



## **Free Primary Education, Gender and Intersectionality: Implications for Gender Equity in Basic Education for Marginalized Groups in Kenya**

Dr. Violet K. Wawire, School of Education,  
Department of Educational Foundations  
Kenyatta University, Kenya  
Mobile: +254-733 761820  
Email: [wawire.violet@ku.ac.ke](mailto:wawire.violet@ku.ac.ke)

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### **Abstract**

*Free Primary Education (FPE) program was introduced in Kenya in 2003 by the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) Government to abolish primary school fees. Recent evidence indicates that a substantial number of children, especially girls are still out of school and that initial gains from the program have been eroded by wastage issues within the system. Specifically, girls from poor, rural and marginalized backgrounds are most affected. The study employed the critical social theory, from a gender perspective, to interrogate the concept of gender and intersectionality in education provision. The challenges that girls face due to social circumstances they find themselves in because they have a disability or where they come from either rural, urban slum, or marginalized region intersect with gender to exacerbate their exclusion in education. This study analyzes the 2019 basic education statistical data from Kenya and supplements it with evidence from qualitative data from four case schools representing rural, slum, pastoralist and disability categories of marginalization in the Kenyan context to highlight the multiple marginalizations that girls from these backgrounds face of girls. In confirming that gender intersectionality is a reality in gender neutral policies like the FPE, the study reports that girls from poor and marginalized communities have lower educational participation outcomes compared to their affluent counterparts due to social, cultural and economic factors. It suggests strategies of enhancing their status to enable them benefit from FPE and related interventions.*

**Key Words:** Intersectionality, Free Primary Education, Gender, Marginalized Groups

### **1.1 Introduction**

Primary education is at the top of the global agenda more so for most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa where a substantial amount of faith has been placed in the role of basic education in solving

socio-political and economic problems facing the continent (Gyimah- Brempong, 2011, Takala, 2010, Bruns, 2005). Several efforts have been made to support countries to ensure that all children access primary schooling. International mobilization and commitment to achieving Education For All (EFA) has been articulated and reaffirmed in various international platforms including the 1990 Jomtien World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA), the Dakar 2000 World Education Forum and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UNESCO, 2015, Bruns, 2005). EFA's global agenda entails broadening access to and participation in basic education by all children regardless of their gender, socio-economic or geographical origin (UNESCO, 2015). Consequently, most African countries began to employ the Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy as a pathway to equalizing social opportunity (UNESCO, 2015, Bruns, 2005). According to UNESCO's Global Monitoring Report (GMR), 2019, UPE has led to increased attendance in primary education for most African countries with improvements in Net Enrolment Ratios (NER) from 56% to 79% between 1999 and 2017. Regrettably, the percentage of children out of school globally still remains large with the African continent contributing the most numbers. Figures for 2017 put the number of out of school children in Sub Saharan Africa at 21% which is way above the world average of 9% (UNESCO, 2019). Therefore, while education is a basic entitlement to all citizens in most countries, the populace continues to experience unequal access to basic education with 64 million children globally not attending school and access being further curtailed by primary school drop-outs mainly for African children of whom half are girls (UNESCO, 2019). Kenya, like most countries in Africa, mirrors this picture in terms of efforts to equalize access to education for its citizens through provision of FPE with similar achievements.

In line with the EFA goals the provision of UPE has dominated the Kenyan Government's educational goals since independence with an initial attempt at implementation, which was not sustained being made in 1974 in the form of abolition of school fees. These efforts were however revived in 2003 with the introduction of Free Primary Education (FPE) by the new National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) Government that took political power (Oxfam, 2005, MOEST, 2003). By abolishing payment of primary school fees for parents, the FPE policy was envisaged to remove a major obstacle that hindered children of school going age from accessing and completing primary education. This was the case of many vulnerable children including orphans, girls, those from urban slums, rural areas, pastoralist backgrounds and those with disabilities (GOK, 2003). On average the improved Gross Enrolment Rates (GER) of 63% in 1999 to 82.3% in 2008 at the primary school level are accredited to the FPE program (UNESCO, 2015, MOE, 2009). The FPE policy was reinforced by the passing of the 2010 constitution and the Basic education Act of 2013 (GOK, 2010, 2013). However, like was observed earlier in the case of other African countries, the measurements of success in the attainment of UPE based on country averages, mask extreme inequalities linked to wealth and gender. In Kenya, national averages camouflage regional differences in terms of access as indicated by the large number of children of school going age (7.5 %) who are still out of school or drop out and do not complete the primary school cycle (MOEST, 2019). These statistics point to the fact that there is a group of children within the system whose needs have not been put into consideration to enable them benefit from the access opportunities availed by the FPE program despite the abolition of school fees. Statistics indicate that children from urban slums, remote rural areas, Arid and Semi-arid Lands (ASAL), those with disabilities and girls are the most vulnerable groups as regards access and retention in primary education (UNESCO, 2020, MOEST, 2019).

Each of these groups of children presents unique socio-economic and cultural backgrounds that require critical scrutiny in relation to educational provision to inform relevant and meaningful policy and program interventions.

### **Statement of the problem**

While most forms of vulnerability as they relate to FPE provision in Kenya, have received empirical scrutiny, gender which cuts across all forms of marginalization is yet to undergo a comprehensive analysis to determine dynamics and educational implications of the interactions that exist (UNESCO, 2015, Ruto, and Mugo, 2009, Mugisho, 2006, Sifuna, 2005). Factors leading to marginalization do not operate in isolation; disability, wealth, and gender interact with regional and rural differences to create mutually reinforcing disadvantages in a phenomenon known as intersectionality (Unterhalter, Robinson & Balsera, 2020). Justification for the gender approach obviously lies in the societal benefits of educating women at the primary school level in relation to promoting family education, fertility, and income. Further, inequalities often combine to exacerbate the risk of being left behind especially for the case of girls (Unterhalter, Robinson & Balsera, 2020, UNESCO, 2019, 2015, Bruns, 2005). An understanding of the socio-cultural, political, and economic dynamics of gendered experiences of children will assist in identifying policy and structural options that can address the needs of excluded girls. The present study, therefore, endeavored to further the current academic and policy discourse on UPE provision on the continent by documenting the gendered differences in the patterns and trends in enrolments and drop-outs between poor and rich economically endowed districts/counties and zones as well as those of children with special needs in Kenya. These statistics are substantiated by context-specific challenges behind gender inequalities in education provision. The study also provides policy and structural solutions that can enhance the participation of all girls of primary school-going age in education in Kenya and Africa.

### **Research Questions:**

The paper was guided by the following research questions:

- What are the gender desegregated enrolments and dropout trends by District/County and zones and those of students with special needs under the FPE program in Kenya?
- What gendered factors influence the participation of children from marginalized communities and backgrounds under the FPE program in Kenya?
- What policy and structural strategies could be used to enhance the participation of girls from marginalized communities and backgrounds in primary education under the FPE program in Kenya?

### **1.2 Methodology**

The paper mainly uses the secondary research design to answer the research questions. Secondary research involves re-analyzing, interpreting, or reviewing past data, in this case, statistical data from the Ministry of Education (Johnston, 2014). This design is appropriate because it gave the researcher the opportunity to re-assess MOE data to unearth the manifestations of gender and intersectionality in primary education in Kenya. However, field data was also used to enrich

statistical data and establish the gendered participation trends (and the reasons behind these) of children from marginalized communities in Kenya under the FPE program.

Secondary data was in form of quantitative data on District/County-based school enrolments and dropout trends before and after the introduction of the FPE policy in Kenya are based on statistical data from the Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MOEST) between 2006 and 2019. This was supplemented with field data, conducted from July to October 2018. Four purposively selected case study schools chosen to represent the different groups of children from marginalized groups and backgrounds in the country were visited. In order to study the diverse socio-cultural and economic conditions inherent in the country, schools located in Nairobi, Kajiado, and Bungoma counties were selected to represent urban, slum, arid, and pastoralist, and rural areas respectively. In addition, Nairobi housed the school catering for pupils with disabilities. Nairobi was selected because it is a capital city operating as the administrative and economic nerve center of the country, characteristics that explain the influx of people from other parts of the country that come in search of employment and other financial opportunities. Its urban nature elucidates the cosmopolitan character that has attracted people from diverse cultural, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds including those that live in informal settlements that are not conducive for school participation. The growing unemployment trends and related economic decline in the country account for 60% of the city residents living in slum communities (Mugisha, 2001). In relation to special needs education, Nairobi was suitable as a study site because it is the residence of some of the oldest special education units attached to primary schools in the country that were started way back by the missionaries and would be a source of rich data on how and why patterns of enrolment have changed with the introduction of FPE.

Kajiado County which is one of the Counties in the Rift Valley province was selected to represent the ASALs. Kajiado County is the least populated in the province mainly inhabited by the semi-nomadic pastoral Maasai community whose main source of livelihood is livestock farming supplemented by agriculture and mining activities when the climate is favorable. Apart from the unfavorable environmental conditions that result in frequent droughts and lack of water for human and livestock consumption, the County is among those that were for a long time marginalized by poor government policies that resulted in the underdevelopment of the area in terms of lack of infrastructure including roads, schools and health services (GOK, 2005, Sifuna, 2005). The school selected from Bungoma County represents learning environments in a rural setting and exemplifies the fact that even within environments of average socioeconomic capacity one may find pockets of poverty. Bumula, the administrative division where the school is situated is the largest in terms of size and among the poorest in the County with high poverty levels that are occasioned by unreliable sources of livelihood. When sugarcane was introduced as a cash crop in the region, residents abandoned the subsistence farming that had been their source of food security for years in favor of the new agricultural model. Regrettably, sugarcane farming has not yielded the dividends they expected due to delays in crop harvesting by the multinational firm responsible. The area's suitability for the study was also in terms of the reality that residents still adhere to cultural practices like wife inheritance, early marriages and polygamy which may have a negative impact on the education of girls (Namalwa, 2014, GOK, 2005).

Other than providing data on enrolments by gender for comparative purposes with the County

statistics, the schools also supplied the study with qualitative information critical to the understanding of the context of the statistical trends observed. With the assistance of the teachers, the study identified children who had problems with school attendance as indicated by chronic absenteeism and those who had dropped out of school to furnish data on gendered participation-related experiences. In-depth interviews were therefore conducted with in-school, and out-of-school girls and their teachers, from one school serving children with disabilities and each of the marginalized zones that included urban slums, ASALs, and rural areas. Interviews provided information on the reasons behind the different patterns of participation between the different economic and agro-ecological zones found in the country and between schools serving children without disabilities and those with disabilities.

Table 1 gives a breakdown of the category of the selected schools including the sample size of the respondents that took part in the in-depth interviews.

**Table1:** Sample Frame

Respondent	Rural	Urban slum	ASAL	Disability	TOTALS
Teachers	6	8	6	4	24
Out of school girls	6	6	6	6	24
In school girls	10	10	10	10	40
Totals	<b>22</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>88</b>

Source: Field data, 2018

Secondary data was collected mainly using a desk review of grey and published literature on the gendered participation trends (and the reasons behind these) of children from marginalized communities in the country under the FPE program. Of great interest and significance were reported from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that had been working in the marginalized communities and with disability schools in the country for several years accumulating a wealth of insights into their cultural and economic way of life that had implications on educational participation especially for the girl child. This information was critically analyzed against available government policy and evaluation reports to generate conclusions for the study. The available literature and documentary evidence was also used to decipher both structural and policy strategies that could be used to enhance the participation of girls from disadvantaged backgrounds in primary education.

**1.3 Theoretical framework**

The theoretical underpinnings of the study are informed by the scarcity of data especially in Africa, on how different social structures of inequality intersect and how these affect educational provision (Ruto and Mugo 2009, Mugisho 2006, Sifuna 2005, UNESCO, 2005). Intersectionality which involves the intersection of various aspects of vulnerability as they relate to the educational provision in Africa has received minimal attention yet it is apparent that interactions between more than one variable of vulnerability would have devastating impacts on those concerned (Unterhalter, Robinson & Balsera, 2020). For example, gender as an aspect of vulnerability often cuts across all other forms



of discrimination making the educational experiences of girls more challenging and curtailing their ability to take up new access opportunities like UPE (UNESCO, 2010). Imperatively, the critical social theory presents the most appropriate framework for the understanding of the study subject given that it explains social inequalities in society. The critical social perspective was thus used to interrogate the educational outcomes of FPE for marginalized groups in Kenya. However, since the study's focus was on girls' experiences, this was blended with the feminist approach.

The critical social theory postulates that social reality is historically constituted and that it is produced and reproduced by people. While it is acknowledged that individuals can consciously act to change their social and economic conditions, these are constrained by various forms of cultural and political domination. The main task of critical social researchers is therefore that of social critique that brings to light the restrictive and alienating conditions and how these can be overcome (Scott, 1978). Applied to the study, therefore, the perspective was behind the efforts that illuminated the characteristics, levels, trends, and interactions of marginalization in relation to the education of girls under the FPE program. The critical social theory, by means of the feminist approach, was hence functional for this paper in the following specific ways:

- It aided the study to identify the marginalizing conditions that impact on the effective participation of children and especially girls, in schooling from the existing literature addressing the Kenyan scene. The conditions that generate vulnerabilities include but were not limited to urban informal settlement environments, rural areas, cultural practices, poverty, and historically determined policy environments.
- It formed the basis of establishing logical links and intersections between marginalizing conditions in educational uptake and gender. In this regard, the literature was cross-examined to establish unique elements that differentiated the experiences of boys to that of girls given a similar set of general circumstances of marginalization in the context of school provision in Kenya.
- Guided insights into the timing of girls' absenteeism and dropout from school as it relates to the maturation cycle of women and community livelihood sourcing activities like harvesting or planting in the case of agriculture-based economies.
- Supported the generation of strategies that would be used to reduce the disparities that exist in the uptake of FPE between boys and girls in marginalized communities in Kenya.

## **2.0 Results and Discussion**

Data collected from the field is supported by relevant secondary data from literature and reported below along the study objectives.

### **2.1 Gender disaggregated primary school enrolment and drop-out trends by district/county**

The introduction of FPE resulted in a significant increase in the national enrolment of pupils at the primary level. However, since national figures mask regional and gender imbalances, the study selected representatives of marginalized communities to be compared with economically endowed counties located in the central region and Nairobi to get insights into the educational outcomes that relate to gender and vulnerability. The specific criteria for County selection included, areas serving

ethnic minorities, ASALs; areas with strong cultural inclinations, and Nairobi and Central province counties to serve comparative purposes. The eight districts/Counties each represent one of the eight former provinces in the country. The summary of primary school enrolments for 2006 and 2014 for public schools where FPE was in operation is presented in table 2.

**Table 2:** Public Primary School Enrolments for Selected Counties, 2006 and 2014

District/ County	2006					2019				
	Boys	Girls	Total	%B	%G	Boys	Girls	Total	%B	%G
Busia	42993	43295	86288	49.82	50.18	113,528	111,580	225,108	50.43	49.57
Homabay	48300	46800	95100	50.78	49.22	141,370	137,462	278,832	50.71	49.29
Kwale	74968	63835	138803	54.01	45.99	94,031	90,819	184,850	50.87	49.13
Murang'a	42263	41814	84077	50.27	49.73	88,100	83,785	171,885	51.26	48.74
Nairobi	95508	97701	193209	49.43	50.57	108,524	113,428	221,952	48.90	51.10
Marsabit	10522	9056	19578	53.74	46.26	25,790	25,754	51,544	50.04	49.96
Turkana	27321	19980	47301	57.76	42.24	79,348	71,208	150,556	52.71	47.29
Mandera	20849	9072	29921	69.68	30.31	57,703	34,421	92,124	62.64	37.36
National	<b>3722255</b>	<b>3537863</b>	<b>7260118</b>	<b>51.26</b>	<b>48.73</b>	<b>4,304,595</b>	<b>4,185,903</b>		<b>50.78</b>	<b>49.22</b>

Source: Basic Education Statistical Abstract, 2014, 2019

The table indicates increases in enrolments within the selected period for both boys and girls but these have not been matched with improvements in the percentages of girls enrolling in the system. Given that gender parity was not attained in most Counties, with only Nairobi registering more girls than boys according to this data, not much is happening to narrow the gender gap which is as high as 5 - 25 points in counties like Marsabit, Turkana, and Mandera Counties in the ASAL region. Busia County exemplifies the loss in the gains in girls' enrolment that were initially made but have been eroded with time.

Table 3 provides the Net Enrolment Ratios (NERs) in the same period. NER represents enrolments of the official age group for a given level of education expressed as a percentage of the corresponding population and can tell us the percentage of children who are not enrolled in school but are of school-going age.

**Table 3:** Primary School Net Enrolment Ratios (NER) of Selected Counties, by Gender for 2009 and 2014

County	2009			2014		
	Boys (%)	Girls (%)	Total (%)	Boys (%)	Girls (%)	Total (%)
Busia	81.0	83.3	82.2	96.0	96.8	96.4
Embu	90.4	92.1	91.3	94.1	98.3	96.2
Kiambu	90.4	91.2	90.8	95.7	98.2	96.1
Kwale	69.1	69.9	69.5	74.1	78.3	76.1
Murang'a	93.2	93.7	93.4	97.1	98.7	97.9
Migori	81.7	83.3	82.5	93.2	98.7	95.9
Nairobi	86.6	87.2	86.9	77.7	77.9	77.8
Marsabit	49.0	47.7	48.4	71.3	60.6	65.8
Turkana	24.7	24.6	24.6	67.5	50.8	58.8
Mandera	42.9	40.6	41.9	35.3	17.1	25.3
Wajir	35.9	32.9	34.6	35.6	20.4	27.2
<b>National</b>	<b>76.2</b>	<b>78.3</b>	<b>77.2</b>	<b>90.0</b>	<b>86.4</b>	<b>88.2</b>

Source: Basic Education Statistical Abstract, 2014, 2019

Similar trends to those observed in the general enrolment of girls are observed in table 3 with regard to NER for ASAL counties. The NER in ASAL counties are generally not only way below the national figures but also those for girls are lower than that of boys. However, there is a shift in participation patterns in the rest of the counties except Nairobi with girls NERs surpassing those of boys. This scenario points to the need to expand the gender focus by including the participation of boys in rural and non-pastoralist regions. The study however went beyond issues of access to analyze patterns of participation in primary schooling in terms of dropout and completion rates by gender as presented in Table 4 for 2006 that was the recent most available data.

**Table 4:** Primary School Drop-Out and Completion Rates by Gender/District for 2006

County	Dropout Rates			Completion Rates		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Kwale	4.5	3.6	3.9	74.5	43.9	58.2
Murang'a	0.7	1.9	1.3	88.0	82.4	85.5
Nairobi	7.6	6.9	7.3	48.5	52.4	50.5
Marsabit	2.2	9.6	5.6	46.1	27.8	36.9
Turkana	16.8	19.9	18.2	55.6	22.9	39.3
Teso	2.6	1.8	2.2	85.4	58.7	71.9
Suba	1.0	0.6	0.8	95.7	59.2	77.5
Mandera	1.9	2.2	2.0	46.2	17.2	32.1
<b>National</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>81.6</b>	<b>71.1</b>	<b>76.4</b>

Source: Basic Education Statistical Abstract, 2014

While completion rates were lower for girls in all districts except Nairobi, dropout rates were higher for girls especially in ASAL districts except for Kwale, Nairobi, and Teso. These results point to the need to investigate contextual factors that affect the participation of boys and girls across urban and rural divides leading to wastage in the primary education system. The study went further to examine education quality indicators to report differentiated conditions by gender as reported in Table 5 below.



**Table 5:** Pupil /Teacher and Textbook Ratios for Public Primary Schools, 2014

County	Teacher /Pupil Ratios	Pupil /text book Ratios
<b>Busia</b>	1: 42.3	2.2
<b>Embu</b>	1: 25.0	1.6
<b>Kiambu</b>	1: 32.0	1.7
<b>Kwale</b>	1: 38.7	1.9
<b>Muranga</b>	1: 30.4	1.5
<b>Migori</b>	1: 40.6	2.0
<b>Nairobi</b>	1: 36.2	1.7
<b>Marsabit</b>	1: 37.4	2.3
<b>Turkana</b>	1: 71.7	3.1
<b>Mandera</b>	1: 68.2	2.6
<b>Wajir</b>	1: 48.5	2.9
<b>National</b>	<b>1: 34.5</b>	<b>1.8</b>

Source: Basic Education Statistical Abstract, 2019

The table indicates that the pupil / teacher-pupil /textbook ratios are below the national average for most counties except those in the central province like Embu, Kiambu Muranga, and Nairobi. This setup has implications on the teaching methodologies employed by teachers that aim to cater to a large number of pupils per class limiting the participation of pupils in the teaching/learning process. Yet, girls and pupils with disabilities that thrive better in learning environments where they receive individual attention from teachers due to their low self-esteem levels but get less attention from teachers in normal circumstances in Kenya, are disadvantaged even more. Consequently, smaller classes present better chances for girls to participate in the learning process (Samuelsson and Samuelsson, 2016, Kitetu, 1998). A further analysis of the participation of pupils with disabilities in schooling in Kenya based on the Kenya National Survey for Persons with Disabilities and National census data is provided in table 6 below.

**Table 6:** Participation of children with and without disabilities in Primary schooling by Age and Gender

	Out of School Children Without Disabilities	Out of School Children With Disabilities
<b>Age</b>		
<b>6</b>	14.30	32.08
<b>7</b>	8.60	28.85
<b>8</b>	6.39	31.37
<b>9</b>	5.05	12.50
<b>10</b>	5.38	17.50
<b>11</b>	4.05	16.67
<b>12</b>	5.43	11.67
<b>13</b>	4.9	19.28
<b>Gender</b>		
<b>Boys</b>	8.21	20.58
<b>Girls</b>	10.43	23.53

Source: Kenya National Survey for Persons with Disabilities (KNSPD), Moyo, 2017

The table shows remarkable differences between the participation of children with and without

disabilities especially at the younger ages and between girls and boys with boys having an upper hand.

**Table 7:** The Participation of Children with and without Disabilities in Primary Schooling by Residence

Residence	Out of School Children Without Disabilities %	Out of School Children With Disabilities %
<b>Urban</b>	9.68	18.44
<b>Rural</b>	9.22	22.74
Province		
<b>Nairobi</b>	8.29	8.84
<b>Central</b>	4.97	17.46
<b>Coast</b>	11.37	22.48
<b>Eastern</b>	6.49	21.37
<b>North Eastern</b>	34.56	50.00
<b>Nyanza</b>	4.27	17.04
<b>Rift valley</b>	10.42	27.50
<b>Western</b>	4.63	24.29

Source: Kenya National Survey for Persons with Disabilities (KNSPD), Moyi, 2017

Table 7 also indicates lower levels of participation for children with disabilities residing in rural areas with about 23% of rural children with disabilities being out of school compared to about 18% of urban children of the same category. Similar trends were reported for some rural provinces including North Eastern province (50%), Rift Valley (27.50%), Western (24.29 %), and Coast (22.48 %). These results agree with similar work that found girls from poor backgrounds in Kenya and South Africa being disadvantaged when it came to accessing to primary education ().

**2.2 Gendered factors that influence the participation of children from marginalized Counties and zones**

The study findings indicate an intersection between various marginalizing conditions which will be highlighted in the discussions that ensue. However, for purposes of clarity, each issue is argued in isolation.

***Geographical location and Poverty***

Physical location emerged as a very significant determinant of whether children accessed and were retained in primary school in the country. Broadly speaking, children residing in locations that were far from the government administrative centers and urban centers were more likely to have issues in educational participation than those in the reverse locations. Rural and remote locations are more often excluded from government development planning and therefore lack basic infrastructure including roads, electricity, and basic services like schools and hospitals essential for decent living and a prerequisite for industrial and business undertakings in a region. In specific, the North Eastern province and most semi-arid and arid lands are reported to have been the worst hit by governmental policy marginalization in Kenya’s history. Literature on the subject establishes strong relationships between Government neglect and poor educational levels of the communities (Ruto & Mugo,

2009, Sifuna, 2005). Nonetheless, the emergence of informal unplanned settlements in major towns in Kenya to cater to low-income residents changes the equation of urbanization and universal affluence. Individuals living in slums under deplorable conditions devoid of basic amenities and infrastructure make up half of the urban populations in the country (Mugisha, 2001).

The absence of industrial and commerce opportunities contributes to the high levels of poverty exhibited in most rural and remote locations. Poverty is one of the strongest factors that marginalize individuals and communities in Kenya given that more than half of the population lives below the poverty line (GOK, 2000). Calculations on the incidence of poverty establish a correlation between geographical location and related agro-ecological characteristics and levels of poverty placing ASALs and rural areas at the top of the poverty ladder. The ASALs North Eastern and Eastern provinces have the highest poverty levels followed closely by rural Counties like the Coast and Nyanza. Similarly, the poor are clustered in socio-economic categories that include small-scale farmers, pastoralist casual laborers, and people with disabilities, again subscribing to the same pattern of vulnerability observed earlier (GOK, 2000). Consequently, regional disparities are closely related and compounded by other socioeconomic disparities.

Poverty and related socio-economic ability have considerable implications on the schooling uptake of households especially when schooling involves meeting some costs (Boadu, 2002, Nungu, 2010). Empirical evidence indicates that although education at the primary level is free, children are still required to meet supplementary costs towards uniforms, textbooks, remedial classes, construction of buildings, and other costs in cash and kind (World Bank, 2009, Sifuna, 2007, UNESCO, 2005) Field data under this study authenticates this fact as articulated by an interview response from one out of school girl residing in a rural area in the western province.

“People think that education is for free. You need about 600 shillings every term”

600ksh is equivalent to six (6) US dollars and should be viewed in the context of half of Kenyans living below the poverty line on less than a dollar a day.

While the additional school costs were a contributory factor to the high absenteeism levels and many drop out cases in the case schools, interviews with girls revealed that school uniforms and access to sanitary towels during menstruation periods were the most critical for them. The availability of a uniform that is in good condition is very important to girls especially when they approach puberty. The significance of having a uniform that was not torn in terms of the confidence it gave one especially when answering questions or performing class activities where one was selected as an individual becomes apparent from the data. According to one deputy male headteacher, girls were more self-conscious than boys when faced with situations like this that centered on their appearance. Similarly, in support of available evidence, the field data disclosed the fact that girls from poor backgrounds missed out on many days of schooling in a given year due to a lack of sanitary towels. This problem was compounded when there was a lack of water in the school and enough toilets for girls to maintain hygiene (Ruto & Mugo 2009, UNESCO, 2005, WERK, 2004). In support of these claims, the study calculated the average number of girls' toilets in the schools against the number of girls in the two case schools and found a ratio of 843:9 translating to 94:1. For girls, this presents a very high number of sharing one toilet and may result in absenteeism especially during

their menses. To exemplify this state of affairs is the confession of one girl from the pastoral setting who claims to have never seen or used sanitary towels.

Direct and indirect costs of sending children to school in Kenya are often higher for households living in rural and remote areas where the majority of the poor live (World Bank, 2009). Investing in the education of children is even more uneconomical in pastoralist communities where the value for education is so low to the point that it is only counted upon in times when the pastoral economy fails, normally during the drought season to supplement family income (Kratli, 2001, Mlama, 2001). The indirect costs involve the opportunity cost parents have to incur in taking children to school in terms of child labor that forms a substantive contribution to the household economy of poor households. While girls assist in performing household chores like collecting firewood, cooking, fetching water, and watering cows in the case of pastoralist communities, boys do work outside the house that may involve herding animals and helping to run small family businesses. The household chores performed by girls have higher returns for rural economies because it is labor-intensive and time-consuming (especially in pastoral communities where drought conditions multiply the time taken to fetch water and traditional cooking methods consume a lot of time) they are at the core of the production system. For example, household chores which are combined with taking care of the younger siblings and sick members are done to allow adults to attend to income and subsistence-related activities. In addition, field data indicates that the girls assist in these activities during their peak spells. Similar experiences are experienced by girls with disabilities because of the high costs required to enroll and retain children in units attached to regular schools but serving children with disabilities. Interviews revealed that parents are asked to pay up to 6,000KSH (60 USD) before a child is admitted into the school. In such a case the choice to enroll a girl with disabilities may conflict with traditional values surrounding the value of girls and disabled people in society and deny them a chance to basic education.

In these circumstances, the cost of educating girls is much higher than that of boys because of the incentives accrued from sending each gender to school. There seems to be better motivation for educating boys in poor communities as presented by the tangible benefits of education in the form of employment and local leadership opportunities that are acquired by men in the local vicinity. This is further compounded by the fact that conventional opinion encourages women to see their future as being centered on the house and family presenting no motivation for parents to use their limited resources on this venture (Boadu, 2002). A comment from one headteacher from the rural school talking about what happens when children are sent home for school fees sums up this perspective that girls education is under prioritized among poor communities:

“Pupils are affected by payment of school fees. If you send a pupil for ten shillings, it takes a long time for the pupil to come back. If they are girls, parents take advantage and give them household chores or send them on errands from relatives”

### *Cultural practices*

Cultural practices are similarly tied up to geographical location based on the fact that most rural and remote localities display strict adherence to cultural values, attitudes, and practices. Unfortunately, some of these practices, which were revealed by interviews and accentuated by related literature, comprising Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), early marriages, sexual violence, are detrimental

to girls education, excessive execution of domestic chores and male superiority and domination of women have a negative impact on education (Ruto & Mugo 2009, UNESCO, 2005, Mlama, 2001). FGM which is mainly performed among nomadic pastoralist communities in Kenya has implications on the schooling of girls because it coincides with puberty-related cultural practices like early marriages. The interviews revealed that during the initiation ceremonies that occur before the rites are performed, children of both genders are separately introduced to knowledge and values concerning procreation, morals, sexual skills, and birth control. However, it is only considered shameful for girls and not boys to return to school after this process (Oxfam, 2005, Boadu, 2002, World Bank, 2001). Consequently, girls are either withdrawn from school to get married in most cases to fetch dowry for their families. Bridewealth in these communities is taken to be very important to the development of household economies because it is not only seen as the acquisition of livestock and the wealth it represents but a means to gain social capital derived from sharing future help from the in-laws after marriage. According to Kratli's work among the Turkana, girls in this community are socialized from childhood to recognize that they have a temporal position within their family of birth and can only stabilize their position in society in marriage (Kratli, 2001). In these circumstances, an investment in the education of girls is an enormous trade-off.

Early pregnancies are another phenomenon that emerged from the study to have an impact on school participation. More than half (6 out of 11) out of schoolgirls who were interviewed were either pregnant or had dropped out of school due to pregnancy. This number includes one girl with a hearing impairment. They attribute their unplanned pregnancies to a lack of information on sexual and reproductive health especially as it relates to birth control and negotiation life skills. This finding ties up with a gender-related deficiency inherent in most marginalized environments that would have reversed the situations of these girls. The lack of female teachers as role models to the girls in these communities to whom they would reach to get emotional and moral support particularly with regard to issues centering around puberty and pregnancy explains part of the problem. Boadu, in his discussion of the Ghanaian experience, postulates that male teachers advising girls on sex issues may be regarded as sex provocation (Boadu, 2002).

The gender-based constraints to education in favor of boys are more pronounced in the rural and isolated areas because of lack of exposure to more progressive practices especially those that relate to gender. For example, due to poor infrastructure, gender sensitization campaigns by NGOs and government organizations that might be employed to change negative attitudes towards female education may never have reached these regions (Mlama, 2001).

### ***Long Distance to schools***

Living in sparsely populated remote and rural locations where schools are far from each other obliges children to walk long distances to and from school consuming some of their time for learning. According to the field data, this undertaking has a greater impact on the girls because when it combines with the household chores they have to carry out, it leaves them exhausted and unable to concentrate on school assignments which may cumulatively lead to absenteeism and sometimes drop out. In addition, for pastoralist communities where girls are highly supervised and protected in typical community settings, sending girls to school raises safety concerns because they will be far from home and vulnerable to abuse. This is one of the main reasons why boarding

schools in these locations are not popular options especially for girls (Oxfam, 2005, Sifuna 2005, Kratli, 2001).

For children in urban slum settings, long-distance to schools with similar outcomes is occasioned by the oversubscription in the neighborhood school schools due to the high demand for education under the FPE program (Mugisha, 2002). The applicability of this problem for girls lies in the fact that they form the majority of the primary school enrolment in the slums according to field data and corroborating evidence on the subject (Mudege, et al 2008, Mugisha, 2002). Girls formed 53% of the total school enrolments in the case school. Dangers for girls commuting to school arises from the fact that they have to board public transport (Matatu), where turn boys are reported to sexually harass young girls or walk through bushy terrain which exposes them to the risk of sexual harassment and rape (Mudege, et al, 2008). Girls with disabilities attending day schools also go through similar experiences although their vulnerability to harassment is compounded by the disability-related needs that require them to be dependent on other people for assistance in accomplishing their daily activities. In the case of school, they have to be escorted to school by individuals who may end up being their assailants. The field data reported cases of children with hearing impairments who had dropped out of school due to similar incidences.

### ***Insecure school and home environments***

Apart from distance from schools being a safety issue for girls in marginalized communities, school grounds and home environments also emerged as a threat to their security in relation to schooling. This was a reality mainly for children living in slum communities where violence inside and outside the family and insecurity is a common occurrence. Consequently, going by findings from two studies whose focus was on slum communities in Nairobi and confirmed by field data, fear of crime and possible rape was a major contributory factor to the girl dropout issue (Mudege, et al 2008, Erulkar & Matheka, 2007). Insecurity was not only eminent in the community where the children lived but were also a common characteristic of the school environments. There were reports of children carrying guns to school, girls being forced to have sex by their peers and teachers resulting in unwanted pregnancies, beatings, and hatred by teachers and schools being used as hiding dens for children who had committed crimes. Further, insecurity concerns were impacting the quality of education provided because teachers were forced to go late and leave school early due to fear of being assaulted on their way to and from school (Mudege, et al 2008, Erulkar & Matheka, 2007).

### ***Timing of Girl dropouts***

The study established patterns in the periods of the year and levels in the educational cycle when girls from marginalized communities began to experience absenteeism problems or dropped out of school. Generally, trends established were related to the role of girls in assisting in household chores and livelihood sourcing activities of the community concerned as well as participation in rites of passage processes. In terms of periods of the year, school absenteeism coincided with peak seasons of major agricultural activities like harvesting or planting of beans and sugarcane that took place in the months of June and July, in the case of the Bungoma rural site and January after rites of passage had been conducted for both boys and girls in the month of December, for the pastoral community in Kajiado. In terms of age and levels in the education cycle, girls seemed to drop out from the age of



ten years when they were in upper primary and old enough to assist in the household activities. An analysis of enrolment patterns by type of school, cohort and class for two of the case study schools illustrate this further. Enrolment data computations were done for the 2003 cohort for a rural and urban school for the years between 2003 and 2007.

**Table 8:** Enrolment patterns by school, gender and class for the 2003 cohort

Year/class(C)	Rural school			Urban school		
	Boys	Girls	%increase/decrease(G)	Boys	Girls	%increase/decrease (G)
2003/ C1	29	29		120	142	
2004/ C2	38	27	-6.89	115	145	2.11
2005/ C3	35	32	17.24	100	139	4.13
2006/ C4	28	20	-41.38	99	122	-12.23
2007/ C5	33	30	34.48	96	115	-5.04
2008/ C6	26	30	0	102	104	-7.91
2009/ C7	22	29	-3.45	95	94	-7.19
2010/ C8	12	12	-58.62	77	55	-28.06

Key: C-class, Source: fieldwork data 2017

The table indicates that gender parity is almost maintained in lower primary but begins to dwindle from this point with the worst results being exhibited at classes seven and eight just before girls sit for the final examinations. This pattern in participation has implications on the life chances of girls from marginalized communities in a country like Kenya where evidence of schooling is pegged on examination certificates that are only given when one completes and sits for the national examinations. This means that most girls not only miss out on gaining basic skills and knowledge taught in school but have less chances of accessing formal employment and further education, circumstances that limit their life chances.

### 3.1 Structural and policy strategies that can enhance the participation of girls from marginalized communities in FPE

Education For All (EFA) cannot be attained without targeted programs for special needs of girls excluded from school. The interventions would focus on the following areas that have been arrived at after scrutinizing existing programs for lessons that would inform future actions.

#### *Incentives for educating girls*

Families from poor and marginalized communities should be motivated to send and retain their girls in school by awarding scholarships and bursaries for girls to offset the opportunity costs incurred in the form of child labor and dowry received when these children are married off early. Inducements can also be engaged to attract female teachers to teach in remote and rural areas and serve as role models for the girls especially on puberty issues. This will subsequently serve to tackle the issue of early and unwanted pregnancies that curtail the educational and life chances of many girls in these communities. Extra allowances and benefits like those given to teachers serving what is known as

hardship areas in Kenya would be an initial step.

### ***Creating Girl Friendly schools***

The concept of fashioning and promoting schools where conditions are conducive for the holistic development of girls should be encouraged among all the primary schools. Lessons can be drawn from existing child-friendly schools sponsored by some NGOs like United Nations International Children's Educational Fund (UNICEF) and partners and Forum for African Women Educationists (FAWE). These schools have positive learning environments that comprise positive teacher attitudes, availability of learning materials, and adequate physical facilities including enough toilets and running water. Special needs of girls are further met by the provision of sanitary towels, education in life skills and sexual and reproductive health as well as the presence of female teachers.

### ***Boarding and mobile schools for ASAL areas***

Mobile and boarding schools should be upgraded to address the security concerns of parents in ASALs in order to attract and retain more girls. Specifically, the facilities should be improved, supplies of food regularized, running costs subsidized by the Government, and security beefed given that evidence on this matter pinpoints these shortcomings in existing schools (Ruto and Mugo 2009, Sifuna, 2007, Oxfam,2005, Kratli 2001).

### ***Gender Sensitization***

Gender sensitization workshops for members of communities should be conducted in remote and rural communities to not only highlight the benefits of educating girls but also on the hardships that girls undergo in learning under existing marginalizing cultural and structural contexts.

## **3.2 Conclusion**

Kenya like most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa where UPE is being pursued through the provision of FPE, and whose focus has been on the achievement of a general increase in enrolments must shift focus to begin examining levels of participation of children and more specifically, girls, from marginalized groups and communities. Instruments of measuring levels of participation like NERs, dropout, and completion rates among poor, remote, rural, and slum zones have revealed major disparities especially for the girl child and especially those with disabilities in comparison to richer Counties in Kenya. These have been substantiated by qualitative evidence that points to the unique needs of girls in these settings that need to be addressed and supported to enable them to access good quality education which can improve their capabilities and chances in life.

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