THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE 2003 FREE PRIMARY EDUCATION POLICY FOR GIRLS' EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IN KENYA: A CASE STUDY OF GIRLS ATTENDING PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN KISII DISTRICT, WESTERN KENYA

By

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ABSTRACT

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Reforms aimed at meeting the Education for All (EFA) global initiative have been implemented in several developing countries in the recent past. One of the goals of this global reform is to increase access to schools for girls and children from low-income families who are considered educationally marginalized due to socio-cultural and poverty related factors. Proponents of EFA initiative emphasize that the education of women and girls in particular is inextricably linked to delayed early marriages, reduction of maternal deaths, and prevention of unsafe sex and its related consequences. It is on the backdrop of such global efforts that Kenya initiated the 2003 Free Primary Education (FPE) policy with the intent to increase access to schools for disadvantaged groups such as girls.

This study sought to explore the implications of the 2003 FPE policy for girls' educational opportunities in Kenya. Using a qualitative case study design, this study explored the schooling experiences of girls in one urban and one rural public primary school in Kisii district, Western Kenya. The study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What have been the schooling experiences of girls since 2003?
2. How has FPE policy influenced girls' participation and achievement in public primary schools?
3. What factors inhibit girls' participation and achievement in schools?
4. What factors enhance girls' participation and achievement in schools?

Data for this study were collected for a period of two months using face-to-face open-ended interviews. The respondents included two school principals (both males), two teachers (both females) and eight female students in two focus groups. Each focus group was composed of four girls. The findings indicate that because of the government removal of tuition fee and the provision of textbooks and writing materials, the 2003 Free Primary Education policy has improved the opportunities of girls' educational participation. However, hurdles such as teenage pregnancies and lack of, or shortage of classrooms, teachers, supplementary textbooks, toilets, and sanitary pads have posed a threat to girls' active participation. External factors such as poverty and negative attitude towards girls' education continue to inhibit girls from active schooling in the wake of the 2003 Free Primary Education policy.

This study presents a meaningful text that is vital to designing gender sensitive educational reforms and programs that can benefit girls especially those residing and schooling in rural and marginalized areas. Policymakers and implementers will find this study key in highlighting both the challenges and opportunities that can be exploited to address issues of poverty and socio-cultural practices that continue inhibiting girls from actively participating in education and thus, derailing the realization of Education for All (EFA) initiative and the 2003 FPE policy goals.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation work to my family and several friends. I would like to express my special feeling of appreciation to my loving parents, Thomas Ondieki and Susan Nyaboke who instilled in me the value of education and hard work. I would also like to thank my loving daughters, Sylvia, Abigael, and Maureen for their love, support and understanding during my educational journey. My special gratitude goes to my significant other Fred Gichuru who offered all manner of assistance and was there for me throughout the writing process. Furthermore, I dedicate this dissertation to many friends who have supported me throughout the process. I will always appreciate all they have done to support the completion of this work, especially Kennedy Onyancha for many hours of proof reading. You have all played an instrumental role in this journey with me providing the much needed strength and support. I will be forever grateful.

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I cannot forget the priceless support of my sister Joyce, my brothers Hezron and Albert, my cousin Abel and best friend Judy who hosted, accompanied, and provided support during the data collection phase. I would also wish to express my deepest appreciation to the school principals, teachers, and students who participated in this study. Without their contribution, the study could not have been possible.

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KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS: Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

ASALs: Arid and Semi Arid Lands

CDF: Constituency Development Fund

EFA: Education for All

FPE: Free Primary Education

FAWE: Forum for African Women Educationists

FGM: Female Genital Mutilation

HIV: Human Immunodeficiency Virus

IMF: International Monetary Fund

KCPE: Kenya Certificate of Primary Education

KESSP: Kenya Education Sector Support Program

MDGs: Millennium Development Goals

MLNs: Multi National Companies

NGO: Non- Governmental Organization

OPEC: Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries

OVCs: Orphaned and Vulnerable Children

SAPs: Structural Adjustment Programs

UNESCO: United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNICEF: United Nations International Children's Education Fund

UN: United Nations

WFP: World Food Program

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY

The UNESCO (2009) Education for All (EFA) report states that remarkable gains are being registered in the poorest countries of the world towards achieving universal basic education (usually interpreted as primary, or primary and junior secondary) and gender equity. However, the report warns of the slow progress towards this goal due to "deep and persistent disparities based on wealth, gender, location, and ethnicity" (p.i). In Sub- Saharan Africa, the picture is grim given that "more than half the countries have not reached the target" (UNESCO, 2009, p.i). In Kenya, which is the focus of this study, educational disparities continue being experienced despite the introduction of the Free Primary Education (FPE) policy in 2003. Girls from poor families are the hardest hit as they continue lagging behind in enrollment, participation, and achievement.

Despite the evidence that the education of women, and girls in particular, is a fundamental asset that developing countries can embrace in order to realize benefits that can translate to increased productivity and better health (World Bank, 2000; UNESCO, 1991; Summers, 1992; UNESCO, 2005), studies show that this may be far from being realized. The current research conducted in several developing countries shows low enrollment and poor participation of girls in primary school education, even though free primary education policy has been put in place (UNESCO, 2005; Nyamute, 2006; Oketch & Rolleston, 2007; Obura, 1992; Muthwii, 2004). Some of the factors accounting for this scenario in Kenya include retrogressive cultures that emphasize the preference for boys to girls, overburdening domestic gender roles for girls, female genital mutilation performed on school aged girls, and early marriages for girls of school-going age (UNESCO, 2005; Sifuna, 2006; Muthwii, 2004; Obura, 1992). Within schools,

gender insensitive environments such as lack of separate toilets for girls and boys, absence of sanitary products, sexual harassment from boys, and teacher's attitude and negative stereotypes regarding girls' educational performance continue derailing girls' educational advancement (UNESCO, 2005; FAWE, 2001; UN, 2000; UNICEF, 2001; Eshiwani, 1993).

This study sought to explore and understand the implications of the 2003 free primary education policy for girls' educational opportunities in Kenya. Given that the literature points out the leading obstacles to girls' education, this study sought to understand how the 2003 FPE policy has changed the environment within which girls are learning. In other words, has the 2003 FPE policy improved the participation and achievement of girls? Are they now participating more or less? Do we have few or new challenges for girls? Has the role of family and school support changed since FPE was implemented? How do they support girls in the milieu of this policy? In sum, there is limited research focusing on how the Free Primary Education policy in Kenya has impacted the schooling experiences of girls since it was implemented in 2003.

Statement of the Problem

Participation in education is generally understood as one of the most powerful forces for not only empowering individuals socially and economically but also for helping to advance national economies (UNESCO, 2000; 2003; UNICEF, 2003; UN 2000). For women and girls, educational attainment is viewed as a "means of altering gender relations and thus, dynamics of power between genders" (Sutton, 2001, p. 37). Despite these assertions, research shows that more and more girls in developing countries continue to be educationally marginalized despite implementation of policies meant to increase their access. This marginalization emanates from deeply entrenched socio-cultural practices, poverty, inadequate learning facilities within schools, and, generally unfavorable school environments (Nyamute, 2006; Sifuna, 2006; UNESCO, 2009;

Oketch et al., 2007). I believe that if this scenario is allowed to continue, the advancement of girls and women is likely to be jeopardized.

The significance of women and girls' education has repeatedly been highlighted at prominent international forums and conferences. Such conferences include the 1990 Jomtien Conference, Thailand, and the 2000 World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal. At these conferences, it was stressed that education is the right of every child and that girls' education is a first step towards ending poverty and achieving human rights (UNESCO, 2005; Nyamute, 2006; Sifuna, 2006; FAWE, 2001). However, a plethora of recent studies show that persistent poverty and lack of enough physical and learning facilities keep children and especially girls from low-income families out of schools (Sifuna, 2006; UNESCO, 2009; Oketch et al., 2007. I assert that this lack of participation in the education of girls renders such international educational agendas meaningless and points to girls and women's continuous relegation to the economic, political, and social peripheries of their countries.

While policies aimed at increasing access might be considered as the most effective means of addressing the problem of educational gender disparity, the manner of their implementation remains a major setback to their success. For example, the literature shows that in Kenya, girls still record low enrollment, poor school attendance, and generally comprise the majority of students dropping out of primary schools, partly because of the haphazard manner in which the 2003 free primary education policy was implemented (UNESCO, 2003; UN 2000). This problem raises questions about policy makers' understanding of appropriate measures they need to take to mitigate the challenge of educational gender disparity. It is imperative that the government embeds such policies on the gendered nature of Kenyan society and actively addresses the problem of retrogressive socio-cultural practices and poverty. Most significantly,

there is a need to engage all stakeholders, including parents and community leaders, in designing intervention programs, besides the policy itself that can address challenges girls face both in school and in the community. I believe that as long as these inhibitive conditions remain in place, girls will continue being marginalized in the educational arena and in overall development.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to explore and uncover the implications of the 2003 Free Primary Education policy on girls' educational opportunities in Kenya. Specifically, I wanted to understand the schooling experiences of girls since 2003, when the FPE policy came into place. Central to understanding their experience was my desire to comprehend how this policy and other related factors have influenced girls' enrollment, attendance, and achievement in public primary school education. Given that the family and the school environments have an insurmountable role in influencing students' (especially girls) participation in learning, I considered it vital to further understand the support mechanisms existing within these two institutions to encourage girls to participate in education. I hope that the findings of this study will provide policy makers and other educational stakeholders with the necessary knowledge for designing policies and intervention programs appropriate in enhancing the education of marginalized groups, such as girls especially, who live within contexts that demean them or their education.

Research Questions

In this study, I utilized one central question and four sub-questions to guide my inquiry. Glesne (2006) asserts, "a research question presents the overall intent of your study and indicates

how open or closed it will be. It provides a focus for thinking about data collection and analysis" (p.29). Glesne adds that sub-questions assist in investigating the central question. In order to understand the implications of the 2003 free primary education policy on girls' schooling in Kenya, I focused on both girls and teachers in public primary schools as my respondents. The central question for this study was: What are the implications of the 2003 free primary education policy for girls' educational opportunities in Kenya? I utilized the following four sub-questions:

1. What have been the schooling experiences of girls since 2003?
2. How has FPE policy influenced girls' participation and achievement in public primary schools?
3. What factors inhibit girls' participation and achievement in schools?
4. What factors enhance girls' participation and achievement in schools?

Significance of the study

The literature indicates that girls' participation in education, especially in the developing world, is a matter of great concern (UNESCO, 2005; FAWE, 2001; UN, 2000; UNICEF, 2001). In the same light, women's education has been advanced as key to achieving their socio-economic advancement and those of the nations to which they belong. Although Kenya implemented Free Primary Education policy in 2003 as a measure of increasing educational access for marginalized groups such as girls, it did not come up with intervention programs besides the policy that could address persistent socio-cultural and economic challenges that hinder them from becoming actively involved in schooling. As such, educational impediments for girls continue flourishing both in communities and schools.

This study will be significant in expressing the schooling experiences of girls attending public primary schools in Kisii district, Western Kenya since 2003, which is a manifestation of

the experiences of most girls in Kenyan public primary schools. It is my hope that this study will provide policy makers and other educational stakeholders with some helpful information that might enable them to design and implement intervention programs that will aid in removing in- and out-of- school barriers that inhibit girls, especially those from low income families, from participating in education.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, I utilized liberal feminist frameworks and the notion of intersectionality to explore and uncover the implications of the 2003 Free Primary Education policy for girls' educational opportunities in Kenya. Theories of educational policy were also employed in this study. Liberal feminism theory advances cultural and social aspects as constructing the reality of women and girls' education and argues for equal opportunities (Moser, 1993; Stromquist, 1994; 1997; Zinn & Dill, 2003; Hill, 1999). It advocates for the removal of barriers which prevent girls from reaching their full potential, whether such barriers are located in the school, family, community, the individual psyche or discriminatory labor practices. The liberal feminist framework enabled me to put into context the social and cultural backgrounds of my primary respondents (girls) in order to understand their schooling experiences. The intersectionality framework shows that cultural patterns of oppression are not only interrelated, but are bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society (Mohanty, 2003; Collins, 1986; Hooks, 1981; Davis, 1981). Examples of this include race, gender, class, sexuality, and ethnicity. The intersectionality framework helped me understand how issues of class and gender in Kenya

intersect and how they serve to advance educational marginalization of girls coming from low income families and rural[1] backgrounds.

Proponents of educational reform theory argue that reforms necessarily arise in a particular social, economic, political, and institutional contexts and that, the way any reform program is conceptualized, developed, defended (and attacked), and implemented will owe a great deal to previous events and practices in a given jurisdiction (Cohen & Hill, 2001; Cohen, 1982,; Levin, 2001; Elmore, 1995). Advocates of these theories also consider that the proliferation of policy and organization slows the decision-making process, makes it more contentious, and introduces new complexities. They further argue that more often than not, policy does not yield the kind of outcomes that are really intended, due to a whole series of obstacles and diverse interests and interpretations (Cohen, 1982; Elmore, 1995; Fullan, 1991; McLaughlin, 1987; Levin, 2001; Duemer & Mendez-Morse, 2002; Hargreaves, 1994). In this study, educational policy frameworks helped me understand how the 2003 FPE reform is being shaped by Kenya's historical factors, political practices, institutional makeup, cultural practices, economic realities, parental inclinations, and so on. For example, from educational policy framework perspective, the 2003 FPE policy has been left open to interpretation by members of the public, including parents because the government failed to clearly state the role of parents. Most parents argue that all that is required of them is to send their children to school for "free". Local politicians, who are more interested in gaining political mileage from their constituents, have reinforced such arguments and steered off from telling parents to offer contributions to schools. Thus, these theories enabled me to put into context developments characterizing the

[1] In this study, rural areas in Kenya is used to refer to places that are distant from the cities and often characterized by poor transport and communications systems, low-income families, and deprived educational facilities. Rural families also tend to adhere to cultural norms and practices that often define the "appropriate" roles and behaviors of males and females in society

2003 Free Primary Education policy and understand how challenges (some generic to policy implementation and others particular to schools) plaguing it, mirror implementation experiences of educational policies in Kenya and other parts of Africa.

Research design

This study utilized a qualitative case study design to understand the schooling experiences of girls since 2003. For comparative purposes, the study examined the policy's influence on girls' enrollment, retention, and achievement in rural versus urban schools. Data for this study was collected for a period of two months using face-to-face open-ended interviews, focus group discussions, and observations. I sampled two schools (one in a rural and another in an urban setting) from Kisii district, Western Kenya. The participants in my study included primary and secondary respondents. I interviewed four girls and two teachers (including the school principals) from each of these schools. My primary sample consisted of girls from each of the sampled schools. The study targeted girls who are in their second to last primary school year (7^{th} grade) and those completing their primary school level (8^{th} grade). My assumption is that this group has had a sufficient amount of schooling experience since 2003 when the Free Primary Education policy was introduced. My secondary respondents included the sampled school administrators and teachers. I sought their perspectives on girls' educational participation since 2003.

This study investigated girls' enrollment trends, retention, and general performance. I reviewed the enrollment of 7^{th} and 8^{th} grade girls since 2003 from institutional registers, made personal observations on the learning and physical facilities available in their schools, and

engaged my respondents in face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions. I sought IRB approval from Michigan State University to conduct my study.

Overview of Chapters

The next chapter, Chapter II consists of the literature review that served to highlight the rationale for studying the implication of the 2003 Free Primary Education policy on girls' schooling in Kenya. The review highlights past similar policies in Kenya and East Africa and how they influenced girls' education. The role of international community in Kenya's educational policies and challenges facing the 2003 FPE policy are stated.

Chapter III describes the methodology for this study while chapter IV is the presentation of data in which the setting of the study and the schools and respondent profiles are described. The respondents' narratives, opinions and challenges are captured in this chapter. Chapter V is a thematic analysis of the data in which three themes emerged in response to the research question: What are the implications of the 2003 Free Primary Education policy for girls' educational opportunities in Kenya? The themes emerge from interrelated realms within which my respondents (girls and teachers) function. They include; school, socio-cultural and economic contexts. These themes are reflective of the respondents' experiences, narratives as well as challenges and opportunities the 2003 Free Primary Education policy has presented to girls attending public primary schools. Chapter VI includes the study's implications, recommendations and conclusions

Definition of Terms

The following is a list of terms that may not be clear to some readers because of the contexts in which they are used. The study is about the 2003 Free Primary Education policy in

Kenya written in a US based institution hence the need to define some unfamiliar terms although they are also clarified in the dissertation when they appear for the first time.

Kenya- the name of the country located in Africa

Kisii- One of the districts in Kenya located in the Western part of the country

Chiefs- Local government administrators

Barazas- Public meetings held by local government administrators to enlighten the public about government policies

Primary School- Elementary school, from 1st through 8th grade

High School- High School, from 9th through 12th grade

Class/Standard/Form- Grade

KCPE- Kenya Certificate of Primary Education national exam administered at the end of primary school level (8th grade) and which is used as a main entry exam to join high schools.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Making education accessible to the less advantaged groups through the implementation of free primary education (FPE) has been a major focus in many countries for several decades. In the context of developing countries, education is a mainstay for regional as well as international development (World Bank, 2004). Given this awareness, international development and human rights organizations such as the World Bank, the United Nations and its specialized agencies like UNICEF and UNESCO have stressed the importance of educating girls who are perceived as among the educationally marginalized group in most developing countries.

Education for women in general and girls in particular has been advanced as one way of realizing benefits that can translate to better health for families and increase productivity (Summers, 1992; Coclough, 1994; UNESCO, 1991; UNICEF, 2005; Leach et al., 2002). Compared to men, women's education is also directly linked to improved political participation, delay in marriage, reduction of maternal deaths and disabilities, the desire for fewer children, the prevention of unsafe sex and its consequences such as STIs and HIV/AIDS and the practice of effective methods of contraception (Grogan, 2006; UN, 2000; UNICEF, 2003; Nafula, 2000; Leach et al., 2003). Unfortunately, this might be far from being realized given the pronounced gender disparities in the provision of and participation in primary school education for girls in many developing nations despite the implementation of free primary schooling (UNICEF, 2004; UNESCO, 2000).

In Kenya, literature shows low enrollment and poor participation of girls in primary school education even though Free Primary Education policy was put in place in 2003

(UNESCO, 2005; Muthwii, 2004; Nyamute, 2006). Some of the factors accounting for this scenario include; retrogressive cultures that emphasize the preference for boys to girls, female genital mutilation performed on school aged girls, early marriages for girls of school-going age, and overburdening domestic gender roles for girls (UNESCO, 2005; Sifuna, 2006; Muthwii, 2004; Obura, 1992; Nyamute, 2006). Within schools, girls face gender insensitive environments like lack of separate toilets for girls, absence of sanitary products, sexual harassment from boys and teacher's attitude and negative stereotypes regarding girls' educational performance (UNESCO, 2005; UN, 2000; UNICEF, 2001, FAWE, 2001). This study explored the impact of the 2003 Free Primary Education Policy on girls' education. Given that a considerable number of girls flocked to Kenya's public primary schools following the implementation of FPE policy in 2003, this study sought to understand the schooling experiences of girls since that period. For comparative purposes, the study examined the policy's influence on girls' enrollment, retention and participation in rural versus urban schools.

To concretize this study, answers to the following questions were sought:

1. What have been the schooling experiences for girls since 2003?

2. How has FPE policy influenced girls' participation and achievement in schools?

3. What factors inhibit girls' participation and achievement in schools?

4. What factors enhance girl's participation and achievement in schools?

Below, I explore literature on:

(1) The evolution of educational policy efforts before and after Kenya's independence with particular emphasis on girls' education

(2) Influence of the international community in the implementation of educational policy efforts in Kenya

(3) The recent regional and national efforts on girls' schooling

(4) An overview of empirical research on the implementation of FPE policy and girls' schooling experiences since 2003

Education during the colonial period

Kenya was colonized by the British from 1885 to 1964. During this period, the colonial government maintained a separate educational philosophy and policy of separate education curricula for Whites, Indians and Africans (Somerset, 2004; 2009; Oketch & Rollerstone, 2007). Africans were barred from accessing any meaningful education as they were mainly required to provide labor on the European owned farms. "Practically, the rural subsistence economy may not have required much education" (Oketch et al., 2007, p. 133). A few Africans who managed to gain entry to primary education could not go beyond four years since access was controlled through the Grade IV examination (ibid). Moreover, since Africans were well much aware of the importance of education as they witnessed those who had acquired secondary education getting jobs in the colonial administration, their demand for it went very high. They even included education as one of the reasons for the fight for freedom at the height of the struggle for independence from Britain.

When the colonial government relaxed its philosophy and opened schools for African children as a measure of meeting the African demand for secondary school, "enrollment of girls in both primary and secondary schools lagged far below that of boys from the very beginning" (Achola & Pillai, 2000, p. 135). Achola et al further note that, out of some 300 pupils enrolled in government sponsored secondary schools in 1945, only two were girls. This indicates that educational gender disparities in Kenya have been a common trend over the years including the period prior to independence. While Achola et al (2000) attribute these developments to the

political ideology of colonialism [which] was both static and patriarchal; Ochwada (1997) asserts that the progressive marginalization of women and girls in Kenya must be understood in the context of history, tradition and emerging world trends. I argue that, post-colonial Kenya still remains highly patriarchal, a potent factor that contributes to girls' educational marginalization.

It can be said that the government's current ideology of gender equality in primary schooling has not spread down to the motivations and actions of individuals and families in Kenya. This is especially true of communities and families that don't value girls' schooling due to socio-cultural considerations. Steiner-Khamsi (2004) cautions, "the pace of [institutional] change, [triggered in part by international organizations] is likely to be affected both by cultural values and by opportunity structures that might vary within nations" (p.37). He notes that national and regional cultures can block, or significantly modify, some of the force of global institutional change.

In the case of Kenya, cultural forces like the gender division of labor and the perceived "appropriate" social roles for women and girls might have greatly hampered girls' enrollment, retention and participation in schools despite free primary education policies. Indeed, UNESCO's (2009) Education for All (EFA) report shows, in Kenya, girls still form the bulk of students dropping out of schools despite the implementation of the Free Primary Education policy. Increasing cases of girls dropping out of school point to the fact that, only making education affordable through the removal of tuition fee may not be the most effective measure of increasing girls' participation in education. Given such a scenario, the government might need to consider taking practical steps such as reduction of poverty, provision of gender friendly learning environment and most importantly, sensitizing communities on the value of girls' education as a

way of changing mindsets and cultural beliefs that demean women or, their education (; UNESCO, 2005).

Educational developments in Kenya (1963-1986)

At independence in 1963, mass education became a main focus of the new government as it sought to expand access for the majority who had been excluded by the colonial government (Achola et al., 2002; Eshiwani, 1993). In terms of gender, Achola et al assert that there were only 55 girls for every 100 boys enrolled in primary schools. However, this has tremendously improved throughout the years despite evidence of fluctuations in enrollment patterns (See table 1). Some literature (Somerset, 2006; 2007; 2009; Bogonko, 1992) attribute the increase in Gender Parity Index during the first 10 years of independence to changing parental attitudes toward the education of daughters (given the government's constant reminder to disengage from cultures that devalue girls' education) rather than the government policy targeting girls.

Table 1. Primary schools Gross Enrollment Rates (%) by Gender, 2003

Year	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Total	91.4	91.2	87.8	85.5	86.8	86.4	87.7	88.8	86.9	87.6	92.7	92.6	103.7
Male	93.4	92.0	88.9	89.1	87.4	87.3	88.7	89.4	88.2	88.1	93.3	93.8	105.8
Female	89.5	90.0	86.7	87.8	85.5	85.5	86.6	88.2	85.6	87.1	92.0	91.3	103.7

Source: Ministry of Education Science and Technology, Statistics Section. (2004). These Gross enrollment rates (%) in primary schools by gender clearly show discrepancies between boys and girls. Thus, from 1991 to 2003, girl-child enrollment at the primary school level in Kenya lagged behind that of the boy-child

According to Buchmann and Hannum (1999), the first president of Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta, promised free primary education to all Kenyan citizens in his inaugural speech.

Muthwii (2004) asserts that the aim of free primary education was to provide more school opportunities, especially for the poor majority. The argument was that the payment of school fees tended to prevent a large proportion of the children from attending school.

While the introduction of free primary education was good news for parents who showed eagerness to have their kids receive formal education, this promise was only partially fulfilled in 1974 when the government abolished fee for the first four years of primary education. Acknowledging the contribution of change of parental attitude towards the education of their daughters to this upward enrollment trend, Achola et al (2007) assert, "the abolition of formal school fees in 1974 accelerated what had already been a steady social trend such that between 1973 and 1975, the Gender Parity Index went up from 77 to nearly 85" (p. 113). However, this credible achievement of high enrollment was accompanied with acute shortage of learning and teaching facilities within public primary schools. Since parents interpreted the "free primary education" policy to mean a "relief" of all their children's schooling responsibilities, they were reluctant to make any financial contribution to schools. Nyamute (2006) postulates that the government's failure to closely scrutinize the 1974 free primary education policy's "financial implications as well as various methods for its implementation [led] the Ministry of Education to rethink its priorities in order to cope with the staggering rise of student enrollment" (p. 17).

One measure the ministry of education introduced in public primary schools was the "building fund" which required parents to make a direct financial contribution to schools. According to Muthwii, (2004), the "building fund" was ostensibly aimed at putting up new facilities given the influx of new students. Unfortunately, the "building fund" turned out to be higher than the school fees charged prior to the policy (Muthwii, 2004; Achoka et al., 2007). As a result, many parents were frustrated and had little alternative but to withdraw their children

from schools. However, the "building fund" was eventually scrapped in 1979 under a new political leadership triggering an enormous enrollment increase in public primary schools (Somerset, 2007; 2009). Free primary education was as well underlined as a standing educational objective of the new government

In all, the highest rates of growth in primary school enrollment in Kenya were witnessed between 1970 and 1974 and, in 1979, following school fees removal and scrapping of the "building fund" (Buchmann, 2001; Bogonko, 1992; Oketch, et al., 2007; Somerset, 2009). According to Eshiwani (1993), Kenya had reached nearly 80% of primary school enrollment within the first decade of its independence and by 1983, nearly 93% of school-age pupils were enrolled in primary schools in Kenya, up from less than 60% in 1963 (Oketch, et al., 2007). Despite the tremendous enrollment increase within this period, girls' enrollment was significantly lower than that of boys (Oketch, et al., 2007, Eshiwani, 1993, Bogonko, 1992, Somerset, 2007; 2009; Buchmann & Hannum, 1999). It is upon such past free primary education policy effects in Kenya that I seek to understand the experiences of girls since 2003 when FPE policy was implemented.

Educational setbacks in the mid 1980s into 1990s

The gains made in primary school enrollment in the 1970s were eroded in late 1980s following the implementation of economic Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) which were advanced by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). These financial institutions imposed economic policy reforms on developing countries with huge financial debt by requiring them to cut their spending in social sectors such as health and education (Nyamute, 2007; UNESCO, 2005; Somerset, 2009). These reforms implemented throughout the 1990s,

were essentially a series of conditions which countries needed to meet in order to continue to receive loans from donor agencies.

Following the implementation of SAPs, the Kenyan government formally dismissed many of the education reforms (aimed at reducing school fees) which were previously adopted. The educational reforms which stemmed from the SAPs required that parents and communities contribute to their children's schooling- a policy known as *cost-sharing* (UNESCO, 2005; Sifuna, 2006; Nyamute, 2006, Achoka, et al., 2007). Within the new system, parents (were asked to pay tuition, purchase books and other educational resources. The net effect of these policies was a steep decline in enrollment rates throughout the 1980s and1990s. Most children whose parents could not afford the financial requirements dropped out of school (Somerset, 2007; 2009; Oketch et al., 2007).

It is plausible to argue that girls more than boys dropped out because, when low-income parents in many developing countries are faced with economic challenges, they give preference to boys in the belief that sons unlike daughters, will support them when they grow old (UNESCO, 2005; Muthwii, 2004; Oketch, et al., 2007). Many parents from communities with such perceptions believe that educating a girl is a waste of resources as they will get married and support their in-laws. Based on the foregoing, one can argue that while the economic agenda of the international community might have been genuine, it indirectly derailed the very agenda they were advancing, namely; educational access.

Although Kenya was a signatory in the 1990, World Conference on Education for All (EFA) its enrollment and participation rates at the primary school level declined as transition and completion rates stagnated (Nyamute, 2006; Somerset 2009; Sifuna, 2007; Oketch, et al.). At the same time, gender and regional disparities widened. Achoka, Odebero, Maiyo & Mauluko

(2007), assert that throughout this period, girls' completion rates trailed those of boys. They also say, "this issue [was] more pronounced in the arid and semi-arid districts and pockets of poverty portions in the urban centers" (p. 280). Such regional and gender marginalization was part of the political carrot that the incumbent government used to win elections in 2002. In January 2003, with the support of the international community, the government of Kenya hurriedly re-introduced Free Primary Education policy.

The role of international community in Kenya's Free Primary Education policies

Kenya is a signatory to a number of international protocols and frameworks whose missions include the provision of universal primary schooling including girls' education of good quality. These include, (United Nations Charter on Human Rights (1948), The First World Conference on Women, Mexico (1975), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995) and the Dakar Framework for Action (2000). Within Africa, organizations such as the United Nations Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI), the Forum for African Women Educationists (FAWE), Forum for Africa Partners in Education (FAPED) and Global Campaign for Education (GCE) have garnered government support in campaigning for girls' participation in education.

While the international community efforts towards free primary education policies in developing countries have been acknowledged, it has at the same time, been perceived by some scholars as a "necessary evil" (Oketch, et al., 2007; Steiner-Khamsi, 2006; Messing- Mathie, 2008). For example, these scholars postulate that the "powerful nations" tend to pressure poor countries to adopt policies which end up not befitting local contexts. They further argue that "several countries in sub-Saharan Africa … (re)introduced the Free Primary Education (FPE) policy [to conform] to both Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals

(MDGs) international agendas" (Oketch, et al., 2007, p.131). While Kenya's FPE policy might be viewed in this light, Kenyan leaders since independence have repeatedly emphasized the need for every Kenyan to access education as a path to individual progress. Kenyans themselves hold the view that schooling is the key to individuals' social mobility, economic advancement and improved quality of life (Sifuna, 2006; Eshiwani, 1993). This skepticism imply that international driven policies that fail to factor in local context into account are bound to impede instead of advancing development agendas including education, an empowering tool for disadvantaged groups such as girls. For example, failure to provide enough physical and human resources prior to implementing FPE policy in Kenya dealt a huge blow to its success. Overcrowding experienced in schools due to massive enrollment made initial impressive gains difficult to sustain as several students dropped out (Somerset, 2009; UNESCO, 2005; Sifuna, 2006).

Free Primary Education policy within the East African Region

Studies show that the three East African countries, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania have not been left behind in efforts aimed at making education accessible to children from low income families (Grogan, 2006; Oketch, et al., 2007; UNESCO, 2005; Nyamute, 2006). The countries' efforts have gained momentum given reports that out of the world's 104 million children aged 6-11 who do not attend school every year, 40% of them live in sub-Saharan Africa and 60 million are girls (UNESCO/UNICEF, 2003). Although the average level of education in sub-Saharan region has generally increased in recent years, completion rates for girls still remain low starting at the primary school level (Obura, 1991; FAWE, 1999, UNICEF, 2003). A UNESCO (2003) reports reveal that after primary education, girls' participation declines sharply (17%) at the secondary level. The sub-Saharan region is home to these three nations.

Similarities and differences in the implementation of FPE policies among East African countries

Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania share some common characteristics and historical backgrounds. These include the fact that all of them were colonized and few of their citizens had access to education during the colonial era and thus, faced similar literacy challenges at the time of their independence in the 1960s (Oketch et al., 2007; Sifuna, 2006; Grogan, 2006). The three countries also took a similar path in addressing this literacy challenge. Uganda declared a campaign for universal primary schooling in1962, while Kenya and Tanzania did the same in 1963 and 1967 respectively (Grogan, 2006; Oketch et al., 2007). All the three countries registered little success in their earlier efforts towards free primary education.

In addition, gender disparity in education is a common phenomenon cutting across these three nations. As Oketch et al (2007) indicate, "at independence in each of the three countries, girls' share in total enrollment was less than 40% in relation to female proportion of the total population in each of the three countries, which stood at more that 50%" (p.135). In the recent past, the three countries have also re-instituted free primary education policy though under different circumstances and with diverse experiences. Uganda was the first to declare and implement FPE in 1997. Tanzania and Kenya followed in 1999 and 2003 respectively (Muthwii, 2004; Grogan, 2006; UNESCO, 2005, Nyamute, 2006; Oketch et al., 2007). Enrollment increased by nearly 58% in Uganda in the first year of implementation and by 22% and 40% in Kenya and Tanzania respectively. Like Uganda, the elimination of school fees at all levels of primary schooling in Kenya was prompted by a national-level election campaign.

Overall, the Kenya government has shown her commitment to free primary education through various Development Strategic papers the most recent of which is Kenya's Educational Sector Strategic Plan and Implementation Matrices: 2003-2009. This plan is aimed at eliminating

poverty as a hindrance to educational development, promoting human rights and attaining sustainable development by providing basic education of good quality for all (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Republic of Kenya, 2005; Achoka, et al., 2007). As noble as these plans might seem, its reality of making an impact on its target is constrained by multiple challenges facing the country ranging from poverty to entrenched retrogressive cultural practice that demean women and girls, to lack of good will from Kenya's political leaders.

FPE policy and girls' schooling since 2003

Free Primary Education was enacted in Kenya in 2003 by abolishing public primary school tuition, fees and other levies. Previous school levies included, registration fees, textbooks, activity fee, caution money, payments for teachers/support staff hired by school committees, development funds, school trips, teachers tours, and internal exam money (Kenya, 2008). The 2003 FPE policy stipulated that the government and other international development partners were to meet the cost of basic education through provision of textbooks and learning materials, wages for critical non-teaching staff and other co-curricular activities (King, 2005; Somerset, 2007; 2009; Nyamute, 2006; Girl- Child Network, 2004; UNESCO, 2005; Muthwii, 2004). The government annual expenditure per pupil totaled Kshs 1020 ($13.60). The FPE policy did not demand that parents and communities build new schools, but rather refurbish and use existing facilities such as community and religious buildings (Elimu, 2004; Muthwii, 2004). It is plausible to say that while this policy was timely and commendable, the government made the role of the parents very ambiguous as it discouraged schools from charging other expenses. The government was very authoritative in words but not in deeds. It is credible to argue that, such pronouncements from the government more often than not make Kenyan parents have the impression that it is the government's exclusive responsibility to provide all the necessary

resources to support the primary education sub-sector. In essence, while the current education is not totally free, literature shows that majority of parents have interpreted it as such and become reluctant to make any contribution due to this notion of "free" education (Nyamute, 2006; UNESCO, 2005). More so, having been initiated as a political campaign pledge meant that FPE policy was not well introduced to Kenyans (Kenya, 2008).

Although the process of implementing FPE policy is still challenging to the government they have not lost their focus of achieving and sustaining universal primary education and raising transition rates from primary to secondary schools (Somerset, 2009; UNESCO, 2005; Muthwii, 2004, Achoka et al., 2007). FPE policy gave priority to the educationally marginalized groups such as children from low-income families and girls (Nyamute, 2006; UNESCO, 2005, Oketch, et al., 2007). The government's assumption was that these efforts will narrow educational gender and social gaps existing in Kenya's educational system. Although this seems far from being achieved, some scholars have argued that FPE policy has cushioned children from poor socio-economic backgrounds from failing to participate in primary education or dropping out of school due to lack of fees and other school levies (Sifuna, 2006)

Though FPE policy was critical, the government failed to take the necessary steps to ensure its successful implementation. For example, the government did not conduct needs assessment to find out if the existing physical and human resources were adequate. As a matter of fact, when FPE was put in place, employment of teachers had been frozen in the country for the previous three years. This fact implies that effects of FPE policy implementation exacerbated the already bad situation.

Challenges facing FPE policy

While free primary education policy has increased participation, it has at the same time created considerable problems given its hurried implementation. The challenges range from scarcity of teachers to insufficient learning facilities. These challenges present a big problem not only to school administrators but to the students and, especially girls. Some challenges the 2003 FPE policy created can be summarized as follows:

Influx of students and shortage of classrooms and sanitary facilities

Studies show that the Free Primary Education reform in Kenya led to the massive increase in primary school enrollment, causing a worsening ratio of textbooks and teachers to pupils as available funding had not kept pace with the increase in demand (Grogan, 2006; Sifuna, 2006; UNESCO, 2005; Muthwii, 2007). It is estimated that enrollment rose from around 6,314,726 to 7,614,326 by the end of 2003 (UNESCO, 2005). According to this report, this roughly represented a 22 .3 percent increase nationally. The enrollment of girls following FPE policy implementation rose by 17.3 percent from 2.9 million in 2002 to 3.5 million in 2003 while the enrollment of boys rose by 17.8 percent from 3.1 million in 2002 to 3.7 million in 2003. Overall, an unexpected 1.5 million children who were previously out-of-school, turned up to attend classes in response to the government's call, bringing a new crisis to the education sector. However, it was also estimated that another 3 million children were not enrolled in school (Elimu, 2004).

The massive turnout of students who responded to FPE call indicates that tuition fee and other levies had presented a severe obstacle to enrollment in primary schools prior to the implementation of FPE policy, thus, a commendable job to the Kenyan government. It also suggests an impressive narrowing of gender disparity in enrollment. However, the downside of this is that, such immense enrollment can place a lot of pressure on existing resources. In the

case of Kenya, such pressures caused many girls who had responded to the FPE policy to drop out due to overcrowded classrooms, lack of water and poor sanitary facilities (Aikman & Unterhater, 2005; Girl- Child Network, 2004; UNESCO, 2005; Muthwii, 2004; Nyamute, 2006; Schmidt, 2006). Aikman et al, (2004) assert that the likely result of such a situation is that, most girls in school will not come to school regularly and would not come at all when they are in their monthly periods.

Unexpected massive enrollments are also likely to compromise quality learning in schools. When such experiences occur in public primary schools, literature shows that there is a likelihood of students migrating to private schools (Somerset, 2009; Tooley, Dixon & Stanfield, 2008; Adelabu & Rose, 2004; Rose, 2002). For example, in their study on the impact of free primary education policies in developing countries, Tooley et al (2008) found that a fee paying *private* (or non-state) education sector, albeit one charging low fees, has 'mushroomed' to meet the needs of the poor in part because of the perceived (by parents) inadequacies of public primary education. This has been cited as a common phenomenon in countries that have implemented free primary education policy (Tooley et al., 2008). However, one wonders how it is possible that these same poor parents can now afford to pay fees in private schools. Some studies conclude that the 'mushrooming' private schools serving the poor have grown in response to state failure to provide primary schooling which is both accessible and of appropriate quality (Adelabu et al., 2004). Thus, they argue, 'the private schools offer a 'low quality education', 'below a desirable level' [and that private schools are simply] 'a low cost, low quality substitute for public primary education. To date, the government of Kenya still struggles with the challenge of inadequate learning and physical resources as public primary schools

especially those in rural areas continue reporting low enrollment and school absenteeism for girls.

Age difference

Studies show that the government's "any age" admission policy (following FPE implementation) created a new problem for lower primary pupils and girls who joined schools (Somerset, 2004; 2007; 2009; Muthwii, 2004; Sifuna, 2006; Nyamute, 2006; UNESCO, 2005). The "any age" admission policy saw a large number of overage pupils (both girls and boys) flocking into schools and enrolling in classes of their choice. The UNESCO (2005) study asserts, "the overage pupils found it difficult to adjust in classes with younger pupils" (p.37). Many of these overage pupils had been working as house- helps (especially girls) or engaged in other forms of child labor. The study reports that head-teachers complained of some of the older pupils who had been working or married and who found it hard to follow school rules and regulations. Such pupils, they noted, ended up having a negative influence on other pupils.

In some cases, the over-age pupils especially those in lower primary were said to be harassing the young ones and even attempted to rape young girls on their way home from school (Girl-Child Network, 2004). In other cases, the older boys were wooing female pupils and even impregnating them leading to girls dropping out of school due to early pregnancies. It is no wonder that currently, early pregnancies are among the leading factors contributing to girls school drop out in many public primary schools in Kenya. Common in rural and hard to-reach areas, this trend is detrimental to the educational advancement of girls (UNICEF, 2005; East African Standard, September 3, 2009)

Regional imbalances

It is a well known fact that some regions in Kenya have been adversely marginalized since the colonial era (Oketch et al., 2007; Eshiwani, 1993). This marginalization cuts across such development sectors as education and infrastructure. Some of the reasons advanced for this scenario include the failure of the colonial government to provide education to regions that were of low potential such as the arid and semiarid lands (ASALs) and failure of Christian missionaries to provide or build schools in regions that had already experienced Arabic and/or Islamic influence such as the coastal parts of Kenya (Sifuna, 2006; Eshiwani, 2003; Oketch et al., 2007). These regions therefore had lower access to all levels of formal Western education at the time of independence in the 1960s". These regions have remained marginalized to this day.

According to Sifuna (2006), girls' low participation in education varies widely at provincial and district levels and it mirrors regional variations in economic and political developments in the country. The Kenya Education Sector Support Program (KESSP) report (2005) asserts that many children in ASAL are out of school due to lack of schools within walking distance. The report also attributes the nomadic nature of the ASAL community that necessitates constant mobility (in search of wetlands and water for themselves and their livestock) as the reason why such areas lag behind in enrollment especially in primary education. Achoka et al (2007) concedes that "it is difficult to have children from these regions attend schools as required since the parents move along with them" (p.277). Other factors advanced for poor school enrollment in this region include poor maintenance of school facilities, lack of sanitation facilities, frequent droughts, pervasive poverty and the increasing number of orphans and vulnerable children due to HIV/AIDS (UNESCO, 2005, Sifuna, 2006, Nyamute, 2006, Achoka, et al., 2007)

Literature shows that the provision of the 2003 FPE policy appears to have had little or no effect on girls within the ASAL region (Sifuna, 2006; UNESCO, 2005; Girl-Child Network, 2004; Achoka et al., 2007). It is estimated that by the end of 2003 (barely a year after FPE policy was implemented), around 550 girls in Arid and Semi Arid Lands (ASAL) district in Kenya dropped out of school), representing around 24 percent. The Girl –Child Network (2004) attributes this drop to a hostile learning environment and retrogressive socio-cultural practices such as female genital mutilation and early marriages (Sifuna, 2006; UNESCO, 2005; Muthwii, 2004; Achoka, et al., 2007). Other factors cited by these literatures include the participation of girls in domestic chores as well as teenage pregnancies. These studies suggest that without specific intervention strategies to address the adverse cultural practices, the existing educational gender gaps are likely to remain in place. I argue that education policies that emphasize access alone but lack insight on practical measures of eradicating educational hurdles for girls to ensure steady participation are bound to fail.

These challenges notwithstanding, a lot of interventions have been put in place mainly by both local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to increase the participation of girls in education in the ASALs regions. One of the practical responses from the NGOs has been the in-school feeding programs (UNESCO, 2005; Nyamute, 2007; Girl-Child Network, 2004; Sifuna, 2006). In this case, places like Arid and Semi Arid Lands (ASAL) that have a particular problem of girls accessing education due to the distance between villages and schools, the World Food Program (WFP) has helped to implement special interventions including an in-school feeding scheme. Given this, the girls who can not afford to go back home for lunch are able to feed and remain in school for the rest of the school day. In addition, the government is providing support to low-cost boarding schools in ASALs mobilizing resources from

development partners in support of the FPE initiative and improving school health and nutrition in collaboration with the ministry of Health (Millennium Development Goals report, 2006). This study considers that it is such practical steps that are necessary for the successful participation of girls in schools.

Financial crisis and accompanying bureaucracy

Insufficient money to run schools is another challenge facing schools in the wake of FPE policy. Given the reality of shortage of classrooms and other learning requirements, studies show that school principals and management committees were compelled to look for extra monies from parents, communities or well-wishers to meet both direct and indirect cost of learning[2] (Elimu Yetu Coalition, 2004; UNESCO, 2005; Nyamute, 2006). Asking for money from parents generated confrontation between school administrators and parents who had interpreted FPE policy as implying a complete "relief" from any financial contributions to school (Nyamute, 2006; UNESCO, 2005). With time however, the government has allowed primary school administrators and school management committees[3] to charge parents some levy to enable them expand school facilities (Nyamute, 2006; Muthwii, 2004; UNESCO, 2005). The process of charging a levy is absolutely bureaucratic and mind-numbing. Muthwii (2004) explains that, "if [schools wish] to charge additional levies, school heads and committees had to obtain approval

[2] According to Elimu Yetu Coalition (2004), direct learning costs in Kenya include, fees, extra tuition, textbooks, examination fees, district internal assessment tests, library and science facilities costs. The indirect costs on the other hand include, building/development fund levies, activity/sport levies, uniforms, transport and food/pocket money.

[3] The school management committee is the key management body of primary schools in Kenya. It is composed of the head-teacher (who acts as a chair), the chairperson of Parent-Teacher Association (PTS), the deputy head-teacher (who acts as the secretary to the committee), two parents elected by other parents but are not members of the PTA, and one teacher from every class.

from the Ministry of education" (p.10). This request however, has to be first sent to the District Education Board by the Area Education Officer, after a consensus among parents through the Provincial Director of Education. It is plausible to argue that such mucky processes of getting financial support more often than not interfere with the smooth running of schools as school principals spend their valuable time chasing funds at the expense of other critical priorities.

Studies also suggest that when schools in developing countries are financially constrained they are likely to find it difficult to retain girls under such circumstances (UNESCO, 2005; Baker et al., 2005). As Baker et al assert, "when schools suffer from severe financial constraints and widespread poverty, their ability to sustain gender-neutral education appears to be significantly compromised" (p. 30). Given the foregoing, I argue that constant financial support (from the government or its partners) to public primary schools remains a very critical factor in the successful implementation of the 2003 FPE policy. Unfortunately however, the vulnerability of FPE policy continues to be witnessed at the beginning of every school year in Kenya when school principals threaten to close down schools due to government delay in sending money meant to run schools. This was repeated again as recently as September 2009 (The East African Standard Newspaper, 2009).

However, Muthwii (2004) indicates that the donor community has been supporting FPE policy through financial aid. For instance, in the 2003/2004 financial year when Kenya's education budget exploded (put at Kshs 79.4 billion, with over 7.6 billion specifically allocated to the 2003 FPE program, the donor community was quick to assist the government with the World Bank giving a grant of 3.7 billion, while the British government gave 1.6 billion. Other donors like the OPEC, Swedish government and UNICEF contributed 1.2 billion, 430 million and 250 million respectively. The problem with this development however, is that, donor funding

is more often than not a temporary gesture meant to act largely as seed money in order to get programs up and running. So, the question that persists is, how long are the donors going to continue providing funds for FPE?

The current cost of free primary education is way beyond the typical budget allocation. In addition, it is worthy noting that Kenya's economy has not been performing well in recent years and cannot support the realization of FPE goals without the infusion of outside funds. It is plausible to assert that for the country to sustain universal access, there will be need for a substantial economic growth to generate public funds for education.

Gaps and conclusion

The preceding literature review has generally focused on attempts that have taken place at the international, regional and national levels to implement free primary education as a measure of enhancing education of the marginalized groups such as girls and children from low-income backgrounds. I have utilized the general status of education in Kenya and girls' schooling since 2003 when FPE policy was implemented to show some of the economic and socio-cultural practices that impede their educational advancement. Within schools, challenges such as shortage of classrooms, sanitary facilities, teachers and learning materials as well as sexual harassments from older boys act as impediments to girls' participation in schooling. Outside schools, poverty and cultural practices such as preference for boys to girls, overwhelming domestic gender roles for girls, female genital mutilation and early marriages contribute towards inhibiting girls from accessing education.

Generally, the conditions that girls have always experienced as they try to access schooling seem to remain in place. So, this study seeks to understand how FPE policy has changed the environment upon which girls are learning. In other words, has FPE policy

improved the participation and achievement of girls? Are they now participating more or less? Do we have few or new challenges for girls? Has the role of family and school support changed since FPE was implemented? How do they support girls in the milieu of this policy? In sum, there is limited research focusing on how FPE policy has impacted the schooling experiences of girls since it was implemented in 2003. My focus in this study will be:

1. The schooling experiences for girls since 2003
2. How FPE policy has influenced girls' participation and achievement in schools
3. The factors that inhibit girls' participation and achievement in schools
4. The factors that enhance girls' participation and achievement in schools

The methodology used in this study to explore the implications of the 2003 Free Primary Education policy on girls' educational opportunities in Kenya is presented in chapter III.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Rationale for qualitative research design

This study sought to explore the implications of the 2003 Free Primary Education (FPE) policy for girls' educational opportunities in Kenya. Four questions guiding this study were: (a) What have been the schooling experiences for girls since 2003? (b) How has free primary education policy influenced girls' participation and achievement in schools? (c) What factors inhibit girls' participation and achievement in schools? (d) What factors enhance girls' participation and achievement in schools? To answer these questions I employed a qualitative case study methodology.

Qualitative study methods allowed me to understand the meanings girls, school principals, and teachers ascribe to the 2003 free primary education policy. Bryman, Bresne, Beardsworth and Keil (1988) have argued that qualitative methods in research "not only elicit the necessary data for analysis but also exposes meanings" (Bryman et al., 1988, p. 16). Meaning (which essentially is the way people make sense of their lives) is always described from the perspectives of the participants, those who are being studied (Glesne, 1999; Patton, 2002; Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtle, 2006). In this study, I describe from the perspectives of those participating in my research the implications of the 2003 free primary education policy for girls' educational opportunities in Kenya. Meaning is shaped by dispositions which sometimes dictate the way people view their world and understand themselves as well as the circumstances around them (Patton, 2002; Glesne, 1999). Thus, understanding the experiences and meanings girls and teachers ascribe to the 2003 Free Primary Education policy is a personal issue. Thus, qualitative research was the most appropriate method as it allowed me to make observations, analyze

institutional documents, and talk to my respondents using interviews and focus group discussions.

In his book, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design,* Creswell (1998) outlined justifications for using a qualitative research approach. One rationale he posited was that qualitative methods are most appropriate when the research questions start with a *how* or *what*, so that initial forays into the topic describe what is going on. Creswell's suggestion was a good fit for my research because, among the things I was interested in learning, is *what* the schooling experiences of girls in public primary schools have been since 2003 when Free Primary Education policy was implemented. I was also interested in understanding *how* this policy has influenced girls' participation and achievement in schools. Answers to these questions enable me to fill in the current knowledge gap in this area.

Qualitative research methods also allowed me to study individuals in their natural setting (Creswell, 1998; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Patton, 2002; Glesne, 1999). In this study, I proceeded inductively and discovered themes from the data which I gathered by observing, interacting, and asking questions in the natural settings where my respondents function. I attempted to make sense of, or interpret the meanings (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) my respondents provided through interviews regarding the implications they see of the 2003 Free Primary Education policy for girls' schooling opportunities in Kenya.

Proponents of qualitative research have also underlined the need for researchers to take the knowing subject as their starting point. Bogdan and Taylor (1975), for example, talked about the need for the researcher to 'see things from a participant's point of view' (14). For their part, Bryman et al (1988) said, "the most fundamental characteristic of qualitative research is its express commitment to viewing events, action, norms, values, etc., from the perspective of the

people who are being studied" (p. 61). In this study, I considered that girls, school principals, and teachers in public primary schools in Kenya are "the possessors of information [inclined to] answer questions in the context of dispositions" this study sought to unravel (Glesne, 1999, p.68). In sum, the principles of qualitative research helped me understand and articulate findings of my research question.

Case Study Approach

Case study as a well established method of inquiry in qualitative research enables a researcher to understand a "complex social phenomenon" and tends to be particularly open to 'research questions of "how" and "why" (Yin, 1994). It also allows the "stories of those "living the case" to be teased out" (Stake,1992 as cited in Denzin, 2000) Thus, I utilized a case study approach to help me address my main research question regarding the implications of the 2003 free primary education policy for girls' educational opportunities in Kenya.

One of the characteristics of a case study is that it establishes the limits of the unit of analysis. Merriam (1998) asserted that "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 added that case studies are particularistic, descriptive, heuristic, and rely heavily on inductive reasoning. Applying Merriam's view of qualitative case studies to my study, first it is particularistic as it is aimed at circumstances of interest of one particular phenomenon, namely the implications of the 2003 free primary education policy on girls' schooling in Kenya. Inductive reasoning for this study was achieved following new concepts and understandings that emerged from my data analysis. In this study, schools were my unit of analysis.

I also preferred a case study approach because its tenets allows tolerance in matters of ambiguity and willingness to respond to emerging data, thereby letting me refine the design of my study even after it had begun (Patton, 2002). I therefore opted for this method so as to provide a vehicle for my interviewees, to speak about their educational experiences and give opinions regarding the influence of the 2003 Free Primary Education policy on girls' schooling. During the interviews, student respondents articulated the socio-cultural and economic challenges that continue derailing their schooling. My respondents' voices are included in this dissertation as a way of articulating their experiences and views.

Sampling

This study utilized purposeful sampling to select respondents. According to Merriam and Simpson (1984), "sampling [is a process of identifying] subjects or events for a study in a systematic way" (p.54). Patton (2002) asserted that "the logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information rich cases" (P.230). He added that information rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry.

In this study, I sampled two public primary schools located in Kisii district, Western Kenya. One of the schools is situated in a rural area while the other is located in an urban area. The aim of sampling schools from these two locations was to allow me understand differences and similarities between the perspectives of girls, school principals, and teachers regarding the implications of the 2003 FPE policy on girls' schooling. I wanted to understand if girls who attend schools and teachers who teach in schools located in these two different areas see differently or similarly the meaning of the Free Primary Education policy to girls' schooling. I also hoped to comprehend the kind of educational resources available in these locations and how

they might be influencing girls' learning within these two different settings. I was also interested in looking at the challenges of the FPE policy and seeing if they are the same or different within these two sites. Overall, the rationale for sampling schools from these two different settings was to help my analysis for comparative purposes.

My study sample was made up of primary and secondary respondents. My primary sample consisted of four girls from each of the sampled schools while the secondary sample comprised of the school principal and one teacher from each of the two schools. Overall, I interviewed eight girls (in focus groups), two school principals and two teachers. The study targeted girls who were almost completing their primary school level (7^{th} and 8^{th} graders). My assumption was that this group had had a sufficient amount of schooling experience since the 2003 Free Primary Education policy was introduced seven years ago, and therefore hopefully had rich data that span this number of years. I also believed that these students, whose ages ranged from 13-14 years or older, were able to articulate their views compared to other students in lower grades.

This study was also focused on the perspectives of the school principals and teachers on girls' participation in education since 2003. Given that school principals are the direct implementers of the 2003 Free Primary Education policy; my assumption was that they had a wealth of knowledge necessary to engage in significant discussions concerning this study. For the teachers, priority was given to those who have been teaching since 2003 and were in charge of 7^{th} and 8^{th} grades. In Kenya, teachers in charge of various grades are referred to as "class teachers". I believed that such teachers were information-rich in understanding the school and family contexts within which girls conduct their schooling. This is because, in Kenya, "class teachers" have more and close interactions with students who attend classes assigned to them

compared to regular teachers, who essentially go to those classes to conduct instruction. “Class teachers” are required by school administrators to be conversant with the family backgrounds of students who are members of grades they are in charge of. Though I considered it vital to include parents as my respondents, the limited resources within my reach did not make it feasible to include them. Also, I was not likely to complete this study within my timeline if I included parents in my sample. I hope that somebody will take my study further and interview parents to get their perspectives regarding the implication of this policy on girls’ schooling opportunities in Kenya.

Data collection procedures

Glesne (1999) identified three data gathering techniques which dominate in qualitative inquiry. These include participant observation, interviewing, and document analysis. To gain thick description (Patton, 2002) for this study, I utilized interviews, observations, document analysis and focus group discussions to collect data.

Interviews

Interviews were employed in this study to gather in-depth information (Mason, 1990; Glesne, 1999; Patton, 2002; Stainback & Stainback, 1988). Mason (1990) defined “interview as a form of discourse…shaped and organized by asking and answering questions” (p.1). He also asserted that a respondent in an unstructured interview is more likely to provoke a discovery by saying something unexpected than is the respondent who can only check one of six pre-coded replies to a questionnaire item.

In this study, I utilized unstructured open-ended interviews with the aim of getting my respondents to talk about their experiences, feelings, opinions, and knowledge (Patton, 2002)

related to the 2003 Free Primary Education policy and girls' schooling. Patton (2002) asserted that open-ended interviewing allows the informant to describe what is meaningful without being restricted to standardized categories. Furthermore, the purpose of the research interview is to gather data and not to change people (Patton, 2002; Glesne, 2006). Thus my interview questions allowed my respondents to describe their own situation from their perspective and in their own words. Further, I considered that the use of open-ended interviews will enable me to come upon unexpected data regarding the meaning of the 2003 FPE policy to girls' schooling.

I also believe that open-ended interviews helped establish a link of openness and engagement between me and my respondents (Mills, 2002). Developing a sense of rapport with my interviewees was vital as they were "much more likely to be candid and forthright and to behave as they normally do if they trust the researcher" (Stainback & Stainback, 1988, p.33). I sought consent from the respective principals to carry out my interviews and enlisted their help in identifying and selecting potential teachers and student informants. Class teachers helped choose girls who came from typical backgrounds, whom they thought could articulate their views and who were willing to talk to people who are new to them. Once this was achieved, I enlisted the help of the school principals, to contact my teacher and student respondents separately. I provided them with a briefing about the study and scheduled interviews at their convenience. This window also allowed me to address questions and concerns they had regarding my study and provide them with consent forms and assent letters. I sought permission from the school principals to issue students with assent letters stating the purpose of my study and ethical considerations meant to guarantee their confidentiality and privacy. I explained to my respondents that the participation in the study was strictly voluntary and that they could reject and/or withdraw from the study any time without penalty. Each interview took approximately 60

minutes and was audio-recorded, with the permission of my respondents, for later analysis. All interviews took place in schools.

Participant observation and document analysis

Proponents of qualitative research assert that participant observation is one of the most essential means of gathering data as it provides researchers with the opportunity to see things that may routinely escape awareness among the people in the setting (Glesne, 1999; Patton, 2002). Becker and Geer (1982) argued that "observation provides firsthand reports of events and actions much fuller coverage of an organization's activities, giving direct knowledge of matters that, from the interviewing, we could know about only by hearsay" (p. 240). They added that participant observers gather data by participating in the daily life of the group or organization that they study. They watch the people they are studying to see what situations they ordinarily meet and how they behave in them. The researcher talks with the other participants and discovers their interpretations of the events he/she has observed.

In this study, I assumed the role of a participant observer. I observed, took field notes, and listened to what the students, school principals, and teachers were saying in regard to the 2003 Free Primary Education policy and its influence on girls' schooling. Through observation, I was able to capture and provide the schools' portraits and record events I watched during my visit. I observed unplanned activities and informal interactions between teachers and students and made observations of the physical and learning resources available in their schools. Among the incidents I witnessed in an urban school (Chuo Primary School) was where boys who had harassed girls and sneaked out of school were administered corporal punishment by the school principal. The principal (Mr. Idi) informed me that student discipline was key in his school and that without it, his school would not excel academically as it was doing.

Since this study was interested in investigating girls' school participation and performance, I reviewed the schools' enrollment registers of girls and boys from 2002 (before FPE policy was implemented) to 2009, and examined school records of girls and boys' Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) national examination performances. These records were readily available in the two schools I visited. I utilized the teacher interviews and student focus group discussions to develop the detailed account of what I saw, heard and observed. The field notes I took became handy during the data analysis stage.

Focus group discussions

Patton (2002) postulated, "the object of focus group interviews is to get high-quality data in a social context where people can consider their own views in the context of the views of others" (p. 386). In this study, l utilized focus group interviews with girls from each of the two sampled schools to gain insights on their experiences and opinions regarding the implication of the 2003 FPE policy on their schooling. Studies show that participants in focus group interviews tend to provide checks and balances on each other which weed out false or extreme views (Krueger &Casey, 2000). In addition, focus groups are enjoyable to participants and tend to provide safety for people in vulnerable situations (Patton, 2002).

For this study, I conducted two focus groups, one in each of the two schools I sampled. Both focus groups comprised of four female students who were either in 7^{th} or 8^{th} grade. I held the focus groups in the schools' staffroom at the end of the school day. In my view, the two focus group discussions helped girls open up and find confidence in talking about their educational experiences and how they thought the 2003 Free Primary Education policy was influencing their education.

Given my awareness on the likelihood of some students in a group declining to speak if they realize that their viewpoint is a minority perspective and the possibility of one or two people in the group dominating the discussion (Patton, 2002), I looked out for participants' body language, especially of those whom I realized were not courageous enough to speak. I encouraged such girls to speak their views. In one case where I realized some participants were dominating the discussion, I became keen in managing the interview so that those participants who were not highly verbal were able to share their views (Patton, 2002).

With respondents' prior consent, I audiotaped all focus group discussions to increase the accuracy of my data collection. Patton (2002) cautioned, "no matter what style of interviewing you use and no matter how carefully you word questions, it all comes to naught if you fail to capture the actual words of the person being interviewed" (p.380). Thus, my respondents words are "recorded in a permanent form that can be returned to again and again for relistening" (Kvale, 1996, p.160).

Data Analysis Procedure

Marshall and Rossman (1989) defined qualitative data analysis as "a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data" (p.112). Data analysis means working with the data to organize it into manageable pieces, enabling the researcher to look for patterns for synthesizing and reporting (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Patton, 2002; Glesne, 1999). In this study, first, I transcribed the interview responses, coded the data, and categorized it based on the respondents' responses to the interview questions. Merriam (1998 asserted that category construction is considered the heart of qualitative data analysis. I then looked for patterns, putting together what the respondents said in one place, and incorporating what they all said. Qualitative research scholars (Glesne, 1999; Denzin, 1989; Patton, 2002) assert that data analysis

involves researchers organizing what they saw, heard and read in the field with a view to categorizing, synthesizing, searching for patterns, descriptive units, themes, and interpreting the data collected.

My data analysis started as soon as I entered the research sites through the observation I made of the schools' physical facilities and overall structure. Lincoln and Guba (1985) affirm, 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). As my data collection progressed, I used my experience with the first respondent to re-phrase my questions for the next interviews. Reworking my interview questions was geared toward guaranteeing that my main question of the implications of the 2003 Free Primary Education policy on girls' schooling was being addressed.

In my study analysis chapter, I have used informants' direct quotes as evidence for emerging themes and capture my respondents in their own terms to communicate my findings. Patton (2002) asserted that direct quotations are a basic source of raw data in qualitative research as they reveal respondents' depth of emotion, the way they have organized their world, their thoughts about what is happening, their experiences, and their basic perceptions.

Role of the researcher

Glesne (2006) suggested that one role of a researcher is being a learner who can tell the story from the participant's view rather than an 'expert' who passes judgment on participants. She adds, "the learner's perspective will lead you to reflect on all aspects of research procedures and findings" (p. 46). Thus, I interviewed my respondents with the openness of gaining new knowledge about the implications of the 2003 Free Primary Education policy for girls' schooling opportunities.

When I met my informants, I acknowledged and made my research biases open as a way of helping them understand who I am and the purpose of my study. I shared my background with my respondents. One of the issues I disclosed to the students is that I grew up and was schooled in Kenya under conditions almost similar to theirs. I shared the same information with the school principals and teacher interviewees and confided that I served as a teacher in Kenya for several years. My disclosure to my informants is in line with Dunbar, Jr. et al's (in J. Gabrium & J. Holstein 2001) assertion that "it is important to the success of the interview for the researcher to disclose something about him-or herself to the interviewees. This is foundation work; that is, it tells the interviewee where the researcher is coming from" (p. 291). Thus, revealing something about myself to my respondents helped create rapport and enabled them to open up and share some of the critical information I was investigating. I hoped that my story would make me "one of them" (Patton, 2002) and boost their comfort level to disclose freely their experiences and dispositions. I listened and recorded each of my respondents' accounts carefully without jumping into any conclusions and missing out any vital information needed for this study.

As a researcher, I am aware that asking people to unearth their lived experiences (including those on education) can sometimes be an emotional endeavor. Thus, I was patient and nonjudgmental as I engaged my respondents in interviews. However, as a Kenyan myself interviewing fellow Kenyans, I took advantage of the "insider" position and asked some culturally sensitive questions but in a culturally appropriate way (Glesne, 2002). This way, my respondents' dignity was upheld and their confidence in sharing the information I was looking for was enhanced.

Ethical Considerations

Glesne (1999) asserted that "ethical considerations should accompany plans, thoughts and discussions about each aspect of qualitative research" (p.113). According to Cassell and Jacobs (1987) a research code of ethics is generally "concerned with aspirations as well as avoidances; it represents our desire and attempt to respect the rights of others, fulfill obligations, avoid harm and augment benefits to those we interact with" (p.2). One principle of ethical considerations for researching with human beings is allowing the informants to give informed consent to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty (Patton, 2002; Glesne, 1999; Creswell, 1998). In line with this rule, I asked for written consent from the principals and teachers and asked students to voluntarily assent to participate in the study. I communicated in clear terms the aims of my study and explained to all my respondents that their participation in the study was strictly voluntary and that they could reject or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. This study was also approved by Michigan State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). I committed to protect and respect participants' privacy to the extent provided by law.

In order to protect my respondents' anonymity, I used pseudonyms or aliases. I also made a commitment to keep all data in a locked cabinet and a password protected computer. Moreover, I plan to destroy any voice record after the conclusion of this study.

Methods for data verification

Verification of data for this study was achieved through the triangulation of data sources. The data I collected through interviews, observations, field notes, and institutional document analysis was examined in order to develop a coherent justification of themes (Creswell, 2003). I also employed member-checking to verify my findings (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 1998). In this regard, in December 2010, I sent transcripts and my interpretation of data back to the participants

to determine whether they felt they are accurate (Creswell, 2003, p.196). I will also send a copy of the final report to the principals of the schools I visited to verify if it reflects their views and opinions regarding the implications of the 2003 FPE policy on girls' education. For this study, I have endeavored to ensure that the study's findings emerged from the data I collected and thus, are dependable and consistent (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In Chapter IV, I present the data, which includes the setting of the study, schools and respondents' profiles.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Setting

I carried out my study in Kisii District, Western Kenya, located about 240 miles from Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya. Kenya has 71 districts situated in its eight administrative provinces. Kisii district is one of the 12 districts that make up Nyanza province. The four districts bordering Kisii include Transmara to the South, Rachuonyo to the North, Nyamira to the East, and Homabay to the West.

Kisii is home to the Abagusii ethnic community, who are part of the 42 tribes of Kenya. The population of Kisii district is estimated at 2 million. In rural Kisii, people are predominantly agriculturalists. The steady rainfall the district receives throughout the year provides favorable conditions for the growth of crops such as coffee, tea, pyrethrum, maize, beans and bananas. People in rural Kisii also keep dairy animals. For the most part, these different resources serve as their main economic activities and a source of their livelihood. Many families sell these products to raise money to meet their daily expenses, including their children's education. The surplus agricultural and daily produce is used for family subsistence. However, due to the increasing population and diminishing land resources, several families live in poverty and lack most of life's essentials.

In the context of education, rural Kisii district is known for gender disparities in education. More often than not, when families cannot afford the cost associated with sending their children to school, boys are usually given precedence over girls (FAWE, 2001; Sifuna, 2006). As such, boys have more opportunities to participate in education compared to girls. This practice stems from the Kisii cultural belief that boys will take care of their parents in their old

age while girls will get married and benefit their in-laws (Mbilinyi, 1999; UNESCO, 2001). Suffice it to say, such gender biased cultural views were among the reasons why the government paid special interest to the girls and emphasized the need to enroll them in schools when the 2003 Free Primary Education policy was enacted. In addition, most schools located in rural Kisii lack adequate learning and physical facilities like classrooms, furniture, trained teachers, toilets, textbooks, water and so forth. It is plausible to argue that the deficiency of these facilities has been exacerbated by the implementation of the 2003 Free Primary Education (FPE) policy.

One dominant cultural practice in Kisii is circumcision for both males and females, performed during the puberty stage. Though it is evidently waning among several Kisii rural households due to the government's threats, female circumcision still takes place albeit, secretly. Circumcision for both boys and girls is perceived as a cultural rite of passage from childhood to adulthood. Female circumcision instills in girls a sense of pride and makes them believe that they have become adults suitable for marriage (UNICEF, 2005; FAWE, 1999). Girls whose families are not enthusiastic about their education easily resort to marriage once they have undergone this rite. However, it is worth noting that female circumcision in Kisii district is not an automatic inhibitor to girls' schooling as several girls who undergo this rite advance to get their education.

In addition, men and women in the Kisii district submit to ascribed gender roles, norms, values, and expectations. Women and girls mostly perform reproductive and domestic chores, such as taking care of young babies and the sick relatives, cleaning the household, cooking for family members, looking for fuel wood from the forest, and fetching water from rivers and streams. These activities unquestioningly consume the women's and girls' valuable time. Primary school girls who spend most of their time carrying out these duties lose a lot of study time (Colclough et al., 2000; FAWE, 2004). Men are assumed to be family bread winners, with

boys expected to help their fathers in providing "security" for family members and "taking care" of family property. Suffice it to say, most boys in rural Kisii grow up believing that they are the superior gender.

In the urban Kisii district, a few industrial and agro-based industries and research centers exist, including coffee research institutes, soapstone quarrying industry, and wheat processing plants. Also, Kisii town is the epicenter of commercial and trade activities in the district. Given the ever increasing demand for education among Kenyans, nearly all Kenyan public universities (such as the University of Nairobi, Kenyatta University, and Moi University) have built new campuses and branches in the Kisii urban center. Over time, public primary schools have also sprung up within these branch universities and research institutions, to provide educational services for the children of the university faculty members, research workers, and other people working and living close to industrial and commercial centers located within this vicinity. It is worth noting that although these primary schools were initially meant to serve children located in urban areas, they increasingly enroll students from rural households that border the Kisii urban center. This has especially been intensified by the 2003 Free Primary Education policy, which mandates all schools to admit any child who shows up to join (Nyamute, 2006; UNESCO, 2005). This notwithstanding, the majority of students who attend these public primary schools come from these "urbanite" families, which are perceived by many Kenyans as enlightened and more aware of the benefits of education for their children.

Introduction

In this study, my purpose was to understand the implications of the 2003 Free Primary Education policy for girls' educational opportunities in Kenya. The goal of the 2003 FPE policy was to increase educational access and participation for girls and children from poor households

in Kenya. The study was guided by an overarching grand tour question and four mini-tour questions. The grand tour question was: What are the implications of the 2003 Free Primary Education policy for girls' educational opportunities in Kenya? In other words, how has the 2003 FPE policy changed the environment within which girls are learning? Are they now participating more or less? Do we have few or new challenges for girls? How do schools and families support girls in the wake of the 2003 FPE policy? The following four questions guided this research:

1. What have been the schooling experiences of girls since 2003?
2. How has FPE policy influenced girls' participation and achievement in public primary schools?
3. What factors inhibit girls' participation and achievement in schools?
4. What factors enhance girls' participation and achievement in schools?

In this chapter, I present portraits of two schools where I conducted interviews and observations to understand their socio-economic setting. I provide readers with the experiences, opinions, and beliefs of school principals and teachers regarding their schools and the 2003 FPE policy. First I present data from Josh Primary School located in a rural area, followed by Chuo Primary School based in an urban area. I then present data collected from focus groups I held with the students. I have used pseudonyms to protect the identity of my respondents.

Josh Primary School

Josh Primary School is located in a rural area and is about 15 miles from Kisii town. The school is approximately a half a mile from the main road leading to Kisii town. Erected at the entrance of the school is an unmanned old wooden gate, which appeared to be falling apart, probably due to the long period of time it has been around and due to lack of maintenance. Josh

Primary School occupies approximately one acre of land that is fenced all around by a messy barbed wire.

The school had one classroom block accommodating single streams of grades one through eight, and a separate "administration" block consisting of the principal's office, the deputy principal's office, a staff room and a small "study room" for students. On the left side of the school compound (about 500 meters away from the classroom block) were two structures that stood side by side and whose main doors faced the direction of the classroom block. Upon enquiry, I was told that they were pit latrines, one for boys and the other for girls. Each of these structures had three toilets whose doors were visible from the administration block, even though they had an outer wall about five inches tall. Evidently, the school lacked enough classrooms and the available toilets seemed not sufficient as I saw students spending a huge amount of time waiting to use the bathroom during the break.

During the time of this study, Josh Primary had a student population of 598, with 299 boys and 290 girls. It had 11 teachers, including the principal and the deputy principal. Almost all students who attended Josh Primary School hailed from the local community and commuted to school daily. During this study, I interviewed the principal of the school (Mr. Joe) and one teacher (Miss Beth), who was in charge of 8th grade.

Joe: "Almost all classes here are overcrowded"

Although Mr. Joe had four years of experience as a deputy principal and six years as a principal of various public primary schools within Kisii district, this was his second year as a principal of Josh Primary School. Joe considered student attendance and discipline as the core priorities for his school. When I asked him to share his views regarding the 2003 Free Primary Education policy, he explained,

> A huge student population as a result of this policy has really strained us and even as you can see, classrooms are not enough. Almost all classes here are overcrowded. We have an average of about 70 pupils in each class. It is overwhelming. (Joe, Personal interview July, 2010)

Mr. Joe faulted the government for "poor implementation of the 2003 FPE policy, which brought a huge number of pupils to schools without first thinking of constructing classrooms and employing more teachers". Joe lamented, "although FPE was a good thing, poor planning spoiled it". However, he was appreciative of the government's effort in improving its provision of textbooks for students. "At least these days, each student has their own textbook, a pen to last for a term, even though it is never enough, and some exercise books". Joe explained that parents were required to supplement these with other textbooks and help in the construction of classrooms.

When I probed to understand if the parents bought supplementary materials, Joe shared that it had been a huge disappointment much of the time, as most parents were unwilling " because they say education is free". He also attributed lack of parental support to family poverty:

> There are a lot of problems in this place. Like one, we can say that not all families can afford to give the supplemental books required by teachers. Also, with a large number of students, we don't have enough classrooms and parents are not able to support us because of poverty. Most of the time, we have children who go home for lunch and they don't have any food to eat. Such children most of the time don't turn up and even when they are in class, they don't concentrate. You really don't expect much from such cases. Many of them actually end up dropping out. (Mr. Joe, personal interview, July 2010)

Joe confided that the numerous parent meetings the school organized seemed not to work as parents remained "overly" passive in making any contribution. He shared that his remaining option was to solicit for funds from the Constituency Development Fund (CDF). CDF is government funds allocated to all members of parliament for various development projects in

their respective constituencies. In fact, during my visit to the school, I saw a ton of unloaded sand and stone bricks right in front of the administration block. Joe informed me that "these are part of classroom construction materials we have just bought using the CDF funds". It is worthy to note that, although the CDF fund has been helping schools expand their facilities, it is often said to be characterized by a lot of politics (Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis, 2006). In this regard, school principals who are politically "well connected" with a Member of Parliament are more likely to access this money than those who are not. What this means is that, some schools are likely to be structurally more developed than others.

Girls' school attendance

When I asked Mr. Joe to *describe how the introduction of the 2003 free primary education has influenced girls attending his school*, he sounded content that gender equity in terms of attendance has been attained through multiple efforts:

> All girls are now in school, it is gender balanced. In any case the curriculum has opened their minds and the children know their rights, they know they have to come to school; we don't have girls at home who are doing maid jobs because child labor is also an illegal activity in Kenya today. Their parents have also been sensitized through many forums like barazas[4] and churches (Joe, personal interview July 2010).

The "maid jobs" Mr. Joe was talking about is a form of child labor in Kenya where young girls (mostly of primary school going age) from rural areas are normally hired by the rich and middle class families who live in urban centers to take care of their young children and carry out some domestic duties like cleaning and cooking. From Mr. Joe's sentiments, it was clear that the government was stepping up efforts to ensure girls participate in schools. However, his views that "all" girls were in school contradicts current information (UNESCO, 2009; FAWE 2006)

[4] Public meetings held by local government administrators to enlighten the public about government policies

and other informants I interviewed later who expressed concern that a huge number of girls are still out of school, even though the 2003 FPE policy has been put in place. It is credible to assert that for girls still engaged in this kind of child labor, the 2003 Free Primary Education policy might not be having any meaning in their lives.

When I asked Mr. Joe to talk about the evident gender enrollment disparities in his school, he simply attributed it to a higher rate of male than female births in Kenya. "You see things have changed, people are getting more boys than girls (laughter)". It was interesting to note that Joe was either in denial or was unaware of the government report that show a higher female population in Kenya. The 2006 Kenya population census estimate report put the female population at 52%. As biased as my views might sound, I felt as though Joe was echoing patriarchal sentiments which do not condone any kind of resentment towards gender inequities, including those related to education. I believe that blurring or denying the reality of the current gender inequities in some public primary schools, not only risks derailing the educational advancement of girls, but as well provides wrong feedback on the impact the 2003 Free Primary Education policy is having on them.

Joe also mentioned teenage pregnancies and lack of sanitary facilities as other challenges girls in his school faced. "Normally when these girls reach adolescence stage, they get cheated by boys and become pregnant. Like now there is a case of one girl in standard eight [8th grade] I am following whom I suspect could be pregnant". He added that other girls skip school when they are in their monthly period because they lack sanitary pads. When I probed to understand if the school helped to provide pads, Joe explained that the school was not doing it because of financial constraints but that they were considering utilizing its "General Purpose Account" (GPA) to buy sanitary pads for girls. On this note, I wish to argue that girls who skip school

because of lack of sanitary pads or teenage pregnancies waste a lot of quality study time and become vulnerable to dropping out of school.

"Nomadic Learning"

Although Joe admitted that the 2003 FPE policy had created schooling opportunities for a number of children, especially from low income families, he was disappointed with the criteria the government required them to follow, of admitting any "interested" child who showed up at their school any time. According to him, this had led to "nomadic learning" and induced cases of truancy among boys and girls in his school. In his words,

> A child can come to school A, do something [engage in indiscipline behavior] and decide to go to school B because of that policy in the Free Primary Education policy that says, if the child comes to your school, yours is just to admit. So they come to this school like this term and next term or this week, next week, and so on. So they come, they go and come back again. You are not supposed to deny them a chance, you are supposed to allow them join. (Joe, personal interview July 2010).

Joe was quick to add that the "no age policy" espoused in the 2003 FPE policy had exacerbated this problem. As he put it, "Initially we were promoting kids on merit but these days, it is the child to say where or which class (grade) they want to go to. Older kids who join are always problematic". He shared cases of frustration among the newly recruited younger teachers when it came to handling discipline cases associated with older boys who harass girls and other younger pupils. When I probed him to understand how he handled such cases, Joe seemed to have resigned to "just trying to accommodate them because there is nothing you can do". However, in Chuo Primary School (an urban school which I visited later), I found the school principal using corporal punishment to enforce discipline. This notwithstanding, Joe's frustration is in line with literature showing how older boys who joined schools when the 2003 FPE was introduced harassed younger pupils and girls on their way home from school (FAWE, 2004;

Nyamute, 2006). The literature further shows that some young girls fall prey to these older boys who lure them into sexual activity leading to teenage pregnancies. I wish to argue here that such unfriendly learning conditions not only trigger poor school attendance for girls but also lead to their eventually dropping out.

Beth: "In lower primary, enrollment for boys and girls is almost half, half"

I first met Beth when the principal called her to his office to find out if she was willing to talk to me. After a brief introduction, Beth agreed to speak with me the following day over the lunch break. At the time of this study, Beth was the teacher in charge of 8th grade and taught social studies in upper primary (5th–8th grades). She was also a member of the school guidance and counseling committee. Beth hailed from the local community and had been teaching at Josh Primary School for eight years.

When I asked her to share with me her thoughts on how f*ree primary education policy has changed the schooling experiences of girls in her school,* she seemed to agree with Mr. Joe that the introduction of the 2003 FPE policy had generally increased student access to schools, and enhanced girls chances to participate in education. As she put it,

> You see, when students used to pay tuition fee, a parent would prefer to pay for their sons but nowadays, girls have higher chances of attending schools because no tuition fee is required. In fact, in most of our lower classes, you will find that enrollment for boys and girls is almost half- half. (Beth, personal interview, July 2010)

Her mention of "lower classes" gave me an indication that the gains Josh Primary School was making in the enrollment of girls might just be happening to girls in the lower primary classes. When I probed to know what happened to girls in upper primary classes, Beth shared that the enrollment of girls "usually" declines as they transition to upper classes. I found this harmonious

with literature which indicated that in many developing countries, the number of girls and boys joining first grade in many primary schools is usually at par, but as they move to upper classes, the number of girls declines (UNESCO, 2006; FAWE, 2005; Muthwii, 2004). Beth added that "even hiring of girls as housemaids still goes on and a parent or a guardian may lie to the chief [a local government agent] or us that their daughter transferred to such and such a school when it is actually not the case". In my view, for as long as the number of girls who transition to upper primary classes continues to dwindle, policies like the 2003 FPE will not have attained their goal of ensuring that girls are enrolled and retained in schools throughout their primary school cycle. To this end, educational stakeholders need to double their efforts to ensure that girls fully participate in schools.

"Girls can miss school but not boys"

Beth also considered that unlike boys, the ascribed gender roles still disadvantage girls' school attendance and academic performance:

> When they are at home, most of these girls have to go to the river to look for water while their brothers are perhaps reading or playing. They get very exhausted and don't even find time to eat or read. Sometimes when there is a problem at home, girls can miss school but not boys. (Beth, personal interview, July 2010)

Beth emphasized that the challenge of school absenteeism mostly affects girls in upper primary classes since they are perceived as "women", able to take up adult responsibilities. She explained that even if teachers provide the "same educational opportunities to girls and boys here at school, once they get home they handle all domestic work while their brothers may be concentrating on their homework". Beth considered this a major contributing factor towards girls' poor performance in her school.

Teenage Pregnancies, School Re-entry, and Associated Stigma

Beth shared that teenage pregnancies are a common occurrence in many public primary schools she had been to, including Josh Primary School. As the teacher in charge ("class teacher") of 8th grade, she confided that she would normally get to know these cases before other teachers, including the school principal, because:

> You see, I take the student roll call every morning and I get to know if so and so is not in school. If a child misses school for two or three days, I do my own investigation by sending word to the parent or guardian. If I am told the child is sick, I will give them time to show up but if they take long, let's say like a week, I notify the office. (Beth, personal interview, July 2010)

Beth confided that she normally did her investigation by sending one or two students from her class to check on a missing student. This included going to the absent student's home as well as finding out from villagers. She pointed out normal sickness, taking care of a sickly parent or a relative, and death of relatives as some of the common reasons that make students skip school. However, she confided that teenage pregnancies pose a threat to girls' schooling. She narrated one case she dealt with:

> Two years ago, there was a girl who became pregnant when she was in class seven [seventh grade]. I happened to be the class teacher. She actually, aborted later with the support of her mother. By the time she was in class eight [8th grade], she was pregnant again. I decided to call the mom and tell her to let her give birth instead of risking her life again. I promised the mother that I will keep it a secret. So, this time the girl delivered, came back to school and passed her KCPE [Kenya Certificate of Primary Education] exam. She is now in form one [9th grade].

Like her principal, Mr. Joe, Beth shared that "girls who became pregnant and wish to go back to school to complete their education are allowed to do so", because, "you know, in Kenya nowadays, with the free primary education policy, there is a rule that when they

get pregnant, you give them some days off like a maternity leave and then they come back to complete their education". Beth confided that, although most girls who become pregnant do not necessarily go back to their old schools, due to the stigma associated with teen pregnancy, "there are now several cases of such girls willing to go back to schools because of this sensitization". It is worth noting that abortion in Kenya is not only illegal but is generally perceived by most members of the society as a highly immoral act. Safe abortion itself is out of reach for many girls and women due to financial constraints (UNESCO, 2006; FAWE, 2004). Women and girls, who might be suspected to have secretly carried it out, are condemned and considered social misfits. More often than not, they are detested and shunned by members of the society. Worse still, while girls drop out of school when they get pregnant, boys who are responsible for such pregnancies are just warned to desist from such behavior and left to carry on with their education. It was interesting that none of the teachers and students I interviewed mentioned teachers as being responsible for some of the school girls' pregnancies. The Kenyan media is replete of cases of teachers who have been caught in the act leading to prosecution or termination of their teaching services (Daily Nation, October, 2010; BBC News, October, 2010; IPS, March, 2011)

Empowering girls through Guidance and Counseling

I learned that Josh Primary School had come up with strategies to enlighten girls on sexuality issues, as a way of minimizing teenage pregnancies. Beth narrated:

> We guide and counsel the girls and encourage them not to engage in sexual activities at this stage. We ask them to instead focus on education alone so they can get better jobs later in life. We also discourage them from thinking of getting married while they are still in school and so on. Most of the time, we share with them our own experiences and tell them to

> emulate our experiences. However, not all of them follow what we say. (Beth, personal interview July 2010)

Her response prompted me to ask if they provided girls with knowledge on how to avoid pregnancies, for example, through condom use for those who may be sexually active. Beth quickly responded that they "don't discuss those things, we only tell them to avoid sleeping with boys". Beth's response speaks to the wall of silence on matters of sexuality existing within the Kisii community. When I enquired how often they communicated to girls on such issues, Beth responded that it happened "once a term or twice or when we see questionable behaviors among these girls". I believe that empowerment programs like guidance and counseling, if efficiently implemented, can help minimize teenage pregnancies and thus, enhance the retention of girls in public primary schools. This, in turn, will offer more meaning to policies like the 2003 Free Primary Education.

Beth also confided that orphans in her school were the most affected when it came to school attendance. "In my class, I have around 4 orphans and these are the ones that are mostly absent from school". Beth shared that she had investigated and found that "these orphans have lost both parents from HIV/AIDS and have to take care of the needs of their younger siblings' before coming to school". She noted that, when they take up such parental roles, they are more likely to miss school because "you find that by the time they finish fending for their siblings, it is beyond school time and so, they just don't come to school on such days". Alice added that, the two girls who are orphans tend to miss school "quite frequently compared to the orphaned boys because you know, boys sometimes don't care". This case illustrates that even when male and female students face similar family related challenges, females are likely to be impacted more because of their social and cultural expectations. In this case, orphaned girls with younger

siblings were more likely to skip school than their male counterparts who happened to be in a similar situation.

When I probed to understand if the school supported orphans in any way, Beth confided that the school did not have any resources to help them. However, she noted that occasionally, members of a local non-governmental organization (NGO) provided them with uniforms and that sometimes, the government offered them (and other orphans) "maize and beans" at one of its local administrative office (located approximately 10 miles from the school). A local church also offered them lunch and bought uniforms occasionally. She also shared instances where teachers in her school had offered "to pay examination fee for orphans who are bright". However, Beth noted that teachers who had helped pay Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) examination fee for orphans "stopped when they realized that their guardians were walking away from their responsibility." It is worth noting that although the government provides "free" primary education to all students in public primary schools, it does not pay for a mandatory KCPE examination fee. In Kenya, all students completing 8^{th} grade are required to sit for this mandatory national test in order to join high school.

Chuo Primary School

Chuo primary school is an urban school located about a half a mile from Kisii town. It is constructed on land belonging to a branch campus of one of the public universities of Kenya. Chuo primary school's compound is fenced all around by a stone wall of about 5 inches tall. A number of well trimmed mahogany trees are planted all around the wall-fenced compound. The school compound itself occupies approximately two acres of land. A big sign bearing the school's name with the school motto (*Education is the key)* was erected by the gate. The huge blue steel gate manned by a security officer leads to the compound. As I approached the school

gate, the security officer enquired about the reason for my visit. After explaining my intent, he allowed me inside.

When I entered, I recognized that Chuo Primary School is comprised of several old and new structures. A number of buildings stand in this compound ranging from classroom blocks, administration block, a kitchen and dining block, student library, toilets for girls and boys, and a huge "multi-purpose" room. Next to the kitchen/dining hall is a huge underground tank, which I was informed stores water for cooking and cleaning. I also learned from Mr. Idi (the school principal) that Chuo Primary School is supplied with water from the Kisii Municipal Council "at a lower fee". With a smile on his face, Mr Idi eagerly shared that "the water is even enough to serve both our teachers and student toilets". It is worth noting that ordinarily, access to water in Kisii district is not always the case.

As I looked at the compound, I noticed workers engaged in a construction of a new building at the far left corner of the school. Mr. Idi informed me that the school was in the process of expanding its classrooms, "since the student population keeps going up". Like his counterpart, Mr. Joe, of Josh Primary School, Mr. Idi pointed out that "CDF money has helped us put up a few structures although the construction materials have become very expensive". Mr. Idi seemed to understand the predicament of the CDF managers when he stated, "I understand that many schools are looking out to CDF to do the same thing we are trying to do here since the government is not chipping in. It is a big hassle". Mr. Idi's sentiments capture the dilemmas and challenges facing school principals, especially those leading public primary schools in Kenya since the introduction of the 2003 Free Primary Education (FPE) policy. The construction activities I witnessed at Chuo Primary School speak to the effort schools are putting in place to address the problem of scarcity of learning resources as shown in the literature (UNESCO, 2009;

Nyamute, 2006). However, compared to Josh Primary School, Chuo Primary School seemed fairly well endowed with learning and physical resources. I believe that such learning environments are more favorable to girls' schooling.

Mr. Idi: "We value discipline in this school"

When I arrived at Chuo Primary School, the school secretary told me to sit and wait by the bench outside Mr. Idi's office, as he had some students in his office. As I patiently waited, I could see six visibly outraged boys leaving his office one at a time. I later realized during the interview with Mr. Idi that the students were being administered corporal punishment, "because some had sneaked out of the school compound and others were caught messing around with others". Mr. Idi stressed that "we value discipline in this school because without it, the school won't be anywhere [in terms of academic performance]". Mr Idi seemed bent on enforcing discipline in his school, by using all means possible, including corporal punishment, which was banned in Kenya in 2002 following the 2001 Children's Act (UNICEF, 2003). Listening to Mr. Idi, I realized that his strong personality and belief in student discipline was unparalleled in his counterpart, Mr. Joe, of Josh Primary School, who seemed to have given up on cases of discipline involving students in his school. While I do not condone the use of corporal punishment as a means of enforcing discipline in schools, I wish to argue that secure learning environments act not only as safety nets for vulnerable students such as girls, but also provide students with a sense of calmness necessary for any meaningful learning to take place. On this note, it is crucial that public primary schools experiencing cases of indiscipline or bullying among its students should employ other non-painful disciplinary measures, such as staying after school, or withdrawing of privileges, to create a safe learning environment for vulnerable

students such as girls. Only in this way will girls attend school and enjoy their learning, thereby giving more meaning to policies like the 2003 Free Primary Education.

During the time of this study, Chuo Primary School had 26 teachers and consisted of 829 pupils, with 401 boys and 428 girls. Mr Idi explained that most of the students attending Chuo primary school came from families working at the university and other urban dwelling families in Kisii town. In a Kenyan context, such families are considered to have a higher social economic status (SES). Mr. Idi added that "others commute from interior parts [rural areas] to come here." Mr. Idi seemed eager to tell me that "when I came here in 2001, there were only 382 pupils in the whole school but this time, the enrollment has gone up from 382 to 829." When I sought to understand his views regarding the cause of this massive enrollment, he explained, "The quality of education we give here has encouraged more and more students to join us. Parents like our school." It was interesting to note that unlike Joe whom I had interviewed earlier, Mr. Idi did not automatically single out the 2003 FPE policy as a reason for a higher student enrollment in his school. He seemed to attribute the student surge in his school to his administrative efficacy.

Chuo Primary School: A Model Sponsored by the University

Idi confided that Chuo Primary School was "a model sponsored by the university" that sponsors [partially] his school. When I probed to find out the kind of model the university had envisioned, Idi explained:

> Unlike other public primary schools in Kenya, we provide lunch for our students, because we want to retain all children in school after lunch. All parents have agreed to contribute 910 Kenyan Shillings (about $18) every term [trimester] towards the lunch program. We also wanted to have our pupils interact with university students by eating from the same dining hall. You see, when these young ones eat with the university students, they get motivated and keep imagining that one day they will become like them through hard work. Besides,

> some of our students come from very poor [low-income] families and their parents might not have food for them. Normally, when such kids go home for lunch and find no food, they don't turn up for afternoon classes. We are trying to minimize such kind of absences through our lunch program. (Mr. Idi, personal interview, July 2010)

However, Mr. Idi disclosed that the practice of having Chuo Primary School pupils eat together with university students had stopped because "the university students complained that our kids were becoming a nuisance to them." Idi explained, "Right now we are on our own, we started our own lunch program. After an hour from now, you will see them [students] lining up to get lunch." When I probed if all parents made the contribution, Mr. Idi explained that orphaned and other children from low-income families are not forced to pay: "We normally provide them with free lunch."

It was personally encouraging that Chuo Primary School did not stop the lunch program even with this setback. The literature shows that schools that provide in-school feeding programs are bound to have more students participate in learning than those that don't (UNESCO, 2005; Girl-Child Network, 2004). The literature further points out that girls who live in places that have a particular problem of accessing schools due to the distance between villages and schools are especially likely to benefit from such programs, since they don't have to go back home for lunch and risk being sexually harassed on the way, or fail to turn up because of a likelihood of engaging in domestic gender roles. Girls who attend schools that provide lunch are also likely to remain in school for the rest of the school day. I consider the availability of lunch programs in public primary schools as one measure that is likely to enhance the success of the 2003 FPE policy, since more students including girls are likely to remain in school.

When the lunch break bell rang, contrary to my expectations, I saw students leave their classrooms and quickly cluster in groups of about ten on their neatly cut lawn. I saw one student

leading each group in a discussion. Upon enquiry on what was going on, I was told that all students were required to dedicate about 15-20 minutes revisiting what they had learnt "at least" in one class during the morning sessions. According to Mr. Idi, this served as a reminder to the students that education surpasses everything, including hunger. Mr Idi emphasized that this way, "they even learn to have self-control." I kept reflecting if this was a good thing for students, some of whom might be already suffering from hunger pangs. It occurred to me that Mr. Idi was more focused on student performance and was bound to do anything that would enhance good results for his school.

Mr. Idi: "Almost in all classes, there are more girls than boys"

When I asked Mr. Idi to describe girls' educational participation in his school, he explained:

> For our school here, I can say that almost in all classes, there are more girls than boys. Even when it comes to completion of each school year from class one [first grade] to eight [8th grade], more girls actually complete compared to boys. And even the score of points [in Kenya Certificate of Primary Education examination scores], you find that in KCPE [Kenya Certificate of Primary Education], girls are above the average score, that is, above 250 points [out of the possible maximum score of 500]. For boys, you can get at least one dropping below 250. So since the introduction of free primary education policy in 2003, no girl has actually gone below 250 points. (Mr. Idi, personal interview, July, 2010)

When I probed to understand his explanation of girls' better performance than boys, Mr. Idi confided that, unlike boys, girls in his school were disciplined and were always in school. He explained:

> We have never had any girl going outside the school compound during school hours without permission but boys sometimes sneak without permission. And even as you came in, I was dealing with boys who had actually sneaked out and others who are messing around with others. (Mr. Idi, personal interview, July, 2010)

Mr. Idi added that families within the school vicinity were also "enlightened [educated] and interested in their children's education including that of their daughters." Mr Idi's views are in line with the literature which shows that educated parents are more likely to send their children, including daughters, to school (Mbilinyi, 1999; World Bank, 2001). It is thus plausible to posit that since most students who attended Chuo Primary School hailed from families working at the university, an institution epitomizing education, girls had a better chance to participate in education.

Stacy: Domestic gender roles and urban girls' school absenteeism

Apart from Mr. Idi, I also interviewed Stacy, a female teacher in charge of 7th grade. Stacy was doing her 20th year in the teaching profession and 8th year at Chuo Primary School. She seemed excited as she shared with me the personal progress she was making in her career. Having joined the teaching profession 20 years ago as a P1 teacher [untrained teacher], she had just finished a degree course the previous year and "was planning to join a Masters program soon."

When I asked her to share with me her experiences with girls' school attendance, she explained that absenteeism from school was a huge impediment derailing girls from academic performance. Noting that this was not a major problem in her school, she cited instances where, "a few girls who come from homes where maybe they don't have house maids are sometimes told to stay at home and take care of their young siblings." Stacy's mention of "house maids" reminded me of the common practice among urban "middle class" families who hire young girls to do domestic chores and take care of their young children. Unfortunately, it turns out that a majority of the hired young girls mostly come from low income families in rural areas, and

belong to families that are either economically strained and are trying to raise money to sustain their families, or do not value girls' education.

Seemingly unconscious of this fact, Stacy added that "when such cases arise in my class, I would normally call their parents and talk to them about the problem of absenting their children. I tell them to try and get housemaids." Stacy added that the parents always responded well when such incidents arose, by promising to have their daughters attend school regularly, "even though there is always a chance of absenteeism happening again and again." This incident indicated to me that despite the advantaged position girls who reside near and attend urban public primary schools seemed to have, like their rural counterparts the ascribed domestic gender roles worked to their disadvantage as they were more likely to skip school compared to the boys. This further shows that social and cultural beliefs about the perceived appropriate roles for males and females in Kisii district cut across the rural and urban boundaries and work to the disadvantage of girls when it comes to education. I argue that unless awareness is created on the harm the ascribed gender roles inflict on girls' educational participation, girls both in urban and rural areas are likely to continue experiencing the drawback of skipping school from time to time.

In addition to the challenges facing students in her school, Stacy shared with me cases of orphaned and vulnerable children (OVCs) at Chuo primary school:

> The AIDS orphans, especially "total orphans" [those who have lost both parents], have "a lot of challenges. But we are aware that most of them are already being taken care of by their aunties and uncles". I wish more can be done to help them but you see, there isn't much we [the school] can do since there is no money set aside by the government to help them. Our school has worked hard to ensure that the orphans at least get free lunch. (Stacy, personal interview, July, 2010)

Sanitary Pads: Johnson and Johnson Company

Despite the challenges facing girls attending Chuo Primary School, Stacy narrated that "girls in our school feel comfortable because we buy them sanitary pads and sometimes they receive free ones from Johnson and Johnson Company." The mention of Johnson and Johnson Multi National Company reminded me of my primary school years. Though I was schooled in a rural public primary school several years back, I remember the company's occasional visits to my school. During such visits, many girls jostled with others with the hope of receiving these much needed essentials. Provision of sanitary pads made a whole world of difference, especially for girls coming from low income families whose parents could not afford to buy these essentials.

During this study, I learned that the Johnson and Johnson Company was mainly making visits to urban schools because of their easy accessibility, leaving girls in rural schools in a disadvantaged position. While teachers from rural schools (like Beth of Josh Primary School) perceived this as unfair and protested it, their urban school counterparts, like Stacy (out of lack of awareness), appreciated the good work this Company was doing, especially in "providing sanitary pads and helping communicate sexuality issues to our girls who have matured". Stacy also confided that Chuo Primary School community was aware of the need to provide pads to girls who could not afford to buy them:

> Because our school is aware of the importance of making girls comfortable, especially when they are in their periods, the school principal has assigned one female teacher the role of buying and keeping sanitary pads which she gives any girl who comes to her when in need. Girls know that and whenever they need help, they go to her. (Stacy, personal interview, July 2010)

This prompted me to ask her where the money to buy the sanitary pads came from. Stacy quickly responded that the school utilizes money from the General Purpose Account (GPA) and

from the parent's contributions to buy these essentials. On this note, I recognized that to a great extent, the economic status of a given public primary school hugely dictated what would be considered a priority in the school. In this regard, economically strained schools in rural schools were likely to utilize money from their GPA account to buy learning materials like chalk or writing materials, while urban schools like Chuo, whose learning and physical resources were already supplemented by parents and the municipal council, for example, had an option of utilizing their GPA money to buy essentials that would make learning more comfortable for vulnerable students such as girls.

Focus group respondents

In this section, I present data gathered from two focus groups consisting of girls attending public primary schools I visited during my study. As Patton (2002) postulated, "the object of focus group interviews is to get high-quality data in a social context where people can consider their own views in the context of the views of others" (p. 386). I considered that focus groups would be enjoyable to the girls and above all, encourage them to open up and share their common educational experiences.

The girls enrolled in the two schools whose principals and teachers I had interviewed were my secondary respondents. I enlisted the help of the head-teachers and class teachers to identify at least four girls who eventually comprised my focus group. I had a total of two focus groups (one from each school). As I had planned, the girls who formed my focus groups ranged between the ages of 13 - 17, had been in school since 2003, and were willing to speak to strangers. I met and interviewed all the informants in their school staff room at the end of the school day so as to avoid any interference with normal class hours.

I had explained to the principal and the teachers that the purpose of my group interview was to understand the girls' experiences in terms of the thematic concerns that I had covered with them. These included the girls' schooling experiences since the introduction of the 2003 FPE policy, the influence of the FPE policy on their educational participation and achievement, and factors that inhibit or enhance their schooling. For the purpose of this section, I utilized three questions to explore student informants' understanding of the implications of FPE policy on girls schooling. I sought to understand; 1) the meaning of FPE policy to the girls; 2) activities girls engaged in while at home and in school; and 3) the support they were getting from parents, teachers or the school. In what follows, I utilize the respondents' words and voices to reveal their perceptions and experiences regarding the 2003 Free Primary Education policy.

The meaning of the 2003 FPE policy to the girls

Students in my focus groups acknowledged that the 2003 Free Primary Education policy had greatly enhanced their participation in education. While some said that they had personally been able to participate in education due to FPE policy, others gave several examples of girls they knew who were previously out of school but had taken advantage of the policy to enroll in schools. One girl said, "FPE has enabled many girls to go to school, many of them are not in the streets these days." Another added, "It has enabled many people especially orphans and others from poor [low income] families to go to schools." Others agreed: "There are many girls who never used to go to school and had been sent to work as house maids in rich people's houses but when they heard of FPE, they joined and are now studying." It is worth noting that for the economically strained families in Kisii district, provision of food is an overriding issue compared to

education. Such are the families who had sent out their daughters to engage in income generating activities as a means of raising money for their family upkeep. When the 2003 FPE was enforced, the government issued a stern warning to all parents who had engaged their daughters in any school unrelated activities to enroll them in schools or face arrest (Nyamute, 2006; UNESCO, 2005). My focus group informants seemed to be aware of this development and confided that, "even though not all girls have joined schools, at least the government action has improved their chances of being in school." One girl from an urban school shared that she transferred from a private school to a public school when her father fell ill and could not raise her tuition fee for the private academy where she was doing her schooling,

> My family was not poor [low-income], so I had been taken to a private academy. But, after four years in that school, my father became so sick and was not able to make any income. Even school fees became difficult for him to get. So I was brought to this free education school [public school] where I don't pay school fees. We are not sent away for fees, we just come to school and learn. (Focus group interview, July, 2010)

To such a girl, the 2003 FPE policy had helped her keep the dream of pursuing education in a "good school". Her experience also speaks to ways in which issues of class determine the kind of a school a student is likely to join in Kenya. It is worth noting that parents who are economically stable prefer sending their children to private academies, where quality learning is assumed to take place. Also, before the implementation of FPE in 2003, there were known "good performing" public schools, mostly located in urban centers (Nyamute, 2006; Rose, 2004). However, before the introduction of the 2003 Free Primary Education policy, admission to these public schools was equally competitive, given their exemplary performance in national examinations. The literature shows that when FPE was introduced in 2003, several parents moved their children from the

expensive private academies to these "good" performing public schools as they were assured of admission (Tooley et al, 2008).This is because the government had mandated all schools to admit any students who showed up. However, many of the students who migrated from the private academies to such "good" public schools did not stay for long after confronting overcrowded classrooms (due to massive enrollment) and other poor learning conditions (Adelabu &Rose, 2004).

When I asked my informants to share how FPE policy had personally benefited them, most of them indicated that FPE had enabled them to join schools and access reading and writing materials. "FPE has provided us with books, pens, textbooks, storybooks and geometrical sets." I learned from my informants that geometrical sets are distributed to students when they reach 5th grade and that students are expected to take good care of them until they complete their primary education. However, complaints from the teachers I interviewed showed that this was normally not the case, as students tore or lost them, and in some cases low-income parents sold them to raise money for family upkeep. One girl from an urban focus group said,

> Free Primary Education has encouraged us as girls to come to school because you know some of our parents are not educated. Also, you know that there is not so much money at home and if you happen to be in an academy, it will force you to buy more than 20 textbooks but here in public schools, FPE is giving us textbooks. So it is really up to the girls to work hard and be somebody in the future. (Focus group interview, July 2010)

Another girl added, "FPE has helped girls not get into trouble of getting married early because they are now in school." Other girls noted that the 2003 FPE policy has created some level of awareness regarding the importance of girls' education among the "uneducated" parents. As one girl put it:

> FPE has encouraged the uneducated parents who believe that girls are not important and that they should not be in school, take them to school. Even the physically handicapped and the very poor [low income families] have now been given a chance. (Focus group interview, 2010)

During this study, the principals I interviewed indicated that most pupils were aware of the government's "the 2001 Children Rights Act", which advocated for the right to education for all children irrespective of their gender, race, creed, or ethnicity (UNICEF, 2003). The Act also discourages the use of corporal punishment, advocating instead the utilization of guidance and counseling. However, most of the teachers I interviewed were unhappy with the withdrawal of corporal punishment in schools. Indeed, as witnessed at Chuo primary school, corporal punishment is still being utilized as a means of enforcing discipline in public primary schools. The majority of teachers I interviewed seemed to prefer the use of corporal punishment, arguing that "counseling does not work for the African child." This example raises the question of whether or up to what extent the government policy gets to be enforced.

One girl from Chuo Primary School indicated that FPE has enabled some orphans to get food. "I think FPE has helped many students to be able to learn and get food. Some of them like orphans never used to get food but now they eat free." However, as already indicated, Chuo primary school's lunch feeding program had been made possible by the parents' financial support. Orphans and other students from low income families who were not able to pay benefited from this arrangement.

Girls who are still at home

Despite the evidence of an increase in educational participation for girls due to the 2003 FPE policy, my focus group informants cited cases of girls whom they knew were

still home. Some of the cases they cited included their siblings, close relatives, and friends. When I probed them to understand why such girls were not in school, they cited reasons ranging from teenage pregnancies and associated stigma, to lack of interest from parents or relatives. One girl from a rural school observed:

> When my cousin became pregnant at class seven [seventh grade], she dropped out of school, came home and gave birth. But she has since refused to go back to school because of the shame. She swore never to go back because she knows everybody will laugh at her. She now helps her mother till their land and just stays at home. (Focus group interview, July 2010)

Another one said, "Some of them [girls] my neighbors, they claim they are not bright and that they can't go back to school because they are too old. They say they want to get married or find work on farms and just make money." When I enquired if the girls they were talking about had attained any level of education before the introduction of FPE, the girl explained that "they stopped going to school when they were in standard three [third grade] or four [fourth grade] because their parents did not care". These examples indicate a low level of self esteem and lack of motivation present among girls who lack support from parents or close relatives. One girl from an urban school narrated:

> A cousin of mine, when her mother passed away, my aunt took her to Nairobi [capital city of Kenya] to work as a housemaid. She was in class seven [7th grade] and she loved to study. When her mom was alive she used to advice her and made sure she was always in school, but now her mom is not there and my aunt cheated [lied to] her and took her to Nairobi.

This response was in line with some of the teachers' views regarding the plight of most orphans in Kenya and how their situation renders them vulnerable to such exploitations. It also shows that school girls are still engaged in this sort of child labor even though the government claims to be hawk-eyed on such cases.

While some girls in my focus groups cited a few examples of parents encouraging their daughters to go back to school after giving birth, more shared that the parents were not always interested in doing this. One of them mentioned that some parents did not put enough pressure on their reluctant daughters to go back to school "perhaps because they don't care much about girls' education". Another argued that "some of the girls, once they give birth, the parent may advice them to go back to school but they can't because she is always ashamed and she may feel shy and embarrassed". One girl from a rural school narrated how her older sister dropped out after becoming pregnant in 8th grade. "My sister was in standard eight [8th grade] in this school, but now she is at home because she got pregnant and dropped out. She now has a two year old". When I enquired if her sister was willing to go back to school, she said that "my mother does not want to take her back to school because she says my sister had discouraged her".

Given this reality, I assert that effective measures need to be put in place to enlighten parents with such attitudes to look out for such girls and bring them back to school. At the same time, programs such as guidance and counseling need to be strengthened to cater for both girls who are in school and those who seek re-entry after becoming pregnant as a way of fighting the stigma associated with teenage pregnancy. Guidance and counseling programs available in the schools I visited did not seem to include counseling girls who joined school after dropping out due to pregnancy.

Domestic gender roles

The literature indicates that in Kenya, the education of girls in public primary schools is often hindered by requiring them to perform household chores such as cleaning their houses, washing clothes, collecting firewood and water, and looking after younger siblings (Mazrui, 2007; Sifuna, 2006). These activities not only deprive girls of the

essential time needed to focus on their studies but also leave them too fatigued to concentrate if they make it to school. More often, girls end up performing badly in their studies compared to their male counterparts. While this view was apparent with my focus group informants from rural schools, informants from urban based schools shared that even though they engaged in some form of domestic activities, their family members either assisted them carry them out or discouraged them from spending a lot of time doing these duties. They attributed this to their family awareness on the significance of education.

When I posed the question, *what activities do you engage in afterschool, weekends or holidays*, most student informants from rural schools mentioned activities such as, cleaning the houses, washing clothes, cooking, and fetching water. One girl said, "I help my mother to sweep the compound, clean the clothes and collect thrash". Another one said, "In the evening, I like helping my mother to weed some vegetables, washing clothes and cooking". Another one added, "I help my mother to go to the river and fetch the water". One girl shared how her mother had to intervene from time to time in order for her brother to help with domestic chores:

> When my mother is at home, I ask her to tell my brother to help me with domestic work because he normally refuses to help me. My brother usually goes out and plays and only helps a little with some work in the house. My mother has to tell my brother to help me. (focus group interview, July, 2010)

These responses not only speak to the existing gender division of labor in Kisii district but also show how the socialization process works to define activities perceived to be appropriate for males and females. In this case, girls considered the domestic chores they performed as earmarked for women and girls. It was also interesting to realize that my

informants considered themselves as 'helping their mothers" carry out their various socially expected gender roles. In my view, such practices impart in girls the belief that women's primary location is in the domestic sphere, limiting their desire to explore the public realm, including education, which is perceived to be dominated by men and seen as more rewarding (Girl-Child Network, 2004). Many of my rural school-based girl informants seldom mentioned doing school related work, like homework, among their evening or holiday activities.

Conversely, most of my informants from urban primary schools indicated that their parents and older siblings encouraged them to focus on their homework even though they engaged in some domestic gender roles during the evenings or weekends. One girl said, "In the evening I help my mother with house chores but she always tells me to sit and read". Another added, "I don't do many chores as such and so, I usually read more books and do my homework". One girl mentioned that her older siblings [a 16 year old sister and a 15 year old brother] "don't let me do much of the chores; I just study most of the time". Another added, "If my mom feels that I am spending a lot of time on domestic chores instead of studying, she asks me to stop doing it so that my brothers can assist". Some of them shared that their parents even hire teachers to provide them with extra tuition at home during the evenings.

Girls in my focus groups also considered the cultural view that boys perform better than girls in school as linked to the amount of time many girls have to devote doing domestic chores instead of studying. As one of them put it,

> Most people say that boys perform better than girls because you see, when many boys get home after school, they don't do a lot of domestic work like the girls. They have a lot of time to read but girls must assist in some domestic chores. (Focus group interview, July 2010)

School support for girls

Students in my focus groups acknowledged that teachers provided them with support in their school work. When I probed them on specificity, they shared that teachers helped them with academic work, advised them against bad peer influences and mentored them and encouraged them to work hard in order to join reputable secondary schools. One student mentioned, "Whenever I have challenging academic questions, my teachers always help me out". Several girls from urban schools were also confident that their teachers believed they were "hardworking and better academic performers than boys".

Girls from Chuo Primary School confided that they appreciated the provision of sanitary pads the school provided as well as the school feeding lunch program. Although they seemed to be aware that not all students paid for the food, they thought it was a good gesture for the school to share with students from low income backgrounds whose parents could not afford to contribute.

Programs such as guidance and counseling were also cited by girls in my focus groups as helping them cope with issues related to sexuality and relationships with boys. One girl from Josh primary explained that, "madam Beth tells us how to take care of ourselves. She tells us not to have boyfriends because it can lead to pregnancy". Most of them said they were told to practice sexual abstinence until marriage". However, the effectiveness of guidance and counseling program was brought into question by the number of cited cases of teenage pregnancies, early marriages, and school dropouts among girls.

CHAPTER FIVE

DATA ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I provide a thematic analysis of the collected data. The themes emerge from the harmonized data of the opinions, insights, and challenges of the respondents as well as the context in which they live and operate on a daily basis. While the views of the student respondents shed light on the challenges and complexities of their educational experiences and opportunities in the wake of the 2003 Free Primary Education policy, those of the teacher respondents reflect on challenges and opportunities presented by this policy in its agenda of increasing educational participation of girls.

This analysis is based on an overarching research question and four sub-questions. My overarching question was: What are the implications of the 2003 Free Primary Education policy for girls' educational opportunities in Kenya? The four sub-questions were:

1. What have been the schooling experiences of girls since 2003?
2. How has FPE policy influenced girls' participation and achievement in public primary schools?
3. What factors inhibit girls' participation and achievement in schools?
4. What factors enhance girls' participation and achievement in schools?

The implication of the 2003 Free Primary education policy on girls in public primary schools in Kisii district is huge and multifaceted. The meaning of this policy and the way it has been implemented seems to be dependent on familiar and interconnected contexts. These interrelated realms emerge as critical factors that determine the impact of the 2003 FPE policy on girls as they seek to maximize the benefits of this policy and enhance their educational participation. These realms include: school environment, socio-cultural, and economic. These

realms greatly influence the community and parental perceptions of girls' schooling and, thus, the likely scenario girls encounter as they try to become active participants in education. For instance, these realms determine whether or not the girls are able to attend school, the kind of support they are likely to receive from their families, schools and teachers, and the learning conditions they are likely to encounter in various schools where they conduct their learning. It is on the setting of these contexts that I hinge my analysis.

School contexts

Learning Environments

Studies have repeatedly shown that secure learning environments are critical in enhancing girls' self esteem, educational participation, and academic achievement (FAWE, 2004; UNESCO, 2006). Based on this assertion, I consider that a meaningful implementation of policies that seek to increase girls' access to schools, such as the 2003 FPE policy, require a favorable learning atmosphere, which is safe and supportive of girls' daily essentials and educational needs.

However, this study revealed that schools in Kisii district, especially those located in rural areas, do little to create such conditions. Girls continue experiencing challenges from both within and out of school that threaten their educational participation, even though the 2003 FPE policy is in place. From within the school contexts surfaced such factors as a gender- insensitive school environment, sexual harassment and bullying of girls, lack of enough toilets and sanitary pads. These findings echo a UNICEF (2002) view, which stated, "In most schools in Sub-Saharan region, learning environments are repulsive to girls and sexual violence against them is the norm" (p.15). This report cautioned that the education system itself may increase girls'

chances of dropping out, interrupting their studies, experiencing an unintended pregnancy, or becoming infected with HIV.

Cases of girls who were sexually harassed and bullied by schoolboys cut across both principals' and student informants' responses. While girls alluded to incidents of boys who harassed them and "thought they could use us as tissue papers", school principals acknowledged rampant cases of undisciplined boys who were harassing girls in their schools. In one school (Josh Primary School), the principal expressed difficulty in handling boys' unruliness given that the 2001 Children's Act of Kenya forbids the use of corporal punishment. It occurred to me that, to this principal, corporal punishment was the only way he was familiar with, which he could use to address this problem. In Chuo Primary School, I witnessed an incident where boys who had harassed girls were administered corporal punishment as a way of imposing discipline. These two cases point to the reality of unsafe learning spaces that makes girls feel insecure and uncomfortable.

Research has shown that unsafe school environments are among the reasons that girls discontinue their studies, get pregnant or have parents refuse to enroll and keep their daughters in school (USAID, 2004; FAWE, 2003). In the context of the 2003 Free Primary Education policy, although there is a government promise of creating safe learning environments for girls within the FPE policy framework, a review of the data collected for this study suggests that this agenda is still far from being achieved. In addition, my experience of how the principals of the two schools I visited addressed this problem pointed to a void in policy and practice on how to clearly handle sexual harassment in schools.

As I have argued elsewhere, while corporal punishment is not the best means of enforcing discipline among bullies and sexual violators in schools, secure learning environments

serve as safety nets for vulnerable students such as girls and also provide the general student population with a sense of calmness necessary for meaningful learning to take place. On this note, it is crucial that the government and other educational stakeholders come up with a clear policy framework that includes designing and including in the national curriculum courses/subjects that address and educate both boys and girls about sexual health and the male/female power dynamics underlying gender violence. Also, public primary schools experiencing cases of indiscipline or bullying among their students should be allowed to employ other non-painful disciplinary measures, such as staying after school, suspending sexual violators, expulsions, or withdrawing privileges.

At the community level, there is a need to have a clear policy framework (with community input) that defines, prohibits, and carries penalties for acts of school-related sexual violence. This is especially important given that most Kisii boys' and men's concept and expression of sexuality is deeply embedded in the cultural and social norms of the Kisii community. For example, during circumcision, boys are taught that that their self efficacy in sexual abstinence may not be as higher as that of girls (Maticka-Tyndale et al, 2002). Such kind of information influences boys to feel culturally entitled to freely engage in sexual activity with girls including using coercive means. Thus, having such a policy framework might persuade community members to support such policies while school principals will feel empowered to disallow and report cases of sexual violence taking place in their schools to the relevant legal establishment. Through such efforts, schools will become safe havens where girls feel comfortable, enjoy their learning and, benefit more from the 2003 Free Primary Education policy.

Scarcity of learning and physical resources

From the data, I realized that schools in Kisii district experience not only a shortage of teachers but also severely lack enough classrooms and toilet facilities to accommodate and serve students who have joined schools as a result of the 2003 Free Primary Education policy. Even though most of the teacher respondents commended improvement in the government's provision of textbooks, they complained that most parents have not been cooperative in buying the supplementary reading materials required of them. In the same way, even though the student informants expressed their delight in having their own textbooks and writing materials, they complained of overcrowding in classrooms and expressed a strong desire to have a comfortable sitting space. A girl in a rural school focus group seemed to express the views of others:

> We were forced to move from our classroom so as to create space for incoming standard one pupils [first graders] who had joined our school. They are normally many at the beginning of the year. The room that served as their classroom became small. So, the headmaster [principal] told us to join the rest of the students in one other standard seven stream [seventh grade] in the school. Now our class is so congested. We hope they will find money to build a classroom for standard one kids so that we can go back to our class (Focus group discussion, July 2010).

These sentiments portray a picture of unpleasant learning conditions that girls continue to experience as a result of the effects associated with the 2003 FPE policy. Further, these opinions raise questions about the quality of instruction taking place in such classrooms. Studies have revealed that comfortable learning classrooms (especially for girls) involve ones that are not overcrowded and where students have their own textbooks and desks (FAWE, 2004; UNICEF, 2006; World Bank, 2000). However, such a recommendation seemed to have been only partially met, as many schools in Kisii district, especially rural ones, still struggle with the problem of fewer classrooms and desks. The girls confided that in most classrooms, at least three students shared a desk meant for one or two students. As a matter of fact, many teacher respondents did

not understand why the government had sanctioned such a noble policy, without first expanding learning and physical resources and employing more teachers. Besides Chuo Primary School, which relied on the parents' minimal monetary contributions to expand classrooms, put in place a lunch program, and bought sanitary pads for girls, shortage of classrooms in Josh Primary school seemed to be a huge impediment even though plans were underway to build more classrooms using the Constituency Development Funds (CDF). Chuo Primary School itself, which I thought was fairly endowed with resources, was still working to put up more learning spaces.

During this study I was disheartened to learn from both the principal and student informants from Josh Primary School that the girls' toilets had sunk forcing them to borrow toilets from families which border the school. However, the principal lamented that the neighbors had demanded that the school pay them for these services. During my visit to Josh, I was shown the girls' toilets which had sunk and two other toilets which stood side by side. The principal informed me that the two toilets which were functional were initially used by boys but one was now being used by girls following the toilet sinking episode. The principal observed that the school could not afford to pay the toilet fees demanded by their neighbors. The toilets I saw seemed to be in a deplorable state and obviously not adequate for a huge student population. The girls who took part in my focus group discussion expressed their aspiration to have better toilet facilities separate from those of boys.

Guidance and Counseling and Student Leadership programs

It is indisputable that successful empowerment programs in schools such as guidance and counseling contribute not only to enhancing girls' self-esteem but also help boost their academic achievement. Both teacher and student respondents for this study considered school programs

key in empowering girls, boosting their self-esteem, and generally helping them participate in learning. According to Mr. Joe, the principal of Josh Primary School, the guidance and counseling and student leadership programs the school provided to the girls were meant to "educate, empower and change gender inequalities and encourage girls to best maximize the benefits of the 2003 FPE policy." The student informants from Josh and Chuo Primary Schools considered the guidance and counseling program as an effective strategy that helped them build their confidence, assertiveness, and self-esteem. Student respondents from Josh Primary School underscored how their female teachers, in particular, had used guidance and counseling to awaken them to understand some of the ways in which they could avoid teenage pregnancies and recognize and fight off sexual harassment from boys and adult males. One girl observed:

> Madam Beth has really been very educative. During guidance and counseling meetings, she normally tells us everything, like how to take care of ourselves and avoid starting sexual relationships with boys. They also tell us not to be cheated by men. (Focus group discussion, July 2010)

Mr Joe, their principal, was also upbeat in the allocation of student leadership roles to the girls as a way of empowering them and addressing gender inequalities witnessed in and outside the school. He asserted, "We make sure that at all levels of student leadership structure, girls play a role either as the head leader or as an assistant." He added that the government occasionally organized gender sensitization programs for teachers to enable them to learn how to create comfortable learning environments for girls. I thought that this was a credible attempt on the part of the government. At least the two schools I visited had in place some form of guidance and counseling program that attempted to address the specific needs of girls. Based on the respondents' views and experiences and the schools' empowerment strategies, it is logical to construe that schools attempt to help girls become empowered and enjoy their schooling experience through guidance and counseling and student leadership programs. However, as

already stated, in both schools guidance and counseling activities consisted of an occasional session for girls in grades six to eight and essentially dwelt on warning girls about the dangers of sleeping with boys. Teacher respondents informed me that such meetings were usually arranged when there were incidents of teenage pregnancy or sexual relationships among students within the school. There were neither clear-cut scheduled programs nor a spelt out routine for these programs in both schools.

A question that persists is whether such programs are more a matter of compliance to the government mandate or if schools have a honest sense of urgency in making these programs more meaningful to the girls, in order to help them become more socially empowered and active participants in education. The number of teenage pregnancy cases cited in the schools I visited not only raised red flags on the effectiveness of guidance and counseling programs but also pointed to a worrisome trend that calls for urgent measures. Raising more questions on the efficacy of these programs were cases recounted by both teacher and student respondents, about girls who were reluctant to come back to school because they were stigmatized once they became pregnant. In addition, there were several troubling cases of sexual harassment experienced by girls in the schools I visited. On this note, I assert that there is need to design effective guidance and counseling programs that target both boys and girls and provide girls with information on how to engage in protective sex including condom use for those who are sexually active. Both teacher and student informants indicated that condom use was never communicated to the girls as one way of dealing with unwanted pregnancies. Guidance and counseling programs should also target teenagers who become pregnant and provide them with knowledge on how to fight off the stigma associated with such pregnancies.

Enrollment and retention for girls

One of the objectives of the 2003 Free Primary Education policy was to increase access to schools for girls. Data for this study show that the general student population in sampled schools has remained high since the implementation of the 2003 FPE policy and that girls' enrollment had been remarkable on a large scale (see table). Most of my teacher and student respondents expressed the view that the 2003 Free Primary Education policy has undoubtedly improved girls' access to schools. They specifically attributed higher enrollment of girls to the removal of tuition fees and other school levies and the provision of textbooks and writing materials such as notebooks and pens. Even though the government threat to arrest parents who keep their daughters at home or who engage them in some form of child labor has not been fully enforced, some teacher respondents viewed it as a big booster in girls' school enrollment. This study revealed that higher educational participation for girls was more apparent in urban schools, where a fairly gender sensitive learning environment and a lunch feeding program existed.

Table 2: Student Enrollment Trends by Gender (Chuo Primary School)

Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Male	197	269	333	299	370	370	378	406	401
Female	185	280	288	363	369	365	382	416	428
Total	382	549	621	662	739	735	760	822	829

Source: Chuo Primary School. These enrollment rates in Chuo Primary School show a remarkable steady growth in girls' enrollments since the introduction of the 2003 FPE. They also show the general growth of student population in this urban school.

Table 3: Student Enrollment Trends by Gender (Josh Primary School)

Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Male	223	268	265	263	261	256	273	269	270
Female	192	259	263	259	263	260	259	265	250
Total	415	527	528	522	524	516	532	534	520

Source: Josh Primary School. These enrollment trends for Josh Primary School show some increase but a slight lack of consistency in girls' enrollment and some discrepancy between girls and boy enrollment over the years.

Despite this exciting enrollment achievement, my respondents raised concerns about school absenteeism and dropout cases among girls, especially the upper primary grades. Informants cited family poverty, domestic duties, teenage pregnancies, inability to raise examination fees, illnesses experienced within families, lack of support from parents or guardians, lack of sanitary pads, orphan situation, and HIV/AIDS-related challenges as some of the reasons for girls' school absenteeism and dropouts. Poverty experienced by many families, especially in the rural areas, forced girls to miss classes frequently to assist in some income generating activities. Girls who schooled in urban centers seemed to attend school more regularly compared to their rural counterparts. With evidence of supportive parents who seemingly places a huge premium on education and a fairly gender sensitive learning environment , it is understandable why girls who attended urban public schools were more active participants in schools and why they even performed better or competed equally with boys compared to their rural counterparts (See Tables). Over the years, girls at Chuo Primary School have scored above average in their Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) national test. To gain entry into a national high school in Kenya, a student would require at least a score of 400 points (out of a possible 500) or between 300 and 400 in their Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) to gain access into a provincial high school.

This achievement in enrollment and performance notwithstanding, Stacy, a teacher informant from Chuo Primary School shared cases of girls in her school who occasionally skipped school to take care of domestic chores and other duties, like babysitting their younger siblings. This development indicates to me that despite the advantaged position girls who reside near and attend urban primary schools seem to have, like their rural counterparts they are forced to conform to the ascribed domestic gender roles which disadvantage them at times. It is imperative that the government and other educational stakeholders join efforts to address both the cultural and economic challenges that continue to negatively affect girls' school enrollment and attendance, especially in the rural areas.

Table 4: 8th Grade KCPE Performance by Gender (Chuo Primary School)

Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Male	334	340	353	325	306	304	319	323
Female	351	347	319	342	332	312	310	314
School Average Score	342	344	336	334	319	308	315	319

Source: Chuo Primary School. These KCPE scores show a fair performance by girls in this urban school. Out of a possible 500 points, all girls scored above average. The school's overall performance is also above average reflecting on the improved quality

Table 5: 8th Grade KCPE Performance by Gender (Josh Primary School)

Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Male	225	232	229	205	242	226	236	205
Female	227	202	221	226	237	223	204	185
School Average Score	226	217	225	216	240	225	220	195

Source: Josh Primary School. These KCPE scores show an uneven and a general below average score for this rural school and girls' dismal performance in KCPE over the years.

Socio-cultural context

The place of women and girls in Kisii community

Kisii district, where my sampled schools were located, is characterized by a patriarchal cultural structure where on a large scale, boys are more valued than girls. The view that boys are future family bread winners and property inheritors bound to remain home and take care of their parents at their old age, while girls will get married and benefit their in-laws, is still highly regarded. This line of thought is mostly upheld by rural families and is reflected in many areas of their daily undertaking, including education. While families, even those financially constrained, might squeeze their meager income to ensure that boys participate in education, they seldom feel obligated to do the same for girls. According to Beth, one of the teacher respondents, "Educating girls in Kisii is not a top priority among most parents. Families instead dedicate more effort into getting them socialized to perform culturally directed gender roles linked to the household" (Beth, personal interview, July 2010). Data from this study found that lack of support for girls' education in some Kisii families is linked to the cultural view of the appropriate role of women and girls within the Kisii community. Despite the government's effort through the 2003 Free Primary Education policy to ensure that all children have access to education, responses among my informants revealed some troubling divergence between parental attitudes and government efforts to increase girls' educational participation.

This study revealed that girls often skipped or dropped out of school to take care of their younger siblings or sickly parents, or to engage in some income generating activities like babysitting for the rich and middle class families to raise money for their family upkeep. Informants also shared that HIV/AIDS has hit the Kisii district, causing some children to become orphans while others are living with relatives including grandmothers. Without adequate suitable

support, some of these orphans have been forced to play many roles, including earning money for their families. Both teacher and student respondents observed that orphaned girls, especially those with younger siblings, were the most affected because, firstly, older orphaned girls feel culturally obliged to fend for their siblings before attending schools. Teacher informants shared that most of them become chronic absentees and end up dropping out of school altogether. Secondly, many orphaned girls who lived with their guardians were often lied to and sent to work as domestic servants in urban areas because culturally, girls' education is less valued

These challenges facing orphaned girls can be partially attributed to the gendered view within the Kisii culture that associates women and girls with domestic duties. It is no wonder that almost all the girls in my focus group considered all the domestic activities they engaged in during evenings and weekends as meant to "help" their mothers. To tackle the plight of orphaned girls in terms of meeting their educational and psychological needs, I advance the view that the government of Kenya should engage community-based groups and other stakeholders to provide for the orphans' basic needs, like food and clothing and establish centers where younger orphaned children can access free shelter so as to free time for their older sisters to attend schools. My observation is that the girl-child, especially those who reside in rural areas, still navigates a disparate terrain characterized by cultural and economic challenges, which makes educational participation difficult for them. Thus, I posit that until these cultural perceptions regarding the value and role of women and girls within the Kisii community shifts, the girl-child stands to continue facing hurdles as they seek to access education. Also, unless an additional policy that targets vulnerable children like orphaned girls is put in place to address child labor exploitations and negative cultural attitudes and beliefs affecting them, then the potency of the 2003 FPE policy in enhancing their access to schools will continue to be elusive.

Poverty

Mulugeta (2004) asserts that poverty both at the individual and society level is a disadvantage to the education of children. While poverty limits the chances of meeting the fundamental educational essentials at the individual level, it hampers the attainment of learning and physical resources at the school level. Compared to boys, girls attending schools in Kisii district seem to be the most affected by the consequences of poverty.

In this study, family poverty was cited as a major reason that causes girls skip or drop out of school to engage in income generating activities to meet their family upkeep. School principals also cited poverty as one of the main reasons that restrain parents from buying supplementary reading materials for their children or make monetary contributions to schools for structural development. Mr. Joe, the principal of Josh Primary School, for example, shared cases of students in his school who came from low income families and frequently lacked food in their homes. He revealed that such students formed a majority of chronic school absentees and registered poor academic performance. Beth, a teacher informant from Josh Primary School further revealed that poverty made some parents sell textbooks and other school materials supplied to their children (by the school) as a way of raising some money to meet family needs.

However, this study revealed that the plight of orphaned children, especially in rural public schools, had caught the attention of individual teachers, local churches, and community based non-governmental organization. Teacher respondents confided that occasionally these stakeholders have come to the aid of vulnerable children and bought them school uniforms, paid for their KCPE examination fees, and provided food. In sum, although on a small scale, the local church and community based non-governmental organizations' practical response seem to have been remarkable in aiding orphaned children, including girls, participate in education. In the

wake of these compassionate gestures, what is missing are polices and strategies that would build and strengthen the ability of schools, communities, and families to support orphaned children as they aspire to participate in learning. These might include providing counseling to orphaned children, provision of food and other life basics as well as protection from labor exploitation, sexual harassment and other retrogressive cultural practices and beliefs concerning women and girls. This way, girls would be able to fully benefit from the 2003 Free Primary Education policy.

Summary

In this analysis chapter, I have provided an analysis of themes that cut across respondents' shared views regarding the implications of the 2003 Free Primary Education policy for girls attending public primary schools in Kisii district. I show how the policy has enhanced their enrollment in schools and how the government effort through the removal of tuition fees and provision of textbooks and writing resources has boosted their chances of participating in schools. Despite these achievements, girls still navigate economic, socio- culturally inhibitive terrains, and unfriendly learning environments, prompting their absenteeism and school dropouts. Based on the respondents' lens, I argue that until these economic obstacles and cultural perceptions regarding the value of girls' education within the Kisii community shifts, the girl-child (especially in rural areas) stands to continue facing hurdles as they seek to access education. In the next chapter, implications, recommendations, and conclusions for this study are presented.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study sought to explore the implications of the 2003 Free Primary Education (FPE) policy for girls' educational opportunities in Kenya. I specifically sought to understand the girls' educational experiences since the implementation of the policy in 2003. I also wanted to understand factors that have enhanced or hindered their educational participation. Student and teacher respondents revealed their experiences and opinions through stories in focus group discussions and individual interviews. Institutional documents, including school enrollment registers and the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) national test results, highlighted participation and performance trends of girls since 2003. The findings revealed both opportunities and challenges that the 2003 FPE policy has presented to girls' educational participation. While the challenges emanate from socio-cultural structures and economic struggles, the government's effort in the provision of learning and writing materials as well as its directive to parents to take their daughters to schools provide a window of hope for girls and enhances their participation in education.

In this chapter, I draw on my reflections from the study especially the themes in the analysis chapter, to uncover the implications of the 2003 FPE policy on girls' schooling opportunities, and to compare them to the existing literature on free primary education and girls' education in Kenya and other parts of Africa. I also provide recommendations for further research. The themes include:

a) increase in access through the provision of learning and physical materials
b) strengthening empowerment programs for girls
c) addressing poverty

Provision of learning and physical facilities

The overall finding of this study reveals that the 2003 Free Primary Education (FPE) policy has improved the opportunities of girls' educational participation despite hurdles that must be removed. Shortage of classrooms, teachers, supplementary textbooks, toilets, and other essentials like sanitary pads has posed a threat to girls' active participation. On the positive side, the removal of the tuition fee and school levies, together with the provision of textbooks and writing materials by the government, has aided in removing educational demands which more often than not disadvantage girls. This study also revealed that the government's efforts through the use of local chiefs to look out for families not willing to take their daughters to school is paying dividends, to a certain extent, and gradually helping more girls to participate in learning. Through these measures, the government of Kenya has enacted its determination in increasing girls' educational participation.

In addition, parental involvement, in the expansion of school facilities and in helping make the learning environment gender friendly in Chuo Primary School, helped girls navigate the hurdle of accessing essentials such as sanitary pads. Also, the parents' financial contributions towards the lunch program ensured that students remained in school throughout the day instead of making trips to and from school in the course of school day. These efforts, according to the interviewees, had reduced the instances of girls dropping out of school or failing to turn up for afternoon lessons after going home for lunch. The policy implications of such interventions and associated gains are huge.

Targeting gender inequality

This study's findings show that the chances of girls' participation can be greatly enhanced if removal of tuition fees and other school levies is accompanied by elimination of

cultural ideologies that perpetuate gendered norms that adversely impact girls' schooling. UNICEF (2009) report suggests that prioritizing gender equity in educational system is vital to addressing the needs and concerns of women, girls, boys, and men alike. Thus, in Kenya, there is a need for the government and other educational stakeholders to mitigate this challenge, by incorporating into the 2003 FPE policy strategies that meaningfully involve local communities in eradicating cultural ideologies and practices (such as domestic roles) which disrupts girls' schooling. Within local communities and families, policy makers and their agents need to mobilize local women and men leaders and involve them in efforts aimed at eradicating beliefs that reinforce the view that girls' education is not beneficial to their immediate family. The government must increase qualified female teachers in rural schools to serve as role models for the girls.

Other studies suggest that much can be achieved if such polices include local input and pay specific attention to local interpretation of education policies (Gita-Steiner, 2006; Achola et al., 2007). For example, the government should put in place strategies that actively involve community members and parents in school activities and in their children's life. Community members should join efforts geared towards providing a safe, harassment-free, girl-friendly environment for them to learn (FAWE, 2006). The government must enlighten community members about the harmful effects of sexual violence experienced by girls in and outside schools.

Indeed, previous studies in Kenya have shown that even though the highest growth in primary school enrollment was witnessed in 1970, 1974, and 1979, following the cancellation of school fees and other levies, girls' educational participation remained significantly lower than that of boys because of retrogressive socio-cultural practices including early marriages, female

genital mutilation, and domestic gender roles (Buchmann, 2001; Oketch et al, 2007; Somerset, 2009). It is these cultural practices and ideologies pertaining to girls' education that the 2003 FPE policy's designers need to be cognizant of and need to look for ways of addressing in order to help girls actively participate in education. Campaigns should be put in place to enlighten community members and parents on the significance of girls' school participation including the fact that girls' education, just as that of boys, is beneficial to their immediate and future families. Female role models involved in the development of their immediate families and communities' should be used as successful cases in point.

Improve learning facilities and eliminate examination fee

Schools in Kisii district still struggle with the challenge of inadequate or lack of learning and physical resources such as classrooms, teachers, supplementary textbooks, toilets, sanitary pads, etc. Inadequacies or lack of such resources continue derailing girls' active participation in schools. Existing literature on the FPE policy initiative indicate that "lack of commensurate rise in the number of teachers and schools has meant increasing teacher: pupil ratios and a dramatic increase in the number of pupils per school, especially in rural areas and urban slums" (Oketch et al., 2007, p.30). This not only compromises the quality of learning being delivered in such schools but also creates unconducive learning environments leading to dropouts and absenteeism among girls. Thus, this study recommends that the government and other stakeholders increase learning and physical facilities in public schools. It is also significant that elimination of the KCPE examination registration fee for low-income children and orphans should be part of a broader government commitment.

Parental participation

This study's findings show the crucial role parents can play to boost girls' participation in education. In Chuo Primary School, for example, such a success of working with parents was demonstrated by the presence of a lunch program, the expansion of classrooms, and provisions of sanitary pads- the most basic yet an overlooked necessity- for all girls. Such success indicates that parental involvement can help improve the learning environment for all children, especially girls, and increase their daily school attendance and academic performance. Literature shows that parental involvement in schools is associated with higher student achievement outcomes (Henderson, A. T. & Mapp, K. L., 2002; Epstein, J., 2001). On this note, it is important that the government of Kenya and other educational stakeholders look for ways and means to actively involve parents in schools' development agenda instead of keeping the parental role ambiguous. More parents and community members should be provided an opportunity by the government to participate in school management so as to provide them with a sense of ownership of schools and to make them key contributors to the education sector.

Since the inception of the 2003 FPE policy, the government has given the impression that with this policy, education is 'free", and that all the parent needs to do is send their children to school. Local political leaders have continued to offer partial information about the FPE policy to the public, by simply urging them to take children to school "for free" (Kenya, 2008). This leaves the 2003 FPE policy open to interpretation by members of the public, including parents. This study considers it vital for leaders to urgently address the challenges associated with FPE policy and to clearly specify the parents' and community's roles in this policy. As I have argued elsewhere, politicians seem to be more concerned with gaining political mileage from the public than with helping children access and acquire meaningful quality education. If the parental involvement that I saw at Chuo Primary School can be replicated in all public primary schools,

then the chances of having more girls actively participate in schools would be increased. School feeding programs (with the support of all educational stakeholders, including parents) need to be introduced as a strategy of retaining girls in schools. Multinational Corporations like the Johnson and Johnson Company operating in Kisii district should also take it up as a matter of necessity to include rural schools in their agenda of visiting schools, and to provide girls with free sanitary pads. Above all, the government needs to include sanitary pads among its provisions to public primary schools, especially those located in rural areas.

Promote local agencies' partnerships

This study indicated a crucial role local agencies play in enhancing the successes of policies such as the 2003 Free Primary Education and in boosting girls' educational participation. Even though the government is primarily responsible in designing and implementing of the 2003 FPE policy, the huge demands accompanying this policy outstretch its provision. I consider such to be entry points for local non-governmental organizations, community based development groups, and churches operating within Kisii district. This study found that whenever Multinational Companies (MNCs), churches, and local community development agencies provided aid in the form of food, uniforms, and sanitary pads to needy children, the chances of girls participating in schools were augmented. This example points to the significant role local/ external agencies can play in improving girls' participation in school in the wake of the 2003 FPE policy. The Girl Child Network (2006), for example, shows how the World Food Program (WFP) agency working in the Arid and Semi Arid Lands (ASAL) district in Northern Kenya has successfully implemented an in-school feeding program and has helped girls who can not afford to go back home for lunch remain in school for the rest of the school day. Thus, it is imperative that such partnerships are strengthened, supported, and recognized by educational stakeholders,

especially at the national level. A step further would be for such agencies to specifically champion the interest of girls by including it in their overall development agenda. In this regard, such agencies might take it upon themselves to sensitize and persuade communities to discard harmful cultural practices and beliefs that derail girls' education and instead provide support and care for girls whose families are deprived. Such local agencies might also play a pivotal role in advocating for girls' right to education within communities that demean girls and women or their education.

Allocating more money to CDF

Findings for this study show that Constituency Development Funds (CDF) has had some positive impact in public primary schools in terms of helping them to expand their physical structures, like classrooms, and to purchase essential facilities like desks and chairs. Given this positive gain, I suggest that the government increase money allocated to CDF, given the stiff competition the CDF resource faces from other community projects like water, health, and road repairs. The government will also need to keep a watchful eye on corrupt deals that CDF coordinators engage in, including providing funds only to schools whose principals are politically "well connected". Such practices perpetuate existing social and economic inequalities and by extension disadvantage innocent children from low-income families.

Strengthening Girls Empowerment Programs

During this study, several respondents indicated the presence of specific programs (such as Student Leadership and Guidance and Counseling) in schools which targeted girls' empowerment. In Josh Primary School, for example, teachers and student informants considered that Student Leadership and Guidance and Counseling programs helped enhance girls' self

esteem. The principal (Mr. Joe) asserted that girls in his school served either as student head leader or assistant. This was also replicated in all classes where a girl served alongside a boy, either as a class student leader or as an assistant. I felt that this was a great way to boost girls' self esteem. In order to strengthen such positive efforts, it is important for schools not just to allocate girls these positions but also to recognize, publicize, and celebrate their good leadership performance. The literature shows that celebrating girls' successes helps them develop a sense of pride and accomplishment on a job well done (UNICEF, 2009; FAWE, 2004). During such events, parents and members of the community should be invited to witness, celebrate, and learn that just as boys, girls possess leadership capabilities. Organizers of such events will need to share evidence from research which indicates that investing in girls' education not only benefits girls but their future families (Summers, 1992; UNICEF, 2003; Muthwii, 2006; Coclough, 1994). This way, community members will come to recognize and appreciate the educational and leadership potential of girls.

In as far as Guidance and Counseling programs meant to enlighten girls on issues of sexuality, and specifically how to avoid teenage pregnancies, is concerned, there is need to strengthen such crucial programs. In this regard, girls who are sexually active should be provided information on how to engage in safe sex, including how to use condoms. It is also important for these programs to target school boys as well, given that they are more often responsible for school girls' pregnancies. Targeting girls alone may not be as effective, as demonstrated by numerous cases of teenage pregnancies cited by several respondents in this study. Thus, it will be critical for schools and community development groups and leaders to organize sensitization workshops and seminars for girls, boys, women, and men on sexuality issues and sexual harassment in and outside schools.

Within schools, it is crucial to hold such workshops more frequently and not just when teachers have seen "weird behavior with girls" (as one teacher informant asserted) or when teachers have encountered cases of teenage pregnancies. Guidance and Counseling programs need to be envisioned more as a process rather than an event. In addition, the boys/men responsible for teenage pregnancies should also be made to bear the responsibility of taking care of the babies born to teenage girls rather than just being warned by the authorities and being left to continue with their education/normal life while the girls bear all the burden of bringing up these children. As informants for this study indicated, the burden of raising up their babies often causes girls to miss school frequently and ultimately drop out of school. I wish to argue that without meaningful change in cultural behavior and attitude concerning men/women and boys/ girls' sexualities and sexual relationships, girls' educational participation is bound to remain in peril. Boys/men will continue feeling culturally entitled to engage in sexual relationships with girls, including using force, without being prepared to take responsibility when pregnancy kicks in. My view is that, until these socio-cultural behaviors are addressed, the 2003 FPE policy can not blossom or be beneficial to girls.

Even though creating a truly gender equitable Kenyan society may be a long term process, mainstreaming a gender perspective in national policies, including education, will gradually improve gender relations within the society (UNDP, 2010). It will aid women and girls' participating fully in all areas of their lives, both in private and public areas. On this note, I wish to suggest that social institutions like churches must put efforts in place to enlighten people on the dangers of sexual harassment. At the national level, the government through school curriculum developers should design courses on gender at the primary school level in order to foster health relationships between boys and girls. Such courses will also provide primary school

students with insights on the gender power dynamics embedded in various cultural settings within Kenya and how they perpetuate sexual violence. Such steps would help create awareness of the adverse effects of gender inequality and how it disadvantages girls in terms of educational participation. The bully boys would have knowledge on the harm sexual harassment inflict on girls and be persuaded to stop this misconduct.

Addressing Poverty

In order to achieve the goal of increasing girl's participation in education, policy makers in Kenya need to address the economic barriers that keep them out of school. Given that the 2003 Free Primary Education is part of the Education For All (EFA) global commitment to increase access to schools for children coming from low-income families, there needs to be a more practical commitment from educational stakeholders. In this regard, stakeholders can organize for school lunch programs within all public schools and provide the basic necessities for girls, including constructing enough separate toilet facilities and providing sanitary pads. Schools located in low-income communities should double their efforts in mobilizing parents to be more involved in the expansion of their children's school facilities despite the experiences of poverty. In this study, for example, it is explicit that poverty in Kisii district, especially in the rural area, remains a constant problem, and this further impedes the ability of parents to supplement government funding. However, I suggest that parental involvement should not just be seen/understood in monetary terms but should also include parents providing their physical skills/abilities, for instance, in the construction of classrooms and other physical structures that do not require them to make a monetary contribution. It is vital to recognize that FPE goals of increasing girls' full participation in education cannot be realized in public schools without parents or community members supplementing the government's efforts.

In addition, the government needs to avail itself and resources such as water in rural areas, as one way of addressing the imbalanced distribution of resources and boosting conducive learning environments. During this study, Chuo Primary School seemed to be well endowed with physical resources including water, unlike Josh Primary School located in a rural area. This not only made Chuo Primary School friendly to girls but also ensured their steady attendance and good academic performance.

The study in relation to feminist framework

This study utilized feminist frameworks which advance cultural and social aspects in constructing the reality of women and girls' education and which calls for equal opportunities. These frameworks advocate for the removal of barriers which prevent girls from reaching their full potential, whether such barriers are located in the school, family, community, individual psyche, or discriminatory labor practices (Stromquist, 1997;, Zinn & Dill; 2003). In this study of the 2003 FPE policy, the social, cultural and economic obstacles facing girls in public primary schools such as Josh Primary School are manifested through absenteeism from school due to domestic gender roles, lack of sanitary pads, lack of enough separate toilets, and sexual harassment. On the positive side, benefits accrued from removing such barriers are exemplified by Chuo Primary School, where the provision of learning and addressing the physical needs of girls like sanitary pads and water made learning conducive for girls in this urban primary public school. The enrollment of girls at Chuo was evidently slightly higher compared to that of boys. Also, girls' performance was above average. This study also revealed the importance of the government's effort in using chiefs to look out for families reluctant in sending their girls to school, as it helped register some achievement in increasing girls' enrollment. In addition, even though girls' empowerment programs put in place in the two schools were not as effective, they

helped girls have a sense of self esteem and to a certain extent, boosted their participation in schools.

The study in relation to educational reform frameworks

Proponents of educational reform theory argue that the proliferation of policy and organization slows down the decision making process, makes it more contentious, and introduces new complexities (Cohen, 1982; Elmore, 1995; Fullan, 1991; McLaughlin, 1987; Levin, 2001; Duemer & Mendez-Morse, 2002; Hargreaves, 1994). They further argue that more often than not, policy does not yield the kinds of outcomes that are intended. In this study, the hurried implementation of the 2003 FPE policy led to several complexities which on a large scale have threatened the success of an otherwise noble policy. For example, the government's failure to expand learning and physical facilities like classrooms and toilets and to hire new teachers led to unpleasant learning environments for girls. In the same way, failure to clearly spell out the role of the parents and the community has left the 2003 FPE policy open to several interpretations by the public and parents, many of whom have remained non-committal to make any contribution to the development of their children's schools. Free Primary Education has been interpreted by parents to mean that they have been relieved of all obligations for their children's schools and that all they need to do is to send their children to school for "free". The government has also failed to actively sensitize community members on the importance of girls' education, apart from issuing arrest threats to parents who keep their daughters home or engage them in child labor. Going with what several informants confided, the government has not been able to enforce this threat fully as girls are still withdrawn from school to engage in income generating and other activities. What this means is that girls' participation in education continues to face hurdles because some families' attitude towards girls' education still remains unchanged.

Contribution to Research

This study revealed the underlying economic and socio-cultural factors that enhance or inhibit girls' participation and achievement in Kisii district's urban and rural public primary schools since the introduction of the FPE policy in 2003. Parents of children attending Chuo Primary School (an urban school), Multi National Companies (MNCs), and local authorities helped equip their schools with the necessary resources that made learning comfortable for girls. The urban parents, who are perceived in Kenya to be well acquainted with the benefits of education for children including girls, made monetary contributions that helped put in place lunch programs and spared more money to purchase sanitary pads for girls and to expand classrooms. Thus, a gender-friendly learning environment as demonstrated by Chuo Primary School can help serve as a model worth emulating by other public primary schools in Kenya. On the other hand, girls attending Josh Primary School (a rural school) put up with a lot of obstacles to participate in learning. For instance, they put up with overcrowded classrooms, lack of enough toilets, lack of water, and lack of sanitary pads. Orphaned girls were hard hit as they skipped school from time to time to fend for their younger siblings because they felt culturally compelled to take care of their younger siblings in the absence of their parents.

Further, poverty seemed to be a major hindrance to the attainment of FPE goals. Because of poverty experienced by many rural families, the majority of parents were unable to contribute towards the development of their children's schools. These obstacles notwithstanding, the supportive gestures from local NGOs and churches in providing uniforms, lunch, and examination fees seemed to have the greatest potential to influence economic changes and help children especially girls, attend schools.

In the larger context, this study adds to the literature that speaks to educational policymakers and other stakeholders on the need to plan ahead before implementing such a policy with effects as massive as the 2003 Free Primary Education policy. I hope therefore, that this study provides policymakers with helpful knowledge to mitigate and change impediments, both within and outside schools that affect girls' schooling in the wake of the 2003 FPE policy.

Limitations of the Study

Since this study was restricted to two schools, one in a rural and another in an urban area of Kisii district, its contributions are limited to what I found in these two schools and their relationship with their external agencies. The findings of this study can therefore not be generalized to other public primary schools throughout Kenya. The influence of the 2003 Free Primary School policy on girls may differ from one school to another. The multicultural situation of the Kenyan context also suggests that the implementation of the 2003 FPE policy and its subsequent influence on girls might be quite diverse. This suggests that the study could have been more informative if more schools in different parts of the country had been studied, and also if parents had been included in this study. The perception of teachers, students, and parents may be different in matters relating to the influence of the 2003 FPE policy on girls' schooling. Based on these limitations, the section that follows offers suggestions that future research may focus on.

Implications for further research

The importance of studying the implications of the 2003 FPE policy for girls' educational opportunities in Kenya cannot be underestimated since such research is rare. Research that focuses on teachers and students' voices would provide a valuable insight into restructuring

reform processes in education and into new policy concerns and directives (Goodson, in Day, Fernandez, Hauge& Moller, 2000). Since this study targeted teachers and students in only two schools, future research could involve more schools in different parts of Kenya and also include parents in the study. The study areas should include reviewing the quality of education taking place in public primary schools in Kenya since the 2003 FPE policy was implemented. It would also be worthwhile to explore the influence of FPE policy on boys, especially those coming from low income families. This study does not conflate boys in Kisii district or Kenya into a single category.

Conclusion

This study has revealed that the 2003 FPE policy introduction in Kenya has improved girls' access to schools and is a worthwhile policy advocating for the rights of children in Kenya. However, it has come with challenges, ranging from poor planning and coordination to failure to get all stakeholders involved. It is vital for policy makers to be cognizant of the underlying factors crucial in determining the success or failure of policies meant to increase educational access for marginalized groups such as girls. This study shows that even if access through tuition fee removal is granted by the government, economic and socio-cultural beliefs and practices regarding girls' education often supersede the government's attempts at providing educational services. Adopting lessons learnt will be the key in realizing the 2003 FPE policy goals and in attaining its intended benefits for girls. Otherwise, this study's findings do not guarantee that school fee cancellation alone can lead to girls' active participation in education.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

LETTERS OF INTRODUCTION AND CONSENT LETTERS

Consent Letter for Parents/Guardians

Project: "Implications of the 2003 Free Primary Education policy for girls' educational opportunities in Kenya: A case study of girls attending public primary schools in Kisii District, Western Kenya".

Dear Parent/ Guardian:

My name is Sheba Onchiri. I am a Ph. D student in K-12 Educational Administration at Michigan State University, USA. I come form Kisii Central District. I am presently involved in research that seeks to explore and understand the implications of the 2003 Free Primary Education policy for girls' educational opportunities in Kenya. The information I will gather will (1) be part of completing my Ph.D dissertation requirement at Michigan State University, and (2) will assist educational stake holders to come up with intervention programs besides the policy itself that would enable more girls to participate in education.

Head teachers, classteachers, and students will provide me with the information I need for this study. I request your permission for your daughter to participate in this study because she has been attending this school for the last 6 years when free primary education was introduced. With your permission, your daughter along with others will participate in a 30-60 minute individual interviews. In addition, I may also request students to participate in a 60-90 minute focus group discussion. A focus group is a discussion involving a small number of participants, led by a teacher-like moderator, which seeks to gain insight into the participants' experiences, attitudes, and/or perceptions. The interviews and /or focus groups will seek to understand the students' educational experiences here in school and at home. The interviews will be conducted during out-of-class hours so that the child's in-class hours are not interrupted. The interviews will be tape-recorded. You or your child will not directly benefit from participating in this study. However, information gathered would help to inform policy makers and other education stakeholders about the impact of free primary education policy on girls learning in public primary schools. The study may also be useful in designing programs that might help make free primary education policy more meaningful to girls

I will not ask your child for any identity, such as her name. Hence, the identity of your child will remain confidential. 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 only by my dissertation chairman (Dr. Dunbar Jr.), Michigan State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and myself. Three years after completion of this study, all data will be destroyed.

Your child's participation in this study is strictly voluntary and you and/or the child may withdraw at anytime without penalty. Also, your child may refuse to answer certain questions or discontinue her participation at any time without consequence. Your child may also request that the tape recorder be turned off any time during the interview. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty. There is a slight possibility that your child may feel embarrassed talking about school and family issues that influence their schooling. This will be minimized by asking culturally

sensitive questions in a culturally sensitive way. Also, your child will have a right not to answer any questions they are not comfortable with.
If you have any concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury (i.e. physical, psychological, social, financial, or otherwise), please contact your child's head teacher or the primary investigator, Prof. Chris Dunbar Jr., Tel: (517-353-9017), email: dunbar@msu.edu, regular mail: 404 Erickson Hall, East Lansing, Mi, 48824. USA. If you may have questions regarding your child' s role and rights as a study participant, or would like to register a complaint about this research study, you may contact, anonymously, if you wish the Human Research Protection Program, at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or email irb@msu.edu, or regular mail at HRPP, 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, Mi, 48824.
Sincerely,

Dr. Christopher Dunbar Jr.
Professor, Michigan State University
K-12 Educational Administration, 404 Erickson Hall
East Lansing, Mi, 48824, USA
(517) 353-9017, Fax: (517) 353-6393
dunbarc@msu.edu

Sheba Onchiri,
Ph. D Candidate, Michigan State University
K-12 Educational Administration
Haslett Road, Apt. # 316
East Lansing, Mi, 48823
(517) 402-4424
onchiris@msu.edu

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.

Child's Name ----------

Parent/ Guardian Signature----------

Date----------

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study:

Signature----------

Full Name----------

Date----------

Your signature below indicates your voluntary consent to allow your child to be audio-taped.

Signature----------

Full Name----------

Date----------

Consent form for class teachers

Project Title: Implications of the 2003 free primary education policy for girls' educational opportunities in Kenya. A case study of girls attending public primary schools in Kisii district, Western Kenya

Dear Sir/ Madam,
My name is Sheba Onchiri. I come from Kisii Central district. I am a PhD candidate in K-12 Educational Administration at Michigan State University, USA. I am writing to you because I am currently involved in a research entitled, **"Implications of the 2003 free primary education policy for girls' educational opportunities in Kenya": A case study of girls attending public primary schools in Kisii district, Kenya**. This study seeks to understand the impact of the 2003 free primary education policy on girls attending public primary schools.
I am asking you to participate in an interview that seeks to understand your experiences and views regarding the influence of the 2003 free primary education policy on girls attending your school. In particular, I seek to understand how free primary education has influenced girls' participation and achievement since it was introduced, what kind of support girls receive from both school and home to work hard in schools and how cultural beliefs regarding girls education interact with free primary education policy. This information gathered would help to inform policy makers and other education stakeholders about the impact of free primary education policy on girls learning in public primary schools. The study may also be useful in designing programs that might help make free primary education policy more meaningful to girls. I further will use the information as part of completing my Ph. D. program at Michigan State University, USA.
You will not directly benefit from your participation in this study.
You will be interviewed once for approximately 60 minutes. Your identity will remain confidential. 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 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 only by my dissertation chairman (Prof. Chris Dunbar Jr.), Michigan State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and myself. Three years after the project is completed, all data will be destroyed.
Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and you may choose not to participate at all, or you may refuse to answer certain questions or discontinue your participation at any time without consequence. Also, you may skip any questions or request that the tape recorder be

turned off any time during the interview. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty. There are no known risks associated with participation in this study. 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.
If you have any concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury (i.e physical, psychological, social, financial, or otherwise), please contact Prof. Chris Dunbar Jr. (517)-353-9017, or email: dunbarc@msu.edu, regular mail: 404 Erickson Hall, East Lansing, MI, 48824. If you may have questions regarding your role and rights as a study participant, or would like to register a complaint about this research study, you may contact, anonymously, if you wish the Human Research Protection Program, at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or email irb@msu.edu, or regular mail at HRPP, 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, Mi, 48824.

Sincerely,

Dr Christopher Dunbar, Jr.
Professor, Michigan State University
K-12 Educational Administration,
College of Education, 404 Erickson Hall
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(517) 353-9017 Fax (517)353-6393
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(517) 402-4424
onchiris@msu.edu

Your signature and date below indicates that you have read the above letter and indicate your agreement to participate in this study.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study:

Signature----------

Full Name: ----------

Date: ----------

Your signature below indicates your voluntary consent to be audio-taped.

Signature----------

Full Name----------

Date----------

Students' Assent Letter

Project Title: Implications of the 2003 free primary education policy for girls' educational opportunities in Kenya: A case study of girls attending public primary schools in Kisii district, Western Kenya

Dear Student,
My name is Sheba Onchiri. I come from Kisii Central district. I am a Ph. D student in K-12 Educational Administration at Michigan State University, USA. I am presently involved in a research that seeks to explore and understand the implications of the 2003 Free Primary Education policy for girls' educational opportunities in Kenya. 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 concerning free primary education. Your experience might include the things you like or dislike about free primary education, as well as things you like and dislike when you are here at school and home. I want to assure you that you will not be punished or be in trouble for talking to me. I will not use your names nor share the information you give me with your parents, teachers or other school officials.
Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. You may choose not to participate at all, or you may refuse to answer certain questions or discontinue your participation at any time without any consequence. There is a slight possibility that you may feel embarrassed talking about school and family issues that influence your schooling. I will minimize these by asking culturally sensitive questions in a culturally sensitive way. Also, you will have a right not to answer any questions you are not comfortable with. You will not directly benefit from your participation in this study. However, this study may be useful in designing programs that might help make free primary education policy more meaningful to girls who are in schools like yours.
If you agree to talk to me, I will assign you a group of other students totaling about 3 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. Individual interviews will take between 30-60 minutes while group interviews will last approximately 60-90 minutes. The interviews will be conducted during out-of-class hours to ensure that your class schedule is not interrupted. 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. Only my dissertation chairman (Prof. Chris Dunbar Jr.) and myself will access them. Three years after this project has been completed, all data will be destroyed. 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. Christopher Dunbar Jr. Tel: (517) 353-9017, email: dunbarc@msu.edu, regular mail: 404 Erickson Hall, East Lansing, Mi, 48824, USA.

Sincerely,

Dr. Christopher Dunbar Jr.
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Educational Administration
College of Education, 404 Erickson Hall
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I ask you to sign this form to show that you are aware of the purpose of our talk and that you are voluntary willing to participate in our talk. Please check your option and sign.

Talk to me individually ☐ Put me in a group☐

Signature----------

Full Name---------- ----------

Date----------

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study:

Signature----------

Full Name----------

Date----------

Your signature below indicates your voluntary consent to be audio-taped

Signature----------

Full Name----------

Date----------

Consent Letter for School Principals

Project Title: Implications of the 2003 free primary education policy for girls' educational opportunities in Kenya. A case study of girls attending public primary schools in Kisii district, Western Kenya

Dear Sir/ Madam,
My name is Sheba Onchiri. I come from Kisii Central district. I am a PhD candidate in K-12 Educational Administration at Michigan State University, USA. I am writing to you because I am currently involved in a research entitled, **"Implications of the 2003 free primary education policy for girls' educational opportunities in Kenya": A case study of girls attending public primary schools in Kisii district, Kenya**. This study seeks to understand the impact of the 2003 free primary education policy on girls attending public primary schools.
I am asking you to participate in an interview that seeks to understand your experiences and views regarding the influence of the 2003 free primary education policy on girls attending your school. In particular, I seek to understand how free primary education has influenced girls' participation and achievement since it was introduced and, what kind of factors support or hinder girls from participating in school. This information gathered would help to inform policy makers and other education stakeholders about the impact of the 2003 Free Primary Education policy on girls' learning in public primary schools in Kenya. I further will use the information as part of completing my Ph. D. program at Michigan State University, USA. You will not directly benefit from your participation in this study. However, this study may be useful in designing programs that might help make free primary education policy more meaningful to girls
You will be interviewed once for approximately 60 minutes. Your identity will remain confidential. 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 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 only by my dissertation chairman (Prof. Chris Dunbar Jr.), Michigan State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and myself. Three years after the project is completed, all data will be destroyed
Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and you may choose not to participate at all, or you may refuse to answer certain questions or discontinue your participation at any time without consequence. Also, you may skip any questions or request that the tape recorder be turned off any time during the interview. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty. There are no known risks associated with participation in this study. 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.
If you have any concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury (i.e physical, psychological, social, financial, or otherwise), please contact Prof. Chris Dunbar Jr. (517)-353-9017, or email: dunbarc@msu.edu, regular mail:

404 Erickson Hall, East Lansing, MI, 48824. If you may have questions regarding your role and rights as a study participant, or would like to register a complaint about this research study, you may contact, anonymously, if you wish the Human Research Protection Program, at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or email irb@msu.edu, or regular mail at HRPP, 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, Mi, 48824.

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Your signature and date below indicates that you have read the above letter and indicate your agreement to participate in this study.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study:

Signature----------

Full Name: ----------

Date: ----------

Your signature below indicates your voluntary consent to be audio-taped.

Signature----------

Full Name----------

Date----------

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Preliminary Class Teachers' Interview Protocol

What have been the schooling experiences for girls since 2003?

1. Tell me something about yourself? (e.g. When did you start teaching? When did you come to this school)?
2. Describe the enrollment, participation and achievement of girls in your class? What was the participation by girls before the introduction of Free Primary Education?
3. Do all the girls stay in school? If no, why? If yes, why?
4. Do the girls face challenges that boys don't? Would you say that many of the challenges are school or home related? Why is that?

How has FPE influenced girls' participation and achievement?

1. In Kenya today, there is a lot of talk about the benefits of Free Primary Education, what is your opinion about FPE and, is it working?
2. Has FPE policy changed girls' schooling experience in this school?
3. Do parents know about FPE and do they send their daughters to school?

What factors enhance girls' participation and achievement in schools?

1. What strategies do you use in this school/class to encourage girls to work hard in their education? (guidance and counseling, provision of sanitary pads, etc)
2. What factors might contribute to female student non-participation or dropout in this school? (lack of enough toilets, water, etc)
3. What do you think are some of your colleagues (teachers') views concerning girls' educational achievement?
4. Describe the parents' attitude towards girls' education? What kind of educational support do parents give their daughters who come to this school? (e.g. do they provide school uniforms to avoid stigma, buy extra textbooks needed, allow time to do their homework, provide sanitary pads, make follow up on their academic progress, etc)

What factors inhibit girls' participation and achievement in schools?

1. Are there differences in educational expectations for boys and girls? If yes, why?
2. In your opinion, how do cultural beliefs and practices in the community influence educational experiences of girls who come to this school? (Boy preference, domestic gender roles, FGM, early marriages, etc)
3. Is there anything else you would like to share with me that we have not talked about?

Preliminary Interview Protocol for School Principals

What have been the schooling experiences of girls since 2003?

1. Tell me something about yourself? (e.g., when you joined the school, in what capacity and how long you have held your current position).
2. What is the current student enrollment of your school? Describe any changes that have occurred in student enrollment during your tenure as the head-teacher in this school?
3. How does girls' enrolment, participation and achievement in this school compare to that of boys since 2003?

How has FPE influenced girls' participation and achievement?

1. In Kenya today, there is a lot of talk about the benefits of Free Primary Education, what is your experience with its policy? –Please talk about challenges and opportunities FPE has brought to schools like yours?
2. Describe the impact of free primary education to girls?
3. How have you or your school changed since the introduction of free primary education in 2003?
4. What is the parents' reaction towards free primary education?
5. Describe your students' absenteeism and school dropout. What do you think causes it? Do parents prefer girls' education to that of boys? Why?
6. Do most students in this school transition to secondary schools when they complete grade eight from this school? Is the transition the same for boys and girls?

What factors enhance girls' participation and achievement in schools?

1. Describe some of the needy students that come to your school. How do you support them (Orphaned and Vulnerable Children, those without uniforms, etc)? Is the support gender specific?
2. In your view, does this school have enough physical and learning facilities that make girls' learning comfortable?
3. What are some of your teachers' views concerning girls' educational performance in this school?

What factors inhibit girls' participation and achievement in schools?

1. It is common knowledge that cultural beliefs within this community influence the way people look at girls' education. Describe how cultural beliefs and practices within this community influence girls' schooling? How is this manifested in classrooms?
2. What do you consider to be some of the obstacles to girls' education within this school? (Overcrowded classrooms, sexual harassment, lack of enough sanitary facilities, teenage pregnancies).
3. Is there anything else you would like to share with me that we have not talked about?

Preliminary Interview Protocol for Students

1. Tell me something about yourself?
2. When and why did you join this school? Do you like your school? If so, what do you like about it? If no, what don't you like about your school?
3. What activities do you do when you are at home; after school, during weekends and holidays? Do you have brothers? (If yes), what kind of activities do they also do?
4. Describe what you know about free primary education?
5. How has free primary education helped you? How about other girls that you know?
6. Did your parents/ guardians talk to you about free primary education? What did they say?
7. In your opinion, what do you think free primary education fails to address/include in order to make learning more meaningful to girls who are in schools like yours? How do you think they should address these issues?
8. Do you know girls from your area who should be in school but do not attend? If so, what do you think prevents them from attending school? What do you think they do at home?
9. Do your parents/guardians talk to you about your education? If yes, what do you talk about?
10. Who has been the most influential person in your education? How has this person influenced you?
11. Describe what your family thinks of your education? What do they think about your brothers' education (if any)? Do you think your family gives same attention to your education as that of your brothers? What about any other family or relatives with which you are familiar?
12. Have you ever missed school or sent home from school because of tuition fees, uniform, school levies, or any other reason? (If yes), how long did it take you to go back to school? How do your parents react when you are sent home for any reason? Would you say that your parents' react the same way when your brothers (if at all) are sent home from school? What about other families or relatives with which you are familiar?
13. Are there other things you have heard people saying concerning girls' education? (If yes), which of these do you find agreeable or disagreeable and why?
14. Can you tell me how comfortable you are when talking with your teachers? Do you like them? If I were to listen to your teachers talking about girls in your class/ school, what am I likely to hear?
15. Do you think your family, teachers and local community have different educational expectations for girls and boys? (If yes), Why do you think this is the case?
16. What academic challenges do you have when you are in school? What about when you are home? How do you solve them?

15. If you had a chance to change anything in your school to make it better, what could that be?

16. Is there anything you would like to share with me about yourself that we have not talked about?

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