

## **Education for All? Parents’ and Teachers’ Perceptions of the Process of Schoolboys Becoming Men in Kirinyaga and Nairobi Counties, Kenya**

Fatuma Chege, and Francis Likoye  
*Kenyatta University, Kenya*

### **Abstract**

This paper focuses on findings based on analysis of perceptions of teachers and parents on how schoolboys in Kirinyaga and Nairobi counties constructed masculinities as they negotiated manhood in the midst of a clearly defined race towards attaining Education for All (EFA) goals in Kenya, by end of 2015, which is around the corner –metaphorically speaking. The paper is based on a FAWE<sup>1</sup>-sponsored study conducted in 2012 and 2013 titled “*Girl-specific education focus and boys’ participation, performance and construction of masculinities in selected Kenyan schools*”. The study posted major school-based findings that were shared through the *CICE Research Paper Series No.5* whereby, boys emerged as relatively underperforming in the schooling project compared with their female peers. It was, however, not feasible to include findings of the interplay of parents (fathers and mothers) and teachers and the role and interpretations of constructions of masculinities in their respective school communities. This paper therefore undertakes to fill up this void by foregrounding findings in this regard, specifically the shaping of masculinities among schoolboys as men-in-the-making navigating the pathways to manhood. Conducted in an African Kenyan context, this study raises interest in the multifarious interpretations of the basic feminist standpoint theories that present men as a group that is socialised from childhood to benefit from structures of power – social, economic, political, or otherwise- that are designed to oppress women and girls as a gender category. The study design departed from the traditional Kenyan gender research that often foregrounds girls’ education independent of that of boys, and which consequently fails to problematise boys’ schooling and their construction of masculinities in a comparative manner. For many parents (mothers and fathers) and teachers, schooling in itself did not appear to offer realistic masculine modelling for boys compared with the girls and as such, the boys were disillusioned and distracted from schooling as they searched elsewhere for models of successful masculinities to emulate.

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<sup>1</sup> FAWE – Forum for African Women Educationalists

## **Introduction**

This paper addressed perceptions of parents and teachers on the construction of masculinities within the context of primary schooling. The paper comprises four main sections excluding the Introduction and Conclusions and Recommendations. The first section focuses on the Background of the Research Problem as well as the Problem Statement itself. This is followed by a second section that entails Conceptual Elucidations, Theoretical Framing and highlights the Methodology of the study. The third section is an expose of the Study Findings and, finally, the study Conclusions and Recommendations are presented.

## **BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY AND PROBLEM STATEMENT**

### *The background & context*

Within the framework of the various international instruments that underscore gender equality and equity, this study was designed to explore constructions of gender identities within the schooling process. Specifically in-built in the study design was the exploration of how schooling processes potentially shaped the navigation of the route for boys becoming men vis-a-vis that of girls becoming women in their respective communities and as successful Kenyan citizens. This study therefore leaned on the following major instruments to guide its conceptualisation:

- United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948);
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990);
- United Nations Millennium Development Goals (2000),
- Dakar Framework for Action Education for All Goals (2000)
- African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1999) among others
- Children's Acts (Kenya), Part 3, article 23
  - Basic Education Act (Kenya, 2013) that guarantees equal opportunities for both boys and girls to basic education, and,
- Constitution of Kenya – Bill of Rights - Chapter 4 (27)

These rights-based instruments outline the entitlements provided for children jointly by nations of the world, by regional state governments in Africa and domesticated by Kenya as sovereign signatory state for which it has also developed its statutory frameworks. Based on all the cited declarations, state governments obligate themselves to ensuring that both girls and boys are accorded their positions as equal rights claimers to all human rights including the right to equality in education and to the benefits that are potentially accrued through education system. In the same breath of entailed declarations, state governments must ensure that parents and teachers (male and female) are educated on their role as duty bearers mandated by law to ensure that girls and boys in their care and tutelage enjoy their human rights, which includes education without discrimination.

In addition, their basic freedoms to negotiate their identities based on individual, cultural, religious and gender are also part of the equality obligations.

Since Year 2003 when Kenya introduced the current Free Primary Education (FPE) policy, a continuously steady school survival rate was noted at primary Grade Five (5) (MoE, EMIS, 2007). However, in our study locations of Central and Nairobi Provinces where the study counties of Kirinyaga and Nairobi respectively belong, more girls than boys completed Grade 5. In the same period, boys in Central Province dropped out of primary school at a higher rate (2.2%) compared to the girls at 1.6%. By Year 2007, girls' survival rate in primary Five (5) in Central Province was recorded at 88.9% compared with that of the boys at 79.6% (MoE EMIS, 2007). In Nairobi, however, the trend was slightly different with the girls trailing behind the boys by 1.2 percentage points –but nonetheless remaining in school to complete Class 8 at a higher rate than the boys who apparently had higher dropout rate (4.2%) compared with 4.0% among the girls. With the increased urgency to accelerate achievement of overall EFA goals as well as that of the gender equality MDG targets of Year 2015, any activity that manifests itself as a risk in this mission calls for systematic investigation. In contemporary Kenya, the perceptions that boys were beginning to trail behind girls in various aspects of schooling attracted political discourse often manifested in public rallies, thus strengthening the need for research-based evidence in which the gender lens informed the tools of generating data. Importantly, the perceptions of parents (male and female) as well as teachers (male and female) who are positioned not only as critical players of schooling processes but also as important shapers of gender identities, become core in the analytical discourse fronted in this paper. Parents and teachers are also significant duty bearers whose custodianship of children in their families or schools respectively is legally sanctioned, nationally and globally. Whether within this custodianship of the project of schooling parents and teachers had perceived boys as benefiting equally with girls in developing gender identities that they deemed successful was problematised in the research.

### *Research problem*

Few researches in Kenya have interrogated the link between schooling and the social pathways of boys becoming men vis-à-vis girls becoming women, especially during the critical transitional stages whereby schoolboys have appeared, in specific settings, to underperform their female peers academically and in educational transitions. The need for systematic unravelling of statistical patterns of boys' academic underperformance within contexts whereby popular perceptions portray boys as disconnecting with schooling and its certification while choosing to pursue early economic engagements as their chosen pathway to “successful masculinities”, has hardly received research attention within the academia. The construction of masculinities outside the objectives of schooling and the education system poses real threats to the mission of attaining EFA. It is in these contexts that we formulated five research objectives to guide the research. However, this paper,

addresses only two out of the five objectives that focus on parents and teachers as shapers of gender constructions. The two objectives are as follows:

1. What are the basic perceptions of female and male teachers towards construction of masculinities among schoolboys in the context of concerns for gender equality and EFA?
2. What are the basic perceptions of male and female parents towards construction of masculinities among schoolboys in the context of gender equality and EFA?

## CONCEPTUAL ELUCIDATION AND THEORETICAL FRAMING

### *Clarification of main concepts*

The concept of *masculinity* (and masculinities), which is core in this study, is used as a relational concept in the sense that it derives its meaning from the existence of the concept of femininity (and femininities). Just like day and night that are conceptualised interdependently; so is masculinity and femininity. Both terms contribute to the broader concept popularly referred to as “gender” (see Squires, 1999). Gender refers to the social, cultural, and psychological traits associated to men and women through specific socialisation practices and contexts. Observations show that the fact that human beings are a combination of biologically female or biologically male persons, there is almost an arbitrary tendency to assign gendered roles, expectations and responses to almost everything that is linked to one or the other gender (women/girls, thus constructing feminine identities/ femininities, as well as men/boys thus constructing masculine identities/masculinities). Because gender allocation becomes consistently policed and consequently essentialised into human life, most people imagine that doing/playing out gender is natural. Theorists have rightly argued that this naturalisation of gender is based on a false premise of confusing biological *sex* and socialised **gender** (Pattman and Chege, 2003). It is in the context of this a theorisation of the construction of Kenyan African masculinities that this paper addresses parental and teacher perceptions on boys’ construction of masculinities vis-a-vis findings of their school under-performance.

### *Theoretical framing*

**Firstly**, the Discourse Theory as advocated by Foucault (1972) informed the theoretical framework of this study to a considerable extent. According to Foucault (1972), identities such as male or female are as relational as is black and white and these exist because we have language to describe them. This implies that, if there were no girls’ performances against which boys’ were perceived to be underperforming, there would have been no basis for conceiving this particular study. According to Wetherall and Edley (1998), masculinities are achieved practices in pursuit of an ideal personal image of maleness. Hence, masculinities are not just simple singular routes towards manhood

but rather; plural identities that intersect with local ethnicities, class and sexuality, which are adapted and performed in particular ways in social spaces within communities, families, and schools (see Burtler, 1990; and Nayak and Kehily 1996). In addition, the Social Constructionist Theory as expounded by Frosh, Phoenix, and Pattman (2002) also influenced the interpretation of this study. Throughout fieldwork and data analysis, researchers were cognisant of the essence of this theory, which presents gender identities as not fixed but as fluid and continually developing according to the different ways in which individuals “construct”, or perceive themselves in relation to the cultural norms and social expectations. In this context, gender identities are “*not like shores that we simply step into but are negotiated*” and that, identities are “*not things that we do or perform*” but are also partly formed through the language we use to describe ourselves and others (see Pattman and Chege, 2003). Further, the understanding of how gender is played out and constructed within schooling, the researchers aligned their understandings to what Haywood and Mac an Gaill’ (1997-50) defined as a “*social process, a set of social relations charged with formal and informal meanings across a diversity of areas...*”. Importantly, Butler (1993) had argued earlier that schooling processes could “*be seen to form gendered identities, marking out ‘correct’, or ‘inappropriate’ styles of being*”. This understanding directed the researchers towards listen keenly and interpreting what the study subjects said; their tone of speech, and the unspoken story, often manifested in silences and gesticulations.

**Secondly**, Postmodern Critical Theory (PCT), which falls within Postmodernism provides the framework for theorising masculinities vis-a-vis femininities in the context of schooling. This framework allows the analyzing and challenging of the dominant discourses that threaten the transformation of societies and hampers the pursuit for gender equality and equity. Critical theory offers a human rights-based perspective that guides generation and analysis of data and its interpretations of the actual realities and the possibilities they render for unmasking wrong rationalisations and supporting eventual transformations (see Horkheimer, 1937). The PCT is thus aligned to social emancipation through the uncovering of ‘aspects of society, especially ideologies that maintain a *status quo* via restricting or limiting different groups’ to the means of gaining useful knowledge’ (Humm, 1995: 50-51). In addition, this theory helps in politicizing social problems, and situating the problems in historical and cultural contexts. From a human rights perspective, Postmodern Critical Theory allows research communities to participate in the generation of knowledge through representations of meanings and interpretations of their experiences using their own voices, thus ‘relativizing the findings’ (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002, p. 52) and enhancing the ownership of emergent knowledge through a process that is participant-centred.

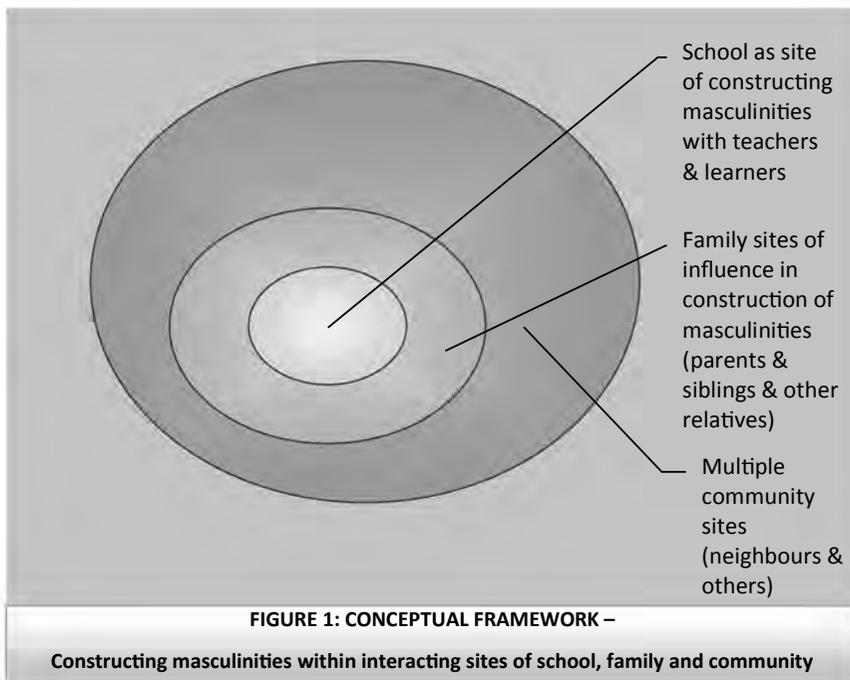
### *Conceptual framework*

Social Constructionist informed the conceptual framework within which evidence

adduced, analysed, and discussed. Within this framework, gender (masculinities and femininities) are ‘socially constructed (rather than being biologically given and driven), making them subject to variation across historical and social contexts. Gender identities also interact with other factors such as poverty, urbanisation and globalization’ (Barker, 2008), resulting in fluid forms of masculinities (and femininities). Literature on masculinity reveals that for boys, the ‘understanding of how they have to act in order to be acceptably male’ is a crucial developmental undertaking (Frosh, Phoenix, and Pattman, 2002: 75-76). Accordingly then,

In a social constructionist perspective, gender norms emerge from prevailing patterns of hegemony/power/supremacy and patriarchy and are in turn reinforced and reconstructed by *families, communities, and social institutions*. (...) [Girls and boys] also learn such norms in schools and other social institutions and from their peer groups, which may encourage risk-taking behaviour, competition, and violence, and may ridicule boys who do not live to these social expectations (Barker, 2008:8).  
[Authors' emphasis]

In view of this conceptual framework, gender positioning entails multiple interacting social sites as observed by Scalway (2000). The following is a graphic representation of this conceptualisation.



## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adapted the multiple methods as a methodological approach that combined both qualitative and quantitative methods. It was important to embrace methods that allowed respect for the humanity of participants, while remaining 'emergent and evolving' (Marshall and Rossman, 1999: 2). Within this framework, comparative case studies were conducted between urban and rural settings as well as across the county of Nairobi and Kirinyaga with the aim of eliciting multiple social realities within specific settings while pursuing and documenting '*in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (...) in real-life context*' (see Mugenda and Mugenda 2012: 39).

### Sampling

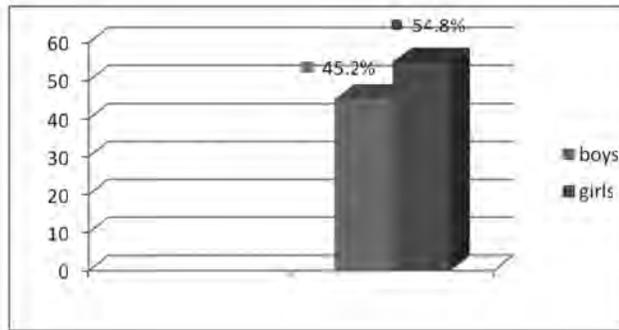
#### *Research locales, sites and participants*

Two counties in Kenya, namely Nairobi and Kirinyaga that are located respectively in Nairobi and Central provinces were selected purposively based on official Ministry of Education (MoE) pronouncement that deterioration of boys' education compared with that of the girls was raising concern. Specifically, the boys were reportedly below the girls in terms of enrolment and completion as well as in performance in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education –KCPE (MoE ministerial release, 2011).

In each of the two counties of Nairobi and Kirinyaga, two research districts were sampled purposively based on their location as urban, peri-urban or rural, yielding four districts. Within each of the four districts, four co-educational primary schools were purposively selected to comprise a total sample of 16<sup>2</sup> schools based on two criteria. *Firstly*, their location as urban, peri-urban or rural and *secondly*, their overall performance whereby half of the schools had girls outperforming boys in specific aspects such as enrolment, completion and academic performance that qualified them for transition to secondary school. Out of the targeted 15 schools covered, eight were in Kirinyaga and seven in Nairobi. The study selected class seven as most appropriate as the pupils had reasonable experience of being in primary school and had relatively less pressure on preparations for the final Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE). Figure 2 portrays the sample covered in all the schools.

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<sup>2</sup> One of the sampled schools did not participate due to persistent conflict of timing between the research team and the school.



**Figure 2: Pupil Sample by gender**

The study also included head teachers from the sample schools (seven females and eight males) who participated in 15 in-depth individual interviews while teachers (30 females and 30 males) of the Class seven pupils participated in 15 mixed-sex focus group discussions (FGDs) –one in each of the schools. In addition, 30 single-sex FGDs were conducted with parents (33 mothers and 27 fathers) of participating pupils of the Class seven pupils who accepted the invitation to be part of the study. Table 1a, b, and c capture the three categories of adult sample

<b>Table 1a: Head teachers by gender</b>		<b>Table 1b: Class teachers by gender</b>		<b>Table 1c: Parents by gender</b>	
Gender	Frequency	Teachers	Frequency	parents	Frequency
Female	7	Female	30	Mothers	33
Male	8	Male	30	Fathers	27
Total	15	Total	60	Total	<b>60</b>

Key informants were sourced from among government officers namely, Education Officers (DEOs) as well as District Officers (DOs). The latter served as the entry points in each district as a matter of protocol. Their interviews focused not only on matters of enrolment, transition, and performance of both boys and girls, but also on their perceptions regarding gender differences in the process and outcomes of schooling. Table 3 below depicts a description of the sample of the Education Officers who participated in this study.

District	Position	Gender	
		m	f
<b>Kasarani</b>	District commissioner (DC)	√	
	District education officer (DEO)		√
<b>Langata</b>	District Officer One (DO1)		√
<b>Kirinyaga central</b>	District Commissioner		√
	DEO representative		√
<b>Mwea</b>	DEO Representative	√	
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>

### *Generating the data*

For the parents, the main method of generating data was the FGDs. Out of the 51 FGDs conducted in all the research sites 14 were with mothers and fathers in single-sex settings. Among teachers, seven mixed-sex FGDs were conducted while female and male pupils also participated in single-sex FGDs. In a bid to validate the veracity of findings, data from the different sources was collated and triangulated by source and method used.

### Data Analysis

The *atlas ti* computer software was used for analysing text data from FGDs. The *Atlas ti* helped in processing thematic codes, transformation of the interview transcripts into analysable data pieces and in actual analysis. In addition, the listening guide method propagated by Taylor, Gilligan and Sullivan (1995) helped to enhance the analysis through the guidance tips if it offers on how to link what the researcher actually hears in the verbalised discussions with what is often *not said*; namely the unspoken silences.

### **Ethical and Logistical Considerations**

**Firstly**, the logistical concerns were addressed through obtaining a Kenya government research permit from the relevant Department of Science and Technology. Within the research Districts, courtesy calls to the DOs were part of the research protocol that supported accountability and transparency of the research activities. Further, within the schools, the administrators were briefed and allowed to interrogate the research objectives, relevance, and potential significance.

**Secondly**, ethical considerations entailed the researcher seeking informed consent from all the research participants. Within the schools, teachers provided access to the pupils as their professional guardians while representative parents provided general consent as members of the school-parents committees. In addition, discussions regarding the nature and

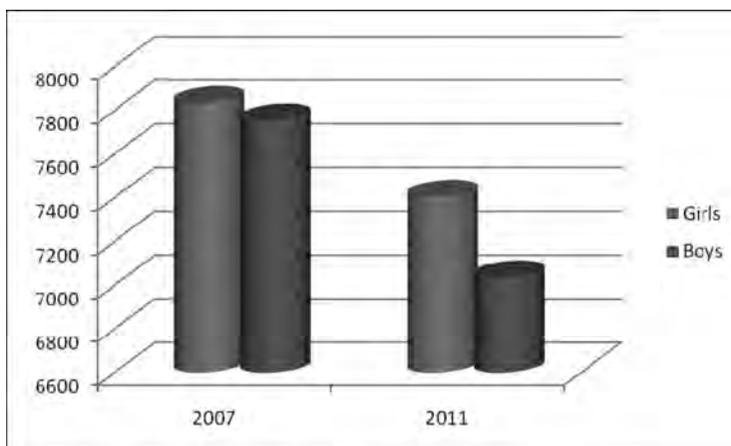
form of the study were held with each of the various categories of participants, including learners (girls and boys) to ensure mutual understandings. Eventually, all interviews and FGDs were tape-recorded based on informed consent. The right of participants to withdraw from the interviews without obligation to give reasons was explained. Finally, the researchers identified all transcriptions by pseudonyms to protect the real identities of the participants and ensure anonymity in the research reporting. This action was meant to also, protect the research subjects in case of unforeseen eventualities linked to the research.

## PRESENTATION OF STUDY FINDINGS

### Backdrop of evidence on declining male performances negating successful masculinities

Data that were available confirmed, unequivocally the general perceptions that boys were indeed lagging behind girls in half of the schools in the two study counties. In addition, even where data were not available, girls were still portrayed as being more pro-school compared with their male peers who were described often as “not too keen” with schooling in almost all areas that include enrolment, transition and performance.

In Langata District of Nairobi County for example, our findings show that more girls than boys remained in the primary school system during the five years leading to the study period. In 2007, the boys in this county were 8,047 which was 6% fewer than the girls at 8,153. By 2011, however, the boys had decreased by nearly nine percentage points to stand at 7,293 compared to the girls whose enrolment had declined by five percentage points to stand at 7,403 as depicted in Figure 3 below.



**Figure 3: Enrolment patterns by gender, Langata District**

This section focuses on parental and teacher perceptions on the role of schooling and community in the construction of masculinity for male pupils.

In Kirinyaga Central District of Kirinyaga County, the trend of girls maintaining

relatively higher rates in school enrolment was noteworthy in half of the eight participating schools. However, even in schools where the boys were more, their retention rate was lower than that of the girls as the boys tended to leave school earlier than the girls did. According to Government officials in the two Districts in Kirinyaga County, boys lacked male role models whom they could identify with educational achievement.

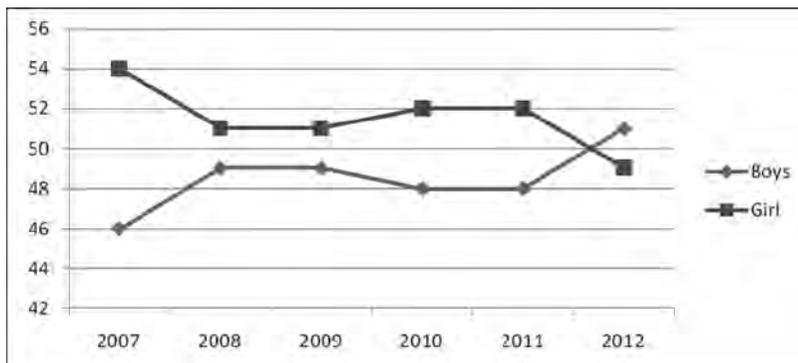
**The government officer from one district explained:**

*Most of the men considered to be successful in the vicinity of where these boys come from are not highly educated and many of them are known to have failed miserably in school; yet they are the wealthiest and hence successful in the eyes of the people.*

**The other officer observed the following:**

*There are many parents who encourage their sons to aim at becoming rich early by doing business and earning money, but the same parent are keen in supporting the success of daughters through education. This situation encourages boys not to focus on schooling but instead they leave school while still in primary school while girls continue.*

As the teachers from these two districts discussed this scenario with explicitly expressed concern, it was noteworthy that very few schools seemed to have a policy in place to address the issue of boys leaving school early. Indeed, in all the 15 schools in both Kirinyaga and Nairobi counties, there was only one school located in Kirinyaga Central where the head teacher explained the school unwritten policy of trying to motivate girls and boys equally to complete school and compete equally. Despite the efforts in this school, the gender-disaggregated data still portrayed that the proportion of girls in school had remained more than that of the boys for five consecutive years since Year 2007 to Year 2011 as depicted in Figure 4 below.



**Figure 4: Urban school in Kirinyaga Central District**

- *Successful male identities constructed outside the norms and mission of schooling*

During interviews and FGDs, the head teachers as well as class teachers respectively expressed the assumption that girls –more than the boys- were increasingly getting motivated to complete school. Many of them argued that the trend of having fewer boys in school was likely to continue because, the family as well as school cultures tended to support girls more than they did for boys. This tendency had the potential to enhance the construction of masculinities that are anti school as has been established among Jamaican boys as well as boys in southwest states of Nigeria whereby boys left school early because they found its mission irrelevant to the construction of successful masculinities.

According to most of the female teachers, the increase in girls’ enrolment and retention in the school was directly linked to both in-school as well as out-of school social and economic factors that influenced girls and boys in different but explicitly gendered ways.

All the head teachers and the class teachers, without exception, were of the view that the contemporary family was characterised by parents who was mainly the mother. Reportedly, mothers made explicit efforts to not only keep their daughters –more than their sons- in school but also motivate them and support them to attain educational success both in the completion of the school cycle and in attaining the benefits of its outcomes.

- *Failing returns in education for boys: Does school provide hope for men-in-the-making?*

To become a man – a real man in some of the African contexts such as those where the study was conducted requires evidence of potential capabilities of caring for aging parents and of “breadwinning” in the literal sense. However, there was an emergent perception that investment in male education through schooling was failing in demonstrating commensurate returns to the investor’s/parents’ expectations. This perceived failure in schooling portrayed a failure in securing the traditional expectations of men in many Kenyan communities, which historically positioned the male offspring as support of the family –immediate and extended. In this context, investment on male heirs was a reasonable thing to do only if it paid off the expected dividends. Interviews with parents as will be noted later on in this paper expounded on observations of neglect sons neglecting their families after benefiting from their investment in their schooling, thus putting the value of formal schooling for boys on the spotlight and by extension the mission for EFA.

Most of the teachers in the participating schools unanimously shared in the observation that societal expectations was waning with regard to the boy child as a future successful male capable of supporting not only his own family but also his parents. This changing perception of male status was a dominant theme among the teachers and head teachers with one of the teachers in Kirinyaga directing blame towards the parents and the society. He argued that the increasing disconnect between schooling of boys emanated from socio-cultural dynamics outside the school as an institution whereby available

successful masculinities were inconsistent with schooling. The FGD excerpt FGD below captures his remarks:

It is the way the society views at home. At home, we are having men. They are not doing their duties so these boys have got nobody to look up to (Kirinyaga Central-teachers FGD)

However, as Tony Sewell (1997) observed in his study of African Caribbean boys, exclusion in schooling may emerge from conflicts between the boys and their teachers within institutional contexts and hence, interrogating weaknesses within the school that disfavour boys is of critical importance. In Nairobi, for example, one female school administrator expressed the view that schools were indeed failing the boys in their construction of masculinities. She explained the holistic obligation of teachers, saying:

We should continue concentrating on this side (of girls) but also *bring the other (the boys) on board so that we can have (equality for) boys and girls...* because I tend to think maybe we concentrate on the girl so much but you find that our girls will not have any men to marry them. Later on, you have these same (unschooled) men who will marry them (female deputy head teacher, Nairobi... *emphasis added*).

Role modelling was yet another theme that emerged. In almost all the schools, male role models were described as clearly lacking. Firstly, distribution of the female teaching workforce raised questions even to the male school administrators whose expressed perceptions clearly indicated that they believed the boys apparently lacked male figureheads in the schools. They argued that male teachers in the school needed to be empowered with skills on how to guide and counsel boys on matters of schooling as well as on matters of becoming men in the same way as female teachers did with the girls especially in preparing them for womanhood. It is therefore logical to assume that many of the boys may have felt socially inadequate or frustrated with the way schools failed to address explicitly their needs in a holistic manner. One of the Kirinyaga County head teachers expounded on this matter as he reflected on relevant historical milestones for his school:

When I came to this school, incidentally I was the only man out of 20 teachers ... 19 were ladies and I felt there was a lot of imbalance. So, I kept on asking the DEO (District Education Officer) to post a few men here so that my boys... the men teachers can also be good role models to the boys. The DEO has done a lot because out of the one, we are now four male teachers and the ladies are quite many. But one thing that makes me happy is that ladies are good workers despite many, many other problems (they encounter).

### **Mothers and fathers' perceptions on construction of masculinities through schooling**

Many mothers in both Nairobi and Kirinyaga expressed value in investing in both girls and boys equally. However, they also were categorical that they had lost faith in

investing in boys' education specifically because they had noted that boys failed to support their families when they matured into men. One mother in an FGD was quick to explain how boys were greatly disadvantaged in schooling when family finances were scarce. This view, as exemplified in the excerpt below, was reverberated almost unanimously in all FGDs with parents.

(...) you know us parents discourage our children... if I have a boy who is in primary, then I tell him, if he gets to class 8, I won't have money to take him to secondary school...this affects the boy so much that he begins thinking of other worldly things" (Kasarani, Mothers FGD),

In this context, Angela Phillips (1993) captured the dilemma in the lives of both girls and boys as constructed their gendered identities differently. Of importance to this discussion is the observation that:

For a boy, the way ahead is not so simple. He learns that the person who leaves (if he has a resident father) is the person he will be like. He is not going to grow up to be like Mummy. (...). For the boy, it is a moment of uncertainty. Even in families in which both parents go out to work, the mother is, almost always, the biggest and most important person in his universe but he will never be like her. (...). He is going to grow up to be a man and from the moment he discovers this difference, the search is on to discover the element of masculinity (Phillips, 1993: 42-3).

#### *Male child labour, social entertainment and schooling: Making choices*

In both Nairobi and Kirinyaga, teachers and parents concurred that boys had more distracters from schooling compared to the girls. While Nairobi boys appeared to be attracted by daily entertainment places where they could watch daytime videos or play a game of pool, the Kirinyaga boys were attracted by both entertainment and increased child labour opportunities through which they could earn ready money by working as casual labourers in the transport industry, farming, and farm trade. According to one father from Kirinyaga:

Rice farming and selling are the main businesses in Mwea District and it takes control of boy child. If the boy is sent away from school for any reason, he knows he can easily be employed in the rice paddies. Some boys also hire farm plots and, if sent away from school, they just leave and usually would not resume learning. Other boys find it more beneficial to get employed in the farms by these rice tycoons and when they get a taste the payment, the value of going to school evaporates... I mean... why then would the boy want to be in school when he knows that eventually it is the money he earns that counts; yet he can earn without any formal education. You see... this is what brings about problems for boys [Parent's FGD, Kirinyaga).

Like the English boys that Paul Willis (1977) studied, it was clear that learning to labour for the boys in our study was the most promising route to their destiny as successful future men. Both the parents and the teachers were agreeable that rice farming presented high competition for boys' labour since they were readily available, willing and capable, compared to the girls who were closely protected from leaving school both at family and school. Farmers also perceived boys as relatively more effective in bending their backs for longer hours without seeking a rest while planting rice in the paddies for longer hours compared to adult labourers. This practice may have contributed to the boys reported considerable and notable dis-interest in schooling as the viable pathway to becoming successful adults, and more so, economically successful men compared to economically poor but schooled men. In Nairobi County, on the other hand, teachers reported that they had little control if any, on the activities in which the boys (or even girls) engaged outside the school. These would include motorbike taxis and donkey cart water ferrying business.



Acquiring the “cool pose” of a boda-boda motorbike rider –a marker of masculinity



The potential for boys owning donkeys for water vending as income generating activity

Further, some of the male parents in Nairobi's peri-urban setting agreed that they (parents) were to blame for discriminating against boys in ways that made the latter disillusioned with schooling. One of the fathers argued that parents who did not support boys as much as they did for girls especially with regard to motivating them with schooling were considered as the major contributors to poor performance and low transition rates to higher classes. The Nairobi father said:

The boys really feel they are discriminated at home because when parents are shopping, they give more preference to the girl. But when the boys also demand to be considered, they are told to shut up; they are not girls (...) What we as parents don't realize is these boys have brains and they can see how we are segregating them at home...so he decides to look for other means to provide for himself. (Peri-

urban Nairobi school, FGD-Father)

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings guided by the two study objectives presented in this paper, the perceptions of parents and teachers, the researchers deduced four main conclusions and related recommendations.

**Firstly**, the general perception of both male and female parents that schooling was becoming less explicitly supportive of boys' pathways to becoming successful men in their communities was an important theme that diverted interest away from the project of schooling for their sons. Considering the relatively small study scope from which these findings emerged, the researchers recommends a replication of this study in similar education context covering more counties with the aim of establishing the veracity of the spread of such perceptions which may affect the commitments made to accord the right of education to every child without discrimination by gender or otherwise.

**Secondly**, the study findings suggest two main factors that did not favour schooling of boys in the context of constructing successful masculinities. These include the yearning for material and economic wealth as the coveted means for defining successful masculinities. A yearning for leisure and easy life of consumption that would be attained apparently more effectively outside the academic regimes of classrooms and schools which seems designed in favour of girls. The study recommends that schools in the two counties employ rights-based perspectives that would guide teachers and parents in giving meaning and value in gender sensitive and responsive ways that would instil hope equally among the boys and girls in the spirit of EFA beyond Year 2015.

**Thirdly**, the findings that boys were often left to fend for themselves at family level means that parents did not offer the desired support at home for boys, thus driving them to seek economic independence at an earlier age at the expense of their formal education. Early exit from schooling, which was found to be rampant among the boys, indicates education wastage, which is inconsistent with the spirit of ensuring gender equality within and through the educational process. Such observations necessarily call for renewed focus on the role of families working in collaboration with schools as part of community practice in supporting their sons to navigate the route to successful adulthood by embracing schooling.

**Finally**, because of the apparent scarcity of successful male role models in the research locales who would positively be identified with school-based successes, the study recommended that schools could invite the few available successful male figures whose schooling outcomes have shaped their adulthood and careers to offer motivational talks to the boys. By sharing their lived experiences, such men could help in demonstrating the limitless models of successful masculinities that have been shaped through formal education, thus providing impetus for acceleration to the attainment of EFA goals beyond 2015.

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