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## **Support to Children’s Education in the Urban Slums of Nairobi: Community and Parents’ Perceptions with an Expanded Phase of an Education Intervention Program**

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## **Abstract**

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The objective of this paper is to examine the perceptions of community elders and parents on their roles regarding support to their children's education. Data come from the qualitative component of a baseline survey conducted in Korogocho and Viwandani, two urban informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya. Data were collected in April-May 2016 through in-depth interviews, key informant interviews and focus group discussions. Results demonstrated that community elders internalized their role as the face of government in their respective communities, and enforced the implementation of education policies on behalf of all children. The community leaders also saw as part of their role the need to encourage parents to be active participants in their children's education. Female parents with boys in the program perceived that parental monitoring and follow-up was important to ensure that their children attended school, and completed work assigned by the teachers, more so in Korogocho. Overall, parents recognized the importance of the role they played in their children's education. This is a good entry point as parental support will ensure the success and sustainability of the intervention to improve educational outcomes for children, which in turn will help their children navigate the challenging period that adolescence presents.

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**Keywords:** community, parents, support, education, urban, interaction, teachers

# **El Apoyo a la Educación de Niños en los Barrios Marginales Urbanos de Nairobi: Percepciones de la Comunidad y los Padres con una Fase Expandida de un Programa de Intervención Educativa**

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## **Resumen**

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El objetivo de este artículo es examinar las percepciones de los ancianos de la comunidad y los padres sobre sus roles respecto al apoyo educativo a sus hijos. Los datos provienen del componente cualitativo de una encuesta de referencia realizada en Korogocho y Viwandani, dos asentamientos urbanos precarios en Nairobi, Kenia. Los datos se recopilieron en Abril-Mayo de 2016 a través de entrevistas en profundidad, entrevistas con informantes clave y discusiones de grupos focales. Los resultados demostraron que los ancianos de la comunidad internalizaron su papel como la cara del gobierno en sus respectivas comunidades, e impusieron la implementación de políticas educativas en nombre de todos los niños. Los líderes de la comunidad también vieron, como parte de su rol, la necesidad de alentar a los padres a ser participantes activos en la educación de sus hijos. Las madres con niños en el programa percibieron que el control de los padres y el seguimiento era importante para asegurar que sus hijos asistieran a la escuela y completaran el trabajo asignado por los maestros, más aún en Korogocho. En general, los padres reconocieron la importancia en la educación de sus hijos. Este es un buen punto de partida ya que el apoyo de los padres asegurará el éxito y la sostenibilidad de la intervención para mejorar los resultados educativos de los niños, que a su vez ayudará a sus hijos durante la adolescencia.

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**Palabras clave:** comunidad, padres, apoyo, educación, urbano, interacción, profesores

School, family, and community partnerships have been lauded as being very important in bridging the achievement gap between children in low socioeconomic status (SES) neighborhoods and their counterparts in the high SES neighborhoods (Bryan, 2005). So critical is this partnership between schools, parents, families, and community members that in contexts like the USA, this belief has been the driving force behind the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) education reform (Bryan, 2005). This is because of the realization that school cannot do it alone, due, in part to the inadequacy of resources to tackle the myriad of challenges that affect learning of children in poor and disadvantaged settings (Bryan, 2005). The inadequacy of resources is more evident in disadvantaged urban informal settlements in Kenya (Abuya, Onsomu, & Moore, 2012). Furthermore, even with free primary education policies in place, education remains inaccessible to the most poor (Oketch & Ngunjiri, 2011). According to Schorr (2011), schools have the capacity to restore hope to children in poor and disadvantaged settings especially when communities partner with such schools. Extant research shows that when schools partner with families and communities, a host of positive outcomes are observed. As a result of these partnerships, parents acquire knowledge, skills and confidence that enable them to be better parents to their children, improve their economic conditions and alter their lives, and boost their ability to become better citizens (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010; Van Voorhis, Maier, Epstein, & Lloyd, 2013). In addition, these partnerships improve the sense of well-being and personal competence (Christenson, 2004). Moreover, families are connected to other families within their respective communities, children are more likely to succeed in school, and there is improved school climate and school programs (Bryan, 2005; Epstein, 1995; Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Other than empowerment, school-family and community partnerships have been seen to contribute to the social capital, and the requisite networks that families can draw from to enable their children to succeed in school (Bryan, 2005). When schools, families and communities partner, they create avenues which enable them to form relationships among teachers, family, administrators, and communities. These provide connections, information and understanding that parents can use to bolster the success of their children (Schorr, 2011). Research has established that children born among parents whose expectations are dissimilar with what schools expect

and value for children to succeed, need to have very strong family-school relationships for enhanced student achievement (Comer, Hynes, Joyner, & Ben-Avie, 1996). According to Bryan (2005), strong relationships among schools, families, and communities that are transformative in themselves require a paradigm shift among all actors. This is in terms of viewing parents as resourceful, assets to the education of their children and the schools that these children attend, rather than being distant and removed from the education of their children.

### **The Importance of Parental Involvement and How it Works**

There is a positive association between parental involvement and student's achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001; Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Melhuish et al., 2001; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999). Parental involvement is important because it enables parents to establish the context in which their children are learning (Hill & Taylor, 2004). Activities that constitute parental involvement in their children's schooling include: communication with teachers and other personnel in the school; assisting their children with schoolwork at home; offering to volunteer their time at school; attending school events and parent-teacher association meetings; and attending conferences that involve parents-teachers. Children whose parents are involved in their schooling perform better in school, have higher cognitive competency, exhibit higher skills in problem solving, attend school regularly, enjoy their schooling, and have reduced behavior problems (Melhuish et al., 2001).

Research suggests that parental involvement is associated with their motivational beliefs (Green et al., 2007). Researchers also argue that parental motivational beliefs are related to the way parents construct their roles of what is required of them as parents in terms of involvement in their children's education (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005). More critical is the fact that parental role construction is shaped by the experiences of parents with groups and individuals who are connected with schools, and is molded by the social context over time (Green et al., 2007; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005). Moreover, parents are motivated to get involved in their children's education when they possess the requisite self-efficacy for enabling the child to succeed in school (Green et al., 2007). Self-efficacy theory in relation to parental involvement presupposes that

involvement decisions made by parents is closely linked to what they expect the outcomes of their involvement to be (Green et al., 2007; Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005).

There is a positive relationship between parental involvement and a welcoming school invitation and a trustworthy school climate (Green et al., 2007). In order for positive effects to be attained, trust, which promotes mutual respect will facilitate cooperation among the different stakeholders and encourage participation. Specific teacher invitations to parents have been found to be useful in encouraging parental involvement from elementary through high school (Simon, 2004) because they reinforce the value that teachers place on parental participation in their children’s education (Green et al., 2007). When children invite their parents to get involved in their education, it serves as an impetus for meaningful involvement. This is due in part to parents’ inherently wanting their children to succeed, and this provides the parents with the motivation to respond to their children’s needs. But parental involvement relies on the perceptions that the parents may have regarding the personal skills and they requisite knowledge of the activities that they undertake, which may be characterized as involvement activities (Green et al., 2007; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005).

It was against this background that this study sought to establish the community and parental support of children’s education in the urban slums of Nairobi, and whether the gender of the child matters. We examine the perceptions of community and parents on their roles with the education of their children, and highlight whether there are differences by sex of the child.

## **Methods**

### **Context of the Study**

Similar to the pilot study (GEC Phase 1) conducted between 2013-2015, the parent study, “Advancing learning outcomes and leadership skills among children living in informal settlements of Nairobi through community participation” from which the papers draws its data was nested in the Nairobi Urban Health Demographic System (NUHDSS). This longitudinal platform has been run in the two slums of Nairobi, Korogocho and

Viwandani, by the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) since 2002. These two slums exhibit characteristics such as inadequate housing, high episodes of violence, inadequate basic infrastructure, high level of insecurity, poor health indicators and high unemployment rate (APHRC, 2002, 2014). The ‘Advancing learning outcomes’ study included adolescent boys, in addition to girls who had been part of the pilot study (GEC Phase 1).

## **The Intervention**

### **After-School Support with Homework in Literacy and Numeracy**

This component supports boys and girls with their homework in literacy and numeracy. The support is provided through positive role models who are drawn from the community and have completed secondary education with a mean grade score of C+ or above in their end-of-secondary school examinations. The after-school homework sessions held twice a week, cover three weeks in any given month. One session covers literacy skills and the other session covers numeracy skills. Each session lasts at least one hour. Recommended numeracy and literacy textbooks are used for homework support and revision.

### **Life Skills Training**

This component involves sharing knowledge on soft skills among adolescents to help them overcome the challenges of growing up and become responsible adults. The topics that adolescents are exposed to include values, self-awareness, self-esteem, drug and substance abuse, relationships, HIV/AIDS, effective communication, effective decision-making, career goals and sexual and reproductive health. The life skills training sessions are to be held once every month.

### **Leadership Training**

This aspect of the program intends to develop leadership skills through in-house leadership training sessions which cover topics such as ethical leadership, teamwork, building professional and social relationships,

communication, and public speaking. Six in-house sessions will be conducted by community mentors. Pupils with leadership potential are provided with opportunities to develop, refine, and practice their skills. Apart from the in-house sessions, the intervention includes talks by accomplished leaders which are held during the school holidays, and exposure visits are held once a year. The leadership component is expected to empower young people to provide transformative leadership in their respective communities by providing them with education and soft skills.

### **Primary to Secondary Transition Subsidy**

A subsidy will be provided for new secondary grade 1 entrants in Korogocho and Viwandani who will have scored 250 marks and above in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) examination. The financial support will subsidize the cost of joining the first grade of secondary school by an equivalent of \$ 113. This will enable the beneficiaries, regardless of gender, to transition to and be retained in secondary school. Public secondary schools use KCPE examination scores as the main selection criterion. Those who score highly are admitted to top, highly competitive public secondary schools in Kenya. These schools follow the annual school fee guideline set by the Ministry of Education charged at between Ksh. 9000/- and Ksh. 54000/- ([Republic of Kenya, 2015](#)), depending on the category of school. However, some of these costs may be pushed upwards by the school management and fees become too costly and unaffordable by parents from the slums where 35% of households live below the poverty line ([Emina et al., 2011](#)). Financial support is therefore essential to achieve the aim of improving transition to secondary school.

### **Guidance and Counseling of Parents**

This component targets the parents of boys and girls aged between 12-19 years and encourages them to provide support for the education and schooling of children who are at risk of not completing primary or secondary school, or not able to transit to secondary school. The intervention sensitizes parents and community leaders on: i) supporting children’s schooling; ii) minimizing the time children are engaged in



household chores and child labor; iii) supporting children with their studies at home; iv) encouraging their children to attend after-school homework sessions; v) cooperating with the volunteers and mentors to help girls and boys; vi) cooperating with the teachers to track boys' and girls' performance in school; and, vii) participating in sensitization sessions with boys and girls.

## **Data**

The baseline evaluation study had both quantitative and qualitative sub-components. For the qualitative component, data were collected from girls and boys in the program, their parents, the village elders, and the chiefs. The findings presented in this paper are based on the qualitative sub-component in order to highlight the perceptions of community leaders and parents on their roles in supporting the education of their children, and highlight whether there are differences by sex of the child. The data are drawn from 34 qualitative interviews, which comprise eight focus group discussions (FGDs) with parents, 12 in-depth interviews (IDIs) with pupils, 12 key informant interviews (KIIs) with village elders, and two key informant (KIIs) interviews with chiefs in the two sites where the intervention is being implemented.(see Table 1). We present data from the IDIs with community leaders, the KIIs with chiefs, and the FGDs with parents of the children in the program.

Table 1

*Categories of participants for the qualitative interviews*

<b>Study population</b>	<b>Korogocho (n=17)</b>	<b>Viwandani (n=17)</b>	<b>Total (N=34)</b>
Focus Group			
Discussions (FGDs)			
<i>Parents</i>	4	4	8
Key Informant			
Interviews (KIIs)			
<i>Chiefs</i>	1	1	2
<i>Village elders</i>	6	6	12
In-depth			
Interviews (IDIs)			
<i>Pupils</i>	6	6	12

## Analysis

Qualitative interviews were tape recorded and thereafter transcribed verbatim into MS Word. A coding schema was generated both inductively and deductively. NVivo software was used to facilitate manipulation and storage of the data. Deductive coding enabled us to generate codes from the research question: What are the community and parental perception on their roles with the education in the urban slums of Nairobi: Does it matter that is a boy or a girl? Moreover, a review of the interview transcripts allowed us to identify the inductive codes that emerged from the data. We did this by identifying those phrases in the transcribed data that were related to the perception of the community and parents with regard to their roles concerning the education of their children (Maxwell, 2004; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The first reading of the transcripts enabled us to gain a deeper understanding into the responses that were provided by the community members and the parents (Maxwell, 2004). The responses for female and male participants were compared. The codes then grouped into thematic areas. Thereafter we grouped the perceptions of the participants into a matrix format (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The following main

thematic areas were identified by the community leaders as their role in supporting children's education: explaining government policy to the parents on the need to keep children in school; engaging with parents to ensure that children are taken to school; and creating partnerships within and outside the community in support of children's school attendance. As far as the parents were concerned, their support to their children's education included: monitoring the children in and out of school; providing basic needs for the boys and girls, including paying of school fees; interaction with teachers in the respective schools that their children attended; forging closeness with their children for improved learning; and support with homework.

## **Results**

### **Perceptions of Community Leaders on Keeping Children in School**

Community leaders (mostly male) whose opinions were sought concerning keeping children in school included chiefs, and village elders of both Korogocho and Viwandani. The chiefs and the elders, whose responsibility is to disseminate government policies down to the people in the location and sub-location respectively agreed that their role in keeping children, both boys and girls, in school was three-fold. This included explaining to the parents the government policy requiring children to remain in school; engaging with parents to ensure that children are taken to school; and creating partnerships within and outside the community in support of school attendance by children. According to the chiefs, their messages in support of children's education were applicable to both female and male children. However, they emphasized the need to ensure that girls attended school, as girls were previously more likely to be left out of school. Some probable reasons for girls having less access to school are the preference given to educating boys, the fact that girls are likely to be kept at home to assist their parents in household chores and other tasks, and the likelihood that girls are married off to older men or get pregnant early in life. The emphasis on girls was as a result of the sensitization that has been done in the last three years, during the pilot study (GEC Phase 1).

## **Explaining to Parents the Government Policy on Education**

The community leaders in the two sites of Korogocho and Viwandani felt that as community gatekeepers, they had to ensure that parents are aware of the Government policies in education. More precisely, the duty of the community gatekeepers entails an explanation on what the Government policy is in so far as taking children to school, enrolling them and ensuring that they remain enrolled in school. To be able to achieve this, chiefs and community leaders use public platforms – *barazas* – to spell out the policies to the parents. Recently the community leaders also use the “*Nyumba Kumi Initiative*” as a forum to encourage parents to take their children to school. In such forums, the community talks openly about those parents who are not sending their children to school. This is an attempt to encourage parents, and in extreme cases, punish those who refuse to take their children to school. The chief of Viwandani explained the importance they have attached to education in their public forums in this way:

...In our *barazas*, every time we hold *barazas*, that is *referring to education* one of the key agenda. ...It is an agenda we have never relented to pick out in any *baraza*, and to show the parents or guardians the need of taking the children to school, in order to eradicate the problems we have in the slum area....After indicating the need, you indicate Government policy, what does the Government say about taking children to school... (KII, Community leader, Chief, Viwandani, 29042016).

The *Nyumba Kumi* initiative was seen as an additional important avenue of disseminating Government policy with regard to parental obligations on ensuring that their children access schooling. The chief, a community leader in Viwandani explained it thus:

From there we have the village elders, ‘*Nyumba Kumi*’ team and the parents themselves. We emphasize owning that program...It is your work to come and tell us who this parent is who does not take a school going child to school....We talk it out with the person concerned and where the talk gets to the end, and nothing is happening, we even arrest the parent or the guardian and they can

be jailed for three years with a fine not exceeding 50,000 shillings... (KII, Community leader, Chief, 29042016).

The community leaders saw themselves as custodians and intermediaries between the Government and their respective communities. They were of the opinion that as the representatives of the Government in their communities, explaining the policies as they affect the enrolment of children in school was paramount. For this reason, they had to ensure that parents send their children to school. A community leader from Korogocho said:

...Like I had said earlier on, you know the Government has really put emphasis on education, so as a village elder in the community we have Government policies and we must take them to the community level so I have to go and tell the parents that they have to take their children to school (KII, Community leader, Korogocho, 27042016)..

### **Engage Parents so that They Can Take the Children to School**

Community leaders also felt that their role irrespective of the gender of the child was to engage parents with the requisite information to understand, and help children ameliorate the challenges that affect their schooling, thereby be actively engaged as parents in their education. For the community members in Viwandani, they felt that they needed to engage the parents more, so that they can be able to take their children to school. A village elder in Viwandani explained further:

For me mostly is to check whether there any pupils who are not going to school. In case I get any I summon the parents. If we get it is something we can resolve, like the child is refusing to go to school, we may threaten them that we will take them to the police and they agree to go...If it is case that is beyond me I take it to the next level, which is to the assistant chief, who takes up the case of the parent who does not want to take the child to school... (KII, Village elder, Viwandani, 27042016).

Community leaders in Korogocho also focused on finding the specific challenges that kept children out of school. A village elder in Korogocho said:

... My greatest role is that after knowing the challenge that makes the child not go to school, I go and talk to the parents. If it is school fees, we find ways of solving it, also we build the capacity of parents to start small businesses so that they can be able to take care of themselves and also pay school fees... (KII, Village elder, Korogocho, 27042016).

Engagement by the community with parents to ensure they send their children to school, was a realization of the importance of parental involvement in their children’s schooling. This is consistent with what the extant research shows in regard to the association between parental involvement and academic achievement of their children with most studies suggesting a positive link between parental involvement and student achievement (Castro et al., 2015).

### **Building Partnerships with Organizations for Children to Learn**

The community leaders in Korogocho put emphasis on an ongoing partnership between the leaders, the parents, the wider community, and organizations that continue to work in this urban informal settlement. They felt that this partnership would be very important for the education of children in the community. The community leaders underscored the role of partnership in addressing some of the thorny issues that impede children’s education success. They wanted to see a replication of the efforts to the boys who had recently joined the program. The chief in Korogocho intimated:

... We have also partnered with APHRC in their project of girl child education and now in ALOT to ensure that the very needy children have gotten support from this program to go back to school. We have also ensured that we have data on all needy cases in this community so that we ask the government to support them through CDF and bursaries from the government (KII, Chief, Korogocho, 29042016).

The community leaders here realized that public-private partnerships remain an important pathway in providing multi-pronged solutions to the issues affecting girls' and boy's education in the urban informal settlements. Therefore, embracing the public-private partnerships, will go a long way in complementing the Government's effort in providing solutions to the problems that afflict the education of children among the urban poor. This was indeed echoed by a representative from the Ministry of education at a stakeholder's forum held in September 2016 in Nairobi. The official stated, "the need is great, and we welcome the participation of all others to help the government provide basic education to the children of Nairobi"

### **Perceptions of Parents Regarding their Role in their Children's Education**

This section details the perceptions of parents regarding their role as parents to their children and by extension their children's education. These were described in six distinct ways and in some cases were related to whether the child was either female or male.

#### **Parents monitoring of children in and out of school**

Parents felt that it was important for them to monitor the children in and out of school. This was to ensure that their children reached school, and attended classes. Moreover, they wanted to know what their children did while they were in school, and whom they were associated with. Monitoring of children was particularly important to female parents with boys in the program and male parents with girls in the program. It is interesting that female parents would more concerned about boys, due to their susceptibility to joining criminal gangs if they do not attend school regularly. On the other hand, fathers were more concerned about the whereabouts of their daughters, due in part to their vulnerability to early pregnancies. Parental monitoring and the follow-ups with children to establish whether they attended school, and completed work assigned by the teachers was mainly evident in Korogocho. Female parents with boys in the program explained it in this way:

...So I have to confirm you go to school and when you come back and what you are doing... So, you have to control the child after school...What are they doing?...in the slums the children are on the roads, they start looking for money, they start skating, playing football..... the child has no time, we parents need to sit down with the children so that the child does not lack discipline...and can attend school (FGD, female parents with boys, Korogocho, 01052016).

The parents observed that to effectively monitor their children’s education it was important that they collaborate with the teachers in the respective schools. This would enable the teachers and the parents to address deviant behavior of their children which often interferes with the children’s learning. This teacher-parent collaboration to enhance monitoring of children was particularly important to male parents with girls in the program in Korogocho. This how these parents perceived it:

...the parent responsibilities, he is not living up to them accordingly. The child comes from school and goes to do evil out there, but when the teacher calls the parent; he [referring to the parent] says that this is my child, let him stay how he wants to...So, if he takes the gun, it’s okay; if he takes the knife it’s okay just here in school but that is not parenthood. (FGD, male parents with girls, Korogocho, 01052016).

### **Providing basic needs for the children**

Parents perceived that their role was to provide children with basic needs for school--thought to be important for school attendance. Examples of these basic needs include; food, and uniform for school. For instance, children who go to school without having eaten some food, particularly in the morning do not concentrate in school. Provision of basic needs was perceived to be a necessity by both female and male parents with boys and girls in the program, and particularly in Korogocho. A male parent attending a male FGD of parents with boys in the program explained:

...The child needs food, when sick they need the medical checkup. So, as a parent, I will ensure that the child has food and that he has



the books he requires in school. Also, when he drops in performance of a subject you (referring to the parent) will go and see the teacher, and so if you are told they need certain books, you go and buy... (FGD, male parents of boys, Korogocho, 01052016).

For parents in Viwandani, the main focus was keeping boys in school. Therefore, these parents put value on payment of school fees in order for boys to stay enrolled in school. Paying school fees so that children attend and remain enrolled in school was important to female parents with boys in the program, and particularly from Viwandani. A female parent while attending an FGD of female parents said:

...I need to work hard to ensure that I have paid school fees, and also I have bought uniform, so that am not just sending him to school, yet, I have not paid the school fees... (FGD, female parents of boys, Viwandani, 30042016).

Parents in Viwandani were convinced that paying school fees was a basic need to enable the children to attend school. This was because parents wanted boys to excel in school over and above what their parents were able to achieve. A female parent with a boy in the program intimates:

...My role is to see that this child goes to school and finishes his studies...Personally, I did not go to school, I reached class six and got pregnant then I dropped out of school. So, I do not want my child to go through that life since as a boy he can become a thief or a street boy so I don't want that... (FGD, female parents of boys, Viwandani, 30042016).

On the provision of basic necessities for their children in the two sites, the narrative from parents point to the payment of school fees. However, in Kenya, free primary education (FPE) was introduced in 2003 (Oketch, Mutisya, Ngware, & Ezeh, 2010). Scholars have established that despite the introduction of the FPE program, levies continue to be charged in many schools (Abuya, Oketch, & Musyoka, 2013). Therefore, when the parents in Korogocho and Viwandani report that payment of school fees is a basic need, they may be referring to the extra levies that are still charged in schools.

### **Interaction with the teachers**

Community leaders who were parents felt that they could effectively support their children schooling by interacting with teachers, enabling them to follow the performance of their sons and daughters. Through the interaction with teachers, parents would forge a closer working relationship, enabling the teachers to be able discuss the performance of the children with their parents. In Viwandani, the community leaders, as parents were emphatic about the role that the parent should play as the caregiver to the children. A community leader in Viwandani explained:

...As a parent, if your child is going to school, you need to visit the school...take the teacher’s number to call and find out how the child is progressing.... (KII, Community Leader, 28042016).

Moreover, the community leaders were also of the opinion that it is important for parents to interact with teachers in order to reduce the probability of children becoming truant. The community leaders felt that despite the fact that children belong to different households, it is the responsibility of the community to ensure that they attend school. This includes interacting with the teachers who teach these children in school. A community leader from Viwandani explained:

So, the headmaster called me, since the child used to say the mother is in town. So, when I went the Headmaster, told me that Beyoncé says that the mother tells her to hold the baby, yet I don’t see like the mother has a baby. So, we found that the child was lying so that she can play. So, you see that *following up is very good* [emphasis added] because if you don’t follow up, then the children start lying. Even when I see a child who is not mine...I will talk to that child then he will change in his education and even at home. (KII, Community Leader, Viwandani, 28042016).

Parents also felt that interaction with teachers reduces the chances that children will succumb to peer pressure. In the absence of continued teacher-parent interaction, children get derailed from attending school. Parent-teacher interaction reduces the likelihood of children getting sucked into

other activities not related to school, like watching movies, whenever they are out of school. Parental interaction with teachers as a way of reducing peer pressure was important to female parents with girls in the program, particularly in Viwandani. This is what one of the female parents said:

...In my case what I do, in every class where my child is I have the teacher's number. Initially when the children are sent home because of fees yet I have paid for my girl who is in class seven the other girls would convince her to go their homes so that they can watch TV. So, I took the responsibility of having the teachers' numbers, so, when the pupils are sent home I call the teacher and ask whether Faith is in school. So, one time the teacher told me that she cannot see Faith...I went and found six girls and one boy in a house where they were talking as they were watching movies. I took that responsibility so as to know whether my child is in class or not... (FGD, Female Parents of girls, Viwandani, 30042016).

### **Forge closeness with their children for improved learning**

Parents in both Korogocho and Viwandani strongly felt that understanding their children was paramount in order for them to forge a close relationship with their children for improved learning. The emphasis was on knowing the children's friends; as friends can be highly influential in their child's life. Knowledge of friends was particularly important to female parents with boys in the program, and who lived in Korogocho. A female parent attending an FGD of female parents with boys in the program explained:

At times you find that we as parents we do not care about the child we do not even know their friends, we need to know who he plays with because you can think that he plays around yet he has gone to learn bad things (FGD, female parents of boys, Korogocho, 30042016).

Parents in Viwandani emphasized the closeness to their children so that they could open up about issues affecting them in school. Moreover, parents envisaged themselves as role models for their children. This is what a male parent attending an FGD of male parents with boys in the program said:

My son is 11 years...initially when he did something, I was harsh to him and he used to run away from me. So, I became friendly and he has started coming back to me and he wants to learn from me. So, for me I have created that friendly environment and I can counsel him since he is almost becoming a man... (FGD, male parents of boys, Viwandani, 30042016).

### **Support with homework**

Parents were of the opinion that their role also included supporting children with homework. Parental support with homework was critical for children to complete homework given by the teachers. These included: making sure the children completed homework; and also, making follow-ups with teachers regarding the children’s performance. Support with homework was a common narrative among female parents with boys in the program, and male parents with girls in the program. Notably, this theme was not very common among female parents with girls in the program. Notable was that in general, more female than male parents provided support with homework. A male parent attending an FGD of males who have girls in the program explained:

...So as parents we need to look at their books and see what they are doing...if you don’t do that the child will develop a *hard head* (referring to being stubborn) since they will see that you are not concerned. But if you visit the school, maybe after two weeks, and follow up on what the child is doing then you also send a signal to the teacher what you have been observant at home. Through that, you will have streamlined the child and even the teachers will see that you are strict, and so they will be keen on the child. So, when the child comes in the evening we need to ensure that they do their work... we need to be keen with the child at home and the teachers can do their part in school... (FGD, male parents of girls, Viwandani, 02052016).

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

The objective of the paper was to examine the perceptions of community and parents on their roles regarding the education of their children, and highlight whether there were differences by gender of the child. The findings show that from the community leaders' perspective, they were a representation of the government in the community. In so doing they had the mandate to support the education of children in the community by constantly sensitizing the parents to enroll their children in school. At times they used force to enable those parents who were not willing to enroll their children in school. These messages of community leaders in support of children's education were applicable for both female and male children. This is because they felt that education is a basic right for every child as outlined in the Basic Education Act in Kenya. However, these leaders put an emphasis on the need to ensure that girls attended schools, as girls were previously more likely to be left out of school (Abuya et al., 2015; Murphy & Carr, 2007; Rihani, 2006). These narratives show that community leaders are an empowered group who are committed to perform the devolved government functions on behalf of their respective communities. In this case, community leaders were exercising collective empowerment. Westhorp et al. (2014) refers to this as collective empowerment where communities make choices that have the potential to influence the policy makers and the community members at various levels. This enables the communities together with their leaders to provide services—the ability to work with community members to ensure all the children attend school. This finding reinforces the notion of strong community-school-family partnerships as a prerequisite for the empowerment of parents (Christenson, 2004), who acquire knowledge, skills and confidence to be better parents to their children, thereby improving their economic conditions, and boost their ability to become better citizens (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010; Van Voorhis et al., 2013).

The findings show that community leaders lauded the public-private partnerships as an important pathway through which multifaceted solutions to the issues affecting girls' and boys' education in urban informal settlements. They underscored the importance of public-private partnerships, in complementing the Government's effort and providing solutions to the problems that affect the education of children among the

urban poor. So strong was the conviction of the community leaders on the role of continued community-school-family partnership that it further validates the notion that schools cannot do it alone. That to tackle the myriad of challenges that affect learning of children in poor and disadvantaged settings, other stakeholders have to be involved (Abuya et al., 2015; Bryan, 2005).

The findings of this study presented a very interesting scenario in relation to parental monitoring of children. Parental monitoring was particularly important to female parents who had boys in the program and male parents who had girls in the program. We presuppose that female parents would be more concerned about boys, due to their susceptibility to joining criminal gangs if they did not attend school regularly. On the other hand, fathers would be more concerned about the whereabouts of their daughters, due in part to their vulnerability to early pregnancies. Through the “eyes” of the parents, monitoring involves the interaction with teachers. In this way parents are able to forge a closer working relationship, enabling the teachers to discuss the performance of the children with their parents. We anticipate that the interaction with teachers for mothers with boys in the program would be useful in keeping boys away from joining criminal activities, while for fathers with girls in the program would enable fathers to track their daughters, thereby circumventing incidences of early pregnancies. This would be possible through interaction with the teachers, thereby increasing social capital (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Putnam, 2000) to be able to support children in school. This finding reinforces what scholars think---that the interaction with the schools offers parents an opportunity to build a consensus as families, and schools with regard to the acceptable behavior that their children should exhibit in school and at home (McNeal, 1999). In so doing, enhancing social control, and inhibiting problem behavior among children (Hill & Taylor, 2004), thereby enabling teachers to effectively teach effectively (Abuya et al., 2013).

In conclusion, this paper raises key implications for programming that involves the implementation of interventions that seek to enhance the education outcomes of young people. The findings illustrate that even though there may be some competing factors which may hinder parental involvement in their children’s education, such as lack of time or conflicts with work schedules, especially for those living in low-income settings, improvements in parent-child communication and higher aspirations for

education for children may serve as good starting points to improve the situation. First, this paper highlights the significance of having the participation of partners; the community, the family, and the school, in articulating the educational needs of young people. Second that every parent is important in the life of the girls and boys—and that there are instances where either the mother or the father can be able to tackle some specific issues among either their sons or daughters respectively. Third, there is evidence that context matters as illustrated by the differences in opinions expressed by caregivers living in the two study sites. Based on the findings reported, we recommend the following:

- Improving the relationship between families and schools should be considered as one of the goals of education;
- In order to increase participation of families in schools, a sense of belonging should be created for families where they are made to feel that the contributions they make to their children's schools are important;
- Efforts should be made to have mechanisms in place to enable families become more involved in school life. This could be done through encouraging more meetings between parents and teachers, as well as creating opportunities for parents to influence school activities in a meaningful manner;
- More research needs to be conducted on the opportunities available for increasing involvement of families in school, particularly among slum communities.

There is need for educational authorities to formulate policies that promote greater family involvement in schools.

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