

Engaging the Custodians of Tradition and Culture

Leveraging the Role of Multiple Actors in Maasai Girls' Education

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Damaris Seleina Parsitau | Kenya

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Abstract

The education of girls living in Maasailand in Kenya's arid and semi-arid regions presents many challenges. This policy brief explores how deep-seated perceptions embedded in Maasai culture hold girls' back. This research looks in depth at Kajiado and Narok counties, both predominantly Maasai areas that have some of the lowest school enrollment and completion rates in the country. Drawing from her own experience as founder of Let Maasai Girls Learn, the author contributes much-needed analysis and data on the status of girls' education in Maasailand. The brief explores how factors like Female Genital Mutilation, childhood marriage, a preference for boys, environmental factors like drought and famine, and the burden of household chores mitigate against the education of Maasai girls. Gaps in current policy frameworks and interventions in the Maasai community are outlined, along with detailed proposals for engaging key gatekeepers who are pivotal to getting (and keeping) Maasai girls in school. A key takeaway is that, too often, well-meaning governmental and non-governmental interventions intended to help Maasai girls have alienated elders and overlooked the value of community-led solutions grounded in existing Maasai social and cultural capital.

Introduction

The Maasai people of Kenya and Tanzania encounter many challenges in offering girls access to education and ensuring they stay and complete their schooling. Maasai culture is heavily patriarchal, with distinct socio-cultural norms and practices that set them apart from other ethnic groups in Kenya. These norms have affected women and girls in several mostly negative ways, particularly related to education.

The custodians of tradition and culture—not lawmakers—are the main decisionmakers in these communities and the implementation of national laws and policies related to education have had little effect. These elders, community and spiritual

leaders, formally elected leaders, youth, and warriors¹ wield so much power, influence, and authority in their communities that their cooperation and participation in changing the status quo in their communities is essential.

As the stewards of traditional rites of passage, these gatekeepers pass these rites and cultural values and norms from one generation to the other. Given their tremendous and unquestioned power within their communities, elders continue to perpetuate and promote socio-cultural practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and child marriage—huge barriers standing in the way of Maasai girls' education. Studies have shown that many of these cultural and traditional barriers are keeping girls out of school. A Kenya Primary Education Development (PRIEDE) Project (2017), for example, found that socio-cultural factors such as FGM and early marriage, which stands at 42.4 percent, stood out as some of the main reasons associated with low participation in school for children from Arid and semi-Arid (ASAL) regions. Other barriers examined in this paper include drought, famine, social inequality, and persistent marginalization of pastoralists by government officials and policymakers.

In ASAL regions, where the majority of Maasai live, a significant proportion of children have never been to school (PRIEDE Project 2017). According to the Ministry of Devolution and Planning (2015), an estimated 1.9 million children age 6–13 years and 2.7 million children age 13–17 years are out of school. Nearly half (46 percent) of these children and adolescents are concentrated in ASAL counties, such as Kajiado, Narok, Samburu, and Turkana. In these regions, socio-cultural practices as well as drought and famine are major barriers to education attainments. The gross primary enrollment rate (GER) in most ASAL counties is below 50 percent, compared to the national average of 119.6 percent.

¹ Warriors are junior elders who have completed training and transitioning from being boys to responsible community leaders.

Maasai girls' education is frequently the focus of significant interventions by both local and international organizations, national governments, development agencies, advocacy groups, and individuals. Yet, despite tremendous efforts and goodwill by these actors, Maasai girls' enrollment, completion, and transition rates still remain critically and comparatively low to girls from non-ASAL regions of the country.

This research seeks to explore ways to engage community leadership and leverage Maasai culture to let Maasai girls learn. Premised on the understanding that community-led solutions where local actors are fully engaged and approached with cultural sensitivity and respect, this research examines and proposes ways to engender more sustainable solutions to promoting Maasai girls' education.

This paper analyzes the current state of Maasai girls' education and why their educational outcomes matter. Drawing from my personal experiences and narratives of Maasai women, girls, men, community leaders and youth, coupled with literature and evidence, I identify the persistent barriers to Maasai girls' access to primary and secondary schooling. With findings from recent ethnographic research among these groups, in addition to reflecting on my own perspectives and experiences as a Maasai woman who understands these barriers very well, I provide recommendations for various stakeholders in education and development to more effectively engage Maasai leadership for Maasai girls' education.

Policy Context and Deficits

The Maasai society is deeply patriarchal with a complex but solid leadership structure. Even though the Kenyan government has made great strides at the national level to expand access to education for all children, it has failed to engage the gatekeepers of Maasai culture and traditions, who have the *de facto* power to determine whether Maasai girls get an education. They are the main decisionmakers for their families and community and their influence is

stronger than government policies (Parsitau, 2017). As well-respected sages in their communities, these gatekeepers of Maasai culture and traditions are not just highly respected and esteemed but are also rarely questioned or disobeyed. They are critical stakeholders who wield tremendous power and influence; not much can be done without their support and blessing.

In its present form, social governance among the Maasai amounts to a government of men where elders, fathers, husbands, and young men govern the community and their families. Consequently, women and girls have no voice in significant issues that affect their lives and well-being, including their right to education and health. This challenging reality, coupled with poverty, ignorance, and parents' favoring their sons over their daughters, all conspire to disadvantage Maasai girls. Therefore, elders, community and spiritual leaders, elected leaders, youth, and warriors as well as other stakeholders including mothers, teachers, community role models, and girls themselves must be engaged in making sure girls receive education. Policymakers, state actors, stakeholders working in education and development (and girls' education in particular) must work to engage communities through local leadership and become advocates of letting Maasai girls' learn.

EDUCATION FOR ALL AND NOMADIC STATUS

The 1999 World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) specifically identified nomadic communities, such as the Maasai, as one of the several groups requiring active commitment to the removal of education disparities. UNESCO (2010) also echoed this by calling for urgent action to address the continuing and extreme education deprivation of nomadic communities, which also reflects broader issues of marginalization embedded in social inequalities.

FREE PRIMARY SCHOOL EDUCATION

Since Kenya's independence in 1963, the formal education sector has expanded rapidly, with a focus on promoting access, retention, equity, and quality

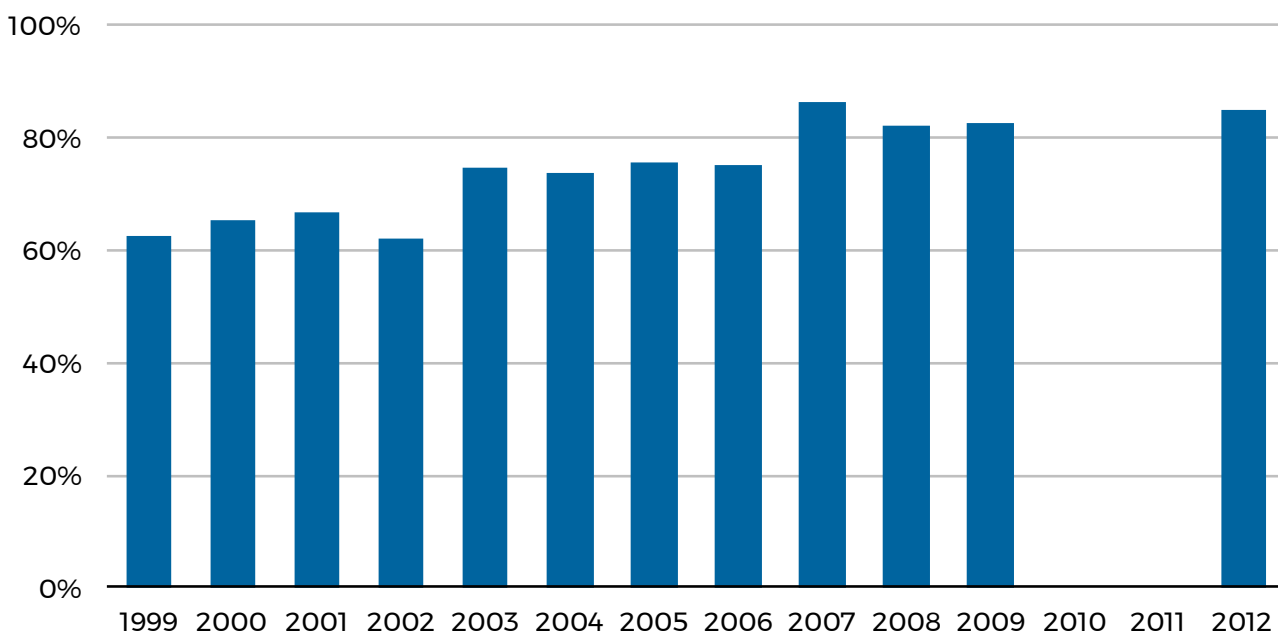
(PRIEDE Report 2017). To act on these objectives, the Kenyan government has undertaken several reforms to align the education sector with national priorities and international commitments on education provision. The most remarkable of these reforms was the introduction of Free Primary Education (FPE) in 2003, which mainly sought to expand educational opportunities for all Kenyan children.

FPE has resulted in a tremendous increase in the number of children enrolling in primary and secondary schools. Enrollment in Kenya’s primary schools increased by 772,600 students over a five-year period from 2009–2014, an annual growth rate of 6.1 percent, according to the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MoEST) report (2015). Secondary education had the largest increase over the period, with about 837,300 additional students, equivalent to a 9.4 percent annual increase. The parity index between girls and boys at primary level increased over the period from 0.95 in 2009 to 1.05 in 2014, showing there were more girls than boys enrolled in primary school. Despite real improvement in the gender parity at second-

ary school over the period, however, the index is still low, standing at 0.92 percent. According to the Ministry of Education (2017), there are still fewer girls than boys in secondary education.

Despite FPE and other policy interventions and frameworks, including the Kenyan Constitution 2010 and the Kenyan Vision 2030, Kenya still has nearly a million children out of school, one of the highest absolute numbers in sub-Saharan Africa, according to the Education for All Global Monitoring Report (2012). Similarly, the number of girls out of school in Kenya is still relatively higher than that of boys, since girls tend to drop out as they transition through grades. For example, while 1.3 million children joined primary school at the start of the FPE in 2003, only 875,000 made it through to standard eight. While 679,000 boys enrolled in standard one, the number dropped to 453,000 in standard eight. Meanwhile, the number of girls dropped from 632,700 to 422,000 over the same period (EFA GMR, 2012; Kariuki, 2015).

Figure 1
Primary school enrollment in Kenya (% net)



Note: Data not available for 2010-11
Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics



Progress has been uneven across the country, with completion rates and learning outcomes poor among students in marginalized areas. Regional disparities in school participation in Kenya have historically been influenced by regional inequality in economic development (Onyango, 2013). Estimates of the number of nomadic kids are conservative due to methodological and definitional difficulties. According to EFA (2012), gaps persist particularly for marginalized girls in pastoralist regions, such as those in Maasai counties.

The Status of Maasai Girls' Education

Government data, academic research, and my own personal observations suggest that the status of Maasai girls' education in Kenya is extremely weak compared to the national averages for girls in Kenya. According to Tobik (2009), 60 percent of Maasai children in rural areas do not attend formal schools. Only 8 percent in rural areas of Maasailand have had a chance to complete secondary education. For example, Kajiado and Narok counties, both predominantly Maasai areas, and the focus of this research, are considered to have some of the lowest school enrollment and completion rates in

the country. In Kajiado county, the rate of girls transitioning from primary to secondary education is also much lower (Ouda, Opiyo, & Wambiya, 2015). Narok county is even more startling, where for every 15 girls enrolled for Kenyan Certificate of Primary Education, (KCPE) only 1 joined secondary school in Narok North (Rotich, Rono, & Mutsiya). Girls' transition rates to university are 2.4 percent in Trans Mara West and 1.0 percent in Narok North Constituency (Tobik, 2009).

Moreover, the quality of education in the two counties are very low, as seen in the low grades: with 67.3 percent of girls in Trans Mara West and 66.3 percent of girls in Narok North scoring from D to E grades respectively in their Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education. Besides, not a single Maasai girl has scored a mean grade of A or A⁻² in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) in secondary schools in Narok County for nearly three decades (Rotich, Rono, & Mutsiya). The girls' inability to attain the university admission requirements denies them the right to university education and future opportunities for employment. This has disadvantaged Maasai girls significantly as attested to by the lack of Maasai girls serving in most areas of Kenyan public life.

THE RIPPLE EFFECTS OF GIRLS' EDUCATION

Stakeholders in education and development should worry that very few Maasai girls are accessing education. This is because there is ample evidence of positive ripple effects of girls' education on improving the health, social, and economic outcomes not only for herself but her children, family, and community (Winthrop & McGivney 2014; King & Hill 1993). For example, studies carried out in Senegal, Nicaragua, and Mozambique have shown that education protects girls against early marriage (Summers, 1994; UNICEF, 2005a; ICRW, 2005). In Côte d'Ivoire, Tanzania, and Kenya, research indicates that educated women are less likely to have

2 A being the highest and A- being the second highest score one can attain in the National Examination in Kenya.

their daughters circumcised (UNICEF, 2005b). And a 63-country study found that increased female education led to improved farming productivity which resulted in a 43 percent reduction in malnutrition from 1970–1995 (Smith & Haddad, 2000).

CLIMATE CHANGE AND GIRLS' EDUCATION

Educating girls is also key to addressing climate change. According to researchers at the Brookings Institution, progress in girls' education and climate change are intricately interdependent: girls' access to schooling is disproportionately impacted by climate stress on households and communities, and girls, if afforded an education, are uniquely positioned to be part of mitigation and adaptation solutions (Kwauk & Braga, 2017). This reflection is particularly relevant for girls from pastoralist communities, such as the Maasai, where evidence suggests that families resort to coping mechanisms that ultimately put an end to their daughters' schooling. And because women and girls are responsible for fetching water and firewood, droughts can cause them to spend more hours per day completing routine household chores, cutting into their time to study or attend school.

Undoubtedly, when girls get the opportunity to have good quality education, it affects their individual life chances and capacity to contribute meaningfully to society and gives them the agency to become empowered, mothers, workers, and citizens.

Barriers to Maasai Girls' Education

Despite these positive ripple effects, a significant number of Maasai girls remain out of school. Those who are able to enroll grapple with a myriad of socio-cultural and structural barriers that stand in the way of completing school and transitioning to college. Maasai girls equally struggle with structural barriers such as high levels of poverty, hunger, malnutrition, and parents who do not understand the importance of education. Other school-related challenges include: lack of funding for education,

lack of trained teachers, lack of classes, poor sanitary conditions (e.g., bathrooms, toilets, and sanitary pads), insufficient desks and chairs, and lack of finances to pay school fees (Write to Learn, 2014). Even though Kenya outlawed caning in school, some students continue to be abused by teachers. While these structural barriers are not unique to Maasai girls, the added social cultural barriers stand in the way of their education.

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

One of the most significant barriers to Maasai girls' education is female genital mutilation (FGM), also known as female circumcision and female genital cutting (FGC). The World Health Organization (WHO 2008) defines these terms as "procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for nonmedical reasons" (see Appendix A for further definitions).

FGM is one of the most common traditional practices among African societies and in some other parts of the world. In Kenya, 21 percent of women reported being circumcised according to the Kenya Demographic Health Survey (KDHS, 2015). While FGM is practiced in 38 districts in Kenya, it is especially popular and prominent among the Somali (97 percent), Kuria (96 percent), Kisii (96 percent), Maasai (89 percent), Kalenjin, (62 percent), Taita Taveta (59 percent) and Meru/Embu (54 percent) groups, and to a lesser extent among Kikuyu (43 percent), Kamba (33 percent) and Mijikenda and Swahili (12 percent) according to the (KDHS, 2004). In these communities, FGM defines reproduction, sexuality, womanhood, adulthood, power, religion, and diverse kinds of identity (Kattam, 1996).

Maasai girls are typically circumcised between ages 11–13. Female circumcision is considered a prerequisite for marriage. Soon afterwards, they are married to a man chosen by the father, in exchange for cattle. The consequences of FGM on girls are grave. Evidence from literature (as well as my own findings from working with survivors of FGM), suggest that it poses serious physical and psychological health

risks, namely: urinary tract infections, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), complications in childbirth, severe menstrual pain, fistula, and even death (Shell-Duncan, Naik, & Feldman-Jacobs, 2016).

FGM demonstrates deep-rooted gender inequalities and constitutes an extreme form of discrimination against women. It is also a serious violation of the rights of girls' health, security, integrity, dignity, and freedom.

The drivers of FGM are complex and multi-dimensional. FGM is a long-standing social-cultural practice among the Maasai that is viewed as a rite of passage. Sociological, religious, and cultural traditions continue to provide justification and legitimation for FGM (UNFPA, 2015). For many parents, FGM is related to marriageability, maintenance of family honor and respect, community acceptance and ethnic identity, ritual marking of transition to womanhood, improvement of hygiene, religious requirements, and social-cultural norms (ICRW, 2016; Kang'ethe, 2013; UNFPA, 2015; WHO, 2016). FGM also prepares girls for their roles as adults and good wives. More importantly, FGM is used to control women's sexual desires, and fidelity (Kang'ethe, 2013; WHO, 2016; Gitagno, 2016; Marindany, 2017; Chebet, 2009).

Significant work has focused on the elimination of FGM with equal success and setback. The Kenyan Government passed the FGM of 2011, which made FGM a criminal offense that results in a jail sentence. This also established an Anti-Female Genital Mutilation Board, a semi-autonomous government agency. Despite these well-meaning efforts, FGM still happens in many parts of the country, including in Maasailand.

While there is a lack of literature on the link between FGM and education, there is data that suggests FGM affects girls' education significantly. Evidence in Kenya suggests a relationship between FGM and school dropouts (Magangi, 2015; Nyabero, Omwenga, & Okari, 2016) and lower participation in school-related activities (Anumaka & Sironka,

2014). A survey involving teachers and school principals in Kenya suggested that girls discontinued school after the cut, due to pressure to get married (Magangi, 2015; Nyabero, Omwenga, & Okari, 2016).

Surveys collected in Kuria in western Kenya, where FGM levels are nearly 96 percent, reveal similar findings where over three-quarters of students reported that student dropouts were the direct result of FGM (Magangi, 2015). At the same time, FGM-related infections and complications during childbirth, such as severe bleeding, severe pains, and difficulty in passing urine and feces and low birth weight, have been frequently cited as among the primary reasons that a girls drop out of school.

Supporters of FGM argue that the tradition is necessary both to the social fabric and for the maturation of girls. Girls who have not undergone the cut are often taunted and told they will never get husbands. This is an effective scare tactic in rural areas in Kenya and Africa (Kratli, 2000) where unmarried women are looked down upon by society. Therefore, uncircumcised girls face incredible pressure to succumb to the cut to avoid being perpetually touted, stigmatized, and excluded. Girls are bullied in the form of body shaming and name calling, including in school environments (Pesambili, 2013). In my interactions and experiences with survivors of FGM—particularly girls who refuse to undergo the cut—many girls are shunned by men and never marry in their communities. Cultural attitudes equate them to lesser women, who are also unclean, and not worthy of being married by Maasai men.

My observations and narratives with Maasai girls who refuse to undergo circumcision suggest that many are also disowned by their parents.³ Fathers of such girls would typically threaten to curse or disown their daughters and vow never speak to them

3 Narratives and testimonies of more than a dozen, three of which are in my care who have been disowned by their parents for refusing to undergo FGM. Attitudes and beliefs of the Maasai informants I interviewed seemed to suggest that FGM is necessary to preserve Maasai culture and the social fabric of the community.

again—and many also withdraw their support for their daughters' education. Eventually, many undergo the cut due to pressure to maintain the love and care of their parents and prospective spouses.⁴

UNICEF (2005) data suggests a correlation between parents' educational attainment and the cutting of their daughters. Existing evidence has shown a lower prevalence of FGM and greater support for the discontinuation of FGM among highly educated women compared to those with lower levels of education (Msuya et al., 2002; Dalal, Lawoko, & Jansson, 2010; ICRW 2016). These findings appear to collaborate my own observations that Maasai families who have secondary school education or higher do not support FGM, nor do they subject their daughters to it. This suggests that education plays a critical role in eradicating FGM, reinforcing the ripple effect of girls' education.

CHILD MARRIAGE

Child marriage, defined as “any form of union where one or both partners are less than 18 years of age,” is a global phenomenon and a common practice in many parts of the world (Girls Not Brides). According to Plan International (2008), a lack of education is a huge driver of this: 67 percent of women age 20–24 without education married as a child, in comparison to only 6 percent of women with secondary school education or higher.

In Kenya, the rates for marriage before 18 years and 15 years of age are 26 percent and 16 percent, respectively. Typically, Maasai girls are married between the ages of 10 and 18, soon after they undergo FGM. Many Maasai girls only perceived by their families as an economic burden or valued commodity who can bring in wealth in the form of livestock, money, and other goods. In addition, Maasai girls are socially told to believe that marriage is the ideal

4 My personal interactions with a handful of girls who refused to undergo FGM were thrown out of their parent's households by their fathers. In many of these cases, even the girls' parents are sent away by angry fathers for failing to prevail upon their daughters who question cultural practices like FGM.

life goal. Therefore, many girls aspire to become wives to earn the respect of their parents and peers.

The factors driving child marriage are countless, including poverty, gaps in laws,⁵ a lack of education, religious beliefs, and fear of teenage pregnancies. Girls from rural areas and the poorest households are more likely to become child brides than girls from urban areas or more affluent households. Parents who have no education are unable to comprehend why there is so much resistance to FGM and early marriage, as it something they have grown accustomed to as a way of life and tradition.⁶

The impact of child marriage on girls' education is significant. Marrying too young denies many girls an opportunity to get an education, as early marriage is often cited as one of the main reasons that Maasai girls drop out of school (UNICEF 2016). Furthermore, studies across the developing world conclude that women with seven or more years of schooling get married an average of five years later than women with no schooling (World Bank, 1993; Colclough & Lewin, 1993; Summers, 1994). There is a need to address the dropout rates since they correlate with fertility rates, health, and nutrition, as well as general well-being for the whole community.

PREFERENCE FOR BOYS

In the Maasai community, cultural norms favor boys over girls. As such, the sons' education is given priority over daughters. This is often due to the perception that boys will contribute to the future wealth and well-being of the family. When resources are limited, parents normally choose to educate

5 The legal age of marriage in Kenya is 18 years; however, there are gaps in law enforcement. Only parents who are reported to government agencies are arrested and charged and the girls are rescued from the practice. Yet there are so many other girls who get married secretly and this goes largely unreported. At the same time, illiterate parents don't really understand the laws or why there are laws against their culture in the first place.

6 Attitudes and beliefs of the Maasai informants I interviewed seemed to suggest that FGM is necessary to Maasai preserve culture and the social fabric of the community.

boys over girls. In most pastoralist communities, girls make up most of the out-of-school children numbers (Kratli, 2000). According to the Maasai Association⁷ chairman, some parents neglect paying school fees for their girls so that they can drop out and get married and bring wealth to the family.

According to Ruth Sanchoine, a university student who narrated her experiences:

“As a Maasai girl, it has been a huge struggle for me to finish school. Maasai parents don’t value girls’ child education. They give priorities to boys as compared to girls. They always see girls as failures that can only become wives and give birth to many children. When girls are under pressure to marry and bring wealth to her father while boys continue to study until they finish without much pressure. Look at me! I am only in school because I got a Good Samaritan who is sponsoring my education.”⁸

According to John Ole Kasaine,⁹ the reason Maasai fathers are reluctant to educate their daughters is that they fear that it is a futile and expensive investment that does not bring any benefits to her parents. This is what he said in an interview:

“Maasai parents are reluctant to educate girls because the investment benefits the family she will marry into, as opposed to boys whose returns would come back to his fathers’ households. So why should we educate girls who like

birds would fly away to their husband’s homes after getting an education?”¹⁰

However, my interviews with young and old Maasai men suggested the underlying reasons Maasai fathers are reluctant to send their daughters to school is because they fear that education empowers girls, who would then revolt against culture—and this threatens the Maasai social and cultural fabric. According to Ole Sopia, an educated Maasai man:

“As Maasai men, we fear educated Maasai girls because when they get educated, they become too stubborn and many refuse to submit to the authority of men. Others even despise Maasai culture and disappear to urban centers and refuse to help their families. That’s why many Maasai men don’t want to marry educated Maasai girls’ because they question men and disobey authority and show contempt for their culture.”¹¹

It seems that the underlying reason why Maasai fathers fear educating girls is power and patriarchy. They fear that girls’ education and women empowerment will upset the government and leadership of men who do not want to be questioned or disobeyed by women.

HOUSEHOLD CHORES

Maasai girls carry out demanding household responsibilities by helping their mothers with time- and energy-consuming responsibilities such as chores, cooking, milking cows and goats, cleaning, fetching water and firewood, and taking care of younger siblings, and so forth. Men and boys do not carry out these responsibilities; rather, they take care of livestock (girls sometimes help) and make decisions for the family. Instead, girls are assigned these chores which heavily affects their ability to concentrate on schoolwork. For example, several girls cited how chores such as milking cows, cook-

7 Maasai Association is a forum of progressive Maasai men who frequently meet to discuss issues that affect the Maasai community such as politics, economic, land, drought, and education issues among many others so that they could lobby politicians from the community to address such issues.

8 Testimony by Ruth Sachoine (her real name with permission), a Maasai girl pursuing a diploma course at Egerton University March 7, 2017.

9 Ole Kasaine, (not his real name) is a Member of the Maasai Diaspora Association in the US whom I interviewed in August 2017.

10 Interview with Ole Kasaine (pseudonym), in February 2017.

11 Interview with Ole Sopia (pseudonym) in March 2017

ing, cleaning, and taking care of siblings stood in their way of undertaking their homework and general studies. In a study by PRIEDE (2017), time consumed by household chores accounted to 30 percent of the reason for girls' low participation in schools from the ASAL regions.

DISTANCE TO SCHOOL

The Maasai are nomadic pastoralists whose economy is based on livestock. As such, they tend to move often through large tracts of land in search of pasture and water for their livestock. Villages and the few available schools are far away. Therefore, children are forced to walk a daunting 15–20 kilometers to school every day. A study by PRIEDE (2017) indicated that nearly one-third of nomadic children miss out on their education due to distance from school.

Coupled with household chores and homework, many children are exhausted and hungry by the time they get to or from school. In marginalized areas, there are no cars, buses, or bicycles available for schoolchildren. Girls' safety on their way to school and back is a major concern to the parents. The majority of the parents I spoke with feared that their daughters would be raped, violated, or even abducted while traveling to school.¹² All these issues contribute to girls dropping out (Kratli, 2000).

CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change exacerbates the barriers associated with a nomadic lifestyle. Prolonged drought worsened by climate change and environmental degradation cause pastoralists groups like the Maasai to move from one area to another in search for pasture and water (Kratli, 2000). This lifestyle means that children's education is often interrupted—and in some cases, halted altogether until the rains come. Many end up having to repeat grades, thereby affecting completion rates (PRIEDE, 2017).

12 Interviews with a group of 10 Maasai parents I spoke with in Transmara District in Narok County where there are security issues related to cattle rustling and land issues, February 2017

Girls, in particular, feel the brunt of hardships related to climate change. When families face drought and loss of livestock and crops, they must choose between sending their daughters to school and saving fees to alleviate increased financial burdens.¹³ Interviews with pastoralist men in Kenya¹⁴ suggest that families even resort to marrying their daughters off as a coping strategy and as an opportunity to restock their lost animals and crops. Cows are very important to the Maasai men. They signify prestige, power, respect, and social standing. As Maasai families lose livestock due to the effects of climate change, diminishing land resources, and population pressure, they become increasingly disempowered and vulnerable. Girls who are married off under such conditions are unlikely to return to school as they eventually become pregnant or must attend to household chores.

A leading factor why Maasai have been reluctant to embrace education is what Kratli (2000) calls the “education paradox” for nomadic people. In this paradox, education programs and policies appear to oppose nomadic lifestyles and cultures. This is seen in the curricula, which do not incorporate aspects of culture that Maasai can understand and identify with. Consequently, the fear of cultural alienation through education makes many Maasai parents uncomfortable with formal education. Maasai parents fear that their children will adopt strange manners, lose respect for their parents and elders, and abandon Maasai culture (Kratli, 2000). At the same time, schools (especially boarding schools) alienate children from their parents, further entrenching their fears of losing their children. Ultimately, parents perceive school as something which equips children to leave the community (Kratli, 2000).

13 Interview with James, Ole Seriani (his real name with permission), A Maasai leader who is also an expert in security and climate change during interviews in Nairobi, February 2017

14 Interviews with Ole Sena, (not his real name), an expert on indigenous peoples land issues in Kenya and a lawyer by profession, February 2017

Gaps in Current Policy Frameworks and Interventions in the Maasai Community

In 2010, UNESCO called for urgent action to address the extreme education deprivation. Below I discuss how state and non-state actors have taken on this task among the Maasai communities in Kenya.

GOVERNMENT EFFORTS

As discussed in the PRIEDE report (2017), the Kenyan government has put a number of policies and laws in place to ensure that all Kenyan boys and girls have access to education. Despite these laudable efforts, enrollment, retention, and transition rates for Maasai children, and girls in particular, are still significantly low compared to other parts of Kenya. The Maasai perceive current policies and political commitments for addressing educational gaps as attempts to coerce the community to abandon their culture and traditions. According to Mercy Cherop:

“The fact that Maasai people must change and adjust to a western lifestyle makes them defensive. They feel pressured when they are told by the government and policymakers to adopt modernity which they fear threatens not just their way of life but also the future of their culture.”¹⁵

The approach towards Maasai culture by state and non-state actors, according to education groups such as Mercy Cherop, has been insufficient. Personal observations reveal a similar conclusion in which the Maasai are viewed as the pristine tribe that has refused to give up its ways, norms, and values for modernity. Many actors have portrayed Maasai culture as irrational, backward, and even primitive. But according to Maasai leadership, this approach is often counter-productive as it makes

the Maasai distrustful and unwilling to be pushed around.

Below are two of these efforts to promote Maasai girls' education.

The Introduction of the Policy Framework for Nomadic Education in Kenya

In 2009, the MoEST established the National Council for Nomadic Education (NACONEK), a policy framework whose aim was to focus on nomadic children with a view to pay closer attention to challenges and barriers facing children in nomadic and pastoralist regions. The policy was later reviewed in 2011 with the aim of addressing three distinct challenges:

1. The gaps between these regions and the rest of the country in terms of access, quality, relevance, and gender disparities in education.
2. Protection of the environment and institutional arrangements in these regions, which are essential to the economic productive and way of life of communities in ASAL areas across the country.
3. Coordination of education programs in these regions and mobilization of additional resources to support investment in education in these regions.

While this policy is ambitious on paper, and could positively affect girls in marginalized areas, many actors unfortunately view it as a political tool used to appease pastoralists. Personal observations suggest that its impact to date on the ground has been minimal. During interviews with education stakeholders (e.g., head teachers and administrators in ASAL regions) said that part of the problem is that only people from marginalized areas run NACONEK, many of whom lack expertise in the education sector.¹⁶ Many are also political appointees, who serve at the pleasure of the appointing authority and may

15 Telephone Interview with Mercy Cherop, (not her real name) is a career educationist who has worked as a teacher and education officers in ASAL regions for over 20 years, August 2017.

16 According to Conversations I had with Mercy, Ole Masii and Ole Tajeu (not their real names, all school Administrators in ASAL region schools during phone interviews, August 2017.

not truly have an interest in solving problems for nomadic children. Some have also been accused of using the organization to make money in the name of helping ASAL regions, without doing the work they were appointed to do. In fact, many stakeholders suggested that they have either never heard of this organization nor have they felt its impact on the ground.

The Children Act and the Anti-FGM Board

The Children Act, adopted in 2011, criminalized FGM and early marriage. The Anti-FGM Board¹⁷ was created to eradicate FGM and early marriage. Interviews with stakeholders¹⁸ suggest that these laws, acts, and policy frameworks have had little, if any effect, on the culture and traditions of Maasai people—many of whom were not consulted during the policy process and do not understand what these policies are meant to accomplish. Despite being outlawed, FGM and early marriage are still rampant throughout Maasailand, as explained by one frustrated Mrs. Mary Naado¹⁹ (pseudonym) during an interview:

“Members of the Anti-FGM board are activists and busy bodies who are shuttling from one conference to another and from one U.N. meeting to another as if that is what they were appointed to do! What do they achieve by going to the U.N. to speak about our culture other than make names for themselves and shop in New York? The real issues are here on the ground where we are! This is where our girls continue to be circumcised, not in New York, yet the only time we see them is when they come with the police to arrest parents? We don’t see them organize grassroots meetings to sensitize us as parents about FGM

17 The Anti-FGM Board was established by the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act of 2011.

18 Conversations I had with Mercy, ole Masii, and Ole Tajeu.

19 Conversations I had with Mrs Mary Naado(not her real name), a concerned and helpless Maasai Mother whose daughter was forced to undergo FGM in Dec 2016 and later married off against her will in February 2017.

yet they are very quick to resort to the laws and talk about human rights? What are these human rights?”

These sentiments are a testament of the disconnect between policy frameworks and the grassroots. As a result, Maasai girls still continue to face tremendous challenges in their quest for education. This calls for different ways to engage critical stakeholders to support girls’ education, beginning simply with engaging community stakeholders and custodians of tradition from the outset.

NON-GOVERNMENTAL EFFORTS

In a bid to fight the two main barriers for Maasai girls’ quest for education, FGM and early marriage, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), women movements, grassroots movements, women lobbies, and many others have sought alternatives rituals to replace the harmful cultural practices. Two interventions that non-state actors have pursued are now popularly known as Alternative Rites of Passage (ARPs) and alternative safe spaces.

Alternative Rights of Passage

In 1996, Maendeleo Ya Wanawake (MYWO), a grassroots women-centered development organization, first introduced ARPs in Kenya as an alternative ritual to FGM among the Ameru community. In this community, FGM was practiced as part of a coming of age ceremony. The intention was for the community to stop genital cutting, but maintain the essential components of the passage to womanhood, such as educating the girls on family life and women’s roles, exchange of gifts, celebration, and a public event for community recognition. Nineteen years since its inception, the practice has been replicated in Maasailand and other counties where FGM is prevalent.

However, ARPs have created their own tensions and paradoxes. A study of Maasai peoples’ perception of ARPs in Narok County suggests that there is both acceptance and resistance to the programs (Kassim, 2014). Success to counter FGM has been minimal because programs have largely failed to change the



Maasai tribe elders and women gather for a forum organized by AMREF, and geared at sensitizing the elders and women towards an alternative rights of passage for young girls, that would stop female circumcision.

Photo credit: Jonathan Torgovnik (CC BY-NC 4.0)

social meaning underlying FGM, particularly Maasai ideas of womanhood and maturity (Muteshi & Sass, 2005). Furthermore, criticism has said the programs are unsustainable as girls go back to the villages and succumb to pressures of the traditional FGM.

Communities that resist ARPs feel it is an outside imposition by donors and NGOs who do not understand communities' perspectives (Kassim, 2014; Gitagno, 2016). Naserian Barta²⁰ said this during an interview:

“These people [NGOs and government agencies] need to talk to our leaders: elders, fathers, elected leaders, spiritual leaders, and

²⁰ Conversations with Naserian Barta (not her real name) is 25 years old Maasai girl from Narok County who feels that community engagement in the formulation of ARP is not well addressed by non-state actors.

our brothers since they are the decisionmakers of the community. These groups have no respect for our elders and are never involved in the formulation of these so-called rites of passage. They do it in Nairobi with donors then they come here and invite people to eat and watch as they do their thing. The decisionmakers are not involved and that's why they will not succeed in their efforts because they are driven by personal selfishness not the concern for girls.”

Ole Naanyu (pseudonym) had this to say about rites of passage:

“We are invited to these ceremonies to eat and sing and watch people do things that we don't even understand. We are not even asked to give our opinions or views regarding those rites. They really don't care about us at all. They just come here, speak a lot of English,

condemn and demonize our culture, take a lot of pictures and go away. They are just here to make money at the expense of our culture.”²¹

Oboler (2001) blames the lack of cultural sensitivities towards the Maasai culture and traditions as one reason ARPs have failed in the Maasai community. Outsiders imagined Maasai culture as backward, irrational, and ignorant. A process of positive social transformation, however, can only occur when programs and policies focus on enabling communities to make a coordinated, collective choice to abandon FGM (Feldman-Jacobs, 2013). This entails working on transforming deep-seated social norms by engaging the custodians of traditions who play a role in maintaining norms and who have the power to influence change in the society.

The Creation of Rescue Centers and Safe Houses as Alternative Safe Spaces

Many organizations have also set up rescue centers, also known as safe houses or shelters, for girls running away from villages to escape FGM and early marriage. While some have been successful in saving girls, many have also created tensions and bitterness with communities because of the coercive nature of how they rescue girls. Some organizations antagonize girls without their parents present, and sometimes forcefully remove many of them from their families. Community leaders have accused some rescue centers of existing solely to make money from donors (primarily for the directors). One elder, Ole Naanyu, captured these tensions during an interview:

“Government officials like police, chiefs, and education officers despise the Maasai people. They look down upon our culture and traditions and call us primitive and backward. They don’t even ask for our permission as parents to take away our girls. They just rip them off from us, arrest mothers and fathers, and throw them behind bars. They collude with teachers in schools and chiefs. We are the par-

ents of these girls and we should be respected. How do they purport to help us when they rip our families apart and draw the curse of the elders on their daughters and render their mothers outcasts! Ultimately, neither those girls nor their parents are helped. Instead, they destroy all our lives. When they throw us behind bars, they tell us about laws and human rights! What rights? Why criminalize our culture? Can you really criminalize culture?”

From the above sentiments, there is a clear sense of tension. The majority of respondents in interviews wanted to see stakeholders engage mutually with communities instead of using force and the language of rights, which Maasai leaders believe criminalizes Maasai culture.

How to Get Maasai Girls in School: Engage Key Gatekeepers

As Kenya strives to expand access to basic education, there must be deliberate efforts to develop innovative models and approaches for equitable and quality education for highly mobile and fragile pastoralist groups like the Maasai.

Many interventions have not pragmatically engaged with communities in ways that make sense to the custodians and gatekeepers—ways that are respectful to their culture and social norms. Any sustainable and impactful interventions must begin to grasp some of the underlying tensions and fears that Maasai people have about losing their culture, their way of life, and what it means to be Maasai. Policymakers must begin to think of how “being Maasai” is compatible with modernity and how to engage the Maasai community with a view toward embracing education in a way that does not threaten their culture.

Despite all the political goodwill as well as concerted efforts from various actors and stakeholders, the answer to Maasai girls’ education could rest on not just how to engage the custodians of traditions in

²¹ Interview with Ole Naanyu (not his real name), a community leader from Osupuko in Narok County, March 2017.

supporting girls' education but also in addressing the deep issues of marginalization that Maasai people continue to experience.

Drawing on my observations and experiences as a Maasai woman, I suggest that community-led approaches towards promoting girls' education are more effective and culturally sensitive when they involve Maasai gatekeepers and custodians of traditions. Gatekeepers and custodians of tradition and culture may be part of the problem—but they can also be part of the solution. The most successful solutions tend to focus on holistic, integrated, and culturally sensitive approaches that are community-based and involve coordination from multiple actors and sectors (Feldman-Jacobs, 2013; WHO, 2008).

ENGAGE TRADITIONAL AND COMMUNITY LEADERS THROUGH CHANGING SOCIAL NORMS

Traditional, spiritual, political, and community leaders are great cultural influencers because of their depth of understanding of Maasai culture and traditions. Until there is a greater understanding of the minds and worldviews of these gatekeepers of traditions, not much can be done. When they are approached with respect, and understand the stakes, they will support girls' education.

I recommend that policymakers and actors in girls' education seek innovative ways of engaging community gatekeepers. This includes having respectful conversations with elders, getting to understand their fears about girls' education, and letting them suggest solutions from their own perspectives. They hold the key to girls' education.

Elders and community leaders should also be involved in the formulation of programs, such as ARPs. Cultural sensitivities and respect must be observed at all times; because a lack of cultural sensitivity has been cited as a reason Maasai elders reject ARP programs. They argue that it is impossible to support a campaign to eradicate FGM when actors view Maasai traditions and culture as backward, ir-

rational, and ignorant. Understanding Maasai value systems—particularly values of respect, honor, fairness, and the roles of elders—are important to Maasai people. When they are shown respect, they respect in return. Stakeholders must uphold these values at all times and stop criminalizing Maasai culture.

ENGAGE SPIRITUAL LEADERS AND FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS THROUGH TRAINING AND SENSITIZATION

The role of religious leaders and faith-based organizations (FBOs) in Maasai communities cannot be understated. Mainstream churches such as the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK), African Inland Church (AIC), the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA), and the Catholic Church are all prominent throughout Maasailand. Many of these FBOs are development providers who run schools and hospitals. As such, they are highly respected and their clergy are very influential. For example, the head of the Anglican Church in Kenya, the Rev. Ole Sapit, is a prominent, progressive, and well-respected Maasai clergy whose support for girls' education is an opportunity that could be leveraged.

In addition, the proliferation of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches are very popular with the youth and younger generations who are attracted to modernity and social change. In my observations of their spread and popularity, these churches' relationships with communities have been positive. Pentecostal churches have made inroads addressing negative traditions and culture, especially FGM, early marriage, polygamy, and many others. They represent some new aspirations for Maasai boys and girls who desire education, monogamous marriage, and development. While they might risk demonizing culture—as Pentecostal churches often do (Parsitau, 2009)—training and capacity building by girls' education stakeholders, clergy and other

spiritual leaders²² could be leveraged to become reliable stakeholders and supporters of girls' education.

Furthermore, research by World Vision (2014) found that religious leaders who show strong leadership on harmful traditional practices can have an impact: having one spiritual leader not subject his daughters to FGM sends a powerful signal to many families. Spiritual leaders can also set positive examples by refusing to conduct wedding ceremonies involving girls less than 18 years-of-age and by including concern for girls' education into their sermons and spiritual activities. Their church spaces can also be used as safe spaces for girls who refuse to undergo FGM. Finally, they themselves can be a bridge between girls and their parents, particularly in leading reconciliation between girls and their fathers.

LEVERAGE YOUTH FOR CHANGE AS AMBASSADORS

In 2013, a group of young Maasai warriors and junior elders who call themselves the Anti-Cut Warriors emerged to oppose FGM and early marriage in Magadi area of Kajiado County. The group was founded by Lelein Ole Kaunga, a young Moran²³ chief who was appointed as a youth leader by his community and who leads nearly 750 young warriors. The Anti-Cut Warriors are a group of progressive, educated, and passionate young men who understand the impact of FGM and early marriage on girls' health and education, and who are causing some ripples in Kajiado County. They have come together with the help of the African Medical Research and Education Foundation (AMREF) and formed a powerful lobby group to fight FGM. They travel to schools in Maasailand and to social and cultural events to speak against FGM and early marriage, and have made public commitments to

fight and to give Maasai girls the right to contest FGM. They also encourage Maasai young men to marry uncircumcised girls, thereby giving voice to the concerns of their sisters, daughters, nieces, wives, and mothers.

Ole Kaunga, a junior elder, is spearheading social change by speaking against harmful traditions and culture that he was appointed to safeguard. He said in an interview on Nation Television (NTV) in Kenya:

“When I stood to oppose FGM, people were shocked! And they said, look! The defender of tradition and culture has gone against the tradition he was given a mantle to safeguard and lead!”

He continued:

“But I stayed firm. I have seen a girl nearly bleed to death after undergoing FGM. It shook me. I believe girls should be given voice and a right away from FGM. So I decided to rise up. I read the Bible and I did not find a single verse that supports FGM. So I speak with my cabinet—which is composed of Morans and junior elders. We discuss the issues and go out to speak up. We use socio-forums to speak against these retrogressive traditions. We have received training from AMREF who have trained us as ambassadors for positive change. So we go out and call for change!”²⁴

Ole Kaunga and his young ambassadors represents new and refreshing agents of change in the Maasai community and are transforming Maasai social norms from within. As strong influencers and thought leaders in their communities, they are the new voice and important allies for girls' education.

22 Spiritual leaders is a generic term here I use to denote leaders from various FBOs, including traditionally inclined institutions such as Maasai traditional spiritual leadership where a leader is anointed by the community and given the mantle to guide his age set group in spiritual as well as communal affairs.

23 A Moran is a name for a Maasai warrior.

24 Ole Kaunga interview on Nation TV viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aAcQDX6dTCI>

According to Sabore ole Parseina,²⁵ a cultural ambassador:

“Maasai society is not very kind to its girls and women who are treated as inferior. This is unacceptable. We must change this. I am not saying that we abandon all our good culture, but we must reject those that have no value and those that harm our girls and women. We are very proud of our culture and of being Maasai but some aspects of our culture are just plain bad and must go.”

The Anti-Cut Warriors represent generational change in the Maasai community and should be leveraged to support girls' education.

LEVERAGE GIRLS' VOICES AND AGENCY FOR THEIR OWN EDUCATION

It is also important that young girls are listened to and seen as critical stakeholders in their own education. The community needs to give girls the opportunity to develop agency and voice in order to resist harmful cultures and traditions. Initial things that can be done include: teaching girls about their rights, building their capacities through leadership and life skills development, and informing them about menstrual hygiene and sexual and reproductive health. In my personal interactions with Maasai girls in schools, villages, and universities, many girls strongly felt that their voices were missing in discussions regarding their lives and health. Nancy Oloitipitip,²⁶ a university graduate and a Maasai girl who escaped FGM with the help of her mom, said:

“Decisions that impact girls' lives and education are being decided by everybody except themselves. Look parents, teachers, brothers, and NGOs are all busy making plans about

25 Interview with Sabore ole Parseina (pseudonym) in Kajiado County, February 2017.

26 Conversations with Nancy Oloitipitip, who now works with an NGO in Kajiado County. This is Nancy's story as she narrated it to me in my office at the Institute. On December 2016, she graduated with a first class honors degree in Gender and Development Studies and is currently working with the Anti-FGM board in Nairobi. In September 2017, she began her MA degree.

Maasai girls' education and yet their voices are unheard. It is as if they are invisible or muted!”

LEVERAGE THE POWER OF MOTHERS: THE UNTAPPED SOCIAL CAPITAL

Mothers are the untapped social capital in Maasai girls' education. Girls spend a lot of time with their mothers doing domestic and household chores. Therefore, mothers are influential to their daughters and also act as a bridge between fathers and daughters. Culturally, Maasai girls do not speak to their fathers directly. If they need anything from their fathers, then they have to go through their mothers or brothers.

A UNICEF pilot program in Guinea Bissau demonstrated how mothers irrespective of their education status could become influential stakeholders in their daughters' education (UNICEF, 2013). By establishing local associations of mothers of girl students, UNICEF helped to improve girls' access to learning and to ensure that girls stayed in school until they completed their primary education. This came out very clearly with girls I interviewed who had escaped FGM with their mothers' support, as explained in this testimony by Nancy Oloitipitip:

“My mother is my hero! I celebrate her every day! She has been a mother and a father to me although she did not go to school. I was no different from my other siblings. She provided for us, took me to school, and saved me from FGM. My mother made it so simple for me that she organized a mock ceremony for me and all the preparations needed for circumcision ceremony, including paying the cutter and the whole community believes I underwent the cut. She did all these to protect me from being ridiculed by the community and seen as a lesser woman. The night before the cut, she arranged for my escape. People came home the following day to eat and celebrate my ceremony but I was gone to safety. That's why I was able to finish school, graduate with a cum laude at Egerton University, and register

for my master's degree. Every day, I thank God for giving my mom wisdom to help me escape the cut."

BUILD THE CAPACITY OF MAASAI ROLE MODELS

Female role models are also essential for inspiring the younger generations of girls. However, since there are very few Maasai women in government or public service, Maasai girls typically lack role models whom they can emulate. The need for role models is particularly acute for rural Maasai girls who have only been exposed to adult women with traditional roles in the home. The gender norms underlying Maasai culture give women and girls no voice to speak up against marginalization and injustice. There is, therefore, a need for strong role models. Stakeholders could help mobilize a network of Maasai women role models who can provide girls with alternative aspirations and to support girls' education through mentorship.

ENGAGE WITH COMMUNITY CUTTERS

The community initiators (in this instance, cutters or circumcisers) are very critical in any intervention. Communities value their work and grant them respect and livelihoods. Some NGOs, such as African Medical Research Education Foundation (AMREF) and Maendelo ya Wanawake Organization (MYWO),²⁷ have engaged with initiators by training them on the risks associated with FGM and the link between FGM and girls' education. But while cutters can be trained and reformed to no longer perform FGMs, they must be provided with alternative livelihoods and meaningful roles in society. For example, they could be trained in alternative reproductive health practices and teach young girls other aspects of Maasai culture and tradition, including Maa language and cultural heritage. This could also help foster intergenerational conversations between the young girls and older women. This appears to have worked in Senegal, where an intervention utilized grandmothers and seniors as entry points for

²⁷ MYWO is a grassroots women's organization that seeks to empower women and girls in all spheres of life.

discussing community traditions and values across generations (Feldman-Jacobs, 2013).

LEVERAGE THE ROLE AND POWERS OF TEACHERS (ESPECIALLY FEMALE TEACHERS)

Teachers are deeply respected by Maasai communities and can play essential roles in the delivery of quality education. Therefore, they are powerful agents of transformation and can be important role models—if they are given the right training and support, including hardship allowances for working in difficult environments. Teachers in Maasailand come from other parts of the country but the numbers of Maasai teachers are growing. This can be good for Maasai children since they speak their language and understand their culture. Female Maasai teachers would offer tremendous support as role models and in creating bridges between girls and their parents.

Linking Policy Action with Community Engagement

Policymakers are a critical piece in the provision of education for Maasai girls and all Kenyan children. In order to promote Maasai girls' education, there is a need for these critical agencies, including the Ministry of Education and other entities like the National Council for Nomadic Education, to consult with communities to understand and appreciate their needs and aspirations. Interventions must be focused on holistic and multi-sectorial approaches that involves all stakeholders.

To start, policymakers need to stop blaming and criminalizing Maasai culture and traditions and, rather, seek innovative ways to engage this culture and its custodians. They need to invest in studies that will help understand the links between culture, traditions, and low rates of schooling. They also need to tap into the thinking patterns of the custodians of tradition, understand their fears, and assure them of the positive ripple effect of girls' education.

Ultimately, however, to be effective, the decision to educate Maasai girls has to involve the Maasai community itself, particularly the key gatekeepers identified above. State actors and policymakers have a role to play in supporting this endeavor, particularly in linking policy action to community engagement. I make three recommendations:

1. Provide training for spiritual leaders to support girls' education.
2. Employ female teachers from Maasai communities who appreciate the culture and traditions, and who will offer support to students who are struggling with cultural issues.
3. Create and offer Maasai girls social and psychological support programs provided by trained counselors, clergy, and female teachers. These programs should address the contextual and age-specific risks and vulnerabilities that girls face at each stage of development.

Conclusion

Overall, more research is needed to effectively establish the link between Maasai culture and girls' education. While there is some quantitative data on girls' education in Kenya, data on Maasai girls' education is limited. At the same time, policymakers tend to simply blame culture and traditions of the Maasai for low primary and secondary school enrollment rates of girls without attempting to understand the complex socio-cultural milieu, thought patterns, and the roles of community gatekeepers. To that end, further research into the intersections of education and culture is needed.

To continue improving efforts to give girls quality education, more must be done to leverage the power of community-led sustainable solutions and to make use of the existing social and cultural capital of the Maasai. This requires an upfront understanding that it is often because of social and cultural barriers that Maasai girls aren't going to school.

Efforts to intervene in Maasailand have been rife with shortcomings and missteps. A more effective approach would be to engage community leaders and custodians of traditions. I have identified several key gatekeepers that should be engaged in any effort to get Maasai girls to school, and have made a few recommendations on how to work with these groups to galvanize their power and influence to support Maasai girls' education.

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Appendix A: Types of FGM

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)/Cutting

BOX 1 WHO FGM/C Classification (Source: World Health Organization: Population Reference Bureau (PRB 2013))

Type 1: Partial or total removal of the clitoris and / or the prepuce (Clitoridectomy)

Type 11: Partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora with or without excision of the labia Majora (excision)

Type 111: Narrowing of the vaginal orifice with creation of a covering seal by cutting and a positioning the labia minor and/or labia majora, with or without excision of the clitoris (infibulation)

Type IV: All other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes, for example: pricking, incising, scraping and cauterization

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