

Maasai Girls' Education Aspirations and Socio-Cultural Constraints: Reflections from Monduli Tanzania

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Abstract

The paper aimed to explore the Maasai girls' education aspirations and the social cultural constraints they face in their effort towards acquiring formal education in Monduli, Tanzania. Capability Approach (CA) was used to guide the understanding of girls' education aspirations. The study employed ethnographic research design by involving 30 participants across the community, including elders, parents, traditional leaders, children (school and out-of-school) and the district education officer. Participant observations and ethnographic interviews were used to collect data for a period of three months. Data were analysed thematically. As a result, the study revealed that girls and some other members in the Maasai society had positive views about girls' education. Girls had education aspirations of acquiring specific careers like being nurses, teachers and doctors. Their aspirations were, however, constrained by some traditional beliefs and practices such as early marriage, girls' circumcision and esoto (a night dance between young girls and the Moran). These traditional beliefs made the Maasai girls' aspirations unfulfilled as they slowly found themselves accustomed to these traditional arrangements while losing the ability to develop capabilities they would need to attain their education aspirations. The study, thus, argues that obstacles that hinder attainment of girls' aspirations on education need to be eliminated from the community. Formal education should enhance girl's agency in order to develop the capabilities they need for their social functioning.

Keywords: Maasai; girls' education; education aspirations; constraints to girls' education; Tanzania

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1. Introduction

Education provision for pastoral communities in general and for girls in particular is not only a global concern but also a matter of urgency (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO, 2010). While it was anticipated that by 2015 all children including girls; children in difficult situations and children from ethnic minorities would have an access to formal education of good quality (Sifuna, 2005), millions of children from indigenous communities are still out of school and, of those, girls constitute the majority (UNESCO, 2010). This has been a challenge to many countries in providing education especially to pastoral groups for a considerable period of time (Sharma, 2011). It is estimated that there are about 21.8 million pastoralists' children who are out of school world-wide (Carr-Hill, 2012). Despite the international and national commitments to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of achieving Universal Primary Education (UPE) by 2005 and eliminating gender inequality in primary education by 2005 (UNESCO, 2010); and given that the deadline for achieving Education for All (EFA) goals and MDGs has passed, pastoralists are still not fully accommodated in the formal education systems. Girls in pastoral communities all over the world continue to suffer the acute educational disadvantage (Dyer, 2010). There has been a persistent disparity in access, participation and learning outcomes, particularly for the most vulnerable groups and minorities. A stronger focus and consideration of the hard-to-reach groups including pastoralists is required (UNESCO, 2010). Thus, the post-2015 agenda requires greater commitment to these groups, specifically by focusing on learning, equity and equality, quality education and skills development (UNESCO, 2013).

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Tanzania is among the African countries that have a considerable number of pastoralists including Maasai, Ilparakuyo (Wakwavi), Barbaig, Kurya and the Ilarusa (Waarusha). Despite that the government has over time claimed to be committed to educating all girls and boys in pastoral communities as in other parts of the world, little has been achieved for boys and even less for girls (Mwengio & Mlekwa, 2003; United Republic of Tanzania (URT, 2007). This study is confined to Monduli district, where the Maasai traditional pastoral activities are predominant. It is estimated that in 2009, the Monduli district enrolled only 49.6% of primary school-aged girls and 69% of the school aged boys (URT, 2009). Similarly, in 2011 the district's Net Enrolment Rate (NER) was 78% where boys' enrolment was higher than girls' (Monduli District Socio-Economic Profile, 2011). The government's emphasis has been on enrolling equal numbers of boys and girls with little or no consideration of what children particularly girls face in participating in education and fulfilling their education aspirations. Children from pastoral communities in Monduli still do not receive their right to education (Oxfam, 2005b). Girls have continually been under-represented in primary education provision and in other levels of education mainly in enrolment, participation, retention and completion rates (Mbogoma, 2005; Allay, 2008; Raymond, 2009; Shao, 2010).

Previous research have studied the relative number of girls and boys enrolled and the reasons for dropouts (Kateri, 2008); under-representation of pastoral community in primary education (Raymond, 2009); assessment of Primary Education Development Plan (PEDP) in providing education to pastoralists (Olengaire, 2009); understanding pastoral community perspectives regarding girls education (Raymond, 2015) but no study has particularly explored the girls aspirations for formal education and the social cultural constraints they encounter in their efforts to acquire formal education, both from within or outside their community. The current study was, therefore, conducted to fill this gap.

1.1 Research Questions

The study was guided by three research questions:

- i. What are the girls' views on formal education?
- ii. What are the Maasai girls' education aspirations?
- iii. What challenges do Maasai girls encounter in acquiring formal education?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Gender and Education: Global Overview

Gender parity and equality in education constitutes a basic human right as well as an important means of achieving other social and economic outcomes (UNESCO, 2012). This has been a concern in the list of international agenda as it is thought of as a bridge, in connecting efforts geared towards promoting development and reduction poverty at both global and local levels. The MDGs required gender equality to be achieved by 2015 not only for gender equality in education, but also it was expected that education would promote gender equality in other areas (Arnot & Fennell, 2008; UNESCO, 2003). Although narrowing the gender gap in primary enrolment is mentioned as among the EFA successes since 2000 (UNESCO, 2012); Aikman and Unterhalter (2005) posit that most EFA programmes have only focused on easing general constraints on access without planning for specific steps that could ensure that girls benefit equally from the new opportunities created. Similarly, gender equality in education has been associated with an access problem and statistics regarding the promotion of out-of-school girls have been mentioned frequently (United Nations Girls Education Initiative, UNGEI, 2008). Nonetheless, some countries including Tanzania were

not able to statistically achieve the expected gender parity in primary and secondary education enrolments by 2015 (UNESCO, 2015).

There is a need not only to emphasize access as a means of acquiring gender equality, but also to transform or improve gender relations in educational institutions (Arnot & Fennel, 2007). Having unequal number of girls and boys in school is just one step towards gender equality progress. This is because:

Gender equality is more than making sure that girls and boys have equal access and progress through school...it is also about ensuring equal treatment in school; that is providing a safe and secure school and supporting learning environment for all and equal learning outcomes that help in building equitable access to socio-economic and political life in adulthood (UNESCO, 2012, p. 6).

Thus, more effort is required to ensure that both girls and boys have equal access to educational opportunities and they achieve similar educational outcomes (UNESCO, 2012). This not only requires educational reforms, but also a changing gender relations within families, and the society as whole (Arnot & Fennell, 2008). It is in this view that that having an understanding of the role of other dimensions pertinent to the notion of agenda that the study was conducted, not in an attempt to denigrate international development agenda, but based on the concern that more inclusive approach is required to lay down equal level playing ground for both boys and girls at school. Having an understanding of the pastoral community girl's views of their education aspirations is part of creating an inclusive space for girls to equally participate in formal education.

2.2 Education among Pastoral Community Girls in Tanzania

Primary education in Tanzania is compulsory and all children regardless of their sex or geographical location are required to be enrolled in primary school from the age of seven. The Education and Training Policy (ETP) (1995) promotes equal access to education for all without any form of discrimination. The Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP) I and II also aimed to improve both access to and the quality of primary education for all children (URT, 2004). Despite these provisions, inequality among children still persists especially for those from rural areas and in relation to pastoralist girls.

Girls generally, and those from pastoral communities in particular face more educational challenges than boys (Lema, Mbilinyi & Rajan, 2004; Kariuki & Puja, 2006; Shao, 2010). Pastoral community girls' marginalization is evident in the education provision right from pre-primary school to tertiary levels of education in Tanzania. Additionally, girls' performance and transition rate to secondary education have been lower than that of boys (Raymond, 2009; Woods, 2009). Although the government has made significant progress in providing primary education to the majority of Tanzanians, yet Maasai children are still lagging behind. Previous studies (Ndagala, 2004; Mbogoma, 2005; Allay, 2008; Tanzania Education Network (TENMET), 2009) indicate that Maasai pastoralists have the highest illiteracy rate (75%) and the lowest enrolment rate (5%) in formal education, which constitutes the lowest rate in the world. Although PEDP has had remarkable success in ensuring access for most Tanzanians, this has not been the case for pastoral groups (Olengaire, 2009). Although it is believed that Tanzania has had achieved gender parity in primary education and that it is among the countries attained UPE by 2015 (UNESCO, 2010), yet more challenges remain for pastoral community girls in terms of access to and participation in primary education (Ndagala, 2004; Mbogoma, 2005; Allay, 2008).

Strategies in place have achieved little success in promoting education provision for girls (Allay, 2008; Shao, 2010). Although PEDP implementation increased the number of schools in all pastoralist districts and the enrolment of children has grown significantly, pastoralist girls' access, participation and completion rates are still poor and their transition rate to other levels of education is also poor (Leggett, 2005). Boarding schools have been started with little success (Bishop, 2007). To date Monduli has three boarding schools (Bishop, 2007; Shao, 2010), but the number of girls in the schools is always low. Similarly, the Emusoi centre, which was established to provide girls from pastoralist and hunter-gatherer societies in Arusha region with the opportunity to participate in formal education, is located in Monduli district, but girls' situation is still poor and their enrolment has not changed over time (Monduli District socio economic Profile, 2011). These trends signify the serious challenges that girls face in education provision in the district.

Apparently, if the government was to realise its commitments to EFA and MDGs and enhance pastoral community girls' participation in education, the government should understand and respond to people's needs, by taking into account all forms of educational inequalities (i.e., gender, class, ethnicity, and physical disability) and the fact that girls face more than one source of disadvantage ((Aikman & Unterhalter, 2005). The government also ought to develop context-appropriate strategies to overcome these multiple impediments (social, cultural and economic) that keep girls out of school (Aikman & Unterhalter, 2005). This is based on the consideration that gender aspects of education, contained in the Dakar framework for action, do not provide a wider understanding of the contexts in which inequality takes place (Unterhalter & Heslop, 2011). It is, therefore, important to specifically understand minority and indigenous girls' lives to ensure that the strategies are effective (Ransay, 2009). This could be in line with the concerns that the current study was conducted to establish. That is, an understanding of girls' education aspirations and the challenges they encounter in their struggle to acquire formal education.

2.3 Theoretical Underpinnings

The understanding of the Maasai girls' education aspirations is guided by Capability Approach (CA) as propounded by Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2000). CA is a framework that guides the conceptualization and evaluation of individual's well-being, inequality, social arrangements, design of policies and proposals about social change in societies (Robeyns, 2003). CA dwells within the concepts/terms of '*Capability*', '*Functioning*' and '*Agency*' (Sen, 1999). Capability is an opportunity or a freedom to achieve what an individual considers valuable. It is a person's opportunity and ability to generate valuable outcome, taking into account relevant personal characteristics and external factors. It is being or doing what one values or one has a reason to value. Capabilities are people's potentials to achieve functioning (Sen, 2002; Nussbaum, 2000; Walker & Unterhalter, 2010). Functioning is being and doing what one considers valuable. It is a person's freedom to be or do things that contribute to a person's wellbeing (Sen, 1999; Robeyns, 2003). Agency is a person's ability to pursue and realise goals one values or has a reason to value, the goals that are important for life an individual wishes to lead (Walker, 2006). Sen (1999) views education as an overarching capability which should expand other capabilities, whether it being gaining skills, gaining opportunities that these skills afford, or gaining other intrinsically important capabilities such as critical thought, respect and empathy (Sen, 1999). Education is also a capability in itself (Walker, 2006) and is also understood here to be made up of a number of separate, but intersecting and overlapping constitutive capabilities (Walker, 2006). CA enables us to question on what education enables us to do or be.

3. Methodology

This was a qualitative study that employed an ethnographic research design to learn about people's experience from their context. It aimed to discover the subjective experience and meaning of social actions in the context in which Maasai people live, and the meanings individuals ascribe to girls' education and how the socio-cultural context influenced individuals' aspirations, experiences and interpretation of their social reality, in this case, girls' aspirations to education (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Hennink *et al.*, 2011). For three months I stayed within the social world of the Maasai community, observing, recording and analysing social structures in their setting, paying particular attention to their social, cultural, familial, political and economic lives in relation to girls' aspirations and opportunities to participate in formal education (Delamont, 2012; Denscombe, 2010). Thirty people were involved in the study including traditional leaders (1), parents (16, 8 males and 8 females), elders (6), village leader (1) and school and out-of-school children (8). The aim was to represent all segments of the population in the studied area in order to capture wider views of each group regarding girls' education. The consideration in participants' selection was based on their proximity to the *boma* where I was hosted, participants' availability and willingness to participate in the study. Participants were selected using purposive and opportunistic procedures. However, this number is only indicative of the ethnographic interviews included and the notes taken for the study. This implies that more people may have contributed their views in various occasions and interaction during my stay in the field. Data were collected using participant observation (Angrosino & Perez, 2003) and ethnographic interviews (Heyl, 2001; LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). Participant observation allowed me to enter into a close and prolonged relationship with Maasai people in their everyday lives to understand better their beliefs, motivations, and behaviours in relation to girls' education than using other approaches (Angrosino & Perez, 2003). This method was considered appropriate because it is not only at the heart of the ethnography but also it allowed me to see things in the best way possible as things could actually happen in the participants' context and perspective. It enabled me to work with all participants at grassroots level and learn their experience in their natural setting. Ethnographic interviews are good in grasping people's point of view, which is the core of ethnography and in assessing peoples' perception, meanings, definition of situations and their construction of reality (Delamont, 2012; Fetterman, 2010; LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). In this study interviews were conducted alongside observations to allow researchers to discuss, probe emerging issues, and/or ask questions about the unusual events in a naturalistic manner (Heyl, 2001; LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). The interviews were guided by un-structured open ended questions; follow up questions and probes focusing on research questions. This was an appropriate method because it was useful in gaining insights about peoples' behaviours, opinion, beliefs, feelings, emotions, and experience about their social life, culture, economic activities and their relationship and considerations about girls' participation in primary education. They were also useful in organizing individuals' perception of reality (Fetterman, 2004).

The study used thematic analysis using the analysis procedures developed by (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This was used to analyse stories from ethnographic in-depth interviews, informal conversations and participants' observation notes. This method of analysis focuses on the content of the stories and in identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns within data. The study adopted the analysis of the steps provided by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87-93). In this manner, I started transcribing the tape recorded interviews and conversation, organizing and making sense of the observation notes and translating parts of the data. I developed a written record of interviews and various informal conversations. I then translated data from

Kiswahili to English. After data had been transcribed, translated and anonymised, they were coded. I used both hand coding and the software for qualitative data analysis NVivo 10 in coding. I started coding using NVivo 10 before I had coded them within the codes created in NVivo. After coding followed report writing. Thematic analysis was appropriate as it enabled me identifying patterns, themes and accounts of events arising across interviews and across other data sources.

Various ethical issues were considered including procedures for gaining access to the community and to individual participants. Alongside seeking official permission for conducting the research, considerations of the unique Maasai traditions, norms, culture and practices was important in the entire research. Based on the remote nature of the Maasai community, two research assistants (male and female) were used to assist in language translation and in helping reaching the participants. Informed consent was orally sought. This is because most participants were not able to read and write; and those who could read were not able to sign the consent form throughout the study. School children consent was sought from the head-teacher and the parents while out of school children consent was sought through their parents. Privacy and confidentiality was protected during data collection and writing of report, through the use of pseudo names and not exposing any information that participants wanted it to be concealed.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Girls' Educational Aspirations

4.1.1 Career Opportunities

Acquiring various career opportunities was among the issues that determined girls' (school and out of school) aspirations. The girls explained that they wanted to participate in formal education in order to become teachers, nurses or doctors when they grow up. They explained that attaining those careers could be a way of changing their lives and other women's lives. Schoolgirls explained that they needed to do well in primary school to proceed with secondary education which would enable them to fulfil their aspirations. They were determined to study hard in order to achieve what they believed they could achieve. During interviews one girl participant said:

...it is good to be educated... I thank God that they have not forced me out of school... I want to be a nurse because I want to help my parents in future... they live a very difficult life and I don't want them to continue living this kind of life...
(Teresia school girl)

The above statements show that girls are aware of the career opportunities available for them in their environment. I observed that their aspirations are closely related to what was available in the community. This shows that girls' aspirations are formed in their interaction with other people in the village (Appadurai, 2004). Girls aspire to becoming nurses, teachers or doctors, but in a rural community like theirs, it could not be possible to realise their potentials as there were various constraining factors connected with the wider society beliefs and their desires on what they would see other people doing around them. Teachers, nurses and doctors are the people that Maasai girls interact with in school, the local clinic and hospitals, thereby influencing their educational aspirations. Indeed, in Maasai society, these were new opportunities as very few health or education professionals were of the Maasai community. This observation corroborates the evidence established in a study by Barrett

(2005) which revealed that teachers were seen as a ‘mirror’ in the sense that that when pupils look at them they were inspired to develop possibilities for their own future.

Also, Maasai girls’ educational aspirations correspond with Walker’s (2006) argument that education has an influential role in helping each person to achieve things like getting jobs and being able to take up other economic opportunities. Girls believed they are able to acquire formal education, and so they valued its opportunities and the possibility of realising their potential and objecting the view that girls were less productive (Raynor, 2008b). It is also argued that a person’s socio-economic condition, attitudes and beliefs about one’s own capabilities are important for developing the aspirations of both parents and children (Behnke, Piercy, & Diversi, 2004). Education was regarded as a device that when used properly would give girls the freedom to pursue their careers and fulfil aspirations they value. Education would also develop their agency to achieve happy life. This means that the values that girls had concerning their well-being largely depended on how much education had given them opportunity to realise aspirations in their context at a given point of time. Thus, Maasai girls’ agency is reflected in their awareness of the efforts required to attain what they desired or valued.

4.1.2 Contributions to Family Income

Girls’ views and educational aspirations were also influenced by their desire to contribute to family income. The girls believed that careers they aspired would enable them to earn an income which would eventually help to earn their own lives, life of their parents and their future families. Despite this hope, the Maasai girls expressed that some parents would not allow them to participate in post-primary education. The District Education Officer (DEO) made a similar comment as he said that “most Maasai parents do not allow them to continue with secondary education, which in most cases prevented girls from realizing their aspirations”.

Regarding Maasai girls’ aspirations the one school girl participant said:

...the education I get I hope will help me get a job ...It will help me to get a job which will give me money to live a good life. This education will also help us to educate our people; it will help to change them especially when they will see, we have succeeded, live a good life and help our parents to live a good life.... I want to study hard so that I may not live the difficult life like the one that my mother lives...I don’t want to marry before I get a job...look at those married while young, they are not able to support their children...they cannot buy them a tablet... (Tumaini, School girl)

The quotes above represent a relationship between parents’ aspirations and those of the children. Wahl and Blackhurst (2000) posit that children’s career aspirations relate to parents’ socio-economic conditions and occupation. Girls’ desire to contribute to the family income stood as a contextual influence which was also associated with the difficult circumstances women and girls were facing in their lives. This reflects the socialization of indigenous people and the pastoral community, in particular, in that most of the time they were not only thinking of their own lives but also in relation to the need of the community (Dyer, 2010a). Girls understand that their acquisition of formal education would enable other members of the community to change for better living and their family members would benefit from their education acquired.

4.1.3 Escape from Traditions and Customs

The study revealed that girls' participation in formal education was regarded as a way of doing away with community traditional practices, such as early marriage, circumcision and attending esoto, which girls are subjected to; hence, hindering their participation in formal education. Girls demonstrated that they felt safe and secure from such traditional practices when attending school, especially boarding schools. The school was regarded and refuge and a secure place for girls as it helped girls to avoid from being forced into early marriage. One a schoolgirl said that:

...it is good for me that I am going to school; I will not marry while young... on the other side of the village a little girl like this one (pointing to a little girl) is married...those who don't go to school laugh at us and call us foolish... we just leave them because they don't know what is in school... (Teresia, school girl)

Based on the girl's experience, schooling was safe for them to escape from forced early marriage and other traditional malpractices. Shao (2010) concurs with the claim in that going to school, especially boarding schools, rescued some girls from being subjected to circumcision and early marriage. Although previous research on gender violence had found that girls' safety is threatened in schools in other parts of sub-Saharan Africa (Dunne, Humphreys & Leach, 2006; Leach, 2008; Parkes & Heslop, 2011), yet girls participated in the current study were positive about the school environment and the learning process. Vaughan (2007) is, however, critical that even when school may be friendly and free from gender bias, girls are still likely to encounter particular pressures to conform to certain gender roles and identities in the wider society after school. School, at times, can be a place for both freedom and unfreedoms (Unterhalter, 2003). There is a need to be aware that although school is ideally expected to contribute to the formation of people's capabilities, it sometimes may constrain their development (Walker, 2006, 2007). This is, especially, when the school environment is not conducive enough to support girls' learning.

Formal education would, therefore, provide girls with the ability to pursue economic opportunities that would enable them to gain independence from traditional marriages (Lesorogoli, 2008). The girls in the study viewed education as a way of empowering and increasing their potential and of transforming gender relations that still discriminate Maasai women and girls (cf. Sen, 1999). Thus, a chance to participate in formal education relieved the girls as it provided them with the impetus to forge the way forward in fulfilling their aspirations.

5. Constraints to Girls' Education Aspirations

The study discovered that besides the contextual circumstances, there were some specific traditional practices that negatively influenced girls' educational aspirations and their participation in formal education. Such practices are discussed in the following sub-sections:

5.1.1 Girls' Circumcisions

All participants stated the existence of women circumcision and its continued practices and impact on girls' participation in education and in achieving their aspirations. Male elders explained that it is impossible to find a Maasai woman who is not circumcised. It was also difficult to let the Maasai girls go uncircumcised. Elders confirmed that it is a norm that women must be circumcised. These participants said:

... it is impossible for a parent to leave your child go without that thing (circumcision)...it is a curse and it brings misfortune... ...the fact is that no matter or how much you will be telling the Maasai about the danger of doing this...they will

only agree with you but in practice...it's something we cannot stop in our culture ...
(Menyelayo, a father)

It is believed that, it is a curse to have a woman not circumcised in the homestead. It was, therefore, impossible for the Maasai man to choose to marry uncircumcised girl. Parents could not allow their daughters grow without being circumcised, while knowing that they daughter should get married in future. It was further explained that if a girl becomes pregnant before circumcision, such a girl will never be respected as mature person in that homestead to death. Mothers supported this belief by explaining that, it was impossible for women to abandon circumcisions for now. It is worth mentioning that women were so aloof on the issue of girls' circumcision. Some did not even want to respond to issues related to it when they were requested to talk of girls' circumcision. A few of them confirmed its prevalence and the impact it had on girls' education. They were affirmed that those who choose not to circumcise their daughters were discriminated, despised, mocked and neglected by not only men who never wanted to marry uncircumcised girls but also their peers and other members of the community. Uncircumcised women are disrespected even by children and were regarded unfit in the society.

These findings confirm the conventional understanding about female circumcision among the Maasai as a passage of rite, signifying that the girl is now mature ready to marry. It also resonates with Lesorogoli's, (2008) findings among the Samburu women that traditionally young women who had not yet been circumcised were not accepted by their peers and other members of the society. In this way, girls' circumcision hindered their aspirations and participation in education mainly because traditionally circumcised girls are not allowed to go to the night dances; they are not allowed to go for pastures and they are also not allowed to go out of their home without their mothers. It, therefore, follows that circumcised girls do not go to school. Those circumcised, while in school they stop schooling as they cannot go to school with their mothers.

However, there has been a change after the government have had serious and continuous follow up on the matter. Recently, the speed has also been slow after legal measures had been allowed to be taken against people who would be caught circumcising girls. It is, therefore, likely that if legal measures are taken against parents who do not want to allow girls to participate in formal education, it may help in reducing circumcision practices in the Maasai society. It in line with this form of belief that the current study argues that not only that women circumcision was practiced as part of the rite of passage from childhood to adulthood, but also it is about women and the society's identity and the way to fulfilling their cultural mind-set as it is a curse for a Maasai woman to go without circumcision.

5.1.2 Early Marriages

Pre-arranged early marriages among the Maasai society were still conducted to date, although posed a great hindrance to girls' education and aspirations. Fathers choose the husbands for their daughters, while their daughters are still very young and sometimes even before they are born. In fact, fathers plan and arrange for the destiny of their daughters before they know what the girls' would aspire to or what the girls would take for their entire lives. Early marriage was found to have three dimensions in relation to the Maasai traditions and economic gains.

The first dimension is based on the fact that early marriage was used as a means through which parents acquired cattle. This was noted to be a common practice where parents expect

to receive cattle in exchange to their married daughters. Participants revealed that sometimes they received up to ten cows for one girl. They explained the way fathers allowed men to book their girls for marriage regardless of the age of the daughter. However, some participants on this benefit had said:

...I feel bad when my daughter is forced to get married...I know the kind of life she is going to live...sometimes we even cry with them because we know it from our own experiences... it is not something one can run to... it is burden...as for our daughter we have no control of the issue at all...we just witness our girls going but we know they will only be happy for one day and the rest of the days will be all pain...
(Naishie, a mother)

The second dimension is based on the Maasai belief that it is a taboo for the Maasai woman or girl to get pregnant before marriage. Parents, therefore, found it better to arrange for an early marriage in order to avoid breaching the taboo which they believed it could bring a curse or misfortune into their family. Lesorogoli (2008) argues that among the Samburu, girls are circumcised while still young due to the fear that when they go to school they might become pregnant while uncircumcised.

The third dimension is that Maasai men are afraid that if their daughters get education they will refuse to marry the son whose parents had chosen for them. Fathers explained that they would not love their daughters to marry out of their community by the waswahili (non Maasai). Maasai men believe that educating or sending a girl to school is giving her a ticket to let the child go outside their society. One father said:

...parents get disappointed to educate girls because when they receive it and get mixed with other people ...they choose and agree to marry non Maasai men... most parents don't want that...because most of these girls have their chosen husbands already...thus people are trying but the girls disappoint them... (Lobulu, a father)

The above discussion reveals the way Maasai girls were moved by other people's minds and decisions. The findings show the way girls fail to practice their agency in order to fulfil their aspirations as they have no decisions over themselves. This, again, corroborates is previous study's evidence that that early marriage is a barrier to girls' education and aspirations because girls are expected to leave school in order to take care of their homes and children (Jasen & Thornton, 2003). These findings are also in line with Gutman and Akerman (2008) who argued that some people's aspirations are constrained by their parents' choices that lead Maasai girls leaving school or becoming pregnant.

5.1.3 Esoto

Participants had different views regarding esoto. While some participants revealed that *Esoto* existed and had serious negative impact on girls both at school and out of school girls; others could deny of its existence, and that only those who live in the remote village would practice it. During interviews, while male elders wanted *esoto* to continue, female elders explained that it was no longer important since it just increased pains to mothers. Male elders were of the view that the Moran group which does not go through esoto is regarded as incomplete and hopeless. Mothers were also of the view that *esoto* was about destroying their daughters. Some fathers, however, admitted that *esoto* dance had serious impact on girls' health and their access, attendance and participation in educational activities. Apart from causing physical damage to girls, it also made Maasai girls reluctant to schooling and when these girls

became pregnant as a result of *esoto* they were segregated from other members of the society. These fathers during interview said:

...*esoto* has so many bad effects to the girls (some become pregnant before they are circumcised; at times they are injured in the process and over bleed....you know the moran are grown-ups and their body structures are quite different from the girls who are too young to manage them ... (Lobulu, a father)

...I agree with you that *esoto* affects girls education because we have been experiencing many girls going with men and drop from school... (Makaa, a male elder)

It was also revealed that it was difficult for girls to refuse to go because the Morans despise them of not being original Maasai girls. One school girl pointed out that some fathers despised mothers who could not allow the girls to attend *esoto*. School girls and boys further showed that while some school girls refuse to get involved in such practice; there were some of them who could go to *esoto* during school days and they completely failed to study in the following day because they apparently looked tired and sleepy. One school girls said:

.....some school girls who still go for *esoto*...they fail to come to school in the following day...when you ask them...they tell you it is none of your business...but the fact is that they came home late and failed to wake up in the morning...those who go to *esoto* and still come to school, they are not able to learn in school... they sleep from the beginning of the class to the end, they cannot understand what is being taught and they are not able to write anything... (Teresia, a school girl)

These findings imply that girls' aspirations and participation in education are matter of concerns that that are constrained many factors. *Esoto* being one of them is a practice that is destructive to girls and the continued belief that this practice would continue is detrimental to Maasai girls' participation in education and the realisation of their aspirations. Surprisingly, it was also noted that even when some girls who had some levels of awareness refused to attend *esoto*, instead of being encouraged, they were mocked and rejected by the peers. Bad enough, those who were expected to protect them from participating in *esoto* i.e., their parents and close relatives, they were the ones who pushed them into such practices. In this way, Girls' agency was so engulfed in such a way that they could not get even a little time and opportunity to practicing it. The girls' aspirations and choice to participate in education were; thus, mainly hindered by the community's arrangements and cultural beliefs and these negatively affected the girls' education aspirations; their functioning within and out of the community and the development of their valued capabilities.

6. Conclusions

Unlike in the past, Maasai girls and the society at large have positive views about girls' education. Girls in particular, are aware of the importance of formal education in changing their life situation and other women in the society. Girls both at school and those out-of-schools greatly aspired for formal education which they believe can enable them earn their lives and the lives of their families. They also believe that formal education would enable them change and abandon the oppressive Maasai traditional beliefs and practices that continued to defeat women in the society. Despite the girls' positive views and aspirations, most of these girls' aspirations remain unfulfilled mainly due to traditionally predominant beliefs and practices such as early marriage, girls' circumcision and *esoto*. Due to these, Girls' agency is, therefore, affected and the development of the capabilities they need for

their social functioning is limited. Thus, obstacles hampering girls' participation in education need to be abolished in the Maasai communities and the society at large. This is due the fact that, women are an important agency of change that could be used to transform the Maasai society especially through education (Raymond, 2015). They need to be empowered socially, emotionally and economically and this would strengthen the girls' capacity to aspire for better future by avoiding oppressive traditional practices that affect their participation in education.

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