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Związek między kulturą Masajów a edukacją dziewcząt: przypadek hrabstwa Narok North w Kenii

The Nexus between the Maasai Culture and the Education of Girls: the Case of Narok North Sub-county, Kenya

STRESZCZENIE: Niniejszy artykuł prezentuje badania, które miały na celu ustalenie, w jaki sposób kultura Masajów wpływa na edukację dziewcząt i kobiet w północnym hrabstwie Narok w Kenii. Edukacja jest instrumentem wyzwolenia, dominacji, rozwoju osobistego i wspólnotowego. Kształcenie dziewczynki zapewnia, że korzyści płynące z edukacji są odczuwalne na poziomie rodziny, a nawet przekazywane przyszłym pokoleniom. Mimo że rząd Kenii zrealizował politykę bezpłatnej edukacji podstawowej w 2003 roku i zadeklarował w 2020 roku przejście wszystkich uczniów ze szkoły podstawowej do szkół średnich, to nauka nadal pozostaje mirażem dla niektórych rodzin z północnego okręgu Narok. Dominująca kultura Masajów utrudnia aktualizację edukacji dziewcząt. Niniejsze badanie zostało przeprowadzone z zastosowaniem podejścia etnograficznego. Przeprowadzono również wywiady z różnymi grupami osób za pomocą wywiadów częściowo ustrukturyzowanych. Uzyskane dane poddano analizie tematycznej analizy narracji. Badanie wykazało, że społeczność nie była entuzjastycznie nastawiona do zabierania dziewcząt i kobiet do szkoły. Jeśli chodzi o zapisy do szkół w hrabstwie Narok, niewiele dziewcząt w porównaniu z chłopcami zapisywano do pierwszej klasy, podczas gdy przejście uczniów ze szkół podstawowych do szkół średnich wynosiło nieco ponad 60%. Niniejszy artykuł wskazuje na potrzebę połączenia wysiłków wszystkich interesariuszy w celu zwiększenia wysiłków na rzecz uzyskania wykształcenia. Wśród tych zaleceń

jest włączenie Masajów do tego szlachetnego zadania, a także wspieranie programów edukacji dorosłych dla młodych matek i kobiet.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: kultura Masajów, Kenia, hrabstwo Narok North, edukacja, dziewczęta

ABSTRACT: This research seeks to establish how the Maasai culture impacts the education of girls and women in Narok North Sub-County, Kenya. Education is the instrument of liberation, domination, personal and communal development. Educating a girl ensures that the benefits of education are felt at the family level and even transmitted to future generations. Even though the Government of Kenya accomplished the free primary education policy in 2003 and went further and declared 100% transition of students from primary education to secondary education level in 2020, learning still remains a mirage for some families of the Narok North Sub-County. The dominant Maasai culture has hindered the actualization of the education of girls. This study was conducted using the ethnographic approach. Various groups of people were also interviewed using semi-structured interviews. The data obtained was analyzed using thematic narrative analysis. The study inferred that the community wasn't enthusiastic about taking their girls and women to school. On school enrollments within Narok County, few girls, compared to boys, enrolled in grade 1 while the transition of learners from primary schools to secondary schools stood slightly above 60%. This paper recommends radical combined efforts of all stakeholders as a technique of persuading the community to scale up its efforts on education attainment. Among these recommendations is incorporating the Maasai elders in this noble task and also supporting adult education literacy programs for young mothers and women.

KEYWORDS: Maasai culture, Kenya, Narok North County, education, girls

Introduction

Kenya became a British protectorate in 1885 and later colony in 1901. Instead of making Kenya a satellite country, the British government began to settle its citizens and imposed an alien organizational system¹. The indigenous population that had existed there for over a hundred years was relocated by the colonial government in order to create available land for incoming British settlers. The Maasai, just like the rest, lost their fertile grazing land in a series of treaties dating from 1904 to 1911 and were moved to the marginal lands in the south. The settlers went ahead and established their homes on the now available fertile and productive land. The challenge for them was that they needed cheap labour to till the land. The colonial government hence introduced hut taxes which forced all the men to pay taxes for their houses/huts. For effective communication between the masters and the laborers, education was introduced to the Kenyans only to the extent that it benefited the colonial government. Education was initially offered by missionaries through segregated schools. Despite the good intentions of the missionaries, they facilitated the colonial government by providing a system of control over the indigenous people. This was actualized by doing away with indigenous culture by labelling it backward and uncivilized and replacing it with "British culture." This infiltration by the missionaries empowered the colonial government to penetrate African society and convert to Christianity its members, who were then able to work for the colonists in their farms and also as translators, clerks, and other low level civil servants². The colonial government created a racially segregated school system, whilst much of the financial resources was devoted to improving the learning and education of the settlers³.

¹ J. Coles, *How the formal education system in Kenya is changing the culture of the Maasai community*. In *Dissertations and Theses*, 2008, https://search.proquest.com/docview/304801435?accountid=13042%0Ahttp://oxfordsfx.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/oxford?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&rft_val_fmt=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:dissertation&genre=dissertations+%26+theses&sid=ProQ:ProQuest+Dissertations+%26+Theses+Gl

² Ibidem.

³ J.M. Gikungu, B. Karanja, R. Thinguri, *A critical view of the historical development and concerns of curriculum in Kenya*, "International Journal of Education and Research", 2(5) 2014, s. 195-204; M. C. Lelei, J. C. Weidman, *Quality*

After Kenya's independence in 1963, the government established several commissions and committees to try and restructure the education system with a great desire for the improvement and development of its citizens. The government has engaged in protracted efforts towards ensuring that its populace acquire basic education. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that, "Everyone has a right to Education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages"⁴. The Government is also a signatory to several International conventions and agreements pertaining to education and has even gone ahead to ratify some of them. These conventions and agreements include: The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989); the Education for All (EFA) Jomtien Declaration (1990); the EFA Dakar Framework of Action (2000); the Millennium Development Goals (2000); the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006); and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1981)⁵. All the above are meant to lay down a broad framework of ensuring the right of Education to all citizens and also eliminate all forms of discrimination⁶. The government has, gone ahead with other 164 countries, and participated in the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000. The April Dakar forum pledged to achieve Education for All (EFA) and identified six major goals to be attained by the year 2015.

and qualities: *Tensions in education reforms. Education Development In Kenya, January, 1–21/2012.* <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6091-951-0>.

⁴ United Nations, *United Nations Human Rights Declaration*. 1–8/1948. <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>.

⁵ UNESCO, *Education for all: Status & Trends*. Lmi. 1993. UNESCO, The Dakar Framework for Action. *Unesco, April, 2000*, 26–28. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001211/121147e.pdf>; United Nations. (1981). *Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women*. 10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02587203.1995.11827574>.

United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of the Child – Resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989*. September, 15. https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/sites/anti-trafficking/files/un_convention_on_the_rights_of_the_child_1.pdf

United Nations, *Millennium Development Goals: Situation Analysis and Perspectives in the African Region*. 1–13/2000.

United Nations, *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)*. December, 28/2006. <https://doi.org/10.5771/9783845266190-471>.

⁶ G.O.K, & UNESCO, *Education for All: End Decade Assessment (2001–2010)*, Ministry of Education, 2012.

The second goal is “Ensuring that by 2015 all children, especially girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality”⁷.

In the past decade, many countries in Africa, including Kenya, have witnessed progress in achieving universal primary education through increased enrolment, extending opportunities to the marginalized, and narrowing the gender gap⁸. However, formal education has not been achieved among some rural nomadic communities. Many of such communities are pastoralists, hunters, gatherers, and fishermen, whose marginalization and discrimination has a historical perspective⁹. Such communities end up being excluded from participating in democratic processes and decision making. Formal education has remained a mirage especially among girls. Over 4 million girls in the world are not attending schools, while another indefinite number continue dropping out of school after their primary education. The Maasais’, being a nomad and pastoralist community, still face marginalization and discrimination in matters of education¹⁰. Women and girls endure a more challenging situation than boys. They face marginalization as a result of their community and also due to their gender, hence limited opportunities to attain levels of schooling comparable to boys both with and without their community. Many of the cultural practices and social beliefs are demeaning to women and contribute to limiting the girls’ opportunities.

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ UNESCO, *Reaching the Marginalized*. In *UNESCO Publishing & Oxford University Press*. 2010. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001866/186606E.pdf>.

⁹ S. Aikman, *Education and Indigenous Justice*. In *EdQual RPC (Issue 1) 2009*; E. Bishop, *The Policy and Practice of Educational Service Provision for Pastoralists in Tanzania. Pastoralism policies, 2005*; S. Krätli, C. Dyer, *Mobile pastoralists and education: strategic options (Issue October) 2009*; A. Sharma, *South Asian Nomads – A Literature Review*. CREATE Pathways to Access. Research Monograph No. 58/2011, In *Centre for International Education, Department of Education*. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED519542>; D.N. Sifuna, *Increasing access and participation of pastoralist communities in primary education in Kenya*. *International Review of Education*, 51(5–6)/2005, 499–516. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-005-8260-9>.

¹⁰ A. Raymond, *Girls’ education in pastoral communities, an ethnographic study of Monduli district, Tanzania*, Berkshire 2016.

The Maasai Culture

The Maasai people are plain Nilotes “*maa*” speakers living in both Kenya and Tanzania. According to oral historians, they originated from Canaan and came along the river Nile through North Africa to their present location¹¹. In Kenya they form the population of Narok and Kajiado counties. The Maasai are nomadic in nature and they use the arid and semi-arid land they occupy for grazing their cattle. They measure their wealth by the number of cattle and children one has¹². The Maasai life revolves around the cattle and the herds they have. The number of livestock must increase in order to sustain the increasing population of the Maasai. The elders even discourage their children from enrolling in schools to become herders of their cattle instead¹³. During the wet seasons they scatter all over the plains and migrate uphill during the dry season. They have a better understanding of the environment, which enables them to utilize the land at their disposal adequately. They never overgraze while at the same time allowing the land ample time for rejuvenation before re-utilizing. The Maasai are polygamous and live in homesteads known as “*Manyatta’s*” which host large families. Boys take care of their fathers’, cattle and are allowed to go to school. Girls on the other hand are subordinate to their fathers, wives are subordinate to their husbands and when their husband dies, they are subordinate to their children and in some cases are inherited by the late husband’s brother¹⁴.

¹¹ R.W. Bussmann, G.G. Gilbreath, J. Solio, M. Lutura, R. Lutuluo, K. Kunguru, N. Wood, S.G. Mathenge, *Plant use of the Maasai of Sekenani Valley, Maasai Mara, Kenya* 2006. *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine*, 2, 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1746-4269-2-22>; R. W. Rukwaro, K. M. Mukono, *Architecture of societies in transition – The case of the Maasai of Kenya. Habitat International*, 25(1)/2001, 81–98. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0197-3975\(00\)00030-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0197-3975(00)00030-8); J. Sutton, *A Thousand Years of East Africa* (Issue 1/1990); British Institute in East Africa. <https://doi.org/10.2307/220152>.

¹² P. Briggs, *Northern Tanzania with Kilimanjaro & Zanzibar: The Bradt Safari Guide*, 2006.

¹³ K. King, *Development and Education in the Narok District of Kenya: The Pastoral Maasai and Their Neighbours*, “*African Affairs*” 1972, t. 71, nr 285, s. 389-407.

¹⁴ Spencer P., *Time, Space and the Unknown. Maasai Configurations of Power and Providence* (1st ed.), London 2003, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203583524>.

The Maasai culture is entirely patriarchal and guided by communal rules and traditions that negatively impact the learning and education of girls. According to an UN report, Gender Equality and Parity in the World, education remains a concern that is treated as a basic human right vital for achieving social and economic goals¹⁵.

Research Methodology

This study was conducted through an ethnographic approach which involved participant observation and participation for a period of 6 months (March – August 2018) in Narok North Sub-County, Kenya. The researcher made extensive visits to the area of study and spent most of the time with the community. He even participated in community activities during his stay there. The data collection tools involved observation, recording and analyzing social structures within their settings while paying special attention to the social, cultural and economic factors. The study also involved in-depth semi-structured interviews which were conducted informally. These interviews were conducted with four (4) Maasai male elders, three (3) women and four (4) school-going girls. Two (2) teachers and one (1) officer at the District education office were also interviewed.

The entire interview was conducted in Kiswahili language. However, for the participants who didn't understand the language, a research assistant (who was a local) translated the language to the local dialect (Maa language).

Where consent was given by the participants, the conversation was tape-recorded. For the participants that didn't give consent, only notes were taken. The tape recorded conversation was later transcribed and translated into English. Data was later analyzed using thematic narrative analysis focusing on what was said and supported by the people's voices.

For ethical reasons the privacy, confidentiality and opinions of the participants were highly respected. Pseudonyms were used for the interviewees as a way of concealing their identities.

¹⁵ UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report Gender Review – 2018*.

Findings And Discussions

This study aims to juxtapose the Maasai culture and their girl child education. Both ethnography and in-depth interviews revealed that there were mixed attitudes among the interviewees regarding the Maasai girl education. Apart from the education officer, teachers, girls and women, most of the interviewees didn't see any value in educating the girl child and woman. However, both girls and the women were of the opinion that the world dynamics had changed over time and hence there was dire need to educate both genders. They argued that educating the girls would produce a more enlightened society that would adequately provide for the family. It was observed that the motivation for educating girls from the positive interviewees arose due to the fact that they witnessed or realized the benefits of educating girls and women through their friends, especially those of neighboring communities. They therefore stressed the importance of educating girls and women with the aim of receiving support from them in future and old age. Girls and women saw education as a way of helping their parents, especially their mothers, later in life. They also saw education as an alternative way to life challenges, where they felt that education would increase their chances of attaining a better life.

Although the Kenyan government actualized free primary education in 2003, enrollment in schools in Narok County still remains lower compared to other parts of the country. Interestingly, among those who enroll in Grade1, only a few children make it to the final grade of the Primary education level. In 2020 the government of Kenya declared a 100 percentage transition of all grade eight children into secondary school. It embarked on a door to door campaign by tracing all 2019 grade eight (8) candidates according to the 14th February 2020 Daily Nation. Irrespective of these intense campaigns, Narok County transition rates still stands at 64%, with a gender disparity rate index of 1.2¹⁶. These dropouts are attributed to early marriages, female genital mutilation (FGM), poverty, preference for boys' education, among other factors.

Conclusion and Recommendations

To guarantee women's and girls' voices are heard and education is prioritized through their lives irrespective of the dominant Maasai cultural practices: the community should aspire to eschew from retrogressive cultural practices. This can only be achieved through consolidated efforts of the Government, civil rights organizations, religious based organizations, and non-governmental organizations. The Maasai girls have for decades been taught that circumcision (female genital mutilation) is the right of passage into womanhood that accompanies puberty. In disguise, this is the precursor to early marriage. Once circumcised, the girls are ridiculed by their peers if they continue with learning at schools as education is presumed to be for children. In this case, after circumcision, they are deemed to have acquired the rights as full adults. The chauvinist structure of the community and their bedeviling of poverty that associate girls as a source of wealth creation in the form of a dowry escalates the pressure for their early marriage. These marriages ultimately seal the fate of education for lifetime. The Government of Kenya should engage in partnership with the Maasai community in order to understand them better and develop tailor-made solutions of incorporating girls into the mainstream education system. Traditional elders should be trained and transformed into crusaders for propagating the essence of girls' education. This is because elders are treated with very high regard and their decisions are law. Adult learning programs should be established at the community levels, particularly for women. This could act as an impetus to take their girls to school and an inspiration for the girls who are in school to work harder. Lastly, the Maasai families, especially the women, could also be empowered economically where possible, so that they are able to provide for the basic educational needs of their daughters. Through this initiative, they will be able to consistently maintain their daughters in school through the school calendar.

¹⁶ Republic of Kenya Ministry of Education, S. and T., *Basic Education Statistical Booklet*, 2019.