

**WARRIOR'S SPIRIT: THE STORIES OF FOUR WOMEN FROM
KENYA'S ENDURING TRIBE**

by

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The Maasai people of East Africa are well known throughout the world because of their strict traditions and customs. Men in this tribe are known for their fearlessness, courage and power as warriors. To become a warrior, one is required to kill a lion using a spear. These warriors are expected to defend their families and clans from all danger and harm.

In this study, I examine a different kind of warrior. These warriors do not kill lions nor do they carry spears; they are women with a warrior's spirit. The women whose stories I tell are brave, determined and resilient in defending their own rights and ensuring they provide for their families. I narrate their stories of how they overcome the traditional roles that society dictates for women and pursued an education, acquiring employment outside the home. Although these women had to undergo female genital cutting and some were abducted to be married at a young age, they continued to fight and challenge traditions in order to become the people they are today. Their spirit and determination are essential traits that allowed them to overcome the restricting traditions that have hindered many women from pursuing an education.

I interpret their stories through the lenses of human capital, human capability and feminist theories. Human capital theory tells us that education is a key determinant of earning an income and is essential for poor families to come out of poverty. A common element in the stories of all the women is a shared motive driving their resilience: the need for employment that would somehow enable them to earn an income. Human capability theory focuses on the ability

to live a life that one values. Feminist theory helps to answer the question of women's subordination to men and all the challenges the women had to overcome to become the people they are today.

Their stories reveal several factors that enable women in oppressive circumstances to succeed. These include exposure and environmental factors, family and guardianship support and personal resilience. The study highlights the challenges the women faced, the many ways they overcame them and how they are changing traditional norms in the Maasai community of Kenya.

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1.0 CHAPTER I: KAKENYA'S DREAM

I dug along a borderline marked using two parallel white ropes. The sand was dry, letting dust settle over my black high-heeled shoes. A thought crossed my mind, “what was I thinking wearing these shoes?” but before I could dwell on that thought, someone shouted, “Move!” and another said, “Be careful.” These voices seemed to come from a distance, but they were very close to me. As I plowed the ground to loosen the soil, my mother kept moving the soil to one side using a spade so as to leave a narrow trench along the ground between the two ropes. I stood up after a few minutes of bending. The crowd clapped their hands, some sung and others cheered loudly. I handed the hoe to a man standing next to me. Everyone wanted the hoe, and the councilor was ushering my friends from America to come closer so that they could dig, too.

I stood next to my mother, looking over the crowd. I felt a sense of joy run through my body. I could not stop smiling and occasionally felt like crying. The people in front of me were young and old, from all different parts of the village. A few had come from across the oceans. The majority were young girls between ten and fourteen years old, mostly dressed in orange-colored clothing and with lots of beaded necklaces and bracelets. They looked beautiful. Women from the village were also all dressed in traditional Maasai clothing: orange, red and white *shuka* (blankets) with beautiful beaded necklaces, just like the ones the girls were wearing. The few men in attendance wore mostly jackets and t-shirts. Only a few wore traditional Maasai clothing. Everyone and everything at that moment looked beautiful.

The digging continued until everyone who wanted to dig had a chance to do so. The entire time a group of girls sang beautiful Maasai choruses. I loved the singing, which reminded

me how much I missed Maasai songs. My mind was at peace. I could see hope for the people of my community, especially the girls who were the focus of this landmark day.

This day was Saturday, August 16, 2008. It was around three o'clock in the afternoon. I will remember this day for many years to come; it is the day we broke ground for the first girls' primary school in my community in Kenya. I had been dreaming of this occasion for many years, and more frequently during the preceding few months. I had envisioned this school, what it stands for, and what it would accomplish for many years. My vision was of a girls' school, a place where girls could be motivated, challenged, and encouraged to become what they wish to become in life. I had dreamt of this kind of place since I was a young girl growing up in this village, and seeing it coming to pass brought tears of joy to my eyes. This day was the beginning of a great journey for girls who would be enrolled and begin pursuing their education in this environment the coming year.

You may be wondering why I am emphasizing that this day was a great day. Well, let me share a little bit of my personal story. One afternoon I was washing dishes outside my mother's house. We had just finished having lunch, and, as our tradition dictates, the role of cleaning and washing dishes is supposed to be carried out by girls. The process of washing dishes at the village is complicated because we do not have sinks or running water to wash dishes in the house as they do in the city or developed countries. Rather, we wash the dishes outside, using water we collect from the river, and we are always careful not to misuse the water because that means more trips to the river. This particular afternoon was special. I had warm water in two pots - one for washing, and one for rinsing. I was bending. My hands were fully covered with soap as I scraped the cups and plates and moved them from one pot to the other. I had just called my sister

Naimutie to come help rinse the dishes and place them on a table-like rack, made of sticks and wood. I was six years old and Naimutie was four.

My mother was sitting in the shade beside us nursing my little brother and talking to my grandmother. A young boy, about 14 years old, walked by and greeted us, first my mother and grandmother, then my sister and me. According to our traditions, greetings for older people (my mother and my grandmother in this case) have to be separated from the greetings for the children (my sisters and me). This is to show respect. After he passed, my grandmother said to me, “I hoped you are washing the dishes well; your husband just saw you.” I shot straight up, soapy water dripping from my hands, and looked at my grandmother. I thought she was joking, as grandmothers like to do with their grandchildren. She said, “Ooh! You didn’t know. Leteipa, the guy who has just passed by, is your husband. That chain (*pointing at my neck*) you are wearing is his, he put it there when you were three years old. Also, his parents have already brought *lerteti*” (a formation of sticks that they placed beside my mother’s bed to show that they are interested in their son marrying me).

Without saying a word, I returned to my initial position and continued to wash the dishes as fast as I could. My feelings were numb; I started imagining being a wife to that boy, washing his clothes and cooking for him. I imagined being pregnant and carrying another child on my back, journeying to the clinic that was so far away. I imagined being screamed at because the cows did not get enough to eat. Did I really want to be a wife to Leteipa at twelve? No! My mind raced. My sister, who had joined me in washing the dishes, had made up a song for mocking me. “Someone is getting married! Someone is getting married! Someone has a husband! Someone has a husband!” and laughing so hard at me. I felt like slapping her, but I couldn’t. She was my

little sister. I felt sorry for her because I knew she was going to also find out soon who her husband would be. I could not believe it that I was engaged and I was only six years old.

I had just started going to school and I loved it. I loved it because I had some time to play with my friends. Even though we were collecting firewood and water for the teachers, it was fun because I did it with my friends. I liked my female teachers because they looked nice; they dressed nice and wore shoes every day. They inspired me and I wished to be like them one day. But now, with the new revelation, it was likely that I would never even complete primary school. Over the next few years, the thought of being married preoccupied my mind. Everything I did at home seemed to be preparing me for that role of a wife. Washing clothes, cooking, collecting firewood, fetching water, and milking the cows seemed to fill all my time before and after school and all through the weekends. Despite these duties, I was determined to postpone my marriage to Leteipa, though I did not know how.

Many girls in my village lack opportunities to continue with their education, especially when they reach puberty. Most of them undergo female genital cutting, a traditional rite of passage to adulthood, and marry at a young age. Most of the marriages are arranged and forced. As I stood there that afternoon, I thought about those young girls who were singing and how most of them would undergo female genital cutting that December. The majority of them would be married off to start a new life in a year or so. Most of them, like me, did not want to be married at a young age, but because that is what tradition dictates, they would have to follow it.

Even though thinking about the past brought sadness to me, I was glad to know that the ground we had just broken for the girls' school would be the beginning of breaking the cycle of a tradition that does not allow girls to pursue their dreams. Although the girls I was seeing would not be able to benefit from this school, I was consoled to know that in the coming year, the

school would start enrolling girls ages nine and ten in fourth grade. We would start with 30 girls in fourth grade and thereafter an additional 30 girls each year until full enrollment was reached in first through eighth grades. As I thought about the hopes and opportunities this school would bring to the girls in this community, I could not help but think how the opportunity would have shaped my life.

As narrated by Amy Argetsinger (2003, December 28 through December 31 & 2004, May 19), in a five-part series of articles in the *Washington Post* newspaper, I fought traditions, challenged some of them, and negotiated with others, forging a way to become the person I am today. Argetsinger (2003 & 2004) describes how I managed to avoid getting married to Leteipa after I finished primary school and how after high school I convinced village elders to support my travel to the United States of America to pursue higher education. The articles give accounts of my journey from childhood to the time I received my undergraduate degree. Argetsinger (2003) discussed how I defied traditions to achieve what no other girl in the village had done: leave Enoosaen and travel across the ocean to acquire a college education.

Since Argetsinger's (2003 & 2004) articles will give background information about my upbringing, I will share how my story has progressed since I found myself on the front page of the *Washington post* newspaper. It was December 28, 2003. I woke up in the morning, read my Bible, prayed and then went for a run. This had been my morning routine for many years, especially during the warm sessions of the year. For December, this morning was not too cold. After my four-mile morning run I showered, made some tea and turned on the computer. As I sat down to open my emails, I was a little anxious. Amy Argetsinger, the *Washington Post* reporter had spent the last few months interviewing my family in Kenya and me in the United States, and this day the first story would appear on the front page of the paper.

I remember being scared, knowing my life story was going to be read by many people. “Will they like it? Would it make sense? Most of all, would the people like me after that?” I thought over and over for many nights before the articles came out. I had no expectations, and therefore I did not know what to anticipate. I opened my email and was amazed at how many emails I had received that morning from my friends, mostly my schoolmates. A lot of them congratulated me for my achievements so far and encouraged me to keep moving on. I received emails from people I did not even know, many telling me how they were inspired by my story.

I was invited to attend meetings and to speak at events, and was even offered my first job as a result of these articles. Because of my upbringing, I did not really understand what it meant to be on the front page of a big newspaper in a big country. Many of my girl friends would tell me how famous I was, even though I did not feel that way. I was just like everyone else. I did not put much into the idea that I was on a big newspaper.

Many positive things have come about as a result of the Washington Post articles. Among them were the well-wishers who offered my mother a ticket to attend my undergraduate graduation. It was a blessing to have my mother and one of her friends from the village attend the graduation ceremony. My mother witnessed her first school graduation ceremony in her life. She said, “The graduation ceremony was more beautiful than a wedding ceremony.” She wished many people from the community could see what she witnessed on that day.

Once I graduated from college that May, many more doors were opened up for me. I spoke at a United Nations conference event in Washington, DC, to an audience of 300 people, and by end of the day I was offered a job. I took the job as the youth advisor at the United Nations Population Fund in Washington, DC, where I worked to raise awareness on the negative effects associated with child marriage and advocated for the education of girls as an option to a

better life. I traveled extensively around the U.S. and around the world representing the United Nations and speaking about issues that mattered to me: education of girls, delaying marriage, and female genital cutting. I believe that early marriage and female genital cutting robs young girls of their bright future. I spoke on the importance of educating girls as a key component of eradicating poverty and empowering the next generation of leaders. The more I traveled and spoke, the more people listened, but deep inside me I felt that there was something missing.

I preached on something I believed deeply, yet so many girls in my own community were continuing to face cultural practices that hindered them from achieving their best. I wanted to do something in my village, the place I knew best. I wanted to help girls from my own community, daughters of the friends I went to school with. I wanted to impact their lives in a big way. I felt that I needed to practice what I was preaching. The way I knew best to help these girls was to start a girls' school for them. I wanted to start at the primary school level, as I believed in giving the students a strong foundation; "Raise your children in the way they may go." Primary education is critical because it forms the foundation for the rest of the child's educational journey.

I also wanted to be educated and empowered so that I could be in a position to effect change on a greater level. I am tired of my country's education system, where wealth determines the kind of education a child receives. Those who are able to send their children to private school get the best education while those students attending public schools get the worst education because of the lack of learning and teaching materials. There are very few teachers in public schools and even fewer in rural schools.

These issues, coupled with the fact that every time I went home to visit from America I found many girls dropping out of school to get married, bothered me so much that I wanted to do

something. That is how this day – the groundbreaking day -- came to be. It has not been an easy road. I started conversing with the village elders about the possibility of building a girls' school in 2005. I was faced with a great deal of resistance from the men in the community. The following is one entry from my journal, written during this time.

Today is Saturday July 17, 2005. I am feeling so tired. I arrived home last night after traveling seven hours on a rough road from Nairobi. I had spent the night in Nairobi after I arrived from the U.S. two days go. It was so happy to have finally arrived home and seen my mom and siblings.

At around 11am this morning, I went to Enoosaen to meet with men and women from the village to discuss the possibility of building a girls' boarding school in our village. I was a bit nervous on my way there because I did not know what to expect from the elders. I was also not sure who would be there. The meeting was to start at noon in a local primary school. I walked to the meeting place with my mom. The walk was about half an hour – it is the same route I used going to school when I was young and the one my family uses to go to the market twice a week. I love walking with my mom because we talk and catch up on everything. To my shock I arrived at the place and there was no one – I had envisioned arriving and finding a lot of people waiting for me but that was not the case. I had to wait for people to come.

My mom told me we were early because noon to Maasai people actually means two in the afternoon. How did I forget this? I grew up here and always knew things never happened on time. I started to become impatient and disappointed that no one seemed interested in coming to the meeting. I called the area chief, whom I had requested to call the meeting. He told me he was still far from the center and that I should be patient -

people were coming. My mom and I found a shade and sat down. We waited for about an hour and decided to go to the center to eat lunch at a local restaurant.

The meeting finally started at three o'clock in the afternoon. The turnout was not as I expected. There were seven men and three women, including my mom. I was hoping that many people would turn up to hear what I had to say. I had informed the chief that I needed to talk to people in the community, men and women about a project I needed to start in the area. He had assured me that he had informed many people and they were going to attend. I was a bit discouraged, but I had to encourage myself that not everyone was going to turn up to hear a girl speak. After all, there has never been a meeting called for a girl to come speak to elders.

I knew that day that I had a long way to go to convince the elders that we were going to build a girls' school in the village. The meeting started with a word of prayers from one pastor, and then the chief spoke to the people informing them of the purpose of the meeting. I was then given a chance to speak.

I started the meeting by thanking the elders for coming to hear what I had to say. Then I reminded them that before I left the village to go to America to get an education, I had promised them that I would come back to help the village with my education. I told them that I had just finished my first degree and was still determined to come back and support them.

I shared with them how education has helped me become the person I am and very much wanted other girls in the village to follow my path. I told them that I knew how much girls wanted to get an education just like the boys. I shared with them the story of my best friend in sixth grade, Emma.

Emma and I were best friends since third grade; we played, ate lunch, and studied together over many years. When school was closed for the holidays in sixth grade in December, Emma and I hugged and parted ways to go home for the holiday. We looked forward to being together in class seven the coming year. However, something drastic happened that December; Emma underwent female genital cutting (FGC) and got married to a man her parents had chosen for her. That was the end of her education, and at 12 years of age Emma had a family to care for. A year later she had her first baby, a girl. To feed her children, Emma had to work on the farm, and sometimes she begged for food from other people. Now Emma has eight children and her first-born daughter is already married with two children.

On my visit to Enoosaen, I met Emma in the market. If it were not for her calling my name, I would not have recognized her. Emma was carrying a huge bag of maize on her back and her health had deteriorated. At age 30, she looked like a 50-year-old woman. My conversation with her began by her saying, “I wish I had continued with school like you did.”

I reminded the elders that girls are unable to compete with boys in the local day primary school because they are overloaded with work at home. Girls are busy with multiple chores including milking cows, collecting firewood, fetching water, washing clothes, cooking for the family, and caring for their young siblings. I told them that if girls were given an opportunity to do well in school they would be able to support their immediate and extended families. They would be able to buy them the cows that parents would normally have gotten had they married off their daughters. They would be able to support their young siblings and their mothers.

I told the elders that it is important that we educate our girls and the best way of educating them is to provide them with a girls' primary boarding school. This kind of a school would enable the girls to learn without interruption from the many chores they have at home. The school would provide the girls with a nurturing environment where they would be motivated to be the best they can be in life.

I told the group of men and women that I needed their support and blessing for me to build that kind of school for our girls. After my long speech, the elders just stared at me. I could not tell if they were happy about the idea, as they did not show any emotion in their eyes. I sat down after I spoke. The chief welcomed the men to react to my request. The first man to stand said, "We welcome such effort and you have our support." From there, every man reaffirmed his words, and I was on my way to building the first girls' school in the area. They even commented that this was the first time they had educated a girl and she had come back to help them. The remnants of stereotype and culture did not evade others as they noted that a boys' school should have been built first and then a girls'. I remained firm that change in the way education was provided to girls was more urgent than for boys, since girls were marginalized by the current system. Fortunately, they agreed.

No woman spoke, as traditionally, whenever men are present, women do not speak. They just listen. I wanted them to speak, but since I did not want to break any traditions by forcing the women to speak, I waited until the end of the meeting to speak to the women alone. After the men spoke, the chief told me to wait for his response in the next few days. Yes, the elders had given me their blessings, but I also needed them to support me in the project. Therefore, the chief went to talk with more men to find out how they would help me.

A few days later, the chief invited me to a meeting he had with other men. I was the only lady and, for that matter, the only girl. In this meeting there were ten men. All the local leaders were also present. They included the chief, the councilor, and the division officer. There were a few pastors and other older men from the village. The meeting took place in the chief's office, near our local market place. The office was a small round building made of iron sheets. There was a table in the middle and everyone sat on the benches that were around the office. After greeting everyone in the room, I sat in the only available space near the door.

The meeting was started with prayers by the pastor and the chief opened the meeting by stating the reason we were all there. The men were there to tell me that they had agreed to let me build a girls' school in the community and they had even offered me a piece of land where we were going to build the school. I was not expecting this news. I was so happy. After several exchanges with the people, they took me to the land where they wanted me to build the school. It was a happy day.

That day, however, as I stood there witnessing the ground breaking of that girls' school I had envisioned, there were not only ten men around me. More than two hundred people stood there with me. Everyone was excited about the hope this school would bring to the daughters of the Maasai community.

1.1 DISSERTATION OUTLINE

I came to this study with the hope of learning about other women in my village who have also overcome several life challenges to become the people they are today. Unlike me, these women did not get the opportunity to study in America or to be featured in the front page of a major

newspaper, but they did overcome great challenges to follow their dreams in life. Today, these women are able to support their families because they fought all the challenges they had and were able to get an education.

This chapter narrates my personal story and gives background on the situation women and girls face in the community I come from. It also discusses, in brief, the beginning of a girls' school I started in the community. Chapter two outlines the methodology used to carry out this study and it also share some of the works that have inspired me to complete this study. Some of my experiences in the research process. Chapter three reviews some of the literature that speaks to the issues associated with girls' education in the developing world. Chapter four through seven contains the stories of the four women who are the focus of this research project. In chapter four you will meet Susan, a woman who had to overcome all of her husband's adversity to return to college and to get a job in order to be able to support her family. In chapter five you will meet Leah, one of the most courageous women I know. Though she was abducted at the age of fifteen, she was able to fight her battles and returned to finish high school and then college. In chapter six you will meet Ruth, a petite woman who overcame community pressure to achieve her education and now has turned her home into a rescue place for girls running from early marriage. In chapter seven, you will meet Rachel. She was orphaned at an early age but found refuge among the nuns in a nearby mission hospital.

The last chapter will provide a discussion of different theories that have helped inform this study. Human and capability theories support the idea of education as a means to move individuals from poverty to prosperity. Feminist theory discusses the oppression women and girls face in order to achieve their education. The chapter also discusses some of the factors that have enabled the women in the study to achieve their success and be the people they are today.

2.0 CHAPTER II: UNDERTAKING THE STUDY

2.1 WARRIOR'S SPIRIT

A warrior, especially amongst the Maasai people of Kenya, is a man who is well respected in the community. He is someone brave who has killed a lion and been circumcised without crying. He is someone who fights on behalf of his people and readily carries spears, clubs and shields with him to defend his community. Finally, he is someone who, when called upon, will come at any moment and rescue his family and his community. Even though he is tall and skinny, a Maasai warrior is fearless, proud, courageous and powerful in all ways. When traveling around Maasai land you will know a warrior by the way he is dressed, with red colored blankets on his shoulder, long red hair and beaded bracelets and necklaces.

In this study, I describe a different kind of Maasai warrior. These warriors have not killed lions and do not carry spears, shields or clubs around the village. Instead, they carry pens, pencils and books as their weapons. These different kinds of warriors only have the spirit of a warrior described above. Instead of killing lions, they kill poverty in their homes. When called upon by their family, they are ready to rescue them by challenging harmful traditions and practices. Moreover, they fight to improve their community. Women and girls in the community go to them for advice, mainly because these warriors are not men, but women. These are brave

women who are changing the way a Maasai woman is viewed in the community. They are a different kind of Maasai warriors; they are women with the warriors' spirit.

The focus of this study is on four women whom I have known personally for many years, living in the Enosh village in the Transmara district of Kenya. These women were born and raised in the community, underwent the traditional rite of passage to adulthood in the village, are married or were married within the community, have completed their primary and secondary education and went to teachers' college. Currently, these women are teaching at the local primary schools. Beyond supporting their immediate families, these women have acted as mentors to girls in the community, and one of them started a support group for women suffering from AIDS. These women are also battling negative traditions that have hindered women and girls from accessing education. The strength, courage, and passion for what they have overcome and currently achieve is the foundation for this research project.

2.2 NARRATIVE AND STORYTELLING APPROACH

To carry out this study, I observed and interviewed these warriors in their homes, workplace and local market. I listened to them as they recounted how they live their lives; how they overcame so much adversity and how they became the people they are today. I recorded the conversation with a small digital recording device, which I later transcribed into a word document on my computer. I also kept a journal in which I recorded my thoughts and perceptions following each interview. As the women's stories unfolded, I turned to a narrative genre, more specifically personal narratives, to situate the study. I am brought to this field of study by *Lives of Moral Leadership: Men and Women Who Have Made a Difference*, by Robert Coles (2001). In

covering the lives of ordinary and famous leaders, Coles (2001) writes in the “documentary and narrative tradition, offering accounts of social or political or religious or spiritual or economic leadership” (p. xix) as it has been demonstrated and observed by him and others. He says, “The work mentioned here has taken me to homes, churches, schools, neighborhoods, soup kitchens, and offices in our nation’s capital” (p. xix). I too journeyed to homes, schools and markets to observe and converse with the women who I describe with the characteristics of a warrior’s spirit. Coles presents the stories of the people and uses quotes to ensure the voices of the leaders he interviews are present throughout the story.

I am further inspired by *Half the sky: Turning oppression into opportunity for women worldwide*, by Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn (2009). The authors narrate powerful stories of women and girls overcoming sex trafficking, prostitution, child marriage and female genital cutting to some becoming successful businesswomen working to change the course of their lives to bring attention to the injustice done to them, creating a movement that sets them free. Their work spurred a global movement in the media, in government and nongovernment organizations, and among individuals to fight injustice and improve the lives of women and girls around the world. Kristof and WuDunn present detailed accounts on each issue, challenging academicians and policymakers alike to engage with their work. By using narrative stories to discuss challenges women face around the world and solutions to those challenges, they invite readers to take action.

Both Coles (2001) and Kristof and WuDunn (2009) laid the groundwork for my study. Through the presentation of these women stories, I hope to open a dialogue at the local, national and global levels on the injustices done to women and also to offer solutions to addressing these injustices.

Narrative research, according to Josselson (2003) is “up close and personal in that it involves in-depth study of particular individuals in social context and in time, and it requires a highly sensitized and self-reflective inquirer rather than a set of objective impersonal skills” (p. 4). The women in my research narrated their personal stories and we had very close moments as they opened up to share deep feelings and revelations for the first time. I felt a sense of privilege and honor that the women trusted me enough to share intimate aspects of their personal lives for this research project. Even though the Maasai people pass traditions and cultures through narration of stories to the young generation, the narration is normally left to the grandparents. Women in general do not have the time or the privacy to share their experiences. Their day is normally filled with caring for their families. The women I discuss in this research were educated, which enabled us to have time to talk in the privacy of their homes or in the home of a friend. A narrative methodology for this study is further supported by Chase (2009), who notes that “narration is a major way in which people make sense of experience, construct the self, and create community meaning” (p. 80).

Gay, Mills & Airasian (2006) point out, “narrative research is a highly personal, intimate approach . . . that demands a high degree of caring and sensitivity on the part of the researcher” (p. 431). During my interviews, the women shed tears. I was not prepared for these instances and at first did not know how to respond to them. I sat quietly and told them, “you are a brave woman; look at what you have accomplished.” I empathized with their situation, and one of my goals in this study is to empower them by sharing their stories with a wider audience. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) also suggest that it is important for the researcher-participant relationship to be mutually caring, respectful and characterized by an equality of voice. The fact that I had

created these relationships before I came to this study was extremely important for the research process.

Ritchie and Wilson (2000) confirm that “telling our own stories – and then revisiting them to see what they mean – is a courageous and revolutionary act, far from the marginal position it occupied in the research community” (p. ix). These women were brave to share about some of the most traumatic moments in their lives. The stories from these women bring out the challenges they faced to pursue their education and the ways they navigated through these obstacles. I have been using the term stories because “humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). Furthermore, as Maasai people we “think in story form, speak in story form, and bring meaning to our lives through story” (Artkinson, 2007, p. 224). The culture and traditions are passed down through storytelling by grandparents around the fire in the evenings. Through stories, boys learn how to become warriors and girls how to become prudent wives rather than warriors. Because storytelling has been part of Maasai culture for centuries, it is appropriate that I tell the life experience of these women in the form of narration. I believe that through stories, the experiences of these women will be passed down to young women and girls. Furthermore, when “we listen carefully to the stories people tell, we learn how people as individuals and as group make sense of their experience and construct meanings and selves” (Chase, 2003, p. 80).

Holloway and Freshwater (2007) explain that there are many reasons why individuals would want to tell stories. People tell stories to come to terms with their lives and to share their emotional experiences. Moreover, the story-telling process allows “individuals . . . [to] take control and subsequently feel empowered” (p. 704). Even though I believe the women studied for this research were already empowered, the process of telling their stories seem to bring them

a new awakening. Besides being tearful in recounting their painful past, I detected anger in their voices, especially when two of the women spoke about how their husbands mistreated them. “My husband died of HIV/AIDS and I did not know,” Rachel noted when explaining how she found out that she was HIV positive. Susan explains the situation with Maasai men:

Imagine you are from school, you put down your bag, you rush to see if you have enough water, the cows are ready to be milked, you need to see if you have food for dinner, you start cooking and the man is just sitting. I am always the last to sleep and the first to wake up.

Holloway and Freshwater (2007) claim “Storytelling provides the narrator with a distance from the (often threatening) experience of vulnerability” (p. 704). In the course of conversing with the women, I saw the opposite; the women felt so close to their experience, which for others, it brought moments of pain but also laughter. It is true, though, that “once the story is in the process of being narrated, it enables the narrator to gain a different perspective on the experience” (p. 704). Some of the women told me that they were glad they went through difficult experiences because these experiences had enabled them to empower others in the community. Ruth says, “Now because I went through the process (referring to female genital cutting), I am able to tell my girls those things do not have any value. There is nothing I can gain from the experience. It did not help me at all. It just embarrassed me.”

After my interaction with the women and transcribing the data, I sat down and rewrote the stories in a chronological sequence. This seemed necessary because when the women were sharing their stories, they did not necessarily tell me in this order; and I was interested in what made the women different and what motivated them to search for education against all odds. Telling their story chronologically enabled me to better understand their upbringing. I then turned to *narrative analysis* to interpret the meaning of the stories told by the women. Bird,

Wiles, Okalik, Kilabuk & Egeland (2009) give the definition of narrative analysis as “a form of interpreting a conversation or story in which attention is paid to the embedded meanings and evaluations of the speaker and their context” (p. 20). To invite the reader to engage directly with the narrative from the women, I used quotations from the stories. Each story unfolds in a sequence of connected events in the woman’s life. Each woman took me on a journey from when she was born to the present. Emotionally, it was exhilarating and strenuous at the same time. In this type of research, “the story is the outcome of the research” (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2006, p. 435), and that is what I provide in chapters four through seven: the stories of women with the warrior’s spirit.

2.3 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

A quick search on women and girls’ education results in hundreds of articles written about the challenges and benefits associated with girls’ education and hundreds of organizations working to address the issues of educating females, especially in developing nations. Most research on this topic has focused mostly on identifying and describing general constraints that hinder girls’ access to education, benefits associated with girls’ education and solutions to increasing girls’ access to education (FAWE, 2000; Floro & Wolf 1990; Herz 1991; Kane, 2004; Lincove 2009 among others). While this research has helped raise awareness of the challenges facing women and girls’ education and the benefits associated with the education of girls; limited data exist that narrates the successful stories of women and girls overcoming obstacles to access their education. It is with this in mind that I attempt to tell the stories of the few women in my

community who have challenged tradition to get an education. All of these women underwent female genital cutting and escaped early marriage in order to continue with their education in a community in which only 11 percent of the girls make it to secondary school. Female genital cutting and early marriage, which I will discuss in detail in the next chapter, are considered some of the traditions that hinder girls from continuing their education. I specifically sought to understand what made these women different, what it was about education that attracted them to pursue it and how education has contributed to their current status in the community.

It is my hope that this work will not only inspire young girls in my community in the Transmara District in Kenya, but that it will open up a dialogue throughout the world on challenging circumstances hindering women and girls from achieving their dreams. Their story of overcoming early marriage and continuing with their education will encourage girls not only in Kenya, but also thousands of girls throughout Africa. The study might also help policy makers and other education stakeholders with helpful insights to enable them to review, acknowledge and change inherent school-based and social-cultural impediments that hold girls back from participating and achieving academic success. Furthermore, it may help local, national and international organizations that are working to improve girls' education in several developing countries.

2.4 NEED FOR THE STUDY

Enosh is a small village located in the Transmara district of southwestern Kenya. It lies about 250 miles west of Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya, with the nearest paved road about 20 miles away. Electricity and running water were only acquired in the last four years and are only

available in the village center. When approaching Enosh village from the east, one sees beautiful hills that shade the village and start to appear from a far distance as a car makes the turn at Tajeu and descends to a small narrow dusty road. On the side of the road there are all types of trees, fences, maize, and occasionally houses. The houses seen in the distance are mostly iron-roofed, shining with the sun's reflection. On the side of the road there are people - men, women and children walking to or from the market. Some women carry bags on their backs or heads, while others lead donkeys loaded with maize or beans to be sold at the market. Men are gathered in groups carrying their sticks and, occasionally, some are taking cows to the market. Children, mostly girls, walk with loads on their heads or carry milk in small containers to the market. The *matatu*, the local means of transportation, passes, stirring up dust. People along the side of the road cover their heads and run towards the little bushes, which are full of dust themselves.

As you enter Enosh village center, there is a government health clinic on your right that has a red rooftop. On the opposite side is a boys' boarding secondary school, fenced with barbed wire and trees. Right past the boys' school there are several *matatus* all lined up for their trip out of town. The center is always full of people, mostly men, standing around idly, doing absolutely nothing. Small shops are built on the side of the road and all have rusty rooftops. There are several women selling milk, clothes, vegetables and other farm products along the roadside.

Beyond Enosh there are massive sugarcane plantations, owned partially by the local people and the sugarcane company. Enosh is surrounded by small hills that make the place quite beautiful. One thing that is impossible to miss on a drive to Enosh is sporadic traffic. This particular traffic is not caused by cars, but cows. The number of cows can be shocking; it is common to see a flock of fifty or one hundred cows' crossing over the road to look for pasture on the other side.

The people of Enosh village are Maasai. They depend on cattle herding and peasant farming to make a living. Children in this village start training for various chores by age five, collecting firewood, milking cows, fetching water from the river, and herding cows. A girl is prepared to be a mother as soon as she starts to walk. Formal education seems not to be a priority among the girls in this village, who are mostly married off by their parents as soon as they undergo female genital cutting, a rite of passage to adulthood at puberty.

Enosh is my village. I was born and raised in this village. I walked the dusty road barefoot to school every morning when I was in primary school. I left the village ten years ago to pursue further studies in the United States, but I often returned home to visit my family. This village has a very special place in my heart, and every time I return home, I am filled with excitement of meeting with old friends and family members. Yet it also fills me with sorrow as I see how the women struggle to make ends meet and how young girls are married off at a young age. It is because of this that I came back to learn about the few women who have overcome cultural norms to achieve their education and to find a solution to some of the misery facing the women and girls of my community.

As noted above, only a handful of women from this community have completed college training. In fact, the Kenyan Ministry of Education estimates that only 11 percent of the girls from the entire district continue with their education into secondary school. Maybe you wonder why this is the case. Maasai traditions dictate that as soon as the girls start walking, they are preparing to become a mother. This means they are trained to undertake all the tasks that a grown woman would perform, including sweeping the house, caring and cooking for the young siblings, and collecting firewood among others. These responsibilities contribute significantly to preventing girls from continuing with their education. In addition, rural schools lack learning and

instructional materials and proper infrastructure, making them significantly unable to prepare the students for a good education. The classrooms are overcrowded with students, making it difficult to deliver a quality education. In such situations, teachers and parents focus their limited time and resources on educating boys who have more to gain from the advanced educational opportunities. For example, during my schooling in the community, boys were offered tutoring in the evenings. Girls like me, however, were ineligible for the extra support because we would be forced to walk home in the dark. Furthermore, I was expected to cook dinner for my family, collect water from the river and milk the cows in the evening. To go to an extra tutorial session at school was therefore impossible.

Studies have looked at the challenges that girls face in accessing education in developing countries, including Kenya (FAWE 2004; Herz & Sperling, 2004; Kane 2004). Rather than focusing on the challenges, this study attempts to identify factors that account for the success of the few women who made it through post-secondary education in a rural setting. The successful women whom I studied are teacher's college graduates. These women have overcome socio-cultural practices such as early marriage and institutional barriers such as lack of learning materials in schools to achieve their education. These women are role models to the girls in our community and I hope their story will inspire young women and girls in this community and around the world to continue with their education despite their circumstances. For me to even have a bachelors' degree, I had to negotiate, campaign, and work within traditions to convince people in my village of the importance of my going to school. My story, and the stories of these women, will inspire women, girls, activists, policy makers and academicians to rise up against any injustice done to women and girls.

2.5 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

My main purpose for doing this study is to narrate and interpret the stories of Maasai women from my community who have successfully completed their post-secondary education and to recount their life experiences and how they perceive their own success. The study describes factors that both constrained and facilitated access to education. Finally, the study attempts to discover what factors contributed to the women's success in completing post-secondary education and acquiring a job in a rural community.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What barriers do Maasai women who continue with post-secondary education have to overcome?
2. What are the contributing factors for these women's success?
3. How do the narratives provide a context for theories regarding girls' education in Kenya?

By asking these questions and interpreting the stories through the theoretical lenses discussed below, I was able to narrate and share the challenges and successes of the women from my community.

2.6 THEORETICAL LENS

One could ask why I decided to narrate the stories of these women instead of just outlining the facts surrounding their lives. The driving force behind my reasoning is to deeply understand these women's stories. I asked myself what really motivated them to pursue their education

despite all the challenges they had to overcome. I have known these women for many years, having grown up in the same village. I understood some of the traditional obstacles they had to overcome to get where they are in life. More so, I needed to understand why I made some of the same choices these women made. Their lives somewhat reflected my own life. Jackson (1989) confirms that, “our understanding of others can only proceed from within our own experience” (p. 17). My childhood experiences were in my mind throughout the research process. When I conversed with the women, they reminded me of the same rituals I underwent. When they told me their stories, I could relate to them. I knew what they meant when they told me that education was the only way to escape the grim circumstances of their lives.

Therefore, as I started to interpret and make sense of my story and that of the women in the study, I turned to a few theories that shaped my understanding of the stories. Each one of us was motivated by the desire to live a better life than that of our parents. We wanted to live in better houses and earn income. We wanted to do something different than what traditions were offering us. We wanted to be independent individuals. Yet, we all grew up in a very different setting and our families had different expectations of us. We all saw education as the way out of our misery. The government of Kenya (2003) believes that “Education improves people’s ability to take advantage of the opportunities that can improve their well-being as individuals and be able to participate more effectively in the community and markets” (p. 39). Certainly education enabled us to improve the way live. The women are all able to care for their families in a much better way than before going to college. The theory behind some of the rational for the women to go to college and earn and income is called *human capital theory*. It tells us that education is a key determinant of earning an income and is essential for poor families to come out of poverty. Throughout the stories of each woman, the motive behind their resilience was the need for

employment that would somehow enable them to earn an income. They believed that earning an income would better their lives. Personally, I dreamed of becoming a teacher so that I could earn an income from teaching and not working on the farm. The women I studied are teachers in the local school, and they earn an income from the government of Kenya.

Another theory that guided my understanding of the women's life experiences is the *human capability theory*. Its core components are functionings, capabilities and agency. What things does a person value doing? Do we go to school because we like to be educated, be healthy, hold a job, or be part of a nurturing family? Functionings in this case are outcomes or achievements we get from acquiring an education (Robeyns, 2006, p. 78). Capabilities, on the other hand, are real opportunities for a person to achieve valued functions, or the substantive freedom to achieve alternative functions combinations (Sen, 1999, p. 75). In other words, are we capable of performing that job we value doing? Did the education we acquire enable us to perform those duties required of us? These women are teachers because they learned at the teachers college how to be teachers. Education has contributed to their capability of becoming teachers. The third concept of the human capability approach is agency. The agent is described as one who has the power to bring change on a level that is of value to him or her (Landorf, Doscher & Rocco, 2008, p. 228). These women have changed the situations in their homes and community. I call them women with warrior's spirits because they have worked to escape poverty and changed the way Maasai women are viewed in the community. They have the power to change the situations they are in. Human capabilities approach therefore "focuses on the ability- the substantive freedom of people to lead the lives they have reason to value and to enhance the real choices they have" (Saito, 2003, p. 24).

Through their journey of acquiring an education, these women had to overcome various obstacles and challenges. And there is no better theory to describe these challenges women face throughout the study than the *feminist theory*. Feminist theory helps to answer “the question of women’s subordination to men: how this arose, how and why it is perpetuated, how it might be changed and (sometimes) what life would be like without it” (Acker, 1987, p. 421). It acts as a guide to understanding gender inequality and a guide to action (p. 421). There are three broader approaches of feminist theory: liberal, radical and socialist feminisms. “Each of these approaches tends to prioritize different aspects of women’s struggles against oppression and also provides a unique analytical structure for investigating and explaining gender relations” (Chege & Sifuna, 2006, p. 4). For the purpose of this study, I utilized two perspectives - liberal and socialist feminist - and their contributions to women’s education.

Liberal feminist discourse is concerned with securing equal opportunities for women and men. It focuses on “issues of equal opportunity in access to resources for women and men, especially in education and employment” (Chege & Sifuna, 2006, p. 4). In education, it is concerned with removing “barriers which prevent girls from reaching their full potential, whether such barriers are located in the school, their individual psyche or discriminatory labor practices” (Acker, 1987, p. 423). Liberal feminists see the “State as an essentially benevolent institution that will both design and implement legislation to ensure women’s equal access to education” (Stromquist, 1990, p. 143).

The *social feminist* idea is that “women performed unpaid labor in reproducing labor power as a kind of subsidy for capital, as well as working directly for capital as employees in factories or producers of commodities” (p. 168). Social feminism’s aim is to “remove oppression (in part by abolishing capitalism) but the immediate task is to elucidate the processes involved”

(Acker, 1987, p. 426). Social feminism's analysis of education holds the school as a site for the reproduction of women's oppression as workers and as women. As workers, they are needed for the maintenance of an inexpensive labor force; as women, they are indoctrinated to accept the sexual division of labor that assigns women motherhood and domestic roles (Stromquist, 1990, p. 146).

Human capital theory has helped in the understanding of the motivation behind these women's success. Did these individuals pursue their college education in order to be able to earn an income or was there something else? Human capability theory has helped in explaining if there are other functionings these individuals gained after receiving their college education. Finally, feminist theory has helped to explain the different challenges these women faced in society and in school.

3.0 CHAPTER III: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

As a young girl growing up in Nigeria, poverty was never a theory. It was not something people read in textbooks or reports. Living on under \$1.25 a day was reality.... There was no food. The situation was so bad that my family could at best have one meal some days; and I clearly remember when I had to carry my younger sister on my back and walk for five miles to find a doctor to save her life from malaria. Looking back, it was education and a caring and supportive family that opened the door to success for me. (Okonjo-Iweala, in Plan International Report, 2009).

Formal education, especially that of the women has proven to be one of the best investment any family, community or country can make. Research (Herz & Sperling, 2004; Hill & King, 1995; Kane, 2004) as well as international institutions like the World Bank and the United Nations, have attested to the great benefits women and girls education brings to a country especially in the developing nations. The World Bank (2006) points out that girls' education is one of the "soundest investments" any country can make because it contributes significantly to the growth of country's economy. Education further allows women to have greater control over their lives

and provides them with skills to contribute fully to their societies; hence impacting all other developmental and social spectrums of the society (UNICEF, 2004). These claims are also demonstrated by the women I interviewed for this study.

Even though research shows great benefit associated with educating girls and women, other findings in developing countries confirm that many girls are out of school. UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2007) notes that, out of the 75 million children not attending primary school in the world, 57 percent of them are girls. The majority of them reside in Sub-Saharan African (47 percent) and South Asia (25 percent). This study and other research (Herz & Sperling, 2004; Kane, 2004; UNESCO, 2005) reveal that many factors affect girls' access and participation in school. These factors includes, cultural practices such female genital cutting, early marriage and parental preference of boys over girls. Furthermore girls are faced with institutional factors like lack of girls' friendly facilities such as separate toilets for girls and boys at the school level and also lack of gender sensitive curriculum and teachers attitudes.

Many efforts have been developed by international and national organizations to address the issues affecting girls' education. Governments also have developed and implemented several policies to address gender parity in schools. These efforts have included free and compulsory primary education for all children at the country level. At the international and regional level, the Education For All (EFA) (1990) policy and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (2000) were developed by the United Nations to address gender parity in education, throughout the world.

This chapter focuses on three areas (a) benefits associate with girls' education (b) barriers to girls' access to and participation in formal education and (c) efforts by the international community and the Kenyan government in addressing gender parity in education.

3.2 BENEFITS ASSOCIATE WITH GIRLS' EDUCATION

3.2.1 Economic benefits

The understanding of the economic potential of girls and women is growing throughout the world; this is according to Plan-International current studies on the *State of the World's Girls* (2009). This is because a “strategic investment in equality and economic opportunity for girls yield real returns and transforms lives” (p. 19). Educated girls and women especially beyond primary level are able to participate in a waged economy because of their literacy and numeracy skills. Dougherty (2005) points out that returns to female education tend to be higher than that of men, despite the fact that female tend to earn low wages. World Bank studies have shown that an extra year of education beyond the average increases girls' wages by 10-20 percent and the return for boys' primary education is 5-15 percent (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2002). In Brazil alone, it is estimated that an additional year of schooling beyond sixth grade “yields a 14.7 percent increase in earning for men and a 15.6 percent for women” (Hill & King, 1995, p. 24). The World Bank (2006) further claims that when women are economically empowered the benefits are not only to the woman, but men, children and society as a whole; hence investing in girls and women “is nothing more than smart economics” (p. 2).

Education is generally claimed to increase efficiency and productivity. This can clearly be seen among educated women farmers. Doss' (1999) analysis of women farmers in Africa revealed that women spend more hours in the agriculture sector than men. In Uganda for example women spend 75 percent of their time in the agriculture sector. Kane (2004) points to a study done in Kenya that shows 22 percent increase in crop yield as a result of improvement in female education level (p. 56). Education provides women with knowledge on how to plant their crops – this includes spacing, using good pesticides and fertilizers. Educated women also are knowledgeable about using improved farm technology tools which will help them increase not only output from the farm but also increase the size of the land they are planting. With the increased output women will not only be participating in subsistence farming but also in commercial production. The family will be the immediate beneficiary and also the country at large as produces are traded in the market. Furthermore, Herz and Sperling (2004) notes that “increasing the share of women in secondary education by 1 percentage point boosts annual per capital income growth by 0.3 percentage point on average” (p. 23). This is a tremendous benefit to the family, community and the country at large.

Few researches have been conducted that examine the returns to education for men and women engaged in the informal sector or in self-employment. This is because the returns in “informal sector work are more difficult to calibrate, since work is often unpaid or earnings are poorly measured” (Hill & King, 1995, p. 24). This is unfortunate since proportionately more women than men who participate in market work are self-employed or in the informal sector. The 2008 MDGs Report notes that “women occupy almost 40 percent of all paid jobs outside agriculture....but almost two thirds of women in the developing world work in vulnerable jobs as own-account and unpaid family workers” (United Nations, p. 18). Education is vital in

transitioning women from informal to formal sector of the economy where they will often gain greater wages than in the informal sector. It is also important to note that even though well-educated women enter the formal sector, most of them “remain in low-status, less valued jobs and face greater barriers to higher positions” (United Nations, 2008, p. 18).

3.2.2 Social benefits

Education benefits for women go beyond the economy gains by the individual, family and country. The social benefits have greater impact on a women family size, health and education of the next generation. Several studies reveal that women with more education have smaller, healthier and better-educated families (Klasen, 1999; Subbarao and Raney 1995; UNESCO, 2000 and World Bank 2006).

Subbarao and Raney (1995) cross-country analysis that looked at fertility and secondary education attainment among women in 65 low and middle- income countries showed that women with secondary education would reduce average fertility rate from 5.3 to 3.9 children per women. When women are educated they tend to have substantially fewer children. This is because they are more likely to delay marriage, childbearing and are more likely to use contraception. A study in Brazil found that “illiterate women have an average of 6 children each, whereas literate women have an average of 2.5 children” (Herz & Sperlings, 2004, p. 27). According to UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, (2005) one year of schooling reduces fertility by 10 percent and the effects are particularly pronounced for secondary schooling.

Delaying childbirth and having fewer children has a great impact on the woman’s health. When girls are married at age 10 or 12 their bodies are not ready to give birth and pregnancy and

childbirth at this age contribute poorly to the woman's health. When girls are in school beyond primary school their bodies will be ready to give birth once they are married at an older age. Having wide spacing between children is also claimed to help the woman's body regain its strength before having another child. Educated women are also able to use contraception and are knowledgeable about its benefit. Furthermore, UNFPA (2005) point out that most maternal death can be prevented if a woman is knowledgeable about the importance of maternity visit, pre-natal and post-natal care.

Education does not only contribute to the health of the women but also to that of their children. A review of many countries studies found that each additional year of a mother's schooling cuts the expected infant mortality rate by an average of 5-10 percent (Schultz, 1993). This is because women with some formal education are likely to get their children immunized, get medical attention if the child is sick, be more informed about their children's nutritional requirements and also adopt improve sanitation practices like boiling drinking water. According to UNICEF (2004) educating girls for five years could boost child survival by up to 40 percent in Africa. A study done in Mali indicates that "a 10% increase in the girls' primary enrollment rate can be expected to lower infant mortality by 4.1 deaths per 1000 lives births" (Kane, 2004, p. 58) and the same rise in girls' secondary participation would reduce child mortality by 5.6 per 1000. The improved health of children and the women have a significant impact on the family and the society in general.

Although studies show that both maternal and paternal education affects children's educational attainment, evidence shows that having an educated mother helps ensure that children go to school longer and study more. A study in India found that children whose mothers were more educated studied two hours more each day on average than did children with

uneducated mothers (Kane, 2004, p. 58). Studies from Ghana, Egypt, Kenya and Peru all found that mothers with a basic education are substantially more likely to educate their children and especially their daughters (Kane, 2004). Women education is critical in breaking the poverty cycle. According to UNICEF (2001), a girl born in poverty is more likely to marry early and have a child while still an adolescent (p. 33). Educated mothers understand the benefit associated with children's education, especially that of girls and they are likely to educate their children.

3.2.3 Education and HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS remains a detrimental disease in the continent of Africa and it has contributed significantly in slowing development in the continent. Death rate in the continent from AIDS has been nearly seven thousand per day (Moss, 2004, p. 177). The United Nations programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) (2004) notes that around three quarters of women with HIV worldwide live in sub-Saharan Africa. Around 13 million women in Africa are living with AIDS compared to about 9 million men. In order to reduce the infection rate, girls' and women education ranks among the most powerful tool for reducing girls' vulnerability.

Research shows that more-educated people, especially youth, are less likely to engage in risky behavior and contract HIV. This is because educated individuals have access to information about the disease and will learn ways to protect themselves. "Women with post-primary education are five times more likely than illiterate women to know the basic facts about HIV/AIDS, according to a 32 –country review of demographic and health surveys" (Herz & Sperling 2004, p. 32). Illiterate women are three times more likely to think that a healthy – looking person cannot be HIV positive and four times more likely to believe that there is no way

to avoid AIDS. Research also show that “girls age 15-17 attending formal school are less likely to have had premarital sex than their same-age peers who are not attending school” (Lloyd & Young, 2009, p. 39). A Zambian study found that AIDS spreads twice as fast among uneducated girls. “In rural Uganda, young rural Ugandans with secondary education are three times less likely to be HIV positive than young Ugandans with no education” (Herz & Sperling, 2004, p. 32). Education does not only offer the woman information on how to protect herself against the risk of HIV infection but also increases her “ability to discuss sex with her partner and negotiate behaviors, such as condom use, that reduce risk” (p. 33).

3.2.4 Education and empowered women

Education is the most fundamental prerequisite for empowering women in all spheres of society. Sen (1999) emphasizes that education helps empower women within the family and the society. As noted above education enables women to negotiate sexual relations with their partners and enable them to leave an abusive husband. The empowering effects for women are shown to reduce violence against women, by helping women stand up for their rights. Herz and Sperlings (2004) note that “Although reducing domestic violence involves complicated social changes ... when women gain education, earning capacity, and standing in society, this neglect gives way” (p. 36).

Female education can decrease female genital cutting, a harmful traditional rite of passage practiced in most African countries. A study in Kenya found that educated women are four times as likely as uneducated women to oppose female genital cutting (ORC Macro International Inc., 1995). In Egypt, mother’s education is associated with lesser intent to mutilate

young girls and greater use of medical means when girls are cut (Malhotra & Anju, 2003). In Burkina Faso, educated women are about 40 percent less likely to have their daughters subjected to female genital cutting. While 78 percent of girls whose mothers had not graduated from primary school had been subjected to the practice, and only 48 percent of girls whose mothers had received some secondary education were subjected to the practice (ORC Macro International., 1995).

3.3 BARRIERS TO GIRLS' ACCESS TO FORMAL EDUCATION

Numerous researches throughout the world have demonstrated that there are major benefits associated with women education (FAWE 2001; Schultz, 2002; Kane, 2004; and Herz & Sperling, 2004). Social and economic returns from schooling for female are greater than the returns on male. Despite the evidence Africa lags behind other continents in terms of providing education to all children. 46 percent of girls in Sub-Saharan African complete primary education compared with 85 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean (Kane, 2004). Many reasons account for the lack of progress in achieving gender parity in education in Africa. To name a few, Africa has the largest number of poor countries in the world and has the largest population growth rate. Furthermore its “nations and people have been ravaged by political conflict, serious economic crises, famine, corruption, displacement and HIV/AIDS” (Kane, 2004, p. 40). All of these can contribute significantly in achieving positive progress in the continent.

There are many studies that outline barriers and constraints to girls' education. King and Hill (1993) reviewed them in their early study and most recently by Herz and Sperling (2004).

These barriers include institutional factors, sociocultural factors and local community/household issues. I will first discuss the historical factors underlying causes depriving women equal chances to education as it gives a better understanding of the current education situation of women on the continent.

3.3.1 Historical background on women education in Africa

Foreign missionaries and other various colonial governments that colonized the continent introduced formal education in Africa. Education during the colonial era was racially segregated among Europeans, Asians and Africans. African men were trained to work in the colonial service as clerks and junior administrators. Restrictions were placed on women who attempted to look for jobs in the cities (Chege & Sifuna, 2006). Generally the goal for colonial education was to prepare girls and women for their domestic roles and boys to earn a living for themselves and their families through employment at the colonial government (Tuwor & Sossou, 2008). The curriculum for girls was “restricted to the service fields of health, nutrition, needlework and childcare” (Chege & Sifuna, 2006, p. 27). The curriculum for girls also ignored women’s work in subsistence agriculture and wage labor, of which African women are the key players. The failure for the colonial administration to provide women with relevant curriculum contributed significantly to low attendance of girls in primary school.

This situation of low enrollment is still evident in most African countries today despite several commitments and efforts by governments to implement universal primary education. The movement to increase education for women in the continent goes back to 1961 when the United

Nation's universal declaration of human rights and UNESCO announced in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia the first education plans for African (Kitetu, n.d). At the Addis Ababa conference targets were set to achieve 100 percent universal primary education in African by 1980. This call was followed by the introduction of universal primary education schemes in several countries in 1970s, for example Kenya, Nigeria, Liberia, Zambia and Tanzania.

Every since the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) and UNESCO, among other international and national bodies, have sponsored affirmative moves, research and conferences within Africa to promote education of girls. These efforts have yield some results in terms of girls' enrollment into primary and secondary school. For example, "female now constitute 50 percent of children enrolled in grade one in Kenya, Zimbabwe, Tanzania and Rwanda" (Kitetu, n.d). Despite the progress, gender inequality in education still exists in most African countries. This could be attributed to poverty, cultural beliefs and practices, and institutional factors.

3.3.2 Poverty

Poverty is the leading cause affecting girls' education in Africa. Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest proportion of people living in poverty compared to the rest of the developing countries. Because of poverty there is inadequate funding to spend on education. Generally, parents incur expenses for sending their children to school. These expenses include tuition fees, textbooks costs, compulsory uniforms, exam fees, transportation cost and the like. The burden on households as a result of fee payment is significant. In Zambia and Ghana for example, education expenses amount to up to 30 percent of the household spending (Kattan & Burnett,

2004, p. 14). Furthermore great disparities exist both at the regional and the country level. For example in Kenya, 47 percent of the rural population lives below poverty line compare to 27 percent of the urban population (Kane 2004, p. 66). In Mali and Niger capital cities have 80-90 percent net enrollment, while rural regions have enrollments rates below 20 percent (p. 61). This indicates that poor families, in rural areas find it difficult to pay school fees, buy textbooks, uniforms, and other school supplies. For this reason children dropping out of school and in other cases families end up choosing between their children whom to educate.

Poverty also contributes to child labor. In Kenya “about 30.1 percent of the parents released their children to work in order to help family business whilst 27.5 percent indicated that earnings from their children’s work augmented the household income” (Vos, Kimalu, Manda, et al., 2004. p. 4). Often girls work more hours than boys whether they are in school or at home. This has implication for dropout, grade repletion, performance and achievement of girls (Kane 2004, p. 67). Moreover, girls from poor families work more hours than girls from wealthier families. In rural Zambia “poor girls work, on average, 94 hours a month, while girls from wealthiest household work 26 hours a month” (Kane 2004, p. 67).

Clearly, poverty has an impact on school enrolment in African. The increase in enrollment in Malawi and Kenya after school fees were abolished suggests that this is the case for many families. Abolishing school fees is the first step in achieving universal primary education, but as Kenya’s and Malawi’s experiences show, it is fraught with difficulties (Kane, 2004). When education is made free as the case of these two countries, schools are normally not ready to accommodate an influx of children coming to school. Rural and slum schools lack enough facilities and teachers to accommodate the increase in number of students and as a result

the quality of education is undermined. In such situations girls are more affected than boys as discussed below in the institutional factors section.

3.3.3 Cultural practices

As noted above, poverty is the largest factor preventing girls from fully participating in education and combined with cultural and institutional factors it creates a difficult situation for girls. Traditional practices such as female genital cutting (FGC) and early marriage hinder girls from continuing with their education. For example, FGC prepares girls for their roles as adult women and wives as opposed the importance of continue with their education. Two million girls are subjected to FGC each year and the majority of them are in Africa (FAWE, 2008). Research shows that once girls undergo this practice they consider themselves as adults and either they choose or are forced to drop out of school to be married. In Gambia and Kenya girls were discouraged from returning to school after initiation ceremonies because they had lost a lot of school days preparing for their own or the boys' ceremonies (Kane, 2004). Furthermore funds that might have been used to pay for school expenses were used to cover the costs of the ceremony.

In many societies throughout Africa marriage is considered the ultimate goal for a girl. Traditional beliefs that education may contribute to girls losing their culture affect parent decision to send their daughters to school. Parents fear that once educated the girl “may question parental decision and later on, the decisions of their spouses” (Kane 2004, p. 63). Furthermore some parents believe that the behavior the girls acquire from school will “damage the family honor and jeopardize, not only their own marriageability, but also that of other women in the

family” (Kane, 2004, p. 63). This belief is mostly practiced by uneducated parents. Additionally “Girls are expected to get married before they are spoilt [when they are still virgins] and hence as soon as girls reaches puberty, age 11-13, they are expected to get married” (FAWE, 2001, p. 7). These traditional beliefs contribute significantly to girls dropping out of school as soon as they reach marriageable age or not attending school at all.

Bride wealth is common among most African societies and is considered a contributor to early marriage. Bride wealth is defined as the transfer of money, goods, or services from the groom’s family to the bride’s family (Haberland, Chong & Bracken, 2003, p.19). In sub-Saharan Africa the bride’s family may receive cattle from the groom or the groom’s family as the bride price for their daughter. This act of transferring goods and services to the bride’s family can be seen as an incentive for the girl’s parents to marry off their daughters at a young age.

Otoo-Oyortey and Pobi (2003) point out in their study on *Early Marriage and Poverty* that “In many traditional settings, poor families use early marriage of daughter as a strategy for reducing their own economic vulnerability, shifting the economic burden related to a daughter care to the husband’s family” (p.11). In some cases the girl may be married to a better off family; however, the younger the girl at the time of marriage, the lesser the possibility the girl would have “acquired critical skills and developed [her] personal capacity to manage adverse situations that may affect [her] overall welfare and economic being” (p. 11). Due to lack of critical skills and development, many young married girls are more vulnerable to poverty and as a result there is a higher possibility that their children will also be vulnerable to poverty. This situation will create a cycle of poverty that may not end and hence cause an increase in child marriage.

Security and safety surrounding going to school and in school are vital in girls' education. The majority of children in Africa walk to school, and mostly girls are not safe walking long distance to and from school. Parents and girls fear of rape, abduction and in some cases attack by animals (Kane, 2004). These factors keep girls from attending school. A study in Kenya also point to cases of teachers and chiefs in the community defiling young girls (FAWE, 2004). While many African governments have laws that protect the girls against these injustices, these laws have not been implemented in local schools and communities.

3.3.4 Institutional barriers

Apart from the cultural beliefs, girls' education is also impacted by the school environmental factors. Availabilities of facilities like toilets and water might affect girls more than boys. In Kenya for example, the average school day is approximately eight hours, an adolescent girl who has her period may want to change and wash her hands (Mensch & Lloyd, 1998, p. 172), however if there is no water or toilets facilities she might stay at home. Furthermore, for those schools that have these facilities some of them are not conducive for girls because of lack of separate facilities for boys and girls. A study conducted in three rural districts in Kenya revealed that only 14 percent of girls' toilets were secure from observation and boys were also seen hanging around the girls' toilets (Mensch & Lloyd, 1998). Lack of these vital facilities in the schools may also contribute to girls not performing well in their education because of missing school several days every month (FAWE, 2001).

Adequacy of learning and teaching materials has also shown to have an impact on girls' education. In most countries in Africa, the allocation of financial resources for education is very low, hence contributing to lack of books, furniture, classrooms and other teaching materials. In such situations where learning materials are inadequate students are "force[d] to struggle to gain access to the available materials and in such situation girls will hesitate in fear of being harassed by their male counterparts" (Mbilinyi, 2003, p. 18). This situation further paves the way for girls' low participation and performance particularly in mathematics and sciences.

The quality of learning materials is also an issue. In many cases materials are not attractive and learners friendly. "They are full of stereo-typing and male gender biased, a fact that discourages girls from effective learning" (Mbilinyi, 2003, p. 18). Analyses of textbooks in Africa found stereotyped material, with women portrayed as subordinate and passive and men as intelligent, leaders and dominant individuals (Herz & Sperling, 2004, p. 11). Girls' learning can be affected, not only by restrictive portrayals of girls and women in school textbooks, but also by the use of examples in the school textbooks.

Research in Kenya found that teachers' attitudes and behavior contribute to girls' poor performance in school. Teachers sometimes will send the girls to cook, fetch water and clean their houses during school time. This gender discrimination affects girls tremendously leading them to drop out of school and in most cases perform badly in their national examination. Gobina (2005) point out that "the dominant socio-cultural expectation on girls is that they be docile and engage in domestic work while boys are expected to be adventurous and to engage in the highly competitive science and technology field of public life" (p. 125). This socialization contributes to girls being excluded from participating in classroom activities that are considered for boys.

3.4 INTERNATIONAL COVENANT AND CONVENTIONS

Several international treaties have been established to provide a comprehensive legal basis for required measures to protect and deliver human rights. The first three, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (1948), The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (1966), and The International Convention on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (1966) are considered by the United Nations as constituting the International Bill of Human Rights. The International Bill of Human Rights has provisions on compulsory and free primary education, and non-discrimination in education. For example, Article 13 of the International Convention on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (1966) states that “primary education shall be compulsory and available free to all; secondary education...shall be made generally available and accessible to all by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education.” As of December 2008, 160 states were parties to this convention and Kenya ratified this convention in May 1972 (UN Treaty Collections, 2009).

The most recent conventions, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (1979) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989), contain the most comprehensive sets of legally enforceable commitments concerning gender equality and rights to education. The CEDAW contains specific wide-range provisions for ending gender discrimination in general. This treaty was developed specifically to address gender issues. Article 10 of the CEDAW addresses discrimination in education noting that the state “shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in

order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education.” It further notes that the state should ensure elimination of stereotyped concepts of the roles of men and women at all levels and in all forms of education and more so the state should “ensure reduction of female students’ drop-out rates and the organization of programs for girls and women who have left school prematurely.” By 2009, 183 countries were party to the convention and the government of Kenya ratified the CEDAW in 1984, after it came into force in 1981.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989) is one of the widely accepted human rights treaties that contain strong guarantees of the right to education. It reaffirms the right to every child without discrimination of any kind to free and compulsory primary education and states that higher education shall be accessible to all. The CRC came into force in 1990 and since then it has been ratified by all countries of the world with the exception of the United States of America and Somalia. The CRC defines a child as any human being under the age of eighteen. In January 2000, Kenya enacted a Children Act and the aim of the Act was “to promote the well-being of children in Kenya” (Sottas, 2007, p. 11) in compliance with the principles set up in the CRC.

3.5 POLITICAL COMMITMENTS

Political commitments result from declarations at international conferences convened by the United Nations. Declarations carry political weight and mostly are time-bound, while treaties carry legal authority and are not time bound. The treaties and political commitments can become mutually reinforcing when securing compliance with human rights obligations. Political commitments “encourages the sense that what really count is making progress towards the goals,

rather than whether or not particular countries are in default of their obligations” (UNESCO, 2003, p. 4). Time frame also helps in monitoring the progress countries are making and helps in setting national and international priorities.

Educational commitments made in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights have been reaffirmed on many occasions. In the 1960s, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the UN lead agency on education, convened several regional conference that established targets dates for achieving universal primary education by 1980 in most of developing regions of the world. At that time, only 25 percent of children were enrolled in primary school and in Sub-Sahara Africa there were twice as many boys as girls attending primary school (Gachukia, 2004, p. 2). This number had increase by 1980 when over 60 percent children were enrolled in primary school. Despite this progress, it was estimated that by “1990 there were more than 100 million children out-of-school” (Jansen, 2005, p. 369). As a result of slow progress, it was imperative that the international community come up with ways to ensure that these out-of-school children go to school.

Therefore in 1990, the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) was held in Jomtein, Thailand, to set out an expanded vision for education and set goals to achieve Universal Primary Education by the year 2000. This commitment was for “universal access to, and completion of primary education by the year 2000” (Jansen, 2005, p. 369). In 2000, however this commitment was not honored as many countries had not fully realized progress in achieving universal primary education. Therefore, in 2000 the Dakar Framework for Action and the Millennium Development Goals reaffirmed both the education and the gender goals. They set a new time frame for achieving Universal Primary education is 2015.

Right to education has been emphasized since the UNDHR was developed in 1948, however; the achievement of gender parity and equality in education has increasingly been emphasized in recent years. Goal two of the 2000 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) notes that member states should “ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.” Goal three speaks to the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women. In relation to education, it notes that member states should “eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and to all levels of education no later than 2015” (United Nations 2000, Goal 3). Despite all this effort by the international community, UNESCO (2009) estimated that 75 million children are out of school and two third of them are girls. It further projects that by 2015, 29 million children will still be out of school.

3.6 WHY IS UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION IMPORTANT?

According to a World Bank study “Education is one of the most powerful instruments known for reducing poverty and inequality and for laying the basis for sustainable economic growth” (Burns, Mingat, & Rakotomalala, 2003, p. 26). Education improves individual income and some research estimates an average of 27 percent of private returns on primary education (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2002). Also Burns, Mingat and Rakotomalala (2003) point out that “When a large share of children do not complete primary education, the productivity of the labor force, the potential for knowledge-driven development, and the reservoir of human potential from which society and the economy can draw are fundamentally constrained” (p. 27). Primary

education also has benefit beyond economic gains. Education gives “individuals the power to reflect and make better choices, seek a voice in a society, and enjoy a better life” (Burns, Mingat, & Rakotomalala, 2003, p. 28). Primary education furthermore is the gateway to all higher levels of education that train the scientists, teachers, doctors, and other high skilled professionals that every country, no matter how small or poor, requires.

Numerous studies have also shown that educated mothers tend to have smaller, healthier families and better-educated families. Several reasons account for this: generally educated women marry later in their twenties rather than in their teens and they are better able to use contraceptives. Educated mothers also have more opportunities to work and earn income outside their home and they also have influence in family decisions (Herz & Sperling, 2004; Hill & King, 1995). A more educated mother may be more informed about proper hygiene and a healthy diet, may be more willing to make the investment of her time and resources in assuring the health of her family. She may have greater access to information about health services and simply may be better able to put her knowledge into practice (Hill & King, 1995, p. 25).

3.7 OVERVIEW OF EDUCATION IN KENYA

The government of Kenya has made significance progress in providing education to all citizens. This can be attributed to Kenya being a signatory of key national, regional and international frameworks that call for equal access to education to all citizens of the world. Among these frameworks are the United Nations Charter on Human Rights (1948), The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), African Charter on Human

and People's Right (1981), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Jomteim (1990), the Dakar Framework (2000) and the Millennium Development Goals (2000). The primary objective of these treaties and declarations is the requirement of governments to implement universal free primary education with specific attention to the girl-child especially the ones in rural areas.

In line with these declarations, the government of Kenya has since independence in 1963 launched and re-launched free primary education (FPE) programs in the country. The first of this initiatives was in 1974, the second in 1979 and the third in 2003 still in progress. These efforts have resulted in significantly increased access to education across Kenya. During the colonial era, "education provision in Kenya was segregated along racial lines, with separate system for pupils of European, Asian and African origins" (Somerset, 2009, p. 233). For example, in the European and Asian systems, primary education cycle was seven years, while for the African it was four years. After the fourth year of primary education, African children who wanted to continue with their education were required to take a very highly competitive common entrance selection exam (p. 234). Only a handful passed the exams; in 1959, for example, only 33.4 percent of the candidates who took the exam qualified to enter 5th grade. For the European and Asian system there was no entrance exam until 7th grade (Somerset, 2009, p. 234).

After independence in late 1963 the new government came into power committed to free universal primary education. However with a shortage of secondary school and university graduates needed to take over positions left by the colonizers, the government was forced to prioritize post-primary education (Somerset, 2009). Therefore instead of making primary education free the government fixed school fees at 60 Kenya shillings per year (approximately \$

8 during that period) in all primary schools in the county. These fees however did not prevent enrollment in primary school, in fact participation increased especially in the upper grades.

3.7.1 First free primary education initiative, 1974

In 1974, the government of Kenya for the first time abolished school fees in the first four grades. Fees were retained in the upper grade until 1978, where fees were abolished each year so that by 1980, the entire primary school system was fees free. “In a single year, from 1973 to 1974, the Grade 1 intake shot up from below 380,000 to more than 950,000 – a rise of more than 150 percent” (Somerset, 2009, p. 236). This increase in enrollment shows that school fees were a barrier for many children from poor families. In fact, there was influx of over age children taking advantage of the free education and sometimes adults were found sitting with regular six and seven years old in the same class which was already overcrowded (p. 236).

Although parents were not paying any school fees in primary school, they were required to pay other non-fees charges. Since the colonial period, construction and maintenance of rural schools and teachers’ houses has remained the responsibility of the local community. The funds were often raised through self-help activities and supplemented by parental levies. As the number of children increased in primary school, it was essential that more schools be built to accommodate the high number of students. The demand for building more school led to an increase in building cost of classrooms, hence parents had to pay high charges in order to raise enough funds for building. These charges sometimes were more than fees that were abolished. For example in one school in Nyeri in 1978, “the building levy amounted to Ksh 600 (\$ US 80) per family, equivalent to the old school fee for 10 children” (Somerset, 2009, p. 237). This

resulted in high numbers of children dropping out of school because parents could not afford these levies. Even though parents were allowed to pay in small installments within a year, they were still not able to pay and in most cases the students were sent home until the parent paid the entire amount. Some of the children never returned, resulting in permanent drop out, for instance, by “1978, when the 1974 FPE cohort reached Grade 5, it had lost nearly 55 percent of its original numbers” (p. 237). In the end, free primary education only increased access to the children from poor families for a few years, then many children had to drop out of school because they could not afford to pay the non-fees requirement.

3.7.2 Second free primary education initiative, 1979

In 1978, Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya’s first president died and was succeeded by Daniel arap Moi, who launched a new FPE initiative in 1979. “The direct imposition of building levies and other non-fee charges on parents was prohibited; instead, schools were required to raise funds for construction and maintenance entirely through community-based harambee [self-help] activities” (Somerset, 2009, p. 238). During this same period, a free milk program was started for all primary schools in the country. As a result of this initiative, there was a rapid growth in enrolments in primary school hence making it difficult for many schools to fund the construction of the needed classrooms and teachers’ houses through voluntary contribution alone. Hence gradually, parents were required to pay some fees to assist in the building of classrooms and teachers’ houses.

In 1988, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank introduced the structural adjustment programs, which required developing countries’ government to introduce

cost-sharing systems in primary school. The aim of the structural adjustment programs was to reduce the share of government recurrent expenditure being devoted to education. All parents were required to pay school fees for their children's education starting from pre-school all through university.

3.7.3 Third free primary education initiative, 2003

In 2003, the newly elected National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) government began providing free primary education in order to fulfill its election platform promise to eliminate user fees in primary schools. The Kibaki government came to power in December 2002 and by January 2003 free primary education was launched with little time for planning. As a result, schools were left almost entirely on their own to handle the overwhelming number of students entering and re-entering primary school. "Grade 1 intake rose sharply, from 0.969 million in 2002 to 1.312 million in 2003; an increase of 35%" (Somerset, 2009, p. 244) in a year. Headlines throughout the world noted that over age children and in some cases adults were all sharing the same classroom. It was not long before overcrowding was reported in classrooms, in some cases one teacher to each hundred students. In rural schools, lessons were cut short so that students could come half day to leave the other half-day for other students.

Although this free primary education program has increase access to education significantly across Kenya, The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2006) notes that "children from poor families still cannot afford to attend school; 9 out of 10 children from poor households fail to complete their basic education." This is because even though parents are not paying schools fees, they are require to buy school uniforms, shoes and other school supplies.

For those children who go to school the majority dropout before finishing their primary education, only 48 percent of the students enrolled in first grade complete eighth-grade. The figures are more alarming when it comes to girls who are faced with many obstacles.

3.8 CONCLUSION

As noted above girls' education raises economic productivity, reduces fertility rates, lowers infant and maternal mortality, improves the health, nutrition and well being of families, and ensures better prospects of education for children. Most of these benefits focus on the economical empowerment of an individual and this point of view has been the dominant argument made for girls' education. The World Bank has been instrumental in advancing the economic benefit of education; and the United Nations has been instrumental in advancing the non-economic benefits of education.

The literature on gender inequality in developing countries shows that poverty, cultural beliefs and practices, and institutional factors continue to contribute to girls' low enrollment, attendance and continuation with schooling. It is noted that parents continue to assign girls more domestic work than boys. In poor households, girls represent an important labor force that parents cannot afford to forgo. In that regard, "even if schools are available and girls enroll, patterns of girls' poor attendance leading to dropping out tend to emerge" (Stromquist, 1990, p. 148).

Generally, the international community has contributed significantly to ensuring that children throughout the world have access to education. Developing countries have also tried to implement this policy, however challenging it has been. What is interesting about this series of

political commitments is that whenever the target dates have been reached, the international community first acknowledges the fact that the goals were not achieved, then immediately proceeds to set another round of targets. The goal of achieving universal primary education has dominated international debate for decades and the international community needs to understand that free education in itself is not enough to address issues associated with universal primary education. There is a need to evaluate the existing targets and share the lessons learned over the past two decades. Access itself is not enough; there is a need to address quality in education. Governments also need to go beyond just signing the agreements but also translate the declarations into practice, otherwise treaty and political commitments creation becomes a cycle that does not tackle the root goal of achieving universal education and gender equality.

4.0 CHAPTER IV: SUSAN'S STORY

4.1 OVERCOMING FAMILY PRESSURE

Susan is a tall, medium-built Maasai woman. She walks and speaks with grace. Her posture and serious-looking face make her intimidating to some. As I approach her to say hello, she doesn't smile but says, "Kakenya Takwenya" – as they greet people in Maa. Without waiting for my response, she opens her arms widely for a hug. I could only reach up to her shoulder, so she must bend down to hug me. She exclaims, "Karibu! Karibu!" (*Welcome* in Swahili). She showed me to the door of her home as I followed her through a narrow door and into her living room. The furniture was covered with white cloth, a tradition that is common in most Kenyan homes. Apart from beautification, the cloth also helps protect the chairs from the dust. Susan's daughter and son walked in and headed straight to me with their heads bowed. This is how children greet older people. I touched their foreheads to give them my blessings.

"Takwenya! Supa!" I said.

They immediately turned around and sat next to their mother. Her daughter is in high school and her son is in primary school. As the children sat, Susan stood up and left the room.

As I was engaging the children in conversation, Susan walked in with a thermos full of tea and cups. In this community, you can never have a conversation before having tea. She

poured the tea and sat next to her daughter. As I looked at her I noticed her daughter looked like her and more so now that they have the same hairstyle, a push back.

Susan is wearing a cream-colored t-shirt and a long, green skirt. She wore red sandals from Bata, a quality shoe store in Kenya. She is serious and does not smile. This look is common among the Maasai women. I remember growing up being told by my grandmother and mother not to laugh and smile *ovio ovio* (aimlessly). “You are a grown up now,” they would say. Come to think of it, I have never seen Susan laugh.

To break the silence I told her she has a lovely house. “Thank you we are just trying” she responded. As our tradition, I asked her how she and her children were doing and how her cows were fairing. I also asked how her teaching was going at Enosh primary school. Lastly, I congratulated her for her new position as the deputy head teacher. This position is normally hard to come by for a Maasai woman. As she shared how everything was going, she described how her new position is demanding. She told me that she is responsible for discipline and the management of the entire school. “I believe I have more work than even the head teacher,” she said. “We have about eight hundred students in the school with ten teachers. I am telling you it is work.” She told me that in the lower classrooms, there are “78 students in one classroom with one teacher – just imagine.” As she spoke, she ended each of her sentences with *muu*, or *imagine*. Traditionally, among the Maasai people one has to respond to the other person speaking with a *hee* sound, which I did faithfully.

Susan continued to tell me about the conditions at the school by giving an example of her own son.

You see I had to move my son to a far away school because he was not doing well at all. He had to be moved to a much lower grade than he was because he had not learned

anything in this local school. Our schools are really bad. There are not enough teachers, no learning materials, and imagine you are expected to perform like other school in the country. How are we supposed to do that? No wonder we never send any children to national schools.

As she spoke, Susan looked straight into my eyes and put her hands together in a praying position and using them to point. “Just imagine,” she continued.

As we shared our thoughts about the challenges facing the education system in Kenya, the cows outside were mooing. They want to be milked, I thought. I told Susan I was not going to stay for long but I had just wanted to greet her at home and request her if I can continue with a conversation we had started a different day in the coming week. She said “no problem. Let me call you on Tuesday to confirm.” There was silence for a bit.

As I looked around her house – I noticed a study table on one side with a few books on top. At the top was the book title *Think Big*. That must be the book her daughter is currently reading, I thought. There is also a chalkboard – this is not usual – I had not seen a chalkboard in any house in Enosh village. Throughout her living room wall were alphabetical letters and different reading and teaching aids. I wonder if Susan spends a lot of time teaching her children.

I started to get up from my comfortable chair and announced to Susan that I had to leave so that she could attend to the cows. We started walking out; it was getting dark. “I have to go now,” I said. “Thank you so much for everything Susan, I will see you soon.” She walked me to her gate and asked her son to take me to the road, where I could catch a ride home.

As I walked with the son to the road– there was silence. My thoughts were quite far. I went to primary school with Susan, I remember how tiny and tall she used to be and of course she was much older than me and was ahead of me in class. She came from a relatively well-off

family, at least that is what I used to think until she told me the truth a few months ago. As a young girl, I never used to talk to Susan that much. I remember her sometimes coming with my older cousin to our home for lunch, as my home was near the school. I always thought she looked beautiful and kind. I admired her.

In the last five years, I have developed a very close relationship with Susan. Whenever I am home from America we both try to find time to talk. I have come to admire her and she has become one of the women who inspired me in the community. She constantly encourages me on the work I am doing in Enosh of building a girls' boarding school. She would tell me, "do not worry about the obstacles on the way but be focused because our community needs this school." Our relationship developed for many reasons. The main one is that there are very few educated women in Enosh village and every time I needed someone to share the ideas I have about the girls' school, I am forced to meet with her and the few other women in the village.

During my last visit to Enosh, Susan had shared with me about her childhood experience. She explained about the uncle who raised her and who served as a Kenyan official in a neighboring country. She was forced to milk cows before going to school every morning and cooked for everyone in the evening after milking. She shared how her aunt didn't want to support her and of the many days she only had milk for lunch. "Just imagine, I would run home for lunch and the only thing I found was a glass of milk," she explained. Susan would drink the milk and return to school until the evening when she went home. "The first thing I did when I arrived home from school was fetch water from the river, milk the cows, wash the dishes, and prepare dinner for everyone. Imagine! I was so tired by the time I went to bed," she noted.

Thanks to a mutual friend, Susan and I had our next meeting in a private home, just the two of us. Susan preferred meeting away from her own home to ensure that her husband did not

hear our conversation. Once we had settled in, Susan sat next to the window and I sat across from her on the opposite side facing the window and the door. I called a boy who was playing outside to bring us a Coke and a Fanta. As we waited, I opened my backpack and removed a small orange bag. Inside were pens, my USB sticks, and a small digital voice recorder.

I showed the recorder to Susan and told her I was going to record our conversation. She said, “That is really nice. I bet this is what the CIDs [spies in Kenya] use” she commented. I explained to her that the recording would help me remember our conversation when I write my study. She examined it and placed it on the table. I picked up the voice recorder and turned it on and placed it on the table. Before long, the boy I had sent for sodas arrived with two bottles of sodas. I gave him the change from my money for him to buy sweets, which are hard to come by in Enosh. If you want to make kids happy, always carry sweets with you. Kids will love you.

4.1.1 Hard Life

When I got married I found life to be very difficult. The first years – it looked like I was enjoying my marriage but after a couple of years, I realized that my life was very difficult. I thought, ‘How am I going to help myself? Maybe I go to college and get an employment.

I asked Susan why she decided to go to college after getting married. Instead of directly answering the question, she told me about her circumstances.

Life was very difficult before I went to college. I used to be very skinny and many people in the community thought I was HIV positive. The little food I had I gave first to my children, then to my husband, and finally, if anything was left, I ate. To find this food, I was forced to work on other people’s farms planting sugar cane and doing any work I could find to buy even a kilo of maize for my children. Just imagine! Sometimes the farm owners would

mistreat us, making us repeat the work we had already done, before they would pay us. Sometimes if a person did not do a good job, the owners would cut the worker's pay. It could take a whole day just to earn fifty Kenya shillings, which was not even enough to feed the entire family for a day.

“I am telling you,” she continued, looking straight at me, “feeding the family was tough – getting the daily bread and I don't mean the actual bread but food; the most common food was impossible” Susan explained.

Showing me her once worn-out hands, she continued

I worked on other people's farms until I decided to cultivate our own land. The land was very hard ground, and I dug with my own bare hands. You see some people would use the ox and tractors to plow their land.

Susan pointed outside as if showing me the farm outside where we were sitting.

I did not have the resources to use these means [the proper equipment]. I dug that hard ground until I planted my own maize. In fact when I left for college, I left four bags of maize in the house for my children. I had just harvested [the crop].

Showing a rare smile, Susan was clearly proud of what she had accomplished.

I asked about her husband and what he does. Susan explained

My husband did not really have a constant job – he used to escort politicians around and that never paid enough for us. In fact he would go for months without coming home and whenever he came home it was even harder for me because he was another mouth to feed. He was supportive though, whenever he got some money he would share it with the family, but it was minimal. Even though we had cows, as a Maasai man, my

husband would never sell them to feed the family. Maybe if someone got sick, but otherwise he would not sell to buy food for his children. Nooo No!

As she stressed this point, Susan shook her head vigorously.

I was not surprised to hear about Susan's husband. Maasai men are generally very proud people and rarely would they work on the farm. Farm work is considered a dirty job and left to the women and people from other communities. Generally, the men are supposed to have enough education to get a job outside the village. It is a woman's responsibility to find food and feed the children and her husband.

4.1.2 Marriage Life

“Don't just look at the man and say he will provide for me everything I need”.

Susan got married just after graduating high school. Unlike most Maasai girls, Susan had an opportunity to decide for herself which man she would marry. The uncle who had raised and educated her wanted Susan to go to a university. He did not want her to be married until she had finished her university education. But Susan was in love with a young Maasai man who convinced her to marry him before going to the university. The deal between the two of them was that they would get married first before she began her university education. Susan agreed.

The day Susan brought her husband home to meet her uncle and aunt is one she will never forget. She recalls, “I was very nervous, I did not know what to expect and I did not know how my uncle was going to react.” After the visit, her uncle asked Susan only one question. “Have you made up your mind about marrying this man?” he asked Susan.

“Yes” Susan responded.

“Well, you are going to have problems in your marriage, but despite the problems you will encounter I want you to stay married,” the uncle continued. Susan remembers that her uncle was in tears when talking to her about marrying the man she had chosen for herself.

But when Susan recounted this story to me, it was she who was in tears. We were silent for a few moments. I felt sorry for her and wanted to hug her, but the table between us posed an obstacle, so I just let her cry. After a while I told her, “You are a brave woman who have accomplished much.”

Susan continued through her tears, “I have never forgotten his words. So the old man knew very well the kind of man I was marrying.”

I had no words to respond to her, so I remained silent.

Sounding regretful for her marriage but also consoling herself, Susan paused and observed

I sometimes feel like the old man’s words have tied me to this man, but I know very well there is no perfect man and that alone has kept me going. You know, when we were growing up, what every girl wanted was to get married. We did not know how hard married life would be. We looked forward to it, so that is what I wanted when I got married: to have a husband and children.

To emphasize this point further, Susan continued

As women in Maasai land, we need to struggle to make ends meet. Don’t just look at the man and say he will provide everything I need. No, not at all! We need to work hard. My marriage has taught me never to depend on a man. I wish that message could be given to all girls in our community. I always tell my daughter to work hard

because if you have hands and have a sound mind, you can do something to help yourself.

As Susan explained her life lesson of marriage, I became curious about what she perceived the role of Maasai men was. I asked her what the men do to help the women. Susan's response was full of bitterness and resentment.

For [In the case of] men, they don't work; they don't work completely [at all]! They will sit under a tree and send a woman [to do something] a hundred times. 'Go get us [me] tea, water, milk, food!' They just sit under a tree doing nothing, waiting for you to serve them from breakfast to dinner. Imagine you are from school, you put down your bag, you rush to see if you have enough water, the cows are ready to be milked, you need to see if you have food for dinner, you start cooking, and [all the while,] the man is just sitting. I am always the last to sleep and the first to wake up.

Susan has become extremely animated explaining the role men play in our community. She continues,

If it is my husband's wish that I would come home from school at lunchtime just to cook for him and then go back to school Just imagine! I am the one who is earning an income and supporting the family, yet I am also his servant to him.

As she spoke to me about the lifestyle of the Maasai men and the condition of her marriage, I did not have anything to contribute to her dialogue, so I just listened attentively. I knew if I started talk, I might not stop.

Before I could ask Susan how the men fell into this lifestyle, she was already telling me about it.

Our community is the one impacting these ideas to our boys. Starting from when they are born, they are entitled to inherit everything from the family and girls don't get anything. This makes the boys lazy because they don't have to work hard to get anything. Everything is there for them. In our community it is the women who provide for the family even though it's not clearly written.

To make sure I got her point of how husbands are not helping their wives, even in the jobs known to be performed by men, she provides an example from her own life.

My husband does not know how to treat our cows; it is I who care for them. At night when the cows disperse for some reason, it is me who gets up to bring the cows back. Even this morning, he told me that when the sun rises, I must remember to treat a sick cow. I do it myself – take it from me. I am telling you, men in our community have become completely nothing. They don't help at all.

It is the women who are upholding the economy of the home. Just imagine! Men are now even going after money we get from selling milk on the road. They tell women to buy the cow medicine and on top of that, wives are instructed to buy airtime for their husbands' phones. Not forgetting for some women that money is the only income they have at home and now they have to give to their husband too. Our culture has changed so much.

Susan paused.

“During my father's time, they never came after the milk money; and they did not let their women treat the cows.”

She pointed at me and said “Kakenya I am telling you we have to do something to help our children. Otherwise they are going to [have] big problems.” Knowing what Susan was

sharing was true, I did not know how to start talking to her about what I was thinking. I just agreed with her that we needed to do something to help our community.

4.1.3 Going to College

I did not tell my husband I was applying for college. In fact I did it alone. I found the application forms and applied. My husband was surprised to see my name on the list of students going to teachers' college. I knew once he saw that I was accepted to go to college, he would come home ready to fight me. I knew that he did not have an otherwise but to let me go to college.

Ten years after getting married, Susan was determined to return to college. She explains her journey of attending college.

The evening I found out that I was accepted to teachers' college, I was very excited but also nervous because I did not know what my husband would say. I milked the cows, cooked dinner, and fed my two young children. I got them ready for bed before I returned to the kitchen to wash the dishes. While I was putting the children to bed, I heard a knock on my door.

“Who is it?! I shouted.”

‘It is me,’ my husband responded.

I opened the door for him. He came in with force as if something were wrong. He went straight to the living room. I told him to wait for a moment so I finish putting the children to sleep. I finished and went to the kitchen and warmed the food for my husband. I walked into the living room and placed a warm plate of food in front of him. He had been very quiet since he walked into the house.

He demanded, “Why did you do it?! Why didn’t you tell me?! Why didn’t you tell me you applied for college?!”

Susan paused to point out that her husband was looking straight at her with tough eyes.

By this time he had adjusted his sitting position. Sitting straight and demanding answers from me. I did not know how to answer but I managed to say because we need some income in this house. Our children need to eat and I knew if I told you, you would have not let me do it.

As Susan explained her story to me, she was nearly in tears. Sitting on the sofa but bending forward as if coming closer to me, she remarked, “Kakenya, I am telling you it was a tough choice.” Susan said that evening her husband did not eat the food she brought him. When Susan placed the food on the table, her husband pushed the food toward Susan. He shouted at her, ‘Take this! I don’t want it!’ So afraid that her husband might hit her, she rushed to pick up the plate and rushed toward the kitchen. Susan was terrified and expected her husband to beat her that night, something he does whenever he is angry at her. During her few minutes away in the kitchen, Susan prayed “Lord please help!” She continues

I went back into the house he was still seating in the living room. I told him I was going to bed. He did not say a word. I went to bed and slept.

I could tell from Susan’s eyes that she was scared to go to bed that night. She told me that in her sleep, she dreamed that her husband beat her, but it did not happen that night. Even though she was scared of her husband, Susan knew she needed to come up with a plan of how to address her situation. She told me that in her sleep and in her wakefulness that night:

I thought [about] how the whole situation of going to college was going to be difficult. I did not have fees. I needed my husband’s support to pay my school fees and also to care

for our children while I was away. I was required to report in school the following week. I needed to come up with a plan to communicate with my husband about what would be required in school. I knew for sure that no matter what, I was going to college.

In the morning Susan woke up with full strength and with hope that everything was going to turn out well. As usual, she was the first to wake and performed her daily duties that included milking the cows, making tea, boiling the milk, and fetching water from the river. She made sure that by the time her husband woke at eight o'clock, the chores were completed and the house looked clean. Susan even made sure that her husband's bath water was warm and ready for him in the outside bathroom. She explains,

As soon as I saw him coming out of the house, I rushed to the kitchen to get him the water for bathing. I put it in a basin and took it to the bathroom for him to wash. After his shower, I brought him tea and sat with him to have tea. This of course doesn't happen every day. I wanted to tell my husband that I would be going to college. You think I have tea with him in the morning every day?

She pointed at me and continued "you know how the Maasai men are. They do not eat with women." I nodded in agreement.

Susan had a plan to get her husband to support her to go to college. As soon as her husband walked into the living room from the bedroom, Susan was ready for him. She poured tea and for the first time in a long while, they ate breakfast together.

"Baba Lemayian, I am going to college and I need your help in paying for the school fees," Susan began, not knowing how her husband would respond.

She continued by admitting that she knew very well that her husband was not happy with her applying to college without his knowledge but that was the only way Susan could get herself an opportunity to go to college.

“When you were applying without my knowledge, who did you think was going to pay your fees?” he responded bitterly.

Susan noted that at that point in the conversation with her husband, she felt more determined than ever to go to college with or without his support.

“Who is going to take care of my children while you are gone?!” he demanded.

“I am going to take them to my sister to care for them,” Susan responded.

“No, no, *I* am going to take care of them – they are *my* children too. It doesn’t matter if we go without food, but I am staying with them,” he told Susan with renewed bitterness.

Susan was not expecting that reaction. Although she felt happy, she dared not reveal this feeling to her husband in case he changed his mind.

“Thank you, Baba Lemayian. This means a lot to me.”

Deep inside her heart, Susan rejoiced and thanked God.

“He thought I would care and feel for him — no, no!”

Susan lifted her right hand and patted the table as she spoke to me with an uplifted spirit. “I was ready to go to school.”

Over the next few days, Susan prepared for her departure. Attending college meant that she would need to leave her four- and two-year-old children and her husband behind to live about two hundred miles away. She would live in hostels with the rest of the students for two years, with a one-month break every three months. Even though this had been Susan’s ambition, she was nervous.

I did not know what to expect as I left my children behind. I had promised my husband to look for someone to look after the house, which I did, but I had never left my children with anybody before.

Traditionally, Susan is to leave her children under the care of her mother-in-law. However, in this case her mother-in-law did not approve of Susan going to college. In Maasai culture, it is okay for a man to leave his family to attend college for many years; however, a woman is supposed to remain with her children. It is a mother's responsibility to care for her family. Susan recalled her mother-in-law's biting words: "Who do you think you are leaving the children with? What kind of woman are you, leaving your house behind to go get lost in a strange town?"

Her mother-in-law's disapproval did not distract Susan. She continued with her preparations, ensuring that the new housekeeper knew everything about her children and her home. Once in a while, her mother in-law would throw words her way.

If you have decided to go, then make sure as you pack, leave space in the bag for your children too. My son will not take care of them.

Susan knew otherwise. She knew that her husband would care for the children as long as a housekeeper was present.

Discouraging words abounded, and not just from her mother-in-law. Most of her friends told her that once she departed, her husband would remarry. It is very uncommon for a Maasai man to stay at home to care for the children and let his wife leave for a long period of time. Most men would marry a second wife to care for him and the children. Susan told me that she trusted in God for that not to occur. If it had to happen, she thought, let it be after college, when she would be in a position to support herself with a job.

With bags packed and housekeeper in place, Susan departed for college.

Once there, life was not easy for Susan at college. Thoughts about her children overwhelmed her and led her to cry uncontrollably. There was no way of getting in touch with her family except mail, which took a full month to arrive. Susan acknowledges that it was even difficult to concentrate in class, but that did not stop her from working hard. Susan also found strength from other women in college who had also left their little ones. She recalls

As I thought about my children, I was consoled by other women who shared their stories of leaving behind their babies, as young as one or two months old. Just imagine! I was worried and my little girl was then two years old.

Susan noted that the other women would tell her, “You are crying for leaving behind a two-year-old baby; what about me who left a one month old—what should I do?” Susan realized then that she was not the only one who had a little baby and who was searching for a better life. “I told myself my children were grown-ups,” Susan said. Of this early period, she consoled herself with prayer. “I left everything to God and God took care of my children.”

After three months, it was time for Susan to return home for one month. She was delighted to reunite with her little ones after being away from them for the first time. Upon returning home, she learned that her mother-in-law had dismissed her housekeeper and that only the children’s father was providing their only care. Susan observed, “My house was a mess. It had not been cleaned in months. There was dust everywhere, clothes everywhere; I did not even know where to start!” Her mother-in-law could not tolerate the fact that her son was buying food and bringing it to a housekeeper to make food for her grandchildren. She wanted to be the one receiving all the goods. Susan explained that when her mother-in-law dismissed the housekeeper,

her husband told her mother that she would be the one taking care of the children. He told her, “you will cook, feed and bathe my children.”

Over the holiday, Susan cleaned and dusted her house, but most of all, she spent time with her children. Susan confided, “Oh, my children! I had missed them. Just imagine being away from your children for that long!” I responded, “I cannot imagine. It must have been hard!”

For the three weeks Susan was home, she found another housekeeper for her children. Not surprisingly, she later learned that this second housekeeper did not last a month. Her mother-in-law had dismissed her too. Susan reported that this routine continued for two years until she finished college.

Every holiday I found a housekeeper, but my mother-in-law always managed to chase her away before too long. I think I had hired around seven housekeepers by the time I finished college.

Through it all, Susan persevered and overcame the guilt of leaving her children and her husband behind. She knew that the college education she was seeking was valuable to her and her family. She believed that she would get a job and that all the hardship she underwent before and during college would be forever gone. She knew that her children would get an education without worrying about where to find funds to educate them. They would eat and sleep in a good place. These benefits would be worth the cost of Susan’s suffering.

4.1.4 Finding Employment

If you don't have papers to employ you, then it is none of my business. In fact I am going right now and if you get employed I will go and leave this home for you. Susan's husband.

In Kenya, each student who graduates from teachers' college must have a recommendation from the district education office in order to receive employment from the government. Therefore graduates from a district with a high number of graduates normally wait for a long period of time before receiving any employment from the government. The district education office offers recommendations according to the year one graduated. In Susan's district, because there were fewer graduates, a teacher's college graduate normally waited for a period of one to two years to be hired by the government, while in other districts, graduates can wait for even ten years before getting any office from the government.

After college, most teachers seek employment in private schools. They also need to continually check in with the district education office for possible employment with the government. For Susan, she waited for two years before she could receive the government employment. She also noted that she was unable to find work in private schools.

I looked for a job at one of the local private schools and the director refused to employ me because I was Maasai. She told me that Maasai people are lazy—especially the women. “What time would you be milking the cows and what time would you be coming to school to teach? I will not employ you,” the director said.

Despite the rejection, Susan believed that one day she would get a job, but in the meantime, she opened a preschool in her home.

Most of the ten children enrolled in the new preschool came from Susan's neighborhood and from her church. Each family paid a small sum for attendance. Susan held the school under a tree outside her house. The children came in the morning around nine o'clock and left around noon. She taught letters and numbers using a movable blackboard that she placed against the tree. Susan was happy with her school except the money she received for teaching was not enough for her family. She still continued to look for another job, hoping that government employment would come soon.

Susan reported that her husband did not think that she would actually get a job one day, even though he supported her college education. She explains

He was well connected and I frequently asked him to help me find a job. But his response was if I did not have papers then he had no business with me. "It is up to you to look for that job," he would say. I was always pained by those words and prayed to God to open the door for my employment.

One thing Susan knew is that those prayers were not going to be answered if she stayed at home and waited. She had to go to the district and push the education office to hire her as soon as positions were available.

One early morning, Susan's husband announced that he was going to Nairobi and in the process gave Susan one thousand Kenyan shillings for her use while he was gone. The funds were primarily for buying food for their children. Ordinarily her husband's travels did not concern Susan, but she needed his help the next day in the district where the teachers were being hired. He was well connected and knew many people who could help her get hired. Especially in rural Kenya, getting a job depends mostly on one's personal connections.

As Susan packed for her husband, she kept thinking about how best to tell him that she needed his help the next day. She waited until the last minute. He was already packed and outside ready to leave when Susan summoned up her courage and called out to him. “Baba Lemayian, tomorrow they are hiring teachers at the district and I really wanted you to go with me so that you could help me find a job.”

He responded

If you don't have papers to employ you, then it is none of my business. In fact I am going right now and if you get employed, I will go and leave this home for you.

Susan responded bitterly, “Hee, you are too late – you should leave now because I am going to be employed. Thank God you had given bus fare.”

Baba Lemayian immediately dropped his bags and ran toward Susan, ready to kick her. She was holding her little girls in her arms; she immediately put them down and ran toward the sugarcane plantation near her house. He ran to the house to pick up his stick so that he could beat her, but by the time he came out, Susan was well hidden in the sugarcane field. She could see him, but he could not see her. He asked the children, “Where is that stupid woman?! Where is that stupid woman?!” He looked for Susan but could not find her. He returned his stick back to the house, took his bags, and left for Nairobi.

The next morning, Susan milked the cows, boiled the milk, washed dishes, collected water, bathed, and left for Esirua to apply for a job. Upon arrival, she first found her sister Lucy, who lived in town, and told her what was going on at home and about her determination to find a job. Lucy promised Susan, “We will find you a job so that when your husband returns from

Nairobi, you will have employment and he will leave you.” Lucy went to look for some of her friends who could help find Susan a job. Susan notes

My sister had connections. She contacted them, and by the end of the day, I was short-listed for a teaching position. I was called for an interview and, sure enough, I was offered a job.

Susan was excited beyond measure. She went home that evening and rested easy that she was employed.

When Susan’s husband returned from Nairobi, he found her with a job. He did not say much. “He thought I would be fired before long because I was not going to be able to perform my duties,” she recalls. After receiving her posting letter from the district education office, Susan was elated and promised herself that she would do her best.

When I start work, I have to wake up at four in the morning. I do the milking, boil the milk, cook tea, and [just] before I leave for school, I warm my husband’s water for bathing.

Susan walks three miles each way to school and back, returning in the evening. “I walk *tep, tep*, until I reach school.” She demonstrates the *tep, tep* sound to me by walking her fingers on top of the table. “I thank God for the head teacher who is very understanding. I was late for class most of the time but he gave me Class One.” Despite the difficult conditions at home, Susan calls school “completely different. In fact, I found home to be stressful and school to be refreshing.”

I asked Susan what she thought of her choice of going to college.

“I am very glad. In fact, I wanted to further my education, but my husband refused. I applied and got accepted to Nairobi University, where I was going to start my degree program.”

She remains happy that she attended teachers' college but regretful that her husband did not let her go back to get her degree. She had even paid for her school fees for the first semester but decided not to go so she wouldn't create problems for her children, who are now in high school. She explained, "I console myself knowing that my children will attend a university one day because I can afford to support them."

Going to teachers' college has enabled Susan to fully support her children's primary and secondary education. With Susan paying their fees, they are all doing very well in school. Two of her children are attending good secondary schools in Kenya and her youngest is in a good, private primary school. Susan concludes

I no longer have food shortage in my house. My mother-in-law who used to have problems with my education and employment is now my friend because I provide her with food too. My husband who is home all the time depends on me, and my children will grow into a life different from mine; all because I made that decision to go back to college. Although Susan has made the decision not to continue with her university education she has achieved what most of the women in the community have not been able to do. She is a determined woman who has challenged tradition to achieve her full potential. She is a woman with a warrior's spirit.

5.0 CHAPTER V: LEAH'S STORY.

5.1 THE PURSUIT FOR AN EDUCATION

Born in a small Maasai village, Leah is the third of nine children and a stepsister to ten stepsiblings. Leah's father has three wives and her mother is the first of the three wives. Leah has always been her father's favorite daughter because she is very hard working. As long as Leah can remember, she cared for her siblings, tended the cows, helped her mother collect firewood, fetched water from the river, washed the family clothes, and cooked for the family. With training beginning at age three, by the time Leah was eight, she knew how to do everything required of a young Maasai woman. Her parents were grooming her to be the perfect wife for a Maasai man.

In Leah's community, girls are prepared for marriage as soon as they start walking. They sweep the house shortly after they start walking, and they spend most of their time with their mothers, who are determined to raise marriageable girls. The Maasai believe that a girl can get a husband faster if she is well trained by her mother. Formal education for girls is never an option; only boys go to school.

Leah's father believed that his sons should attend school to become leaders in the community. After all, the chiefs, Members of Parliament, counselors, police, and all other leadership positions in the community were held by men. A woman's role was to stay at home, raise children, and care for the family.

When Leah was eight years old, something unusual happened. Two of her siblings got sick and her mother needed Leah's help carrying them to the hospital in a nearby town. Departing early in the morning, they walked four agonizing miles, arriving at the hospital around noon. Because both Leah and her mother were carrying children on their backs, Leah recalls that upon arrival, she was sweating profusely and just wanted to find shade under a tree to cool off. But before she could do that, she and her mother were required to line up in the hospital to see a nurse.

Leah had never visited this or any other town, located just four miles from her home. People in the city dressed differently, they wore shoes, and they spoke a different language. The houses were also different. Unlike the traditional mud huts that Leah knew, these houses were bigger than hers, with roofs of iron sheets. Although she was amazed by everything, Leah did not have the courage to ask any questions; she just let herself be consumed by the wonder of the moment.

When Leah and her mother reached the front of the line, Leah felt eager with anticipation although somewhat apprehensive; everything was so new to her. The two of them entered the nurse's room and the door closed. Amazingly, a man—not a woman, as she expected—sat behind a table, immaculately dressed in white clothes. Leah was impressed by how clean both the man and the room appeared to be. The nurse motioned to Leah's mother to sit in the only available chair in the room.

Next Leah heard the nurse and her mother speak a language she had never heard before. As the conversation continued, the man dressed in white examined Leah's siblings with something that was hooked to his ears. He appeared to be listening to her siblings' chests and backs. When the nurse finished, a woman appeared, and he handed her a piece of paper with

writing on it. The woman left and returned with several packages of medicine, which she gave to Leah's mother. Leah explained

My mother stood up and told me to open the door so we could go home. I had never seen a house like that and I have never seen people dressed so smartly like that.

On their way home, Leah thought about what she had just seen.

I did not know there were people who lived like that. The walls of the house were so smooth and when you leaned on them your cloths didn't get dirty. 'I was curious and I asked my mother what kind of people lived there.'

Her mother told her "the people who are educated are the ones who live there." Leah asked if the woman dressed in white was educated and her mother responded affirmatively. She had one final question. "Which language were you speaking, when talking to the doctor?" Her mother told her that it was 'Swahili' the national language of Kenya.

Leah thought about her house, which she had helped her mother build. It was made of sticks tied with ropes, and it had mud everywhere. She shared the house with the calves, and every morning she had to clean up after them and sweep the house. She thought to herself, "I think going to school would be a good idea so that one day I can build my mother a house like the ones in the city."

Leah did not know whether she could go to school, but she knew her brothers attended. From that evening on, she became interested in what her brothers were doing. While they read and wrote on paper; Leah sat next to them and asked her brothers to teach her what they were doing. "My brothers would tell me, "This is *one*," and I would write '1', this is *A* and I would write *A*." Learning to read and write from her brothers became Leah's hobby every evening after finishing all her chores.

Leah's mother observed what her daughter was doing and wanted to take her to school. Her mother had never gone to school herself but thought that if she had a daughter who could help her write her name when a doctor ask her to do so, it would be nice. One morning when Leah was nine, her mother told her to wash her feet and clean-up because she was taking her to school. Leah could not believe her mother was taking her to school. She washed and quickly got ready. "There was really not much to do to get ready, I just washed my feet and put on the only other dress I had" Leah noted.

After walking three miles, Leah and her mother arrived at the school, but they did not see any students outside. It was ten o'clock in the morning and all the students were in classrooms. They heard teachers' voices in various classes. They walked into the room with the only door open and found some teachers sitting and talking. Her mother spoke to one of them who directed them to the head teacher's office. Once in the head teacher's office, he asked Leah's mother to sit in the available chair and then asked her what she wanted.

"I have come to bring my daughter to school," Leah's mother told the head teacher.

"Mama, this is a very big girl, do you think she is going to finish school? I think you are just wasting your time and money on her," he replied.

Leah's mother answered in frustration

Teacher, I know my daughter is going to finish school. I am so tired of every time I go to see a doctor, their telling me to write my name and age down on a paper and I am unable. I just want my girl to one day do this and to read for me.

Giving in to this desperate tone, the teacher succumbed. He told Leah to place her hand over her head and touch her opposite ear. She did so, and the process was repeated with the other

ear. This is how teachers determine if a child is old enough for school, which was unnecessary for the already nine-years-old Leah. After touching both her ears, Leah was deemed qualified to attend school. The head teacher told her mother to go home and he took Leah to the first-grade class, called “class one” in Kenya. When Leah arrived at the classroom, the teacher welcomed her and told her to sit with the other kids on the floor. Leah recalls

They were very young children in my class and I felt somewhat lost. The teacher requested me to write numbers on the floor and I did. She also told me to write ABC and I did it. I had learned all this from my brothers.

The teacher left the classroom and returned to summon Leah to a different class – class two. There Leah met with another teacher who welcomed her. This teacher gave Leah a chalk and told her to write addition and subtraction signs on the floor, which Leah did. -Next the teacher gave Leah math problems to solve. Again, Leah succeeded. Again Leah was advanced to the next class, but this time, the teacher told her, “This is class three. It is your new class.”

Leah was happy to be in class three. She notes that “the kids in the class were closer to her age than the ones in class one or two.” Although she was still older and could not find a playmate in her class, she kept herself busy in what she knew how to do best. She said “when the kids went out to play, I swept the classroom and arranged the chairs. I knew my responsibilities.” Over the next few years, Leah went to school and enjoyed learning. However, her father had never been told that Leah was attending school. Leah says that “my father did not find out because he visited our home once in three months or even four. This was an advantage of his having many wives.”

When her father was around, Leah says she played a lot of tricks on him.

I woke up at five in the morning, milked [the cows] as usual, swept the house, made tea and even cared for the cows. I worked faster than usual because I wanted to finish everything before it was time to go to school. Since my mother did not want my father to find out that I was going to school, she pretended to send me somewhere. I would then hide my books under my clothes and run to school. My mother knew I was not coming back. My father would ask, "When is this child coming back to drink tea and go take care of the cows?" He would stay for a little while and then leave.

However Leah and her mother's secret could not be kept forever. When Leah was in class five, the school asked all the parents to come to school for a parents' day meeting at the end of the term. Leah's dad came because his sons were attending the same school. After the parents' meeting, all the students were called to come join their parents so that the teachers could officially release them home for a month. The students sat on one side the parents on the other side. Leah hid herself among other students the entire time so her father could not see her; at least that was what she thought.

In Kenya when schools are closing for the holiday, the best three students in each class are normally announced in front of everyone and those students are requested to come to the front to receive their prizes. On this day, Leah had no idea she had done well in her class and was to be called in front of everyone as the best student in her class. She recalls

When names were called for the first three students in each class, I was the top student in my class. When my name was called, I did not believe my ears and I hesitated until the teacher called again. I was so scared and did not know what my father was going to do.

People clapped hands for Leah's good work in her class, but her father was in shock. Leah saw her father wake up from his seat and started coming towards her. "I think my father wanted to confirm for sure I was the one and not a relative or someone else," she notes. No one knew what Leah's father was after, as the teacher continued calling other children's names, Leah's father continued to move closer. Leah knew that he was very upset and she heard her father explode

'It is my daughter they are bringing to school to become a prostitute!' Everyone was utterly shocked because they thought my father would be proud of me.

The commotion did not last long and Leah's father was restrained from attacking his daughter, but he swore that someone was going to pay for it. After several people spoke to him, he decided to leave her alone and went home. Leah was very nervous as she contemplated going home that day, but her teachers assured her that nothing bad would happen to her and if her dad ended up beating her she was to report the matter to them and the principal. Although they assured her, she knew she or her mother were in trouble. When she arrived home, she did not find her mother or her father but only her paternal grandmother and her little siblings at home. She asked her grandmother where her mother was. She responded "your father came here from school, beat her, and sent her to her parents." Leah was so hurt to hear that she was to blame for her mother's beating. She cried a lot that day. Her father had already returned to his other wives. For the next few months, Leah did not see or hear from her mother or her father. Leah's grandmother helped her care for her siblings.

When school reopened a month later, Leah's mother had not returned. Her grandmother was very supportive of Leah's education. She told her

You see how our backs are bending; it is because we are sweeping these *bomas* [where the cows sleep] every day. If someone has a chance to go to school, they should go. So please go.

Leah returned to school. After a year, her mother returned. Fearing that her mother would stop her from going to school, Leah assured her that she was very happy and wanted to continue with school. Her mother was supportive.

A few months later, Leah's father came to visit them and informed her that she was going to be circumcised in the coming month of December. Leah knew very well that she was not going to continue with her education past seventh grade if she got circumcised that December. She did not say anything to her father; instead she told her teacher about her father's intention. The teacher advised Leah to refuse to be cut until she finished her eighth grade final national examination.

In Kenya the eighth-grade exam determines which high school one goes to; therefore completing this exam would enable Leah to apply to high school anywhere in Kenya. She wanted to stay away from the village, where her father would constantly disturb her.

Leah knew that her father would not listen to her if she requested a postponement to the circumcision. Her only option was to find her father's best friend. Leah says

I had to go get my father's most respectable elder – *enkiyeu* – to come and convince him that I should not be circumcised until I finished standard eight. He had to promise my dad that I was going to be very respectful of him and not shame him until I finished standard eight.

He agreed after a long negotiation. Leah's father allowed her to continue with school on condition that she would not shame him, and if she did, he vowed, "that is the day I will bury you."

Leah continued with school and eventually completed standard eight. The day she finished her final examination, her parents had already made all the arrangements for her to be circumcised. After this occurred, Leah stayed in seclusion for six months. Traditionally after the cutting, they stay in seclusion, where no man is supposed to see them and where the mothers prepare the girls for their wedding day that comes right after seclusion. The longer the girl stays in seclusion the more mature she becomes. The tradition also holds that she becomes "ripe" for her husband because she will not have been around a man since the time of her seclusion.

Throughout this period of seclusion, Leah thought about returning to school. Her national examination results had been released, but no one told her how she had performed and whether any high schools had offered her admission. But Leah was determined. She gathered her courage and asked her mother to talk to her father about letting her come out of seclusion. With much negotiation, her father agreed. He felt lucky to have nine men wanting to marry his daughter.

The engagement of most Maasai girls takes place right after the circumcision ceremony. The exception is for girls from well-off families, when engagement can take place as early as birth. But Leah did not fall into this latter category. As a Maasai girl, Leah played no part in the engagement ceremony and had no choice concerning who she would marry. This decision normally falls to the girl's father and uncles. In Leah's case, however, her father was the sole decision maker. Leah explains

my father wanted me to marry an older man – who already had two wives and wanted me to become the third wife. My father told me, ‘This is the correct husband because he has a lot of cows, and you know how to care for them. Your husband also is old and he will not be able to beat you often, so he is the best man for you.’

Leah did not say much but agreed with everything her father said with one stipulation.

“I told my father that I really liked this man and I wanted to marry him, but on one condition: I must finish secondary school first. My father was so surprised when I told him that he exclaimed, ‘my girl to go to school again? No way!’”

Leah would not give up and boldly told her father that if he did not allow her to return to school, she would report him to the District Officer (D.O.) who would arrest him for marrying off a child attending school. Her father was intimidated by this threat and conceded that she could return to school. Leah explained

My father told me I could go to school but that even if I reached the university level, as long as I was a woman, I would be married off. I was so excited that my father agreed to let me continue with my education.

But Leah did not realize that her father had other plans for her. At midnight that day, while Leah and her siblings and mother were deeply asleep, there was a loud knock on the door. Without warning, chaos ensued. Leah heard a deep male voice commanding them to open the door, and before anyone could respond there was a big bang and Leah, without a flicker of a doubt, knew the door was broken. She, her little sisters, and her mother all screamed. They were scared and did not know who the people were. The house was too small and there was no place to hide. All the children could do was rush into their mother’s room. Soon they were face to face

with four men who had bright, blinding flashlights. The men found Leah curled up in the corner of the house with her sisters. They grabbed her violently and told her that they would beat her up if she tried to resist. They tied her mouth with a piece of cloth and dragged her out of the house. She could not scream anymore and no one came to her rescue. They carried her outside, and when they were far enough from home, they put her down and commanded her to walk with them. When she refused, they beat her and forced her to walk.

The night was long. Leah and her kidnapers walked for hours through bushes, valleys, and mountains. Just as she had suspected, the men told her that they were taking her to her husband and that she should not be stupid enough to think she would return to school. It was about 3:00 A.M. when they arrived at a small house in a town far from home. The men commanded her to enter the house. Once inside, the men left her and locked her inside.

Luckily Leah knew where she was. Her aunt married a man on this side of the village, and Leah had visited her several times in the past. The house where Leah found herself was next to the house where she used to sell milk when she visited her aunt. After the men left, Leah discovered that the windows in the house were locked from the inside, enabling her to escape. She waited for a few minutes after the men left. She then opened the window slowly and scanned outside to ensure no one was keeping watch. It was pitch dark, but by then she was accustomed to the darkness. She could not see anyone, so she took her chance.

Once outside Leah tried to locate her bearings and even though it was very dark she was able to locate the house she was looking for. She ran there as fast as she could, tip-toeing every step of the way in case her kidnapers had arranged for someone to watch over her. She knocked at the neighbor's house, and after the woman confirmed who was knocking, she opened the door. The woman was very surprised since it was not common for girls to visit in the middle of the

night. She asked for an explanation before she let Leah inside. Leah was anxious and begged the woman to go in. The woman obliged, but once inside, she demanded that Leah explain what was happening. Leah attempted to do this but was stopped by her own sobs. The woman stood her ground and continued to wait for an explanation so she could decide whether to offer help.

Finally, Leah managed to tell her story. Sympathetic, the lady gave Leah some fresh clothing, made her tea, and gave her food. While Leah devoured the food, she and the woman devised a course of action. Leah could not stay at the women's house; she needed to return home, where she would report her father to the police. The woman arranged for her son to take Leah on his bicycle to the nearest bus station so she could return home.

Leah was quite hurt by her journey with the kidnappers. She had wounds and sores that prevented her from walking normally. She had been in seclusion for six months and was not accustomed to walking such a long distance. When Leah stood up from the woman's chair, she recalls

I felt pain in my thighs and feet. I could barely walk. I placed my legs far apart from each other; that is the only way I could even get out of the house. I got on the bicycle and we left the place at dusk.

By the time they arrived at the bus stop, it was 7:30 A.M. and the bus Leah planned to take had already departed. The next bus was not until evening. Leah did not know what to do. She did not want to stay there because her kidnappers might find her. The boy who pedaled the bicycle offered to take her farther, in the direction the bus had gone. On their way, Leah and the boy saw a public service vehicle stuck in mud. People were pulling the car out. "God has remembered me today," Leah thought. They waited for the car to be pulled out, and within minutes, the two boarded it and headed toward Leah's town, which they reached within an hour.

Leah recalls

I did not want to go home because I knew the first place those men would look for me was back at my home. Therefore I told the boy who had given me the bicycle ride to look for a place that had a Kenyan flag because that is where we would find a police station and the office of the District Officer (D.O).

Leah had learned in school that any official offices, especially the one for the D.O and the police, have a flag raised in front of it throughout the week. When they spotted a flag, Leah was overjoyed. By that time, it was almost noon, and although Leah was hungry, the mission at hand was urgent, so the two headed straight to the office.

They entered the door marked D.O. Inside they met a young woman who served as receptionist. Leah spoke up, "I want to see the D.O." The receptionist did not want to talk to Leah because she looked dirty. By the look of her clothes, the receptionist doubted that Leah was of sound mind. "I looked like a mad woman, I know," Leah said. The receptionist tried to avoid Leah and spoke to the boy, asking him why they wanted to see the D.O. Again Leah spoke up, this time, in English. The receptionist responded that the D.O. was not seeing any visitors at that hour because it was lunchtime and he had left the office.

Leah could hear the D.O. speaking in the adjacent room. Without much thought, Leah dashed to the room, avoiding the receptionist's block. The receptionist shouted, 'Sir! There is a mad woman here who wants to see you!'

Leah was already standing in front of the D.O.

"Young lady, how can I help you," he asked.

Leah, unprepared, responded

I want to go to secondary school. I did class eight last year and my father circumcised me in December and then last night some men came and abducted me and took me to the house of my intended husband.

The D.O. did not respond at first. He rose from his chair and reviewed the list pinned on the wall of the students who had taken the national examination the previous year. He asked Leah what her name was. Leah told him her full name. The D.O. found her on the list.

”You are the best girl in the district,” the D.O. announced. “We have been looking all over for you.”

Leah was silent at first. The D.O. asked Leah what had happened to her, and she told him everything. He told Leah that he would make sure she would attend secondary school.

Outside the door, the boy who was with Leah sat patiently waiting for her. After the D.O. had heard Leah’s predicament, he sent a police squadron to retrieve her father. He also ordered the receptionist to get food for Leah and the boy. After eating, Leah asked the D.O. to arrange to bring the boy back to his home, which was done.

Leah’s father arrived in the government vehicle.

The D.O. asked him, “Is this your daughter?”

‘Yes’ he replied.

“Then we cannot negotiate. You are under arrest for marrying off your girl against her will.”

The D.O. ordered a police officer to take Leah’s father to jail. He told Leah that her father would spend a night or two in jail so that they could talk to him. Leah was taken home. Leah told her mother and sisters everything, including the fact that her father was in jail and that she would be attending secondary school.

Before long, Leah's uncles and the local chief arrived. They had heard the news. They scolded Leah for getting her father arrested. Leah responded that she only wanted to be allowed to continue with her education. Her uncles and the chief came up with a strategy of getting Leah's father out of jail. They told Leah to go back to the D.O. and tell him that she wanted her father released from jail. Leah should also stipulate the proviso that her father must guarantee that he would allow her to attend school and would pay her school fees.

Leah agreed. She went to the D.O. again and asked for these terms. Leah also insisted that her father vow before the D.O. that he would pay her school fees until she finished high school. Her father made the vow, and the D.O. released him from jail..

In tears he thanked Leah for having mercy on him. He promised not only to pay for her education but also that he would never force her to get married against her wishes.

That is how Leah finished her high school education.

Through these actions, Leah created a path for her younger sisters to receive an education. By the time she finished high school, she had created a great relationship with her father, who had become her Number 1 supporter and a believer in girls' education. At one point, Leah observed, "My father asked me what I wanted to become when I finish school." This was a rare question coming from a Maasai father. Leah wanted to become a teacher or a pastor. She explained, "I wanted to become a pastor or a teacher because I had a desire to socialize with people. I love talking and I love getting people's attention.

Sure enough, Leah did become a primary school teacher.

After high school, Leah was yet faced with the pressure to marry the man her father had chosen for her. By this time, Leah recalls, "the man looked very old." She never wanted to marry a man who had many cows or an old man who had other wives. Leah explains

In my life, I had never imagined I would get married to a man with so many cows like my father. I never wanted to start milking so many cows again. I don't want it – no! I don't want it.

Leah wanted an education so that she could get a job, which could help her support her mother.

I was tired of seeing my mother every day climbing our roof to fix leaks. I wanted to build her a house with an iron sheet roof so that she wouldn't have to go up there every time it rained.

For this to happen, Leah needed to go to college.

Faced with pressure from her father to marry the same old man, Leah had to come up with yet another scheme. This time, because she had finished high school, Leah did not have the law on her side. The chief or the D.O could not support her because she had finished high school, why shouldn't she be married? All girls should get married at some point. Leah's primary school friends were already married with many children, so why not her? Not knowing what to do, Leah decided to run away to the home of her boyfriend. Leah had told this boyfriend that her father wanted her to marry an old man, which she did not want to do. He offered Leah support by proposing that he take her to one of his relatives far away and hide her there until her father gave up on her.

Leah accepted the offer, and she and her boyfriend traveled to this relative's home. On arrival, Leah's boyfriend asked her aunt to allow Leah to remain there for a long time. The aunt insisted that the two of them should get married and stop hiding like children. But Leah and her boyfriend were not ready to get married. They had just finished high school, and neither of them had a job. Her boyfriend promised his aunt that he would look for a job and once he found one,

he would marry Leah. Leah's village is small and everyone knows everyone. Leah and her boyfriend had been seen together before Leah disappeared. On returning to his home, Leah's boyfriend was confronted by Leah's relatives, including her father. They accused him of abducting Leah and hiding her, and took him to jail. Leah and her boyfriend's aunt were informed of the matter. His aunt stepped in and secured her nephew's release, but on condition – that they marry afterward. If Leah and her boyfriend were married, no one would jail him because they were both over eighteen and the law would protect them. That is how Leah got married to the man of her choice against her father's wish.

Soon after getting married, Leah got pregnant and had a baby. Her husband had no job and neither did she. Life was tough for them as they tried to raise a child. They depended on both sets of parents for support. Soon after the birth of their first child, a second was on the way. Leah was worried, but she remained determined to attend college. After the birth of her second child, Leah applied to and was accepted at Teacher's College. Her husband had agreed with the decision to apply. Their younger child was seven months old. Excited after receiving her admission letter, Leah shared the news with her husband, but his response was not very encouraging: "Let's talk about this tomorrow," was all he said.

The next morning, Leah spoke to her husband again about going to college. He told her that they did not have money to pay for her fees and that the baby was too small for Leah to leave behind. Leah suggested that her husband should speak to his father about selling a cow to pay for her college fees and that once she completed school and had a job, they would replace the cow.

Her husband reported back that his father was not willing to pay for Leah's education. Furthermore, the children were young and Leah needed to care for them. Leah thought to herself,

“This is yet another obstacle that will prevent me from going to college.” She had to devise a plan for how to go to school. “I must go to college” she told herself.

Early the next morning, her husband had left to go to a nearby town. Leah packed for herself and her children and left for her parents’ house. She knew that even though she had disappointed her father by marrying against his wishes, he was going to help her go to college. When Leah arrived home with her two children, she was welcomed by her mother, who told her not to worry about anything. Leah’s father came home in the evening and found her daughter. She told him that she needed his help to attend college because her husband and her father-in-law both refused to support her. Leah’s father had not approved of her daughter getting married to that family from the beginning, and this was his opportunity to get even.

The next day, Leah’s father called Leah’s husband and told him that if he was not going to pay for her daughter’s education, then he should never expect her to return to him as a wife. Leah’s husband did not have much to say in response. In a week, Leah was off to college with the support of her father. She left her children with her mother. When Leah’s husband learned that Leah had gone to college and left the children in the care of her mother, he confronted her mother-in-law. He claimed his right to care for his children. When Leah’s mother relinquished her stewardship to him, Leah’s husband took the children to his own mother. But his mother and family members refused to help. They told him, “What are you going to do with those children? Will you carry them on your back? Take them back to Leah’s parents.” Leah explains that because men do not generally care for children, he had no choice but to return his children to Leah’s mother.

The drama continued when Leah’s father refused to take the children back. Leah’s mother, however, was sympathetic toward her grandchildren. She took them in and cared for

them. During school holidays, Leah spent all the time with her children in her parents' house. She did not want to upset her father again and possibly jeopardize finishing college. She kept in touch with her husband through letters, and when she was home for holidays, he came to visit her at her parents' house.

Before Leah finished college, her husband married another woman. Leah could not believe it. "I was looking forward to seeing him at my graduation ceremony, but my parents' told me that he had married another woman," Leah explained. When Leah returned home from college, she was very conflicted: She wanted to see her husband, but she was hurt that he had married another woman. Leah was not willing to stay married to this man. She stayed at her parents' home until she was hired by the government to teach at a local primary school. She observes, "I thank God I went to college, now I can live alone comfortably," Leah said.

Leah moved into her own apartment with her children. She took her children to school and provided for them. The children's father has never cared for them or paid a dime for their school fees. Leah has been the sole provider for her children. She never remarried.

Leah has dedicated her life to teaching girls to resist forced marriage. "I have a story to tell them," she says. Currently, Leah teaches at a local primary school in the village, where she also serves as a counselor for girls. On weekends she is dedicated to counseling youths at her church. On school holidays, Leah runs youth seminars, which are attended by more than 100 boys and girls from around the village. Leah told me that she is now living a life of joy and happiness and is so grateful that she remained persistent in getting her education. When you meet Leah on her way to school, she is always greeting people with a winning smile. Her joy and her laughter are contagious.

6.0 CHAPTER VI: RUTH'S STORY

6.1 OVERCOMING COMMUNITY PRESSURE

I am sitting on a bench under a tree with my friend Ruth. It is five-thirty in the evening and the sun is settling down in the blue sky. My three-year-old son and Ruth's four-year-old son are playing soccer. They are enjoying throwing the ball down hill, together running after the ball, and walking back up the hill. They repeat the activity several times. I love visiting Ruth in the evening because her home has the best spot to watch the sunset. Growing up, we never watched the sunset, and rarely did the village people stare at the sky to enjoy the beautiful sky at dusk. Since I have been in America studying, however, I make sure to appreciate the lovely sunset we have in our country whenever I return. Ruth's place is perfect for taking it in.

Ruth is making a red Maasai cloth with beads. She seems not to be as interested in the sunset as I am. I am taking pictures with my small camera and staring at the sky, watching the sun's slow descent minute by minute. I keep telling Ruth that the sunset is so beautiful, but she does not seem amazed by it. Once in a while we tell the boys to be careful with the stones when playing with their ball. Traditionally, Maasai women would not be sitting down to watch the sunset. Rather, they would be busy milking the cows and making sure the family had something to eat in the evening. Ruth and I have this opportunity for two reasons: we are both educated and Ruth is in a position to hire extra help at her home. She doesn't have to cook or milk the cows,

but instead can ask her house help to do so. I admire Ruth and the life she has created for herself. I often wish women in our community could have the life Ruth has.

Ruth is a first grade teacher at a local primary school. She is thirty-nine years old and looks younger than most women her age. Her body is petite in size. Ruth is always dressed in baggy clothing, which makes her small body look big. Most of her clothes are dark in color. When I was in high school I often saw Ruth, because she used to teach in a school in the district. I never spoke to her because she was older than me and I did not know her very well. Ruth grew up in a village far from mine.

This particular evening, I had come to her home just to watch the sunset and catch up with Ruth. As I gazed at the sky and Ruth was made her cloth, she asked me a lot of questions about America. She made fun of me for becoming an American because I was watching the sunset. “Is there no sunset there?” she asked. I told her that I had not seen the sunset in America. I also told Ruth of my interest in doing a study about her life and how she managed to become the person she has become, growing up in Maasai land. I told her the study would involve an interview with her when she had time available for a longer conversation. She did not hesitate, responding with, “That would be fine.” She asked, “When do you want us to talk?” I told her that the following Saturday would be a good time because she would not be at school. We agreed to meet then. I was to go to her house in the early afternoon hours and spend time with her talking about her life.

It had started to get dark and I needed to go home. I asked Ruth if she could call one of the people with a motor bike to take me home. Motor bike rides have become very common in the village as a means of transportation. It is easy because they can go everywhere, even where

there are no roads - which is nearly every place in the village. My motor bike arrived, and I made it home just before the sky grew completely dark.

6.1.1 Ruth's home

At two o'clock on Saturday afternoon, I was on my way to Ruth's house. Her home is a twenty-minute walk from my mother's house. The walk was quite refreshing, as I walked on the local road that does not have much car traffic and only occasional motor bikes. The road was quite dusty and the air was dry, and the only sound I could hear was the children chasing away monkeys, which were eating their maize. Ruth's house is on the top of a hill, and as I approached it I could see activities going on between the two houses in the compound. Her house resembles many houses in the community, being made of mud walls and iron sheet roofs. In between the main house and the kitchen is a place for washing dishes, which in Kenya happens outside the house due to lack of piped water. Ruth's dog ran in my direction, and I was not sure if it was aggressive, so I called out for someone to restrain the dog just in case. People in the community have dogs for security purposes, rather than as pets.

A few minutes later, I was standing outside Ruth's house and everyone, including Ruth, had come out of the house to welcome me. We greeted each other. Ruth and I hugged as she said "*karibu karibu nyumbani*" (welcome welcome home), and then she instructed everyone else to say hello to me. Her four adopted daughters greeted me and immediately went to the kitchen to prepare tea. After greetings, Ruth welcomed me to her main house.

Ruth's house is beautiful. The floors as well as the walls are smeared with mud. The wooden seats are well-cushioned and covered with light green handmade clothes with a white edge. As I sat facing the door, Ruth took the seat next to the window on one side of the room

and asked me to feel at home. As I continued to commend Ruth for the nice house she had, she pointed out that they were planning to build a better one, which would be brick-walled. I did not see any problems with her current house, as it was the most common and modern in the community. In fact, this is the same kind of house my mother lives in. Traditional Maasai houses were very small and bread-shaped, made of mud all around. Then, over time, because of interaction with other communities, the houses changed to be grass-roofed with mud on the walls. Later, after a lot of deforestation, grass became scarce and people turned to iron sheets. Richer people went a step further in modernizing their houses; they had iron roofs with sand, cement and bricks on the walls. Their floors were made of cement. This is the type of house that Ruth was planning to build.

We exchanged words about our families and how they were faring, a tradition all Maasai people practice. Even when people meet on the road, they take time to ask each other how everyone is doing. The conversation is normally very long, because it involves details about each family member, the family's cows and goats, and everything else the other person has done since the last encounter. I have always tried to shorten my talk about my affairs, and Ruth seems to do so also.

As we spoke, I thanked Ruth for allowing me to talk to her about her life and took the opportunity to explain again to her that I was doing a study about women who have succeeded in the community - women who have gone to college and have married Maasai men. I told her that the study would help inspire other women and girls around the world who face similar challenges in their lives. Ruth acknowledged that the purpose of the study would positively impact others. She asked me where I wanted to start and if I was going to write everything she was saying. I told her not to worry about me writing; I was going to voice record our

conversation and would listen to it again. She commented that it is good to be in America, where everything is made easier for us. “If you were here in Enosh, where would you find such things?” she said. I just laughed and asked her if it was okay with her for me to voice record our conversation. She consented, and I immediately punched the recording button.

6.1.2 Childhood

“Ruth, what made you different from other Maasai girls?” I asked. Her response was simple,

Not because my parents were badly off. My mother was a teacher and my father worked for the government as a land officer. We lived well compared to everyone around us. But my neighbors used to live in a lot of hardships, their lifestyle was different, and the kind of life women lived made me different.

Ruth’s parents were both learned. Her father, like some of the Maasai men that time, had received some form of education. Unlike other men who found jobs out in big cities far away from home, Ruth’s father got a job near home. This enabled him to be home often. Ruth’s mother was from a different clan of the Maasai who lived closer to the city. Her maternal grandfather was a pastor who believed in educating his daughters. Although Ruth’s mother dropped out of high school to get married, she still had an opportunity to go to college later in her life. When her mother got married, she came to a community that did not educate women at all. Her high school education enabled her to get a job at the local school as a teacher. Ruth’s father also got a job at the land office near their home. They both lived and raised their children together.

Life outside Ruth’s home was very different. She said, “During my childhood, I used to see women in my neighborhood suffer a lot.” These families lived a typical Maasai lifestyle. A

man married three or four wives and had many children and lots of cows. Ruth explains one encounter she had with a lady in her neighborhood. She said, “I saw a lady give birth, but she did not even have a cloth to hold her baby with. The lady took a piece of cloth she was wearing – *shuka* – and used it to hold her baby.” Ruth gestured as if she was pulling the shuka from her side and holding a baby with it. In a very sympathetic voice, Ruth continued, “This is how she carried her baby – a baby who had just been born.” There was a pause and then she continued. “When someone looks around that home, there are so many cows, just imagine.”

Traditionally, when a woman gave birth, especially to a boy, her husband would sell a cow. The money received from selling the cow would normally be used to purchase all kinds of foodstuffs for the woman and the baby. According to Ruth, however, only a small amount of the money would be used to actually buy the woman the food she needed. She says that the men usually ordered the older children to follow him to the market so that he could buy things for them. Ruth said, “Then the man buys a few kilos of sugar, the smallest packet of tea leaves and the smallest cooking oil – *kimbo ile ya karatasi*. Now the husband has done shopping, just imagine.” She also pointed out that the shopping was not just for the woman who gave birth. If the man had many wives, all the other women would take something from the shopping basket, leaving the woman who just gave birth with almost nothing. Ruth concluded:

Then the husband takes the rest of the money, goes to drink and comes home at night when he is so drunk and starts beating his wives. These are some of the things I used to see, and I said no, I would rather remain in school than get married.

6.1.3 Parents' education

Because of Ruth's parents' education, she was able to go to school from an early age. For three years, she went to the same school where her mother taught. Ruth says that even though she was going to school, she never learned anything. She went to school just to play with her friends. Although she was moving from one grade to the next, she says her parents noticed that Ruth did not know how to write or read. "I was pushed from one class to the other because I was the daughter of a teacher." Her parents wanted their daughter to do well in school, so they took her to a boarding school run by missionaries about fifty miles away. Ruth explained:

The school was run by purely white nuns. It is not because I passed the exams to get into that school but because of the area I came from, they admitted me in fourth grade even though I was very poor in reading and writing.

Life in boarding school was tough at first, but after some time she got used to it. Ruth noted that the nuns were very caring and the other students who came from different communities were also very kind to her. During her first days of school Ruth was very scared because she thought the teachers were going to call on her to read and she did not know how to read. She explained:

My first lesson was history. The teacher came to class and called one student to read a paragraph. I was so scared because I thought I was going to be called too. But thank God the nuns had already told the teachers about my poor reading skills and that I needed help.

Ruth said that she really liked being in that school because "everyone was very understanding and caring," something she had not experienced in her former school. Over time, Ruth caught up with the rest of the students and began excelling in her education.

During the school's holidays Ruth would return home for one-month breaks, during April, August and December. These were the moments when Ruth had an opportunity to visit with her friends at home. As she grew older, Ruth started to notice that most of her friends were undergoing female genital cutting, a traditional rite of passage to adulthood, and getting married soon thereafter. As each December arrived, she lost more of her friends to this ritual and to marriage. By the time Ruth was going to high school, she did not have any friends left in her home area. All of them were either waiting to be married or were already married. Also, because Ruth's mother never wanted her daughter to be influenced by the local girls, she ensured that Ruth had limited interaction with them. "My mother was very tough and influenced our upbringing very much. She never allowed us to do some of the things my friends were doing. She did not allow it."

When Ruth finished primary school, her parents sent her to a high school very far away. To get to the high school from her home, Ruth had to take an overnight bus. Because she was small in size, she was never charged bus fare, but she was required to stand the entire way. "Imagine twelve hours of standing in a slow-moving bus. How did I do it?" Ruth was amused. Luckily enough, Ruth got used to the boarding life away from home. The high school Ruth attended was one of the best high schools in the country. She says that she went to school with students from everywhere in the country. "My friends from school came from all over; they came from Nairobi, Mombasa, and all those big towns."

Ruth found high school life entertaining and fun. Being from outside helped Ruth to make lots of friends. She frequently shared her experiences from home, though no one spoke of the harmful rituals that were happening in her community. Ruth said, "Openly and innocently I would talk to them about the things that used to happen at home. They found it funny the way

our people dress.” Ruth shared how young men – *ilmoran* – dressed with one pair of cloth – *shuka* – and no shorts or under garments. The girls loved hearing her stories because they were all unique. Throughout high school, Ruth was favored by many girls because of the kind of life she lived at home. She notes, “I used to be friends with girls whose parents were big people in the government and they also taught me a different lifestyle.” She spoke of girls whose parents owned cars, who lived in big houses and had a lot of possessions. These girls spoke of what they wanted to become in life:

Some wanted to teach in high school, some wanted to become lawyers and some just wanted to drive big cars. I listened to them and also wanted to live a different lifestyle than that I was living at home. I wanted to become a lawyer.

As we were talking, Lynn, one of Ruth’s adopted daughters, walked in with serving dishes full of food. It was my favorite dish: chapatti and beef stew. She also brought a thermos full of Kenyan tea. Ruth asked if I could eat now. It was around four o’clock in the afternoon. I told her that what I really wanted to eat was the chapatti with tea. Lynn poured tea into two cups and moved one closer to me and the other closer to her mother. We washed our hands and started eating. There was silence, and when I looked at Ruth she seemed to be thinking about something. “Where is your mind, Ruth?” I asked her.

I am thinking and reflecting about my life in school. Sitting on the top of a banked bed, surrounded by many girls, I am telling them stories of Maasai land. I think I was the only different person there – there were no other Maasai girls there.

Ruth had not shared her life story with any other person before. Traditionally, Maasai people do not speak about themselves to anyone; it is considered bragging. It is also rare to find women Ruth’s age sitting and sharing about their experiences. They are usually busy fetching

water from the river, collecting firewood and ensuring that the family has something to eat in the evening. Story telling and sharing of life experiences are done by grandparents to young girls and boys in the evening before going to bed.

After high school Ruth really wanted to go into the tourism industry, but her father had a different plan: to send her to teachers' college. Teaching used to be considered mainly a woman's profession, and her father felt that his daughter should follow this path. Ruth says that she did not anticipate the life she is currently living, "in a rural community, walking to school every morning, being surrounded by the village life." What Ruth envisioned of her life while growing up was to "live in the city, with a good office, a good car and living a different lifestyle." Even though she sounded regretful when speaking of her current life, Ruth says that she thanks God for becoming a teacher because teaching and living in the village has enabled her to do the things she is currently doing: helping girls that have run away from forced early marriage to return to school.

6.1.4 Becoming a woman

Unlike her peers in the village, Ruth managed to finish primary, secondary and college education before getting married. However, there was one ritual she had to undergo to be considered a woman in her community. The year Ruth graduated from college she was surprised by her parents' arrangements. Ruth explains "I was completely shocked when one morning my mother told me and my sister that we needed to be circumcised." Traditionally, a girl who has not undergone female genital cutting is considered a child and unclean. For Ruth, who was going to start her teaching career in the village, it was imperative traditionally for her to undergo the genital cutting. Otherwise, the students would still consider her a child and would not respect her

as their teacher. When Ruth insisted that the students would not know, her mother told her not to ask questions but to do what she was told.

Although Ruth was a well-educated lady in the village, she did not know the side effects of female genital cutting (FGC). She says, “I just agreed to what my parents wanted.” The cutting ceremony takes about a week of celebration. The event starts with the girls moving from one home to another, gathering other girls to celebrate with them the end of their childhood. Most of the girls in these ceremonies are young girls, aged between twelve and fifteen. Ruth was twenty-four when this ritual was taking place. She notes that her mother tried to protect her from most of the traditions performed during the celebration. For example, she was not allowed to gather other girls to celebrate. Ruth had the advantage of a small body. Because of her size, people could not easily discern Ruth’s age by just looking at her.

Ruth says that the evening before the cutting, she joined the rest of the girls who were going to be circumcised. Early the next morning the cutting took place outside her parents’ home. She said, “Many people came to see us, men, women, young and old. They all came to see the cutting.” Ruth looked straight at me and told me that she did not want to remember what happened to her on that day. “It was a dirty exercise; it never added anything in my life. It did not help me at all. It just embarrassed me.” Traditionally, the day after the cutting, women from the community check to see if the girls’ clitorises were totally removed. If they found that some parts were still there, they would repeat the exercises to ensure nothing was left. Again, Ruth’s case was different. The women did not check her the next day because her mother refused to let them do it. The mothers of the other girls who were with Ruth commanded that the exercises be repeated, because the entire clitoris had not been removed. Ruth recalled the girls crying. “Imagine, they were cutting on the existing wound,” she said.

Ruth also remembered that before the cutting, people used to tell her that if she did not go through the circumcision she was not going to be a reasonable woman. “I was not going to behave well; I was not going to care for my family well.” However, she claimed that the cutting never added anything valuable to her life and that she never learned anything that could help her take care of her children. One thing Ruth gained from the entire experience is that she is able to openly share with all the girls she mentors about genital cutting. She said, “Now because I went through the process, I am able to tell my girls that those things do not have any value.”

6.1.5 Marriage life

“Marriage is something of great value – it is more important than school.”

Marriage among the Maasai people is very important because it enables someone to have a family. Girls are generally married off as soon as they reach puberty. Boys are married after undergoing the ritual of warriors, generally at around eighteen. Ruth was atypical; she did not get married until she was thirty-two years old, which is quite unusual for a Maasai woman. Ruth also was unique because she chose for herself whom to marry. Her husband was forty when they got married, also much older than is customary. Both individuals were nicknamed in the village “senior bachelors.”

Ruth tells me that by the time she was getting married, her age mates were long married, they had children and grandchildren. She says, “I am just starting my life. My son is four years old and the second one is on the way. People used to laugh at me, that I am too old to be married.” Women in the village used Ruth as an example of a woman who would never get a husband. Women would tell girls, “Can’t you see her? She is in school and growing so big with

no husband. Who is going to marry her? There is nobody to marry.” These comments used to hurt Ruth, but she stayed focused on her course.

After Ruth finished her college training, she returned to her village to teach. Her parents, who were very supportive of her, encouraged her to continue with her dream and not to worry about marriage until she was ready. She lived at her parent’s house and went to school to teach every morning for a period of six years. She had received a post at a local girls’ boarding school from the government. After several years of teaching Ruth finally fell in love and married a Maasai man who was also educated and who had not followed the Maasai traditions. Ruth’s husband works for the Kenyan government and his job requires him to be away from home several weeks a month. He tries to be home whenever he gets an opportunity. Ruth looked for a transfer from the boarding school where she was teaching to a school near her home in Enosh village. She commutes every morning to school, and every evening returns home to her son.

6.1.6 Empowerment

During her teaching years at the girls’ boarding school, Ruth came into contact with many girls who were fleeing from female genital cutting and early marriage. These girls came from different villages in the district and they wanted to have an education. The girls wanted a different life than the one their parents were forcing them to go through. Ruth says:

I could see girls coming to the school, crying and begging not to be returned to their parents’ home. They wanted to continue with their education. My heart would just melt away. I wanted to help them so much. I actually just started to help them whatever way I could.

This exposure to needy girls in the district changed the course of Ruth's life. Growing up, Ruth never thought girls in her community did not want to get married young; she thought every one of them liked getting married. But after she started teaching at the boarding school, her belief began to change. Although the school allowed the girls to stay there, it did not provide them with personal care. After a while the girls would give up and return to their parents' home. It is for this reason that Ruth started to help the girls on a personal level. She said, "I could see the girls with no soap or lotion or sanitary napkins and I would just buy it for them, even before they would ask. I felt for them." Because she provided for the girls, they started trusting Ruth, and they came to her for other personal reasons and for guidance. Ruth became a highly popular teacher at her school, and before she knew it the word had gotten out that she was helping the girls. Soon, Ruth had many more girls coming to her for help from everywhere in the community. She did what she could to help them until she left the school to move closer to her husband and her home.

Ruth was sad to leave her school to move to Enosh village where she now teaches. However, after a few months in Enosh village, Ruth began to replicate her experience at the all-girls school. She started to inspire and council young girls in her current school. Ruth has a good heart, and because of that, many girls in the village have come to her for guidance. Many girls would come to Ruth for help, especially when running away from marriage. Ruth said, "These are my girls now," pointing at the four girls she has at her home currently.

One of those girls is Lynn, who came to Ruth after running away from the husband that her parents had chosen for her. Ruth recounted how Lynn showed up at her house at around five o'clock in the morning, crying and requesting assistance. She was running away from a man her father had betrothed her to. Lynn is a smart girl. She is in form three in high school and does

very well academically. Despite this, her father had given her away because she had reached the age of marriage. Lynn did not want to get married. She wanted to continue with school. Ruth felt that she had to do what she could to help. First, she took Lynn to write a statement at a police station so that the law could protect both of them. Ruth never likes confronting the parents of the girls, but before she helps any girl, she ensures that the parents know where their daughter is. She tells them that she has taken their daughter, that she is going to educate her, and that all she needed from them is their blessings.

Ruth has become very successful in this cause because no one wants to refuse a respected woman who has offered to take care of their daughter. Most of the time, Ruth said, it has been difficult for her. “Imagine talking to wazee [elders]. Sometimes it was so hard, but I had to do it to help the girl,” she noted. Ruth is determined to help the girls in every way she can. At the moment, she does not have any other help except her own money. Ruth’s husband is also very helpful and mostly seeks scholarships from the government to assist the girls to go to high school. Ruth also ensures that all the girls are doing well at school and provides them with all their personal needs. “Kakenya, I am just trying my best. I just hope these girls don’t shame me,” she told me. Ruth desires the best for the girls and she hopes that she will also be able to help even more girls in the future. “I am just doing what I can to help,” she said, and that is how Ruth is empowering many in the community.

7.0 CHAPTER VII: RACHEL'S STORY

7.1 AGAINST ALL ODDS

Rachel is a well-built woman; light skinned and always wearing a smile on her face. She is funny and full of hopes but also has despair in her eyes. When I last saw Rachel, it was at my school in Kenya, where she had come to borrow a pen to mark her students' homework. It was around 10 AM. She was in a hurry as she told me she had left tea cooking and that the other teachers would not take it off the kerosene stove until she returned. I asked my colleague Lydia to give her a red and a blue pen, which I identified as "the ones I just brought from America."

Rachel exclaimed, "they are from America? How lucky am I today! I am going to brag in the staff room about my new pens. They are special." She smiled broadly.

As she waited for Lydia to give her the pens, I asked her how she was doing.

"I am well," she responded. "I just have to discipline some kids in my class who are not listening. These boys are big."

Smiling, I told her, "If anyone can discipline those boys, it is you."

She laughed as Lydia handed her the pens. Rachel thanked us as she rushed out the door. "Let's talk later!" I called back.

Rachel is a schoolteacher at Enosh Primary School. She teaches standards seven and eight English, which was one of her favorite subjects in middle school.. Since Rachel joined the

teaching staff of Enosh five years ago, English has remained the school's best-performing subject in the national examination. Her complaint about the boys not listening to her stems from their Maasai heritage. Those who have been circumcised do not take orders from a woman. Because of the Maasai customarily place women at a lower case, the older boys find it hard to accept any guidance or discipline from a female teacher. This is what Rachel was dealing with in standards seven and eight: big boys who do not respect her because she is a woman. One of Rachel's methods of disciplining them is to require the boys to stay outside the classroom during her lesson and then give them a lot of homework to complete by the next day. In this way, Rachel hopes the boys will realize that she knows more than they do and that they should respect her.

Rachel says, "I know that I cannot cane them because that is what our culture tells us, but I am allowed to use other discipline measures."

Rachel has been around boys since her childhood. When she was growing up she spent most of her time cooking and caring for boys.

One thing about me is that I was an adopted child and that in the home where I grew up, there were a lot of boys. So I know them very well and they cannot intimidate me, especially now that I am an older woman.

One beautiful afternoon, I drove a motorbike from my mother's house to Enosh to visit Rachel in her apartment. As I approached Rachel's place, I ran into her twelve-yearold daughter, who carried a small basket on her way to go shopping. We greeted one another.

Rachel was outside her house when I arrived. We hugged, and she led the way inside. As she welcomed me (*karibu kwetu*), she invited me to sit on a sofa of green upholstery with red flowers. Her daughter returned from shopping with three bottles of sodas: Fanta, Sprite, and

Coke. The girl placed them on the floor next to the table. Rachel was setting down a delicious African dish, *Pilau* (rice mixed with chicken and African spices) on the table. It was around 2:00. Although I had already eaten at my mother's house, I could not pass on Rachel's delicious food - one of my favorites. Rachel, her daughter, and I ate the Pilau and drank the sodas. After she finished eating, Rachel's daughter went outside to play with her friends.

Rachel told me about her childhood. Her mother died of heart disease when she was two years old. She had been receiving treatment from a hospital run by the Catholic Church, in Esirua. The only doctor and most nurses at the hospital came from Holland. In the entire district, this was the only hospital with a doctor. Rachel's uncle (husband to her aunt) worked at the hospital and was the only Maasai nurse in the hospital. Rachel says that before her death, her mother had requested her uncle and the nuns at the hospital to care for Rachel.

After her mother died, Rachel explained, her father remarried and left her in the care of her aunt Esther and Esther's husband, Ole Tano. Rachel grew up not knowing who her real parents were. She told me

I did not know where my home was or who my father was. I only knew that my uncle and aunt were my parents. They cared for me just like their other children.

Ole Tano and Esther took good care of Rachel. They sent her to school and treated her like their own children. Throughout her childhood, Rachel did not feel different from other children in the family until she was in standard six, when Rachel was considered tall and heavy for her age. She had reached puberty, at which time Maasai tradition dictates that girls must undergo female circumcision, considered a rite of passage to adulthood. The celebration set in December was to mark the end of her childhood and the beginning of her adulthood. Arrangements were made, relatives were invited, and everyone—including Rachel—was excited.

During the same period, a man came to Rachel's family who was introduced to Rachel as her grandfather from her mother's side of the family. He came to celebrate Rachel's rite of passage ceremony and to bring Rachel home with him to marry her to "the right man" he had selected.

When Rachel's grandfather informed her about this, she was stunned speechless. She had not known her grandfather until now. Her aunt and her uncle were unhappy with the grandfather's request. They could not believe that the man appeared without warning after they had raised Rachel as their own for so many years. Maasai tradition holds that a grandfather's intentions are correct and should be honored. Rachel's grandfather wanted her to marry someone he knew well who had lots of cows and other wives. The grandfather believed that he would treat his grandchild well.

Rachel notes that the confrontation between Rachel's uncle and grandfather was "ugly." Her uncle insisted that she continue with school. Although Rachel remained with him and her aunt, her uncle's attitude toward her was changing, and he treated her differently.

After the circumcision ceremony, Rachel's grandfather returned to his home without her. After Rachel had completely healed, she returned to school. This was her last year in primary school. During the second month of this year, every student must register for the Kenya Certificate Primary Examination (KCPE), which determines a student's qualifications to attend secondary school

When it came time for Rachel to register for the exam, her newly changed uncle refused to pay the registration fee. He told Rachel to ask her grandfather for the fees. Rachel could not do this, as she did not know where her grandfather lived. Faced with the challenge to raise the money herself, Rachel recalls collecting money from everyone she knew. "Some gave me one

shilling, some two, until I had enough money to register for my national examination,” she explains. But after she registered, her uncle arranged for Rachel to live with her grandfather. Rachel could not refuse to do this.

7.1.1 Finding my grandparents

Rachel recounted the day she moved from her uncle’s home to her grandfather’s home with great emotional memory.

I was to move from one village to another village far away. My uncle secured my ride in a police truck that was going toward my grandfather’s village. The police were supposed to drive me up to a particular point, and from there, I would have to walk to my grandfather’s house.

Rachel was scared and nervous. She had never been outside her uncle’s village and now she was forced to travel to an unknown village alone. “How could my uncle be so uncaring after the many years I lived under his roof?” Rachel thought.

Her aunt had given her directions, but fourteen-year-old Rachel did not understand them. “The place was far!” Rachel remembers. It took two days to arrive at the place where the police truck left her on the side of the road. Along the way, she cried for hours, but no one seemed to care. She was tired and hungry. She could not stop thinking about the task ahead and that she had no one to depend on but herself. Rachel recalls

For the first time in my life I felt the need to grow up, to stop crying and face what was ahead with courage and determination. Crying was not helping and I strongly felt there was no time to continue doing that which I knew wouldn’t help.

When the police truck stopped and they handed her twenty shillings to use as fare, her mind was racing at super speed, she was filled with fear, but she had resolved to survive against all odds. Rachel remembers, “That’s why I just walked in the direction they had pointed, without thanking them, without hesitation, and without looking back.”

She was to walk until she reached a certain small town where she would hike a ride in a *matatu* (a public transportation mini-bus) that would take her to her grandparent’s town – wherever that place was. “I was scared, but there was nothing I could do – all I knew was that I was a big girl now,” Rachel remembers. The town was roughly six miles away and by the time she arrived, she was disoriented as a result of hunger, dehydration, and exhaustion. She needed something to eat and drink.

After eating, which she had done in an unusually relaxed manner, she enquired and found her bus stop. The mini-bus had standing room only. After her long journey, Rachel was obligated to continue in discomfort. “They squeezed me into the *matatu* and I could not even see outside.” The mini-bus made many stops until it finally reached Rachel’s destination. When Rachel descended, she was completely lost but was compelled to keep moving. Knowing only her grandfather’s name, she asked again and again where he lived. She finally found her way there.

7.1.2 The year with my grandparents

Rachel was warmly welcomed by her grandparents. Her grandfather was excited to finally have his granddaughter home. He told Rachel “it is good you have come. I am going to take good care of you.” He promised Rachel to take her to school and to provide her with everything she needed. Rachel was anxious to return to school to prepare for the national exam she would take at the end of the year. After staying at her grandparents’ home for a week, Rachel reminded her

grandfather that school was in session and she needed to go there right away. He promised her that he would look for a school for her and not to worry.

Weeks passed, and Rachel was still not in school. She had to do something otherwise her education was in serious jeopardy. “I decided to visit my uncle [not the same uncle she lived with growing up], who was teaching at a local school, and tell him about my predicament,” Rachel recalls. Within a few days, her uncle had made arrangements for her to join the school, which did not require fees. At the end of the year, Rachel needed to return to her uncle’s village to take the exam at the school where she had already paid the fee. She asked her grandfather to arrange for transportation back to the school, but he refused. Instead, he informed her that a new husband awaited her—the older man with two other wives and with the wealth of many cows, who Rachel had seen many times. Rachel refused her grandfather’s demand, telling him that she would return to the uncle’s village to take the examination.

As examination day approached, Rachel worried that she could not find her way back to Esirua, her uncle’s village. She shared her concern with the teachers at the school she attended. Both teachers and students raised funds for Rachel’s transportation. Rachel was excited about returning home but also nervous because she did not know what to expect from her uncle.

With bus fare tucked well inside her pockets, Rachel planned her trip. She made sure that her grandfather would not learn about her departure until long after she was gone. Rachel left the house before dawn. She recalls

It was dark when I started walking; there was no one outside, not even on the road. I was so scared, but I had to keep walking so that my grandfather could not find me.

Rachel barely remembered the way out of the village. She traced back her steps and asked for more directions along the way. Two days later, she arrived at her uncle’s home. Her

aunt welcomed her home with great emotion. Rachel was also happy to be home, but her uncle did not say much to her.

The 3-day examination began the next day. Afterward, Rachel's uncle asked when she would return to her grandfather. Rachel responded, "I don't want to go there. I want to continue with school. If I return, my grandfather will marry me off to an old man." Fearful, Rachel began to cry. "I just want to stay here at home with everyone," Rachel continued through her tears.

Because Rachel went against her grandfather's wishes, according to Maasai tradition, in order for her uncle to allow Rachel to stay with him and his family, he needed to deliberate with his brothers and other elders in the village. Rachel recalls, "He [her uncle] never wanted any curses from the old man. He wanted people to know that it was my decision to stay and not his." The entire family of Ole Tano sat and talked about whether to allow Rachel to remain with her uncle. They formally asked Rachel if she had decided to go against her grandfather's decision and stay with her uncle.

"Yes," she responded.

After a long deliberation, the group allowed Rachel to keep living with her uncle and his family.

7.1.3 Home at last

The national examination results were out in a month. Rachel had performed well and had received admission letters from three different secondary schools. She was so happy and shared her joy with her uncle and aunt. But her joy was short lived; Rachel learned that her uncle was unwilling to support her high school education. Three of her uncle's birth sons were likewise offered admission, and no funds remained to send Rachel to school. Further, Maasai tradition

held that boys should always be educated before girls. It was irrelevant that Rachel outperformed her male cousins in the exams. Rachel's uncle advised her to seek funding from other relatives. He bought her mailing stamps and told her to write to all of them to help fund her high school education.

With the help of her aunt, Rachel wrote them all. She waited for responses but did not receive a single one. She wrote again a second and third time, but still no responses came. Rachel was frustrated; she did not know what to do. All the boys in her family had reported to school. The deadline for enrollment in the schools to which she had been admitted were approaching. Rachel kept praying and hoping that things would change for the better. She recalls, "I stayed at home and cleaned, cooked, and worked as a house girl. I was very down." Two of her admission letters had reached the deadline. There was no money and she was left with only one more school to possibly attend. She was still hopeful that something would come to her rescue, but nothing seemed to be happening.

On the day before her last deadline, Rachel woke up early in the morning and went to church to pray. "I attended a Catholic church and we had regular morning prayers," she remembers. Rachel needed to go to pray because in her mind she had thoughts of suicide. But she believed that if she did so, she would not go to heaven and that God would not forgive her. Rachel planned to go to church in the morning to pray for God to forgive her sins and then walk in the wilderness and let the wild animals devour her. "If the animals killed me, then I would not have committed any sin and I would go to heaven," Rachel confessed.

At six o'clock in the morning, Rachel told her uncle and aunt that she was going to pray and that they should not worry about her. At church, Rachel prayed her rosary faithfully, knowing that she might not be coming to church again. After prayers, Rachel came out following

the nuns who were also at the morning prayers. While she was walking out, one of the nuns reached out to her and asked her how she was doing. Rachel could not say a word; she just started to cry. “I cried, cried, and cried until I could not cry anymore,” Rachel remembers. Sister Roselina did not know what to do but consoled Rachel. Instead of letting Rachel go home, sister Roselina took her to the convent. The entire time the sister tried to talk to Rachel, but she was unable to respond through her tears and never said a word. Once in the convent, the nun gave Rachel tea and bread. She ate and she was offered a place to sleep and a painkiller. “I fell asleep completely. I felt safe,” Rachel recalls.

At around 11 AM, Rachel woke up and found sister Roselina sitting next to her bed watching her. The sister handed her a handkerchief and placed two more on the table next to her bed. Rachel took the handkerchief from the sister’s hands and wiped her nose. Her nose was stuffy after hours of crying. Sister Roselina asked Rachel how she was feeling and requested her to take a shower as it would make her feel better. She handed her a towel and offered her a fresh change of clothes. Rachel followed the sister’s guidance. In the shower, Rachel let the water just run over her. “I felt like I was in another world. All my worries had disappeared. I was in a new place,” Rachel explained. After the shower, Rachel put on a nice-smelling lotion sister Roselina had given her and some clean clothes. She felt like a newborn baby.

Rachel joined Sister Roselina in the sitting room, where she had food waiting for her. They ate together and for the first time Rachel could speak without crying. The sister started the conversation by congratulating Rachel for doing well in school. She told her “I heard you did very well.” Rachel’s eyes swelled with tears, but she managed to hold them back and thank her. The sister continued to ask Rachel which school she was planning to join and when she would be departing. Rachel summoned her courage and told her, “I don’t have school fees to go to school.

Two admissions have reached deadlines and I am only left with one that is also ending today.” She told sister Roselina about her uncle not being able to pay her fees and about her unsuccessful efforts to raise funds from her relatives that never resulted in anything.

Sister Roselina was very sympathetic and promised to accompany Rachel to nearby Shartuka Secondary school the next day. To begin, sister Roselina sent Rachel home to get her admission letter, which listed detailed requirements. Rachel was nervous to return home after being away for many hours, but she knew no one was at home that time of day. Her aunt had gone to the market and her uncle was at the hospital. Rachel ran home and within no time she returned to the convent with the admission letter.

The sister reviewed the list of requirements and without hesitation and to Rachel’s relief she informed her that she would take care of her school fees and her shopping. Rachel was so happy and for the first time in so many days, her dream of getting an education was just a step away.

Sister Roselina traveled all day to take care of all Rachel’s requirements. Rachel remained at the convent and never informed anyone at her home where she was. When sister Roselina returned in the evening, she had all that Rachel needed to go to school.. The sister had the school fees and she had also bought all the items Rachel needed to take to school the next day.

At the end of the day, sister Roselina was left with one more thing to do. She wanted to ask Rachel’s uncle for permission to sponsor Rachel’s education. She informed Rachel of her plan. Rachel was scared and did not know what her uncle would say. Then sister Roselina called Rachel’s uncle and asked him to come to her house. When he arrived, he was shocked to find Rachel there. Rachel was terrified to see her uncle. She thought her uncle was going to beat her.

When Rachel's uncle heard the plans, he became defensive, interjecting, "I wanted to support this girl's education, but her grandfather came and took her. Why isn't he helping her now?" Sister Roselina did not want to dwell on what had happened in the past, so she told him, "I will take care of her myself. I will take her to school tomorrow. I just wanted you to let me take care of her." Rachel recalls

The next day, Sister Roselina took me to school herself. She drove me all the way to school. She met with the head teacher of the school and paid all the school fees. I was enrolled in the school.

Rachel felt loved; she had not experienced this level of care since childhood. Much success came to Rachel that year. The head teacher helped her apply for a scholarship, which she received. The scholarship covered her school fees for the remaining four years of high school so that Rachel could study without interruption. She remains grateful to Sister Roselina, who she considers her guardian angel, a close friend, and a mentor.

7.1.4 Life after high school

Right after finishing high school, Rachel's uncle told her to find her biological father. In her uncle's eyes, Rachel had reached an age to be married, and the responsibility for arranging this falls to the father. Rachel had never seen her biological father. She only remembered people talking to her about him. She did not know where to go to find him. What would she say once she found him? Rachel had no option but to go look for him. She asked her aunt for help. The aunt helped locate Rachel's father in a nearby village.

Following her aunt's directions, Rachel found her father and stepmother, who welcomed her. Over the next few months, Rachel lived with them and their school-age children, who were

all enrolled in local schools. Rachel helped around the house by washing clothes, doing dishes, cooking for the family, and anything else her stepmother needed help with. But she did not feel at home, and she longed to return to her uncle's house. She did not know her father and felt like a stranger in his presence. Rachel was eager to receive the results of her Kenya Secondary National Examination.

Rachel had done well on the exam. She spoke to her father about attending a secretarial college. This was the main profession for women during her time. She saw it fit for her to work for someone in an office typing and attending to the needs of the boss. This was the dream job every young girl wanted to have, even though what Rachel really wanted was to become a nurse. To her surprise, Rachel learned that her stepmother had refused to allow Rachel's father pay her college fees. "There is no money to send you to college," Rachel's stepmother announced. Rachel was left with no other option but to return to Sister Roselina.

Rachel woke up early in the morning and walked to her uncle's home. It was a long distance, but on the road she found kind people who were helpful and drove her part way. She arrived at her uncle's house later in the afternoon. Her aunt welcomed her with a smile and exclaimed, "My child, you have come back! I am glad you are here." Rachel was happy to be back home again. This is where she grew up and this is where she felt most at home.

That evening, Rachel's uncle returned from work and found Rachel. "I have helped you up until form four. I have reached the end of my help now, and you must return to your father," he told Rachel. Not knowing how to respond, Rachel cried and begged him to allow her to stay there. "I will look for school fees to go to college soon. All I need is for you to let me stay here for now," Rachel told him. He agreed.

After staying home for two days, Rachel met with Sister Roselina whom she knew would help her with college. Sister Roselina was happy that Rachel came to her. She looked for colleges for Rachel, encouraging her not to apply to a secretarial college but instead to either teach or become a nurse. According to Sister Roselina, secretarial work was for people who had not gone to high school, not for people like Rachel who had done well in high school. The two of them decided that Rachel would pursue a nursing diploma, which was offered at the hospital where Sister Roselina worked. After getting help from Sister Roselina with the admissions paperwork, Rachel received an admission letter to attend nursing school at the hospital. She was very excited and shared the news with her uncle and aunt.

To her surprise, her uncle did not welcome this opportunity. This was the same hospital where he worked as a nurse. Rachel's uncle was not willing to work at the hospital where his niece would be trained as a nurse. Even if he tried to resign, the hospital was not willing to let go the only Maasai nurse on their staff. Rachel needed to pursue another opportunity for herself rather than going to nursing school.

Sister Roselina was disappointed at the choice but encouraged Rachel to apply for a teaching position at a local school. Rachel applied and was hired at one of the schools to be an assistant teacher. At that job, Rachel noticed an announcement that applications were being accepted for a Teachers College. Rachel was now confused: Should she leave her job or go to college? For the first time, she was earning an income. Even though it was not much, she was not depending on anyone else and was able to sustain herself. "It was a hard decision for me because for once I had my own freedom. I was not asking anybody to buy me anything. I was independent," Rachel explains.

Going to Teachers College meant that Rachel needed to return to Sister Roselina for support. She did not know what Sister Roselina would say. “I did not know if she was tired of supporting me.” The advantage of Rachel going to Teachers College was the guarantee of obtaining permanent work after graduation. However, if Rachel stayed and worked as an untrained teacher, she could lose her position at any time. The pay was also very low compared with the salary of a trained teacher. Rachel decided to give up her job and return to school. She was accepted at a Teachers College far from home.

In a government effort to encourage high school graduates to attend teachers colleges, fees were waived. Rachel needed only bus fare, money for personal items, and pocket money. She had saved a small amount from her teaching job, but it was not enough to support her for the entire three months she would be attending college. Rachel went to Sister Roselina, who provided everything she needed.

No one knew where exactly the college where Rachel was going was located. Rachel had never heard of the town. But Sister Roselina was determined to find out where it was; she asked around and finally found someone who knew the town. It was hundreds of miles away. Sister Roselina convinced the person who knew the town to take Rachel to college. It was a two-day journey.

Rachel was excited about college. She was on track to achieve what she wanted in life: independence. Rachel was for the first time in a place with people from all over Kenya. For the first time in her life, Rachel found that it mattered not where a person was from. Instead, the focus was on attending classes becoming teachers. Most of the students were young women like her. In Rachel’s village there were only two other women her age who were pursuing a college education. Every other woman she knew back home was married with children.

In college, Rachel fell in love with a man from a different tribe. “I found someone who loved me and wanted to marry me,” Rachel recalls. “We arranged for the wedding and I was married to my sweetheart while still in college.” Rachel still visited her home in Esirua during school vacations but mostly stayed with her husband. They both received teaching positions in the city, where they raised their two children together. In retrospect, Rachel reflects,

I was married when I was young. I was 19 years old. I thought the only way I could find peace was by living with someone who cared about me and with whom I could share my problems.

As she told me about her wedding and the man she loved, Rachel began to sweat. She was proud of her wedding; she showed me the photo on display in her living room. The photo shows her in a white wedding dress and her husband in a black suit. This is not the kind of wedding that would take place in her village. This was a wedding for educated people. Everyone—including Rachel’s biological father, uncle, and grandfather—were happy she finally married. Her biological father received seven cows for her dowry, which he shared with Rachel’s uncle and grandfather. Rachel was pleased that everyone had given her the blessings she believed she needed to start a family.

But after ten years of marriage, far away from where she grew up Rachel was faced with a big dilemma. Her husband became gravely ill and died without her knowing of the cause. At the hospital, the doctors told her it was tuberculosis. However, within a short time after her husband died, Rachel also became sick and spent many months at the hospital. At the time, her youngest daughter was only two years old and her older son was seven years. Rachel recounts, “We had been doing very well. We had built a nice house and owned a car.” But when her

husband became sick, most of the family savings was depleted for care taking. When Rachel herself fell sick, she had no savings and desperately needed money.

Rachel was diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. Her bone marrow was not producing any red cells. At first she was shocked to learn that her husband had died of AIDS and she was not aware of it. “My husband died when he was almost healthy, he did not look sick at all” Rachel notes. It was a painful revelation. Rachel was determined to live for her children. “I made a decision that day to live for my children’s sake,” Rachel explains.

“I was admitted to a very expensive hospital, where I got better treatment and that is why I am alive today.” In order for her to pay the hospital bill, Rachel needed to sell her house. She sold everything she could think of to pay the bill. The revelation of her being HIV positive also meant that she needed to start taking medication, which was very expensive at the time. HIV drugs cost her twelve thousand Kenyan shillings per month. She only earned fifteen thousand a month from her teaching job. It was very difficult. Not only had she lost her husband, she had lost everything else they had owned and she had to care for her children. After Rachel recovered from other illnesses and was left to battle HIV/AIDS alone, she returned to teaching.

7.1.5 Living with HIV Virus

Living an HIV-positive life has not been easy for Rachel. First her in-laws rejected her. Then she realized that at her school, people were prejudiced against people with HIV/AIDS. No one would go close to her; she was seen as an outcast. She did not know whom to turn to. She thought about returning to the home where she grew up but did not know how they would receive her. Rachel,

however, knew one thing about the challenges she was facing—she needed to live for her children and to do so, she needed to eat healthy and ease her stress.

It was easier said than done. The first thing Rachel did was to find a support group. “When you are living with HIV/AIDS it is very important to have a support group,” Rachel explains. She learned about the Kenya Network of Positive Teachers (KNPT) and joined it. This group, which was for teachers living with HIV/AIDS, was vital to Rachel as she continued to teach. She made friends who she could call when she needed help. “They stood by me and I did the same for them,” she remembers.

Living with AIDS meant that Rachel had to take drugs that made her sick. Sometimes she needed to sleep in just a little longer than usual. After a year of joining KNPT, Rachel was selected as the chairperson of the local chapter. This position enabled Rachel to interact with many people living with AIDS and also those who were positive and who had not been able to overcome the stigma. She became the spokesperson for teachers living with AIDS and worked with her teammates to encourage others to be tested and get treatment. She recalls

Those I felt had the problem, I told them to try and accept it. I talked to them; some did not want to take drugs. But I persisted, as I know the importance of managing the disease well.

One thing about Rachel is that she has never been afraid of talking about HIV/AIDS. She tells everyone who will listen what the disease is like. Although some did not like to hear her words, the information she conveyed did help to save others’ lives.

The training and her position at KNPT prepared Rachel, and she made a decision to return to her hometown, where she would be able to help others who were HIV-positive. After living in the city for twenty-six years, Rachel was ready to return to the village. She was

determined to connect with her childhood friends and also to help her community fight HIV/AIDS. Her cousin had stayed in touch with Rachel and made occasional visits to see Rachel in the city. When Rachel lost her husband, her cousin who was a pastor, visited her regularly. Because of Rachel's openness about HIV/AIDS, he was so moved that he started taking people from the community who were suffering from HIV/AIDS to Rachel for counseling.

Treatment according to Rachel has made a big impact in the lives of people living with AIDS. She noted that prices were significantly reduced once the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) started to subsidize the cost; it now cost only a hundred Kenyan shillings per month to have access to the drug. This program was launched by President George W. Bush through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), which helped make HIV/AIDS drugs accessible to all throughout the developing world. It has been one of the most successful programs to help people living with the disease. Rachel is grateful for such the program because it is saving lives.

Due to the demand from her community, Rachel's plan to return came to fruition. She requested a transfer from the teachers' commission in Nairobi to return to her home village. The transfer was granted.

Since returning home, Rachel has had a rewarding life. Not only has she been teaching at the local school, she has also started a support group for persons living with HIV/AIDS. She has a group of fifty people who are open about their HIV/AIDS status and who are now taking treatment. Rachel explains, "So many people are sick here, and they are ignorant and afraid to talk about it. Why should people die when there is medicine that can help them?" Rachel is determined to fight the stigma associated with this disease. At the local school where she teaches

she is known for speaking openly about AIDS in the staff room without fear. “I am not afraid, not even when people talk about me at the market.”

Rachel is a well-built woman and no one would recognize that she is HIV positive just by looking at her. She explains

People used to think I was lying when I told them I am positive. In fact, I have to show them the medicine I take for them to believe me.

People in the community generally believe that someone living with HIV is supposed to be very skinny and in poor health, but Rachel has proven them wrong. She urges everyone to be tested, and if they are positive, to seek treatment that is readily available.

As I listened to Rachel narrate her life history, I could not help but think about the power of education. How determined and strong willed she is! Faced with obstacles throughout her life, Rachel always persists. The personal-factor effect helped Rachel develop the tools she needed to pursue her life goals. The nun who became her godmother provided the opportunity for Rachel to succeed and never shamed her. We truly can become what we dream of becoming if we can only be patient and persistent no matter what comes our way. Rachel has proved this.

8.0 CHAPTER VIII: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study narrates the stories of a few Maasai women whose determination has helped them overcome adversity and succeed in achieving their education when others from similar circumstances could not. Coming from situations of poverty, in a culture marked by oppression of women, it is indeed remarkable that these women persevered to complete their college education. Their stories demonstrate how a woman with a warrior's spirit is able to convert a life of poverty and oppression with the probability of a forced early marriage into a life of success for themselves and their families. The study explores the kinds of obstacles these women overcame, the ways they overcame them, and the factors that motivated them to achieve their success.

In this chapter I employ the theories of human capital, human capability and feminism to interpret the stories of these women. I also offer my conclusions from the study by discussing some of the important factors that facilitated the women's achievement of their dreams. The study was guided by the following questions:

1. What barriers do Maasai women who continue with post-secondary education have to overcome?
2. What are the contributing factors that brought about these women's success?

3. How do the narratives help to provide a context for theories regarding girls' education in Kenya?

8.1 HUMAN CAPITAL

Listening and narrating the stories of the women I studied brought out one important element in their lives. Each one of the women wanted to continue with school and, more specifically, attain college-level education in order to gain access to formal employment with the sole purpose of being able to earn income to support their families. After Susan was married for ten years, she was tired of doing casual labor and wanted to go to teachers' college so that she could get a better job and earn a better income. Leah decided to leave behind a seven-month-old baby and travel far away to get her college education because she wanted to have a job that would enable her to live in a better house. Personally, I wanted to get a college education because I wanted to have a job so that I could be in a better position to help my mother and, later, my community. I can say confidently that we all wanted a better life, and the way to achieve this was to secure a good job that would provide an income.

Human capital is the theory that tells us that education is a key determinant for determining income level and essential for poor families to come out of poverty. It refers to “knowledge, attitudes, and skills that are developed and valued primarily for their economically productive potential” (Baptiste, 2001, p. 185). It looks at “the productive capacities of human beings as income-producing agents in an economy” (Hornbeck & Salamon, 1991). Education is therefore critical and relevant in the development of a country's economy because “education

creates skills and it helps to acquire knowledge that serves as an investment in the productivity of the human being as an economic production factor, that is, as a worker” (Robeyns, 2006, p. 72). According to the World Bank, education ought to be regarded as an investment in developing a country’s human resources. Therefore, education is important because it allows workers to be more productive and to do their work more efficiently.

Furthermore human capital theory has played a major role in shaping education policies in developing countries. For example, in the government of Kenya’s *Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation 2003-2007*, education is mentioned as a key determinant of earnings and therefore as an important means by which to alleviate poverty. It notes, “Education improves people’s ability to take advantage of the opportunities that can improve their well-being as individuals and be able to participate more effectively in the community and markets” (GoK, 2003, p. 39). It is vital that women become part of this process so that they are not locked out of the market.

Studies in developing countries show that higher levels of education increase the probability that women will engage in formal paid employment (Birdsall, & Behrman, 1991; Cameron, Dowling, & Worsick, 2001). We learn this from Susan’s story. When she was working on other people’s farms, she earned less than a dollar a day, which made it very hard to meet her needs. But with a college education, Susan has been able to send all her children to the best schools in the country and is able to take care of her family without constraint. Higher levels of education increase the gains from formal labor force participation more for women than for men. A review of the literature on returns to investment in education finds that, overall, women receive slightly higher returns on their schooling investment (10 percent) than men (9 percent) (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2002). Returns vary, however, by level of schooling. Women

experience even higher returns on secondary education (18 percent) than do men (14 percent). These returns can be measured in terms of low fertility rate, low child mortality rate, and stronger impact on children's education. These returns contribute to human capital; for example, lower fertility allows for higher investment in children's human capital. The fewer children the mother has, the more likely she is able to educate them.

In the women's stories I tell in this study, employment is vitally important to their lives. It has enabled the women to earn high income, they are able to educate their children, and they are able to support the community in ways they would not be able to if they did not have any education. Human capital theory advocates for the investment in women's education because it adds to economic growth. Arends-Kuenning and Amin (2000) sum it up by asserting that, from the human capital point of view, "Increasing a society's educational level leads to higher levels of economic growth because educated people are more productive than uneducated people."

8.2 HUMAN CAPABILITY THEORY

Clearly, there is more to be gained from formal education than merely its economic benefits. In order to improve the human capital theory, one has to look to the human capability theory, which offers added value to the importance of education, especially for women. Amartya Sen, an Indian economist and a 1998 Nobel Prize winner in Economic Sciences, first developed human capability theory in 1980 as a broad paradigm for evaluating the effects of social change policies on human well-being. Since then, he has collaborated with Martha Nussbaum, a political philosopher, and Sudhir Ananda, a development economist, to make the capability approach a predominant paradigm for policy debate in human development, where it inspired the creation of

the UN's Human Development Index (HDI). The HDI is the preferred framework for discussing equality of opportunity, especially with respect to gender equality.

The core components of capability theory are functionings, capabilities and agency. Functionings are defined as the various things a person may value doing or being (Sen, 1999, p. 75). Examples of functionings are being healthy, being educated, holding a job and being part of a nurturing family. Functionings are therefore outcomes or achievements (Robeyns, 2006, p. 78). Capabilities, on the other hand, are real opportunities for a person to achieve valued functions, or the substantive freedom to achieve alternative functions combinations (Sen, 1999, p. 75). The third concept of the human capability approach is agency. The agent is described as one who has the power to bring change on a level that is of value to him or her (Landorf, Doscher & Rocco, 2008, p. 228). Human capabilities approach, therefore, "focuses on the ability- the substantive freedom of people to lead the lives they have reason to value and to enhance the real choices they have" (Saito, 2003, p. 24).

Education is key in the human capability approach, as it enables individuals to gain the autonomy they need to live the lives they want. Being knowledgeable and having access to an education that allows a person to flourish is generally argued to be a valuable capability (Nussbaum, 2003; Robeyns, 2003; Unterhalter, 2003). Nussbaum (2003), in her study of Indian women, highlights the importance of education to women in expanding their opportunity set. Capabilities imply that women are aware of their choices and are free to act on them. Arebds-Huenning and Amin (2000) point out that education enables women to "obtain increased control over their environments when they have the ability to earn income and posses increased bargaining power" (p. 128). Unterhalter (2003), however, cautions that "some forms of education do not enhance freedom, or may do so only partially and in contradictory ways" (p.

12). For example, some “subordinated groups, like girls or children of particular racialised or ethnicised groups learn their place of unfreedom when they enter schools” (p. 11). A study in Ethiopia emphasizes this by showing that girls face violence in school, and a South Africa study points to cases where girls are raped at school by teachers.

Capabilities that are most directly linked to education are the capabilities “to live a long life, to enjoy bodily health, to develop one’s senses, imagination and thought” (Arends-Kuenning & Amin, 2000, p. 128). Saito (2003) elaborates the impact a mother’s education has on her child’s survival. He notes that “maternal education influences child survival through various pathways: enhanced socio-economic status, greater health choice for children, including interaction with medical personnel, cleanliness, emphasis on child quality in terms of fewer children, and greater food and capital investment” (p. 23). We see an example in Leah’s mother, who was tired of always having the doctor write her name when she visited the hospital. She wanted her daughter to get an education so that she could at least one day help her write her name and age when visiting the doctor.

Even though the women did not speak specifically of gains from education beyond employment, their lifestyles speak volumes about the benefit of getting an education. Each of the women has an average of two to three children and, according to the human capital theory, they should be able to care for them. Human capability theory measures social changes; low fertility “enhances women’s well-being because women are freed from persistent childbearing and child rearing” duties (Arends-Kuenning & Amin 2000, p. 127). This enables the women to have more time to spend on activities other than their role as mothers. If these women were not educated, I would not have had a chance to interview them in the comfort of their own home or my friend’s

house, because their duties would have been too numerous. The women were further empowered to hire additional help at their homes.

From Leah's story, we learn that she left her marriage because she did not want to be married to a man who had another wife. Leah was only able to do this because she had a choice, and she knew very well that she would be able to take care of her children without her husband. This is a result of her education, which empowered her and enabled her to have more than one option. Nussbaum (2003) reminds us that without employment, a woman has limited ability to leave a bad or abusive marriage. But, if a woman can get a job outside her home, she can stand on her own (p. 332). This is exactly what Leah did: left her husband, stood on her own, and took care of her family.

8.3 FEMINIST THEORY

Moving beyond the benefits that education brought to these women, their stories also uncover several inequalities and injustices done to women. Each of the women underwent female genital cutting as a rite of passage to adulthood. It is estimated that two million girls are subjected to this practice each year (FAWE, 2008). As we learn from Leah's story, after she underwent the genital cutting, her father was ready to marry her off, which was going to be the end of her education. Leah fought to return to school by reporting her father to the authorities. Kane's 2004 study in Gambia and Kenya revealed that girls were discouraged from returning to school after undergoing genital cutting because they had lost a lot of school days while preparing for the ceremonies and during healing time (Kane, 2004). Leah noted that it took her six months to heal,

and by then all the students had gone to high school. Her admission was no longer available. She was forced to repeat eighth grade in order to secure a space in high school the following year.

When addressing gender issues in education, the role of feminist theory in shaping the discourse of equality and equity cannot be ignored. Feminist theory addresses “the question of women’s subordination to men: how this arose, how and why it is perpetuated, how it might be changed and (sometimes) what life would be like without it” (Acker, 1987, p. 421). Feminist theory further serves as a guide to understanding gender inequality and a guide to action (p. 421). Liberal, radical and socialist feminisms are part of a broader body of theoretical frameworks and approach to the study of gender. “Each of these approaches tends to prioritize different aspects of women’s struggles against oppression and also provides a unique analytical structure for investigating and explaining gender relations” (Chege & Sifuna, 2006, p. 4). For the purpose of this study, I examine how two perspectives, liberal and socialist feminism, contribute to education.

8.3.1 Liberal feminism

Liberal feminist discourse is concerned with securing equal opportunities for women and men. It also focuses on “issues of equal opportunity in access to resources for women and men, especially in education and employment” (Chege & Sifuna, 2006, p. 4). In terms of education, it is concerned with removing “barriers which prevent girls from reaching their full potential, whether such barriers are located in the school, their individual psyche or discriminatory labor practices” (Acker, 1987, p. 423). Liberal feminism sees the “State as an essentially benevolent

institution that will both design and implement legislation to ensure women's equal access to education" (Stromquist, 1990, p. 143).

Liberal feminists believe in working within the system to correct the factors that are contributing to girls not going to school and completing basic education. They have influenced policy formation internationally, regionally, and nationally in order to address barriers to girls' education. In 1975, the United Nations (UN) declared an International Year for Women in recognition of years of neglecting women in decision-making processes. This was the beginning of the United Nations Decade for Women, which was followed by numerous international conferences highlighting the injustices women were facing around the world. Conferences addressing inequality in education included the 1990 Education for All (EFA), the 1995 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), and the 2000 Millennium Development Goals. They all called on the international community and governments to implement policies addressing gender inequality. One major push has been for the provision of universal free primary education.

Research on this policy has shown that when countries offer free primary education there tends to be an increase in access to education to all children. Lewin (2009) points out, "Access to primary schools has grown substantially in most SSA [Sub-Saharan African] countries over the last two decades and Gross Enrollment Rates (GERs) now average 97%" (p. 151). Furthermore, Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia and Uganda recently moved to implement free education in their countries, illustrating how girls' enrollment in basic education has increased substantially (Riddell, 2003). In Kenya, for example, the gender gap is quite minimal between boys and girls age 6-19 (Shabaya & Konadu-Agyemang 2004, p. 407).

In sub-Saharan Africa, research took the liberal view of “exposing gender inequality within schooling without necessarily addressing the deep social structural that supported and, often, glorified such inequalities” (Chege & Sifuna, 2006, p. 8). These deep social structures have resulted in high number of girls dropping out of school. UNESCO's (2010) recent report noted that when an equal number of girls and boys enroll in first grade, by fourth grade, 50 percent of the girls have dropped out and 64 percent leave school before acquiring full literacy (p. 54).

Clearly, increasing only access to education for girls does not guarantee that they will continue their education, nor does it ensure eradication of inequality in education. From the women's narratives we learn of Rachel's struggle to find funding to return to her uncle's house in order to take her national examination. Her grandfather was determined to marry her off, but because Rachel had a strong will and determination, she was able to continue with her education. Later, after passing her exams, we learned how she looked for ways to continue with her high school education. It was a struggle even though there were laws that were supposed to protect her from being married off. She did not have funding to go to high school. Her uncle had decided to send the boys to school, but not her. It is good to work within the system to create laws that can protect women from the injustice done to them, but sometimes these laws are far from the reach of the girls who need them the most. Also, the women are not made aware of the laws that protect them.

8.3.2 Socialist feminism

Turning to socialist feminists for further exploration on gender issues, we find that their ideas came about because they believed that liberal ideas were falling short in analyzing activities that are fundamental to women's existence. This was the case even though they still "continued to admire the historical materialist form of understanding and shared Marxism's liberating intent" (Peet, 1999, p. 166). The socialist feminists believe that "women performed unpaid labor in reproducing labor power as a kind of subsidy for capital, as well as working directly for capital as employees in factories or producers of commodities" (p. 168). This is double oppression of women, who are already overworked at home without any compensation and working as well for an employer. In the long run, their aim is to "remove oppression (in part by abolishing capitalism) but the immediate task is to elucidate the processes involved" (Acker, 1987, p. 426).

Social feminist analyses of education hold the school as a site for the reproduction of women's oppression as workers and as women. As workers, they are needed for the maintenance of an inexpensive labor force; as women, they are indoctrinated to accept the sexual division of labor that assigns women motherhood and domestic roles (Stromquist, 1990, p. 146). Miriam David (1980), who has examined the articulation among the State, education and the family, argues that the "school has replaced the church as the institution that links with the family in the maintenance of domestic and social relations" (Stromquist, 1990, p. 146). She asserts that universal and compulsory education was accompanied by the State acknowledging the responsibility parents, particularly mothers, play in their children's education. This expectation forced mothers to educate their children even before they start school, in order to give them a head start. This head start is necessary for them to fully benefit from going to school. Furthermore, "schools, especially in situations of declining resources and in socially

disadvantaged areas, rely on unpaid help from mothers ranging from repairing books to assisting with classroom routines” (Acker 1987, p. 427). To a socialist feminist, the school system exploits women and contributes to their oppression.

I do not necessarily agree that schools exploit women, but I believe that education does enable women to have more choices. Each of the women I study have hired someone to help them with their household work while they concentrate on their employment. It is because they are earning an income that they are able to make this choice. If they did not have an education, they would be left to do low paying jobs, which would end up creating the situation the socialist feminist are fighting. In most cases, the low paying jobs are for women who are illiterate. These women are unable to hire another person to help them with housework. In a sense, they do the double job of raising their children and working in an informal economy.

With regard to gender inequality and access to and attainment in schooling, the socialist feminist perspective claims that the large number of illiterate women in the world can be “attributed to women's double role as reproducers of children and guardians of the family, and as workers in a segregated labor force that absorbs many women in the informal sector of the economy, which requires little formal education” (Stromquist, 1990, p.147). Generally, domestic work takes a lot of time from the women and, in a society where the economy relies on subsistence production, women are not able to go to school. However, as the country becomes more technological, advanced production does not require physical labor anymore, and more women begin to gain access to education. We see this among the women we study; they were all required to do work at home before going to school and again after returning home from school. Many studies on girls’ education point to the fact that girls, especially those in the rural areas, spend many more hours doing chores at home than boys. These duties deter girls from going to

school and sometimes from performing well in their exams. Consequently, in most cases, they end up dropping out of school sooner than boys.

Socialist feminists are also concerned with how socialization of “girl-children and boy-children in the home, school and community at large has a major impact on the children’s education” (Mannathoko, 1999, p. 451). Research informs us that the girl-child has the status of a visitor in her parents’ home, which she will leave when she gets married. Girls do not inherit any property and hence they are socialized to become the best possible mother to her children and wife to her husband. This socialization contributes to girls’ and women's lack of empowerment. I believe, based on the women I studied, that their community does socialize girls and boys to grow up differently. Girls are socialized from the time they are born to be mothers and wives. Meanwhile, boys are socialized to be warriors who defend their community and who work outside their homes. This socialization puts ideas in girls minds that they are destined to be mothers. The narratives from the women powerfully tell us how girls can break that mentality and fight to achieve their dreams. It is women like the ones whose stories I tell that can serve as role models for young girls in communities that socialize them to grow up in a certain prescribed way. It is for this reason that I believe telling their stories will inspire others to find ways to overcome challenges they face every day in their lives.

8.4 CONCLUSION

After listening and narrating the stories of the women I studied in Enosh village, I learned a couple of lessons. I learned that education beyond primary school is vital to ensure that girls and

women have access to employment. I learned that employment is very important for women to fully and effectively support their families. I learned that determination and resilience are critical elements to ending the oppression against women. I learned that for national and international laws to work they need to be relevant to the people who are implementing them on the ground.

Among the questions that guided this study were, “What are the factors that contributed to these women’s success? How did these women overcome cultural norms to achieve their education in a community in which only a few women make it to the top?” In learning from their stories, several factors account for their success. These include exposure and environmental factors, family and guardianship support, and personal resilience factors.

8.4.1 Exposure and environmental factors

Clever is an eye that has gone out.

There is a Maasai saying: “clever is an eye that has gone out.” It speaks to the success of the women in this study in achieving their education. For instance, when Leah helped her mother to take her sibling to the doctor, the experience became an eye-opener for her. As a result of this trip, Leah saw a different kind of life, where people lived in different houses and women went to school and were hired to work at the health clinic. Leah asked her mother “what kind of people live in these kinds of houses?” and her mother responded, “It is people who are educated.” This trip began a journey for Leah in a different direction - a direction she never would have imagined if she did not go to the city. We learned that from that evening, Leah started to study alongside her brothers, asking them questions and inquiring from them what they had learned at school. From just one visit, Leah’s journey to education and success began.

Ruth received her education outside of her village. Her parents took her to a boarding school, starting from the time she was in fourth grade. This influenced the way Ruth grew up. Even though her case is special in that she had educated parents, Ruth still noted that the life in the village made her different. She gives examples of men marrying many wives and not having much to support their family. Ruth never wanted to grow up to live the life that most of her peers were living. She wanted to go to school and become like girls she met at the schools outside her community. In high school, Ruth was exposed to other girls who aspired to go to university, whose parents owned cars, and who lived in big houses - all the things that Ruth wanted to have when she grew up. She says, "Some of the girls wanted to teach in high school, some wanted to become lawyers and some just wanted to drive big cars." She says, "I listened to them and also wanted to live a different lifestyle than that I was living at home." This is a completely different lifestyle than the one Ruth saw at home. She says that at home, "all my peers were getting circumcised but no one in my school spoke of circumcision at all." Ruth says, "I saw a lady give birth but she did not even have cloths to hold her baby with. The lady took a piece of cloth she was wearing and used it to hold her baby." This lifestyle was not desirable to Ruth at all. She wanted to live the way she saw the other girls in her school live. These exposures contributed to her working hard in school and to succeeding in life.

We look at Rachel's story and see the same concepts at work. Rachel grew up in a family that was well off. They lived in the city, and her uncle worked at a hospital. But she faced many challenging circumstances after finishing her primary school education. We learn that she nearly committed suicide because of the desperation of being denied schooling. Rachel says that she wanted to become a nurse and knew very well that getting a job would help her get her independence. She wanted to become a nurse because she grew up going to a church where there

were missionaries who were nurses at the local hospital where her uncle was working. It is exposure to these nurses that led Rachel to work hard and return from her grandparent's home to do her national examination. It is the same drive that led her to make that one decision – to go to the church in the morning to make her request known to God, where she met the sister who eventually ended up being her godmother.

8.4.2 Family and guardianship support

One figure cannot kill an insect

Educated mothers lead to smaller, healthier and better-educated children

Several studies (Herz & Sperling, 2004; Klasen, 1999; Subbarao & Raney 1995; UNESCO 2000; World Bank, 2001) speak to the importance of an educated mother, which is evidenced by Ruth's story. I would also say that there is great importance in mothers in general. This is reflected in my personal experience. My mother dropped out of school to be married at an early age. She says that if she had continued with school, she would have had a much better life than the one she was living. She had therefore tasted the fruits of education and knew that it was what she wanted for her children. She worked very hard to protect us from the plans that my father and my uncles had - to marry us off at an early age.

Ruth's story also reveals how much her mother supported her. One may say that Ruth's mother let her down by allowing Ruth to be circumcised; but, from the traditional point of view, she felt that her daughter needed to fit in. Ruth was going to be teaching at the local school and her status in the community was going to be affected if she did not go through the female circumcision. However, her mother showed her support and concern for her daughters by bringing the nurse to take care of Ruth and her sister after the cutting.

Leah's case is very special in that her mother was not educated but she helped Leah get into school. She says that she was tired of people requesting that she write something down when she did not know how. She wanted to have her daughter know how to write so that she could be of help to her. She decided to take Leah to school and let her study for several years without her father knowing about her education. She was beaten by her husband but continued to support her daughter's education. The desire for education extends to Leah's grandmother who encourages her to go to school in the absence of her mother.

Rachel finds support from her guardian, a nun who went to the same church as her. She came to her when Rachel was at the end of her road. She had decided to run away into the bush so that wild animals could eat her and end her misery. Rachel wrote letters to countless relatives requesting them to send her to school but none of them came to her rescue. Fortunately, a door was opened for her when she went to pray that morning. Sister Roselina became her guardian angel and supported her throughout high school and college.

8.4.3 Personal resilience

Environmental factors and individual support were vital to these women's success, but even more powerful were the women's strong will and determination to overcome challenges despite all that stood in their way. Leah is a strong-willed woman; after being abducted by men determined to marry her off, she fought back. She had the courage to put her father in jail for a day in order to get the education she wanted. She later left her husband and decided to go to college despite having a seven-month-old baby. Leah's resilience enabled her to fight against all odds to get a college education. Leah could have easily given up when her father found out that she was attending school or when her father planned to marry her against her will or even after

she fell in love and was living with her boyfriend with two children. Leah was determined, despite all the circumstances surrounding her, to become educated and to better her life. She had made up her mind that, no matter what, she was going to get her college education and find employment so that she would be able to be self-sufficient.

Rachel, an orphan who was raised by her uncle and aunt, never let her situation deter her from achieving her best in education. She went out to look for ways to support her own education. Even when her grandfather was ready to marry her off to an older man, Rachel looked for ways to get back to her uncle's home in order to do her national examination. When Rachel's uncle told her that he was not going to pay for her high school education, Rachel was determined to walk any distance to find a scholarship. At one point she felt like dying, but in the process she found someone to support her education. She was willing to share her story with a nun, who was able to help her. Rachel could have easily just gone back to her grandfather and agreed to marry the old man, who, according to the village standard, was well off. She did not do that, but decided to write letters to her relatives instead, and later went to the nun for help. This determination kept her from easily quitting and enables Rachel currently to live with HIV/AIDS. She is able to stand up and teach others and to break the taboo against the virus because of her strong will.

Resilience enabled Susan to leave behind her two-year-old daughter to go to college far from home. It enabled her to overcome all the negative words from her mother in-law and members of her community and to focus on attending college. Even when her house helper was chased away by her mother in law, Susan did not waver, but rather continued with her education. This focus has enabled her now to have a job that allows her to provide for her children and for their education. Although Susan is not completely free from her husband's oppression, she is at

least independent, and her children are getting the best education available because Susan is earning an income.

In conclusion, the stories told in this project provide a means to help those who hear them know that they too have an innate resilience that they can tap into and use to reclaim their destiny. With the support of the one person or the few people around us, each one of us has the capability to achieve our full potential. The concepts I have learned throughout this project are some of the things I am incorporating in our girls' school in Kenya, and I hope my readers will also take a stand and overcome all the challenges that are hindering them from achieving their full potential. In learning from Ruth's story, students at the Kakenya Center for Excellence school in Kenya have taken part in a study tour outside their village that exposed them to other cultures and communities. We are also training the girls on the importance of speaking up against the injustice done to them as Leah did when she reported her father to the local authority. We are providing the girls with tools they need to overcome any challenges and barriers they may encounter in their life to achieving their dreams. These girls are the next generation of women who will challenge traditional norms in their communities by learning from the women like the one I have shared about in this study.

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