

## Rural Girls' Educational Challenges in Tanzania: A Case Study of Matrilineal Society

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**Abstract:** This study investigated Rural Girls' Educational Challenges in Tanzania particularly the matrilineal society (Luguru) where women hold very influential positions in terms of property rights influencing their daily lives. Therefore, the study examined the influence matrilineal system in girls' education. Data were collected using a checklist and questionnaires supported by personal observation and formal discussion with key informants. The study was based in four schools randomly selected out of 13 secondary schools in the study area by 2006. It involved 116 respondents (80 students, 32 teachers and four school administrators). Surprisingly, findings shows that although, the number of rural girls who are enrolled in secondary schools is increasing in the study area the risk of them to drop out asserted to be high than boys. Pregnancy, early marriage and truancy noted to be the contributing factors. Again girls were mostly engaged in domestic chores thus eroding their study time. In addition, hostels, distance and transport status were other prominent educational challenges facing both rural girls and boys as well. The study provides also analytical findings on the influence of women in Luguru society (matrilineal system) in educating female students since women in this society have strong authority in terms of inheritance compared to those in patrilineal system.

**Key words:** Rural girls, educational challenges, matrilineal, Morogoro Rural District, influential position

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### INTRODUCTION

Equity is cited as one of the major challenges facing educational development. It is taken to refer the disadvantaged groups including the rural poor, street and working children as well as gender imbalance. Women in Africa have very limited access to educational opportunities. A number of studies have indicated the small percentage of girls who receive formal education at primary, secondary and post-secondary levels in Africa (Adams and Kruppenbach, 1987). Prior to independence, access to basic education in Tanzania was dismal, with wide inequities in terms of race, religion and gender. Many primary schools had been established by Christian missionaries. In 1947, <10% of the school-age population was enrolled in primary school. The abolition of primary school fees in 1973 removed that impediment to schooling and Education Act number 25 of 1978 made enrolment and attendance of boys and girls in primary school compulsory. All villages in Tanzania have at least one primary school and girls make up 49.3% of the student population (Karen, 2003).

At the secondary level before independence <1% of the school-age population was enrolled and no females

had ever progressed beyond the primary level. Following economic liberalization in 1985, many primary leavers in Tanzania found no jobs or decent living in the rural areas and were flocking into urban areas but without the requisite knowledge and skills to survive in a liberalized market economy. Their competitiveness in the middle and lower labour market was too low compared to that of their counterparts in neighbouring countries. The response to secondary school took chances after that error but really the expansion of secondary level became a priority since 1961. The transition to secondary school is around 20%, but the gender gap is still large, partly due to very low performance of girls in primary school leaving examinations. Still the few who manage to enter these schools face different educational challenges including dropout due to the extreme poverty in both rural and urban communities in Tanzania (Evans, 2002; IOB Evaluations, 2004).

According to UNGEI (2005) report, girls' education has been a priority in most of the developing countries including Tanzania. Responding on Tanzania girls' education condition, The United Nations Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI) was launched in Tanzania in November 2002. In collaboration with Forum for African Women

Educationalist (FAWE) Tanzania, United Nations Children and Education Fund (UNICEF) supported a national forum which was convened in November 2004 to build partnerships in Tanzania and propose modalities for future implementation of girls' education strategies. The United Republic of Tanzania supports girls' education in many of her districts including Morogoro Rural District through Girls Secondary Education Support (GSES). The programme was initiated to efficiently increase investment in human capital in order to raise income and to reduce inequality in the society. Despite of the initiatives highlighted the proportion of girls attending school in Morogoro Rural District is slightly higher than that of boys for all ages up to 14 years. However, people from age 15 reported to have no formal education is 65% for women but only 35% for men (Mswia *et al.*, 2005). This situation presupposes that the pace of transition to secondary schools is low for girls in the district. Lifanda (2005) identifies some of the main obstacles to be socio-cultural and religious practices; availability of water hygiene and sanitation, financing education, pregnancy, relevance of education programmes, distance from school and lack of security.

The objective of this study was to investigate Rural Girls' Educational Challenges in Tanzania particularly the matrilineal society (Luguru). The Wa-Luguru people in Morogoro Rural District are amongst the few remaining matrilineal societies in Africa and Tanzania as well. Though the market economy is right to be accessed, the peasant way of life is still dominant. In this society, women hold very influential positions in terms of property rights influencing their daily lives. It is not surprising therefore that traditionally girls are preferred to boys (Hamdani, 2006). Therefore, this study aimed at looking the influence matrilineal system in girls' education.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Research design:** A cross-sectional research design was used in this study. The design was used on the basis that, it allows collection of data from different groups of respondents at one time (Singleton *et al.*, 1993). Data collected were used for simple statistical description, interpretation and determination of the relationship between different variables.

**Sampling procedure**

**Population and sample size of the study:** A simple random sampling procedure was applied to obtain schools and respondents in this study. Out of 13 secondary schools found in Morogoro Rural District the sample consisted of four schools namely; Matombo, Nelson Mandela, Mkuyuni and Kiroka (Table 1) from which three groups of respondents were drawn, that is male and female students and their teachers. The first two were for comparison purposes and teachers for providing clarification on issues why for example there are any differences. A total of 80 students, 32 teachers and four school administrators (key informants) were interviewed. Names of the selected students and teachers were obtained from school registers. From each school 20 students interviewed, that is ten boys and ten girls. Also, eight teachers were interviewed, that is four males and four females.

**Method of data collection:** This study involved several data collection methods; both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. Quantitative data was obtained through interviews while qualitative technique was utilized for collection of data through key informants' discussion. The application of more than one instrument in data collection was useful in the sense that it provided checks and balances as regards to shortfalls characterized by each of the data gathering instrument. Data were gathered from both secondary and primary sources. Quantitative and primary data were gathered using questionnaires while qualitative data was being collected by direct observation and face to face interviews. Secondary data obtained from existing information/sutdy, published and unpublished reports. This included different reports from Morogoro regional education office, Research on Poverty Alleviation (REPOA), research reports from various institutions and non-governmental organizations dealing with education.

**Data processing and analysis:** The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 12 computer software was used in analyzing data. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze data so as to find for sample means for studied variables. Multiple responses used to analyze all open ended questions in the study. The collected data was first

Table 1: Respondents selected according to the surveyed secondary schools

School name	Total number of teachers			Total selected			Total number of students			Total selected		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Kiroka	5	5	10	4	4	8	46	26	72	10	10	20
Matombo	5	8	13	4	4	8	195	168	363	10	10	20
Mkuyuni	9	6	15	4	4	8	191	156	347	10	10	20
Nelson Mandela	14	12	26	4	4	8	199	163	362	10	10	20
Total	33	31	64	16	16	32	631	513	1 144	40	40	80

classified into meaningful categories, in addition, were assigned numerals/codes to assist in the analysis. After the analysis research findings were put in categories based on the research objectives. Presentation is done through the use of tables and figures. The components of verbal discussion with key informants were analyzed in detail using content analysis method. In this way, the content of the interviews was subdivided into smallest meaningful information. This capacitated the study in ascertaining values and attitudes of respondents.

**Reliability and validity of methods:** To test validity and reliability of methods for data collection, pre-testing of the questionnaire was done before actual collection to determine their clarity and relevance to the objective of the study. Pre-testing was done purposely to control the quality of questionnaire and the information obtained through them. The revised version of the questionnaire that was used in the study was translated in Kiswahili. The questionnaires for pre-testing were administered to twelve respondents drawn from the schools that were in the survey prior to the commencement of the study. Those respondents had similar characteristics as the respondents included in the main survey. The questionnaires were modified to incorporate lessons drawn from the pre-testing. All the respondents, who were involved in the pre-testing were excluded from the sample.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Residence and ethnicity:** Residence and ethnicity in this study was considered as a background variable. Students in the surveyed area were requested to mention their parent's current residence as well as where they reside during the holidays. The study finds that the majority (71.3%) of the parents were living in Morogoro rural, Morogoro town (17.5%) and outside Morogoro region (11.3%). It is observed that more than half of the parents who had students in the surveyed secondary schools were staying in Morogoro rural. The findings in Table 2 shows the majority (44 students) of the students interviewed were Luguru and other (36 students) were from different groups. The result shows that the Luguru groups accounted for more than half (44 students) of all (80) students interviewed. The population therefore provides a basis of generalization in the study area. Table 2 also, indicates that all 40 male students are day students, followed by 29 day female students while fewer (11) female students were boarders (hostel). The significant observation is that a bigger number of students resided outside school environment after school hours. This implies the lack of hostel service in the

Table 2: Residence and ethnicity of respondents (students)

Parameters	Count (N = 80)		Total
	Male	Female	
<b>Residence</b>			
Days	40	29	69
Boarding	0	11	11
Sub total	-	-	80
<b>Ethnicity</b>			
Luguru	23	21	44
Others	17	19	36
Sub total	-	-	80

surveyed schools. Out four secondary schools surveyed only one school (Matombo) had hostel service, which accommodated 80 girls and the rest 283 students were residing outside school as reported by a respondent (Acting Academic Master) at Matombo Secondary School. Commenting on this same point, he said that the need of hostel services is a fact, which cannot be denied in these newly established ward secondary schools taking into consideration that they are situated in remote and where there are no educational supportive shelters near schools. From only two secondary schools namely, Milengwelengwe and Selembara out of 13 secondary schools in Morogoro Rural District reported to have hostel services.

**Educational challenges in secondary schools:** According to Lewin and Caillods (2001) in all educational systems, secondary education holds a middle position between primary and tertiary sectors in terms of structure and content. As a result this subsystem, therefore, holds responsibilities of enlightening people for further studies and at the same time creating skills for job opportunities to them. In fact, society insists more and more that secondary education be, at the same time, job oriented such that, producing school leavers who are functionally ready for research, as well as preparing students for higher education. But, the educational environment do not favour, the purpose as a result the majority of students especially girls dropout schools.

Respondents in the area of study were asked if school dropout rate of female students is higher than that of male students in secondary schools (Table 3). It was found that the majority of teachers (90.6%) and students (87.5%) confirmed that it is true and few teachers (9.4%) and students (12.5%) rejected. This indicates that there was a high risk of girls to dropout of schools than boys in the surveyed secondary schools. This is also supported by teachers when they were asked between boys and girls who were more likely to drop out of schools and results revealed that, 65.6% of the respondents said girls mainly, both (31.3%) and the least (3.1%) said boys mainly. The findings agree with Mensch *et al.* (1999) who asserted that the proportion of children out of school is greater to

Table 3: Educational challenges

Parameters	Teachers % (N = 32)		Students % (N = 80)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
There is high dropout rate of female students than male	90.6	9.4	87.5	12.5
Female students do not perform better like males in final examinations	87.5	12.5	76.3	23.8
Female students utilize their academic time apart from learning than male	90.6	9.4	56.3	43.8
Female students are more likely to be affected by the impact of HIV/AIDS	78.1	21.9	66.3	33.8
There exist more negative attitude toward natural science subjects in female students than male students	90.6	9.4	63.8	36.3
High demand of new technology and emerging areas of interests to female students	75.0	25.0	51.3	48.8
Female students population increases markedly in secondary education	43.8	56.3	58.8	41.3
Female students special programs like Girls Secondary Education Support (GSES) are fairly provided	34.4	65.6	62.5	37.5
Female students freedom of expression increases	78.1	21.9	70.0	30.0
The use of male oriented language and male image in teaching materials	68.8	31.3	41.3	58.8

girls than boys in rural areas due to the insufficient development of roads, transportation and long distance to school.

Pregnancy, performance, mismanagement of academic time and truancy are some of the factors influencing higher dropout rates among female students in secondary schools. This is observed in response to the question asked to teachers, if truancy was a serious problem between boys and girls. The study indicated that girls mainly (43.8%), both (43.8%) and who said boys only were 12.5%. This shows that there was a high rate of girls who missed classes in the surveyed schools compared to boys. In examining, who performs better between boys and girls the majority (93.8%) of the respondents (teachers) said boys and the least (6.3%) said girls. This indicates that boys do better than girls in their formal examinations compared to girls. As Masanja (2007) in discussing the most influential factors for the under representation of females in natural science subjects is due to the low participation rates of female students in advanced courses and lower performance levels in examinations.

This study also looked into marriage and pregnancy before completion of school. The majority of teachers (43.8%) and students (36.3%) showed that the problem exist in the surveyed area. This shows that many female students were vulnerable to drop out of school due to pregnancy. It is reported by Oxaal (1997) that pregnancy disrupts girls' schooling and in many countries girls are automatically expelled from school if pregnant. Again the study adds that girls from poor households may also be more likely to engage in sexual survival strategies to secure support for their schooling in turn risking pregnancy and the curtailment of the education.

Information on who utilizes more academic time on other works instead of learning or doing homework between female and male students indicates that girls academic time misused (90.6%) than boys (9.4%) as presented in Table 3. This indicates that girls' time in the surveyed schools was mostly used for other duties apart from academics. The costs of education to households especially in rural areas affect both the enrolment and the

dropout rates. Even, when girls are attending school they are still required to help with household chores, which can hamper their achievement in school and thus their possibility of continuing in education. Unforeseen incidents such as the illness of a household member can mean that daughters are required to drop out of school (Oxaal, 1997). This observation agrees with the findings in this study when both students were asked to respond on the question if cooking or fetching water a problem to girls' education. The majority of teachers (36.9%) and about 42.5% students confirmed it was a very big problem while those who said that it is never a big problem were 15.6% teachers and 20.5% students.

As presented in Table 4 respondents were asked to mention other educational challenges. The majority of the respondents (37.5%) revealed that the need of hostel service as one of the educational challenges to be considered in the study area, need of self confidence (23.2%), female students to avoid sexual relationship (17.9%) and cultural barriers (21.4%). This shows that the lack of hostel service dominated among the challenges mentioned. It implies that accommodation was a serious problem and could have many effects to students particularly girls one being lack of conducive area since the three out of four secondary schools located in remote areas where there was no electricity. Accommodation around these schools was not appropriate for academic work. The implication is that the effort of the government in establishing community (ward) based secondary schools was positively implemented and this could help to enrol many girls who were previously not accepted to join far secondary schools from their home as indicated by one key informant from Kiroka Secondary School. But still their learning environment is not accommodative to both girls and boys students.

**Responsibility of paying school fees:** Although, in matrilineal societies community public power is also vested in men (maternal uncles, brothers and sometimes sons of women) (Brydon and Chant, 1989), information on who pays school fees in this study (Table 5) indicates that fathers mentioned to have paid school fees more than

Table 4: Other educational challenges

Parameters	Teacher % (N = 32)	Student % (N = 80)	Overall (N = 112)
Need of hostel service	40.4	36.3	37.5
Need of self confidence	28.1	21.3	23.2
Avoid sexual relationship	9.4	21.3	17.9
Cultural barriers	21.9	21.3	21.4

Data set were based on multiple responses

Table 5: Responsibility of paying school fees (N = 80)

Response	Male		Female	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Father	13	32.5	22	55.0
Mother	11	27.5	2	5.0
Guardians	9	22.5	6	15.0
Government of Tanzania	2	5.0	3	7.5
Both parents	5	12.5	7	17.5

mothers. Data point out that fathers paid to 22 female students and 13 male students, while mothers paid to 11 boys and two girls; followed by guardians who paid to nine boys and six girls; both parents (five boys and seven girls) and lastly the government of Tanzania (two boys and three girls) in the study population. This indicates that fathers accounted for more than half of the total school fees payers to female students. It was expected that mothers who have influence in terms of inheritance among Luguru to pay school fees for their daughters.

### CONCLUSION

This study pointed out that many rural girls are enrolled at secondary schools but are more likely to dropout school compared to boys. Girls reported mostly to engage in domestic chores soon after classes than fellow male students. The risk of dropouts in schools indicated to be high to girls due to pregnancies, failure in national examinations and truancy (such that to look for sick persons). Another challenge observed was the poor quality of learning environment.

The schools lacked libraries, means of transport, electricity, clean water and hostels. Lack of hostels made students to walk long distances for accommodations. The situation reported to affect girls in the sense that many of them were at risk of sexual harassment when on way to home and in their shelters too. Therefore, despite a range of interventions and policy changes aimed at improving the education of rural girls in the country (Tanzania) still there are obstacles persists that hinders to further rural girls' progress in education as identified in this study. The study also concludes that the influence of women in Luguru society (matrilineal system) in educating female students was slight rather than the fact that women have strong influence in terms of inheritance compared to those in patrilineal system. It was male

parents reported to take care of academic issues such as paying school fees and the educational development.

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