



## **Policy interventions for attraction and retention of female teachers in rural secondary schools: Perspectives of rural educators in Makueni County, Kenya**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Attraction and retention of female teachers for secondary schools in rural areas has been a concern for researchers, and ongoing challenge for education authorities all over the world ( Ashiedu & Scotladd ,2012). It remains one of the most persistent and serious problems in education (Ingersoll & Perda,2013). Kenya, like many countries across the world is committed to the provision of equitable education services. To this end, the country is a signatory to various international protocols relating to equity in the provision of education (Musembi, 2011).

The most recent of these is the Sustainable development Goals (SDG's) which were adopted as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a road map for people and the planet that will build on the success of the Millennium Development Goals and ensure sustainable social and economic progress worldwide. It seeks not only to eradicate extreme poverty, but also to integrate and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development economic, social and environmental in a comprehensive global vision (UNESCO, 2016). Regarding education this protocol seeks to focuses on quality education and commits to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030 (UNESCO, 2016). In addition, the government of Kenya has launched Vision 2030, which focuses on making Kenya a newly industrializing, middle income country providing high quality life for all its citizens by the year 2030 (Republic of Kenya, 2007, p. 2). Education is one of the key pillars of this vision and in this regard, the government is aiming at recruiting more teachers and ensuring that all schools have adequate teachers. In light of these

### **ABSTRACT**

The potential role of female teachers in achieving the Education for all (EFA) and the Sustainable Development Goals, specifically on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting life-long learning opportunities for all (Goal 4), achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls(Goal 5 ) is well documented. Available evidence, however, suggests that attraction and retention of female teachers in secondary schools located in rural areas remains a significant and on-going challenge. In response, policy makers in Kenya have recommended three key policy interventions namely decentralization of teacher recruitment, payment of hardship allowance and provision of housing. A literature search reveals a dearth of information on the perspectives of rural educators on the effectiveness of these interventions. The paper presents findings based on one objective of a broader study which was to: Establish the views of female teachers' and other stakeholders' regarding the effectiveness of strategies for attraction and retention of female teachers in Makueni County. This study adopted a mixed methods design. The paper presents findings from the qualitative component of the study. Interviews were used to gather data. Based on their interpretations, the authors provide useful insights and offer suggestions on how the implementation of these policies could be improved.

commitments, teacher management, particularly equitable distribution of teachers, becomes an increasingly important policy area (Musembi, 2011). Unfortunately schools in Kenya have continued to experience Teacher shortages. The shortage is more pronounced in schools in hardship areas. These are poor, remote and geographically isolated rural areas with harsh climatic conditions and poor infrastructure (Musembi, 2011).

Evidence suggests that the hardships associated with Arid and Semi-arid Lands makes recruitment, deployment and retention of teachers difficult (Republic of Kenya, 2012). Teachers for secondary schools are not keen to take up postings in these hardship areas (Musembi, 2011). A more pressing problem, as is the case in similar areas in other countries (Swai, 2013), is the retention of teachers. A major concern for education policy makers in Kenya, in this regard, has been how to effectively attract and retain teachers in rural and remote schools (Musembi, 2011, Republic of Kenya, 2012).

Halsey (2009) & Burton & Johnson (2010), contend that deploying more teachers to rural areas contributes to social, economic and environmental sustainability and hence the long term security of a country. Similarly (Reid, Green Hastings, Locke, & White 2010) affirm that attraction and retention of high quality teachers in rural areas is critical in ensuring sustainability of these areas. This therefore underscores the importance of having more teachers in rural areas in the achievement of the sustainable development goals.

Rural schools face particular challenges in attraction and retention of teachers (Barley, 2009, Hansen, 2011). Reasons for rural staffing shortages include female teachers' beliefs about geographical, social, cultural, and professional isolation and inadequate housing (McClure, Redfield, & Hammer, 2003, Hudson & Hudson, 2008 & Sharplin, 2010). These studies have suggested that social, cultural, geographical, historical, and service issues associated with rural teaching need to be explored in teacher education programmes (Boylan, 2004).

According to (Chege & Sifuna, 2006), attraction and retention female teachers in secondary schools in rural in Kenya is difficult. As a consequence although rural areas in Kenya have more shortages of teachers as compared to urban areas there are

imbalances in terms of the proportion of male and female teachers'. This scenario can be attributed to among others poor housing and lack of medical facilities (Chege & Sifuna, 2006). The low presence of female teachers in rural areas have serious ramifications on the achievement of SDG's especially on goal no. 5 on gender equality that seeks to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Evidence demonstrates that the presence of female teachers has a positive impact on girls' education as it believed that female teachers can serve as role models to girls, contribute to their enrolment and retention, performance and continuation in secondary schools (Kirk, 2006, Mulugeta, 2012, Mitchell & Yang, 2012).

In an effort to attract and retain experienced teachers in rural schools recruitment and retention incentives have been proposed as a workable and effective strategy (Roberts, 2005, Sinyolo, 2007). In Kenya a task force on the re-alignment of the education sector to the Kenya Constitution suggested that one incentive for encouraging deployment of teachers to hardship areas is to guarantee that postings will be for a maximum of four years only and provisions of additional allowance and benefits.

One of the policy initiatives the government identified was the decentralization of teacher recruitment. Decentralized teacher recruitment in Kenya is part of the wider policy on decentralization of education began over twenty years ago (Gershberg & Winkler, 2004). In Kenya the adoption of this policy can be traced to the decision of the government to put an embargo on recruitment in the public service which meant cessation of automatic employment of trained teachers. As a result in 2001, the TSC adopted a new policy of recruiting teachers based on demand and availability of vacancies. As a result of this policy shift the recruitment of secondary school teachers was decentralized to the school level (Teachers Service Commission, 2006). The policy was expected to enhance attraction and retention of teachers in areas that are considered difficult to staff and to take care of gender equity.

In the context of this study, an interesting issue relating to decentralized teacher recruitment with regard to staffing schools in rural areas in Kenya is the question of its effectiveness in attraction and retention of female teachers. Ultimately, there are few systematic studies on the implementation the decentralization policy regarding the staffing

of remote rural schools (Musembi, 2011). More importantly there is need for research that examines the effects of decentralization on women teachers (Gaynor, 1998). The study therefore was critical since decentralized teacher recruitment as a strategy for redressing teacher shortage in hardship areas in Kenya is a contentious issue (Musembi, 2011).

The government also pays a hardship allowance to encourage teachers to accept posting to hardship areas. However it is inadequate and has failed in attraction and retention of female teachers to secondary schools located in rural areas (Chege & Sifuna, 2006). The provision of housing has also been described as an effective policy initiative (Republic of Kenya, 2007, Adedeji & Olayinan, 2011). So far, there have been limited studies that have interrogated these policy initiatives to establish whether they have been effective. Moreover the policy interventions for attracting and retaining female teachers in rural schools have seemingly not borne the preferred outcomes as female teachers have continued to avoid postings to rural schools

## METHODOLOGY

This paper is drawn from a larger study that adopted a mixed methods design. It presents findings obtained from the qualitative component of the study. The study involved 12 female teachers, 10 principals 2 trade union officials from the Kenya Union for Post Primary Education Teachers (KUPPET) and the Teachers Service Commission Human resource officer in Makueni County who were purposively selected. Interviews were used in this study to gain in-depth knowledge from participants about particular phenomena, experiences, or sets of experiences regarding teacher attraction and retention (Demmarais, 2003). Informed consent was given by all the participants. To promote an easy flow during each interview–conversation was sensitive to the personal elaboration of each participant (Goodson & Gill, 2011)

## DATA ANALYSIS

The qualitative data collected using interviews was transcribed, coded and interpreted thematically and then supported by qualitative data analysis in the form of texts and verbatim quotes from the respondents.

## RESULTS

This study focused on three policy initiatives namely decentralization of teacher recruitment, payment of hardship allowance and provision of housing

### Decentralization of teacher recruitment

The findings of the study revealed that the success of decentralization in redressing female teacher shortage in rural areas is a contentious issue. While some respondents felt it had contributed to attraction and retention of female teachers in rural areas others said it hadn't. This is in line with available literature (e.g. Musembi 2011).

One teacher observed:

*...decentralization had helped and many more female teachers have come since most of the vacancies are in the rural areas.... like in my school 5 teachers have been recruited.*

Another teacher noted:

*...decentralization helps because you find you have no choice I was in Nairobi but had no choice but to move and look for a vacancy in a rural area.*

Another teacher declared:

*...decentralization does contribute to more female teachers being attracted to and retained in rural schools. In my school 5 female teachers have been recruited through this method.*

Similar sentiments were expressed by some principals. One principal stated:

*...I think it has contributed because it is a case of going to where the vacancy is. When it is done up there people could manoeuvre...once you are interviewed and you pass you sign a contract you of five years which you are obligated to adhere to.... In my school two female teachers were employed in this way. They happen to come from around....This sub county.. There is a quiet policy that emphasizes on the recruitment of locals who are qualified (Interview: 1/4/2016).*

Other teachers had a different view. According to one such teacher '*...in my school decentralization has not assisted in getting more female teachers. We mostly get male teachers. Another teacher agreed saying '...decentralization does not attract many female teachers to my school. Some go away and*

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*never to come for the interviews even after making the applications to our school.*

In concurrence with the teachers who indicated that the policy hadn't helped One principal stated:

*...I wouldn't see it that way myself like i said earlier they go through interviews both men and women– the interview is based on merit – no preference for any gender- getting female teachers is by chance they go through interview and by luck chance the ladies go through. We have 5 men and 4 ladies. The school has seen an upswing in number of ladies who are joining our school. Let me say except one female teacher the others joined through recruitment it happens that when we go for the interviews it has happened that they sail though (Interview; 24/2/2016).*

According to the TSC county Human resource officer and a Kenya Union for Post Primary Education Teachers (KUPPET) official decentralization may not have directly contributed to more female teachers being available in rural areas because there is no gender bias during recruitment. If the number has increased as evidenced in the returns then it was by chance because the recruitment is purely based on merit and the TSC is equal opportunity employer. The above observations clearly show that the effectiveness of the policy in ensuring more female teachers are attracted and retained in rural schools remains a contentious issues and it difficult to ascribe the presence of female teachers in rural secondary schools to the decentralization policy.

Attached to the decentralization policy in recruitment of secondary school teachers is a caveat that teachers would remain in a station for 5 years before seeking for a transfer. The female teachers interviewed expressed mixed feelings: Some teachers supported this policy: One teacher claimed:

*...bonding is a good thing because if it wasn't there schools would be forced to employ BOM teachers ... Some female teachers would simply aim for posting and then go back to towns... so it good for both students and schools.. For female teachers it is also good to experience rural area we can't all just leave them to men. If we do who will develop these areas? (Interview: 24/2/2016).*

Likewise most principals supported this policy despite some inherent problems. In this regard one principal Stated:

*...bonding for five years .it is a contract with specifications. The teachers are not forced. They want the job...they are in need of a job... they have no option but to accept the policy...it reduces mobility among teachers ...it is good. Recruitment has got some time frame (Interview: 21/3/2016).*

The TSC human resource officer in agreement with most principals and a KUPPET official supported the policy bonding for five years saying that the policy ensures stability in the work force. Two teachers categorical were candid in their opposition to this policy:

*...The five year bond is not good because for example you may get a job when single then get married and you want to be near your spouse but you are forced to stay away from family... Maybe three years because it is also not good to be employed and want to leave immediately without the policy people would get the job and want to leave immediately (Interview:18/5/2016).*

*...The 5 year bond is not good because some people get affected by the climate, may find an unfriendly working atmosphere and after the five years it is not a guarantee because you need a suitable replacement or the principal says you can't leave .. May be 3 years is a better option (Interview: 17/5/2016).*

There were principals who were opposed to this policy. One of the principal asserted:

*...bonding female teachers for five years is not good .In some hardship areas some schools will miss female teachers because of hardship and family issues-some schools will never get female teachers.*

### **Views on Hardship Allowance**

The views of female teachers regarding Hardship allowance as strategy for attraction and retention revealed mixed feelings. One teacher claimed:

*...When i compare with a colleague who doesn't*

*have hardship allowance in Machakos County, there is a difference they are paying me 12,000 shillings before i was getting 10k there is a difference. It is as if I don't get it there is no point of remaining here i would rather go to my rural area. It is a good idea a motivator (interview: 24/2/2016).*

Most of the principals were in agreement: One principal noted:

*...To some extent it is an incentive which encourages teachers to stay longer in areas where there is hardship allowance. The teachers don't want to transfer to an area without a hardship allowance because of reduction of salary .... Despite the hardships the teachers who move will tend to move to other areas around the hardship zone (interview 23/3/2016).*

According to the one KUPPET official:

*...It is a good idea most ...female teachers wouldn't want to transfer to areas that don't pay hardship allowance. Others want to come to the county because of it. It can be used to get a loan facility with a financial institution and invest. It is a pull factor for female teachers (Interview 24/2/2017).*

The TSC County human resource officer summarised his views thus:

*...The hardship allowance does contribute to attraction and retention of female teachers who can even use it to get loans and develop themselves. Some areas in this county though classified hardship are not that bad.*

The findings are consistent with others that concluded that, financial incentives encourage teachers to come to rural areas (Kitchenham & Chasteauneuf, 2010) . These findings also concur with those of (Pugatch & Schoeder, 2014) whose analysis of hardship allowance as an incentive in Gambia established that it was effective in getting more teachers to more remote areas. The findings however contradict those of (Musembi , 2011) concluded that the payment of hardship allowance was not very effective as a strategy for attraction and retention of teachers in remote rural areas.

### **Provision of Housing as a strategy for Attraction and retention.**

Results from interview data collected shows that all the teachers regard provision of houses for teachers in schools would be a very effective attraction and retention strategy. The discussions with the teachers and other stakeholders highlight the justification for housing teachers as an attraction and retention strategy, the scarcity of houses in schools, the quality of houses in local markets and the challenges schools face in providing houses to teachers .The teachers clearly affirmed that provision of staff houses was an effective strategy for attraction and retention. They also reveal that most schools did not have houses and that the ones available in the local markets were of poor quality. Concerning this issue several teachers had a lot to say:

*...Houses can attract and retain female teachers but unfortunately... we don't have enough staff houses... we have only 2 houses... In the local market there are very few houses thus some teachers are forced to stay in Mbumbuni 10kms away ...most houses are single rooms with no water (Interview :24/2/2016).*

Female teachers housed in schools described the advantages such as security, convenience and quality of housing. One teacher claimed:

*...It is true most of the houses in rural markets are of very low quality..... small rental rooms I happy am housed in the school... the house is good... I feel safe. Initially i was staying in the local market. Available houses were in poor condition ... with no electricity and shared amenities... the school has 6 houses for teachers. They are not enough for everyone (Interview: 1/4//2016).*

The study, sought the views of principals on the importance of providing houses as a strategy to attraction and retention of female teachers to secondary schools in rural areas. All the principals in agreement with (Musembi, 2011; Swai, 2013; Oliviera, 2015)and Boniface, 2016) accepted that this would be a very effective strategy. They also outlined the status of provision of houses in their schools, the local markets as well as the challenges they faced in implementing this policy. Concerning the policy of housing for female teachers the principals had a lot to say. One principal commented:

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*...Housing is an effective strategy. Like my school has houses when we have transfers we get many requests from teachers who want to come. We have 6 houses which are available. We house one female teacher... In the nearby market the houses available are not good. They are low class. Financing is the challenge. Infrastructure development is the responsibility of parents the Constituency development fund prioritizes classes not teacher's houses (Interview: 1/4/2016).*

The views of a KUPPET official concurred with those of the female teachers and principals. She went further and articulated what role the union was playing towards the implementation of this policy. She declared:

*...of course it is a good strategy. You know like in boys schools the preference is to house male teachers because female teachers are seen as committed to their family chores. Most schools are don't have houses.. Many schools have only two houses for principals and deputies. Some have none at all. In our school we have talked to the Board of Management to understand that female teachers who commute are straining. When we attend principals meetings as a union we advocate for housing of female teachers in schools. In the local markets the available houses are not attractive but because you have no choice you are forced to stay. The bigger house could be two double rooms or even two different rooms. Sometimes teachers are forced to rent more than one. The houses lack essentials like water and electricity. (Interview:24/2/2016).*

The study also sought the views of TSC officials on provision of Housing to female teachers. The TSC county human resource officer concurred:

*...It is true that provision of staff houses could attract and retain female teachers in secondary schools in rural areas. Unfortunately most teachers live in the rural markets where houses are of poor quality. Most secondary schools in the county do not have the financial resources to build. However the more established schools do have some houses.. If schools were facilitated by the ministry of education to construct more houses female teachers would be happier and feel secure to work in these areas. This would*

*ensure higher retention the female teachers... the teachers' service commission pays a teacher a house allowance and it is upon the teacher to identify a suitable place to live in (Interview:18/5/2016).*

Consistent with previous researches (Beckett, 2009, Heeralal, 2014, Boniface, 2016) housing for teachers is one of the most significant factors in attraction and retention of teachers in secondary schools located in remote rural areas. Mulkeen (2010) and Lowe (2006) were categorical that availability of houses near schools was strongly linked to retention of female teachers. Findings from this study have clearly shown that the quality of housing in most parts of Makueni County is very poor. Irrefutable scholarly evidence exists to show that poor quality housing conditions demoralize teachers, lower their self-esteem, and escalate their poor performance, and ultimately contributes to their turnover (Bennel, 2004).

Regarding decentralization of teacher recruitment the study concludes that a majority of the female teachers had been recruited through this policy despite the fact the policy makes no preference for the female teachers. Furthermore, a majority of the respondents did not like the mandatory 5 year stay policy on first appointment especially given the fact that even after serving for that period transfers were not guaranteed.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings study concludes that payment hardship allowance is an effective strategy for attraction and retention of female teachers in rural areas. Concerning the provision of housing, the study concludes that a majority of the respondents regard it an effective strategy for attraction and retention of female teachers. Further the study concludes that a majority of the female teachers live in rural markets where houses were of very poor quality since most of the schools don't have staff houses. Despite this, the study affirms that the provision of houses for teachers isn't prioritized especially in day schools which are the majority in the County. Financing, the study asserts is a major challenge facing schools in efforts to construct houses for teachers. Finally, regarding this strategy the study determines that the role of the employer ends with the payment of house allowance. This study therefore concludes that there is need to take deliberate and concrete

steps to actualize this strategy whose potential to address the problem of female teacher attraction and retention for in rural areas well documented.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Recommendations regarding decentralized teacher recruitment**

The study recommends that: a) there is need to revisit the policy on decentralized teacher recruitment with a view of guaranteeing more female teachers get posted by providing for quotas which would be consistent with the two thirds gender rule as enshrined in the Kenyan constitution of 2010. The recruitment guidelines should also have parameters to identify female candidates who are likely to remain for long in the rural areas if recruited. This proceeds from the finding that even though the policy indicates gender would be one of the guiding principles the guidelines for teacher recruitment doesn't make any provisions for. The presence of many female teachers in secondary schools however suggests that by declaring most of the vacancies in rural schools the policy does contribute both by design and default and so this study recommends it should be maintained albeit with the suggested improvements. The study also recommends that on based on the fact that that some of the schools in the rural areas more so the newly established day schools lack female teachers the TSC should design a system such that teaching vacancies in such circumstances are reserved for female candidates during recruitment.

### **Recommendations on bonding of teachers**

The study recommends that 5 years stay policy' for all teachers on first appointment needs to be reviewed with a possibly of reducing it to 3 years. This would be consistent with suggestions of female teachers and a government task force report. The policy, the study recommends should not be applied in the entire country but on a case by case basis since the situations are not the same and there could be rural areas where female teachers are more comfortable living in as compared to others. Furthermore while the policy assures some schools female teacher attraction and retention it makes it very difficult for others especially in the more remote rural parts of the county.

The TSC should also contemplate commencing a transfer policy that assures unconditional transfer

to female teachers who have worked for a given number of years beyond the obligatory five years in a rural area to a place of choice. This would be a welcome shift from the current practice which offers no guarantee and appears to burden the female teacher with the duty of getting a suitable replacement

### **Recommendations regarding Hardship allowance**

The TSC in consultation with the SRC should review the adequacy of hardship allowance in view of the current practice of pegging the allowance on a teacher's job group unlike before when it was calculated at 30% of a teachers basic pay guaranteeing teachers an increment every time their basic pay was raised. It is possible the study recommends working out an acceptable financial compensation for teachers in the county and offering a standardized amount irrespective of a teacher's job group. This is critical given that a majority of the female teachers are in the lower job groups. In doing this study recommends that the experiences of hardship as experienced by the female teachers be taken into consideration.

There is need for a paradigm shift in the determination of hardship areas in the County to one that looks at smaller units like Sub Counties, divisions, wards and even schools. The current system is based on the County as a unit and treats all areas in the same way yet some are more endowed than others. The import of this is that female teachers in the same job group within the county get the same amount notwithstanding the fact that they encounter different levels of hardship. Such a practice is not without precedence in the country as there are places where the payment of hardship allowance is based on smaller administrative units like Sub counties and would imbue a sense of justice and fairness especially for female teachers in schools in the more remote areas in the county.

The government should redefine its description of rural areas regarding teacher deployment its official documents. Currently definitions such as 'hardship areas', 'remote rural areas', 'hard to staff', 'difficult to staff' are not uncommon and tend to perpetuate negative connotations and stereotypes among female teachers regarding working and living in such areas thus affecting efforts towards attraction and retention . This study therefore recommends the use of definitions that portray these areas for what

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they are 'the next frontiers' for development in our country especially now that we have a devolved system of government.

### **Recommendations regarding provision of Housing for female teachers**

The government should revisit its policy of provision of housing to female teachers in rural areas. It should go beyond mere rhetoric and take concrete steps including budgetary provisions and systematic plans for construction of houses in secondary schools to address this problem across the country. Further the government should consider availability of houses in schools as one criterion during registration of new schools. Similarly, the TSC as the employer should not limit its role in this matter to the payment of house allowance. This study recommends that the TSC should consider availability of houses in schools especially in the very remote areas where there are no market centres in the vicinity a condition before allocation of vacancies during teacher recruitment.

Given the fact that lack of decent housing is a significant contributor to low retention the current study advances a number of strategies; a) the National government should provide current data on the deficit in the provision of houses in the schools in the county b) Private developers should be identified and be given tax incentives to participate in private –public partnerships with the schools in construction of houses which should be rented to the teachers at a reasonable cost to enable the investors to recoup their investments , c) Local markets near schools should be mapped and marketed to investors to construct houses following guidelines approved by County governments to ensure quality houses are constructed and availed to the schools for leasing for the teachers d). Individual schools could help in attraction and retention of female teachers in rural areas. They ought to prioritize in their development or strategic plans the wellbeing of their teachers especially with regard to housing and other school facilities and encourage parents to contribute and seek support from the Constituency Development Funds and well-wishers, e) Where school houses are inadequate as is the case in most schools in the county it is suggested that female teachers be given a priority in getting accommodation within the schools.

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