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Robinah Gimbo  
*Southern Adventist University*

Nadine Mujawamariya  
*Southern Adventist University*

Sara Saunders  
*Southern Adventist University*

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# Why Maasai Parents Enroll their Children in Primary School: The Case of Makuyuni in Northern Tanzania



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Robinah Gimbo  
*Southern Adventist University*  
[robinahgimbo@southern.edu](mailto:robinahgimbo@southern.edu)

Nadine Mujawamariya  
*Southern Adventist University*  
[mnadine@southern.edu](mailto:mnadine@southern.edu)

Sara Saunders  
*Southern Adventist University*  
[sarasaunders@southern.edu](mailto:sarasaunders@southern.edu)

## ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the reasons why the Makuyuni parents of Northern Tanzania do or do not enroll their children in school. Ten Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and several key informant (KI) interviews were conducted in the Mswakini Juu and Makuyuni villages. The findings revealed that reasons for enrolling these children in school included future economic stability for the family, government policies enforcing parents to enroll their children in primary school, partnership with World Vision, increased physical accessibility to education, and the World Food Program (WFP) which supplies food for all primary schools in the district. The findings also exposed hindrances to primary school enrollment including protection of tradition and culture, females marrying at a young age, and inability to afford extra scholastic expenses. The most emphasized motivator for sending children to school was the observation of material benefits to the families who had done so. Conversely, a key deterrent was the observation of families who had in fact sent their children to school, but had failed to realize a return on investment in cases where educated offspring were yet unemployed. This study suggests that increased commitment to education would benefit the Maasai people by better equipping them to secure and maintain employment. Other suggestions presented include better preparing children for primary school and sensitizing Maasai leaders to the benefits and realities of education. [PUBLISHER ABSTRACT]

**Keywords:** *education, Maasai, primary school, Tanzania, World Vision*

## **Introduction**

The aim of this particular study was to examine the motivators and deterrents to primary school enrollment in the case of Makuyuni ward in Northern Tanzania. In this location (combined with neighboring Kisongo ward where World Vision implements the same Area Development Program) primary school enrollment increased from 36% in 2007 to 83.85% in 2012, according to World Vision's 2012 program evaluation report for the area (World Vision, 2012). These statistics are remarkable for a region where the population is 95% Maasai, a pastoralist group generally known for their resistance to formal education in both Kenya and Tanzania. Using qualitative focus groups, the study explored which deterrents and motivators to primary school enrollment have had the greatest weight in this local context.

The findings should contribute to the literature, which informs government education policies in Kenya, Tanzania, and to a lesser extent in other countries which have failed to sustain primary school enrollment rates for children from pastoralist societies. The findings will also inform the approaches of churches and NGOs in the field of development in education, particularly the international NGO, World Vision, which has been actively involved in Kisongo and Makuyuni since 2002 and has contributed to the promotion of primary school enrollment in the area to some degree.

## **Methodology**

This section presents the methods that were adopted by the researchers during the study. It therefore includes the research design, sampling techniques employed, study instruments, and reliability of study.

### **Research Design**

The study adopted qualitative methodologies of data collection through focus group discussions (FGDs) to provide information on the research topics. Literature review was conducted to triangulate and aid in the discussion of findings and recommendations.

### **Study Population**

The research was conducted in two villages of Mswakini Juu and Makuyuni in Makuyuni ward. Ten FGDs were conducted as well as key informant (KI) interviews with people knowledgeable about the subject. A total of eight FGDs were conducted with only Maasai parents having children currently enrolled in primary school. Two (2) FGDs with School Management Committees (SMCs) were conducted. In each of the selected villages, a primary school was chosen from which the SMC was interviewed as one group in addition to a group for mothers, and two separate groups for fathers.

The fathers were in two groups (younger fathers and elder fathers). This was because according to the Maasai culture, men belong to their age groups according to the year they were circumcised. The elder group receives respect from the younger group to such an extent that if put in one FGD, participants from the younger group may not feel free to challenge the views presented by an elder. Challenging an elder may be considered disrespectful and could even be punishable by either beating or compensation in terms of a cow or goat as it may be deemed appropriate. The women, on the other hand, belong to the age group of their husbands; however,

the women can interact freely across the different groups. The women, therefore, were not separated. The table below shows the number of participants in every group category.

No	I. Focus group	No. of discussants
1	Mswakini Juu SMC	6
2	Mswakini Juu mothers	9
3	Mswakini Juu elder fathers	13
4	Mswakini Juu younger father	4
5	Makuyuni SMC	7
6	Makuyuni elder fathers	6
7	Makuyuni younger fathers	10
8	Makuyuni mothers	15
	<b>II. Key informants</b>	
9.	District Education officials	4
10.	Head teacher	1 (also participated in Makuyuni SMC FGD)
11.	World Vision staff	1
	Total	76

### Sample Size and Selection

The parent registers were obtained from both of the two selected primary schools. With the help of Head Teachers and the SMC chairpersons, the parents were categorized according to their Maasai traditional group and the following criteria were followed to select parents that participated in FGDs:

- All participants selected were to be Maasai with children currently in primary school.
- A wide range of participants were to represent a wide range of ages.
- Participants were to come from different *bomas* (homesteads).

- They were to provide optimal representation of the diversity within the Maasai population of the village: different views on religion and politics, different clans, different corners of the village, different levels of buy-in to education and agriculture, etc.
- They were to be recruited from the maximum number of *bomas* and households possible.
- Participants were not to participate in more than one group even if they qualified for more than one. Parents on SMC were not to also participate in FGDs for mothers or fathers.
- One family was not to send multiple participants for the different groups. If a husband was selected for one of the fathers' groups then his wife was not to be considered for the mothers' group.

Key informants were selected purposively. These included head teachers, NGO staff, government leaders and District Education officials.

### **Sampling Techniques**

During this study, researchers employed a purposive sampling. Two schools were selected; one being in a village far away from the main road while another was in a trading center. These criteria were used with a desire to understand the different views from the two different communities with different degrees of exposure to outsiders. The SMCs belonged to the two different schools in each of the villages.

### **Research Instruments**

An interview guide with only five open-ended questions was designed to guide the discussion. Many key concepts were explored during the discussion. The lead facilitators for all groups used English with the help of a local translator from Swahili and Maasai languages to English and vice versa.

### **Validity of the Instruments**

The researchers ensured validity through crosschecking the information with key informants by following up on issues that seemed unclear from the focus groups. This helped researchers to obtain a better understanding. The researchers also ensured validity through sharing with the research experts (professors) who reviewed the research instruments and provided advice that ensured a better quality of the research.

### **Research Procedure**

Prior to conducting the research, the researchers complied with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Southern Adventist University. The research instruments were sent to the board and approval and clearance were sought and granted.

Prior to data collection, an introduction letter from World Vision Kisongo/Makuyuni Program Development Coordinator was delivered, which introduced researchers to the local authorities. World Vision has worked in the community for eleven years and it already had a well-established partnership and reputation. This made it easier for the community and District to be receptive and transparent in sharing information.

The researchers visited the two schools and conducted the meetings with the head teachers and SMC village leaders to discuss and select parents for FGDs. During these initial coordination meetings, appropriate time, dates, and methods of engagement were discussed and agreed upon.

### **Limitations to the study**

- Language barrier was a limitation. Three languages—English, Swahili, and Maasai—were used, so the researchers depended on translation to and from English. One translator in particular had to be recruited last minute and appeared to struggle at times with understanding the researchers' English well enough to translate properly. Repetition and rewording were necessary several times. This could have led to some inaccuracy in the final quotations.
- Furthermore, the moderators and note taker were outsiders to the tribe, region and entire nation where the study was being conducted. All three were foreign nationals who had come to live and work amongst the Maasai less than two months before beginning the data collection. As such, it is likely that they misinterpreted some statements or were at times misinterpreted themselves due to their ignorance of the cultural context, even where the translator picked the best words possible.
- As expected in qualitative research, having eight FGDs discussing the same topics made for a challenge during analysis. At times, the views shared by the respective discussants contradicted each other, which complicated efforts to summarize. The researchers triangulated the contradictions through key informant interviews to help understand some of those factors and endeavored to deliver both sides of subjective contradictions, and to identify the most accurate data for objective facts.
- On two occasions in particular the researchers had reason to suspect that some participants did not meet the criteria for the FGDs, but these participants were not requested to leave. On the first occasion, some women in the mothers' group appeared to be still in their teens and too young to have children in primary school. However, they were not very vocal and their presence did not appear to have any influence on the vocal older ladies. On the second occasion, however, the presence of an elder who was also the former Village Chairman almost definitely had a significant influence on the discussion in a young fathers' group. In retrospect he probably should have been asked to leave at the beginning, but under the circumstances the researchers felt it would be interpreted as disrespectful and hinder rapport for the immediate FGD and perhaps for the future.

## Findings

### Motivators to Primary School Enrollment

#### Perception of Value of Education

FGD participants revealed that Maasai parents have a positive perception of the value of education and that is why the enrollment of children in primary schools in the entire community has increased. The value of education is attached to the fruits expected from education, most especially the hope that children will be in position to help their parents in the future. All FGDs and key informants supported this idea as one of the major factors for increased primary school enrollment in the community. The parents told the researchers that there are children in the community who completed school and got employed and are now helping their parents. These, therefore, served as the observed fruits of education, which are motivating many more parents today to enroll their children in schools. One of the discussants said, “Education is seen as an investment where parents expect fruits from their children. As such this has motivated sending children to schools.”

There are several examples in the community where children who completed schools are supporting their families. During an interview with one of the key informants, a World Vision staff and himself a Maasai in the young men’s age group, he said, “For example: myself, I grew up here; I am working here and supporting my family so other people can see what I do for my family and also want to take their children to school. I and my other four brothers constructed a house for our parents, and we continue to offer more other support to our parents.” The community generally observes the fruit from education, a practice that participants believe has promoted enrollment among this Maasai community. The Maasai people are now sending children to school irrespective of the gender, according to one respondent during FGD who noted, “Currently no girl can be forced into early marriage because people are aware of rights.”

It was further discovered that secondary school students have also played a role in motivating primary children to be enrolled in school. They are motivators and role models to those in primary and encourage young children to be enrolled in school. Participants noted that young children admire secondary students, an attitude which can motivate them to enroll and sustain them in school. Parents acknowledged the fact that there are children who “push” their parents to enroll them in school. Interviewees reported some cases where children have forced their parents to enroll them in school. One said, “A 3-year-old child may refuse to eat to pressure parents to send him/her to school. I’m a kindergarten teacher.”

#### Government Role

**Policy:** All FGDs commended the role played by the Tanzanian government to enact and enforce laws, which require that all children in school-going age be enrolled in school (Ministry of Education, 1995). The government through *Mpango wa Maendeleo ya Elimu ya Msingi* (MMEM; Primary Education Development Plan) requires that children be enrolled in primary

school by the age of seven years. Study participants confirmed that village leaders play a major role in monitoring to ensure that all children are enrolled and retained in primary school. All FGDs reported that any parents who are found keeping children of school-going ages at their homes face the law. Anyone not sending a child to school can easily be identified and fined and taken to prison. During a discussion with Mswakini Juu SMC one participant in support of this point remarked: “They fine you money and take you to police.”

Government enforcement, according to the findings, has helped to trigger parents—especially the fathers—to enroll their children in primary schools. Punishments make some parents fearful and they then send their children to school.

***Monitoring in education:*** Results indicate that through government structures, the children not yet in school, but expected to be ready for schools the following academic year, are all registered. It was revealed, furthermore, that the lists of these registered children are shared with key partners including NGOs working in the area, like World Vision, and nearby schools. The Tanzania Education policy provides that all children should be in primary one by the age of seven years. Key informants reported that once the academic years commences, village leaders visit primary schools to crosscheck with their list and verify the children that have been enrolled. Those identified as not in schools are followed up at their respective households to ensure enrollment of all children.

The government also established free primary education, whereby parents do not have to pay tuition for children to access primary education. Parents told the researchers that this also motivates parents to register their children in primary schools.

Findings continue to unveil that the government established capitation grants, which are given to primary schools quarterly. These small grants help schools to obtain petty school requirements like chalk and stationary; this money can as well be utilized to purchase scholastic materials for the most vulnerable pupils. Such government support promotes enrollment and retention of those children from very vulnerable families.

***Accessibility of education:*** All participants reported that the shortened distance between schools and homes made access easier. They praised the government for establishing schools nearby in comparison to the past. Respondents acknowledged that schools in the past were very long distances from the homes of many pupils, too long to be walked by younger children. Discussants from the village of Makuyuni Juu, however, emphasized that distance was still a major accessibility issue for them. They are constructing their own primary school and teachers’ housing little by little, and urging the government and any other players to support them in realizing their dream of accessible education for their small children.

The government of Tanzania also provides free primary education, which theoretically makes primary education financially accessible to all people. Many parents were simply waiting for an affordable education option for their children.

District officials stated that boarding schools constructed in the ‘70s by the government contributed to current higher enrollment. This was also mentioned as a change in one parent FGD, which contributed to the difference in enrollment rates currently as contrasted with the



childhood of discussants. Being a pastoralist community, the Maasai of Makuyuni lived a nomadic lifestyle. As such, households could keep moving in search for water and pasture for their cattle. In such a setting, respondents reported that the establishment of boarding schools has a positive effect on school enrollment. However, as discussed elsewhere in this paper, several FGDs also emphasized that Maasai often maintain one permanent household where school-going children can live year round while certain other family members or hired herders roam with the animals in search of pasture, rendering nomadism a non-issue regarding primary school enrollment for Maasai children.

### **NGO Contribution**

**World Food Program:** Key informants reported that the World Food Program (WFP) has played a role in catalyzing primary school enrollment. WFP has been supplying food to all primary schools in this District. This is a pastoralist community where cattle-keeping activity is high as opposed to farming. This area is usually affected by prolonged drought with characteristics of semi-desert conditions; hence, at times many households cannot afford more than one meal per day. Under these conditions, free food at school is a motivator for primary school enrollment.

In contrast to the view of the key informants, most parents in the FGDs did not see food in school as a major contributor to school enrollment, but rather a mere catalyst. During an FGD with older fathers, one respondent emphasized, “No, [school enrollment will not be affected when WFP leaves because], we have money. Children were studying before WFP came, and they will continue to study after it leaves.”

Parents emphasized the fact that Maasai parents have understood the value of education, and it is this attitude that has increased enrollment rather than the influence of food in schools. It is only those who have not understood the value of education that can be influenced by food. During an interview with older fathers, one participant remarked, “It depends. Most know the value of school. But some would keep the children home if the free school feeding programme finish.”

According to district education leaders, food in schools has been the biggest motivator for increased primary school enrollment. Leaders believed that enrollment is most likely to drop significantly this year since WFP is soon stopping the food aid in primary schools. The school leadership committees also acknowledge the role of WFP as such a great motivator to primary school enrollment. During an interview, one of the interviewees lamented, “I can’t imagine how the situation will be when WFP contribution stops...”

**World Vision Tanzania:** World Vision support has also reportedly played a substantial role in increased enrollment. The organization through its sponsorship program registers vulnerable children and recruits sponsors for them in the USA. To encourage increased primary school enrollment, the organization initially made it clear that they would register children of school-going age only if they were enrolled in school. Parents who had not enrolled their children previously but who hoped their children would benefit from registration with World

Vision were therefore motivated to enroll their children in school. According to FGD participants, children registered in the program at that time received attractive benefits such as scholastic materials and uniform incentives.

Findings continue to reveal that World Vision has played a central role in sensitizing the community on the value of education. The organization works in partnerships with the ward leaders and District officials in pursuing the sensitization agenda for the education of both girls and boys. Through sensitizations, parents appreciated the value of education. This significantly contributed to the increased primary school enrollment in schools. Some children also push their parents to enroll them in schools as the children themselves admired the WV sponsorship benefits.

World Vision improved the primary school learning environment through infrastructure development, which participants believed must have contributed to the increased enrollment rate as well. This infrastructure development included construction of primary school classrooms, staff houses, and supply of desks, and water tanks in schools.

### **Parents' Role**

Findings revealed that parents play a big role in primary school enrollment. This is because they take the decision and responsibility of enrolling children in schools. Study participants even told the researchers that some children could be forced by their parents to be enrolled in school. One of the participants in an FGD with the men remarked, "I emphasize that parents are making their decision, but even if children are arrogant they have to be in school."

## **Factors that Still Hinder Primary School Enrollment**

### **Education vs. Culture**

According to the participants, some Maasai people perceive education as a threat to culture. This was ranked the highest factor that would hinder education in the past, and is still a major factor for those parents whose children are not enrolled in school even today. Education was seen as something that would ruin Maasai culture among the young generation.

The Maasai are very proud of their rich, unique culture and treasure its preservation. One of the major cultural practices that Maasai of the older generation would not want to change is Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). According to the World Health Organization (2014), FGM refers to all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. Study participants told researchers that this practice reduces extramarital sex. It is believed that a woman who has undergone FGM loses sexual desire and hence keeps herself from committing adultery.

Traditional ear piercing and stretching is yet another cultural practice that some Maasai parents fear to lose if their children obtain an education. This practice is a painful exercise, which includes burning of some parts of the ear and creating a big hole for bearing the large earrings for beauty. Key informants told researchers that a big ear shows that a person is a good listener. Respondents reported that schools teach against these practices and so education may affect the sustainability of such cultural customs among the Maasai.

## Enrollment and Gender

All FGDs and key informants interviewed revealed that daughters in the Maasai culture are seen primarily as a source of wealth and as such may be married off young as opposed to being sent to school, as early marriage brings quick returns. Respondents reported that in the Maasai culture, the parents of the groom will pay bride wealth in terms of cattle to the family of the girl. Since wealth in Maasai culture is defined by the number of cattle one has, early marriage for daughters is a way for her parents to become wealthy. Culture may hinder the parents from seeing a benefit from educating a young girl. Her education is seen as a delay to wealth accumulation. One parent during an FGD expressed that, “When a child refuses to go to school, it’s an advantage for parents if the child is a girl.”

According to the participants, boys have historically stayed out of school as well to instead take on the role of herding cattle. Findings reveal further that during very dry seasons, boys would even spend a long period away from home as they went to *ronjoo*,<sup>1</sup> where pasture and water could be obtained for the survival of the animals. Findings also revealed that the children that were not loved by their fathers would be sent to school. Those loved by their fathers would be entrusted with the wealth of cattle and hence take on the herding role. One of the study participants in his testimony noted, “In the ‘60s when I began primary school children were forced to go to school. The one less loved was sent to school. The loved child was sent to herd cattle.”

Results show that in the past, Maasai people would generally see value in cattle over formal education. As one participant explained, “Because of livestock keeping. [Parents who resist formal education] prefer informal education at home because they see more value in livestock keeping. That’s the only reason.”

Respondents reported that this attitude is, however, fading out, adding that now, parents or Moran<sup>2</sup> may take over the herding job and let children attend school. In one of the FGDs, when asked about who does the herding now that children are in enrolled in school, a parent said, “There are still cows, but mothers do the herding now, or they employ someone. The Morans can take the cows to *ronjoo* as primary school-going children are left to attend school.”

## Poverty

Poverty was reported from all FGDs as a factor that would hinder some parents today from enrolling their children in primary school. There are families that are unable to afford the school requirements and therefore can’t send their children to school. Even though primary education is free, extra expenses for scholastic materials, uniforms, contribution for payment of cooks and security guards may present to some parents a deterrent to primary school enrollment for their children.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ronjoo* refers to the migration of Maasai herders with their livestock to more suitable temporary grazing sites according to seasonal changes.

<sup>2</sup> A *moran* is a Maasai warrior in the age group which has been through circumcision, but has not yet been instated as elders.

### **Large Families**

Paradoxically, in two FGDs, discussants shared that wealth was in fact a hindrance to primary school enrollment for some families. Where wealth is measured in number of animals and children, sending all children to primary school may indeed be daunting. An Mswakini Juu mother explained, “Also polygamy [can be a reason not to enroll children in primary school]. A husband may manage many wives and many children. He may not be able to fairly support all children, so he just leaves it up to mothers alone.” Similarly, a Makuyuni Juu father said, “Also there is the point of big families. The family with many cattle is also a big family with many wives and children. The large number of children is a constraint to being able to send all to school.”

### **Poor Financial Management**

Mothers in one FGD also claimed that some families appeared too poor to afford to send children to primary school, but were in fact suffering due to their own poor use of resources: “Others are not poor, but are drunkards. If they get money for educational expenses they waste it on drinking. Those people will still not send children to school in 20 years.” When the moderator suggested that impoverished families should hope to have many daughters to bring in livestock as bride wealth, another mother replied, “Some get dowry and just consume the livestock instead of investing in it.”

## **Perception of Education**

### **Vision of Education**

In this study, Maasai parents generally envision a positive picture of education in the future. Participants told researchers that they expect better quality education in the future, through secondary and beyond. Primary education today is therefore seen as the foundation for such better education. In the future, the parents hope for even better enrollment rates in school. The community/parents believe that good education even draws foreigners.

### **Return on Investment**

Findings revealed that education is perceived as an investment where returns are highly expected. These expected returns are mainly concerned with children being employable and in position to economically support their parents and families. A few respondents also hope that their children, through education, will be in a position to gain skills to improve livelihood activities (such as agriculture). In one of the FGDs, a parent noted that, “Children who go to school are expected to even be better farmers and cattle keepers.” An SMC member in another FGD also said, “They do that farming and herding better because of education.”

### **Beyond Primary Education**

There is much hope for continued education in this community, according to the participants in this study. The parents expressed great interest in having their children pursue formal education, even beyond primary. The major motivator, however, is the expected material

return on investment from financially successful graduates who give back to their families and communities.

## **Discussion**

### **Value of Education**

It is interesting to learn that the major reason for increased school enrollment as reported in parent FGDs is the improved perception of parents regarding the value of education. In all FGDs this issue was emphasized, which is quite remarkable considering that the Maasai are nomadic pastoralists. As one father said, “Now we see the value of education because some people’s children finished studies and found good jobs—even in the USA—and can send money home. It is good to have education so that when moving outside the boma to town you can understand signs and announcements.”

However, an analysis of the findings reveals that the value of education perceived in this community is primarily related to the observation of fruits through employment as opposed to the benefits of education for life. Respondents also shared that one of the deterrents to parents sending children to school is observing those who have been in school but are unexpectedly and disappointingly failing to obtain good jobs and are unable to support their parents. However, the respondents placed a much greater emphasis on the observation of good fruits across all FGDs.

The literature indicates that Maasai in other communities in neighboring Kenya have similarly been observing the fruits of formal education and adapting their perception of the value of education. Stories collected from families in the Amboseli region indicated that some wished to send children to school because they had seen the political and economic advantage of those families who did have educated members (Cochrane et al., 2009a). Data collected from various Maasai communities in Amboseli and Kitengela, Kajiado District, Kenya in the mid-2000s revealed that the level of education of the household head was indeed directly positively related to the household income, and these same households continued to invest in education for the next generation (BurnSilver, 2009; Nkedianye, Radeny, Kristjanson, & Herrero, 2009).

Both the respondents in this present study and the previous literature explain that push factors are decreasing the viability of pastoralism and forcing many Maasai to prepare their children to pursue alternative livelihoods through formal education. As one father explained, “In the past Maasai parents/community were wealthier in cattle, and inheritance was in the land and mainly cattle. But now there are global problems and the land is cursed. Only education can be passed down— no longer cattle and land.”

In the early 90s, Hillman noted that the Maasai of both Kenya and Tanzania were being progressively pauperized as their rangeland was commandeered in the name of development, making pastoralism less viable. As they have been forced to turn to farming, they find that often that is an even riskier livelihood in semi-arid lands with frequent drought, a threat that has been increasing as a result of global warming. When their young men migrate to cities to seek wage-earning jobs, they are often marginalized to low-paying and high-risk employment as watchmen. Their basic educational opportunities have been scantier than the national average in countries where access and quality of education are already universally deficient (Hillman, 1994). A 2005

publication from UNESCO regarding education for pastoralists in East Africa also recognized these increasing pressures:

Potential external factors are: adverse climate change leading to drought and famine; lack of grazing lands due to pressure from governments not to cross international borders; the designation of some traditional grazing areas for other uses by the government; population growth leading to occupation of lands previously used by pastoralists; sedentarisation programmes; and armed conflicts leading to dispossession of pastoralist livestock. (Car-Hill & Peart, 2005, pp. 33, 34)

In 2009, Homewood, Kristjanson and Chenevix Trench observed that the Maasai were not so stubbornly resisting change as the stereotypes purported, but were instead diversifying their livelihoods to employment and farming as rangeland was privatized, poorer families were bought out of their land, and the viability of pastoralism diminished. Families with few cattle had difficulty accessing education and other opportunities to escape poverty, but "according to surveys conducted... at the African Conservation Centre, Maasai families already see education and off-farm jobs as the best option for coping with population growth and future droughts" (Homewood et al., 2009, p. vi). Even in the early '90s, Bonini found that the Kisongo Maasai who perceived formal education as irrelevant were a minority (Bonini, 2006).

### **NGO World Food Programme**

The World Food Programme had been in Makuyuni and neighboring Kisongo for six years at the time this current study was conducted, providing free lunches in primary schools. Indeed, this seems to have contributed considerably to increased primary school enrollment. However, most of the parents in the FGDs of the present study said that the provision of free school lunches worked as just a catalyst, and its end would not adversely affect primary school enrollment rates. Conversely, interviews with key informants revealed that the issue of food given in schools is a key factor for increased school enrollment. In a discussion with SMCs, it was discovered that leaders are concerned about the state of enrollment once World Food Programme leaves this year (2014). One of the participants in an SMC FGD lamented, "I can't imagine how the situation will be when WFP contribution stops." Officers at the Education Department of Monduli District expressed similar concern. The Kisongo/Makuyuni 2012 Evaluation Report from World Vision shows that enrollment has increased in this community from 36% in 2007 to 83.5% (84% for boys and 83% for girls) in 2012 (World Vision, 2012). The fact that the time WFP started supplying food corresponds with the onset of increased enrollment in primary schools suggests that one could reasonably infer that WFP may have had an impact on the primary school enrollment trend.

In 2005, Sifuna claimed that similar WFP interventions among pastoralist communities in the arid and semi-arid lands (ASAL) of the neighboring country of Kenya did not prove to have a sustainable impact on primary school enrollment rates. Enrollment increased and remained high

throughout periods of drought and food insecurity, but enrollment rates decreased again as rains came and food security increased (Sifuna, 2005). Has the sustained primary school enrollment rate increased in recent years in Kisongo and Makuyuni wards been primarily a result of dependence on WFP for food security or other factors? WFP began serving primary schools in Monduli District as emergency response during a particularly devastating drought. Sadly, the project has reached its end just as another drought is beginning. Future research will be needed to determine whether SMCs succeed in mobilizing communities to sustain their own school feeding programs.

## **Factors Hindering Primary School Enrollment**

### **Education vs. Culture**

Some FGD participants shared that Maasai parents may sometimes resist formal education because they perceive it to be a threat to their culture. This theme has been identified in previous literature as well.

Traditionally, the Maasai identify as "people of cattle" to the core, with all other values supposedly stemming from that pastoralist identity. They look down upon non-pastoralists—hunters and farmers—as undignified and poor. This view is reinforced by their mythology. There have long been colonies of Maasai farmers who have interacted with purely pastoral Maasai, but these groups have been seen as distinct, and non-Maasai by the purely pastoral Maasai. As economic changes have forced many of Maasai lineages to give up pastoralism though they still claim their Maasai identity, the traditional definition of "Maasai" may be shifting (Galaty, 1982). Development initiatives and education curricula have historically been antagonistic to pastoralism, promoting sedentarisation and farming as the way forward for the "backwards" Maasai. Education has therefore been viewed by many Maasai as a threat to their way of life (Bishop, 2007; Bonini, 2006). Stories collected from families in the Amboseli region indicated that some resisted sending children for formal education because they had observed that formal education eroded Maasai cultural values (Cochrane et al., 2009a). In one FGD in this current study, one mother claimed, "School does not attack people's culture." Another mother immediately added, "It used to be true [that education was seen as a threat to culture.] Educated children would lose respect for Maasai community."

Homewood et al. have called for the Kenyan and Tanzanian governments to release the potential of the Maasai to contribute to the economy through policy changes, especially through provision of quality and accessible education. This is not antagonistic to pastoralism and would have the power to pull them out of the margins, particularly as they acquire language and literacy skills (2009).

Interviewees in Keiper and Rugira's study of academically successful pastoralist youth acknowledged that education provided a refuge from threats of the traditional way of life, such as female circumcision and long days and nights of herding while braving the elements and wild animals. These same youth hoped to help their people by using their education to bring changes to their childhood communities (Keiper & Rugira, 2013).

Sawamura and Sifuna (2008) explained that although many rural parents are anxious for their children to succeed in education, and their children are anxious to meet those expectations,

For children in rural Kenya, education functions as a tool to exit traditional society... All wish to go to university; such aspirations for higher education support the expansion of primary education. Although few children wish to stay in the rural community and work for them, most children dream of working in the modern sectors of urban cities. Girls, in particular, often have a definite wish to exit traditional society. (Sawamura & Sifuna, 2008, p. 115)

Primary education for girls in particular runs contrary to traditional Maasai culture. In the Maasai culture, wealth and riches are measured by the number of cattle that a man has (in fact, among the Maasai livestock belong to men only). Discussants shared that marrying off young girls results in quick wealth accumulation. At the end of the day, wealth is counted by number of cows, and yet an uneducated girl can bring just as many cows to her family in terms of bride wealth, and more quickly. Maasai culture, like many other traditional African cultures, has a patriarchal structure within which all brides leave their childhood home and join the home of the husband's parents. Parents, therefore, view the education of girls as not beneficial to them, but rather to the family of the husband. Parents may not expect any return on investment for sending a girl to school, yet her education delays their wealth accumulation. However, discussants claim that the situation is changing in modern times. A mother from Mswakini Juu explained, "Maasai value cows a lot. Marriage of girls *brings* cows. Sending children to school may *cost* cows." Her colleague added, "In the past enrollment was low because girls would be married off, but now girls are free to finish primary through standard 7." In the Mswakini Juu FGD for the SMC members, one woman also stated, "Girls have no right culturally to refuse marriage. But they may fight for that right if educated... Currently no girl can be forced into early marriage because people are aware of rights."

Other discussants also acknowledged, however, that cultural resistance to education is still a challenge for some girls. In Makuyuni, an SMC member said, "Some still want to marry off girls early. Two weeks ago a girl came to the UWT (Union for Women of Tanzania) for help to escape early marriage, and she was helped to go to school in Moshi." In a fathers' FGD in Makuyuni, one discussant claimed, "The government doesn't push all children. Only girls, because girls may be married off early for cows. Only a few cases [exist]."

Prior research in Monduli District has also shown that Maasai girls face cultural resistance when pursuing education. Temba, Warioba, and Msaliba (2010) explored attitudes towards education for Maasai girls in Monduli district and learned from respondents that there had been improvement in recent years. However, resistance to education for girls is still an issue due to fears of cultural "pollution", loss of labor force at home, the "waste" of the investment since girls become part of their husbands' families once married, and the attraction of marrying off daughters in exchange for bride wealth as soon as possible (Temba et al., Warioba, & Msabila, 2010). This is not unique to the Maasai of Monduli District, either. Stories collected



from families in the Mara region indicated that some openly prioritized formal education for male children over female children (Cochrane et al., 2009b). And in Loitokitok in Kenya, Anastasia and Tekelmariam (2011) discovered that Maasai school girls there reported that their peers' education was negatively affected by parents' discouraging them, undergoing FGM, staying home to care for younger siblings, entering into early marriage and/or experiencing early pregnancy, and participating in cultural dances with some of these factors being attributed as causes of others (Anastasia & Tekelmariam, 2011). Many researchers and individuals report stories of girls resisting and/or fleeing from forced child marriage in order to pursue further education (Archambault, 2011; Temba et al., 2010; Ngoitiko, 2008).

A more detailed look at the findings of Temba et al. is appropriate here as their study also explored primary recent education trends in the same Monduli District. Respondents to Temba et al. stated that the factors still negatively affecting Maasai girls' basic education in Monduli District include "Poor retention rate/drop out, Absenteeism, Truancy, Lack of awareness on importance of education, Early marriages" and "Promiscuous sexual relations at tender ages [sic]" (Temba et al., 2010, p. 41). Additional specific cultural constraints identified included chores at home and with the herds, initiation ceremonies (female circumcision, which is a high-risk procedure), and *esoto* (night-time cultural dances), which can result in children missing school the next day and often involve high-risk sexual behaviours (Temba et al., 2010).

The District Education Officer (DEO) and other respondents in Monduli also identified their challenges to reversing cultural hindrances to Maasai girls' education as involving lack of funding to facilitate seminars and other efforts, as well as Maasai parents' adamant resistance to change, their migration behavior, the remoteness of their homes, and the low international support and poor stewardship of local NGOs. The DEO emphasized that the frequent migration of the Maasai made it challenging to work with them. Both teachers and the Maasai elders shared that the work done by NGOs was too little to have a real impact in the large area and population of the Maasai. Furthermore, some NGOs are exploiting the situation mainly to benefit themselves from the money entrusted to them, and most of their work is focused in easily accessible areas while the remote majority remain marginalized (Temba et al., 2010).

Temba et al. asked respondents in Monduli District to identify the greatest factors contributing to improved attitudes towards girls' education. Nearly all cited the impact of campaigns and awareness raising by the government (80%), and NGOs and CBOs (90%). A few respondents also mentioned "radio programmes, Maasai graduates at various levels, experience from towns and cities regarding success of women and girls," and "influence of mother[s] who got primary education [sic]" (Temba et al., 2010, p. 39). Respondents reported that the improved attitude towards girls' education is evidenced by the following list of facts:

1. There are Maasai girls in primary schools.
2. Some Maasai parents now send their girl children to international schools.
3. A good number of Maasai people contribute in building primary schools in their respective societies.
4. Increased efforts by Maasai female graduates to encourage girls' education among the Maasai communities.

5. Requests to NGOs by Maasai elders for schools in their respective villages.
6. Higher attendance of girls than boys in some schools in Monduli [sic] (Temba et al., 2010).

As quoted by Temba et al. (2010), the DEO of Monduli states that the government has been key in promoting Maasai girls' education in Monduli district through awareness raising and school construction, but many NGOs have made a great impact through awareness raising, as well as through sponsorships to keep girls in school. Significant organizations listed by him include World Vision, ARK Mission, MWEDO (Maasai Women's' Development Organization) and *Maarifa ni Ufunguo* (Knowledge is Key). Discussants in the current study also stated that the government and NGOs have been key in promoting Maasai girls' education through sensitization as well as law enforcement. An SMC member in Makuyuni claimed, "Also NGOs and the government educated the community against early marriage." An SMC member in Mswakini Juu also argued that "[w]ithout government enforcement, rates may return to how they were in the 1980s. Girls may be married off instead of being sent to school. Girls can be married off or kept home to work."

Maasai girls interviewed by Temba et al. claim that their parents prefer child marriage to completion of girls' education because of the bride wealth. They call for the government and NGOs to work at educating parents on the rights and potential of the girl child. Archambault (2011) argued that the issue of early marriage for girls should not be oversimplified as a victimization of girls by greedy fathers; the pressures on the modern Maasai resulting from government policy and climate change have led to increased poverty and some fathers may view early marriage of a daughter as the best option for sustaining both his homestead's future as well as that of the married-off daughter. One discussant, a mother from Mswakini Juu, alluded to this, identifying the root cause for seeking bride wealth may arise out of poverty rather than greed: "First reason [for keeping children out of primary school]—marrying off girls in order to gain cows, because of poverty."

### **Poverty**

The issue of poverty came out from many FGDs as one of the factors hindering some parents from enrolling their children in primary school, as alluded to in the above discussion on challenges for girls. However, all FGDs and key informants agreed that primary education is free. There is a likelihood that the issue of poverty could have come in as participants were thinking about secondary education and institutional education rather than just primary education. The Maasai people have animals that can be sold off to help pay school dues. In an interview, a key informant who is both a World Vision staff and a Maasai said, "In my view there is no Maasai who is poor; in fact Maasai people are not poor. All people are rich, and the sale of just one cow can meet the education requirement of all your children and you remain with money."

This means that the ability to pay for children's school dues even at secondary schools and above can truly be within reach for many parents if they can have the will to sell off some cows. It is surprising that most children out of school are reportedly busy herding cattle. In one

of the FGDs, one parent had this to say: “The parents don’t have money for uniform, so children are sent home. And then they return to herding.”

The fact that children return for herding implies that their parents are not actually too poor to have their children enroll in primary school. However, some discussants did insist that poverty is a real constraint for some of those withholding their children from primary education. A mother from Mswakini Juu explained, “Some want to send their children to school, but they are too poor to pay for school expenses like uniform.”

In Makuyuni Juu, an excerpt of the discussion with mothers went as follows:

*Makuyuni Juu Mother 15:* Those with no cow, goat, or sheep run away to town to look for work so they can feed their children.

*Moderator:* Does this community really have people so poor that they don’t even own one cow or goat from which to get funds for school uniform?

*Makuyuni Juu Mother 15:* So many! [Laughter around the circle] You find many in Makuyuni Juu like that. [Number 1 agrees.]

Later in this same FGD, however, discussants emphasized that drunkenness and poor management of assets were at the root of some of this prohibitive poverty.

*Makuyuni Juu Mother 15:* Some get dowry and just consume the livestock instead of investing in it.

*Makuyuni Juu Mother 11:* Others are not poor, but are drunkards. If they get money for educational expenses they waste it on drinking. Those people will still not send children to school in 20 years.

### **Recommendations**

Education is a key driver in a country’s development and is both formal and informal. Formal education is carried out in recognized institutions, including pre-schools or nursery schools, primary, secondary schools or higher learning institutions such as universities and colleges.

The Maasai—like all people in this world—should benefit from formal education. It should be noted that apart from formal education, highlighting the pros and cons of their culture, norms and values is another factor that contributes to overall development sustainability and is important in addition to formal education to all children of school age. However, it is recommended that scholars should explore more in this field due to its complexities worldwide so as to meet the expectations of people by maximizing their full potential.

Due to the efforts of different partners—for instance, Non-Governmental Organizations and local leaders—in sensitizing the Maasai, there has been increased school enrollment in Makuyuni. This is because parents assume that once their children are educated, the chances of getting a job are high.

There is a need to ensure that food provision at schools continues through sustainable measures. These measures should involve mobilizing parents through shared participation like establishing school gardens as a way to promote food-feeding programs for long lasting

outcomes. Since there is not enough food in individual children's homes, having food at schools would help add motivation for pupils to be enrolled in primary school.

There is need to have vocational skill trainings in primary schools promoted so that even after primary school, children are able to sustain themselves in the future. Parents become discouraged when they see children who attended school neither attaining a better standard of living nor helping their extended family economically.

The government should support pre-primary education through establishment of pre-schools to prepare children for primary schools. Also, in order for more children to be enrolled in primary schools, the government needs to sensitize the Maasai traditional leaders and cooperate with them as respected decision makers in their tribes.

### **Conclusion**

Education is very important in today's worldwide development. The Maasai are one of the tribes that have long been restricted by their culture to move from poverty to prosperity in the modern world, which is the reason this study was conducted. The Maasai in Tanzania and especially in the Makuyuni area invest in their children's education as a legacy, even though their traditional cultural norms may still oppose formal education. Furthermore, in these days, boys and girls are going to school together. The fathers and mothers in Makuyuni have realized the importance of education through the benefits they see to some parents who have educated their children. Such benefits are one of the motivators to send their children to school and support their formal education. Another reason the parents send their children to school is the feeding program that came through the World Food Program. This was confirmed with the education officers at district level, local leaders and young fathers. The food in primary school came in order to solve the problem of poor enrollment in primary school. Primary school enrollment also affects the higher levels of education because without pupils in primary school, you cannot expect high numbers of pupils continuing on to secondary schools or universities.

However, girls' education remains more challenging due to cultural context. In Maasai culture, girls are considered as a source of wealth because of the numbers of cattle they can bring in as dowry. In Kisongo and Makuyuni, the Maasai are still promoting female genital mitigation (FGM) for young girls between five to nine years old. If a girl is circumcised, it means that she is ready to be married according to Maasai culture. Girls' education is not likely to be as important according to an older fathers' discussion: "Good education" for girls, traditionally, is preparation to take care of the family and to give birth as early as possible.

The Tanzanian government policy strongly encourages the education of all boys and girls and, therefore, public primary schools demand no school fees. Additionally, the government has also instituted some punishment to those parents who do not support their children to attend school. The punishment is managed by the school management committee (SMC) and local leaders. The government has also established boarding schools for girls for primary school in the Maasai community. This is one of the mechanisms to encourage the girls to go to school, but also to change the Maasai culture to promote education for young girls as well as boys.

In brief, the research showed that the mindset of parents in Makuyuni has changed and they are now contributing to school construction in some villages where the children walk a long distance to go to school. The government is working with different NGOs to promote education, and local leaders continue to sensitize the parents about the importance of education for their children. This was evidenced by the vision of both mothers and fathers in the research when they shared their bright vision of education for their children up to university, equipping them to be professionals in future.

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