

## BEING YOUNG, KENYAN AND GENDERED: THE OUTCOMES OF SCHOOLING AND TRANSITIONS TO ADULTHOOD IN POOR URBAN AND RURAL SETTINGS

Fatuma Chege (Kenyatta University), Madeleine Arnot (University of Cambridge), and Paul K Wainaina (Kenyatta University)

**“Education is Freedom”** ([www.unicef.org/voynew/ What Young People are Saying, August 2004 No. 11:1](http://www.unicef.org/voynew/What_Young_People_are_Saying_August_2004_No_11_11))

*[We Want to] Depend on our own, to know how we can live our lives and succeed in life. If [only] they (government) can provide us with funds to do business, or they open a place for people or institutions for learning at least to upgrade our education, in certain courses... (emphasis added -interview 2008- young Kenyan man resident of urban site)*

*This paper which is derived from findings of the Education, Youth, Gender and Citizenship (YGC) project<sup>1</sup> foregrounds the experiences and outcomes of schooling as constructed through the voices of young female and male Kenyan youth aged between 18 and 25 years who lived in conditions of relative material poverty in one of the urban communities of the study<sup>2</sup>. Using qualitative data mainly from interviews, the paper demonstrates how young men and women from impoverished families and communities constructed the outcomes of their schooling, demonstrating the realities of how they negotiated their daily lives and experiences that were build upon some broken promise from a formal education that had failed to deliver them –and their families- out of the cycle of poverty. The expressed need to transform their lives by break out of the cycle of poverty while at the same retaining a sense of belonging to their families and local communities - ‘home and family’ – formed the dominant discourse in the voices of the young women and men –most of who seemed eager to project and be heard. The study findings capture articulations of the value attached to formal education as a communal and individual investment even when the experience of schooling was itself portrayed as a failure in delivering the economic expectations of this young generation of hopeful Kenyan women and men. The explicit difference between young people’s educational aspirations and expectations of schooling vis-à-vis the realities of its outcomes as experienced in their daily lives provided the young people a point of departure in interrogating other non-economic benefits of schooling – which in one way or another enhanced their well-being and made them different from the non-schooled peers. Findings demonstrated that the level of schooling –primary and secondary- influenced the articulation of non-economic (social and human development) outcomes of schooling. Gender also seemed to influenced the manner in which the social and human development outcomes of schooling were played out among the youth with the young men presenting themselves as community focused in terms of seeking ways to transforming their environments while the young women were keen in changing their own lives and of their offspring. Thus, the route for escaping poverty was constructed differently between the women and the men while articulation of the means of escape was considerably more concretised among the youth with secondary education. It is in this context that this paper interrogates the implications of different levels of schooling among young Kenyan women and men who live in poor urban settlements.*

<sup>1</sup> The YGC project was part of the broader Research Consortium on the Outcomes of Education and Poverty (RECOUP) – sponsored by DfID of the United Kingdom

<sup>2</sup> A separate article addresses findings from the same study focusing on youth in rural site.

## INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

### *At the beginning there was a forest-not poverty: The story of Kibera –Kenya*

The essence of human development is founded on the expansion of people's capabilities for living decent lives and enhancing their opportunities for economic, social and political empowerment (Chege F. and Wainaina PK, 2009; Kabiru Kinyanjui, 2008, Key note address). It is not without reason then, that many contemporary researchers and scholars would hesitate to accept any unidimensional, statistics of global poverty based on the superficial definitions of economic deprivation *per se*. As Peter Armstrong (in *Make Poverty History*) observes, 'each household behind any figures has its own human story to tell' regarding the multidimensional aspects of poverty in families. Extreme poverty, is discerned by some set objective indicators such as poor provision of education (quantity and quality), malnutrition and poor health care, poor/or lack of provision of adequate water and absence of dignified sanitation facilities, as well as undeveloped/ or non-existent roads and other communication infrastructure. Qualitative research in this study has its value in helping to concretise these conditions and demonstrating beyond statistical figures that while poverty may be perceived as the antithesis of human wellbeing, it may not succeed in crushing the human spirit. Indeed, as this study shows, extreme poverty may succeed in drawing out many of the fine qualities of the human fortitude when family and community loyalties survive the desperate search for livelihoods –displaying stoicism in the face of exclusion, as well as dignity in the midst deprivation (see OneWorld Guides online, updated August 2009). Nonetheless, considering that current global projections seem to suggest that 800 million people would remain in extreme poverty come 2015 (OneWorld Guides *ibid*), the concern that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of eradicating extreme poverty (defined as living below the USA \$1 per day) may not be realised is not far-fetched. This notwithstanding, having the MDGs has kept the global community –more so the less developed countries – on their toes by challenging them to put poverty reduction at the centre of their national economic strategies.

It is in this perspective that we selected four sites (two rural and two urban) of communities living under conditions describable as extreme poverty due to deprivation of material assets and the means to survive with dignity. One of these sites, namely, Kibera (urban) is the subject of this paper. Kenya's Department of National Planning categorises Kibera as 'urban slum'.

## THE URBAN SITE OF KIBERA –GENERAL SETTING

In this area, (...) we are a big population here in Kibera - people are so congested in the houses and every one has his or her own language. We have drunkards, lunatics... every sort of person...so we are used to outburst from people and also abusive languages (Ismail -young male)

Located southwest of the city centre, Kibera<sup>3</sup> was in pre-colonial times part of Maasai grazing ground that was taken up by the colonial government before the outbreak of World War 1 (WW-I) to serve as a military reserve for training newly recruited King's Africa Rifles (KAR). This was the squad of indigenous male soldiers who formed much of the British Army's rare guard and used mainly as carrier corps.

Currently, Kibera falls within one of the administrative Divisions (Nairobi West) of the Nairobi Province—which is Kenya's capital city. It is Kenya largest slum and Africa's second largest coming second only after the expansive Soweto in South Africa. Located roughly 5 kilometres (3 miles) southwest of the city centre and encompassing an area of 2.5 square kilometres (0.965 square miles), the Kibera slum accounts for less than 1% of Nairobi's total area, yet with an approximated population 1.2 million, Kibera is home to more than a quarter of the city's entire population. This makes it one of the most densely populated settlement in the country with an estimated 2000 persons per hectare (1250 per acre). While Kibera began as a one-location informal settlement, it has grown into three main sub-locations, namely, Sarang'ombe, Lindi and Kibera –the latter reflecting the original name. Each of these sub-locations is divided into several villages that bear different names –some of them reflecting ethnic orientations or a communities' occupation. Our study was confined to the original Kibera sub-location, specifically the *Kichinjio*<sup>4</sup> village whose physical, social and occupational characteristics portray a microcosm of the broader Kibera.

On entering any of the Kibera sub-villages, an observer notes not only the shanty type of houses but also the numerous narrow streets (most of them congested footpaths) that criss-cross the settlement with crowds of people (young and old –even children, male and female) walking in all directions and looking busy and even purposeful. In addition, there are groups of young men hanging (idling) around the small grocery shops, chatting away and appearing to take note of walkers by, particularly strangers<sup>5</sup>. The most visible occupation on the streets of Kibera comprise men doing all sorts of jobs such as metal wielding, carpentry and selling in small grocery shops or roasting green maize for sale to passers-by. There are women on the streets cooking and selling food stuffs on the way side that include doughnuts, potato chips, and fish. The sale of green vegetables is also commonplace. Amidst all these activities is the overbearing feature of disorderly

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<sup>3</sup> Kibera is a Nubian term derived from *Kibra*, meaning 'forest' or 'Jungle'. Nubians are a Nilotic group originally from Southern Sudan who came into Kenya serving in the British Army as soldier carrier corps. The current Kibera shanty settlement (slum) has its origin in 1918 when the British Colonial Government allotted residential plots within the forest just outside Nairobi –but without legal title deeds- to the African Nubian soldiers as a reward for service in the First World War and earlier ones. From a few Nubian families in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the jungle of trees (*Kibra*) was gradually transformed into a populous jungle of shanty houses that have become home to over one million low-income and poverty stricken Kenyans migrating from from diverse parts of the country.

<sup>4</sup> *Kichinjio* is a Kiswahili word meaning slaughter house (abattoir), signifying the occupation of the Nubian first family that occupy that area which entailed slaughter and sale of goat meat.

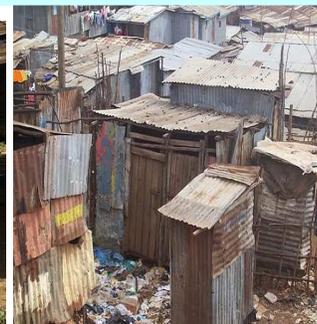
<sup>5</sup> The young men would often call out to the research guides/gatekeepers to find out if there were any chances of being engaged in income activities that the *strangers* would be bring to the community. The guides are quick to warn the *strangers* about the physical dangers looming in Kibera, particularly from muggers and other petty robbers. The Kenya police force is often reluctant to frequent the slum resulting in the community engaging vigilante groups - for a price –to ensure security and track down thieves and debtors.

disposal of garbage, presence of numerous open trenches of sewage disposal and drainages from residential and commercial sites which Kibera walkers have to navigate meticulously as they go about their businesses. Amidst all this is a unique smell which forms part of the Kibera identity.

Generally, most of the Kibera dwellings are in the form of temporary<sup>6</sup> makeshift houses whose walls are generally build of wooden off-cuts (timber waste/ tree poles) that are smeared with mud. The roofs are made of tin material or corrugated iron sheets of low quality that in many cases are enhanced with plastic material to keep of rain water. Rental quarters –which are the majority, are constructed in blocks multiple single rooms each of which serves single persons as well as entire families of between three and ten members. Most of the rental quarters do not have sanitary facilities such as toilets and bathrooms as only a few landlords/ladies consider providing shallow pit latrines and makeshift bathrooms whose use may be based on a fee–depending on whether the user is an adult or a child<sup>7</sup>. Residents who are unable to pay for such facilities are clearly deprived of basic human dignity and their general well being considerably hampered. There are relatively few instances where landlords/ladies have installed piped water –often illegally. The water is available for sale –usually exorbitantly based on a standard measurement of different sizes of jerry-cans. Basically, the lack of proper water and sanitation systems that characterises Kibera slum poses a health hazard from the raw sewage that freely flows in the open trenches. The high levels of poverty that hamper access to clean piped water and ability to respond to the looming health hazards comes to mind on entering the Kibera slum. While an estimated 1 in 5 of the 2.2 million Kenyans living with HIV reside in Kibera, most of the families are exposed to the risk of contracting waterborne/airborne diseases and malaria.

### VIEW OF KIBERA SITE

#### View of Kibera Slum –the unplanned human settlement in the heart of Nairobi



<sup>6</sup> In Kenya, the type of walls –and roofing- of houses are often used as indicators of economic capabilities of the occupants. Hence, stone walled houses are formally categorised as permanent and relatively expensive to own or rent compared to timber-walled (semi-permanent) or mud/earth-walled (temporary) houses which are middle and lowest, respectively.

<sup>7</sup> Residents who do not have toilet facilities or cannot afford to pay for their use have little choice but to dispose of human waste into the environment through an infamous method known as the ‘flying toilets’

people's homes (congestion)

water & sanitation  
(open drainages)

Lucky to have latrines &  
bathrooms



Typical Kibera Residential Courtyard

The physical setting of Kibera, coupled with the level of poverty in the slum tends to have implications of the provision of social amenities that include schools, playgrounds, and community halls among others.

In this section, we focus on schooling in Kibera comparing the availability of public and private schools as well as primary and secondary schools –public and private. This shall put in the context of Nairobi and in .

**[SOME 2 PAGES REQUIRED HERE ON SCHOOLING –URGENT PLEASE]**

The physical setting of Kibera, coupled with the level of poverty of the slum residents tends to have implications of the provision of social amenities, particularly schooling its perceived benefits. In this section, we focus on schooling in Kibera in the context of the broader Nairobi province within which this slum settlement is located

**[INCLUDE 2-3 PAGES ON THIS ISSUE]**

### *Focusing on poverty in Kenyan contexts*

While the post-colonial Kenya Government manifesto of 1963 pledged to fight not only disease and ignorance but also extreme poverty as part of its development agenda, the larger population of Kenyans –including the majority of those living in our urban study site - has continued to grapple with material poverty which every subsequent Kenyan

government has been aware of. For purposes of our study, we considered extreme poverty as experienced by our subjects in the localised context of ‘relative poverty’. This conceptualisation of poverty connotes the internal disparities of poverty that characterise the unfixed nature of poverty where some of the residents are perceived and described as *matajiri* (the rich) while others are *maskini* (the poor). Some indicators of being rich in these poor urban settings is material base and ownership such as having rental rooms which yield a predictable source of income; water which is a prestigious commodity to have, among other differentiating conditions within the slum environment.

Specifically, the concept of ‘relative poverty’ as used in this study is influenced by sociological researchers and scholars who have acknowledged the replacement of the older idea of absolute poverty to help distinguish measures of judgements that are defined by members of a particular society as they identify what is considered a reasonable and acceptable standard of living. The concept is concerned with the *absence of the material needs that tend to hamper the full participation in accepted daily life*. Notably, most of the literature on poverty acknowledges the presence of poverty relative to the standards of living in a given society at a specific time. Thus, people would be described as ‘*living in poverty*’ when they are *denied source of income sufficient for their material needs*. The people are further defined as poor when the outcomes of their deprived circumstances *exclude them from taking part in activities which form enhance their relevance and attach meaning to their role* in that society. This means, as Townsend (1979) observes, relative poverty can never be fixed; it is fluid and oscillates in response to changing social expectations and living standards of a given moment. Hence, what one person may consider a luxury may, indeed be perceived as a necessity by another person who needs to acquire the same as a ticket for social inclusion. In a nutshell then,

Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the types of diets, participate in the activities and have the living conditions which are customary, or at least widely encouraged and approved, in the societies to which they belong. (Townsend, 1979)

In the same perspective, Marx argued that because,

Our needs and enjoyments spring from society; we measure them, therefore by society and not by the objects of their satisfaction. Because they are of a social nature, they are of a relative nature. (Karl Marx)

The fast-growing population of young and explicitly hopeful Kenyans who have little choice but to continue depending on their parents for their everyday needs, both materially and emotionally further aggravates the desperate situation on young person and the parents,. Like many Kenyans who experience relative poverty in their histories and daily lives, the majority of the young female and male Kenyans in the study–constructed their lives as extremely needy claiming that they spent considerable time in what they described as ‘*hustling*’ (an apparently complex concept involving the various strategies that young women and young men use in negotiating their impoverished conditions and seeking survival as their daily occupation. The youth claimed that this *hustling* is inherited from parents and that it was imperative to break this cycle of poverty. Like their parents, it is noteworthy how the *hustling youth* presented themselves

as actors in trying to resolve their position of deprivation by striving to lead positive lives. They talked of trying all means to earn a livelihood, thus attempting against the odds to secure economic independence that would allow them to meet basic survival needs such as food, shelter and clothing and eventually attain social wellbeing and dignity for themselves and their families.

### ***Contextualising poverty in the Kenyan study***

Even as the Economic Survey (GoK, 2006) describes the living standards of Kenyans as having improved by a 10 percentage point drop in proportions of people who lived under the poverty line (from 56% to 46%) in 2006, it is clear from our findings that such pronouncements did not make sense to the ordinary Kenyans. The study subjects (youth and their parents, as well as elders) responded to the Survey and by critically pointing out the problematics entailed in the popular definition of poverty as the daily ‘survival on less than one US Dollar (approximately KSH70 or GB£0.5.00)’. According to many of them, even earning three (3) US\$ per day would still keep them below the poverty line as that would barely meet the daily needs of an average family of between 6-8 people even without having to live in a decent dwelling, wear decent clothing or even access clean water to bathe and cooking, and provide a semblance of dignified life in society.

Hence, based on a preliminary community research that sought communal and localised meanings of key concepts such as poverty and wellbeing, this study has adapted the more encompassing definition that looks at poverty as *a situation of deprivation from which people want to flee*. It is contextually a situation that calls people to action with aim of changing their conditions and that of their world *so that many more may have enough to eat, adequate shelter, access to quality education and health, protection from violence, and claim a voice in what happens in their communities*.

Our study shows that, the living conditions of poverty is one of the situation that many of the research subjects wished to escape from in pursuit of the ability to support their average family size in a dignified manner. It is a situation, which to them, transcended, the apparently simplistic view of surviving under one US\$ per day. Besides the economic and nutritional measure of poverty, there were expressed concern on poverty as the deprivation of personal dignity due to lack of hygienic environments and means to acquire these, inability to access dignity of clothing, housing, leisure time, among others.

Instructively, these broad constructions of poverty manifested themselves in the lives of the study families and were clearly linked to the perceived failure of formal education to deliver the expected returns for poor communities. However, even with these expressed disappointments, this study captures the mood of sustained loyalty among families to continue investing in schooling as noted in their articulation of the faith they still had on formal education having the potential to yield expected benefits that would liberate the next generation of young people in the community. This expressed faith, coupled with the notable sacrifices that families made to give education to their children clearly refutes part of the argument advanced by King (2006) that because the necessary ‘intimate’ interactive relationship between education and economic growth and development has been difficult concretise in Kenya, the poor economic performance had continued to raise poverty levels and *discourage households to invest in education*. Our findings show that while poverty levels in Kenya may have deteriorated in recent years, poor families in the

study sites continued to invest considerably in their children's education relative to other forms of family-based investments such as marriage and family income generating projects. Findings in this study are more in synch with earlier observations by Abagi, Olweya and Otieno (2000) that many Kenyans had continued to express faith in the ability of education to better the lives of their children *despite the pervasive unemployment trends that deprived young school graduates of a means of livelihood*.

According to the National Development Plan (NDP 2002-08:68), poverty levels in Kenya are closely linked to population growth whose increased rates experienced in the 1990s reportedly outstripped economic growth rate, thus yielding 44% of a dependant population aged 0-15 years. Arguably, since 55% of Kenyans are below 18 years (defined as children), and since two thirds of the total Kenyan population is below the age of 30 years, it means is that a comparatively large group of Kenyan youth who were the focus of our study, are effectively dependent on adult population for basic needs such as education, health, food, shelter and protection. Needless to say, the economic and social dependence of female and male children on their parents may have different implications on the lives of the young people from impoverished families. For example, in Kenyan African families, a young man living off his parents is viewed differently from when a woman lives off her parents. The expectations for the man to move out and get a job and for the girl to either get married to a man who could support her materially is a commonplace scenario. This paper demonstrates the social dynamics linked to the role that education plays in transforming gender expectations among young people and their parents. It specifically addresses the struggle by the young women, and some of the young men, to detach from inequitable traditional gender roles and expectations which remained alive among many families. Many of the young women, in particular, perceived education as the ticket to leave the impoverished environments of their community and live in more affluent neighbourhoods where they could bring up a new generation of children.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

In designing the Youth Gender and Citizenship (YGC) Study, the researchers were guided by concerns raised by Naryan, Chambers, Shah, and Petesch (2000) that, while the world comprised of approximately 3 billion poverty experts –who are the poor people themselves- the development of discourse about poverty has been dominated by the perspectives and expertise of those who are not poor –namely the professionals, politicians and agency officials (p2). Naryan demonstrates that by locating the poor people at the core of the research process as equal experts in generating knowledge, researchers can reverse this trend –a practice that the RECOUP project has adopted considerably.

In addressing poverty in this study, therefore, we took cognizance the potential to fall into the trap of defining and understanding poverty from our subjective positions as schooled professionals whose living standards were observably different from those of our study subjects. We consciously considered 'subjective poverty' defined within a framework of regarding poverty in the contexts of how people perceived their position in relation to others in society and the lack of consideration that people could be poor *sometimes – or well off only sometime* -not all the time. This was particularly relevant in helping researchers to be reflective to the dilemmas that were likely to confront them due to their

individual histories and their collective backgrounds of having acquired relatively higher levels of formal education and attained recognisable professions that identified them collectively as non-poor people out to research communities of poor people.

By adapting participatory approaches, the researchers positioned the research subjects as *the 'true' experts of poverty* based on their direct experience of living in poverty. On the same timber, the researchers took cognizance of observations by Keith (1979) who cautions on the difficulties posed by attempts to define poverty from the perspective of other and based on subjective perspectives. We consciously reflected on the political undertones linked to the definitions of poverty and the potential of challenge on the moral authority of the definers-cum-researchers who functioned from advantaged positions of power (economic, academic or otherwise). In this context, Keith (1979) foregrounds the need for a level of objectivity in trying to understand poverty by defining it in reference to the actual needs of the poor and not by reference to the expenditure or standards of lives of those who are not poor (Keith Joseph, 1979)

Methodologically therefore, the YGC Study, like the other RECOUP projects in Kenya, was designed mainly within the qualitative paradigm that employed both in-depth interviews and non-participant observations. In addition, use of data from the community scoping, census and group discussions, helped to contextualise the issues related to poverty conditions of the community.

Sampling of the study sites was based the location in regions that had been identified as pockets of the poorest communities in the Population Household Census (PHC) of 1999). The study locales were selected to include one rural community setting in Nyeri District (Nyaribo sub-location) and one urban setting in the City of Nairobi (Kibera, sub-location). Based on the population size, the rural locale provided 5 villages as researcher sites while Kibera only produced one village as the research site.

This paper focuses on the findings of Kibera whose selected village yielded 283 households from which the YGC sampling was purposively conducted. Interviews were conducted with 10 young women, 10 young men and their corresponding available parents/guardians – whenever they were available and willing to participate. All interviews were recorded on voice recorder based on direct informed consent. The researchers observed research ethics by explaining the nature and purpose of the research, they promised anonymity and confidentiality. They also explained of the respondents to decline participation in any aspect (or entire) research activity without any obligation to give reason.

## **SPEAKING THROUGH VOICES OF YOUNG 'KIBERANS'**

### *Household census and community mapping*

Data from household census and

Life in Kibera was described as physically unattractive. Both the young women and the men portrayed the living conditions as unhygienic, unhealthy and a risk to their well-being. These descriptions were corroborated in the census data and physical observations made in the village during the community scoping and consequent community study. Approximately half of the houses constituted earthen walls and floors and were roofed with iron sheets. About one quarter were

made of timber waste and the rest a combination of timber and stones. In some cases plastic coverings were used to secure the dwellings from rain water. Slightly more than half (55%) of the families in the study village used electricity for lighting<sup>8</sup>, while the others used kerosene lamps and other improvised lamps. Only 1% of the families indicated use of solar panels for lighting. Toilet facilities were a notable area of concern considering the level of congestion in the community. Nearly 80% of the families said they used pit latrines, while only 3% had flush toilets. A considerable 17% did not have any toilet facilities in their residence and hence, three quarters (13%) of them said they purchased the use of toilet on a daily basis where they were required to pay KSH5.00 for adult use and KSH3.00/= for children. The remaining 5% said they used the 'flying toilet'<sup>9</sup>. Only 1% of the 278 households in the sample village owned piped water, the rest had to purchase water from commercial water-points or families who had water reservoirs while others depended on rainwater when the season was favourable.

### **EXPERIENCES, HOPES AND ASPIRATIONS OF YOUNG 'KIBERANS'**

As most of the young men and women constructed the struggles of daily living that were compounded by the material poverty they experienced, the gendered dimensions of community life was characteristic in their stories. While the young men talked mainly of the frustrations of not being able to earn a living and be independent, many of the young women talked pursuing whatever means that would deliver them from poverty materially and in particular enable them to re-locate from Kibera to other 'more promising'. They aspired for a live outside their community where they envisaged living 'better lives'. The young people's narratives of life in Kibera capture the central role that poverty plays in decision making within the family, in –decisions that affect the education of children and their future lives. Some of the women were categorical that they would not wish to have their children living in Kibera where they were likely to replicate their parent's apparently miserable lives.

#### ***Having babies, being jobless... hustling...living: gender differences in community life***

Gender emerged as a major differentiating factor in the construction of 'self' between the young women and their male counterparts. At the outset, the young women tended to relate their lives in connection with their feminine identities of motherhood and marriage while the young men presented themselves as independent of the home –particularly the natal family in which some of them expressed their position as being in control of their situation, taking responsibility of others, and ready to move away from the natal home and be able to fend for themselves. This gender difference appeared to be build on the fact that many of the young women in the study were already mothers at an early age of late teens and early twenties. They also seemed ready to share their family life and construct their families with regard to parental presence (or absence) in their lives, whereby many of them apparently had absent or non-supportive/abusive fathers.

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<sup>9</sup> A flying toilet connotes the unsystematic disposal of human waste using plastic wrapping

Comparatively, the young men revealed little sentiments about family settings and even less about their fathers. As in many studies in various African countries (see Pattman and Chege, 2003), this may explain why the young women and a few of the young men talked positively about their mothers compared with the fathers or father figures.

Most of the young women in the interviews were young mothers, a fact that was notable prominent in their self construction. This aspect of parenthood was less marked among the young men—even when some of them were actually biological fathers and/or husbands. The young women who were mothers readily acknowledged the realities of motherhood in their lives and their direct connection to their own mothers, thus exemplifying a generational continuity of gender values and expectations of femininity. Notably, schooling –of whatever level- did not seem to have disrupted this aspect of gender construction where motherhood and/or marriage emerged as a primary identifier of the feminine identity.

In the excerpt below, we note how Hanna, a secondary school graduate and a young mother articulates her resilience in making the best out of her situation as a young women living in the poor urban site. Her construction of self revealed an unreserved nature of a young woman with a mission in life that was not dampened by early motherhood. When asked to describe herself to someone who did not know her, Hanna hesitated, then proceeded to present herself in a manner that captured her biological reality as a young mother who was self-determined to make meaning in her life by taking action to address family poverty through engagements in casual labour and leisure activities.

**Hanna:** Mm... I am single and having a baby... am jobless. But even then, am just trying to make ends meet because that's not the end of life, you know. When I became pregnant, I did not tell anybody. Nobody knew I was pregnant. My mother discovered when I was 8 months pregnant. That's when she discovered. At that period and time, I was just doing my things; I go to Girl Soccer, plaiting (women's hair), to get a little money. At least I saved my money which I went for labour with. When I was going to deliver... I had everything with me. Even my mother, was not aware. She was just called and told that, you have a grand baby, boy (Chuckles) then she was very- she was surprised. (**Young woman-single, secondary F4**)

Hanna's village mate, Jamila, like many of the other girls in this site, began by locating herself within family contexts –from the immediate to the natal one. She was quick to bring in her mother as her point of reference suggesting that her life was shaped more by her mother than her father.

**Jamila:** I was born here, brought up here and later got married here. Where I am right now is not my family but my husband's family (Laughter) according to my education background, I reached Form Three due to lack of money then after two years life became hard and later decided to get married. We are not rich in our family, we are *hustling*. I was brought up by my mother, she was my everything, she took me to

school and catered for my needs. My father is the kind of men who don't care he neglected all his duties to my mother. So I can say I belong to my mother because she provides everything to me (**Young woman-single, secondary F3**).

In comparison, the male peers in the study did not seem to foreground the biological and social linkage to the family life such as having babies and getting married as the primary identifier in the construction of self identity. The young men portrayed themselves as more linked to public world of work (entrepreneurship), and politics which position them away from the home and family, compared to their female peers. In so doing, some of them constructed their kind of masculinity around a perceived independence compared to a perceived dependence in femininity. They were eager to demonstrate the role as men with responsibilities over the women in their lives thus presenting a discourse that positioned femininity as relatively *easier* mode of being. This perception needs to be understood in the context of the fact that marriage and having children were clearly gender with some of the young women (unlike the men) readily identifying marriage as better and readily available option in escaping poverty for them than did the young men. For most of the young men, getting jobs and doing business that portrayed them as in charge of their lives and supportive of their natal families constituted the masculine discourse as foregrounded in many of the discussions exemplified in the interview captions presented below of the young men constructing their identities

My name is Yakobo, a youth and a businessman. I have reached form four and I completed a year before my sister. I chose to give her that opportunity to continue schooling for I am a young man I will know how I will cope with life (**Yakobo, young male, Form 4**)

Even when poverty apparently interrupted the school career transition of the young men as noted in Makhobi's interview, the link between schooling and being economically independent via employment emerged as a key identifier of masculinity compared to marriage and having babies that was dominant among girls in similar situations. Further, while secondary school seemed to open up the horizons of the responsibilities among the young men with regard, not only to themselves but also with their immediate families –as exemplified in Yakobo's interview above- primary school education seemed to fail in that regard as the primary school male graduates presented a relatively narrow focus of responsibilities in their lives. For example, Motuku, who was a primary school graduate, was keen to demonstrate his struggles as he explored the world of employment as the only option to support himself. Unlike Yakobo above, Motuku did not demonstrate any perceived responsibility to his immediate family, even when he talked of community service. With only a primary school education, he knew that getting more lucrative and prestigious jobs would be difficult and that he had little choice but to accept the menial employment that was available. Motuku was also quick to point out –as did many of his age-mates in this study- that when jobs did not come by, he did community service to improve the living environments of where he lived.

**Makhobi:** I think I dropped because it was hard and the life I am living (of poverty is also hard)...

**Interviewer:** At which level did you dropout?

**Makhobi:** Class 8. When I left there I wanted to go on but I had a problem with my chest, I would not persevere the smell of paint and... So I was forced to try different means and I succeeded. I used to get casual jobs just in local restaurants like a cleaner, I proceeded from a cleaning to service, I worked there for at least two years then after that the restaurant was sold and the new owner could not employ us. So I do some little businesses here to cater for my needs. When I don't have a casual job here, I spend at D.O in a youth group office. It is called Youth in Action and we are involved in garbage collection, just that (**Motuku, young male, STD 8**).

The narrow focus noted in the above constructions of masculinity in poverty stricken communities was further concretised in Noel's interview excerpt below which reflected similar patterns with regard to the role of different levels of education in the lives of young men with primary school appearing to have comparatively less impact in the way the constructed gender.

As you know we were born and brought up here in Kibera. I am twenty four years old (...). My father died when I was ten years old and I was left with my mother. So it's our mother who brought us up. We did not acquire (much) education. I have gone to school up to class 8. I would not continue schooling because of hardships in life. I have one sister who is older than me, then another one who is ahead of her (...) both reached class eight. We are seven; three sisters and four boys (**Noel, young male, STD 8**).

When Noel was asked if his life as a boy in the family was different from that of his sisters, he was quick to suggest that the life of girls was relatively less problematic even when they had little schooling because they could always get married and be catered for by men:

(...) you know a *girl is like a bow and an arrow*. Once she is done with class eight and sees no way forward to continue with her studies, she gets a man who eventually marries her. They (girls) normally *find life to be very easy*, but us men we have to learn more (in school)... But for us men we must reach to a higher level (**Noel, young male, primary 8**)

***As a young woman, I won't prefer to bring up my children here...(in poverty)***

For many of the young women, secondary education seemed to open their imagination and aspirations in different directions compared with their male peers. For starters, the life they had experienced in Kibera did not fit their aspirations they held for their children. They expressed dreams of being able to escape the life of poverty that characterised their daily experiences and relocate to 'better' neighbourhoods using marriage and childbearing as their most readily available ticket. The young women expressed dissatisfaction with poverty cycle

they had inherited from their generation of parents and aspired to be able to make a break in the poverty cycle in ways that offer their own children different life – better than their own. Jamila, a young mother and a secondary school graduate exemplified this dream of breaking away from poverty as she described life in her village as problematic for bringing up children and hence not fit for her children – even though this had been her only home. She cited role models of her girls in the community who had apparently broken the cycle of poverty through marriage, thus giving her children an alternate start in life with different and possibly better changes of being less poor.

The fact that I have been brought up in Kibera I won't prefer to bring up my children here, you see? She will be thinking about the problems she has faced in Kibera, I have seen several things in Kibera and I would not want my children to experience the same. She (the girls) will work hard at least continue in life, but for the boys they will just marry in Kibera and his life will be in Kibera. But you know girls can get married a distance = **(Int: and you have seen that happening)?** Yeah, I have seen even one of my cousins, she was brought up in Kibera, she hated men from Kibera, and preferred one from outside the community and she got a husband and now living a good life and you cannot believe she was brought up in Kibera if you see her with her car **(Jamila, young married mother, secondary F3)**

For Jamila, her identity as a Kibera resident did not alter her dreams of to 'work hard' at salvaging her offsprings from what she perceived as the negative aspects of poverty as experienced in her village in Kibera. She expressed conviction at being able to 'shift' her life even when the young men seemed to talk about getting used to the life in their community and adjust accordingly or change it where they could.

There are very many expectations because I have told you I was born here, brought up here, went to school here, you get married here so your life will be Kibera. You know you should also work hard, at least to uplift your standard, you be a little bit hard working, you see? Yes, maybe God can help you to shift but still leave your praise there **(Jamila, young woman, F4).**

It seemed that secondary education did not change the perception of the young men with regard to possibilities of '*shifting*' physically from Kibera. Instead, they talked about '*getting used to*' the conditions in which they lived –despite the challenges and risks it presented to their generation. According to Yakobo, young men had little options but to stay in –and stay on in order to perhaps transform their community for a better life in the future. They did not identify the options of marriage as an escape rout as did their female counterparts and exemplified by Jamila in her interview excerpt above. Indeed, Jamila had prophesied that the men in Kibera were apparently bound to remain, get married and continue living in Kibera. This view was confirmed in Yakobo's rationalisation of his position as a young man residing in Kibera.

In this area, (...) we are a big population here in Kibera – people are so congested in the houses and every one has his, or her own language. We have drunkards, lunatics... every sort of person...so we are used to outburst from people and also abusive languages (**Yakobo, young man, Form 4**)

It is arguable that secondary school education possibly increased the marriage value attached to the young women of Kibera more than it did for the young men, thus enhancing the women's dreams of possibilities of escaping poverty physically through the route of marriage. This may not be said about their male counterparts who could not possibly use the same escape route from poverty. Breaking out for the young men required different strategies which began by understanding and accepting the challenges they faced in the community as the basis for changing the same. Interviews revealed this position that seemed to be exclusively a masculine construction.

### **TRADITION AND MODERNITY: THE ROLE EFFECTS OF SCHOOLING**

#### ***The men are hairdressers and women are bus touts: changing gender values***

The young men constructed themselves in traditional ways as the providers of the family and women as their dependants through marriage which was presented as a major vehicle for female escape from poverty. The young men thus, expressed view that generally women's lives were much easier in terms of investing in marriage market. Masculinity was characterised through the concept of 'work hard' which was produced as a positive attribute for men. Unlike the young women, the young men did not seem to consider leaving their slum residence to escape poverty but rather sought to be productive agents of change for their community. The men's discourse was more focused on how to 'work hard' and be able to support a family and transform the physical environments.

Both the young women and the men in Kibera expressed high expectations of the capabilities of the men in the community to perform duties across the genders. However, while the young men stressed the need for men to engage in 'hard work in order to support themselves and their families, it was clear that the young women and men of Kibera were already experiencing men and women in their communities crossing the gender boundaries to perform non-traditional roles. For example, it seemed acceptable for women to take up the role of breadwinner without necessarily usurping the apparently symbolic patriarchal arrangements of the community culture. The young women and men expressed awareness of changing gender expectations that allowed particularly the women to venture into non-traditional roles in order to support their husbands or partners. Notably though, both the young women and men were unanimous that because of difference in physical strength with most women being disadvantaged, not all women were able to perform all the traditional jobs that are allocated to men, such as construction of buildings or digging graves (this challenge is noted in Pattman and Chege, 2003). Accordingly one of the young women, Jamila, rationalised that some gendered roles had to be performed by men apparently because men '*were energetic*', and that their *strength was not the same* as that of women Hence, she argued, '*men doubles –or are almost three times capable of doing jobs that were very hard for women.*

In the same breath Catherine said she would be happy if her daughters and sons did all the jobs in the house without gender discrimination. She observed that the practice would be in order because just as some women touted for passengers in public service vehicles, she had witnessed men performing traditional women's jobs such as plaiting women's hair. Further, she had observed women crossing gender boundaries and working in the fields to slash grass and operate lawn mowers.

I have seen a women slashing, using this...what do we call it? (Slasher). It was the other that is normally pushed (Interviewer: Lawn-mower). So I don't see any difference. Today people have changed, in the past people got surprised to see one putting on mini skirts and hipsters, but nowadays they see it as a normal thing **(Catherine, young female, F2)**

Jamila's views on this matter resonated those of Catherine as she explained:

At the moment you can do (any job) because if there are girls who are touts. There is nothing we (women) cannot do at the moment. If, lets say you are girls only, you must -as a woman work like a man in that house-you see? You should know how to go out and fend for your partner. (...) You are alone at home, you tell me, will you not work just like a man in that house? You shall just go and fend knowing that your relatives are there; they need to eat, they need to go to school. The jobs I cannot do... that one of construction, I cannot do (because) it's for men **(Jamila, young female, F3)**.

Touting for passengers in public commuter vehicles emerged as the most striking example of roles that young women performed across the traditional gender divide, apparently because of the social and physical challenges it posed. Basically, the tout has to sit precariously in the moving public vehicle, persuade commuters to use their vehicle, double up as conductors for the vehicle and often deal with rowdy tired and abusive commuters. According to Noel, the occupations that women and men undertake are dictated by the needs -rather than the gender - of the individual person. In Noel's arguments, we note the ease with which the youth in the study entertained the flouting of traditional gender roles while cautiously indicating sensitivity to traditional generational boundaries between parents and their children.

It all depends with the living standards, how difficult is the situation. A parent (man) is not supposed to do a woman's work ones he has children and *vice versa*. The children should therefore try their level best even if it means selling groundnuts, and help their parents. This is because when your mother is of age, she is not supposed to do a man's work. My age, yeah, infarct most of the ladies who are touts are my age, they should - they are supposed to do such jobs, there is no problem **(Noel, Young male, Std 8)**.

## **SCHOOLING AND TRANSFORMATIONS OF GENDER EXPECTATIONS**

***'I told you, education is good...'***

This study brings out insights that foreground a major outcome of schooling as manifested in the manner in which the young people appear to embrace possibilities of deconstructing traditional gender roles, expectations and boundaries as demonstrated in this interview excerpt with Naema who was a young woman with secondary education. Naema points out the perceived value of education (schooling), identifying the enablement it provides in girls ability to cross gender boundary and still be considered feminine.

**Interviewer:** Now, there are some people who say, women can do work which men can do. Is it right?

**Naema:** Yes. There is no difference between women because they used to say women can not fly a plane and now aren't they flying aeroplanes? It depends with the way a person is. *I told you education is good.* If you are educated... everyone has a purpose which is in his life. (...). Maybe someone wants to become an engineer of a plane... yes a lady. I also wanted to be an engineer. There isn't a job for a man and a woman in this world.

**Interviewer:** So a man can do what a woman can do?

**Naema:** Yes. There are those who work as house maids, like a bachelor, like the one who has no wife, he does the work a woman can do; he cooks, washes, wipes. Maybe he has a wife and the wife has died and has been left with children. He has no otherwise but do the chores, washing the children, doing everything. So I see it is better for someone to work with one heart (willingly) (**Naema, young women**)

In Naema's views, the statement that '*education is good*' captures attention as it appears to be loaded with meanings to the effect that formal schooling liberates a person's narrow-mindedness that is often embedded in stereotypical traditional beliefs and practices that govern the do-s and don't-s in the communities and families. Naema, argues in line with many of her female and male peers.

In the same timber, Yasin, asserted that given the potential for post-primary education to change the lives of young people positively, elevate them from what he described as a state of dormancy, it was imperative for '*my Kenyan government*' to ensure that the young generation of youth who had completed primary school and were idle, were helped to become self-reliant and be successful. Like Naema, he argued that education helps to liberate the mind giving the youth an independent mind that would be difficult to manipulate for negative actions, such as those he had observed in recent times in Kenya. With regard to education, Yasin, expounded his thoughts underscoring the need to be able to:

*Depend on our own*, to know how we can live our lives and succeed in life. If they (government) can provide us with funds to do business, or they open a place for people or institutions for learning at least to upgrade our education, in certain courses, and know when you learn this and go to certain companies, I will be employed. If I do this (get educated) and go to a certain person, when he/she sees my papers he/she will employ me. At least we could not be dormant, if someone comes here with money and

gives you one thousand; if you are told go to someone and light a fire, already you will do something like that. Why? He/she have given you money which you have not worked for, but if you have worked for it, or the government has opened institutions for free, provided you want to do technical work, you learn, you get a letter already you are a technician. If you want to do mechanical engineering, you just go and learn. If I want to do electronics, I just go and learn. If I want to do driving, you go and learn  
**(Yasin, young male, F4)**

Employability (formal or informal) for young people was constructed as the key to their independence and patriotism. However, this was pegged on access and attainment through education. As Yasin explained, in Kenya, young people needed educational testimonials based on their educational attainments on knowledge and skills. These, he argued, would help chart a life of success for the youth.

If I bring such a letter to your office as a driver, of course you will employ me. If I take a letter to other people an electrician, they will still employ me to repair radios. If I go to electricians, they will employ me. If I go to several places with that letter, I will still get employment, but for now I don't have any course, I don't have any experience, but am there. I have tried to go round and round, the only job I get is to carry bricks in construction sites. I have worked in construction sites until I broke my limb; bricks fell and broke my limb **(Yasin, young male, F4)**.

### ***Traditional gendering of education and transforming generations***

While all the young women and women in the study seemed keen to un-gender the schooling process, a few of the male parents (fathers) appeared to cling to the traditional perceptions that devalued the education of women and girls and constructed them as dependants of men in their lives. Notably, a parent like Makhobi, who had left school at primary 8 did not appear to be wholly decided on the issue of equal investment of girls' education *vis-à-vis* that of the boys. He argued about the community's perceptions of economic risk in terms of the returns expected by the girls' parents –not the girl herself and her immediate family/offspring. He cited examples of how girl would supposedly benefit the husband's family which did not invest in her education. What Makhobi seems to overlook are the direct benefit of a new generation of the girl's family. This lack of insight may arguably be based on Makhobi's relatively lowly education level.

**Interviewer:** In Kibera area, how do people regard education for boys and girls?

**Makhobi:** Here the percentage is fifty-fifty because, one side feel like the boys should be educated while others feel that both should be given a chance (yeah) or all of them to be educated but the boys should be the first ones because women will live the home by the end of the day .You see, even if they are educated, their education will only help their children and husband, you find that some of the girls move here and about until they

get pregnant and give birth, maybe the parents thought that she would be the star of the house, so they give birth and by the time they decide to go back to school, it is too late because there are many other things that require people's attention, not her, so by the end of the day, she gets what she was looking for. No one cares about her anymore (**Young male, STD 8**).

Unlike the primary graduate, Makhobi, Jamila who was a young mother and of secondary education, underscored the conflict that faced many of her female and male peers when asked to make a choice of educating either the girl or the boy based on scarcity of resources. Like her peers, she argued that that gender would not be a factor to consider when deciding about the education of her children:

**Interviewer:** Interviewer: Okay, if you have money or assets of educating one child of which you have a boy and a girl, and you are told to educate one, who would you choose?

**Jamila:** I can't choose because there is no difference. I don't know, I mean I can make sure both have gone to school equally. How? I mean they can go to school up to where I can manage, because for now I cannot differentiate them. Now I cannot say that a boy is good and a girl is bad or the girl is good and boy is bad. They are all equal.

The response on making gendered choices for education of children was resounded in Hana, another secondary female graduate who stressed the difficulties of discriminating one gender from the other based on limited resources. Sounding baffled by the question on prioritising the education of children, Hana said:

Yeah, okay, if it is a boy ... yeah, let's say... you get a girl, okay. And you don't have enough money to educate both of them (Coughs)) which one will I decide and take to school, the boy or the girl? This boy or the girl? ... The first priority?: yeah! God (Chuckles). I pray that God will not allow that to happen to me because... because (Pause..Laughs) yeah! I will have neglected - I cannot because- I will only take the boy to school yeah... Maybe this boy will (speaks fast) with his life... yeah. I wish I took the girl to school. Yeah, she would have helped me more than this boy, yeah. I can't really tell. I won't choose on either of them. I'll really have to sit and talk to them, yeah. Maybe if they come with that decision themselves. Not from me (Laughs). With me it will be hard, yeah. Because I want the best for both of them (**Hana, young female, F4**).

Jamila's assertions are markedly different from those of Yuna, a primary school graduate who seemed not very sure about how to prioritise education of her daughter or son. She considered the issue with regards to envisaged investments for herself in old age rather than the benefits to her children's future. She explained:

I would first educate the girl because she is the one who will help me, when a man gets married he tends to follow what the wife says and so forgets the mother. It is okay

because she will only help me more. (...) It is important to have *all of them* since *they are all children*, again you can have a good boy who will not follow the wife so much, so will help you (**Yuna, young woman, Std8**):.

Notably also, Noel, a primary 8 graduate who had described the girls as the ‘bow and arrow’ portrayed indistinctness on whose education to prioritise in case of scarce resources. Like Yuna, he expressed mixed messages but when asked to make a clear choice, he chose education of the boy child:

**Noel:** I will take them to school. I will treat both of them the same way, educationally. Educationally you will treat them the same way because both of them have a right to education, but if you think that girls have no right to education, then you will have made their lives miserable.

**Interviewer:** Okay you now have the two of them but no money, what will you do? You have a boy and a girl.

**Noel:** For me, I will educate the boy, because the girl can get married anytime, and that will be their luck

## **PARENTS INTERROGATING OUTCOMES OF SCHOOLING AND GENDER**

Interviews with parents of the young women and men in the study seemed to confirm their children’s perceptions of the outcomes of education in bringing about change in the construction values and enactment of gender roles at family, community as well as national level. For example, Omondi’s father was categorical that education through schooling had brought change in the gender relations among his community. He observed that by taking his children to school, he had opened up doors for them to think and act differently from the cultural prescriptions of his ethnic community, including what he presented as the most fundamental one relating to marriage. He explained:

**Omogeni’s father:** Yeah... education can bring a change. Right now (Pause seemingly thinking hard), I can’t force a child to marry a XYZ tribe. This boy (Omogeni) can get educated and have many friends, even whites (Caucasians), or any other tribe, and they can even wed. Education changes one’s perceptions, yeah? For example, the traditions and taboos... yes.

**Interviewer:** how does education change one’s traditions and beliefs?

**Omogeni’s father:** If one is educated, let’s say he reads the bible well, goes to church, he will find some differences, because when you read the bible you will see the difference in traditions, and also in his life. Well, you cannot follow the traditions so much (after that). Also, when you marry (across tribe), you will not follow it (your own traditions) so much.

Like the young people, Omogeni’s father expressed the view that reflected those of most of the other parents, that ‘*schooling was a good thing*’ because it observably improved women’s lives socially and economically. He pointed out that schooled women were better able to improve on their relations with others, be entrepreneurial in their practices and economical in their spending. He provided succinct examples as captured below.

**Interviewer:** How do you think education will help women change in their thinking?

**Omogeni's father:** Education has really helped women. Education helps women on how they should live in their homes. It helps a woman know how to put up with other women. Education can also help a woman know how to save some something. It also ensures unity, and they become one thing, they will look for ways of raising their living standards... yeah, education is good.

***Beyond secondary education for youth in impoverished communities?***

At an individual and community level, secondary education appeared to have made visible impacts on the lives of young women and men compared with primary education. This emerged from self-perceptions, constructions of the self and portrayal of confidence while engaging in local and national issues concerning young Kenyan youth. Compared with the primary school graduates, most of the secondary school graduates –despite their conditions of poverty and unemployment- were clearly intellectually conversant with the issues affecting their communities, practically engaged in activities that are designed to uplift the living conditions of their communities and making their environments more habitable. According to one of the young men, Stanley, rather than staying idle it was more fulfilling to engage in community activities such as sports, cleaning the environment and doing volunteer work with various organisations that focus on life in his community. He explained,

Now I have involved myself in many activities. When I finished (school, F4), I became a chairman of a certain group here in Kibera. It is called Dudu Baya Youth Group. We were trying to form a network so that all groups here at Kibera, have a fund raise which will help them raise money. Then I was taken by a certain NGO, which deals with exchange program, between Kenyans and Tanzanians. I spent most of last year starting from April to October in Tanzania and Malindi. The organisation is called World Corps Kenya. I interact with communities. They take you to placement department. For example I was taken to school in Tanzania, we worked with them and still there was this education activity base. I choose a topic like HIV; I address them as we finished community work. Then I went to Malindi I was taken to KEFRI. You know KEFRI? Kenya Forest Research Institute. I worked with them. We did crop rotation. After I finished, I was given a grant then I started business project at home - poultry keeping. I bought hundred chicks. So they are doing well (**Stanley, young male, F4**).

**CONCLUSION**

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