

CCE Report No. 4



# **GENDER IN EAST AFRICA:** *Gender Report 1*

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# GENDER IN EAST AFRICA: Report No.1

This Report focuses on the pilot phase of research undertaken on 'GIRLS AGAINST THE ODDS' in KENYA and UGANDA. It describes the Background to the project, its aims and development to the end of 2010.

## 1. Background

### **1.1. Kenya – general**

Kenya is a large country, with a population of 38.6 million in 2009 (KNBS, 2009). It is situated in East Africa and borders the Indian Ocean and Somalia to the east, Ethiopia to the north, Sudan to the north-west, Uganda to the west and Tanzania to the south. Kenya is also a poor country, with 52% of its population living in absolute poverty (UNDP, 2009), a situation made worse in the short-term by the violent ethnic uprising following the general election at the end of 2007, and then more recently by the impact of the global economic crisis and rising inflation. Kenya's economic growth rate has fallen sharply in the last two years, with its trade balance worsening as the sectors on which the country depends were hit, with tourist numbers declining and prices falling for horticultural and primary agricultural exports such as tea.

According to the 2009 Human Development Report, life expectancy in 2007 was only 53.6 years. Two thirds of Kenya's population lives in rural areas where basic living standards are poor and few households have piped water or access to a main sewer. Although facilities in urban areas are better, even there, only 14.2% of households have piped water to their houses, and only 19.5% are connected to a main sewer (KNBS, 2010). In 2009 approximately 8% of Kenya's population lived in the capital city, Nairobi, where the level of infrastructure is better and the inhabitants are more likely to own household goods such as mobile phones. However, Nairobi is also a highly unequal city because alongside an increase among the rich and affluent, and the growth of a middle class, lies extreme poverty (Swadener, 2000). Population density is high, and migration has contributed to the proliferation of informal housing settlements (commonly referred to as 'slums'), where there is an increasing incidence of urban poverty and inadequate access to housing and basic services such as primary health care.

## ***1.2 Uganda – general***

Uganda is a land-locked country in East Africa occupying 241,551 square kilometers, 18% of which consists of open inland waters and permanent wetlands. It is bordered by Sudan to the North, Kenya to the East, Tanzania to the south, Rwanda to the southwest and the Democratic Republic of Congo to the west. It also shares a significant part of Lake Victoria (45% of the shoreline) with Tanzania and Kenya. It has a population of 31.8 million (UNDP, 2009) and an average annual population growth rate of 3.2%, one of the highest in the world, with an average life expectancy of 53 years. The proportion of people living below the poverty line has declined from 56% in 1992 to 31% in 2005/06 (UNDP, 2007). However, there are great disparities in regions with the north suffering considerably more. Two decades of civil war saw two districts – Lira and Oyam – witness great atrocities by the Lord's Resistance Army, which has had a devastating effect and impact on the lives and livelihoods of the people in the area.

Uganda's main economic activity is agriculture (particularly coffee) and it is estimated that 88% of the population is engaged in subsistence agriculture. Within the last few years the discovery of vast oil reserves in western Uganda near the Lake Albert River Basin has sparked great interest and could potentially have a positive impact on human development.

The country has experienced dramatic changes throughout the past decades and it has managed to put behind it the negative impact of the political turmoil of 1971-1985, which had a devastating effect on the country's economic and social infrastructure. A number of reformist programmes including The Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP), Decentralisation, Poverty Action Fund (PAF), Civil Service reform and Universal Primary Education have contributed to Uganda's progress in making significant strides in improving human development.

Significantly, Uganda is the only nation in the world that has substantially reduced its HIV infection rates; it has dropped from a high of 18% to an estimated 6.5% since 2001 (UNAIDS, 2010).

## ***1.3 The education system in Kenya and Uganda***

Kenya's basic education system allows for eight years of primary schooling (Standards 1-8 for children aged 6-13), and four years of secondary schooling (Forms 1-4 for children aged 14-17). At the end of Standard 8, the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education determines those who proceed to secondary education or vocational training. The Kenya Certificate of secondary Education, taken at the end of Form 4, acts as the qualification for entry to college or university.

Free primary schooling was introduced in Kenya in 2003, which led to the number of pupils in school increasing from 5.9 million in 2002 to 7.2 million a year later (UNESCO, 2006). However, although most Kenyan children now attend school, completion rates remain relatively low, and have actually declined over the years (Mukudi, 2004; Gisemba Bagaka, 2010). Even when pupils do complete all their primary education, many children still lack basic literacy and numeracy skills (DIFD, 2010). It is also increasingly the case that basic education in a world of more sophisticated technology is not sufficient to prepare people for jobs, yet 'participation rates at secondary and higher education remain stubbornly and dramatically skewed towards the richer end of society' (Palmer et al, 2007).

In part, low enrolment and attendance rates reflect the fact that although nominally free, a policy of cost-sharing between government, parents and communities means that the indirect costs of schooling demand a considerable output from parents, for example for school construction and maintenance, textbooks and other materials, as well as uniforms. With over half of Kenyans living in poverty, household income is a significant correlate of school enrolment and retention in Africa (Kattan and Burnett, 2004). Furthermore, secondary education is not free, and in 2005 just under half of those completing primary schooling transferred to secondary school (UNESCO, 2006).

Uganda's formal education system consists of seven years of primary schooling, followed by four years of lower secondary and two years of senior secondary education. This 7-4-2 pattern is followed by three years (3-5 yrs) of tertiary education. In addition, there is the alternative path of vocational and technical schools after primary level (Nakabugo et al, 2008). The age of entry into primary school is 6 years. The medium of instruction is English.

Universal Primary Education was introduced in 2001 with subsequent rapid increases in primary school enrolment and the associated problems of large class sizes, pressure on infrastructure and teachers, and shortages of books and materials. In 2009 primary education enrolment increased by 3.4%, from 7.96 million pupils in 2007/08 to 8.19 million in 2009. Net primary school enrolment reached 93.2% in 2008/09, up from 84% in 2005/06. The primary education completion rate has also risen, but remains low at 52%. According to a DFID study, 'Uganda is still off track to achieve 100% primary school enrolment by 2015' (DIFD, 2010).

Uganda became the first African country to have free secondary education. Irrespective of this initiative, the gap between primary and secondary school enrolment remains high. It is estimated that only 25% of children make the transition from primary to secondary school. This is due to the lack of secondary school places available.

## **1.4 Gender within the education system**

The Kenyan government formally recognises gender equality as central to the attainment of the Education for all and Millennium Development Goals, and UNESCO's latest EFA Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2010) does show some improvement, suggesting that gender parity had been achieved in enrolment in Kenyan primary schools by 2007, when 86% of primary-aged pupils were enrolled in school. Nevertheless, the Report also suggests that the gender ratio had worsened since 1999 with respect to secondary education, with only 88 girls enrolling in Form 1 for every 100 boys in 2007 (compared to 96 in 1999). Girls' enrolment relative to that of boys continues to fall throughout secondary schooling, and almost two thirds of undergraduates in Kenyan universities are male.

The Ugandan government has put in place a number of policies over the last two decades in order to foster gender parity in education. For example, the National Strategy for Girls' Education was launched, together with the Promotion of Girls' Education scheme, to facilitate girl child retention and performance at primary level. The Equity in the Classroom programme is also being implemented. Some progress has been made, with the 2010 UNESCO Report showing that, like Kenya, Uganda had also achieved gender parity with respect to enrolment in primary education between 1999 and 2007, when half of all primary school enrolments were girls. With respect to secondary education, boys' enrolment still outstrips that of girls, with only 83 girls enrolling for every 100 boys – though still is a considerable improvement since 1999, when only 66 girls enrolled for every 100 boys. Beginning with the 1990/91 academic year, all female applicants to public universities were awarded 1.5 bonus points, a measure that had increased the female population of Makerere University to 41% by 2002, compared to 23% before the scheme was introduced (Muhwezi, 2003).

## **2. The development of the project**

The gender project was initiated by members of the Centre for Commonwealth Education, initially conducting literature searches and exploring aspects of girls' education through contacts and visits to Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda.

Such discussions were formalised at a meeting held during the CCE Summer School in Cambridge in June 2009, attended by eight representatives from the Universities of Cambridge, Makerere and Nairobi, the Aga Khan University Institute of Educational Development (Dar es Salaam), FAWE (Forum for African Women Educationalists) and UNICEF-Uganda. At this



meeting, the focus of the project was agreed, a pilot study planned, a timetable drawn up and responsibilities shared.

Progress was reviewed and the project was further refined at a Workshop held in Nairobi in January 2010, with eleven delegates attending.

## **2.1 Partnership**

Whilst acknowledging the difficulties of working between North and South, the team agreed at its first meeting to seek to establish partnerships that generated trust and reciprocity. These would be partnerships which were symbiotic, with each partner needing the others; which were respectful of different cultural norms and understandings; and which were based on equality in the sense that each has something to offer.

Partners who have contributed to the planning and/or implementation of the research reported here are as follows:

CCE: Alicia Fentiman, Susan Kiragu, Molly Warrington and Mike Younger  
AKU-IED: Jane Rarieya  
Makerere University: Robinah Kyeune and Alice Merab Kagoda  
Nairobi University: Lucy Kibera  
FAWE: Irmin Durand and Barbara Ceptus  
UNICEF-Uganda: Emmanuel Kamuli and Jane Afoyocan  
Independent Researcher: Sarah Shucksmith

## **2.2 Project Justification**

Given that the reasons why girls drop out of school across many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa are well-known, it was agreed to set up a project on girls' retention in school, exploring the factors which keep girls in school 'against the odds' (that is, girls who come from poor backgrounds or from families or communities where schooling is under-valued for cultural reasons).

The study is justified because, whilst it is recognised that there is a great deal of literature published on gender and education in sub-Saharan Africa, from a wide variety of sources:

- not all studies are robust, and relatively few are published in well-reputed journals;
- much existing work is on the challenges faced by girls, but detailed case-study research on retention is lacking (Hunt, 2008);
- reported studies are often quantitative, with a lack of in-depth qualitative research;
- while a focus on the MDGs led initially to a number of publications on gender and education, interest seems to have waned more recently.

It is anticipated therefore that the research will be useful both in filling gaps in the existing literature and also in informing policy and practice – one of the key objectives of the CCE.

### 3. The aims of the gender project

The aims of the gender project are guided by the overarching principles of the Centre for Commonwealth Education, which are to build sustainable partnerships which seek to understand and increase young people's and teachers' participation in their own learning, and to understand further how that learning extends beyond schooling, and how it connects with prior learning, and with other arenas of learning in informal as well as formal contexts. The ultimate goal is to improve the quality of children's lives, to enrich the quality of learning and teaching, and to improve the well-being of children and youth within and beyond school. This goal is pursued in a climate of widening participation, with individuals and groups, with voluntary and statutory agencies, so as to widen opportunity, underpinned by common principles of equity and social justice.

Within that overall context, the specific aims of the East Africa Gender Project are:

- to develop an understanding of practice in relation to gender and education in East Africa;
- to develop research and intervention projects that are focused around the needs of women and girls in Kenya and Uganda;
- to impact positively and directly on educational policy and practice.

The key research question is: what keeps girls in school against the odds? In order to answer this question, the team agreed the following objectives:

- to identify a group of girls who continue to study and attend school despite evidence of economic, social or cultural pressures which militate against them doing so;
- to trace the girls' educational histories within the context of their family, community and school and so identify the reasons why they are retained in school;
- to explore specifically the roles of school practices and policies, and of role models and mentors, in accounting for girls' retention;
- to conduct a longitudinal study mapping these girls' educational outcomes over a 3-year period.

## 4. Methodological approach

### 4.1 *Selection of case studies, schools and girls*

In order to study girls' retention, the case-study areas needed to be districts where there were known to be challenges and hardships which might prevent girls from attending or continuing with school. In Kenya, the pilot case study District was chosen in discussion with FAWE, whilst in Uganda pilot areas were selected initially by colleagues at the University of Makerere and then through UNICEF.

Research permits were obtained from the Ministries of Education, and schools were selected in discussion with relevant District Education Officers. We aimed to choose schools that were recognised as providing a relatively high-quality education, and which had a reputation for encouraging girls' education, and hence schools where girls were retained 'against the odds'. Preliminary visits were made to the schools in Kenya to explain the project and obtain the Principal's permission to work with the school. In Uganda, because of the long distances involved to the two main case-study areas, no preliminary visits were made.

Because it is known that girls begin to drop out of primary school around the age of puberty, teachers were asked to select between 4 and 6 girls from Standard 5 (Kenya) or Class 6 (Uganda), who were from backgrounds where families were poor or where 'western'-style schooling was under-valued, but who were in school and likely to continue with their education. These were girls who would be expected to be 11 years old, though in practice, because of late starts and disrupted patterns of schooling, a number of the girls proved to be several years older.

### 4.2 *Research ethics*

A set of ethical guidelines were formulated by the research team before the research began. These fulfilled the basic ethical requirements of informed consent and confidentiality, so that the individual's rights of privacy were not invaded, harmed, deceived, betrayed or exploited (Burgess, 2002). It is, however, necessary to pay attention to adapting 'universal ethics' to local conditions in such a way that participants understand, respect and agree with what is happening (Brown et al, 2004). Thus, before interviews were conducted, the purpose of the research was fully explained to each girl in her preferred language. A sheet was provided in English or Kiswahili (Kenya) or the relevant local language (Uganda), and each girl was offered the opportunity to ask questions before signing a consent form. Researchers explained that

participation was entirely voluntary and that the interviewee could withdraw at any stage or decline to answer any questions. Permission was also obtained to record the interviews.

In the kind of contexts in which we were working, however, it was rarely possible to take account of all ethical decisions before the research began: these need to be addressed as they are shaped contextually (Riessman, 2005). Researchers therefore had to negotiate unreal expectations and assumptions made by teachers and pupils about what pupils could do to change their situations. They had to tread a sensitive path with respect to differentials of power and position, as well as dealing with ethical dilemmas caused when girls revealed situations that seriously affected their personal safety. At times, when exposed to stories of extreme deprivation and hardship, it was difficult not to become too personally involved.

### **4.3 Interviews**

A common interview guide was devised by those researchers directly involved in data collection, in consultation with the wider research team. This sought to obtain biographical data as well as asking questions related to the participant's experience of schooling, the problems she faced, her aspirations and the factors which encouraged her to remain in school. Initial questions were devised to put the respondent at ease and to enable rapport to be established. The guide was modified following an initial pilot interview, and then revised at the Nairobi workshop in the light of findings following the Kenyan pilot stage.

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with a total of 24 girls from 4 schools in Kajiado District, Kenya between October 2009 and January 2010. Interviews also took place in 2 schools in Uganda in December 2009, with further interviews with 10 girls in two schools in Kyenjojo and Ntoroko Districts, and a further 10 girls in 2 schools in Nebbi District in April 2010. In Kenya girls were offered the choice of an interview in English or Kiswahili, while in Uganda they were interviewed in their local language. With the exception of the initial Ugandan interviews, all interviews were recorded. Each interviewee was given a small gift as a token of thanks.

Interviews from Kajiado, Nebbi, Kyenjojo and Ntoroko were fully transcribed and translated, with analysis undertaken using the software package QSR NVivo 8. Analysis was first of all undertaken deductively, using the interview guide as the basis for initial coding. This was followed by inductive analysis, drawing out insights from the girls' own words. Further analysis continued through discussion with those working closely on the project.

#### **4.4 Observations**

Observations of the school building and its surroundings, as well as informal discussion with the Principal and teachers of each school, provided contextual data and enabled a fuller understanding of data obtained through the interviews.

### **5. The Kenya pilot study**

#### **5.1 Case study background**

Kajiado District is one of 18 Districts within the Rift Valley Province of Kenya. It borders Tanzania to the south-west and Nairobi to the north-east, and covers an area of approximately 22,000 km<sup>2</sup>. Its mainly Maasai population is predominantly rural, with most practising a traditional semi-nomadic pastoralist way of life. According to the Kenyan National Coordinating Agency for Population and Development, Kajiado District is characterised by illiteracy, frequent droughts, HIV/AIDS, poor infrastructure, acute water shortages and pressure on land. Schools are scattered over a vast distance, enrolment levels are low, particularly for secondary school, and the high rate of school drop-out, particularly amongst girls, is cited as a major problem.

#### **5.2 Main findings**

Analysis from interviews conducted in the pilot stage of the study showed that girls' participation in school was affected by the socio-economic environment in which they lived, by local cultural practices and by the quality of their educational experience. Girls in Kajiado district encountered a set of inter-linked challenges which prevented or limited their access to education, and yet despite a lack of agency in relation to some of these challenges, they had high aspirations and a zeal for education which was fostered both through their schools and through the role of key figures, mainly from within their community.

##### **5.2.1 Key challenges faced by girls in Kajiado**

Environmental and infrastructural challenges existed through the communities' vulnerability to environmental uncertainty. A scarcity of natural resources, amplified at the time of the research by several months of drought, meant girls had to go longer distances to collect the basic resources of water and firewood, leaving them less time for study. One girl, for example, talked of a 5-hour trip to fetch water, undertaken 3 times a week. Some also missed school on some days of the week to take animals to find water.

An inadequate educational infrastructure meant long distances to walk to and from school – often 2 hours, and sometimes 3 or even 4 hours in each direction – contributing to tiredness and hence reduced ability to study.

Poverty manifested itself through poor quality dwellings and a lack of basic infrastructure and material goods. Hunger was evident among some participants, with some walking the long journey to and from school with no food. Some families lacked sufficient money to pay fees, such that girls dropped out of school for certain periods, while some lacked basic scholastic materials such as pens. Often there was insufficient space for study at home, or no light available.

Girls experienced a set of challenges relating to their gender, within a strongly patriarchal culture. They lacked rights over their own bodies, with FGM and early marriage widely practised between the ages of 10 and 14. Since girls moved to live with their husbands' families on marriage, education was often seen as an economic cost not worth investing in, and almost half of the respondents said their fathers did not value education for girls.

Two thirds of girls raised the subject of harassment, violence or threats of violence from parents, teachers or male members of the community. Corporal punishment was regularly experienced in school – the only negative aspect of school mentioned. More significant for many girls was the fear of rape on the journey to and from school and the continual harassment from boys, in a context where pregnancy is a significant cause of school drop out (Were, 2007). Several girls were vulnerable through the custom of requiring pubescent girls to sleep outside their hut when their father was present.

All girls were required to fulfil a heavy burden of domestic labour. As is not unusual, they were given more tasks than their brothers (Kane, 2004), leaving them little or no time for study after school.

### **5.2.2 Girls' aspirations**

While girls were sometimes powerless in the face of the challenges that confronted them, they could also effect change through the strategies they engaged in to maximise their educational experience, and through their aspirations for the future. They talked of developing self-reliance, being single-focused on school work, the importance of being attentive in class and studying as hard as possible.

Many girls demonstrated an amazing zeal for education, seeing it as something every girl deserved. They talked about education as 'taking you to another place' and saw it as a means

of opening up career opportunities and as a route to independence. All rejected marriage in the immediate future and some altogether. Instead they had ambitious career aspirations, frequently imagining themselves in the professions of teaching, law or medicine. They saw these as enabling an escape from poverty and as a means to give back materially and practically to their families and communities.

### *5.2.3 The role of the school and of key figures*

The quality of schooling is critical to retention (Lloyd et al, 2000), and schools therefore played a vital role through their ethos, environment, teaching and the relationships they have with pupils. Girls spoke of the encouragement they received from some members of staff, of particular teachers who cared for them as individuals, and of good teaching where teachers were willing to explain work in different ways to ensure that pupils understood what was being taught. In some instances teachers were also said to be available and approachable outside the classroom, playing important roles in raising levels of self-confidence. In one school, bringing in role models from outside was viewed as particularly valuable in raising aspirations.

Whilst many teachers played important parts in the girls' lives as supporters, encouragers and advisers (particularly cited was the frequently articulated message to avoid sexual relationships with boys, and thus avoid pregnancy), some also acted as catalysts for change, campaigning on girls' behalves or not uncommonly helping particular girls to escape FGM and early marriage.

Besides teachers, there were key figures from within the family who supported and encouraged girls in managing and responding to the challenges they faced. Sometimes key figures acted as agents of change, helping girls to change the direction of their lives. Parents clearly played an important role, and although many fathers discouraged their daughters' education, a third did support and actively facilitate their schooling, selling cattle for example, to pay fees, despite the tradition of investing wealth in animals. However, despite generally having little or no education themselves, it was frequently mothers who facilitated their daughters' education, threatening fathers with the law, taking on extra chores and challenging the views of their husbands. Girls were also often supported in practical ways by various other female relatives. Brothers, too, were sometimes instrumental in challenging resistant fathers and otherwise helping girls to attend school.

In addition to immediate and wider family support, there were instances of members of the local community, such as chiefs or church leaders, or even people further afield, from

NGOs, for example, who supported girls in attending school or who served as their role models, admired and emulated from afar.

## 6. Kenya main phase

The findings summarised above indicate the value of the Kajiado pilot, and it was agreed at the Nairobi Workshop in January 2010 to begin the main phase of the research, extending into new areas, and looking at each school in greater depth in order to better understand the relevant contextual factors. It is expected that this research will confirm and validate findings from the pilot, as well as looking for further factors that influence retention in different parts of Kenya.

The fieldwork for this main phase of the project took place between July and September 2010, developing the breadth of the pilot into three new areas:

- A mixed urban/rural coffee-growing area of Central Province;
- An informal settlement in Nairobi;
- An area of Nyanza, on the shores of Lake Victoria.

These areas were chosen on the basis of diversity around the central research question of retention against the odds. Interviews were conducted in four schools in each area, with five Standard 6 girls in each school.

It was also agreed at the Nairobi Workshop to develop the depth of the Kenyan pilot project, spending longer in each school to widen the study beyond girls to include focus group interviews with teachers and a group of Standard 6 boys in each school. An observation schedule was also agreed in order to supplement contextual information about each school. This data collection took place in the three new areas, with the additional data also collected in the original Kajiado schools. Analysis of all the data is approaching completion at the time of writing, and will be discussed at the second Nairobi Workshop in February 2011.

The intention is also to track participants to the end of 2012, in order to understand retention over time. This will involve further interviews in 2011 and 2012 to explore in particular their trajectories as they come to the end of primary school. It was also agreed that, if possible, efforts would be made to track down any girls who had left school, to ascertain the reasons for their withdrawal.



## 7. The Uganda pilot study

### 7.1 Case Study Background

The pilot study was conducted amongst 20 girls in four schools in three distinct districts: Nebbi, Kyenjojo and Ntoroko. They vary significantly in terms of ethnicity and livelihoods. Below is a brief description of each area.

#### 7.1.2 Nebbi District

Nebbi District is located in north-western Uganda and is bordered by the Arua District to the north, Amuru District to the east, Builsa District to the southeast, and the Democratic Republic of Congo to the south and west. It comprises a total area of 3,288 km<sup>2</sup>, and has an estimated population of 535,400. The district was originally divided into three counties, Padeyere, Jonam and Okoro, but Okoro county has now become a new district. The main ethnic group is Alur. The main economic activities are predominantly farming and fishing on Lake Albert and in the Lake Albert Nile. According to the District Education officer, there are 233 primary schools and 31 secondary schools. In comparison with national averages, Nebbi is more disadvantaged than other districts. For example, the pupil class ratio is 1:128 compared to the national average of 1:55. Although enrolment in primary school is increasing, the average rate of drop out, especially of girls is 53.8% as compared to boys at 46.2%; this is major concern.<sup>1</sup> Two schools in this district participated in the study: Athele (rural) and Pakwatch (semi-urban).

#### 7.1.3 Kyenjojo District

Kyenjojo District is located in western Uganda. It is bordered by the Kibale District to the south, Mubende District to the east, Kiruhura District to the southeast, Kamwenge District to the south and Kabarole District to the west. The district headquarters are at Kyenjojo; the district was created in 2000. It is located approximately 274 km from Kampala and is part of the ancient Kingdom of Toro. It has an estimated population of 481,000. The main economic activities are tea plantations and farming. Nyakasenyi School, which is located on the main road from Fort Portal, participated in the pilot research.

#### 7.1.4 Ntoroko

Ntoroko District is a new district (formerly part of Bundibugyo). It is located in western Uganda near the border of the Democratic Republic of Congo and is at the southern most end of Lake

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1 Unpublished report from the Directorate of Education – Nebbi District Local Government.

Albert. Certain events have had a profound impact on the communities, namely the 1995 Land Act and Demarcation of the Semuliki Game Reserve, which restricted access to resources within the park, and women, in particular, lost out. From 1997-2000, the insurgence caused mayhem and many people were displaced and there was considerable loss of life, property and food insecurity. The communities in this area are fairly heterogeneous and consist of many ethnic groups; they are a peripatetic migrant population whose major sources of livelihood are fishing around the lake, cattle rearing, local trade, and trade across the border with DRC. A government report of the district shows that poverty had prompted a number of women and teenage girls to engage in acts of prostitution and early marriages. In addition, other factors such as a high rate of theft, alcohol abuse and poor living conditions have contributed to the 'fear' of living in such a harsh environment. The schools in the area are understaffed and lack basic resources; education is poor with a very high drop-out rate and a lack of secondary education (Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, 2003). Rwanagara School participated in the pilot. It caters to a diverse and mixed community comprised of the Balulo, Batoro, Bakonjo and Baturka.

## **7.2 Main Findings**

Analysis from the interviews conducted in the pilot stage of the study illustrated the diversity of factors affecting girls' participation in the three districts. There were common constraints affecting participation of girls in all four schools such as pregnancy, early marriage, peer pressure from male peers (in and out of school youth), child labour, and poor menstruation management. However, there were also differences between the districts in terms of geography (difference between rural and urban), access and distance to schools, types of livelihood affecting participation, ethnicity, specific cultural practices, lack of parental involvement and kinship obligations. Unlike the Kajiado study, the majority of girls in Uganda seemed to lack aspiration for the future and lacked role models. This was particularly evident in two schools – Rwanagara and Athele – which are remote, rural schools and where, significantly, there is a lack of female teachers. Most noticeably in Rwanagara there are no female teachers because of the harsh environment, and in Athele there is only one female teacher. The lack of female teachers and the lack of female role models in the local culture appear to have a negative impact on girls' motivation or aspirations beyond the community in which they live. In many instances this is exacerbated by living in difficult circumstances without close kin and the lack of support networks.

### *7.2.1 Key challenges faced by girls in the Uganda Pilot Phase*

Poverty was a key determinant affecting school enrolment, absenteeism and drop out across the four pilot areas. Most cited lack of money as a major factor affecting education. All the girls who participated in the study are also working children. Domestic activities are part of everyday life and gender-specific tasks such as sweeping, fetching water, collecting firewood, looking after siblings, the elderly and the sick were identified as female responsibilities. In some instances, the girls had to take on the responsibility of trying to earn enough money to pay for a school uniform, books and examination fees by selling vegetables or selling water to households. One girl in Athele (18 years) had to interrupt her schooling to assist her blind father and sell vegetables in order to pay for her uniform. She described herself as the 'mother' of the household. In Pakwatch, one of the interviewees fetched water and sold it for 200 shillings per jerry can in order to make money to buy 'soup' ingredients, so she could feed herself and her siblings.

A third of the girls interviewed were orphaned (in some cases due to HIV/Aids) and many lived in households without either of their parents. Many are defined as 'double orphans' (World Bank, 2005); in some instances these children are living with elderly grandparents or male kin members, and in some cases they are being defiled by uncles and grandparents.<sup>2</sup> The lack of parental support and the added responsibility of looking after elderly grandparents places extra burdens on the girls.

Distance to schools was another factor affecting girls' access to schools. Some of the girls were frightened to walk to and from school. In Rwangara where children walk long distances, the girls were not only scared of being attacked and raped but also killed. (This was near the game reserve and an area where there was political conflict). In addition to walking long distances, girls complained of hunger and not having any food during the day. It was also noted that many children only have one meal a day and arrive at school hungry. The lack of food can contribute to poor performance and achievement (Levinger, 1994).

In all four schools, sexual harassment was identified as a key challenge facing adolescent females. This is consistent with other research conducted in Uganda on the risks schoolgirls encounter (Mirembe and Davies, 2001). Some of the girls in the study were victims of sexual harassment and most cited sexual harassment and 'bad behaviour by boys' as challenges. They spoke of the abuse they had encountered from male peers and told harrowing tales of fending off attacks and rape. On their way to school they were often 'bothered' or 'teased' by boys and

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2 Field Notes from Focus group discussion with teachers, March, 2010.

had been offered money (10, 000 Ugandan shillings) in exchange for sex. Two young girls had to physically fend off their 'attackers' and one made a formal complaint to the police. As a result, she had to transfer to another school.

Another gender specific challenge is menstruation management. Two thirds of the girls in the study cited menstruation as affecting female enrolment and as a reason for absenteeism and drop out. Most do not have access to sanitary pads, proper toilet facilities or access to water. Only one school, Nyakasenyi, provided an 'emergency' kit which provided pads and knickers to menstruating girls. They also showed the girls how to make pads from local materials (Somner, 2009).

Engagement in certain types of livelihood, such as fishing, was identified as a contributing factor for dropping out of school and non-enrolment. The immediate rewards (money) of fishing create an environment where money is readily available and disposable. (This is combined with high alcohol consumption, prostitution and domestic violence). In addition, the lack of value placed on education by parents or guardians were other contributing factors associated with the high drop out. One teacher remarked that, "the fishing communities around the lake value money more than education". This was confirmed by a visit to a primary school in Nebbi District where we had hoped to do our pilot study. However, the school had very few students in upper primary and did not even have a Class 7; therefore, it could not take part.

### ***7.2.2 Girls' aspirations***

Unlike the earlier Kajiado study, the aspirations of girls in the Uganda pilot were limited and localised. Two thirds of the girls wanted to become a teacher or a nurse – both occupations that are observed in the local communities. Only one girl had an aspiration to be a lawyer and one had an aspiration to be like a minister who had visited the area. The role models who were identified tended to be teachers, nurses, a secondary school girl, bank clerks/managers, and others who were 'visible' in their everyday lives. None of the girls mentioned the names of eminent or prominent Ugandan women or men outside their communities as people they wanted to be like (i.e. from radio, newspaper, TV or video). This varied significantly from boys' aspirations of wanting to be a president, minister, engineer, doctor etc.

### ***7.2.3 Role of the school and key figures***

The school plays a significant role in the lives of the participants. Many of them regard the school environment as a safe haven from the world outside. Significantly, they expected the

teachers 'to protect' them from bad behaviour and peer influence. Most of the girls mentioned that a major role of the teachers is to provide guidance and counselling, and they viewed the teachers' roles as mediators and disciplinarians to combat bad behaviour by male youths – both inside and outside school. If they encountered problems (such as abuse/male pressure) outside of the school, they would report it to the teachers.

All the girls liked school and only one mentioned punishment in school as a negative factor. In all schools, the teachers played an important role in the girls' lives not only as educators but also as advisers. This is especially pertinent because of the high number of orphans and vulnerable girls in the pilot study. The schools had afternoon clubs such as the GEM (Gender Education Movement) Club and HIV/Aids Club. Membership was open to both boys and girls. These clubs provided important information relevant to their lives outside the classroom.

The school environment was also one which they valued and took pride in. In one school (Athele), there was a thatched/mud temporary classroom and the pupils mentioned it as something they didn't like about the school as well as the lack of stances latrines.

## **8. Future directions**

Findings from the Kajiado study confirmed the hypothesis formed through initial discussions with African partners that particular people play a key role in encouraging or enabling girls to remain in school against the odds. A linked project has also therefore taken place to explore with adult women who themselves completed their education against the odds, the place of role models and other factors significant in enabling them to finish at least secondary education. Interviews were completed with 18 Ugandan women in March, and a further 20 Kenyan women in October 2010. Findings from these interviews form the subject of a further Research Report.

The February Workshop will discuss the findings to date and focus heavily on how these findings might be translated into practice in order to make a difference to pupils, especially girls, in East African schools. At the previous workshop, NGO representatives were supportive of the idea of formalising a system of role modelling and mentoring in schools, and – if this seems appropriate as far as our partners are concerned – we plan to develop this further as a practical outcome of the research. Following some brainstorming at the workshop, it is hoped to set up small-scale intervention projects in liaison with the Ministries of Education in Kenya and Uganda in the second half of 2011.

It is anticipated that an external funding bid to enable this to happen will be put together after the Nairobi meeting.

## 9. Conclusions

Over the two years since the Gender in East Africa project was first thought about, links have been initiated and developed between the CCE and institutions and organisations in both Kenya and Uganda. Well-established partnerships now exist with FAWE and UNICEF-Uganda, with working relationships with researchers at the University of Makerere, AKU-IED, and with government ministries. The wider gender team continues to expand: it has met on two occasions and is about to meet for a third time. These occasions have proved to be dynamic and fruitful in articulating where we are and where we hope to go in the future. Crucially, they have enabled sensitivity to the local context, taking account of the ideas and views of Kenyans and Ugandans whose experience and knowledge make this research possible.

So far, the emphasis has been on research, with the completion of pilot studies in Kenya and Uganda, and fieldwork completed for the main stage of the Kenya research, as well as for the linked project on 'women role models'. Findings from the Kenya study were reported at FAWE's Regional Conference in Kampala in February 2010, and at the Royal Geographical Society's annual conference in London in September 2010, and two papers have been submitted to academic journals.

The next stage of the project, however, is concerned with moving from research to intervention in order to impact positively on gender relations in schools and to explore how we might make a meaningful difference to girls' retention, and especially to the girls who have willingly provided us with so many – often painful – insights into their lives.

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