

**Numbers Are Not Enough:
Why Gender Inequality in Education
Persists in Kenya**

by

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B.A. (Anthropology), University of British Columbia, 2008

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

in the

School for International Studies
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Summer 2012

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Abstract

The achievement of gender equality in education is an important development goal, endorsed primarily by the MDGs. Mainstream development literature promotes female education for its instrumental benefits and recommend policies designed to eliminate physical, economic, and cultural barriers that restrict girls' access to school. In contrast, feminist development literature emphasizes education's intrinsic value and its role in expanding girls' capabilities, and argues that girls continue to face barriers even in the classroom; feminist scholars therefore advocate for policies to improve girls' learning experience. In Kenya, policymakers have deliberately addressed physical and economic barriers to girls' access to education, with impressive results, but have neglected cultural barriers. Kenyan policy has also largely ignored the findings of the feminist literature, focusing exclusively on achieving parity in enrollments. This paper concludes that the goal of gender equality in education must be expanded to encompass the pursuit of qualitative equality.

Keywords: Gender equality in education; Millennium Development Goals; education and capabilities; cultural barriers to education; education in Kenya

Dedication

To my remarkable husband, Jonathan, who never doubted I could do this.
Words are not enough.

And to all the girls still fighting for their right to education.
May you one day experience true equality.

Acknowledgements

It is with immense gratitude that I acknowledge the support of my senior supervisor, Dr. Morten Jerven, whose insight and advice contributed significantly to this paper. I would also like to thank the entire faculty and staff at the School for International Studies for their wisdom and assistance throughout this year.

To my classmates in the MAIS 2011/12 cohort, none of this would have been possible without you. It has been a privilege to get to know each of you and to journey together towards this finish line. Jen Allen, in particular, thank you for your incredible editing skills; this paper is better because of you.

To my family and friends who cheered me on along the way, thank you for your interest in my research, your confidence in my abilities, and your infinite willingness to listen to me complain.

Finally, to my husband. Your patience, encouragement, and faith in me, not to mention your commitment to cooking for me all year, are the reasons I am here today.

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List of Acronyms

ASALs	Arid and semi-arid lands
HDI	Human Development Index
HDR	Human Development Report
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNDG	United Nations Development Group
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UPE	Universal Primary Education

Introduction

Education has long been recognized as both a means of promoting development and a development goal. The importance afforded to education has made it a central tenet of development policy at both the state and global levels, with the primary objective being to ensure that every child receives an education. In this pursuit of universal access, many efforts have centred on achieving gender equality; however, as scholarly research has identified and publicized the numerous benefits of educating girls specifically, female education is now heralded as an effective solution to poverty and underdevelopment in its own right. As such, education policy now deliberately seeks to provide opportunities for girls around the world to attend school.

The case of gender equality in education is worth considering for two principal reasons. First of all, it highlights the fact that since scholars from different fields employ different research methods, they focus on diverse facets of an issue and therefore promote ideas that are very distinct, if not contradictory. Secondly, this topic also offers insight into the imperfect relationship between academic research and policymaking; by comparing the literature on gender and education and related policies, we see that certain scholarly ideas become popularized and accepted in policy circles while other relevant theories and insight are overlooked.

The primary contribution of this paper is to bring together research on gender and education from both mainstream development literature and feminist scholarship in order to compare their methods, conclusions, and policy recommendations, and to

evaluate how well education policies reflect these different findings. As will be discussed in depth throughout the paper, the mainstream development literature, as well as supporting literature from the fields of education and health, has relied primarily on quantitative analysis of demographic or survey data in order to identify the benefits of girls' education. These methods allow scholars to establish causal chains linking female education to specific development outcomes, thereby highlighting the instrumental value of girls' schooling. From this starting point, the mainstream literature then defines the barriers to female education as any obstacles preventing girls' enrollment. To address these challenges, scholars recommend policies that eliminate these barriers in order to increase girls' access to education, meaning that from this perspective, the pursuit of gender equality in education is limited to efforts to attain quantitative equality in girls' academic participation.

In contrast, the feminist literature has mainly relied on theory and qualitative methods such as interviews and observation to establish education's intrinsic value and its role in developing girls' capabilities. Rather than focusing on obstacles to access, feminist scholars highlight the barriers faced by girls in the classroom and in society at large that limit their capacity to learn and hinder their ability to benefit from their education. These scholars scorn the use of quantitative analysis because they argue that such methods do not capture girls' experience at school. Their central argument is that numbers are not enough: girls' educational equality must be about more than parity in enrollment rates, extending further to the quality of the education they receive, their well-being in the classroom, and their ability to convert their education into future opportunities. Feminist scholars therefore promote policies that advance girls' equality in the learning environment.

The case study of Kenya presented at the end of this paper illustrates how policymakers have tended to prioritize the perspectives advanced in the mainstream literature and have thus primarily addressed barriers to girls' access to education as a means of attaining social and economic benefits. However, many of the findings from this stream of literature are ignored, as current policies only tackle certain types of obstacles to girls' schooling while largely neglecting persistent cultural barriers. Moreover, the findings in the feminist literature about girls' discrimination within the classroom have not been implemented in practice. The analysis of Kenya's education policies therefore reveals that in the transition from research to practice, significant insight is lost.

Structure of the Paper

In order to analyze the current policy regime surrounding gender and education, this paper will explore four broad questions. First, how did the promotion of girls' education become central in global development policy and which perspectives have become dominant? Second, what specific benefits have been associated with female education? Third, what barriers have prevented the attainment of gender equality in education? And finally, how effectively has the scholarly knowledge translated into policy? These questions will be explored in turn in the paper's four sections, with insight from both mainstream and feminist development literature considered at each stage. The paper focuses generally on the efforts to increase gender equality in primary school in sub-Saharan Africa, a region that has been criticized for its persistent gender gap in enrollments, with specific emphasis on Kenya, which in contrast has been praised for nearly attaining gender parity in education.

Section I opens with an overview of the history of the global policy emphasis on universal access and gender equality in education, examining how these ideas have become so pervasive. This section also considers the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the primary driving force behind the pursuit of gender equality in education, as well as criticisms of this framework that denounce its exclusively quantitative focus. This section argues that scholars from different fields recommend different policies due to distinct interpretations of the idea of 'gender equality in education.'

Section II examines the benefits accorded to female education in the literature, which serve as the justification for investing in efforts to promote girls' schooling. This section highlights a key disagreement between academic disciplines. While the mainstream development literature argues that educating girls is important because there are higher social and economic returns to female education than to male education, the feminist literature accentuates girls' inherent right to education and its impact on their capabilities.

Section III addresses the barriers that have contributed to girls' exclusion from education, recognizing that girls continue to be underrepresented in schools across sub-Saharan Africa. The mainstream development literature highlights many obstacles hindering girls' access to education. A further contribution of this paper is to compile and organize these barriers into three main categories: physical, economic, and cultural. Conversely, the feminist literature focuses on the barriers faced by girls once they enroll in school, arguing that since girls continue to face discrimination in the classroom, simply ensuring their presence in equal numbers is an insufficient policy objective when equality of experience is the ultimate goal.

Finally, Section IV provides a case study of Kenya's notable efforts to increase gender equality in education. Policy efforts since independence, including the recent abolition of primary school fees, have brought Kenya close to attaining both MDGs 2 and 3. However, analysis of these policies and examination of disaggregated statistics reveal that not all the priorities identified in the literature are reflected in practice. The central argument is that Kenya's education policies have primarily aimed to eliminate physical and economic barriers to girls' enrollment, while neglecting the cultural obstacles that limit their opportunities to attend school. Furthermore, these policies have focused almost exclusively on increasing girls' access to education, rather than improving their experience while actually at school. This analysis reveals that policymakers have only selectively implemented the recommendations in the literature. However, a brief look at Kenya's 2012 Education Bill demonstrates that cultural barriers and the learning environment are increasingly being targeted. The case study therefore provides insight into the immense challenges that remain in the pursuit of gender equality in education, while also offering hope that change is coming.

The paper concludes by affirming the view expressed in the feminist literature that gender equality in education must be seen as more than a quantitative objective. As such, education policy must be reimagined so as to promote girls' well-being in the classroom, contribute to developing their capabilities, and oppose their oppression in society at large.

Section I: History of Global Policy on Gender & Education

For the past several decades the topics of gender and education have featured prominently in international development discourse (North 2010, p.425). In order to understand the current policy regime it is important to examine the evolution of the global commitment to universal education, and more specifically the focus on promoting girls' education.

Access to schooling for all children was established as an international priority at the end of the 1940s, as a result of concerted efforts by the United Nations (UN) (Sifuna 2007, p.689). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, named education as a fundamental human right and established that primary school should be mandatory and available free of charge to all children (Colclough 2004, p.166).

In the late 1950s and 1960s, the focus on developing human capital led to widespread investment in education for its instrumental benefits. This strategy was especially promoted in newly independent countries, where education was regarded as the driving force behind social and economic development (Omwami & Keller 2010, p.10-11). The international emphasis was particularly on funding primary schooling, which was thought to offer the highest return on investment.

During the following decades, attention shifted to ensuring that all children receive an education. In 1990, the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien

concluded with all of the 155 represented countries committing to implement universal primary education (UPE) by 2000 (Omwami & Keller 2010, p.11-12). The follow-up conference in Dakar in 2000 reaffirmed this aim, as it had not been achieved in the intervening decade.

Independent of the education dialogue, 'gender' emerged as a topic of interest in development during the 1970s, becoming a ubiquitous buzzword in the development discourse by the 1990s (Cornwall 2007, p.70; Jackson 1996, p.489). Global dialogue at events such as the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 resulted in concepts such as 'gender equality' and 'women's empowerment' featuring prominently on donor priority lists (Cornwall 2007, p.71; Unterhalter 2005, p.113). As it became recognized that girls were less likely to receive an education than boys across the developing world, improving girls' access to education became a mainstream priority. Although the concept of UPE had already gained popularity, there was renewed emphasis on ensuring gender equality in educational opportunities.

Throughout this period the definition of development was evolving, due in large part to the efforts of Amartya Sen, who advocated that development should concern itself not only with economic growth or modernization but also with "expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy" (Sen 1999, p.3). Sen articulated the need to remove the "major sources of unfreedom" crippling people's lives, which include poverty and lack of economic opportunities (ibid). As a result, development policy began to more deliberately promote education and health as means of helping people realize their capabilities and freedoms.

In response to this expanded conceptualization of development, in 1990 the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) began publishing an annual *Human Development Report* (HDR), which emphasized the need to focus on social development rather than exclusively on economic advancement. Instead of using income as the sole measure of development, the HDR created the innovative Human Development Index (HDI), which also uses measures of life expectancy and educational attainment to evaluate people's overall well-being (UNDP 2012, n.p.). In 1995 the HDR further introduced a measure of gender inequality, recognizing that even where health and education services had improved, women and girls still faced restricted access (ibid). By propagating this broader idea of development, the HDR played an important role in drawing international attention to the need to improve policy efforts targeting both gender and education.

The Millennium Development Goals

Decades of efforts to highlight the importance of universal access and gender equality in education culminated at the Millennium Summit in New York in 2000, at which time the Millennium Development Goals were established. Goals 2 and 3 both pertain to gender and education and are therefore central to the global policy discussion on this topic. As stated on the UN MDG website (2012b), these Goals are framed as follows:

Goal 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education

Target 2.A: Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

Goal 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women

Target 3.A: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015. (n.p.)

Since their adoption, the MDGs have enjoyed unprecedented popularity and have significantly influenced the international development agenda (White & Black 2004, p.1). The Goals have become development norms, shaping both global and domestic policy by setting “standards for the appropriate behavior of states” (Finnemore & Sikkink 1998, p.893). Although lacking in punitive capacity, the Goals are morally prescriptive and have acquired “a taken-for-granted quality” that pressures states to pursue the particular development aims promoted by the MDGs (p.895).

Because of their perceived legitimacy and validity, the MDGs have cemented the pursuit of gender equality in education as an international development priority. Nearly every sub-Saharan African country has committed to achieving UPE (Bennell 2002, p.1179), both for its intrinsic value as a human right as well as for its instrumental value in reducing poverty. While the range of policies implemented by these countries is quite varied, the efforts are all fuelled by the same objective of getting all children into school, with specific emphasis on increasing girls’ access to education.

Feminist Critique of the MDGs: Narrowly Framing ‘Gender Equality in Education’

While much of the development literature promoting female education applauds the MDGs for incorporating a specific focus on gender, many feminist scholars have criticized the Goals for the narrow way in which they frame the concept of ‘gender equality in education’ (North 2010, p.431). Having emerged in the 1990s when the trend in development was to create clearly defined objectives and means of evaluation (Unterhalter 2005, p.113), the Goals are relentlessly quantitative; because of this the global approach to gender equality in education has also been largely quantitative in focus.

The primary criticism of this approach has hinged on the conflation of gender equality and gender parity; the enormous idea of gender equality, which has manifestations in the political, economic, cultural, and social realms of a society, is reduced in the MDGs to ensuring equal numbers of male and female students (Unterhalter 2005, p.111). North (2010) insists that this is not merely a discrepancy in vocabulary, but also in intent; she argues that the distinction between pursuing true equality, versus parity, affects how the gender issues in education are addressed (p.428).

As sub-Saharan African governments establish their development policies, they are inevitably influenced by donor agendas (North 2010, p.435). In the context of the global emphasis on the MDG target of gender parity, this means that governments have prioritized getting more girls into school (p.428). This leads to policies focused exclusively on increasing access to education, rather than on challenging the social structures that discriminate against girls or on ensuring their equal participation, attainment, and opportunities.

In sum, the influence of the MDG gender parity agenda on both global and state policy has created a culture of striving to attain quantitative 'success' at the expense of acknowledging deeper issues of gender equality in education, such as whether girls experience equality in the school setting (North 2010). Feminist scholars conclude that the Goals have therefore been central in "reinforcing a narrow interpretation of gender" (p.435), which pervades policy today.

Evidently there is considerable disagreement around the topic of promoting girls' education. Based on their unique definitions of 'gender equality in education,' scholars

across different disciplines have sought to answer the questions of why it is worth investing in girls' education, why girls continue to be disproportionately excluded from schooling opportunities, and how best to shape policy accordingly. As we will see in the sections to come, they have arrived at vastly different conclusions.

Section II: Benefits of Girls' Education

For decades, social scientists have been conducting empirical research on the merits of educating girls. Mainstream development scholars have promoted the instrumental value of female education, identifying the high social and economic returns resulting from girls' schooling, while feminist scholars emphasize the intrinsic value of education and its role in developing girls' capabilities. Overwhelmingly, the findings from both streams of research indicate that educating girls has distinct and significant outcomes and is therefore a worthwhile investment for governments to make.

Instrumental Benefits: Effects of Girls' Education on Social & Economic Development

While education clearly has important benefits for all children, several development scholars have argued that there are higher social and economic returns to female education than to male education, both at the individual and the country level. Levine (2006) reports that attending primary school can increase a girl's lifetime income by 20%, a more significant growth than for boys (for whom she does not report an exact figure). She also states that educating girls brings inter-generational benefits, as maternal education significantly increases daughters' likelihood of attending school, substantially more so than paternal education (p.128). Similarly, female education is shown to have a unique impact on child health; mothers' rate of literacy is found to be more strongly associated with child health than overall literacy in a region, since women

are the primary purveyors of healthcare in the home (Schell, Reilly, Rosling, Peterson & Ekström 2007, p.295). These findings suggest that educating girls is not only important because girls have been denied the opportunity in the past, but also because their education produces distinctly valuable development outcomes.

Additionally, female education has been identified as a particularly important strategy for economic development. The World Bank has explicitly stated that educating girls has a more significant effect on the economy than educating boys (Shabaya & Konadu-Agyemang 2004, p.399). Cooray and Potrafke (2011) affirm that “educating girls is doubly advantageous,” as it increases their human capital and their personal contribution to the economy and also because as mothers they pass on this human capital to their children (p.268).

These findings have led to female education being named as one of the paramount solutions to underdevelopment. Herz (2004), for instance, comments that “once all its benefits are considered, female education may well be the highest return investment available to the developing world” (p.1911). Wagner (2008) echoes this enthusiasm, stating that recent research proves that “investing in girls’ education is a ‘best buy’ that benefits young women, their future families, their communities, and their countries,” and noting further that female education is the key to a “virtuous cycle” of development (p.8). Shabaya and Konadu-Agyemang (2004) summarize this perspective with their conclusion that “the benefits of female education are incalculable whether we examine it from social, political, cultural or economic perspective” (p.418-19). These bold statements have strongly influenced policymakers, who seek to capitalize on the benefits of female education as a means of fulfilling development aims.

In order to determine the credibility of these claims we must examine the specific benefits attributed to educating girls, as well as how scholars have linked female education to these outcomes. Benefits at the individual level will be considered first, followed by benefits at the country level.

Impact at the Individual Level

Education is shown to have important benefits for female students themselves as well as for their future children (Levine 2006, p.127). The two outcomes that receive the most attention in the literature can be broadly summarized as greater health and greater wealth. Scholars have argued for different causal mechanisms linking education to these outcomes, some of which are complementary and some of which are contradictory.

Many of the research findings build upon one another, making it possible to identify three plausible causal chains linking education to increased health. First, various studies can be combined to trace a relationship that begins with girls' education leading to increased skills and knowledge, which provides them with access to higher education and employment (Wickrama & Lorenz 2002, p.259). These outcomes in turn result in later marriage (Roth, Fratkin, Ngugi, & Glickman 2001, p.40) and subsequently fewer children (Cotton 2007, p.40), which finally contribute to greater maternal and infant health and reduced infant mortality (Grown, Gupta & Pande 2005, p.541).

A second possible causal mechanism linking female education to greater health is the actual health teaching that girls receive as part of their academic curriculum. Scholars claim that this increased awareness leads to more consistent use of contraceptives (Wagner 2008, p.8), greater likelihood of using health services (Wickrama & Lorenz 2002, p.259), better understanding of reproduction (Bates, Maselko

& Schuler 2007, p.103), greater awareness of disease transmission (Adamczyk & Greif 2011, p.654), and improved nutrition and sanitation (Peña, Wall & Persson 2000, p.67). Each of these outcomes contributes to both greater maternal and infant health.

The third causal chain highlights the psychological and social benefits of female education. Scholars presenting this argument explain that education contributes to a girl's elevated social standing and greater household bargaining power (Lutz 1997, p.210), improved decision-making and problem-solving strategies (Wickrama & Lorenz 2002, p.259), and increased self-confidence and autonomy (Bates et al. 2007, p.103). Each of these outcomes is said to be related to women's improved health, as women are better equipped to make health decisions and more likely to access health services.

To each of these three causal chains, which all result in improved health, scholars have noted a further link to increased income. Education directly provides women with greater employment opportunities (Wagner 2008, p.8), but their improved health allows them to be more productive workers and therefore leads to higher wages. Many authors emphasize that women's heightened economic standing benefits their entire family and leads to greater social status and resource mobility (Peña et al. 2000 p.64). Because of this, Levine (2006) declares that educating girls will ultimately contribute to lifting families, communities, and future generations out of poverty (p.131).

Shabaya & Konadu-Agyemang (2004) further observe that the benefits of education eventually become self-perpetuating, as educated mothers have been shown to be more likely to send their children to school. Referencing a study of multiple countries, they report that for every extra year of education a girl receives, her children will remain enrolled for an additional third or half a year (p.398). Clearly this is an

important outcome as all the benefits conferred on mothers by education will now be available to their children once they attend school themselves.

Impact at the Country Level

These micro-level benefits to female education cumulate in benefits at the country level. Many studies support the argument that educating girls plays an important role in a country's development. Most notably, educating girls is shown to contribute to decreased population growth, improved health, and increased economic growth.

Declining population growth is a direct result of the first causal chain discussed above; as girls' education leads to later marriage and later age at first birth, the result is fewer children per girl. At the country level, this means that educating girls is an effective means of decreasing the birth rate (Herz 2004, p.1910). This inverse relationship between female education and population growth is reported to hold across history and geography, and is said to be consistent even when calculations account for income (Levine 2006, p.128). As the growing global population has given rise to concerns about sustainable development (Herz 2004, p.1910), decreasing population growth is seen as an important means of addressing poverty and raising living standards worldwide.

Similarly, improved health at the country level is an outcome of the increased maternal and infant health resulting from the first two aforementioned causal chains: as girls acquire health knowledge, solicit health services, or earn a stable income, their health improves. Specifically, scholars have observed that a more educated female population contributes to countries having lower rates of HIV/AIDS (Cotton 2007, p.49) and malnutrition (Levine 2006, p.128). Education is also associated with lower national rates of infant and maternal mortality as well as higher life expectancy (Shabaya &

Konadu-Agyemang 2004, p.399). In sum, education has been shown to promote greater health of the overall population, which is an important goal of human development.

The final relationship, between female education and economic growth, is an important justification for governments' investment in increasing girls' access to school (Cooray & Potrafke 2011, p.268). One argument is directly linked to improved health, as discussed above, which suggests that a healthier population begets a more productive labour force and therefore leads to heightened economic performance. Another proposed causal linkage is that education leads directly to increased knowledge and skills (Lutz 1997, p.210), meaning that promoting greater access to school for girls leads to a greater quantity and quality of workers, which facilitates economic growth and poverty reduction. As girls have historically been denied educational opportunities, they represent a tremendous potential resource; the more educated they are, the more they can contribute to economic performance.

Intrinsic Benefits: Effects of Girls' Education on their Capabilities

In contrast to the research underlining the instrumental value of girls' education, the other dominant discourse among education advocates is that of human rights, which sees the provision of education as morally prescribed and therefore intrinsically valuable in its own right (Gauri 2004, p.471). This perspective is critical of the mainstream focus on education as a strategy to attain development objectives, insisting rather that education must be regarded as a basic right related to wider concepts of social justice and equality, and thus as desirable for its own sake (Colclough 2004, p.167).

Much of the feminist literature on gender and education employs Sen's capabilities framework to advance a perspective that diverges from the "dominant neoliberal human capital interpretations" of education, and instead explores what education allows people to do and to be (Walker 2006, p.164). What this perspective emphasizes is not so much the outcomes of schooling, but girls' opportunities to develop their capabilities through education (p.165).

Walker (2006) operationalizes Sen's approach by creating a list of education capabilities, which includes autonomy, knowledge, respect, recognition, aspiration, voice, bodily integrity and health, and emotional integrity, and explains that schools have the opportunity to advance each of these desirable outcomes (p.179-180). Among this list, Walker most ardently believes in education's capacity to promote girls' voice, commenting that one of the key benefits of school is its ability to teach children to debate, ask questions, and think critically (p.173). This is particularly significant where girls are denied a voice outside of school, such as in patriarchal cultures; in these settings schools are uniquely positioned to help deconstruct girls' social exclusion by "challenging the continuation of practices of silencing and passivity" as they encourage girls to speak up in the classroom (p.174). Walker views all these capabilities as mutually reinforcing, noting that the absence of one would compromise the overall quality of education and the possibility of students forming agency and expanding other capabilities (p.180).

Within this framework, schools become a site of transformation. Rather than viewing education as merely a transfer of knowledge and skills, it becomes instead "a potentially transformative process that can address fundamental social inequities and injustices" (Maclure & Denov 2009, p.612). Specifically, schools are recognized as

spaces in which gender identities can be challenged (Dunne, Humphreys & Leach 2006, p.92) and where girls can be empowered to improve their social standing and overcome societal gender inequality.

The feminist literature concludes that educating girls must be more than a means; we must be concerned with whether it truly enhances their standard of living (Subrahmanian 2004, p.195). Far from possessing only instrumental worth, education has deep intrinsic value; it is a fundamental human right and serves to enhance girls' capabilities, increasing their overall quality of life (Walker 2006, p.168).

A Worthwhile Investment

It is widely recognized that the imperative to promote education is framed in two distinct ways, using either an economics discourse or a human rights discourse (Gauri 2004, p.465). Scholars explain that while the rhetoric on rights tends to dominate the public dialogue, human capital theory and the economic concept of return-on-investment still constitute “the functional rationale for the continued support of primary education” (Omwami & Keller 2010, p.12).

However, these two perspectives need not be mutually exclusive; rather, when paired they reinforce the idea that educating girls is critically important—for its instrumental as well as its intrinsic benefits. Cumulatively, the academic literature presents a convincing argument that educating girls is an effective development strategy with benefits at both the micro and macro levels, as well as an ideal avenue for promoting girls' human rights and capabilities. The literature therefore provides a credible justification for the pursuit of gender equality in education at the policy level.

Unfortunately, the literature also reveals that across the developing world, and particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, girls continue to enjoy less access to education than boys (Shabaya & Konadu-Agyemang 2004, p.400). It is therefore important to consider why families and governments continue to under-invest in girls despite all the evidence indicating that this is a worthwhile investment to make.

Section III: Barriers to Girls' Education

The development literature identifies many barriers to girls' education in sub-Saharan Africa. As in the case of identifying the benefits of female education, there is again disagreement in the literature, this time over which obstacles are the most significant. The mainstream literature is concerned with barriers to girls' access to education. Within this group several scholars have focused on issues with the supply of education, arguing that some girls do not attend school simply because education is not sufficiently available. However, scholars such as Bennell (2002) have observed that addressing only supply is often an inadequate approach, particularly since "[in] the context of pervasive and deep-seated poverty coupled with the continued likelihood of *de facto* noncompulsory education in most countries, the supply of education will not necessarily create its own demand" (p.1180). As this perspective has gained credence, the academic focus has shifted to the barriers to demand for female education, investigating why families choose not to educate their daughters even when education is accessible.

The feminist literature on gender and education goes one step further, drawing attention to the fact that even when girls are able to surmount all the barriers constraining their access and successfully enroll in school, they continue to face distinct challenges once in the classroom. These scholars are critical of the assumption in the mainstream development literature that getting girls into school is invariably beneficial (Dunne et al. 2006, p.77), arguing that since girls continue to face discrimination at

school, policy should move beyond access and seek to promote equality in the learning environment.

Barriers to Girls' Access to Education

Although the mainstream development literature identifies many barriers hindering girls' access to education, no author provides an organizational framework for classifying these barriers. Some scholars, such as Glick (2008), make a distinction between barriers that are gender-specific and others that are gender-neutral, meaning they obstruct all children's access to school yet disproportionately affect girls (p.1624). However, even in this case the obstacles are often simply enumerated without hierarchy or connection, making it difficult for policymakers to establish priorities.

For the purposes of this analysis, therefore, the barriers to girls' education will be organized into three broad categories: physical barriers, economic barriers, and cultural barriers. The effect of geography on access to education will also be briefly considered, as girls residing in rural areas often face all these obstacles. While all three types of barriers have been named in the literature as reasons for girls' lower enrollment rates, we will see that some are more easily and more often addressed by governments—at the expense of other, perhaps more salient, barriers.

Physical Barriers

The physical barriers to girls' education often receive significant policy attention despite the fact that academic research places little emphasis on them. Because physical obstacles are the easiest to identify, they are among the easiest to remedy.

These types of barriers tend to limit all children's access to school by constraining both the supply of, and the demand for, education.

A major physical barrier in sub-Saharan Africa is simply a shortage of schools; this is a particularly significant problem in rural areas, which may lack educational facilities altogether (Glick 2008, p.1632). Existing schools may also be located far apart, requiring children to commute a considerable distance every day. Distance has been shown to particularly affect girls' likelihood of attending school, which Glick hypothesizes is because parents are uncomfortable permitting their daughters to travel long distances unaccompanied.

Additionally, there are features of the school building itself that may specifically preclude girls enrolling. The most frequently discussed problem is lack of adequate washrooms, which reflects the general lack of privacy and security experienced by girls at school (Colclough 2004, p.178; Mareng 2010, p.70). This simple problem could also make parents unwilling to enroll their daughters or could inhibit girls attending school.

Even where schools are available and appropriate, the overall quality of education in sub-Saharan Africa is said to be "deplorable" (Omwami & Keller 2010, p.25). Several factors contribute to this low standard. For one, the rampant problem of teacher absenteeism cripples the likelihood of students truly learning (Banerjee & Duflo 2011, p.74). Another issue is the unacceptably high student-teacher ratios in many sub-Saharan African countries, with classes of over 60 students representing the norm (Bennell 2002, p.1184). Teachers are often underpaid and lacking in motivation, which undermines their commitment to their jobs (p.1189). The resulting low quality of education causes many parents to determine that the costs of educating girls are too

steep considering the lack of apparent benefits (Banerjee & Duflo 2011, p.78).

Economic Barriers

A common theme in the literature is the debilitating effect of poverty on children's access to education. The direct costs of education are often insurmountable for impoverished families; Herz (2004) estimates that school fees may represent a quarter of poor families' household income, an amount that is rarely feasible to pay (p.1911). Even where school itself is free, the related costs of uniforms or textbooks may be prohibitive.

Beyond the actual expenditure required to educate a child, schooling also entails opportunity costs since families relinquish the wages their children could have earned during school hours (Shabaya & Konadu-Agyemang 2004, p.411). In areas where poverty is persistent, girls are often needed and expected to contribute to household income (Levine 2006, p.127). Because of this demand on their time, many girls never enroll; others who begin school subsequently drop out in order to find work and help provide for their families.

Distance to school can also represent an economic obstacle to education due to both the expenses of transportation and the opportunity costs incurred when a long commute reduces the time a child has for work or chores (Glick 2008, p.1632). As girls often have significantly more household responsibilities than their brothers, the sacrifice of time required to travel to and from school provides a disincentive to educating them. These direct and indirect costs can either exacerbate the burden of school fees or create a financial barrier where education is free.

While household poverty can preclude both boys and girls attending school, it tends to more significantly disadvantage girls. This fact was established by a 2000 study in Kenya, which found that higher school fees led to a significant number of girls discontinuing their schooling while having no impact on male students, leading Glick (2008) to conclude that girls' education is more price-responsive than boys' (p.1632-33).

Particularly in cultures where boys are more highly valued than girls, and when their financial situation denies them the possibility of educating all their children, parents often choose to invest in their sons' education rather than their daughters'. This confirms that poverty is still one of the most important obstacles to girls' enrollment, a fact that has led to policymakers devoting considerable attention to this barrier.

Cultural Barriers

Finally, much of the mainstream literature is dedicated to identifying culture-specific barriers to demand for female education. Many societies in sub-Saharan Africa continue to promote strict gender roles (Shabaya & Konadu-Agyemang 2004, p.410), leaving women and girls socially and economically disadvantaged. Where gender inequality is pervasive, girls are less likely to receive an education than boys, whether because they are overtly denied access to school or because they are eventually forced to drop out.

Cultural, religious, and other traditional practices and beliefs can pose massive challenges to girls' access to education. For example, the particular beliefs held in a community may shape expectations of girls' behaviour, both in childhood and in adulthood. Girls may be required to remain physically separate from boys (Niles 1989, p.14), be restricted to the domestic sphere (Obasi 1997, p.165), or be expected to

prepare for marriage and childbearing (Alene & Worku 2008, p.9). Where their social roles are clearly defined, a common opinion is that girls have no need for education to provide them with alternate opportunities; in such instances sending girls to school is seen as a waste of resources (Shabaya & Konadu-Agyemang 2004, p.413).

Additionally, the pervasiveness of child marriage means that some girls never have the opportunity to attend school (Alene & Worku 2008, p.9). This is a particular problem in societies where girls leave their parents' home on the occasion of their marriage in order to join their husband's family, meaning the returns to female education will benefit a girl's husband (Iyamu & Obiunu 2006, p.150) and future family (Herz 2004, p.1911) rather than her family of origin. In this case boys' education is seen as a family investment with generational benefits, particularly old-age security for parents, while educating a daughter has no such future payoffs and is consequently considered a futile investment (Obasi 1997, p.166). Furthermore, as her time with them lasts only until her marriage, many parents prefer to benefit from a girl's labour while they can rather than sending her to school (Roth et al. 2001, p.43). All of these factors constitute disincentives to educating girls.

Cultures may also simply display gender favouritism. This is commonly seen in patriarchal societies, where "entrenched attitudes that place higher premium on male education" are pervasive (Shabaya & Konadu-Agyemang 2004, p.403). In these societies, boys may be deliberately offered more educational opportunities than their sisters for the singular reason that they are more highly valued (Obasi 1997, p.166). Where this attitude intersects with other types of barriers, such as lack of schools or high costs, girls have little hope of receiving an education.

As these cultural barriers have existed for many generations, they are often the most deeply entrenched obstacles to girls' education. This makes them extremely challenging to overcome. As such, targeted efforts are needed to eradicate these barriers and provide girls with equal access to educational opportunities; however, as we will see in the case study, such approaches have rarely been employed.

Geography

The final obstacle discussed in the mainstream literature is geography, which includes elements of all the aforementioned barriers, indicating that girls in rural communities face the most stringent obstacles to education. In rural areas, the physical barriers are exceptionally common as schools are often few, far apart, and lacking in resources (Glick 2008, p.1632). Additionally, poverty is typically more widespread, rendering the direct and indirect costs of education a tremendous challenge (Shabaya & Konadu-Agyemang 2004, p.413). Finally, rural areas often have more persistent cultural traditions, meaning gender roles and discrimination against girls may be deeply ingrained (ibid). One other factor compounding these challenges is that parents in rural communities may not be educated themselves and therefore may not understand the benefits of education.

The literature concludes that challenging conditions such as living in impoverished rural areas contribute to the “comparative neglect of female children” (Klasen & Wink 2003, p.281), meaning that although geography may constrain all children's likelihood of enrolling in school, girls tend to fare worse than boys.

Barriers Faced by Girls at School

Taken together, these various barriers provide a strong explanation for why the gender gap in enrollments persists across sub-Saharan Africa. However, feminist literature highlights that the barriers preventing access to education are not the only challenges girls face; rather, they continue to face obstacles within the classroom (Dunne et al. 2006, p.77), which reduces their likelihood of completing or benefitting from their education even if they are fortunate enough to go to school.

According to feminist research, the framing of education as an unquestionable social good has precluded discussion of the potential for school to be a damaging environment for girls, one where gender inequalities are reinforced rather than diminished (Dunne et al. 2006, p.77). Schools are inherently gendered institutions, yet the international imperative to increase girls' access to education is built on the assumption that the school environment is a positive one—or at the very least a neutral one—when the reality is rather that schools are characterized by unequal power relations across lines of gender (p.78). As such, girls continue to experience discrimination, exclusion, and even violence while at school, which damages their levels of achievement, completion, and transition and may ultimately limit the long-term impact of their education.

Some of the barriers faced by the girls who do enroll in school are comparatively easy to identify. One of the obstacles most commonly addressed in the feminist literature is the psychological and physical abuse endured by female students, most significantly in the form of sexual harassment (Glick 2008, p.1636; Walker 2006, p.176). There has also been considerable research on girls' use of transactional sex, where relations with

male teachers or 'sugar daddies' ensure their access to tuition fees, textbooks, or passing grades (Dunne et al. 2006, p.88; Shabaya & Konadu-Agyemang 2004, p.415). These encounters often go unreported as girls fear being blamed, ridiculed, or punished. Dunne et al. explain that consistent implicit and explicit abuse invariably leads to girls having their education disrupted due to frequent absences, changing of schools, emotional trauma, or the ultimate choice to drop out (p.93). These disruptions contribute to decreasing the returns to female education in comparison to male education (Glick 2008, p.1636). For all these reasons, discrimination at school leads to long-term social and economic consequences for young girls.

Girls also face numerous social obstacles at school, such as male-bias in the classroom (Colclough 2004, p.178). Both the content of the curriculum and the power dynamics in the classroom can produce, and reproduce, patterns of exclusion. How a child feels when she is at school directly affects what she learns—or indeed fails to learn. A girl who never receives encouragement from her teachers, avoids speaking up for fear of punishment, or worse is told she is incapable of grasping a concept due to stupidity, may be unable to absorb the material being taught (Walker 2006, p.178). This is one factor contributing to girls' average educational attainment being consistently lower than boys'.

The fact that the learning environment can negatively impact girls' academic performance has been documented in Kenya, where a study conducted in 2000 revealed that girls' education is significantly affected by teacher attitudes (described in Glick 2008, p.1636). Lloyd et al.'s research showed that female students were more likely to drop out in situations where teachers felt that certain subjects were unimportant for girls, where girls felt that they were less able to approach teachers for help, or where

they were treated differently from their male classmates. None of these results were found to be as significant for boys.

Beyond limiting girls' ability to succeed, school may actually reinforce their subordination. Feminists have long commented on the 'hidden curriculum' at school, referring to the informal lessons children acquire in the classroom about socially acceptable gender roles and relations (Dunne et al. 2006, p.78). For instance, this type of subliminal instruction may occur when girls are required to help clean the school, a responsibility not shared by their male classmates. Such daily activities contribute to the gender differentiation that is tacitly promoted in schools. As Dunne et al. explain, "[t]hese learned patterns of performance and interaction become reified to form the basis for gender relations within and beyond the institutional boundaries" (ibid). Formal and informal practices within the classroom therefore contribute to reinforcing the distinct gender roles that characterize broader society.

Walker (2006) summarizes that gender may not only prevent girls from receiving an education, but may also constrain their ability to convert their education into capabilities (p.166). If girls' education is undervalued in society, they may be prevented from experiencing the full benefits of education even where they are given the opportunity to attend. It is thus important to evaluate whether girls are "equally able to convert resources into valued educational opportunities, and [whether they are] recognized socially and subjectively as having equal claims on such resources and opportunities" (p.167). From this perspective we see that even when girls are able to access education, they are not guaranteed the opportunity to thrive in the classroom, complete their schooling, or benefit from their education in the future.

The conclusion reached by the feminist literature is that numbers are not enough; when girls' whole schooling experience is considered it becomes obvious that 'gender inequality in education' is far bigger than unequal access. Because of this, education policy must move beyond addressing the obstacles limiting girls' access to schooling and begin incorporating efforts to improve the learning environment for those girls who do enroll. Only when this becomes a priority can education policy be said to be truly promoting gender equality rather than merely attaining parity in enrollment rates.

Section IV: Towards Gender Equality in Education in Kenya

In order to determine how theory and research around female education have translated into policy, it is helpful to examine a specific country. By considering the progress, persistent barriers, and education policies of a single state, it becomes possible to establish which benefits to girls' education are pursued, which barriers are tackled, and which obstacles remain. Furthermore, analysis of these policies offers insight into which stream of literature has most strongly influenced policymakers and how 'gender equality in education' has been defined in practice.

Situating Kenya

Kenya has a population of just over 43 million people (Central Intelligence Agency, 2012 estimate) that is comprised of several distinct ethnic groups. Of this number, 42.2% of Kenyans are under the age of 15 (2011 estimate) and 78% reside in rural areas (2010 estimate). Estimates suggest that about half the population lives below the poverty line, with the arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs) constituting the most disadvantaged regions (Unterhalter & North 2011, p.496). These demographics all pose challenges to the delivery of education.

The selection of Kenya for this case study was prompted by its above-average progress towards MDGs 2 and 3 in comparison to the wider region. At present, sub-Saharan Africa is lagging behind global progress towards both gender and education

goals. The MDG Report 2012 asserts that sub-Saharan Africa has demonstrated steady progress in its pursuit of universal primary education, recording an increase in net enrollment rates¹ from 58% in 1999 to 76% in 2010 (UN 2012a, p.16). However, in comparison, by 2010 the average net enrollment rate for all developing regions was 90%, with every other region recording a rate higher than sub-Saharan Africa (ibid). According to the 2012 MDG Progress Chart, at the current rate of growth in enrollments sub-Saharan Africa will fail to achieve Goal 2 by 2015 (UN Statistics Division 2012, n.p.). It is also important to note that the region's 2010 primary completion rate of 70% falls far below the global rate of 90% (UN 2012a, p.18).

With regards to Goal 3, on the other hand, the 2012 Progress Chart reports that sub-Saharan Africa is expected to meet the target, with girls' primary school enrollment "close to parity" (UN Statistics Division 2012, n.p.). Nonetheless, the region's 2010 gender parity index of 93 was still the lowest of any region, with the average for all developing regions reported at 97 (UN 2012a, p.20). In more than half the countries in sub-Saharan Africa girls also remain less likely to complete their primary education than boys (p.18).

Kenya, in contrast, is on course to reach both Goals within the requisite timeframe. The UNDP in Kenya (2012) reports that the country is "very likely to achieve

¹ According to the United Nations Statistics Division (n.d.), a country's gross enrollment rate for primary school is the total number of students enrolled at that level stated as a percentage of the total number of children of primary school age in the population. In contrast, the net enrollment rate is the number of students of *primary school age* enrolled stated as a percentage of the total population of that age. When compared, the fact that gross enrollment rates are often significantly higher belies the high incidence of under-aged and over-aged children enrolled.

full primary school enrolment by 2015,” thanks to its attainment of a primary net enrollment rate of 92.9% in 2009 (n.p.). When compared to the region’s net enrollment rate of 76% in 2010 (UN 2012a, p.16), Kenya’s relative success is remarkable. Gender parity has also nearly been achieved, with girls’ enrollment rate representing 95.8% of boys’ in 2010 (UNDP in Kenya 2012, n.p.), slightly higher than the region’s 93% (UN 2012a, p.20).

Together, these statistics indicate that Kenya has performed better than sub-Saharan Africa in general, making it an appropriate choice for evaluating what has worked well in terms of increasing girls’ access to education. Analysis of Kenya’s education policies reveals that the government has consistently and effectively targeted the physical and economic barriers to female education, allowing more girls than ever to go to school.

However, despite remarkable progress Kenya has yet to fully achieve universal primary education or gender parity. Evaluation of the country’s policies also reveals a lack of attention given to the cultural barriers to girls’ education, meaning that many girls, particularly in rural areas, continue to be excluded from school. Furthermore, policies have not addressed girls’ experience while at school, meaning that female students still face discrimination and inequality in the classroom. These findings suggest that in order to truly attain gender equality in its school system, the Government of Kenya should now take the further step of deliberately targeting cultural obstacles and should also seek to improve the learning environment for the girls who are currently enrolled.

History of Education Policy in Kenya

Kenya's commitment to promoting education has a long history. By reviewing the major policies and the resulting growth or decline in enrollment rates we can better understand the educational environment that characterized Kenya when it committed to the Millennium Development Goals in 2000.

Under British colonialism there were limited opportunities for education for Kenyan children, particularly girls (Shabaya & Konadu-Agyemang 2004, p.413). Foreign missions operated most of the schools with little investment from the government (Colclough & Webb 2012, p.264). Upon independence in 1963, however, the Kenya African National Union committed to providing education to all children and worked progressively towards this goal. Kenya followed in the path of other newly independent countries in sub-Saharan Africa who were investing heavily in their education sectors in order to promote social and economic development. As a result, enrollments in primary school rose 40% in Kenya between 1960 and 1970 (Sifuna 2007, p.691).

Over the following decade, the Government of Kenya moved steadily towards providing free primary education. In 1971 a presidential decree eliminated school fees in all the remote districts, recognizing that paying tuition posed an insurmountable barrier to many children's education in these poorer regions (Sifuna 2007, p.691). A second presidential decree at the end of 1973 ensured free education for all children in grades one through four and established a standard annual fee for students in grades five through seven; this policy resulted in a surge in enrollments from 1.8 million students in 1973 to 2.8 million in 1974 (p.692). A third decree in 1978 abolished primary school fees outright.

Although enrollment rates increased impressively throughout this period, the primary education sector was rather inefficient in the 1970s (Sifuna 2007, p.692). This was largely due to the strain placed on schools by the rapid influx of students, which forced many to conduct classes either outside of the school building, during multiple shifts, or in several streams in order to accommodate their swollen numbers. Drop-out rates were unacceptably high, reaching an average of 40% in 1978, and completion rates remained consistently below 50% right through the 1980s (p.693).

The late 1980s saw the implementation of the World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programmes in Kenya, which reinstated school fees with the intention of reducing the budgetary strain caused by free education (Sifuna 2007, p.693). This policy led to deterioration in educational quality and a significant drop in enrollments, as evidenced by the gross enrollment rate slipping from 95% in 1989 to 78% in 1995 (ibid). This decline negated most of the progress made in the previous decades and forced Kenya to consider new strategies to promote education.

In September 2000 the leaders of the Kenyan government joined other heads of state at the New York Millennium Summit, where they committed to achieving the MDGs (Unterhalter & North 2011, p.495). By embracing the Goals, Kenya renewed its commitment to promoting UPE and also formally pledged to tackle the gender disparity that had characterized its school system. Since then, Kenya has seen unprecedented growth in overall enrollments and impressive progress towards gender parity, all of which has earned the country accolades from the international community.

Most sources that praise Kenya's recent educational progress credit the reintroduction of free primary education in 2003, following the election of the National

Alliance Rainbow Coalition (Mukudi 2004a, p.232; Unterhalter & North 2011, p.496). The implications of this policy have been remarkable: while enrollments had previously been on the decline, the abolition of school fees led to an influx of 1.3 million new students in a matter of weeks (United Nations Development Group [UNDG] 2010, p.16). This abrupt increase meant the gross enrollment rate jumped from 93% in 2002 to 104.8% in 2004, with a net enrollment rate of 82.1% (Government of Kenya 2005, p.13).

Since this initial surge, enrollment rates have continued to steadily grow. The most recent figures available estimated an absolute number of 9.38 million students in 2010 (International Monetary Fund [IMF] 2012, p.8), with the 2009 gross enrollment rate reported as 110.0% and the net enrollment rate as 92.9% (UNDP in Kenya 2012, n.p.).

Primary completion rates have also improved since the introduction of free schooling, increasing from 62.8% in 2002 to 76.2% in 2004 (Fleshman 2010, p.16), and ultimately to 97.8% in 2009 (UNDP in Kenya 2012). In many ways this is a more important achievement than growth in enrollments, as it indicates that the elimination of financial barriers allows children to prolong their education and therefore receive more of its benefits.

As the enrollment and completion rates have risen, gender gaps have narrowed. At the national level the rates of enrollment, retention, and completion in primary school have grown increasingly similar for boys and girls (Government of Kenya 2005, p.17). As noted earlier, in 2010 girls' primary enrollment rates constituted 95.8% of boys' (UNDP in Kenya 2012, n.p.). Although boys do continue to enjoy a slightly higher enrollment rate, most reports emphasize the fact that the rates are now nearly indistinguishable.

The rapid and considerable growth in enrollments since 2003 for both male and female students has resulted in the majority of Kenyan officials and their international supporters declaring that the elimination of school fees and related policies have been successful in achieving universal access to education (Fleshman 2010, p.16). Particularly as the country's enrollment and parity rates have been consistently higher than those for all of sub-Saharan Africa, it appears that Kenya's education policies have been successful at bringing the country within reach of MDGs 2 and 3.

Reevaluating the Claims of Success: A Closer Look at the Statistics

If this paper's evaluation of education in Kenya ended here, the national data would point to the conclusion that current policy efforts have been sufficient to nearly attain gender equality in education. However, although Kenya has indisputably made important progress towards its education aims, it is important to recognize that the statistics used to validate the claims of success may be misleading. As Vandemoortele (2004) cautions, progress is exceedingly difficult to measure due to paucity of data, lack of monitoring, and the fact that averages are inherently deceptive and can be easily manipulated (p.124). Consequently, it is virtually impossible to make worthwhile comments about progress towards any education objective for an entire country because some areas have experienced successes while others have endured setbacks. It is therefore imperative to examine the types of statistics used and to determine what they actually report and what they obscure.

First of all, Kenya's national education figures hide the fact that gaps in access to education exist across interrelated axes including poverty, geography, gender, and

ethnicity (UNDG 2010, p.1). A particularly significant issue in Kenya is the persistence of regional inequalities in access to education. While the national primary net enrollment rate in 2004 was 82.1%, the rate for Kenya's eight provinces that year ranged from 19.3% in the North Eastern province to 98.3% in the Western province (Government of Kenya 2005, p.13). The lowest enrollments in the country are consistently in ASALs, which are also the poorest regions. Concerted efforts to improve education rates in these areas have shown some success, with the net enrollment ratio for the ASALs climbing from 27% in 2007 to 42.5% in 2010/11 (IMF 2012, p.8). While this progress is encouraging, it is evident that when compared with the average standard for Kenya as a whole, the enrollment rates in the ASALs are strikingly low.

Gender gaps in enrollment tend to be more pronounced in these disadvantaged areas, a fact that is masked when national gender rates are reported. Surprisingly, certain provinces have actually observed a widening in their gender gaps since the introduction of free education (Unterhalter & North 2011, p.496). In 2004, the national net enrollment rate for girls of 82.0% obscured the shockingly low rates recorded in some provinces, the lowest of which was 14.9% in the North Eastern province (Government of Kenya 2005, p.13).

While many sources note this issue of low enrollment rates in rural regions, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) emphasizes in its 2012 report *The State of the World's Children* that Kenyan children living in urban slums also have a lower likelihood of attending and completing school than their urban non-slum counterparts. While no exact figures are included, the graph illustrating this discrepancy puts primary enrollment for urban non-slum residents around 95%, with enrollment for slum residents closer to 85% (p.30). Evidently, even in areas where enrollments are high, not all children enjoy

equal educational opportunities.

Secondly, there are problems inherent in the use of enrollment rates to denote progress towards UPE. Gross enrollment rates are often used to make progress appear more significant, as these figures can be as much as 15-25% higher than net enrollment rates (Colclough & Al-Samarrai 2000, p.1928). While more impressive, gross enrollment rates do not accurately communicate the number of children who remain out of school. Glick (2008) also warns that neither gross nor net enrollment rates measure attendance, completion, or acquisition of knowledge and skills (p.1631). Although it is important to calculate the number of children who access education, enrollment data do not report educational attainment or quality.

This is very pertinent in the case of Kenya, where the quality of education has been strongly criticized. The 2010 Uwezo Survey confirmed this low quality through its evaluation of how much Kenyan students have actually learned at school (described in Banerjee & Duflo 2011). The survey reported the following: 27% of grade 5 students were unable to read a simple paragraph in English, the primary language of instruction, while 23% could not read in Kiswahili, the other language used in schools. Another 30% were unable to do basic division (p.75-76). Scholars have blamed this low standard of education on the fact that the 2003 policy eliminating school fees was implemented too quickly, without thorough preliminary analysis, proper identification of needs, or sufficient planning and budgeting (Sifuna 2007, p.695). The subsequent surge in enrollment was not accompanied by efforts to improve infrastructure or hire additional teachers, meaning the quality of education deteriorated. Although more Kenyan children than ever have the opportunity to attend school, many of them are failing to truly receive an education due to the “very unfavourable learning environment” (p.697).

Glick (2008) argues that a poor standard of education is particularly disadvantageous for girls, as it provides a further disincentive for parents deciding whether or not to invest in their daughters' education. This hypothesis was confirmed by a study in Kenya conducted in 2000 that reported that improving teacher quality led to higher female enrollment and lower withdrawal, yet had no effect on boys' enrollment patterns (p.1635). Low educational quality in the country therefore disproportionately affects girls' chances of receiving an education.

When enrollment rates are considered alongside educational quality, and when national averages give way to statistics that are disaggregated by region, the evidence shows that there is still a long way to go in achieving gender parity—or true equality—in Kenyan schools. It is also evident that despite important progress, girls in Kenya continue to be less likely to receive an education than boys (Government of Kenya 2005, p.16). In order to determine why this is the case, Kenya's education policies will now be examined so as to identify which barriers to female education are currently targeted and which barriers require more attention.

Overcoming the Barriers: What Policies Have and Have Not Addressed

Kenya's Ministry of Education uses the slogan "Quality Education for Development" (Government of Kenya 2011, n.p.), indicating its belief in education's instrumental value as an effective strategy for promoting economic advancement and poverty reduction. The Ministry declares on its website that it is working in partnership with other Ministries and organizations "to achieve universal free primary education and gender equality by 2015" (ibid), emphasizing its commitment to the MDGs. The website

also includes claims of success about Kenya's progress towards attaining UPE, noting the rapid growth in enrollments in the past decade, particularly among poor and marginalized families.

The section of the Ministry of Education's site devoted to outlining policy priorities states that the Ministry's primary focus is ensuring "equitable access, attendance, retention, attainment and achievement" (Government of Kenya 2011, n.p.). The Ministry summarizes its efforts to attain this aim, as well as the official objective of UPE, through "capacity building for...education managers...and construction/renovation of facilities/equipment," as well as "by ensuring affordability of services" (ibid).

This summary of the Ministry of Education's priority strategies, coupled with the outline of Kenya's education policies since independence, provides significant insight into the types of barriers acknowledged and addressed by the government. The first strategy named by the Ministry, of improving teacher quality and upgrading infrastructure, indicates a commitment to ensuring consistent supply of education by tackling physical obstacles. The Government of Kenya (2005) has repeatedly acknowledged the numerous physical challenges within its education system, which it lists as overcrowded classrooms, lack of adequate facilities, and high student-teacher ratios (p.14). The IMF (2012) notes the government's accomplishments in tackling these barriers, describing, for instance, their efforts to hire teachers in order "to address the acute shortage and improve the pupil teacher ratio" and indicating that 18,000 new teachers have been employed since 2008 (p.8). Although the government has diligently implemented efforts to remedy these physical barriers, thereby promoting access for all children, few of these endeavours are specifically concerned with girls' access.

The second strategy named by the Ministry, of providing affordable education, illustrates the belief that poverty is one of the paramount barriers to education and is therefore critical to address. The most obvious attempt to tackle this barrier was the 2003 abolition of primary school fees that sought to remove the financial impediments to demand. However, scholars have highlighted that financial constraints have persisted since this policy was implemented; despite the availability of ostensibly free education parents continue to be expected to pay for supplements to schooling such as uniforms and textbooks (Mukudi 2004b, p.451). These costs still prove insurmountable for poor families, leading to parents keeping all their children out of school or prioritizing sons' education over daughters'.

In order to tackle these persistent financial constraints, the Government of Kenya has supplemented its free primary education policy with several other initiatives such as conditional cash transfers, merit-based scholarships, and other bursaries (Glick 2008, p.1634; Government of Kenya 2005, p.15). Many of these subsidies have specifically targeted disadvantaged students, notably girls and children from poor communities.

While these policies have led to tremendous increases in enrollment, as described above, they concentrate solely on removing the first two types of obstacles identified in Section III, namely physical and economic barriers. Although these policies indicate the Government of Kenya's attention to both the supply of, as well as the demand for, education, the efforts to increase demand are largely premised on the idea that the only relevant constraint is poverty. The implicit assumption is therefore that with the financial burden eliminated parents will immediately enroll their daughters. Evidently this has not been the case, as many parents continue to choose to keep their daughters out of school even when education is available and affordable.

Persistent Cultural Barriers

This paper argues that most of Kenya's policies have ignored the underlying factors that perpetuate the gender gap in education, namely the deeply rooted cultural, religious, and social traditions that continue to keep girls out of the classroom. Some parents keep their daughters out of school deliberately—not only because there are no local schools or because the costs are debilitating, but because they simply do not see the value in educating them. It is therefore insufficient to make school more appealing or affordable; efforts to achieve gender equality in education must include strategies for tackling the beliefs and traditions that limit girls' ability to enroll or remain in school (Colclough 2004, p.178).

The literature on development in Kenya identifies numerous specific cultural barriers that continue to limit girls' access to education, noting that these barriers are persistent, damaging, and acknowledged but too rarely tackled by the government. The most commonly identified cultural barriers in Kenya are child marriage and early pregnancy, household responsibilities, female genital mutilation, and the lower importance ascribed to girls' education by parents and society (Glick 2008, p.1638; Mareng 2010, p.70-71). Certain obstacles also bridge multiple categories of barriers, such as HIV/AIDS, which exacerbates poverty and forces girls, who are the culturally prescribed caregivers, to abandon school in order to work or look after family members (Government of Kenya 2005, p.17).

These challenges intersect in the context of minority ethnic groups, who, as discussed above, register especially low education rates among girls. Not only are these groups often disadvantaged economically and geographically, they also tend to hold traditional values that limit girls' access to education. Mareng (2010) gives the example

of the Maasai, whose cultural practice of dowry frames girls as a means of acquiring wealth and therefore leads to marriage being prioritized over schooling (p.69).

Similarly, the regionally disaggregated statistics reveal that girls from rural areas are exceptionally disadvantaged. The 2005 MDG Report attributes this to the lack of infrastructure in these areas, but also to such factors such as customary values, girls' disproportionate household responsibilities, high rates of early marriage and pregnancy, and rampant gender-based violence (Government of Kenya 2005, p.17).

Despite the emphasis on cultural barriers in the literature, current policies do not adequately address these barriers to girls' education. There are many possible reasons for this. For one, such efforts are certainly more difficult to implement, not to mention more difficult to measure, which makes them less favoured in a policy climate that privileges quantifiable objectives and firm definitions of success (White & Black 2004, p.10). They also require more creativity and more cultural familiarity. Furthermore, efforts to challenge cultural practices, whether in the name of human rights or equality, are often interpreted as imposing Western values and could therefore be politically unpopular. This is one area where the literature offers many suggestions that could and should be utilized by policymakers.

Exclusive Focus on Parity

The overview of the Ministry of Education's priorities also makes evident that the only barriers addressed by Kenya's education policies are those impeding girls' access to education; the obstacles faced by girls who do enroll, so diligently described in the feminist literature, have received little or no attention in policy. This indicates that in Kenya the narrow definition of 'gender equality in education' as meaning parity in

enrollments has characterized policymaking. Furthermore, the ideas of promoting capabilities and creating a learning environment that empowers girls have not made the transition from literature to policy.

Despite their stated commitment to promoting gender equality in education, the Kenyan government has not implemented strategies that address girls' exclusion within schools. Lack of awareness, willingness, and enforcement, coupled with insufficient resources and culturally-rooted gender disparities, allow girls' exclusion in school to persist (Dunne et al. 2006, p.90). The many forms of discrimination endured by female students seriously hinder the possibility of attaining true gender equality in schools (p.92). Moreover, girls' implicit and explicit exclusion at school also reduces the quality and longevity of their education, thereby jeopardizing the possibility that school will grant them equal opportunities to boys later in life.

In order to determine policymakers' perspective on gender equality in education, Unterhalter and North (2011) interviewed members of both Kenya's national and provincial Departments of Education. These interviews revealed that many government workers believe that gender has successfully been addressed because the Ministry of Education is paying attention to net enrollment rates and the gender parity index (p.506). Several interviewees expressed that since gender parity has nearly been achieved, broader gender equality is not a priority (p.507).

When gender-specific policy was mentioned in these interviews, it was typically in the form of promoting equivalent rates of enrollment or attainment for both boys and girls, or of ensuring equal numbers of male and female teachers (Unterhalter & North 2011, p.507). On the few occasions when interviewees did mention more targeted

policies to improve girls' opportunities, they listed measures such as distributing sanitary products or introducing curriculum reform. The authors describe these endeavours as "gender lite" (ibid), noting that while such policies do acknowledge the need to specifically address the barriers faced by girls, they represent fairly superficial efforts and assume that all girls constitute a homogenous group that can be targeted with identical policies.

Unterhalter and North (2011) further note that the discourse of rights and capabilities with regards to gender in education was never used by the Kenyan education officials; rather, the interviewees seemed preoccupied with completing specific tasks and attaining what the authors term "the MDG minimum of gender parity" (p.508). Unterhalter and North conclude that the "indicator culture" promoted by the MDGs has resulted in education officials in Kenya defining gender equality as strictly gender parity in enrollment (ibid). This leads to the implementation of either gender-lite approaches or gender-blind policies that largely ignore the underlying factors contributing to inequality.

Policy Recommendations

Beyond describing the persistent barriers to girls' educational equality, the literature offers suggestions for appropriate policies to target these obstacles. While several of the recommendations discussed below refer specifically to Kenya, they could be applicable in any context where cultural practices and beliefs impede girls' access to school and negatively affect their experience in the classroom.

Tackling Cultural Barriers

Scholars insist that governments must implement practical strategies to surmount the cultural barriers to girls' access to education, indicating that these policies need not be limited to the education sector. For example, if traditions such as child marriage and female genital mutilation were prohibited then girls might be more able to enjoy their right to education (Mareng 2010, p.71). Additionally, efforts to reduce the time girls spend on household responsibilities would increase their opportunities to attend school (Glick 2008, p.1638). A simulation model created for Kenya indicated that as a result of decreasing the distance to a clean water source by two kilometres, girls' enrollment and attainment would be increased twice as much as boys' (World Bank 2011, p.111). Improving access to water and other means of easing girls' workload could reduce the demands on their time and therefore make parents more likely to consider sending them to school.

Other empirical studies show that girls' access to school is negatively affected by the presence of younger siblings, particularly if they are ill, as the responsibility to care for them often falls to older daughters. A 2004 study in Kenya revealed that when childcare expenses decreased girls' enrollment increased, with no corresponding impact on boys' enrollment (Glick 2008, p.1638). Glick suggests that introducing subsidized childcare nationally would therefore be an effective means of reducing the demands on girls' time. An alternate strategy he mentions would be to increase school flexibility, whether by changing class times or creating local satellite schools, thereby helping girls balance their responsibilities.

Outside of policy, other endeavours could involve public information campaigns promoting female education and describing its benefits. Official endorsement of the

advantages of female education can have an important impact in areas where traditional beliefs constrain girls' access to schooling (Glick 2008, p.1638). Glick references research that shows that these types of efforts can be particularly effective in increasing female enrollment where parents themselves lack education.

Overall, the reality in Kenya and many developing countries is that women still hold a lower social status than men within traditional society (Mareng 2010, p.70). This entrenched gender hierarchy inevitably constrains girls' likelihood of receiving an education. As such, what is truly needed is government and media advocacy for gender equality at all levels of society. This will lead to cyclical benefits: as girls' social standing improves they will be more likely to receive an education, which will in turn elevate their status.

Regardless of the specific policies implemented, it is important to place more intentional emphasis on the social practices and values that continue to keep girls out of school. This shift in focus will not only permit more girls to access education, but will ultimately improve the environment in which they learn.

Addressing the Learning Environment

The feminist literature also includes recommendations for policies that deliberately promote girls' equality within the classroom. A common lament among these scholars is how rarely the gendered nature of the school environment is recognized—or indeed challenged. To help rectify this issue scholars recommend that explicit gender sensitivity training should constitute a compulsory component of teacher training. The focus should be on encouraging teachers to consider the ways in which the gender

hierarchy is implicitly reproduced at school and to view the classroom as a site of individual and social transformation (Maclure & Denov 2009, p.615).

Increasing the number of female teachers is often suggested as a strategy for increasing female enrollment, but it can also positively affect girls' academic performance (Glick 2008, p.1636). Glick hypothesizes that this benefit may be because girls respond better to instruction from female teachers, or alternatively because women may be more likely to encourage female students.

Many scholars promote the idea of making schools "girl-friendly," referring both to the physical buildings as well as the content of girls' education (Grown et al. 2005, p.543; Levine 2006, p.127). Recognizing that the material taught in the classroom can also exclude girls, Birdsall, Levine, and Ibrahim (2005) advocate for curriculum reform, encouraging a shift away from gender-biased teaching materials (p.340). Maclure and Denov (2009) further recommend that curriculum should be modified to include such topics as gender-based violence, harassment, and discrimination (p.615). Shabaya and Konadu-Agyemang (2004) move beyond the idea of "girl-friendly" schools and rather advocate for the creation of as many female-only schools as possible, which, they argue, will enhance girls' safety, confidence, and potential to excel (p.420).

Ultimately, a broader recognition of the value of female education is needed. Rather than being one more facet of palatable social policy, the promotion of girls' educational equality would therefore become an intrinsic part of the greater struggle for women's rights and gender equality (Maclure & Denov 2009, p.617). For this to be so, school must become a space where children learn to challenge the dominant gender structures in their culture and where girls' capabilities are deliberately advanced (Walker

2006, p.163). Rather than incorporating 'gender' as one goal on a time-bound to-do list, the promotion of women and girls' equal rights must influence all development policy and must also be seen as worthwhile goal in and of itself.

On a Hopeful Note: Things Are Changing

It is encouraging to note that Kenya's education policy appears to be moving in the direction suggested by the literature. Just this year the Ministry of Education drafted a new Education Bill. This document promotes the intrinsic value of education, includes measures to address gender and regional disparities, and establishes criteria for an ideal school environment. Among the guiding principles characterizing the provision of education are "the right of every child to free and compulsory basic education" and the "elimination of gender discrimination" (Republic of Kenya Ministry of Education 2012, p.11-12). Schools are also explicitly forbidden from denying access to any child on the basis of gender (p.27).

In their 2005 MDG Status Report, the Government of Kenya (2005) enumerated the country's priority programs in the education sector, which include "ensuring equitable access to education by targeting disadvantaged areas...and vulnerable groups, such as street children and the girl child" (p.35). To address the specific challenges of increasing access for children marginalized by gender or geography, the government has now instituted various affirmative action policies. Amongst other measures, the 2012 Education Bill commits to providing "appropriate boarding primary schools in arid and semi-arid areas, hard-to-reach and vulnerable groups" (Republic of Kenya Ministry of Education 2012, p.25). The Bill also commits to ensuring that no children from these

marginalized groups are subject to discrimination or prevented from completing school (p.29).

The Bill recognizes that enrollment is not the ultimate education objective and therefore pledges to also make attendance and completion compulsory for every child (Republic of Kenya Ministry of Education 2012, p.30). As such, the Bill states that the government will penalize any parent who fails to educate their child (p.26), and further prohibits the employment of a school-aged child (p.28).

Finally, the Bill addresses the learning environment by acknowledging that education barriers do not end upon enrollment. The edict that “[n]o pupil shall be subjected to torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, in any manner, whether physical or psychological” (p.28), if realized, could have a significant impact on girls’ ability to learn in a safe and supportive environment.

These types of policies represent a major step in the right direction, as the government has committed to identifying and eradicating the deep-rooted cultural barriers to girls’ educational equality. However, explicit descriptions of these policies or evaluations of their impact have yet to become available, so only time will tell whether they will succeed in improving the educational experience for girls in Kenya. If indeed they do prove effective, then there is hope that these types of policies can spread across sub-Saharan Africa and the developing world and finally eliminate the barriers that have prevented girls from enjoying true equality in education.

Conclusion

Although the MDG target of gender parity in access to education appears to be within reach in Kenya as well as sub-Saharan Africa, the objective of qualitative gender equality in education, as defined in the feminist literature, is far from becoming a reality. Under the pervasive MDG ideology, “[o]fficial preoccupation with quantitative targets – the numbers of schools built, teachers hired, and students enrolled – is overshadowing...faith in the overall transformative potential of education” (Maclure & Denov 2009, p.613). However, with the MDG achievement date of 2015 only a few years away, the time is ripe to reevaluate how best to frame gender and education goals for the future.

Feminist scholars argue convincingly that the very parameters of ‘gender equality in education’ need to be expanded such that policy moves beyond promoting access and the quantitative goal of parity and seeks rather to create a school environment that treats girls equally, fosters the attainment of their capabilities, and truly contributes to their social empowerment. Unterhalter (2005) insists, alongside Sen, that it is not access to schooling that must be equalized, but capabilities within the educational context (p.115). In order for this to become a reality, girls must be able to attend school with certain conditions in place: freedom from discrimination or violence in the classroom, on the way to school, or as a response to attending school; freedom to focus during lessons, unimpeded by the burdens of hunger or anxiety; and freedom to acquire

knowledge due to the use of gender-appropriate curriculum and teaching methods (p.116).

Evidently this understanding of gender equality in education is immensely difficult to implement. In many sub-Saharan African countries today poverty is rampant, violence against women is routine, and patriarchy is entrenched and continually reproduced in public discourse (Maclure & Denov 2009, p.613). This means that even where girls are given the chance to attend school, ostensibly to improve their future opportunities, these opportunities are constrained by social conditions that offer few real options to women (p.618). This context makes schools' potential to be sites of social transformation challenging—and imperative.

Based on feminist scholars' expanded definition of 'gender equality in education,' it is apparent that "gender parity should be seen as a starting point rather than the end goal" (North 2010, p.434). This paper therefore concludes that numbers are simply not enough; in order to truly see girls thrive at school, benefit from their education, and enjoy elevated social status, gender equality must be more than quantitative. Kenya's 2012 Education Bill demonstrates recognition of this fact, suggesting that policymakers are now more deliberately adhering to the recommendations in the literature. Hopefully this is indicative of a shift in policy at the global level, such that the ultimate educational objective will become true equality for every child.

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