Mentoring for Kenya's Marginalized Girls
Benefits, Challenges, and Policies

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AED   Academy for Educational Development

AGI-K   Adolescent Girls Initiative–Kenya

APHRC   Africa Population and Health Research Center

BALIKA   Bangladeshi Association for Life Skills, Income, and Knowledge for Adolescents

CASEL   Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning

CHATS   Creating Healthy Approaches to Success

FAWE   Forum for African Women Educationalists

FGM   female genital mutilation

FORWARD   Foundation for Women's Health, Research, and Development

GBV   gender-based violence

GCN   Girl-Child Network

GoK   Government of Kenya

IPA   Innovation for Poverty Action

KNBS   Kenya National Bureau of Statistics

MoEST   Kenya Ministry of Education Science and Technology

UNGEI   United Nations Girls' Education Initiative

WERK   Women Educational Researchers of Kenya

WHO   World Health Organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Although data are scarce about mentoring programs—especially for girls—in primary schools in low-income areas (both globally and in Kenya), those who have provided such programs have seen some positive effects. As a result, many girls who would probably have dropped out of school have instead improved their academic achievements, increased their attendance records and stayed in school longer—often because they have delayed early marriages, which occur as early as age 13 years. Also, mentors help girls acquire life skills to navigate the transition from childhood to adolescence, overcome negative peer pressure, avoid risky sexual behavior, give birth to their first children at a later age, change negative attitudes toward education, deal more effectively with problems related to female genital mutilation (FGM) and manage menstruation while in school.

However, despite their huge potential, the mentoring programs/approaches for girls are weak due to the following factors: (1) a lack of clarity of what mentoring is and is not; (2) weak selection criteria for those girls who need mentoring the most; (3) a lack of systematic data collection to determine the programs' effectiveness; (4) too few mentors, who include teachers and peer educators; (5) inadequate training of mentors; (6) a lack of mentoring policies and guidelines to implement the programs; (7) a one-size-fits-all mentoring approach that does not allow for the various conditions of poor girls in different cultural contexts and stages of adolescence; (8) few female teachers in the schools, which means girls have few role models; (9) weak strategies to address existing gender stereotypes and cultural norms and taboos; (10) an overextended curriculum and (11) an education system that overemphasizes the end of cycle examinations, which in turn means that schools have little time to focus on mentoring activities.

Mentoring addresses these problems: gender-based violence (GBV); early and child marriages; FGM; menstrual management and hygiene; risky sexual behavior; truancy, drug abuse, and other negative behavior; subjugation of girls and women in poor communities; and life skills and academic achievement.

Recommendations for strengthening mentoring programs and policies, which are discussed in sections 3 and 4 below, include: Considering the specific context and age of the girls who will be mentored when designing and creating policies and strategies to support mentoring; combining life skills education with mentoring; developing comprehensive criteria for selecting girls who would most benefit from mentoring; and institutionalizing mentoring in the education sector to ensure implementation.

This policy paper draws upon a desk review of reports from the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI), various other institutions, and the Kenya Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MoEST); stakeholder consultations; and a school survey using both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The stakeholders interviewed were from organizations running mentoring programs in Kenya and were members of the National Steering Committee charged with developing a mentoring policy for Kenyan schools. The paper also includes recommendations from experts who design and implement mentoring programs in marginalized Kenyan communities and elsewhere.

A case study of the Opportunity Schools Mentoring Program, sponsored by the Women Educational Researchers of Kenya (WERK), was also included.

A three-stage sampling strategy was used to select the schools to be surveyed with respect to their mentoring approaches and practices. First, the author identified the sample, which consisted of 11 counties that have low access and retention rates *below* the national average (which is 86 percent and 83 percent, respectively). The second stage involved identifying 228 primary schools in these counties (out of a total of 2,194) that had retention rates *above* the national average. The third stage involved studying 63 of these schools where girls performed relatively well over the last three years. Of these, the author interviewed teachers from 43 schools (61 percent of the schools) by telephone; this number reflects the fact that the other schools could not be reached by telephone.

Mentoring for Kenya's Marginalized Girls: Benefits, Challenges, and Policies

Joyce Kinyanjui

Section 1: The Kenya Context

Enrollment and Retention Patterns

Since Kenya introduced free primary schooling in 2003, the number of children enrolled at all levels has greatly expanded. Because more children have passed their primary school final exams, a larger number have been able to enter secondary school (which begins at grade 9). According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS 2016), the net enrollment rates in 2015 were the highest ever—74.6 percent of children age 3 to 5 years in early childhood development and care centers, 88.4 percent in primary schools and 47.8 percent in secondary schools.

However, in 2014, 24 years after the 1990 Jomtien World Declaration on Education For All was signed, 11.6 percent of Kenyan children age 6 to 13 (a total of 1,292,675) were not in school, either because they never attended or dropped out (MoEST 2015a). Of these, nearly 45 percent (580,921) were boys and 55 percent (711,754) were girls (MoEST 2015a). The problem is worse in 11 of 47 counties (West Pokot, Turkana, Garissa, Isiolo, Kwale, Narok, Marsabit, Mandera, Tana River, Samburu, and Wajir), where 62 percent of girls and 50 percent of boys are not in school (MoEST 2015a).[1]

Regarding enrollment of girls in poor communities, the figures for those at the different levels is the following:

in preschools, 64 percent of the total, compared with the national rate of 70.4 percent (MoEST 2015a); and in primary schools, 61 percent, compared with the national rate of 86.4 percent. Regarding retention, the average rate for boys and girls from poor communities at the end of primary school is 50 percent, compared with a national rate of nearly 83 percent (MoEST 2015a). Both boys and girls begin to drop out in grade 2, but the number declines steeply after grade 4. They both drop out at the same rate, except in Garissa, Mandera, Turkana, and Wajir counties, where girls are twice as likely as boys to leave. In Mandera, Wajir, and Garissa, more than half the girls are not enrolled in primary school, with fewer than 20 percent of boys and girls completing it. Fewer than 25 percent of the boys and girls are in secondary schools in these three counties. Regarding secondary school, only 12.2 percent of girls in poor communities are enrolled, against the national rate of 45.2 percent (MoEST 2015a).

Education is a great predictor of success later in life. King and Winthrop (2015) describe the following benefits of girls' education: (1) More educated girls and women aspire to become leaders and thus expand a country's leadership and entrepreneurial talent; (2) economic growth is faster when girls (and boys) learn; (3) more equal education means greater economic empowerment for women through more equal work opportunities; (4) more educated girls and young women are healthier—and as adults have healthier

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SOUTH SUDAN

ETHIOPIA

Turkana

Mandera

Marsabit

UGANDA

Wajir

West Pokot

Trans Nzoia

Elgeyo-Marakwet

Bungoma

Uasin Gishu

Baringo

Samburu

Isiolo

SOMALIA

Busia

Kakamega

Nandi

Laikipia

Siaya

Vihiga

Kisumu

Meru

Kericho

Nyandarua

Nyeri

Tharaka-Nithi

Homa Bay

Nakuru

Kirinyaga

Garissa

Nyamira

Kisii

Bomet

Murang'a

Embu

Migori

Kiambu

Narok

Nairobi

Machakos

Kitui

Kajiado

Makueni

Tana River

Lamu

Kilifi

Taita-Taveta

TANZANIA

Kwale

Mombasa

150 km

100 mi

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children; (5) more educated mothers have more educated children, especially daughters; and (6) more educated women are better able to protect themselves and their families from the effects of economic and environmental shocks. All these factors can help lift households out of poverty (World Bank 2016). UNICEF (2011) reported that a woman is more likely to get a job and earn a higher wage if she has a basic

education; a 1 percent increase in female education raises the average level of gross domestic product by 0.37 percent; every added year of primary school boosts girls' eventual wages by 10 percent to 20 percent; and an extra year of secondary school boosts them by 15 percent to 25 percent. Despite these benefits, the barriers to girls remaining in school prevail.

Barriers to Girls' Education

Girls drop out of school for various reasons (Wambua 2013; Chege and Sifuna 2006). These include (1) economic issues, (2) social-cultural issues, (3) early pregnancies and sexual diseases; (4) household chores; (5) the low value placed on girls' education; (6) menstruation management and hygiene; (6) poor health and nutrition; (7) environmental issues worsened by climate change; (8) violence; and (9) long travel to schools.

Economic Issues

Although primary school is free, families must still pay for school supplies, such as writing materials like pens and pencils, exercise books, textbooks, and uniforms. Also, because there are far too few teachers, parents directly hire them and pay their salaries. However, given the level of poverty, many parents cannot afford these costs: Scholarships exist, but not nearly enough to support all those who are financially eligible. Thus, it is not surprising that the 2014 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KNBS 2015) found that children at the greatest risk of not attending school are from the lowest wealth quintile; all the counties sampled were among the lowest nine (out of 47). However, two other counties—Narok, which was number 20, and Garissa, which was number 35 (KNBS 2013)—were also included in the study because within them, indigenous subgroups are very poor and the schools in their areas have low access and retention rates.

Moreover, nearly all secondary schools in Kenya are boarding schools, which means that parents must also pay for room and board. If parents manage to pay these costs, they prefer to send sons, whom they believe will earn more when they enter the labor market. This discourages girls from working hard to improve their grades or even to remain in school, as they are unable to envision academic achievement and careers.

Social and Cultural Issues

Although FGM is illegal, it is commonly practiced, with the highest rates in poor communities. The 2014 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KNBS 2015) found that 21 percent of all Kenyan women age 15 to 49 have undergone FGM. However, in some poor counties (Pokot, Maasai, Somali, Rendile, and Samburu), the rates reach 77 to 94 percent, depending on the ethnic group. In Kajiado, where the Opportunity Schools mentoring program was carried out, the rate is about 77 percent. Since FGM was banned through the 2001 Children's Act (GoK 2001) and the 2011 Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act No. 32 (GoK 2011), older girls who are in school and learn about the laws are more likely to challenge their parents' approval of FGM. Thus, many families are circumcising their daughters at a younger age. Among younger women who are 15 to 19 years of age, 46 percent had FGM when they were 5 to 9; while among older women from 45 to 49, the number circumcised at an early age drops to 17 percent (KNBS 2015). In general, FGM negatively affects girls' education, because once they have been circumcised, they are considered eligible for marriage.

Although schools have a great opportunity to challenge these norms, they do not exist in isolation from their communities. Thus, mentoring programs must include all in the community—women, girls, men, boys, elders, and religious leaders. When the community is engaged in conversations about girls' vulnerabilities and approaches to ensure their health and well-being, interventions are more successful (Population Council 2016).

The average age at which Kenyan girls marry is 18, and nearly half (48 percent) are married by 20 (KNBS 2015). However, girls in poor communities are more likely to be child brides; marriages are often early and forced—even at age 13—with the national average age being 18 (KNBS 2015). However, this number is questionable, since it is difficult to obtain reliable data on this issue in rural areas, where more than a few girls are married by age 15. This leads to early pregnancies: To obtain money, families sometimes arrange marriages to older men who offer a high bride price (dowry). Once this occurs, the young brides

leave school. Further, in pastoralist communities, located far from the schools, children begin school at a later age (since younger children cannot travel far alone); this means that by the time girls reach grade 4, they are already adolescents; and in some counties, they may be pressured to marry.

Early Pregnancies and Sexually Transmitted Infections

Both nationally and in poor communities, 15 percent of women age 20 to 49 had their first sexual relations by age 15, 50 percent by age 18, and 71 percent by age 20 (KNBS 2015). This puts girls at risk of early pregnancies or sexually transmitted infections—such as HIV, AIDS, and others—all of which cause them to drop out of school. The average age for first sexual activity in Kenya is 18 (KNBS 2015). The lack of role models—women who have *not* given birth at an early age—perpetuates the status quo, and this inhibits girls' ability to imagine a future that is different than what society has determined is appropriate.

According to the organization Twaweza East Africa (2016), 34 percent of Kenyan children are born to teenage mothers. Although Kenyan policies allow girls to reenter school once they give birth (GoK 1994), most do not, because they are unaware of this provision, cannot find someone to care for the baby, are married and expected to stay at home, or because of the stigma attached to pregnancies outside marriage.

Adolescents face peer pressure, which offers a sense of belonging and identity. But it also solidifies gender and social stereotypes and risky sexual behavior, early marriage, and dropping out of school.

Household Chores

Girls are expected to assume household tasks, such as caring for younger siblings and sick relatives, or to do housework. Also, the youngest girls tend the families' flocks and do not begin school until they are around age eight. Once they start school, younger sisters assume this task.

Low Value Placed on Girls' Education

Kenyan society, which is patriarchal, values boys more than girls, which instills feelings of superiority in the former and inferiority in the latter. Since society places more importance on boys being educated, girls accept their lower status with apathy (KNBS 2015), and drop out of school. This perpetuates the status quo and inhibits girls' ability to imagine a different future. And this inequality becomes more pronounced during adolescence (Women's Refugee Commission 2014). A large body of empirical evidence indicates that gender norms (including masculinity, femininity, and equality), power in sexual relationships, and intimate partner violence affect sexual and reproductive health and outcomes (Haberland 2015). If left unchecked, gender discrimination and power imbalances in schools encourage attitudes and practices that uphold unequal gender norms and tolerate GBV (UNESCO 2015). According to the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), teachers must therefore be trained to adopt gender-responsive approaches so as not to reinforce unequal gender norms (FAWE 2005).

In remote communities, 7 percent of women from age 15 to 49 have *never* attended school (KNBS 2015); in some, the percentages are even higher. For example, in Wajir, it is 76.9 percent; in Mandera, 75.9 percent; in Garissa, 72.7 percent; in Turkana, 64.1 percent; in Marsabit, 61.9 percent; in Samburu, 55.7 percent; in Tana River, 41.7 percent; in Isiolo, 39.7 percent; in West Pokot, 33.8 percent; and in Kwale, 21.7 percent (KNBS 2015). Again, because few women in the communities have attended school and engage in activities that differ from the norm, most girls who live there do not think education is relevant or understand what it means to be empowered.

Menstrual Hygiene and Management

The onset of puberty and adolescence become barriers to girls' education due to a lack of knowledge, misconceptions, traditional myths and social norms, a lack of skills to manage menstruation, a lack of sanitary pads and a limited number of functioning separate toilets for girls. Based on the author's survey of 43 schools, only 51 percent reported they had an adequate number.

Since some children live far from the schools and often begin their studies at age eight or even older, they

have their first menstrual periods by grade 4. Given the lack of privacy or toilets in general, many girls stay home several days a month. In turn, this may cause them to fall behind in their studies, which ultimately leads some to drop out.

Environmental Issues Worsened by Climate Change

Long droughts, worsened by climate change, frequently cause nomadic pastoralists, hunter-gatherers, and fishermen to migrate to other areas. The problems are particularly severe in the poor counties (Mandera, Isiolo, Wajir, West Pokot, Garissa, Kwale, Marsabit, Samburu, Tana River, Narok, and Turkana), since they are arid or semiarid. And these constant moves cause girls to attend school irregularly. As mentioned above, they thus fall further behind in their academic work, are made to repeat classes, and eventually drop out.

Gender-Based Violence

Regardless of their age, race, class, caste or location, girls are vulnerable to many forms of GBV, including rape, sexual harassment, intimidation, teasing, and threats. Poverty, wars and long journeys to school increase the risk (ActionAid 2013); 80 percent of all children have suffered physical abuse, 70 percent verbal abuse, 30 percent sexual harassment, and 20 percent sexual abuse (WERK 2015). Most abuse occurs at home, followed by in school, and peers are the main perpetrators (WERK 2015). Various studies have found that in schools, teachers perpetrate violence—usually with *caning*—to impose discipline, although it was officially abolished in 2001 (WERK 2015; UNICEF 2010). Partly, this is because teachers are not trained in alternate forms of discipline and see caning as an appropriate method (or even the *only* way) to stop disruptive behavior.

In 2015, the MoEST developed a manual on positive discipline, which is used to train teachers on ways to manage behavior without resulting to abuse (MoEST 2015c). This includes ways to (1) understand the reasons for some behavior, without resulting to labeling children as bad; and (2) communicate with children, even when they have made a mistake, using a problem-solving approach to manage behavior problems

instead of high-handed approaches that see children as inferior to adults.

Both sexes are victims of GBV, but girls and women are affected more (MoEST 2015b), because it is a symptom of underlying gender inequality, established roles and a power imbalance (UNESCO 2015).[2] A 2015 WERK study confirmed this; 67 percent of girls are more likely to suffer sexual abuse than boys. GBV negatively affects girls' physical and mental health in both the short and long terms, impeding their ability to learn and socialize, and their transition to adulthood (UNICEF 2010, 2011). However, the topic is so sensitive that, within a culture of silence, most GBV is not reported (WERK 2015). Thus, girls who need psychosocial support do not receive it. One outcome is that they leave school.

The Long Distance to Schools

Because many families are pastoralists, the land on which they live and raise flocks is often far from the schools. Thus, children must walk long distances—sometimes, 6 to 10 kilometers—to and from school; and this is particularly dangerous for girls, who may face violence, including sexual abuse along the way.

Section 2: The Current Status of Mentoring

Mentoring may be defined as a "structured and trusting relationship that brings young people together with caring individuals who offer guidance, support, and encouragement" (MENTOR 2009). It assumes that the mentor will be older, knowledgeable, and willing to guide a younger person, who is referred to as a *mentee.* Mentees usually look up to mentors as role models, because mentors are seen as leading successful lives, contributing to their families and communities (Academy for Educational Development 2011).

Mentoring Approaches

Mentoring should equip pupils with skills that will help them succeed in both school and life. Although mentoring cannot remove all barriers (see section 1), it helps girls to:

1. Acquire the social skills (sometimes called "life skills") they need to achieve academically and to transition to the world of work (Southwick et al. 2006; UNICEF 2012; Population Council 2015a; King and Winthrop 2015);

2. Deal more effectively with or prevent problems related to FGM (Pesambili 2013; Oloo, Wanjiru, and Newell-Jones 2011);

3. Avoid early marriages (Asante Africa 2016);

4. Avoid early pregnancies (APHRC 2015);

5. Reduce school violence (ActionAid 2013);

6. Develop girls' leadership skills (FORWARD 2016; Age Africa 2016);

7. Manage menstruation while in school (FSG 2016);

8. Avoid risky sexual behavior (APHRC 2015);

9. Address school truancy, drug abuse, and other negative behavior (CASTEL 2013);

10. Improve attendance and the number of grades that girls complete—even if they do not ultimately graduate—by helping them see the value of education as it relates to jobs, or to their lives in general (CASEL 2013).

Most barriers are due to social/cultural norms like FGM and gender stereotypes; but very few programs are designed to address these issues, because social change is slow and depends on successive generations of girls being educated: For example, girls whose mothers have some education are less likely to undergo FGM (KNBS 2015). The failure to address the causes of gender inequality is slowing the achievement of gender equity in education.

Based on the author's survey, most mentoring occurs in schools—either during classes or afterward, in extracurricular activities—with teachers being fully involved. Also, members of the communities participate, since 31 percent of schools use alumni and 12 percent use parents as mentors. The author's survey found that 76 percent of the schools were established by the communities, which indicates the parents' commitment to support their daughters participating in after-school mentoring programs. Indeed, the literature also indicates that successful girls' education programs that tackle social norms like FGM have close ties to the community, which is where dialogues and decisions about such issues are made (Oloo, Wanjiru, and Newell-Jones 2011). When school–community relations are strong, and many in the community are educated, social norms that negatively affect education begin to change. Community-backed programs also have helped improve students' behavior and attitudes (Garringer and MacRae 2007).

Mentoring Activities in Schools

This section discusses different activities that include mentoring—although schools use a combination of several activities to ensure maximum impact. These activities include:

One-to-one programs, where an older student or adult female mentors one girl (Austrian 2012). This approach is used in 81 percent of the schools surveyed, and it seems effective, since the mentors act as older sisters with whom the girls can confide more easily than with parents or teachers (UNGEI 2016) and whom they want to emulate. Such programs have helped girls in Madagascar and Nepal to stay in school (UNGEI 2016). These programs' main advantage is that low-income girls are mentored by those who have faced the same issues (Austrian 2012). Their main weaknesses are that they require a large number of mentors, which may not be possible to find, and that only a small number of girls benefit.

Group mentoring programs, where one mentor meets with several girls. This approach is used in 71 percent of the schools surveyed. It allows for more interactions and more opportunities for girls to interact with each other. Also, it works well for imparting general information, although the one-to-one approach is better when girls need more personal support.

Peer-to-peer programs, where one girl counsels another of the same age; 33 percent of the schools used

this approach in order to increase the number of mentors (Austrian 2012). However, training peers was a main challenge. Without it, peers—who themselves may not be well informed—may transfer inaccurate information. Thus, the government should develop criteria for selecting, training, and supporting them.

E-mentoring programs, where mentoring is done electronically, either to individual girls or groups. Although none of the schools the author surveyed use this model, it has been adopted elsewhere because of the limited number of community-based mentors. One example is in Kenya—the Global Give Back Circle (2016)—which links to over 600 mentors in 14 countries. However, these programs are most often limited to secondary schools in upper-income areas—since schools in poor rural communities do not have internet access or telephones (some do not even have electricity). The government launched an ambitious program to connect all primary schools to electricity; and by 2014, 73.7 percent of secondary schools were connected (MoEST 2015a). This is a major step, but internet connections for all schools will take quite some time.

Although e-mentoring could increase the number of girls involved, it may not be the best approach when girls are in crisis and need help immediately. Also, e-mentors (who are not near the community) may not understand local conditions, families and cultures, and they cannot empathize or give information in a language and style that the girls understand (Austrian 2012). One solution could be to match e-mentors with the girls with whom they have most in common.

Female teachers act as mentors, but more mentors are from the community or even outside it. Given the shortage of female teachers, schools and programs use mothers, religious and community leaders, professional women, and young females from the community, including alumni, as mentors. But this can be problematic, since they are not officially part of the schools and may have difficulty negotiating for time and rooms in which to conduct sessions. Also, they may not have the skills needed. However, if they were trained, they could acquire these skills.

Schools provide space in or outside the school for girls' clubs, where girls meet with other girls to share their challenges and support each other to remain in school (an example of peer-to-peer mentoring). These spaces are also used by mentors to (1) teach girls about sexuality and reproductive health, menstruation, and hygiene (Austrian 2012; International Center for Research on Women 2011); (2) build self-awareness; (3) help girls discover their talents; (4) help them to form groups; (5) teach them how to allot time to study; (6) build resilience; (7) select role models; (8) set goals and learn how to achieve them (Camfed 2016); and (9) develop financial literacy and other skills (Women's Refugee Commission 2014)—all of which have been shown to improve girls' education.

Topics covered depend on the program's objectives, which mainly focus on (1) improving academic performance (e.g., tutoring girls who need help with certain subjects), (2) developing life skills, such as creative thinking, setting goals, forming friends and learning business skills, among others listed above; (3) providing accurate information about sexual and reproductive health and the services available (since their lack is a major cause of early pregnancies and marriage); and (4) helping girls negotiate effectively when pressured into early sexual activities.

Mentoring programs also teach socio-emotional (life) skills, through peer-supported learning and practical experiences such as community service; and extra-curricular activities like sports, games, clubs, societies, networks, dance, and drama (UNICEF 2012). Such skills help girls deal effectively with routine challenges (WHO 2003), make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathize with others, and manage their lives in a productive manner (WHO 2003). Acquiring these skills can help them achieve as students, citizens, and workers and prevent various types of risky behavior—such as drug use, violence, bullying, and dropping out of school (CASEL 2013).

Programs usually run from three months to two years, but researchers agree they should be at least 6 or 12 months (Rhodes and DuBoise 2008). Since de-

veloping relationships and trust takes time, it is best for meetings to be held regularly (Liang and Rhodes 2007).

Schools lack a formal structure for implementing mentoring activities—for example, 67 percent of those surveyed hold ad hoc meetings.

To help low-income families, some funders give unconditional or conditional cash awards that, besides covering school fees, also cover girls' participation in mentoring programs. Based on a recent evaluation of such programs in Kenya by the organization Innovation for Poverty Action (IPA), they have improved girls' attendance, particularly when the cash is predicated on the girls' improving their attendance and remaining in school (IPA 2014).

The Impact of Mentoring Programs on Girls' Education

School-based mentoring produces many positive outcomes, such as (1) improved test scores and grades; (2) improved quality of classwork and assignments handed in; (3) reduced serious school infractions, such as disciplinary referrals, fighting, and suspensions; (4) reduced truancy; and (5) improved perceptions of education (Garringer and MacRae 2007). In Tanzania and Zimbabwe, Camfed International (2016) found that Learner Guides—young women from participating communities trained as life skills program facilitators and teachers' aides—helped improve exams results and the commitment to studying.[3]

By encouraging community leaders to break the culture of silence and question widely accepted cultural norms/taboos like FGM and early marriages, results have been positive. For example, the Mobilising Action to Safeguard Rights of Girls in Tanzania project was able to shift social norms (FORWARD 2016). It provided space for girls to meet, obtained information about ways to combat FGM, and helped the girls to support each other and share personal experiences. As a result, fewer girls were circumcised—from 3,417 in 2012 to 1,402 in 2014.

Exposure to female community leaders, professionals and other successful role models improves ev-

eryone's perceptions of women and weakens gender stereotypes about roles and norms. When this occurs, parents' and their daughters' aspirations begin to change. For the girls, a role model allows them to see healthy relations and positive forms of femininity and masculinity.

Building girls' leadership abilities through mentoring programs can have positive spillover effects (Women's Refugee Commission 2014). The Mobilising Action to Safeguard Rights of Girls in Tanzania project trained 810 girls, who in turn shared their information with 1,698 more girls and young women through clubs and networks. After this, the girls and women reached another 4,683, increasing awareness of sexual and reproductive health matters, girls' rights and entitlements, and how to access local services (FORWARD 2016).

Creating Healthy Approaches to Success (CHATS), a program conducted by Age Africa (2016), improved girls' leadership skills by providing them with information about sexual/ reproductive health, gender equity and rights. It also improved the way their groups operated and helped participants with public speaking, self-advocacy, critical thinking, and self-esteem. Beneficiaries are now more likely to see themselves as leaders and role models, to confide in someone when harmed or threatened, and to advocate for themselves and other females who are abused or insulted.

Nawiri, from the Kiswahili term for "blossom," are girls' clubs where members run/lead the clubs, with guidance from patrons. They make their own decisions, which are pertinent to their needs (Discovery Learning Alliance 2016).

In the Wezesha Vijana Project, launched by Asante Africa (2016) in Kenya, mentors informed girls about body changes during adolescence, how to cope with them, how to form healthy relationships, how to assert their rights and how to make decisions for their futures. After one year, 94 percent of the girls *strongly agreed* with the statement, "I think I am able to say 'NO' to peer pressure toward sex and/or unhealthy sexual behaviour," compared to 74.4 percent of girls from the control group. Further, absences from school decreased; nearly 40 percent of girls were absent from

school during the six months before the evaluation (Asante Africa 2016), as opposed to 63 percent in the control group, who were not mentored. The girls in the project said they managed their menstrual periods better and got support from mothers and peers, which improved learning outcomes and attendance, and reduced the dropout rate.

The Bangladeshi Association for Life Skills, Income, and Knowledge for Adolescents (BALIKA) project, supported by the Population Council (2016), was a randomized controlled trial, conducted from November 2012 to February 2016, to evaluate approaches to prevent child marriage and improve opportunities for girls. Those who received tutoring in mathematics and English—as well as life skills training in gender rights and negotiations, critical thinking, and decisionmaking—were 31 percent less likely to marry young. All understood menstruation, and 36 percent were using sanitary pads.

Various projects have shown that mentoring affects retention rates substantially. The ActionAid Stop Violence against Girls in School project convinced young mothers to return to school by using peers to inform them of their right to education (ActionAid 2013).[4] Thus, by the end of the program, their dropout rate had decreased by 20 percent. Although other factors cause girls to drop out, early pregnancies, and marriage are major.

In Madagascar, increased attendance and retention was attributed to mentoring in the girl-to-girl strategy (UNICEF 2005), and in Nepal through the sister-to-sister strategy (Global Action Nepal 2016).[5] In both, older girls are paired with younger ones, offering academic and psychosocial support and acting as role models.

In Kenya, the School Sanitation Improvement Project of the Girl-Child Network (GCN) improved attendance and retention rates by providing sanitary pads and functioning toilets/water. To date, the project has reached 120 public primary schools with 14,458 girls (GCN 2016).

Developing girls' social networks (Austrian 2012) with spaces where the girls came together and forged a common identity helped improve self-confidence, health, and well-being (Population Council 2016), which in turn increased attendance and retention.

In Ghana, the Wonder Women After-School Clubs program, supported by the Varkey Foundation, promoted discussions among the girls and adult female role models about different careers; this boosted their aspirations and self-confidence, and improved their school attendance and scores (Varkey 2016).

In Kenya, the program Adolescent Girls Initiative–Kenya (AGI-K), supported by the Population Council (2015a), used a health and life skills curriculum to teach girls how to communicate with adults, manage stress and anger, and resolve conflicts.

In Mozambique, Kenya and Ghana, the Action Aid Stop Violence against Girls in School Project overcame the culture of silence by increasing girls' confidence and opportunities to discuss their concerns, to challenge the culture of violence in and around schools, to report incidents, and to create peer support networks (ActionAid 2013). The program provided space where girls could meet with peers and trusted adults to access information about their rights. By the end of the program, violence against girls by family members, teachers, and peers was reduced by 50 percent from baseline statistics. According to the final report, about 14,000 girls in these districts were helped. Reduced violence also increased girls' enrollment by 10 percent in Mozambique, 17 percent in Kenya and 14 percent in Ghana.

Challenges to Mentoring Approaches and Practices

The inability of many programs to change social-cultural norms like FGM and gender stereotypes, usually because such changes take a long time, is slowing the achievement of gender equity in education—since most barriers are due to these issues.

An overemphasis on cognitive skills also hinders girls from acquiring critical life skills such as empathy, self-direction, conflict resolution, collaboration, creativity and problem solving. Performing better in school involves learning skills that promote self-confi-

dence, along with the ability to conceive of a lifestyle other that the traditional one assumed by most women in the community.

Further, the failure by 65 percent of the schools and 71 percent of the organizations sampled to select mentors using a rigorous selection process that carefully checks their references may put the most vulnerable girls at the risk of abuse. Until now, the main criteria seem to have been availability (because most mentors are volunteers) and willingness to become a mentor. For faith-based organizations, membership in a particular religious group was the only criterion.

Use of untrained mentors and peers weakens the programs because they may not have the skills to listen and communicate, nurture, advise with correct information, and to support the girls.

Although mentoring is seen as a promising, low-cost intervention for at-risk youth, data that could show its effectiveness have not been systematically collected (Miller et al. 2013). For example, the Population Council (2015b) and Garringer and MacRae (2007) are only now learning about what constitutes an effective school-based mentoring program and the best practices/approaches that can be scaled-up.

Girls from 10 to 13 years of age are overlooked in most mentoring programs, since they usually focus on girls from 14 to 16 or 17 to 19. In Kenya, girls in the last two groups are in secondary schools, and those enrolled only account for 45.2 percent of girls (MoEST 2015a). This means that nearly 55 percent of girls who could benefit are excluded. Given the high rates of early sexual activity, child pregnancies and marriages, mentoring should start with girls from 10 to 13.

Although Kenya has signed various international charters and passed national laws that aim to reduce violence, exploitation and abuse against children, it is difficult to translate these policies into practice, due to inadequate legal structures (UNICEF 2010) and child protection policies, poorly enforced laws, and weak or nonexistent reporting mechanisms, which often allow abusers to act with impunity (MoEST 2015b).[6]

Some mentoring programs select girls who are already among the high achievers to participate in leadership training. Thus, girls who may need mentoring even more are left out.

Teachers are at the heart of mentoring, but they may lack the required skills. According to the National Education Sector Plan, teachers are entrusted with mentoring, molding, and nurturing students through guidance/counseling programs, student councils, clubs, and extra-curricular activities but lack the knowledge/skills needed (MoEST 2015d; Kimbui 2010).[7] Nongovernmental organizations have in-service training programs to develop their skills; but until now, the numbers trained have been limited. Also, the curriculum and approach of the training vary.

Lack of conceptual clarity about the nature of mentoring is a serious problem. For example, in many schools, the distinctions between mentoring, guidance/counseling, and pastoral instruction programs are unclear.[8] And, where it occurs in the latter, the issues are framed in religious terms (WERK 2016).

In general, the dearth of female teachers denies girls adequate role models who can help them attain self-confidence and play a critical protective role in their lives (UNGEI and ODI 2016). Shortages are even worse in poor communities' schools, since they tend to be isolated, and lack social and economic infrastructure, such as universities, hospitals, banks, shops, and markets. Another problem is that, even where teachers are available, they are identified as the main perpetrators of violence against children (WERK 2015; UNICEF 2010).

A one-size-fits-all mentoring approach is not effective, because poor girls are not a homogeneous group. For example, some low-income counties are home to ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities—such as the Munyoyaya, Wardei, and Pokomo communities, which face discrimination in educational and economic opportunities, and have higher poverty rates than the dominant groups (WERK 2013). Even in the same ethnic and religious groups, the levels of girls' vulnerability differ; for example, those who refuse to be circumcised (FGM) in a community where it is the norm suffer abuse and are

at-risk of being trafficked. Or those who refuse to be married early may need to be taken to rescue centers where they can be protected. Accordingly, mentoring programs should be designed to address these specific challenges.

Life skills education is critical for girls' education, but the process of nurturing such skills takes far more time than many programs can allot, given that they last only three months. Further, meetings between mentors and girls are ad hoc or irregular, with as few as one a year.

Programs that combine mentoring, scholarships, and cash transfers help to increase attendance, retention, and completion rates. But it is difficult to attribute this success to only mentoring, or to the cash transfers.

Section 3: How Mentoring Can Be Improved

Mentoring can be improved in at least 11 main ways:

1. Data should be systematically collected from various mentoring programs using different settings and approaches to develop a best-practices model for girls in poor communities.

2. Good mentoring should build strong relationships between mentors and girls.

3. All mentors (including teachers) need to be trained in the needed skills, attitudes, and activities to enable them to be effective (Garringer and MacRae 2007). This training should include an understanding of their roles, responsibilities, and limits; challenges that girls face; various approaches to mentoring and effective strategies/activities; teaching life, listening, and communication skills; children's rights; how to nurture the mentoring relationship; and how to end the relationship, depending on the particular program's aims/strategies.

4. To augment one-to-one mentoring, the government needs to develop criteria for selecting peer educators. While developing the terms of reference and components of their training, the government should consider the fact that peer educators are primarily students who should have a strong support structure.

5. Teachers or responsible adults should oversee mentoring activities in schools to prevent potential abuse/exploitation of the girls.

6. Local mentors should be trained, since talent and drive exist even in the poorest communities. A Future First (2015) study found that 78 percent of adults in Kenya said they would agree to be mentors, if asked, but fewer than 1 percent had done so due to a lack of opportunities or planned activities in which they could to engage. Thus, when mentoring programs are designed, they should promote the training of older girls and young women (from age 18 to 30).

7. Mentoring programs should focus on both cognitive and noncognitive skills, since the latter predict life outcomes with the same or greater strength as cognition (Kautz et al., n.d).

8. Various incentives should be increased in order to encourage female teachers to locate in schools in poor counties. In fact, the Teachers Service Commission, which recruits and manages teachers, should strive to post female teachers in all schools, since they may be the only role models that girls will ever have.

9. Focus on the girls, but also involve boys, men, and women in discussions about gender issues. Meetings should occur in those schools or communities where those attending could help to seek solutions to the girls' barriers—such as long distances to travel to school, where boys could help by accompanying the girls.

10. Design mentoring programs that are age specific, because girls in early adolescence, from age 10 to 13 years, are different from those who are 14 to 16 or 17 to 19.

11. Provide safe spaces where girls can meet, get information on the challenges they face, help support and advise each other, and share personal experiences.

Section 4: Policy Recommendations

Significant and lasting improvements in girls' education can only be achieved if policies do the following:

1. Tackle the barriers to girls' education through strategies that address cultural norms, GBV, early and child marriages, FGM, and subjugation of girls and women in poor communities. These strategies should be rooted in a broader agenda that includes gender equity.

2. Develop a mentoring policy that better defines its objectives; creates regulations and procedures to guide mentoring programs by state and nonstate actors; and establishes protocols and a referral system to access legal, social, and psychological care that can respond to and report violations of children's rights.

3. Include guidelines for designing mentoring programs that can be adopted in various contexts.

4. Present a multisectoral approach that reflects the connection between culture, religion, poverty, natural disasters and climate change, sexual and reproductive health, and education (United States Government 2016).

5. Redesign the school calendar and daily schedule to accommodate the nomadic patterns for girls in those communities.

6. Review teachers' professional development curriculum to ensure that it includes gender-responsive pedagogy—that is, training teachers in the skills they need to lead classroom discussions where girls can explore gender stereotypes; teach life skills in both pre- and in-service courses.[9]

Combine life skills education with mentoring.

7. Include statements on life skills education and education for sustainable development in the basic education competency framework, in order to synchronize with Sustainable Development Goal 4.7 (UNESCO 2016) on education for sustainable development and global citizenship.

8. Integrate life skills into the curriculum.

Develop comprehensive criteria to select girls who will benefit the most from mentoring.

9. Choose the girls who are most at-risk of leaving school at an early age—given the shortage of mentors—for the programs. Criteria would include girls who are:

   a. From single-parent homes or have no parents.
   b. From extremely poor families (Sewall-Menon and Bruce 2012).
   c. From homes where they are neglected by parents or guardians. Child neglect is a form of abuse, and is a barrier to meeting a child's basic physical, emotional, social, educational, and safety needs—for example, with adequate/timely health care, supervision, clothing, nutrition, and housing, among others (DePanfilis 2006).
   d. From families that have rejected practices like FGM and/or forced early marriage, which may need support because other girls or community figures intimidate, threaten or isolate them. Occasionally, girls are taken to *rescue* centers; but there are too few to accommodate those who need them.
   e. From families where parents have HIV/AIDS, and thus face discrimination and hostility; research shows that only one in four women and two in five men have "accepting" attitudes toward those with HIV/AIDS (KNBS 2015).
   f. From minority communities
   g. At risk of dropping out due to low academic achievement, are over age, have disabilities, have disciplinary problems, are chronically absent, and have HIV, AIDS, or other sexually transmitted infections.

Institutionalize mentoring in the education sector to ensure it is implemented.

10. Use existing structures—for example, guidance and counseling departments and extracurricular activities, for mentoring.

11. Institutionalize community service at the secondary and tertiary levels to allow interested alumni to volunteer in their schools as mentors. This will ensure a continuous supply of female mentors from the community.

Section 5: Conclusion

Gender equity is a priority for many countries, including Kenya. However, barriers to girls' education exist that keep many girls out of school and cause those who enroll to drop out. Although mentoring is not a panacea for all challenges, it has been linked to education outcomes such as attendance, retention, and success in school and life. However, more research is needed to test assumptions and provide more evidence on what types of mentoring work best.

Mentoring occurs in Kenyan schools; but the approaches are weak, which undermine its impact. Also, girls from 10 to 13 years of age, who would benefit from mentoring, are left out because many programs target girls who are 14 to 16 and 17 to 19. To strengthen mentoring, the government needs to pass the necessary laws, combine life skills education with cognitive skills for greater impact, develop criteria for selecting girls who need mentoring the most, and institutionalize the programs in schools.

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Notes

1. The Kenyan Constitution defines a marginalized community as one of the following: It has a relatively small population, is composed of nomadic hunters and gatherers, is geographically isolated, or, due to past or current laws/practices, has experienced discrimination that has made it unable to fully participate in the integrated social and economic life of Kenya (GoK 2010).

2. School-related GBV is defined as acts or threats of sexual, physical or psychological violence occurring in and around schools, perpetrated as a result of gender norms and stereotypes, and enforced by unequal power dynamics (UNESCO 2015).

3. Learner guides are young women in Camfed's alumni (CAMA) network who return to their local schools, volunteering at least 2-½ hours a week for 12 to 18 months. They are trained in delivering life and learning skills, as well as psychosocial support. The "My Better World" curriculum and workbook help students build self-knowledge and resilience, discover their talents, select role models, set goals, and learn how to achieve them. The guides introduce students to new learning techniques, helping them form groups and allotting time to study. They work with schools, communities, and district governments to keep vulnerable children in school and help them overcome their challenges. In return for their commitment, they can access interest-free loans to develop their businesses, and mobile phones to stay connected. Respected for their expertise, these young women are multiplying the returns from their own education for the benefit of their communities (Camfed 2016).

4. ActionAid's Stop Violence against Girls in School project was a five-year initiative from 2008 to 2013. It aimed to empower girls to enjoy their right to education and participate in a violence-free environment and was implemented simultaneously in Ghana, Kenya, and Mozambique. It placed girls at the heart of the project, providing them an opportunity to express their views in community-level initiatives both in and out of school, where they shared their experiences with research teams. By engaging in local and national level advocacy work, the project teams ensured that girls' voices were heard by many stakeholders, including high-level decisionmakers (ActionAid 2013).

5. The "girl-to-girl" strategy, piloted by UNICEF in Madagascar in 2001, encouraged teachers to identify first-grade girls—"little sisters"—who were at risk of dropping out. The little sisters were then paired with "big sisters" from the fourth and fifth grades, who signed pledges to support the young girls. The big sisters' role was to walk with the little sisters to and from school, play during recess and do homework together. They also advised the younger girls on hygiene and social skills, and helped build their confidence in the classrooms. The strategy was successful as it kept both in school: The younger girls were helped to remain in school while the older ones saw themselves as role models and behaved more responsibly (UNICEF 2005).

6. International and national laws include the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNCRC (1989) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, ACRWC (1990). The international laws are encapsulated nationally by the Children's Act (2001), the Sexual Offences Act (2006), the Employment Act (2007), the National Plan of Action for Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (2008), the Constitution of Kenya (2010), the Basic Education Act (2013), and the Gender Policy in Education and Training (2015).

7. The five-year National Education Sector Plan (2013–18) outlines the education sector reform implementation agenda in six priority areas, based on challenges affecting the sector, including sector governance and accountability, quality, access, equity, relevance, and social competencies and values.

8. The Pastoral Instruction Program has been part of Kenya's primary school curriculum since 1964. It aims to equip students with desirable values and attitudes.

9. Gender responsive pedagogy refers to teaching processes that consider girls' and boys' specific learning needs. It calls for teachers to take a gender approach in planning lessons, managing classrooms and evaluating performance so as to give equal opportunity to both boys and girls and avoid reinforcing negative gender stereotypes.