. Tuseme had further enabled them to develop into powerful human beings able to make informed decisions about their "bodies, mind, and soul". Faith captured the views of other girls saying:

> I was very shy when I was brought here. I used to cry most of the time. I did not know how to speak English properly. So I spoke very little and contributed very little in class discussions. Since the introduction of *Tuseme* club, I am able to speak more and share ideas with others. *Tuseme* helps us to speak out our mind and hearts on issues that affect us. We now know our rights and we cannot keep quiet any more (Faith, Focus Group Interview, June 2007).

Equating Tuseme and the Center of Excellence with a reservoir of knowledge, the girls unanimously underscored how the Center and its programs had awakened their conscious to understand the dangers of some cultural practices in their community. Lydia, observed:

> I now know about the dangers of circumcision, the teachers have told us and now I know I don't have to accept it. Again as adolescents, my teachers here in school are just like my parents, they tell us everything. How to care for ourselves, cope with challenges of being teenagers and in life. We learn how we can avoid

> sexually transmitted infections [STI], which I could have not known, and even HIV/AIDS (Lydia, Focus Group Interview, June 2007).

The principal and teacher respondents were also upbeat in their view of Tuseme as one of the best practices that had led to the empowerment of girls in the Center. Through Tuseme:

> Girls are inspired to express what they see as factors leading to poor academic achievement, schoolgirl pregnancy, sexual harassment and drop out: and then to find ways through which they [girls] can actively participate in the problem solving process (Muniu, Personal Interview, June 2007).

Educating and empowering girls under Tuseme framework appealed and allowed me to envision how ordinary schools and communities that adopt Tuseme approach had the potential to transform themselves into environments that are academically, socially and physically gender responsive for both girls and boys. One way to protect girls and give them voice in a community where they are voiceless was the Center of Excellence's symbolic and solemn Rescue Center.

The Rescue Center

Built in the year 2000 with the support of FAWE and other sponsors, the rescue center, dubbed *Emparnat Naisula* (home for girls), is revered as a safe haven for girls who are rescued from FGM and arranged marriages (Appendix C1). According to Wario:

> Because some of the rescued girls find it difficulty to go back home, FAWE put up the rescue center to accommodate them. It is like a home to them. It has three wings; the hall, the kitchen and the sleeping wing. When we close school, the rescue center serves as a home for the rescued girls. They engage in some vocational work, they do needle work, sewing/stitching and bead work so they don't get bored. They also prepare their own meals here. We offer remedial lessons for those who lag behind in some subjects (Wario, Personal Interview, June 2007).

I learned that the rescue center was also home to girls who had transitioned from the Center to either secondary schools or colleges but were still disowned by their families.

By the time I was collecting data, the total population of girls in the rescue center was 85: 55 girls attending primary schools, 26 girls attending secondary schools, 2 girls at the university, and 2 girls attending a vocational training institution. These girls' parents had refused to reconcile with them because they had disobeyed their culture to either get married or undergo FGM.

I further learned that the rescue center is not only equipped with boarding facilities, but also with a library and a theater hall. The inside walls of the rescue center were painted with empowering messages on girls' education. Besides pictures of girls from Centers of Excellence from other African countries, some catchy posters read, "Say No to Child Labour!" and "Give us education, it is our right" as well as pictures of chiefs meeting with girls and their commitment signatures to promote girls education in the community (Appendix C2). One girl said of the rescue center:

> The rescue program is very helpful. The teachers here are so friendly, they take good care of us when we are not visited, they buy soap for us, they give us clothes and food to cook for ourselves because we cannot go home. It provides a place for us to stay. For me it is home (Faith, Focus Group Interview, June 2007).

The rescue center carried with it the aura of a normal home, but there were no parents, siblings, cows, dogs and chicken running around and about in the homestead. The girls were like siblings to each other and their stories and experiences weaved them together. There were those who had been given away, carried out wifely duties and had children of their own. There were also those who were as young as 8 years, but had been raped, violated and subjected to cultural abuse, the main one being FGM. The rescue center carried both their burdens and their dreams.

The rescue center had special facilities that promoted and enhanced the girls' participation in education and facilitated their empowerment. It provided them with a

conducive and safe environment for studying. As part of the package of the rescue center was a holiday program designed to assist the girls whenever the Center was closed at the end of the term. Girls in the focus group were ecstatic about the holiday program and what it entailed.

The Holiday Program

The holiday program was designed to cater for girls in the rescue center during school holidays. It provided girls with training opportunities in income-generating skills such as baking, making beads, ornaments and weaving. Besides these activities, the program also provided remedial lessons in subjects that challenged girls such as Science, Math and Technology (SMT). It is during the holiday session that rescue center hosts various visitors from donor agencies, Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs), local women's groups as well as activists and well-wishers. I gathered that during their visits they donate clothing, food and other supplies to support girls in the rescue center. Occasionally, they take these girls out for special trips or sponsor their Christmas.

Through skits and theatrical performances, the girls use the theatre hall in the rescue center to communicate with visitors and their community about their plight. It is in the theatre hall where girls share their experiences prior to coming to the Center and showcase their abilities and transformation. According to Mr. Muniu, "the girls use the theatre to research on factors that lead to high dropout rates, analyze the problems, express the outcomes in theatre performances and conduct post performance discussions with the school and the community to arrive at viable solutions".

I learned that some of the girls who had 'graduated from the rescue center' through successful reconciliation with their families had become advocates for girls in

their villages who were experiencing the same repressive cultural practices they had undergone. Rhoda, a female teacher respondent who hailed from the Maasai community observed that while the rescue center had created awareness among girls, its 'graduates' had become activists in their villages enlightening their peers on the dangers of FGM and early marriages. She said:

> In fact most of these 'graduate girls' when they go home they talk to their sisters and other girls, they empower them. They tell them to refuse to undergo FGM and incase of anything they should run here where they are safe. They tell them to make sure they see the District Commissioner, the chiefs and anyone who can help them get to the Center. And once they come here we receive them, and make sure that they are safe. We give them uniform and it becomes hard for one to identify them from the rest (Rhoda, Personal Interview, 2007).

It was not only the 'graduates of the rescue center' that had taken advocacy roles to their communities, but all girls who attended the Center of Excellence were perceived to be activists of gender inequality in their villages. On this view, Mr. Muniu shared:

> Our girls here, have been so sensitized that even when they go home over the holidays, they know of girls who are threatened for marriage or FGM, they advise them to come here. What we have agreed is, when a girl comes, then the local chief should come and get the details of the run-away girl and go to the parents to know if indeed the girl has been forced to these practices. The chief is our legal shield and this has worked for a number of girls (Muniu, Personal Interview, June 2007).

Mr. Muniu indicated that a number of girls in the rescue center had 'graduate girls' and 'girl activists' to thank for their rescue.

It was discernable that the holiday program through its activities and services not only provided opportunities for the girls to feel safe and protected from harmful practices, but also enabled them to realize and explore their academic potential. Given the magnitude of trauma and abuse girls in the rescue center had endured, I viewed the rescue center as a therapeutic facility where they gradually found healing and gathered enough

skills to move on. Cognizant of the fact that school cannot replace the role of family in children's education and their general development, the Center of Excellence established reconciliation programs targeting parents, families and communities as equal partners and stakeholders in girls' education.

Reconciliation Programs

With the help of FAWE, the Center had initiated reconciliatory seminars and sensitization workshops in the local community to enlighten them on the importance of girls' education. The seminars encouraged parents especially fathers to support the education of their daughters, something they were culturally against. Emphasizing the importance of the seminars and workshops, Mr. Muniu said:

> I believe the workshops and seminars have created a very positive response. The community can now associate with what we are doing here. And now that they see what we do, we tell them to take their turn. We make sure they know that we are not against their culture, we tell them their culture is rich and good but there are some things in the culture that we need to change that affect girls. Because we talk to them, they are now seeing sense of why girls also need education, but I say it has not been easy (Muniu, Personal Interview, June 2007).

With the understanding that the Center's role was not to change the Maasai culture, the respondents underlined the gradual change of cultural mindsets among community members. The involvement of provincial administration officials such as district officers, local chiefs, and officials from the Ministry of Education and children's rights office gave currency to the need for girls education and ensured that parents and other community members understood and respected children's rights. While it is difficult to get such high level officials all at once, the Center often uses local chiefs to sensitize the local community. According to the Center's principal, chiefs in Maasai

community are among the most powerful opinion leaders who can serve as effective intermediaries in mobilizing and communicating with the Maasai at the grassroots level about various aspects of development.

A review of one of the documents, Minutes on Community Mobilization, showed that in 2005 the following took place: (1) most chiefs were reporting no cases of early marriage of school going girls in their areas (2) fathers were physically bringing their daughters to school, something they did not do before (3) 30 out of 58 girls who had been rescued from early marriages and FGM and housed at the rescue center had been reconciled with their parents and (4) the school had recorded only 3 cases of pregnancy in four years as opposed to an average of about 5 per year prior to 2002. The latest workshop, which was held in 2006, involved 47 chiefs from 7 divisions of Kajiado District. The goal of the workshop was to: review the challenges of the rescue program, strategize how to improve the reconciliation process, listen to the views of the rescued girls and how to put the strategies into an action plan.

Through reconciliation programs, it is apparent that the education of girls ought to go hand-in-hand with the education of the community. Reconciliation programs provided rare opportunities for girls to question and critique their community's cultural practices and parents, especially mothers got as chance to share their views and concerns. This was also one of the platforms that development agencies, community based organizations and churches employed to sensitize the community on issues of HIV and AIDS as well as poverty.

Reconciliation programs created a new understanding of the role of girls' education in the community. Such understanding was premised on the dividends of girls'

education as captured by Rhoda, "when they [parents] see a woman chief, a woman teacher and a woman district officer, they are persuaded to believe that through education, their daughters too can be officers". The arduous nature of the reconciliation process created in girls an urgent need for them to work hard to reflect their families sacrifices and support. They understood that their success in school hinged on hard work and faith in God.

Hard Work and Faith

A recurring theme that cut across all respondents was hard work and faith. Teacher respondents pointed out that the Center was firmly grounded on its religious founding and its motto, *Determination and Dedication to Excellence*, instilled in teachers, students and other staff the virtue of hard work and freedom of worship. Mr. Wario stated that the Center's strong spiritual aspect was one of the ways girls could find healing through love, forgiveness and care. Given the abuse, pain and trauma that characterized most girls' past experiences, prayer, sharing and talking about God was part and parcel of the Center's daily routine. According to Wario:

> We give our girls a lot of pastoral care. The teacher in charge allocate one or two people from either AIC or another church to talk to the girls especially on Wednesdays when we have assemblies. In these assemblies, teachers use the Holy Scriptures to instill virtues such as love, caring, and forgiveness. I believe that when these girls leave here, the spiritual aspect is catered for. You cannot miss one or two that stray but the majority are brought up in the knowledge of God (Wario, Personal Interview, June, 2007).

The girls concurred that their faith in God had seen them through the pain and suffering in the hands of their parents and 'husbands' and was working for their success in the Center. Their sense of love and caring is captured in the program, *Girl take care of Girl*

where they voluntarily help newly rescued girls with basic items like soap, uniform, and sanitary towels. In the words of Hope:

> Like other girls here in the Center, I did not have anything when I was brought here. Other girls shared their items with me. So, we share what we have and I believe this will help us when we go out there because we already know what it means to share and care for one another. This is what God wants for us (Hope, Focus Group Interview, June 2007).

The spiritual aspect was a critical and necessary component of a holistic approach to educating girls.

The girls' understanding of the concept of sharing as taught in the Center was a departure from what their communities had led them to understand. Lydia noted, "I now know that I don't have to share my future husband or allow myself to be shared". Their focus was to earn better grades that could lead them to join good secondary schools. Student respondents attested to the encouragement they received from their teacher saying:

> The teachers are encouraging. They tell us to work hard. Before I came to this school I knew nothing. What I knew was to look after a baby. I was just there, waiting to grow up and have my ears pierced and wait to get married or be given away. Now I know that school is important to me and I can be anything I want to be (Lydia, Focus Group Interview, June 2007).

Mr. Muniu stated that majority of girls who sat their Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) scored an average of 350 points out of 500. In 2006, "we had 92 candidates who sat for KCPE and all of them passed and are in secondary schools". Mr. Muniu further shared that the day before I interviewed him, he had taken the last girl to a secondary school after a well-wisher decided to sponsor her. He said of the girls, " she scored good points in her KCPE exam and she is an orphan. She was selected to two schools previously but we did not have money to pay for her tuition. To make matters worse, she is HIV positive. Her parents are dead. She got it [HIV] from her parents".

The eye-catching academic, spiritual and extra-curricular trophies displayed in Mr. Muniu's office exemplified their faith and hard work (Appendix C3). He was particularly proud of one: "This trophy here [showing it] I was given last year for admission, retention and completion. We are a school that admits and retains most of our girls". I thought the trophies were a constant reminder to the girls who were in and out of Mr. Muniu's office that the Center's core objective was to harness their potential and equip them with knowledge and skills to navigate the hardy terrains of life in and out of the Center. The contribution of teachers was central in the theme of hard work and faith. Their professional development to create a gender responsive environment for girls to achieve was captured in the model, gender responsive pedagogy.

Gender Responsive Pedagogy (GRP)

All 21 teachers in the Center of Excellence had undergone training on how to utilize a Gender Responsive Pedagogy (GRP) model as part of a holistic intervention to make teaching and learning processes gender responsive. Teachers from Centers of Excellence from three countries namely; Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda in collaboration with FAWE developed GRP. According to Mlama (2005), "they used their own school experiences to identify issues that needed to be addressed and they developed a gender responsive handbook for teachers. They piloted the handbook in their own schools for all subjects offered" (p.13). A review of the GRP teachers' manual revealed areas that teachers laid emphasis for its effectiveness. They included:

- Lesson planning
- Teaching and learning materials

- Language use in the classroom
- Classroom set up
- School management system and
- Strategies of combating sexual harassment and management of sexual maturation.

I asked the principal to describe changes he had observed since the teachers had started using GRP manual. He explained that the practical application of GRP manual had produced very encouraging results along the following areas:

- Raising the awareness of the teachers on the gender constraints to learning. Equipping the teachers with concrete skills on how to eliminate the gender based constraint to the teaching and learning processes
- Equipping the teachers with skill for new teaching methods, which apply not only to gender but to the overall improvement of the quality of their teaching
- Equipping the teachers with the skills to identify gender stereotyping in teaching and learning materials such as textbooks and visual aids and the skills to produce gender responsive materials instead
- Promoting innovation and creativity in the teachers in the bid to come up with gender responsive teaching methodologies, teaching and learning materials
- Introducing a gender friendly atmosphere in the school among teachers and students, both inside and outside the classroom
- Improving the quality of teaching and learning overall leading to better performance by both boys and girls (Muniu, Personal Interview, June 2007).

Mr. Wario also shared his experience before and after GRP training:

> Most of the teachers are GRP trained and even those who come here on transfers are quickly sensitized through assemblies and staff meetings so that they get to know how to deal with girls with special needs. Initially, we did not know how to handle girls having problems with their menstrual periods – maybe they do not have sanitary towels, or they are uncomfortable due to menstrual pains. Even if we understood what it was, we did not take it serious until we underwent a series of seminars including GRP training. I remember one time we were in groups and Dr. Mlama [FAWE Executive Director] asked us to talk about girls' problems. We talked about other things and she asked us if we ever think of these girls when they have their periods, when they miss class during those four days or maybe a week, multiply those days per term or even per year, they come to over a 100 days. Now, when a girl tells you that she wants to go out during a class session, you simply understand and they have other problems, we encourage them to speak out (Wario, Personal Interview, June 2007).

Rhoda was categorical in her views about the benefits of GRP training on students with special needs including those that were physically, emotionally and visually challenged.

I learned that the Center had embraced an inclusive learning model, where girls with unique needs and disabilities were encouraged to learn alongside 'normal/regular' students. Mr. Muniu said:

> We emphasize inclusive learning. We have girls who are physically challenged, some with visual impairments and other who are either orphans from HIV and AIDS or other causes and other children from broken families due to divorce or separation of parents. We have girls who are grossly abused and some who come from poverty stricken families. It is really not easy but we try to help them within our ability. We have a unit for the visually impaired and 2 special education teachers. We have one teacher who is trained in guidance and counseling. In fact all of us here are trained through in-service to help girls with emotional problems. (Muniu, Personal Interview, June 2007).

The Integrated Unit for the Visually Handicapped (Appendix C4) was equipped with resources such as Braille system. Teacher respondents admitted that handling of students with special needs was challenging since it needed a lot of training and resources. With no proper government policies to support children with physical, emotional, and learning impairments in rural areas, Mr. Muniu observed, "These children are the ones who may never have come to school because of negative attitudes or beliefs that they cannot learn. This community [Maasai] does not believe that such children have a right to education and should attend school". The Center's guidance and counseling department coordinated support services for needy and challenged girls in the Center.

Like most Centers of Excellence in sub-Saharan Africa, Kajiado Girls Center of Excellence had a functional guidance and counseling program that attempted to address specific needs of girls. The program had one trained counselor, who was a retired nurse. She had in turn in-serviced teachers and trained peer-counselors among students. So, there were counseling teams amongst teachers and students. G & C activities included a

weekly session for all girls focusing on HIV/AIDS, reproductive health, pregnancy, girl/boy relations - all conducted through debates, Tuseme and film/video/drama. I further learned that G & C provided necessary medical treatment and referral services to girls suffering from HIV and AIDS and as well as those who were rescued and had severe bodily and mental injury. The program had led to successful integration of girls into normal school life of hitherto psychologically injured and traumatized girls rescued from forced marriage and FGM.

Based on the respondents' views and experiences in the Center and its empowerment strategies, it is logical to construe that the Center had enabled the girls to expand their worldviews. It had led them to understand the deeply entrenched gender inequalities within their communities and empowered them to confront cultural biases, which deprived them of educational opportunities and violated their human rights. They were cognizant of the benefits of school, delaying marriage and having fewer, better-nourished and educated children. They realized that once they are educated, they have more chances of being productive, earn better pay, and participate in social, economic and political decision-making. Their exposure to the Center had led them to develop appreciation for not only the person they were and could become, but also have prospects for their future and fight for opportunities that could transform their lives and that of their villages. While I listened to the respondents' description of opportunities and challenges in and out of the Center, I wondered how the government supported both the girls and the Center of Excellence.

Role of Government

One of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals to which Kenya is a signatory, is to ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling. In line with this goal, the government of Kenya introduced Free Primary Education in 2003 to cater for a large number of children who were locked out of school because their families could not afford. As a sign of good will and commitment to alleviate bottlenecks that impede girls' participation and achievement while in school, the government in 2004 struck an agreement with manufacturers to drop all taxes on sanitary towels for women. Along free primary education, respondents identified other key strategies the government uses to support the Center and the girls. These include: The Children's Act of 2001, Bursary schemes, Constituency Development Fund (CDF) and World Food Program. I explain them below from the respondent's lens.

Free Primary Education (FPE)

There was consensus among respondents that the introduction of Free Primary Education (FPE) in Kenya was a positive development agenda for disadvantaged and marginalized groups. Like in other schools around the country, the Center of Excellence had experienced an influx of students from the local community and beyond. Many students, who took advantage of FPE and enrolled in the Center, came from poor families. In the words of Rhoda, "Most of these girls were locked out because either our culture [Maasai culture] does not believe in educating girls or because of poverty". The principal observed of free primary education:

> It has brought many children to school. In this community in fact people are very poor. I am sure some parents are relieved once they bring their daughters here.

> There was a time when there was drought and all the animals were killed because of the drought. You find that there was no food at all and some of the parents brought their girls here because they thought they might get food and even they might receive support, that is, get a sponsor to pay for their education (Muniu, Personal Interview June 2007).

I learned that the government paid all teachers in the Center and provided textbooks and other supplies although they were not sufficient. Teacher respondents however indicated that the number of needy girls in the Center surpassed the resources the government allocated it. They singled out Constituency Development Fund and bursaries as significant sources, but were not enough to cater for most girls' fees especially those who entered secondary schools.

Constituency Development Fund

Constituency Development Fund (CDF) was established in 2003 through the CDF Act with an aim to control imbalances in regional development. It targets all constituency-level development projects, particularly those that aim to combat poverty and promote education at the grassroots level. The fund comprises an annual budgetary allocation equivalent to 2.5% of the government's ordinary revenue and 10% of this allocation supports educational programs in each of the 210 constituencies in the country (Institute for Economic Affairs, 2006).

Mr. Muniu was concerned that politicians, who least understand the plight of most schools and the students they serve, controlled CDF program. Neither school principals nor teachers were part of the CDF committees. Individual parents made application for each child and the school principal confirmed that the applicant was a student in his/her school. Mr. Muniu wore many hats. Besides being the Center's principal, he was a guardian for the rescued girls. He said of CDF:

> There are few of our girls who benefit from CDF. When I submit the names, I try to seek help for those girls in standard 8 [8th grade] who are about to join form one or those who are already in secondary school. You know in this constituency, there are many needy students. I might submit 10 names and only two students are considered. Some girls get sometimes Ksh. 5,000 [$70] or Ksh.10,000 [$140]. The average fees a student pays in secondary school annually is Ksh.25,000 [$370]. While what I get is not enough, it helps them to stay in school, it makes a difference in the life of a needy girl (Muniu, Personal Interview, June 2007).

Another source of support comes in the form of bursaries and scholarships from the government, NGOs, individuals and well-wishers. For instance, Secondary Education Bursary Fund (SEBF), which was established in 1993/4 through a presidential pronouncement, aimed to cushion the country's poor and vulnerable groups against the high and increasing cost of secondary education. By so doing, it ensured that this cadre of students had increased enrolment in and completed secondary school education. Like CDF, the amount allocated to each beneficiary does not cover a student's entire annual fees and so, "unless there is some other monies from well wishers, our girls in secondary schools end up coming back here to the rescue center for fees, which is not there", said the principal.

The role of friendship and well-wishers as understood in the Center signified hope for girls education. As if to speak for all respondents, the principal captured other their views, "I don't know what we could have done without friends". He illustrated:

> A few parents are willing to sell their cows and pay fees for their daughters. Those [girls] that are rejected by their parents are the most needy. We have to look for sponsors to cover their fees. This is where friends and well-wishers are critical to our Center. In fact like this list, [waving a list of girls], these are needy girls that I have to get fees for. This other list [showing another list of 12 girls] shows the names of girls who are sponsored by a friend from US. Her name is Sandy. She came to the school and she was touched by the needs of these girls. She fundraises for these kids, she pays their fees and for their upkeep (Muniu, Personal Interview, June 2007).

I also garnered that the government had started a kitty for local boarding schools in rural Kajiado district with a view to increasing the community's participation in education. "There are 7 boarding schools in this area. This money comes from the Ministry of Education. We use part of this money to pay our workers and school fees for girls who enter secondary school", said Mr. Muniu. While he appreciated the initiative of this kitty, he was concerned of its sustainability given the fact that national elections were a few months away from being held.

One fundamental thing teacher respondents were certain was not going to change is the enactment of Children's Act of 2001, which is:

> An Act of parliament to make provision for parental responsibility, fostering, adoption, custody, maintenance, guardianship, care and protection of children; to make provision for the administration of children's institutions; to give effect to the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the rights and welfare of the child and for connected purposes (Government of Kenya Laws, 2006).

The Act outlawed cultural practices that are considered harmful and infringes on the child's welbeing and human rights. It is noteworthy that during reconcialtion seminars and community sensitization, children's officers form part of the facilitation team. With this Act, the Center had a legal framework to use local law enforcement agencies such as chiefs and administration police to protect run-away girls and offer security to the Center. Before the Act, "chiefs were notorious in grabbing and marrying young girls as their 2nd, 3rd or even 4th wives. Now they risk loosing their jobs and getting imprisoned if girls are given away in their area. So they have to join the government's campaign to wipe out the menance of early marriages and FGM", said Wario. The chiefs were also used by the Ministry of Education to assist the World Food Program (WFP) in distributing food to

villages that experienced famine. WFP was the major supply of the Center of Excellence's food security.

World Food Programme (WFP)

Kajiado district falls under the government's category of arid and semi arid lands (ASAL), which are mainly defined by endemic poverty, low economic growth and food insecurity. As a pastoralist and marginalized community, Kajiado's inhabitants often experience food shortages and need supplemental food assistance to survive. Kajiado Girls' Center of Excellence was one such beneficiary of the WFP. Given the influx of girls in the Center due to free primary education, the principal said that WFP had stepped up their supplies of rice, beans and corn to feed the girls.

While all the support the government extended to the Center was crucial, none was as fundamental as the Children's Act. It was a viable tool that targeted the contexts that created and perpetuated cultural practices that held the girl child back. The Act targeted parents and communities and sanctioned them to send their children to school. Coupled with free primary eduation, the Children's Act had the potential to change the way schools and communities viewed and build conversations on gender, power and culture. I thought that a 'compulsory component' to read 'free and compulsory primary education' would also put pressure on parents, families and communities to take charge of their children's education as a basic right.

Hopes and Dreams

The aspirations and dreams of student respondents in this study are captured through their experiences and backgrounds, which they believed will be fought and

shaped by one tool, education. As already observed elsewhere in this study, the girls' backgrounds were characterized by early marriages, FGM, poverty, HIV/AIDS as well as a culture that prefers boys to girls. In their view, the Center, which is an oasis of hope, carries their dreams. It holds the key to the tools that they will need to navigate their traumatizing backgrounds with a view to transforming them. One girl in the focus group spelled out her dream saying:

> My dream is to be a doctor and when I finish my school, I want my village to realize that Maasai girls can make it in life. I know that when some of them see us wearing this green uniform [pointing to her green uniform], think that these big girls need not to be in school, they need to be married. I want to shame those who believe that girls are there to be married. I want to work in our community to treat people in the community who are not able to go anywhere for treatment. I will show them that girls *wako na power mob sana* [girls have a lot of power] (Lydia, Focus Group Interview, June 2007)

For Naomi, being a teacher and role model for girls in her community was a more satisfying dream. She too shared:

> I want to be a teacher. I want to be an example, a role model for my kids and other girls in our community who think they can't make it. Sometimes you cannot listen to everything the people in the community say. You make a choice. For me I have made a choice to stay here and when I complete my school, I know life will be better for me than it is now (Naomi, Focus Group Interview, June 2007).

Knowing that she did not have anything to fall back on if she did not perform well in Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) exam and proceed to high school, Hope said of her aspirations:

> I want to become a great woman in this nation. Then I will help girls get an opportunity to be in school. School will change many girls' lives. I want to become an Engineer. I want, when I get good money, to start my own school that will give girls a chance to speak out, to be girls and have an opportunity to be looked at as worthwhile human beings right from the families, villages, and communities and in the nation at large. I know I will get support from many people around the world to reach this dream. This is my greatest dream. I want to go back and help my parents. Help them know that education is key, vital to our family and fundamental to development of any kind (Hope, Focus Group Interview, June 2007).

Hope expressed concern over her siblings and parents because she had not seen nor communicated with them for six years. She did not want them to know of her whereabouts until she entered college. Her father had driven her out of home, yet she was very emphatic about forgiving and helping them once she completed her education.

Like the rest of the student respondents, Faith believed that only through education would she get a chance to be a pilot and serve as a role model for her community. She strongly argued that her success in education would give her community a reason to change their attitudes regarding girls' education. She argued:

> I want to continue with my school and eventually become a pilot. If I become a pilot someone else will learn from me. For your information, I am not circumcised. They [Maasai community] will need to know that even an uncircumcised girl can do anything and everything that she wants to do. My circumcision for now is education (Faith, Focus Group Interview, June 2007).

In the same vein, Lydia connected the critical value of education as a development tool in the community. She shared:

> If people get educated and go back to the village they can help to improve the conditions of their people and many will be encouraged to go to school by seeing what they do. I know when people in my village see me succeeding in school and becoming a doctor, they will see the difference with those who didn't go to school and I think will make them think and change their stand about educating girls like boys (Lydia, Focus Group Interview, June 2007).

These girls' views show that their dreams and aspirations are cognizant of their backgrounds, but also strongly believe that education holds the ultimate key to their lives and community transformation.

Every student respondent seemed to have adopted a reconciliatory tone and attitude towards their families and community but not their system of beliefs. For instance, Naomi's father had given her away at the age of 9 before she was rescued at the

age of 11. Although she blamed her father for her woes, she struck a forgiving tone saying:

> I want to help my dad although he is against my education. I want him to know that education is as good as the cows he received when he gave me away. I want to help my sister, even if she is not educated. I will be there for them. I don't believe in failing. My dreams are living. I cried when my sister gave birth to her child. I shared with her before she gave birth that I don't want to live a life like the one you are living. Her husband beat her all the time, demanding food, milk the cows and what have you. I will not allow myself again to be given away. My sister can also break away and come to school. I will help her. She is only 17 (Naomi, Focus Group Interview, June 2007).

When I probed the student respondents on what they thought of girls in their villages who did not have a chance to be in school, they unanimously said that their culture does not support girls' education. But, they pointed out, "it will take people who are educated to change that belief". They thought that the community's position had led most girls to discount themselves and had accepted such position without questioning or critiquing it. One girl in the focus group had the following advise for them:

> I tell them not to despise themselves. I will tell them school is very important. Even if they see us wearing this uniform and we stay in school for many months. Being in school for months is about our lives. I want to finish school from here and go to high school. I know God will open a way I go to a good school, get a sponsor and my life will be better. I will tell them school is now free they need to think about going to school if they get a chance. Since I came to school, I know many things, which they don't. (Faith, Focus Group Interview, June 2007).

Another girl had this advise:

> I will tell them the importance of education. Education means a lot to me. Once you are educated, your mind is expanded. You don't have to succeed with better grades to live a better life. With education, you can know how to wash yourself and your children. You are not going to get children [give birth] without a plan. You can avoid making bad choices that will affect your life. Like you now, you are at university, you can get a job and earn your own money. You can take a plane and go anywhere when you are educated. You cannot compare yourself with those uneducated women in the village, who are beaten by their husbands everyday and they think that is right. Education helps a lot because it makes one know the world better (Hope, Focus Group Interview, June 2007).

These perspectives echo studies, which point to the relationship between girls' education and its impact on the socio-economic development of their families, communities and countries. Investing in girls' education pays off not only in terms of higher rates of school attendance, attainment, and completion, but also improves the status of women within families, the local community, and the political arena (USAID, 2002; Summers, 1992; Psacharopoulos and Patrinos, 2002; Schultz, 2001; Behrman, 2003).

The dreams and aspirations of student respondents get tested when they are about to transition out of the Center. For instance, they were all worried about their education sponsorship, the kind of high schools they would join, loss of steady family-like support they were enjoying at the Center and the possibility of dropping out of school. These formed the core of the challenges they foresaw affecting them once they completed their education in the Center. Below are some of their perspectives:

Lydia:

> I worry a lot about what is going to happen to me if I don't get a sponsor for my secondary education.

Naomi:

> I worry about that too. I want to finish school from here and go to high school. I know God will open a way I go to a good school. If I get a sponsor my life will be better because I will not have to worry about school fees.

Faith:

> I want to have one sponsor. A sponsor I know. A sponsor I can communicate with. I can tell her or him my problems and I can share my school results. I can get advise from the sponsor. Now, the ones I have, I don't even know their address. I don't know where I can write and say thank you. I don't know if they will continue sponsoring me next year when I join form one [9th grade].

Besides student respondents, teacher respondents acknowledged that once the girls leave the Center for high school, they face insurmountable challenges. The principal reiterated the power of friends and well-wishers. He said:

> We have so many needy girls. We may not offer much as far as school fees is concerned. We try to look for sponsors to pay for these girls' education. Besides all the help we get from FAWE, which sponsors about 18 or 19 of our girls in secondary school, we have a few well-wishers who support one or two girls. These are people we talk to, people who have come here and have been overwhelmed by these girls' needs have decided to assist one or two girls. Like now there is a girl in Alliance Girls High School whose tuition is paid for by a well-wisher (Muniu, Personal Interview, June 2007).

The repertoire of the Center's friends, according to Mr. Muniu, included officials from the Ministry of Education. From his talk, I realized that it took a long time to access and build meaningful relationships with such officials around issues and educational needs of the girls affiliated with the Center. In his words, Mr. Muniu said that an official from the Ministry of Education had recognized his efforts by observing that he had seen many principals go to his office not to talk on behalf of their students but for their own children. The official had offered to help him find placement in secondary schools for a significant number of girls. It was unfortunate that before Mr. Muniu presented the list, "the same official had become a victim of the high turnover the Ministry of Education is well known for". Sustainability of promises such as the one from the official of the Ministry of Education remained a challenge.

Challenges

My interview with the students as they talked about strategies of realizing their dreams and hopes revealed a number of challenges in the Center, some which prompted me to probe the principal and teacher respondents. The girls pointed out that they were congested both in the dormitories and classrooms, had inadequate toilet facilities, and felt that their security in the dormitories was not guaranteed. One girl captured the concern of others beseeching:

> We don't have toilets in the dormitories. So, girls use their plastic basins to empty themselves at night. It is worse when one wants to go for long call. We have to call the matron [she does not live in the dormitory] to take us out to the pit latrines. Many girls experience problems. Sometimes, I have been forced to go and wake up the matron when there is a major problem, like sickness. We have asked our principal to do something about this, before it gets worse (Hope, Focus Group Interview, July 2007).

Lack of toilet facilities in the dormitories was particularly a painful and embarrassing challenge for the principal. He acknowledged that FPE, which had led to an upsurge of students in the Center, had constrained available facilities and resources.

> It is true we don't have enough facilities. We need toilets in the dormitories. We also need to put up a dormitory to accommodate more girls. Sometimes, it hurts me when a girl comes and we are not able to give her a place to sleep well because our facilities are over stretched. If we have a dorm the ministry will give us more teachers (Muniu, Personal Interview, June 2007).

He shared with me the recommendations from a previous Board meeting, which clearly had stated the need to build toilets in the dormitories, erect additional classrooms and an extra dormitory only when funds were available. He was happy to that a well-wisher had donated some money to build toilets in 5 of the dormitories and he expected construction to begin any time.

Hope, a student respondent, seemed to hit on an issue that the rest of the students in the focus group seemed to be aware of, but were reluctant to say. She revealed disturbing cases that involved older girls sharing beds among themselves or with younger girls. She said:

> Sleeping twos has further created another problem. There are a few cases where some girls have quietly complained that this is a problem. A couple of weeks ago, I handled a case where an older girl was touching a young girl inappropriately during night. I am sure these girls [pointing to the rest in the focus group] know of cases where bigger [older] girls are romantically involved. I fear for the younger girls. I don't know if the office knows about this, but I guess they do. But me I sleep alone in a dormitory meant for 35 but now holds 60 girls (Hope, Focus Group Interview, June 2007).

Rhoda, one of the teacher respondents, echoed Hope's observation stating that congestion in classrooms and dormitories was a crisis that had been exacerbated by free primary education. She warned:

> The classrooms are overcrowded, they are now holding over 50 students instead of 35. The dormitories are congested too, the girls are sharing beds, which I think is not good especially for young girls. Even the *Rescue Center*, which is meant to be home to rescued girls, has now one wing open for use by all other girls. And there are consequences that come with this situation; malaria, chicken pox or any other infection and many of them get sick/affected because of the overcrowding conditions (Rhoda, Personal Interview, June 2007).

My observation, as I went from one classroom to another, confirmed that indeed classrooms were congested and there were wide age disparities among students. Much older girls, some who had been married and were young mothers were sharing classrooms with very young girls. According to the principal, academic ability and not age determined the placement of girls once they arrive in the Center. They pay less attention to the dynamics that come with age differences both in classrooms and dormitories.

As an unintended consequence, student respondents, all who were in senior classes complained that they were not allowed to study beyond 8:45pm. They were required, just like standard one girls, to sleep by 9:30pm when the lights both in classrooms and dormitories are switched off. One girl captured the mood of the rest:

> Those of us who are preparing to sit for KCPE [exam] are forced to sleep early like standard one girls. I feel that we should be left to extend our studies for a short period of time. I am preparing to be the best KCPE girl in the nation. But I worry if I, and those who are older like me, will meet this huge goal if I cannot be left to extend my studies beyond 9:30pm. I now use my torch [flash light] to read (Faith, Focus Group Interview, July 2007).

Without downplaying student complaints, Rhoda who was cognizant of the problems in the Center said that challenges in the Center were nothing compared to the challenges and torture the girls went through in their homes and villages. I probed her on student safety.

Although the security of the Center and safety of the girls was assured, a chilling revelation from student respondents indicated that their safety in the dormitories had serious risk implications. It emerged that five of the seven dormitories were locked from outside during the night. My visit to one of the dormitories revealed that windows were high and tightly grilled and until somebody opened the door from outside, it was virtually impossible for anyone from inside to get out in case of an emergency. One student shared:

> We are locked from outside and sometimes I wonder what will happen in case of an emergency, such as fire. I understand that it is all about security but I believe that there should be emergency exists instead of locking the doors from outside. There should be a way of catering for our needs especially at night, when we cannot go out to the latrines, which are far away from the dorm. We need to have toilets, even if it is one in each dormitory (Lydia, Focus Group Interview, July 2007).

This description reminded me of two infamous and tragic cases of school fires in Kenya in which dormitories were razed down and students' lives lost. One of the tragic cases occurred in 1998 at Bombolulu Girls Secondary School where a dormitory fire left 26 girls dead. Another dreadful case was in 2001 at Kyanguli Boys High School where 64 students died in a dormitory inferno at night in similar circumstances. Investigation on both cases revealed that both dormitories were locked from outside and with no emergency exists, students were trapped in what was paradoxically considered a secure place. These sad reminders prompted me to revisit the safety issue with the Center's principal.

The principal affirmed that the Center's Board had reviewed its safety rules and recommended that matrons for each dormitory be hired and required to live within the dormitories. With the assistance of the Minister of Education, who happened to come from the Maasai community, they had arranged to fundraise to build two more dormitories to ease congestion as well as complete a library. I felt like Mr. Muniu was overwhelmed by the Center's challenges, but he said that he had faith in himself, his staff and in student, who gave him a reason to wear many hats and keep the Center moving.

The Maasai: A vulnerable Community

For purposes of this theme, I use the term vulnerability to depict how some aspects of the Maasai culture hold the community hostage thereby making it susceptible to the impact of social, economic and political pressures that deeply challenge its peoples' daily survival. By so doing, I hope to explicate the Maasai community's perceptive stance towards girls' education, poverty and HIV/AIDS in relation to the Center.

Throughout the interview process, I gleaned from respondents that the girls' backgrounds had a direct impact on their education. For instance, student respondents felt that their community's belief in large families and preference of boys to girls had marginalized them and suffocated their right to education. Below are some of the girls' responses regarding their families:

Faith:

> We are a family of 6, 5 sisters and 1 brother. I am the last-born but my father has 3 wives. My mother is the second one. The first one has 9 children. The third one who is very young has 2 children. All of us are 17. I am the only girl in school. I thank my mother for bringing me here.

Lydia:

I come from a large family, my father has 3 wives and my mom is the 2nd wife. I have many brothers and sisters. All of us are 16.

Naomi:

I also come from a large family. My father has 2 wives. My mother is the 1st wife and there is a 2nd one. I have 3 sisters and 2 brothers. My other mother has 4 children, in total we are all 9.

Hope:

I have 2 older sisters who never went to school and 3 brothers. My sisters are married. I remember when my father took me out of school to be circumcised, my 2 brothers who were going to school were waiting to fetch cows from my marriage to continue with their school. Since I was brought here, 6 years ago, I have not seen my brothers or sisters or my parents. I miss them.

While these girls strongly believed that education is the liberating tool, the large families that characterized their family composition had created a competing environment that disadvantaged them. Such environments had led to their lack of empowerment to challenge and effectively fight the forces of their oppression, discrimination and unequal treatment. Growing up in such structures, systems, values, attitudes and practices in which they were always the underdogs, it was discernible that before they came to the Center, the girls had often internalized their inferiority and accepted it as given. Respondents agreed that such internalization had put pressure on most girls to conform to their community's belief in FGM and early marriages. One girl said:

> Some girls in our community undergo FGM mainly because of peer pressure. They fear to be ridiculed by their peers. But there are those who stand firm and don't mind what others say. They feel like they have to belong to the group of their friends. It is also bad (FGM) because it is like it gives them a license to sleep with any man they want, since they are now women (Faith, Focus Group Interview, June 2007).

Augmenting Faith's view, Rhoda shared:

> Yes, FGM is still done here. I remember there was a girl who was secretly taken to the hospital and a nurse did it, they took her home and kept her there but somehow the girl managed to escape and came here [Center]. You know one other problem is peer pressure, when most of the girls realize that all their friends have gone through it, they also want to go [conform] because they don't want to be labeled, or considered a girl [little child], because she cannot talk or share anything with the others (Rhoda, Personal Interview, June 2007).

These perspectives explain the cultural pressures both girls and parents find themselves in when they support practices such as FGM and early marriages in order to cushion their families and daughters from social stigma. In this case, FGM becomes a double-edged sword in that it elevates the girls and their families' social and economic status, but also predisposes them to health risks, physical harm and denies them access to educational opportunities.

Origin of Maasai's Resistance to Girls Education

Mr. Muniu and Ms. Rhoda attempted to explain the origin of Maasai's resistance to girls' education. Their resistance dates back to pre and post-colonial period when the British alienated their fertile land and pushed them to unproductive reserves. They lost vast grazing fields for their animals and wandered from one place to another in search of water and/or pasture. Since then, it is hard for the Maasai community to embrace anything whose origin is from the *mzungu* (white man), including formal education, which was started in Kenya by the Christian Missionary Societies (CMS). Ever since, their investment is reflected in large herds of cattle and large families. The value of the girl child is recognized in terms of the number of cows (dowry) her family accrues when she is given away for marriage. According to Rhoda, "Marriage cannot take place until a girl is circumcised. There is no Maasai man who can stand the ridicule of the community if he marries a woman who is not cut". In this environment, the girl child and indeed the Maasai community is caught in social, economic, historical and cultural trajectories that do not conform to the dynamics of the contemporary society.

Rhoda, who in chapter four I described as the rescued who became the rescuer, embodies a new generation that is gradually but firmly engaging their communities to unlearn some retrogressive cultural practices that spell doom to the girl child. From the time she was a young girl, Rhoda had struggled to shake off her father's tenacity to get married to a man of his choice. She finally gave in to her father's cultural demands after completing college. She got married as a second wife to a man older than her father. Her marriage however, did not last as her father had espoused because, "neither the man nor myself was happy. So, I asked my father to break that thing [marriage]. As a teacher, I was posted to this Center as a rescued woman and now I am rescuer of girls in the same situation". Rhoda indicated that were it not that she was educated, she could still be held captive by her culture. This is the arduous path that girl respondents seemed to be aware of and ready to trek. However, poverty, which is inextricably related to Maasai's nomadic lifestyle, cut across respondents' experiences and posed a major challenge to the Center.

Poverty

Poverty, both at the individual and society level, is a disadvantage to the education of children in developing countries (Mulugeta, 1998). In the Maasai community, poverty causes families to prioritize their needs and often girls' education takes the bottom rank. Rhoda narrated a case of a girl aged 9, who was traded [given away for marriage] for grass during drought. I learned that it is during such difficult times that most girls are given away as a means to replenish their families' livestock. Mr. Muniu also recounted cases where some parents had brought their daughters to the Center not for education, but to get something to eat. He said, "Three years ago, there was severe

drought here [Maasai community] - most animals died for lack of water and pasture, there was no food and so some parents brought their girls here because they thought they might get food".

I garnered that poverty in the context of Maasai community, means not having large herds of cattle, many wives, children and enough food. Inadequacies in these areas coupled with little value placed on girls' education means that many girls are more likely to miss educational opportunities. However, the upsurge in student enrolment in the Center, due to Free Primary Education, was a testament that many parents are willing to send their children to school but they cannot afford. Provision of school uniform and other basic school supplies for the girl child was a challenge to most parents. For instance, Mr. Muniu, observed:

> In the Maasai community, things like sanitary towels are not an issue to women in the community. Now that these girls are here, do we continue with what they do at home or you change? I have to go out and talk to people to donate sanitary towels. Girls could miss school because of their periods. Today, thanks to well-wishers that is taken care of unless we talk of other issues like pain that come with their periods (Muniu, Personal Interview, June 2007).

In the course of collecting data for this study, I encountered an 8-year old *regular* (operated from home) girl, Kaleche in standard one. Kaleche wore a patched tattered green uniform. Her toes peeped from her conspicuously oversize and worn out shoes. She struggled to walk in them. I learned that she usually borrowed shoes to wear to the toilet. Kaleche reminded me of my days in primary school. We were not allowed to wear shoes. Occasionally during weekends, I could sneak out with my sister's shoes. They were oversize but I was happy to wear them. All that belonged to me was a pair of sandals, which I remember one day a teacher confiscated in school. I always longed for the time when I could have my own shoes. I visualized myself in Kaleche's shoes and I was

gripped by emotion. I learned from Mr. Muniu that Kaleche's step-father had neglected her because she was not his biological daughter. Surprisingly, Kaleche had a sister in the Center who was fairly groomed. I sought Mr. Muniu's permission to buy Kaleche shoes and other basics I learned she lacked. Just like Kaleche whose face beamed with joy at the sight of a new pair of shoes, I was overjoyed for the opportunity to fulfill her dreams, new shoes and other basics (Appendix C5).

In the context of poverty, I garnered that in order to increase girls' access, participation, retention and achievement in education, the government and other development agencies ought to address poverty in rural areas. Respondents intoned that due to poverty, girls' education does not make it to the family's prioritizing table. Even those girls who may complete their primary education, their chances of transitioning to secondary schools are greatly diminished due to poverty. Only sustainable sponsorship beyond primary school is a sure way of most girls realizing their education dreams and aspirations. Besides poverty, HIV/AIDS posed another challenge to the Center and the Maasai community. This was detrimental to girls' education.

HIV/AIDS

Student respondents shared that they knew girls in their villages who had not seen the inside of a school or had dropped out of school to care for family members who were dying of HIV and AIDS. The Center had a few cases of girls, suffering from HIV infection, who were taking antiretroviral medicine. When I asked Mr. Muniu to describe the extent to which HIV/AIDS was a problem in the Center, he seemed not worried about the 4 cases he had in the Center, but of "several cases of parents in this community who

are dying of HIV/AIDS". He shared that once they undergo FGM, girls are allowed to freely engage in sex to qualify to be considered women and this put them at risk of infection.

The Maasai's age-set system and the culture of sharing had put pressure on the youth to conform to their community's culture. Once boys undergo circumcision, their culture encourages them to embrace sharing especially within the age set. While the culture of sharing is good, it becomes toxic when it is extended to sharing wives/husbands, thereby creating a suitable cyclical environment for HIV/AIDS to thrive. Rhoda had this to say about the concept of sharing in Maasai community:

> Sharing is a Maasai way of life. We share everything, whether it is food from the same bowl, milk from the same calabash or even wives, whom we share and have children with. Even the young people after circumcision are given a lot of freedom to freely engage in sex. They are encouraged to use their youthful energy so that as they grow older they can settle down (Rhoda, Personal Interview, June 2007).

In the context of sharing, the Maasai way, where "there is no such word as rape", I deciphered that girls are more susceptible to HIV infection, more likely to drop out of school due to pregnancy and blamed for these eventualities.

All student respondents further confessed to knowing a person in their community who had either died or was suffering from what they suspected to be effects of AIDS. They had scanty information on HIV/AIDS infection and prevention. They seemed to know little about condoms and they were reluctant to talk about them. However, one girl shared her experience:

> Long time ago, me and my sister saw some men carrying those things [condoms] and when we were playing, I found a balloon and me and my sister played with it. I never knew what it was until my brother told us to throw it away and not to touch it. He never really told us what it was. I thought it was my balloon that I had

> found. One day my brother's wife told us not to pick up condoms and then I started hearing about them (Lydia, Focus Group Interview, June 207).

From their responses, it was evident that much of what they knew about HIV and AIDS was what their teachers had taught them.

The Center supplemented teaching of HIV and AIDS with resource persons affiliated with FAWE, Churches and Ministry of Health. When I asked the girls to share what they were taught, they all answered in a chorus saying, "Abstinence - They tell us to abstain from sex and be faithful to our husbands when we get married after we complete our education", said Faith as the rest nodded their heads in affirmation. My observation indicated that the girls were uncomfortable initiating discussions on issues related to HIV and AIDS but were eager to listen to and participate in discussions if somebody else deliberately involved them. I probed them on how their teachers involved them to which they said, "they just tell us". My interview with teachers confirmed that they told the girls "how to take care of themselves, how to abstain". I wondered how these girls could acquire knowledge and develop attitudes and skills that support the adoption of healthy behaviors, without an interactive teaching and learning process.

While teaching young girls about abstinence and fidelity in marriage is no doubt a good moral lesson, I further wondered how realistically such information was going to help girls navigate cultural practices that do not recognize or listen to their voices. I thought the Center's curriculum needed to balance between information about HIV and AIDS, ways to cope with the disease and life skills for girls. Research shows that HIV/AIDS prevention programs that have balanced knowledge, attitudes and skills related to HIV transmission have proven more effective in actually changing behavior than those that have focused on information alone (Ongaga, 2007). Life-skills-based

programs have proven more effective in delaying the age of first sexual intercourse and increasing safe sex behavior among sexually active youth (e.g., increasing use of condoms, reducing number of sexual partners) (UNICEF, 2005; Kelly, 2000).

To move from an informational model to an empowering model in the context of HIV and AIDS, would so much depend on how the Center broadens its empowerment programs to involve the local community to reflect on their cultural, social and economic values with a view to transforming them. By so doing, the Center will not only have targeted girls alone, but the contexts upon which they (girls) and boys operate. This will also mean that government programs and development agencies working in rural areas such as Kajiado, would have to mainstream or incorporate into their interventions and programs, empowerment strategies that meaningfully involve local communities.

Summary

In this analysis chapter, I have attempted to uncover themes that cut across respondents' shared messages regarding girls' experiences before and after their exposure to the Center of Excellence. I show how invisible girls are in the Maasai community and how the Center of Excellence elevates and empowers them and serves as an oasis of hope for their community. Besides being a formal education institution, the Center is a safe haven for girls especially those who run away or are rescued from early marriages and FGM. Based on the respondents' lens, I argued that the only sustainable key to fighting vicious and cyclic locks ranging from poverty to HIV/AIDS to gender inequality, lies in education for all and empowerment of girls. In the next chapter, implications, recommendations and conclusion for this study are presented.

CHAPTER VI

IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

In this study, I explored the experiences of girls in a Center of Excellence in Kajiado district Kenya. I specifically sought to understand their experiences prior to and during their involvement with the Center. Besides understanding their educational goals, I also wanted to find out strategies the Center utilized to empower them. Student respondents revealed their heartbreaking lived experiences through narratives, perspectives, and opportunities and attested that education holds the key to their social, economic and cultural emancipation. The findings revealed challenges and opportunities that many Maasai girls face to access and achieve in education. While the challenges paint a wider picture of the community's socio-cultural and economic struggles, the Center epitomizes opportunities and shines rays of hope for girls and their community.

In this chapter, I draw on the reflections from the study especially the analysis chapter to state the impact of the Center, give recommendations as they relate to other studies on girls' education, implications for further research and conclusion. I also present my brief reflection on the study. As observed in chapter five, the following themes, which shape and define the experiences of girls in the Center of Excellence, emerge from the data;

1. Education and Empowerment, which outlined how the Center of Excellence was transforming the perspectives and lives of many disadvantaged girls in the Maasai community. For the girls, the Center with its empowering environment was a safe

haven and it served as a reservoir of knowledge and skills upon which they would build a solid ground for their future as well as question their community's cultural beliefs and practices that disadvantaged them.

2. Hopes and dreams, which focused on the personal aspirations of the girls in and beyond the Center of Excellence. The girls believed that education was the ultimate key to realizing their dreams.
3. The Maasai: A vulnerable community in which I underscored Maasai's cultural practices and the challenges such practices pose to the education of girls. I attempted to capture their vulnerability by underlining the concomitant effect of dry and economically unreliable climate and poverty.

It is on the framework of these themes that I state the following implications.

Impact of the Girls' Center of Excellence

In the long term, the Girls Center of Excellence in Kajiado continues to serve the local Maasai community by enlightening and sensitizing them on and about issues of education, HIV AIDS and poverty reduction. Through its outreach programs; reconciliation seminars, chiefs' meetings, drama and skits, the Center's enlightenment shines a liberating light on the local Maasai community to shun FGM and early marriages. Through these avenues, I believe that the importance of education for both girls and boys is recognized and sustained. It was rewarding to learn that government efforts, through local chiefs and children's officers, the community is gradually supporting girls' education and changing their perception of viewing them as economic assets.

The local chiefs also serve as the government's eyes, in the local community, to monitor, enforce and ensure that girls and boys go to school under the Free Primary Education policy. Coupled with reconciliation programs, the Center ensured that parents were on board in supporting their children's education. These efforts, according to the interviewees, had reduced instances of FGM and helped rescue many girls who had been married off at a tender age. At the same time, girls who had a chance to be in the Center were passing on, to their siblings, an empowering message that carried the importance of going to school, shunning FGM and resisting early marriage.

In the long run, the local community is hoped to have a sense of ownership for the Center of Excellence, which they once viewed as an intrusion on their way of life. Over and above, the Center's programs, which are enshrined in their motto, mission and vision, make the Girls Center of Excellence an icon of change in the Maasai community with respect to girls' education. The implications of such iconic interventions are huge.

Implications and Recommendations

Promote and increase investment in girls' education in rural and marginalized areas

This study echoes other studies (Kakonge, 2001; Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2002; Shultz, 1993; Cotton, 2000; Coclough et al 2000; Chege & Sifuna 2006) that reveal dividends of and call for increased girls' participation in education not only within the Maasai community but also in other rural environments. Kajiado Girls Center of Excellence in Maasai community presents a rare demonstrative gender responsive opportunity for girls to access, participate and perform in education. This study's student respondents' seemed to be increasingly motivated by various deficits in their community to embrace education as a means to improve their lives and that of their community. They

all envisaged career aspirations as teachers, doctors, pilots or accountants, which they said could empower and propel them to critique and question their community's practices that hinder girls' education.

Research has shown that educating girls in rural areas enables them to challenge some of the cultural practices that disadvantage them, and how they may be contributing to such oppressive processes unknowingly (Egbo, 2000; Mlama, 2005). Although findings of this study do not guarantee that education alone can eliminate deep-seated cultural ideologies that perpetuate gendered norms that disproportionately impact girls and women, I argue that education for girls in a broad sense serves to remove them from the periphery to becoming active participants.

Like many other studies whose focus is on gender equality and girls' education (Colclough, C., et al, 2000; Kabila & Masinjila, 1997; FAWE 2000; Gordon, 1995; Herz & Sperling, 2004), this study underscored the importance of girls' education not only as an empowerment tool but also as a potential solution to mitigate a broad range of societal problems such as poverty, HIV/AIDS and child mortality. Increasing girls' chances to gaining educational opportunities in rural areas would boost both their quality of life and that of their families and communities. In the context of HIV/AIDS, research has shown that HIV education and prevention skills should be introduced to children at a younger age, that is, before they get involved or engage in any form of sexual activity, which may make them susceptible to the risk of HIV infection (Kirby et al., 1991; Kelly, 2000; White & Ballard, 1993). This complements the argument that participation in primary and secondary schooling is a critical factor in protecting young people, especially girls, from the risk of HIV infection.

Research on HIV and AIDS in Kenya show that youth aged between 15-24 years are mostly affected (KDHS, 2004; UNAIDS, 2002) and of this, girls are most vulnerable. Data from this study indicated a growing threat of HIV/AIDS not only in the Center, but also in the community. The fact that the Center was already serving girls infected and affected by HIV was indicative that both the Center and community need strong HIV/AIDS education and awareness programs. My observation and interaction with student respondents revealed that they had limited informational knowledge about HIV/AIDS and lacked strategies and skills to utilize the same information in certain circumstances. In this context, skills based education should be designed to help youth develop the knowledge, attitudes, values, interpersonal relations, critical and creative thinking, decision making and self-awareness skills to enable them to make sound health-related decisions (IPAR, 2004).

Since I did not observe or garner information of any in-school program that comprehensively attends to HIV and AIDS, it is my view that the Center in partnership with local organizations should roll out life skills education programs that include specific skills to reduce risk of HIV infection. This may include skills on how to use a condom or how to refuse unwanted sex and skills on how to negotiate on underlying structural drivers of HIV. Since most of Maasai community's cultural practices are understood to propagate gender norms that dictate the prevalence of FGM and early marriage in rural areas, there is need for a concerted effort both at the local and national level to address this trend.

Local approach

At the local level, attitudinal change is imperative not in terms of getting rid of the culture but designing culturally sensitive strategies to transform or discard some aspects of the local culture that are detrimental to the welfare of girls, women and the entire community. Therefore, targeting the local community with a view to sensitizing them to cultivate a positive image of girls is likely to lead to change of attitudes in support of their education and subsequent empowerment.

National approach

At the national level, one strategy for addressing and promoting girls education in rural and marginalized areas is through universal basic education. While Kenya has done well in this area by introducing free primary education, it is my view that it should also be compulsory. There is need for the government of Kenya to enact a compulsory component of free and basic education, which will create pressure and tie parents to sending their children to school regardless of their cultural, economic and social inclinations. Herz and Sperling (2004) argue that if education is not made mandatory, the decision to educate children falls to the parents, who incur costs now and who cannot capture much of the benefits, since they accrue across a child's lifetime and to society as a whole. Therefore, a determination based solely on the cost-benefit calculation of parents may lead to a nation's underinvesting in education.

Free and compulsory education is likely to create an impetus for both the government and local communities to work together to expand structural and boarding facilities such as dormitories and classrooms to accommodate more students especially

girls in rural areas. By so doing, the government will have created critical policies aimed at increasing girl's retention and participation in educational programs in school. This shows that investing in girls' education calls for multifaceted approach that incorporates policy makers, national leaders, local opinion leaders and non-government organizations such as churches and those that are community based.

Strengthen community mobilization and advocacy programs through meaningful partnerships

The fact that education, in the long term, serves as a cornerstone in transforming lives of vulnerable and underserved groups in rural communities cannot be overemphasized. While the government of Kenya bears the primary responsibility for managing the education system, meaningful involvement of numerous stakeholders and partners inside and outside government is necessary to expand and improve the range of basic education opportunities on the scale needed in rural areas. Such effort, obviously calls for strong and continuous support at the political level, while action needs to take place in each and every rural community. For instance, creating partnerships with organizations working in rural Kajiado to be cognizant of the value and relevance of girls' education and include it in their development agenda is a critical step.

Meaningful partnerships can facilitate dialogue on issues that cut across the core spectrum of the community such as the threat of HIV/AIDS, poverty, and children's rights including education. In my view, partnerships in these issues might:

- Assure advocacy for implementation of any existing laws, policies and regulations regarding harmful cultural practices that endanger children and deprive them of the right to free and basic education.

- Provide mechanisms for care and support for vulnerable children in schools, families and communities due to the impact of HIV and AIDS as well as instability in families
- Promote development of, and training in, life skills-based approaches geared to combating the impact of HIV and AIDS among adolescents in schools as well as in the community.

Besides involving local development agencies to address girls' education, it is also imperative to mobilize and work with families and communities. The success of the Center in sensitizing the community through reconciliation programs is an indicator that given a rationale, families and communities can transcend their cultural mores to support the education of their children, both boys and girls. For example, my parents became more involved in my education and school affairs when I, as a girl passed my secondary level exam. Based on this and what I have observed since then, I have come to learn that high levels of parental and community participation are associated with improved school performance.

In the course of collecting data for this study, I thought of what it will take to establish more Girls Centers of Excellence in the whole country instead of having 'one island of excellence' in the whole country. While FAWE has helped establish Centers of Excellence in some countries in sub-Saharan Africa to enable disadvantaged girls optimize their educational potential, I thought that it is imperative for Ministries of Education, to work towards mainstreaming best practices that ensure creation of gender responsive school environments to benefit all students in rural areas. These may include transforming some rural schools into Centers of Excellence and training and equipping

more teachers with skills for empowering girls and boys for gender equality through the *Tuseme* and Gender Responsive Pedagogy models.

To foster the development and implementation of gender responsive school environments, it would be critical for education policymakers to consider gender equality as an integral dimension of teaching and learning. This will necessitate the training of head teachers in leadership traits, gender-based violence in school, gender budgeting and analytical skills. Further, it may include providing more scholarships to needy girls, allowing those who get pregnant to go back to school after delivery, ensuring their safety and security through construction of schools close to homes and provision of boarding facilities. In addition, review curricula for gender responsiveness, increase the number of female teachers to provide role models and provide gender responsive school environment including separate toilets for boys and girls.

By so doing, the government will have adopted FAWE's programmatic objectives to: (1) Increase access particularly of rural girls, the very poor, the geographically and culturally isolated and marginalized (2) Continue to stimulate policy reform particularly ensuring gender provision in EFA and education policies and plans (3) Strengthen the capacity of teachers in Centers of Excellence to acquire skills needed to promote girls' access, retention, and performance and (4) Influence the replication and mainstreaming of practices in girls' education into the national education systems and practice.

Implications for Policy

In order to achieve the goals of universal education for children especially in developing countries, policymakers will need to address the economic, social, and cultural barriers that keep children, especially girls in poor rural areas out of school.

Research is replete with evidence that investing in girls' education delivers high returns not only for female educational attainment, but also for maternal and children's health, more sustainable families, women's empowerment, democracy, income growth, and general productivity (Herz & Sperling, 2004; FAWE, 2000; UNICEF, 2003).

Based on severe deficiencies in educational access and quality, policies that have led most countries in sub-Saharan Africa to introduce free primary education are hinged on funding promises and commitments in the context of Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and Education for All (EFA). This international commitment comes with increasing scrutiny and monitoring mechanisms that require countries like Kenya to find more effective and cost-effective means to delivering basic education. The introduction of free primary education in Kenya creates an impetus for the Ministry of Education to come up with strategic policies and outreach programs that endeavors not only to meet the needs of the Maasai families and communities, but also harness their potential to address problems of their children's education.

Kajiado, like most rural communities in Kenya, is under-developed and so designated as a semi-arid zone based on regional climatic rating. Despite continued government efforts to ensure development in such areas, this region still lacks some of the basic social necessities such as water, health services, electricity and roads. This trend, as is understood in Kenya, is attributable to inequalities in the regional distribution of national resources. To ensure substantive socio-economic change for such regions, there is need for specific measures to be put in place to promote equitable distribution of national resources. Pertinent to such measures is a clear policy framework that will

provide means for measuring what works in such areas to reduce poverty and increase educational opportunities for all children.

However, many rural communities such as the Maasai are unlikely to unlearn and relearn some aspects of their culture until some new understanding, through some form of education, is established in their communities. In the context of education, this means implementing educational policies meant to increase access, retention, participation and achievement from the grassroots level. Elmore (1997) has elaborately written about bottom-up policy implementation [Backward mapping] in a way that validates the local contexts and its variations.

Elmore argues that *Backward Mapping* begins not at the top of the implementation process but at the last possible stage, the point at which administrative actions intersect private choices. It begins not with a statement of intent, but with a statement of the specific behavior at the lowest level of the implementation process that generates the need for a policy (Elmore, 1997). Being cognizant of and localizing FGM and early marriages as two intertwined bottlenecks that affect the education of girls in the Maasai community, gave FAWE a rationale to establish Kajiado Girls Center of Excellence. Creating policies and programs that take advantage of Free primary Education and meaningfully involve rural communities to understand their socio-cultural contexts in relation to their children's education would be a viable way of starting to tackle girls' education at the grassroots level.

The study in relation to GAD theory

With a view to addressing gender and development issues, GAD framework calls for the formulation of more gender-sensitive interventions, programs and empowerment policies that require the involvement of both men and women as beneficiaries and agents (Leach, 2003). In the Center, tenets of GAD framework are manifested in reconciliation and sensitization programs whose purpose is to involve all stakeholders to support girls' education. These programs include; *Tuseme,* Girl Help Girl Policy, Gender Responsive Pedagogy, Holiday programs and the Rescue Center. Of great importance is the government's requirement of the provincial administration through local chiefs, district commissioners and education officers to monitor and enforce policies that outlawed FGM, early marriages and promote Free Primary Education. Therefore, the Girls' Center of Excellence through its programs and policies continues to provide opportunities and meet both practical and strategic needs of the girls.

Contributions to Research

Through the respondents' voices, this study unraveled an understanding of underlying socio-cultural, economic and academic transformation both in the Center and within the Maasai community that greatly enhance or impede participation and achievement of girls in education. While the Center of Excellence equipped the girls with educational tools and empowered them to understand themselves in the context of their community's socio-cultural milieu, the community on the other hand seemed to gradually come to understand the dividends of investing in education. The relationships between the Center of Excellence and the local Maasai Community as well as religious

organizations and community based development agencies have the greatest potential to influence economic changes, cultural evaluation and monitoring the advancement of girls' education. Since this study was restricted to the Center of Excellence, its contributions are limited to what I garnered in the Center and its relationships with these constituencies.

On the larger context, this study adds to the conversation that speaks to education stakeholders and policymakers on the need to create safe and gender responsive school environments for all children. I hope, therefore that this study provides policymakers and other educators with helpful insights that enables them to acknowledge, review and change inherent school-based and socio-cultural impediments that infringe on children's rights including the right to education. Although I do not expect every public school to be a Center of Excellence, I hope that the characteristics of a gender responsive school environment as demonstrated by Kajiado Girls Center of Excellence serves as a model intervention worth adopting. On this context, this study creates a framework on which to design, implement, monitor, and evaluate policies that might engender aspects of social justice including diversity, gender, equity and culture.

Recommendations for Further Research

As already observed elsewhere in this study, the Maasai community was initially opposed to the establishment of the Center of Excellence because it was understood to take away their daughters, who were a dependable family and community resource. However, data showed that this view was changing gradually with the help of different strategies including sensitization and reconciliation programs. The enrolment of girls in

the Center became exponential when free primary education was introduced. Having these facts in mind, it is important that further research be carried out to understand:

1. The extent to which poverty and not cultural practices becomes a dominant factor that impedes girls' education in the Maasai community.
2. How the Center of Excellence can harness the potential of parents and students who are successfully reconciled as well as female role models from the community to build awareness and consensus on the social and economic advantages of girls' education.
3. What the place of boys' education in the Maasai community? What do the boys do with their education?
4. Mechanisms that can be created and sustained to support the funding aspect of the girls that complete their education from the Center and proceed to secondary schools. Data from this study indicated that the Center's principal, Mr. Muniu had taken a self-initiated responsibility to seek funding from individuals and organizations to support these girls.
5. How girls who complete their studies from the Center but fail to join secondary schools are rehabilitated. Mr. Muniu indicated that most of the girls who sit for KCPE attain grades that would earn them admission into secondary schools, but largely lack consistent funding to continue their secondary education.
6. Ways that the Ministry of Education can mainstream some aspects of the Center of Excellence in public educational institutions. This might include fora to explore personal and controversial issues that students may feel uncomfortable discussing in their families and communities.

7. The impact of a Center of Excellence in a mixed (boys and girls) school in a similar setting.
8. How having only female teachers impact the academic performance and empowerment of girls. Data from this study show that there were only two male teachers and the rest of the 21 other teachers were females. Does having an almost female dominated staff work well for girls' education?
9. How do girls negotiate the tension between their culture (Maasai Culture) and the western conception of 'the place of girls'?

Reflections

From my observation, I learned that the Center of Excellence is an interdependent institution that thrives on the will of non-profit organizations, the government, the community as well as well-wishers. The girls know that without well-wishers and the support of their families, their transition out of the Center is difficult. They, therefore treated any visitor to the Center with respect and courtesy for this is one way of winning the hearts of many visitors to support their course. That is how Kaleche won my heart to buy her a new pair of shoes and other basics that she needed. Despite the cultural backgrounds and trauma that many girls had been subjected to, they were happy and went about their routines like nothing had happened to them. I feared that they had gone through a lot to open up and share their experiences.

Coming from a different ethnic community, which is geographically and linguistically distant from the Maasai community, I considered myself an outsider when I went to the Girls' Center of Excellence to conduct this study. However, I learned, from

the interviews, how remarkably similar the girls' experiences were to mine. The sight of girls in uniforms, their demeanor and specifically their show of respect for teachers, elders and guests reflected a sense of discipline and familiarity that is too vivid from my primary school years. It did not take me long to remember, follow and fall into the daily routine in the Center as was characteristic to my experience in primary school. In the course of my interview, the Center held Monday morning assemblies, prayers and staff meetings, all, which were part and parcel of the Center's culture. While these cultural norms are characteristic of many schools in Kenya, witnessing their enactment in the Center evoked in me shared values, beliefs, understanding and meaning.

Contrary to my assumption that the Center was just like any other regular primary school where girls take a low profile and are not expected to perform as well as boys, I encountered a group of unique, highly motivated, self-confident and goal-driven girls whose quest for knowledge was well beyond my expectations. They exhibited a strong sense of urgency and readiness to confront their challenges in bid to redefine and refocus their lives. Their spirit and hope for a bright future evoked memories of my primary school years when most girls were not motivated to stay in school. In my time, good academic performance was synonymous to boys whereas girls' good academic performance was considered an act of chance. Unlike my girl interviewees whose educational challenges revolved around access, retention, and performance, mine primarily centered on performance. Utilizing both their stories and challenges and my educational opportunities, challenges and exposure, I encouraged them to make optimal use of the Center's facilities, well-trained and gender-sensitive teachers as well as

conducive environment to excel academically and become beacons of change in their communities.

From my primary school times, my father used to tell me that the power to change my life was in my hands. Despite his support, I did not wish away the cultural challenges such as domestic chores: fetching water, firewood, taking care of babies and cooking, but worked hard in school whenever I had a chance to make it better. I shared my experience with the girls and reminded them that their challenges notwithstanding, they had a viable and well-meaning environment that they could capitalize on to transform their lives. All they need, I told them, was to develop the resilience and cultivate an indomitable sense of urgency that I witnessed in their faces and way of doing things. Their lives were being defined in the Center and their future was in their hands.

Conclusion

This study revealed economic and social conditions that were eye opening to me. The climatic conditions of the Maasai people in and around Kajiado depicted an area and a people in dire need of assistance. This study made me strongly believe that retrogressive cultural practices notwithstanding, improving living conditions in rural areas represents a key challenge for educational progress. Data showed that the girls' experiences in the Center was helping them learn more about their rights, give them a voice, dream and work towards joining college, and advance their own and community's social and economic welfare.

The girls' dreams and aspirations are unlikely to be realized without convincing a larger Maasai community that educating their children, especially girls holds the ultimate key to improving their livelihoods. This necessitates that implementation of education for

all children ought to be integrated within all aspects of sustainable rural development through multi-sectoral and interdisciplinary strategies and programs. It is within this framework that the community would understand the rationale of supporting girls' education as a basic human right along strategies meant to alleviate poverty and improve health and social services.

Carrying out this study provided me an opportunity to observe, view and understand, insights, perspectives, opinions and ideas as well as broader and deep-rooted challenges that forestall the education of girls not only within the Maasai community but also in many rural and marginalized environments. I gained an insider outlook although I went in as a n outsider to the community

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

APPROVAL LETTER FROM HUMAN RESEARCH PROTECTION PROGRAM, MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY, CONSENT AND ASSENT LETTERS

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

Initial IRB Application Approval

May 30, 2007

To: Reitumetse MABOKELA
425 Erickson Hall

Re: **IRB # 07-066** Category: EXPEDITED 2-7
Approval Date: May 30, 2007
Expiration Date: May 29, 2008

Title: EXPLORING THE EXPEREINCES OF GIRLS IN A FAWE CENTER OF EXCELLENCE IN KAJIADO DISTRICT, KENYA.

The Institutional Review Board has completed their review of your project. I am pleased to advise you that **your project has been approved.**

The committee has found that your research project is appropriate in design, protects the rights and welfare of human subjects, and meets the requirements of MSU's Federal Wide Assurance and the Federal Guidelines (45 CFR 46 and 21 CFR Part 50). The protection of human subjects in research is a partnership between the IRB and the investigators. We look forward to working with you as we both fulfill our responsibilities.

Renewals: IRB approval is valid until the expiration date listed above. If you are continuing your project, you must submit an ***Application for Renewal*** application at least one month before expiration. If the project is completed, please submit an ***Application for Permanent Closure***.

Revisions: The IRB must review any changes in the project, prior to initiation of the change. Please submit an ***Application for Revision*** to have your changes reviewed. If changes are made at the time of renewal, please include an ***Application for Revision*** with the renewal application.

Problems: If issues should arise during the conduct of the research, such as unanticipated problems, adverse events, or any problem that may increase the risk to the human subjects, notify the IRB office promptly. Forms are available to report these issues.

Please use the IRB number listed above on any forms submitted which relate to this project, or on any correspondence with the IRB office.

Good luck in your research. If we can be of further assistance, please contact us at 517-355-2180 or via email at IRB@msu.edu. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Peter Vasilenko, Ph.D.
SIRB Chair

c: Mary Ombonga
1272 Deer Path Lane
East Lansing, MI 48823

OFFICE OF REGULATORY AFFAIRS
Human Research Protection Programs

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202 Olds Hall
East Lansing, Michigan
48824-1046
517-355-2180
Fax: 517-432-4503

www.humanresearch.msu.edu
SIRB & BIRB: IRB@msu.edu
CRIRB: crirb@msu.edu

Consent Form for Parents/Guardians

Dear Parent/Guardian:

My name is Mary Ombonga. I am a Ph.D student in K-12 Educational Administration at Michigan State University, USA. I come from Nyamira District. I am presently involved in research that seeks to explore and understand experiences of girls enrolled in Kajiado Girls Center of excellence. The information I will gather will; (1) be part of completing my Ph.D dissertation requirement at Michigan State University and (2) will assist education stakeholders to improve facilities in the Center and create more gender responsive Centers in the country to encourage more girls to participate in education.

Kajiado Girls Center of Excellence Head teacher, some teachers, and a few students will provide me with some information. I request your permission for your daughter to participate in this study because she has been attending school in this Center for the last 3 years. With your permission, your daughter along with others will participate in 45-60 minute individual interviews. The interviews will seek to understand the students' experiences in school and their future dreams. The interviews will be conducted during out-of-class hours so that the child's in-class contact hours are not interrupted.

The identity of your child will remain confidential. The interview may be tape-recorded. Reports and research findings will not permit associating your child with specific responses or findings. Your child's privacy will be protected to the maximum allowable by law. I will keep the data in a locked cabinet that will be accessible by my dissertation chairman (Dr. Mabokela) and myself only.

Your child's participation in this study will be strictly voluntary and you and/or the child may withdraw at any time without penalty. If you may have questions or concerns about your child's rights in this research, contact the Center's Head teacher or the primary investigator Dr. Reitu Mabokela (517-353-6676), e-mail: mabokela@msu.edu, regular mail: 425 Erickson Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824. If you or your child is dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact – anonymous, if you wish – Peter Vasilenko, Ph.D., Chair Human Research Protection Programs by phone: (517) 355-2180, fax: (517) 432-4503, e-mail: IRB@msu.edu, or regular mail: 202 Olds Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824, USA.

I ask you to sign this consent form to indicate that you are aware of the purpose of the research and are willing to allow your child to participate.

Thank you

Child's Name_____

Parent/Guardian Signature_____ Date_____

Students' Assent Letter

Project Title: Exploring the Experiences of Girls in a FAWE Center of Excellence in Kajiado district, Kenya.

Dear Student,

My name is Mary Ombonga. I come from Nyamira District. I am a student in Educational Administration at Michigan State University, USA. I am required to write an examination, which involves talking to students like you. I am therefore requesting you to talk to me about your experience here in school. Your experience might include the things you like and dislike both here in school and at home and what you could like to become once you complete your education from this school. I want to assure you that you will not be punished or be in trouble for talking to me and you are free to withdraw from talking to me at any stage of our conversation without any penalty. I will not use your names nor share the information you give me with your parents, teachers or other school officials.

If you agree to talk to me, I will assign you to a group of other students totaling about 5 and then we will talk as a group. If you will not want to be assigned to a group, I will talk to you individually. Our talk will last approximately 45-60 minutes. With your permission, I will tape record our conversation. I will keep all the information you give me such as recorded tapes and notes in a locked cabinet.

If you may have questions or concerns about my request to talk to you please feel free to contact your head teacher or my teacher. My teacher's name and address information is: Dr. Reitu Mabokela, Tel: (517-353-6676), e-mail: mabokela@msu.edu, regular mail: 425 Erickson Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824 USA.
Thank you.

I ask you to sign this form to show that you are aware of the purpose of our talk and that you are voluntarily willing to participate in our talk. Please check your options and sign.

Talk to me individually ☐ Put me in a group ☐

Dr. Reitu Mabokela.
Professor, Michigan State University
Educational Administration
College of Education, 425 Erickson Hall
East Lansing, MI 48824, USA
(517) 353-6676 Fax: (517) 353-6393
mabokela@msu.edu

Mary M. Ombonga
Ph.D Student, Michigan State University
K-12 Educational Administration
1272 Deer Path Lane
East Lansing, MI 48823, USA
(517) 853-9396
nyamwega@msu.edu

Signature_____ Date_____

_____ Please initial here if you agree to be tape recorded.

Consent Letter for Administrators.

Project Title: Project Title: Exploring Experiences of Girls in a FAWE Center of Excellence in Kajiado district, Kenya.

Dear Sir/Madam:

My name is Mary Ombonga. I come from Nyamira District. I am a doctoral student in K-12 Educational Administration at Michigan State University, USA. I am writing to you because I am conducting a study entitled, Exploring Experiences of Girls in a FAWE Center of Excellence in Kajiado district, Kenya.

I am asking you to participate in an interview that seeks to understand how the Center influences the girls' educational goals and its relationship with the community. The information I will gather would help to inform FAWE, policy makers and other education stakeholders to design gender sensitive programs that can benefit girls to realize their full educational potential in this Center as well as in other educational settings around the country. I further will use the information as part of completing my Ph.D. program at Michigan State University, USA.

You will be interviewed once for approximately 90 minutes. With your permission, I will take notes and tape-record the interview in a way that your identity will remain confidential. Reports and research findings will also be written in a way that conceals your identity. Your privacy will be protected to the maximum allowable by law. I will keep the data in a locked cabinet that will be accessible by my dissertation director (Prof. Reitu Mabokela) and myself only. Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without penalty.

I ask you to sign this consent form to indicate that you are aware of the purpose of the research and are willing to participate. Should you have any concerns or questions regarding this study, please contact Prof. Reitu Mabokela. (517-353-6676), e-mail: mabokela@msu.edu, regular mail: 425 Erickson Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824. If you have any questions or concerns about this study regarding your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact – anonymous, if you wish – Peter Vasilenko, Ph.D., Chair Human Research Protection Programs) by phone: (517) 355-2180, fax: (517) 432-4503, e-mail: IRB@msu.edu, or regular mail: 202 Olds Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824, USA.

Sincerely,

Dr. Reitu Mabokela. Professor, Michigan State University Educational Administration College of Education, 425 Erickson Hall East Lansing, MI 48824, USA (517) 353-6676 Fax: (517) 353-6393 mabokela@msu.edu	Mary M. Ombonga Doctoral Student, Michigan State University K-12 Educational Administration 1272 Deer Path Lane East Lansing, MI 48823, USA (517) 853-9396 nyamwega@msu.edu

I voluntarily agree to participate in the study.

Please Sign: _____ Date:_____

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Interview Protocol for Students

1. Tell me something about yourself?
2. When did you join this center? How did you know about it? Who brought you here?
3. Do you like it? If yes, what do you like about it?
4. Do you have friends here in school? What about at home? What kind of activities do you do with your friends when you are at home? When you are not in class, what do you like doing?
5. Are your parents happy that you are in this center? How often do they come to see you here in school? Who comes, mom or dad? If they come to see you, what do you talk with them? What do they bring to you? Do they ask you what you are doing in school?
6. Do you know girls or boys from your community that do not go to school? If yes, what do they do instead?
7. Do you know of a girl or a friend who wants to be in this center but has not? If yes, describe reasons as to why she is not able to be here.
8. When you close school at the end of the term, do you help your parents do some work? If yes, what kind of work? If you have brothers, how do they also help?
9. In our communities, we have a lot of ceremonies. Can you tell me of any that happens in your community? Do you like them? If yes, what do you like in them? If no, what don't you like about them?
10. How have you changed since you joined this Center?
11. What are your dreams once you get out of this Center?
12. If you had a chance to talk to those girls and boys who do not go to school, what could you tell them? What could you tell their parents?
13. Is there anything you could like to share with me about yourself that we have not talked about?

Interview Protocol for administrators

What are the experiences of girls prior to and after their involvement with the FAWE Center of Excellence in Kajiado?

- Tell me something about yourself?
- How can you describe the history of this Center? Why was this center established?
- How can you describe the students who attend this Center?
- Without naming names, describe a typical background most of these students come from?
- Do you think these students are happy being in this Center?
- What do you consider as your most important accomplishment for the girls from the time they join the Center to the time they leave?

In what ways has the Center influenced the girls' current and future educational goals?

- How would you describe the curriculum that you/staff use in this Center? (How is its delivery different from public schools?
- What kind of challenges do you face working in this Center? If any, how do you overcome them?
- Do you experience student dropouts? If any, what triggers it?
- HIV/AIDS is a dreaded disease that has claimed many lives in the world. Do you have any of such cases among students or teachers? Or even in the community? If so, how do you as a Center respond to such cases?
- Describe where most of the girls, who complete their standard 8, go. Does your support follow them once they transition from this Center?

What strategies does the Center employ to support the educational goals of the girls?

- What makes this institution a Center of Excellence? Can you describe the types of services that the Center provides for the girls and the community.
- How do you involve the students' parents in their children's education?
- If I were to listen to a parent in your office/school talking about his/her child, what am I likely to hear?
- Describe how this Center benefits from the church. What other organizations help this Center? How do they help?
- How can you describe the government's role in this Center?

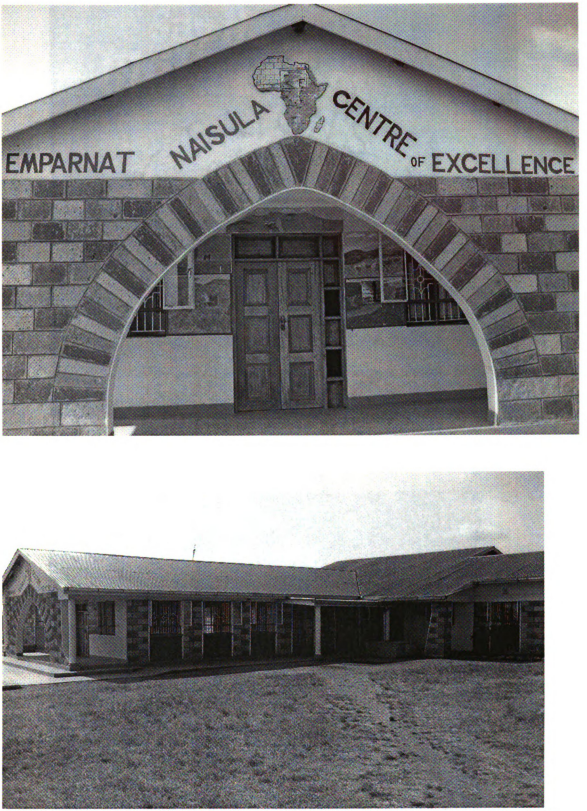
What is the nature of the relationship between the Center and the community within which it is located?

- Describe how the community perceives this Center.

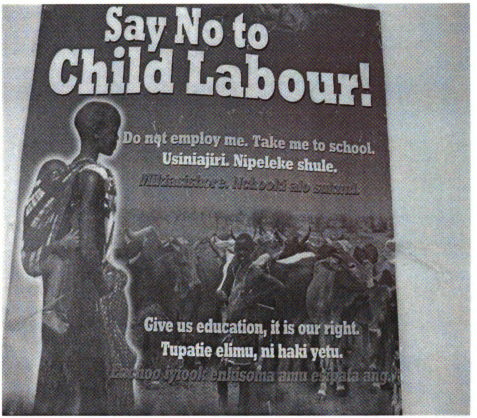
- Do you think the relationship between the Center and the community or parents can be improved?
- What influence/impact has the free primary education has had on this Center?
- Who are members of the board?
- Do you have Parents Teachers Association (PTA) and annual parents' meetings, as is the case in most public schools?
- If you had one thing that you could tell the following stakeholders about the vision, and the reality of the way things are today in this center and its students, what could that be?
    - The parents/community
    - Students
    - Church
    - Government (ministry of education)

APPENDIX C

PICTURES FROM THE SITE

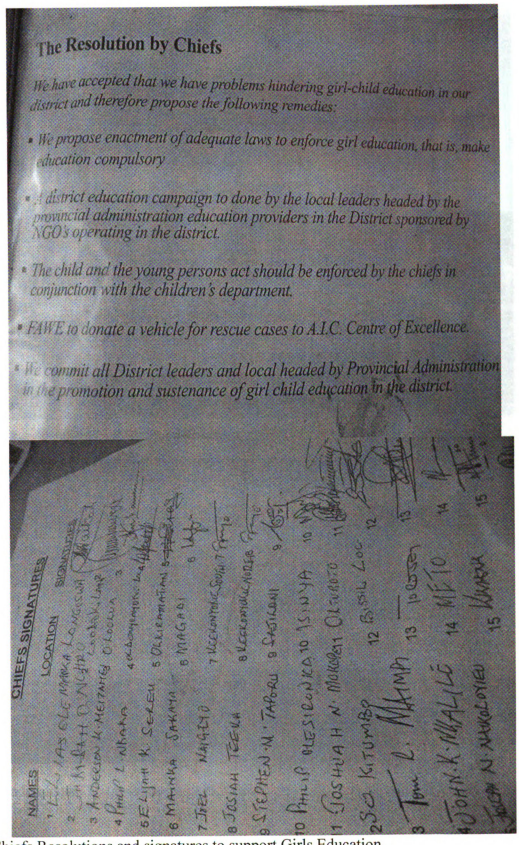


C1: Emparnat Naisula Rescue Center



One of the eye-catching posters displayed in the Rescue Center

Chiefs Meeting to promote girls' education

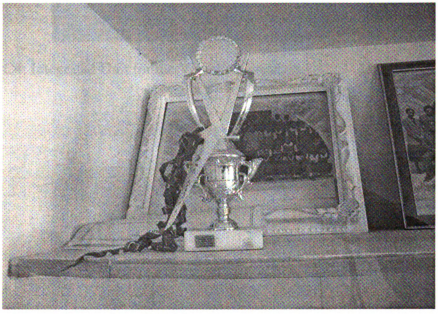


The Resolution by Chiefs

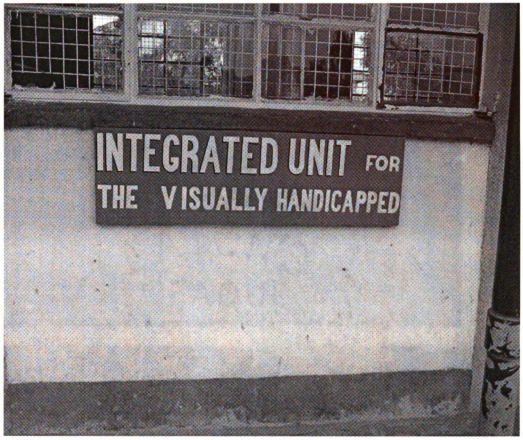
We have accepted that we have problems hindering girl-child education in our district and therefore propose the following remedies:

- *We propose enactment of adequate laws to enforce girl education, that is, make education compulsory*
- *A district education campaign to done by the local leaders headed by the provincial administration education providers in the District sponsored by NGO's operating in the district.*
- *The child and the young persons act should be enforced by the chiefs in conjunction with the children's department.*
- *FAWE to donate a vehicle for rescue cases to A.I.C. Centre of Excellence.*
- *We commit all District leaders and local headed by Provincial Administration in the promotion and sustenance of girl child education in the district.*

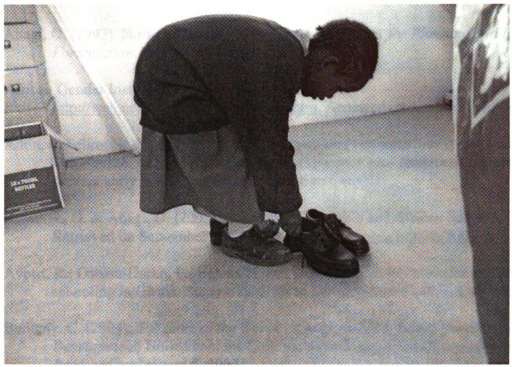
C2: Chiefs Resolutions and signatures to support Girls Education.



C3: Academic and Extra-curricular trophies as displayed in the principal's office



C4: Integrated Unit for the Visually Handicapped.



C5: Kaleche getting some help to put on shocks and her first new pair of shoes.

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