

## ABSTRACT

Dissertation Title : UNIVERSITY GOING IN CONTEXT: A  
CASE OF GUSII STUDENTS OF  
SOUTHWESTERN KENYA

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The main objective of this qualitative ethnographic case study is to ascertain the level of awareness and preparedness among high school students in Gusiiland, Southwestern Kenya, for university education opportunities and possibilities. Through an in-depth interviewing process, a purposive sample of twelve students and four focus groups were conducted in four Gusii high schools to capture students' perceptions and conceptions of the university going process. In addition, twelve parents and eight teachers participated in the study. The data were analyzed to identify a set of ideas, issues and themes from all the participants.

Also, data from each target student were analyzed as case study, and later a cross-case analysis was undertaken to refine data across participants and schools. Utilizing the theories of social capital, cultural capital and human capital, this study explores the role of the family, school and community in the preparation of students' university going within their socio-cultural environment. Structural inequality in the distribution of educational resources, rigidity of the curriculum and overemphasis on examinations, extreme poverty and local politics emerged as some the barriers to

university pathway for Gusii high school students. To overcome these impediments, students adopted unique strategies characterized by strict study schedule, group networks and holiday tuition to gain entry into university.

This research contributes original material on the university going process in Kenya and hopes to shed light for future research in this hitherto unexplored academic area. Finding out what students know about higher education including their plans on how to pay for their university costs is worthwhile in helping Kenyan policy makers and scholars in understanding the needs of prospective undergraduate students entering Kenyan universities.

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OF SOUTHWESTERN KENYA

By

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother Esther Kerubo Moreri for many years of love, support and encouragement. Mama, it is a blessing to have you in my life, you are my hero. Tiba Omonene Nyasae akorende botambe. To my husband Charles Choti who has been a source of motivation and constant love. To my children, Jeff, Martin and Naomi, upon whom falls the mantle to continue with the love of learning.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background**

In the recent years, the Kenyan government has engaged in a series of reform policies aimed at increasing the total number of places and proportion of students in public higher education institutions (Johnstone, 2003; Oketch, 2003; Sanyal & Martin, 1998). However, reforms in higher education are unlikely to make any significant change in isolation of primary and secondary education levels, because disparities in public higher education institutions are a reflection of the inequalities in the lower levels of education in terms of resource distribution. The existence of differential participation in higher education based on class, gender, ethnic and regional boundaries, calls for a scholarly study to explore students' conceptualization of higher education opportunity and their involvement in the university going process within their socio-cultural milieu. The study's findings will inform and inspire policy makers and educators in enacting policies that will provide adequate preparation for aspiring university students, especially those from low income and underrepresented groups.

The present study seeks to establish the level of preparedness and aspiration for higher education among Gusii high school students. For the past two decades, fewer students from Gusii schools do qualify for university entry as compared to other ethnic groups of a comparable population size. In addition, Gusii high schools rarely feature among the top 100 schools in national rankings based on performance in the KSCE national examinations. For example, in 2006 a total of 20,199 candidates sat for the KSCE from Gusii schools and only 3.6 percent of these students

qualified for university entry. Moreover, Gucha district, one of the three Gusii districts with 170 high schools had only 84 students who joined public universities while Starehe Boys Center, a high school in Nairobi province, had more than 202 students qualifying for university admission in the same year. Although no scholarly research has been undertaken to understand why fewer students from Gusii high schools qualify for public higher education, calls to increase the number of Gusii students joining universities has been growing, especially during the 2007 general election campaigns.

Indeed, access to higher education is a fundamental human right irrespective of the distinguishing characteristics that make people different. The 1998 UNESCO declaration concerning access to higher education institutions clearly stipulates:

Admission to higher education should be based on the merit, capacity, efforts, perseverance and devotion, shown by those seeking access to it, and can take place in the lifelong scheme, at any time, with due recognition of previously acquired skills. As a consequence, no discrimination can be accepted in granting access to higher education on grounds of race, gender, language or religion, or economic, cultural or social distinctions, or physical disabilities (UNESCO, 1998, Article 3).

In the past few decades, higher education participation rates have improved worldwide. It was projected that by 2015 there will be 97 million students enrolled in higher education, half of whom will be in the developing countries (World Bank, 2002). Yet, by 2005 the global higher education enrollment had surpassed that projection to reach 110 million students and it is now expected that the milestone of 120 million enrollment will be reached by 2010 (Daniel, 2007). While there has been this rapid expansion of higher education opportunities, stratification of higher education in the wider society continues to be evident (Shavit, Arum & Gamoran,

2007). Kenya is no exception in the rising higher education enrollment and the persistently inherent stratification. The total undergraduate student population rose from 570 students in 1963 to over 92,000 students in 2005. Yet, access is very restricted, with only 5 percent net enrollment.

In order to overcome the impact of colonial rule and spur development, Kenya's secondary education became an organized formula for preparing young people to effectively participate in societal activities. Education equipped them with relevant skills, knowledge, public mannerisms and rules of behavior, and competencies for their personal mobility and social advancement. From the government's point of view, education was meant to

foster and promote national unity, prepare and equip the youth with skills to play an effective role in nation building...to ensure opportunities for the full development of their talents and personality and to assist in the promotion of social equality and training in obligations and responsibilities (Court & Ghai, 1974 p.19).

Education disparities prevalent in Kenya are a result of a combination of factors, including gender, class, regionalism, ethnicity, nepotism, and corruption. The distribution of education resources has been historically skewed. As part of the British colonial legacy, Kenya's education system is fundamentally elitist. Formal education was launched in colonial Kenya in the early nineteenth century by white Christian missionaries, with the support of colonial officials, to evangelize and "civilize" the local people. In addition, the British colonial government supported education for locals in order to facilitate colonial administration and bring social change (Ajayi, Goma, & Johnson, 1996).

Although access to higher education has been expanded, many groups are still underrepresented, and the Kenyan university education continues to remain elitist (Eshiwani, 1993). Access to Kenyan public universities is based on competitive national examinations. However, a part from individual ability and effort, performance in the national examinations is dependent on geographical location, upper primary schooling and secondary school characteristics. In particular, in a “contest” type system of education such as in Kenya, rural and low income students are highly disadvantaged.

There is no doubt higher education expansion is critical to the country’s national development. According to UNESCO (2000), the expansion of higher education can spur economic development and position a country favorably in the competitive global economy. Kenya needs to compete in the global economy, and greater numbers of students attaining higher education could translate into the generation of knowledge and technological advancement, key ingredients for a competitive economy. Hence, the link between university education and economic development makes access to higher education a matter of national concern.

University education, according to Kofi Annan, the former UN Secretary General,

must become a primary tool for Africa’s development in the new century, [it] can help develop African expertise; [it] can enhance the analysis of African problems; strengthen domestic institutions; serve as a model environment for the practice of good governance, conflict resolution and respect for human rights, and enable African academics to play an active part in the global community of scholars (UNIS, 2000).

From a student and family’s perspective, university education is a source of upward mobility, especially in a society that is characterized by widened socio-



economic inequality (Society for International Development, 2007). By sending their sons and daughters to the university, Kenyan families aspire for recognition and privilege in society while others hope to escape from the chains of poverty. Most importantly, university students assume a higher social status upon getting a university degree. Higher education provides students with a competitive advantage to get desirable social positions, including career mobility (UNESCO, 1998). Thus, the students' desire to get better jobs, lead better lives and uplift their families motivates them to compete in the national examinations in a bid to secure university admission.

## **1.2 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to understand the level of awareness and preparedness among high school students in Gusiiland, Kenya, on university education opportunities and possibilities through their own perceptions and expressed aspirations. The study aims to generate knowledge on what high school students know about higher education participation in terms of opportunity and accessibility, and what they are doing to meet the requirements for university admission such as qualifying examinations and financial arrangements. Prior research has shown that students develop university going aspirations based on their family's socio-economic background and school characteristics (McDonough, 1997). Utilizing theories of capital (economic, cultural and social) this ethnographic case study explores the role of the family, school and community in the preparation of students' university going.

This study seeks to understand how Gusii students are socialized to understand higher education opportunity and how they are engaged in the university going process within their socio-cultural context. Given the existence of differential participation in higher education based on gender, ethnic and regional boundaries, this study aims to explore the potential relationship between socio-cultural environment, familial influences, educational and social experiences, and politics on how these students transition into university. This new knowledge becomes an impetus to guide policy makers and educators in enacting policies that will promote gender and regional equity in higher education. This research contributes original material on the university going process in Kenya and hopes to shed light for future research in this hitherto unexplored academic area. Finding out what students know about higher education including their plans on how to pay for their university costs is worthwhile in helping policy makers and scholars in understanding the needs of prospective undergraduate students entering universities

### **1.3 The Scope of the Problem**

In Kenya, even as higher education remains a significant ingredient to the socio-economic development, maintaining and expanding public higher education to ensure equal access is a big challenge. There exists a wide disparity in higher education participation that is based on class, gender, ethnicity and regionalism. For example, a recent study on the experiences of women in Kenyan public universities showed the existence of gender inequities in enrollment patterns, where women students constitute 30 percent of the total student population (Choti, 2004). Apart

from the affirmative action policy introduced by the universities' Joint Admission Board (JAB) in 1993 to give female students one point advantage on admission, little has been done in terms of policy formulation to address the glaring gender inequalities in Kenya's public universities. Furthermore, there are no specific policies or programs that target students from disadvantaged backgrounds and sensitize them about higher education at secondary school level, a time when they are expected to make decisions about higher education participation.

The problem of unequal distribution of education opportunity is widely acknowledged, although not much has been done to address the issue. For example, a government committee, working on a proposal to establish a second public university wrote:

[I]t is now recognized that while some areas of the nation are well served in terms of primary and secondary schools, and so have had the possibility of greater access to university education, there are some sections of the nation, particularly in arid and semi arid areas which have been at a disadvantage in terms of access to education. Attention is now being focused on ways by which such imbalances may be redressed. Also those groups which traditionally did not seek out educational opportunities now have begun to appreciate the need to enroll their sons and daughters. All these things will surely increase public demand for more post-secondary and university education in the country (Kenya, 1981, p.1).

Although the recommendation led to the establishment of a second university in 1984, little has been done to address the issue of unequal distribution of public education opportunities. Moreover, little research, if any, exists that focuses on how students engage in the university going process within the Kenyan context. Secondary school education is a critical transition point for students in Kenya. Each year, Form four (12<sup>th</sup> grade) students compete in the national examinations to secure places in public higher education. Usually, only around 5 percent make it out of more

than 300,000 candidates. Many of the drop outs move to towns in search of the perennially elusive jobs. Others join tertiary colleges, polytechnics, institutes, and other commercial and professional colleges. Further, a good number of these students repeat the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, to position themselves for the following year's examination with the hope of doing better. In this contest type of education system, Kenyan higher education has remained exclusively for males from the middle and upper social economic backgrounds (Eshiwani, 1993).

Higher education institutions have attempted to address equity in the distribution of educational opportunities using different mechanisms. For example, through compensatory education policies and programs, universities seek to provide equal educational opportunities for low socioeconomic and disadvantaged groups of people who would otherwise not have had the opportunity for university education. The overriding concern has been to compensate for unequal secondary school education experience, through the introduction of affirmative action that ensures that female students have opportunity for a university education.

Provision of higher education opportunities for the disadvantaged groups is essential in an attempt to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor in society. Given the knowledge based economy and the demand for higher productivity, university education is becoming a basic right. Moreover, for the purpose of overcoming the tendency towards social reproduction of inequality, a democratic higher education geared to providing social mobility is necessary.

## **1.4 Conceptual Framework**

Scholarship on access to higher education opportunity identifies interplay of the structural and individual characteristics that shape differential education participation. For the Kenyan education system, socio-economic, cultural and political and geographic factors influence higher education access. In the Gusii context, the university going process is socially and culturally mediated as well as psychologically enacted by individual students within the structures and location of their secondary schools. Additionally, university going is a learning and socialization process, and students learn to adapt to the process based on the individual and structural characteristics within their socio-cultural environment.

In creating an understanding of how Gusii high school students conceptualize and aspire for higher education opportunity and how they are engaged in the university going process, this study utilizes a conceptual framework of university going developed by Perna (2006). Perna's model incorporates human capital, social capital and cultural capital theoretical frameworks. In particular, her model highlights the interplay of a student's background characteristics such as socio-economic status, ethnicity and gender; and human capital that includes student's academic preparation and performance; social capital such as parental involvement, cultural capital such as parental education; and financial resources that include tuition and financial aid in shaping student's understanding of higher education opportunity.

The theories of capital contend that students construct their postsecondary education opportunities based on their family, school and community contexts and the interconnectedness of these three environments enable or constrain students'

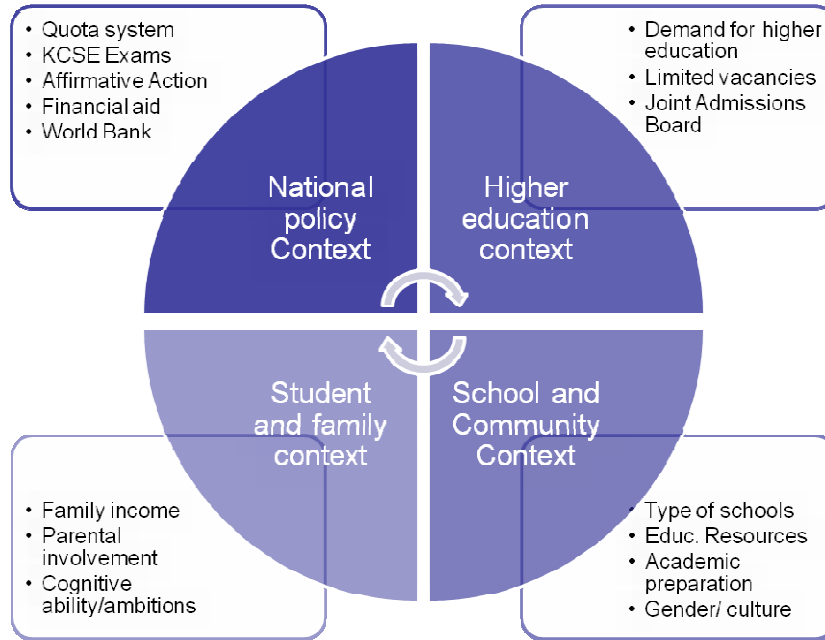
postsecondary opportunities. From a human capital perspective, students and their families invest in higher education based on expected future benefits. Cultural capital, acquired from the family, school and the community, offers students needed advantages to maximize their educational choices and transition to university. Through a network of exchanges derived from the acquisition of social capital, students access valuable information regarding higher education opportunity. Therefore, a comprehensive approach that integrates the various perspectives from human capital, social capital and cultural capital is needed. In trying to create a socio-cultural understanding of university going among Gusii students of Southwestern Kenya, I theorize that students' construction of university going knowledge is based on their interaction with the social and cultural environment.

In addition to Perna (2006) model, this study adds a new concept to university going process, that university going is a socialization process, in which students process information regarding university going based on their socio-cultural context. A multi-perspective approach to university going needs to investigate the interplay of economic, political and social factors that shape students' understanding of higher education opportunity. Indeed, the level of understanding and the intensity at which students are engaged in the university going process is the focus of this study. The layers of environmental context that influence student's higher education aspirations and decision making are used to frame this study. In particular, this study explores how the school, community, public policy and family contexts influence student's university going.

Perna's model advances the understanding of university going by integrating both human capital theory with sociological theories of social and cultural capital and by nesting student decisions within the several layers of context. According to Perna (2006), a student navigates the university going process within the four contexts. The socio-economic and policy contexts, the higher education context, the school and community context interact with each other to influence the family context within which a student's decision making concerning higher education participation takes place. Given these contexts in Perna's model, it is worthy exploring how and to what extent each of the contexts contributes to Kenyan students' conceptualization of higher education opportunity.

Perna's model assumes that the influences on university going as fixed impacts with little insight on the process by which these influences operate. A refinement of this model is needed to show how students internalize these contexts, especially in upper primary and high school years, a period when they are intensely involved in the university going process, through academic preparation, taking qualifying examinations and selecting programs and universities to attend. In addition, this study implements Perna's model of university going within the Kenyan cultural context, a region that has not been explored with regards to university going research. Also, given that national examinations are the only criteria for university entry, a refined model enriches the layers of context that influence the university going process.

## A Conceptual Model of University Going





## **1.5 Research Questions**

This qualitative ethnographic case study utilizes in-depth interviewing approach to study the involvement of Gusii high school students in university going process. The case studies of twelve students from four Gusii high schools are the focus of this study. Given the influence parents and teacher counselors have on a student's university going process, parents and respective high school teacher counselors also participated in the study. The guiding question for this study asked: how do high school students conceptualize higher education opportunity and how are they engaged in the university going process?

In order to answer this question, sub questions are developed:

1. How do Gusii high school students describe their preparation by the family and community to pursue higher education?
2. How do the students perceive their chances of attending a higher education institution?
3. How do a student's family, high school, and community contribute to his/her understanding of and plans for higher education?
4. What do the students perceive as opportunities, challenges/barriers in the university going process? Are these opportunities/challenges differentiated in terms of gender and socio-economic class?
5. Are students academically advantaged or disadvantaged for studying in Gusii?
6. How do the students' significant others (parents or relatives) describe the university options for these students and what are their expectations for the students?

## **1.6 Research Methodology**

This study investigates the university going process among Gusii high school students in Kenya through a case study approach. According to Yin (1989), a case

study refers to an empirical inquiry that “investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context when the boundaries between the phenomenon and contexts are not clearly defined, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (p. 23). In this, Yin is supported by Creswell (1997), who views a case study as an “exploration of a bounded system or a case or multiple cases over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (p. 61). In other words, a case study involves an investigator who makes a detailed examination of a single subject or group or phenomenon. Accordingly, Berg (1998) defines case study as a systemic gathering of enough information about a particular person, social setting, event or group to permit the researcher to effectively understand how it operates or functions” (p. 212).

The selection of a case study approach was determined by the topic under investigation and the type of research questions that seek to provide a comprehensive understanding of the targeted social phenomenon. A case study allows flexibility in tailoring the scope of the investigation as new ideas and evidences unfold in the process. As Stake (1988) correctly affirms, case study approach allows a researcher to “set the boundaries, and then...search out certain issues and themes... set boundaries again and maybe again as ...to know the case better” (p. 258). Since higher education policy developments are a result of many interactions with varied actors, a case study allows me to utilize historical events to identify the extent of the study and its limits, in addition to providing an in-depth investigation of the phenomenon.

This study seeks to establish an understanding of how high school students in Gusiiland conceptualize and aspire for higher education opportunity. To achieve this objective, the study selected four public high schools in Gusiiland as research sites. These high schools were purposively selected on the basis of their categorization by the Ministry of Education and they constitute a sample of secondary schools in Gusiiland.

This selection allowed me to collect data capturing the views and perceptions of students with different academic abilities, gender and social class. The four schools are relatively different in terms of their academic characteristics and the academic profile of students. While all provincial and district schools are boarding schools, all Harambee<sup>1</sup> schools are day schools. Provincial schools select their students from the applicant pool before the district schools. Student enrollment is based on students' performance in the national primary school examination known as Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE). Most students in provincial schools did better in these examinations as compared to those in district level schools. Provincial schools charge higher tuition and low income families opt to send their children to the local day schools. In addition, the categorization of the schools is also a reflection of the existing social class contexts within the schools.

In this study, in-depth interviews were conducted with selected students, their parents, and teacher counselors. Although the interview questions were structured to

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<sup>1</sup> Harambee is a Swahili word meaning pulling together, emphasizing communal unity of purpose – used to describe secondary schools initiated, built, and managed through community effort. They usually catered for children hailing from the locality. Though these schools began to be established all over the country in the early 1970s as a response to the government's failure to provide adequate secondary education opportunities, they came to be more widespread in Gusiiland. Later, they attracted partial government support in terms of trained teachers.

uncover participant's views, they were adapted to accommodate the way the participants framed and structured their responses. The in-depth interview provided me with an opportunity to understand how participants made meaning of higher education opportunity. In addition to individual interviews, I conducted focus group sessions with a wider group of students from each of the four schools to gather views about their university plans and thoughts about higher education and the role of significant others in the university going process.

Before the interviews, participants were required to sign a consent form. The form was supplied in duplicate copies, one retained by the participant and the other by the researcher. In addition, the consent form explained the participant's right to withdraw from the study at any time. With participant's permission, the interview sessions were audio taped.

Given the influence parents and teacher counselors have on student's aspirations, their roles were examined within the context of habitus. Planned interview sessions with respective parents and teacher counselors sought to gather information about each student's aspirations, academic ability and involvement in university going process. Also, this study gathered documents from the schools such as calendars of events and general notices to students to gauge the type of information available to students about university going. The interview with parents explored areas of parental involvement in their children's education and plans on how to pay for university tuition and other costs related to attendance.

The audio taped interviews were transcribed. The process of analyzing data obtained through transcribing interview tapes, notes and listening to the audiotapes

helped to identify a set of ideas, issues and themes from all the participants. Following each interview session, I used my analytic memos to check facts with participants to verify my interpretation of their expressions and words. In cases where I needed further clarification during the analysis, I conducted telephone follow up interviews with the participants as I also made efforts to incorporate any new findings with the already transcribed data. This process was necessary for me to create a clear perspective and holistic understanding of the case. In addition, I embarked on reading and marking the texts using abbreviations and color codes for quick reference during intensive analysis. First, I analyzed data from each target student and school as a case study, and later a cross-case analysis was undertaken to refine data across participants and schools.

### **1.7 Significance of the Study**

This study contributes original material as one of the first qualitatively-guided studies on university going process in Kenya. It is hoped that the findings from this study will draw attention to the circumstances and needs of high school students aspiring for university education. Gusii students are underrepresented in higher education institutions as compared to other ethnic groups of a comparable population size (Mwiria & Ngethe, 2007).

In the past, Gusiiland has not had significant political influence in the allocation of educational resources and most Gusii schools are inadequately resourced. Second, there is not a single national school in Gusiiland. National schools are model schools which admit top performing students, have adequate

resources and, in most cases, almost all their graduating students qualify for university education. The unequal distribution of public resources, including higher education opportunity and jobs among the various ethnic groups and regions, was the main cause of the recent ethnic tension and vicious violence that broke out in Kenya following the 2007 general election.

Most scholarly studies on university going process tend to rely on quantitative approaches. For instance, a world-wide study on access to higher education conducted by Shavit, Arum & Gamoran (2007) takes a quantitative approach to analyze the problem of higher education inequality. Although quantitative studies make a great contribution to the understanding university choice and access, they limit the narratives by replacing participants' voices with numbers. This qualitative case study research, thus, becomes imperative to augment the already existing quantitative studies to create an in-depth understanding of higher education access.

Moreover, most of the available research studies on university going have been conducted in the western world. However, because of the impact of globalization, liberalization of university education and the need to understand student's university going processes, there is a need for research anchored in a developing country such as Kenya that brings the voices and challenges of university going students into the limelight. This study will make a great contribution towards a global understanding of university going, bringing in the unique political, ethnic and geographical disparities prevalent in Kenya to the study of higher education

opportunity. In addition, this study will make a contribution towards understanding higher education access within Kenya's examination contest-based education system.

Besides, since the introduction of higher education reforms in the 1990s (Sanyal & Martin, 1998), no study has been conducted on its impact on access. There has been growing public fears that access to higher education might be problematic especially for low income students. The Higher Education Loans Board (HELB) was established in Kenya to provide loans and scholarships to needy university students. The introduction of a means tested loan<sup>2</sup> was to support students whose parents could not afford to pay tuition and fees for room and board. The HELB loan system was the first attempt by the Kenyan government to consider socio-economic disadvantage in awarding financial assistance. Finding out what students know about higher education including their plans on how to pay for their university costs is a worthwhile effort in helping Kenya policy makers and scholars alike to understand the needs of prospective undergraduate students entering Kenyan universities. Therefore this study, seeks to make a contribution on the literature on high school students' conceptualization of higher education opportunity and their involvement in the university going process.

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<sup>2</sup> Mean tested loans are low interest loans awarded to university students through the HELB. The amount awarded is based on individual student's family income ascertained through a series of questions that students respond to in the application forms. The responses are scored as a percentage and calculated through a set formula to gauge students' family income and ability to support them at the university.

## **1.9 Organization of the Dissertation**

The introduction chapter contains the purpose of the study, the nature of the phenomenon under investigation, the framework for studying the phenomenon and a brief overview of the methodological approach to the study. Chapter two contains the literature review, analyzing available scholarly work on Kenyan education and theories of education participation. Chapter three contains an overview of the Kenyan context of higher education with historical developments in higher education and an outline of higher education reforms since independence. It also contains the Gusii context of education, the focus for this study. Chapter four presents the research methodology, rationale for the approach, sample and site selection and strategies for data analysis. Chapter five presents the profile of the four schools under study; Tumaini, Baraka, Angaza and Imani. Chapter six highlights a brief background of the twelve high school students, the focus of this research. Chapter seven discusses the role of the family in mapping students' university pathways. Chapter eight presents the social dimension of university going with the influence of school and community environment in students' university going process. Chapter nine highlights structural inequalities in the distribution of educational opportunities and unique strategies adopted by students to achieve academic success. Chapter ten presents the discussion of the findings, conclusion and suggestions for further study. The last section contains references used for this study.



## **1.10 Summary**

Higher education opportunity in Kenya i.e. access and choice in a higher education institution is situated within a student's socio-cultural context. Individual students develop their understanding of higher education opportunity based on existing social structures, social institutions and economic resources. Their responses to higher education and the development of aspirations are influenced by family resources (economic capital) and social context (social/cultural capital) and their perceptions about the possibility of getting into a higher education institution. Students develop aspirations to and make decisions concerning participation in higher education based on their habitus. Situated within the Gusii socio-cultural context, this qualitative case study utilizes a conceptual framework of university going developed by Perna (2006) to collect views from students about their understanding of higher education and their perceived challenges or enablers in the university going process.

## **1.11 Definition of Terms**

**Access:** Ability to negotiate and gain entry or admission to a public institution of higher education. Access to a Kenyan public university is determined by a student's performance in the national examinations, administered by the Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC), taken at the end of Form four (the final year of high school education).

**Barriers:** A set of factors or circumstances which prevent an individual student from pursuing a higher education for example lack

of financial support, lack of academic preparation, lack of family support.

**Choice:** A decision to pursue higher education; to apply and get selected into a particular program of study in an institution of higher education. Although Kenyan students exercise choice in selection of programs of study, the Joint Admissions Board has the ultimate decision on the placement of students in the regular track depending on available slots and student performance. However, with the liberalization of Kenyan public higher education, the concept of choice is taking another dimension as dissatisfied and well-to-do families are increasingly declining the JAB offers to pursue their program of choice such as medicine through the private track.

**Cost-sharing:** Students meet partial cost of their university education as the government meets the rest. The cost-sharing concept was introduced in the 1990s following the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) prescribed for developing countries by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to control public expenditure and inspire economic growth. Formerly, the government entirely paid for higher education and availed loans to students.

**Ekegusii:** A language spoken by Abagusii people of southwestern Kenya. Ekegusii language is spoken at home, in the churches and market places within Gusiiland. The ministry of education discourages the use of Ekegusii or any other ethnic group language in school settings.

**Enablers:** Individual or organizational factors that facilitate a student's university going process.

**Ethnic group:** Refers to a culturally distinct group of people with a common ancestry, language, and territorial contiguity. For example, the Gusii ethnic group inhabits southwestern Kenya and they speak Ekegusii language.

**Ethnicity:** Refers to the social relationships of people who consider themselves culturally distinct from other groups. Cultural differences between the various groups of people shape their interactions. Based on their interactions, ethnicity could assume both negative and positive dimensions.

**Positive Ethnicity:** Refers to the pride associated with one belonging to a particular ethnic group.

**Negative ethnicity:** Ethnic hatred and bias, where one community feels superior and better than the other group. It causes conflict amongst ethnic groups.

**Extreme poverty:** Individuals/families in a state of severe poverty. In this condition, they live on less than one dollar (\$1) a day a poverty line set by the World Bank. Many of these individuals/ families lack the basic needs such as food, water, shelter and healthcare.

**Family:** The basic Gusii family is not nuclear, but rather extended consisting of a man and his wife, children and extended members, for example a man's parents and in-laws.

**Guidance & Counseling Teachers:** These are regular classroom teachers, appointed by the Teachers Service Commission with additional responsibilities in guiding and counseling high school students. While some are appointed by the commission as heads of department in G/C, a high school principal appoints a group of teachers normally 5 to 6 depending on the size of the school to serve in the

department. G/C teachers may have reduced teaching loads to free time to work with students.

**Gusiiland:** The geographical area occupied by the Gusii or Abagusii, a Bantu-speaking ethnic group in southwestern Kenya.

**Habitus:** A common set of perceptions held by all members of the same class which shape a student's attitudes and aspirations, based on beliefs and past experiences (Bourdieu, 1986)

**Harambee:** Harambee is a Swahili word meaning pulling together, emphasizing communal unity of purpose. It is grounded in the indigenous Kenyan culture of self help. It symbolizes the Kenyan peoples' attitude, cooperative spirit, and effort in working together for the common good.

**Harambee schools:** These are secondary schools that were initiated, built, and managed through community effort. They usually catered for children hailing from the locality. Though these schools began to be established all over the country in the early 1970s as a response to the government's failure to provide adequate secondary education opportunities, they came to be more widespread in Gusiiland. Later, they attracted partial government support in terms of trained teachers.

**Higher education opportunity:** The possibility for pursuing higher education degree. Higher education opportunity encompasses access and choice. A number of factors interact to shape student's access and choice of a higher education institution. Ideally, most students would prefer an opportunity to attend a four year public

university, however, in reality, several factors limit this possibility and students are forced into different postsecondary paths.

**Household:** The term household is used in this study to refer to the basic unit of production and consumption. The study assumes that production and consumption patterns among the Gusii involve more than a single family.

**Low income:** A possession of a set of risk factors including but not limited to lack of employment, total lack of or limited source of income, low or no parental higher education participation, deprived rural residence, lack of or limited agricultural land.

**Means tested loans:** Mean tested loans are low interest loans awarded to university students through the HELB. The amount of loan awarded is based on individual student's family income ascertained through a series of questions that students respond to in the application forms. The responses are scored as a percentage and calculated through a set formula to gauge students' family income and ability to support them at the university

**Parents:** Refers to the biological mother or father or a legal guardian with the responsibility of the student's education.

**University:** A four year, bachelors' degree granting institution.

**University going:** Refers to the academic and cultural preparation that develops the habits of the mind and ways of thinking or expectations that lead into the process of planning, applying and enrolling in a particular a four year degree granting institution.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature reviewed in this chapter is divided into two sections. The first section contains available literature on access to education opportunities and higher education costs in Kenya. The next section entails a review of the theories of capital as they relate education participation.

### **2.1 Access to Education Opportunities in Kenya**

The need to train indigenous workforce to replace departing expatriates following Kenya's independence was the impetus behind government efforts to expand higher education (Eshiwani, 1993). Accordingly, the government, through the provision of education, ensured that individuals could have an opportunity to acquire relevant skills required for national development. In addition, education is highly valued and broadly embraced not only as an empowering cultural process, but also as a major gateway to a successful life. However, despite government efforts to expand education opportunities, not all groups have had equal access to higher education. Available research shows that a combination of socio-political, economic and cultural factors influence the distribution of education opportunities in Kenya to the disadvantage of women (Hughes & Mwiria, 1990), low socio-economic groups (Eshiwani, 1993) and certain geographical regions (Buchmann, 1999). For instance, Hughes and Mwiria (1990)'s study on the implications of university expansion revealed that women's access to higher education is a big challenge. They concluded that persistent gender inequality in higher education system is responsible for the

diminished the presence and role of women in the labor market. In addition, Eshiwani (1993) in his book, *education since independence*, provides a detailed description of education participation in Kenya from 1963 to the 1990s. His study observed that although enrollment has continued to expand both in primary and secondary level, higher education enrollments remained stagnant over the same period. The competitive nature of university entrance examinations favored certain groups of students than others. Using the profile of university students enrolled in the 1980-1990s, Eshiwani concluded that Kenya's university education remains exclusively for males from upper socio-economic classes, making it an elitist system of education.

Likewise, Buchmann (1999) analyzed data collected through household surveys and focus group interviews to study access to education opportunity in Kenya. In particular, the study aimed at investigating the role of the government in expansion of education opportunities in primary and secondary levels. Buchmann's study revealed the existence of unequal distribution of government resources directed to education with regions such as the Central, Nairobi and Rift Valley Provinces getting a bigger share that gave them better schools than the rest of the country. The study underscored that the unequal distribution of government resources could pose a big challenge to Kenya's meritocratic system of education that utilizes examinations as a method of selecting students for the next level of education. Students with unequal educational preparation and from different socio-economic family backgrounds are forced to compete at the same level. In such a case, her study concluded that, within the competitive system of Kenyan education, poor students

have limited access to good secondary schools and are highly disadvantaged in a competitive examination system.

On the other hand, Osoro, Admundson & Borgen (2000), through a survey study involving students from six high schools in Nairobi and Nyanza provinces investigated the role of a career guidance department in the way students made selections in their subject combinations and future career plans. The study utilized gender and academic ability variables to analyze how guidance and counseling teachers grouped students into various subject combinations. Although gender and academic ability are significant indicators in trying to understand teachers' decisions and students' subject combination choices, the study did little to capture other factors that could equally influence how teachers made decisions. For example a student's socioeconomic status, location and type of the school, and the influence of significant others influence how teachers relate to students. In addition, parents and the peer group have greater influence on student's choice of subject combinations. In most cases, many high school students in Kenyan decide to choose subjects already picked by others simply because they want to remain in the company of friends who have chosen similar subjects. Sometimes they engage in discussions as to which subject combinations they should pick to ensure they remained in the same group.

In addition, the design of the survey questions are too general and giving little room to capture specific experiences that could help create an in-depth understanding of the subject combination choice phenomenon. For instance, asking students about the availability of a guidance and counseling office in their respective schools, tells little about their experiences with the office as regards to the choosing of subjects.



Additionally, being a survey study, it limited the responses students provided and their voices were missed, especially as it regards their experiences with the subject combinations chosen. To fill these gaps, my study takes a step further to capture student's experience with the guidance and counseling teachers, and their role in student development of higher education aspirations and subsequent involvement in the university going process.

## **2.2 Research on Higher Education Costs**

The role of cost-sharing in the Kenyan higher education system and its impact on student choices has not been explored in depth. Available research studies on this topic (Nafukho, 1996; Mwinzi, 2004; Ndirangu & Bosire, 2004) reveal a change in university students' spending behaviors as a response to the increasing higher education costs in Kenya. As mentioned earlier, cost sharing is the transfer of part of the university costs to the students and their families in a system that had a tuition free higher education till 1990. For instance, Nafukho (1996) investigates the state of students' living conditions in the universities following the introduction of cost sharing. This study, involving 80 students from Moi University, found the existence and increase of entrepreneur activities in student halls of residence that had a negative impact on students' academic performance. In this study, more than 45 percent of students reported that they engaged in entrepreneur activities within the halls of residence due to insufficient financial support from their families.

Initially, when cost sharing policy was introduced in Kenya, students strongly resisted the policy with violent protests and riots leading to the closure of public

universities for one year in 1990. Realizing that the government would not rescind the policy, students and their families' immediate response was to organize fundraising (*harambee*, in Swahili) throughout the country to assist university students in public universities. However, for some students such financial assistance was hampered by regional disparities in terms of economic endowment as it yielded little financial support to barely support them through one semester. On the other hand, Mwinzi (2004) noted an increase in the income generating activities, as mechanism of coping with funding shortage in meeting the college costs. Although participants had a positive view of engagement in the income generating activities, Mwinzi concluded that many of these activities had negative impact on students' social and academic life on campus.

Similarly, Ndirangu and Bosire (2004) investigated characteristics of student entrepreneurs at Egerton University, reasons for their running businesses and how these activities impacted their academic life. The study found that 64 percent of Egerton university students, who engaged in businesses, did so for survival reasons, including; the need to meet personal expenses such as buying food, transport, school supplies, in addition to meeting costs of their leisure activities. Again, these students indicated they had family responsibilities. While some students were raising their own families others were responsible over their younger siblings' secondary school tuition and fees. In the analysis of student characteristics, this study revealed that a majority of those involved in small business activities were students from low income families and had no source of income. However, they found that running business interfered with students' academic progress. They noted that such activities had the

potential to negatively impact students' long-term goals, especially in pursuing graduate education. This is because many of these students reported very low GPAs as a result of little time they allocated to studies. In order to improve the situation, the study recommended to the government through Higher Education Loans Board (HELB) to find ways of increasing the loan amount awarded to students especially those from low income family backgrounds.

Although the research on the impact of cost sharing in Kenya's public universities (Nafukho, 1996; Mwinzi, 2004) show that college costs have an impact on the quality of student's social and academic life on campus, especially for low income students, the studies offer little to show if university costs are part of the considerations in students' higher education participation choices. Therefore, it would be worthwhile to take the study of university costs and locate it within high school contexts when students are making choices about higher education to establish what students know about their ability to pay for college, how students and their families are planning to pay for higher education and if university costs is an important factor in their choice process as does other university going activities, such as preparation for university qualifying examinations. Research on the interplay of the socio-cultural contexts and other structural factors to influence student aspirations and participation in higher education is worthwhile.

Besides, there is little research available that addresses the impact of cost sharing on how prospective university students make decisions about higher education in Kenya. For instance, Oketch (2003) studied the financial diversification and partial privatization of Kenyan universities following the implementation of

Structural Adjustment Programs that led to the introduction of cost sharing in the 1990s. This study found that unlike before, public universities had started to be more responsive to the changing economic and social realities by embracing ways and means of diversifying their income. For example, in the late 1990s, many Kenyan public universities started programs meant to generate additional income. One of the programs was the enrollment of students through the Privately Sponsored Students Program (PSSP). The PSSP has since become the most viable program in generating funds for the universities. In many cases, well-to-do parents decide to enroll their children in the PSSP program to gain access to competitive programs such as Medicine, Pharmacy and Engineering which would otherwise not be available through the regular university admission programs. However, he noted that students did not have access to adequate information to make informed university choices. In addition, because the Joint Admissions Board (JAB) has the ultimate responsibility to place government sponsored students, admitted through the regular program, into academic programs, many of them are placed in programs they have little interest in. Because of such a mismatch, unemployment rate in Kenya has continued to increase.

### **2.3 THEORIES OF EDUCATION PARTICIPATION**

In spite of notable expansion of higher education opportunities, research has shown that this development in itself does not reduce class inequality in access to education opportunities (Society for International Development, 2007; Shavit, Arum & Gamoran, 2007). Research on education stratification (Shavit et al, 2007) demonstrates a wide range of socioeconomic, familial, and community resources that

continue to be of great importance with respect to educational attainment. In particular, persistent inequality in access to higher education calls for effort to revisit theories about education participation and their role in shaping education stratification. As previously noted, this study draws from human capital, social capital and cultural capital theories to explore higher education opportunity in Kenya.

Human capital theory focuses on the economic behavior of individuals i.e. the way human beings invest in knowledge and skills leading to higher productivity and earnings (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961; 1993). Cultural capital theory investigates the way power structures are reproduced in society and the influence of culture on individual behaviors. Cultural capital represents the reproduction of dominant symbols and meaning (Bourdieu, 1977b). On the other hand, social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman 1988a; Putman, 2000) focuses on human relationships, and the norms that govern such relationships. Each of these theoretical frameworks offers significant but incomplete insights into factors that account for differential educational achievement among students.

### **2.3.1 Human capital theory**

Rooted in the words of Adam Smith (1776) “a man educated at the expense of much labour and time...maybe be compared to one of those expensive machines,” (p.42), the human capital approach was formulated in the 1950s to account for earning differences, earning distribution and individual decision making regarding human capital creation. As a result, human capital theory emerged in the field of economics of education (Becker, 1964; Psacharopoulos, 1980; Schultz, 1961) to

recognize the fundamental role of education as an economic investment that leads to productivity of individuals and their environment. Simply put, investment in human capital to acquire knowledge and skills is driven by anticipation for future benefits realized through increased human productivity and higher earnings. Further, human capital theory provides an explanation for earning differentials based on a person's level of education and experience. Individuals with more years of schooling are likely to have better jobs than those with less years of schooling and the higher individuals are educated, the greater the economic productivity at the aggregate level, and hence economic growth (Becker, 1964, Schultz, 1961).

From a human capital theory perspective, investment in university education leads to the acquisition of advanced skills and knowledge, access to better jobs, and ability to fit in the workforce, thus higher work productivity. Human productivity and growth is reflected in the quantity of goods produced, their quality and greater variety in the product mix (Bowen, 1977). According to Schultz (1963), human capital theory's relevance to education can be understood in terms of its investment (production) and consumption benefits. As he observes, "when the benefits are in the future, schooling has the attributes of an investment...the satisfaction that people obtain from schooling is the consumption element" (p.8). In other words, the investment part of human capital looks at the sacrifices made by an individual to acquire education, and these includes forgone earnings, loans taken, financial aid, and other college related costs incurred. On the other hand, consumption elements refers to benefits that accrue from getting a higher education such as development of individual and family values, attitudes and satisfaction levels, and better health

(Bowen, 1977). These are non monetary benefits or returns to education. Students and their families make choices to participate in higher education based on the investment and consumption aspects of education. As Otero (2007) notes “education investment is worthwhile and will be selected if the rate of return exceeds the capital cost—in this case, time and money — and the returns of alternative investment opportunities (opportunity cost to investment)” (p.574). Whenever the future benefits outweigh the costs of attendance, students and families make a choice based on a cost-benefit analysis.

Investment in higher education has individual benefits. Higher education offers graduates a better life as evidenced by higher levels of psychological wellbeing, better health, and a longer life span (Breneman, 2001). From a student’s family perspective, university education is a source of upward mobility in the society. Within the Kenyan context, a society that is characterized by inequality (SFID, 2007), a family’s hope of escaping poverty is centered on getting their sons and daughters to acquire a university education. As well, university education carries with it a special recognition and privilege. As Laberee (1997) puts it, university educated individuals assume a higher social status upon getting their university credentials, which offers them a competitive advantage to get desirable social positions. From this perspective, it can be understood as to why many Kenyan students compete in the national examinations in the hope of securing university admissions, with a desire to get better jobs, lead better lives and uplift their families financially.

Human capital plays a major role when parents and students make decisions to invest in higher education. For instance, Nerlove (1972) captures the role of human capital in this way:

To the extent that a liberal education, a perfection of the human and social qualities which may be inherent in every human being, enables the student to adapt more flexibly to the economic environment in which he may find himself over his lifetime, the acquisition of an education reduces the economic risks to which the student may be exposed. Certain kinds of education may be regarded as an 'insurance policy' against unemployment, against technological obsolescence of one's skills, and against low income (p. S185-S186).

On a societal level, higher education benefits accrue through improved civic participation, social cohesion, a creation of safe neighborhoods, and better selection of spouses, and in general, more educated people are less likely to be a burden to the government, because governments tend to spend less on problems that may result in the absence of these social conditions. The educated populations are likely to make informed choices that promote social cohesion. In addition, educated population is a prerequisite in the flourishing of democratic values and practices in a society.

Moreover, economists (Breneman, 2001; Bowen, 1977) argue that higher education, accompanied with the creation of new knowledge and skills, raises the income base of the community leading to better living conditions. This is because, the higher the income, the greater the community's tax base to cater for the social needs. Furthermore, freedom of individuals is understood and well exercised within an educated populace: better living conditions for graduates, a reduction in crime and safer neighborhoods and ability to make better selection of spouses and fewer divorce cases, income saved from potential divorce lawsuits.



However, human capital theory is criticized for its shortcomings as regards to guiding students in making decisions to invest in a postsecondary education. Human capital theory holds the assumption that individuals make decisions based on perfect information that allows them to evaluate all possible alternatives and make the best choice, which gives them a maximum lifetime utility (Becker, 1964). Yet, in the real world, there isn't sufficient information that can enable students and parents make choices regarding investment in higher education. In particular, university<sup>3</sup> choice is a complex and interrelated process, influenced by socio-economic, political and cultural factors all interacting to shape students' understanding of a postsecondary education opportunity (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; McDonough, 1997).

Although higher education opportunities may be available, the majority of students, especially those from low socioeconomic backgrounds have limited information and knowledge on how to navigate the education system. As Jongbloed (2005) puts it, "students generally do not have clear goals and may be uncertain about their own capacities and about the consequences of their educational choices" (p.9). Moreover, students from higher socio-economic classes have more access to information and more resources to invest in education, as well as greater cognitive abilities on how to use the information acquired (Otero, 2007).

Moreover, human capital theory fails to capture other factors that influence or constrain individual student's ability to invest in university education. According to Otero (2007), a person's ability to invest in higher education depends on whether

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<sup>3</sup> In this study, the term university is used instead of college. In the Kenyan context, a bachelor's degree granting institution (four year) is known as a university, the focus of this study. The term college denotes a vocational institution (normally two year) that awards credentials known as Diplomas.

there is a supply of education that the individual desires, and whether the individual can overcome the factors that constrain his/her higher education participation, for example ability to pay tuition and fees, as well as meeting university admission criteria. Further, human capital fails to capture the interaction between one's socio-economic background, innate ability, and informal knowledge that influence a person's productivity and earnings. Human capital theory offers great insights as regards to the individual and familial motivations to invest in education because of the anticipated benefits associated with participation in higher education. However, to gain an in-depth understanding of university going process, it is worthwhile to explore the role of organizational, socio-cultural and environmental factors in the distribution of higher education opportunities.

### **2.3.2 Cultural capital theory**

French sociologists, Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron (1977), developed cultural capital theory to analyze how culture and education contribute to social reproduction. Cultural capital refers to the set of linguistic and cultural competencies an individual inherits and sometimes learns from his/her family that gives one an advantage to succeed in education (Bourdieu, 1986 p.246). Bourdieu's assumption is that individuals inherit cultural capital based on their social status and cultural background. Further, explaining his understanding of cultural capital, Bourdieu (1986) posits:

The notion of cultural capital initially presented itself to me, in the course of research, as a theoretical hypothesis which made it possible to explain the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from the different

social classes and class fractions can obtain in the academic market, to the distribution of cultural capital between the classes and class fractions (p.244).

From Bourdieu's statement above, cultural capital is used by dominant classes to maintain their status quo. Through the transmission of class advantages from one generation to the next, middle and upper social class children acquire skills and knowledge that leads to success. In this case, Bourdieu hold the view that social inequalities are perpetuated within the education system, because students obtain academic credentials that lead them unequal social and economic positions. Therefore, cultural capital is a mechanism for maintaining and legitimizing social reproduction in society (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

Bourdieu identifies three forms of cultural capital, namely, embodied, objectified and institutionalized cultural capital. *Embodied cultural capital* refers to the "form of lasting impressions of the mind and body" (Bourdieu, 1997, p.47). Embodied cultural capital is represented by "high" culture or engagement with traditional notions of art, for example visiting a museum of art (Tierney, 1999). Embodied culture capital is experienced through the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and a disposition to appreciate and cultivate culture (Dumais, 2002). It is acquired over time and it signifies symbolic capital which can be transferred, but it is not recognized as an economic capital. In other words, embodied capital represents the values and tastes that individuals acquire through enculturation and assimilation. The period it takes one to acquire embodied cultural capital largely depends on individual family's life style (Bourdieu, 1983). For example, the amount and quality of time

parents spend with their children greatly influences their development and subsequent acquisition of cultural capital.

On the hand, *objectified cultural capital* refers to special cultural goods and activities. It is represented in the development of the abilities to appreciate things such as objects, monuments, writings and paintings (Bourdieu, 1997). This form of cultural capital is transmitted from one generation to the next through family socialization. For example, high income parents expose children to appreciate various cultural goods such as music, books, and recreational activities. Such children acquire objectified cultural capital and as they grow up, possession of objectified cultural capital adds to the degree to which they value these cultural goods, for example pictures and books. In other words, objectified cultural capital entails the ability to enjoy that which one has acquired.

Moreover, *institutionalized cultural capital* refers to the academic credentials and the credentialing system (Bourdieu, 1997). Institutionalized capital develops a result of one having embodied cultural capital and successfully converting it through education to obtain academic credentials. Such academic credentials serve as “certificates of cultural competence” (Bourdieu, 1984) but such competence is defined and regulated by members of the dominant group. However, to obtain cultural competence a student must first gain access to the family’s cultural capital. In other words, this type of “cultural capital is alternatively an informal academic standard, a class tribute, a basis for social selection, and a resource for power which is salient as an indicator/basis of class position” (Lamont & Lareau, 1988, p. 156). Academic credentials are institutionalized as legitimate, recognized in the society,

and they generate monetary value and they carry with them some form of social prestige /social power to the owner (holder of the degree). However, academic credentials are not transferable to the next generation, as the holder of the credentials passes on, such credentials become valueless.

Although the credentialing system is used in the society to reward individuals accordingly, social class influences how people apportion value to higher education credentials and elite groups are advantaged in the competition for credentials. Therefore, academic success relies on the cultural capital and the inclination to invest in the academic market. For instance, high income parents invest quite a large amount of time, effort and money to ensure that their children do well in education system so as to receive good academic credentials. However, Bourdieu cautions that in a world of mass education, inflation of qualifications can alter the value of the cultural capital. This is because availability of credentials and ownership of credentials as a resource determines its market value. As many people get higher education, the value of higher education and the prestige associated with it begins to lessen.

Within the education system, cultural capital is utilized to create an understanding of the relationship between social class and educational inequality (Bourdieu, 1982, Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Bourdieu's idea of cultural capital helps to explain how economically stable families, with high cultural capital, instill linguistic and cultural competencies on to their children, which in turn gives them the ability to succeed in the education system as opposed to children from low socio-economic background, who enter school with a disadvantage (Bourdieu, 1986;

Dumais, 2002). Besides, advantaged populations utilize cultural capital as a tool to exclude disadvantaged people from jobs, resources and high status group. For instance, Lamont & Lareau (1988) view cultural capital as “institutionalized, i.e. widely shared, high status cultural signals (attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviors, goals and credentials) used for social and cultural exclusion” (p.156). However, Lamont & Lareau (1988) differ with Bourdieu in their view that cultural capital serves the function of exclusion. They argue that cultural capital informally sets the “academic standard, as a marker of class position and a displayer of social selection” (p.156). In other words, informally, academic credentials confer power and privilege to the educated populace in society.

Expounding on the moment of social and cultural exclusion, Lamont & Lareau (1988) contend that high socio-economic status groups use their cultural capital advantage to oppress the less or disadvantaged groups in society. Because dominant groups in society accord some value to cultural capital, this is further reinforced and rewarded within the education system by teachers and other educators at the expense of the students from low socio-economic backgrounds. For example, when children from well- to- do families are rewarded for possession of the right cultural capital, while students from low socio-economic backgrounds are reprimanded for displaying unacceptable cultural cues, moments of social inclusion and exclusion become evident in the schools. In other words, possession of cultural capital or lack of it puts a student at a particular social class in the classroom.

Further, as Horvat, Weininger, and Lareau, (2003) put it, cultural capital displays some form of ownership or control over goods such as mannerisms and

practices that have recognizable high status value in society and this becomes as a power resource that facilitates access to organizational positions while acting as a class indicator (Bourdieu, 1982). However, Lamont & Lareau (1988) caution that the possession of cultural capital may not be sufficient to get what one desires, rather what matters most is how an individual ‘activates’ the cultural capital possessed. As Lareau and Horvat (1999) posit, “a closer focus on moments of the activation of capital situated in a field analysis that emphasizes how individual behaviors are recognized and legitimated or marginalized and rebuffed provides a more conceptually accurate picture of how social reproduction occurs”(p.52)

Besides, cultural capital is closely entangled with the way students achieve in schools and how they get access to high paying jobs after graduation. Bourdieu (1983) explains such entanglement as follows:

[C]ultural capital, whose diffuse, continuous transmission within the family escapes observation and control so that the educational system, i.e. converted into capital of qualifications, is subject to a more disguised but more risky transmission than economic capital. As the educational qualification invested with specific force of the official becomes the condition for legitimate access to growing number of positions, particularly the dominant ones, the educational system tends to increasingly dispossess the domestic group of the monopoly of the transmission of power and privileges- and among other things, of the choice of its legitimate heirs from among children of different sex and big ranks (p.254).

According to Bourdieu, the transmission of cultural capital is hidden, disguised as individual merit a process that is reinforced and legitimated by the education system hence perpetuating a cycle of social reproduction. The unequal educational outcomes among children are attributable to the unequal distribution of cultural capital among

social classes. As Bourdieu (1977) contends, cultural capital is the foundation of class relations, attitudes towards culture and cultural tastes.

Although the existence of unequal distribution of rewards are said to be based on cultural capital, there exists gaps in the study of cultural capital and its relation to educational attainment that need to be addressed. First, cultural capital studies are yet to analyze the interaction between the parents' cultural capital and children's cultural capital on education success. For instance, DiMaggio (1982)'s study had analyzed cultural capital based on students' cultural interest but not the interaction between parents and students' cultural capital. Understanding how well-to-do students utilize the cultural capital acquired for their own academic success is important.

Moreover, few studies are yet to examine how cultural capital is rewarded in an education system. For instance, Bourdieu revealed that students with high cultural capital are likely to be recognized by their teachers than those who do not have the same cultural capital. As Dumais (2002) puts it, cultural capital serves as "a signal to teachers who are predominantly middle class and tend to have a high regard for culture" (p.48). Within the education system, teachers and other educators for example guidance and counselors interact frequently with students and have a greater role in the development of a student's self image and motivation to achieve academically.

Further, Bourdieu (1967) argues that schools play a critical role in cultural integration of students, a process that allows individuals to have the same perceptions, thoughts and actions and ultimately "predisposed to communication and understanding amongst themselves" (p.340). The academic culture of schools creates



a common code enabling all those possessing that code to “attach the same meaning to the same words...behaviors ...works” (p.341). Additionally, he contends that the “patterns of informing the thoughts of a given period can be fully understood only by reference to the school system, which is alone capable of establishing them and developing them, through practice, as the habits of thought to a whole generation” (p.342).

To underscore the importance of cultural capital to education attainment, McDonough (1998) observes that possession of cultural capital helps students to experience smooth transitions between high school and college. In particular, university students from well-to-do families are said to better adjusted to the outside responsibilities and have a smooth transition to the world of work, owing to their exposure to varied opportunities and connections to internships, volunteer opportunities and other networks that prepare them for better paying jobs. As McDonough (1998) observes:

The patterns of student’s aspirations are shaped by the class context of the communities, families, and schools in which these students live their daily lives. The class based patterns stand in stark contrast to traditional aspiration or expectation research which assumes an individual-level analysis. Class based patterns of aspirations are a joint product of family and school influences (p.184).

Although Bourdieu suggests that a possible interaction between gender, social origins and cultural capital is worthwhile, few scholars have studied the interaction between gender and cultural capital (DiMaggio, 1982; Dumais, 2002). Moreover, Bourdieu (2004) contends that:

They [women] have a statutory monopoly over the judgment of taste. This attitude is encouraged and fostered by the whole cultural system. It is not uncommon to hear a ten year- old girl discussing the cut of a skirt or blouse

with her mother or with her friends. This type of behavior is rejected by the boys, because it is discouraged by social sanction. In a society dominated by masculine values, everything contributes on the contrary to foster among them the churlish and coarse, rough and pugnacious attitude...whereas the men, by virtue of the norms that dominate their early upbringing, are stuck by a kind of cultural blindness for everything having to do with 'tenue'[bearing] as a whole, from bodily hexis to cosmetics, women are much more apt to perceive urban models and integrate them into behavior, whether it be clothing or techniques of the body. The peasant girl speaks the language of urban fashion well because she bears it well, and she hears it well because the 'structure' of her cultural language predisposes her to it (p.590).

Class and gender differences could have a greater impact on educational attainment than cultural capital alone and, according to DiMaggio (1982), depending on gender and social origins, cultural capital could have different educational outcomes for different sets of people. Further, he writes:

Boys with educated fathers who were culturally oriented may have been less involved in their peer groups and less likely to possess other traits that lead to school success than were other boys. Those high status boys who were not academically oriented may have used high culture as an alternative arena from achievement. By contrast, boys from humble backgrounds who were upwardly mobile may have begun to enter the status culture of the upper middle class during high school. Upwardly mobile boys may have been more inclined to express cultural interests and to participate in cultural activities than were upper middle class boys, who took such interests for granted... Conversely, cultural capital seems to have been part of an identity shared by academically successful high school girls. In a society in which men monopolize careers and control the material rewards they carry, it is all the more important for women to distinguish themselves through fundamentally cultural markets... Women who wish to be recognized as eligible partners for men from high status backgrounds may need cultural capital to a greater extent than men who wish to achieve in the world of work. For boys from high status families, it may be more important, in high school, to develop a taste for women who appreciate culture than to develop a taste for high culture itself (p. 198).

While Bourdieu investigated cultural capital for high income students, DiMaggio (1982) studied cultural capital for the disadvantaged students. Combining Bourdieu's and DiMaggio's concepts of cultural capital to investigate the gender differences in

the interaction of social capital could be a worthwhile undertaking and a great contribution to the field of education.

Further, possession of cultural capital alone does not account for the motivation to invest in higher education across class, and especially among students of low socio-economic backgrounds nor does it explain how the provision of education resources or lack of it influences higher education participation. A better understanding of inequality in higher education participation entails analysis of environmental and societal factors that influence how students understand their educational opportunities.

### **2.3.3 Habitus**

Utilizing Bourdieu's model of habitus provides the basis through which I attempt to achieve an understanding of how Gusii students access information and knowledge to navigate their way through the education system. Within this context, the way students view their education opportunities, make choices, and generate strategies for academic success is a function of habitus. According to Bourdieu (1977), *habitus* refers to "a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks" (p.83).

According to Paulsen and St. John (2002), *habitus* is defined as "an enduring, internal system of values, attitudes, beliefs, and actions, which is derived from the student's immediate family, community, and school environments and is common to

members of one's social class" (p.196). In other words, habitus represents knowledge, norms, and mannerisms that one derives from one's parents and social class. Simply put, habitus provides the lens through which an individual learns about his/her social environment and chooses a set of actions that are acceptable to the social group. It is one's view of the world based on experience emanating from belonging to a particular group or social class. Habitus arises from a particular set of social conditions that affect a social group, and can shift over time as conditions and perceptions change (Harker, 1984). Habitus represents the way culture is personified in an individual, it comprises of attitudes, beliefs and experiences of those inhabiting one's social world. In this case, understanding of higher education opportunity is based on student's interactions within the family, school, community and the environment.

Therefore, a family's socio economic background and the environment provide the social, cultural, economic and symbolic perspectives that shape students' understanding of a postsecondary opportunity. This study situates a student's acquisition of university going knowledge within the social, cultural and organizational contexts because habitus shapes how he/she reacts to the social environment and shapes the way he/she responds in line with the understanding of the norms and their place within the world. Family habitus enables parents to transmit to their children those values (cultural capital) and consequence academic success, which in turn, largely depends on the family's social economic class. In this case, McDonough (1997) illuminates that "parents transmit the cultural capital by

informing offspring about the value and process of securing a college education, and its potential for conversion in the occupational attainment contest” (p.9).

Further, McDonough (1997) extends her analysis to include the concept of organizational *habitus*, which is the impact of socioeconomic status on the behavior of individuals through a mediating organization such as the school. Within the school context, school counselors, representing the organizational habitus, work closely with students during the college going process and they play a significant role in shaping students postsecondary destinations. As McDonough (1997) puts it, the school becomes “a mediator of collective social consciousness in regard to the processes and outcomes of college choice” (p.10). Therefore, from an organizational *habitus* perspective, schools and the communities in which they exist provide a powerful context through which factors that impact student’s social thinking about their postsecondary education opportunity are played out. Within the Gusii community, insitutions such as religious and community leadership possess moral authority and the ability to shape students’ decision making process. As Bourdieu (1977) explains,

between the child and the world, the whole group intervenes...with a whole universe of ritual practices and also discourses, sayings, proverbs, all structured in concordance with the principles of corresponding habitus (p.167).

In sum, Bourdieu’s theory relies on two key assumptions. Firstly, social structure, where class is characterized not only by economic possessions but also by a cultural identity. Bourdieu demonstrates that each social class has its distinctive habitus i.e. cultural knowledge, practices and dispositions, and so social class hierarchy is closely related to cultural hierarchy. Secondly, in education system, unequal educational outcomes among children are attributable to the unequal

distribution of cultural capital among social classes. Children from a high culture tend to be favored because they possess cultural competence that is acceptable by the dominant culture. In other words, academic success or failure may not be as a result of natural aptitude but it is a product of the functioning of the education system. Within the society, class inequalities that separate the advantaged from the disadvantaged are reflected in differential educational attainment. For example, as children start school, those from wealthier families bring with them a high cultural capital with more linguistic advantage than their counter parts from low socio-economic backgrounds. Again, such differences give them a head start advantage and are reflected in the way students relate with their teachers and their overall educational success. This practice reflects Bourdieu's concept of cultural reproductive view which demonstrates how the education system contributes to social inequality by "sanctioning the hereditary transmission of cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1997 p.48).

On the other hand, countering Bourdieu's argument, DiMaggio (1982) contends that cultural capital can be served as a path of social mobility for children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, while it may not provide added advantage for children from the middle and upper classes. Using a cultural mobility perspective, DiMaggio (1982) argues that cultural capital may not be solely determined by family background, particularly in societies where "status cultures are more diffuse and more loosely bounded" (p.190). To attain upward social mobility, students from low socioeconomic classes adopt a strategy by actively participating in high cultures as a

way to move up the social ladder and hence, this is the group of students who benefit more from cultural capital.

Bourdieu points out that cultural capital and social capital are interrelated and can be transformed into human capital [educational attainment]. Commenting on social reproduction in schools, Walpole (1997) observes that “ concepts of cultural capital and habitus explain ways in which individual agency combines with socially constructed opportunities and aspirations to reproduce the existing social structure” (Walpole, 1997 p.50). However, Walpole (1997) indicates that it is possible to break the cycle of social reproduction by changing the environment within the education system. He notes that:

[H]abitus has a dynamic component and an individual can adopt new elements as a result of new experiences, historical changes in the material environment, exposure to another individual’s habitus, or associating with people who originate from a different habitus, all of which are possible in a [educational] environment (Walpole, 1997 p.5).

The way students develop their postsecondary education aspirations can be understood from the cultural capital perspective. For instance, students develop educational aspirations based on their environment. These expectations are based on their knowledge of the real world and therefore, although each student would want to succeed, students from different backgrounds have different perceptions and expectations of their chances for academic successes (Hanson, 1994). Further, from a cultural perspective, education systems provide a fertile ground for the reproduction of class relations in society. Therefore, the way school systems impact students’ development of educational aspirations and attainment cannot be underestimated. For example, Hanson (1994) observes that “when low socio-economic students enter the

academic arena, they enter a cultural milieu in which they have few resources [cultural capital] to compete with others, and the values of the dominant culture reign. Students develop a system of attitudes, aspirations and activities (their 'habitus' or world view) that reflect a realization of their opportunities and of the larger structure of class relations (p.161).

The cultural capital theory has been criticized for failure to account for the underprivileged groups in society (Lamont & Lareau, 1998). In addition, it shows little on how students from low socioeconomic backgrounds navigate the system to gain access to high status culture. Besides, although there exists the chance for social mobility within the education system, Hanson (1994) argues that a “considerable number of youths who are talented and motivated do not achieve because of their placement in the stratification system” (p. 159). School systems that track students limit student choices as regards to higher education participation. In particular, students who find themselves in vocational tracks, have their higher education aspirations inhibited. As Hanson (1994) aptly puts it, “selection into ability groups, placement in the curricular, teachers’ expectations, class segregated schools, and the resultant unequal resources, as well as bureaucratic control and emphasis on competition, all work to fit youths into economic positions that are similar to their parents” (p.162). Working hard to achieve may not seem feasible within low income students’ socio-cultural and economic context. Besides, rarely do these students see any success story within reach they can relate to or identify with, all they see is a great number of unemployed youths in the community.



### **2.3.4 Social capital theory**

Originating from an exchange theory in sociology, social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1977; 1993; 1997; Coleman, 1988) is appropriate for discussing the structure of relationships among the Gusii students of Southwestern Kenya and subsequent influence on the conceptualization of postsecondary education opportunity. Bourdieu (1993) defines social capital as:

the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition-or in other words membership in a group-which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively owned capital a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word (p.249).

Further, Bourdieu explains that social capital is the closed network that exchanges valued real and symbolic goods amongst selected members. In other words, social capital can provide valuable information, offer intellectual and emotional support, and access to networks of influence. However, the quality and type of networks an individual is connected to influences his/her accumulation of social capital.

Accordingly, Coleman (1988a) identifies social capital as forms of social interactions with family, relatives, friends, schools and social groups that create social networks in the community. Further, he explains that "both social capital in the family and social capital in the community play roles in the creation of human capital in the rising generation" (p. S109). Thus, social capital allows individuals to get gain access to economic, social and cultural resources available in the community.

Within the education system, social capital is composed of social-structural resources that influence student's development of human capital through academic success (Coleman, 1988a). Further, Coleman (1988a) utilizes the interaction between human

and social capital to communicate the view that social capital is not an intrinsic feature of social networks, but it comes into existence as a result of social interaction and resources available for an individual's use depending on one's social structure.

In other words, social structure is that form of capital that gives an individual or group member a competitive social advantage to succeed in his/her pursuit of lifetime goals. For example, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) define social capital as "the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that an individual or group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (p.119). On the other hand, Coleman (1988a) views social capital as a function of social structure that creates an advantage to group members, and propels them to achieve. Within the social structure,

social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities having two characteristics in common. They facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure. Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making it possible the achievement of certain ends that in the absence would not be possible...unlike other forms of capital, social capital inheres in the structure of relations between actors (p. S98).

Taking from Coleman's social capital theory, Goddard (2003) differentiates the structural and functional components of social capital. The structural component of social capital represents the social networks while the functional aspect of social capital represents the level of trust and norms that guide group members. For instance, Goddard (2003) cautions that "knowing someone does not necessarily guarantee productive interaction; one may also consider the functionality of relationships... If for example, one's social relationships are characterized by low

trust and norms that discourage academic engagement, one could reasonably expect them to be associated with low academic achievement (p.59).

Moreover, in support of Coleman's view on the functionality of social capital, Putnam (1993) draws attention to the action facilitated by social structure, in that "social capital here refers to the features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated action" (p.167). In addition, Putnam (2000) lays greater emphasis on cooperation and coordination among members for mutual benefit of all. Such a capital can only be obtained through membership in informal groups and clubs, especially if this is located within one's community, it can be of great benefit to the young people. Besides, it is important to note that one form of capital can be converted into another form for the benefit of members of the group. As Bourdieu (1997) posits:

The transformation of economic capital into social capital presupposes a specific labor, i.e. an apparently gratuitous expenditure of time, attention, care, concern, which, as seen in the endeavor to personalize a gift has the effect of transfiguring the purely monetary import of the exchange and, by the same token the very meaning of the exchange (p.54).

According to Bourdieu (1993), the amount of social capital possessed by a given agent depends largely on the size of the network of connections a person can effectively mobilize and on the volume of capital possession in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected" (p. 249). Having social networks is beneficial in the acquisition of social capital. This is because social networks focus on the relationships and connections that individuals have with one another and behaviors engaged in by individuals within a particular network. For instance, students with greater social networks find it easy to gain access to reputable post secondary

institutions, have the ability to enroll in competitive programs, as well as access general information about future employment prospects. As Lin (2000) explains, the “embeddedness in resource rich social networks increases the likelihood of receiving useful information, in the routine exchanges and without actively seeking such information” (p.792). Simply put, interactions within one’s network, opens doors to vital information that otherwise could not have been accessible.

In many ways, social capital involves individual actors within social structures and the productive actions that they facilitate within these structures (Coleman, 1988a). In the process, social capital enables students to draw resources from family members, peers, school and community to facilitate their academic productivity, and in that way, students are able to understand more about their choices as regards to higher education opportunity.

Social capital theorists (Bourdieu, 1977; Coleman, 1988a) underscore the importance of the family in the intergenerational transmission of social capital, especially for educational attainment. For instance, Coleman (1988a) explains that:

But there is not merely a single “family background”; family background is analytically separable into at least three components: financial capital, human capital, and social capital. Financial capital is approximately measured by family wealth or income. It provides the physical resources that can aid achievement: a fixed place in the home for studying, materials to aid learning, the financial resources that smooth family problems. Human capital is approximately measured by parents’ education and provides the potential for a cognitive environment for the child that aids learning (p.S109).

In addition, Becker (1984) acknowledges that “no discussion of human capital can omit the influence of families on the knowledge, skills, values and habits of their children” (p.21). From the social capital perspective, university going process is a

collective effort involving the student, family members, community and school personnel, all investing both emotional energy and commitment through various supportive networks. Such interactions aid students to accumulate the desired social capital that could be converted into academic success for example passing university entrance examinations, gaining access to privileged information or applying for financial aid to facilitate their postsecondary education attendance. In addition, such emotional energy and commitment facilitates the development of trust, norms and expectations among students who have shared goal i.e. higher education participation. Coleman (1988a) posits that trust and trustworthiness within the social structure are critical resources that can generate social capital for the young people. He underscores the importance of shared norms in the creation of social capital that:

When a norm exists and is effective, it constitutes a powerful, though sometimes fragile form of social capital. Effective norms that inhibit crime make it possible to walk freely outside at night in a city and enable old persons to leave their houses without fear for their safety. Norms in a community that support and provide effective rewards for high achievement in school greatly facilitate the school's task...effective norms can constitute a powerful form of social capital...This social capital, however, like the forms described earlier, not only facilitates certain actions; it constraints others. A community with strong and effective norms about young persons' behavior can keep them from having a good time (p. S105).

Within the Gusii community, cultural norms serve as a guide to individual member's actions, and by extension, make individuals to conform to what is acceptable. Hence, norms are commonly used to constraint social behavior that could be detrimental to young people's development and academic achievement. For example, norms can constraint social behaviors such as truancy, drug and alcohol abuse that could lead to school dropout. Thus facilitate academic success. To the Gusii people, norms are a community resource, which guides member's choices. For

example, among the Gusii community, members inspired by the spirit of mutual togetherness and a sense of belonging, watch for each other's children and guard against any type of social behavior considered unacceptable. As well, Coleman (1988a) points out that, whenever parents in a community discuss their children's behavior, they are likely to come up with acceptable norms that guide their daily activities and interactions and even issues related to school such as homework could be taken care of. Hence, the role of the community and the environment in young people's development and academic achievement cannot be underestimated. As Coleman (1988a) puts it:

The social capital that has value for young person's development does not reside solely within the family. It can be found in the community consisting of the social relationships that exist among parents, in the closure exhibited by this structure of relations, and in the parents' relations with the institutions of the community (p. S113).

The practice of guarding neighbors' children as one's own and of enforcing acceptable behavior at the community level concurs with Coleman's (1988) concept of intergenerational closure. In this case, intergeneration closure ensures that adults know everybody else in the community and everyone is connected such a way that it is no possible for one's behavior to escape the notice of others. This is particularly essential when parents know and interact with their children's friends' parents. For example, watching over one's neighbor's children is a traditional practice among the Gusii of rural Southwestern Kenya. Within this context, Coleman (1988b) asserts that:

Social capital of intergenerational closure exists in some isolated small towns and rural areas where the social relations among adults are restricted by geographic distance and residential mobility less important. Intergenerational

closure exists in schools based in a religious community..., although the social relations which make up the community are more narrowly around a single dimension of social life, the religious institution...intergenerational closure does not now exist in most public schools or in most non-religious based private schools. The absence of social capital represents the loss of a resource for young persons (p.338).

Accordingly, this statement affirms his principle that just as physical capital and human capital facilitate productivity, social capital does influence productivity within the education system.

Because of the social structure of the education system, social capital theory becomes an appropriate approach for understanding higher education participation among students of various socioeconomic backgrounds. For instance, Perna and Titus (2005)'s study investigated parental social capital and its influence on college choice and enrollment. To measure social capital, their model utilized variables such as the type of school attended, level of parental involvement, and volume of resources available from social networks at the school and homogeneity of these networks. The strength of this model lies not only in the level of parental involvement but also in student's exposure to other types of social networks within the environment. The study revealed that parents who are more involved in their children's education do increase their children's social capital. As well, such parents are more likely to be involved in their children's college choice and such involvements increase student's chances of enrollment in higher education.

Social capital is also important in students' transition from high school to college. As Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) observe, undergraduate students from upper incomes enter into college campuses to find life similar to that from their family setting, a social world that they are familiar with. These high income students

in college campuses become like a “fish in water: it does not feel the weight of the water and it takes the world about itself for granted” (p.127). Conversely, students from low income families might feel like “a fish out of water” and these are the students who are likely to withdraw or step out of college because of the feeling that they do not fit into the system, they view themselves or are seen as outsiders or they feel they are being excluded from the system.

In addition, it is important to note that there positive and negative dimensions of social capital, especially on how social capital is produced and utilized. On the positive side, personal relations within and among social groups and other entities within the community are critical because they provide sense of pride, identity and commonality of purpose among members of a community. For instance, the shared social norms and cultural values strengthen the ties and relations that exist among members of one ethnic group or clan enabling the growth of its members.

The quality of information exchanged through social networks based on trust, reflect the functional nature of social capital. When individuals exhibit high level of trust amongst themselves, they are likely to share more information and the existence of norms functions to regulate and influence the type and form of exchanges between the members of a group. In schools, social relationships between students, families, communities and teachers support and motivate students towards academic achievement. In the pursuit of a postsecondary opportunity, social capital can be utilized to not only motivate student aspirations towards higher education, but also to provide information about university qualifying examinations, financial aid application, and selection of programs of study. Students and parents trust and rely



on teacher counselors to provide them with accurate information about university going process.

On the negative side, social capital has the ability to create some form of social bonding among individuals engaged in bad behavior, making it difficult to break their circle. For instance, social bonding among criminal gangs, created and strengthened through intra-group relations, can be detrimental to young people. In addition, when social capital is used to exclude other people from the group, it can be viewed as negative social capital. Sometimes, adults may label or stereotype their neighbor's children or other youths in the community, making it difficult for the young people to freely interact and share information. This is particularly common among low income communities, where school truancy is very common. Youths who find themselves in such isolated situations develop low self esteem and are not motivated to achieve their desired ends.

In sum, although Coleman theory discusses how social capital can be lost due to the social structure, his model fails to address how social capital can be compensated for or offset, especially as it relates to educational attainment.

## **2.4 Summary**

The various perspectives discussed above, reveal that students' higher education opportunities are influenced by complex and interwoven factors. All these factors interact to enable or constrain students understanding of a postsecondary education opportunity.

From a human capital perspective, students and their families invest in higher education based on expected future benefits. Cultural capital, acquired from the family, school and the community offers students needed advantages to maximize their educational choices and transition to university. Through a network of exchanges derived from the acquisition of social capital, students access valuable information regarding higher education opportunity.

Although the multiple perspectives discussed provide insightful information from which we could create an understanding of higher education opportunity, taken separately, each one of them barely captures the complicated process of university going. For example, research on social capital fails to capture cross-cultural patterns in social stratification and education inequality. For instance within the Kenyan context, educational stratification must be examined with the ethnic and gender perspectives that influence how students and parents make decisions regarding investment in higher education. The development of education, just as economic growth shows ethnic variations in terms of access to economic and educational resources (Oketch, 2007). In addition, economic and social inequality is closely related to political influence. Elites close to political power brokers have better access to economic and educational resources to benefit their children and their extended family members. The elite groups have a better understanding of the benefits associated with the attainment of higher education as opposed low socioeconomic groups. This is because the elites have the necessary cultural capital. Within the Kenyan context, cultural capital refers to the information, knowledge and experiences valued and rewarded by the Kenyan society. Further, Kenya's

socioeconomic stratification influences how secondary school students gain access to higher education opportunity.

Moreover, most of the studies on differential education attainment (Bourdieu, 1967; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; DiMaggio, 1982; Dumais, 2002; Lamont & Lareau, 1988; Lareau and Horvat, 1999; McDonough, 1997) have all been conducted in the Western nations, USA and France. It could be worthwhile to extend these models to other contexts, especially developing countries. For instance, human capital theory assumes that individuals will make choices based on information available. However, in reality, access to adequate resources or information regarding higher education participation is limited. Instead, a set of socio-economic, organizational and cultural factors interact to facilitate or constraint individual students' understanding of higher education opportunity.

In sum, a comprehensive approach that integrates the various perspectives from human capital, social capital and cultural capital theory is necessary. In trying to create a socio-cultural understanding of university going among the Gusii students, I theorize that student's construction of university going knowledge is based on their interaction with the socio-economic and cultural environment.

## **CHAPTER 3: CONTEXT OF HIGHER EDUCATION OPPORTUNITY IN KENYA**

### **3.1 Historical Development of Education in Kenya**

Researchers have identified education as a significant ingredient to socio-economic development in Africa because it enhances social mobility and occupational advancement (Ajayi, Goma, & Johnson, 1996). Moreover, a literate population is a prerequisite in the flourishing of democratic values and practices in a society. With increased literacy levels, individuals would ably participate in societal affairs, improve their civic participation and engage the mass media for the general development of a society. It is also through education that individuals acquire relevant skills required for national development. Thus, for Kenya, school-based education is highly valued and broadly embraced not only as a cultural transmission process, but also as a major gateway to a successful life. For this reason, the demand and competition for higher education opportunities in Kenya is fierce. The government's effort to expand educational opportunities, especially at university and tertiary college levels have not kept pace with the increasing public demand.

In order to overcome the impact of colonial rule and spur development, Kenya's secondary education became instrumental for preparing young people to effectively participate in societal activities. Education equipped them with relevant skills, knowledge, public mannerisms and rules of behavior, and competencies for their personal mobility and social advancement. From the government's point of view, education was meant to

foster and promote national unity, prepare and equip the youth with skills to play an effective role in nation building...to ensure opportunities for the full

development of their talents and personality and to assist in the promotion of social equality and training in obligations and responsibilities (Court & Ghai, 1974, p.19 ).

Education disparities prevalent in Kenya are a result of a combination of factors, including gender, class, tribalism, nepotism, and corruption. The distribution of education resources has been historically skewed. As part of a major British colonial legacy, Kenya's education system is fundamentally elitist. Formal education was launched in colonial Kenya in the early nineteenth century by white Christian missionaries, with the support of colonial officials, to evangelize and "civilize" the local people. In addition, the British colonial government supported education for locals in order to facilitate colonial administration and bring social change (Ajayi et al, 1996).

The British colonial policy on education was discriminatory. The education system was structured along racial and gender lines. The Frazer report of 1909 recommended for the establishment of different schools, serving Europeans, Asians and Africans differentially (Bogonko, 1992). In this policy, Africans received industrial and religious education, tailored to provide them with skills to perform manual jobs in the white settler farms and become faithful converts in Christianity. Asians received commercial education tailored to meet their commercial interests, while Europeans received academic education, a replica of the British liberal arts education. The relegation of Africans into industrial education and subsequent mistreatment by colonial regime affected their attitudes towards the development of education. Furthermore, inequality was manifested when the colonial government restricted the movement of African Kenyans migrating to Nairobi and Mombasa in

search of employment opportunities. In general, socioeconomic stratification followed racial lines as Europeans and Asians had access to better job opportunities in the government sector based on the type of education received. Hence, formal education was closely linked to social mobility and classification.

Accordingly, the colonial white paper, “Education Policy in British Tropical Africa” (1925), set the pace for colonial education with the adoption of adapted education. Basically, it spelt out the main tenets of the British education policy namely, the implementation of education under government control through indirect rule; adapted education to the local needs and conditions [culture]; use of local languages in primary schools as a medium of instruction; education of the girls to be given more attention; and that greater emphasis should be on provision of primary education (Colonial Office, 1925). Further, this colonial policy on education also endorsed three R’s for Africans; rejection of what was considered unscientific and obnoxious, like witchcraft; retention of the best indigenous culture, and rejuvenation of the old by grafting an alien western culture preferably with a Christian bias (D’Souza, 1993).

Racial inequality fueled the struggle for independence as Africans resisted segregated industrial education. They started establishing Independent Schools in the 1950s. The primary objective of the African Independent Schools was the cultivation of the spirit of African nationalism as a tool for resisting colonial rule. The schools were also meant to provide knowledge and skills that colonial education did not offer. The Independent school movement became strong among the Kikuyu of Central province. It later it spread to Kisii, Kericho and Kakamega (Sifuna, 1990). However,

the schools were constrained by lack of essential resources and were of poor quality as compared to the well equipped colonial schools.

The Independent Schools were widely resented by the colonial establishment, which regarded them as a threat to their “evangelizing” and “civilizing” mission in Africa and Kenya, in particular. For this reason, the colonial government closed down the schools for allegedly training militants who were opposed to the British rule. This action undermined the Africans’ effort to expand their education opportunities. Clearly, the policies enacted and implemented by the colonial government perpetuated educational inequality that persisted in Kenya even after independence. For example, analyzing the distribution of education resources in Kenya, Kinyanjui’s study (1974) revealed a pattern of geographical, racial and ethnic differences in access to educational resources. The study noted differences in the distribution of secondary schools, staffing and resources available in each school. It also established that a majority of secondary schools were located within the white settlement areas and in urban centers, serving European and Asian students.

Accordingly, Court’s (1979) analysis of educational inequality concluded that although the Kenyan education policy places greater emphasis on academic achievement as the only criteria for selection to higher education, it is hard to prove that each student has equal opportunity to learn in the system. This is because access to high quality secondary schools is related to other factors other than individual ability, namely, ethnicity, nepotism, gender, class, and geographical location.

The differential development of education and access to educational opportunities is closely related to socio-political set up of the Kenyan society. During

the colonial administration, those African chiefs who collaborated with the British rule had their sons and daughters educated abroad at the expense of those who resisted colonial rule. Utilizing the divide and rule strategy of governance to gain African loyalty, the British government awarded scholarships to children of the collaborating local chiefs. There was a growing dissatisfaction among the locals who yearned for a 'big school' they could call their own, to send their talented young men to. Yet, the beneficiaries of the colonial regime, who came to wield political power at independence, merged almost imperceptibly their individual aspirations with economic power to take over the jobs, positions and life styles which the economy made possible (ILO, 1972). Hence, they accepted the system largely unequal with a tiny minority of Africans who were privileged and a significant majority who remained poor (Oketch, 2007).

Administratively, the colonial government demarcated the country into various geographical boundaries, separating Kenya's 42 ethnic groups. The boundaries, set along ethnic lines, divided the country into eight provinces, namely, Nyanza, Western, Rift valley, North Eastern, Central, Eastern, Nairobi and Coast provinces. Each province was divided into several districts. For instance, the Luo and Gusii are based in Nyanza province; the Kikuyu in Central province; the Kalenjins in Rift Valley province; the Swahili and Mijikenda in Coast province; and Akamba, Meru and Somali in Eastern province.

Politically, the various districts were also divided into constituencies after independence and each constituency represented by one Member of Parliament. Apart from Nairobi province and parts of Nakuru district that are cosmopolitan



regions, the rest of the constituencies are represented by members of parliament from their respective ethnic groups. Therefore, the style of politics at the constituency level and type of administration both at provincial and district level shape the direction of the socio-economic development and quality of schools in the area. People's access to resources influence their daily activities and subsequent level of socio economic status and students' academic achievement. Although all students compete for the same higher education opportunities, the number and quality of schools are unequally distributed. In addition, ethnic groups that have had political power— the Kalenjin and Kikuyu — have high quality schools and more resources are devoted to education than schools in other ethnic groups for example the Somali, Turkana and Mijikenda.

### **3.1.1 Education in Post Independent Kenya (The Kenyatta Era): 1963-1978**

The Kenyan government embarked on the formulation and implementation of educational policies to meet the goals for national development. The various policies adopted have resulted in changes in the educational structure and curricula content over the years. For instance, the Ominde Commission Report of 1964 recommended the adoption of the 7-4-2-3 system of education<sup>4</sup> with a strong focus in making secondary education relevant to the needs of the country at independence. Since then, Kenya's education policies have undergone changes through various commissions and reviews that include the Gachathi Report 1976; the Mackey Report 1981 (also known as the Presidential Working Party on the Establishment of the Second Public

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<sup>4</sup> The 7-4-2-3 system consisted seven years primary, four years secondary, two years advanced high school and three years of university education.

University, 1981); the Kamunge Report, 1988; the Presidential Working Party on Education and Manpower Training for the Next Decade 1988; the Mungai Report, 1995; Ndegwa report, 1991; and the Koech Report 1999.<sup>5</sup>

Secondary education in Kenya has received more attention than other levels of education. The Ominde Commission of 1964 made recommendations towards the improvement of secondary education because of its potentiality to prepare individuals with skills to spur economic development. The government's commitment to human resource development at independence saw the expansion of secondary education. From a human capital theory perspective, education plays an important role in a country' socio-economic development and Kenya's government invested heavily on secondary education in order to train high level skilled people to meet the labor requirements.

In Kenya's first Development Plan, 1964-1968, secondary education took the lion's share of the education expenditure, taking more than 58 percent of the total expenditure. Despite the government's effort to provide education, the rapid increase in student population and the high demand for secondary education outstripped the government's ability to provide education for all who desired it.

The rise of *Harambee* (self help) movement in the 1960s became a mobilizing tool for the local people to start schools to augment government's efforts in the provision of secondary education. Historically, as Kenya attained independence in

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<sup>5</sup> For details on changes in Kenya's education policies read, Bogonko, S.N "A History of Modern Education in Kenya 1963-1991. Evans Brothers Nairobi, 1992 and the government reports on commissions are contained in: Republic of Kenya "Kenya *Education Commission Report* Part1, 1964; *Second University: Report of Presidential working party (Mackey report) 1981*; *The national Committee on Educational Objectives and Policies (Gachathi Report) 1976*; *Presidential committee on unemployment 1982-1983*, Government Printer Nairobi Kenya.

1963, the Harambee movement became a political slogan to pull Kenyans together.

Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya's first president used the slogan in his inauguration speech

June 1, 1963. He stressed:

As we anticipate in pomp and circumstance, and as we make merry at this time, remember this: We are relaxing before the toil that is to come. We must work harder to fight our enemies...ignorance, sickness and poverty. I therefore give you the call: HARAMBEE!! Let us all work harder for our country. (Kenyatta, 1964 p.7)

In the post independence reconstruction, Jomo Kenyatta relied on the Harambee spirit to pull together the diverse Kenyan communities for nation building. To achieve this objective, he articulated that "Harambee is based on the realization of the challenge of nation building... It's conceived in the knowledge to meet this challenge, the government and the people of Kenya must pull together. We know out of our efforts and toil we can build a new and better Kenya..." (Parliament, 1963). Thus, the motivation to initiate Harambee schools was conceived on the positive impact of education on nation-building.

Harambee schools were built under the self-help movement in 1960 to cater for children whose parents could not afford tuition and boarding fee in government schools. By 1964, Kenya had more than 70 Harambee schools. In 1973 the number increased to 600 as opposed to 381 government schools (Bogonko, 1992). As the number of Harambee schools overtook the government sponsored schools, the ministry of education began to recognize the central role played by Harambee schools to cater for students not admitted to government schools. However, rapid expansion of Harambee schools through community efforts alarmed educators and policy planners, particularly on the quality of teachers and poor physical facilities,

compelling the government to introduce measures to guide the opening of additional new Harambee schools. In 1965 the government introduced a policy requiring communities to raise a certain amount of money (Ksh. 20,000)<sup>6</sup> before granted permission to set up a school. The move was strongly resented by the public, prompting the government to withdraw the policy. Instead, efforts were directed to aid the schools with resources, although not at the same level as were government sponsored schools. By 1968, 232 out of 245 Harambee schools were getting some form of aid from the government (Furley, 1972). Their physical facilities remained poor and were plagued by financial mismanagement, prompting frequent closures.

### **3.1.2 Education in the Moi (Nyayo) Era: 1978-2002**

President Daniel Arap Moi took power in 1978 as Kenya's second president following the death of Jomo Kenyatta with a promise to follow Kenyatta's footsteps. The term footsteps in Swahili language means *Nyayo*, hence Moi's legacy came to be known as the *Nyayo* era. The major educational policies enacted by Moi include; Free primary school milk, 1979; the 8-4-4 system of education, 1983; the Quota system, 1985; and the double university intake, 1987 and 1990. The free primary school milk program was introduced to entice students to stay in schools, especially those from pastoralist communities, largely the Kalenjin, who had not promptly embraced the idea of schooling. The free milk led to increase in student enrollment, from 2.9 million in 1978 to 3.6 million in 1979 (Amutabi, 2003) and many of these

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<sup>6</sup> The exchange rate on US dollar to the Kenyan Shilling varies from time to time. In the current (2009) exchange rate, one US dollar exchanges at Ksh. 72 Kenya shillings.

students hailed from the pastoralist communities who traditionally prefer milk as their main food, and could not stand regular school hours because of hunger.

However, the introduction of school milk came at the expense of another program, the Kenya Equipment Scheme (KES) that supplied schools with essential stationary such as textbooks, writing materials and chalk that majority of the schools nationwide needed more than just the supply of milk. President Moi's main aim regarding the school milk policy was to promote education among his own Kalenjin community, who lagged behind other communities, such as the Kikuyu. As well, he managed to divert most of government resources allocated to education into the improvement of schools in Rift Valley, inhabited by his ethnic group. Regional inequality in the distribution of resources, ranging from job opportunities, schools, roads and health facilities was very pronounced during his tenure. For example, Brockerhoff and Hewett (1998) found that child mortality in Kenya was closely related to ethnic inequality. They pointed that despite inhabiting the rural part of the Rift Valley province, the children of the Kalenjin ethnic group, former President Moi's ethnic group, had improved child mortality rate more than that of other children. Their study concluded that Kalenjin children had better access to health resources such as health centers and hospitals.

Further, to curtail the massive domination of the Kikuyu in education, in 1985 Moi introduced the quota system in the selection of Form one students joining government secondary schools. In the quota policy, each government school, national, provincial and district, should admit 85 percent of its students from its locality. In the first few years of his presidency, Moi spent government resources in

building high quality schools in Rift Valley, his home province and so, this policy served him well because now Kalenjin children had enough schools. By introducing the quota system, Kikuyu children could now be confined to their local schools, thereby cutting down their national domination in education and giving the Kalenjin an opportunity to catch up. Jomo Kenyatta had ensured that his Kikuyu community excelled in education as reflected in the concentration of the best performing schools in the top 100 category, largely drawn from Central province.

However, this policy is criticized for failing to uphold the recommendation of the 1964 Ominde report that called for national integration through schooling. The quota system had succeeded in balkanizing the nation and promoted unequal distribution of education opportunities. Although the introduction of the quota system in 1985 was to correct the inequality, it helped to promote regionalism and localization of the problem, contrary to the spirit of nationhood (Amutabi, 2003). Regional and ethnic animosity grew stronger during the Moi era. Ethnic groups with poor quality schools had limited opportunities to access higher education. For example, a single school in Moi's Rift Valley backyard (e.g. Moi High School Kabarak) could send more than 200 students to university at once than all the more than 200 Gusii secondary schools combined.

Although not much has been done to address the problem of unequal distribution in education opportunity, the issue is widely known. The situation is captured in the words of the Presidential Working Party on the Establishment of the Second Public University that

it is now recognized that while some areas of the nation are well served in terms of primary and secondary schools, and so have had the possibility of

greater access to university education, there are some sections of the nation, particularly in arid and semi arid areas which have been at a disadvantage in terms of access to education. Attention is now being focused on ways by which such imbalances may be redressed. Also those groups which traditionally did not seek to enroll their sons and daughters. All these things surely increase public demand for postsecondary and university education in the country (Kenya, 1981, p.1).

Although the recommendation led to the establishment of a second university in 1984, little has been done to address the issue of distribution of public education opportunities. The Mackey Report of 1981 also recommended the introduction of the 8-4-4 system of education<sup>7</sup>, modeled after the American style of education to replace the British model of the 7-4-2-3 system. Its aim was to prepare the youth for self employment after school with a concentration of vocational education curriculum. The 7-4-2-3 system had little vocational content, and graduates had high expectations though with little self reliance skills. To achieve the objective, the structure and content of education had to change. However, this change to vocational skill training under 8-4-4 inhibited students' aspirations for university education because of lack of flexibility in options available for students making choices in subject combinations. Because of the compulsory science subjects, students in rural Harambee schools, with little laboratory facilities, perform poorly in national examinations.

The 8-4-4 System has been criticized as being one of the failures of the Nyayo era and that it was politically motivated by president Moi who wanted to leave a legacy of an education reform associated with him (Amutabi, 2003). In addition, the main stakeholders in the education system teachers, parents and students were not consulted to give input into the reform process. As well, the system was hurriedly

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<sup>7</sup> The 8-4-4 system of education entailed 8 years of primary, 4 years of secondary and 4 years of university education.

implemented without a pilot program and subsequently, there was subject overload especially in secondary schools. Teachers could hardly cover the required syllabus in any given year. As a teacher in the system, I personally felt the overwhelming pressure to complete the syllabus and prepare students for national examinations. Most schools have shortened holiday breaks by several weeks in order to cover the syllabus, limiting students and teachers' an opportunity and time to rest and recover from exhaustion associated with a term (semester) long study and in readiness for a new term.

The weakness associated with the 8-4-4 system of education is articulated in the National Development Plan (1994-1996):

The 8-4-4 System of education was introduced in the country to rationalize the education system. The system has been subjected to a number of reviews and it's becoming clear that it should be reviewed further during the plan period in order to improve education delivery in the country (Republic of Kenya, 1994 p.217 quoted in Amutabi, 2003 p.137).

As a result, a commission of inquiry was constituted, the Totally Integrated Quality Education and Training(TIQET), also known as the Koech Report 1999, to review the system of education and make recommendations for improvement. The commission identified the disparities in access to quality schools as the basis for poor school performance for most areas and called the government to address the geographical and ethnic inequalities in the supply of education opportunities.

The linkage between political patronage and education development during the Moi era is captured by the words of Bradshaw and Fuller (1996), who stated that "Moi regime remain[ed] very active in the education sector, but much of this policy activity serve[d] to maintain minimal levels of legitimacy and to broaden Moi's



political interdependence: opening up more secondary schools and university spaces to appease urban elites and the restless middle class” (p.90). Through a presidential decree, Moi ordered public university cut-off points lowered from 13 to 10, for students who sat for the Kenya Advanced Certificate of Education (KACE) exam in 1987, thus increasing the number of students eligible for university education necessitated a double university intake in 1988. Further, in 1990 the first 8-4-4 students were due to enter the university together with the last group of the 7-4-2-3. Again another double intake occurred in 1990 and universities had to grapple with increased number of students on campus.

Other studies on socio-economic stratification in Kenya (Oucho, 2002; Oyugi, 2000) posit that allocation of government resources follow ethnic and political patronage lines, and each of the three Kenyan presidents— Jomo Kenyatta, Daniel Moi and Mwai Kibaki— have benefited members of their ethnic groups at the expense of the rest of Kenya. These practices were evidenced in the allocation of government jobs and other senior appointments in the government, seen as a source of the recent ethnic conflicts that engulfed Kenya in the month of January and February, 2008 following flawed presidential elections. When it comes to educational opportunities, the Kikuyu having held two presidencies— Kenyatta, 1963- 1978 and Mwai Kibaki, 2003 to the present— have benefited more, followed by the Kalenjin under president Moi from 1978 to 2002. The rest of the 40 Kenya’s ethnic groups are yet to get their turn, although several generations could have been wasted for lack of opportunities to advance to university education.

### **3.1.3 Education in the Kibaki Era: 2002-2008**

The National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) government came to power in January 2003 under President Mwai Kibaki, ending the Moi era of 24 years. Campaigning on the platform of educational reform, the new government particularly pledged to introduce “Free Primary Education” as a means to bring an end to inequality in the distribution of resources in education delivery. True to its word, the NARC government introduced free primary education in its first year of existence (2003). Enrollment increased by additional 2 million kids into schools. In addition, NARC introduced the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) to channel the government funds to the constituency level, empowering citizens at the grassroots level to decide on the expenditure based on their respective priorities. Allocation of funds to the constituencies is based on its population size and on average each constituency receives about Ksh. 50 million annually. Most constituencies have committed a larger portion of these funds in the improvement and expansion of education, especially the infrastructure aspect. In addition, the government has allocated bursary funds to both secondary and university education for tuition and boarding fees for students from financially needy families.

Although enrollment in secondary schools increased over the years, the gap between the rich and poor continues to widen. According to SID (2004), the top 10 percent of Kenya’s households controls 42 percent of the total income while the bottom 10 percent controls less than 1 percent. Such a pronounced inequality creates a society with ethnic tensions based on the skewed distribution of resources, “different lifestyles, opportunities and standards of living” (Oketch, 2007, p. 155).

However, ethnic inequalities in the allocation of government resources continue to persist with President Kibaki and those who are allied with him have been benefiting most. Politicians driven by ethnic interests influence the allocation of resources to their communities to create stronger ethnic linkages and consolidate their power using government resources.

### **3.2 Examinations and the Ranking of Schools**

Many countries today use examinations as criteria for selection of students to university education. Kenya uses the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE). However, Kenya's school examinations have a shorter history that is closely linked to colonial education and that modeled after the British education system. The examination is undertaken at the end of the final year in high school, the 12<sup>th</sup> grade level (Form IV) and admission to universities is based on the candidates' performance. The results are used to create the applicant pool for selection to limited spaces at Kenyan public universities, usually about 15,000 spots per year. These examinations are administered and controlled by the Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC). Student achievement in the school system is measured through their performance in these examinations.

Accordingly, Kenya national examinations remain the only mechanism for identifying an individual's potential to succeed in the next level of the academic ladder, determining the individual student's future destiny. In this "contest" type of education, students compete nationwide against each other for limited education opportunities in the next level of education. It is a cut-throat competition as the

examinations are used to determine which students qualify to proceed to university. Many fail to make it to university. Usually, only around 5 percent of the students make it, out of more than 300,000 candidates. Many of the drop outs move to towns in search of the perennially elusive jobs. Others join tertiary colleges, polytechnics, institutes, and other commercial and professional colleges. Moreover, a good number of these students repeat the 12<sup>th</sup> grade to position themselves for the following year's examination with the hope of doing better.

In this national examination system, schools and students compete against each other for the top positions in examination ranking. School rankings are based on student's performance on national examinations, calculated as performance index and the score of 10 is the highest that a school can get (See Table I). Ranking is a common practice in Kenya that serves as an accountability function for teachers and schools. Because of ranking, public examinations are subject to close scrutiny by parents, politicians, the public and the teaching profession. The best students and schools, usually the top 100, are ranked publicly in the media attracting attention from students, teachers, parents, politicians and the public towards academic performance. Consequently, the examination system has entrenched a culture of winners and losers. Good schools, usually well equipped and politically-supported, excel in performance while poor and rural based Harambee schools take a back seat as losers.

For many years, poorly endowed rural schools perform dismally. Such schools, enrolling more than three quarters of the student population (Amutabi, 2003), are of poor quality, providing low quality education and failing to compete effectively

with the well equipped schools. When poor results are announced, blame is usually directed at school principals and head teachers, and the public routinely calls for their removal. In most cases, principals and head teachers are transferred to other schools. This appears futile because, if the principal or head teacher is incompetent, transferring him/her does not improve education standards in the new station. Thus, it is a problem transferred, not solved. Sometimes, others get demoted or are fired depending on the pressure. However, rarely do educators and policy makers examine the opportunities and limitations among schools, such as resources, learning environment, and quality of student intake as factors that constrain or enable students' academic achievement.

The ranking system is criticized for promoting unfair competition among students and schools. According to one Kenyan teacher, in an article entitled "the tyranny of ranking uneven schools," there is no moral justification in ranking schools because they have different resources and students from different academic backgrounds (East African Standard, 2004). As the examination results are announced at the end of February each year, such news become nightmare for students and teachers, especially from the low performing schools. Consequently, pressure to make it to the rank list has encouraged schools to engage in malpractices aimed at manipulating examination results (Siringi, 2008). For example, in some schools, low achieving students, with minimal prospects of doing well, are denied the chance of registering for the national examinations because of the likelihood that they would lower the school's mean score. The mean score, calculated by the aggregate scores of all the candidates, is used to rank schools. In such cases, low performing

students are forced to repeat Form three as only high achievers are allowed to register for the examinations to boost the school's ranking. Because of rankings, schools are under constant pressure to present their best candidates for the examinations in the hope for higher ranking. Again, the school's reputation and the school principal's continued employment hinge on the examination results.

Although national examinations are open to students of all backgrounds and are meant to safeguard the interests of students from poor family backgrounds, Kenya's national examinations have helped to serve and promote the interests of wealthy families. Children from poor backgrounds enter the contest under-prepared and with less confidence as opposed to their counterparts, who are well prepared, having gone through high quality schools, raised in secure homes and safe neighborhoods. Good schools with well-to-do parents pay for extra tutoring and organize mock examinations focused on improving their students' performance in examinations.

Rural schools fair poorly in national examinations as compared to government schools and when it comes to ranking the two are in extreme ends with Harambee schools ranked the lowest. A set of factors disadvantage Harambee schools in ranking. Schools' regional disparities, individual students' background and quality of education are determinant factors in the school's performance and ranking (Mwiria, 1990). Rural schools have poor teaching and physical facilities, and inefficient administrative and organizational structures. Since the Kenyan education system is examination oriented and selection to universities and other tertiary colleges depend on the examination results, few students from Harambee schools get these

opportunities. This examination oriented system presents unfair competition for students and schools that are unequal in terms of teaching and learning facilities.

Table 1 below illustrates student intake (for the class of 2005) into the different categories of schools, and subsequent performance in the KSCE exams. In this table, government schools (national and provincial) have a higher performance index of 8.8 and 5.7 points respectively, implying that students enrolled in such schools, especially national schools, did well in their examinations. The highest combined performance index is 10 points. It is important to note that such schools have better entry points than Harambee schools. All students in the final year of primary education sit for national exams prepared by Kenya National Examinations Council that sets the criteria for placement or admission to the next level of education. Students are then selected per their performance in examinations to join secondary education in national schools, provincial schools, district schools or Harambee schools. The national schools select the best students nationwide per their performance in the examinations and at the same time giving each province a chance to be represented in the class. The provincial schools select their students from within the province while the district schools draws its students from within the district and Harambee schools from the locality.

It is important to note that although Harambee schools enrolled more students (120,238), they have historically performed poorer as compared to government schools. With a performance index of 4.3 percent, only a small number of Harambee students qualify for university education. There are schools in rural Gusii, some I have visited in the past, that have not had a single student qualify for public university

entry for more than a decade. For instance, aspiring parliamentary candidates in the 2007 parliamentary elections capitalized on the poor performance of Harambee schools, the majority of secondary schools in Gusii, as evidence of political and ethnic based structural inequality in the distribution of resources. During the 2007 general election campaigns, there were calls from politicians and voters alike pointing to the need and urgency to investigate the condition of primary and secondary schools in Gusii in mapping the future of the community.

Table 1: 2005 KCSE Examination, Centers and Candidature by Category of Schools

School Type	Total No: of Schools	Total No: of students	No: of students within the cut-off Marks	Performance Index
National Schools	18	3,518	3,509	8.8728
Provincial Schools	939	92,774	92,406	5.7820
Harambee Schools	2389	120,238	119,632	4.3629
Private schools	751	35,069	34,749	4.230

Source: KNEC, 2006



### **3.3 Gender Stratification in Education**

Decisions on who should access education do not take place in gender neutral platform. There exist conflicting preferences, multiple voices and inequality between household members that is reflected in the unequal power relations and the distribution of resources with regards to education participation (Choti, 2004). In the Kenyan context, men experience more power than women in decision making and the allocation of family resources tends to favor men at the expense of women, resulting in unequal education participation.

Further, gender studies in education participation reveal a combination of historical, socio-economic, and cultural factors that interact to constrain educational opportunities available for women in Kenya (Kanake, 1997; Stromquist, 1998; Barngetuny, 1999; Mungai, 2002). Gender disparities in Kenya's educational system, as in the rest of Africa, have been culturally oriented as well as historically constructed. The British colonial government gave little attention to women's education. Women students' opportunities were not the same as those of men. The desire to have women enrolled in the universities came much later when the university educated men were looking for college women to marry and there weren't many. Hence, the conception of women's higher education in Kenya was not intended for women to have a pursuit of liberal knowledge like their male counterparts. Instead, it was tailored to produce suitable spouses, loving wives and homemakers for the budding male civil servants and clergy.

The structure and daily practices within the school context presented boys and girls with unequal opportunities, therefore reinforcing gender discrimination and

giving girls little opportunity to develop and exercise leadership skills. For example, while boys in colonial elite schools were trained to become effective public servants, girls in equivalent schools were taught needlework and needlepoint, crochet and baking (Aidoo, 1998). This fact is aptly captured in the words of the headmistress of a Ugandan missionary college: “My staff will do their best to teach Domestic Science, House-wifery and Hygiene as it is taught in England.”(Musisi, 1991, p.757). Furthermore, the educated housewife was viewed as a potential consumer by the colonial class, who could motivate her husband’s productivity and consumption. As one colonial official emphasized:

She must be educated to want a better home, better furnishings, better food, better water supplies, etc. and if she wants them she will want them for her children. In short, the sustained effort from the male will only come when the woman is educated to the stage when her wants are never satisfied (Roddan, 1989, p.57).

It is clear from the above observation that women’s education has historically been neglected on culturally gendered grounds. In particular, women’s higher education has not been a priority. Many of the challenges women face in their pathways to university rarely attract the attention of policy makers. Clearly, the unequal participation of girls and women in the education system is a strong indicator of the invisibility of women leaders in Kenya’s higher education (Choti, 2004).

The Kenyan society, structured on the African patriarchal system, undervalues the role of women in the economic and social development of the society. Whenever resources in the family are scarce, a girl’s education is sacrificed in favor of the boy’s education (House-Midamba, 1990; Mungai, 2002). More often, a parent develops a strong preference for a boy, a situation that diminishes the value of a girl’s education.

In most cases, this limits the girl's access to education. The boy, believed to be a source of security for the parents during their old age, in addition to perpetuating the family name, gets top priority in access to schooling while the girl's schooling is delayed and frequently interrupted by the need to help in childcare and farm work.

The priority given to girls' future roles as mothers and wives has a negative impact on their participation in formal education (Odaga & Heneveld, 1995). Women are socialized around the kitchen chores, how to be submissive, and learn to accept the male power as a norm. They do not challenge authority, a factor that plays a role in their marginalization. The school curriculum undervalues the role of women as compared to men. As Wanja, the barmaid in Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*, reveals:

Boys were always more confident about the future than us girls. They seemed to know what they wanted to become in later life: whereas with us girls the future seemed vague. It was as if we knew that no matter what efforts we put into our own studies, our road led to the kitchen and the bedroom. (Ngugi, 1977 p.37)

There is a strong African belief that once a girl gets married she belongs to her husband's family, and so it is not worth investing in her education. The family considers investing in a girl's education as a waste of funds, with no immediate returns to the family.

Other socio-economic factors constrain girls' education. Female education is at its lowest in the rural and marginal areas where poverty reigns and where there are limited opportunities for income generation (Odaga & Heneveld, 1995). Parents are unable to pay fees and related expenses for their children's schooling. Most of the children resort to child labor to supplement family income, a situation that denies the children access to education, safety, and security (Mungai, 2002).

The portrayal of girls and women in Kenyan school textbooks has been cited as one of the factors that promote women's marginalization in the education system (Obura, 1991; Gathu, 1997). Books are transmitters of ideas that shape and influence people's attitudes, behavior, and values. Despite the crucial role that books play in the socialization of an African child, women are virtually absent in textbooks, even in texts addressing agricultural issues, a predominantly African woman's occupation. Moreover, the school curriculum does not empower women. It imparts negative images of a woman's role in society by transmitting values of humility, low ambition, and subordination, deemed as characteristics of good wives and mothers. The underestimation of girls' cognitive ability and capacity to be leaders is always brought to the reader's attention. During the education process, women are met with negative comments from teachers such as girls are not good in math, a situation that makes girls shy away from mathematics and science subjects.

Cases of sexual violence affect women more than men, as illustrated in the memorable, chilling, and fatal raping incident in Meru district, Eastern Kenya, where school girls were violently and fatally raped by their male schoolmates. The tragedy took place in July 1991 in a little known Catholic secondary school, St Kizito, 4000 km north of Nairobi, and left nineteen schoolgirls dead at the hands of their male schoolmates. Seventy-one others were reportedly raped. The St. Kizito incident caused public and international outrage, especially following the head teacher's casual comment that the boys never meant to hurt the girls but only wanted to rape (Daily Nation, May 1, 2000).

Sexual harassment is rampant in Kenyan universities, especially after the introduction of “cost-sharing” in universities in 1990 (Daily Nation, 2003). Since its inception in 1963, higher education in Kenya was free. The taxpayers financed both tuition and living expenses for students admitted into public universities through a loaning system (Weidman, 1995). The introduction of cost sharing due to the declining state budget as compared to the rising enrollment numbers affected students from low-income families who could not afford to pay for tuition and living expenses. The soaring cost of tuition and boarding fees, and the decrease of student loans, has created a condition that makes female students become vulnerable to sexual abuse in their quest for survival. Female university students have been forced to trade sexual favors for financial support from older men, or from single, affluent male students and from lecturers (Daily Nation, 2003). Many other students have become housewives to their fellow male students who can take care of them, making the girls lag behind in class work, and their chances for graduate studies are diminished as they obtain low grades in the undergraduate level.

The sex for marks scandal, with a coined phrase “*Sexually Transmitted Grades,*” came into the limelight in 1999, which explain the experiences of some female students in a Kenyan university. The male faculty members could solicit sex from some female students in order to award them passing grades. The affected universities set up committees to investigate the cases and the lecturers, who pleaded guilty, were fired by the university authorities (Daily Nation, 2000).

Women’s educational aspirations and family’s decision making regarding investment in their education, are responsible for the gender stratification in the

education system. For example, the majority of students enrolled in rural or Harambee schools are girls. Kenya has more government boys' secondary schools than girls' schools and the growth in girls' enrolment is reflected in Harambee schools. For instance, in 1984- 1985, girls comprised 48 percent and 45 percent of students enrolled in assisted and unaided Harambee schools (See Table 2). At the same time, girls comprised of 34 percent of students enrolled in government schools in 1984. The girls are generally disadvantaged in schooling as reflected in the enrolment patterns. Daily chores such as fetching water from the stream and gathering firewood, in addition to preparing meals for the family, disadvantage many girls.

Furthermore, there are limited opportunities for girls due to strong gender bias in subject choices. Girls are streamed out of science and math subjects into traditional female subjects that shape their future career choices. School teachers promote the societal gender stereotypes into the classroom setting by treating boys differently from girls. Given the limited choices available to women, women's participation in the labor market and opportunity to assume leadership roles in society have increasingly become a rarity.

In response to the glaring gender disparities in higher education, the government introduced an affirmative action policy in 2003. In this policy, university admission requirement for female students was lowered by one point to allow more girls meet admission requirements to public universities (Republic of Kenya, 2004). Despite the efforts in policy development, in practice Kenya's higher education has remained exclusively a male domain, usually of the middle and upper social

economic backgrounds. Although such policy developments are desirable for Kenya, historically the major beneficiaries of university education have been the elite class, and they do not seem to serve the needs of disadvantaged groups. As Eshiwani (1983) notes, university education has been a privilege of students from higher socio-economic backgrounds and advantaged groups.

### **3.4 Higher Education Financial Aid System**

Financial aid is a fairly new phenomenon in Kenya and available reports (HELB, 1995) indicate that there existed, though not well structured, some form of college financial aid during the colonial period, especially in the 1950s. Although not elaborate, Kenya's financial aid system has undergone four major policy shifts, namely, Higher Education Loans Board (HELF) 1950- 1974; University Student Loans Scheme (USLS) 1974- 1980; Loan Disbursement and Recovery (LDR) 1981- 1994; and Higher Education Loans Board (HELB) 1995 to the present.

#### **3.4.1 Higher Education Loans Fund (HELF): 1950- 1974**

The establishment of the Higher Education Loans Fund (HELF) in 1950s to award loans to students pursuing university education outside East Africa marked the beginning of Kenya's financial aid history. The then British colonial government awarded loans to Kenyan students pursuing studies in Britain, United States, the former USSR, India, Canada, and South Africa. In order to get the loans, recipients were required to submit financial securities such as Land Title Deeds, Insurance policies and other written guarantees. The loans were to be repaid, with low interest

rates, upon completion of their university studies and attaining of employment with the government sector. The post-independence government was the only employer of university graduates (Eshiwani, 1983) and many were hired to replace departing expatriates.

The newly independent East African countries (Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda) pursued higher education expansion jointly through the integrated university, known as the University of East Africa (UEA). The University of East Africa had constituent colleges that included the Makerere University College (Uganda), University College of Nairobi (Kenya) and University of Dar es Salaam (Tanzania). Unlike students who studied abroad using HELF loans, students enrolled in the University of East Africa had all their college costs met by their respective governments. In addition, UEA students received a stipend, popularly known as *boom*, textbooks, free meals and accommodation in residential halls, all paid by the government. As Nkulu (2005) observes, this generous public funding to higher education institutions occurred because of the desire to create a trained workforce to replace departing expatriates. Policy makers expressed much hope that higher education could also spur socio-economic and political development of these newly independent countries.

### **3.4.2 University Student Loans Scheme (USLS) 1974- 1980**

The mid 1970s and early 1980s registered a rapid growth in secondary school completion rates (Ajayi et al, 1996) that resulted in a higher number of students joining local public universities. As the number of students aspiring for a university



education continued to expand, the government could no longer meet the needs of the enrolled students. Hence, in 1974, the government established the University Student Loans Scheme (USLS) under the ministry of education to advance loans to students pursuing studies at the universities of Dar es Salaam, Makerere, and Nairobi.

However, there existed inadequate mechanisms to identify students who needed financial assistance and how they could repay the loans received. As a result, most beneficiaries had their records misplaced and loan repayments were defaulted (Economic Review, 1998). It is also important to note that misunderstanding of the USLS loan's terms by recipients was perhaps the biggest challenge that USLS loan system faced. Most students and their families perceived the USLS loans as grants that did not require repayment. Such a misconception played a role in causing the high default rates. In addition, the non-existence of sureties or legal mechanisms on how to recover the loans complicated USLS's loan recovery efforts. When default rates surpassed 80 percent, USLS loan scheme was disbanded in 1980 (Economic Review, 1998) largely because it lacked a proper tracking system.

### **3.4.3 Loan Disbursement and Recovery (LDR) 1981-1994**

Following the disbandment of the USLS loans, the government had to devise a method of providing financial assistance to financially needy students, and also find ways to recover funds owed by previous loan beneficiaries. As such, a Loan Disbursement and Recovery (LDR) office was established within the ministry of education to facilitate the process. Through LDR, university students received their stipend at the beginning of each semester. As well, individual colleges were allocated funds to cater for the food and boarding needs for all enrolled students. However,

this funding policy faced criticism from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, the major lenders to Kenya as well key actors in Kenyan government policy, over what they termed as high expenditure on higher education (World Bank, 1988). According to the World Bank, higher education spending was not a significant priority and yet it was overstretching the national budget (World Bank 1995).

Beginning 1990s, the IMF and the World Bank implemented changes in their lending conditions and that pushed Kenya's higher education towards privatization. Invariably, continuing IMF pressure on the government to limit spending in higher education, and instead, institute cost recovery measures compelled the government to introduce cost-sharing. Cost sharing is a gradual shift of part of higher education cost from the government to parents and students (Johnstone, 2004). In Kenya, cost sharing was marked with a reduced tuition, payment of fees for room and board for university students which did not exist before. With these measures, public funding of higher education took a different direction; moving from a fully public sponsored system to a privatized system of higher education.

#### **3.4.4 Higher Education Loans Board (HELB) 1995 to the Present**

Unlike the two previous phases, financial aid landscape under the HELB has greatly changed. As mentioned earlier, the introduction of cost sharing became problematic for low income students. Initially, this policy was met with a strong resistance from students leading to the closure of the universities for one year. Finally, to end this stalemate and reopen universities, the government had to find a

formula to aid deserving students, especially those students from low socio economic backgrounds, to pay their tuition and fees. Proponents of the cost sharing policy (World Bank, 1994) argue that it would increase access to higher education, make beneficiaries of higher education be part of the cost for equity reasons, and it would achieve efficiency in the management of public universities. As such, most African countries introduced user fees in the 1990s to meet the cost of higher education. Although the introduction of subsidized tuition and fees in the regular track and the privately sponsored programs are two forms of cost sharing meant to increase access to higher education, college opportunity for low income students is limited in either of the two arrangements. While the student loans are meant to cater for the socio-economically disadvantaged, the loans are unreliable and inadequate to meet the financial needs of the enrolled low-income students.

Thus, the government established the Higher Education Loans Board (HELB) in 1995 to provide loans and scholarships to financially needy students in public universities. To assess students' eligibility for financial assistance, the HELB utilizes a Means Testing approach to provide loans and bursaries to financially needy students. However, HELB student loans cover only about one-third of the yearly higher education costs, the rest must be born by the student and family. For example in the 1995/96 academic year the loan amount covered only Kshs.18, 000 (US\$1,020)<sup>8</sup> for food, Kshs. 7,000 (US\$397.05) for accommodation, Kshs. 8,000 (US\$454) for tuition, and Kshs 9,000 (US\$510) for books (HELB, 2002). The maximum amount of the loan a student received was Kshs.42, 000 (US\$2,382) and this covers 35 percent of the estimated costs born by the family (Sanyal and Martin,

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<sup>8</sup> Reported in constant US dollar, 1996.

1998). In this case, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds find it difficult to bridge the gap between financial aid received and the costs of university education.

### **3.5 Patterns of University Access**

Each year, over 300,000 students compete for about 15,000 seats in Kenya's public universities. Using students' performance in national examinations as the criteria, the Universities' Joint Admissions Board (JAB) designs and implements the admission process for all students enrolled in Kenya's public universities' regular programs. High school graduates undergo a lot of anxiety awaiting the results of the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examinations and the impending admission decisions by JAB as to whether they will qualify to get a seat at the competitive public university's regular program. The process is not only competitive and selective (as only students from particular schools perform well in the examinations and make to the admissions list) but also that these qualified students must meet the cost of their education. Since the government transferred the cost of higher education to students and families, passing a university qualifying exam has become a short-lived joy among low income students and families, given the cost sharing scheme.

Even though current developments are meant to widen access, the transition towards funding formulas in which more of the financial burden is placed on students, is likely to act as a further disincentive to students from low income families and disadvantaged groups. The increased tuition and fees lead to greater exclusion and continues the elitism that has existed in the university for many years. For example,

Hughes' study (1987) on access and experiences of students at the University of Nairobi, Kenya, reveals a widening gap in accessing university education in the 1980s. Students from low income families and disadvantaged groups did not have equal opportunity to university education compared to students from the middle class.

Kenya's cost sharing policy assumed dual track tuition practices i.e. the regular and the parallel tracks. Higher achieving students from low income backgrounds enrolled in the regular track receive government student loans. Conversely, students in the parallel track, known as the Privately Sponsored Student Program (PSSP), pay full tuition and are ineligible for government student loans irrespective of their socio-economic background. The regular track students get admitted through JAB based on their performance at the KCSE examinations while students who opt to study under the PSSP track are those who did not secure admission to the regular degree programs but are able to pay. Because of this dual tuition policy, PSSP students' tuition and fees are three times more than that of regular students.

Although Kenyan public universities set a minimum admission requirement of a C+ (plus) grade average at KCSE, university admissions are pegged on bed capacity and classroom spaces. Basically, all undergraduate students admitted to public universities are expected to live in residential halls. Hence, the number of students admitted in any particular year reflects the number of rooms/beds available, usually rooms created by the graduating class.<sup>9</sup> On average, the seven public universities have a combined figure of 15,000 vacancies for incoming undergraduate students per

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<sup>9</sup> Students admitted to Kenyan public universities are expected to progress from one year to another as a cohort and are expected to graduate together. The expected date of graduation is assigned during initial registration.

year. Depending on the size and number of programs offered, some universities may enroll a higher number of students than others. The distribution of students across the universities is not equal. For instance, the University of Nairobi, the largest public university, is allocated the highest number of students.

In the admission process, the JAB regulates and approves cut off points for entry into universities. The entry points vary from year to year depending on the nationwide students' performance at the KSCE.<sup>10</sup> The highest grade is A with 86 points. However, JAB's admission process is so competitive that only students with high scores at the KSCE get priority. With this competitive process, universities reach their target by the time JAB gets to consider students with a B. Thus students with B-(minus) and C+ (plus) averages are locked out. For instance, in the 2004 intake, only 10,232 of the 49,719 students who scored a minimum of C+ and above in the KSCE got admission to the six public universities (Daily Nation, 2005). Consequently, the students who are left out have options to seek a university education through the PSSP plan, join Kenyan private universities, enroll in two year colleges or seek education opportunities outside the country.

The educational system is pyramid-shaped and a student cannot simply decide to advance from one level of education to another. Even then, as students progress from one level to the next, enrollment numbers tend to decrease greatly and the biggest decrease "peak" is the number of students who enroll and graduate from the university. Earlier studies on education opportunities (Fields, 1975) show evidence that children from relatively well-to-do family backgrounds tend to benefit more from

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<sup>10</sup>JAB has had an upward revision of university entry points. In 2002, the cut off point was 64 and in 2003 it was changed 66, in 2004 the cut off was 67.

education than those from poor family backgrounds and that this tendency is more pronounced at the university level. It is important to note that the enrollment rates in Kenyan higher education institutions currently stands at 5 percent. Since university access is through competitive national examinations, low income students are under represented in higher education institutions.

Earlier factors that affect low- income students in the education level do limit their access to higher levels of education. These students receive low quality public primary and secondary education hence their inability to compete in national examinations with high income students attending private schools. In order to secure seats in well performing national schools, high income parents invest a lot in their children's primary education through high cost private schools. Students from private primary schools excel in secondary school qualifying examinations as compared to their counterparts from public primary schools. Because students compete against each other to secure seats in national schools, students scoring high marks are assured of admission to national secondary schools. These are the schools that transition greater numbers of their students to the university. Conversely, low- income students have limited possibility attending national secondary schools and lack motivation to aspire for a university education. Their high school experience is deficient of necessary learning facilities, lack private tutoring and have limited exposure to university environment.

## THE GUSII CONTEXT

### 3.6 Socio-economic and political contexts

The Gusii or Abagusii<sup>11</sup> are a Bantu speaking-people occupying the fertile highlands in Southwestern Kenya. Upon their settlement in this area in around the mid nineteenth century following a series of migrations, the Gusii forged a closely knit socio-cultural, economic and political community. They are believed to have originated from a place called Misri, believed to be north of Mt. Elgon in North-Western Uganda (Ochieng, 1974). The Gusii people recognize their common ancestor, the legendary patriarch, Mogusii, the founder of the ethnic group and the person after whom the community is named. The Gusii hold strong cultural identity: a common language, *Ekegusii*, and common beliefs, attitudes, norms, values, and traditions.

The Gusii ethnic group inhabits one of the most fertile and agriculturally productive parts of Kenya. The region has abundant rainfall conducive for the cultivation of both food and cash crops in addition to rearing livestock such as cattle, sheep and goats. Commonly cultivated food crops include bananas, millet, pumpkins, sorghum, sweet potatoes and maize (corn). Their cash crops include coffee, tea, pyrethrum and sugarcane. Passion fruits, vegetables and poultry are also a source of income.

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<sup>11</sup>In pre-colonial times the land occupied by the Gusii people was called Gusiiland. But the British colonizers changed the name to Kisii in 1907 probably for pronunciation purposes. The people were known as the Abagusii or Gusii (Omogusii refers to a single Gusii person). In the English language they are called Kisii but the people refer to themselves as Abagusii or Gusii. The term Gusii is derived from Mogusii, the person from whom the Gusii Claim their ancestry. In this study, the area occupied by the Gusii is referred to as Gusiiland and the people as Gusii.



The Gusii culture is rooted in the African philosophy of socialism with a high degree of communal responsibility. Both formal and informal training was provided by the community's social institutions. The family, peers and the community, provide the necessary support for the growth of an individual. Most of the teachings were passed through sayings, story telling, lullabies and myths, all intended to correct children's behavior according to the societal norms and expectations. In addition, initiation rituals were used to socialize the Gusii children into becoming responsible and productive members of the community. Initiates were taught the community's history and beliefs, in addition to learning their gender specific roles.

The division of labor among the Gusii was based on gender and age. The Gusii people have very strong patriarchal beliefs, in which the male hierarchy, considered superior, consisted of the sons, husbands and male elders while the female hierarchy included the daughters, wives and elder women. The women and girls' daily duties included cooking, fetching water and firewood, taking care of children and other household duties such as plastering houses with clay. The men attended to the cattle, making fences, and any other hard jobs that women were unable to perform, such as ploughing land with oxen and thatching of houses. The males occupied the superior positions and were responsible in decision making within the family, clan and community.

### **3.6. 1 Formal Education**

Formal education reached the Gusii people through the missionaries in the 1900s. The Roman Catholic and the Seventh Day Adventist Church established

mission schools at Nyabururu (1911) and Nyanchwa (1913) respectively. However, this missionary type of education's aim was to evangelize the Gusii people and win souls for Christ and had little academic preparation. This fact was demonstrated by Pastor Baker of Wire Hill Mission in Louland in 1912, who reported that:

for furthering of same, we couple the educational and industrial line. The educational so far the native may be fitted to help in evangelizing his people (sic) the industrial because we believed the 'gospel of work' going hand in hand with the 'gospel of salvation' (quoted in Choti, 1998, p.100)

The missionaries traversed the larger Gusii land teaching people the basic tenets of Christianity and how to read the Bible. Gusii people had a very negative attitude to this education, which they associated with the British colonial domination. Education among the Gusii made little progress between the 1920s and 1930s, and women were excluded from this type of education. The first school was opened in Gusiiland in 1930 and few students were willing to enroll in formal education. This attitude influenced the way they embraced education during the colonial period and their subsequent minimal participation in the national arena. With the start of the Independent School movement, a few of the Gusii started to embrace education but not seriously and it is against this background that the Gusii people had few people serving as civil servants in the post independence Kenya.<sup>12</sup> Even then, women were excluded from the education system and are reported to have joined formal education much later and in very small numbers.

Gusii is one of the densely populated regions in Kenya with a population size of 2 million people. Gusii population density is about 400 persons per square

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<sup>12</sup> As of 1974 only three Gusii people had held cabinet posts in the government: Lawrence Sagini, James Nyamweya, and Dr. Zachary Onyonka.

kilometer. Over the years, as the viability of the land for agricultural activities continues to get smaller, the Gusii people have ventured into employment and business as a source of social and economic mobility. Although Gusii people began to value education and invest heavily on their children's education, with an expectation that the children will secure better paying jobs, culture plays a significant role in the way they make decisions as regards to education participation. Gusii culture, shaped by gender specific roles influences the education participation decisions as women and girls are held to do household chores. Hence, female student enrollment in Gusii secondary schools is at 45 percent. Women and daughters are still considered a source of wealth acquired through bride wealth at the time of marriage and many parents married off their daughters to get the wealth (Choti, 1998).

Within the Kenyan context a complexity of factors shapes higher education participation among different groups of students. These factors are mediated or constrained by the distribution of educational resources to public schools, performance in university entrance exams, and public policies such as financial aid and affirmative action. However, students construct their postsecondary education opportunities based on their family, school and community contexts and the interconnectedness of these contexts enable or constrain students' postsecondary opportunities.

Further, a study by Orvis (1985) among the Gusii found that expenditure for education was especially large relative to any other investment, including investment on land. A man's income was spent, to a large degree, not on agriculture but on education for his children and siblings. However, although Gusii people have an

ambition to send their children, especially sons to secondary school and spend a considerable amount of money on education, very few Gusii students manage to go for university education. On a personal experience, I was the first female student to attain a university degree from my village of more than 3000 people. As a first generation and female student from a very humble socio-economic background, my pathway to university was equally challenging. None of my secondary school colleagues made it to a public university that year and it took several years to have other female students from my village qualify for public university entry. To date, it is possible for me to count all female students who have attained university education in my village. Again, many of the aspiring students have remained in touch with me for advice and guidance on how to navigate the education system. Therefore, it's against this background that my study seeks to explore how Gusii students of Southwestern Kenya conceptualize their higher education opportunity within their socio-cultural context.

**Table 2: KSCE Examination Results, Gusii Schools 1989-1993**

Year	# of Schools	# of Candidates	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	E	Me Sec
1989	107	6216	0	1	5	16	56	164	406	827	1373	1900	1287	137	3.5
1990	97	6954	0	0	3	21	64	223	500	1010	1646	2150	1166	66	3.7
1991	112	6982	0	1	2	30	135	343	712	1310	1790	1743	673	17	2.4
1992	118	6960	0	0	15	41	141	373	715	1127	1812	2076	574	24	4.1
1993	125	8166	0	12	49	168	371	634	1011	1542	1830	1941	595	13	4.6

## CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN

### 4.1 Introduction

This study explores how high school students in Kenya conceptualize higher education opportunities and how they are engaged in the university going process. To achieve this goal, a qualitative research design is considered appropriate for the present study because it allows in-depth investigation of a phenomenon. It also allows the researcher to develop an understanding of how socio-cultural environment constrains or informs the way students understand university going process. In utilizing description and interpretation to capture the meaning of the Gusii high school students' perceptions, qualitative research helps us understand these students in their sociocultural context. Unlike quantitative research, which relies upon manipulation of data to offer a generalized analysis, qualitative research tends to capture a particular unique experience and consciousness in order to make meaning out of that particular context. M.Q. Patton (1985) describes qualitative research as:

an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there.... it attempts to understand the nature of that setting...what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what is going on for them, what their meanings are...and in the analysis to be able to communicate that faithfully to others who are interested in that setting...The analysis strives for depth of understanding (p.1).

Qualitative research is valuable in conducting educational research in African countries because it contextualizes the topic of investigation while deriving greater meaning from the natural setting of the participants. Borg, Gall & Gall (1993) maintain that the goal of “qualitative research is to develop an understanding of individuals in their natural state, taking account the relevant context” (p. 19). Beyond this, qualitative research offers a good opportunity to understand a phenomenon from

the eyes of participants in their sociocultural context. Furthermore, qualitative research emphasizes obtaining the insider's view of situations and events, revealing the extent of the problem while presenting an in-depth understanding of the situation as well as the issues raised by the participants.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), qualitative research is an interpretive, naturalistic approach in which "researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p.2). The approach conceptualizes the topic of investigation, while deriving greater meaning from the natural setting of the participant. Most importantly, qualitative research places emphasis on obtaining the insider's view of situations, and revealing the extent of the problem while also presenting an in-depth understanding of the situation as well. Accordingly, Berg (1998) notes that:

Qualitative approach enables researchers to answer questions by examining various social settings and individuals who inhabit these settings...and how inhabitants of these settings make sense of their surroundings through symbols, rituals, social structures, social roles, and so forth (p.7).

Consequently, Bogdan and Biklen (1992) have identified five key features of a qualitative research which can be summarized as:

(1) Qualitative research is *descriptive* in gathering and reporting the data.

Qualitative researchers explore the range of behavior and expand their understanding of the resulting interactions. In addition, Merriam (1998) notes that qualitative researcher's use words and pictures rather than numbers to convey what they have learnt about the phenomenon as well as the use of quotations and excerpts contribute greatly to the descriptive nature of a qualitative research.

(2) Qualitative research has the *natural setting* as the direct source of data and the *researcher becomes the key research instrument* in the project. All data for research are mediated by the human instrument, the researcher. The researcher is responsive to the context, adopts techniques and strategies according to the environment, so as to maximize his/her opportunities in collecting quality data (Merriam, 1998). Therefore, the researcher participates in the social world of the participants in order to collect qualitatively significant data.

(3) Qualitative research provides a way of *analyzing data inductively*. That is to say, a qualitative researcher builds abstractions as particulars that have been gathered and are grouped together in categories. In other words, the theory is developed from separate pieces of information that have been collected as evidence and are interconnected to support the research.

(4) Qualitative researchers seek the *insider's point of view* and recognize the meaning that is assigned by individual construction. The discovery of the inner meaning rather than the outward form is essential to qualitative research. The job of the qualitative researcher therefore is to discover those meanings, the internal logic that directs the actions of the actors, in order to adequately understand and explain social behavior.

(5) Qualitative researchers are concerned with the *process rather than the outcomes* or end results. Qualitative research focuses on process and meaning to convey the understanding of a phenomenon. Although Bogdan and Biklen (1992) provide the essential features of a qualitative research, they note that a qualitative

research does not necessarily have to exhibit all these features in order to be classified as qualitative.

In order to understand how Gusii students construct higher education opportunity, a qualitative approach becomes an appropriate technique. In addition, educational researchers in non-western countries have the advantage of using qualitative research because of the ability to gain access to populations or sites that have not been studied. For instance, an educational researcher interested in non-formal educational processes in indigenous African communities, such as initiation rites, would be better placed to gather data as a qualitative researcher in a bid to discover the extent and value attached to these practices when the researcher becomes part of the community of the participants, studying them as an insider while observing the issues that are of interest to one's research.

Although there are scholarly guidelines for conducting a qualitative research, an assessment of the challenges likely to be faced by a researcher conducting research in Africa is lacking. Africa has its unique research challenges, particularly in rural settings, where respondents possess minimal or total lack of knowledge and exposure to oral interviews. Further, most of rural Kenya, particularly Gusiiland, has poor transportation and communication infrastructure that can slow down and undermine the researcher's movements.

The topic under investigation has not received the attention it deserves in available Kenyan scholarly studies. This study, which breaks new grounds, takes an exploratory approach in an attempt to guide future research studies. Literature review reveals that many of the available studies, which explore education participation in



Africa and Kenya, in particular, have been on literacy and primary education attendance.

#### **4. 2 Case Study Approach**

The present study is based on a case study of twelve Gusii high school students. It seeks to establish the students' level of conception and understanding of higher education opportunities. The Gusii community is part of the wider Kenyan society and has been confronted with profound processes of socio-economic change where boundaries are constantly transgressed and contested, and new norms and values are emerging. Yet the Gusii have managed to stay distinctly enclosed in their moral system, deeply embedded in rigid norms, values and time-honored traditions. So, new and old forces co-exist among the Gusii, who are clearly a distinct sociocultural entity (Choti, 1998 p. 4). Most importantly, education is the foremost aspect of human endeavor, which the Gusii have passionately embraced for their children.

A selected case study offers an appropriate format of understanding processes while discovering “context characteristics that shed light” on an issue (Saunders, 1981 quoted in Merriam, 1998 p.33). As Yin (1989) contends, a case study refers to an empirical inquiry that “investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context when the boundaries between the phenomenon and contexts are not clearly defined, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (p. 23). In this, he is supported by Creswell (1997), who views a case study as an “exploration of a bounded system or a case or multiple cases over time through detailed, in-depth data

collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (p. 61). In other words, a case study involves an investigator who makes a detailed examination of a single subject or group or phenomenon. Accordingly, Berg (1998) defines a case study as a systemic gathering of enough information about a particular person, social setting, event or group to permit the researcher to effectively understand how it operates or functions” (p. 212).

The selection of a case study approach was determined by the topic under investigation and the type of research questions that seek to provide a comprehensive understanding of the targeted social phenomenon. A case study allows flexibility in tailoring the scope of the investigation as new ideas and evidence unfold in the process. As Stake (1988) correctly affirms, case study approach allows a researcher to “set the boundaries, and then...search out certain issues and themes... set boundaries again and maybe again as ...to know the case better” (p. 258). Since higher education policy developments are a result of many interactions with varied actors, a case study allows me to use historical events to identify the strengths and limits of the study, while also providing an in-depth investigation of the phenomenon.

A case study’s strength lies on its ability to employ multiple forms of data collection to build an in-depth case (Creswell, 1998) and these forms of data collection include semi-structured interviews, document review, focus groups and participant observation. Accordingly, Yin (1994) observes:

a case study is preferred in examining contemporary events, but when the relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated. The study relies on many of the same techniques as a history, but it adds two sources of evidence not usually included in the historian’s repertoire: direct observation and systematic interviewing (p.8).

A case study is appropriate for a researcher who wants to study contextual conditions that are highly pertinent to the phenomenon under investigation (Yin, 2003) and in particular when “questions of how or why are being asked about the contemporary set of events which the investigator has little or no control” (Yin, 1994, p.9). Further, Merriam (2001) provides a rationale for using a case study, maintaining that it offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding phenomenon”(p.41). Patton (1990) supports a case study research when he or she asserts that:

case studies, on the other hand, become particularly useful when one needs to understand some special people, particular problem, or unique situation in great depth, and where one can identify cases rich in information rich in the sense that a great deal can be learned from a few exemplars of the phenomenon in question (p.54).

Over the years case studies have been used to study problems in many disciplines such as law, psychology, sociology and education. According to Merriam (1998), a case study approach is particularly useful in research because of its adaptability to different research problems in many fields of study Merriam (1998) identifies the following characteristics of a case study:

(1) Particularistic: A case study focuses on a particular situation, phenomenon, event, or program. A case study is important for what it reveals about a phenomenon and for what it might represent. This “specificity of focus makes it an especially good design for practical problems – for questions, situations or puzzling occurrences arising from everyday practice” (p. 29). Apart from this, case studies are particularly useful because they “concentrate attention on the way particular groups of people

confront specific problems, taking holistic view of the situation. They are problem centered, small scale, entrepreneurial endeavors” (Shaw, 1978, as cited in p. 29).

(2) Descriptive: A case study seeks to offer a rich description of a phenomenon under investigation in depth. By offering a detailed description of a problem under investigation, case studies are viewed as holistic, grounded, lifelike and exploratory.

(3) Heuristic: A case study highlights a researcher’s understanding of the phenomenon under study. Previously unknown relationships can be expected to emerge from case studies leading to a rethinking of the phenomenon being researched. New insights into how things get to be the way they are can be anticipated from case studies. A case study seeks to discover new meanings, the extent of the reader’s experience, or confirm what is known. For this reason, a case study can “explain the reasons for a problem, the background of a situation, what happened, and why” (p.31). According to Patton (1990), heuristic is a form of inquiry that brings to the fore the personal experience and insights of the researcher. Therefore, a case study allows a researcher to have “a personal experience with, and intense interest in, the phenomenon” under investigation as well as participants who must “share an intensity of experiences with the phenomenon” being studied (p.71). The shared intensity of experiences involved in this phenomenon is heightened by the fact that study participants and I share the same socio-political and cultural backgrounds and educational experiences.

(4) Inductive: A case study employs an inductive reasoning approach to formulate concepts, generalizations, hypotheses or theories rather than testing

existing theory. Qualitative researchers formulate theories from intuitive understandings and observations from field work.

In a qualitative study, a sociocultural analysis of a single social unit or phenomenon is best defined as an ethnographic case study (Merriam and Simpson, 2000, p.109). This present research study falls within the case study research's subcategory of ethnographic study. Part of the reason is that the study's main objective is to provide an in-depth examination of a phenomenon within a particular culture and environment.

#### **4.3 Ethnographic Research**

Ethnography is a form of qualitative research that is utilized to study people's behavior within a particular cultural context. Creswell (1997) views ethnography as an analytic description of a social or cultural group. Ethnography was chosen because it privileges lived experience and felt knowledge. As most ethnographers do, my study used interviews and observations to probe deeper into the inner worlds of opinions, perceptions, experiences, attitudes, and thoughts of the participants. As Fetterman (1998) correctly argues, ethnography is the art and science of describing, explaining and interpreting specific aspects of a particular group or culture. In this context, culture is "the acquired knowledge that people use to interpret experience and generate behavior" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992 p.38) and this culture ultimately embraces what people mean about "what they do [behavior], know, believe, understand, feel [attitudes] or what they say [language], as well as what they make and use [artifacts]" (Creswell, 1997, p.59).

Ethnographic approach to research is increasingly gaining attention among researchers. Spradley (1980) notes that:

A quiet revolution has spread through the social sciences and many applied disciplines. A new appreciation for qualitative research has emerged among educators, urban planners, sociologists, nurses, public interest lawyers, political scientists, and many others...Qualitative research called ethnography has come of age (p.v).

The purpose of ethnographic research is to describe and interpret cultural behavior, and it incorporates the participants' symbolic meanings and ongoing patterns of social interactions" (Merriam & Simpson, 2000 p.108). Accordingly, Watson-Gegeo (1988) views ethnography as the "study of peoples' behavior in naturally occurring, ongoing settings, with a focus on the cultural interpretation of behavior" (p.576). Consequently, ethnographic study's focus on the cultural context and its concern with holism is what sets it apart from other forms of qualitative research. Most importantly, ethnographic research explores the phenomenon (university going) within the socio-cultural context of the participant's family, school, and community. Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner & Steinmetz (1991) support the use of ethnographic study because it gives researchers an opportunity to "learn to see the world from the eyes of the person being interviewed" (p.48). Further, Fetterman (1998) notes that, "every ethnography is, in a sense, an evaluation, for it describes how relationships in social contexts work. Ethnographic educational evaluation has contributed to a more complete understanding of both old and new issues in education" (p. 21).

Ethnographic research aims to "discover the social relations that organize a particular setting...and study how artful social activity is produced from moment to

moment, moves through which people sustain and coordinate collective activity” (Fetterman, 1998, p.48). Such social relations are studied in the context of their historical, social and political underpinnings, and their relationships with other social structures.

Educational researchers welcome the emergence of ethnography in the field of education, as an appropriate research method that aims to provide rich, descriptive data about the contexts, activities, and beliefs of participants in educational settings (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). It also allows a researcher to make sense of the data from a cultural perspective. In other words, ethnography is more of an approach of interpreting data rather than a technique of data collection. As Merriam (1998) posits, ethnography is a sociocultural interpretation of the data.

In research studies that seek to provide a sociocultural analysis of education policy and practice, ethnographic interpretation of data is appropriate because it is likely to yield valuable insights into current issues of concern to educators, and can provide grounded theoretical perspectives from which more large scale survey type studies can be developed (Masemann, 2003 p.127). Therefore, this research utilized case study as a technique for data collection and a way of gaining knowledge about the individual, organizational, and socio-political contexts of the phenomena. Ethnographic technique was used to make sense of the data within the context of the participants’ socio-cultural environment.

#### **4.4 Ethnographic Case Study**

This study combined ethnographic and case study approaches. As Merriam (1988) observes:

An ethnographic case study is more than an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a social unit or phenomenon. It is a sociocultural analysis of the unit of study. Concern with the cultural context is what sets this type of study apart from other qualitative research (p.23).

Ethnographic case study utilizes a variety of methods of data collection such as different forms of interviewing, document review and participant observations in order to generate quotations, excerpts of documents and descriptions, resulting into narrative description. An ethnographic case study seeks a holistic description and explanation to build a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. As Snow (1999) postulates, “the intention is to secure an up-close, firsthand, intimate understanding of the social worlds, issues and/or processes of interest, particularly as they are experienced and understood by individuals studied” (p.98).

#### **4.5 Research Sites**

Marshall and Rossman (1994) recommend the selection of a research site based on its accessibility, with a high probability of finding the phenomenon of interest, and where a researcher is more likely to develop trusting relationships with participants, ensuring high quality data collection and without compromising the credibility of the research project. This study sought to establish an understanding of how Gusii high school students conceptualize and aspire for higher education opportunity. To achieve this objective, four public high schools in Gusiiland were selected as research sites. These high schools were purposively selected on the basis



of their categorization by the Ministry of Education and they constitute a representative sample of secondary schools in Gusiland. Further, and in order to make the data more reflective of the experiences of both male and female high school students, I made deliberate efforts to balance gender in the types of high schools selected for each category. A Girls' high school and a Boys' high school were selected at the provincial school level; at the district level category, a mixed boarding secondary school was selected; while a mixed day secondary school was at the Harambee level.

In the provincial category, the selected schools are Tumaini Boys High School and Baraka Girls' High School.<sup>13</sup> As part of the oldest government secondary schools in the area, most prominent Gusii personalities, politicians, civil servants and others serving various sectors of the Kenyan society, studied in these institutions. Although these schools registered a remarkable performance in university qualifying examination in the 1980s, for the last decade, these schools have performed relatively poorly as compared to other provincial schools in Kenya.

At the district level category, Angaza high school; a mixed gender/coed school was been selected. The school has performed fairly well in national examinations although not to the level of provincial schools. This school was selected because of the ability to contribute to a cross-gender understanding of the university going process. In the Harambee category, Imani high school was selected. Unlike Tumaini, Baraka and Angaza, boarding schools, Imani high school is a day school, meaning students operate daily from home to school.

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<sup>13</sup> Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the participants the

In general, the four schools are relatively different in terms of their academic characteristics and the academic profile of students. By focusing on schools across different categories, the study sought to explore how individual students, families and school environments, interact to shape the students' understanding of higher education opportunity. The study situates students' understanding of higher education opportunity within socio-cultural and organizational contexts and how their habitus influences the decisions they make concerning higher education participation.

#### **4.6 Selection of the Participants**

The selection of the research participants for this study was done through purposeful sampling, a process that started in November 2007. Purposeful sampling, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), is “based on informational not statistical, considerations. Its purpose is to maximize information, not facilitate generalization. Its procedures are striking different, too, and depend on the particular ebb and flow of information as the study is carried out rather than on priori considerations. Finally, the criterion invoked to determine when to stop sampling is informational redundancy, not a statistical confidence level” (p.202). The object of the research, as in this present study, is two fold: to detail the many specifics that give the context its unique flavor and to generate the information upon which the emergent design and theory can be based (p.201). The multiple case study characteristics of this research involve students' context in four different high schools and the ability to bring in multiple perspectives on the issue of higher education opportunity. A total of twelve high school students drawn from four high schools, were the focus of the study. An

in-depth interview with these students aimed at developing an understanding of how students construct higher education opportunity irrespective of differential academic abilities and achievement.

The study investigated the influence of human, social and cultural capital that constitutes a measure of a student's socio-economic class. However, among the agriculturally dependent Gusii community, it was difficult to measure socio-economic status. This is because of the existence of non-quantifiable income from subsistence farming and non-existence of family or individual tax return income as is common with families in the western societies. Instead, a student's eligibility to benefit from a government bursary scheme was used to classify students' SES. Government financial aid for secondary education is awarded to the intellectually gifted but financially needy students from low-income and disadvantaged families such as orphans and those from single, separated, or extremely poor families. Students benefiting from the bursary scheme as well as those who are considered financially capable were involved. Further, in order to explore how different factors interact to shape student's understanding and conception of higher education opportunity, I also interviewed their parents and teacher counselors for each participating school. In order to gauge how selected students' views compare with other students in the school, I conducted one focus group interview in each of the four high schools.

**Table 3: Research Sites and Participants in the Study**

School type	School name	Students interviewed	Focus group students	Parents	Teacher Counselors	Deputy Principal	Total
Provincial/Boys	Tumaini Boys	3	10	3	3	1	20
Provincial/Girls	Baraka Girls	3	8	3	1	0	15
District/Mixed	Angaza Mixed	3	10	3	1	0	17
Local/Mixed	Imani Day	3	10	3	1	1	18
Total		12	38	12	6	2	70

#### **4.7 Positionality as a Researcher**

My experience with the group under study as well as the research setting qualifies me as an insider in this study. Insider refers to members of specified groups and collectivities or occupants of specified social statuses. In this case, similar historical, political and cultural processes locate with my research participants. The research is set in the Gusii community where I was born, grew up and received high school education. For example, one of the schools selected, is my Alma Mater. In addition, I have eight years of high school teaching experience in the Kenyan education system which presented me with excellent opportunity to teach and interact with students. I taught History, Religious Education, Social Education and Ethics in Forms I- IV (Grades 9- 12) as well as prepared students for national examinations. During my teaching career, my subjects recorded remarkable performance index in national examinations and won several awards for best performed subject category in four straight years. In addition, I headed the Department of Guidance and

Counseling, a responsibility that ensured working closely with my students, in the process of making career and college choices. I enjoyed teaching, counseling and guiding students, especially female students who generally, face unique socio-economic situations, characterized by limited opportunities for personal advancement due to retrogressive gender stereotypes and inequalities.

In particular, the ability to engage in prolonged conversations with parents in my native language, Ekegusii, enables me to bridge the gaps and become accepted by my research participants. Commonalities such as language and ethnicity foster an environment that invites free sharing of experiences and reflections, leading to increased generation of deep knowledge in such research encounters. However, I am aware that my positionality as an insider is not fixed and could be unstable depending on the group I was dealing with. In some situations, I become an outsider than an insider or even neither. For instance, I was aware of my class differences with my participants, the fact that I am an educated woman, living abroad and who can speak English, unlike most of the research participants, especially parents who speak only the native language, Ekegusii. These characterizations enlisted some kind of special treatment for my presence, of which I made frantic efforts to down play.

Also, because of my position and experience with the phenomenon, I got into this research study with my own biases, values, assumptions and subjectivities. I am a first generation college student, and my high school education, in a girls' boarding school, largely sponsored by the community, was one of the best educational experiences I have ever had that made a turning point in my academic and career life. As a former student in the education system, who struggled and beat odds to get a

university education, I relate well with the many challenges that Gusii students face in university going process, especially low income students and females, in particular. As a former teacher, who also held the Guidance and Counselor portfolio, I have extensive personal knowledge of the national examinations and university admission process. In addition, I identify with the work of counseling teachers, and I understood the kind of pressure they face from the stakeholders to improve students' academic performance and school rankings. As a guardian to several children, including my nephew, studying in Gusii high schools, I relate well with family involvement in the university going process, and especially, what every parent or guardian would expect for his/her child. As a mother of three, and a mom to a college freshman, I empathize with the parents in their daily struggle to provide for their children's educational needs and expectations that they do well in the national examination to join a reputable public university. However, given my position as a qualitative researcher, I also realize that I am the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. Therefore, it is important for me to strive to untangle, illuminate and monitor the subjectivities that might shape this research process and findings (Pershkin, 1988).

#### **4.8 Sources of Data**

In this study, I utilized interviews, observations and document reviews as tools for data collection. These data collection strategies offered me the flexibility in pursuing the topic and stories that were salient to the participants. Accordingly, Creswell (1997) identifies the most common sources of research data to include

interviews, observations, document reviews and audiovisual materials. To him, data collection is “a series of activities aimed at gathering good information to answer emerging research questions” (p.110). Thus, an important step towards a successful data collection process is to find people or places to study and to gain access and establish rapport so that participants will provide good data. Also, determining a process of purposeful sampling of individuals or sites is important in qualitative case study. Moreover, a qualitative researcher needs to consider appropriate data collection strategies that will yield good information. Such activities involve locating the site/individual, gaining access and making rapport, purposefully sampling, collecting data, recording information, resolving field issues and storing data

#### **4.8.1 Interviews**

Interviews as a strategy for data collection involves a researcher taking the role of asking participants questions. In-depth interview questions helps to develop an understanding of the participants’ experience with the phenomenon and the meaning they make with that experience. In this study, in-depth and semi structured interviews with selected students, their parents and counselor teachers were the main source of data. As Merriam (1998) puts it, an interview is a “conversation with a purpose” in which a researcher seeks to find out what is in a participant’s mind regarding the phenomenon under investigation. In these purposeful conversations, my questions were aimed at eliciting detailed stories and reflective responses while encouraging participants to open their world of experience as I listened to capture emerging concepts and themes.

During the interview process, my attempts as a researcher were to understand participants' "feelings, thoughts and intentions" about university going process (Patton 196). Hence, the ensuing conversations opened into the participants' world, thereby giving me a unique opportunity to develop an understanding of the participants' perspectives, perceptions and aspirations with respect to higher education opportunity.

In this study, in-depth interviews with selected students, their parents and teacher counselors lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes. Although the interview questions were structured to uncover participants' views, they were adopted to accommodate the way the participants framed and structured their responses. In such cases, questions were asked to probe and enlist responses from the participants depending on their previous response. This was conducted in line to what Marshall and Rossman (2006) advocate that in depth interview questioning need to permit "participant's perspective on the phenomenon of interest to unfold as the participant views it (the emic perspective), not as the researcher views it (the etic perspective)" (p.101).

These interviews provided me with the opportunity to understand how participants make meaning of higher education opportunity. Before each interview session, potential participants were required to sign a consent form (supplied in duplicate copies, one copy was retained by the participant and the other by the researcher). The consent forms included an explanation of participants' confidentiality in handling of the data and their rights as human subjects, risks and benefits involved in participating in the study. In addition, the consent form



explained participant's right to withdraw from the study at any time. With participant's permission, the interview sessions were audio taped.

#### **4.8.2 Focus Groups**

Selected students participated in focus group interviews. One focus group was conducted in each school with 6 to 10 Form four students to discuss their perceptions and opinions about higher education opportunity. These focus group interviews were conducted in a free and permissive environment that invited student expressions and points of view about higher education opportunity, giving me the chance to understand how they are engaged in the university going process. As a facilitator leading the discussions, I asked questions that focused on the topic under investigation [higher education opportunity] in a way that allowed participants to talk freely how they conceptualize higher education and their engagement with the university going process.

This approach is best suited for student informants because it provided me with an opportunity to interact with students in their own social world, to gain some insights and generate ideas to pursue the issue to a greater depth (Cresswell, 1997). In order to capture students' diverse opinions and points of view about the university going process based on their varied levels of understanding, they were drawn from different educational experiences and socio-economic backgrounds. This arrangement provided me with a unique opportunity to get a broader view of how they conceptualize higher education prospects.

I chose focus groups in addition to personal interviews because of the focus groups' opportunity to provide me with a rich, cumulative and elaborative data. In addition, focus groups enabled me to interact with student participants in their natural setting. This interaction enhanced my relationship with the students and thereby deepened my understanding of their university going process. Data obtained from the focus group discussions were compared with the data from personal interviews to create an elaborative and cumulative understanding of the students' conception of higher education opportunity.

#### **4.8.3 Participant Observation**

Minimal observations were carried out, limited to student activities during the student's preparation time, popularly known as *prep time*. Students' prep time refers to the period when students are left to study on their own and to complete any assignments in the classrooms. In boarding schools, morning prep time runs from 6.00 am to 7.15 am while evening prep runs from 7.00 pm to 9.00 pm, a time when students are required to leave their classrooms for their dormitories. As a former student and teacher in the education system, I understood that effective utilization of prep time, a reflection of a student's degree of personal organization and focus, is an essential ingredient to a student's academic success. Academically, focused students utilize prep time to complete class assignments, seek assistance in areas they have difficulties understanding while engaging in extra readings in preparation for the national examinations. A random observation of student participants during prep

time provided me with an opportunity to observe the kind of activities that students engage in at their unsupervised time.

#### **4.8.4 Document Review**

This study reviewed documents such as newspaper articles, mission statements, strategic planning, course syllabi, public pronouncements, examination records, school rankings and posters. In addition, minutes from staff meetings regarding the school's performance in national examination, academic and career counseling department's events calendar, government bursary award records, and other correspondences within the school were used as evidence on how the school prepares students for higher education opportunity. As well, external communications from the ministry of education will also be accessed to examine how education policies are disseminated and implemented. In addition, examination records for the previous years were obtained from the three Gusii districts of Gucha, Nyamira and Kisii Central. Document analysis is preferred because "documentary information is likely to be relevant to every case study topic" (Yin, 1989: 79). In this case study, policy documents carry a lot of weight in understanding the university going process.

#### **4.8.5 Field Notes**

During my fieldwork, I kept field notes documenting my experiences and observations to augment data collected from other sources. In particular, taking interview notes alongside audio tape recording was essential. Field notes refer to the

“written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data in a qualitative study” (Bogdan and Biklen p.74). Field notes were important because they provided me with a “personal log,” which helped me keep abreast with the development and progression of my study project. (Bogdan and Biklen p. 107). Also, such notes come handy during the period of transcribing the audiotapes because they include “verbal descriptions of the setting, the people, activities, direct quotes” and my comments on the margins (Merriam 1998, p.106). Later, going through my notes helped me visualize each research participant’s use of non-verbal cues, facial expression, and each interview setting is replayed live again in my mind. In the process of transcribing, notes come handy especially in detecting any mistakes and errors made. Comparing the notes while listening to participant voices from the audiotape helped me to detect and fix any errors I committed.

Moreover, Bogdan and Biklen (1992) capture the importance of field notes to qualitative researchers with the words:

Your audio tape misses the sights, the smells, the impressions and remarks made before and after the interview... but field notes provide the study with a personal log that helps the researcher keep track of the development of the project, to visualize how the research plan is progressing as by the data collected and remain self-conscious of how one can be influenced by the data collected (p.107).

The field notes, in addition to a journal kept during the duration of the fieldwork, helped me reorganize myself for the next interview session following my evening reflections of the day’s work, based on what I had planned to do and what I actually accomplished within any particular interview session. Adhering to time-schedules

and making prompt re-adjustments when necessary was vital for maximum utilization of my overall fieldwork duration.

#### **4.9 Entry into the Site**

After the study was approved by University of Maryland's Institutional Review Board (IRB), I formally wrote to the Principals of the respective high schools about my intentions and research visitations to their institutions. I used email contacts to some of the school principals in Gusii and requested them to facilitate the process, particularly in locating and contacting students' parents. Owing to my earlier connections and networks as a student and later high school teacher, the research sites were familiar. In addition, a principal in one of the Gusii schools was my colleague at Moi University (during my undergraduate education), a person whom I used as a *gatekeeper* to gain access to the other school principals. In the process, I was able to recruit students and teacher counselors for the study, based on the criteria set for the selection of participants.

Navigating the research field in rural Kenya was very challenging due to poor transport and communication. I was aware that this was going to be one of the major hurdles that I had to face during my field work. However, familiarity with the cultural settings and geographical terrain mediated some of the challenges. For instance, I was prepared to walk long distances covering the hilly Gusii country, from one school to the next, especially in locating students' parents, many of whom are spread far apart. Three of the participating schools are boarding institutions that

enroll students from all corners of Gusiiland. This implied that student homes were equally far distance apart.

Wearing comfortable sneakers helped me navigate the terrain and walk long distances in places where my car could not pass due to bad weather and poor road conditions. In some rainy days my driver and I could be stalled on the small paths until the rains subsided. During this period, I avoided the comfort of wearing my dress pants due to cultural limitations. Rural Gusii people, especially the elderly have not embraced the idea of women wearing dress pants and so, to avoid a hostile reception, I dressed just like any ordinary Gusii woman. However, I had carried comfortable clothing that was appropriate for the beautiful warm Kenyan weather. Given that I had conducted a successful research study in 2004 involving six public universities, I drew from this experience to make necessary adjustments, in addition to utilizing my former acquaintances, to achieve the objectives of this research.

#### **4.10 DATA ANALYSIS**

I analyzed the data using computer software NVivo 8, to identify a set of ideas, issues and themes from all the participants. Also, data from each target student were analyzed as case study, and later a cross-case analysis was undertaken to refine data across participants and schools. To analyze the data, I first created a case study database (Yin, 2003b) that included transcriptions from the focus groups and interviews, as well the school's academic profiles. I developed a preliminary list of codes using the conceptual framework and knowledge of prior research, while also allowing additional codes to emerge.

#### **4.10.1 Single Case Analysis**

As mentioned in the previous section on data collection, data were collected by interviewing twelve students, their parents and respective teacher counselors. I also collected data by conducting focus groups, student observations and document reviews. Data collected from each target student was analyzed as a separate case. In addition, I also analyzed data from individual schools. Finally, I conducted cross-case analysis of the data collected from the four research sites. Both single case analysis and cross case analysis I utilized the analytic procedures recommended by Marshall and Rossman (2006) as outlined below.

#### **4.10.2 Analytic Procedures**

In order to reduce the voluminous data that I had collected into manageable chunks and facilitate my interpretation of the words and acts of the participants in away that brought meaning to those reading my written report, I utilized Marshall and Rossman's (2006) analytic procedures that included; (1) organizing the data; (2) immersion in the data; (3) generating categories and themes; (4) coding the data; (5) interpretation through analytic memos; (6) searching for alternative understanding; and lastly, (7) writing the report/findings.

##### **(1) Organizing data**

In this stage, I organized my data using note cards to log the data already collected according to the date, names, times, places where it was collected and the source. In addition, all transcribed interviews were stored in Nvivo8 computer

software that I used for data analysis. Also, I labeled all folders and computer files for easy retrieval whenever I needed them.

## (2) Immersion with the data

In order to avoid repetitions and being overwhelmed by voluminous data, I engaged in simultaneous data analysis while collecting data. This process enabled me to reduce the amount of data to manageable levels by the time the last interview was conducted. However, I realized that this process was not easy because data were overwhelming and “voluminous.” (Patton, 2002)

## (3) Generating categories and themes

Generating categories and emerging themes was perhaps the most intellectually challenging phase my data analysis. As Marshall and Rossman (2006) point out, this process involved “identifying salient themes, recurring ideas or language and patterns of belief that link people and setting together” (p.158-159). In order to ensure efficacy of the categories and themes generated, my study followed Merriam (1998)’s proposal that categories need to reflect *the purpose of the research* [ability to answer the research question]; they *should be exhaustive* [placing all relevant data to category]; they should be *mutually exclusive* [ability to fit relevant data in one category]; *sensitizing* [naming to reflect what is in the data]; and *conceptually congruent* [ ability of the same level of abstraction characterize all categories at the same level (p.183-184).

The number of categories I generated depended on the data collected. I embarked on keeping my data manageable by ensuring that I create as fewer categories as possible in order to increase “the level of abstraction” and easy



reporting of the findings (Merriam, 1998). As mentioned earlier, my data were managed through the use of index cards, file folders and computer files. The computer program selected for analyzing my data is NVivo 8 because of the advantages associated with the program that include; ability to provide an organized storage file system; easy to locate the material; and ability to find meaning of each sentence and idea (Creswell, 1997). However, it was not easy exercise learning and mastering how to use the program. Sometimes, I could be frustrated with the program when I was not making good progress as anticipated.

#### (4) Coding data

In order to group data into categories ready for analysis, the data had to be coded. Coding is defined as the “operations by which data are broken down, conceptualized, and put back together in new ways ...the central process by which theories are build from”(p.57). In this study, it included a “constant comparison, theoretical questioning, theoretical sampling, concept development, and their relationships that helped to protect [me as] the researcher from accepting any of those voices on their own terms, and to some extent forces [my] researcher’s own voice to be questioning, questioned, and provisional” (p.173). The main purpose of coding was to discern patterns in the data that helped refine conceptual themes or categories and their relationships (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) in a way that facilitated my analytic thinking.

In the coding process, I outlined a rough draft of the possible topics and categories based on my first reading of the transcribed data. As first step, I used open coding which involved naming and categorizing of the phenomena through close

examination of the data. The process of analyzing data achieved through the transcribing interview tapes, notes and listening to the audiotapes helped to identify a set of ideas, issues and themes from all my participants. This process was necessary in order to create a clear perspective and holistic understanding of the case. In addition, I embarked on marking texts using abbreviations and color codes for quick reference during intensive analysis.

#### (5) Writing analytic memo

Throughout the entire fieldwork, I embarked on continuous writing and thinking as part of the research process. In particular, writing reflective memos while highlighting powerful quotes, excerpts and stories became essential components on my data analysis.

Time was devoted to reflect on the text material that emerged with the theme of the topic under investigation and I made efforts to re-group the text as issues kept on emerging in the process. In this stage, regrouping data while collapsing some of the themes was essential in trying to bring meaning and coherence to the categories that were used to construct what Strauss and Corbin (1990) call the storyline.

#### (7) Alternative Understandings

After creating concrete categories from the text, I took time to evaluate and peruse through data in order to develop a clear understanding of the phenomenon. Also, I searched for negative instances of patterns and incorporated them in the text and to develop a line of argument in the discussion.

#### (8) Writing the report

In this section, I wrote an outline of the sections to be included in my discussion. Developing an outline of my study, showing how data gathered from interviews was to be presented aimed at facilitating my writing and organization of ideas during my dissertation writing.

#### **4.10.3 Cross Case Analysis.**

In this stage I analyzed and compared data from the four different schools while checking on recurring themes across the cases. First, I did within-case analysis followed with a cross- case analysis (Merriam, 1998). In this case, I analyzed and reported independently data collected from the four schools. Since this was a multi case study, I had “to build abstractions across cases” (Merriam, 1998, p.195) as I made attempts to “build a general explanation that fits each of the individual cases” (Yin, 1994 p.112). However, a cross case analysis was the most tricky part of the analysis because of the individual characteristics of each site and the emerging themes.

#### **4.10.4 Internal Validity**

Internal validity in research deals with the “question of how the research findings match reality” (Merriam, 1998 p.201). In qualitative research, it is important to note that reality can be subjective and multidimensional. Therefore, effort must be made to ensure that standards are in place to assess whether this study can be considered as valid and authentic.

To ensure validity and trustworthiness of my research, I employed two strategies for achieving validity, namely *data triangulation and member checks*. Data triangulation involves the use of different and multiples data collection methods and sources as well as multiple perspectives in the way data is analyzed. Employing multiple sources of data increases the reliability and validity of the findings.

To ensure construct validity, I collected information from multiple sources including participants with different perspectives (i.e., students, parents, teachers, counselors) (Yin, 2003). I also conducted minimal observation of the students and reviewed school records after the interview process.

A second strategy to ensure validity involved member checks with the participants. *Member checks* refer to the process of allowing participants review their texts to ensure accuracy and completeness interview notes. Because of time limitations, after each interview session, I reviewed my notes with the participants to ensure whatever I wrote reflects the participants intentions or concepts. In addition, after transcription process was completed, I produced a draft case study report for each student and school, and asked the primary contact at each school ( a teacher counselor) to review the report with individual students and provide feedback (Yin, 2003). In cases of follow ups for clarification, because of the distance between the participants and my residence, in addition to limited finances, I conducted telephone follow up interviews with the participants and incorporated new findings with the already transcribed data.

#### **4.10.5 Reliability**

Reliability refers to the extent to which one's findings can be replicated, the data is regarded as dependable and consistent (Merriam, 1998 p. 206). Because of that, qualitative researcher is the main instrument of data collection and as such the researcher must come upfront to carefully reflect on, deal with, and report potential sources of bias and error (Patton, 2002 p.51). According to Maxwell (2005), validity of research findings are threatened by the "selection of data to fit the researcher's existing theory or preconceptions and the selection of data that stand out to the researcher" (p.108). As mentioned in the previous sections, I made attempts to explain my positionality in the study, the rationale for selecting the participants and the socio-cultural context from which the research was conducted, all aimed at ensuring dependability and consistence of the data collected. Moreover, using multiple sources of data collection helped to boost the study's reliability.

#### **4.10.6 External Validity**

External validity refers to the extent to which findings from this research can be transferred to other contexts or generalized beyond the current study. Marshall and Rossman (2006) observe that the generalizing or transferring qualitative research's findings to other settings can be problematic. Since qualitative researchers engage in purposive sampling in the selection of study participants with an intention to understand a social phenomenon in-depth, it's not possible to generalize statistically (Merriam, 2002).

However, Marshall and Rossman (2006) suggest that a qualitative researcher needs to state the theoretical parameters of the research upfront so that readers can determine if the study can be generalized to other contexts. On the other hand, Merriam (2002) views generalizability in qualitative research as “concrete universals” whereby “the general lies in the particular”, implying that “what we learn in a particular situation can be transferred to similar situations subsequently encountered” (p.28).

In this case, the reader is left to determine what is applicable to his/her context in what Firestone (1993) refers to case to case transfer. In this reader generalizability, qualitative researchers must also provide the rich details about the context of the social phenomenon in such way that readers are able to make comparisons. As Merriam (2002) points out, providing rich, thick descriptions is a major strategy in ensuring generalizability of a qualitative research. As previously mentioned, data triangulation through multiple sources helped to strengthen my study’s validity. In addition, because this is a multiple case study, involving four different sites, such a research design has the ability to enhance the level at which this study could be generalized to other contexts.

#### **4.11 Ethical Considerations**

According to Merriam (1998), ethical considerations are important during the data collection and analysis of the findings, and the validity and reliability of a study lies upon the ethics of a researcher. As Smith (1990) observes, the ethics of a researcher “has to do with how one treats those individuals with whom one interacts

and is involved...caring, fairness, openness and truth seem to be the important values under girding the relationships and [the research activities]” (p.260 ). In most cases, research activities expose a qualitative researcher to the public and private lives of the participants calling for a high level of trustworthiness. Whenever such cases occur, researchers must make every effort to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants’ information. In the real sense, there isn’t any clear formula on how to deal with ethical issues in the field because situations could be different from one setting to another.

Overall, it is the responsibility of a qualitative researcher to make a moral decision. As Punch (1994) remarks, “acute moral and ethical dilemmas... often have to be resolved *situationally*, even spontaneously” (p.84). In this case, as a researcher, I was aware that I had to carefully handle this research undertaking in such a way that my actions do not affect the research participants negatively. Adhering to the code of conduct in qualitative research, as stipulated by the University of Maryland’s Institutional Review Board, efforts were made to shield the identity of my participants by use of pseudonyms in the discussion of my findings. I also made every attempt to protect and maintain the confidentiality of the information provided by participants. Again, this stipulation was contained in the consent forms which participants read and signed before participating in this study.

#### **4.12 Limitations**

Time spend in fieldwork was one of the limitations of this study. My data collection exercise lasted between 7 to 8 weeks although I would have wanted to stay longer and observe the phenomenon over a longer period of time. Secondly, the distance between the research site and my residence affected my attempts to have a physical follow up interview with participants that might have provided additional information.

Thirdly, the language was a barrier in this research. Parents enlisted for this study were not fluent in English; therefore I used their native language, Ekegusii, to conduct the interviews. Although I am a native speaker of the Ekegusii language, translation of Ekegusii conversations into English might not capture all the words and flavor of the Ekegusii language. This is because Ekegusii is more of a spoken language and has limited vocabularies that can be translated effectively into English. In the process of translation, the flavor, intention and weight of the words especially powerful quotes and excerpts are likely to be lost. However, the limitations do not undermine the importance of the findings to the understanding of university going process in Kenya.



## CHAPTER 5: THE PROFILE OF SCHOOLS

This chapter provides a description of the four high schools involved in the research study, namely, Tumaini, Baraka, Angaza, and Imani.<sup>14</sup> As academic arenas, high schools constitute the primary educational theatres that propel qualifying students to universities. The chapter accordingly highlights the main characteristics of each school in terms of size and category, admission and tuition policies, staffing and organization of the academic affair's office. Owing to their roles and obligations in the school system in supporting students' educational aspirations through teaching, guidance, and counseling, teachers are at the center of this study. By focusing on the high schools and the teaching personnel, this chapter explores the crucial role schools play in students' university going process.

In Kenya, the teaching profession is managed by the Teachers Service Commission (TSC). For administrative purposes, student affairs in high schools is structured into separate departments, comprising academic counseling, career counseling, and guidance and counseling. Academic counseling office deals with students' academic performance and the national examinations; the Career counseling guide students in making decisions about their future careers; and the Guidance and Counseling deals with student behaviors and students' family related issues. However, in most schools that I visited, academic counseling and career counseling were in the academic affairs department and teachers played the role of advising students in both areas. Since this study is interested on how students aspire for higher

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<sup>14</sup>The school names used here are pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants.

education and how schools prepare students for university going, the academic affairs office was also my main focus.

In most Kenyan secondary schools, the department of guidance and counseling is run by specially trained teachers, commonly referred to as teacher counselors. These teacher counselors are appointed by the Teachers' Service Commission or locally appointed by the school principal, usually after gaining some teaching experience. Secondary school teacher counselors carry a lower teaching load compared to their colleagues in order to create time for them to guide students in academic and career choices. In all the four schools covered in this study, the teacher counselors interviewed indicated that they were also teaching Form 4 (12<sup>th</sup> grade) classes in addition to directly being involved in the students' transition process.

In these schools, I also spoke with counselor teachers in charge of the academic affairs department and those serving in various roles related to the students' university going process. Specifically, I interviewed Mrs. Matoke (Guidance and counseling), Mr. Gisemba (Academic counseling), Mr. Tinega (Dean of Studies), and Mr. Mogoko (Deputy Principal), all of Tumaini high school; Mr. Onyoni (Senior master and head of academics affairs) of Baraka high school; Mr. Ogendi (Head of academic affairs) of Angaza high school; Mr. Michira, (Head of academic affairs), and Mr. Onserio (Deputy Principal) of Imani high school.

#### 5:1 TUMAINI BOYS HIGH SCHOOL

Tumaini is one of the best schools in the region and has a history of preparing students well for national examinations. It is a public boys' boarding school located

in the outskirts of Kisii town, the main city in Gusiiland. The school's gate, with a large sign bearing the school's name and motto overlooking to the main road, is manned by a security guard. As part of the school's security measures, the gate is always closed and visitors must sign a log book, stating the purpose of their visit before entering the compound. Founded in 1935 as a government intermediate school, Tumaini is one of the oldest public high schools in Nyanza province.<sup>15</sup> As the demand for secondary education increased among Gusii people, Tumaini was changed into a government secondary school. The school's sizeable playground, separated by a fence from the teachers' quarters and the school farm, is subdivided accordingly to fit all the various sports that students engage in. The school provides housing for some teachers at a rate the school administration terms as maintenance rent, meaning the rent charged by the school is relatively lower than the market rates in the neighborhood. Although many teachers have expressed the interest in the school housing scheme, the school can only accommodate a few.

With the exception of a large modern two-storey building that houses senior classrooms, teachers' staff room, and lunch dining room in one wing, and the administration offices on the other, most buildings, especially student dormitories, were built in the colonial period (before 1963). The front side of the administration block has a well maintained flower bed with beautiful blossoming flowers, a spot that also serves as a school assembly and a parking lot. On Mondays and Fridays, Tumaini holds mandatory morning assembly and also hosts the national flag. Clad in full uniform, the boys stand in lines according to classes, with Form one students at

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<sup>15</sup>Intermediate schools were upper primary schools founded by the British colonial government.

the front, keenly listening to the morning assembly proceedings. The principal, the deputy and the teachers' on duty not only utilize assembly time to make announcements, but also an opportunity to communicate their expectations to the students.

Tumaini's working staff consists of seventy teachers and sixty seven service men and women. Most teachers hold bachelor's degrees in education. Some boast of postgraduate diploma in education (PGDE) from local public universities while a few are graduates from universities abroad. The school's teaching staff is diverse in terms of experience, age, and gender. Heads of various departments have offices located in different buildings within the school while the rest of the teaching staff occupies two staffrooms. Most of the teachers hail from the local Gusii community and live within Kisii town and its environs. In the second term (May-August), just like most public secondary schools, Tumaini receives interns from local universities on teaching practice. At the time of the interview, there were 8 student teachers from local universities teaching Forms 1 and 2 classes. Also, some of the teachers are enrolled in graduate programs in local public universities, taking classes during vacations through the school based program.<sup>16</sup> The HELB provides loans for those teachers wishing to pursue graduate degrees.

With a student population of 1360 students, Tumaini has six streams per class. Ninety percent of the 324 students in the 2008 Form 4 (12<sup>th</sup> grade) class joined Tumaini in Form 1 (9<sup>th</sup> grade). The others joined in Forms 2 (10<sup>th</sup> grade) and 3 (11<sup>th</sup> grade), while seven students were repeating, having had unsatisfactory results in their

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<sup>16</sup>School-based mode of study is a form of in-service or professional development that allows teachers to study towards a bachelors or a masters' degree by classes in the months of April, August and December when schools are closed.

KSCE examination the previous year. Majority of the Tumaini boys are from the Gusii community, drawn from all the three Gusii districts, namely Gucha, Nyamira and Kisii. As a provincial level school, Tumaini admits 15 percent of her students from other districts within Nyanza province and a small number from other parts of Kenya. The school admits students with high scores in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE). Usually, its cut off marks for admission is 350 out of 500. However, teachers indicated that sometimes political pressure is mounted on the school administration to admit some students, especially from prominent families, with lower marks.

The total annual boarding school fee is set at Ksh. 30,000. As a public high school, students benefit from free secondary education in which the government pays Ksh. 10,265 annually for each enrolled student to cover tuition, administrative costs, class activities, school maintenance and improvements. Tumaini parents pay boarding fees and other charges to meet the cost of school uniforms, text books, laboratory fee, holiday tuition and other incidences. Students who are unable to make their payments within a set time are normally sent home from school to get the money. Some parents make payment arrangements and gradually clear the balance owed without having their sons sent home. A few students from extremely low income families are awarded bursaries directly from the government and some from the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) to meet the cost of attendance.

Tumaini students come from diverse socio-economic family backgrounds. While some are from well-to-do families, majority of them belong to the middle income families and from extremely low socio-economic backgrounds. In my

interview conversations with the boys, I realized that most of their friendships were mainly based on socio-economic class, cognitive ability, parental education level and occupation, residential location and parents' visits to the school. The main indicator of class difference, according to the focus group students, is the amount of money each boy carries and spends as pocket money. Students from well-to-do families have more than enough pocket money and some even have personal bank accounts and ATM cards. When asked how they accessed their bank accounts and yet they were not allowed to leave the school, the ATM card holding students indicated that they sent their trusted teachers to withdraw money for them.

On the extreme side of the Tumaini class difference, are students whose parents can only afford just enough money as a return bus fare when the school closed. The latter led somewhat pathetic lifestyles, usually going without the students' favorite food supplements, such as bread, butter, and cocoa, sold in the school canteen. The poor boys depend entirely on the school meals that include porridge or strong tea for breakfast, Githeri (maize and beans) for lunch, Ugali (Cornmeal) and Sukumawiki (Kales) for dinner, which they indicated, were not quite satisfying. In some cases, teachers spoke of how they use personal money to help such needy students whenever they are stranded with lack of bus fare home. A teacher stated: "Here we have some extremes, sometimes I sympathize with a boy who can't afford to buy bread. He is hungry...he can't read. Maybe the food he ate was not enough. You know adolescent boys tend to eat a lot. So what he does, he is tempted to spend that Ksh. 50 he was given as bus fare. When the school closes, such

a boy starts to cry because he can't go home. I am forced to part with my own money to get the boy go home.”

Tumaini is known for its favorable learning environment that enhances students' preparedness and capacity to excel in the national examinations. Moreover, the school deliberately strives to cultivate and nurture students' aspirations by adequately catering to students' academic needs. Regarding students' academic needs, Mr. Tinega had this to share:

Like there are situations when students complain of certain teachers and what they have covered in class, of course that should go to head of subject but I know when it appears to the students that no step has been taken then I handle the problem, So I go directly and talk to them. When mostly it comes to academics I usually talk to them, I call them and talk to them separately if it is Form 1s, 2s or 3s; I just talk to them. I do talk to them when I have issues especially when it comes to academic performance, when the performance is low. Sometimes I do so incorporating other stakeholders like the heads of departments in charge of careers and exams. I call them and talk to them in a group because we are doing the same work. [Tinega]

When asked how they managed such a large number of students and how they prepared them for national examinations, both teachers and administrators mentioned discipline as the key factor. In order for students to get good grades in national examinations, teachers and parents insisted that self discipline was fundamental.

Tumaini ensures that students maintain high standards of discipline. As Mr. Tinega stressed:

There should be high standards of discipline because if the student is not disciplined somehow in the course of time he might misbehave and be sent away. The work should be covered in time, that is why it is important to have targets for the same, so as to give the student enough time for revision and in order to make the student ready to tackle the exam considering that the competition is so tight and the cut off marks to the university are so high; it is only the fittest who will survive. Everything must be done to ensure that such deadlines are met. It also means that assessment of the student should be

standard and frequent. In addition, it must be done in time and revision done as well. The division wall has to be brought down so that the learner is comfortable with the teacher. [Tinega]

Tumaini high school maintains a horizontal system of teaching in the six-stream classes to afford teachers the opportunity to teach different classes from Forms 1 through 4. In order to facilitate student learning, teachers adopted the system of co-teaching, sharing their teaching load on the basis of how subjects were examined in the national examinations. Mr. Tinega spoke of how they organized their teaching, “Again when you come to teaching of the subject, let’s say Biology, in the exam, it is divided into paper I and paper II. In Tumaini, we teach in papers format, you find I am teaching paper I, and the other teacher is teaching paper II. So, when making a time table schedule, we assign two teachers to handle one subject. Like now papers format starts in Form 3, we have 22 lessons in Geography and in Biology we have 30 lessons, so every teacher must reach Form 4.”

In the co-teaching system, two teachers handle one subject in the same class. After the timetable is drawn, each subject teacher responsible selected the section of the subject — either paper I or paper II— which he/she felt comfortable with, had confidence and expertise in as well as the ability to predict which questions might appear in the final exam, giving students an opportunity to prepare adequately. Mr. Tinega stressed, “Even when it comes to topics, you might find I am not good in a certain topic, so I ask my colleague to help me tackle that topic. Also, there is what we call ‘crop teaching,’ a situation where a teacher is given a certain topic to teach across the six Form 4 classes. So if this time you were given a topic, next round you



will not be given that topic, thus they will change to another teacher. It gives students a chance to have different perspectives. That is really good.”

Since many teachers handle the same subject in different streams, each subject teacher strives to remain at par with the rest by making arrangements to meet the students at their own time. Mr. Tinega emphasized: “If a teacher lagged behind in teaching and keeping update his/her lessons, then he/she has to look for extra time, outside class time, to teach and ensure he/she makes up the students’ missed lessons. In cases where the individual subject teacher failed to do so then the department has to come in and organize so that other teachers come in to assist to bring the load at par with the rest.” Such teaching strategies are not only applied to Form 4 classes but also to the lower classes. In addition, similar strategies are applied in setting internal examinations and Continuous Assessment Tests (CATS). For example, as Mr. Tinega indicated, “we have six Form 1 classes and only one person sets the examinations, as such we use similar schemes of work to teach, the one who sets exams refers to that, they [teachers] don’t necessarily ask about what has been covered. It is our responsibility to know that within a particular time frame we should have covered a particular amount of work.”

This system of teaching is applauded, especially, by heads of departments because it enables them to supervise teachers’ work in their respective departments. Mr. Tinega expressed that: “When it comes to such cases [missed lessons], I come and see how long the teacher has missed in class so that he compensates the lessons. It is our responsibility to ensure that missed lessons are covered; we are not forced to do so but we automatically know we have to teach.” In addition, such a system

provides heads of departments with an opportunity to gauge syllabus coverage, an issue that is critical in preparing students for the national examinations. Mr. Tinega had this to say about the system of stream teaching: “Everyday a system that enables us to know whether all lessons were attended to, so the moment somebody is absent two three times the head of department is informed and he should know of the problem because we work as a team.” This system is helpful to individual subject teachers because it gives them an opportunity to evaluate their progress in the syllabus coverage by comparing themselves with their colleagues. As Mr. Tinega reported, “Recently I was away for two weeks, my mother passed on; when I came I was updated on the progress. Now, I have set time when to compensate that [teaching] and catch up quickly.”

Tumaini has a good system of motivating teachers in various ways. Among the incentives they have is a free teachers’ lunch. The teachers receive free lunch in addition to mid-morning tea. Teachers who stay late to teach during the evening preps get a free ride home in the school van or receive money to pay for a taxi ride home. In the past years, the school management used to offer Ksh. 1000 to teachers whose student(s) earned grade A in the national exams. However, “much friction arose given that teachers know that after grouping in Form 3, they usually know that A’s are for so and so, whoever is not ready for the scheme is given a poor class. Team work has really helped us. Therefore, the bill of the school came down. The issue of individual credit is no more, if one didn’t teach Form 4, they must have taught the students in Form 1.”

To express appreciation for the teachers' hard work, the school organizes an annual trip for teachers in the month of April (vacation period) to a destination of their choice within East Africa. In the past years, teachers have visited Mombasa, a major tourist attraction city in the east coast of Kenya and Mwanza in Tanzania. The teachers were looking forward to their next annual trip, possibly to Uganda, although the Deputy Principal, Mr. Mogoko, indicated that such a reward system may face challenges "because our students' parents are now becoming difficult to part with money." In general, Mr. Mogoko was proud of the schools' academic performance: "Otherwise I am interested in ensuring that my students passed their examinations because when I meet these parents outside there we are happy that the students did well."

Similarly, Tumaini School has devised ways of motivating their students to work harder and aspire for higher education. The incentives include an academic trip, gifts presented during prize giving day ceremony and a treat for dinner with the principal. Speaking about the reward system, Mr. Mogoko observed:

Students are motivated in time when they have done the continuous assessment tests and those who have done well get enlisted for an academic trip. When we have the academic day or prize giving day, it is colorful because this is the time we give a briefcase as a present to the top students. Top Form 4 students get to have supper [dinner] with the Principal in one of the best hotels in town where they are recognized. Also, money awards are given to such students. [Mogoko]

In addition, the top performers at Tumaini enjoy privileges. Mr. Mogoko explained: "We give them [high achievers] privileges such as when they go for meals they do not queue, they just walk in and get served without wasting any time. Also, we offer them some money to buy bread." In offering academic assistance to low

achievers, Baraka school paid special attention to “students at the bottom of performance table when they are in Form four more so after the mocks. These weak students are put into small groups and handed over to tough teachers and who are also patient.” In similar ways, top performers are given demanding “teachers to push them harder to go beyond the mark.”

In his comments about the aspirations and expectations of three students of this study—Don, Allan and Kevin—Mr. Mogoko referred to them as “university materials, whether the examination is done today or tomorrow, they must score an average of A.” Other teachers made the same observation, demonstrating how the three boys have consistently excelled in class since joining the school. It was revealed that the three students frequently consulted with the academic counseling office to inquire about any developments regarding university admission requirements, especially about cluster points in their chosen fields of study. In particular, Mrs. Matoke spoke of Don’s last visit to the counseling office, “He [Don] always comes here to inquire about the cut off for medicine which is set at 47.7 points. I told him that for him to be taken for medicine, he must get straight A’s in all the subjects, and not even an A minus in any one subject. The boy is ambitious and he has a positive attitude towards what he is doing, which is a prerequisite for a student aspiring for higher things. He is a well behaved boy, looking at him it is quite hard to tell that the boy comes from a well-to-do family. He is always mindful of his work.” In Allan’s case, she had this to say, “He [Allan] came here with high marks. He does very well and wants to become a medical doctor or engineer. I am very sure he will make it to the university. He has the potential and has already demonstrated

that in his academic performance. We are satisfied with his class work.” Mrs. Matoke had similar remarks for Kevin, remarking, “He usually comes to the office asking for brochures to see the university in-takes. He is very motivated and disciplined. Students who pass must be motivated and disciplined, and that is Kevin. You will never find him in trouble. We have him as a student leader not because of his leadership qualities, but his ability to be a role model. Through him, we pass a message to the rest of the students, to be a leader you have to be smart, disciplined, and hard working. That’s exactly what Kevin stands for.”

The academic counseling office guides students on subject choices. They provide students with the necessary information needed to make choices about higher education participation. Students make a selection of subjects in Form 3 based on what they want to major in once they get to university and once the students are informed of the admission guidelines, they strive to meet the requirements in their chosen programs of study. Mrs. Matoke spoke of how she guided students in their university going process.

I guide all the students; for instance, when the Form 1s come, I talk to them about the school curricular and about the subjects that are offered here [Tumaini]. As for the Form 2s, I talk to them regularly because this is the time they are going to choose their careers. We start to talk about the cluster cut off points and the information sent to us from the Joint Admission Board, I talk to them so that they can work hard in order to attain points that will enable them to join careers of choice. We instruct them on how to avoid situations such as getting the mean grade qualification that would enable them join university but fail to attain the cluster points for particular career programs. [Mrs. Matoke]

Tumaini boys have higher education aspirations and most of the focus group students and those under study expressed their desire to study science and engineering courses. Their motivation to study such programs is based on the desire to become

trail blazers in their villages, role models, and the prospects of securing well paying jobs. The students' aspirations and expectations about higher education were similarly expressed by Mrs. Matoke:

Most of the students go for medicine, others go for engineering courses. There is a small number that goes for other careers for instance teaching and business and other courses; however, their prime interest is in medicine and engineering. When they don't perform well they go for the other options because at that point they lack alternatives. The medium group – those who attain B, B-, and C+ - we advice them to go for diplomas in middle level colleges and others go for parallel program courses if their parents can afford to pay. [Mrs. Matoke]

## 5.2 BARAKA GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOL

Baraka Girls' High School is located in the outskirts of Kisii town. It is classified as a provincial school. The school was established in the early 1965 and is one of the oldest government schools in the Gusii region. Baraka school's main gate, overlooking the busy road leading to Kisii town, is always closed with a guard at the entrance. All visitors sign a log book at the gate and state the reason for the visit before the guard opens the gate. Visible from the road is the school administration block, a small building that houses the offices of the Principal, Deputy Principal and the secretary. The school occupies about 12 acres of land. Baraka has 52 teachers and 36 non teaching staff. Baraka teachers operate from two staffrooms while heads of departments have their offices in different buildings within the school. Most of the teachers are graduates of local public universities with degrees in education. Some hold postgraduate degrees and diplomas. At the time of study, there were 5 interns on

teaching practice from local universities, teaching Forms 1 and 2. A few of Baraka teachers reside within the school, while others reside in Kisii town and its outskirts.

Many of the buildings in the school were erected in the 1960s, especially the girls' dormitories and a few classrooms. There are 22 classrooms. The school has a newly built two-storey building, housing heads of departments' offices and staffroom in the ground level and senior students' classrooms in the top level. Other buildings in the school compound include teachers' houses and the non-teaching staff quarters. Baraka has a sizeable playground, subdivided according to the different sporting activities offered at the school.

The school has a chapel used for worship on Saturdays and Sundays that also serves as a morning assembly hall. Baraka students assemble in the chapel every morning to sing and pray before the beginning of their lessons at 8 am. Seventh day Adventist students worship in the chapel on Saturdays while Sunday keepers worship Sunday morning from 9 am to 10:45 am, followed by a mandatory worship service for all students from 11 am to 12 noon. With a reputation of high standard of discipline among students and teachers, Baraka has set the tradition and mission to prepare girls to become future leaders in the country. Baraka has graduated many prominent women personalities within the Gusii community, Nyanza province, and the country.

The school has 1204 students and most of them are drawn from the larger Gusii region, covering Gucha, Kisii, and Nyamira districts. As a provincial school, Baraka admits fifteen percent of her students from the other districts in Nyanza province, and a few from other parts of Kenya. Almost 90 percent of Baraka girls

join the school in Form 1. Admission to the school is based on the students' performance in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE). The cut off points for admission to Baraka is 350 marks. In cases where selected students fail to take their places in Form 1, the school refills those vacant spots with onsite admission as long as the prospective student meets the minimum requirements.

In addition, a negligible percentage of students join the school in Forms 2 (10<sup>th</sup> grade) and 3 (11<sup>th</sup> grade) as parents/guardians seek for vacant positions that the school may have following desertion or, due to various reasons, some students' failure to continue attending Baraka. For instance, due to the 2007-2008 post election ethnic violence, most Gusii students studying outside Gusii region retreated back to Gusii home schools for learning opportunities. The district education offices compelled schools to admit additional students to accommodate those displaced by the post election violence. As a result, Baraka class size increased sharply beyond the required forty five students to cope with the changed circumstances. At the time of this study (2008), there were 201 students in Form 4 (12<sup>th</sup> grade) registered for the national examinations. Three of the Form 4 (12<sup>th</sup> grade) students were repeating while four others had relocated from other schools due to the post election violence.

Baraka students pay boarding and other fees amounting to Ksh. 28,000 per year. From the beginning of the 2008 academic year, Baraka girls, just like other secondary school students in Kenya, benefitted from the free secondary education policy. Under the policy, the government pays Ksh. 10,265 annually for each enrolled student in public secondary schools to cover tuition, administrative costs, class activities, school maintenance and improvements. Baraka parents meet the



boarding fees and other charges that include school uniforms, textbooks, holiday tuition, examination registration fees and other incidences. Students, whose fee is not cleared in time, are normally sent home from school to get the money. Some parents make payment arrangements and gradually clear the balance owed without having their daughters being sent home.

Baraka students belong to very diverse socio-economic family backgrounds. There are students from well-to-do families, from middle income families, and others from extremely poor socio-economic backgrounds. Students with financial difficulties, especially those from low income families, are eligible to apply for bursary awards from the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) although a very a small number get the bursary. Hence, many of these students drop out of boarding schools to attend Harambee day schools.

Besides a four-day' mid-term break for home visitations, Baraka school allows parents and other family members to occasionally visit students. However, some parents, especially well-to-do parents, visit the school more frequently to talk to class teachers and monitor their daughters' academic progress and, in many cases, without seeing their daughters. Such parents are active in the school and consult with subject teachers to organize for private tutoring in subjects their daughters might show some difficulties in understanding, especially math and sciences.

Baraka girls are routinely clad in full uniform throughout the day except during games (time after 4 pm), when they change into sports uniform and then back to the regular school uniform before attending evening preps. Students observe strict rules that govern usage of school uniform. They are not allowed to bring to school

any type of clothing other than the designated pairs of uniforms provided by the school. Baraka girls keep their hair short. Since the girls are not allowed to leave school for a haircut, the school administration makes arrangements to have a local barber to visit the school, especially after 4 pm and during weekends, to have the girls' hair cut.

As I entered the school, I was a little surprised to see Baraka girls with short hair, especially having lived outside Kenya for a while. I left Kenya when secondary school girls kept beautiful long hair and sometimes with braids. I was curious to know how that changed and the teachers were prompt, explaining that a decision was made to have girls keeping their hair short because it was felt that they spent unnecessarily long hours tending their hair at the expense of studies. Later, as I visited more schools, I realized that the idea of keeping the school girls' hair short was commonly enforced

Academic affairs at Baraka high are handled by the senior master, whose office is located in the new two-storey building. Mr. Onyoni, the senior master is the main contact between students and teachers and third in rank after the principal and the deputy principal. Administratively, the principal oversees the overall running of the school and the deputy principal ensures discipline is maintained among students, while the senior master is in charge of academic affairs, including examinations and teachers' performance, especially in terms of class attendance. As the academic affairs officer, the latter coordinates the administration of all examinations and continuous assessment tests within the school. Given the high numbers of students, examinations are administered under very strict deadlines to eliminate any cases of

examination irregularity. For instance, an examination timetable is drawn to allow students across the five streams sit for a particular paper or subject in the same period. Although different teachers teach different streams, only one teacher sets an examination in a given class and this is usually done in a rotational basis. Utilizing a similar scheme of work, all subject teachers are expected to cover a certain amount of work within a given period of time. This strategy gives students an opportunity to complete the syllabus at the same pace and be able to answer questions that have been prepared by a teacher in another stream. Internal examinations and tests are administered on a bi-weekly basis.

The rigorous examination process is meant to prepare students for the national examination at the end of secondary school education. Mr. Onyoni had this to share: “we prepare these girls well, that’s why we give so many exams... that’s why we are ever here with them revising the papers. We want good grades from these students. We set high standards to make them work hard. They have to work hard. We do our part so they also have time to do theirs. They have enough time to do that.”

However, frequent administration of examinations is disrupted when students have to be sent home for lack of fees. In such cases, the senior master and his team have to make choices as to whether to postpone the exams or not. As Mr. Onyoni expressed:

Sometimes after we draw a timetable to start the exams, the principal may say the school needs money to run, we have to feed these girls... but you find their parents haven’t paid fees. Sometimes it becomes challenging to make such decisions because postponing exams affects teachers’ planning and teaching. When the school has to close in a certain date, if teachers have not marked the exams, it becomes difficult. The students want their report forms, and the office wants to close. Because of the workload, teachers have to work under pressure to complete report forms before students go home and teachers don’t like that. [Onyoni]

In addition to the administration of exams, the academic affairs office is responsible for the promotion of the students to the next class. Baraka has a promotion policy that sets standards on how students are promoted to the next level. In particular, rising Form 4 students must pass with an overall C grade of 39 points students. In addition, these students must pass with average grades in math, at least two science subjects and one language. In Forms 1 and 2, students study or enroll for a total of eleven subjects and to be promoted to the next class, a student must earn a minimum 550 marks.

Students who fail to meet the requirements are expected to repeat the class. Normally such girls make an appointment to meet the senior master with their parent/guardian to discuss the next step. As Mr. Onyoni indicated, the policy, enacted with the consultation of parents during the PTA meeting, is clear that these students should repeat the class until the required marks is obtained. In few instances, “girls, who slightly miss the marks, may be given a chance to proceed to the next grade...but they have to promise first that they will put more effort.” In some cases, the parents may decide for their daughters to repeat a class until their academic performance is improved, “there are cases a girl may get 40 points and her parent says she has to repeat...so that she gets high grades the next year, and may be up to 54, which a good thing for her.” Students not satisfied with the decision, especially those with very low grades, do withdraw from the school or have an option to transfer to another school, probably a day school.

The promotion of students who have missed to take exams is one of the most difficult choices the academic affairs office has had to make. As he expressed: “now

there are cases where a girl has missed the exam for one reason to another, or may be due to sickness, the promotion policy says that girl has to repeat. Now, it's up to the senior master to decide what to do with that student. Maybe she is one of our bright students...I have to find ways to make sure that the student is given a fair hearing.”

Personal discipline and hard work are evident among Baraka girls engaged in the university going process. Students engage in personal studies during the morning and evening preps. As the teacher indicated, “these girls have morning preps and evening preps to give them extra time to do their work. It's from Form 1, that's why we sometimes threaten them that they will repeat if they fail. The girls work hard from Form 1, Form 2, and Form 3. In Form 4, now they work even harder...that's why they go to university.” Teachers have high expectations for the students, and based on their teaching experience, they have the ability to predict students' final scores in the examinations. Speaking about the preparedness of the top Form 4 students involved in this study, Mr. Onyoni retorted:

These girls are ready for exams, and they will go to university straight. Our system of testing has never failed us. We give them index numbers [individual candidate identification numbers] according to their academic ability; our number one always goes to a university. Number two and three also go to university. Let me say that those from index numbers 1 through 10 usually go to university. There has never been a girl that was within index number one to ten that didn't go to university. The points are essential. It's not whether a girl has qualified to university or not, we also want to know how many points each girl has scored. From the previous years' exam results, we can see that the girls' points are sometimes in a particular order as their index numbers. The girls are motivated and compete vigorously to be given index number one.  
[Onyoni]

Baraka motivates the girls towards academic excellence using various reward mechanisms. For example, Mr. Onyoni spoke of the existence of honor rolls for high achievers:

For the top ten girls who did really good, they receive awards during awards ceremony at the end of term. We have a ceremony in the chapel the morning before girls go home for holidays. When all girls are assembled, we call forward the top ten girls from each class and are recognized as they walk to the stage to receive award certificates. The girls really like it when they are recognized in front of the school, and next time each girl will compete in class waiting for that ceremony. [Onyoni]

In similar ways, Baraka utilizes negative or fear oriented mechanisms in order to encourage underachieving students to work harder. These girls undergo an embarrassment of having to return to school for specialized instruction while the rest of their colleagues are on vacation. The fact that these girls take public transportation to school, being seen at bus stops wearing school uniforms is embarrassing enough because people familiar with Baraka high policies automatically know they are the under achieving students group. In addition, they are threatened with expulsion if their grades do not improve within a year. As Mr. Onyoni aptly put it:

These girls [under achievers] report to school two weeks early than other students. It is an embarrassment when a girl is seen wearing uniforms to school during the vacation. They feel very uncomfortable so they are motivated to do better. Another way is by calling out 50 girls that did the worst to stand in front of the school, during the awards ceremony. They feel uncomfortable and it helps them to put more effort to get better grades next time. And at the end of the prize giving ceremony, parents of these girls remain seated as others leave so that they can talk and encourage the girls. The parents are also told that the girls will not have the chance to repeat if they fail again. [Onyoni]

Baraka teachers are rewarded for their performance and dedication in helping students in the university going process. For example,

They [teachers] are taken out for special treats such as dinner. The teachers are also awarded by parents once a year. They are awarded by the improvement in exam grades and overall course improvements. Subject teachers are rewarded for the best improved subject. The group is from Forms 1 to 3; there are three teachers that get the award. As for math and sciences, they are also grouped from Forms 1 to 3. There are awards for humanities and

for sciences. And there is also the A grade award for the teacher who produced the highest number of A grades in his/her subject. You see, improved subject you have been captured there. Humanities, you have been captured there. We count what we call the A grade, in the subject, we count how many A's, and we give one thousand Kenyan Shillings for every A earned in a subject. So if there are 68 A's that is Ksh. 68,000. So the teacher pockets it. Form 4 west has always been the best class but last year the best girl came from Form 4 East. [Onyoni]

In addition, Baraka students are served with free lunch and tea. Teachers teaching during the morning preps and during weekends are served with breakfast. Forms 3 and 4 teachers are also paid additional allowances for teaching during the vacation. The school organizes for teachers teaching evening preps to get a ride to their homes.

Baraka organizes various events and meetings meant to nurture students' higher education aspirations and sensitize them about the university going process. During annual prize giving days, Baraka invites prominent personalities, especially women to deliver keynote speeches, to motivate the girls towards higher education. Many students in the focus group identified some of the past speakers as their heroes. Mr. Onyoni spoke of how the school also "invites alumni to speak with them...those who have left to come and talk to them. Like the various graduates. We invite speakers to come and talk to individual classes, like the Form 4. They are told about university education. They are told getting a first degree is not enough; it's like going to Form 5.<sup>17</sup> They get informed. They talk to them." In addition, Baraka invites examiners in various subject to talk to students on how to tackle national examinations.

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<sup>17</sup>In the former 7-4-2-3 system of education of education in Kenya, Form 5 was a two year advanced high school. The 7-4-2-3 system ended in 1989 giving way to the current 8-4-4 system.

Holiday and weekend tutoring is one of the ways that Baraka prepares students for the national examinations. Forms 3 and 4 (11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade) girls attend a mandatory two week tutoring in the months of April and August. Teachers use this opportunity to complete the syllabus, engage in revisions and teach students how to tackle the examination papers. Baraka purchases revision materials from other districts to help the girls practice answering questions.

### 5: 3 ANGAZA MIXED HIGH SCHOOL

Angaza is a medium sized mixed boarding high school in Gusiiland. Founded in the 1970s, Angaza high school, occupying a fifteen acre piece of land, is located several kilometers from Kisii town. The buildings within the school compound include student dormitories, thirty classrooms, an administration block, a chapel, science laboratories, staffroom, dining hall and a small library that doubles as a textbook store. Angaza has a sporting field subdivided according to the various sports that include soccer, basketball, volley ball and net ball for girls. Another part of the land is set aside for the rearing of milk cows to produce milk for school consumption. Teachers residing within the school compound including the principal rear cows for milk as well. The land is fertile and the agriculture department uses part of it to plant vegetables and other fruits for sale.

Angaza has a student population of about 1000 students in Forms 1 through 4 (9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades). The current Form 4 class (12<sup>th</sup> grade) has 206 students registered for the national examinations. Most of the students are drawn from the three Gusii districts, Gucha, Kisii, and Nyamira, while other students are from other



parts of the country. Students are selected to join Angaza based on their performance in the Standard eight exams (KCPE). The school's admissions committee, made up of departmental heads, selects students who score between 300 and 365 marks in the KCPE and students with higher marks are given first priority during selection. In addition to the centralized admission process conducted at the district headquarters, involving all provincial and district schools, individual schools are allowed to admit additional students with 20 marks lower than the cutoff point. Angaza's cut off point is 300 marks. Students admitted through onsite interviews must meet this requirement and the academic counseling department is in charge of administering and selecting these students after the interviews. In many cases, onsite admissions are meant to replace selected students, who for some reason, fail to report to school. A few admission cases occur in Forms 2 and 3 to replace students who might have dropped out. However, according to the teachers, the numbers of the onsite admitted students are not more than 20 percent.

Angaza's 1000 students are grouped into five streams per class based on their academic ability. According to the teachers, the decision to place students based on their academic ability is meant to promote competition amongst students. As Mr. Ogendi noted, "we just group them depending on their KCPE marks, those with the highest marks we put them in the same stream, and those with lowest marks we put them on another stream for competition purposes. We feel that it is not good to put them together... it is unfair. The good ones tend to relax when they find nobody is challenging to take their number one. To keep them working harder we stream them accordingly." A mixed boarding high school, Angaza has a comparatively equal

number of boys and girls in all classes. Angaza students are of diverse socio-economic status; however most of the students are from Christian family backgrounds.

Angaza has forty seven teachers and twenty three non-teaching staff. Many of the teachers hold bachelors degree in education from the local universities and a few others hold postgraduate diplomas in education. At the time of this study, there were four student interns on teaching practice from the local public universities. Student interns are assigned to a school for a period of one term, teaching the lower classes, Forms 1 and 2 (9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade). Most of the teachers are from within Gusiiland. In addition, four other teachers had reallocated to Angaza from a neighboring province. After the election violence in 2007-2008, out of province teachers had safety concerns in returning to their previous work stations. Similarly, two teachers from outside the community who had been teaching at Angaza failed to report to work for the same reason. Angaza, just like many other schools affected by the election violence, had to make drastic adjustments to ensure that students had the opportunity to cover the syllabus and prepare for the national examinations in time.

Although a public high school, Angaza has a strong religious affiliation, based on its sponsorship, which is felt as soon as one steps into the school compound. Basically, each Angaza building has famous quote or inspirational words from the Bible, all inscribed on the outside walls and above the door frames. Among those I noted include quotes such as “Work hard and become a leader, be lazy and never succeed,” “The road to success passes through effort,” “No success comes without hardship,” “Jesus is the way,” “Time is money, don’t waste it,” “Reason is God’s

admirable gift to man,” “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.” Conversations with teachers about the writings revealed Angaza’s strong believe that if the words were kept constantly in view of the students, they would easily stick in students’ minds and thereby remind them continuously to live according to the virtues.

Angaza’s religious life is incorporated into the school’s daily schedule, and students routinely engage in daily morning prayers in the school chapel. Although other schools in the study similarly incorporated religion, the religious zeal at Angaza, and its influence on students’ life was more striking. It is also important to note that the teaching of religious education is compulsory in both primary and secondary school curricula. Angaza students spoke positively about the ways the school had nurtured their spiritual growth. Many students in the focus group cited that their parents’ decision to enroll them at Angaza was based, in part, on the school’s religious background.

Angaza’s academic counseling office deals with academic affairs in the school that include administration and analysis of the examinations, monitoring of students’ academic progress, and aiding students’ university going process. In the coordination of examinations, “we organize for materials that teachers may need to administer their exams. If there are any specimens needed for the science practical, teachers bring their requests and we coordinate the process of getting them. We have to make sure that the examinations run smoothly. We draw the exam timetable.” As Mr. Ogendi explained, “here now I deal with matters concerning examination, here we give guidelines on setting, marking, and even give computation of the marks from the teachers’ side.”

Promotion of students from one grade to the next grade is one of the responsibilities of the academic counseling department. After the analysis of internal exams, the academic office compiles the lists of students who have met the requirements to be promoted to the next level. Angaza's student promotion policy requires students who fail to meet the minimum set standards to repeat the class. Accordingly, the academic counseling teachers' responsibility is to "advise students who may have performed below average. We talk with their parents and listen to what they have to say and then we make a decision together. Parents are very supportive in this regard... they know in the long run, their child will do better." The academic office works closely with class teachers in the promotion of students to the next class. Mr. Ogendi spoke of the class teachers' central role in the school:

...because whatever we do overlaps other duties so we cannot do without class teachers. They assist us in analyzing the exams and bring the scores to the academic office for overall ranking and promotion. They assist in the promotion of students...we have given them this freedom as class teachers to promote students. Even when we have onsite interviews, it is not the academic office that sits to make decisions on admission, class teachers really assist us in this area. In other areas like administration of exams, they also come in. We cannot move into classrooms to supervise and invigilate, they are there. For us, we ensure the process is running. [Ogendi]

In academic matters, the academic counseling office serves as the main contact between students, teachers, and the administration. According to Mr. Ogendi, "the office forms a bridge, connecting the school principal to the teachers and students concerning academic programs in the school. We monitor and find out what is happening; so, it's through this office that we coordinate teachers, especially class teachers to see that academic programs are running smoothly." In addition, the

academic counseling office works closely with parents on matters pertaining to students' academic performance. The office, according to Mr. Ogendi:

Reports students' academic performance to the parents. When parents want to know the performance of their kids, they come to our office and we try to assist them... We discuss the performance with the class teacher or the subject teacher, depending on the nature of the parent's concern. In that way, we help parents to know the performance of their children. [Ogendi]

In preparing students for the university going process, the academic counseling office coordinates the holiday tutoring sessions. Angaza, just like most secondary schools in Kenya, conducts holiday tutoring sessions for students in Forms 3 and 4 in the months of April and August. Parents meet the costs of the tutoring sessions that last between two to three weeks. On average, parents pay between Ksh. 900 Kenya Shillings and Ksh. 1200 per holiday session. Teachers utilize holiday tutoring sessions to hasten coverage of the syllabus in order to give students ample time to revise for the final examinations. For underachieving students, teachers, with the help of the academic counseling office, organize for special sessions to help them achieve academically. Mr. Ogendi had this to share about the strategy:

For such students [underachievers], we normally give the extra work to catch up. We do not always really realize our targets, but we somehow assist them to improve in that area. We advise them on the best studying methods... If a student has a problem, we will organize for a study, we assist these students, try to tell them on how they are supposed to study, help them draw their personal timetables, and then we try to advise them on specific subject areas, and on career choices. [Ogendi]

Due to increased responsibilities of guiding students in career choices and in academic performance, Angaza's academic counseling office is staffed by three teachers, led by the head of department, Mr. Ogendi. Moreover, these teachers are allocated with reduced teaching load in order to give them ample time for the

demanding counseling office. While the guidance and counseling unit deal with students' social behavior, the academic counseling unit doubles as the career counseling office as well.

The academic office keeps students' academic records in binders and report books piled up on the shelves at one corner, color coded by class for easy retrieval.

Mr. Ogendi indicated that his department was in the process of transferring the records into a computer:

We find there is really a lot of work and when we do it manually, it's too hard. You never know when a particular student's record is needed. Maybe a parent has come and wants to know about his or her child's progress or the Principal wants to know. He just calls you in the office and says, "Mr. Ogendi can I have student X's file?" Maybe that time he [Principal] is on phone with a parent; you have to get the record right away. We feel the computer will make it easy to retrieve and monitor student's academic records. [Ogendi]

In addition to organizing students' academic records, the office coordinates Form 4 students' registration for the national examinations and applications for university admissions. The registration process starts in Form 3 (11<sup>th</sup> grade) when students make choices on subject combinations to be examined at the end of their secondary school education. Applications for university admission are optional, although schools encourage students to submit their applications on time. In many cases, students make decisions on the timing of their university applications based on the affordability of the application fee of Ksh.400. In addition, there is a penalty fee for the late submission of applications, especially after examination results have been released. In the university application process, as Mr. Ogendi explained, "a student can either wait until the exams are released to submit university application or apply

just after completing the examination papers. It's [application] not compulsory. You cannot be forced to go to a university, it is your choice."

Angaza students undergo individual and group counseling sessions before they make choices on university programs of study. Teacher counselors analyze student academic records and the guidelines provided by the Joint Admissions Board (JAB) to guide students in making choices. The students obtain information about higher education through various ways. For instance, subject teachers regularly talk to students in class about higher education opportunities, especially on their particular subjects. Students also read local newspapers about universities and, as Mr. Ogendi indicated, "students get informed by people from outside, especially their parents. They get first hand information from former students who are at universities. We also invite speakers to tell them about the whole process of going to universities. We normally invite the examiners to tell them how to tackle exams, because they must first pass exams in order to proceed."

Additionally, Angaza students are provided with information about government financial aid programs, even though only a few of them, according to Mr. Ogendi, take the financial aid information seriously. According to him, "students' focus is more on passing examinations than how to pay for university education. Many start to plan of how to pay after the examination results have been released. For those who make it to university, the government financial aid comes in handy." But because a majority of Angaza students are from low socio-economic backgrounds, paying for university education through parallel education or private university education is not an option. Hence, most of them make decisions to repeat

in the hope of getting university entry points and benefit from the government financial aid programs.

According to Mr. Ogendi, Angaza teaches with the primary motive of sending as many students to the university as possible. Comparing the academic motivation and achievement of Angaza's class of 2007 to the class of 2008, Mr. Ogendi was of the opinion, "I can say they are the same, but the class of 2007 had quite a number of students who were highly motivated than the current ones; we have many doubts, they are lazy, and don't want to wake up." Although the difference is an indication that the class of 2007 was better than the class of 2008, Angaza teachers had not given up in providing these students with the necessary support and opportunity to succeed. The teachers attempted various instructional strategies to facilitate students' chances of doing better in their final examinations. For example, they gave students internal exams and continuous assessment tests on a regular basis. The academic office ensured that teachers completed the syllabus in time to enable students revise for the finals. At the time of this study, students were preparing to sit for the district mock examinations; preparatory examinations administered regionally, involving only schools within a given district. Angaza was also planning to buy revision materials, such as mock examination papers from various districts, especially those known to perform well. Similarly, individual teachers, utilizing years of experience and wisdom, designed ways of preparing students, especially on examination tackling techniques.

Angaza recognizes and rewards students' academic performance. For instance, Angaza teachers reward students with some exercise books for revision



purposes. In addition, some teachers give money awards, especially subject and class teachers. As one teacher observed, “if your class has performed well or there is a student you feel has really improved, you give some money as bus fare to motivate them.”

Similarly, Angaza teachers are rewarded for their subject performance in the national examinations. The school has a committee in charge of prize awards, in which two teachers from the academic office are members. The awards committee works closely with the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) in drawing a budget to recognize and appreciate the teachers’ good work in the previous year. Mr. Ogendi indicated that the committee sometimes seeks and obtains funding from the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) for this purpose. The prizes teachers receive include items such as lanterns, a pair of shoes, a shirt, a suite, and sometimes limited cash awards ranging between Ksh. 500 Kenya Shillings to Ksh. 1,000. Owing to the fact that the Ministry of Education does not approve monetary awards to teachers, such money is given “under the cover of a *bahasha* [envelope], normally it ranges between Ksh.500 for B pluses to Ksh. 1000 for A minus and above just to motivate our hard working teachers. But you know, the Ministry does not want to hear that we give teachers money, they say you can give them an item.” From my interactions with Angaza teachers, I realized that teachers took pride in their work and they closely monitored students’ progress. They engage students in informal conversations to convey their expectations.

Angaza students take different pathways after high school. On average, twenty five students score B plus and above to secure admission to public

universities. A few others, depending on parents and family's financial ability, enroll for parallel degree programs or join private universities. According to Mr. Ogendi, thirty percent of the Form 4 (12<sup>th</sup> grade) students repeat to get better grades, while another group, "the wasted percentage" — the percentage that melts out— it can be a small one, I think a round 10 percent become wasted." The students' differentiated pathways are determined largely by students' academic performance and familial socio-economic background. Mr. Ogendi indicated that based on their teaching experience, teachers are able to tell students' pathways before they leave Form 4(12<sup>th</sup> grade): "As teachers we know our students, we can tell their future pathways from their academic performance and family background...we are able to tell the options, those who can pass, those who will end somewhere and those that are going to be wasted." For Angaza students who decide to repeat, those with a record of good conduct are given priority. At the time of the study, there were fifteen students repeating, ten of whom were in the previous year's class.

#### 5:4 IMANI MIXED HIGH SCHOOL

Standing on the top of the beautiful green hills of Gusiiland is Imani mixed day school. Imani is located about 10 kilometers from Kisii town and easily accessible through the busy tarmac road leading to Kisii town. However, due to the worn out roads in most parts of Gusii, driving to Imani takes 40 minutes from Kisii town. Imani high school, separated by a tiny gate and fenced buildings, shares a playground with a primary school. The two schools occupy about 10 acres of land

that lies in the neighborhood of a market center. However, Imani high school occupies about 1 ½ acres of land.

A two- streamed school, Imani high has few buildings. The major building in the school houses classrooms, teachers' staffroom, offices of the principal and the deputy principal. A secretary sits at the entrance of the two offices, adjacent to another relatively smaller room labeled "Counseling Office". The room was being used by a student intern on teaching practice who tried to organize the counseling department. A second building, quite small, houses two laboratory rooms for sciences, although they are not equipped with much of the needed science equipments. The school does not have electricity or running water. A small wooden kitchen used to prepare students' and teachers' lunch stands alone next to the classrooms. A beautiful two storey building is under construction, supposedly intended to house a library, Form 4 classrooms, and students' dining room. However, the building is stalled due to lack of money. Although the Ksh. 300,000 the school had received from the CDF towards the construction was inadequate, the principal hoped the construction would be accomplished the following year with expected additional funding from the same constituency fund. Although incomplete, the building is open to Form 4 students, who find the place convenient for their own private studies, especially during lesson transition based on subject combinations. Due to scarcity of classrooms, students leave the classroom whenever a subject they do not take is being taught.

At the center of the buildings are two trees, providing a pleasant shade for teachers who prefer to take a break from the biting rays of the afternoon sun. The

compound has beautiful flowerbeds that are well maintained. It was clear that students knew that they could not step on the grass or pluck the flowers without a punishment. Generally, Imani students appeared quite disciplined and orderly. I learnt that the school was run on a strict code of regulations and rules, which were effectively enforced. Although caning of students is not allowed in schools, I noticed that Imani teachers use cane to enforce adherence to the school rules.

Imani high school has sixteen teachers and seven support staff, including a secretary, four cooks who prepare teachers' and students' lunch, and two guards. All teachers are degree holders from local public universities and TSC employees. Five teachers hold diplomas known locally as Postgraduate Diplomas in Education (PGDE).<sup>18</sup> In addition to the regular teaching staff, the school had three student interns, on teaching practice from the local universities, teaching Forms 1 and 2 (9<sup>th</sup> grade and 10<sup>th</sup> grade).

The school has 502 students. The Form 4 class (12<sup>th</sup> grade) has 87 students registered for the national examinations. As a day school, most students are drawn from the neighborhood while students from far distances live at the shopping center next to the school. Students are admitted to the school through onsite interviews. Prospective students are required to pass the interviews in addition to earning above the 250 marks in the KCPE exam, the cut off marks for Imani high. With this cut off marks, Imani admits students with the lowest KCPE marks, hundred marks lower than Tumaini and Baraka's cut off marks. However, because of its low cost status, Imani attracts some students with high KCPE scores, those unable to take up their

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<sup>18</sup> The PGDE is a type of teacher training offered to individuals who received non-education undergraduate major degrees but wish to become teachers. The training makes them eligible for hire by the TSC.

places in the high cost boarding schools due to their parents' inability to afford the required boarding fees. Under the free secondary education policy, Imani students only pay for their lunch, uniform and holiday tuition. Additionally, Form 4 (12<sup>th</sup> grade) students pay examination registration fees of about Ksh. 6,000. Most students come from extremely low income families, and this fee is a burden for the families. Although such students qualify for bursaries that enable them pay for fees, the bursaries are limited. Students who fail to pay are usually sent home from school until parents are able to pay the money or make payment arrangements.

Imani is located in a different district from Tumaini and Baraka, and it is one of the best performing schools in national examinations in the district. In 2007, Imani had 80 students taking the national examinations; seven students scored B plus and above, earning the school a performance index of 7.42 with an improvement of 1.5 percent from the previous year.

Imani teachers utilize a variety of instructional strategies and are highly motivated to ensure that their school continues to do well. They were excited that their school, a Harambee day school, could outperform many of the boarding schools in the district that admit students with higher KCPE scores. Speaking on how they managed to achieve the results, the deputy principal, Mr. Onserio had this to say:

We have been trying all the years though this is the first year that we have taken such position overall in the district. We are excited about that. We have morning preps as from 6.00am to 7.50 am. Any teacher who finds time can come in and assist the students can do so. During lunch break too, and we have extended time after 4 pm for the candidates to have time to learn. We have added an extra day unlike many schools from Forms 2 and 4; they come to school on Saturdays. Also during the holidays we have an extension of two weeks and during this time we use it to cover the syllabus. Teachers rest only on Sundays. [Onserio]

It has been a long journey for Imani high to achieve the top position despite the challenges they face as a day school. As Mr. Onserio noted, it has taken the “cooperation of parents and the discipline of students... we have been appearing in Newspapers since 1992 at the district level rankings. It is not that we select good students, they come to seek the chance and our cut off is 250 marks.” The parents interviewed in this study expressed support for the school. Similarly, students adhered to their study timetables. On the many occasions I visited the school for this study; I witnessed an environment where students were determined to succeed.

To motivate students towards academic achievement, Imani has a rewarding system that recognizes high achievers. For example, teachers in Forms 3 and 4 (11<sup>th</sup> grade and 12<sup>th</sup> grade) give their students a notebook to write revision notes. Imani teachers also reported that the new school principal had devised a method of rewarding the top three students from each class by taking them for lunch or dinner.

As Michira observed:

He [new principal] has made a routine for the top 3 students in each class; he takes them for lunch in a Kisii hotel as a motivation. He also invites the curriculum and class teachers to accompany them. We have seen students struggling to be among the top three. He has also brought a trophy which rotates in Form 3 classes. The class with the highest score gets the trophy. [Michira]

In addition, Imani has monetary awards for the top academic achievers. For instance, the best three students from each class receive Ksh.700 while those in positions four to ten get Ksh. 500. Mr. Onserio spoke about the prize giving day when parents, guardians, and other people from the community are invited to celebrate and reward the academic achievements of the students. During this study, the school held a prize giving ceremony where the guest of honor awarded the top

student, a boy, with Ksh. 4,000 while the top girl received Ksh. 3700 and to these two students, the school topped the award with Ksh. 700 to each student.

Similarly, Imani motivates the teachers in various ways. For example, all teachers are provided with free lunch and free tea in the morning, which is served with bread. Those teaching Form 4 during prep time get Ksh.100 per day as transport allowance, and those teaching on Saturdays receive Ksh. 300. In addition, during the prize giving ceremony, teachers are recognized and rewarded for their good performance. In celebrating good examinations results, all teachers are rewarded irrespective of whether they taught the candidate class or not. According to Mr. Onserio, “each teacher gets a present; even those who did not teach the Form 4 class, they get something. They are part of the team. In one way or another, they might have been consulted or contributed to students’ success.”

In preparation for the national examinations, Imani students take internal examinations every week and teachers make arrangements to revise the questions in class. In addition, Imani students are exposed to other examination materials, especially mock examination papers from best performing schools in the nation. The school meets the cost of acquiring the past papers to give students an opportunity to discuss them on their own. To ensure that all students have an opportunity to perform well in the examinations, Imani takes special interest on under achieving students because they could potentially affect the school mean score if their grades are too low. As Mr. Onserio explained, “we find a way to give the weak students examination after every two days so as for them to be ready and exposed to examinations to come and we sit with them around table to discuss the difficulties

they experience in answering the examinations.” In general, Imani students are exposed to numerous examinations and teachers encourage them to take the challenge and consult them regularly on their subject areas and on exam taking techniques.

Imani parents are very supportive of their children and teachers’ efforts at school. Although the majority of Imani parents have little or no education, they support teachers’ decisions concerning students’ transition to higher education. They believe teachers know what they are doing and what is best for their children. Moreover, many parents have little knowledge about higher education. Given that Imani has no electricity, the parents have purchased pressure lamps for use during prep time. Teachers have high expectations of the students under study. They described them as highly disciplined, organized and focused. In particular, they expected Makori to emerge at the top student in the national examinations, “If he [Makori] remains steady he is an A material.” The teachers indicated that Christina had had health problems making her to be on and off school but they hoped she could get a B plus and for Zuma, he is a struggling student who can not be found in any mistake. Zuma has the potential, especially in sciences, and they expect him to earn good grades that could take him to the university.



**Table 4: Within School Differences in the Academic Profiles**

School name	No: students	Student Entry points	No. of teachers	No. of teacher counselors	No. of candidates (2008)	No. university entry (2007) B+ and above	School's mean score
Tumaini Boys (provincial boarding)	1360	350 and above	70	8	324	162	9.14
Baraka Girls (provincial boarding)	1204	350 and above	52	5	201	40	8.45
Angaza mixed (district boarding)	1000	300 and above	47	4	206		
Imani mixed (local day)	502	250 and above	16	2	87	7	7.65

## 5.5 Conclusion

Schools with a history of academic competitiveness attract students from socially advantaged backgrounds, many from private primary schools with scores higher than 350 marks in the KCPE examinations. Tumaini and Baraka are among the few academically competitive schools in Gusii where parents and guardians scramble to secure available vacancies for their children. Overstretched boarding and learning facilities is evident as these schools struggle to cope with the increasing number of students. In many schools, students are streamed according to academic ability to steer what teachers view as academic competition. Academic counselors and class teachers enforce strict promotion policies as only students meeting the minimum grades are allowed to proceed to the next level. Students' efforts and

academic accomplishments are publicly acknowledged and rewarded during the annual prize award ceremonies. Also, teachers are rewarded for their hard work.

Inspired by the school's strong religious atmosphere, Angaza high school parents, both middle and lower income, teachers and students share common religious beliefs. The school prides itself on religious grounding to cultivate virtues of discipline and hard work among its students which culminates into academic achievement. A midst lack of essential facilities such as electricity, textbooks and laboratory, Imani is a model Harambee School in rural Gusii. With dedicated teachers and parents, on average ten students do qualify for university entry each year. In sum, schools play a fundamental role in students' university going process and, students' aspirations and the extent to which they hold amidst institutional factors such as school type, teacher behavior and school's academic counseling determine their transition into higher education.

## CHAPTER 6: THE PROFILE OF STUDENTS

In this chapter, I introduce the twelve students who participated in this research project. They include, Allan Moreka, Kevin Nyambane, and Don Mogaka of Tumaini High School; Rose Maina, Monica Akama, and Jessica Teya of Baraka High School; Steve Kerongo, Esther Okioma, and David Rioba of Angaza High School; Christina Ondara, Zuma Mose, and Makori Kerandi of Imani High School.<sup>19</sup> Their individual profiles below highlight each student's family background, early education, motivations, achievements, strategies and challenges in their university going process.

### 6:1 Allan Moreka

Allan Moreka is a second born in a family of three. His father is a high school principal and his mother a primary school teacher. Allan's eldest sister is a student in Kenyatta University, undertaking an undergraduate degree in education. His younger brother is in Standard two. In addition to their salaried income as teachers, Allan's parents operate a *matatu* business — a local public transport business. They are also small scale farmers, growing tea, maize, and vegetables. In addition, they keep three cows for milk, which they sell to neighbors. The family lives in rural Gusiiland, where they maintain a modest homestead of a four-bedroom brick house.

The first time I visited Allan's home, his parents were away. I met his younger brother who gave me his mother's cell phone number. Later in the evening,

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<sup>19</sup> Student names used here are pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants.

I called and talked with his mother and was able to make an appointment with the family. In my second visit, I met Allan's mother, who, to my surprise, was my high school classmate. She used to sit a desk behind me and we knew each other very well, but lost touch after high school graduation. Indeed, it was a pleasant encounter, a re-union after two decades. It was that "Ha-Ha" moment. I asked her, "Is Allan your son?" "Yes! Allan is my second born child," she responded with a discernible sense of motherhood pride. What a coincidence! "How did you get to know my son?" She asked. "I am doing a research project and it just happened that he was invited and accepted to participate in the study." All participants in this study were recruited by the schools' teacher-counselors based on the categories I set. During the course of the interviews, I had spent several days at Allan's school. We had frequent interactions and conversations on various issues, including family and his parents, but it had not occurred to me that his mother was well known to me. The parents were hospitable in their home and were more than excited to see me. During the interviewing process, we sometimes veered off track to talk about where each one of us and other classmates we knew were in life's milestones. It became more like a mini high school reunion when Allan's mother called another former classmate, who lives in the neighborhood, to inform her that I was around and, in the next hour, we drove to meet her.

Allan and his elder sister attended boarding primary and secondary schools. Although they spent most of their time in their respective schools, the two siblings have overtime forged a close relationship, according to their parents. During school holidays, they did most of their school work together, with Allan receiving valuable

assistance from his sister. Given that their younger brother was born much later, the parents' efforts were focused on Allan and his sister, and more particularly Allan, as the first male child in the family. Allan started reading at the age of four. His mother was very instrumental in instilling the reading habits.

The influential role of Allan's mother in the development of his early learning skills is captured in his own words:

My mom brought me number charts and alphabetical charts. She wrote words on paper for me to copy and I did copy them. Later she introduced me into reading language books. She would read loud and ask me to read after her. Basically, that's how I mastered reading at a tender age. But mom is that strict when it comes to school work but equally a great teacher. I owe her a lot.

Clearly, Allan's close relationship with his parents and their love of reading helped shape his early academic achievements. His father had this to share about the culture of reading in his family, "As my children grew up, I showed them how to like story books. I could read to them and make jokes about the stories we read to make sure they stuck on their minds. As a teacher, I knew when students read story books, they promote their language. I had to do that for my kids. Make them love books." With college educated parents, Allan enjoys the privilege of speaking three languages at home, namely, Ekegusii (vernacular), Kiswahili, and English.

Allan attended a private primary school with his elder sister. He scored 426 marks out of 500 in his KCPE examination and was enrolled at Tumaini high school in Form one. Compared to the other key student participants in the study, Allan had the highest KCPE marks. Allan spoke frequently about his close friends at school, who had similar higher education aspirations although, academically, they did not

perform well as did Allan. He expressed optimism that his friends could perform well in the national examinations and join a public university. His wished that they could be admitted to the same university with two of his close friends. During their leisure time, Allan and friends played rugby, had chats about interesting novels they had read, and had conversations about life after high school. As Allan pointed out, “we talk about the difficult life we could lead if we would not make it to the university.” Such discussions give Allan and friends the impetus to work harder, get better grades, and join institutions of higher education. Also, their understanding that higher education is the gateway to success is a clear reflection of the underlying value attached to higher education in Kenya, in general, and among the Gusii, in particular.

Allan expected to do well in the national examinations, obtaining excellent grades that could secure him entry into a public university to pursue medicine in order to become a surgeon. Although he was confident and optimistic about doing well, when asked about plan B in case he failed to attain university entry points, Allan planned to repeat Form 4 (12<sup>th</sup> grade). Allan had no plans to enroll in a private university or in a parallel degree program, like his sister. He had strong feelings that his parents could not afford to support the two of them. In addition, he did not want to strain them financially when he could easily secure financial aid once he passed the national examinations.

## **6:2 Kevin Nyambane**

Kevin is the last born in a family of five: two boys and three girls. His father holds a middle level college diploma and works as a veterinary officer with the

ministry of Livestock and Development. His mother, a high school graduate with a certificate in secretarial training, works in the same ministry as a clerical officer. All of Kevin's elder siblings are enrolled in public universities under the parallel degree program. The family lives in the suburbs of Kisii town, where they had purchased a piece of land. Just like many Kisii families living outside their ancestral land<sup>20</sup>, either in towns or cities— they have maintained strong ties to the rural home, where they practice subsistence farming. The languages used at home include English, Swahili and Ekegusii (vernacular).

Kevin's siblings attended boarding schools from upper primary through secondary school. Though his eldest sister did well in her high school national examination, she fell short of the required university entry points. As a result, she enrolled for a middle level diploma in clinical medicine and graduated with a distinction. She subsequently proceeded to pursue a degree in microbiology at Jomo Kenyatta University and is scheduled to graduate in December 2008. The second sister is in fourth year while the third born is in third year, both pursuing degrees in education. Although Kevin's parents have had financial challenges in supporting their children through school, their commitment and determination to see their children through higher education has kept them going. In addition to their salaried incomes, they had taken loans and organized fundraisings to meet skyrocketing college tuition for their children. The cost is relatively higher because Kevin's siblings pursue their degrees in public universities through the Self Sponsored

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<sup>20</sup>In Gusii society, only male children inherit family land, which they, too, pass on to the next generation of male children. However, due to various reasons, including population pressures, some Gusii families and individuals have moved out of their ancestral homes, purchased land and settled either within or outside Gusiiland. Yet, these Gusiis in the Diaspora maintain strong ties to their ancestral land, to which many prefer as burial sites at the point of death.

Student Program (PSSP), which runs parallel with the government-sponsored program. The latter only provides admission for the most outstanding students, those who score above the cut-off point for university entry.

Kevin attended a public primary school before he was transferred into a private school in standard five. At the end of his Standard 8, he sat for the 2004 Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) and scored a total of 410 marks out of 500. He was selected to join Tumaini high school in 2005, where he has consistently maintained an impressive academic performance. For this reason, Kevin enjoys immense admiration from both his teachers and fellow students as well from his family members, especially his parents. His parents are particularly proud of him. Commenting on his traits, they described Kevin as a curious child who never misses an answer to any questions. He puzzles everyone in the family with his well articulated responses to issues or questions. They illustrated his innovativeness by recalling an incident in which he, almost effortlessly, repaired a broken television set that had eluded everybody.

Kevin is active in extracurricular activities, both in school and in the community. He has served in various leadership positions right from his first year in school, plays rugby and belongs to a youth group in his church. At the time of the interview, Kevin was a student leader in the school. Initially, his parents had been reluctant to let him participate in a leadership position; a role they thought would interfere with his studies. His father had even gone to school to protest that he should not be allowed to take up a leadership position because of its potential to negatively impact his academic performance. He reported that “I went there one time to talk to



the school principal not to allow him become a school prefect because he may drop in class...because from my own experience both in primary and high school, I was chosen as a prefect, and my performance started dropping rapidly. It was because most of my time was taken attending to my duties as a prefect.” However, the school principal did not agree to his demands but used it as an opportunity to reassure him that the school administration would not let Kevin’s responsibilities interfere with his studies, that “you come in February and collect an A result slip for your son.”

Although serving as a student leader, a position that was very demanding, Kevin continued to maintain a steady academic performance from year to year. Hence, Kevin’s parents expressed confidence about the prospects of him doing well in the national examinations, and were glad that he insisted on being a student leader, a role that might have motivated him to excel.

Kevin’s parents and siblings were supportive of his educational aspirations and consistently encouraged him to consider pursuing his education beyond a bachelor’s degree. University education is an important asset in Kevin’s family and, like most students interviewed for this study, Kevin’s family members were central to the development of his higher education aspirations. His parents, in particular, reported to have guided him on the types of friends he needed to keep if he wanted to excel academically. They did not want him to associate or hang around with boys from the neighborhood who showed little interest in school, used alcohol or loved partying all-night. His father recounted how he had tried hard to cut Kevin’s links with such boys. In general, Kevin’s family had nurtured his higher education aspirations and clearly authored his university pathway, unlike many of the students

interviewed for this study. Unlike many of them, Kevin had made numerous visits to the universities.

He expected to qualify to join a public university and aspires to become a civil engineer. His motivation to become an engineer is based on information he received from his teachers that engineering is a well paying profession. His academic ability and interest in university education, coupled with the fact that his school sends over 160 students annually to public universities, gives Kevin the confidence of securing university entrance points. Kevin is among the top five students in his class. When asked why he thought university education is important, he said that , “because the cost of living is so high, if I do not make it to the university I will be rendered useless...my high school education cannot take me anywhere in terms of job opportunities.” According to Kevin, attaining a university education makes it easier to secure a rewarding career and valuable job. Kevin plans to take a computer course and driving lessons before he joins university.

### **6:3 Don Mogaka**

A second born child in a family of three boys, Don is the family’s favorite child. His father, a senior government officer in the ministry of Medical Services, holds a master’s degree in medicine. His mother is a nurse by profession. She is presently studying for a master’s degree in public health. Don’s elder brother is a student at the University of Nairobi, studying Journalism. Growing up in a relatively affluent family, Don started school at the age of five and by age six he had started reading. He had plenty of reading materials at home, such as picture books, story

books, and wall charts. Don started his earlier schooling in the metropolitan city of Nairobi, which, according to his mother, set a good foundation for his academic standards. Later, when his father was transferred to Kisii and the family relocated, Don and his brothers attended primary schools in Kisii town.

He joined a boys' boarding primary school in Standard four. His elder brother also attended the same school. He was in his final year (Standard 8) when Don joined the school. In his new school, Don started off as an average student. According to his mother, attending a boarding school at a tender age affected his academic performance. He had difficulties adjusting to boarding school life. In particular, they were concerned about the school's poor feeding program or, rather, poor diet that made him to miss home. Although the parents made several trips to the school with home-cooked food, the school regulations disallowed such practices. In spite of the dietary challenges, Don's academic performance picked up in the final year. He scored a total of 410 marks out 500 in his Kenya Certificate of Primary Education. He was subsequently admitted to Tumaini High School in January 2005.

Don is doing quite well in class and is among the top students in his Form 4 class. His parents have high expectations that he will do exceptionally well in the national examinations, not only to secure admission to one of the public universities but also to get into the highly competitive field of medicine. For inspiration, his parents bought him Dr. Ben Carson's books when he was in Form 1 (9<sup>th</sup> grade). Eventually, Don came to admire the author's personal history and he considers Dr. Carson as his role model and, like him, he made decision to become a neurosurgeon. In addition, Don identifies his pediatric father as his role model. As his mother

indicated, Don grew up to know his father as a doctor and so he felt he should follow his father's example.

University education holds an important value in Don's family. With both parents holding university degrees, Don and his siblings are expected to attend university. The parents started saving for university education quite early and as the mother indicated, God had blessed them so much such that their children's university tuition would not be a problem in whichever university or program they would chose to enroll. Unlike most students in this study, Don's university pathway is clearly defined for him. His career choice in studying medicine is clear in his mind and firmly settled. The most important thing for him is to work hard and obtain the required grade points in order for him to qualify for government subsidy in tuition. Unknown to Don, however, is the fact that his parents have already planned to enroll him for medicine through the parallel program, in case he failed to qualify for university admission through the regular program. The medicine program has limited entry opportunities as is highly competitive. The program is offered only in two public universities: the University of Nairobi and Moi University. Students planning to enroll in medicine have to score straight A's in all the eight subjects taken in the KSCCE examinations.

In addition, prospective students must score highly in the cluster points (47.7 points) drawn from Mathematics, three sciences and two languages. According to his teachers, Don's academic standing is excellent and is potentially capable of attaining straight A's in all subjects except, perhaps, in languages. However, his language limitations are being addressed by his parents, who have arranged for him to receive

private tutorship, particularly during holidays. Ability to undertake private tutoring or “shadow education” has enabled Don to improve his language writing skills and exudes confidence that he is going to do well in languages.

Don’s parents are determined to support him and ensure he attains his academic goals. They disclosed to me that there is even a surprise gift in store for him if he made the A grade. They planned to buy him a brand new car. As part of a motivating strategy, Don’s parents have consistently given him monetary rewards whenever he had performed well in school. For every A grade he scores in the end of term exams, his parents deposited a given amount of money in his account. For this reason, Don has always worked hard and striven to attain straight A’s in most subjects since Form 1 (9<sup>th</sup> grade) when his parents implemented the money rewards. At the time of the interview, Don revealed that he had enough money in his account for personal use once he joined the university.

To motivate Don through monetary rewards is a conscious decision the parents made. According to his mother, their first born son did not do well in high school. They were very much disappointed when he failed to do well and join a competitive university program. The parents had wanted him to pursue a degree in medicine at the university but his C plus grade in the KSCE exam could not secure him a spot in the competitive medical program not even through a parallel study. Hence, they did not want the same thing to happen to Don, hence the rewarding strategy. Don is given enough pocket money to buy what he needs while in school. The parents gave him an ATM card in case he needed more money and the parents were not available. Because he is a known eater, Don’s parents ensure his account

has enough money to buy whichever type of food he wanted, in addition to the food served in the school cafeteria.

#### **6:4 Rose Maina**

Rose is the only child in a single parent family. Her parents divorced when she was in Standard 3. She had not seen her father for almost 8 years. Rose's mother is unemployed. She had attended a two year Secretarial Studies program but dropped before the second year due to financial constraints. Rose's father, a teacher, had abandoned the family and secretly married a second wife. Rose's mother narrated how she learnt about her husband's second marriage. She was deeply depressed and had to be hospitalized. Rose confided that the impact of the divorce had affected her mother's health and she is ill most of the time. Rose's mother spoke of how her husband abandoned her because she was unable to get a second child. After the divorce, Rose's mother started a small business of selling second hand clothes. However, the business failed after a few years.

In spite of the stress caused by her parents' divorce, Rose remembers her good childhood years and the good relationship she had with her father. Rose started reading by the time she was in Standard one. Her father helped her with school work and she had access to picture books and other story books that her father bought. Rose attended a private primary school and attained 388 marks out of the possible 500 marks in her KCPE exam. She was selected to join a girls boarding high school in the outskirts of Kisii town but her mother decided to enroll her at Baraka due to its

proximity to her home. Moreover, Rose had health problems and her mother needed a school nearby home where she could monitor her health.

For Rose, aspirations for higher education began developing when she was in Standard seven. She recalled of how her primary school class teacher told her about university going. This was because the teacher recognized Rose's academic potential. She was among the best students in her class. In addition, her mother kept urging her to work hard in school and that it was only through higher education that she would get a good life. As a result of this, Rose started developing a keen interest in university education. Her dreams for higher education became clearer at Baraka high school. She began aspiring to attend the University of Nairobi for a degree in medicine. She explained her choice of a career in medicine on well paying job possibilities upon graduation. Her dreams for university education continued to grow during her days at Baraka. She realized she had the potential to make it and since most of his schoolmates had joined university from Baraka, she knew one day she would also be able to join university if she continued to work harder. For instance, in the previous year's class, 65 students had qualified for entry into public universities. These students earned a minimum grade of B plus and above. Since Rose is the top student in her class, she strongly believes that she is would make it to university.

According to Rose, many benefits accrue from the acquisition of university education, including a good job and social status. She believes that higher education would earn her respect and recognition in her community. Moreover, she would become a role model to younger girls. With her good education, Rose hopes to be a source of pride and contentment to her struggling divorcee mother.

Compared to other students in the study, Rose's family's financial situation could be described as pathetic. She barely has any money at school. Her mother leads a fragile life. It was difficult for me even to locate her for the interview since she had relocated from their previous residence due to inability to pay rent. Since Rose had been in school for the last three months, she was not aware that her mom had relocated. However, the mother later told me about how a Good Samaritan<sup>21</sup> had offered to house her in an incomplete extension of a house still under construction. We sat in the tiny room for two hours as she told me her experiences. The room's doors and windows were still unfixed. She confided that she had deliberately kept Rose unaware of her whereabouts because she did not want to stress her at a time when she was preparing and sitting for her examinations. She had planned to pick up Rose from school after she wrote her last paper. Although I had not met Rose's mother before, she narrated her life situation to me and I felt so sympathetic about her situation. I took the little pocket money I had and gave her to buy basic needs she lacked at the time.

At school, Rose had few close friends. Most of the time, she preferred to be alone. However, she occasionally engaged in discussion groups with her classmates. One of her closest friends had graduated from Baraka high school a couple of years ago and is attending the University of Nairobi. One of the reasons she had wanted to attend the University of Nairobi was that she had heard stories from her friend about life in the university. Rose's teachers spoke positively of her and were almost certain

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<sup>21</sup> Good Samaritan is taken from a Biblical story of a man who helped a person who had been attacked by robbers and abandoned by the roadside to die. Many people passed by and did nothing but the last man (Good Samaritan) came by and took the victim to hospital. The saying of a Good Samaritan is commonly used in Kenya for individuals who exhibit generosity to those in need.



she would do well in her exams. Highly popular with her teachers, Rose also served as a school prefect in the school library. Her determination and motivation to excel and possibly be at the top of her class was partly because she wanted to win a prize offered by a local bank, Equity bank, to the best student in the year's national examination. The prize, in form of employment at the bank and sponsorship for a university education, is a coveted prize among many students.

### **6:5 Monica Akama**

Monica is the fifth child in a family of six; two boys and four girls. Monica was all smiles as she talked about her family. Her father, a retired high school principal, is a well known figure in the area of education. He had served as a principal in many of the top performing schools in the nation. Monica's mother teaches in a primary school near their home. Her older siblings attend public universities. Her eldest brother is pursuing his undergraduate degree in the USA. According to Monica, he has been there for the last seven years, and has not graduated. Two of her elder sisters are students at Makerere University, Uganda, and University of Nairobi, Kenya, respectively. Both are enrolled in the parallel program. Her younger brother is in Standard eight (8<sup>th</sup> grade) in a boys' boarding primary school.

In terms of socio-economic classification, Monica belongs to a middle class family. She spent most her early life in urban settings. According to her, she started reading at the age of five. Among the reading materials available at home were number and letter charts, vowel charts, big picture books, newspapers, and several

puzzle toys and books. The family speaks the vernacular Ekegusii language, Swahili and English. Monica's parents were very instrumental in the development of reading skills in her and in her siblings. As teachers, parents understood what their children needed to master and develop reading habits. They read stories to their children as they were growing up. His father occasionally took them to the local library and talked about their progress in school and the need to work hard virtually every evening.

Monica attended a private day academy up to standard seven before transferring to a boarding school, where she scored 397 marks out of the possible 500 in her KCPE. She was admitted and attended a Girls' boarding secondary school in a neighboring province. However, owing to the 2007-2008 post election violence, Monica was unable to return to her former school to complete her final year in high school. Through the efforts of her parents, Monica got enrolled in Baraka high school, from where she is scheduled to sit for her Kenya Certificate of Secondary education exams. The transition was stressful for her. She missed her former school, especially her close friends and teachers. However, by the time we met for the first interview, she had adjusted well to Baraka, a school with about the same number of students and level of academic achievement or performance in the national examinations as her former school.

At Baraka, Monica had two close friends and participated in group discussions with her class mates. Although she likes sports and is a very good basketball player, Monica was not active in school sports in the year. Her reason for not being active is that she had joined Baraka a little late that she did not have enough time for both

sports and her studies. She had to devote her time fully towards exam preparations. She made her preference clear in her expressed opinion that participation in sports could not make much meaning to her life if she failed in the examinations. But if she qualified for the university, she had another four years to play her favorite sport at the university.

Monica's family attaches great value to education. As a former high school principal, her father had sound knowledge of the university going process. He had placed Monica in a university going pathway from upper primary level that gave her the background to achieve academically. He expressed his feelings about the importance of higher education and constantly encouraged Monica and her siblings to work hard in school because "education is the only key to good life." Whenever Monica and her siblings did well, they received rewards for their good work. Moreover, he monitored Monica's class work and made regular visits to Baraka to see her and to talk with her teachers about her progress. To ensure Monica had the opportunity to excel academically and qualify for university entry, he provided her with all her academic needs, such as paying school fees in time, meeting her subject teachers on a regular basis, buying revision materials and ensuring that she had enough pocket money.

Monica planned to attend the University of Nairobi to study medicine. She wanted to become a doctor. In preparation for this career track, Monica enrolled in sciences in Forms 3 and 4 (11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade), and she is doing well in the subjects. To achieve her goal, Monica planned to do better in the mock examinations (preliminary exams) that prepared students for the national examinations. A close

look at her daily schedule reflected the central role the upcoming examinations played in her future academic life. To pass the examination, she knew that she had to revise thoroughly all works covered in Forms 1 through 4 (9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade). To achieve her dream, Monica woke up at 4 am to be in class by 4:30 am. She took a few minutes to pray and talk to God to let her wishes for the day known. Some Form 4 (12<sup>th</sup> grade) students at Baraka woke up at 4 am. The night guards rang the bell so that the students could wake up. To Monica, it entailed great discipline and determination for her to be able to wake up at 4 am on a daily basis. She spoke of how some students tucked back to their beds soon after the bell alarm, that “they can’t get up to study because it is voluntary. You know what, I say to myself, I know what my target is, and I have to get there no matter what. Plus, I will have all the time to sleep after my last paper.”

Monica started developing university going aspirations while in Standard 4 (4<sup>th</sup> grade). By that time her two older siblings had been admitted to university and this particularly became a challenge to her. From her father’s expressions, she knew she was doing better academically than any of her siblings and that gave her greater confidence that she could do better in the KCSE examinations than any of them. Her aunt, a lawyer by profession, is her role model. She spoke of how her aunt came from a very humble family background and yet beat all odds to succeed in school and in life. She learnt from her aunt’s life experiences that she could be anything she wanted to be as long as she set her goals and worked hard to realize them. Also, Dr. Ben Carson, the author of books; *Gifted Hands*, *Think Big*, and *The Big Picture*, is her role model. She had read these books while in high school and made a decision to

study medicine and become a neurosurgeon. Monica's fees and tuition is paid promptly and she was among the few students in the study that were never sent home for lack of fees. She felt university education is very much accessible to her.

## **6: 6 Jessica Teya**

Jessica is the fourth child in a family of six: two boys and four girls. Her eldest brother is pursuing degree in education at Kenyatta University. The second born sister completed Form 4 (12<sup>th</sup> grade) and earned grade B plain of 58 points in KCSE examination, short of four points to meet the university cut-off points in that year. Her other sister sat for the KCSE exam in 2007, scored C plus and is repeating Form 4 (12<sup>th</sup> grade). Jessica and her sister were in the same class in 2008. Her two younger siblings were in Standard eight and five respectively. Her father completed high school and is a peasant farmer who also doubled as a casual laborer at the local church. Her mother, also a peasant farmer, had no formal education. They earned income by growing tomatoes, maize, beans, bananas and potatoes in a small piece of land they owned.

Jessica started reading at the age of 7. She had access to picture books, charts and bible stories to help her master her words. In the family, they spoke the vernacular language, Ekegusii, and Kiswahili, when necessary. Her dad was instrumental in helping Jessica and her siblings to develop reading skills. He used to read to them Bible stories and eventually, Jessica developed her love for books. Jessica and her siblings attended public boarding schools for primary and secondary

school education. Jessica attended a girls' boarding primary school and earned 397 marks out of 500 in her KCPE. She joined Baraka Girls School in Form 1 (9<sup>th</sup> grade).

During school holidays, Jessica and her siblings take an active role in their local church's activities. In family conversations about school, their father encouraged them to work hard in school and to be religious. He formulated motivation strategies to aid his children achieve academically. Constant reminders, open and frequent discussions about school work helped get Jessica and her siblings focused in school. For instance, at the end of the term, they all sit across the table with each child viewing their own report forms as they analyze them together in turns. Whenever any of his children failed, he encouraged them to do better while he rewarded those who did well. Each child had an opportunity to explain areas they had difficulties and, together, they discussed how they could improve in the following term. Sometimes, Jessica's father sacrificed financially to pay for private tuition or "shadow education" in subjects they needed academic assistance to do better.

Jessica started thinking about higher education while in Standard six. She aspired to join a public university, study medicine, and become a doctor. Her decision to become a medical doctor is based on her experiences with people around her community. She had witnessed people in her village suffer from various diseases such as malaria and typhoid, but could not get medical attention due to their inability to pay. Her vision is centered on helping the poor people who could not afford to pay for their healthcare. Additionally, Jessica's real name is taken from a missionary doctor, who once happened to be visiting her local clinic and incidentally helped her

mother deliver her. She was told the story, and her father regularly reminded her that she needed to study and become a doctor.

Her family lived in rural Gusiiland, several miles from Kisii town. Compared to other participants in this study, Jessica's family lived the farthest from Kisii town. On the day I visited her parents, we drove for more than two hours to their home. Her father was particularly excited that we drove several kilometers to meet them and that the meeting was probably the best thing to have happened to him in life - to have him interviewed because of his daughter's academic achievement. His joyous expressions said it all, "I am very proud because it is a privilege to have someone come all the way from the United States just to interview me, if she [Jessica] is a failure, I would not have had this opportunity." Jessica's father is equally proud of her performance: "When we go for parents' day at school, I feel proud when she is mentioned among the top students in her class. But I will be more proud when she has done her best in passing her examinations." Initially, I had contemplated whether it is worthwhile to drive such a long distance to meet with Jessica's family. Without it, I could have dropped Jessica from my study. However, as a researcher, I felt that Jessica's voice needed to be heard no matter the distance. Jessica is very soft spoken and shy and during interview sessions and other conversations with her, Jessica seemed to choose her words very carefully.

Jessica's parents had difficulties in meeting her tuition fees. She was sent home regularly for lack of fees. Despite her humble socio-economic background, Jessica had not been a beneficiary of the government sponsored secondary school bursary program. His father complained that there was so much undercut dealings in

the way bursaries were awarded in his constituency that the whole process is not transparent. He gave up trying to apply following initial failed attempts.

Jessica's family attached great importance to higher education. Her father expressed the necessity of attaining a higher education degree. He repeatedly lamented that if he had attained university education, he probably could not be straining to raise his children since it could have landed him a well paying job. In addition, university educated people are more respected in society even when they did not earn much money. He believed that Jessica's university education would be an investment to the family because completing a degree opened opportunities for getting a good job in the city. He believed that the only way his family could be transformed, socially and economically, is through his children's higher education achievements. Hence, his determination to provide them with the best education he could afford.

Jessica had close friends in and outside of school. Her friends in school had university going aspirations similar to hers. After classes, she spent time in group discussions with some of her friends and classmates. Jessica maintained a very close relationship with her parents, especially her father who travelled to visit her in school on a regular basis. She is very optimistic that she could do better in her examinations and join a public university. Her academic standing is good and based on the number of students who meet the minimum entry points from Baraka every year, she is confident to be among those who would qualify in 2009. Her chances are assured given the fact that she is among the top five students in her class. Her daily schedule starts early. By 4:30 am she is in class doing her prep readings before starting the



regular class schedule at 8 am. After classes, usually at 4 pm, Jessica and friends grouped together with books, revision questions to start group discussions till 7 pm when they break for dinner. After evening preps (after 9: 30 pm), her discussion group meets again till 11 pm, when they retire to their various dormitories to sleep.

Although she is not very active in extracurricular activities, she occasionally played volleyball. Attending a private college or parallel program is not an option for Jessica because of her family's socioeconomic status. In case she failed to meet the required university entry points, she planned to repeat Form 4 (12<sup>th</sup> grade) and retake her KCSE examinations. Jessica hoped her father could afford to raise boarding fees for her to repeat Form 4 if the situation demanded, now that the introduction of free secondary education is a reality in Kenya.

### **6:7 Steve Kerongo**

Steve is the first born in a single parent family of two. His younger sister is in Form 1 (9<sup>th</sup> grade) at a Girls' boarding school. His father died when Steve was six years old. Steve's mother, a high school graduate and a housewife, started to sew sweaters for sale now that the breadwinner was no more. After school, Steve and his sister helped their mother put together the pieces of sweaters she had sewn during the day. Profits from the sale of sweaters enabled her to purchase a small piece of land in Eldoret, Rift Valley province. Later, Steve's family left Nairobi and relocated to Eldoret, where his mother started small scale farming, planting maize and vegetables, rearing chicken and milk cows. She sold eggs and milk in the neighborhood to earn

income. During vacations, Steve did casual jobs to earn income to support the family.

In January 2008, Steve's family lost all property when their house was burnt down by arsonists during the post-election violence in Kenya. As his mother narrated, they escaped death narrowly by hiding in a nearby forest for four days before they were rescued and relocated to Kisii, their ancestral home. One of his extended family members housed them and sought placement in boarding schools for Steve and his sister. When I visited Steve's mother for an interview session, she was still living with the relative, her late husband's cousin. She expressed feelings of being a little uncomfortable staying with the relative because the family had also adopted many orphans. Also, the family was helping to pay school fees for her two children, making her feel more of a burden and being too dependent. But owing to limited options in terms of living arrangements and financial constraints, she opted to stay until she found a place to relocate to.

While in Eldoret, Steve successfully completed his primary education, scoring 398 marks out of the possible 500 in the KCPE exams. He joined a mission boarding secondary school, where he studied until the 2007-2008 post election violence forced them out of town. Being a Kisii by ethnicity, Steve was a clear target of the marauding local Kalenjin warriors, who were up in arms against members of certain immigrant communities in the Rift Valley, including the Gusii, for ostensibly not voting for the Kalenjin's favored presidential candidate. Upon their arrival in Kisii, Steve was assisted by his uncle to join Angaza mixed boarding secondary school. Although a victim of the post election violence, Steve consciously chose to forget the

past and move on with his studies. According to him, the decision was timely as it helped him adjust well to Angaza, although the memories were hard to erase.

Steve had made some friends at Angaza, mostly students who had similar life experiences as his. During the interview, he regularly mentioned two of his close friends. He spoke of how one of his friends lacked the basic necessities because his parents could not afford and so they shared the little financial resources Steve had. The other friend was also much affected by his mother's illness. Although they spent most of their free time talking about academics and life after school, Steve noted that they sometimes found themselves drifting to discuss their families' situations while they comforted and encouraged each other. Steve occasionally thought about his late father and the fact that he never left behind any savings for the family. Steve's father was a university graduate who held a senior job in the public sector. He thought a lot about the life they could have led if his father had not died. His mother failed to secure his father's retirement benefits due to bureaucracy and endemic corruption. Furthermore, she lacked financial resources to enable her pursue the benefits through the legal system.

From his mother, Steve had learned that his father was a university graduate, who, before his death, looked forward to seeing his son accomplishing the same. Steve took this as a challenge and a solemn debt he owed to his late father. Without revealing it to his mother, he vowed to himself to work hard and ensure the fulfillment of his father's wishes. To this end, he was initially inspired by his Standard 8 science teacher. Steve recalled a visit he made one day to the teacher's house and, upon viewing his graduation pictures, had a fruitful conversation on the

value of university education, which left him fired up. He vowed to graduate from college like his teacher. Steve recalled his teacher telling him: “Life is not just graduating from primary school but graduating from university.” Steve learnt from his teacher’s comments that university education made a big difference in one’s life and was worth struggling for. In addition, constant reminders from his high school principal about the importance of higher education set Steve on a university pathway. His high school teachers were united in urging him to “aim higher” in his studies because they knew he had the potential and intellectual aptitude. His mother was not left behind; she made it crystal clear to him that she was prepared to do everything in her power to ensure that he lived to realize the dream of his late father by securing a university degree. She particularly promised to buy Steve a motorcycle as a present if he passed his national examinations.

Steve spoke of how his grandmother had told him stories about the sacrifices she made, including brewing and selling a local brand of liquor, popularly known as *chang’aa*, to raise fees and educate his late father. Now that his father was gone, Steve’s grandmother hoped that his education at the university would be of great importance to her. According to his grandmother, her efforts to educate his late father would not be in vain if Steve graduated from the university.

Clearly, Steve was under increased pressure to succeed academically. And, he knew, there was no short cut in this. He had to work hard. Steve had great confidence about his preparations for the national examination. He was among the top five students in his class. He regularly consulted his teachers for assistance, especially in languages, where he felt he is not confident about his level of

performance. He also joined other classmates for group discussions, a strategy he said helped him revise for the examinations. Steve woke up early at 4 am to study and hoped to do well in the final examinations and join a public university to study for a Bachelor of Commerce. In addition, he planned to take a Certified Public Accounts (CPA) examination and eventually became a banker. Steve attached great value to university education. He spoke of how life in Kenya had become very competitive and the only way a person could secure a well paying job was to get a university degree. Above all, he was conscientiously aware that he had to attend university and get a degree, like his late father.

Steve was actively involved in extracurricular activities, especially in religious related activities such as singing and drama. He is an active member of Angaza's church choir. When I was first introduced to Steve, he was busy working in class, composing songs for his school choir. When I met with Steve the last week of the interviews, he and his choir members were scheduled to travel to another district for a concert. He spoke of how music had become like food for his soul, a comfort in the midst of the many challenges he faced. Since the family had lost everything during the post election violence, Steve found music as a means of soothing his emotions. The fact that he lost his school books and notes affected him the most, and since the national examinations tests student's knowledge of the work covered from Forms 1 through 4, Steve relied on his close friends for revision notes. His uncle had also been very supportive, buying him revision books and past examination papers to facilitate his preparations for the final examinations.

## **6:8 Esther Okioma**

Esther is a fourth born in a single parent family of five, three boys and two girls. Their father was killed during the recent 2007-2008 post election violence in Kenya. Esther's mother dropped out of high school in Form two in favor of marriage. The family practices peasant farming, growing maize, millet, beans, and vegetables in a two acre piece of land where the family lived. Esther's father had land in their ancestral home where he was buried. Although the family had no plans of going to live there, her mother, however reported that she would like her children to have frequent visits there to know and bond with their relatives.

Esther started to read when she was nine years old. Esther's family speaks Ekegusii and Kiswahili. Esther was exposed to wall charts and picture books that helped her learn to read. Esther and her siblings spent most of their early education and childhood with their father. She spoke of how her father had been her first and best teacher in her early life. He bought newspapers every weekend and the children's corner on the Sunday Nation newspaper was Esther's favorite section. She enjoyed reading stories about other children's achievements and solving puzzles.

Esther and her siblings attended public primary schools, living with their father where he worked while their mother remained in the farm. They travelled home to visit their mother when schools closed for holidays. Esther's father had worked as a civil servant in the ministry of public works until his retrenchment in 1997. He returned home to help the family with farming until he was killed in the post election violence. Esther's older siblings helped her with school work and she used most of their text books in her classes. Esther scored 360 marks out of a

possible 500 marks in her Standard Eight KCPE and was admitted to Angaza high school.

Esther developed her university going aspirations while in Form 1(9<sup>th</sup> grade). She had heard about university going from her older siblings. Her eldest brother is a student at Thika Institute of Technology, studying for a diploma in mechanical engineering. The second brother completed high school in 2005 with a mean grade of B minus, below the regular university entry cut-off points. Owing to financial constrains, the family was unable to enroll him for a parallel degree or support him to repeat Form 4. Nevertheless, he planned to apply to the Kenya Medical Training Center (KMTC), a government sponsored institute, to study biomedical engineering. However, Esther's mother sounded pessimistic on this possibility, underscoring the competitiveness and corruption surrounding the admission process to KMTC, in which people literally pay huge sums of money to secure admission. Esther's third born sister sat for her KCSE examinations in 2007 and scored a mean grade of B plain. She is still at home since their mother lacks financial resources for college education. While Esther and her younger sister were in high school, her youngest brother was in Standard eight (8<sup>th</sup> grade).

The family hopes Esther would do well in her 2008 KCSE national examinations and join the University of Nairobi for a degree program in medicine. Her teachers had similar expectations and were upbeat about her chances to succeed academically. On her part, Esther expresses confidence and identifies her supportive uncle, a special education teacher, as her role model. To Esther, university education would enable her obtain a good job and lead a decent life. For this reason, she

worked hard in school and scored good grades, mostly A's and Bs that place her at the top of her class.

Esther's mother and siblings have been a source of encouragement to her, persistently urging her to work harder and pass her final examinations. In the event she scored below the university cut-off points, Esther planned to repeat Form 4 (12<sup>th</sup> grade) until she obtained the required points to enroll in any of the affordable regular public university programs. She, however, expressed fears that her mother might not afford college, given that her older siblings were yet to join even the middle-level colleges. To her family, even the middle level colleges, such as KMTC, are considered out of reach due to high tuition charges as well as the endemic corruption activities in the admission process.

Esther's mother struggled financially to pay her tuition, which amounted to Ksh 20,500 per year. Since the fee payment is not prompt, Esther was sent home for lack of fees at least once per term. Moreover, she had not benefitted from the secondary school bursaries meant to assist students from low income households to pay tuition and other fees. Although she had applied twice for the bursary, she only received regrets.

During the interview, Esther spoke frequently about her two close friends who have similar higher education aspirations. In the company of her close friends, Esther discusses issues dealing with life after school in general and, specifically, about their higher education plans. They organize discussion groups with other classmates to revise for the national examinations. Esther spoke positively about her friends. She



underlined their support, especially in helping her adjust to life following the untimely death of her father.

### **6:9 David Rioba**

David is the third born in a family of six: two boys and four girls. While his father teaches in a nearby primary school, his mother, a high school graduate, is a peasant, growing maize, beans and potatoes. David's eldest sister attends Jomo Kenyatta University, pursuing a bachelor's degree in Horticulture. Two siblings, including David, are in high school. The other two younger siblings attend a boys' boarding primary school. David is 20 years old and is repeating Form 4 at Angaza. He sat for the national examinations in 2005, scored a C plus and went back to start from Form 3, to gain what he called examination momentum.

David started reading at the age of 5. His father availed a few story books, wall charts and other picture books. His father coached him during the evenings and sometimes enrolled him for private tutoring or "shadow education" during vacations. David attended a public day primary school before he transferred into a boarding primary school in Standard Six. He scored 366 marks out of 500 marks in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education. He was selected to join Kisii High School but could not proceed to Form 2 (10<sup>th</sup> grade) due to lack of fees. He later enrolled in a day secondary school near his home, for Forms 3 and 4 (11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades). Eventually, he scored a C plus in his national examinations. Since he did not qualify for university entry, David's parents enrolled him in Angaza School. He was enrolled in Form 3 because there was no open vacancy in Form 4 (12<sup>th</sup> grade).

David first thought of going to university when he was in Standard 6 (6<sup>th</sup> grade). He heard about university going from his parents and elder sister. His family encouraged him to go beyond high school. By the time he was in Form 2 (10<sup>th</sup> grade), David had not decided on what career he wanted to pursue until he read Ben Carson's book, *Think Big*. He developed interest in medicine and wanted to become a surgeon. David regards Ben Carson as his role model.

David spoke of his close friends in school who had similar higher education aspirations. They organized study groups with other classmates to prepare for the final examinations. While with close friends, David shared life experiences, issues that ranged from movies, girl friends, football, their families and life after high school. David also had a record of friends he had learnt to avoid following parental intervention. He spoke of how one time he sneaked out of school to watch pornographic movies at a nearby market center. When his father came to the school, he did not find him. Teachers were not aware that David and friends had sneaked out of the school compound. David's father returned home only to come back the following day, demanding to know where David had been. David had no option than to explain to his father where he had gone. He felt embarrassed and remorseful after the incident. He regretted his sense of judgment, especially in keeping friends who engaged in underage drinking and drug abuse although he did not do that himself. He felt that he was becoming a source of disgrace to his father, a church elder, and abandoned the bad company altogether.

David is very active in extracurricular activities, both in school and his local church. He was not only a celebrated volley ball and hand ball player, but also a

talented singer of his church and youth choirs. Spiritual matters are very central to David and one of the reasons he joined Angaza high school was because of its religiosity and climate of spiritual nourishment, not common in many public schools. During our conversations, David made many references on how spiritually enriching Angaza had been to him and his friends.

David's high school courses include Mathematics, English, Kiswahili, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Geography and Agriculture. Biology is his favorite subject. He is doing well in class, earning mostly A's and B's. His teachers recognized his potential and commended him for the good work. He spoke of how at one time when he earned first position in class, the school principal called him to his office and told him he wanted David to eventually join university. Since that time, David had consistently worked hard to make that happen. To achieve his dreams, David followed a strict study schedule. He started his day at 4:30 am with morning preparations known as *morning preps*. After 4 pm, when the regular class hours were out, David and his close friends grouped together for discussion based sessions on their set timetable until 6:30 pm when they left for dinner. Evening preps at Angaza started at 7 pm until 10 pm when all students were expected to leave classrooms for their dorm rooms for a good night's sleep. David is determined to make it to university. He told me: "If I would not qualify, then I will repeat until I make sure I have qualified to university."

David is fairly knowledgeable about types of financial aid programs available for students qualifying for university education. Having had a sister attending university, David understood that he needed to pass highly with a minimum grade of

a B plus in order to receive government financial aid. His aim was to enroll in a public university where he could receive financial aid. He planned to study medicine at university since his goal was to become a surgeon. David's motivation for university education is based on a long term desire to secure a well paying job that could transform his family's social economic status. He spoke of how he hoped that one day he could be in a position to relieve his parents of the financial burden.

David paid Ksh.20, 000 per year at Angaza as tuition fees. His school fees payment was not always prompt and, for this reason, he was regularly sent home for the funds. He reported that sometimes he could be home for two to three days before his father was able to raise money to pay the school fees. David had experienced financial difficulties throughout his secondary school life. Only once did David receive Ksh 5,000 from the secondary school bursary program.

### **6:10 Zuma Mose**

Zuma is the youngest child in a polygamous family of eleven. His father has two wives. While Zuma's mother is the second wife with five children, his step-mother has six. His father, a primary school teacher since 1975, is said to have lost his job in 2002 due to what he termed as professional misconduct. He was thus dismissed from the teaching service without benefits, a situation that adversely affected the family's financial status. The sudden loss of his job, coupled with a large family to take care of, seem to have taken a huge toll on Zuma's father who was heart-broken. Zuma's mother, hitherto a house wife, now started venturing into some

small business, selling grains in order to support the family. However, two years later, she was involved in a car accident, leaving her incarcerated and unable to continue with her business.

Zuma's siblings had not done well academically. His eldest sister had dropped out of high school to get married. The second born sister suffered a mental illness and dropped out in Form two. One sister completed high school but on a poor note, scoring a D plus grade in the national examinations. She was unemployed at the time of this study. Finally, the fourth born scored a D plus grade and is repeating Form 4 (12<sup>th</sup> grade).

Unlike his siblings, Zuma is confident and expected to do well in his final examinations. His academic record looked good and promising. He did well in his KCPE, scoring 329 out of a total of 500 marks. Zuma is one of the few students in this study that had attended a public day primary school. He is a strong B high school student with high hopes of excelling in the final examinations. Although none of his family members had attended university, the family, especially his father, constantly encouraged him to work hard and aspire to join a public university. Aware that his parents were disappointed by his elder siblings' poor academic performance, Zuma quietly vowed to revive the family's hopes and dreams by doing well in school. For this reason, he aspired to attain university education and become a role model and, in the process, enhance the family's image and sense of pride.

Zuma is among the top three students in his class. The fact that his school sends at least ten students to university each year renders Zuma to be confident that he will be one of those who would make it to university that year. His high

expectations are shared by his teachers, who describe Zuma as not only likeable and good natured, but hardworking, focused, and intelligent. His classmates who participated in the focus group admired his determination and ability to organize classmates into study groups. Zuma wants to pursue a career in engineering or aviation. He thought these professions offered good pay and with university education, he could be in a position to help his family in the future.

### **6:11 Christina Ondara**

Christina is the second born in a family of eight: six girls and two boys. Christina's father is a part-time carpenter with little formal education. While her father is a primary school drop-out, her mother had no formal education at all. Her mother cultivates subsistence crops on their exhausted piece of land of two acres. The family is generally poverty-stricken. His father received occasional financial assistance from his sisters to support the family. Christina's aunts were very close to the family and helped raise Christina and her sister. Christina's older sister completed high school with a straight C grade and got married. She is unemployed, but the family hopes her husband would consider enrolling her in a two-year college. Christina's younger siblings are in primary school except her immediate follower, who is in Form two and is staying with one of her aunts.

Christina attended a public day primary school up to standard six, when she transferred to a private primary school. She scored 383 marks out of a possible total of 500 marks on her KCPE examination. Although she was selected to join a girls' boarding school in Form 1 (9<sup>th</sup> grade), her parents could not afford the required

school fees. Instead, her aunt invited Christina to live with her and attend Imani Day Secondary School. Though a consolation, Christina knew that joining Imani School was not her choice but an option imposed on her by poverty. She knew she had lost an opportunity to join a more prestigious school and these thoughts troubled her for some time before she fully settled down at Imani high. To her parents, especially his father, her aunt's decision to enroll Christina at Imani high was good for her since it shielded her from frustrations and feelings of total loss as compared to the prospect of her staying home due to lack of school fees. At least, she was in school, busy and engaged, hence kept away from thinking about her missed opportunity to attend a superior boarding high school.

Imani is a mixed day school and quite a distance from Christina's home. She lived with her aunt in a shopping center near the school. She occasionally visited her parents during school holidays because the school had very little breaks. Imani had a policy requiring students to attend school on Saturdays in an effort to increase the students' chances to do well in their national examinations. The school has a relatively good record in national examination results compared to other schools in the region, notwithstanding the fact that it is a day school that lacks essential facilities such as a library and a science laboratory. In 2007 Christina sat for her KSCE exam and earned a B minus grade. Although she had qualified to enroll in the parallel degree program at a university, her parents could not afford tuition. She decided to repeat Form 4 (12<sup>th</sup> grade) with the hope of attaining a higher grade for university admission and government sponsorship through loans and bursaries.

Although Christina's father had only a primary school education, he had some knowledge of higher education as opposed to her mother who had no formal education. Her father encouraged her to work hard and join a public university. He had high hopes in her and thought she stood a good chance of becoming a shining example in the family and, possibly, the trail blazer as the family struggled to untangle itself from the shackles of grinding poverty. This was a tall order and Christina was clearly awake to this fact – that university education was the key to success in a society confronted with limited possibilities for advancement and socioeconomic mobility. Although none of the family members or relatives had attended university, her father expressed much hope in university education because he had heard during Imani's prize giving day that university educated people made a lot of money. So, he wished Christina could be one of those well paid university graduates. Clearly, Christina is doing well in all her courses, including math and sciences. Her goal is to attain university admission to study Electrical Engineering. The same optimism and expectations were expressed by her teachers.

#### **6:12 Makori Kerandi**

Makori is the sixth child in a family of eight: three girls and five boys. His father, a primary school dropout, works at the Nandi Hills tea plantation and occasionally comes home to see the family, usually around the end of the month. Makori's mother had no formal education. She works in the small subsistence family farm and sometimes undertakes petty trade, including selling the farm surplus. His eldest brother completed high school in 2005 and is employed as a guard by a Securicor company in Mombasa. His elder sister dropped out of primary school and



got married. While the third born sister dropped out of high school in favor of marriage, the fourth born got married after completion of high school. His younger brothers were all in school.

Makori attended a public primary school and scored 301 marks out of the possible 500 marks in the KCPE. He was selected to join a boarding high school but his parents were not financially capable of supporting him. Instead, he joined a low cost local mixed *Harambee* day school. His two other siblings were attending the same school. Although the school charged low tuition and fees, it lacked teachers and a library and, as a result, students were performing poorly in national examinations. According to Makori, the school was performing so poorly that, by the end of his third year, no student had qualified to university. For this reason, he decided to transfer to Imani high. Imani had a good reputation of doing well in national examinations and admission. Due to the school's competitiveness, Makori was unable to secure a vacancy in Form 4 (12<sup>th</sup> grade). He was therefore compelled to repeat in Form 3 (11<sup>th</sup> grade).

Makori and his younger brother shared a rented room in a shopping center near the school. His brother was in Form 2 (10<sup>th</sup> grade) in the same school. Their mother supplied them with food, including maize flour and vegetables. At the time of the interview, I met with Makori's mother who had walked from home, twelve miles away, carrying thirty pounds of maize flour for her sons. She reported facing extreme financial difficulties in meeting the basic needs of her children.

Makori started thinking about university education while in Standard eight. He used to confide in his father that he wanted to be a university lecturer. He was

aware that the sure path to the realization of his dream was through hard work in school. To achieve this, Makori maintained a very rigorous study schedule. He started his day with morning studies at 3 am until 6 am, when he left to prepare and be in school by 6:45 am. In the evening, he had his supper at 7 pm and did his evening studies until 11 pm. He worked closely with other classmates in study groups in revising and preparing for examinations.

Makori does well in all his courses, including sciences. His most favorite subject is chemistry. He looked forward to a university education that would culminate in a Ph.D. program in chemistry and eventually in becoming a university professor in the same area of specialization. With this accomplishment, Makori hoped not only to eject poverty from his family, but also to gain respect and admiration in the village as the trail blazer.

Makori is quite ambitious and a dreamer. His immediate plans after high school were to enroll for computer classes while waiting for examination results. He is very confident about making it to the university. In the previous year, six students from Imani had qualified for university entry and since Makori is among the top students, he had high hopes that he could score at least a mean grade of B plus to be admitted to a public university.

**Table 5: Key Participants by Gender, School type, SES and Academic Ability**

Participants	Gender	School type	Parents' occupation/SES	KCPE marks out of 500	KCSE Grade
Allan Moreka	Male	Provincial	HS principal & teacher	426	A
Kevin Nyambane	Male	Provincial	Low level civil servants	410	A
Don Mogaka	Male	Provincial	Physician & nurse	410	A
Rose Maina	Female	Provincial	Unemployed	388	A
Monica Akama	Female	Provincial	Retired HS Principal & teacher	397	A
Jessica Teya	Female	Provincial	Peasants	397	A
Steve Kerongo	Male	District	Unemployed	398	A-
Esther Okioma	Female	District	Peasant	360	A-
David Rioba	Male	District	Teacher & peasant	366	A-
Zuma Mose	Male	Day	Peasants	329	A-
Christina Ondara	Female	Day	Peasants	383	B
Makori Kerandi	Male	Day	Peasants	301	A-

### 6.13 Conclusion

In view of the foregoing, it is clear that the informants of this study were drawn from different socio-economic backgrounds and form a fair representation of the Gusii community in southwestern Kenya in particular and the Kenyan society, in general. While some are struggling to succeed in life to overcome poverty through hard work in school, a few others put effort to get university education as a matter of

life or fulfillment of family tradition. However, it is clear that high school students are aware that possibilities for success in life are limited and what a university education can offer in terms of accessing well paying jobs, gaining respect and status in the community, and in overcoming poverty. Higher education is precious and families are prepared to invest heavily to educate their children through university.

The level of consciousness with regard to university going is relatively high among students, parents, and teachers. Indeed, university education is the ultimate goal for many students and families. Yet, the effort to attain higher education is confronted by insurmountable challenges, including financial constraints, limited university opportunities, and poorly equipped secondary schools. Although my intention was to capture the views of students with different cognitive abilities, the schools, through the academic counseling office, gave me access to only those students who were highly expected to qualify for public university entry. The twelve students interviewed in study, including those that participated in the focus groups are top performing students in their respective schools.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **PERSONAL AND FAMILY CONTEXT IN THE UNIVERSITY-GOING**

This chapter investigates Gusii students' university going process through personal (familial) influences on their educational aspirations and expectations about higher education. In aspiring for higher education, a complex interplay of personal (familial) and socio-political factors interact to shape university pathways for Gusii students. These factors emerged from the interview data as students talked about higher education aspirations and expectations about their future careers. Also, parents and teachers interviewed contributed to the understanding of how Gusii students conceptualized higher education opportunity, and how they were involved in the university going process. In considering personal (familial) influence, the chapter focuses on the role of significant others such as parents, siblings, peers, and students' early academic achievement, experiences and expectations about higher education.

#### **7:1 Early socialization in the family**

The family environment emerged as the foremost critical learning environment that influenced the development of individual students' learning ability as reflected in their later academic achievement. Students identified their parents as their first teachers who had the most influence on their educational aspirations. Through family practices students learnt how to count and read at home, skills that come handy as they entered formal learning settings. Students reported that their parents provided various writing and reading materials which included, but not limited to, wall charts featuring numbers, letters, the alphabet, picture books, sticks

for counting, and phonetic toys. The provision of early learning materials varied from family to family depending on each family's socio-economic status. Well-to-do families had a variety of reading and writing materials available to their children who, by the time they entered school, were already conversant with the curriculum. Moreover, these children continued to enjoy access to superior educational materials corresponding to their ages, including newspapers, puzzle toys, story books, and other relevant items that enhanced their learning endeavors.

Reflecting on their upbringing, students whose parents had some college education, and especially those with university degrees, talked of a reading culture in the family that had a powerful influence on their later academic achievement. Such parents assumed an active role in their children's learning to ensure that they mastered the reading and counting skills before they began formal schooling. The parents, especially the mothers, became their children's first teachers. Recalling his early learning experiences at home, Kevin commented:

I started [reading] at an early age. My mother was strict...a really disciplinarian. I tell you it was a no nonsense kind of thing...before she left for work she made sure I was left with some work to do...It's like "Kevin, I want you to do this, do that before you go outside to play." You had that fear that she could beat you with a cane if you failed to finish the assignment...She comes in the evening and you have to show your work...We had to work together, I mean school stuff before you eat supper...and I think that helped me a lot. By, let's say 8, I was reading story books. Mom was so hard on me but with such a love that you can't hate her. You just have to do it. She was like "that for your future...I won't be there for you Kevin, get up and do this math..." Still I preferred mom to, let's say, dad or any of my sisters, because she was patient with me. [Kevin]

Although most mothers were more actively involved in their children's early learning, in some families, the fathers did teach the children. Such cases were

prevalent in families where mothers had little or no formal education. For instance, David had this to say about learning at home:

My father is a teacher, right. He made sure I could read at the age of five. I had wall charts, a few story books, and picture books. I knew my numbers and letters before going to preschool. He had to literarily coach me at home. I didn't have any problem or even forget to do my homework. The first thing he wants to see is my books. You've to be ready to answer questions if you got anything marked wrong. I had to work on it, just like I was going to some big class or something. [David]

Although students with parents who had limited education or no education at all received little or no type of coaching at family level, they received necessary encouragement and moral support that enabled them to realize their potential. For instance, Makori learnt his numbers and letters by observing his neighbor's children. Compared to other students in this study, Makori and Christina were late in learning the basics of writing and reading due to limited familial coaching enjoyed by their counterparts. Nevertheless, they were never deterred. In most cases, they struggled on their own and sometimes were shy to read aloud in class whenever their teachers asked them to. As Makori explained:

I tried the numbers on my own. I used the ground...you know *risiko* [smooth front yard ground] outside our house as my first book. I wrote, erased and wrote again. It was a good way to practice my writing. I could even do it on the walls. I used charcoal pieces [*amakara*] to write. That's how I mastered it. My father barely knew what I was doing. My neighbor's kids were pretty smart. Whenever I went over to their house, I could observe keenly how they write...I practiced that when I got home. You know the other kids almost my age could refuse to show me...that's because I didn't write as well. I could be disappointed and run to our house and tell my mom how bad the boys are... [Makori]

Despite the challenges, Makori perfected his skills by improvising the naturally available items such as soil and charcoal pieces into writing materials. Although

Makori grew up in a poverty stricken home, he was determined to beat the odds by pursuing higher education to make a difference in his life.

While preschool education is meant to give children an opportunity to play and socialize, Kenya's preschool children are set for formal learning because of the stiff competition in securing Standard one spots in good schools. Many schools require written interviews before admission, compelling teachers and parents to have children undergo long hours of drilling to write their names, numbers, and recite letters during their preschool period. For example, David spoke of how his father helped him to practice writing and spelling his full names as well as recite the letters of the alphabet. Similarly, Zuma's father, a teacher, played an influential role in ensuring that Zuma demonstrated ability to communicate in English language at an early age. Although he did not buy a lot of books because of the cost, he had access to school books which he used in teaching his children.

The number of languages spoken at home influenced the way students adjusted to school and their ability to read. University educated parents used a mixture of English, Kiswahili, and Ekegusii, languages that were also used in school for instruction to communicate with their children. Students, who frequently used English and Kiswahili at home, reported how they found it easier to recognize and sound out words better than those who did not have such language exposure. Additionally, early proficiency, especially in English, gave students a head start in terms of understanding and following classroom instruction.



## 7:2 Parental Expectations and Involvement

Parental expectations and pressure to achieve academically emerged as one of the powerful elements that shaped students' higher education aspirations.

Irrespective of parental education level, the potentiality that their children could one day realize the dream of a higher education is by itself a central theme amongst all parents. No doubt, the hope for their children's university education is an important part of their lives. All parents expect their children to attain a university education and relieve them of the financial struggles they had experienced. Higher education is held highly— as possibly— the only way families can achieve economic stability and social mobility. Gusii parents value education and invest heavily on their children's education, with an expectation that the children will secure better paying jobs.

Although all parents hold higher expectations about their children, those with little education and low income have little knowledge about the possibilities of the university going process for their children, but still they provide the necessary moral support for their children to achieve academically. In addition, they had much faith in teachers' ability to guide their children through the university going process. In response to the question: "*how have you helped your child to ensure she/he achieves academically?*", educated parents reported that they not only closely monitored their children's academic performance, but also supported their academic endeavors by availing the necessary educational resources. They purchased examination revision materials, made frequent visits to school to meet and talk with their children's subject teachers, and sought external assistance such as private tutoring, the "shadow education," in a bid to improve their children's chances of succeeding academically.

For financially struggling families, private education is not an option. They enroll their children in public primary schools which are easily affordable. Although offering free education, Kenya's public primary schools are largely non performers in comparison to private and high cost schools. Public schools are confronted by a dearth of essential resources, demoralized teachers, and relatively unmotivated students with low educational expectations. As a result, students from low income families face insurmountable obstacles on their educational path and, as such, find themselves in an uneven competition for limited university opportunities. Kenya's national examination is uniform and standard for all candidates irrespective of the differentiated schools. In spite of the challenges, hardworking students from poor backgrounds, with support and encouragement from their parents, family members, and teachers, register impressive scores in the national examinations.

Gusii parents invest heavily in their children's education. The parents constantly remind the children that their future depends on sound education that would make it possible for them to secure well paying jobs. This is important because Gusiiland is presently a densely populated area with limited land resources for future generations. So, to the Gusii parents, education is the only resource they can offer to their children. Unsurprisingly, therefore, my study found strong parental commitment in ensuring their children attained university education or some kind of higher education. Many parents are deeply engaged in their children's educational process by supporting initiatives that motivate and guide students towards academic achievement. Besides ensuring that the children complete their assignments in time,

many parents supported the schools' rewarding systems and other measures meant to promote academic standards in favor of the young people.

There is a generally constant interpersonal communication between children and their parents, and also with other older siblings. Both parents and children reported regular evening conversations hammering on various issues, but the most common topic was on the value of higher education and academic achievement. Students recalled that their parents emphasized the need for hard work in school. Parents also monitored how the children used their free time and discouraged idleness, setting penalties for misuse of time, which included withdrawal from a favorite activity. For instance, the students reported that their parents pressured them and were sometimes denied a chance to watch TV whenever they had not done well in class. As one student expressed:

They [parents] push me to do well in school. I am told you can not watch T.V during weekdays and that is it. They mean it...dare you open and you'll see. So I have to study and wait for the weekend. But it pays to work hard. My family has this kind of tradition to reward somebody for good grades. For every A grade that I make, my parents deposit money in my savings account to which I can buy what I want. Like now, if I do not make the grades to take me for a degree in Medicine, my parents will definitely enroll me in the parallel program to study medicine but I do not want to burden them with my college costs. I just want to pass and join a public university; with that, my parents would not have to sacrifice a lot. [Don]

To most students in this study, parents and other siblings remained a source of inspiration and encouragement in their educational endeavors. They were all in agreement that parental concern, particularly in constantly inquiring about their academic progress in school as well as availing educational resources and supplies, inculcate in them a sense of purpose and determination. As one student observed, "I

was performing poorly in class due to lack of school supplies, but after discussions with my parents, they started availing the required items...”

Most student participants received coaching from their parents on their school work. Mostly, educated parents were very much involved in the primary school years and did offer to coach their children how to do their school work. In secondary school, fewer students reported getting help from their parents in their school work. However, parents who were unable to coach their children in secondary school level sought and paid for private tutoring services in subjects that their children needed extra help. For example, although Jessica’s father was unable to coach his high school children, he worked hard to finance tutoring services for them. In spite of the widespread economic hardships, Jessica’s father affirmed, “I do enroll my children in private tutoring when their school doesn’t offer tutoring in Form 1 and 2, especially in the December long holidays. The tutoring is available in the neighborhood and it is not that expensive but you have to sacrifice.” All parents, irrespective of their educational level or socio-economic status expected their children to get a university education. They made self sacrifices for their children which means even though not well-to-do they invest a considerable time and money to ensure that their children achieved academically, in order to secure entry to public universities.

The parents understood that university education could make a difference in their children’s lives and had high expectations about their children’s future. Clearly, all parents for the twelve students interviewed expressed high expectations for their children’s academic goals. Most parents expressed confidence that their

children could pursue higher education after high school. Based on their lived experiences, parents informed their children about expectations to pursue higher education for a better future. Although most of these students attend boarding schools, the parents monitor their academic performance by making regular visits to the schools.

To get their children inspired to work hard, parents used their personal life situations to encourage them to achieve academically. For instance, Allan's father shared his strategy of getting his children motivated to work harder in addition to developing a spiritual relationship with God. He said:

When they [Allan and his sister] come home for holidays, I normally advice them to put more effort in their studies. I tell them the advantages of getting a better education. I give them my own example as a principal of a secondary school; that I hailed from a humble family, and because of my education I have interacted with people and have seen the importance of higher education. I tell them to put more effort so that they can enjoy later in their lives. I also tell them to go to church because that is where they will get knowledge and wisdom from God. [Allan's father]

On the other hand, some students were motivated to work hard because of the success of their parents. Such parents provided positive role models to their children. One student whose father is a medical doctor wanted to become a doctor himself following the role model of his father. He said: "I want to be a doctor just like my dad. He will be very disappointed if I do not make it to medicine. That one I know for sure because he has done all he could to make sure I get all I need to succeed. It's now up to me to do my part."

Makori's parents utilized personal experiences of growing up in extreme economic hardships. Offering themselves as examples, the parents pinpoint their deprived lifestyles and economic misery in cautioning their children to work hard in

school in order to break the chains of poverty. In so doing, Makori and his siblings are given reason to aspire for higher education in order to lead better lives in the future and, eventually, transform the family's social economic status as expressed by his mother;

We usually encourage them to work hard in school because for us we didn't go to school. They should not lead the life we are leading. We also encourage them to go to university so that they can come back to the village and relieve us from this poverty we have. I want them to build a good house for me. Nearly every family around us has a *mabati* [iron sheets] house except me. *Ntagete abana bane bankore koba omonto ankio* [Literally translated, I want my children to make me become somebody important one day]. [Makori's mother]

### **7.2.1 Report Card Orientation: Marks and grades matter**

The importance of passing national examinations was central in every family's conversations about school. Irrespective of a student's level of education, examinations are an important part of their educational experience and parents are actively involved. At the primary school level, parents focused their efforts on getting their children to do well in the KCPE and get admitted to performing secondary schools. For secondary schools students, parents and teachers made it absolutely clear that passing the KSCE examination was the only way to secure admission to a public university. For instance, Kevin spoke of how his parents constantly reminded him about how expensive it was to attend a private university. He gets the message that if he does not make it to a public university, probably higher education might not be accessible. In general, parents advised their children to aim higher, and that education is key to success in life. Whenever students close school for holidays, the first thing they show their parents is a report form. Parents wait for

the report forms with anticipation that their children are going to do well. A child who secures a top position in class is considered a source of pride for a Kenyan parent.

Parental involvement in student's education, accompanied with routine discussions at the end of the term about their grades and general academic progress, were reported as one of the ways parents kept their children on higher education track. For example, Christina's father reported that:

I usually go through her report form and advise her to add more effort in areas that she is weak. I do try my best to make sure that I have given her morale that I am considerate in her academics. I do remind her that even if I don't have money that should not bother her because that is my duty and her duty is to excel in her studies and ask for money to go to university. I do try to buy her books whenever I can. [Christina's father]

When asked how involved the family was in Monica's university going process, particularly in making sure she did well in the national examinations, his father responded, "we do ensure she has all her revising materials. The teachers are doing their part in ensuring they [students] have humble time to revise. When I go there I talk to individual teachers in relation to their respective subjects to find out how she is performing in them." In addition, Monica's father had this to share:

We give her encouragement and learning materials and also provide her with basic needs. As for pocket money, to me, it is not necessary that she buys bread but I give her to buy anything that she might miss in school. I know that I pay money to school in order for them to be fed. She can buy occasionally but my intention is not on buying food. It depends because I buy her enough things to use. She can stay in school without a cent but I have no problem because I know I have provided enough basic needs. I do not know if her mother gives her but we sit and discuss at how much we should give her. [Monica's father]

### **7:2:2 Rewards and Reinforcements**

Parents, for most part, utilized both reward and punishment strategies to motivate their children towards academic achievement. For example, Kevin's parents used both reward and punishment:

We [parents] urge them [children] to work hard and if they feel they have energy to go on they should go even to Master's. We advice them that out there it is not easy as there are dangers they should not indulge in them. We reward them when they do better in school. We make them struggle hard to be rewarded. When they don't do well we do punish them by withdrawing some privileges, even some favorite foods, in order for them to work hard. When they bring their report forms into the table and discuss them all, those who have done well are rewarded in front of others to show them that if they do better, next time it will be them. [Kevin's father]

Different rewards are given to students depending on each family's tradition. For good grades, some students receive monetary awards, earn a holiday trip, an exemption from household chores, while others receive verbal compliments and acknowledgement during family dinner time. For example, when asked about the types of conversations he had with his children when they came home for vacation, Monica's father reported: "Always when we are at home we do talk about their progress in school. Where they have not put more effort I quarrel a bit. I encourage them to work hard because education is the only key to Kenya of today and tomorrow. I usually reward them when they have done well and verbally reprimand them when they have not done well."

### **7:2:3 Active involvement in schools**

Some parents were actively involved in school activities, mainly through parent-teacher associations. They use such opportunities to monitor their children's



academic progress. For example, Zuma's father utilizes his frequent visits to the school as the PTA chairman to closely monitor his son's academic progress.

When I come here [school] I often ask about my son. As for the principal, who teaches him Kiswahili, I often speak to him whenever I drop here. And when I look at the report form and see his area of weakness I go to his subject teachers and talk to them about it. Especially he is weak in physics I had to check his teacher and request him to give Zuma extra coaching. [Zuma's father]

Active parental communication with teachers and school administration was evident among the parents I interviewed for this study. Although not actively involved in school activities, many low income and single parents made visits to the school to seek assistance whenever they could not provide for their children. Many parents made visits to make fee payment arrangements to avoid their children being sent away for lack of fees. Rose's mother, a single parent, spoke of how she sought teachers' assistance whenever she was unable to provide for her daughter's needs. In most part, she lagged behind in fees payments and could not afford many of the school supplies needed for her daughter. In such cases, she requested teachers to help Rose with whatever she needed, especially text books and other school supplies.

I went and told the teachers that I am unable to buy even a textbook. Teachers assisted her with textbooks. Again, she was appointed the school librarian. In the library, she is in charge of text books. Due to her good performance she told me during the April holidays that I don't have to struggle because with that responsibility she now has access to textbooks. [Rose's mother]

Low income and less educated parents lacked a clear understanding of the education process and were thus not in a position to effectively monitor what their children were doing in school. Such parents relied heavily on the schools to provide their children with needed guidance for academic success. As one parent remarked,

“I think my child is ready...if not, teachers would have told me. I think they’re doing a good job, so I do not bother to go to school. Teachers know better.” Although Zuma’s father did not have adequate knowledge about career choices, he entrusted teachers to offer his son the necessary guidance in making decisions about his future career:

So, I gave him a chance to choose his own career guided by his career teacher. There is one teacher who is very much interested in Zuma. He has bought him several textbooks, one in geography and another in chemistry. [Zuma’s father] Similarly, while Makori’s mother rarely contacted teachers, she had faith in

teachers; that they were doing their best in preparing her two sons for university education. She explained:

I only know the principal. I normally don’t come here all the time because where they are staying I have rented a room for them. I actually bring them food on a weekly basis. I haven’t talked with the teachers; only the children who tell me on how they are fairing in their school work. They say teachers are good and want them to do well. Teachers know more than I do. What can I say then...? I just pray to God. [Makori’s mother]

Certainly, educated parents served as role models for their children and were an important information resource about higher education. One student reported:

“My father encourages me to work hard and become a teacher like him because teaching is a cheap [inexpensive] course to do.” In addition, educated parents ensured that their children in boarding schools had the opportunity to do well. Such parents made regular visits to the school and were in constant communication with subject teachers to identify areas that their children needed to improve before exams. For instance, Monica’s father reported: “I have been to school several times to check on her and talk to his teachers to see her progress. When I go there I do talk to the deputy and her class teacher too. I need to know if she needs any help before it’s

late.” Similarly, Don’s mother observed: “My son had some difficulties in languages because he could get good grades in mathematics and sciences but below average in languages. I had to talk to his language teachers and now he is doing well.” In many cases, such parents work with subject teachers and school administrators in a manner that is beneficial to their children. For example, Don’s parents have good relations with teachers, some of whom are relatives. As Don’s mom stated:

The principal is a cousin to his Dad and he looks concerned. He has been of great help, for he has taken him as his own child. If the boy wants to talk to us he goes to the principal and he passes the information to us. The biology teacher is his uncle too and thus helps him in his school work and advises him to work hard. We sometimes invite them for lunch or dinner and they talk to them. Their uncle who is a lecturer at the Kabete campus tells him to work hard and make it to the university. [Don’s mother]

Kevin’s parents were in constant communication with teachers and school authorities, not only to monitor his class performance but also to ensure that the leadership responsibilities Kevin had been given would not interfere with his studies.

I went there one time and talked to the principal not to allow him become a Prefect because he may drop in class. Like my second born, I had to quarrel with teachers when they chose him a prefect and his grades were dropping. The principal assured me that he would not let him drop in class. He told me to come and collect an A in February 2009. I even met their church elder in the Sabbath school about it. He also assured me the same. [Kevin’s father]

Allan’s father, a good example of a modern day helicopter parent, was deeply involved in his son’s studies. He maintained constant communication with his teachers, pressuring them to assist him do better: “I also talk to the subject teacher to look at his weak areas. I also tell him to work hard on areas he has weaknesses and urge him to contact his teachers for further guidance. Sometimes I visit the school, talk with his teachers without him knowing I have been there....” Allan’s father was actively involved in the school’s activities and had not missed a single parents’ event.

He took pride in Allan's exemplary academic performance and that his efforts had paid off:

All the time since he joined Form 1, he has been performing well. I have never left that to chance. I have been there for this boy literally every single time. Four years is a very short time, if we relax I think things could be bad. Teachers know that I have to be there and inquire how my son is doing. Recently there was a Prize Giving Day in school which was attended by the Minister for Education. I was there and witnessed he [my son] was among the top 10 students who were chosen to dissect the rabbits in the biology lab for the visitors to come and see. I was among the visitors who went into the room and my son was among them and that made me be very proud of him. [Allan's father]

Owing to the competitive system of education, parents expect their children to excel in each level. Overall, parental involvement, which included monitoring students' homework, tutoring at home, providing necessary resources, frequent family communication and discussions about the value of higher education, frequent visits to schools as well as family cohesiveness are among the motivating strategies that parents used to help their children achieve academically. In addition, parents closely monitored what their children learnt in school and they also limited the amount of TV viewing. While parents featured prominently as influential significant other in students' university going process, siblings also influenced students' educational pathways.

#### **7:4 Big Brother/Sister: Sibling influence**

An older sibling's academic achievement or lack of it motivated these students to aspire for a higher education degree. Siblings occupied unique spaces in the lives of these students, sharing similar family and educational experiences. Many of the students reported that their siblings, especially those who attended universities,

were an important source of information and social support in their views about going to the university. A few of the students, for example, Allan, Don, Kevin, and Monica, have their siblings enrolled in public universities. They viewed their siblings as role models and mentors in the university going process. In terms of academic preparations, these students learnt study strategies and ways of preparing for exams by following siblings' educational paths and how they achieved academically. These students were set to follow the footsteps of their big sisters and brothers.

Siblings' conversations, direct intervention, and educational experiences provided positive influences that shaped student's own academic achievements. In many ways, students in this study reported being challenged to achieve academically just because their older siblings had succeeded. Siblings' expectations helped them to keep track of their grades and study habits to achieve academically. For example, David spoke about how he felt challenged by her sister's success to the extent that he vowed to achieve academically and join a public university, just like her. She was not only his role model, but also a source of inspiration and mentor. She advised him on reading strategies and became an influential person in his academic life. He learnt from his sister that, in order for him to excel in his studies, he had to "become an early riser and work hard, be close to teachers in case he needed their help." Another focus group student spoke of how his sister's success posed a challenge to him, particularly because of gender, "my eldest sister holds a diploma in pharmacy; this gives me morale to work in order to achieve better than her. I am a man and you get this unspoken message from parents that you need to outperform a girl. So, I feel I should go beyond her."

In most part, these students spoke of how their older siblings helped nurture their higher education aspirations. In addition, the choice of particular fields of study and possible universities to enroll was linked to a siblings' advice and experiences in those institutions. In many ways, siblings opened the doors of opportunity, in which younger siblings were able to view higher education as a reality. For example, Kevin's first visit to a university was during his sister's graduation, and from that time on he felt that was the place he wanted to be in one day. He recalled:

As we [family members] arrived at the university gate, oh...the place looked beautiful, with all the decorations ...hanging from the entrance all the way to the buildings. She [sister] was in her graduation gown. She was excited to see us come. She had been waiting at the gate for a while. There were many people coming to attend the graduation. So many cars and buses...it was like everybody was there. My sister took us round the university. For me, it was a really orientation to the university. From that day I knew and I felt that I should join a university. [Kevin]

Kevin took it as a challenge and since that time, he has worked hard in his class work earning mostly A's and B's, putting him on top of his class. It has been his long term dream to join the very university his sister attended. Kevin spoke positively of his frequents visits to universities his siblings attended, to get first hand knowledge about university life before he enrolled. He visited his siblings and stayed on campus for a week during the April, August, and December school vacations. Listening as siblings gave personal accounts of their experiences at university, Kevin was confident that he understood the challenge he was up for.

Having siblings enrolled in institutions of higher education helped to establish a university going tradition in their respective families. This factor featured prominently in our study as students with a sibling or siblings in university showed understanding of the university going process and the significance of higher

education in their lives. For example, David vividly shared how his dreams to enroll for higher education were firmly associated to his university-going sister:

She [older sister] was the first to go to university in our family. I saw how she worked so hard by herself. My father didn't know much about university. By then I was in class six. She came home in the evening, showed me this letter. She told me she had been called to join the university. When she said, [David] I want you to work hard and follow in my footsteps. You can't have a life without a degree. It's just going to be miserable working in the farm like... That was when I felt I should join her. I am working hard to join university to make my sister happy. She set the pace; I can't disappoint them [parents]. I know it will make a difference in my life. I owe it all to her. [David]

Familial expectations about higher education were, in most part, based on the older siblings' academic achievements. The older siblings not only established a family tradition, but also authored the pathway that younger siblings were expected to follow. As David expressed: "Since I am the second born, my family's obvious expectations are that I will join university just like my sister. My father always reminds me of this whenever he visits me here in school. To my father, it feels more that since I am a boy I should definitely go [university]. There is, in his tone, a sense of inevitability and urgency, that I really don't have any option and that, kind of, puts pressure on me." In addition, older siblings attending universities helped to shape students decisions about future careers. For example, one student spoke of how her sister helped her in making decisions about majoring in Industrial Chemistry at the university:

I want to do industrial chemistry and my sister is my role model. She really encourages me to work very hard. She told me, "You could land a good job if you majored in engineering." I am very good in chemistry, and I said to myself, yes, I can do industrial chemistry. But that was basically her idea and I bought into it. So if nobody tells you, maybe you don't know which way to go. This world is very competitive, you know. Sometimes you have to get

somebody to tell you, this is the way. I think it's helpful that I have a big sister at campus. [Focus group female student]

In similar ways, older siblings who had achieved academically, offered to help with homework and discussed school activities with their younger siblings aspiring for university education. For example, Kevin received tutoring from his older siblings enrolled in the university. In particular, his sister offered tutoring sessions in mathematics and physics, subjects he had problems in, until his grades improved. In addition, based on their own experiences, siblings helped guide their younger ones in the university going process. For instance, students spoke of how they had understood about the existence of financial aid and cluster points for admission to particular programs at the university based on their siblings' experience with the process. Students' higher education aspirations and choice of particular universities, in most part, was based on stories they had heard from their siblings about university life. For instance, when asked about his higher education plans and whether he had made any visits to the university, Kevin had this to say:

I have done it [visiting universities] on several occasions. The first time, I felt cool to have stepped into the university compound. I saw that life in the university was the best ever one could to have. The lifestyle in the university seemed good to me...you are there on your own, making your own decisions. There is really a lot of freedom. I consider joining university to enjoy freedom of choice that my siblings are enjoying. I can get financial aid and just spend. I think it's cool to live on campus. That feeling of being a way from parents is nice. I can not wait to go [university]. [Kevin]

#### **7:4:1 “I don't want to be like them”: Striving to be a different sibling**

In many ways, some students in this study aspired for university education as trail blazers, driven by desire to bring honor to their families. Some wanted to accomplish what their elder siblings had failed to achieve. Taking lessons from what



they considered as negative sibling experiences in life choices and lack of academic achievement provoked them to want to set an example— that of being different from their older siblings. Makori’s experience falls in this category. His aspirations in higher education were linked to his siblings’ academic failure. Unlike any of his siblings, Makori has put more effort in his studies and set his eyes on higher education. He spoke of how he felt provoked to bring recognition and honor to his family in the village by attending and obtaining a university degree, something his elder siblings had failed to accomplish.

According to Makori, his older siblings lacked ambition for higher education although they regretted for not putting effort in their studies. Recounting how his family remained infamous and unrecognized in the village, partly because none of his family members were properly educated to command respect, Makori had this to say, “Sometimes nobody knows about my family, I mean it terms of recognition...we (his family) are not recognized because we have nothing [achievement] to talk about. Basically, people want to hear about big things and when I go to university, they [villagers] would come for advice. I want to set that example by working hard. Then they [villagers] will be like...oh the son of Kerandi passed with flying colors. He will be going to the University of Nairobi. You know that’s kind of things I want to achieve first. People nowadays just talk of money. We don’t have anything now; they [siblings] are jobless. I guess they did not want to work hard enough. Or, maybe, they [siblings] didn’t see the reason to [work hard] but now they are kind of regretting”.

Similarly, listening to Makori's mother talk about her older children's lack of academic success provides enough reason to understand Makori's determination and drive to be a different child in the family.

I have eight children. The first born is 28 years old and the youngest is 6. I have five boys and three girls. The girls are the eldest followed by the boys. My first born child reached class eight and went into tailoring because her health could not allow her to proceed to high school. The second born completed her high school but didn't pass well and could not go to college because of lack of finance. My third born too refused school and joined her sister in the tailoring trade. My fourth born is a boy; he completed his high school and didn't do well either. He works for a Securicor company in Mombasa. He hasn't been home for long. None of them [older siblings] has something [job] now. My only hope is in the younger two sons [Makori and his brother]. The immediate follower to Makori is in Form 1. The last born is in primary school. I thank God for giving me these children but I also feel like God, why can't you make even one child finish university. Maybe that could be my savior. To buy me clothes... maybe built me a *mabati* [iron sheets] house to harvest rain water. [Makori]

Zuma's father, too, frequently reminded his son how his older siblings had failed in their examinations, disappointing his efforts in paying for their studies. Worse still, they remained dependents on their parents. None of Zuma's siblings had obtained good grades to secure a place even in a middle level college or a job. Turning this failure into a family tragedy, Zuma's father cleverly used it as a reference point in firing up and inspiring the young boy to work hard in school and salvage the family from further disgrace and shame. As a result, Zuma knew throughout his high school years that he had to do well in his studies. As he explained: "My father usually encourages me to work hard and be a role model to my elder brothers who missed to complete their education." Similar sentiments were expressed by a focus group student, who shared her source of motivation to achieve academic success:

My parents are concerned about my academic performance. I am staying with my aunt, but whenever my Dad comes to visit; he usually calls me and asks me of the report form. Like in Form 1 and 2, I was not performing well...they were so much discouraged that I didn't get a good position... so they really encouraged me to work hard. Like my sister who finished high school she did not do well. Also my brother who is in Form 4 repeated because he did not do well. Now Dad tells me to work hard because he is now looking at me and he wants me to go to high levels. [Female focus group student]

The issue of siblings' influence on the students of this study was variously pervasive. Although Monica's older sisters attended public universities, they were enrolled in the parallel degree program, which catered for students who missed the cut off points for regular degree programs and were, therefore, admitted on purely self-sponsorship terms. While students in regular programs obtained government sponsorship through loans and bursaries, those in the parallel programs met the full cost of their university education. For Monica's case, her father was straining financially to meet the cost of his senior daughters' university studies. In her own conscious thoughts, Monica vowed not to become an additional burden to her father by working hard and passing with flying colors to ensure her admission to a regular university program with government funding. To her, the desire to lessen her father's financial burden formed a source of inspiration and drives to do well in her secondary school examinations. Accordingly, her ambition to earn grades above the university cut off points to qualify for government sponsorship aptly expressed in her words:

I don't think I would like to join a parallel program because two of my sisters are in there [University of Nairobi and Makerere University in Uganda]. It costs a lot to register through the program. I have seen my father just sit and look at me...you can see him scratch his head...it's just a pain to raise the money because you know... he is retired, he doesn't make that money, he has to spend like...I tell you it's a really pain. I wish they [sisters] worked a little harder and not get the Cs. They could be getting HELB and my parents could be going through that [pay a lot] money. [Monica]

She also talked about his elder brother, who left for the USA seven years ago and had not completed his first degree:

I don't want to be like my brother, he has been in States for 7 years now. He still says he is in college. I can't imagine how that happens, I was in lower primary by then and now I am about to join university. *Nafikiria huyu jama hataki kusoma, pengine anakula raha tu na hata hakuna mwenye anajua* [I just think this guy [her brother] is not serious with studies, maybe, he is enjoying life there, who knows]. My dad always tells me to be different. I don't want to disappoint him. He has great faith in me. [Monica]

According to the parents, Monica represented hope for the family and that she had the potential to influence her older siblings. In particular, after watching Monica do extremely well in class, her siblings are also putting more effort in their studies. Monica's father had this to say about the influence Monica's academic performance had on siblings:

She has a positive influence on her siblings due to her better performance; they respect her so much. At one time when their younger brother was sent home because of lack of fees they [sisters] were sympathetic because they know that they are the cause why he cannot have enough school fees. So, they feel bad that they didn't do well enough in their academics such that they got average grades. They are now working hard to get good grades at the university to compensate. I think her [Monica] performance is a constant reminder of the opportunity they lost. She stands out...really shining. I have no doubt about that. [Monica's father]

A similar situation existed at Kevin's family whose siblings also attended public universities through the parallel program. Financing their university education has become a financial burden with parents taking huge loans to support them. As a result, his parents always remind him to work harder in order to earn himself a government scholarship under the regular admission to a public university. While straining to pay his children's tuition and fees, Kevin's father is nearing retirement and that means Kevin is unlikely to get his financial support. However, the family

expects Kevin to earn better grades than did his siblings. By so doing, the expenses they could have incurred paying for Kevin's parallel degree study could be saved for retirement. Such are the conversations that dominate family dinners whenever Kevin is home for holidays. As he recalls, "we usually have the discussion at home with my parents and they hint to me how much they hope for me to make a difference by joining a public college in order to ease them the burden of paying fees to private colleges.

#### **7:4:2 Role model for young siblings**

Striving to set a good example for younger siblings to emulate is one of the themes that emerged from the study interviews. Some of our interviewees were motivated to achieve academically by the desire to be role models for their younger siblings and others of their ilk in the village. For example, Christina expressed the need to set a family tradition for her younger siblings. For this reason, she strove to achieve academically in order:

For them [siblings] to know it pays to work hard in school. I just want them to see that I have achieved academically. It's like at home I'm the big sister who they look up to. Not really that I am the eldest, but you know my Dad has great hopes in me. He tells them, "look at Christina and how she is doing in school." My Dad feels really good when he comes here [school] for prize giving days. He can't stop talking about it to my sisters. He wants them to follow my example. [Christina]

Christina improvised a reward system to motivate and recognize her younger siblings' hard work whenever they got good grades. In most cases, from her pocket money, she bought small gifts and offered treats to appreciate their good work. In addition, Christina's father also spoke of how he regularly consulted with her in

matters concerning the younger children's academic performance. Christina's father continued to explain:

I like her [Christina] because I have her as their [siblings] advisor. When she is there [school] I have much hope that she can do what I want her to do. I am proud of her because if she will pass then I would be very happy...Her influence is academics where she challenges her siblings that if anyone gets the marks she got ...she would give out Ksh. 50 shillings to anyone who reaches that. [Christina's father]

A similar situation applied to Jessica. She also saw herself a source of motivation to her younger siblings as well as their role model. In addition, her good academic performance posed a challenge to her two older sisters. Jessica's father had this to say about her influence:

Her [Jessica] elder sister whom they are within the same class is motivated by Jessica's efforts because she feels that if Jessica will defeat her in the examinations and she is the older, then it wouldn't sound alright for her. So this makes her to want to do her best in order to remain at par with Jessica. Even her elder sister, who completed her form four last year knows that Jessica does her best... this motivated her also to do her best so that Jessica could not catch up with her if she repeats in Form 4. [Jessica's father]

Don has, too, role modeled himself to his younger brother as well as other children within the extended family and the neighborhood. As his mother reported:

He [Don] has made his younger brother to be responsible. He [Don] works hard in school and even his uncles are impressed about his academic performance. They tell their children to be like Don. They feel that he is a challenge and an example to their children. Even neighbors, you hear them tell their children, "Why can't you behave like so [Don]." That makes you feel that he is making an impact on young children in the neighborhood. [Don's mother]

### **7:5 Socio-economic status and educational aspirations**

Although all students expressed the goal of attaining university degrees, paying for university education is something that bothered most of them, especially in

the event of failing to meet the entry points required for one to qualify for government financial aid. Moreover, even those students who score highly and qualify for regular public university admissions and get government subsidy in their tuition and fees through HELB loans, these funds are not sufficiently adequate to keep them in college. Most students, therefore, were somewhat worried about their financial situation, even though they hoped to do well in the examinations. While some parents had concrete plans about their children's' higher education participation, student from particularly low socio-economic strata were more worried that despite their aspirations for university education, their dream might not be realized because of their families' wanting socio-economic conditions.

The students' awareness of their socio-economic background was a source of motivation to achieve academically, and attain good careers/decent jobs in order to transform their families' financial condition. Students from low socio-economic backgrounds were well aware of their parents' inability to provide and wanted to work hard for a better future, unlike that of their parents. Makori expressed: "You know I want to live a better life than my dad and mom. I also want to give them a better life. They [parents] have sacrificed so much to get me here. My father grew up as an orphan and only managed to get an Eight grade education. He now works in a farm picking tea to support the family." Makori's greatest worry, however, is how to finance his university education. He is certainly aware of the fact that without alternative funding, either through government financial aid or the constituency bursary, he would not be able to afford paying for higher education. For Makori, pursuing a parallel degree or a private university was not an option.

Additionally, Makori's mother regretted that her lack of formal education due to her family's inability to support her impacted her ability to meet the needs of her children. She did not wish the same to befall her children. She narrated her story how she had spent most of her early life as a babysitter with relatives in exchange for daily up keep and was married at the age of sixteen. With nine children to look after and a husband working and living away from the family, she has difficulties to provide for their daily needs. When we met for this interview, she had just brought flour and vegetables to Makori and his brother who live behind the shops at a market center near the school. She had high expectations in her children, that they would eventually succeed and one day change her life for the better. When asked how she planned to pay for her son's university education, she curtly replied, "God will provide." Clearly, she endured hardships to provide for the family of nine.

The students' awareness of the unemployment situation in the country was discernibly captured in the interviews. Students indicated awareness motivated them to work harder in order to become competitive in the job market. Kenya's unemployment situation is perennial and stood at more than forty percent in 2008. Many students expressed the desire to position themselves for a better chance of getting a good and well paying job as the source of motivation to pursue education beyond high school. However, it emerged from focus group interviews that students from well-to-do families had connections in higher offices and finding jobs may not be a challenge for them. As Esther explained: "When you have your parents or siblings who know people in government offices or they themselves are up there...then you do not have to sweat yourself with high grades...you'll still get that



private university degree and be up there yourself tomorrow...I see that happening a lot in this country... if we had somebody up there my brothers and sister would not be sitting at home with their Bs, they would have gotten somewhere by now...but see, they are just out helping in the farm.”

Similarly, Rose believed money made all the difference, as “students who rise up early or stay up late to read are rebuked by some of the students from rich families...you hear them say ‘let them read hard, you know they can’t make without the HELB,’ I think they do so because they believe some of our parents can’t afford to give us a university education... that makes me work hard...keep going and going...You know, I just never give up. I am doing fine.” In spite of the challenges facing her due to her parents’ divorce and subsequent extreme financial strain, Rose is very motivated to achieve her dreams, “Because they [the well-to-do kids] have a plan already set about their university education, some of us have to work for it... I find it encouraging and sometimes I feel proud of myself that despite the fact that my mom has nothing [money] I can still be the top student in this school.”

### **7:6 Academic ambitions and personal achievement**

While some of the students’ academic pathways were shaped through parental and older sibling guidance, many of the students in this study worked to create their own academic pathways by developing ambitious educational and future career plans. Individual students’ dreams propelled them toward the development of university going imaginations and the expectation that a university education would make a difference in their lives. Many students saw a promising future coming through hard work. Others reported that their desire to get a university education and a good career

was largely motivated by their personal experiences, especially the struggles that their parents underwent. Students' academic ambitions and motivation toward personal achievement is exemplified well by Makori's reflections on his family's struggles and his desire to maintain academic excellence for the sake of his family's future;

Sometimes I think about the life that we have lived and wish that my children would never undergo the same. I am expecting a good job in future to provide for my family the basic needs that they may need. We face difficulties like lack of school fees; we miss breakfast and we don't wish our children to undergo that. When we ask our mother why we can't have it she says whatever she has provided is what she can afford at the time. We understand because we know our family background that we don't have much. Our mother always asks us if we know how much they are struggling to get our school fees. "Are you [he and his brother] working hard to go to university and get good jobs than what we [his parents] are doing [jobs]?" My response to her is that we can make it and that remains a challenge to us now. We go and think and rearrange ourselves where we are not doing very well we try to put extra effort. [Makori]

Similarly, the role his future career could play in transforming the family's socio-economic situation, coupled with confidence in his academic abilities, motivated David to attain a university education. He commented, "even though I come from a poor family if I go to university and be employed, I can change my family's lifestyle. My dream has been to become a surgeon. I know I can make it. My father is a primary school teacher; he does not make that much money. He has taken loans to support us. I think they [family] will be ok when I finish [university]." Another student had similar views, "when I look at home how our mum struggles, I want to make a difference in our home."

The desire to become a trailblazer motivated Zuma to pursue university education because nobody in his village has a university degree. Like many other students, the accomplishment could make him a respected person in the community.

He argued, “in my home area nobody has gone to university, most people have diplomas from intermediate colleges like teachers’ training colleges. That’s one of the reasons why I want to go to university. My ambition is that one day I may become a role model to the upcoming students.”

Awareness of the community needs and challenges motivated students in aspiring for higher education in order to equip themselves for important roles in society. Jessica’s motivation to study medicine at the university was based, for example, on the desire to help many poor people in her village, who could not afford healthcare. She said: “My dream is to become a medical doctor...when I see people sick and can’t go to hospital until they die...I feel sorry. I want to come back and treat them. They do not have to die easily for some diseases that are simple. I think I am capable. I just need to work hard.” In the same vein, a focus group student expressed her desire to pursue a law degree to fight some ills in the society, “for me I want to make a good society. I want to go to university to become a lawyer. I do not like corruption, so that is why I want to become a lawyer to do away with it.”

In similar ways, students’ prior academic achievement facilitated the development of their higher educational aspirations. For many students, academic achievement in primary education, especially in the standard eight examinations determined the types of schools they enrolled for secondary school education, and subsequent motivation to aspire for a university education. For example, Jessica and Allan, both working hard to study medicine at the university were top students in their respective schools in the standard eight examinations, both students shared their experiences of how being a top student had changed their perceptions and from then,

higher education opportunity had become a reality. Likewise, many students in this study are high achievers, take top positions in their classes and have strong convictions about university education than many of their classmates who did not excel in primary school exams and had to attend low quality secondary schools.

Students' high school grades played a role in the development of their university aspirations. The motivation to undertake the necessary academic preparation to compete for university entry was based on the fact that these students were aware they were top performers in their respective schools and they considered themselves university material. Their academic accomplishments also positively impacted their relationship with parents, peers, and teachers. Students with good grades attracted admiration from teachers and parents. Furthermore, many students explained how good grades in class had helped them set higher expectations of themselves that they will score highly in the national examinations. In many ways, maintaining academic excellence created self confidence in their ability to pass university entry examinations and pursue their dreams.

### **7:7 Church, faith and extracurricular activities**

Spirituality and faith played a central role in the lives of most students in this study. Most students were actively involved in religious activities at school and home. Some sang in the church and youth choirs. On the part of David, he attended church every Sabbath [Saturday] because, "the church helps a lot by encouraging me spiritually and gives students like me hope to work hard. I am a choir member in our church. I am in a youth choir at my home church." Steve was active in the church

choir and drama, church activities were dear to him and he diligently followed the Sabbath whether at school or at home. His school was religiously affiliated and that gave him the opportunity to be active in spiritual matters. Monica reported that although she started her day very early, the moment she got to class, the first thing she did was to say a prayer first before starting to study. She said: “I wake up at 4:00 am the morning and I get into class by 4:30 am, talk to God before I start to read.”

To underscore the importance of church going to academic success, Monica’s father reported that his children “...are church goers and participate in various church activities, which helps to rebuild their character and they avoid being discipline cases. The moment your child is not a discipline case, you know she or he is going to make it. Undisciplined children pay no attention to teachers and they fail in exams. I thank God for my children’s good character. Like now Monica is quite active with church, again her performance has been better compared to her siblings, which is why I thank God for her. Her work is impressive, her behavior is good too.”

Parents offered prayers for their children to pass the national examination. Makori’s mother knew little about exam preparations but was very prayerful and optimistic on his performance, “I hope he has prepared enough. I do pray for him and God will do his will on him to pass.” Makori spoke about his faith in God and its importance in his educational achievements. He had what he called successful educational experiences because he believed in God and avoided bad company, something he attributed for his good performance in school. If it were not for his spirituality he would have probably dropped out of school like did his siblings. He spoke of her mother’s faith in God and how she constantly prayed God to provide for

the family needs, especially food and school fees. He talked of his mother as a strong woman of prayer who taught him about God.

Similarly, faith and prayer was prevalent in most interviews as parents expressed their wishes and prayers for their children to succeed in the examinations. Jessica's father reported: "I am really praying that she passes her exam because if she does then I will be very happy." For this family, spirituality was an important aspect of their lives. Jessica's father worked as a casual laborer in his local church, and used this as an opportunity to have spirituality and faith play an important role in his family. He involved his family in the church services and had prayer sessions at home. He spoke of how he wanted his children to learn to be God-fearing and, even if they left home for boarding schools, they would still remain connected with God. For example, although Jessica was not actively involved in church activities during her last year of high school, she never missed church services. Her faith in God had greatly contributed in providing her strength in the university going process. She spoke of her parents' prayer for her and said that her faith started to grow in her early age, when she attended church services as a child and later she attended a church affiliated primary school. She continued to talk how her faith in God had enabled her to avoid bad company which would have affected her studies. By attending church, Jessica was able to choose and keep friends who were spiritually upright and focused on their studies. She also spoke of girls from her neighborhood, who never took church serious got into bad company, most of them become pregnant before finishing high school.

Esther talked of how she always prayed to God to get her and her family through the difficult challenges they were experiencing after her father had been killed during the election violence. When we spoke for the first time, she had just returned from her father's funeral. She spoke about how faith and prayer had kept the family going in the face of those trying family moments. In order to overcome the emotions associated with the loss of her father, she turned to prayer. She prayed for her mother's health and that she could be able to meet their needs. She constantly prayed for her family's welfare.

Many times I think of the problems at home. I think about how my parent [mother] is struggling to provide my basic needs and if I will ever get money to continue my studies and because of the tribal clashes [election violence] I do fear a lot about the safety of my family. When the thoughts crowd my mind I call home to see whether everything is fine, I pray and then I go back to my studies after they have assured me. [Esther]

Esther believed God was to work out a miracle to have her and sibling's tuition and other fees to attend higher education institutions. She spoke of how her mother had brought them up to be well grounded spiritually and that has helped to strengthen her faith in God. She talked of her mother as a prayer warrior, who taught her to pray and give thanks to God for everything. Whenever she did well in school, and she had earned good grades and a good position, she thanked the Good Lord for that.

Similarly, Esther's mother was hopeful about her academic achievement, declaring, "God willing, she can make it to university." Speaking of her family's spirituality, Esther's mom observed: "Being in the church has helped me so much. I was born in a Christian family. My father made sure that on Friday, before the Sabbath has started, everything is ready and everybody is in the compound...My

children are all baptized in church and they are church goers...I can say that my children are the ones who can choose to perish because I have taught them Christian values; so, I hope they will follow it the rest of their lives.”

The opportunity to visit the school regularly for church services was utilized by Kevin’s parents and siblings to monitor his academic performance. They reported:

We do visit him regularly when we have a chance; we don’t wait until they have visiting day. They have a Sabbath school in the school compound; so, sometimes we send his sister to go as if she is going to church and they meet there; she encourages him to work hard for they [siblings] have finished and the chance is there for him to go to university.

Speaking of his religious activities in school, Kevin’s parents emphasized how he was “always active in that he can preach to his fellow students during their Sabbath school church service and also sing in the school church choir.”

In addition, Kevin’s family offered spiritual guidance as a means of ensuring that their children not only did achieve academically but were also spiritually well grounded. They believed that spiritual guidance could enable them to do well in school. Family discussions on spiritual matters were central in Kevin’s family: “We do talk each evening during their school holidays because at times we are busy during the day. We have supper together at the table. We speak on spiritual matters, social affairs, and encourage them not to shy off whenever they have a problem with their own affairs.” The parents counted it a blessing for having children who knew about God and were doing well in school. As his father remarked, “this is just a blessing from God that we have very good kids. Soon they will finish university degrees, and those who want to go for masters or even PhD we’ll support them. We thank God because he gave them to us.”



Steve's mother prayed to God to provide what she could not afford to buy for Steve. She said: "I only pray for him because even if I wanted to buy him some reading materials now, I have no money. I talked with some of my friends and my sister who is in Nairobi to assist me with revision papers and books too." Constant prayer strengthened the faith and hope of Steve's family in the midst of challenging circumstances they faced — his father's death, displacement due to election violence, and loss of property to arsonists. Speaking of the circumstances surrounding their loss of property due to arsonists, his mother said: "I called on God to intervene because his books had gone [burnt] and he had to start afresh but we thank God that we are a live...Only God and prayer which can help us...Since I joined the church, I always pray with my children." She spoke of how she got to meet with God during the tough and painful experiences following her husband's death:

The challenges that I have experienced since my husband died are many and painful. When he died we had not saved any money. My mother in-law was an alcoholic and [so are] some brother in-laws. Even before the burial they decided to chase me away. Everything was packed as we left with the body for burial. I returned to Nairobi with my children, the house was cold and we had no bed or utensils. Now I felt life was of no use; in fact I had bought some poison to kill myself and the children because my husband is gone and has not helped us much. I had no job, how can I survive with the children? Some friends used to give us food and encouragements. Fortunately one of my cousins came to enroll as a student at the Kenya Polytechnic and came to stay with us. She was saved and she took me to church. The church heard my predicament and contributed and paid for our rent for one year, bought us some basic requirements and some money remained and I started business with it and God made changes in me and the drug that I had bought to commit suicide I decided to throw it away. [Steve's mother]

Steve himself relied on prayer to forget the unpleasant experiences with the election violence. He spoke of how the school had provided him with time to worship God and had made friends with whom he shared the faith. The most

important thing he liked about his school was its emphasis on spiritual matters which had helped to strengthen his faith in God in ways that made him to forget the bad experiences. He spoke that whenever he felt overwhelmed, he turned to God in prayer and that prayer had become a healing therapy for him. His mother was equally grateful that she could cry to God in prayer and miracles could happen. Whenever she had a serious problem, she prayed and God sent her help. She still held a strong faith and prayed for her children's success regularly. She believed God would provide for whatever they needed. When we ended this interview session with her, she had these final words for me: "I would like you to remember us in prayer wherever you go because it wasn't our wish to be displaced [by the post election violence]."

## **7.8 Conclusion**

This study revealed that the family was the most influential institution in the way Gusii students aspired and prepared for higher education. Parental involvement in education assumed various roles from coaching their children from a tender age, rewarding for good grades, and investing in private primary education among others. In what can be viewed as "helicopter parenting," many well-educated parents closely monitored their children academic performance through regular visits to the schools. On the other hand, low income parents, driven with a desire to give their children a better future, underwent struggles to see their children through high school amidst financial difficulties. The social networks forged within and outside the family propelled these students towards academic success.

At individual level, driven by ambition, determination and desire to transform the future of their family's socio-economic status, these students set their goals to acquire a university education. Amidst challenging life experiences, many students found solace and strength through participation in religious activities. As first generation students, and with academically unsuccessful siblings, many yearned for university education not only to become unlike their siblings, avoid disappointing their parents or teachers but also to secure an opportunity that their parents were denied due to economic circumstances.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY CONTEXTS IN THE UNIVERSITY GOING PROCESS**

This chapter highlights the influence of the school and the socio-cultural context in the university going process. It examines the social milieu of Gusii students aspiring for higher education in order to establish the extent of its role in the university going process. This section, thus, delineates the pathways of the twelve students of this study, from upper primary level through high school. It evaluates the students' academic preparations particularly in high school, the roles and influences of teachers and counselors, peers and friends. In addition, the section incorporates the influence of community-school partnerships and culture on educational attainment.

#### **8:1 Quality of primary schooling**

There is no doubt that the quality of schooling plays an important role in the development of educational aspirations and expectations, and subsequent academic achievement. This study's interview findings show that the onset of higher education aspirations among students takes place at upper primary school level. The quality or, rather, the nature of schooling students receive in upper primary school not only influences their future academic attainments but also determines and shapes ways through which they utilize their potential to achieve desired goals. Most students spoke of how their upper primary school experiences prepared them to aspire for higher education. It is important, however, to note that a majority of the students in this study attended private primary schools, which tend to produce excellent

examination results compared to public primary schools. According to their parents, private schools have smaller class sizes, are well managed, and offer quality education as opposed to the poorly managed and heavily congested public primary schools. Therefore, in terms of preparing students for higher education, private schools have favorable ratings.

However, presently there are two types of private primary schools in Gusiiland. Apart from the high cost boarding schools, which are few and largely catering for kids from well-to-do families, the failure of public primary school system to adequately prepare students has resulted in the advent of private day schools known as *Academies*, relatively low in tuition and fees. The mushrooming of the *Academy* schools is a clear response of the ordinary common people, who cannot afford to send their children to the high cost private boarding schools, but are frustrated by the poor state of the public schools. The academies are usually owned by individual, mostly retired or current public school head teachers. They enroll students whose families cannot afford to pay for a private boarding school. Although most of these schools lack essential facilities, depending on location or ownership, *academy* schools have continued to emerge in many locations, for example many are located behind shops in market centers without adequate classroom space. While the impacts of the uncontrolled mushrooming of *academy* schools in Gusiiland is beyond the scope of the current study, their existence, however, presents alternative educational possibilities for children from low socio-economic backgrounds.

Commenting on the state of public schools and the emergence of academies, Mr. Onyoni observed:

Public primary education here [Gusii] is pathetic. Since the introduction of academic ranking and quota system of secondary school admission, the academies tend to be doing much better than the public schools. People have shifted to academy schools. All the teachers working in public schools have enrolled their own children in the academies; evidently showing they have lost confidence in public schools. So, while teachers in public schools are lazily relaxed, they are pretty assured that their children are well catered for in the academies. Unfortunately, most pupils in public schools come from very poor families, who see their hopes in higher education diminish as pupils from academies end up in the best public secondary schools because they usually excel in performance. [Onyoni]

Although academies, too, lack the necessary educational resources, their studying strategies and overall management skills are relatively superior to those found in the crumbling public schools. For instance, the academies' policy of hinging teachers' salaries and connecting employment to the students' performance in their respective subjects ensure that teachers are not only constantly kept on toes and work under pressure, but also are held to be productive and accountable. Hence, many *academy* school teachers strive to ensure their students are adequately prepared to succeed and excel in the KCPE examinations. According to parents, this is the main reason why they prefer the *academies* to public schools, especially at the upper primary level. As I travelled through Gusii during data collection I noticed a growing number of academy schools. Mostly, they are located in shopping centers because this is the only place that the proprietors and owners of the schools can find buildings to rent and start a school. Most of them have no resources to build a school. Buildings that were designed to become shops are now classrooms. I noticed a phenomenon in many market centers that I visited and students have no playgrounds. As Mr. Onyoni concurs:

Nowadays academy schools are everywhere. Passing from one shopping center to another, you cannot miss an academy. Teachers in these schools drill

their pupils a lot with the aim of making them excel by scoring highly in KCPE. We do not know what we can do to curb the practice. It is cut throat competition, which unfortunately disadvantages pupils in public schools whose KCPE scores are routinely low. So, while the academy pupils are selected to good secondary schools on the basis of their excellent scores, pupils from public schools end up in struggling secondary schools such as the local Harambee schools, which are known for poor academic performance. [Onyoni]

With an exception of Makori and Zuma, the rest of the students in this study graduated from private schools, both boarding and day. Those from well-to-do families attended boarding primary schools, while others graduated from the academies. Owing to adequate academic preparations in these schools, these students were able to do well in their KCPE and secure admission to good secondary schools such as Tumaini and Baraka. This study established that development of aspirations for higher education depended on the kind of educational experiences at upper primary level. Hence, the quality of upper primary schooling is important in Gusii students' aspiring for higher education because it served as the spring board upon which students launched their high school studies, which, in turn, determined their possibilities for university education.

## **8:2 Choosing High Schools: Reputation and ranking**

The transition of students from primary to secondary school in Kenya is based on students' performance in the Standard 8 national examination (KCPE). Kenya's high schools, classified into national, provincial, district and local schools (Harambee) admit students on the basis of their scores in the KCPE. However, parents have a choice to enroll their children in high schools that select them or to seek vacancies in other schools of their choice. In making choices on which schools

to enroll their children, parents consider a number of factors. In this study, a school's reputation and ranking in the national examinations emerged as the most important factor that influenced parental choices for high schools. When asked the reasons they considered in choosing their children's current schools, performance and reputation ranked top than proximity or tuition and fees rates.

Tumaini, Baraka and other provincial schools in Gusiiland enroll the brightest students of the community. Yet, owing to competition, securing a vacancy in such schools is viewed as a pleasant break through. Most parents with financial resources are willing to spend more money to ensure their children attend reputable schools that can facilitate their academic success. For instance, Allan's father spoke about the high school choice process and how he finally decided to enroll him at Tumaini high:

I met with my colleagues whose children had been selected to the school [Tumaini] and we discussed this school in detail. We first looked at how the school has been performing over the years. We gave that a tick. Upon agreeing that the school has been doing well, we brought in our kids. We knew the boys will make it academically from this school if they put effort. One thing I like about this school is the way it prepares students for the national examination. I also looked at the proximity of the school and, again, its good activities. [Allan's father]

When it comes to the education of their children, Gusii parents do their best in ensuring their kids access the most promising opportunities available. The community attaches great value in higher education for their children. More importantly, parents do not take anything for granted in choosing suitable high schools for their children. They are conscious to the fact that the type of high school a student attends, in many ways, determines the student's eventual performance in national examinations. For example, in choosing Monica's high school, among other factors, her father considered the school's good reputation:



I chose the first school for my daughter because of its good history. It had a good reputation nationally because it competes well with other national and provincial schools in national examinations. I wanted my daughter to be in such a school. I figured out that even if I spend more money in tuition and fees, and the fact that the school is quite a distance from my home, she had the opportunity to do well in her final examination. I also looked at this school [Baraka high]; so far it is the best girls' school in the region and also the school fees is relatively reasonable. [Monica's father]

### **8:3 Academic Preparation and the National Examinations**

National examinations play a prominent role in the transition of students from one level of education to the next. In particular, students in this study were preparing for the national examinations that could determine their future academic life, especially regarding university entry. Parents and teachers worked together to ensure that these students received adequate academic preparations to perform well in the national examinations. Owing to the stiff competition associated with the national examinations, nearly all parents expressed concern about the future of their children if they failed to meet the minimum requirements for university entry. To ensure their children were adequately prepared, most parents, especially those with college degrees and above, reported making frequent visits to schools. This was one way they stayed in touch and received updates about their children's academic performance. In what can be viewed as "helicopter parenting," Allan's father made monthly visits to the school to ensure that his son was well prepared for the examinations: "for this year I have been there monthly. I will change the routine to go there every two weeks as the examination period approaches to check on my son

and monitor his progress, to see if there are any challenges he is facing before his final exam.”

Parents were equally concerned whenever they learnt that their sons and daughters were not doing well in certain subjects. They made visits to meet the school’s principal and subject teachers in search of academic assistance for their children. English language was one of the subjects that parents mentioned as problematic to their children and needed to be addressed. Allan’s father had this to say about his son’s struggle with English: “I am sure he is prepared but I am worried about English and more so thinking what should I do to assist him improve in English language. He therefore consulted the school’s principal and Allan’s English teacher and, together, they vowed to assist the young boy in overcoming his weaknesses in the language. The father quickly offered to buy him many story books and novels as he encouraged his son to read widely and improve his writing skills. In addition, Allan’s father improvised other ways of assisting him and insisted:

What I am doing now before they [students] sit for their mock, I want to buy him mock papers from various districts. At the same time, I am looking for good notes from some schools which I know are performing very well and take the papers to my son. At the same time, I am looking to see if I can find the senior examiner in English so that I can invite him to my house to talk to my son on how he can handle the English examination paper and how to tackle the questions. [Allan’s father]

The parent-teacher partnerships emerged as critical academic liaisons in assisting high school students overcome certain academic weaknesses as parents became increasingly involved in the learning process of their children. In overcoming Don’s perennial difficulties in English language, his parents’ involvement became imperative and really made a big difference. Through such

networks involving students' parents, their relatives and friends worked with teachers ensure students received the necessary academic preparations for higher education. On the other hand, even those parents who had infrequent visits to schools found a way to keep in touch with the teachers. For example, Christina's father had made fewer visits to her school but he made sure that he was in touch with her physics teacher, a problematic subject to her. When asked what he had done specifically to make sure Christina improved in physics, he said: "In her performance I am in touch with her physics teacher on a regular basis. I talk to him on phone whenever there is need and I have been able to buy her certain reading materials, which presently are quite helpful to her. Physics is the same subject that made her score B minus her last year's national examination. From what I am hearing from her teacher lately, she is making impressive improvements. I am sure she will finally be ok."

### **8:3:1 Pressure to succeed in the national examinations**

The Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examination is the only gateway to university education for high school students. It is usually undertaken at the final year of secondary school education. It is regarded the most important national examination in one's life because it determines whether one proceeds to university or college or not. High school teachers have four years to prepare students for this examination. The student informants of this study reported tremendous pressure from parents and teachers to perform and excel in their studies. Some students feared their parents would be disappointed if they failed to qualify for university entry. When asked if she was under pressure to make the A grade,

Christina had this to say: “Yes I am under pressure to meet their expectations, because when I failed to attain the ‘university grade’ in the previous year, I was pressured to repeat in order to perform better. If I don’t make it this time they will be disappointed because they have high hopes in me.” At the time of interview, Christina was repeating Form four, having earned a mean grade of B minus in the previous year’s KCSE. She thus failed to meet the cut-off points for public university entry because of her not so good Physics scores. David, who was also repeating Form four, expressed similar sentiments. When asked if he felt he was under pressure to make it in the national examinations, he replied: “Oh yes, I can say that I am under pressure to work extra hard. Whenever I am in class I have these high expectations in my mind; I hear their [parents]voices urging me to move on, that I should improve my grades in order not to let my family down. I tell you, it is a burden, a milestone in one’s neck.”

The pressure on students to do well in the national examination is real and widespread in the Gusii community. Here education is decidedly regarded as the lifeline to prosperity and decent living. The focus on attaining good education is so intense in this community to the point where kids are rarely allowed the flexibility of exploring other options in life. Many respondents spoke of a “guilty phenomenon’ in the event of failing to achieve in their academic endeavors. Moreover, such feelings were expressed by those who felt that, because their families had heavily invested in their studies, academic failure could constitute a disaster for the family. Further, students from low income families reported feeling the pressure to achieve academically because of the fact that they may not have a second chance.

Nevertheless, familial pressures on students to succeed in their studies produced the intended results. Clearly, the students got the message and, accordingly, appreciated the importance of hard work in their studies. For instance, Zuma reported that his family expected him go to university in order to help them financially in future. He understood that it was his obligation to do well and make those who have struggled to make him what he was proud of his academic achievement. His family repeatedly reminded him during family conversations that he was their future and only hope in their struggles against poverty. It was clear to him that with a university education he could secure himself a decent job. Again, like most of his colleagues, he noted that it was going to be a sad thing if he failed in his KCSE examinations because he could not meet his family's expectations. Similar sentiments were expressed by Makori, who feared: "I'm under pressure to meet their expectations because if I don't make it to university then I would disappoint my parents' efforts in educating me." Likewise, Kevin felt the familial pressure "to pass his examinations with flying colors."<sup>22</sup> His family never failed to constantly remind him of its dwindling financial prospects and their hopes in him to turn the tables in favor of the family's future survival. Asked about familial pressure, Kevin retorted: "Yes I am under pressure because my father is due to retire the coming year so if I don't make it [passing the exam], I may miss his financial support." Kevin was therefore obliged put more effort and achieve academically.

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<sup>22</sup> Passing with flying colors designates passing highly, with straight As. Such a success, invites celebration from family and friends. Flying flags is a common way of expressing an extremely successful accomplishment. For example, athletes after winning a marathon race, flags from their countries of origin are flown to celebrate the win. It is a sail through moment.

#### **8:4 Life at boarding schools: Sugar and cocoa mix**

Kenya's high schools, particularly national, provincial, and district level schools, offer boarding facilities to all students. Students live in the dormitories for the duration of their study with one month holiday breaks in April, August and December. Boarding schools especially regulate students' study habits and behaviors. This school structure gives students adequate opportunity for close interaction with teachers. It is no wonder that boarding schools rank higher than day schools in terms of academic performance in national examinations. In practice, students in the senior classes, Forms three and four, have shorter holidays (two weeks) each as they are engaged in exam preparations through holiday tutoring programs. This means that boarding schooling students spend only 6 weeks with parents in a year while the rest of the days are spent in school. Three of the four schools in this study are boarding schools, hence the need to highlight on the boarding school life and its influence on students' educational aspirations.

According to students, at least from their perspective, the food offered in boarding schools is insufficient in terms of both dietary quality and quantity. School meals typically consist of a mug of porridge for breakfast, Githeri (a mixture of beans and maize) for lunch, and Ugali (cornmeal) and Sukumawiki (Kales) for dinner. They complained of feeling hungry after a short while. Hence, availability of pocket money to buy food and snacks from the school canteen was critical. Giving pocket money was identified as one of the key strategies parents used to ensure their children were relatively comfortable in school. As Allan's father aptly puts it: "We parents are literally supporting our children in terms of food. You find that my son told me to

buy for him sugar, butter, and cocoa. When I asked him what they were for, he told me that they are provided with boiled water and a little sugar; so he needs the other ingredients to complete the equation. Then, I understood what he meant.”

Although pocket money was significant, not all parents could afford to give their children enough extra money to spend. Jessica’s father reported: “I do my best to ensure she is comfortable in school. I provide her with textbooks and pocket money for her basic shopping only. Most times I am unable to meet all her financial needs...and she understands our financial situation. Though she complains about insufficient food and other shortages in school, I only urge her to persevere and work hard for a decent future. I like my daughter for one thing - her understanding and discipline. I know she will succeed in spite of all these challenges.”

### **8:5 Peers and Friends**

Just like family members, peers played an important role in the university going process. Social bonds and peer influences are critical in shaping one’s worldview, dreams and aspirations. Most importantly, these social relationships more often develop into close knit associations to the extent, at least transitionally, they replace sibling relations in the boarding school enclosures. For many students, such school friendships last a lifetime. Students in this study spoke of how peers had influenced their academic journeys, both positively and negatively. Most students had two sets of friends: the hard working peers with similar educational aspirations, and the not so hardworking peers who were trying to pull them down. Positive influence peers set higher standards of academic achievement they wanted to attain.

They also created a spirit of positive competition amongst themselves. Focus group students talked about their peers' higher education aspirations and dreams. They formed study group networks to enhance their studies, especially in the preparations for tests and eventually their KCSE examination. Almost every student in this study talked of how he/she belonged to two or more study groups. These peer groups were formed voluntarily based on mutual understanding, personal friendships, common interests and similar backgrounds and, above all, shared aspirations to succeed. These study groups' sessions were exclusively informal and private, usually conducted after school hours and were not supervised by teachers.

In choosing peers, students' socio-economic backgrounds played a major role. Many students were drawn together into becoming friends because of shared experiences. Makori reported about his friend:

I chose Albert as my friend because of how free he is with me and how I am with him. I met Albert in my previous school. He had a problem. By then, he had just lost both of his parents and I comforted him. He really had a lot of problems from home, you could just see without being told. I was there for him; I comforted him and advised him not to leave school. Then from there we became friends to this day. I shared with him my family problems. That helped because he felt somebody was also feeling what he was going through. We are like brothers now. [Makori]

Students utilized their friendship as an opportunity to inspire and motivate one another to work hard. Most of the low income students shared personal experiences of growing up in financial difficulties due to their parents' low education. They vowed to achieve what their parents had failed to achieve academically. Makori spoke of conversations he regularly had with his close friend: "We usually advise one another to remember our backgrounds, where we have come from. It is a source of our inspiration."



Christina and her two friends met on their first day at Imani high. They were admitted the same day and because they knew nobody in the institution, the three girls drew closer to one another and, in time, forged a meaningful and fulfilling friendship. Christina refers to the two friends as close confidants whom she shared personal problems with. They, too, did the same to her, sharing personal challenges in their families that resonated with her situation. As she stated: “Whenever I have something bothering me in school or even with life, these are the people I share with. They share with me problems they have, normally about finances. We are really very close to each other.” Christina’s two friends had similar educational aspirations and all planned to pursue same courses of study at university. When asked what types of conversations they had with her friends, Christina had this to say: “we talk on how we can manage our time without wasting any opportunity. We also discuss how to make use of our teachers, how to do personal studies. We encourage one another to work hard. Sometimes we help each other with class work, especially in areas of weakness. We make jokes with my friends about our teachers and tell stories about our families.”

Each student respondent of this study spoke of a school friendship that made a difference in her or his life in general. During their academic endeavors, similarly situated students forged close relationships for mutual support and appreciation. For instance, speaking about his friends, Steve noted:

I have two close friends. We have shared dreams, common aspirations. We are all hard working and because of that we are among the top 10 in our class. We compete a lot and we are very good friends; we support each other. We share a lot about class work and hard times. I met them the first time I got to the school compound. They welcomed me. Sometimes we talk about our

aspirations, at times we try to build the life we want to be. We lay strategies on what we are supposed to do to pass our KCSE exam. [Steve]

Steve had met his school friends when they were in need and offered to help. Their friendship based on life situations had grown and Steve viewed his friends as brothers he never had. They were there for each other. Steve, who lost his father early in life, was also an Internally Displaced Person (IDP), having relocated from Rift Valley province during the post election violence. He found comfort in friends who had similar life experiences.

One of my friends has grown up in misery where by his parents are not able to provide basic materials and has not completed his school fees. The other one, his mother is sick and he is psychologically affected. Like me life changed completely. My mother was majorly affected for she could not cope with the loss [his father's death]. Friends gave her comfort, but it was not easy to start off. We were in private schools and we had to come back to public schools. He [dad] was the bread winner and when he died, it was not possible for mom to stand on her own. First, we used to stay in Nairobi. Then after my father died we went to Eldoret and there she could cultivate land and get food. Before long, violence broke out. We lost everything. I see like, we are kind of brothers. We understand each other's life well. [Steve]

Zuma's friends shared similar educational aspirations, and through support and encouragement they learnt the value of supporting each other. They set their ambitions high and the dreams to transform their families drew them together. Zuma and his friends shared their social and academic lives together with most of their conversations focused on their individual family's financial limitations. Zuma spoke of how they lacked adequate study materials, such as textbooks, so, their friendship included exchanging whatever they had to meet their study needs. As Zuma observed:

I have two friends within the school premises but not outside. One of my friends is in Form four and the other is in Form three. Both of them are doing well in their academics and look forward to joining institutions of the higher

learning. My friend in Form four is a childhood friend. We were in nursery school together and joined the same primary school up to high school and in the same class. We share our learning materials and encourage one another to work hard. We hope to join the same university, too. [Zuma]

For Zuma, this kind of friendship had extended not only to academic life but also serve other social needs. For example, Zuma shared the circumstances of how he met with one of his school mates in need, and how Zuma became a Good Samaritan by giving him accommodation and the two ended by becoming good friends.

My friend in Form 3, I met him at the entrance to the market place. Although he was my school mate, I never used to interact with him. When I met him, he looked so disturbed. “It’s like this boy has a problem” I just told myself, may be he needs help. When I inquired what his problem was, he told me that his father had died and his mother wanted to transfer him to a school nearby his home, because she could not afford to rent him a room. I felt for him and I went and talked to my dad if I could give him accommodation. He agreed. He also promised to help him pay his school fees. [Zuma]

In the process, Zuma and his friends grew closer to each other and in most cases their talks centered on family issues, especially on the many ways their parents struggled to raise their tuition and fees and other school related expenses. They also discussed plans for higher education, future careers and the possibility of transforming their individual family’s socio-economic status through academic success.

Some students reported having friends in senior classes who helped shape their academic achievements. In certain instances, peer relationships constituted a mentoring component. These are cases where senior students ended up influencing their junior peer associates’ educational advancement. This is what happened to Rose, who, during her Form one year, had a close friend in Form three, who influenced her educational life. She observed: “My senior friend used to advise me in

case of any problem and also encouraged me to take my studies seriously. When I was in Form 1, she was in Form 3. I expected her to go to university because she usually worked hard and was disciplined.” Rose’s lose friend completed high school from Baraka High school in 2006 and joined university to study for a Bachelor of Education Degree. They have since remained very close friends and Rose aspires to achieve academically, just like her friend.

### **8:5:1 Peers to be avoided when in serious study**

On the other hand, students had peers who had negative influence on their higher education aspirations. They described them as not so hard working and had little aspirations towards higher education. These are the type of peers that most of them tried to avoid when in serious study. According to focus group students, students with low educational aspirations were viewed as academic failures and lazy, who could not contribute much to their higher education aspirations. Rose reported having peers outside school whose “educational aspirations are not similar to mine.” She spoke of how most of the time she had to avoid them whenever she had homework or had to study seriously.

They just want to hang out with me; they are not in any way thinking about educational success. It’s like they have lost hope and you know it’s too late to change them. I just say, I will hang out with you for one hour or so, mostly the time I want to take a break from my studies. Then I get back immediately. You know we don’t even talk about school. They want us talk about boyfriends and that puts me off because I am not ready to have one yet. [Rose]

Among the friends to be avoided according to one student, are those friends who “can misguide you into not being studious; they try to convince you not to go for morning studies. Some students have a culture of taking excuses for not going for

preps on Friday, saying that it is a members day, they laze around during the weekends. A lot of them spend time writing letters to girl friends at the expense of studies. I try to steer away from such people.” Similar sentiments were expressed by Zuma about his friends who had negatively influenced his academic performance until he realized to avoid them.

I used to have a company of my girlfriend and, as you know, we were adolescents by then; I started dropping in class performance. I used to be at the top in my class but now I dropped to be the second then I realized the company was consuming a lot of my time and I dropped the idea of having a girlfriend and concentrated on my studies. [Zuma]

Strong negative peer influence emerged during the interviews. For instance, Kevin shared how some of the friends he kept had distracted his attention from academics had his parents not intervened, he could have easily been swayed. Kevin had this to share about his adventure with negative influence peers.

I used to have some friends around my neighborhood and during holidays, they could come over and ask me to go out. Many times we could just sneak and go to night clubs to dance and have good time... you know just to enjoy teen life. When my parents realized I had been sneaking at night they warned me. What happened is that these boys were found drinking alcohol, smoking and even stealing. These are some of the friends my parents don't want me to associate with. So my mom and dad advised me to stop this company. I stopped immediately. I can now imagine what could have happened to me if I continued being their friend. [Kevin]

Such peers with a potential for negative influence attracted the attention of Kevin's parents who wanted to remain protective of their son's outside influence. They became aware of the dangers such an association could bring to Kevin. Reflecting back then:

We made it clear to him that he had to stop playing video games and watching movies with boys from the neighborhood. We really became tough on him...Where we knew that he was ready to learn is when one boy, a friend of his came and wanted him to go out and have fun but he refused. He had told me that

he does not want that friend who doesn't want to learn. He said he wanted somebody who was ready to discuss a problem in a certain subject and not one who could disturb him. He developed cold feet towards him until the boy noticed and left him alone. [Kevin's mother]

Similar sentiments were expressed by Monica about her out of school friends who had no similar higher education aspirations like her. She was particularly concerned that her friends were not aspiring for higher education. They were not serious with school work and never discussed anything to do with higher education. She spoke of how she could hang out with them only because she wanted to take a break from her studies.

Outside the school, I have friends. We do not share in academic aspirations. They are willing but they don't have the ability. One friend used to come to my grandmother to pick guavas, my grandfather would be very harsh but I would assist her. The other is just a neighbor from home. We do not discuss about going to university but about academic life, yeah we exchange materials. She is in Kaimosi Girls High School. When we are together we like to go out for swimming.

Interviews with parents revealed deep parental concerns about the kind of friends their children kept and what influence they were likely to have on their academic achievement. Most parents expressed awareness of the potential impact peers could have on their children's character and academic performance. Therefore, parents keen and vigilant on the type of friends their children associated with, especially those they brought home during the holidays. For many parents, potential impact of such friendship was closely monitored without children's knowledge. For example, Don's university educated and professional parents were actively involved in his life. As professionals in the medical field and successful parents, Don's parents were considered as role models in the community. In most cases, they could be invited to nearby schools, including Don's, to give lectures on the dangers of peer

pressure on academic success. They were aware what unchecked association with the wrong group could have on their son's life. His mother had this to say about Don's friends:

His [Don's] friends, I don't think they impact much on him, but what we feel as parents is that they take much of his time during the holiday. There are some who we think are not fit for him because their background is wanting. Like one of his friends, I thank God that they moved away from here. The boy used to come with a pornographic video inside the books pretending that they have come to discuss but instead they watch the video. At one time when Don had gone to school I was sorting out his clothes to be washed when I came across a condom. You know he is one who doesn't want to be found in a mistake and if he is found in a mistake he is so sorry such that he cries and says I am sorry. I can say some of his friends are good and others their parents don't bother to know where their children are even if they sleep out. As for my son, he is not the type who can go out of the house in the morning and come back in the evening without permission. [Don's mother]

Esther carefully managed two types of friendships. Her mother spoke of how most girls in her village were not aspiring for higher education and so many of them dropped out in primary school and others in high school in favor of married life. Esther's mother did not approve the friendship out of fear that it could have a bad influence to Esther. During the interview, Esther's mother had this to say about which friends Esther should avoid:

Most of the children around here [village] never did their academics so well; others opted to get married; so, that is not the company I would have liked my children to have. For Esther, there is one girl they studied together in primary school whose characters I didn't admire. She used to come home but Esther was not going to their home. At times, they could exchange sweaters but I warned her about that girl. After a while their friendship ended but this girl dropped out in class six and got married. [Esther's mother]

For David, truancy and absenteeism increased under bad influence from friends without the knowledge of his teachers, until his father intervened. Reflecting back, David expressed appreciation to his father's intervention to save not only his

academic future, but also his life which could have been ruined by drugs. He narrated how it had become a routine sneaking from school with his alcohol consuming friends, missing out on class assignments and time for study until he father caught him. He affirmed:

There are friends whom my parents have warned me against their company and I have heeded. I can remember one incident whereby we had sneaked out of school and gone to see pornographic films at Ichuni market. My father came to school and didn't find me. The following day he came and demanded to know where I had been the previous day. I had no otherwise but to tell him where we had gone and he warned me against them. The other friend was a drunkard and disorderly. I don't drink, because my father is a church elder and has been advising me against drugs and alcohol. He warned me against him and I stopped the company. [David]

Allan's parents kept a close eye on his friends. They explained that during his adolescent stage, dealing with peer pressure was his biggest challenge and, at many times, his parents applied punishment to get him out of the hook of bad peers.

Allan's father experienced difficulties in cutting his ties with friends but, he explained, he never gave up on him. He instead decided to remain firm and instill discipline in his children:

More often I always tell Allan to choose people who can share with him academically, and not a bad company that can ruin his academics. He can go and borrow a book and discuss matters pertaining to education. I have noticed, more especially during holidays, Allan walking with some boys who are school drop outs. I have also met or seen him moving with a girl because of this adolescence, and I have warned him. So, as a human being and a teacher, I noted that it was due to adolescent stage and what I did generally I guided him. But there is a time when I chased him from here not to sleep in my house because I noted he was roaming aimlessly. I noted that he had a problem then I understood him. I called him and talked with him that he just has to wait to finish his schooling for he cannot serve two masters at ago. Since then, I noted a change of things thus he is now upright. If I don't become tough, they may overpower me because they want to take life on their own and not to be told. [Allan's father]



## **8:6 Teachers and Teacher Counselors**

Teachers play an important role in facilitating students' university going process. Teachers prepare students towards academic achievement by setting higher standards and expecting them to pursue higher education. They provide encouragement, usually verbal encouragement through discussions, in which they also challenge students to work harder towards higher education attainment. Across all the four schools, students talked positively about their teachers, for being very concerned about their post secondary plans.

As top performers in their respective schools, these students reported having good relationships with their teachers, who proactively provided them with information and other resources to facilitate their plans for pursuing higher education. Most teachers also expressed that they liked working with the high achieving students, hence such a cordial relationship among the teachers and the students. Describing how they developed aspirations for higher education, most students recounted memories of how they first heard about higher education from their primary school teachers, who encouraged them to pursue education beyond primary school. For most students, their primary school teachers had acted as their source of motivation to aspire for higher levels of education. In addition, the students reported that teachers took pride in students' academic achievement and constantly pushed them to achieve higher grades.

### **8: 6:1 Students' perceptions of their teacher's expectations**

Student's perceptions of their teachers' expectations influenced the way students thought about their higher educational goals. In most cases, teachers' words

of encouragement had the greatest impact in the way students responded and developed higher education aspirations. In particular, the time spent talking about higher education goals with their teachers was underscored. For instance, Esther had this to say:

They [teachers] expect me to pass. They call me and advice me to put more effort in my weak areas because they have high hopes in me to boost the name of the school. One of the teachers told me that I am capable passing my exams if I put more effort. The teachers are easily available when I need them. I see them in the staff room or departmental offices. I can say that the school is preparing us well because the teachers are devoted in teaching and school provides enough reading materials. [Esther]

In the same way, Zuma, too, expressed his teachers' high expectations in him: "They expect me to pass the examinations. They normally call me for assistance, for uplifting in the areas they think I am weak and need more effort. The teachers coach me privately, they give me books and other materials to read and they also encourage me to work harder." Teachers recognized students' hard work and rewarded them accordingly. Such rewards provoked competition among other students to achieve good grades. Doing well in class was important in the students' university going process. As Zuma reported:

At least in each term, the top 3 students from each class have a luncheon with our principal and we discuss a lot about our academics and life after school. During the luncheon, teachers speak about strategies for success. They challenge us to think big and aspire for great things. They motivate us to work harder each term. What I have seen in this school, when teachers know you are doing well, I mean you are a good student and they are convinced you are serious about going to university, they will always be there for you. I see that happening a lot. Teachers want to push you to a better grade, 'I need A grade Zuma', I hear that a lot whenever I meet them [teachers] out here. [Zuma]

In addition to their role in motivating their students to work harder, Imani teachers were actively involved in students' academic preparation for higher education.

Teachers strove to position students in a manner that could help them succeed in the national examinations. As Zuma reported, Imani school teachers never missed lessons and were always ready to assist any student in need of academic assistance.

High school principals, class teachers, and subject teachers took a keen interest in student's academic achievement. In most cases, teachers let their expectations known to students whenever they came into contact with them. Apart from constant encouragement and setting higher standard for students, teachers took an active role in students' university going process. Reporting on teachers' expectations and student's role in living up to the expectations, one focus group student had this to say:

My teachers expect the best of me in terms of grade and co-curricular activities, they call me personally. They meet me in person. I meet the principal, at least, once in a week. The teacher in charge of Guidance and counseling meets me regularly as do other teachers in various subjects. It is a concerted effort and they are persistently focused. Yes, they stay in the school compound, so I go there anytime I need help. They are preparing us to pass examinations, through preps, we have also completed the syllabus and doing revision, they have availed papers of various districts, we are competing with other schools, and we have holiday tuition in April and August for 2 weeks during each season. [Male focus group student]

According to Monica, her teachers' sociability, accessibility, readiness to assist and counsel students influenced her to aspire and achieve academically. She underscored her experience in Baraka high school and the role teachers played in her university going process. Teachers made their expectations known to students during class and out of class interactions. She passionately explained:

My teachers want me to do well. A teacher gave me a dressing down for missing a point and I had to promise that I will get it right next time. My principal also wants me to be somewhere. My teachers tell me on my face their expectations of me. One of my teachers, whom I usually contact, always insists that I have a bright future but through hard work...teachers are

preparing us for the final exams. At this point the only subjects where the syllabus coverage is incomplete is Chemistry and English grammar. In the rest of the subjects we are being given papers to revise. We were in for tuition; we went on with the syllabus. The thing I like about the school is that the teachers are social; you can approach them any time. [Monica]

Teachers engaged students in conversations that communicated their expectations of the students and facilitated students' higher education aspirations. Zuma had this to say: "I usually have one on one discussion with my teachers, especially the principal, who is also my Kiswahili teacher and the deputy principal, my physics teacher; so, I have an opportunity to approach them. You hear words like... 'Zuma are you on track? I want grade A from you in my Kiswahili... and I know you are capable of getting that. You just have to sit down and create that mindset.' That gives me a challenge, and every class I go to, I hear the same message. That gives you enough pressure to remain on track."

By virtue of his student leadership responsibilities, Kevin was constantly in touch with his teachers. He was expected to pass and join the university, not only because of his father's opposition to him taking a leadership role in school, but also the fact that he could serve as role model to other students. Hence, most of the teachers were more than willing to help him achieve his dreams. Kevin had this to share about his experience with Tumaini teachers and his school responsibilities:

They expect me to work hard and pass my examination, given the position I hold in school. Again, they have many hopes in me because my performance is good. They usually call me to advice me when they feel that am heading the wrong path in my academics. My career teacher meets me regularly, at least on a weekly basis. [Kevin]

In all the four schools of this study, one essential task in the university going process that teachers had to accomplish was the timely completion of the syllabus. In

order to pass the national examination, syllabus coverage was central as part of the students' academic preparation. Student underscored the determination of subject teachers in ensuring that the syllabus was completed to allow students time to revise for the final examination. Timely syllabus completion is imperative because the national examination tests students on the content learnt from Forms 1 through 4 (9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade). So, teachers who completed the syllabus in time not only had the opportunity to revise the four years' work with their students, but also gave the aspiring candidates ample time to undertake comprehensive revision exercises in readiness for the final KCSE examination. It is on the basis of this accomplishment that most students in this study expressed confidence that their teachers had prepared them well and that they felt they had a good chance of doing well in the subjects enrolled. For instance, David had this to share about his subject teachers' commitment to ensure that he achieved his academic goals:

Our academic prospects are very good because most teachers are committed to ensure our success and work hard to complete the syllabus in time. We have completed the syllabus in some subjects, only three subjects that haven't fully been covered but we hope to be done in a few weeks' time. [David]

Students underlined the decisive role of teachers in the university going process. Teachers are not only the movers of the process, but the masters of the game, equipped with multiple reading strategies which were especially deployed in the final months and weeks leading to the KCSE examination. They administered weekly tests to assess students' understanding of the concepts learnt and also assisted them learn how to handle exam questions in terms of timing and in keeping their responses relevant and to the point. David had this to say on their preparation for exam: "I can say that the school is preparing us well on how to succeed in the

impending national examination. We are presently subjected to several weekly examinations in order to familiarize ourselves with what we are expecting to get in the near future.”

Most students reported how their teachers exposed them to exam taking strategies. Once tests were administered, teachers could set aside time for reviewing the questions in class and, according to Steve, this approach gave students an opportunity to ask questions:

I do talk especially with my class teacher and subject teachers. We do talk after every exam and teachers revise the quizzes in class and advise us how to write essay answers. Particularly for my case, we talk about my weakness in languages and he sends me to language teachers and asks me to take the feedback to him if I have improved in languages. I can say teachers are always willing to give me extra coaching. They are available and easily approachable. The school has prepared us enough for the examinations. We have finished the syllabus in some subjects. The teachers are determined to finish the rest before mock exams. They have helped me where I could not work on my own. Teachers have enough materials that I usually borrow from them. I do see them every now and again; they are just there for us. For each subject, I see the teacher concerned. [Steve]

As one student reported, “I had one case with my chemistry teacher. I wanted to ask him on how to answer a chemistry question; he gave me very good suggestions.”

Similarly, Kevin concurred that their teachers created a learning environment where each student felt they could achieve if they worked hard enough.

The teachers ensure that they are present in class during each lesson. They compete to finish the syllabus in time. They are strict in matters pertaining to education. Teachers want everybody to pass. If you fail, you have chosen to...Here every student's grade counts towards ranking the school... in class, everywhere, teachers and the principal talk about those students who are not working hard enough...those that might lower the school's mean score... you know I don't want to be one of those...The school facilities are enough for us [students] to use and the environment too is conducive to learn. [Kevin]

Similarly, Imani students reported that their subject teachers organized for national examiners to visit their school and to talk about examination taking strategies: “We have at times had speakers, like now we had one who was brought by our Christian Religious Education (C.R.E) teacher from Cardinal Otunga high school and was guiding us on how to answer C.R.E. questions. All students were present; in this school the subject is compulsory.”

### **8:6:2 Students’ Voices: “Teachers challenge us to work harder”**

Students reported how their teachers challenged them to work harder and achieve better grades in order to qualify for university entry. Teachers sacrificed even their free time, including lunch hour and evenings, to meet with students who needed extra help. Speaking about teachers’ availability, Allan had this to say: “Our teachers are always challenging us to work harder. They are available whenever we need them. They call meetings with us to discuss the way forward and what was expected of us in order to shine in our studies and plans for higher education.”

Although many teachers were available there were some teachers who were particularly helpful to certain students and provided ongoing encouragement to help students realize their academic potential. The teachers helped students to understand the economic and educational opportunities available, and personal implications for pursuing higher education. For example, Rose spoke about her teachers’ support towards the realization of her higher education ambitions.

The principal called me at one time and told me that she has high hopes in me... she also encouraged me to work hard and make it to the University. The teachers are concerned about my performance; they encourage me to work hard...Our guidance and counseling teacher calls us as a group and advises us

to work hard... We learn about the expectations of our teachers when they ask a question and maybe I fail to engage in class discussion... At least five teachers in a day are concerned... We had guidance from teachers on choosing subjects. They say I have good chances of going to university. They tell me money shouldn't be a problem, if I pass it is easy to get a government scholarship.[Rose]

In many ways, teachers took pride in the students' academic achievement. Teachers' recognition of student achievement was underscored by many students. For instance, Rose reported: "teachers appreciate our good performance by giving presents during the prize giving day; they do give things like course textbooks, geometrical sets, and scientific calculators. Some class teachers can give you little money if you did well and like they want to motivate you to better grades next time. Students compete for that prize."

The importance of teachers' availability and readiness to offer guidance to students with respect to the university going process was underscored by Christina and others. Teachers consistently provided encouragement, information to enable students achieve their dreams about pursuing higher education, and "I can say that mostly my subject teachers are available whenever I need them, unlike the guidance and counseling teacher. Especially the mathematics teacher calls me more often to know how I am fairing in my practices or exercises he gives in class. He advices me to check on him whenever I feel that I need his help and do more practice."

However, the absence of a guidance and counseling program at Imani high school was a concern for all students. They identified this as a setback to their educational aspirations. The teacher in charge of academic guidance was not available to students, instead other teachers, the deputy principal, in particular, and teachers in



charge of examinations, were actively involved with students in the university going process. In addition, most students reported having access to class teachers who provided them with resources they needed to make decisions about pursuing higher education.

### **8:6:3 Scouts of revision materials**

Students reported how their teachers worked so hard to prepare them for the national examinations, including teaching extra hours, scouting for revision materials and extending the school calendar into holiday time, all to make students ready in their various subjects. Most students in the focus were in agreement: “All teachers are very much available and are ready to assist us.” Similarly, Rose had this to say about teachers, in her school:

I think this school is preparing us well for national examination because some of the teachers scout for revision materials, they ask the students to contribute to cater for the expense. They offer extra coaching after the normal class hours. The coaching takes place for the entire examinable subjects at 4:30 pm to 5:30 pm; a time table for this program was crafted. Sometimes the teachers buy examination revision papers for us. [Rose]

Teachers influence students’ academic achievement with the level of expectations they hold for students’ academic achievement and for their own performance as teachers. Enrolling at a public university was considered more prestigious than attending a middle level college, and so, each teacher strove to increase the number of students who qualified for entry into a public university in order to maintain their schools ranking and reputation. As David explains below, teachers’ expectations and preparations of students for national examinations were equally aimed at protecting the school’s reputation:

Their [teachers] expectations are we should make it to university to raise the school's name. I can remember one time my principal called me to his office and commended me in my performance, when I took first position in my class and he told me that he knows that I will make it to university and, in so doing, uplift the name of the school, too...Our biology teacher, Mr. Michieka usually calls me to his office and tells me how important it is to be a learned person, so he expects me to work hard. I haven't had any conversation with our guiding and counseling teacher. The teachers I can say are easily approachable and available whenever we need them. [David]

#### **8:6:4 Teachers nurture and mentor students aspirations**

Rose first thought of going to the university while in primary school through the influence of her teacher. She had this to say: "I first thought about going to university when I was in class seven. My primary school teacher told me about university." Zuma's uncle doubled as his primary school teacher and is the one who triggered his higher education aspirations and has since remained his mentor to date. "I shared [my higher education aspirations] with my uncle who was my former primary school teacher. He encourages me to work hard. He bought me books to boost my career."

Most students reported that their teachers also engaged them and held regular conversations about their post high school plans. Teachers challenged students to put more effort and aim higher. Teachers informed students that life could be challenging if they did not make the required grades to enable them compete with other students outside. Kevin spoke about his conversations with teachers and how they constantly challenged him to achieve academically because life after school wasn't going to be easy if he failed to achieve his goals. He testified:

When we meet at games time we do talk about life after school. They tell us that out there isn't as easy as we may think so we have to focus on what we want to do once we are out of school. If I have a problem I go to them for an

advice. Sometimes when I perform below their expectation they call me and inquire over what happened. They encourage me to put more effort to achieve the best. [Kevin]

### **8:6:5 “Some are insensitive”: Teachers who put off students**

Although most students had a positive experience dealing with teachers, some students reported having experienced negative reactions from certain teachers whenever they needed assistance. Rose spoke of her experience with some of the teachers: “What puts me off from some of the teachers is when you go to see them, from a far off they shout at you asking what you want from them.” Students from Imani and Angaza High schools, the only two mixed schools in the study, reported that their teachers took offence whenever boys and girls were seen talking together. One student reported: “Our teachers abuse us a lot that we indulge in love affairs a lot and that is why we are failing in our exams. Yet, this issue of love affairs is not widespread in the school and affects very few individuals. It is rare to find such love cases because there is strict supervision in the school and penalties for culprits are prohibitively severe.”

### **8:7 Gender and education attainment**

Gender is a discernible factor in Gusii high schools and profoundly impacts students’ aspirations for university education. As observed throughout this study, enrollment in academically viable and competitive high schools plays a role on students’ university aspirations and subsequent success, for both males and females.

From the study, most male students reported to be under pressure from parents, teachers, and community to do better and outperform their female siblings, female classmates, and female neighbors, validating the dominant cultural view of the masculine roles. The Gusii peoples' traditional view of the role of men, otherwise called *Abasacha* in Gusii language, literally translating to "those who go out to search" - meaning men are the breadwinners and heads of households. Their masculine role in society requires them to go out to search for food, for the means of survival, to provide for their families. Indirectly, schools have also endorsed this view as male students reported being under pressure to work harder because of the societal expectations that they have to take care of their future families. For Gusii women, known as *abakungu* in the Gusii language, the culture identifies them with the home; they are home bound and domestic-oriented. Though modernity and women's activism and movements in favor of gender equality has increasingly blurred gender divisions, the traditional gender ideology still lingers in the consciousness of the elderly, who, in turn, inculcate it in the minds of young people. As a result, the influence of gender on educational aspirations was clearly noted and articulated in the expressions of both boys and girls in academically competitive schools.

Female students in Gusii high schools experience and manipulate the structural forces of class and gender in their own ways to achieve academic success. This implies that the issue of gender and the extent at which it affects female students' academic performance and participation in the university going process is closely connected to class or level of one's social economic status. Simply put, a

girl's participation in education depends on her social class and household income, especially the father's level of education and professional standing. While it is fair to argue that today's Gusii parents give equal educational opportunities to both girls and boys, it is also true that those with limited financial resources would rather invest in the boys' education as opposed to the girl child. Here, parents tend to be driven by the simple reasoning that their future survival interests would be taken care of by their sons since the daughters would have long gotten married and moved out. Yet, these are contested arguments which require detailed analysis but, incidentally, fall outside the scope of the present study.

Interviews with female students in the focus group reveal a combination of class and gender influencing their decisions about higher education participation. For instance, many of these students' motivation to work hard were partly based on the desire to be independent in life. This was expressed in their own words: "I want university education to give me a good career so that I can get a good job and earn good money. I don't want to be dependent on my future husband for my needs. Men sometimes are very oppressive when they see that you don't have an income. I don't want to be like my sister-in-law. That's why I am working so hard. My brother treats her badly but she doesn't really do anything. He treats her like a kid in the house. I do not want to be that way when I get married."

In many ways, lessons learnt from their lived experiences in their individual families and from neighbors led them to reconstruct their own "worldview" of what it means to be a successful woman. Realizing the structural limitations they had to deal with, given the patriarchal nature of the Gusii society, the desire for independence

and economic security propelled the girls to put more effort in their studies and achieve academically. Gusii women lag behind men in education, occupation, and in social standing. The majority of Gusii women live in poverty. They are perennial dependents on their husbands. Many drop out of school to get married since poor parents do not pay much attention to girls' education. The girls interviewed in the focus groups indicated that they are aware of women's standing in the social structure and wanted to work hard not only to escape poverty but also to improve their social standing. Most Gusii high school girls are aware that women have to get good education and good jobs. They want jobs that would enable them to make good money. In choosing careers, they were very selective. Many of the students expressed the view that they did not want to become teachers because they thought teachers are lowly paid and have to struggle to make ends meet. Most of the teachers in Gusii schools are women and the profession is not highly regarded in society, hence the girls' burning desire to break away and enter the men's professions.

On the other hand, educated parents with stable incomes indicated that they did not have gender preference in educating their children. This is a change in the way Gusii parents have traditionally handled the issue of education in relation to gender, whereby male siblings had an upper hand. Clearly, there is a shift in the gender paradigm that favors the rewarding of individuals on the basis of their talent and skill as opposed to birth or gender. Old thinking is being edged out as modernity and scientific thought entrench themselves. Moreover, most parents are reportedly receiving financial and other forms of assistance from their married daughters more than their married sons and, to these parents, educating girls is a reliable investment

by itself. The changing view of the role of women among the Gusii in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is attributed to the fact that some of the parents interviewed for this study had a high school education and above. This implies that with higher education, the traditional view of the role of women has shifted.

### **8:8 Community Involvement**

The Gusii community share a common set of cultural values that lay emphasis on connectedness with extended family and neighbors, spirituality, collectiveness and a strong sense of ethnic pride. Mobilizing community resources to meet the needs of students and families is one of the critical roles of the community in the university going process. In this study, schools and families in collaboration with the churches, local police, local business and non-governmental organizations, political leaders and social service workers influenced students' academic aspirations.

In order to utilize community partnerships to achieve academic success, teachers and the school administration were well informed of the community strengths and resources, as well as the potential challenges to these partnerships to the running of schools. The challenges emanating from the community, discussed in detail in the next section, derailed the academic progress in many Gusii schools, especially with politics and church interference in the leadership and direction of schools. However, teachers, especially academic counselors, were proactive in reaching out to influential people in the community, such as political leaders, spiritual leaders, businessmen and other successful professionals to speak to students on various subjects. In addition, the community contributed to the running of academic

programs through volunteering and financial assistance. As Imani teacher, Mr.

Onserio reported:

In one way or another, I feel they have assisted and because most of these people are our parents; so, as much as they contribute towards the financial academic programs in the school I can say they are part of the local community so they are assisting us. The local community is very much positive about this school and, at the same, time they give us information or advice whenever they can. [Onserio]

Despite the structural disadvantage in the distribution of education resources, the Gusii community's attitude to education is very positive. Mr. Mogoko of Tumaini high shared his views on how Gusii people have put efforts to invest in higher education:

Omogusii [Gusii] have come to value high education and they are creative. I can give the example of students joining parallel programs, including mature people, especially teachers; primary school teachers as well as secondary school teachers have joined these parallel programs in large numbers; many people have really joined these parallel programs in our local universities... We had a teacher here who was given scholarship by the University of Nairobi; he went and did his masters and after completion he applied for this post which was advertised in the Ministry of Education and got hired... In fact, some of us, it is because of financial problems; you have a family there, you want to assist people, you are left standing there without moving but it is our wish if there is a way we can still go for further studies, Omogusii [Gusii] has generally come to value education. You can hear all over, wherever you go, at meetings, funerals, churches - the preaching is addressing the need to educate our children. It is the gospel of the community! [Mogoko]

In order to overcome the structural barriers to higher education, in the recent years an emerging trend among Gusii parents is to encourage their children to pursue education opportunities outside Gusiiland. Mr. Mogoko of Tumaini high commented:

As a community the Gusii are very industrious and they like education, the only weakness they have is that they will always run where they hear there is good performance and crowd there, whether it is in Kisii, Bungoma Central, in America, like now if you go to Uganda, in this high school, there are so



many Kisiis' there, sooner or later you are going to find Makerere University is having only Kisiis', I can actually say the attitude is positive. [Mogoko]

### **8:8:1 Harambee and Women Groups**

In many ways, low income parents utilized the Gusii communal spirit of Harambee to support their children's education through fundraisings and extended family assistance. Some of the parents reported that they had conducted at least one fundraising activity in trying to raise tuition and fees. For example, Kevin's parents noted: "We conducted a fundraising [event] because we were very much stuck so we paid and now we are at zero. Once you have conducted one Harambee then at times people may not take it kindly." Similarly, Esther's mother received financial assistance from the community towards her children's education: "I had called one fundraising when my son had joined the Institute, people came and we collected around Ksh. 40,000 which enabled me pay for my children and the remaining I used in other expenditures." Jessica's family had faced a financial crisis in raising tuition and fees before the community got involved. Her father recalled: "I can remember when my son was headed to university and my two daughters were going to Form one [and] another one was in Form two. When he was going he had to go with a lot of money and it meant that others would not go to school. What I did, I called some of my friends and did a small fundraising and it boosted me for them to go to school. We collected around Ksh. 80,000"

In addition to Harambee fundraisings, organized groups within the community provided an opportunity for people like Kevin's family to borrow money for tuition and fees which they later repaid. Kevin's mother recalled: "Sometimes we borrow

from women groups, though the groups are draining us in that the interest rates are high.” Similarly, Jessica’s father utilized the presence of women groups to raise money for tuition. As he affirmed: “Other sources are the loans from the women groups like Kenya Women Trust, a registered co-operative. At least, each year, I do take a loan from them because their interest is cheaper and affordable, at around 1.7 percent. Their payment duration is one year. I have taken loans from them up to Ksh. 40,000. They have even emergency loans. At times when I am in financial crisis I go to them and they loan me.”

### **8:8:2 Equity Bank Scholarships and Employment Opportunity**

Teachers and students spoke of how local businesses have supported their quest for higher education. Among the notable local businesses that had influence on student aspirations was the local Equity Bank. In addition to providing two four-year university scholarships, Equity Bank boosted academic achievement in the local schools by hiring the top student from each of the best two performing high schools in Gusiiland. The role of Equity Bank was underlined by one Baraka high school teacher: “absolutely, Equity Bank is a motivation for this school; they are doing very well to those boys because they give them employment and when they are going to university they give them a donation of Ksh. 60,000. That is great.”

Most students I spoke to were aware of the Equity Bank scholarship award and employment opportunity and were fiercely competing for the coveted prize. For example, Kevin’s motivation to higher education was based on his ambition to work for Equity Bank: “my immediate plans are that I work with Equity Bank, but if I do

not manage to get in as the top pick from here [Tumaini], I'll go for private teaching in high school. I want to teach chemistry. My long term goal is to carry on my career by joining a public university to pursue civil engineering, look for a job before going in for a Master's degree in the same field." Rose's mother thought her daughter had the potential to qualify for the Equity Bank job opportunity and the scholarship for higher education if she worked harder: "When I look at my child's academic performance and listen to what her teachers are saying about her future academic prospects, I am convinced she is the favorite for the Equity Bank award package..."

## **8.9 Conclusion**

The socio-cultural, political and economic factors within the school and community shaped the ways in which Gusii students aspired and prepared for university education. In particular, students' educational experiences during upper primary schooling and academic preparation in high school contributed greatly to their academic achievement. Many students' university pathways were shaped through private primary school education that advantaged them to gain access to academically competitive public high schools. In schools, teachers not only prepared students to pass national examinations but also assumed the roles of mentors and nurturers of student aspirations. In their academic journeys, students encountered peers who not only sustained their educational aspirations but also helped to accomplish academic tasks. Among the Gusii students, differences based on cultural experiences and expectations about gender roles emerged to shape their urge for a university education. As male students felt the pressure from parents and teachers to

outperform their female colleagues and sisters, because of their presumed role as future breadwinners, female students took the challenge and expressed a desire to break away from the cultural gender confines, through university education, to enter the male dominated professions and lead an independent life. Clearly, the data revealed that the socio-cultural environment under which Gusii students studied and lived, contributed greatly to their educational aspirations and perceptions of their future roles in society.

## CHAPTER NINE

### SOCIOPOLITICAL CONTEXT AND STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

This chapter discusses the structural context in which Gusii high school students negotiate their entry into institutions of higher learning. Specifically, this chapter highlights the forces that operate within the family, school, and community to shape students' aspirations and expectations for higher education. The structural forces that impact education opportunity for Gusii students include, but are not limited to, unequal distribution of educational resources, endemic poverty, and the community environment in general under which these students operate. These are the factors responsible for the Gusii students' low transition rates into university. In addition, the chapter concludes with an investigation of the mechanisms that these students, schools and parents employ to confront the structural barriers to university education.

#### **9:1 Unequal resources, unequal opportunities**

Although individuals have a right to gain access to educational opportunity regardless of their socio economic status, gender or ethnic origin, interviews with teachers, students and parents revealed manifestations of inequality that structure education opportunity. Structural inequality was a constant reality in the lives of these students as they narrated similar stories about barriers brought about by inadequate resource distribution to prepare for higher education. In similar ways, teachers recounted how lack of resources had impacted the running of schools, hence

low transition rates into universities. The problem of structural inequality is inherent in the Kenyan education system. A student's ability to enroll in the university depends on the type of schools attended for both primary and secondary education. Students from well-to-do families, particularly those schooling in urban high schools, do better in the national exams than those from the resource-deprived rural schools. Although Tumaini high school is generally viewed as the most well equipped high school in Gusiiland, a close examination and interviews with teachers and students revealed that the school is at its worst state, overstretched in its resource capacity and crumbling as it struggles to cope with increased numbers of students. One of the teachers summarized the pathetic situation in the school as follows:

Our school is not one of the best in terms of facilities and learning materials – we have a problem and I think because we miss these resources somehow we are affected... We started up a project where we were buying books, it has gone for 4 years, so far our stock in the library is enough. And our school facilities, physics facilities are inadequate; we are however trying to cope up; dormitories are congested, right now two students share a bed; that is a challenge.

The situation in the other schools was even more pathetic. Students and teachers underlined perennial challenges facing their schools, including lack of educational facilities such as classrooms, textbooks, science equipments, teachers, etc. For example, Imani students reported experiencing challenges with limited textbooks, revision materials, and limited number of teachers, especially in sciences leading to untimely syllabus coverage. As one focus group students expressed: “There are cases where we have not thoroughly covered the syllabus yet we are approaching mock exams. On our own, we are going to cover the syllabus but despite of this we need teachers to guide us.” Students expressed frustration in the

way the school administration dealt with their complaints regarding the challenges they faced. One student explained: “Although we are always telling the principal that we do not have enough teachers, nothing has been done about it...We feel like he does not care or he is simply ignoring our pleas. Exams are just around the corner.”

The challenges facing Gusii schools are a reflection of the overall skewed nature of Kenya’s socio-economic development, characterized by corruption, mismanagement, and inequalities in resource distribution on the basis of ethnicity and regionalism. From the interviews, it was clear that Gusii students are aware of the structural inequalities in the distribution of education resources. They also know that the situation is structural and beyond their control. According to Makori, who attended a day school: “Gusii schools are disadvantaged in that there are no enough facilities comparing to the schools outside Kisii; in contrast national schools which have enough facilities, consequently perform better.” Harambee schools have the lowest transition rates into post secondary institutions. Most students who qualify for university entry hail from well-to-do families and have attended national schools. It is important to note that there is not a single national school in Gusiiland.

Gusii students expressed concern in a wide range of issues that impact their university going aspirations. Besides lack of resources, many focus group students also raised the issue of unfairness in the admission process for high schools. Individuals with social power manipulate the structures to gain access to good schools in favor of their children while those from the powerless lower echelons of Gusii society are condemned to non-performing village harambee day schools. To be sure, the latter schools are established by communities to cater for their children,

graduating from the equally poorly equipped village primary schools. Usually, these students' KCPE scores are relatively low, hence their inability to secure admission to the more competitive national or provincial or district public high schools.

The issues of structural inequality in the distribution of resources and unfairness in the high school admission process inevitably lead to the existence of highly differentiated high schools in Kenya and Gusiiland, in particular. There is a rigid hierarchy of schools that are structurally nurtured and maintained to sustain the societal class structure. Moreover, the situation is made even more complicated by the standardization of the high school curricula, treating all students equally in terms of academic programs and subjects taught and examined irrespective of the highly differentiated schools they attend. This approach not only refuses to recognize the limitations of the poorly equipped, struggling village high schools, but also limits students' ability to excel in areas they are talented in. All students across the country are placed in the same academic track irrespective of their school resource capacities, academic abilities, aspirations for higher education, and career plans. For instance, students enrolled in poorly resourced schools are confronted with lack of essential facilities, such as laboratories for compulsory science practical experiments. Yet, Kenya's ministry of education treats students as if they are all attending homogenous high schools with uniform infrastructure and facilities.

In addition, teachers expressed concern that the curriculum required students to reproduce facts presented to them that in many cases have little to relate to their immediate environment of cultural context. In many cases, students are overloaded with content knowledge which creates frustrations whenever the concepts have not



been mastered. Educational achievement is largely determined by the curriculum, teaching and national examinations whose demands favor students from well-to-do families attending well equipped and resourced schools. Because of the skewed nature of the education system, students from the deprived village schools feel disadvantaged and doomed to fail, leading to despair. Furthermore, the competitive examination system that awards successful students as winners and punishes failures as losers, effectively reinforcing structural inequalities that, in turn, anchor and perpetuate the status quo.

Student interviewees underscored lack of effective guidance and counseling programs in their schools. Again, this is an issue closely linked to the paucity of resources in certain schools, particularly the poor village high schools. Imani high school is a good example of schools in this category, with inactive guidance and counseling services. Imani high student, Christina, recalled: “I think the guiding and counseling teacher only came in Form 3 when we were choosing subjects; in other occasions, he never comes. There is no particular committee that handles academic or guidance and counseling.” However, some students indicated that they approached their class teachers and the school deputy principal to address their concerns that the teacher counselor would have handled: “When we have an issue we reach the deputy principal, subject teacher, or our class teacher...we talk to them in case of any problem with our class work.”

## **9:2 “Some Teachers are not committed”: Demoralized teachers**

Although teachers play a great role in the academic preparation of students, interviews with focus group students, school administrators, and parents revealed that

not all teachers were committed to preparing students for academic success. For instance, Mr. Onserio of Imani high school attributed the minimal performance of Gusii schools in the national examinations to teachers who were not committed in teaching:

Teachers are not committed in playing their roles. You find that they are committed else where and they miss their lessons. If we could cover the entire syllabus...then we would have good performance. All the A's that the whole of Nyanza province schools had was equivalent to the A's that only one national school, Mang'u high school, had. [Onserio]

The ministry of education attempted to introduce performance contracts in 2008 to hold teachers accountable for their work. However, most teachers, with the firm support of their union, the Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT), successfully resisted the move. According to Mr. Onserio, “resistance to performance contracts is partly because teachers would not like to be held accountable for their bad performance; that is why most teachers are scared of performance contracts. We cry for a good salary package but we are not doing what is equivalent to it.”

One way through which teachers in Gusii schools demonstrate their teaching commitment is by enrolling their own children in the same schools they teach. Those who fail to do so and proceed to enroll their children in different schools they perceive as better equipped and performers are held with suspicion as their professional commitment is questioned. Mr. Onyoni, whose three daughters attended Baraka, where he served as a senior teacher had this to say: “It is not good; you cannot risk your daughter or son. You should be the one to bring your child in the school you are teaching; but when you see there is a teacher who does not bring his children to the school he is teaching, then that teacher is not doing what is required of

him.” Most of the teachers interviewed in this study had their children studying in the schools they were teaching. Furthermore, schools encouraged teachers to enroll their children as a way of motivating teachers to work harder for the benefit of their children as well. However, some teachers ignored this well intended gesture and enrolled their sons and daughters in preferred schools.

### **9:3 Politics and religious interference in the running of schools**

Political interference in the daily running of schools emerged as one of the factors that contributed to the poor academic performance of most Gusii high schools. Although high school principals are hired by the Teachers’ Service Commission as civil servants, it emerged that local members of parliament interfere with the selection and appointment of school principals in a bid to reward friends, family members, and political cronies. This study’s interviews were conducted shortly after Kenya’s 2007 presidential, parliamentary, and civic elections. Most teachers I spoke to, including the interviewees of this study, expressed apprehensiveness over expectations that some high school principals were destined for transfers or demotions depending on which political side they aligned themselves with. This concern was particularly cast upon those principals who identified with and actively supported opponents of the newly elected members of parliament. The most disappointing part of this retrogressive practice is its tendency to sacrifice merit, professionalism, experience, and competence at the altar of political expedience and parochialism. More often than not remarkably successful high school principals see their careers nipped in the

bud as they give way to political appointees. As a result, schools lose stability and momentum of continuity, which undermines both students' and teachers' morale.

In most cases, well performing schools are targeted by politicians because of what teachers termed as 'hot seats' for political hegemony and entrenchment. For this reason, incompetent individuals are appointed as principals to head very established school. One teacher commented: "When these political sycophants assume office, you start hearing about misappropriation of school funds, you see teachers' morale nose diving, and the school's performance starts going downhill." Moreover, the politicians apply the strategy of divide and rule, whereby they set one clan against the other through skewed political appointments. The school boards of management are turned into political theatres for rewarding supporters and political cronies as well as punishing perceived supporters of their dethroned opponents. The extent to which politics has negatively impacted the running of Gusii schools is captured by Imani high school's Deputy Principal, Mr. Onserio's words:

We the Gusii are not doing well and this is due to a lot of factors because our people don't want to look at quality education when it comes to school management, they are only interested in seeing that the people in charge of the school are specifically drawn from within the community in assumption through such placement they would be able to inappropriately use the school for personal gain. [Onserio]

The problem of clan divisiveness is more rampant in the local harambee schools, where, owing to retrogressive politics, villages compete in establishing their own schools despite of their lack of capacities to adequately equip and staff the schools. In doing this, the villagers are only driven by the desire to own schools which would be run by their sons and daughters as opposed to "outsiders." Thus,

many of the schools are characterized by strong divisions, inefficiency, and disagreements among stakeholders. According to Mr. Michira of Imani high school:

In the villages every clan has its own school; they hire their clan members as teachers irrespective of qualifications because it is their school. The principal must be one of their own son or daughter, even if he or she is not qualified...everything is not even very serious, you find people going there just passing time. You have a school with 50 students...Clannism does not build a nation. Clannism is a destroyer. In fact, it is a chronic disease that people must think of healing before reviving the schools. This is a nationwide problem. [Michira]

In addition to politics, religion and denominational affiliations to schools through sponsorship has been a thorny issue in most Gusii schools. The Catholic, the Seventh Day Adventist, and the Pentecostal Churches are the major denominations in Gusiiland and, so, the main religious sponsors of most public Gusii schools. For this reason, they have an upper hand in the appointment of the members of the Board of Governors and the principals of their respective schools. As a result, they jealously guard against the intrusion of non-denominational principals and board members into their schools. Mr. Mogoko was quick to point out that, “apart from the community’s ‘ownership’ of the schools, we have the churches, too, who would not allow a person from a different denomination to come in as a principal or chairman of the board of governors irrespective of one’s managerial abilities and skills.” In a way, schools end up becoming closed workshops, with limited openings for liberal education, modernization, and democracy, all essential elements in progressive centers of learning.

#### **9:4 Students' entry behavior**

Another form of external interference in the running of schools was noted in the selection of Form1 (9<sup>th</sup> grade) students. Teachers recounted the dilemmas they face when ordered by their seniors to admit students whose scores are below the cut off mark, a practice that partly contributed to the schools' poor performance in the national examinations. For instance, Mr. Onserio blamed his schools' performance to external interference in the selection of Form 1 students, whereby students below average were unfairly admitted into the school. He lamented:

The number one challenge that affects academic performance is students' entry behavior. We as a school have the mean mark we have set as a minimum requirement for admission; though, the entry requirement varies from one year to another based on performance...there are cases whereby the management are given students by our seniors, like from the D.E.O's [District Education Officer] office, others from the head office in Nairobi. We have no option but to admit the students without meeting the entry behavior; then there teachers, say, if I am a teacher teaching in this school and my child has got 250 Marks...my child has to be admitted to this school. Admissions are done with all these irregularities! [Onserio]

In most cases, this practice is rampant and beyond an individual school's control, especially the high performing schools, because they take orders from people in higher offices who are returning favors to their friends and relatives.

Academically, competitive schools such as Tumaini are constantly under pressure to admit students below the cut off points. In this, the politically appointed principals are held hostage by political interests as their political "god fathers" prevail upon them to admit students in favor of their supporters and cronies irrespective of their KCPE scores. Furthermore, the schools' student-holding capacity in terms of boarding space and studying facilities are ignored as accountability and common sense are sacrificed in the altar of political expediency. It is no wonder, then that

most Gusii schools are pathetically congested to the extent that two students share a bed. It is a mess. Classrooms meant for 40 students are now hosting close to 60 students and everywhere resources are overstretched. Mr. Mogoko, the Deputy Principal of Tumaini high school gave this description:

We cannot minimize entry behavior problem and we cannot blame anybody because we are in a community which has all kinds of people. Just like my seniors are not of the same type, homogeneity does not exist, and we know in the whole world we cannot attain it, for that reason somehow the weak ones find their way here. You know Tumaini high is one of the schools with a lot of problems and here, when we talk of the cut off marks...we never stick to it...never. You look at the records you will see it yourself. Madam, I'm not cheating you. [Mogoko]

### **9:5 Irregularities in national examinations**

The mismanagement of the national examinations by the Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC) emerged as one of the major challenges that students face during the university going process. As mentioned earlier, admission to universities and other middle level colleges depends on students' performance in the KCSE examination. Owing to the stiff competition over limited available university vacancies, some unscrupulous students, teachers, and school administrators collude with the KNEC staff and police officers in charge of the administration and security of the examinations, to gain access to the examination papers before the due date. This study established that the illegal sale of examinations papers had been going since 1999 without KNEC detecting the source of leakages. In fact, according to the Daily Nation (2009), the racket of selling examination papers "has become a money-printing machinery for many people involved in the examination process, from

secondary school owners and officers to teachers and guards” (Editorial, February 14). Moreover, the fact that these incidents of examination irregularities take place almost every year, though with differing degrees, they have gradually undermined the credibility of the national examination system.

Generally, Gusii high school students are increasingly apprehensive about examination irregularities, particularly the severe penalties that befall affected students and schools. In some instances, an entire school would have results for all its students cancelled. Whenever such situations arise, the affected schools are usually compelled to re-enroll the students, which lead to the doubling of examination classes and overstretching of the schools’ limited resources. Furthermore, coping with the unexpected numbers of students for a whole academic year is a nightmare to schools and parents who have to spend more than previously planned for. For instance, one of the participating schools in this study had examination results of about 300 students cancelled a few years ago due to cheating, detected in only two subjects. Yet in that year, the school had 305 regularly promoted students to Form 4 (12<sup>th</sup> grade). Thus, the re-enrollment of the penalized students meant that a total of 605 students had to be accommodated in the school’s Form 4 class. As a result, the learning experience throughout the year was described by teachers as scandalously pathetic as boarding and learning facilities were overstretched. The teachers I spoke to indicated that it was perhaps the most challenging year they have ever had in the whole of their teaching careers.

Due to its sensitivity, the issue of examination irregularity was severally raised by both teachers and student interviewees. For this reason, I decided to probe



it further in order to understand it in depth, especially in finding out why, in the last few years, cases of examination irregularities have increased nationwide. One

Tumaini high school teacher explained:

Like last year there were rumors outside there that those things [leakages] were circulating. I could not confirm, though; and the sensitivity of this information was scary. I have not particularly come across a leakage and I don't advise our students to depend on leakages. But we have had this rumor that in Kisii leakages circulate but others say leakages circulates all over Kenya but it is because the Kisii people are people who do not hide, they keep on saying, but in other places... you find they are using leaked papers but they are not saying. I cannot say that we actually get these leakages, and if they are there, I am the only one who is left behind, who struggles on his own to score with my students. [Mogoko]

This conversation, though based on rumors, seem to indicate that examination leakages could be a nationwide issue, but because of the Gusii people's culture of trying to help everybody, they are easily caught in the process. In addition, the Gusii people are known for careless talk or as possessing a "loose tongue." This implies that the Gusii's "talkative nature" creates, perhaps, misleading impressions with respect to examination leakages. Most disturbing were revelations from teachers that whenever their students pass highly, they were perceived to have cheated. Yet, most teachers were in agreement that they worked extra hard in preparing their students to not only to pass the KCSE examinations, but also to excel in institutions of higher education. As Mr. Mogoko noted:

There is the notion that Gusii schools are full of cheating; I think when it comes to Tumaini school, when they pass somehow they are very...very conscious about the marking and generally affecting the performance. It is just rumor; it passes. When they go to universities they do well; for example, we have had some going to Uganda for university studies and they do very well. [Mogoko]

Once beaten, twice shy, as the saying goes. Students in schools that had been affected by examination cancellations were concerned about the leakages, insisting that they would exercise a lot of care in handling the examination papers. On the other hand, students from schools that have never been affected before, although students had heard about the leakages, expressed confidence in the examination process. As one student explained:

Our school has never been involved with leakages and I have never encountered that since I came here; but I have heard about it. With me, I think my grade can not be affected because I believe I can do the best of myself. I don't think I can get any help for me to pass, because sometimes we can be given a class test and then you find, may be, we are given time and may be the teacher has gone out and that one who struggles to ask others may end up becoming the failure. So, I believe nothing is going to happen with my exam because I will write it myself. [Rose]

Similarly, another student insisted, "I believe if we do our own work we will come out successfully. I heard them [KNEC] saying that they will now provide special security arrangements in every examination center. I hope it will work because I do not want to see my results cancelled due to somebody trying to cheat."

However, negative publicity for the school was a concern for focus group students:

I think, in our province (Nyanza), it is like examination cheating takes place only in Gusii schools. This is misleading and unfair to us...there are some schools in Luo-Nyanza which do the same, but even if they are found with the papers, it is not made public to people. I mean, like announced or written on the newspapers. And yet in Kisii, may be a school is found cheating, they just take it that they are always involved and they write in the newspapers. And in other schools, in Luo-Nyanza or Central province or even in the Coast, they don't even talk about it. [Unidentified female student]

Other students were concerned about the overall impact of perceived or real examination cheating in Gusii schools on students' morale, in general. According to

Rose, “after having worked very hard and then one hears there is an exam leakage in Gusii schools, the students get discouraged and this affects the good students. The leakages may be are for those who have not worked hard...they are unnecessary for those students who have worked very hard to prepare because they do not need them.”

The KNEC secretary, Paul Wasanga attributed the cases of leakages to mobile phones, which, though banned in examination centers, were used by some unscrupulous candidates in collusion with some examination officials. The latter were believed to relay examination questions once they had been accessed prior to the exam time (Daily Nation, 2008). However, KNEC has adopted measures that could help minimize chances of examination papers being compromised, especially when papers are being transported to examination centers. According to Mr. Wasanga, the KNEC adopted measures to curb cases of irregularity:

Unlike in the past when papers were delivered to police stations and locked in their armories weeks before the exam dates, he said that last year papers were delivered weekly to distribution centers just two or three days before candidates sat for them... most of the exam papers used in last year’s exercise bore serial numbers, “allowing us to account for each of them as the exams were going on.” Before last year’s exams began on October 21, KNEC barred school heads and supervisors from access to spare examination papers, and candidates were barred from carrying mobile phones to examination centers (Daily Nation, 2009).

In addition, schools also put measures in place to restore normalcy in the school’s examination centers. As Mr. Gisemba reported:

As for the cancellation of exams, we now make sure that teachers don’t teach students after September in order to give them [students] time to study on their own. The teachers go to laboratories when they are needed only. The practical paper is handled between the principal and the teacher concerned

only and incase there is leakage of exam papers, then the people responsible would have to answer. [Gisemba]

For the students sitting for the examination, extra precautions were taken to ensure that the integrity of the examination was not compromised. On this, Mr. Gisemba elaborated further:

We discourage students from using cellular phones within the school compound during exam period. We strictly warn them against cheating; we discourage any communication in the exam room and emphasize the need to be honest, to write what they know...They are not allowed to carry with them any pieces of paper to the examination room; we tell them that if they see a leaked paper anywhere, they should run away from it. [Gisemba]

However, in spite of the tough measures that schools and KNEC have taken to curb examination cheating, the problem of examination irregularity seems far from being over. For instance, in the 2008 KSCE examination results released on February 28, 2009 out of 305,015 candidates that sat for the examination, 1,419 students had their results cancelled due to examination irregularities, many of whom had defied the order and carried mobile phones into examination rooms.

### **9:6 Family financial hardships**

Almost half of the students in this study have low income family backgrounds. Many of them shared personal experiences of growing up and living in extreme financial hardships. They attended poorly resourced public schools, often lacking essential learning facilities. In similar ways, the low income students transitioned into struggling day secondary schools with limited facilities for academic preparation. For instance, although Christina, Makori, and Zuma were admitted to relatively competitive boarding high schools, they opted to join the poorly resourced

Imani high school because their respective families' inability to raise the required tuition fee for the former. Most parents interviewed for this study were equally apprehensive about the prospects of their children attaining higher education given the prevailing poor economic conditions.

Though highly motivated towards higher education, many students were concerned that limited resources within their families could impact their prospects of attaining a higher education degree. Some students, for example Jessica, Steve, Christina, and David mentioned frequently how they were sometimes sent home from school for lack of fees more than once per term, missing out a reasonable percentage of class work. David spoke of how he was sent away from school for several days before his father could raise some money to enable him get back to school: "my father pays for my tuition but the fee balance is not paid promptly, so every term I am sent home and I stay for two days to even a week before I get fees." According to teachers I spoke to, students sent home regularly hardly catch up with lost time and work. Hence, lack of fees posed a challenge to high school students from low income families.

Moreover, the poverty situation has been worsened further by the rising number of students classified as total orphans due to high HIV/Aids related deaths, a recent phenomenon plaguing Kenyan schools, which, according to teachers, has ruined prospects of higher education for low income students. This has also resulted into the emergence of a new family concept — the grandparent family; a family situation where grandparents have been left with the responsibility of upbringing

orphaned grandchildren following the deaths of their sons and daughters due to HIV related illnesses.

Meeting the financial and other needs for total orphans is an increasingly heavy burden right now. Many of the relatives may not be able to help these students go to universities because of the high demands; first, psychologically they are affected. We use our counseling services to talk with them. Without parents it's extremely hard to cope. Relatives have to trade between providing the basic needs such as food and clothing and an education. You see them [relatives] come here to plead for fees payment. These students owe the school huge fee balances. Grandparents are the ones taking care of these orphans... let's be realistic, first, they are not employed and now tell me if they can pay for higher education. I see this as a big problem confronting our education system. Think about the future of these kids without an education!  
[Mrs. Matoke]

Clearly, the combination of poverty and disease has caused a devastating blow to the aspirations for higher education among students from poor families. As one teacher explained:

Poverty in the family is a big obstacle for these students...they come from very poor backgrounds, they lack funds to buy books or pay school fees. Many schools now have to deal with quite a great number of students who are orphans, I mean total orphans... these students are cared for by relatives.  
[Onyoni]

The challenge of finding ways to support the aspirations of similarly situated students was a concern among focus group students, three of whom identified themselves as total orphans, living with grandparents. Financial hardship was a pervasive concern and a common feature among these students as they shared personal experiences, particularly how their lives had changed since losing both parents. Yet, it was heartening to discern the resolve and determination in some to succeed in their educational endeavors amid the prohibitive circumstances. Instead of despairing, some learnt to cope as others, unfortunately, fell by the way side.

## **9:7 Family instability**

It is not gainsaying to stress that the wellbeing of a family is critical to students' academic achievement. In many cases, family problems spill over to children, affecting not only their psychological wellbeing but also their academic performance. During the interviews, most teacher counselors spoke of how inter-parental conflicts were sometimes played out in schools and that majority of the students with behavioral problems were those from families undergoing divorce or separation. On the impact of unstable families on students' educational achievement, Tumaini school counselor, Mrs. Matoke aptly observed:

The parents also have a role; we have noted that some of the students have social problems in some cases emanating from their home environment, some students are orphans, some students have come from homes where parents are separated and they are fed with information from the two antagonistic partners. As a result, they are not able to settle down and study, this adversely affects the students, and it becomes difficult to assist the student if you don't have the background information. [Mrs. Matoke]

In addition, teachers interviewed felt that the time spent in managing students' disruptive behavior could as well be invested in helping them achieve academically. As Mr. Mogoko, the deputy principal of Tumaini high school, noted: "when parents are not available to supervise and monitor the students' behaviors at home the school can't do it alone. You see, the school's intervention comes in very late. This student is already spoilt. Disciplinary case students do not do well academically. The school's efforts are inadequate to address the problem which parents should have fixed when this kid was growing up." As a result, many students with behavioral problems missed classes due to absenteeism over issues that parents could have helped to curb within the family set up.

### **9:8 “That boy next to me”: The unintended consequences of mixed schools**

A good number of secondary schools in Kenya are mixed (co-ed), but only a few offer boarding facilities. In Gusiiland, Angaza is one of the few schools that maintain mixed boarding status, where female and male students share classrooms, dining hall, and other facilities except dormitories. At the time of this study (2008), most mixed boarding schools in Gusiiland had separated into single sex institutions, though maintaining their original names. In converting the schools into single sex institutions, the students were split along gender lines and placed in separate compounds with their own boarding and classroom facilities. From this study, it emerged that maintaining mixed boarding schools had proved problematic in Kenya as female students faced so many challenges, including, but not limited to, sexual harassment and teenage pregnancies, resulting into dismal performances in the national examinations.

According to Angaza and Imani teachers, mixed schools offer students an opportunity to learn how to interact with the opposite sex. However, as observed in Angaza, uncontrolled interactions between male and female students had the potential for negative impacts on students' academic achievement. In addition, boarding school life cultivated an environment where such interactions culminated into love affairs. In studying together, the boys and girls in their adolescents were tempted into having love affairs whenever opportune moments arose, often with devastating consequences, including teen pregnancies and expulsions from school for those caught in such illicit liaisons.



Mr. Ogendi of Angaza high explained both the importance and shortcomings of having mixed schools:

It is really a good experience. I can say so because they derive mutual understanding in terms of behaviors and so forth...However, in the process of close interactions adolescents may be tempted explore the sexual aspects of their lives, often with undesirable consequences. Somehow, we have tried to discourage them to be having love affairs in the school. Some of them go as far as sneaking out at night, and then you start hearing they were seen in...This happens all the time. We have had those cases; we have had to advice but those who do not listen to that advice end up scoring low than what we expected.” [Ogendi]

As already stated, one of the unintended consequences of student love affairs was teenage pregnancies, a common problem facing Kenyan secondary schools. The Ministry of Education’s policy requires female students who become expectant to be sent home immediately. In addition, these student mothers are discouraged from rejoining their previous schools, unless they had already registered for exams. In this case, they may be allowed to operate from outside the school as they write their final examinations. Although teenage pregnancy is not really a serious problem, students interviewed in this study indicated that they, at least, knew of a girl who had become a victim of this predicament and sent home. One teacher responded: “I have not seen this again. We hear some rumors that so and so are expectant but when we conduct our routine pregnancy tests, it turns out to be a hoax. Sometimes we hear of abortions here and there but we really do not get to obtain concrete evidence; so, we simply move on...”

### **9:9 Sharing Beds: Quite discomforting**

Due to overstretched facilities in boarding facilities, schools are compelled to have their students share beds. Student interviewees and focus groups expressed concern that in sharing beds, they had no say in the choice of their bedmates, something that made them uncomfortable. As Esther commented:

During admission into Form I, you are [student] given a bedmate who is not of your choice, actually a stranger. You are not allowed to choose, say, a friend or, at least, someone known to you. If you do not like your bedmate, there is little you can do about it; even if you raise complaints so that perhaps you are given a substitute, nobody listens to you. It is very frustrating and demeaning. There is no specific criterion when it comes to being given a bedmate; they are normally from any class. [Esther]

Some students were adversely affected by this sleeping arrangement in which they were forced to share beds with “strangers”. They were frustrated and stressed by the school’s failure to effectively address their accommodation grievances. Also, this sleeping arrangement exposed vulnerable students to bad peer influence. Overall, some students and even teachers opined that congestion in schools led to poor academic performance since the prevailing conditions were generally demoralizing.

### **9:10 Insecurity: Post election violence and students’ strikes**

Post election violence broke out in Kenya following the controversial 2007 General Parliamentary and Presidential Elections. The violence was characterized by inter-tribal skirmishes, leading to killings and displacement of thousands of Kenyans, particularly those considered immigrants in the expansive Kalenjin dominated Rift Valley province. The Gusii were adversely affected and many were evicted from their settlements and forced to return to Gusiiland. Gusii students studying in the Rift

Valley schools were displaced as well. Accordingly, Gusii schools were pressed to inevitably take in the returnees. This meant that most schools had to cope with the unanticipated increase of student numbers. As a result of this, overcrowding in classrooms and dormitories became a common feature in many Gusii boarding schools.

All the four schools involved in this study were affected by the influx of new students. Among those returning students from the Diaspora were Monica and Steve. Also, there were many students who, though not part of the returnees, were directly affected by the violence. For example, Esther lost his father in this politically instigated mayhem. One teacher observed: “many high achieving students had been impacted directly or indirectly by the violence...The other boy is an Internally Displaced Person, he was at another school but because of the ethnic clashes he moved here.”

The rising number of secondary school strikes in months of March through October, 2008, was attributed to the post election violence. This period witnessed the highest number of school strikes in the Kenyan education history. Secondary school strikes became a national concern as student engaged in a series of unrests destroying property through fires that also claimed the lives of some students and disrupted learning for several weeks. Although the four schools under study were not directly affected, student unrest was so rampant during this period such that students could be seen talking in groups trying to catch up with news of which school had been on strike that day. During these months, an average of ten schools went on a strike in a single day. The period coincided with my field work and many students expressed

concerns and fears, that their school could be the next to go on strike, because students in the neighboring schools had gone strike. The rising number of strikes among schools became an issue of great concern among head teachers, and according to the head teachers' association Chairman Mr. Cleophas Tirop: "In June [2008] we had an average of 10 cases of unrest daily compared to about two last year. The trend is worrying as incidents of burning down school property are now the preferred choice of many students in expressing grievances."

In a ministerial statement to parliament, on the school strikes phenomenon, the Minister for Education, Prof. Sam Ongeri had this to say; "post election violence is also another feature for the school unrest as it caused more effect on our youth...main cause of vengeance of children in schools who are expressing the aftershock of the post poll violence in schools within Nairobi, Central, Kisii and parts of Eastern provinces." The minister also attributed the school unrest to students making unrealistic demands on the administration such as the purchase of a new brand of school buses equipped with televisions and DVDs, unrestricted visits to opposite sex schools, and more time for entertainment, failure to which they burnt down the school buildings and destroyed property. In his statement, Prof. Ongeri reported that by July 22, 2008 more than 180 public high schools, 7 private schools and 21 middle level colleges had gone on strike, a figure that represents approximately 3.7 percent of the educational institutions. In response, the Speaker of the National Assembly, Kenneth Marende directed the Parliament's Select Committee on Education to investigate into the crisis and report back. However, according to the counseling teachers I spoke to, the ministry's failure to put mechanisms in place to

counsel students, especially those who had witnessed the election violence may have contributed to the rising number of strikes.

### **9:11 The unemployment crisis**

The number of young unemployed people in Kenya has continued to grow and currently the rate of unemployment is surpassing 40 percent. In the rural areas, the resource poor neighborhoods, the numbers are even greater. Although a limited opportunity for urban employment was expected to spark competition for further education, for many focus group students, the opposite view was prevalent. Disadvantaged and resource deprived neighborhoods had a negative influence on students' higher education aspirations as most of them talked of how the presence of a high number of unemployed university graduates in their villages does not inspire them towards higher education. In Gusii, like many parts of Kenya, there are numerous university graduates, considered the educated unemployed that live in the community. As one student observed, "when I look around my area, I see so many of these people from university who have been *tarmacking* [job hunting] for jobs for over ten years. Sometimes I wonder, what is the point of going to university? If I will get out and never get a job." Because of the weak economy, Kenyan youths have limited job opportunities; hence this affects the way students perceive opportunities for their own future employment. In many ways, such discouraging neighborhood conditions contributed to how some students made decisions about higher education participation.

Similarly, the competition for scarce job opportunities has caused the rise of the incidences of bribery among desperate people yearning for a job opportunity. As

Mr. Mogoko lamented:

I think sometimes we are selfish people and this emanates from our culture. Instead of a Kisii working hard, he will prefer to bribe. The bribery levels in Kisii are very high when compared to other tribes, like when looking for employment people bribe even up to Ksh. 150,000 while in other places people are employed without paying a cent. So people don't seem to care about their children doing well because they presume that they will bribe their way into jobs for their children, anyway as Gusii people we are in trouble. In terms of university students who are abroad for studies, we are the leading community in Kenya. This shows that we are not lazy people; however we need to discourage negative cultural traits. [Mogoko]

## **9.12 STRATEGIES ADOPTED FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

In spite of the obstacles standing on their way to university, many Gusii high school students expressed a determination and resolve that sustains their personal ambitions in academic achievement. All were in agreement that it takes personal drive, discipline, sacrifice, and determination to successfully sustain a rigorous study schedule in the accomplishment of their set academic goals. Indeed, in the midst of challenges, the students found inspiration and optimism. As Steve observed:

It is exciting but there are all sorts of challenges. I am personally determined to move on because there are no options really. It is a life and death kind of situation since some of us were born and are growing up in utter poverty. It is only education that can get us out of this pathetic mess...I was encouraged by the way our school performed last year. It took many students to university and I have made up my mind to be among those who will make it this year. It is tough but if others have made it, why not me? Presently I am doing well and my teachers are happy of my work...I think I am on the right track.  
[Steve]

As explained earlier, Gusii high school students' academic success is a result of a corporate effort involving students, teachers, parents, relatives and peer groups,

as well the community. It is clearly a sustained endeavor that entails the adoption of various strategies in preparing students for the KCSE examination. This section focuses on some of the commonly adopted strategies by schools, teachers, parents, and students in ensuring academic success.

### **9.12.1 Holiday tuition**

Holiday tuition arrangements are informal teaching sessions that are conducted by schools to supplement the normal teaching period in a year. In this, schools in consultation with parents and students, utilize part of the holiday days in the months of April and August to provide extra coaching and tutoring to senior high school students, particularly Forms 3 and 4 (11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade). The motive behind this effort is the adequate preparation of students for the competitive KCSE examinations. In some schools, low achieving students receive an extra week of tutoring services. Usually, respective parents meet the cost of this coaching exercise. Though the exact amount paid per student depends on the school, the figure generally varies from Ksh. 500 to Ksh 4000 per session. The students interviewed for this study acknowledged the importance of tutoring sessions in preparation for the national examination. They underlined the extra efforts made by their teachers in a bid to not only complete the official syllabus, but also to ensure that the students were sufficiently equipped with the relevant knowledge and techniques of answering examination questions. As one student affirmed:

Teachers are preparing us to pass examinations, through preps; we have also completed the syllabus and doing revision, they have availed papers of various districts, we are competing with other school, and we have holiday tutoring in April and August for 2 week during each season.

In addition to holiday tuition, resource deprived schools such as Imani high had made Saturday a mandatory school day for students in Forms 2 through 4 (10th through 12<sup>th</sup> grade). Imani teachers received incentives for teaching on Saturdays. In Kenyan schools, it is a common practice for teachers to teach extended hours outside the normal school schedule, especially very early in the morning and after 4 pm in order to complete the syllabus and prepare students for the examinations. The pressure to perform well in national examinations and be ranked nationally dictates that subject teachers sacrifice their time with the family to help teach candidate classes.

### **9.12.2 Participation in Mock Exams**

In preparation for the national examinations, taken annually from mid-October to mid-November, schools organize for students to take a pre-examination called mock examination during the month of July. All Form 4 students participate in the mock exam. While some schools participate in the district wide mock exams, others choose to take internal mock exams prepared by the schools' teachers. Teachers use students' score in the mock exams to determine which areas their students need to focus on in order to improve their scores in the final examinations. As one Tumaini teacher reported: "We pay special attention to our students at the bottom of the mock performance ranking table. These weak students are put into small groups and handed over to experienced teachers for academic uplifting. Similarly, the good



students are kept on toes and encouraged to uphold confidence as well as maintain focus as they approach the KCSE examinations.”

Moreover, teachers are stricter in the grading of mock examinations in order to avoid increased performance levels that might lead to overconfidence among students, which, in turn, would possibly undermine their performance in the final KCSE examination. As one Tumaini teacher reported:

More especially after mocks the able students pass and average ones do not do well. We do not participate in the district mock because the setting panel picks questions from past papers that at times our teachers have revised with the students. In Tumaini School, we do our own mocks, set by our own teachers; our mocks are very hard in that the able boys feel if they have passed in mock they will automatically pass in the national exam and this is the time the average boys who do not perform wake up and start working hard. Often in our internal mock, the overall mean grade is 6 which possibly turn into 9 in national exams.

Another teacher echoed similar views on how participation in the mock exams had a motivating influence on students:

They are ready to work, they want to go to university and I think they will make it. When you look at their study habits, you can agree with me that these grades they are getting are not just – it has not been by chance, they have been working hard. They are placed at the top every time, the top ten students; the performance has been consistency. In our internal exams, they have been ranging from B plus to A minus. We grade them lower so that they can work harder; with this A minus, in the national rankings they will have A plain. That’s how we do it here.

The centrality of mock examinations in the university going process was underscored by many students, who were concerned that incomplete syllabus coverage might affect their grades in the mock exams. One focus group student remarked: “In some subjects we have limited number of teachers, there are cases where we have not thoroughly covered the syllabus, yet we are approaching mock

exams. On our own, we are going to cover the syllabus but, in spite in spite of this, we need teachers to guide us.”

The subsequent months after the mocks are spent revising different mock papers from various districts in the country as well as past KCSE papers. Since each district offers a different mock examination, students get an opportunity to share knowledge their counterparts throughout the country. To this effect, parents ensure that their sons and daughters have access to mock questions from other districts for revision. As Don’s mother shared: “When my son wanted the revision materials, he requested us to contact his principal to see which ones were appropriate for him. He told us to bring him the mock papers for those schools which perform better in national examinations, particularly, Nairobi schools.” In addition, teachers used every opportunity to prepare students for examination taking strategies: “we give them internal exams, continuous assessment test, district mocks, which are coming up soon; we shall go through revision after finishing the syllabus; we invite specialized people to talk to them, at the same time we buy revision materials...Teachers also look for their own ways of preparing them according to certain techniques.” Most importantly, the mock results help to boost students self confidence in handling examination questions as they look forward to the final KCSE examinations.

Before sitting for the mock examinations, the students undergo a series of pre-mock tests. These tests are meant to familiarize them with the content covered in class within a short time span. As one focus group student reported: “I promised him [Dad] that I would perform well in pre-mock examinations, which, I did. I have notified him and he has promised to buy me a present for the same. In those pre-

mocks I did well in C.R.E [Christian Religious Education] and he told me when we close school he is going to give me a prize.” Similarly, Steve expressed optimism in his upcoming mock exams that: “Teachers expect me to be the top student come mock examination. Last term I was number five in pre-mock but when we did our class assessments, I was in number three. This time round, teachers expect me to emerge the top student.” Zuma’s father was equally optimistic about his son’s preparation process and participation in the mock exams: “I believe so...from his report form and from what his teachers tell me. He is hard working. I told him to pass highly even though I do not have money; I know, at least, he can go to a middle level college. Based on his pre-mock results, I am very optimistic that he will be above the university cut off points come the KCSE exams.”

Among students, stakes were high as performance in the mock examinations was being controversially debated on the Kenyan media in relation to the past scandalous irregularities in national examinations. Amid rumors ‘doing the round’ that, in the event of examination irregularities in future, the KNEC could use the mock results to award grades to students, the media was articulating the merits and demerits of this remedial measure. To the students, this was malicious talk meant to promote injustice by establishing unlevelled ‘academic play ground.’ As noted above, mock examinations were variously set, administered, and graded in different schools within heterogeneous circumstances. For instance, most Gusii high schools deliberately graded their mock examinations with meanness in a bid to minimize over-confidence among their students. Broadly aware of this strategy, Gusii high school students were genuinely alarmed by the prospect of ‘elevating’ their mock

grades to the final KCSE grades in case of irregularities in the latter. Clearly, this idea was going to favor students in schools known for generous mock grading mentality, while adversely hurting those students in schools like Tumaini which deliberately gave lower mock grades to their students to avoid over-confidence among the candidates.

The mock rumor was attributed to the rise in the number of students' strikes across the country during the month of July, when the mocks were being administered nationwide. This prompted calls for the banning of mock exams in secondary schools. Accordingly, Form 4 students in several schools refused to sit for their mock examinations after their attempts to cheat failed (Daily Nation, 2008). In response, on September 4, 2008, the permanent secretary in the Ministry of Education outlawed the administering of mock examinations in secondary schools, alleging that it was being used by teachers to make quick money. But, and in fairness, the underlying reason for banning mock examinations in schools was actually to quell the pressure from the rising cases of strikes in secondary schools.

### **9.12.3. Early-risers and Trans-nighters: Working to make the grade**

For Gusii high school students, the period preceding the KCSE examination is marked by a beehive of activities centered on intense examination preparations. To live up to their own expectations as well as that of their parents and teachers, students not only adjusted their lifestyles in favor of studies, but also sacrificed all other interests at the altar of academic achievement. Teachers reported this period as the quietest moments in their schools as all students were unusually united in one

objective: passing the KCSE examinations and subsequent entry to university. Even the academically challenged students were hoping for the best; after all, most were Christians who, truly, believed in the power of prayer as well as in miracles. So, all students were set in overcoming the single hurdle between them and the Ivory Tower, as Kenya's universities were known in the 1970s and 1980s.

Personal time schedules for most students included, waking up early, skipping extracurricular activities, and staying up late into the night to study. Their daily study schedules ranged from 3:00 am to 2:00 am. For most students, their day started between 3:00 or 4:00 am and ended at midnight. For example, to avoid disappointment, David followed a strict study schedule, starting the day at 4:30 am with the morning preps until 8:00 am when the regular school schedule began. After 4 pm, David gathered his close friends for a two hour group discussion before retreating for intense personal revisions and consultations with his teachers and colleagues. Although evening preps started at 7:00 pm through 10:00 pm, David extended his evening studies until 11.30 pm. However, David noted that many students kept a similar schedule.

For Monica, the 4:00 am to 11:00 pm study schedule was fine. When I asked her how she was preparing for the national examinations, Monica had this to share, "I am doing much to prepare for mock which is in July. I have to cover everything from Forms 1 through 4. In preparation, I wake up at 4:00 am and get to class by 4:30 am, talk to God, then start to read. During the evening preps, I am always in the library looking for materials until 11:00 pm when I go to bed." Likewise, Jessica's day was not any different; she woke up at 4:00 am and by 4:30 am she was in class doing her

own studies before the regular class schedule began at 8:00 am. After classes, usually at 4:00 pm, Jessica and friends gathered together with their books and revision questions to start group discussions till 6:00 pm when they left for dinner. After evening preps at 9: 30 pm, the group met again and extended to 11:00 pm when they retired to their dormitories to sleep.

Unlike the others, Makori, who attended a day school, started his day at 3:00 am with morning studies until 6:00 am, when he started to prepare to be in school by 6:45 am. In the evening, after his supper at 7:00 pm, he did his evening studies until 11:00 pm. However, Makori reported that in observing such a strict study schedule, with less time to sleep, caused him to experience exhaustion and fatigue, particularly after eating corn meal (*ugali*) for dinner. In order to avoid being fatigued in the middle of his study schedule, Makori asked his parents to buy him a food flask to keep his food warm until 11:00 pm when he had done with the evening studies. This group of students called themselves “early risers”. *Early risers* kept a strict schedule of rising up as early as 3:00 am to study.

As I listened to the focus group students with similar stories, I became curious, wondering how they managed to maintain such a strict study schedule, especially in waking up that early. I asked them, “Do you guys use alarm clocks? How do you know its time to wake up?” They responded that the school guards woke them up at 4:00 am. It had become a regular practice for the night guards to ring the school bell at 4:00 am for the benefit of the early risers. Day scholars, especially those operating from their homes, mentioned their parents and siblings as assisting in waking them up. Furthermore, others in this category, including even those in

boarding schools, acknowledged their dependence on the ever on time morning crows of the Gusii cock. The African cock crows at specific times in the early hours of the morning to alert people it is dawn. The first crow is at 3 am followed by second cockcrow at 5.30 am, and subsequently at 6 am. The stage of cock crow a person responds to depends on the type of job they did. Some focus group students were quick to remind me that we were in Africa, in case I had forgotten due to my stay in the United States, as they confessed their reliance on the Gusii cock's morning crows. To a farming community such as the Gusii, the cock crow is the most reliable time clock.

There were also students who were not early risers because they preferred to study late in the night. This group of students called themselves "*transnigheters*". Transnigheters were those students who studied past midnight. They had the ability to study through the night; in other words, to trans night. They maintained 6:00 am to 2:00 am schedule. While the early risers woke up at 4:00 am, the transnigheters remained in bed until 6:00 am. Since the schools do not encourage students to transnight, those involved did it in a discreet manner. Students shared stories of how in some situations, they used candles to study if the lights were turned off from the main switch. In some schools, students even used bathroom lights, which were always on. Teachers were aware that some students were staying up all night to study but they thought it was not so serious to warrant penalties. Moreover, students often involved in this practice were those doing well in class.

A student who identified himself as a transnigheter aptly summarized his day:

After evening preps...I rush to the dormitory to make "cold power," and put butter on my bread. After eating I change, sometimes I shower, to get fresh

and start to read. When everybody is asleep I read very well. At this time, points really stick very well. When others are rushing to class at 4:00 am I am deep asleep. I like it that way...you know, sometimes you have a choice to make, what works best for me...that's what I do. Trans nighting is best for me.”

The drink, cold power, a mixture of cocoa, sugar and cold water, is very popular among boarding school students. While some schools provided students with hot water to make beverages after night preps, students who failed to get the hot water or had no flasks to store hot water preferred cold power. According to students, cold power provided them with the power to stay awake past midnight.

Although a majority of the students belonged to one of the two groups, there were other students who did not belong to either group; they did not wake up early nor stay up late. Those who belonged to this group, particularly the candidates, were viewed by the two groups as lazy with no personal academic ambition. As one student observed: “Some of the students can misguide you into not attending preps...they try to convince you not to go for preps. Some students have a culture of making excuses for not going for preps on Fridays, saying that it is a members' day, they also laze around during the weekends. A lot of them spend time in writing letters to girlfriends. They can not wake up to study. You see them a lot here. They just do not know what they need in life.”

#### **9.12.4 Discussion group networks: It is all but ‘harambee’**

Group discussions emerged as a network that students utilized during the university going process. Across the four schools, students reported belonging to more than one study group. In most cases, the study groups were based on subjects



enrolled in and share academic aspirations and ability. Students worked on a timetable that was strictly followed. In most cases, peer pressures and interests determined the type of classes these students chose to enroll in. Rose shared about her friends and their influence and motivation to study together in groups:

We have a lot in common with my friends and mostly we have group discussions, we usually have it once a day at around 4:00 p.m. and we also meet during weekends. We are really serious about our performance. We talk about it a lot. I expect all my friends to go to university. Everybody is working hard and the group discussion is helping, we are kind of trying to pull each other up, especially if we have a difficult quiz, we ask the subject teacher. When we are not in group discussions, we as well hang out together and have conversation about what we would want to do in order to go to the same university. [Rose]

Allan reported that his close peers in school had the same higher education aspirations as himself. They spent much time together with friends in group discussions and they had the same subject combinations. Talking of conversations with friends, Allan had this to say:

We normally have discussions on how we can better our grades in order to move on to institutions of higher learning. We talk of the difficult life we can lead if we can not make it to university. We encourage one another to be competitive in subjects we are best in. When we hang out with my friends we usually play rugby and at times chat about what we have read in novels. [Allan]

Makori spoke of his commitment with group discussions and how he had greatly gained from such a network of friends, “in the evenings we have group discussions before we leave school. We cover areas we did not understand in class and what [questions] we think would appear in the final examination. With group discussions, you have to be committed and must contribute. If you are seen as a dependent [liability] they [friends] would avoid you. They would start meeting in a place you do not know. So you have to work hard to play your part.”

The centrality of discussion group networks to academic achievement is underscored by David's words, "at personal level I have taken the initiative and formed a discussion group with those students who do well in class." He reported that they held group discussions with his friends daily as from 4:00 pm to 7:00 pm. He also spoke of his two closest friends, Peter and Douglas, who were members of his discussion group. "My friends are really committed to go to university and we are doing this together. For instance, Peter's mean score is a B plain. I know that he will make it to university and Douglas has always been at the top of our class. When we are with my friends, we discuss which strategy to take in order to improve our grades." Most importantly, David's associations with peers had not only motivated him to work harder, but also to get more focused. To him, his friends were an asset in his academic endeavors.

Similarly, Esther linked her friends to her academic performance and aspirations for higher education. "I have two close friends in school and I have others at home. They [school peers] have similar educational aspirations as mine. We are classmates. They take position two and fifteen, respectively. I usually take position one. We study together, solving math problems as a team, and encourage each other a lot. I expect them to go to university because they get B plus and above." She talked of how her friends challenged her and she vowed to remain at the top of her class. "I was like I have to take the top position, I am not going to relax and give it [class position] away. Once I lose position one, my momentum might go down. I do not want that to happen. It is like we agree to compete in exams." Conversations

with her close friends also touched on “the courses that are offered in university and which ones we are going to do if we reach there.”

Although not all of Steve’s friends had similar perspectives on education, most of them were overly ambitious, were doing well academically and wanted to join universities after high school. Talking of his friends, Steve had this to say:

I have friends, and close friends both inside and outside this school. Some have different perspectives on academics but most of them are very ambitious. The friend I have aspires to get a grade that would enable him to join university to do accounting. He is working hard. We are neighbors at Eldoret, I expect him to get a B+ and above. We encourage one another, talk about experience about university life, and work hard, extra work in academic work. When we hang out we tell stories, and being fans of ball games we talk about the same.

Kevin’s friends had similar academic aspirations. He reported of how he had greatly benefitted from associating with his friends who were academically talented and focused just like him. He spoke of how he and his friends supported one another to excel academically and sometimes how they competed and challenged one another.

He emphasized:

I have five friends. Each one of us wants to succeed academically. We normally have a fair competition when it comes to examinations. We do compete, at least, to a head of the others. So, we aspire to make it to the university. Some of my friends are my classmates. I used to be a class monitor since Form 1, when I ran for higher post of leadership, I nominated one of my desk mates to succeed me in overseeing the class; thus we became friends.

### **9.12.5 Repeating to make a better grade**

For the ambitious Gusii high school students, failure to qualify for university admission is a terrible personal setback, which leaves them with limited options.

Most repeat Form 4 without second thought. They do so with high expectations of

not only improving their grade, but also securing the coveted place in one of Kenya's public universities. Furthermore, majority of students who repeat are those from poor families, who can't afford to pay their way through parallel degree programs, which are 100 percent self sponsorship. Students from well-to-do families easily go in for the parallel degree programs since their parents can afford to pay. All that is required of the latter to join university is attaining, at least, a C+ grade in the KCSE examination.

When David scored a C grade two years ago, he went back to Form 3 to gather what he calls academic momentum. He is 20 years old and his retreat to Form 3 explains the age gap between him and most of his class mates, who are 2 years younger than him. While the idea of repeating a class is legally acceptable in Kenya, it is more widely practiced in Gusii schools than anywhere else in the Republic of Kenya. Again, this is a demonstration of the high regard the Gusii community attaches to higher education. Amid diminishing resources, such as land, and coupled with population pressures and widespread poverty, the Gusii view education as the only gate way to a decent life. On this, the Gusii do not take chances. Indeed, in the past Gusii parents were contented in passing a piece of land over to their male children (girls having been married) but, in the absence of this resource today, education is the indisputable inheritance that they can bequeath to their off springs, including their daughters.

David's repeating experience is shared by many in Gusiiland. In spite of the fact that he had spent 6 years in high school, he was more than ready to do it repeatedly until he received his university admission letter. He insisted: "incase I do

not qualify, I will repeat until I make it to university.” Esther held similar academic perspectives as David. She had lost her dad in the post election violence and witnessed how her mother struggled in providing for their basic daily needs as well as paying their school fees. To Esther, university education was the ultimate goal and, she vowed to achieve it if only to avoid disappointing her trusting mother. She clearly understood her circumstances and knew that entry to a regular university program would secure her government sponsorship since her mother could not afford to pay for a self-sponsorship parallel program. She made it clear: “In case I do not attain the required points for university entry, I will repeat. My mother can’t pay for a parallel program... my elder siblings are yet to join other courses [middle level colleges]; so she can’t be able financially. My brother wants to join KMTC<sup>23</sup> to do biomedical. I will have to repeat to attain the marks.”

Similarly, Christina, who was repeating Form 4 at the time of the interview, indicated that she was ready to repeat, again, if she missed university entry points. She told me: “In case I fail to attain the university entry grade, I will be forced to repeat in order to perform better.” In short, repeating classes is a popular strategy especially employed by Gusii high school students in their academic endeavors as they aspired for university education. Furthermore, most schools’ promotion regulations allow weak students to remain in one class for another additional year in order to improve their grades before they can proceed to the next senior class.

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<sup>23</sup> KMTC stands for the Kenya Medical Training College. KMTC, a public institution awards medical related diplomas and competition for admission is very stiff.

### 9.12.6 School-Community partnerships

School community partnership is one of the strategies schools utilized to promote students' academic achievement. Across the four schools, teachers reported enjoying positive working relationships with the communities surrounding their schools. Also, most families were comfortable collaborating with teachers and the school administration in activities that promote students' social and intellectual development. A good number of parents and extended family members devoted their energies and time to help students succeed. Mr. Onyoni observed: "In one way or another, the community around the school comes to our help whenever there is need. Some of them assist us by reporting students who sneak out of school without permission and are seen engaging in bad activities such as alcohol and drugs. They report to us and we act to contain the situation before it gets out of control. Many of them are the source of some supplies we use in school such as food, firewood, etc. Others, especially the well-to-do, support our school financially...they assist us all the time."

Although students' families and the neighboring community form our dependable network for positive development in the schools, teachers spoke of a few money thirsty individuals in the community who offered drugs and alcohol to students. Mr. Ogendi of Angaza underlined this community problem:

We have not really seen this happen apart from a few people, who are out to make money; they come around selling drugs and some strong local brew known as *chang'aa* to our students. This is a Christian institution; we do not condone this kind of behavior. It is really not a major problem but we are very vigilant on this and we will eliminate such bad habits.

To ensure that schools are secure places for learning, the institutions have forged alliances with local administrative and policing forces in a bid to maintain tranquility and an enabling environment. For instance, Angaza high school took steps to involve local law enforcement agencies such as the provincial administration officers and local chiefs to bring to justice individuals involved in the alcohol and drug business.

We have taken necessary disciplinary actions aimed at collecting them; sometimes we send word through provincial Administration or the chiefs at Ekerubo to arrest people who sell *chang'aa* and those who have the video shows. Recently, it was reported that students sneak from school to go and watch pornographic video shows out there. A message was sent to the local District Officer, who promised to deal with it in person; so I do not know if he has done so. But I do not think it happened.

In rural schools, teachers reported a weak community participation mostly in places where parents and community members have little or no formal education. Teachers reported how some community members appeared to be intimidated and lacked the courage to face the school administration out of fear and the feeling that they were not knowledgeable on school matters. Such parents virtually left everything to the teachers in guiding students in the university going process. More importantly, school administrators had realized the importance of strong community-school partnerships in academic achievement. The schools, therefore, devised a variety of strategies to encourage community participation through *harambee* activities in order to mobilize resources for the development of schools. In addition, successful and prominent members of the community are regularly invited to schools for aspiring and mentoring speeches to the students. Also, schools encouraged

community involvement in the extra-curricular activities, including attending and sponsoring school events such as sports, prize giving as well as fundraisings.

### **9.13 Conclusion**

Structural inequity in resource distribution between and among various schools along political and ethnic lines accounts for the differences in students' performance in national examinations and subsequent enrollment into higher education institutions. In their university pathways, Gusii students encounter an unfavorable economic, social and political environment characterized by lack of learning and boarding facilities, insecurity, examination irregularities and extreme financial difficulties among others. Most Gusii schools have been incapacitated in their preparation of students for university entry due to external interference in their admissions process and appointment of heads of schools.

Once elected into office, Gusii politicians capitalize on their political power to reward family, friends and cronies with appointments as principals to the detriment of the schools. Teacher interviewees observed that many of these political appointees have proved incompetent in the running schools and are only in office to serve the interests of the appointing individuals. Similarly, competition and rivalry among Gusii clans to have their own sons and daughters serve as heads of schools has led to mushrooming of rural high schools, many of them with little or no facilities to prepare students for higher education. Students caught in this socio-political environment have little or limited options for higher education opportunity and many of them watch as their dreams for higher education dim slowly. However, a few of



them, especially the exceptionally bright, like students in this study, find ways to navigate the system by devising unique strategies to sustain a rigorous study schedule in the accomplishment of their set academic goals. In addition, resource deprived schools such as Imani high support their students efforts through an extended study week to include Saturdays, holiday tutoring and participation in mock examination.

## CHAPTER TEN

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 10.1 Introduction

This chapter offers a summary of the findings of the study on university going process among Gusii high school students. The study is carried out within the frameworks of social capital, cultural capital, and the human theories. The implications of the study on policy and practice as well as recommendations for further research are also highlighted.

The purpose of this study was to study awareness and preparedness among Gusii high school students on university education opportunities and possibilities through their own perceptions and expressed aspirations. The theories of capital contend that students construct their postsecondary education opportunities within the family, school, and community contexts. Indeed, it is the interconnectedness of these environments that enable or constrain students' conceptualization of their postsecondary opportunities. The guiding question for this study reads: how do high school students conceptualize higher education opportunity and how are they engaged in the university going process? Utilizing the qualitative ethnographic case study research technique, this study carried out in-depth interviews involving twelve Gusii high school students and focus group discussions with thirty eight students. The students were selected from four Gusii high schools on the basis of their outstanding academic performance as well as active involvement in the university going process. In addition, owing to their influence on the students' educational aspirations and academic success, parents and teachers were also interviewed. Thus, the interview

data provided information on the interrelatedness of and the various contexts within which Gusii students aspire and prepare for higher education.

## **10.2 Summary of the Study Findings**

The study findings indicate that students' conceptualization of higher education opportunity is shaped by a variety of contexts that include; the family context, school and community context, higher education context, the sociopolitical context, the national context and the international contexts. In addition, the interrelatedness of these contexts influence the way high school students, parents and teachers adapt to the demands of the university going process.

In this study, the family emerged as the most influential institution in the way students aspired and prepared for higher education. The family context characterized by parental income (socio-economic status), parental expectations and involvement influenced students' attitudes about education, choices and types of schools they attended. In addition, successful older siblings who occupied unique spaces in the lives of these students became role models and enablers in the university going process. On the other hand, students with academically unsuccessful siblings desired a university education to improve their family's social standing. Extended family members and relatives provided the necessary social and economic support to enable students achieve their desired goals. For Gusii students, the desire to pursue higher education was based on familial experiences.

Within the school context, academic preparation, the role of teachers and peers emerged as influential factors later academic achievement. In particular, a

student's upper primary schooling provided the necessary foundation to transition into a reputable high school. Many of these students attended private primary schools and had high entry points into high schools. While in high school, teachers worked closely with parents and the community to ensure their academic success. In addition, the community context that characterized by cultural beliefs and expectations provided the necessary guidance and incentives to motivate students towards academic achievement.

The sociopolitical context was characterized with structural inequalities in the distribution of educational resources along geographical, political affiliations and ethnic lines. The findings show that the sociopolitical context had little in aiding students' transition into a postsecondary education. Instead, the political context cultivated by the colonial legacy, perpetuated and perfected by subsequent political contexts presented impediments to students' university going process. This study found that structural inequality was a constant reality in the lives of Gusii high school students.

In particular, politically motivated education policies such as the quota system of admission into secondary schools, coupled with lack of educational resources limited the schools' capacity to adequately prepare students for university entry. Such a socio-economic environment in Gusii schools further complicated the situation and many students, especially in Harambee schools watched as their dreams for higher education dimmed. A sense of desperation could be felt from their anxiety over the impending national examinations and concerns about lack of syllabus completion. In addition, the politically instigated post election violence, politicians

and church leaders' interference in the running of schools in many ways limited students' academic preparation and subsequent transition into higher education institutions.

The study findings show that students, parents and teachers are sensitive to the ever changing national contexts. As a result, they have devised unique strategies to cope with a rigid national curriculum, competitive national examination, shifting university cut off points, limited university vacancies and inadequate financial aid. However, the university going process was complicated by examination irregularities that posed a challenge to many candidates. Students, parents and teachers collaborated closely in the intensive activities that characterized the university going process and schools undertook extra measures to ensure that the examination centers were not compromised. Students' self motivation and ambition to attain a university education played a major role in the way they maintained a very strict study schedule and with sleepless nights to prepare for the national examinations.

Unlike many other higher education systems, especially in the western world, the study findings show that the Kenyan higher education context had little influence in the way students engaged in the university going process. This is because public universities have no contacts with their prospective students during the university going process. Instead, the JAB has the responsibility of admitting students who qualify for university entry. All prospective university students are selected to university campuses and to degree programs based on their performance in the KSCE examinations.

Accordingly, International organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have become key actors in Kenya's education policy. The study found that the international context played a role in the number of university places available to students under government sponsorship. To finance education, the government relies on loans and grants from these organizations. Hence, such a dependence on foreign aid creates a window of opportunity for these organizations to exert their influence on Kenya's higher education policy. In particular, these organizations were active players influencing the introduction of cost sharing in higher education and in setting the limit on the number of students who could benefit from government sponsorship.

### **10.3 Family Context**

In this study, significant others such as parents, siblings, and extended family members played a fundamental role in the university going process. Family members worked collaboratively and separately to support and encourage students in realizing their long held dreams of attaining a university education. In various ways and in different capacities, significant others contributed in one way or another to these students' academic accomplishments. The families, especially the middle class, put forth structures to convert their economic and social capital into cultural capital to enable students succeed academically. These students developed a sense of entitlement to higher education based on their family members' expectations. Through a network of connections and exchanges, intellectual and emotional support, and with the support of other social structures, students acquired the necessary social

capital and utilized it to their advantage during the university going process. The twelve key participants of this study shared information and demonstrated how they managed to achieve academic success based on the social environment in which they were brought up and socialized that valued education.

### **10.3.1 Parental involvement and expectations**

The study illuminates mechanisms that parents utilized to facilitate students' university going process. Clearly, parents held high expectations about the possibilities that their children could pursue higher education. However, there were distinct class differences in their involvement and investment in their children's education. Well-to-do parents displayed intensive involvement in their children's education and in utilizing their social, economic and cultural capital at their disposal as opposed to low income families. The study findings showed that well-to-do parents have the knowledge, skills and connections to manipulate the complex university going process to their children's advantage. The well-to-do parents also, in general, are able to position their children on the university pathway through their parenting styles and choice of schools. Many of the well-to-do parents are able to move their children around the education system i.e. from non-performing public primary schools into academically competitive private primary schools.

In this study, class is visible in the university going process as economic and social capital are converted into cultural capital to propel students towards academic achievement. Well-to-do parents invest more time and resources into their children's education. These parents have cars that facilitate frequent trips to boarding schools to

monitor their children's progress. They provided their children with hidden cultural resources— such as visits to the library, museums, theaters, private tutoring and rewards for good grades — that gave their children the ability and confidence to navigate the competitive and examination oriented education system and achieve academic success.

Their already acquired social and cultural capital— largely based who they know and have contacts with, ability to utilize teachers outside the schools for private tutoring— is an unseen yet a powerful resource at their disposal. The study showed how successful parents utilized informal knowledge and skills to cultivate a *habitus* to navigate the education system. These parents coached their children at home in memorizing the letters of the alphabet and numbers before they started formal schooling. Such family practices enriched students' cognitive *habitus* and their approach to problem solving and information processing continued even after enrolling in formal schooling. Hence, the students acquired a sense of entitlement for higher education. The parents have economic resources and ability to enroll them in any type of higher education institution they chose to.

On the other hand, although low income parents did not have the economic, social and cultural capital as compared to the well-to-do parents, by any means they were not left behind. These parents utilized invisible strategies to propel their children's educational aspirations. This research demonstrated that informal messages communicated parental expectations that influenced individual student's orientation towards academic achievement. Messages sent through family conversations and parents' lived experiences of financial hardships created awareness



among individual students about their socio-economic status. Most importantly, low income students, like Makori, learnt that higher education was the only key to unlock the chains of extreme poverty in his family. Irrespective of the parental education level and socio-economic class, parents had understood the importance of higher education and they made it clear to their children that without a university education they faced a bleak future.

The social capital manifested itself in the forms of social networks that parents forged within and outside the family setting to enable their children to conceive and internalize the university going process. In many ways, parents understood their obligations to support their children amidst financial constraints. For example, Zuma's father, after losing his job, pursued the opportunity of becoming the Chairman of Imani high school's board of governors, a position he utilized to create social networks with the school administration and teachers for Zuma's academic benefit. In similar ways, Makori's mother entrusted teachers with the responsibility of guiding her son in the university going process. Although she had limited knowledge about higher education, the fact that she had good relationships with teachers, gave Makori an edge in his academic endeavors.

In addition, Rose's mother forged a close relationship with the school principal and teachers to obtain financial assistance towards her daughter's educational needs. Although she lagged behind in fee balances, Rose was not sent home for lack of fees. Baraka teachers not only provided Rose with material needs but also guided her in the university going process. These are examples of parents who had realized the need to cultivate social networks to empower their children for

academic success. Although the social networks these parents cultivated were outside their socio-economic class, they were academically beneficial to their children. In many ways, these networks were meant to compensate for lack of social capital in the family. According to Coleman (1988) social capital can only be helpful if utilized effectively and exploited to generate more capital. In similar ways, parents in this study deliberately pursued a variety of avenues to forge social networks to ensure that their children had the opportunity to qualify for university education.

The well educated parents differed from their counterparts in their involvement in the university going process. They helped and supervised homework, financed private tutoring services for their children whenever needed, and set rules and routines within the family setting to ensure that their children devoted a substantial amount of time to reading. In many families, a tradition of rewarding students for grades was a strategy parents utilized to motivate students towards academic achievement. As a result, grades and reports cards became so critical in their academic lives such that they worked so hard in order to please their parents, and avoid possible disappointment, or withdrawal of privileges that followed a failure to achieve satisfactory grades.

As this study illustrated, active parental involvement in the children's university going process was evident among highly educated parents. These parents were aware of the intensity of the university going process and, in particular, the demands of the national examinations. This is in line with other research findings elsewhere. For instance, other research shows that active parental involvement facilitates the development of children's educational aspirations and subsequent

academic achievement (McDonough, 1997; Coleman 1988). Parents not only set rules and traditions of rewards but also assumed an active role in students' learning process. For example, parental involvement in the choice of schools, paying for tutoring and availing learning resources boosted student's academic achievement. Similarly, Coleman (1988) maintains that educational expectations and obligations within the family are an important source of social capital that facilitates the level of parental involvement in their children's education.

According to this research, Gusii parents closely monitored their children's academic progress by making frequent trips to schools and forging close working relationships with subject teachers in order to identify areas their sons and daughters needed additional academic assistance. For instance, Don and Allan's parents arranged for private tutoring services to improve their performance in languages. They also provided revision materials and pocket money to ensure their children had what they needed to achieve academically. These parents expressed willingness to invest all they could to ensure their children succeeded academically. In contrast, low income families lacked resources and opportunity to provide private tutoring, pocket money, and school fees for their children. Students from low income families expressed uncertainties over their ability to stay in school for the remainder of the academic year due to unpaid fee balances, which threatened to interfere with their future academic plans. Yet, these students expressed a determination, derived from depths of their poverty, inspiring them to succeed academically. The desire to flee the chains of poverty drove children from poor families toward academic achievement.

### **10.3.2 Socio-economic class and education aspirations**

The family's socio-economic status featured prominently in the interviews as parents and students talked about their choice of schools and aspirations for higher education. Although private primary education was the pathway to a reputable high school, families with severe economic hardship did not attempt private education. In fact, low income parents narrated their daily struggles to provide the family with basic needs, let alone seeking a private education. However, parents expressed strong feelings about their children's chances of obtaining university entry based on their academic ability and previous academic accomplishments. To these parents, university education was the ultimate goal.

The importance of university education is underscored by low income parents as they yearned for rewards higher education could bring to their families in terms of future earnings. Interviews with parents revealed that monetary benefits that accrue from education had become a priority guiding their spending patterns in their children's education. Although previous research (Bowen, 1996) shows non-monetary rewards as a major reason for investment in higher education, participants in this study were motivated by the expected monetary benefits. However, few other students aspired towards higher education to become important people in society and role models to young people in their village and community. More than half of the participants were the first from their families to attempt university entry.

Parents' ability to pay for their children's education was important in the development of educational aspirations. Extreme poverty in the family deprived students of the necessary financial capital to make decisions about higher education

participation. The study revealed that because of extreme financial difficulties, they attended poorly resourced public schools and, accordingly, recorded minimal performance in the KCPE examinations. As a result, they enrolled in day secondary schools, which were less costly but hampered by inadequate resources for academic preparation. For example, Christina, Makori, and Zuma attended Imani day secondary because their parents were unable to raise tuition needed in a boarding school. Parents make school choices for their children's primary and secondary education based on their income. Private boarding schools charge tuition and fees that ranges between Ksh. 40, 000 Kenya Shillings to Ksh.100, 000 per year and only a few families can afford. Private schools maintain smaller classes giving students individualized teaching and coaching on examination taking strategies. For example, when it comes to national rankings in the Standard 8 exams, the top 100 positions are dominated by students from private schools.

Kenya's well-to-do parents combine private education and tutoring to give their children an edge in the competitive education system. Most of them invest heavily in primary education with a view that their children will perform well, be admitted to prestigious public secondary schools, and eventually enroll in public universities to benefit from government sponsorship. Kenya's education system is multifaceted with a public education, a preserve of children from poor families, contrasted with a well performing private school system, where every able parent want to enroll their children to give them an edge in the competitive system of education.

Given this type of university pathway, the construct of social capital can be useful in explaining why there exists disparities in students' aspirations and performance in national examinations among the Gusii schools. In addition, there exists a weak day secondary school system consisting of Harambee schools and other private schools, many of them lacking essential facilities such as electricity, science laboratories, and libraries. At the top of the Kenyan education system are prestigious public universities that admit top students in the KSCE exams, mainly graduates from reputable national and provincial schools. On the other hand, a growing private university education also enrolls students with ability to pay, mainly those who miss cut off points to a public university.

In addition, ability to pay for higher education was a common concern for parents and students alike. Students who fail to make the university cut off points pay a higher tuition and fees than the others during their course of study. In addition, these students are not eligible for university HELB loans and bursaries. Although low income parents held high expectations that their children could join university, in reality they had limited options as regards higher education choices. For instance, David, Makori and Christina, planned to repeat Form 4 in case they failed to qualify for university entry. Similar plans were expressed by Steve, Jessica, Rose, Zuma and Esther. Their parents understood that tuition and fees charged to privately sponsored students, those who missed entry points, were thrice to that of the regular program entrants. These parents shared that could not afford to pay for their children's higher education. More so, Esther and Jessica had elder siblings who had not taken any postsecondary training because of financial difficulties in the family.

Given the limited financial resources, students' academic preparation for university education was indirectly influenced by the types of secondary schools students enrolled. For instance, although Christina, Zuma and Makori had qualified to enroll in provincial boarding schools in Form 1, due to parents' inability to pay, they enrolled at Imani Day school. Their parents narrated personal sacrifices they have had to make in order for their children to remain enrolled, including doing without basic needs. For most students, family's socio-economic status did limit the options they had concerning post secondary education plans. Such students expressed concerns that they could not enroll for a private university education or a parallel program because of their parents' inability to pay.

Families with low incomes or abject poverty were driven by the desire to give their children a better future. Such families not only identified education as the gateway to a better future, but also as the best means available in the war against poverty. Therefore, while students from well-to-do families easily pursued higher education as a matter of family tradition or legacies, those from poor families were essentially driven by the desire to transform the future of their families' socio-economic status. Furthermore, those students with a history of academically unsuccessful siblings urgently wanted to succeed in order to turn the tables of fortune in favor of their families. While they were keen not to disappoint their expectant parents and relatives as well as their teachers, they were also on a mission to establish positive academic family traditions and legacies for future familial descendants. Simply put, they wanted permanent victory over poverty through the acquisition of university

education, an opportunity their parents were denied due to unfavorable economic circumstances.

### **10.3.3 Siblings**

The research established that academically successful older siblings played a crucial role in influencing the educational behavior of their younger siblings. The social structure of life in Gusii families gives older siblings, especially the first born, a sense of responsibility to guide the actions of younger siblings. Interactions with older siblings are based on mutual respect and, in many ways; the presence of siblings in a family provides a sense of social support. Unlike parents, teachers, and peers, academically successful siblings' occupied a unique space in the lives of aspiring students because they shared both family and academic experiences and, therefore, better suited to guide and mentor their younger siblings in the university going process. Students benefited socially and academically from older siblings who guided and motivated them in their academic pathways through direct intervention with homework, words of encouragement, personal academic journeys and life experiences, as well as career and university choices. Positive influence from siblings, especially from university enrolled siblings, provided necessary impetus in the students' academic preparations.

In many ways, older siblings provided the necessary socio-emotional support in the absence of parents, guided their junior siblings on life choices as well as in the choice of friends as most of them attended the same boarding schools. Siblings served as a source of information about higher education; how to prepare for the



national exams, careers to pursue, and availability and application for financial aid. Thus, the older siblings become enablers in the university going process. Overall, uniquely situated in the family and with educational experience, successful older siblings assumed various roles in the university going process that ranged from providing guidance and information, tutoring, inspiration, motivation and even substituting for parents.

In the Gusii community, and even in the wider African society context, the presence of an older sibling in the family substitutes for parents, by providing care (baby sitting) and in making decisions affecting the younger siblings. In addition, in many Gusii families— for example my family— a successful older sibling(s) provided financial support towards the education of younger siblings. Focus group students reported living with their older siblings who also paid their tuition and fees. As a result, siblings cultivated strong bonds of relationships that lasted a lifetime. In making decisions, a successful older sibling is usually consulted to give some advice.

On the other, students without older siblings or those with academically unsuccessful older siblings turned to extended family members such as cousins, uncles, and aunts, neighbors and other successful members of the community for guidance. The study illuminates paradoxical cases in which academically unsuccessful siblings motivated their junior siblings to achieve academically in order to be unlike them. For example, one student argued:

For me my challenge is that, for example, my brother did not achieve what he wanted to achieve; that is why he went for parallel, and my sisters did not get the university grade; that is why they went to middle level colleges. And now my uncles and aunts were happy when I performed quite good in primary and now they are waiting for my high school results; and my father feels that he

did not have a child who will achieve a good grade and now I want to work hard to make my father proud.

#### **10.3.4 Extended family members**

Extended family members played a very important role in enabling students realize their long held dreams. This was particularly the case with low income students such as Christina and Steve. Within the Gusii cultural setting and in the wider African society context, extended family members play an important role as child care providers, guardians, mentors and guiders of their relatives' children. In this case, grandparents, uncles and aunties and other distant relatives had a moral obligation to guide the younger people to understand societal values and expectations. Societal expectations mandated relatives to help not only in raising the children but also in meeting their needs whenever the situations call for such assistance. In many ways, the social structures of life within Gusii gave relatives a sense of responsibility to guide and mentor their relatives' children.

The relatives' economic and social capital was converted into cultural capital in the students' university going process. For example, Steve, having been displaced by the election violence, sought refuge at his uncle's house together with his mother and sister. The uncle not only provided the family with accommodation but also sought schools for Steve and his sister and financed their education. Steve's uncle was actively involved in his university going process. He made frequent visits to the school to ensure that Steve had what he needed to succeed in school. In the event Steve qualified for university education, his uncle had promised to buy him a milk cow.

Similarly, relatives played a major role in Christina's family and in her education. While she had no hope of joining high school due to her parents' inability to pay tuition and fees associated with attendance, her aunt offered to not only fund her education but also provide her with accommodation and upkeep during her high school years. Relatives also served as mentors and role models to the students. For example, Monica identified her aunt, a lawyer by profession as her mentor and role model. Also, Zuma and Don sought their uncles' advice concerning career choices. The study revealed that the current reality with the lives of many students that have become total orphans due to the rising number of deaths caused by HIV related diseases. Many of these students recounted their stories in the focus group sessions how their grand parents have assumed the role of meeting their needs. In addition, Gusii community, a close knit cultural society, many families rely on relatives for economic and social support. In many cases, children from low income families live with their well-to-do relatives to obtain an education. For many low income parents, relatives are a source of social, economic and emotional support as they struggle to meet the needs of their children.

#### **10.3.5 Students' academic ambitions and personal achievement**

As the study found out, many students mapped their own academic pathways by developing ambitious educational and future career plans. Individual students' dreams propelled them towards developing university going behaviors and the expectation that a university education will make a difference in their lives. Student participants expressed a vision of a promising future through hard work. In addition, their motivation to excel and realize long held dreams was based on the confidence in

individual academic or cognitive abilities. Students who excelled in class reported having a positive relationship with teachers, a source of confidence which they attributed to their academic success.

Teachers reported that students worked harder when they perceived their chances of passing examinations were foreseeable. In similar ways, high achieving students expressed confidence in the possibility of obtaining university entry points based on their high school grades. These expressions reflected aspirations based on individual student's view of his or her own chances of getting to the next level of education. In the process, they acquired self-esteem and were motivated to achieve. Similarly, schools recognized and rewarded high achieving students by making school based tests competitive for students who wanted to be recognized. In the process, many students maintained good grades.

High achieving low income students were motivated to achieve when they realized that they could do better than high income students. In some ways, low socio-economic class had become a positive influence to educational attainment, because low income students narrated that they were motivated to achieve socio-economic mobility. As one focus group student observed: "I want to join university in order to make a change in our family. You at least have something you can do. With a good job and a good salary, I will be able to save for the future... You don't really have those good marriages, and you can save if you need to use in future, to live a good life." Despite growing up in extreme poverty, students such as Esther, Christina Makori, Steve, Rose and Zuma made decisions to aspire for higher education to change the socio-economic conditions of their respective families. They

narrated personal experiences laden with emotions on how their motivation to university was because they did not want to live like their parents. One Baraka student (female) commented: “For me a want to make a good society, when I look at home how our mum struggles, I want to make a difference in our home.”

#### **10.4 The school context**

The research established that adequate academic preparation, encouragement from teachers and peers networks are critical in the development of higher education aspirations among Gusii students. Educated parents paid greater attention to the types of schools they chose to enroll their children and many favored private boarding schools, especially between Standards 5 and 8. This was critical because performance in Standard 8’s KCPE examination determined the kind of high school a student joined. By the time they joined secondary school, they were already set on track for university education. In this case, families with sufficient social capital understood and ably manipulated the competitive education system in favor of their children. Able parents ordered their children’s academic pathways through heavy investment in private primary education that eased admission into a competitive high school and eventually gaining entry into a public university.

##### **10.4.1 Academic preparation**

Interviews with parents revealed that most Gusii parents conceived of a clear university pathway as one comprising of a private boarding primary school, a reputable public high school, then on to a public university. Because of this trend,

over the last decade, there has been a stiff competition in getting admission to private primary boarding schools. Students in private schools perform better in the national examinations as compared to their counterparts in public day schools. In addition, the ranking of schools in the local media based on performance in the national examinations has elevated the status of private schools. Given the competitive nature of Kenya's education system, parents invest time and money to ensure that their children are advantaged in the competition for a good secondary school. For example, in academic pathways, Tumaini and Baraka students reported having greater chances of joining university than Angaza and Imani high students. Tumaini and Baraka students had a sense of confidence based on the schools' history of academic performance. For example, in 2007, a total of 226 out of 316 Tumaini students and 103 out of 185 Baraka students qualified for university entry by scoring a mean grade B and higher.

Participants underscored the fact that the quality of the school has an influential factor in developing aspiration for higher education and subsequent academic achievement. Although Tumaini and Baraka schools admit students with higher entry points, who are academically prepared to write the national examinations as compared to Angaza and Imani high students, interviewed students at Imani expressed confidence that they could equally perform well and join university. Student participants attributed their sense of confidence to the academic atmosphere in the school that promoted a university going culture. For example, Makori, a top student in his class, was confident that he could make it in the examinations because, at least, in every year six students qualify to university from his school. In case of a

repeat scenario, which happens most of the time, Makori could be among the few Imani students set for university entry.

#### **10.4.2 Teachers and Teacher Counselors**

Gusii schools' teachers served as counselors in three areas, namely: academic counseling, career counseling, and guidance and counseling. Academic counselors handled students' academic preparation issues, career counselors guided students in making career choices, while guidance counselors dealt with students' behavioral and social needs. Additionally, teacher counselors served as subject teachers.

Subject teachers work closely with students in their respective subjects to prepare them for the national examinations. Interviews with students revealed that subject teachers had greater influence on the development of students' educational aspirations and subsequent academic achievement. Most students reported enjoying a positive relationship with their teachers, whom they described as friendly and easily approachable. Students reported regularly consulting subject teachers for updates concerning examination requirements. Subject teachers held high expectations on students and set standards to ensure students achieved in the various subjects they were enrolled. Similarly, to ensure students were academically prepared for the national exams, subject teachers exerted a lot of pressure on them to achieve. Teachers also invested time and effort to provide extra coaching on examination taking strategies. Subject teachers were reported to be available to students after school hours, weekends, and even during school holidays, when they offered two week holiday tuition.

Class teachers are charged with the responsibility of guiding students' academic and personal development. They play a fundamental role in guiding students in making subject combinations and in handling students' behavior problems before refereeing them to guidance counselors for further guidance. They participate in the promotion of students from one grade to the next. Indeed, Gusii students spend more time with teachers and peers than they do with parents. With extended holiday tuition, high school students stay with parents slightly more than month in any given academic year. In many cases, parents rely on class teachers' advice concerning their children's academic progress. In this study, students reported that their primary school teachers were influential in inculcating interest in learning and subsequent academic achievement. Students spoke of how they developed their higher education aspirations in Standard 7 and 8 after their primary school teachers talked to them about higher education opportunities.

In local schools, although teachers were motivated and willing to help students in academic preparation, they often lacked essential educational resources such as textbooks and science subject laboratories. Student taking science subjects in Harambee schools lack the opportunity of using science laboratories. Some of them come to conduct science experiments during the final examination period, with minimal outcomes. Moreover, most rural schools are understaffed and teachers are often overloaded with teaching responsibilities, making students to have minimal contacts with teachers.



### 10.4.3 Peers

It emerged in this study that peer values, attitudes, tastes, and ambitions shaped the way Gusii students aspired for higher education. Perceptions of their academic ability and acceptance into the peer group influenced the way they set priorities, and particularly aligning themselves with peers of similar academic goals. In addition, interviews with focus group students revealed that in making decisions about subject combinations and career choices, the influence of peers was stronger than that of parents. For instance, Jessica, Monica, Esther and Kevin chose subject combinations based on their close peer's choices. They wanted to remain together with their best friends. In some cases, students confided that the influence from peers made them arrive at decisions that could sometimes override that of their parents.

For Gusii high school students, friends served as a social connection and a support system away from family members. Drawn together by similar family circumstances, social support became necessary to navigate the academic pathways. Hence, many of these students developed a particular mindset about life and academic issues through association with peers. In particular, low income students believed on the value of higher education as the only way to escape from extreme poverty that characterized their family backgrounds. For example, Steve, Esther and Makori reported choosing friends who were similarly situated like them and their friends provided them with the necessary emotional and social support away from their family.

Many Gusii students, particularly those from low social economic strata, intellectual achievement is the main source of popularity amongst peers. Commonly,

high achieving students enjoyed popularity irrespective of their socio-economic class. Because of the competitive nature of Kenya's education system, students' academic records are displayed on school notice boards after mid-term or end of term exams. Since students are ranked according to their academic ability, every student knew their classmates' academic standing. For the high achievers, this public display of grades, of their academic prowess, gave them the opportunity to shine amid the accolades associated with academic excellence. Most importantly, academic excellence gave students from poor backgrounds a rare opportunity to enjoy the glare of public admiration and accolades that seldom came their way.

Gusii students were drawn to each other based on socio-economic class, grade level and cognitive abilities. They had understood creative ways of utilizing peer influence to their academic achievement and most of them reported maintaining multiple peer groups. For instance, peers formed discussion group networks geared to achieve what they considered as the most challenging task, that of preparing for the national examinations. Similarly, Coleman (1980) underscores that peer group becomes a clique that is based on similar socio-economic class and grade level. In the formation of peer group, gender featured prominently among mixed school students. Taking in gender consideration, students reported being comfortable and academically productive working with students of their gender than the opposite sex. In similar ways, female students were more concerned because they reported being harassed by their male classmates.

Participants shared that those who associate with peers who lack university going ambitions are less likely to drop in their academic performance and were less

likely to pass that national examinations to gain entry into a university. Although in the present study peers were less influential as compared to academic preparation and parental involvement in shaping student's educational pathways, they nevertheless encouraged students towards academic achievement. This was particularly evident in the way Gusii students maintained multiple peer groups, simultaneously. However, these students reported valuing high achieving peers to help them accomplish projects and other class assignments.

Students in this study reported encountering negative influences from peers who lack higher education aspirations. Many students narrated how most of their peers lacked the motivation to excel in school and that negative influence from peers presented a hindrance during the university going process. In such cases, achieving students strove to stay clear from such groups of friends. Previous research has also shown that adolescent peer group has a potential to exert negative influence on the social and academic development of the adolescent children (Azmitia & Cooper, 2001). Many of the aspiring students learnt to avoid their peers in order to engage in serious studies. Overall, student's personal achievement, status among peers, and peer group discussions influenced their academic success. They worked in groups through mutual understanding to uplift one another academically.

## **10.5 The Community Context**

The findings of this study show that religion and faith, cultural beliefs and expectations influenced the development of educational aspirations and subsequent academic success. Additionally, neighbors, elders, community leaders and church

leaders had a role to play in the students' university going process. The students receive advise, mentoring and encouragement to succeed, and an understanding of the importance of higher education within their socio-cultural environment. In many ways, the social structure of life in Gusii encouraged a communal approach to children's upbringing. The Gusii community's way of life empowered neighbors, elders, community leaders, local shop keepers and church leaders to watch over and guide the young people's ways of behavior and to maintain a peaceful coexistence in the community.

#### **10.5.1 Church and faith and extracurricular activities**

Spirituality and faith played a central role in the lives of Gusii students. Many of the students were reported being active in religious activities at school and home, most of them sang in the church choir and youth choir. These students conveyed how found solace and strength through participation in religious activities. Gusii high school students shared how their faith in God had provided them with comfort amidst financial and personal difficulties they encountered in their academic endeavors. Similarly, parents shared about their belief in God and how God provided for the needs of their family, especially tuition and fees. For example, Esther's mom spoke of how God worked in mysterious ways to send people to her life to bail her out financially whenever she had fee problems. She shared how she could sometimes receive financial help from people she did not expect. In general, most families were actively involved in church activities and these students had started attending church from a tender age as many of graduated from Christian primary schools.

In similar ways, schools utilized spirituality and faith to instill discipline, morality, and hard work among its students. Kenya's education curriculum includes a compulsory religious studies subject meant to instill virtues of discipline and hard work. Prayer and worship are part of the schools' daily routine in both public and private schools. The cultural and educational role of religion in the life of Gusii students, characterized by a daily worship routine, can be elucidated from Bourdieu's (1986) symbolic form of cultural capital. Cultural capital promotes the acquisition of skills, knowledge, and education that leads to a better life in society. Each student participant shared that the Saturday or Sunday worship in the school's chapel had contributed to their character formation and a focused life style. It created an opportunity for them to relate with the outside people, especially the church ministers, pastors, and other influential people who became their role models. As one Baraka student noted:

Saturday worship in the chapel has had a great influence in my life. I have been encouraged to the Bible something I never used to do. I think I am doing better in CRE simply because of going to the chapel. We sing hymns...even when you are down in spirit that singing just uplifts you up. In the chapel is where you meet great speakers, really inspirational people out there...you feel like yes, I can achieve...nothing is impossible.

Similarly, Steve's views on the role of spirituality in his life, underscores the importance of religion among young people.

I can now sing in the choir, something I never thought I could. I think even preaching...it's now easy... It's really important that students come and worship. It changes all your life and you become more focused on bigger things. You learn you should not do this and that. You just get focused on studies and avoid bad company and such.

Many of these students acquired the love of God and education based on the religious experience in their respective schools. Religious experience provided them

with a cognitive *habitus* in which they developed aspirations and expectations towards higher education. In addition, participation in co-curricular activities after classes cultivated a sense of belonging and created team spirit that students utilized to excel academically. Many of the students interviewed played sports with their peers with whom they also formed discussion groups to revise for the exams. Participation in co-curricular activities created a network of friends among students with similar social and academic interests that fostered students' higher educational aspirations.

### **10.5.2 Cultural beliefs and expectations**

Many of the students underscored the role culture beliefs and expectations played in their educational aspirations. This not only included Gusii people's love for religion but students identified with cultural expectations of their future role in society and the view of education as a means to self improvement. Male students mentioned frequently about pressure they received from parents, teachers, and community to outperform their female siblings, female classmates, and female neighbors. This reflects the Gusii cultural view of men, 'Abasacha,' who are supposed to go out and search, 'gosacha.' Within the Gusii culture, men are presumed breadwinners and heads of households, who must provide for their families. It is against this cultural worldview that male students narrated their experiences and pressures to conform to societal expectations of their future roles.

On the other hand, female students' motivation to university was based on the desire to lead an independent life. Female study participants talked of lessons learnt from lived family experiences and from neighbors that developed the desire for

independence and economic security. Gusii women lag behind men in education, occupation, and social standing. Majority of women live in extreme poverty; they live under one dollar a day, the commonly used poverty line. Participants shared stories of female classmates who dropped out of school to get married because parents paid little attention to their education. Focus group interviews with female students revealed their knowledge of Gusii women's standing in the social structure. They desired university education to not only escape poverty, but also to improve their social standing. Female students expressed strong opinions that women need good education and good jobs as men do. Talking about future careers, they avoided becoming teachers because most Gusii teachers were women and the profession was not highly regarded in society. Teachers were lowly paid and they saw them struggle on a daily basis in the community. Female students wanted to break away from the cultural expectations to enter men's professions. It is clear that the 'habitus' under which Gusii female students developed their higher educational aspirations contained images of women oppressed in the patriarchal Gusii culture. These images contributed to the way female students conceptualized higher education opportunity and the desire to break away from the cultural confines to earn income and lead independent lives to avoid relying on men (fathers, husbands, and brothers) for provision.

Interviews with parents provided a changing view with no gender preference in regard to parental responsibility and decisions related to educational opportunities. The views of these parents emerged as a generational change, contrary to the traditional Gusii family that has over the years favored male siblings in making

decisions concerning higher education investment. This represents a changing development among the Gusii views on the role of women in society. Some parents with grown up children also expressed that their married daughters were more responsive to family needs than their married sons. Higher education for girls to these parents was an investment. The changing view of the role of women among the Gusii in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is attributed to the fact that more than half of the parents interviewed had a high school education and above. Thus, with education, the traditional view of the role of women among the Gusii and Kenyan society at large is rapidly changing.

#### **10.6 The Sociopolitical Context**

In this study, the sociopolitical context included the unequal distribution of educational resources based on ethnic and political affiliations, and the politically motivated policies such as quota system of admissions. In addition, sociopolitical context under which students prepared for higher education was characterized by the post election violence and heightened ethnic tensions, and stakeholder politics in the running of schools. The current sociopolitical realities influenced the way students aspired for higher education and in many ways; the sociopolitical context presented numerous challenges to the students' university going process. Interviews with students and teachers revealed the world of reality on schools struggling to cope with an increased number of students amidst diminishing educational resources.

Structural inequality had become a constant reality in the lives of Gusii students and they narrated their experiences with the education system. Most



secondary schools lack essential facilities such as text books, laboratories, dormitories and teachers. Although the Ministry of Education allocates a budget to assist schools meet their essential supply needs, such resources, according to the parents and teachers interviewed, are channeled to politically correct districts and geographical regions to the detriment of the majority of schools.

In addition, the study found that introduction of the politically instigated quota system of admission into secondary schools had complicated the university going process, especially in poor resource endowed districts. The quota policy limits students' ability to attend a secondary school outside their district of birth or primary school. In many ways, the quota system policy undermines any efforts to promote diversity and peaceful coexistence in the country. Unlike students born and raised in urban areas, rural students do not have an opportunity to study and interact with students from a different culture or ethnic group under the quota system policy. Many of these students meet somebody who speaks a different language from theirs for the first time when they enter university campuses. For the unsuccessful students, such an opportunity never presents itself unless they move to towns in search of a job opportunity.

Even then, the politically instigated post election violence created a different reality for the few students studying or living outside their ethnic boundaries. Many of these students, for example Monica and Steve were forced to flee their schools. The violence heightened tensions among ethnic groups and disrupted many families living arrangements. Many of the post election violence victims, both parents and

students expressed unwillingness to return to their settlements even if the political climate returned to normal.

In addition, the study found that stakeholder politics interfered with the running of schools, affecting the schools' ability to adequately prepare students for academic success. Interviews with teachers and parents revealed the existence of an entrenched political hegemony and religious encroachment that had affected the management of schools. In particular, participants expressed mistrust and disappointment over politicians' and church leaders' interference with the appointment of high school principals and their deputies with little regard to an individual's competence to manage a school. This situation is also complicated by clan divisiveness especially with harambee schools, where villagers wanted to create opportunities for their sons and daughters to become heads the schools while blocking those they consider "outsiders." Such moves are done with little regard to the local community's capacity to equip the schools and the managerial skills of those who assume school leadership responsibilities.

### **10.7 The Higher Education Context**

The study findings reveal that public universities have minimal contacts with high school students and have little influence in choosing their prospective students. Instead the JAB is charged with the responsibility of allocating students to universities. Although universities did not contact prospective students and were not obligated to do so, many of the students with university educated parents and siblings knew about life at the university. These students expressed awareness of the

prestigious universities and programs offered in these universities that they wished to enroll. To these students, universities that offered science, medical and engineering careers were considered reputable. Most of the students wanted to pursue careers in these areas, and only a couple of the Kenyan public universities offered programs in the three areas. Although students had had little choice on universities they wanted to attend, if they scored the required cluster points in the KSCE examinations, they stood a better chance of being selected by the JAB to attend those universities.

### **10.8 The National Context**

The national context included a rigid national curriculum, shifting cutoff points, limited university vacancies, and inadequate financial aid, ranking of schools, and complicated by examination irregularities that posed a challenge to many candidates.

The findings show existence of intense pressure on students and schools to perform in national examinations and make it to the national rankings. As a result, many of them engaged in malpractices to manipulate examination results through leakages and impersonations. To conform to the pressure to succeed, many teachers spoke of how they tailored their instructions to teach to the exam. Many schools had become stricter with their promotion policy to the detriment of low achieving students who were forced to repeat a class until satisfactory marks were achieved. Overall, students, parents and teachers collaborated closely in the intensive activities that characterized the university going process and schools undertook extra measures to ensure that the examination centers were not compromised. Students' self motivation and ambition

to attain a university education played a major role in the way they maintained a very strict study schedule and with sleepless nights to prepare for the national examinations.

## **10.9 The International Context**

To finance education, the government relies on loans and grants from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. As a result, these organizations have a powerful influence in shaping Kenya's public policies. The study revealed that these organizations are active players in Kenya's higher education policy including the introduction of cost sharing, the structure financial aid system, setting limit on the number of government sponsored students and the hiring of teachers. The study established that with over 305,000 students competing for the 15,000 spots available at public universities implied that over 95 percent of the students had little chance in making it to the cutoff points. However, participants in this study, driven by ambition, determination and the desire to achieve academically, did not give up instead devised unique strategies to sustain a rigorous study schedule to accomplish their academic goals to be among the 5 percent who will be enrolled at the university.

Although the introduction of subsidized tuition and fees through cost sharing is meant to increase access to higher education, higher education opportunity for low income students remains at stake. While the student loans are meant to cater for the socio-economic disadvantage, the loans are unreliable and inadequate to meet the financial needs of enrolled low-income students. Many low income students

expressed fear about the possibility of financing their university education due to inadequate government funding.

### **10.10 Dreams Realized**

In the academic journeys of the twelve students involved in this study, their dreams to enroll in a public university were realized on February 28, 2009 when the Minister For Education announced the KCSE examination results of the 305, 015 candidates that sat for the examination in 2008. With strong determination, a strict study schedule, and with the support and encouragement from parents, siblings, peers, teachers and individual schools, all except one of these study participants qualified for university entry. It was a day of joy as many of them called me from Kenya to break the news followed by emails detailing their scores in various subjects. From Tumaini high, Don, Kevin and Allan all had a mean grade of A plain, the highest score in the KSCE examination. Rose, Monica and Jessica also earned a mean grade of A plain. All Tumaini and Baraka focus group students also qualified for public university entry, most of them earning A plain and A minus grades. From Angaza high, Zuma and Makori each earned a mean grade of A-(minus) while Christina scored a mean grade of B plain. Christina is the only student in this study that failed to meet the cutoff points for public university entry. In Angaza Esther, Steve and David scored a mean grade of A-(minus). In the focus groups, three out ten Imani high students and six out of ten Angaza high students that participated in the study did qualify for public university entry. Although these students would not know which programs of study they will pursue at the university until next year fall, there

was a sense of relief that they, at last, qualified for university entry and that their dream of attending a public university had been fulfilled.

### **10.11 Revisiting the University Going model**

The study was conceptualized using Perna's 2006 model that investigates the interaction between the socio-economic and policy contexts, the higher education context, the school and community contexts in influencing university choice and access. Although Perna's model helped to draw the conceptual map for this study, the findings show that in the Gusii students' university going process, more contexts influence the process beyond the identified four contexts. Gusii students' university going process is conceptualized within six influential contexts. The family context is the most fundamental institution in the students' university going process. In particular, siblings, occupying a unique space in the lives of university aspiring students, play an important role as enablers in the process of meeting the requirements for university entry. The cultural context in which Gusii students study and prepare for higher education shaped their higher education aspirations and career plans. The cultural experience had long-lasting impressions on the students' university going process as they strove to conform to, while others rebelled from, societal expectations of their future roles.

The sociopolitical context, characterized by the influence of the colonial legacy and the unequal distribution of educational resources along ethnic and political affiliations shaped the way schools prepared students for a postsecondary education. In addition, the international context that includes the IMF and World Bank as key

actors in Kenya's education policy emerged with another dimension in the university going process. The study findings show that the government's dependence on international loans and grants to finance education dictated on the number of students who could qualify for government subsidy in public higher education institutions. Therefore, the contexts that influence Gusii students' higher education access are beyond Perna's model could capture. A proposed model of the Kenyan university going process, must seek to encompass contexts outlined in the table below.

**Table 6: Contexts, Key players, Issues and Approaches in the University going Process**

Contexts	Family context	School/community context	Sociopolitical context	Higher ed. contexts	National contexts	International contexts
Key players	Parents Students Siblings Ext. family	Teachers Students Peers Comm. leaders Church leaders	Politicians Policy makers Teachers Church leaders Community leaders	JAB Policy makers Universities	Policy makers KNEC Ministry of Education	Policy makers IMF World Bank Ministry of Education
Issues/ Approaches	Family income Cognitive ability Personal ambitions Private Education Tutoring Rewards/Reinforcements	Academic preparation Group discussions Mock examinations Holiday tuition Community partnerships Cultural beliefs and expectations	Unequal distribution of resources Post-election violence Interference in school policies	High demand for education Financial aid Limited vacancies Cut off points	Quota system Curriculum National exams Rankings	Financial aid Cost sharing Limited vacancies

## 10.12 Summary and Recommendations

The manifestation of educational inequality as reflected in this study is a product of historical development of education, deeply rooted in the colonial style of administration that favored certain segments of the population. The educational system that is highly centralized and over reliant on performance in national examinations does not take into consideration the disparities in learning environments that students are exposed to and resources available to schools preparing students for qualifying examinations. This analysis opens room and invites more in-depth research to identify mechanisms that institutions could employ to widen access and increase the completion rates of low income students

As an exploratory study, the findings have implications to all facets of the educational system, beyond the university going process. The study has implications



to students' educational experiences and forces that operate within the family, school, and community to shape students' aspirations and expectations for higher education. In addition, the study has implication to the structure of education opportunity in Kenya that is characterized by structural inequalities in the distribution of educational resources, low socio-economic status, and the community environment under which students operate that contributes to low transition rates into the university. This study has implications for policy makers and educators to explore innovative ways of increasing the number of low income students that transition into university. The study has shown that students from low income families are academically capable if only given equal chance and access to adequate academic preparation.

Understanding university pathways among Gusii students took a multi-directional research to investigate the interplay of school environment, family, and community in students' academic achievement. However, further research highlighting education experiences of students from Kenya's other ethnic groups could create a deeper understanding of the influence of culture, geographical location, and the distribution of educational resources to academic success among Kenyan high school students.

Kenyan students have limited control on university choices. Colleges and universities have no direct communication with prospective students and therefore students do not embark on the search process. Instead, university admission process is handled by the Joint Admissions Board (JAB). Prospective Kenyan university students are admitted to university programs based on their performance in examinations and available vacancies in that particular year. Because of these

considerations, university cut off points vary from year to year. Students have limited control over universities they enroll. In most cases, students are admitted to universities they never chose but due to limited vacancies and competitive admission process, such students normally register for classes and in the process, learn to like or dislike the universities and programs that they have been placed in.

In many ways, schools and families equip students with necessary social and cultural capital in the development of educational aspirations and subsequent academic achievement. The school and family provide values and networks that students utilize to achieve academically. The life experiences of these students created an understanding of the barriers Gusi students face in their quest for higher education. Anticipatory government response focused on increasing the number of low income students into higher education institutions is necessary. In addition, there is need to create an understanding of the potential role of socio-cultural factors such as family values, traditions and practices, and social activities on the students' educational experiences. Hence, family, school, and community partnerships, formed through formal and informal networks, focused on providing necessary resources could also foster young people's educational aspirations.

The study findings revealed structural inequalities in the distribution of resources in Kenya's education system and its inability to meet the objective of giving students adequate academic preparation. Insurmountable challenges within the public primary education system compelled able parents to invest in private education. Stakeholders in public education need to rethink the mission and vision of the education system and advocate for fair and equitable distribution of educational

resources to allow a level ground for public schooled students to compete in national examinations to secure admissions into prestigious national and provincial schools. All students irrespective of gender, class or ethnicity can achieve when provided with necessary resources for academic preparation. The findings revealed barriers within the education system that impact low income students' access to higher education. The few students who succeeded had devised creative ways to navigate the university pathways despite the hostile environment and financial hardships.

A better re-conceptualization of higher education opportunities entails finding means and ways of addressing problems at the lower levels of education that limit the participation of women and students from low socio-economic backgrounds. Strategies to bolster access and retention of these groups, especially in primary and secondary levels are needed and they should culminate in higher education institutions. It takes political commitment to inspire and sustain the participation of various sectors of the society in order to improve access of educational opportunities. Until policy makers attend to such issues, university education may continue to remain a preserve of elites in society. Anticipatory government and institutional response to promote access and retention of women and low income students would entail funding resources for support programs at individual institutions and an increase in the quality of financial aid packages in the form of grants rather than loans.

### **10.12.1 Recommendations**

This is the first original research undertaken in Kenya that investigates why and how students aspire for and succeed to enroll in higher education while many others do not. This study puts a face on Gusii students through their perceptions, aspirations and pathways to university education. The challenge of preparing students for university education is enormous. Gusii students face insurmountable challenges—academically and socially—that impend their university going process. In order to adequately prepare students for university education and to increase the number of students qualifying for competitive university programs of study, measures have to undertaken to change the condition of schooling in Gusiiland. Based on the findings of this study, knowledge of university going literature reviewed in this study, and an understanding of pre-university programs and strategies used in other countries to widen access to universities, I offer recommendations for consideration.

Improve the quality and availability of academic counseling in schools. The absence of a strong academic and career counseling programs in schools negatively impacts students' university going process. The study revealed that academic counselors are overwhelmed by the number of students they have to deal with, while other schools they lacked functional academic counseling programs. I suggest for a partnership of stakeholders (the Ministry of Education, schools' PTAs and the local community) to support and improve counseling services in schools. This could be achieved by enlisting volunteers from the community to offer talks to students and the hiring of a counselor through the schools' Board of Governors (BOG) to work with students. In addition, I suggest that such a partnership explore possibilities of

deploying academic counselors to primary schools to guide student choices. The study revealed that students develop higher education aspirations during upper primary school years. Unfortunately Kenya primary schools are not staffed with academic and career counselors. These are critical years that strategies and programs to improve students' academic preparation are essential to ensure academic achievement. I recommend a stakeholder partnership to create opportunities and school counselors guide students' academic and career choices. Offering in service training to primary school teachers to serve as academic counselors would meet the educational needs of students, especially in developing their higher education aspirations.

Create a First Sibling Educational Opportunity Partnership (FSEOP) a mechanism to assist the first born siblings attain access to a postsecondary education. Older siblings played a fundamental role as enablers in the university going process. To strengthen their capacity to respond and shape the academic behavior of the younger siblings, the government and the community need to explore ways of ensuring that firstborn children, especially first generation university going children, are able to transition into a postsecondary institution. I suggest creating a partnership to include all stakeholders (schools, community organization and relevant government organizations, local businesses and the church) to set objectives and leverage resources to support such programs.

Recommendation for an overhaul of the administration of the national examinations, scrap the ranking of schools and students and explore alternative ways of measuring student success in the system. Over emphasis on national examinations

as the only criteria for university entry and the ranking of schools based on examination performance encouraged irregularities in the handling of examination papers. The pressure to succeed in national examinations meant that students undergo vigorous study period accompanied with lack of sleep for two years to make the grade. This study findings recommend for educational debated and enactment of policies that would explore alternative ways of assessing students' achievement and eligibility for university admission, for example, the use of previous student's academic performance and scrapping of school rankings may promote fairness and objectivity in university entrance process. The current reality with the examination system, compromised with irregularities, would not be sufficient to serve as the only single determinant of a student's qualification for university entry.

In addition, this study recommends for a reduction of the curriculum content and the number of compulsory subjects. Anxieties related to the syllabus coverage and examination taking denies the students an opportunity to develop and utilize their talents while in school. Many students forego co-curricular activities in order to devote their time to study. Similarly schools have prolonged school calendars to include holiday tuition and a six day study week. Prolonged study period denies students opportunity for relaxation and ability to assimilate whatever they have learnt. Additionally, before students are examined in practical science subjects such as biology, physics and chemistry, steps should be taken to ensure that these students have access to science laboratories during their course of study. Many schools, especially Harambee schools have non functional science laboratories and yet students have to sit for practical science examinations. Efforts directed to equipping

science laboratories will greatly improve students' performance in these subjects and the overall KSCE scores.

## Appendices

### Appendix A: KSCE Exam Results, Gusii High Schools in Selected years

#### KISII DISTRICT KSCE RESULTS 2002-2007

YEAR	CANDIDATES	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	E	X	Y	Z	MS
2007	8267	15	158	285	445	574	623	775	1045	1243	1516	1425	258	1	146	65	4.72
2006	7170	7	69	141	242	377	453	594	743	1055	1478	1578	373	43	14	3	4.23
2005	9464	8	144	241	388	477	667	862	1133	1462	1947	1797	269	59	6	4	4.51
2004	7836	0	34	148	271	391	524	708	984	1245	1369	1523	181	62	386	10	4.41
2003	7127	7	44	158	270	399	476	597	862	1191	1511	1265	112	57	177	1	4.48
2002	7303	0	33	135	258	352	409	520	810	1248	1642	1574	202	41	76	0	4.97

#### NYAMIRA DISTRICT KSCE RESULTS 2004-2006

YEAR	CANDIDATES	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	E	X	Y	Z	MS
2006	6699	2	39	98	182	235	382	572	772	1033	1313	1648	363	18	8	10	4
2005	9345	2	44	195	295	431	623	892	1263	1575	1816	1845	283	45	12	23	4.31
2004	8219	0	38	164	336	422	510	726	1044	1296	1654	1589	220	65	155	3	4.27

#### GUCHA DISTRICT KSCE RESULTS 1998-2007

YEAR	CANDIDATES	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	E	X	Y	Z	MS
2007	7584	3	57	133	240	377	566	741	925	1112	1451	1528	303	0	12	75	4.279
2006	6339	0	23	61	128	229	291	463	660	880	1233	1250	381	0	350	0	3.48
2005	8786	1	51	158	297	387	590	833	1169	1372	1778	1778	284	99	112	16	4.323
2004	7945	2	34	155	304	477	563	589	813	1098	1267	1068	93	0	136	0	3.834
2003	6179	2	39	144	212	346	435	564	813	1098	1267	1066	93	94	0	6	4.521
2002	5676	1	17	80	179	266	340	511	741	1143	1354	1171	115	81	266	0	4.221
2001	6265	1	8	45	126	236	354	512	800	1113	1565	1226	102	82	96	0	4.014
2000	5475	1	8	56	110	210	321	552	778	981	1261	816	47	87	251	0	4.113
1999	5047	1	4	27	69	121	248	392	740	1040	1265	981	77	56	26	0	3.946
1998	5277	1		13	42	142	257	427	689	1069	1432	915	41	59	175	0	3.783



## APPENDIX B: PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

<b>Project Title</b>	<b>University-Going Among Gusii High School Students, Kenya</b>
<b>Why is this research being done?</b>	This is a research project being conducted by Dr. Jing Lin and Truphena Choti at the University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, USA. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are currently a parent or guardian to a high school student. The purpose of this research project is to better understand the conception of, and preparation for, higher education opportunity among Gusii high school students (Kenya).
<b>What will I be asked to do?</b>	The procedure involves one interview of approximately 60-90 minutes. This will be an informal interview with questions aimed at better understanding your role in your high school child's conception of higher education opportunity and preparation for the university-going process. Questions may explore your motivations, expectations, challenges, surprises, learning, rewards, and reflections on your overall involvement as a parent or guardian. You may terminate the interview at any time at no cost. You may request that the interview be conducted in your home or in a public place that is convenient for you.
<b>What about confidentiality?</b>	<p>We will do our best to keep your personal information confidential. This interview will be audio-recorded. The audio-recording will be stored on a password protected computer. To help protect your confidentiality, your name or other personal information will not be attached to the digital file. Only the researcher will have access to the recording. The recording will be destroyed five years after the completion of the data collection for this study. The transcript of the interview will not contain any personal identifying information. In any reports or articles generated from this research project, your identity will be protected.</p> <p>Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law. In accordance with legal requirements and/or professional standards, we will disclose to the appropriate individuals and/or authorities information that comes to our attention concerning child abuse or neglect or potential harm to you or others.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>I agree to be audio-recorded during my participation in this study.</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>I do not agree to be audio-recorded during my participation in this study.</b></p>
<b>What are the risks of this research?</b>	You may feel frustrated or uncomfortable discussing some aspects of your personal socio-economic situation or background. You may choose not to answer particular questions or to terminate the interview at any time.

<b>Project Title</b>	<b>University-Going Among Gusii High School Students, Kenya</b>	
<b>What are the benefits of this research?</b>	This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the investigator learn more about your parental role and influence in your child’s aspiration for higher education. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of this parental role and influence.	
<b>Do I have to be in this research? May I stop participating at any time?</b>	Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, however you change your mind, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized in any way.	
<b>What if I have questions?</b>	<p>This research is being conducted by Dr. Jing Lin and Truphena Choti in the Department of Education Leadership, Higher Education, and International Education, College of Education at the University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, USA. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Dr. Jing Lin, EDHI, Room 2115, Benjamin Building, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742, USA. Telephone: 301-405-3568. Email: jinglin@umd.edu.</p> <p>If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: <b>Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; (e-mail) <a href="mailto:irb@deans.umd.edu">irb@deans.umd.edu</a>; (telephone) 301-405-0678</b></p> <p>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</p>	
<b>Statement of Age of Subject and Consent</b>	<p><i>Your signature indicates that:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>you are at least 18 years of age;</i></li> <li>▪ <i>the research has been explained to you;</i></li> <li>▪ <i>your questions have been fully answered; and</i></li> <li>▪ <i>you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project.</i></li> </ul>	
<b>Signature and Date</b>	<b>NAME OF PARTICIPANT</b>	
	<b>SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT</b>	
	<b>DATE</b>	

## TEACHER COUNSELOR CONSENT FORM

<b>Project Title</b>	<b>University-Going Among Gusii High School Students, Kenya</b>
<b>Why is this research being done?</b>	This is a research project being conducted by Dr. Jing Lin and Truphena Choti at the University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, USA. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because your position as a guidance and counselor teacher in this high school principal. The purpose of this research project is to better understand the conception of, and preparation for, higher education opportunity among Gusii high school students (Kenya) and their engagement in the university going process.
<b>What will I be asked to do?</b>	The procedure involves an in-depth interviewing that will last approximately 60-90 minutes. This will be an informal interview with questions aimed at better understanding of your students' conception of higher education and their engagement in the university going process. Questions may explore their understanding of higher education opportunity and conscious preparations and aspirations in accessing the same. The interview will, preferably, be conducted within the school premises; though, this will remain under your prerogative. As a respondent, you may terminate the interview at any time.
<b>What about confidentiality?</b>	<p>We will do our best to keep your personal information confidential. This interview will be audio-recorded. The audio-recording will be stored on a password protected computer. To help protect your confidentiality, your name or other personal information will not be attached to the digital file. Only the researcher will have access to the recording. The recording will be destroyed five years after data collection has been completed. The transcript of the interview will not contain any personal identifying information. In any reports or articles generated from this research project, your identity will be protected.</p> <p>Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you are, or someone else is, in danger or if we are required to do so by law. In accordance with legal requirements and/or professional standards, we will disclose to the appropriate individuals and/or authorities information that comes to our attention concerning child abuse or neglect or potential harm to them or others.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>I agree to allow the student researcher to interview students of my school for the stated purpose of this study.</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>I do not agree to allow the student researcher to interview students of my school for the stated purpose of this study.</b></p>
<b>What are the risks of this research?</b>	You may feel frustrated or uncomfortable discussing some aspects of your counseling experience in this school. You may choose not to answer particular questions or to terminate the interview at any

	time.
<b>Project Title</b>	<b>University-Going Among Gusii High School Students, Kenya</b>
<b>What are the benefits of this research?</b>	This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the investigator to better understand the conception of, and preparation for, higher education opportunity among Gusii high school students (Kenya) and their engagement in the university going process.
<b>Do I have to be in this research? May I stop participating at any time?</b>	Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, however you change your mind, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop from participating at any time, you will not be penalized in any way.
<b>What if I have questions?</b>	<p>This research is being conducted by Dr. Jing Lin and Truphena Choti in the Department of Education Leadership, Higher Education, and International Education, College of Education at the University of Maryland, College Park. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Dr. Jing Lin, EDHI, Room 2115, Benjamin Building, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, USA. Telephone: 301-405-3568. Email: <a href="mailto:jinglin@umd.edu">jinglin@umd.edu</a>.</p> <p>If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: <b>Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; (e-mail) <a href="mailto:irb@deans.umd.edu">irb@deans.umd.edu</a>; (telephone) 301-405-0678</b></p> <p>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</p>
<b>Statement of Age of Subject and Consent</b>	<p><i>Your signature indicates that:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>you are at least 18 years of age;</i></li> <li>▪ <i>the research has been explained to you;</i></li> <li>▪ <i>your questions have been fully answered; and</i></li> <li>▪ <i>you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project.</i></li> </ul>
<b>Signature and Date</b>	<b>NAME OF PARTICIPANT</b>
	<b>SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT</b>
	<b>DATE</b>

## STUDENT ASSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEW

<b>Project Title</b>	<b>University-Going Among Gusii High School Students, Kenya</b>
<b>Why is this research being done?</b>	This is a research project being conducted by Dr. Jing Lin and Truphena Choti at the University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, USA. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a high school student. The purpose of this research project is to better understand the conception of, and preparation for, higher education opportunity among Gusii high school students (Kenya) and their engagement in the university going process.
<b>What will I be asked to do?</b>	We are inviting you to participate in a 60-90 minute long interview about your conception of, and preparation for, higher education and your engagement in the college going process. You may stop the interview at any time for any reason. Your parent(s) or guardian(s) will not be present during the interview. The interview will be conducted within your school premises unless advised, to the contrary, by the school principal.
<b>What about confidentiality?</b>	<p>We will do our best to keep your personal information confidential. This interview will be audio-recorded. The audio-recording will be stored on a password protected computer. To help protect your confidentiality your name or other personal information will not be attached to the digital file. Only the researcher will have access to the recording. The recording will be destroyed five years after data collection has been completed. The transcript of the interview will not contain any personal identifying information. In any reports or articles generated from this research project, your identity will be protected.</p> <p>Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law. In accordance with legal requirements and/or professional standards, we will disclose to the appropriate individuals and/or authorities information that comes to our attention concerning child abuse or neglect or potential harm to you or others.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>I agree to be audio-recorded during my participation in this study.</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>I do not agree to be audio-recorded during my participation in this study.</b></p>
<b>What are the risks of this research?</b>	You may feel frustrated or uncomfortable discussing some aspects of your personal socio-economic situation. You may choose not to answer particular questions or to stop the interview at any time.

<b>Project Title</b>	<b>University-Going Among Gusii High School Students, Kenya</b>	
<b>What are the benefits of this research?</b>	This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the investigator to better understand the conception of, and preparation for, higher education opportunity among Gusii high school students (Kenya) and their engagement in the university going process.	
<b>Do I have to be in this research? May I stop participating at any time?</b>	Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, however you change your mind, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized in any way.	
<b>What if I have questions?</b>	<p>This research is being conducted by Dr. Jing Lin and Truphena Choti in the Department of Education Leadership, Higher Education, and International Education, College of Education at the University of Maryland, College Park. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Dr. Jing Lin, EDHI, Room 2115, Benjamin Building, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, USA. Telephone: 301-405-3568. Email: <a href="mailto:jinglin@umd.edu">jinglin@umd.edu</a>.</p> <p>If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: <b>Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; (e-mail) <a href="mailto:irb@deans.umd.edu">irb@deans.umd.edu</a>; (telephone) 301-405-0678</b></p> <p>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</p>	
	<p><i>Your signature indicates that:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>the research has been explained to you;</i></li> <li>▪ <i>your questions have been fully answered; and</i></li> <li>▪ <i>you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this interview</i></li> </ul>	
<b>Signature and Date</b>	<b>NAME OF STUDENT</b>	
	<b>SIGNATURE OF STUDENT</b>	
	<b>DATE</b>	

## **Interview Guide for Student Respondents**

**Project Title: University-Going Among Gusii High School Students, Kenya**

1. Introductions

### **Family**

2. Tell me a little bit about yourself and your family. Can you tell me about your parents' occupation? How many languages are spoken at home?
3. What kind of conversations do you have about school with your family? Give examples
4. What expectations does your family have for you about school?
5. How did you get to know about your family's expectations?
6. What have your family done or are doing to help you meet the expectations? Give examples
7. Do you feel that you are under pressure to meet these expectations? Please explain
8. At what age did you start reading? What types of reading materials were available in your home when you were growing up?
9. Do your parents coach you on your school work? Do you get any extra help for your school achievement?
10. How are household chores shared amongst your siblings?
11. Do you feel advantaged or disadvantaged by your gender in the way you relate with your family?
12. Have ever made a visit to any of the universities? If yes, how can you describe your experience during the visit? Are you considering joining that university after high school?
13. Can your parents support you to go to a private university if you can not get into the public university?

### **Friends**

14. Do you have any close friends in school? How about outside this school? If yes, are their educational aspirations similar to yours?
15. How did you choose your friends? Do you expect them to go to university?
16. What kind of conversations do you have with your friends about going to university?
17. What do you do when you hang out with your friends? Do your parents know who your friends are? Have they been to your home?

### **Schooling and Preparation**

18. What type of school did you attend for your primary education? How did you fare in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE)?
19. How did you get to enroll in this school? What do you like most about this school? What don't you like about the school?

20. What kind of activities are you involved with in this school?
21. How do you choose your classes? What classes are you enrolled in?
22. What do you think your teachers, principal, and guidance and counselors expect about your education? How do learn about their expectations? Give me examples
23. How often do you engage in conversations with your teachers or counselors about your life after high school? Describe some of the recent conversation you have had with any one of them? Do you think they are approachable and easily available whenever you need them?
24. Do you think the school is preparing you well to pass your qualifying examinations? Please explain.
25. What kind of things you do in school that you think prepare you to pass examinations and join university? What kinds of things that you think are not preparing you towards that goal?

### **Aspirations**

26. When did you first think of going to the university? Who first told you, and who always tells you, about university opportunity? What are your plans for university education?
27. Has any member of your family attended university? What about extended family member(s)? Do you have any role models?
28. What are your immediate and long term plans after high school?
29. Why do you think you need university education? Will university education make a difference in your life? In what ways?
30. How many students from your present school qualify for university admission each year? In your own estimate, do you think you will qualify for university admission in your year?
31. What do you want to be in life in terms of occupation/profession? Who is your role model?
32. How often do you discuss your aspirations for higher education with your parents? Are there any other family members, including the extended family members, who have influenced your university choice process? Do you feel pressured to live up to their expectations?
33. Do you consider university education accessible to you? What are the opportunities and obstacles?

### **Community**

34. Have you shared your educational aspirations with other people outside the family (community)? What are they telling you? What is their reaction?
35. What kind of activities are you involved in your community? Give examples
36. How can you describe your community in terms of how they are involved in your education?



37. Where and how do you spend your school vacations?
38. Do you think your community will be available to offer financial assistance towards your education, if asked to? Please explain why you think so.
39. Do you feel proud of being a Gusii? Does being a Gusii advantage or disadvantage you in the competition for university admission. Give me examples
40. Do you know who your member of parliament is? How often does he/she visit the school? Are there specific things he/she has done to ensure students from your constituency succeed in school?

### **Money and school fees**

41. What is the amount you pay for tuition and other fees? Who pays for your high school education? Is the fee payment prompt? If not, how often are you sent home for failure to clear the fee balance? In making fee payments, do your parents have preferences between you and other siblings?
42. What kinds of conversations do you engage with your family about money? What kind of things does your family spend money on? Does your family save money any more? If yes, for what?
43. In the event you attain university admission requirements, how will you pay the required fees? Are you aware of the availability of financial aid packages offered to eligible university students by the government? How did you learn about it?

## **Discussion Guide for Teacher Counselors**

### **Project Title: University-Going Among Gusii High School Students, Kenya**

1. Introductions

#### **Experience**

2. What made you want to be a guidance and counseling teacher?
3. How long have you been in this school? How long have you served as a guidance and counseling teacher?
4. What is the experience like for you as a counselor working with these students? In this school environment? Do you get to meet all students you advise in a timely manner?

#### **Expectations**

5. What are the options of your students after they complete high school?
6. Where do your students get information about university education?

7. In your opinion, what do you think is the most important thing to do a student aspiring for university education?
8. What are some of the challenges that your students face in trying to meet the requirements for university admission?
9. How does your department or school help students overcome these challenges and improve their chances of getting university admission?
10. How often do you meet with your students? Do you know their current academic standing?
11. For the students selected for the study, how do you rate their level of readiness for university education?
12. In your opinion, are these students motivated towards higher education? Please explain?
13. What are your expectations for these students as far as university-going is concerned?
14. How many students have joined university from this school in the last two years? How will you compare their motivation to the current students? Are they the same or different? Give examples

### **Preparation**

15. How do you prepare your students to pass their qualifying examinations?
16. What types of programs do you have that sensitize your students about university-going? Give examples
17. How many teachers work with you in this department? Did you get the support of class teachers in your work with students? How do involve teachers in your work with students? Give examples
18. Do you organize any kind of trips for your students to visit to universities or any institution of higher learning?
19. How do you reward students who have displayed exemplary performance in their class work? How about the teachers?
20. Are you aware of financial aid programs that are available for students attending universities? Are your students aware? What type of information do you provide to your students about financial aid?

### **Parents and Community**

21. How often do you communicate with the parents/ guardians? How involved are the parents in the university-going process?
22. Do you have the necessary support from your colleagues and the community to achieve the goals set?
23. Do you invite people from the community (politicians, civil servants) to speak to your students? Give examples
24. Can you describe the work of the parent/teacher association in this school? How have they supported students towards academic achievement? Give examples

25. How do you describe the attitude of the Gusii community about higher education? Are students encouraged to pursue university education?
26. What does community expects students to do after completing university education? How do you get to learn about the community's expectations?
27. What will you do to help Gusii students understand about higher education opportunity? In what would you motivate high schools students towards higher education?
28. Do you have anything else you will like to share?

### **Interview Questions for Parents/Guardians**

#### **Project Title: University-Going Among Gusii High School Students, Kenya**

##### **1. Introductions**

##### **Family**

2. Tell me a little about yourself ( brief biography- education, occupation,)
3. Tell me a little about your family (how many children, ages, schools, expectations for your children, etc)
4. What type of reading materials do you have at home for your children (books, newspapers)?
5. How are household chores shared amongst your children (boys and girls)?
6. How often do you discuss issues with them? Do you get to talk about their school work? Do you get time to discuss their progress reports at the end of each term?

##### **Schooling and Preparation**

7. What type of school did your child attend for his/her primary education (public/private)?
8. Why did you choose to enroll him/her at the current high school?
9. Do you know your child's classroom teacher? In the past year, how many times have visited your child's school?
10. How often do you communicate with his/her teacher, guidance and counselor or principal? What do you talk about?
11. What have you done, and what are you doing to ensure your child's success in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education and eventual admission into university? Give specific examples
12. Do you think your child is well prepared for the national examinations (KSCE)?
13. How and where does your child spend his/her school holiday breaks? Is your child involved in any community or church activities/
14. Have any of your children been to a university? How many and where? Have they graduated?
15. What program of study will you want your child to enroll and why? What value do you attach to university education?

16. Describe your child's friends. What impact, do you think, they have on your child?
17. Describe your relationship with your child? Are you proud of him/her? Tell me about one or two of your most memorable experiences with your child?
18. Do you think your child has some influence in the family, extended family, and beyond, say, in the village, community, with friends, etc? If yes, what kind of influence is he/she asserting? Please explain.
19. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your child?

### **Money and School Fees**

20. How do you raise his/her tuition and fees? What are your main sources of income?
21. Do you have any financial challenges in meeting tuition and fees for your child's secondary school education? If yes, give examples of such situations. Do you seek outside help to pay the fees? Who helps you most?
22. What sort of things do you spend money on? Do you have any savings? What do you save for?

### **Community and Support networks**

23. Do you have any kind of support networks within the extended family or community that helps you raise your children?
24. What kind of support do you children have from these relationships that prepare them to pass examinations and join university?
25. Do you think your child is advantaged or disadvantaged in the competition for university admission by studying in a Gusii school?
26. Do you think Gusii schools prepare students well for national examinations? Why do you think so? Give specific examples.
27. Do you think your extended family and neighbors, if called, can help you raise tuition and fees to pay for your child's university education? Have you sought assistance in the past to pay your child's secondary school fees? Explain the type of response you received?
28. Do community members hold any kind of meetings to discuss Gusii education standards? Have you attended any of those meetings?
29. How about your local member of parliament? Do you think your MP is accessible? What kind of projects/programs has your MP initiated to raise the standards of education? Do you think your child has benefited from these programs? Give me examples
30. Do you or any of your family members ever held a political office? Do you or any of your family members have any influence on how the community decisions are made? How about the way voting for political office?

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