

Factors Contributing to High Rate of Illiteracy among the Borana Muslim Women in
Marginalized Areas: A Case Study of Marsabit County

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Abstract

This study involved an investigation into the factors contributing to a high rate of illiteracy among the Borana Muslim women in Mata'arba location in Marsabit County. The factors investigated included cultural and other general factors that affect formal education among the Borana Muslim girls in marginalized areas. These factors include early marriage, ethnic conflicts, pastoralism, poverty, preferential education for boys rather than girls, female genital mutilation (FGM), HIV and AIDS. The study adopted a qualitative method, and was guided by phenomenological research design in collecting data. Structured interview questions and participant observation tools were used in answering the research questions. The research population was composed of Borana Muslim women aged 12 to 40 years who have never had an opportunity to go to school. The interview questions were translated into the language of the respondents and then administered directly to the sampled respondents through the help of a research assistant and the resultant data analysed. The study showed that the attitude of Borana Muslim women towards formal education is generally positive: They viewed illiteracy among the girls as a critical issue. Nevertheless, to ensure equitable quality education for the women, a form of intervention is urgently needed. In conclusion, the study observed that there is a need for all stakeholders to step up the action concerning the importance of formal education among girls. This calls for a joint effort by the government, the community and the Borana women themselves to arise and fight illiteracy at all costs. Key highlights on how to improve the Borana Muslim women's situation were raised. They include; creating awareness on the integral dimension in inclusivity of Borana girls in education, discouraging early marriages, provision of mobile formal schools among the pastoralist communities, and enhancing security among the communities. The recommendations strive to form a basis for serious consideration by anyone wishing to promote lifelong education and eradicate illiteracy among the Borana Muslim girls in marginalized areas.

Key Words: Borana, education, *dugsi*, illiteracy, *madrassa*

Introduction

Literacy remains the most vital practical tool to a brighter future. However, although education is a basic human right, it remains unfulfilled for many children around the world. In its

broadest sense, education is the means through which the aims and habits of a group of people lives on from one generation to the other (MOEST, 2015). According to the World Literacy Day 2014, “Accessing and resourcing schools is most challenging in the developing world, particularly in Africa where a large majority of the world’s illiterate live” (UNESCO, 2014). The problem is even more extensive when looking at the gender inequality reflected in literacy rates. Women made up more than half the illiterate population in all regions of the world. The global monitoring report over education noted that two-thirds of the global illiterate are women (UNESCO, 2014). Despite the right set of circumstances brought about by digital platforms to promote education, 263 million school children still lack basic literacy skills with just a small percent of the poorest girls completing secondary education. Majorities are from low-income and conflict-affected areas (UNESCO, 2017). In Sub-Saharan Africa, 65.3 % of women are found to be illiterate; an indication that significant barriers to achieving gender equality are yet to be overcome.

In Kenya, major strides have been taken under the Millennium Development Goals (MDG’s). However, results show that there still exists the problem of inequity and inequality in education (Asante Africa, 2016). One of the places which is adversely affected is the northeastern region in Marsabit among the Borana Muslim people (Doyle, 2004, p.12). The Borana people are one of the groups of Oromo who left the southern highlands of Ethiopia in the early 1500's (Kjaerland, 1976, p.12). They live in Marsabit County, stretching into Tana River, Garissa and in Moyale Districts (Schlee & Shoghollo, 2012, p.14). In Marsabit County, 61.9 % of women have never attended school (KNBS, 2015). According to Fratkin and Roth, the Borana Muslim women have the highest illiteracy rate among other marginalized communities in the northern part of Kenya (2004, p.27). As a result, they are losing out on productivity and

participation that is necessary to help them develop, prosper and sustain growth (Wambua, 2013, pgs.125-128). It is recorded that only one woman out of ten in the age bracket of eleven to forty years has had an opportunity for formal training. In agreement, Eshelby and Garretis record that there are only a few girls who manage to clear the first eight years of primary education, with no evidence of girls moving on to secondary schools (2006, p. 41). This study, therefore, is an attempt to inquire into factors which have led to a high illiteracy rate among the Borana Muslim women in Mata'arba, in Marsabit County.

Reviewed Literature

One of the main goals of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) is to end illiteracy and all gender disparities in education by 2030 (Orchard, 2016). The goal of gender equality and women's empowerment is believed to combat poverty and tackle inequality (Asante Africa, 2016). In a global report assessing progress towards gender equality, the situation has remained unchanged for the past twenty years (King and Winthrop, 2015). The report shows that there are significant hurdles to overcome in achieving the global goal of gender equality in education.

Why Literacy for Women?

The benefits of literate women as compared to those who are illiterate are very high (Leach, 2000, p.4). In this study, illiteracy is defined as the inability to read and write. It is important to note here that "many research studies correlating literacy and development indicators, such as fertility rates or child mortality" are based on women's literacy rates (Cochrane, 2009; Stromquist, 1997, p.92; Bown, 1990). Bown's study observed that most of the maternal deaths occurred in marginalized poverty-stricken areas where women were illiterate (Bown, 1990, p.6). Years later, Cochrane demonstrated an inverse relationship between women's literacy and fertility (2009, p.46). The findings showed an impact of women's

education on child health where an estimated 300,000 women in the world died from pregnancy related complications (Cochrane, 2009). The study showed that each extra year of maternal education was associated with a nine % decrease in under-five mortality (Cochrane, 2009). This mutuality between women's literacy and health indicated not only a decrease in child mortality but even more importantly, increased life expectancy. A positive change was also seen in women seeking medical health for themselves and for their sick children. Literate women were able to adopt preventive health measures, such as immunization and greater knowledge of family planning methods. According to Cochrane, education is highly important in ensuring women are able to access and understand health services and information delivered by skilled birth attendants (2009, p.16). Therefore, literacy becomes a matter of survival where there is a high rate of maternal deaths. The importance of being literate for a woman is also found in enabling her to put her potential to optimal use (King and Hill, 1993, p.30). As Robinson observes, a woman makes most of the decisions in the family (2004, p.48). Therefore, education enables her to be a right thinker and a correct decision-maker. This is achieved by "bringing her knowledge from the external world, teaching her to reason, and acquaint her with past history, so that she may be a better judge of the present" (Robinson, 2004, p.48). Without education, a woman, as it were, is shut up in a windowless room (King and Hill, 1993, p.47). Sad to say, the UNESCO Global Monitoring Report estimated that it would take another half a century for the poorest young women globally to learn to read (UNESCO, 2014).

Different views on Muslim women and Education

Education for the female population remains a controversial issue in the majority of the Islamic societies. Religious beliefs play a key role in determining whether or not a girl should go to school. The Borana Muslims hold closely to their cultural and religious beliefs (Schlee &

Shongollo, 2012). They believe that “formal education introduces Christianity and Western practices among the society” (Isaac, 1986, p.27). On the other hand, in the Islamic faith women are seen as a weaker sex (S.4: 34), and unable to make much out of education. The Qur’an records that their place is the home, where they raise children and take care of the household (S.33: 33). In areas where this is a factor, illiteracy among girls is inevitable.

There is no rule that prevents a Muslim girl from undertaking what is permissible (Schlee & Shongollo, 2012) as long as the matter is a subject of interpretation and consideration in accordance with the fundamentals of the Shari'a, and if it concerns the interests of Muslim women at large. This, however, has to be in accordance with the conditions and circumstances of the society. Notwithstanding, there are a number of contrary views that seem to downplay the importance of education, such as women undergoing menstruation, childbearing and labour, a fact which may be seen to hamper and impair their performance (Forward, 2016). Again, Islam speaks against immodesty and intermingling of sexes; thus, women are not to be found in places such as public institutions where intermingling is not controlled. In responding to this argument, Schlee and Shogollo state that education is a basic right for all, and is not dependent on religious or man-made conditions (Schlee & Shogollo, 2012). In agreement, some Muslims declare that education brings enlightenment in religion and this is an important objective and duty made binding by the Shari'a. Muslims feminists on the other hand fight for the rights of Muslim women in light of education, stating that girls should not be decided for on whether they should go to school or not.

Cultural factors contributing to Illiteracy among the Borana Muslim Women

1. The Pastoralist lifestyle

The practice of pastoralism is fraught with challenges when it comes to literacy. These consist of “inconsistent rainfall patterns, drought, fluctuating prices of commodities and lack of value chain infrastructure” (Doyle, 2004, p.14; Oba, 2013). Thus, for children to go to school, the parents must find a way to live within a reasonable proximity of the school, which sometimes is very difficult (Schlee, 1994, p.39; Sifuma, 2010; Chege & Sifuna, 2006; Fratkin & Roth, 2004). In the report given by Eshelby and Garretis, pastoralists and agro-pastoralist communities occupy nearly 85% of the marginalized areas (2006, p.41). During the drier months, animals are taken to distant places to feed, sometimes for a long period. In addition, the value placed on formal education among the Cushites is based on wage-labor opportunities (Nyamongo, 1994, p.57). As Hallpike states, “Formal education has little prospects of wage employment in the marginalized areas” (2003, p.7) as it does not provide the kind of training deemed useful for the member of the household, village or community that lives “in a precarious ecological environment” (Jeffery & Basu, 1996, p.37). As a result, “skills that would prepare girls to be good mothers and wives” are much more appreciated and recommended than formal schooling (Hallpike, 2003, p.25).

2. Ethnic conflicts among the Borana tribes

Over the years, simmering ethnic conflicts have been erupting now and then, leading to low school turn out. According to UNESCO, “Children have borne the brunt of these conflicts, with many being unable to continue with education due to persistent instability” (UNESCO, 2010). According to Elshelby and Garretis, conflicts erupt when; “People are resentful of having to give up their valuable grazing land or their livestock to the cattle rustlers leading to violent disputes” (2006, p.63). Although the police and clan elders are brought in to calm the situation, the outcome is usually very wanting. The attacks “have involved complex legal, political and

economic dynamics that extend from local to national and even regional dimensions, encompassing the communities and their allies (Isaac, 1986, p. 27). Even where there are no direct clashes between communities, periodic killings continue to occur, creating insecurity and forcing households to emigrate with their livestock (Schlee, 1994, p.63). According to Sifuma, “Large numbers of Gabra moved with their livestock from Borana administrative zone of the Oromia Regional State to Udet and Moyale Districts of the Somali Regional State” due to clashes in their area and that is where they found a living to this day (2010, p.25; Oba, 2013).

3. Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

A large body of empirical evidence indicates that the practice of FGM affects education (Wanjiru & Jones, 2011). There is an assumed “inverse connection between female genital mutilation (FGM) and education” (Willcox, 2005, p.38). Although FGM is illegal, it is commonly practiced in poor communities (Pesambili, 2013). FGM is part of an initiation ritual for girls (KNBS, 2015). During this time, the girls miss school for several months or they don’t come back at all (Kituyi, 2010, p.15). After this interval, girls have trouble catching up with the rest of the class. It is stated that, “The Borana girls who have been subjected to FGM are often considered grown up and eligible for marriage” (Nyamongo, 1994, p.58; Kituyi, 2010, p.15). Many girls suffer from health problems, pain and trauma following the FGM procedure (Willcox, 2005, p.63). Sources show that the practice is as real today as it was then. For the girls who continue with education, findings show that they are often absent or less attentive in class, leading to “poor performance, interruptions and premature termination of schooling” (Willcox, 2005, p.64). As a result, the girls lose interest with school and identify entirely with their new roles as wives (Nyamongo, 1994, p.55). Those who defy the order and continue schooling in spite of being married soon become pregnant and cease at that point.

4. Preference of a boy child over a girl child

Most patriarchal societies ascribe more value to boys than girls (KNBS, 2015).

According to the Women's Refugee Commission, this inequality becomes more pronounced at an early age (Women's Refugee Commission, 2014). The result is that it encourages gender discrimination and power imbalances in schools (Haberland, 2015). Nevertheless, the family has to decide who has the highest possibility of improving the family status. This variation is majorly experienced when an education opportunity arises. Girls are left at home while boys are enrolled into formal schools. The same position is expressed in the Qur'an (S.16:57-59, S.43:17-18).

Most Borana Muslim families adhere to the custom in being congruous with the religious obligations. In addition, the financial benefits that the girl's family derive from the marriage play a major role in determining when a marriage should take place (Nyamongo, 1994, p.59). Thus, women have no business going to school due to the fact that the "role of providing for the family lies entirely on the man in the family" (Kituyi, 2010, p.37).

5. Early marriages

Early female marriage is a common cultural practice in most parts of marginalized societies in Kenya. In areas where the practice is prominent, the family of the girl plans for it, "sometimes without the knowledge of the girl" (Kituyi, 2010, p.16). According to Nyamongo, the girl can be married to any man regardless of age provided it is approved by the family (1994, p.58). In addition, families are more likely to marry off their daughters to offset financial burdens, with many subsequently dropping out of school (Fieldrich, 2004, p.46). This report concurs with the Twaweza study, which show that 34% of Kenyan children are borne by teenage mothers (Asante Africa, 2016). Nevertheless, Education For All (EFA), global monitoring report

(GMR 2013/14) estimated that child marriage would drop by 14% if all girls in Sub-Saharan Africa had primary education, with a massive 64% drop when they have access to secondary education (UNESCO, 2013).

General factors affecting formal education among the Borana Muslim women

1. Poverty

In Kenya, poverty means an inability to getting choices and opportunities. It means “lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society” (Government of Kenya, 2012, KNBS, 2015)). In most arid parts, poverty means not having enough to feed and clothe a family and not having a school or good classrooms where teachers and learners can interact. Poverty is known to be one of the factors that affect education tremendously (Government of Kenya, 2012). Most people in drought-stricken areas are low-income earners who mostly survive on livestock. According to Sabatier, “The incidence, depth, duration and timing of poverty influence a child’s educational attainment” (Sabatier, 2007, p.38). In agreement, Street states, “The depth of poverty has affected the achievement and retention of children in schools in most part of the country” (Street, 2009, p.15). As a result, massive poverty has crippled many families’ efforts to educate their children despite the introduction of Free Primary Education (FPE). According to Alidou, children at the greatest risk of not attending school are from the lowest wealth quintile (FAWE, 2005). According to Fieldrich, 70 % of the one billion poorest people in the world are women (2004, 5). It is therefore imperative that the “political will and momentum is kept apace to ensure all children, especially girls, are given the chance to fulfil their potential and secure their future” (Orchard, 2016).

2. The HIV and AIDS pandemic

HIV/AIDS is a global epidemic (Sabatier, 2007, 2). It has become the most devastating disease, which wipes out entire families. According to a UNAIDS report, “Sub-Saharan Africa remains the region most severely affected by HIV/AIDS.” In Kenya, there are approximately 700 – 800 people who succumb to the disease every day (AIDS Control Unit, 2013, VIII). Thus, AIDS remains a serious threat in our social and economic development. It has led many children to be orphaned. An AIDS control unit records that there is no family in Kenya that remains untouched either directly or indirectly (AIDS Control Unit, 2013, VIII). According to Sabatier, in areas where polygamy is practiced, the HIV/AIDS pandemic is an even worse challenge (2007, p.53). As Muslims, the Borana can marry up to four wives (S.4: 3), and this greatly enhances the spread of HIV. With parents succumbing to the disease, many girls automatically stop schooling and become the guardians to their siblings.

Materials and Methods

The research method adopted to investigate and describe data was qualitative. The design was used in collecting information about relationships and experiences by looking for correlations and making predictions based on the data (Creswell, 2007, p.60). The type of qualitative research design used in this study was phenomenology. The design is an inductive, descriptive research approach developed from phenomenological philosophy (Babbie, 1990, p.63). In this study, the design helped in understanding the essence of the phenomenon by examining the views of the Borana Muslim women as they participated in the phenomenon, hence allowing a deeper understanding of their lived experiences. According to Willis, the purpose of phenomenological design is to describe and interpret the experiences as perceived by the respondents (2007, p.86). The assumption was that there were multiple ways of interpreting the same experience, and that the different meaning of each participant would constitute the

reality. In order to achieve the purpose of the study, the researcher formulated three research questions as a guide to the study.

1. What is the attitude of the Borana Muslim women towards formal education?
2. Which are some of the cultural and general factors that limit the access to formal education among the Borana Muslim women?
3. In what ways do Borana Muslim women think the community attitude towards formal education could be improved?

The study examined a population drawn from Saku Constituency in Mata'arba location in Marsabit County. The total population of Borana Muslim women in Mata'arba location was approximately 3,500. This was the total number of Borana Muslim women between the age of twelve and forty years who have never had an opportunity to go to school. The researcher used multi-cluster sampling design to sample the population. The sample size of the research was 20 Muslim women. These were 10 younger Borana women between the ages of 12-20, and 10 women aged between 21-40 years. The researcher also interviewed a number of Christian women in the process. However, for the sake of this study, the researcher only analysed the data that was collected from the Borana Muslim women.

The researcher conducted personal, in-depth structured interviews, which were guided by both open and closed-ended questions. The interviews were typically long, and the researcher had several interview sessions with each participant. According to Gorden, interviews provide a rich and detailed description of the human experience (1987, p.61). Due to the heavy reliance on this single method of data collection, and the illiterate nature of the respondents, the researcher conducted the interviews through the help of a research assistant. His role was to translate the interview questions into the Borana language of the respondents as well as provide interpretation during the interviews. The researcher immediately recorded the findings and added follow-up questions whenever necessary. In order to meet the ethical considerations, authorization to

administer the study was granted from Africa International University. The researcher also observed the social cultural religious dimensions of the Borana Islamic community.

Results and Discussion/Findings

Data Analysis

In order to analyze the data, the researcher described and transcribed the data according to how participants responded to each interview question. The researcher then reduced the information into significant statements or quotes and combined them into themes. From the themes, the researcher developed patterns of what the respondents experienced in terms of conditions, context or situations. The key ideas and themes that emerged from the raw data were used to develop patterns, which were used to analyse data. As Creswell states, the best way to analyze interview questions is through patterns (2007, p.60). The researcher organized each day's findings per interview questions and looked across all participants and their answers in order to identify consistencies and differences.

Findings and Interpretation

Research question one was trying to inquire into the attitude of Borana Muslim women towards formal education. The researcher categorized the data under different patterns and themes, which were derived from the findings. In the category of 21-40 years, five respondents indicated that their parents were not aware of formal education and that is why they did not attend formal schooling. One respondent said, "By that time, I never heard my parents or anyone around me talk about formal education and so I never knew that I missed school until the age of 14 years when I got married." Three respondents in the same age bracket (21-40 years) indicated that they married at a tender age hence missing an opportunity to go to school. Two respondents indicated that their parents were pastoralists; hence there were no schools wherever they stayed.

In the category of 12-20 years of age, three women indicated that their parents were not aware of formal education, while seven indicated that although they would have liked to attend formal school, they got married at an early age. One respondent said, “I remember people coming home and saying that they have come to bring the bride price, only to realize later that I was the bride.” A respondent said, “One day I mentioned to my parents about going to school. I had heard about school from my cousin who had come to visit during the holidays. For some reasons, my parents were very annoyed, and I got very confused. I wondered why. It is then my parents told me that education is for the poor.” According to her parents, the poor are the children whose families did not own hundreds of sheep, goats, camel and cows. These findings showed that although there was a chance for some of the Borana Muslim a woman to go to school, their parents refused to enrol them. The respondents further emphasized that their parents understood the role of girls to be farming, herding and household chores. However, the overall results showed a positive attitude towards education among the Borana Muslim women.

Factors limiting the access to formal education among the Borana Muslim women

Research question two was trying to investigate as to how cultural and general factors limit the access to formal education among the Borana Muslim women. The cultural factors that were investigated were early marriages, female genital mutilation (FGM), pastoralist activities and preference of a boy child over a girl child. The findings indicate that early forced marriages impede girls’ education. Out of the twenty women interviewed, eighteen believed that early marriage is one of the main causes of illiteracy among the Muslim women. One respondent said, “In some cases, girls are married off before they reach age ten.” A metaphor in the Borana and Somali languages saying “a girl is like a vegetable” has been used to support early marriages. The implication here is that a girl blossoms only for a time and with age her beauty fades. With

this, the Borana marry their girls at their prime age, which is considered to be anytime from the age of ten.

The researcher further examined whether there was a correlation between FGM and formal education. The findings showed that the age for undertaking FGM was declining, with the majority facing the cut between ages 5 to 7, when resistance is minimal. As a result, seventeen respondents did not see any correlation between illiteracy and FGM. They concluded that FGM does not affect formal education among the girls due to the fact that by the time they are going through the procedure, the girls are not ready for school. Other three respondents shared on how the cut affected them negatively to an extent that they could not continue with school.

The researcher examined the interrelation between a pastoralist lifestyle and illiteracy. Fifteen respondents showed that formal education among the Borana Muslim girls has been affected greatly by the Borana nature of pastoralism. The findings indicated that all the women whose parents were pastoralists did not have a chance to attend school. In the age bracket of 12-20 years, eight Borana women did not go to school, as their parents were pastoralists. One respondent said, "To a Borana, cattle come first." She confessed that according to her parents, herding was more important than education. Although the other two respondents were willing to enrol, no school was found in places where they lived. For women living in pastoralist areas, rights to security, freedom from inhuman or degrading treatment, rights to information, expression, association, privacy and confidentiality are hard to come by (Oba, 2013).

The preference of enrolling boys rather than girls in school was also probed. Out of the 20 Muslim women who were interviewed, two respondents admitted that girls offer much more help to their parents than boys after they acquire education. However, other eighteen respondents indicated the need to educate boys more than girls in order to enhance the family success in the

future. Some women indicated that educating a girl is a loss to the family as she would later get married, hence misusing the family resources which might otherwise have been used to enhance the wellbeing of the family.

The second part of research question two investigated other general factors that affect formal education among the girl child in the Borana Muslim community. These were poverty, HIV and AIDS, ethnic conflicts and religious beliefs. In regard to poverty, the findings unanimously agreed that poverty plays a major role in the lack of education for the female population. The respondents stated that most girls lack the basic needs required in the success of formal education such as books, stationery and uniforms. Of key importance, which was mentioned by all the respondents, is the absence of sanitary towels. Different themes emerged as to what poverty meant to different respondents. Just to mention a few, the respondents indicated that poverty in their context meant an inability to get choices and opportunities due to the marginalized nature of the society. It meant lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society as lack of education has denied them the purchasing power. It also meant not having enough to feed and clothe a family and not having a school or good classrooms. The point here is that the cost of living is beyond their pockets, thus the inability to afford the basic needs. Poverty was also attributed to insecurity due to constant eruption of ethnic clashes among the communities. The result is a form of powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities who are susceptible to violence, and often living in fragile environments where even a basic need such as water is hard to find. Sometimes women have to travel for long distances to fetch water and this affected them greatly.

In regard to HIV and AIDS, results indicate that the Borana people shy from discussing such issues openly. With the scarcity of information on this issue from the respondents, it is clear

that they refused to admit the presence and impact of HIV/AIDS within their families. This is associated with the high level of stigma attached to the affected and infected. However, the findings indicate that HIV and AIDS are prevalent in the area as the respondents declared that they have been affected in one way or another by the deadly virus. The twenty respondents mentioned a number of parents who have succumbed to the deadly virus thus denying their children a chance to ever find their way to school. When parents die, the girls take over the family responsibility.

There are constant ethnic tensions that erupt in violence once in a while in the area under study. Findings indicate that when fighting erupts, most schools are closed indefinitely. Out of the twenty respondents, seventeen stated that ethnic conflicts are a major problem in the area and affect the female population immensely. The three who had contrary opinion indicated that the elders always intervene when ethnic conflict emerges before it affects the community. However, all the respondents were in agreement that parents do not allow their girls to go to school when ethnic conflicts erupt due to insecurity.

Religious beliefs are another factor that were investigated. Results showed that Borana Muslims prefer their girls to attend *Madrassa* before enrolling them into formal schools. *Madrassa* is the main Islamic education system where Muslims from the age of three are taught the doctrines of Islam. Findings indicated that in earlier times, formal education was shunned in the area, not because the concept was alien, but more so due to its association with Christianity. All the respondents indicated that more value was given to religious studies. One respondent commented, “Even for the few who attempted going to school, it was okay for them to miss school for days, and their parents would not question it. However, nobody would dare miss the *Madrassa*. If you did, you would not only face the beatings from the parents, but you would also

meet the wrath of the religious teachers. And woe to you if that would happen to you.” The argument here is that the success of *dugsi* would be jeopardized by formal education. *Dugsi* are the *Madrassa* centres where boys and girls are instructed on how they live out their Islamic beliefs and practices. The Muslim respondents showed that they still feared the Christianization effect of schooling on their Muslim children. In looking for a correlation between religious beliefs and formal education, all the respondents were in agreement that attending *dugsi* is better and more appreciated than formal education. The respondents mentioned that in any discussion about formal education, *Madrassa* would always come first, thus giving it the highest priority.

Research question three was trying to investigate ways in which the Borana Muslim women think the attitude of the Borana community towards formal education could be improved. Several themes and patterns developed from this question. The 20 respondents stated that parents played a key role in enhancing the education among the female population. Unfortunately, not many parents are aware of it. The findings show that some parents receive the bride wealth of their daughters as soon as the girl is circumcised from the ages of 6-8 years. All respondents indicated that protection of the Muslim girls from early marriages is one of the main ways in which formal education could be improved. In addition, Borana Muslim girls suffer due to unmet needs while attending school hence they end up dropping out. If a girl is sure of her needs being met while in school, chances are that she may want to go to school. One respondent had this to say, “Lack of sanitary towels and other essential needs diminished my hopes of ever going to school.” Girls need support from the family and the community so that they may concentrate on their education. Other findings point to the government as a way in which girls’ education could be improved. The respondents desired to see the government put more effort in building girls’ schools in the area. The idea is that the government should not only disburse funds for the

brighter students but would also need to allocate funds specifically for girls' education. In addition, the respondents indicated the absence of safety for the girls who refuse to bow to the negative community demands. In their view, only the government is able to counterattack this practice by discouraging early marriages and providing shelters for girls who are being forced into such practices. They were also of the view that the government should facilitate and provide mobile schools for pastoralists' families. Their argument was that a directive from the government to the pastoralist communities to allow their girls enrol into formal school would also heighten the urgency. The respondents also projected the need to have the government take the upper hand in providing security in the area by promoting peace and especially among the Gabra and the Borana communities. One respondent said, "Without peace there is no education." Another point that came out is that Borana people need to break with some of their traditions. For example, traditions that promote the preference of boys over girls in relation to formal education should be addressed. To enhance girls' education, equality between girls and boys should be promoted. One respondent said, "To me, both girls and boys are equal. They all need to be educated."

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study came up with the following conclusions:

1. Significant barriers to formal education among the Borana Muslim women still exist. Strict measures need to be taken in enabling them to become more empowered in decision-making. As such, promoting literacy among Borana Muslim women is key as it is directly entwined with meeting the wider Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
2. Cultural factors are a major hindrance to formal education among the Borana Muslim women. These factors are playing a major role and the Borana community should deal

with the aligned issues more effectively. For example, although FGM is highly discouraged by the law, some Borana Muslim women think they are dependent on it, and that they cannot be fully human without having been circumcised.

3. A striking absence of reliable and consistent information on HIV and AIDS for pastoral communities is eminent. The absence of this information does not necessarily mean that the vice is not affecting the community. This poses a clear and present danger among the Borana Muslim community and especially in the pastoralist communities. Perhaps this is attributed to several socio-economic characteristics that compromise their resilience. The factual knowledge available is not being translated into practical response in the community. Thus, the community has not fully accepted its presence and the threat associated with the pandemic.
4. Poverty is a major factor that leads to illiteracy among the Borana Muslim women. While some Borana people assume that formal education is meant for the poor, more equal education means greater economic empowerment for women through more equal work opportunities.
5. Although ethnic conflicts contribute negatively to formal education among the Borana Muslim women, there is a new trend that has led to a lack of teachers in marginalized areas. This has been contributed by an increased tension caused by the militia groups, thus forcing the teachers who are not from the area to flee. If not secured, this high rate of insecurity among the teachers will accelerate the rate of illiteracy among the female population.

Recommendations

1. There is a great need of creating awareness on the importance of formal education among the Borana Muslim girls. However, this should be a joint venture consisting of the community leaders, the government, the parents, the religious leaders and the Borana Muslims themselves.
2. Mentoring programs among the Borana Muslim girls should be encouraged. Although mentoring is not a panacea of retaining girls to school, a report given by Action Aid showed that mentoring affects retention rates substantially with the dropout rate decreasing by 20% (Action Aid 2013).
3. The Marsabit County government has a big role to play in enhancing Borana Muslim girls' education. This is in terms of providing the necessary structures and resources, security needed for the teachers and especially those not from the ethnic groups in the area, as well as the provision of sanitary towels.
4. The Ministry of Education in conjunction with the World Food Program (WFP) should introduce feeding programs in the schools. The researcher noted that the organization has been running feeding programs in other marginalized areas and experiences indicate that the program has encouraged parents to send their girls to school. This move would bear much fruit where parents are unable to feed their children due to poverty.
5. Community leaders should be in the forefront in breaking the culture of silence and question widely accepted cultural norms/taboo like FGM and early marriages. They are to come up with strategies that address cultural and religious beliefs, norms and gender inequality.
6. There is need to expose the young Borana Muslim girls to female community leaders, female politicians, professionals and other successful role models who have made it as a

result of going through formal education. This could perhaps help them deal with stereotypes in regard to formal education, hence changing their aspirations.

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