

## **Social Conflicts Affecting Teaching and Learning in Public Primary Schools of Elgeyo Marakwet County, Kenya**

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### **Abstract**

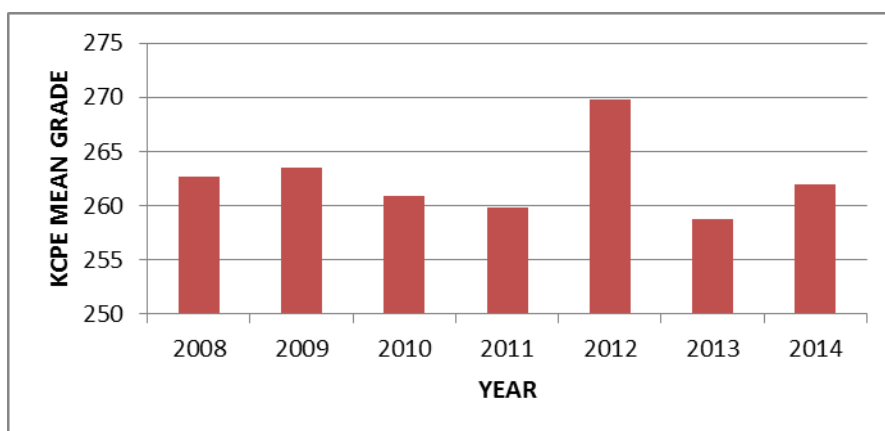
*Social-cultural factors have contributed to educational disparities in some areas in Kenya. A study was carried to determine the extent to which conflict affect teaching and learning in public primary schools in Elgeyo Marakwet County. The Bronfenbrenners (1990) ecological systems theory was adopted. The Design was descriptive survey and the methodology used was mixed research method. Stratified sampling was used to stratify sub-counties in to those in Elgeyo and Marakwet then simple random sampling technique was used to select two sub- one from each stratum. Simple random sampling was used to select 80 public schools in Elgeyo Marakwet County. Simple Random sampling was used to select 48 class teachers, 24 parent representatives and 60 pupils from the sampled schools. Purposive sampling was used to sample the (2) Sub-Counties Education Officers and the Head teachers. A total of 80 Head teachers participated in the study. Data was collected by use of questionnaires and interviews. Data analysis was done through descriptive statistics which included application of percentages and frequency tables and graphs. Findings from this study established that social conflicts negatively affect teaching and learning in the County. It is recommended that those harmful cultural practices that influence teaching and learning should be abandoned and the community sensitized on alternative means and ways of mitigating the motivating factors. Also, concerted efforts by the government and other stakeholders should be made so that conflicts are minimised. The findings from this study will be utilized by the Ministry of Education and line agencies to adequately plan and formulate policies oriented towards enhanced strategies for promoting students' teaching and learning.*

**Key words:** Socio Conflicts, Teaching, Learning, Public Primary Schools and Elgeyo Marakwet County

### **INTRODUCTION**

Kenya upholds education as a principal human right and recognizes it as pivotal towards the achievement of self-fulfillment and national development (GOK, 2007; MOF 2006). Consistent efforts have been made to address issues of access, equity, quality and relevance of education. At the national level, commissions of education have periodically been set up to examine educational provision. The government has also propelled interventions such as Free Primary Education to boost access. Curriculum reviews have been undertaken to address significance and ease overload on the learners. Public private partnerships in education have been encouraged leading to increased individual and community participation in the education sector. Despite all these efforts, the education sector is still plagued with challenges. Since Kenya's independence in 1963, sub- located in arid and semi-arid Kenya have continued to show evidence of extensively lower access, participation, completion and achievement rates (Sifuna, 2005). In an effort to address specific policies and interventions targeting the most deprived areas and the recommendations effected. Ruto and Kibutha (2010) indicate that social, cultural and

economic factors have contributed to educational marginalization in the Arid and Semi Arid Lands (ASAL) in Kenya. Also, other challenges to access of education include: poor communication vast distances to schools, low literate communities, lack of social role models, lower valuation of girls' education and limitations of basic schooling resources like teachers (GOK 2005, 2006, 2007). These mentioned factors have greatly affected student performance in some of the in Kenya. Elgeyo Marakwet County has been one of those that have recorded a drop in Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) performance in the last five years as shown in figure 1. It is this dropping performance that prompted the researcher to investigate the socio-cultural factors that influence teaching and learning in Elgeyo Marakwet County.



**Figure 1: KCPE performance in Elgeyo Marakwet County From 2008-2014**

Holmes and Cooper (2004) indicate that cultures have different norms, values and expectations, and these cultural differences have a strong influence on educational practices. They further state that cultural attitudes and values influence how we teach and how we learn, and our ideas about educational practices.

Amanda (2012), while writing about the impact of cultural practices in Education, explains how Maasai cultural, physical and economic backgrounds do affect teaching and learning in these regions. Thus these findings seem to indicate that socio- cultural factors impact on the way children participate in education especially in the nomadic and semi nomadic communities. While it seems obvious that socio-cultural affects achievement in education of learners, after several decades since independence, the cultural entrenchment in these communities not to go away.

Other factors such as conflict in the community, society or country also do affect the learning environment. UNESCO Report (2011) further indicates that education systems have been directly affected by conflict: children and schools today are on the front line of armed conflict with classrooms, teachers and pupils seen as legitimate targets.

It is with such views in mind and situations that this study on the socio-cultural factors influencing teaching and learning in public primary schools in Elgeyo Marakwet County was undertaken.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Study Area

This study was carried out in Elgeyo Marakwet County in Kenya. The county borders Baringo County to the East, Uasin Gishu to the West, West Pokot to the North and Nakuru to the South. The main agricultural activity is crop and animal farming. In the lower part of the county, where the population is sparse for instances the valley and the escarpment, the inhabitants practice mainly animal farming and lead pastoral life styles. In the upper part of the valley, where the population is dense, the natives practice mainly crop farming in maize and wheat. The central government has attempted to set up secondary schools of different categories; that is, day or boarding, and single sex or co-educational. Most parts of the County are designated as Arid and Semi Arid Lands (ASAL) with very harsh climatic and physical terrain. The area is often affected by cattle rusting conflict which is usually among the Marakwet and the Pokot. The continuous poor performance in the KCPE exams in this county prompted the researcher to carry out the research in this area as seen in Table 1.1. The research tools were confined to the head teachers, class teachers, learners and parents of the sampled schools.

### Research Design

A mixed research method was used in current study where both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis were applied (Spratt et al, 2004). It was thus more than simply collecting and analyzing both kinds of data; it also involved the use of both approaches in tandem so that the overall strength of a study and greater than either one of the two approaches (Creswell, 2009).

### Target Population

All the primary schools in Elgeyo Marakwet County were covered in this study according to (Agarwal, 2009; Castillo, 2009; Hyndman, 2008; and Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003; Gall & Borg (2007). The accessible population was the public primary schools from Marakwet East sub-county, Marakwet West sub-county, Keiyo North sub-county and Keiyo South Sub-county of Elgeyo Marakwet County. In 2007, Elgeyo Marakwet County had 573 Primary schools with an enrolment of 110,399 pupils and a teacher to pupil ratio of 1: 36

### Sampling Process

A Simple stratified random sampling technique was used in this study (Kerlinger, 2000; Neumann, 2006). Schools were categorized into strata based sub-; Marakwet East, Marakwet West, Keiyo North and Keiyo South. Simple random sampling was used to select two sub- in the counties which include Marakwet east and Keiyo north 3.6.2 Sample size. A sample was obtained from the sample frame which was primary schools in Marakwet East and Keiyo North Sub-. Simple random sampling was used to select 30% of the schools in each of the selected sub- (Kerlinger, 2000). This led to selection of 40 Government sponsored primary schools out of the one hundred and thirty five (135) Governments sponsored primary schools in Marakwet east and forty (40) public primary schools in Keiyo North which forms 30% of the total 133 public primary schools for the study. Thus a total of 80 schools were sampled. Simple random sampling was used to select one class in lower and one in upper primary in all the 80 sampled schools, then 10% of the population of the selected class was sampled and a total of 640 pupils were sampled. Purposive sampling was used to sample 80 head teachers from all the sampled schools. Simple random sampling technique was used to sample 30% of the 80 sampled schools which is approximately 24 schools whereby simple random sampling was used to select one parent representative in each of these schools. A total of 24 parent representatives were sampled. Simple random

sampling was also used to select two class teachers', one upper primary and the other from lower primary in all the 24 sampled schools and a total of 48 class teachers were sampled. Purposive sampling was used to sample the two (2) sub-counties Education Officers. Therefore, a proportionate sample size of 794 respondents was selected.

### **Research Instruments, Reliability and Interviews**

The data was based on primary sources (Leedey & Ormrod, 2005). The questionnaires were given to the class teachers, the learners and Head teachers. The questionnaires comprised both open-ended and closed-ended items due to its reliability in testing attitudes or perceptions of individuals (Kothari, 1990; Mugenda and Mugenda, 1999; Kahn and Best, 1989). Split-half techniques to analyze data collected and to obtain X and Y scores was used. The Spearman correlation coefficient formula was used to compute the data obtained in the two groups, with a reliability index  $\geq 0.5$ .

### **Research Instruments Piloting**

A pilot study was undertaken to prepare for the main study in the neighboring (West Pokot) County which had the same characteristics as the study area. The pilot sample consisted of 20 students and 10 teachers, 5 parent representatives and 2 Sub-Counties Education Officers who were randomly selected.

### **Data Analysis**

The data obtained from the questionnaires and interview schedules were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software tool. The number of respondents and the percentages were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The data was presented using tables and graphs.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Influence of Conflict on Teaching and Learning**

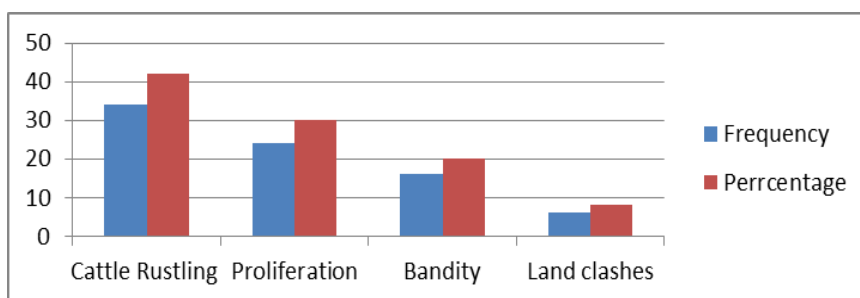
The Head teachers' responded that Conflict influences academic performance, Table 1

**Table 1: Prevalence of Conflict in Marakwet East**

| Statement                                      | Response             | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------|------------|
| How often is your school affected by conflicts | Always               | 20        | 50         |
|                                                | Rarely               | 10        | 25         |
|                                                | Not at All           | 6         | 15         |
|                                                | Not sure/ Don't know | 4         | 10         |
|                                                | Total                | 40        | 100        |

The findings in Table 1 show that 20 (50%) of the Head teachers stated that their schools were always prone to conflict while 10 (25%) indicated that their schools were rarely prone to conflict, 6 (15%) showed that their schools were not prone at all to conflict and 4 (10%) were not sure whether their schools are prone to conflict. Majority of the Head teachers showed that conflict results in the closure of schools and also the high turnover of teachers who opt to move to more secure areas. Interviews with the parent representatives indicated that. Most of the schools were prone to conflict. These schools are prone to conflict which is associated with cattle rustling in the area as the Pokot and the Marakwet engage in conflict and violence when they raid each other to steal cattle. Majority of the teachers stated that

such conflicts do affect pupils' attendance and hence affect teaching and learning in a way that the pupils miss classes due to the insecurity. The teachers also leave due to insecurity all these affect the pupils' learning and eventually their general academic performance. About 60% of the teachers reiterated that conflict affected syllabus coverage due to teachers and the pupils being away until the situation improves. Such missing of lessons for weeks seriously hampers syllabus coverage which eventually leads to poor academic performance among students. The Head teachers were asked to state the major forms of conflict (Figure 2)



**Figure 2: Major Forms of Conflict in the Region**

The data in Figure 2 indicate that 34 (42%) Head teachers cited that the most cause of conflicts is as a result of cattle rustling, 24 (30%) cited proliferation of guns, while 16 (20%) banditry and 6 (8%) cited land clashes. Thus the major issue is cattle rustling and the government should ensure that the area is secure and the cattle rustlers are brought to book. The Head teachers were further asked to state if their pupils participate in these conflict and the findings are as shown in Table 2. Pupils Participation in Conflict.

**Table 2: Pupils Participation in Conflict**

| Statement                    | Frequency  |    | Percentage |
|------------------------------|------------|----|------------|
| Are pupils involved in these | Very often | 40 | 50%        |
|                              | Often      | 24 | 30%        |
|                              | Rarely     | 8  | 10%        |
|                              | Never      | 8  | 10%        |
| Total                        |            | 80 | 100        |

The data shows that pupils do participate in these conflicts in that majority of the Head teachers 40 (50%) cited that they do participate very often while 24 (30%) of them indicated that they often participate whereas 8 (10%) indicated that they rarely participated in these conflicts and 8 (10%) indicated that they never participated. The findings show that pupils do participate in these conflicts. These conflicts affects the pupils' learning in that participation means they will be out of school for some time and their absence in class will affect their learning. Some pupils miss classes because their families are affected and they take off to safer places. It was also established that those not affected are from areas where the government has deployed security personnel. The Sub-County Education Officer indicated that pupils do participate in these conflicts and some even lose their lives but the major challenge is that they may stop going to school after participating in the conflicts.

### Conflict and its Effects on Learning Activities

The section deals with the response concerning conflict and its effects on learning activities. It was observed that conflict in the region affects teaching, learning because of the mass movement. When conflicts arise they lead to closure of schools due to the insecurity. Furthermore, conflict affected co-curricular activities because they are done at county level and they need the participation of all the schools. However due to conflict the most affected schools do not participate. The effect of these is pupils less participation in the various activities like athletics, music and drama, seminars and symposia at the county level.

### Conflicts and School Development Programs

When the Head teachers were asked if conflict hinders school development program they gave their views as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: Conflict and School Development Programs**

| Statement            |            | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------|------------|-----------|------------|
| In Your Opinion      | Very often | 36        | 45%        |
| Does Conflict        | Often      | 32        | 40%        |
| Influence School     | Rarely     | 8         | 10%        |
| Development Programs | Never      | 4         | 5%         |
|                      | Total      | 80        | 100        |

The findings in Table 3 show the conflict affects school development programs which in turn affect teaching and learning. Majority (36, 45%) of the Headteachers indicated that conflict very often affects school development programs whereas 32 (40%) also said it often affect and 8 (10%) indicated that it rarely affects and only 4 (5%) stated that it never affects school development programs. Findings show that conflicts hinder school development programs as the parents will even be available to contribute to the development of the schools as they are dealing with conflicts at home. Another challenge that the Headteachers cited was lack of enough teachers since most of the teachers request for transfer in the conflict prone areas. This dire shortage of teachers affects the development of the school and the teaching and learning.

**Table 4: Stakeholders and Conflict Resolution**

| Stakeholders                | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1) Board of Governors       | 8         | 10%        |
| 2) Parents                  | 16        | 20%        |
| 3) Local politicians        | 40        | 50%        |
| 4)Provincial administration | 16        | 20%        |
| Total                       | 80        | 100%       |

From the findings it was visible that the local politicians should try and ensure that there is no conflict in the community this was cited by 50% of the respondents the rest were 20% parents, 20% provincial administration and 10% Board of Management.

The researcher also sought the headteachers' general views on conflict and education and the

**Table 5: Head teachers' Views on Conflict and Education**

| Statement                                                         | SA | A  | N | D  | SD |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|----|----|---|----|----|
| 1) Ethnic conflict is perpetuate by the society                   | 40 | 18 | 4 | 10 | 8  |
| 2) School property is often damaged during the conflicts          | 60 | 18 | 0 | 2  | 0  |
| 3) Pupils performance are not affected by conflicts               | 0  | 0  | 0 | 0  | 80 |
| 4) Education can help reduce these conflicts                      | 62 | 15 | 2 | 1  | 0  |
| 5) Ethnic conflicts are manifestation of economic inequalities    | 48 | 24 | 3 | 2  | 3  |
| 6) Staff turnover has mainly been as a result of ethnic conflicts | 38 | 26 | 2 | 5  | 9  |
| 7) School stakeholders work very hard to stop these conflicts     | 40 | 26 | 0 | 10 | 4  |
| 8) These conflicts hardly impact on school fees payment           | 0  | 10 | 5 | 35 | 30 |
| 9) School pupils are not involved in these conflicts              | 15 | 5  | 5 | 25 | 30 |
| 10) Government often fuel these conflicts                         | 20 | 12 | 7 | 22 | 19 |
| 11)NGOs and churches help sensitize the community on peace        | 43 | 35 | 0 | 2  | 0  |
| 12) Local community can help solve these conflicts                | 20 | 5  | 0 | 5  | 0  |

From the findings it was indicated that ethnic conflicts are perpetuated by the society as shown by the 40 teachers who strongly agreed with the statement. That school property is often damaged during conflict as majority 60 of teachers agreed with the statement. All the 80 teachers disagreed with the statement that Pupils' performance is not affected by conflicts. 62 teachers strongly agreed that education can help reduce these conflicts. 48 teachers strongly agreed that ethnic conflicts are manifestation of economic inequalities. Majority of the teachers 38 agreed with the statement that staff turnover has mainly been as a result of conflicts, 40 teachers agreed with the statement that school stakeholders work very hard to stop these conflicts. Majority of the teachers 30 strongly disagreed that school pupils are not involved in these conflicts and 40 teachers strongly agreed that government often fuel these conflicts and 43 teachers strongly agreed that NGOs and churches help sensitize the community on peace and 20 teachers strongly agreed that the local community can help solve these conflicts.

One head teacher Mr.Cheboi (not his real name) reported that: *There are many pupils in this school because it is safe as compared to other conflict prone areas, also the parents are stable and have farms where they plant food crops and are able to pay their children's fee and also provide for their basic needs.*

It was also established that the conflict prone areas had low enrolment as compared to the unaffected regions. Thus the low economic abilities of the parents, together with cultural

practices, gender differences and conflict between the Pokot and Marakwet do influence student teaching and learning in schools in the County

### **Influence of Conflict between Marakwet and Pokot on Teaching and Learning**

It was established that most schools are prone to conflict which is associated with cattle rustling, proliferation of guns, banditry and land clashes in the area which mainly among the Pokot and the Marakwet. This conflict affects attendance and performance in a way that the pupils will miss classes due to the insecurity. The teachers also leave due to insecurity all these affect the pupils' academic performance. The teachers also reiterated that conflict affects syllabus coverage in that during these conflicts the teachers and the pupils are away until when it stops. Such missing of lessons for weeks seriously hampers syllabus coverage which eventually leads to poor academic performance among students. The head teachers said that in serious cases these conflicts result in closure of schools and also the high turnover of teachers who opt to move to the more secure areas. This explains why the teacher-pupil ratio is high in this region because most teachers leave due to insecurity.

Mazonde (2008) explains that in the formal settings supported by the public in Africa, there is an estimated thirty-seven pupils per teacher in sub-Saharan African nations in the year 2000 and a reduction in the student-teacher ratio would greatly increase the cost of primary education, since the population of potential primary school pupils is growing quickly.

The findings further indicate that pupils do participate in these conflicts in that majority of the teachers and the sub county education officers cited that they do participate. These conflicts affect the pupils' academic performance in that participation means they will be out of school for some time and their absence in class may affect their performance. Some pupils miss classes because their families are affected and they take off to safer places. It was also established that those not affected are from areas where the government has deployed security personnel, the sub county education officers Mr Chumo (not his real name) indicated that *"Pupils do participate in these conflicts and some even lose their lives but the major challenge is that they may stop going to school after participating the conflicts"*. Moreover it was established that conflict influences co-curricular activities because they are done at county level and they need the participation of all the schools, but due to conflict the most affected schools do not participate.

This effect on co-curricular also affects academic performance because there will be minimal interaction among the students. Also the head teachers indicated that conflict has had an impact on school development programs because it basically relies on the stability of the region. The stakeholders: parents, teachers, NGO's, administration and the general public need a peaceful environment so as to offer any assistance and development. Hence this issue of conflict is serious factor that influences academic performance in this County. This issue of conflict is not only a matter of concern in this region but in other parts of the world in that when the governments adopted the Dakar Framework for Action (2000), they identified conflict as a major barrier towards attaining Education for all. Education systems have been directly affected by conflict: children and schools today are on the front line of armed conflicts with classrooms, teachers and pupils seen as legitimate targets. The consequences of these have not been good as one UNESCO report (2011) puts it this way, "There is a growing fear among the children to attend school, among teachers to give classes, and among the parents to send their children to school. This conflicts lead to psychological trauma and stigmatization and are sources of profound and lasting disadvantages in education. This is actually evident in Elgeyo Marakwet County in that the learners drop out

of school because of psychological trauma that is associated with conflict, the teachers also asked for transfers for sake of their safety and all these lead to poor academic achievement and more so low enrolment.

### **General View of Conflicts in Elgeyo Marakwet County**

From the findings it was established that conflict between Marakwet and Pokot communities is perpetuated by the society and that school properly is often damaged during these conflicts. It was the views of many Head teachers that Pupils' performances are affected by conflicts and that education can help reduce these conflicts. The inter-ethnic conflicts are manifestation of economic inequalities. Moreover these conflicts lead to staff turnover and that school stakeholders work very hard to stop these conflicts. It was also evident that school pupils are involved in these conflicts. It was noted that head teachers indicated that the government often fuels these conflicts and that NGOs and churches help sensitize the community on peace. The local community can help solve these conflicts.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

It was established that most schools are prone to conflict which is associated with cattle rustling, proliferation of guns, banditry and land clashes in the area which is mainly among the Pokot and the Marakwet. Conflict affects attendance and performance in a way that the pupils will miss classes due to the insecurity. The teachers also leave due to insecurity all these affect the pupils' academic performance. The teachers also reiterated that conflict affects syllabus coverage in that during these conflicts, the teachers and the pupils are away until when they stop. Such missing of lessons for weeks seriously hampers syllabi coverage which eventually leads to poor academic performance among pupils.

It is recommended that schools in the conflict prone areas should establish school feeding programmes and try to sensitize and educate the parents on their role in their children's education that they provide the children with proper clothing, food and shelter. Also the schools should think of changing from day to boarding schools so that the pupils can get time to do their reading and also have teachers to guide them do their homework as they reported that their parents or other adults living with them did not provide a place where they could concentrate on their homework. The pupils should be encouraged to remain attached to their culture but should be educated on the good and bad cultural aspects. Also teachers and learners should be educated on their role in implementing this policy. The government with all the other stakeholders and school community should work hand in hand to stop the conflict in the region because it has been indicated to affect pupils' teaching and learning.

## **BIO-DATA**

Salome Lulley holds a Doctor of Philosophy in Religious Studies and a Master of Philosophy in Communication Technology and Curriculum Instruction (Moi University). She is a Part-Time Lecturer in both Moi and Kisii Universities with wide experience in Social-Cultural Research and Conflict interventions activities in Elgeyo Marakwet County.

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