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To explore educational opportunities and challenges facing the Maasai girl child: A case study of the Aidlink School Sanitation Improvement Project, Kajiado County Kenya

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Executive summary

The barriers to education which exist for the Maasai girl child in Kajiado County, Kenya stem from multi-dimensional and deeply culturally entrenched issues. Despite the introduction of free primary school education by the Kenyan Ministry for Education in 2003, school dropout rates for girls in arid and semi-arid regions of the country remained high. In this case study of the School Sanitation Improvement Program established by Aidlink and the Girl Child Network in Kenya we found that the programs innovative, multi-dimensional approach to the inclusion of girls in education was not only effective, but essential in dealing with the issues of absenteeism and poor progression of girls in education.

1. Introduction

In 2004, a report on the status of gender equality in education highlighted the discrepancies in school dropout rates between girls and boys in arid and semi-arid lands (ASAL) in Kenya. Over the course of the study, between 2000 and 2003, significantly more girls than boys left education before completion (GCN, 2004, p37). In the same report, which detailed the multi-dimensional barriers to education for girls in these regions, lack of appropriate facilities for girls during menstruation was cited as a key factor that affected girls' performance, retention and transition (GCN, 2004, p15). In response to this need, and in an effort to address other harmful practices which negatively impact on girls' education, such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and early childhood marriage, Irish NGO Aidlink, in collaboration with the Girl Child Network (GCN) in Kenya, established the School Sanitation Improvement Project (SSIP) in Kajiado, an ASAL district south-west of Nairobi.

The aim of this case-study is, firstly, to understand the extent of issues faced by Maasai girls in attempting to attain an education in Kajiado, and subsequently to understand the scope of the SSIP and Aidlinks efforts to overcome these issues.

In June, 2011, the Kenyan Ministry for Education set aside Sh300 million (€2.7 million) to provide sanitary towels for girls in primary schools nationwide based on the Aidlink and GCN model. This

progressive move represents a significant effort on the part of the government to eradicate a substantial barrier to girls' education, yet simultaneously it presents new issues of complexity as would be associated with the implementation of any project on this scale. It is hoped that this paper will offer a practitioner, approaching this project for the first time, an introductory overview to the problems faced by Maasai girls in education and the operation of the SSIP.

This report will take the following shape. Section 2 will describe the methodology and limitations of our study. Section 3 will examine the cultural context in Kajiado County at the time of establishment of the SSIP and the specific aims and interventions included in the program. In Section 4 we will detail our findings.

2. 1 Research Methodology

The research design used in this study was a descriptive review. The study aimed to utilize both primary and secondary information as follows:

- Secondary data on girls education in Kenya was used to establish an understanding of the social and cultural issues which act as barriers to education for Maasai girls.
- Primary data on the process involved in establishing the SSIP within a school was collected from the GCN by means of a survey completed by the GCN Deputy-Director.

In attempting to describe the barriers to education for Maasai girls in Kajiado and the efficiency of the SSIP, the researchers used both qualitative and quantitative data.

2.2 Limitations

This is a retrospective, desk based case study of issues in Kajiado County and the SSIP. Given the specific nature of the case study, the qualitative and quantitative data required to properly assess both the issues which exist in the region and the effectiveness of the SSIP was predominantly sourced from Aidlink and the GCN. As such we had little or no opportunity to contrast this information with data from any other sources.

3. Education in Kenya and the SSIP

3.1 Girls in Education in Kenya

The benefits to increasing educational opportunities are well documented. In a 1993 World Bank publication, *Women's Education in Developing Countries: Barriers, Benefits, and Policies*, the authors reason that a countries level of female education and the gender gap in education serve as important determinates of aggregate family wellbeing as well as economic growth. They argue that the benefits

of improving female education go beyond increasing personal productivity and income. When women are included in education - and consequently in the workforce - multiple secondary benefits are observed. Decreasing fertility eases population pressure. Family health improves, increasing life expectancy and quality of life. The book concludes that a countries failure to raise the education of women to the same level as men imposes a substantial cost on its development efforts (p21).

Before discussing the activities encompassed within the School Sanitation Improvement Program it is first necessary to develop an understanding of the local context at the time of commencement of the program. The aforementioned GCN report from 2004 collected primary data from 153 primary schools across 8 Kenyan provinces. In all 2050 pupils (50% female) and 648 teachers (58% female) took part in the survey. This comprehensive study will serve as a snapshot of the situation for girls in education in Kajiado prior to the introduction of the SSIP.

A quick review of available data, compiled by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics as part of their dataset on African Development Indicators, would suggest that, in the past two decades Kenya has made significant strides towards narrowing the gender gap in education. In Figure 1 below, illustrates a ratio close which is trending to parity for girls and boys in primary and secondary education in the country.

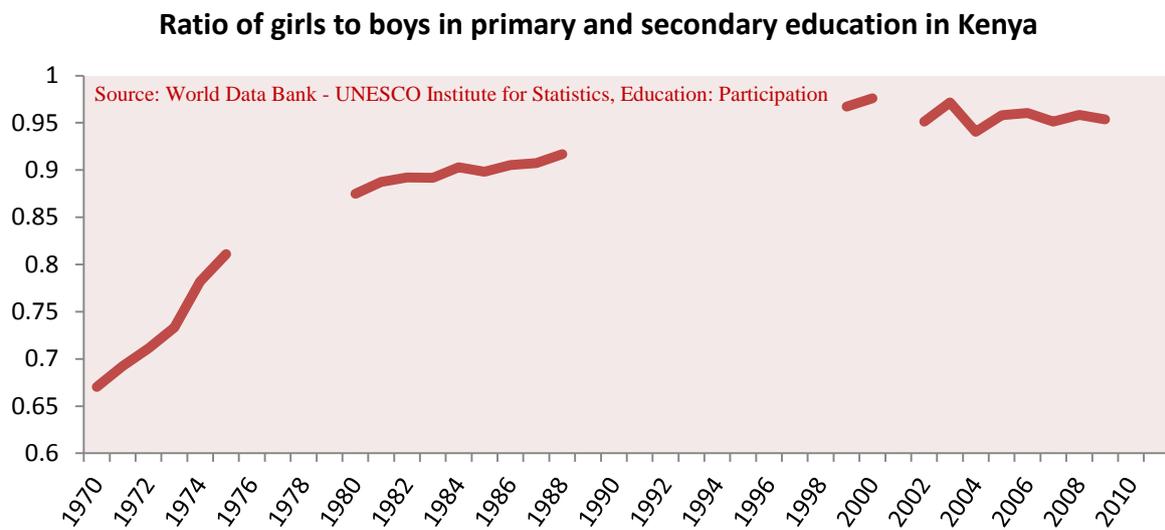


Figure 1

Similarly, Figure 2 indicates that girls are increasingly likely to complete primary education in recent years, and there has been a substantial reduction in dropout rates of both boys and girls since 1970.

% completion rates in Kenyan primary education

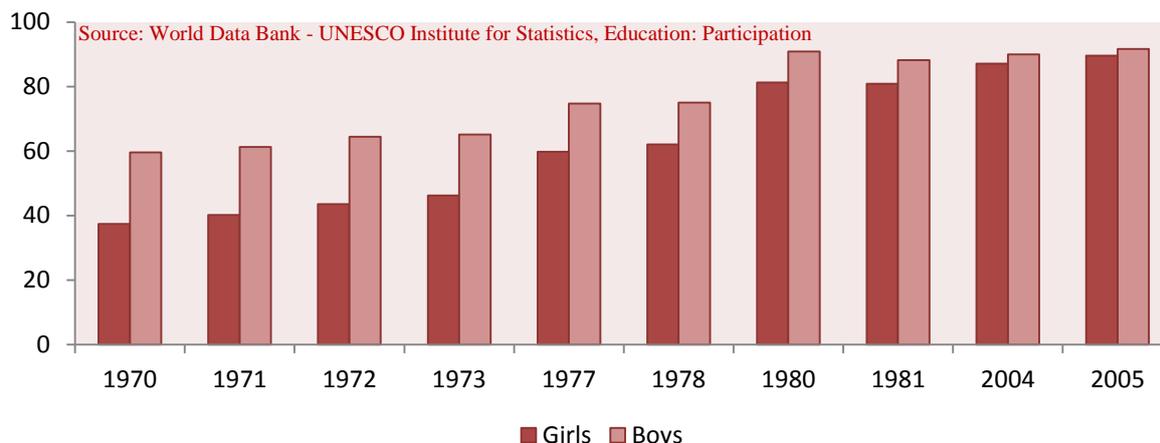


Figure 2

However, national aggregate statistics such as these can gloss over regional discrepancies, and miss concentrations of inequality which can only be quantified by more regional studies. Figure 3 displays data collected over the course of a comprehensive study of gender equality in Kenyan education published in 2004. It is clear from these dropout figures that, in ASAL regions, girls are significantly more disadvantaged when compared to boys in terms of continuing in education. Kajiado is one such region.

Drop out trends in ASAL districts



Figure 3

It is important to note that this report was produced one year after the introduction of Free Primary Education (FPE) in Kenya in 2003. It would appear the initiative had little impact on dropout rates in its first year. In order to understand the drivers behind this disconnect between boys and girls dropout rates, it is necessary first to recognise the barriers which must be overcome for pastoral girls to

achieve an education. Table 1 below details the findings of a survey carried out by the GCN for their equality in education report in 2004. In conducting the survey, they sought to understand the reasons for the high dropout rate among girls in ASAL by garnering the opinions of principals and teachers in the region. The respondents' opinions were bucketed into 7 factor categories.

Factors	No. Principals	Pct	No. Teachers	Pct
Early marriages/traditional practices	45	72.5%	136	76.4%
Poverty/inability to pay levies	39	61.2%	119	66.9%
Parental ignorance/lack of interest	33	53.2%	106	59.6%
Sickness, truancy/peer influence	24	38.7%	85	47.7%
Child labor in exchange for money	21	33.8%	68	48.3%
Nomadic/pastoralism/domestic chores	19	30.6%	48	27.0%
Negative attitudes towards girls	19	30.6%	43	24.2%

Negative cultural practices, along with the limitations of poverty fall out of this survey as the predominant issues impacting girls in education in ASAL. However there is a multi-dimensional aspect to the forces acting against girls in education and so it is necessary give an overview of the issues which arise both out of school and in school to gain a better understanding of the interplay between them.

Out of school issues preventing girls accessing education include:

- **Traditional practice**

FGM and early childhood marriage have a large and negative impact on girls attending school in Kajiado. Although illegal in Kenya, FGM is still widely practiced in Maasai communities. One school surveyed in December 2011 estimated that 28 of the 28 girls in Standard 8 at the time, 10 had been circumcised (Report on Olteyani Primary School, 2011). Beyond the harmful human rights issue, FGM is seen as a precursor to marriage by the Maasai. Once circumcised, girls can be married off, effectively ending their education. With children as young as 12 being circumcised, this issue is obviously militating against girls education.

- **Poverty**

When families are unable to access basic services due to poverty, their ability to invest in their children's education is very limited. There is a tangible link between poverty and early childhood marriage, in which families receive a dowry for their girl – In many cases this extra income is invested in their boy-child's education or training. (GCN, 2004, p12)

- **Parents perception of education**

In general, lack of school enrolment and completion with rural children in Kenya is due to their parents view that education is not valuable, or that it is unsuitable for girls. From a young age girls are socialized into sex roles, which they internalize and as such end up believing that they do not belong in school. (GCN, 2004, p.12)

Research by child rights NGO Plan suggests that parents low expectations and little support for girls education, coupled with coupled with high stakes examinations in which girls tend to perform poorly are key factors preventing transition from primary to secondary school for girls in Kenya. (Plan, 2012, p43)

- **Girl Child Labour**

Again, linked both to poverty and parents perception of education, girl child labour is seen as a means to earn much needed income for a household and so is preferred in some instances to education. Indeed the labour may not be for money, a child may be kept from school because of the need to look after domestic chores or to take care of young or sick family members. A girl's labour can be seen as critical by a family, and therefore her schooling may have a significant indirect cost on poor families. (GCN, 2004,p.12).

Wagura and Nyangena (2009) further explore the issue of child labour in rural Kenya, concluding that children's school attendance and progress are increasingly affected through the increased work that results from natural resources becoming scarcer. The women and girls spend more time collecting resources and less time on their school work. These findings are backed up quantitatively by Warrington and Kiragu in in their 2012 report, in which some of their girl respondents report a 5 hour round trip to fetch water, undertaken 3 times a week and an additional 2 hours a week required for collecting firewood.

- **Insecurity and distance from school**

This issue is particularly significant for girls of pastoral families. Parents are reluctant to allow their children to school due to the distance the children must travel coupled with the dangers which the trip would expose them to. These concerns erode parents confidence in sending their daughters to school. (GCN, 2004, p.12)

In school issues which deter girls from attending include:

- **Gender insensitive school environment**

The 2004 GCN report cites numerous disadvantages suffered by girls in school arising from the classroom environment and the lack of appropriate girl friendly facilities. It expresses serious concern about the lack of toilet facilities saying that 93% of schools visited had no water facilities and for many the nearest water source was up to four kilometres away. 40% of schools visited had no toilet facilities at all (GCN, 2004, p15). In a 2005 press release, UNICEF stressed that providing girls only toilets can play a crucial role in increasing girls attendances at school by cutting down the number of days missed due to menstruation. (UNICEF, 2005). In 2011, UKAid carried out a systematic review of available literature on the impact of the provision of girl only toilets on girls' education but could not find any studies designed to quantify the impact of separate-sex toilets. The report concludes that the

lack of gender disaggregated data points to a lack of gender awareness in the field of hygiene and sanitation (UKAid, 2011, p33). More recently, Warrington and Kiragu (2012) reported that several girls in their study spoke of having to remain home for several days each month because of a lack of water to wash their clothes when menstruating.

The 2004 GCN report also detailed the classroom difficulties, with many classes lacking desks and seats and given the nature of the girl's uniforms, girls are inhibited from concentrating in class as they try not to expose themselves in class. The report states that the loss of privacy and dignity incurred by girls in the school environment is prohibitive to a girl students learning and makes them reluctant to attend school, especially when menstruating. (GCN, 2004, p15)

- **In school gender issues**

The school environment does little to negate the “sex-roles” which are acquired in the home – in many cases school activities simply reinforce these beliefs. Respondents to the GCN survey reported that teachers were very harsh with girls, often physically beating them. They also indicated that the male students follow the example set by the teachers, abusing and beating girls both in school and on the journey home. (GCN, 2004, p15)

- **Sexual harassment**

Girls in school are vulnerable to sexual harassment from both their male counterparts and their teachers. Respondents to the GCN survey indicated that girls are often abused, beaten and humiliated in class. Furthermore, teachers are sometimes perpetrators of sexual harassment and exploitation of girls. (GCN, 2004, p15)

The 2004 GCN report on gender equality in schools concludes that the girl-child at a significant disadvantage and as such is not an effective participant in primary education. It was in response to the issues highlighted in this report that Aidlink and the Girl Child Network established the School Sanitation Improvement Program.

3.2 The School Sanitation Improvement Program

The School Sanitation Improvement Program was established in Kajiado 2006. The main objective of the program was to enhance participation of girls in education. The SSIP intended to tackle the issues detailed in the previous section through the provision of sanitation facilities, social advocacy and capacity building. The interventions encompassed within the SSIP can be grouped into two distinct categories – structural interventions whereby the program provides direct infrastructural improvements to schools and cultural interventions which relate to the social advocacy component of the program. Using this classification, the operations within the program are detailed below.

Structural Interventions

- **Provision of sanitary towels**

By providing schools with sanitary towels and underwear the SSIP intended to mitigate the absenteeism of girls from school during their monthly menstruation.

- **Construction of girl friendly latrines**

The construction of girl friendly latrines aimed at improving the school environment through enhancing sanitation and hygiene and in turn improving the participation of both girls and boys in education. The SSIP envisaged that by reducing incidents of hygiene related illness among the school population and reducing the stigmatization and discrimination of girls by providing them with friendly sanitation facilities it would be possible to boost attendance of children in school. (GCN, 2012, p4)

- **Construction of Water Tanks**

By providing year round access to clean and safe drinking water while simultaneously reducing the distance to water points the SSIP aimed to increase school attendance.

Cultural Interventions

- **Rights of the Child (ROC) Clubs**

Through ROC Clubs, the SSIP set about making children capable of self-advocacy and empowering them to champion for their own rights at the community level.

- **Life and sexual maturation training**

Specific training programs designed by the SSIP targeted at school children aimed at boosting awareness of issues relating to sexual maturation, HIV/AIDs and life skills.

- **Teacher training**

Teachers in schools reached by the project were targeted for training in gender pedagogy and positive role modelling for both girls and boys, while at the same time sensitizing teachers on the various legislations in the country that promotes and protects the rights of the child (GCN, 2012, p 4).

- **School Management Committiees (SMC) training**

The project aimed at engaging with School Management Committees in order to sensitise them on social and cultural factors that hinder the participation of girls in education. Moreover, the SMCs were to be trained on development of gender sensitive and inclusive school development plans (GCN, 2012, p 4).

As the SSIP has now been running for 5 years in Kajiado county, this study focused on attempting to understand the process of running these interventions and the impact of the program to date.

4.1 Process Questionnaire

In designing the questionnaire it was decided to focus on the process used to establish the SSIP in a given school. It was our opinion that this process would ultimately play a crucial role in the success of the project in a given location. This decision also seemed to be the most appropriate as our respondent was Florence Annan, the GCN deputy-director. As much of our information for this study was sourced from GCN documentation it is likely that questions around impact would have rendered answers which we could have established from the documentation. Also the process of selection, implementation, maintenance and evaluation was not detailed in the GCN documentation.

Figure 4, below, illustrates the form which the questionnaire took. The completed questionnaire is included in Appendix 2.



Figure 4

The questionnaire revealed a very thorough project management approach to running the SSIP within individual schools. The main findings from each section are detailed below.

- **Site Selection Process**

In order to better understand how the School Sanitation Improvement Project (SSIP) is rolled out across Kajiado County, the first section of the questionnaire attempted to garner some information around the process of school selection.

Specific requirements for a schools inclusion in the SSIP include:

- Must be a needy public primary school located in Kajiado and under the MoE.
- Must have a functioning SMC.
- The sanitation facilities must be in a deplorable state and fall well below the criteria of UNICEF

Distinct efforts are made to avoid duplicity with government programs and operations such as WASH. Importantly the SSIP also attempt to gauge and encourage community participation and ownership prior to establishment so as to avoid dependency and facilitate sustainability. The extent of the program within the school is determined by both in school and out of school factors. On average selection of a school to implementation of the program takes two months.

- **Implementation**

The second section attempted to enhance our understandings of the practical issues faced in the implementation of the SSIP in schools in Kajiado. We found a robust strategy in place for managing this period of the program.

Questions around the program implementation within a school showed that critical sensitivities were present when introducing girls to the program for the first time. Before the distribution of sanitary towels occurs, a GCN officer conducts reproductive and sexual health training with both boys and girls. While this training was done in groups, the girls also have peer to peer training available to them. Importantly teachers also benefited from training in this period, and parents to benefit from training in the form of in school meetings or outreach programs conducted by the GCN.

In relation to the girl friendly latrines, the survey revealed that the SSIP targets Ministry for Public Health guidelines of 1 toilet for every 25 girls in a school. In the 44 schools provided with latrines since 2007, 83% have met this desired ratio. One issue which emerged from the survey relating to the latrines is that in some cases they begin to be frequented by school boys as well.

- **Maintenance**

Once the SSIP has been established in a school, there is an obvious need for monitoring and maintenance. The third section in our questionnaire informed our research on the extent of this component of the SSIP.

Again we found clearly conceived maintenance plans in place to ensure standards of interventions did not trail off over time. Distribution of sanitary towels is done on a termly basis – with girls being provided with 12 packets of towels and three pairs of underwear each year. Each school also has a stock of sanitary towels and underwear as a contingency plan in case there is any emergency or disruption to the termly deliveries.

Latrines and water tanks are maintained by the school Water Management Committee. Training is provided in maintenance to members of the SMC in water and sanitation infrastructure management. The estimated lifetime of a well maintained water tank is 7 years. Members of the SMC are trained in resource mobilization in order to help them in the management and enhancement of the provided infrastructure. Additionally, inspections are carried out, once a term, by the Public Health Department and the District Education Department to assess the condition of the water and sanitation infrastructure.

- **Evaluation**

The evaluation section of our report attempted to gauge how the progress and success of the project was measured to date and also how this will continue going forward as the program becomes increasingly established across Kajiado.

Again the respondent reported strong evaluation frameworks and documentation around project processes, inputs, outputs, activities, goals and social impact. Project officers are well versed in when and how monitoring and evaluation are conducted and are required to give

feedback on positive or negative changes which will be responded to with immediate effect by the senior management team.

4.2 Extent of project to date

From the GCN brief on the SSIP published in 2012 it was possible to assess the extent of the project to date. The figures are provided in Table 2 below.

Activity	No of Beneficiaries
Structural Intervention	
Distribution of Sanitary Towels	4,255 children
Girl Friendly Latrines	44 schools
Water Tanks	36 schools
Cultural Interventions	
ROC Clubs	74 schools
Life and Sexual Maturation Training	4,000 children
Trained SMCs	195 members
Trained Teachers	171 teachers

Table 2. Extent of project interventions to date.

4.3 Cost per component

The aforementioned questionnaire also allowed us to gauge the cost of individual components of the project. The findings are detailed in Table 3 below.

Activity	Cost
Distribution of Sanitary Towels	€2.42 per girl per term
Girl Friendly Latrines	€4,389
Water Tanks	€8,925
Cost per Child Impacted	€33.50

Table 3. Cost per component.

Importantly, the cost of the program per child exhibits strong returns to scale. The deputy-director of the GCN reported that the cost per child decreases as the program expands.

5. Conclusion:

While the Millennium Development Goals set much needed benchmarks off which countries can be judged on their development performance, it is crucially important that practitioners do not become primarily focused nationwide aggregate statistics on pertinent issues. As we have seen with regards to girls education in Kenya, nationwide statistics can mask deeply entrenched regional problems in which an array of multi-dimensional social and cultural factors inhibit progress.

Aidlink and the GCN have developed a model which applies a multi-dimensional approach to this multi-dimensional problem. In the past 5 years they have demonstrated how such a framework is essential in achieving meaningful results regarding the inclusion of marginalised girls in education. It can be argued that simply providing free education is not enough. There is a spectrum of challenges which must be overcome in order for girls to feel capable of participating in school.

Despite the relatively short existence of the program, its success to date speaks for itself. Since 2007 Aidlink and the GCN have seen:

- Absenteeism of adolescent girls decrease by 65-70% in project schools.
- Enrolment increases of 30% in project schools
- In 2011, 47 girls who had previously dropped out of education re-enrolling as they now feel more comfortable to participate in education.
- A reduction in the practice of FGM in project communities due in part to the activities of the ROC clubs.

(Source: Aidlink Website)

As the Kenyan government now embarks on a their initiative to provide girls in education nationwide with sanitary towels, the SSIP will serve as an important framework in relation to process, efficiency, and evaluation.

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