Changing Social Norms to Universalize Girls' Education in East Africa: Lessons From a Pilot Project

Introduction by the Editors

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INTRODUCTION

Africa has the highest number of out-of-school children as well as the highest gender disparity rate of all regions. The challenges to education are evident in enrolment, dropout, stagnation and completion rates for marginalized groups and these are intensified for girls. Indeed, gender and poverty exacerbated by the impact of HIV/Aids intersect to create a powerful nexus of disability for many girls in East Africa who face special policy, economic, institutional and sociocultural constraints including: early marriage, child labour, early pregnancy and a lack of effective policies and interventions to mitigate these drivers of exclusion.

Conceptually, the discussions in this volume are in line with the argument by Stromquist (2012) on the imperative of viewing schools as gendered institutions and a need to focus on educational content and the educational experience that reproduce gender ideologies and hierarchies. We note that these ideologies draw on the gender and social norms within communities and they interact with schooling for girls in very specific ways. We add voice to the growing body of literature on gender and education, which critique the predominant focus of policy, funding and research on resource, infrastructure and changing institutions at the expense of engagement with gender and social norms and problems of

exclusion (Okwany 2016, Okwany & Ebrahim 2015, Stromquist 2012, Unterhalter et al. 2014).

The authors in the volume highlight this significant link by taking a social norms approach to profile the process, activities, strategies of and research on community-led pilot interventions that have successfully contested girls' educational exclusion by shifting social norms to enhance girls' educational inclusion.

THE INTERVENTION

This edited book is an output of the pilot-project titled: 'Righting the Future: South-South Collaboration and Capacity Building for Universalizing Secondary Education for Girls in Africa.' This three-year pilot project (2013–16) was supported by the International Child Development Initiatives (ICDI) in collaboration with the International Institute of Social Studies of Erasmus University Rotterdam and received financial support from The MasterCard Foundation as part of the Partnership to Strengthen Innovation and Practice in Secondary Education initiative (PSIPSE). ICDI is a nongovernmental, knowledge organization focusing on the psychosocial development of children and young people growing up in difficult circumstances. ICDI believes in the power of children and young people, supporting their rights and addressing the underlying causes for the problems they face and providing a platform for policy, practice, programme development, teaching, training and research. ICDI has a formal agreement with the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) of Erasmus University Rotterdam to collaborate on training, research and policy analysis on issues related to children and youth in development. In each country a local NGO implemented project activities (Nascent Research and Development Organization in Uganda and Impact Research and Development Organization in Kenya), was paired with a local university to document and inform project implementation activities (Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology and Maseno University in Kenya and Uganda Technology and Management University in Uganda). The project catalyzed meaningful South–South knowledge sharing, collaboration and capacity building for the development of demand-driven, cost-effective, locally driven and sustainable practice for universalizing secondary education for girls.

The project was designed to draw good practice from the successful experience of MV Foundation, a nongovernmental organization in India, to promote universalization of girls' secondary education in East Africa. MV Foundation's approach, described in detail in Chapter 2, focuses on changing social norms regarding education, and as a consequence of this, changing behaviours and responses of local institutions towards universalizing education for children. Could this approach be transferred, adapted and owned by communities in East Africa? This question was at the heart of the project and the varied, but positive, responses form the subject of the chapters written by the project partners in Kenya and Uganda.

The volume editors are from ISS and ICDI, while the majority of chapter authors of this book are project staff of the implementing partner organizations of the project and university partners in Kenya and Uganda. Two of the nine chapters—one each from Forum for African Women Educationalists Uganda chapter and Population Council Kenya Office—have been written on projects funded under the broader donor collaborative, Partnership to Strengthen Innovation and Practice in Secondary Education, within which the pilot project was funded.

The chapters in the book on the RTF project provide analyses of the process of critically adapting the MVF model and developing a context-appropriate integrated approach to universalize secondary education for girls in purposively selected areas by ensuring that all girls in the project context enrol in and complete secondary education. This includes documentation of the strategies and challenges of pilot project activities in bringing about significant and sustainable change. The chapters by university partners in the project contexts provide a reflexive perspective on research activities that were carried out simultaneously to document and inform implementation activities. The authors reflect on the process of implementing and documenting strategies to build community demand and accountability for girls' education as well as the internalization of the norm of 'all girls in school' in the project communities. These strategies reveal how the efforts have facilitated the re-entry of girls to school and supported their transition to and retention in secondary education, with the consequence that some villages have been successfully declared 'all girls in school.' The book informs efforts to understand and improve gender and education in Africa specifically, and developing contexts more broadly, by demonstrating how a responsive model can be opera-

tionalized and empirically applied to girls' education in context through a critical interrogation of policy, practice, discourse and research.

The book will be a useful resource for all the collaborating organizations and universities as well as other research and partner organizations. Additionally, academics, researchers and undergraduate and postgraduates students in the fields of social policy, development studies and education will benefit from the insights offered in this book. Taking into account the recent increased interest in and engagement of policy provisioning for girls' education, this book will also be of interest to development practitioners, donors, international organizations and policymakers.

The chapters in this volume provide illustrative evidence on effective ways of engaging with gender and social norms which influence girls' education in disabling and enabling ways and the importance of involving key constituencies in the process. This requires working in an integrated manner with a range of policy actors including young people and targetted communities. The authors offer strategies employed in changing the larger culture of disabling norms, apathy and negative attitudes towards girls' education. The analyses show that this requires a sustained focus on the link between social and educational institutions and policies, which can serve as sites for entrenching gender ideologies but also provide opportunities for transformation.

Finally, we dedicate this publication to our late friend and colleague Arthur Muhangi. He was the director of Nascent RDO Uganda Office and played a key role at the stage of conceptualization of the project and in setting up initial activities in Uganda. Arthur was a champion for children and a promising young East African scholar who was taken from us all too soon.

CHAPTER ABSTRACTS

Chapter 1
Gendered Norms and Girls' Education in Kenya and Uganda:
A social norms perspective
Auma Okwany

Kenya and Uganda have both made considerable quantitative gains in education. However, there is still persistent gendered exclusion in education and the majority of children out of school are girls. Exclusion is ex-

acerbated for poor girls whose experience is situated in specific sociocultural, material and spatial contexts including urban and rural poor locales. This chapter problematizes the dominant framing of girls' exclusion in education and in education policy. This exclusion is disproportionately focused on access and institutional failure while ignoring the links between schools and social norms in communities. As a result, there is insufficient attention paid in policy and research on the intersecting gendered norms in school, communities and households, which combine to bring about girls' dropout, including pregnancy-related exclusion. Drawing on empirical research in articulation with literature, and adopting a social norms approach, the analysis underscores the need to understand and focus on the complexity of gender and power relations at the household and community levels as a pathway to transform disabling norms and enhance educational inclusion for girls in marginalized contexts in East Africa.

Chapter 2
The MVF Model: Lessons for mainstreaming gender issues
REKHA WAZIR

Based in Andhra Pradesh, India, the MVFoundation (MVF) is widely recognized for its unique approach to eradicating child labour and universalizing education for children. Since its inception in 1991, it has withdrawn over a million children from labour and mainstreamed them into full-time, formal schooling, and has helped in making 1,500 villages child labour-free with all their children in school. In addition, they have succeeded in retaining 25,000 adolescent girls in school and stopped 8,000 child marriages. This chapter describes the MVF model, focusing in particular on its efforts to universalize education for adolescent girls—a notoriously hard-to-reach group. This includes strategies such as mainstreaming gender issues by changing community norms about girls' education, creating community ownership and rootedness of the programme, collecting data on all girls in the secondary school-age group and discussing barriers and constraints with all stakeholders to create locally appropriate, long-lasting and viable solutions.

Chapter 3
Exercising Agency: Shaping new destinies for young females
SHANTHA SINHA

This chapter is based on video interviews with 30 girls who have been enabled by MV Foundation to pursue their education. The girls who are in the age group of 18–22 years from rural areas in districts of Ranga Reddy and Nalgonda whose parents are non-literates and have been involved in farm work as casual labour and sometimes as bonded labourers. They are mostly from the scheduled caste community. It attempts to construct how these girls extricated themselves from drudgery of work and exploitation by exercising agency in defiance of power structures and authority. It shows how when exposed to debates and discussions centered on children's rights and girls' education in the neighborhood they gain strength to exercise agency and begin to imagine a new life. It locates the narratives of these young girls in the context of existing practices of child participation in the form of children's clubs, 'Meena Manch' (girl-child collectives supported by UNICEF), unionization of children for better conditions of work, child participation as shields in land struggles, in armed conflict, or street children's exercising 'choice' of remaining on the streets and so on. It also seeks to locate the process of exercising agency in relation to structural issues, and its link to social mobilization and institutional support.

Chapter 4
Righting The Future: Changing social norms to support girls' education in Uganda
ANNAH KAMUSIIME AND ELIZABETH NGUTUKU

Urban poor slums are often defined by material poverty and vulnerability of households, and their marginalization from social services. Slum populations also tend to focus on needs for survival and may sacrifice other basic social needs including those of their children. Within a context of competing needs, lack of social services overlapping with gender and social-cultural norms that are often hostile for girls, education for children is usually at stake and this is more accentuated for girls who often face other intersecting social challenges. In this chapter, an analysis is presented of the process of the intervention labelled, 'Righting The Future: South-South Collaboration and Capacity Building for Universalizing

Secondary Education for Girls in Africa'. This is a project that utilized a strength-based approach to mobilize communities in support of girls' secondary education in two urban poor slums in Kampala. The project accomplished this by engaging with social norms that shape girls' education and has been successful in creating an ethos of 'all girls in school'. Project strategies included community mobilization efforts that have enabled girls to re-engage with and stay in school. The authors reflect on their experiences in engaging the community and mobilizing around changing norms on education for girls. Their grounded reflections are interspersed with other literature on girls' education and similar practice in the global South. They draw on this analysis to illustrate the importance of a shift from focusing on despondency and precarity in urban poor slums, to a focus on community strengths and resources as a pathway to mobilize around transformation of social norms, and how this creates a space and possibility for dialogue. They note that this space needs to be sustained through continuous engagement with community in supporting girls' education.

Chapter 5
Evidence-driven Practice: Perspectives from a three-year project research
DORIS M. KAKURU

In this chapter, the author presents an overview of the process of a three-year research project documenting and influencing practice. Departing from the norm of extractive academic research detached from educational practice, the chapter discusses the process of research that was designed to document and inform implementation activities of the project, 'Righting The Future' (RTF), supporting girls' secondary education in urban poor locales in Kampala. The research design, data collection, analysis and dissemination involved input of project implementation staff and active community members, and the intervention process also informed research activities. Spanning the three-year project duration, research activities commenced with the immersion visit to MV Foundation in India from which the universalization model was adapted. The range of studies conducted was book-ended by a baseline and endline survey to collect quantitative data. Research findings were continually disseminated in community meetings and dialogues, networking meetings and academic conferences. This critical review highlights the process

of documenting and informing project implementation activities and the implications of evidence-based interventions for policy and practice.

Chapter 6
Righting the Future: Changing norms to contest the exclusion of girls in secondary education in rural Kenya
KAWANGO AGOT, RACHEL APONDI, BEATRICE N. OKWANY, ROSEMARY ACHIENG, SPALA OHAGA

Girls in rural areas face multiple intersecting economic factors and gendered social norms and practices that constrain their access to and participation in education. This chapter presents a reflective analysis of the process of implementing a project designed to universalize girls' secondary education by transforming social norms and attitudes in two rural project sites in Siaya County, western Kenya. The sites were located in a context where high vulnerabilities for girls are a product of high HIV prevalence, widespread poverty, and high rates of secondary school exclusion, including pregnancy-related exclusion. This critical analysis of the two-year project reveals that there is growing awareness of the need and importance of interventions in community engagement that build on local resources and efforts of poor communities. Project milestones include the declaration of 'all girls in school' villages, demonstrating that when communities are engaged in strategies to see girls in school, they rise to the occasion. The analysis also shows how mobilized communities and community leaders became the champions of girls' education, challenging families who keep girls out of school, removing obstacles to school attendance and retention, negotiating with schools for re-entry of girls, identifying schooling alternatives for girls with children, mobilizing resources to take and keep girls in school, and creating healthy competition as they propelled their villages towards the goal of 'all girls in school'. The chapter highlights the process, outcomes and potential for the scale-up of this community-led pilot project.

Chapter 7
The Impact of Transforming Social Norms on Girls' Education
in Rural Kenya
GLADYS OTIENO AND JULIUS O. KOYUGI AND AURELIA MUNENE

This chapter presents an impact study of the three-year pilot project implemented in two rural locales in Siaya County to change social norms in support of girls' access to, retention in and completion of secondary school. The study examined the impact of project activities and strategies, and their outcomes in transforming norms and universalizing girls' secondary education in the project site. Data collection comprised mixed qualitative and quantitative methods, including the endline survey and focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and creative child-participatory methods, which highlight the most significant change stories. Findings are presented which show the voices and perspectives of community members on the challenges and success of changing mindsets and attitudes, and the success of declaring communities 'all girls in school'. The findings reveal the significant impact of the pilot project in mobilizing communities and transforming norms to support and universalize girls' education.

Chapter 8
Are School Principals 'the Bad Guys'?
Nuancing the narrative of school re-entry policy implementation in Kenya
CHI-CHI UNDIE AND HARRIET BIRUNGI

Although the evidence base on school re-entry processes in East Africa is limited, school personnel feature prominently within this body of literature as key hindrances to the proper implementation of school re-entry policies, and, therefore, to teenage mothers' access to education. There is evidence to suggest, for instance, that stigma and discrimination by some school personnel, coupled with a lack of awareness or understanding of school re-entry policies and associated guidelines, inhibit demand for school re-entry. This chapter provides 'the other side of the story,' by drawing on the perspectives and experiences of school personnel themselves, thus creating a fuller portrait of the complexities of implementing re-entry policies. Data for this chapter are derived from two sources: narratives from a policy dialogue held in 2014 with nearly 200 secondary school principals in Homa Bay County, and a baseline survey with 167 of

the same principals. These data help to highlight the realities, challenges, conflicts, opportunities, and innovation experienced or harnessed by principals in low-resource settings where support for school principals as designated implementers of re-entry policies is minimal. In so doing, the chapter identifies promising approaches to more effective policy implementation in this area and helps to redress the imbalance brought about by privileging some perspectives over others. The school re-entry intervention that emerged in Homa Bay County as a result of giving voice to school principals is also described.

Chapter 9
Protecting Education for Pregnant and Parenting Students: Lessons from a successful intervention in the post-conflict context of Northern Uganda
CHRISTINE SEMAMBO SEMPEBWA, JULIUS TUKESIGA, DOROTHY MUHUMURE AND FLORENCE NABENDE

This chapter presents an analysis of the project, funded by one of the Partnership for Strengthening Innovation and Practice in Secondary Education (PSIPSE) donor partners, MacArthur Foundation, and implemented by Forum for African Women Educationalists Uganda (FAWEU) in partnership with; Christian Counselling Fellowship (CCF) and the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW). As evidenced by a number of studies conducted by FAWEU and other researchers, Uganda has one of the highest school dropout rates due to pregnancy. Despite the numerous dividends that come with education, for most schoolgirls, pregnancy spells the end of their schooling as there is no formal education sector policy protecting education for pregnant or parenting students. Within this context we provide a critical analysis of FAWEU's experiences gained from the intervention—Pader Girls Academy (PGA)—a model that was founded by CCF, to support pregnant girls, student-mothers, their children and other categories of vulnerable girls to access secondary and vocational education in the post-conflict context of northern Uganda. This is the only school in Uganda (and in the East African Region) that has child-mothers, pregnant girls and babies within a school setting. Data for this chapter are drawn mainly from a study carried by FAWEU on the PGA model in 2012 and lessons learned from the model in the period 2013–16. The PGA model has successfully changed the lives of hundreds of pregnant and parenting stu-

dents and their children in Northern Uganda. We share the lessons that the model offers for policy and practice in protecting education for student mothers and engaging with social norms that constrain their capabilities.

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