



REPORT

Girls' Agency Perspectives in Education

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviations	Meaning
CAMFED	Campaign for Female Education
CBC	Competency-Based Curriculum
GCN	Girl Child Network
MoE	Ministry of Education
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNGEI	United Nations Girls and Women's Education Initiative
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WB	World Bank

1. Introduction, Background and Context

1.1 Background

It is evident that promoting and sustaining girls' education, as well as addressing gender inequities in education, is complex (Monkman et. al, 2023). Despite longstanding governmental support for girls' education at the global and national levels, progress has been hampered by a variety of overlapping challenges such as lack of resources, policy gaps and weak enforcement and short-term interventions (Unterhalter, 2023).

Accessing reliable data, establishing inclusive institutions, and building an evidence basis in support of gender equality is a demanding but not impossible task. Evidence indicates that girls who exhibit agency are more likely to engage actively in their education, remain in school, and achieve higher academic success (UNICEF, 2022). The empowerment of girls and the promotion of their agency is therefore a critical area of focus for advancing educational outcomes.

Globally, it has been established that enhancing girls' agency can have far-reaching effects not only on their educational achievements but also on their social, economic, and health outcomes (UNESCO, 2023). In sub-Saharan Africa, including Kenya, interventions that promote girls' decision-making abilities, leadership skills, and participation in school and community activities have shown promising results. For example, mentorship programs, leadership training opportunities, and community-based initiatives that encourage girls' voices have been linked to increased school

attendance and completion rates (Wane & Asim, 2023). However, barriers such as poverty, early marriage, and cultural norms that limit girls' autonomy continue to pose challenges (Njuguna & Omondi, 2022).

In Kenya, despite significant strides in improving access to education for girls, disparities persist, especially in rural and marginalized communities (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, 2023). The government of Kenya, in collaboration with local and international organizations, has launched several initiatives aimed at empowering girls and promoting gender equality in education (Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), 2023). However, there is a need for more comprehensive evidence on how these interventions impact girls' agency and, subsequently, their educational outcomes. Understanding these dynamics is essential for formulating effective policies and programmes that can support girls in overcoming challenges and achieving their full potential. This study, therefore, seeks to address this gap by gathering evidence on the role of girls' agency in education in Kenya. By examining the factors that enhance or hinder girls' agency, the study aims to provide insights that can guide stakeholders in strengthening programs and interventions tailored to the Kenyan context.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to examine the role of girls' agency in shaping educational outcomes in Kenya, mapping regional and organizational efforts to promote agency, identifying barriers to gender equity, and documenting policies and programs addressing these challenges.

1.3 Objectives of Study

1. To gather evidence on girls' agency perspectives and its effect on girls education in Kenya
2. To map out the areas where girls agency has affected education and organizations providing interventions

3. To collate available data and carry out a literature review on studies related girls' agency, education and especially girls' education in Kenya.
4. To outline the systematic barriers/gaps to achieving gender equity in education in Kenya
5. To identify and document National plans and priorities by GOK and non-state actors in addressing these barriers

1.1.1 Expected Outcomes

The expected outcomes of this study are to:

1. Evidence on girls' agency perspectives and its effect on girls education in Kenya
2. A detailed mapping of regions and a directory of key organizations (both local and international) that provide interventions related to girls' agency.
3. A synthesized literature review that consolidates current findings and identifies gaps in research, providing a foundation for new insights and contributing to future policy recommendations.
4. A comprehensive analysis of the obstacles preventing gender equity, creating an understanding of the areas where strategic intervention is needed. This will serve as a reference for stakeholders looking to address these challenges effectively.
5. A well-documented overview of government strategies and non-state actor initiatives, providing insight into current efforts and alignment with global standards. This outcome will assist policymakers, educators, and stakeholders

2.0 Study Approach & Methodology

A desk review methodology involving a systematic approach to collecting, analysing, and synthesizing existing data, literature, and reports relevant to the study objectives was used. This approach provided robust insights into the relationship between girls' agency and education in Kenya while identifying actionable strategies for intervention. The process was structured to establish a comprehensive understanding of girls' agency and its implications for education in Kenya and to review academic journals, reports, and policy documents to identify conceptual frameworks related to girls' agency. Global and regional literature was analysed to contextualise the concept of girls' agency, particularly with Kenya's socio-cultural, educational, and economic environment at the centre stage.

Understanding the interplay between girls' ability to make autonomous decisions and their educational outcomes is essential for identifying areas of impact and opportunities for enhancement. To achieve this, a comprehensive collection of data from diverse sources, including published research, reports from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), government publications, and evaluations, was conducted. These sources provided insights into instances where girls' agency has either positively or negatively impacted their access to, retention in, and success within educational systems. The next step involved mapping organizations that work to promote girls' empowerment in education. This process included identifying both governmental and non-governmental entities that implement programs and initiatives focused on enhancing girls' educational opportunities and agency.

To gather and synthesize available data and literature related to girls' agency and education, specifically in Kenya, it was necessary to retrieve secondary data sources,

including reports from the Ministry of Education and other agencies. Key findings and gaps in research related to Kenya's context were highlighted. Further, to outline barriers to achieving gender equity in education in Kenya and identify areas where gaps persist, policy documents, national reports, and case studies were reviewed. Additionally, national education policies, strategic plans, and frameworks such as Vision 2030 and the National Education Sector Strategic Plans were also examined

2.1 Data Analysis and Reporting

The findings have been organized into thematic categories corresponding to the study objectives and synthesized into actionable insights and recommendations. Qualitative analysis was used to identify patterns, trends, and gaps in the data and a comprehensive report prepared to summarize evidence, barriers, interventions, and policy priorities.

2.2 Resources Used

This study utilised a range of online databases and institutional repositories to collect relevant information. The databases included the Journal Storage (JSTOR) digital library and Google Scholar, while institutional repositories from various organizations were also incorporated.

2.3 Ethical Consideration

There were ethical considerations to ensure the integrity and credibility of the research process. Intellectual property rights were observed by proper citing of all sources to acknowledge the contributions of original authors. It was also necessary to adhere to academic and professional standards for referencing, ensuring transparency and traceability of information. Cultural and social implications of the findings were considered to ensure that stereotypes or stigmatization is not perpetuated through use of inclusive, accurate, and non-judgemental language in the report.

2.4 Dissemination and Advocacy

The findings of this study were presented during a stakeholder workshop to share insights on how girls' agency influences educational outcomes and to highlight strategies for addressing barriers to gender equity in education. The gender dialogue forum engaged policymakers, educators, development partners, and grassroots organizations across Kenya, ensuring the recommendations and lessons learned reached key stakeholders for effective implementation.

3.0 Findings

3.1 The Concept of Girls' Agency

Different organizations define girls' agency in various ways, often influenced by their specific goals, theoretical frameworks, and cultural contexts. The concept of girls' agency is multifaceted and context-dependent. Understanding its universality can help shift the focus from changing girls to addressing the systemic threats that jeopardize their well-being (Bay-Cheng, 2019). Academicians, along with organizations that advocate for empowering girls, have conceptualized this concept in various ways.

While academic literature acknowledges its complexity, many researchers argue that agency is not just about making 'good' decisions but also involves navigating complex social and cultural landscapes. For instance, in the context of child marriage, agency might involve subtle forms of resistance or negotiation within the constraints imposed by family and community expectations. Abebe for instance reconceptualizes children's agency as a continuum that is shaped by relational processes and structural constraints, emphasizing that agency must be understood within the broader cultural and societal frameworks in which children operate. (Abebe, 2019)

FAWE (Forum for African Women Educationalists) defines girls' agency as the ability of girls to make choices, take actions, and influence their own lives and environments in ways that challenge gender inequalities. It encompasses empowering girls to assert themselves, voice their opinions, and actively participate in decision-making processes at all levels, from personal to societal.

FAWE emphasizes that fostering agency involves building girls' confidence, critical thinking skills, and resilience, which are essential for them to advocate for their rights and pursue their aspirations.

According to FAWE, promoting girls' agency also involves addressing systemic barriers—such as cultural norms, poverty, and discriminatory practices—that hinder their capacity to exercise power over their lives. By enabling girls to become change agents, FAWE contributes to achieving gender equity in education and beyond. (FAWE, 2023)

The Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED) conceptualizes girls' agency as central to transforming communities and achieving systemic change. Their approach involves empowering marginalized girls through education and supporting them to become leaders who contribute to social and economic development. CAMFED's model emphasizes dismantling barriers to education, nurturing young women's leadership, and equipping them to act as role models and change-makers. Young women who have benefited from CAMFED's support give back to their communities by mentoring and supporting other vulnerable children, advocating for girls' rights, and addressing issues like child marriage and youth unemployment. This grassroots-led approach ensures sustainable impact by positioning educated young women as catalysts for change in their communities and beyond. CAMFED. (n.d.) <https://camfed.org/who-we-are/>

According to UNICEF, girls' agency is a critical aspect of their empowerment and wellbeing, focusing on ensuring that adolescent girls have the opportunities, education, and support to make choices that influence their lives. This includes increasing access to gender-transformative programming that empowers girls to make decisions in areas such as health, education, and safety. UNICEF's approach emphasizes the importance of developing skills, providing relevant education, and protecting girls from harmful practices, while supporting them in becoming active participants in their own futures. UNICEF's initiatives frequently involve raising awareness about the dangers of practices like child marriage and promoting policies that support girls' rights and education. The organization believes that increasing

girls' knowledge and awareness can lead to greater agency, enabling them to resist harmful practices and make better life choices. UNICEF - Girls' Agency.

Global G.L.O.W. (Girls Leading Our World) defines girls' agency as the ability of girls to make choices and take actions that affect their lives and futures. The organization emphasizes the importance of providing girls with the knowledge, skills, and opportunities to exercise their agency. Their programs often focus on educational and community empowerment, aiming to create environments where girls can thrive and make informed decisions about their lives. <https://globalgirlsglow.org>

The Coalition on Violence Against Women (COVAW) in Kenya emphasises the role of women's agency in combating violence against women and girls. COVAW defines girls' agency as the capacity and ability of women and girls to prevent and address violence within their communities. The organization highlights that violence against women and girls is both a cause and a consequence of gender inequality, making it essential to empower women and girls to take action against such violence. COVAW's approach underscores the importance of legal and policy frameworks that support women's agency in addressing these critical issues <https://covaw.or.ke/about-us/>.

According to World Vision, healthy, educated, and empowered women and girls are change agents. When women and girls are supported, they become advocates for their rights and the wellbeing of their communities, leading to transformational change and are able to build social capital for themselves and for future generations.

The Learning and Action Alliance for Girls' Agency in Kenya (LAAGA) defines girls' agency as the freedom and ability to set and pursue goals against all odds. The alliance, identifies attributes such as self-confidence, decision-making skills, and perseverance as crucial for exercising agency. Girls primarily exercise agency in personal aspects such as education, health, and safety, with education being their main goal. However, the exercise of agency is found to be situational and dependent on safe spaces, along with supportive actors. Constraints to girls' agency include poverty and harassment from boys and men. Additionally, girls describe

their agency support systems as encompassing safety, protection, psychological support, and guidance from various stakeholders, such as mothers, teachers, and village administrators. In the realm of education, girls' agency is also explored through the experiences of pregnant and parenting girls. This perspective views girls' agency as dynamic, relational, and rooted in gendered concepts of resilience. It argues that listening to the concerns and solutions of pregnant and parenting girls especially those who are out of school, is crucial in challenging deficit-based interpretations of their experiences. By doing so, supportive environments can be created that recognize the evolving and diverse nature of girls' agency, particularly in the context of societal norms and gender roles (Ekiné, Samati, & Walker, 2013).

AMPLIFY Girls conceptualizes girls' agency through dimensions like intentionality, empowerment, and self-reflection. It emphasizes the need for contextually specific tools to measure girls' agency, recognizing the diverse experiences across East Africa (Sidle et al., 2020).

FAWE (Forum for African Women Educationalists) conceptualizes girls' agency as integral to their empowerment, particularly through the establishment of gender-responsive educational environments. Their approach emphasizes the importance of equipping girls with self-confidence, leadership skills, and the ability to overcome gender-based barriers. FAWE's Centres of Excellence (COE) model, for instance, targets schools in disadvantaged regions and provides a holistic framework that includes gender-responsive pedagogy, teacher training, and empowerment programs that help girls develop decision-making, negotiation, and leadership skills <https://fawe.org>.

Programmes at Zizi Afrique Foundation emphasize empowering children and youth, particularly those furthest behind, with essential competencies for learning, living, and working. The foundation's approach involves engaging communities, parents, and youth in collaborative efforts to promote education and social well-being. By strengthening parental involvement, enhancing literacy, and fostering local leadership, Zizi Afrique ensures that youth, including girls, are actively involved in shaping their own learning and futures. This approach fosters a sense of agency in

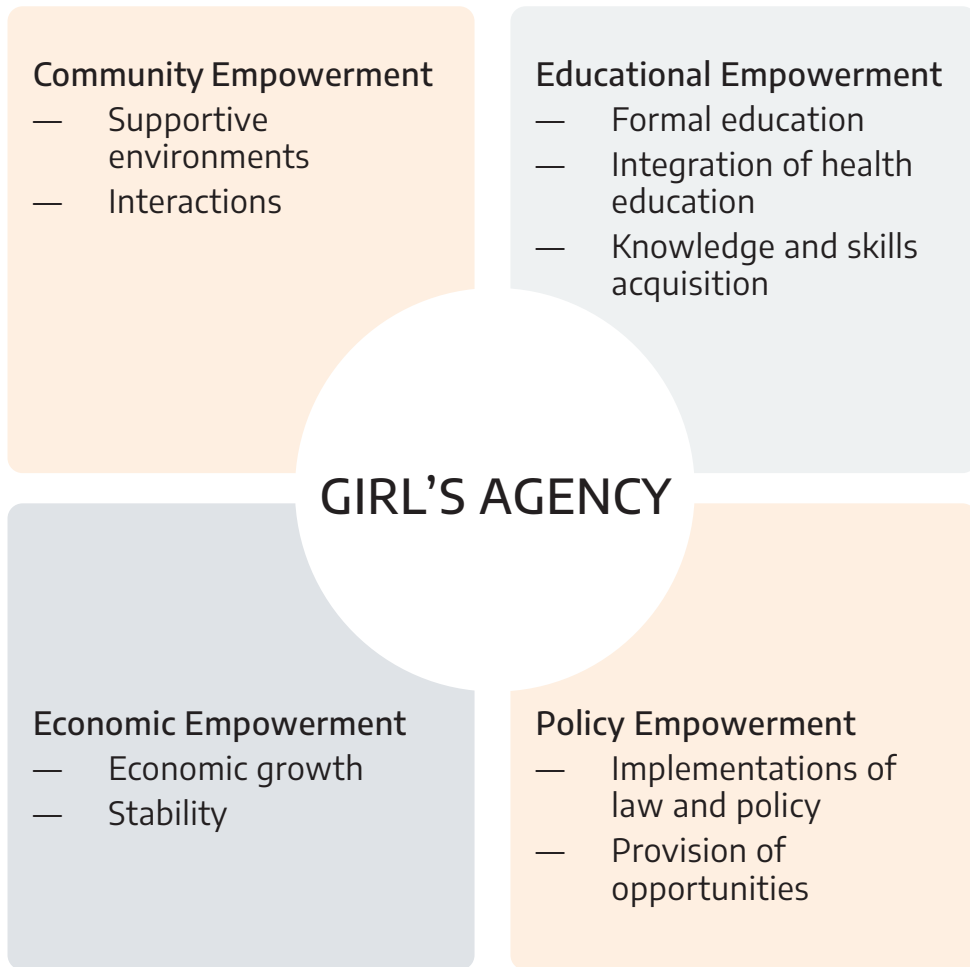
youth, especially in marginalized communities, to overcome barriers such as poverty and illiteracy <https://ziziafrique.org/who-we-are/>

Guardian Girls Kenya conceptualizes girls' agency as the empowerment of girls to act as leaders and make independent decisions that affect their lives, with a strong focus on safety and self-defense. The organization emphasizes developing self-confidence, resilience, and leadership skills in young girls, enabling them to challenge societal norms and advocate for their rights. Their programming includes self-defense seminars, sports, and mentoring, all designed to equip girls with the tools to protect themselves, become active community participants, and overcome gender-based challenges. [Guardian Girls Kenya](#).

From various perspectives, girls' agency is understood as the capacity and ability of girls to make decisions and take actions that impact their lives, especially in addressing gender-based violence and overcoming educational challenges. It involves recognizing and supporting the diverse and dynamic nature of girls' experiences and resilience. Empowering girls to address and prevent violence, as well as supporting their educational aspirations, are key components of fostering their agency. It is a multifaceted concept that also encompasses the need for legal and policy support to combat violence against women and girls. Additionally, definitions of girls' agency also vary widely across different organizations and theoretical frameworks. Child-centric organizations and NGOs often link agency to knowledge and decision-making, particularly in the context of child marriage.

Practitioner-derived frameworks highlight the significance of context-specific measures, while empowerment and social environments are seen as critical to developing agency. Recognizing the multifaceted nature of girls' agency is essential for creating more effective interventions and support systems. It is also evident that some organizations tend to narrowly frame agency, assuming increased knowledge leads to increased agency and better decision-making. This view may overlook the contested and contradictory nature of children's agency, particularly in the context of child marriage (Lokot et al., 2021).

3.1.1 Girls' agency understood through various forms of empowerment



Girls' agency can be understood through various forms of empowerment, including economic, educational, policy, and community dimensions, which collectively enable them to exercise control over their lives and shape their futures. Economic empowerment enhances girls' agency by providing them with financial resources, skills, and opportunities to generate income, thereby reducing dependence and increasing their decision-making power both within the household and in society. Access to education is a foundational driver of agency, equipping girls with knowledge, critical thinking skills, and confidence to challenge societal norms, pursue careers, and advocate for their rights. Education also serves as a pathway

to leadership, enabling girls to envision and achieve higher aspirations. In the policy sphere, girls' agency is amplified when legal frameworks and institutional policies prioritize gender equality, protect their rights, and create safe, inclusive spaces for participation. Policies that address barriers such as child marriage, gender-based violence, and limited access to resources ensure that girls can fully exercise their potential. At the community level, fostering supportive environments through cultural and social transformation plays a pivotal role in strengthening girls' agency. When communities recognize and value girls as active participants in decision-making processes, they are empowered to contribute meaningfully to family and community development. These dimensions of empowerment; economic, educational, policy, and community intersect to create a holistic understanding of girls' agency, enabling them to navigate challenges, seize opportunities, and shape resilient, equitable futures.

3.1.2 Divergence in Definitions and Conceptualizations of Girls' Agency

The concept of girls' agency has garnered significant attention in discussions on gender equity, empowerment, and development. However, its definitions and conceptualizations vary widely across disciplines, contexts, and theoretical frameworks. This divergence stems from differing perspectives on what constitutes agency, the factors that influence it, and how it manifests in girls' lives. While some scholars emphasize individual autonomy and decision-making, others highlight relational and collective aspects of agency, particularly in environments where social and cultural norms play a significant role.

This subsection explores the diverse ways in which girls' agency has been defined and conceptualized. By examining these differences, we can better understand the nuances of girls' lived experiences, the constraints they navigate, and the opportunities they harness to influence their lives. Acknowledging these divergences lays the foundation for developing a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of girls' agency that accounts for both individual and structural dimensions.

3.1.3 Convergence in Definitions and Conceptualizations of Girls' Agency

Most frameworks agree that girls' agency involves the ability to make decisions that directly affect their lives. Beyond decision-making, there is a shared understanding that agency also encompasses the capacity to act on one's goals and interests, even within constrained or challenging environments. A central aspect of these definitions is empowerment, which emphasizes the importance of having a voice, participating meaningfully, and accessing opportunities that enable growth and development. Additionally, there is broad consensus that girls' agency is dynamic and shaped by the social, economic, and cultural contexts in which they live.

A comprehensive definition integrates multiple dimensions. It is multifaceted and shaped by diverse frameworks, priorities, and contexts. Organizational mandates often influence the way girls' agency is defined and promoted. In humanitarian crises, the focus shifts toward ensuring rights and safety, with an emphasis on protecting girls from violence and creating environments where they can exercise their agency.

The scope and objectives of initiatives further shape the understanding of agency. Programs centered on empowerment through education, sports, or skills development often highlight the role of opportunities in enabling girls to act on their goals and aspirations. Additionally, cultural, and societal influences play a significant role in defining agency, as local norms, traditions, and gender roles determine how girls navigate and express their agency within specific contexts.

This section examines these varying perspectives, exploring how organizational priorities, contextual dynamics, program objectives, and societal norms collectively contribute to the broader conceptualization of girls' agency. In this regard "Girls' agency refers to their ability to make and act upon choices, navigate societal structures and constraints, and influence their lives and communities, individually or collectively, while recognizing the relational, cultural, and temporal contexts that shape their actions and aspirations." This definition captures autonomy, relational influences, collective action, and the broader socio-cultural dynamics affecting agency.

3.2 Organizations Providing Interventions

Girls' agency interventions in Africa, particularly in East Africa and Kenya, have significantly impacted education by addressing barriers that limit girls' access to and participation in quality education. These interventions focus on empowerment, breaking socio-cultural norms, improving infrastructure, and advocating for policy reforms to ensure gender equality in education. In rural areas of Kenya, girls often face multiple challenges such as early marriage, adolescent pregnancy, and a lack of safe spaces, which significantly impact their educational opportunities. These barriers affect various aspects of education, including enrolment, retention, and academic performance. To address these issues, organizations such as FAWE, LAAGA, AMPLIFY, UNGEI, UNESCO, Girl Child Network, World Vision, Plan International and the Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED) have implemented targeted interventions.

3.2.1 Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE)

The Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) operates in 33 African countries, including Kenya, and plays a pivotal role in advancing girls' education across the continent. FAWE provides scholarships and mentorship to marginalized girls, trains teachers in gender-responsive pedagogy, and advocates for policies that promote and protect girls' education. FAWE has achieved milestones, including the introduction of gender-responsive pedagogy in schools across Africa and increased enrolment and retention rates for girls.

3.2.2 CAMFED (Campaign for Female Education)

CAMFED's multidimensional approach aims to improve access and learning outcomes for marginalized girls in secondary education. CAMFED operates across Sub-Saharan Africa, including Kenya, where it works to support marginalized girls through scholarships, uniforms, and school supplies to help them access education. The organization trains 'Learner Guides' (female graduates) to mentor schoolgirls and partners with communities to reduce early marriages and ensure that girls remain in school. (Rose

et al. (2022) note that these efforts are aimed at addressing barriers such as poverty, school inaccessibility, and lack of gender-sensitive practices. In addition to these efforts, CAMFED has supported girls in attending school and has created a network of women leaders (CAMA) advocating for change. Despite these achievements, there are still notable challenges, such as limited infrastructure to sustain mentorship programs in remote areas and difficulties in scaling their initiatives across the region. In Tanzania and Zimbabwe, CAMFED's programs, which include financial support and community engagement, have had a positive impact on reducing dropout rates and improving academic performance among disadvantaged girls.

3.2.3 Education Development Trust (EDT)

EDT operates in Kenya and other East African countries, focusing on implementing the Girls' Education Challenge to address school dropouts, providing teacher training and community mobilization programs, and promoting gender equity in education. The organization has enhanced literacy and numeracy skills for girls in primary schools and engaged parents and communities to support girls' education.

3.2.4 Plan International

Plan International operates across East African countries, including Kenya, with a focus on promoting gender equality through education campaigns, preventing gender-based violence in schools, promoting girls' rights and education, with a focus on marginalized communities, and encouraging girls' leadership and participation in decision-making processes. The organization has introduced digital literacy programs for girls and has also successfully reduced instances of school-related gender-based violence in the targeted areas.

3.2.5 Learning and Action Alliance for Girls' Agency in Kenya (LAAGA)

The Learning and Action Alliance for Girls' Agency (LAAGA) in Kenya is a collaborative initiative aimed at enhancing the educational, social, and economic empowerment of girls through collective learning, action, and advocacy. It comprises 23 leaders in gender equality and through education from 18 countries across Africa, America,

Asia, and the Middle East and collaborates with the Brookings Center for Universal Education (CUE). LAAGA brings together stakeholders from diverse sectors, including government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), communities, and schools, to address the systemic challenges that undermine girls' agency and educational opportunities. The Learning and Action Alliance for Girls' Agency in Kenya represents a model for addressing systemic challenges to girls' empowerment. By fostering collaboration, focusing on holistic support, and championing gender equality, LAAGA seeks to transform the educational landscape for girls in Kenya. The objectives of the LAAGA initiative centers around creating a transformative impact in the lives of girls and the communities they belong to. A key goal is to foster girls' agency by empowering them to make informed decisions about their education, health, and future. This involves equipping them with essential leadership skills, enabling them to actively participate in community and societal development. Strengthening stakeholder collaboration is another vital objective, as the initiative seeks to unite diverse actors in developing and implementing coordinated interventions that address the barriers hindering girls' empowerment and access to education. In tandem, LAAGA advocates for gender-responsive policies in education, health, and economic sectors to improve the overall conditions for girls in Kenya. The initiative places significant emphasis on promoting knowledge sharing. By facilitating the exchange of best practices, research findings, and success stories, it aims to inspire and guide stakeholders in their collective effort to uplift and empower girls.

3.2.6 The Adolescent Girls Initiative-Kenya (AGI-K)

The Adolescent Girls Initiative-Kenya (AGI-K) is a multi-sectoral intervention program targeting girls aged 11–14 in Kibera slums and Wajir County, Kenya (Austrian et al., 2015). The program focuses on violence prevention, education, health, and wealth creation through girl, household, and community level interventions (Austrian et al., 2016). AGI-K aims to delay childbearing and improve girls' well-being by addressing risks and vulnerabilities faced during early adolescence (Austrian et al., 2016). The program's implementation has shown strengths and weaknesses, as revealed by qualitative data collection (Muthengi et al., 2016). Teenage pregnancy remains a

significant issue in Kenya, leading to high dropout rates and limited educational opportunities for girls (Mbogo, 2021). To address this, multi-dimensional and multi-sectoral interventions are recommended, including programs to reduce school dropout rates, improve academic performance, provide reproductive health training, and address cultural practices (Mbogo, 2021). These interventions aim to create opportunities for girls to complete their education and thrive. Adolescent Girls Initiative-Kenya (AGI-K) aims to address these challenges by implementing multi-sectoral interventions for girls aged 11-14 in Kibera slums and Wajir County. These interventions focus on education, wealth, health, and violence prevention, recognizing the stark differences between urban and rural settings (Austrian et al., 2015). Despite the obstacles, early intervention has the potential to improve girls' life chances and delay negative outcomes.

3.2.7 The Girl Child Network (GCN)

The Girl Child Network (GCN) in Kenya focuses on empowering girls through education, mentorship, and advocacy, addressing various gender issues affecting girls' development. These issues include female genital mutilation, early marriage, school dropouts, and sexual abuse (Munyao, 2013). Girl Child Network (GCN) is a network of over 312 organisations, key government ministries, departments, and individuals that believes that education is the most critical empowerment tool for girls. GCN programs are geared towards the promotion and protection of girls through education. GCN promotes informed and educated girls who are able to demand their rights and protect themselves from abuse and neglect. Their holistic approach incorporates grassroots cultural sensitisation with policy advocacy to ensure sustainable girl-focused education and empowerment outcomes. GCN has been implementing educational programming in various communities since 2007, with the aim of promoting access, retention, performance, and transition of girls in school. GCN works at five interdependent levels: policy, communities, families, schools, and learners. In partnership with EAC, GCN is implementing the Our Right to Learn! project in the Kajiado, Tana River and Garissa counties of Kenya.

3.2.8 AMPLIFY Girls

AMPLIFY Girls is a network of 40 community-driven organizations (CDOs) spanning five countries in East and Southern Africa. The network prioritizes localized development and the urgent need to channel resources and power to CDOs dedicated to building adolescent girls' agency by amplifying the voices, work, and impact of these organizations. Since its inception in 2018, AMPLIFY Girls has focused on initiatives that align with its mission. Key among these efforts, and in collaboration with the Girls Agency Lab Consulting, is the creation and strengthening of the Adolescent Girls Agency Survey (AGAS), the world's first psychometric tool designed and validated to measure girls' agency within the contexts where its partners operate. AMPLIFY Girls provides partners with support in AGAS data analysis, AGAS results reporting, and dissemination, offering actionable insights. This guidance empowers organizations to leverage their AGAS results for program evaluation, fundraising, or advocacy purposes, driving impactful change in the lives of adolescent girls across the region.

3.2.9 Global G.L.O.W. (Girls Leading Our World)

Global G.L.O.W. supports girls' agency in Kenya through initiatives such as the GLOW Club and advocacy programs. The GLOW Club is a mentorship-driven initiative aimed at equipping girls in vulnerable communities with the skills needed to navigate societal challenges and advocate for their rights. The program emphasizes social and emotional learning, self-advocacy, decision-making, entrepreneurship, and sexual and reproductive health education. These sessions are conducted in a supportive group setting by trusted local mentors who tailor activities to the cultural context of their communities. The goal is to empower girls to use their voices and realize their potential as leaders and change-makers. In addition to grassroots efforts, Global G.L.O.W. engages in advocacy at both local and global levels. The organization organizes Local Advocacy Summits, which are entirely girl-led, allowing participants to voice their concerns to community leaders. At the international level, girls supported by Global G.L.O.W. participate in global forums such as the United Nations' Commission on the Status of Women and the International Day of the Girl, ensuring their perspectives shape policies and initiatives aimed at gender

equity. Through these efforts, Global G.L.O.W. is helping girls in Kenya build confidence, overcome barriers, and lead initiatives that positively impact their communities while influencing broader gender equality efforts globally

3.2.10 Women Education Researchers of Kenya

The Women Educational Researchers of Kenya (WERK) is dedicated to advancing girls' agency and empowerment through initiatives that focus on education, mentorship, and community engagement. One of its cornerstone programs in this regard includes Watoto Wote Twende Shule and Education for Life, aimed at increasing school enrolment, retention, and literacy outcomes for marginalized girls. These initiatives have tackled barriers such as poverty and cultural norms by providing scholarships, mentorship opportunities, and mobilizing communities to support girls' education. Furthermore, WERK enhances educational environments by equipping schools and education managers with necessary resources.

WERK also champions community sensitization and advocacy efforts to address harmful practices like child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM). By collaborating with parents and local leaders, the organization fosters supportive attitudes toward girls' education. Additionally, it advocates for gender-sensitive policies and better school infrastructure, including private sanitation facilities, to ensure girls' safety and dignity. Mentorship and skill development are central to WERK's approach. Through its mentorship programs, girls are connected with role models who guide them through societal challenges and inspire leadership. Workshops on financial literacy and advocacy further empower girls with essential skills to make informed decisions and contribute to societal change. Research underpins WERK's strategies. Initiatives like GEC Wasichana Wote Wasome involve baseline studies and surveys to identify barriers to education and girls' agency. These data-driven insights inform targeted interventions that enhance learning outcomes and promote equitable access to education across Kenyan counties. By implementing these initiatives, WERK reinforces its commitment to gender equality, providing girls with the tools they need to excel in school and beyond.

3.2.11 Zizi Afrique Foundation

Zizi Afrique Foundation actively promotes girls' agency through a range of programs and initiatives that aim to build life skills, foster equity, and enhance access to education. The organization's contributions are integral to empowering girls across Sub-Saharan Africa, and some of its notable efforts include integration of values and skills. Zizi Afrique has made significant strides through the ALiVE initiative, which integrates values and life skills into educational systems. For instance, the inaugural Values and Life Skills-Africa Conference emphasized the importance of teaching girls critical skills for decision-making and community participation. This initiative aligns curricula with the realities of girls' lives, ensuring that their education is relevant and responsive to their needs and the broader societal context. Utilizing data to highlight success stories serves as a powerful advocacy tool to secure additional funding and support, creating a cycle of continuous improvement and greater effectiveness.

3.2.12 World Vision

World Vision works in collaboration with communities, faith leaders, and governments to challenge harmful social norms that negatively affect women and girls. The organization focuses on raising awareness about the gendered causes of poor health and well-being. Additionally, World Vision builds advocacy skills in women and girls, enabling them to speak up for their rights at all stages of life. The organization's programs empower women and girls through initiatives in health, nutrition, water, sanitation, hygiene, livelihoods, and education. These efforts aim to improve their economic opportunities and overall quality of life. World Vision also provides education support, such as scholarships, school construction, and teacher training, to increase girls' access to education.

3.2.13: Moving the GoalPosts (MGP)

Moving the GoalPosts (MGP) organization in Kenya is a prominent community-based organization that focuses on **girls' agency** through sports, particularly football, as a tool for empowerment. Based in Kilifi County on the Kenyan coast, MGP uses football to provide safe spaces for girls and young women to develop their

confidence, leadership skills, and knowledge on critical issues. MGP's initiatives are recognized for transforming gender narratives and equipping girls with the tools to challenge barriers such as early marriage, lack of education, and gender-based violence. By combining sports with life skills. This organisation empowers girls to become agents of change in their communities.

3.1.14: Identifying and Addressing Gaps in Promoting Girls' Agency in Kenya

Several organizations in Kenya have been actively involved in promoting girls' agency through various interventions, such as educational support, mentorship, and leadership programs.

However, despite the positive impact, there are notable gaps :

1. **Limited reach and scalability:** Many interventions are localized to specific regions or communities, leaving out girls in more remote or underserved areas. These programs often struggle to scale due to limited resources, creating gaps in access and equity. Expanding the reach through partnerships with local community-based organizations, leveraging technology for virtual mentorship and education, and securing funding for nationwide programs can help increase accessibility.
2. **Cultural and societal barriers:** Girls in some communities face deep-rooted cultural beliefs and practices that limit their agency, such as early marriages, gender-based violence, and traditional roles. Some programs fail to fully engage with the communities to shift these attitudes. Incorporating community-based sensitization initiatives that involve both girls and their families can challenge harmful cultural norms. Engaging local leaders and influencers in advocating for girls' rights can lead to more sustainable changes.
3. **Insufficient focus on mental health and psychosocial support:** Many programs focus heavily on educational empowerment but neglect the mental health and emotional well-being of the girls. This can hinder their ability to fully embrace their agency. Integrating psychosocial support into educational and empowerment programs is critical. Training mentors and program leaders to recognize and address mental health challenges will ensure that girls are fully supported in their development.

4. Short-term interventions and lack of follow-up: Some initiatives offer temporary relief or training without providing long-term support or monitoring of the outcomes. This leads to a lack of sustained impact, as girls may return to their original circumstances after the intervention ends. Implementing long-term follow-up strategies, such as alumni networks, continued mentorship, and regular check-ins, can ensure that girls continue to be empowered after the intervention ends.
5. Exclusion of girls with disabilities: Many programs do not adequately cater to the needs of girls with disabilities, either due to physical inaccessibility or a lack of specialized support. Ensuring that interventions are inclusive by providing accessible learning materials, training staff on the needs of girls with disabilities, and creating tailored programs will promote true agency for all girls.

3.3 Evidence On Girls' Agency And its Effects on Education

Globally, research indicates that girls' empowerment is linked to positive educational outcomes. UNICEF (2022) reports that when girls are empowered to make decisions about their education and personal lives, they are more likely to remain in school, perform better academically, and pursue higher education. A study by Plan International (2021) shows that interventions promoting girls' leadership skills and confidence contribute to higher school retention rates and reduced gender gaps in education. These findings underline the need for a supportive environment where girls can express agency to bolster their educational success.

In Africa, the context of girls' education is multifaceted, influenced by socioeconomic, cultural, and political factors. Research by Wane and Asim (2023) emphasizes that while progress has been made in girls' enrolment in schools, challenges such as poverty, early marriage, and gender-based violence persist, limiting girls' agency. Interventions that support girls' decision-making, such as mentorship programs and community-based initiatives, have shown promising results in increasing school attendance and completion rates. The African Union (2021) highlighted that fostering girls' agency through life skills training and community engagement initiatives significantly enhances their participation in education.

In Kenya, girls' education has experienced notable improvements over the past decade. However, disparities remain, particularly in rural and marginalized communities. A report by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD, 2023) indicates that fostering girls' agency through educational programs that include mentorship, leadership training, and advocacy for girls' rights can improve educational outcomes. According to Mager, U et al, girls who have opportunities to participate in decision-making processes at school and home are more likely to complete their education and aspire to higher academic achievements.

These findings reinforce the importance of targeted programs that address sociocultural barriers and promote girls' confidence and leadership. Girls' agency, defined as their ability to make choices and act upon them, significantly impacts their educational outcomes.

3.4 Examining Girls' Agency In Education: Insights From Studies On Girls' Education In Kenya

Girls' agency is increasingly recognized as a critical factor influencing educational outcomes globally. Evidence from global, African, and Kenyan contexts shows that promoting girls' agency is crucial for enhancing educational outcomes. Programs that empower girls, build their leadership skills, and support their active participation in decision-making processes lead to higher school retention and success rates. Addressing systemic and cultural barriers remains key to ensuring that all girls have the opportunity to exercise their agency and achieve educational success. Girls' education is a critical component of the broader agenda for sustainable development and gender equity. Over the years, significant strides have been made to improve access to education for girls, yet numerous barriers persist, ranging from socio-economic challenges to cultural practices and systemic inequities. This literature review explored the concept of girls' agency in the context of education in Kenya, analysing current studies, case studies, and interventions aimed at empowering girls through education.

In the Kenyan context, gender norms and social constructions deeply influence girls' educational experiences. Studies have shown that girls face numerous challenges, including economic barriers, gender-based violence, and societal expectations, which hinder their educational attainment (S Psaki et al. 2022). For instance, financial constraints and lack of academic support are critical barriers that prevent girls from accessing and completing their education. Additionally, there exists gender norms that prioritize boys' empowered to make decisions and exercise control over their own lives among girls (Abuya et al, 2014)

Research underscores that enhancing girls' agency improves not only their educational outcomes but also their socio-economic status and societal contributions. A study by UNESCO (2021) highlights that educated girls are more likely to delay marriage, reduce child mortality rates, and contribute to economic growth. A critical area of focus in the literature is the agency of young women, particularly in marginalized communities, as it directly impacts their educational outcomes. Scholars like Dejaeghere (2017) argue that a gendered analysis is essential to understand the constraints and opportunities that young women face in these contexts. Dejaeghere emphasizes that while educational aspirations are often framed as indicators of success, they must also be understood within the structural and cultural barriers that limit the scope of girls' agency. This perspective aligns with broader studies that highlight how gender dynamics intersect with socio-economic conditions to shape girls' educational opportunities and their sense of possibility

Moreover, substantial research supports the idea that girls' education is a key driver for broader social and economic development. Educating girls not only benefits the individuals but also contributes to the well-being of their communities, fostering long-term economic growth and social equity. Dejaeghere's work, alongside other research, demonstrates how girls' education leads to improved health outcomes, greater economic participation, and enhanced decision-making power within families and communities (UNICEF, 2014). Therefore, addressing both the aspirations and agency of girls, while considering the broader socio-economic factors at play, is crucial for formulating interventions that promote gender equality in education.

In summary, the literature reveals that the intersection of gender, aspirations, and agency is a critical area of inquiry that warrants attention in educational research, especially within the context of under-resourced communities. Understanding the nuances of these factors can inform more effective policies and practices that enhance educational outcomes for young women.

3.5 Systematic Barriers/Gaps to Achieving Gender Equity in Education in Kenya

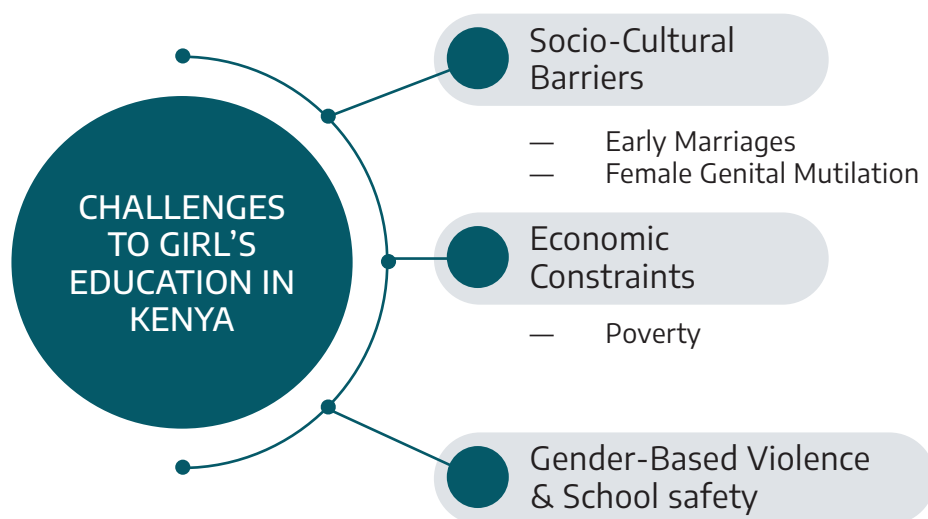
Gender equity in education remains a crucial goal in Kenya, reflecting broader efforts to ensure inclusive and sustainable development. While progress has been made in increasing school enrolment and retention rates for girls, significant systematic barriers continue to hinder the realization of full gender parity. These barriers are rooted in cultural, economic, institutional, and structural challenges that disproportionately affect girls, particularly in rural and marginalized areas. Addressing these gaps requires a comprehensive understanding of their nature and implications, as well as targeted interventions to overcome them.

Some Challenges to Girls' Education in Kenya include:

1. **Socio-Cultural Barriers:** Early marriages and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) continue to impede girls' education in rural areas. Despite legislative frameworks like the prohibition of FGM Act (2011), enforcement remains weak in some regions.
2. **Economic Constraints:** Poverty is a significant barrier, with many families unable to afford school fees or related costs like uniforms and books. Girls are often kept out of school to support household chores or care for younger siblings.
3. **Gender-Based Violence and School Safety:** Gender-based violence (GBV) and lack of school safety are significant challenges to girls' education as they create hostile and unsafe learning environments. GBV, including harassment, bullying, and physical or sexual abuse, can lead to trauma, absenteeism, and reduced academic performance. Unsafe schools often discourage parents from

allowing their daughters to attend, especially in communities where concerns about security and reputation are heightened. These barriers undermine girls' right to education, limit their potential, and perpetuate cycles of inequality and poverty. Addressing these challenges requires creating protective policies, promoting awareness, and ensuring safe, inclusive spaces for learning. environments can be unsafe due to harassment and gender-based violence. This discourages attendance and affects academic performance

Several systematic barriers hinder the achievement of gender equity in education in Kenya. Cultural and social norms, which encompass deeply entrenched cultural beliefs and practices that significantly impede gender equity in education. In some communities, girls are still viewed primarily as future wives and mothers, with limited value placed on their formal education. Practices such as early marriages and female genital mutilation (FGM) further exacerbate the problem, often forcing girls to drop out of school at a young age. Additionally, societal expectations regarding household roles mean that many girls bear the burden of domestic chores, leaving little time or energy for academic pursuits. These norms limit girls' aspirations and opportunities, perpetuating cycles of poverty and dependence.



Economic constraints are a significant barrier to gender equity in education. Poverty remains a major obstacle to gender equity in education. In many low-income households, limited resources are prioritized for boys' education, with the

expectation that they are future breadwinners. Families struggling to make ends meet may also rely on girls for income-generating activities or as caregivers for younger siblings. While primary education is free in Kenya, hidden costs such as uniforms, transportation, and learning materials still pose a significant burden on poor families. This disproportionately affects girls, who are more likely to be withdrawn from school when finances are tight. Therefore, economic hardships undermine girls' ability to access and complete their education, particularly in rural and marginalized areas.

Inadequate gender-sensitive infrastructure and facilities in schools is a critical barrier. Many schools do not have adequate sanitation facilities, such as separate toilets for girls and boys or access to menstrual hygiene management resources. Girls often miss school during their menstrual periods due to stigma and the unavailability of sanitary products, leading to reduced participation and eventual dropouts. Inadequate school infrastructure also includes a lack of secure environments. Long distances to schools expose girls to risks such as harassment and gender-based violence, further discouraging attendance. These infrastructural gaps create an unwelcoming and unsafe environment for girls, affecting their ability to thrive academically.

Reports of sexual harassment and abuse by peers and, in some cases, teachers, undermine girls' confidence and willingness to attend school. Additionally, lack of effective reporting and redress mechanisms perpetuates a culture of silence, with perpetrators often going unpunished. GBV in schools not only affects girls' academic performance but also their mental health, leading to higher dropout rates and long-term emotional trauma.

Kenya has progressive policies aimed at promoting gender equity in education but weak policy implementation also undermines the effectiveness of existing interventions, resulting in many girls being left behind. Regional disparities and marginalization contribute to more pronounced gender equity challenges, especially in areas such as arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs), where poverty, cultural norms, and resource scarcity intersect. In these regions, education infrastructure is

underdeveloped, and traditional practices like cattle herding or child labour take precedence over schooling. The compounded effects of marginalization deepen the educational divide for girls in these regions, making targeted interventions critical.

In conclusion, achieving gender equity in education in Kenya requires addressing the systemic barriers that disproportionately affect girls. Cultural norms, economic constraints, inadequate infrastructure, gender-based violence, and weak policy implementation must all be tackled through a multifaceted and inclusive approach. Emphasis should be placed on community sensitization to challenge harmful practices, increased investment in gender-sensitive infrastructure, and robust policy enforcement to ensure that no child is left behind. By addressing these gaps, Kenya can unlock the full potential of its female population, contributing to sustainable development and societal progress.

3.7 National Plans and Priorities for Addressing Barriers to Gender Equity in Education in Kenya

The Government of Kenya (GOK) and various non-state actors have implemented several plans and priorities to address these barriers: Policies to promote gender equity in education have been developed. These policies aim to improve access, retention, and completion rates for girls. Similarly, non-state actors have provided financial support, community engagement, and advocacy to promote girls' education. These interventions have shown positive impacts in other countries and can be adapted to the Kenyan context.

Kenya's commitment to gender equity in education is evident in its policies and progress, but sustained and adaptive strategies are needed to ensure comprehensive and long-lasting impacts. These efforts align with the goals of Vision 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Some of these plans include:

1. **Education Sector Support Program (ESSP):** This program aims to improve access, equity, quality, and relevance of education in Kenya. It includes strategies to address gender disparities, such as increasing girls' enrolment

and retention rates, promoting gender-sensitive teaching and learning, and providing scholarships for girls from marginalized communities. The ESSP addresses girls' agency in Kenya by tackling structural barriers to education and promoting equity, quality, and inclusivity. By increasing access, providing resources, creating safe spaces, and challenging societal norms, the program empowers girls with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to make independent decisions, improve their livelihoods, and contribute positively to their communities.

2. **Kenya Vision 2030:** This national development blueprint outlines a vision for Kenya to become a middle-income country by 2030. It emphasizes the importance of education and gender equality, and sets targets for improving access to education for all children, including girls. Kenya Vision 2030 recognizes education and gender equality as key pillars for achieving sustainable development and transforming Kenya into a middle-income country by 2030. In addressing girls' agency, the blueprint highlights the importance of empowering girls through access to education, enabling them to make informed decisions, pursue opportunities, and contribute to national development. By prioritizing universal access to quality education, Vision 2030 ensures that girls, especially those from marginalized communities, have equal opportunities to attend school and complete their education. This not only equips them with critical knowledge and skills but also challenges traditional barriers such as early marriages, gender-based violence, and cultural stereotypes that undermine girls' potential.
3. **Legislation Supporting Gender Equity:** The 2010 Constitution and the Basic Education Act of 2013 underscore the right to education for all, explicitly prohibiting gender discrimination. These frameworks promote policies like affirmative action to support underrepresented groups and encourage female representation in education
4. **Targeted TVET Inclusion:** Efforts to increase female participation in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) have shown progress, with the Gender Parity Index (GPI) improving from 0.76 in 2018 to 0.86 in 2022.

5. **Five-Year Gender Equality Plan (2023–2027):** This plan focuses on reducing gender disparities in education, tackling gender-based violence, and eliminating harmful cultural practices like female genital mutilation (FGM). It also emphasizes empowering women and girls through capacity-building and participatory decision-making. The strategy integrates the bottom-up economic transformation agenda for inclusive growth.
6. **Gender Policy Framework:** This policy provides a framework for mainstreaming gender equality in all sectors of development, including education. It outlines strategies for addressing gender-based discrimination and promoting gender equality in education.
7. **Free Primary Education:** This policy has significantly increased access to education for children, including girls, especially in rural areas. However, challenges remain in terms of quality and retention.
8. **School Re-entry policy:** This policy aims to provide opportunities for learners, especially adolescent mothers, to return to formal education after dropping out due to pregnancy or other social challenges. It was introduced in 1994 and revised through guidelines in 2020, the policy supports the reintegration of teenage mothers, ensuring their constitutional right to education while addressing the root causes of school dropout, such as stigmatization and lack of awareness.

4. Challenges girls' face due to lack of agency

Lack of agency among girls in Kenya perpetuates challenges such as early marriages, limited education, gender-based violence, teenage pregnancies, poverty, and exclusion from decision-making. Addressing these issues requires empowering girls through education, life skills, and supportive policies that challenge cultural and systemic barriers. Empowered girls can break cycles of poverty, advocate for their rights, and contribute meaningfully to society's development.

1. **Early and Forced Marriages:** Girls become vulnerable to early and forced marriages, where critical decisions about their lives are made by family members, often driven by cultural traditions or economic pressures. This vulnerability has profound consequences: many girls are pulled out of school to enter into marriage, depriving them of opportunities for education and economic empowerment. Early marriages frequently result in early pregnancies, which can lead to serious health complications and further entrench the cycle of poverty. For instance, in communities such as parts of Samburu and Maasai, it is not uncommon for girls as young as 12 or 13 to be married off in exchange for dowry. This practice denies them the chance to reach their full potential, both academically and personally, perpetuating systemic inequalities and limiting their future prospects.
2. **Limited Access to Education:** Girls who do not exercise agency will often have little or no say in decisions regarding their education, as these choices are frequently dictated by family priorities or economic challenges. In many cases, they are tasked with domestic chores or caring for younger siblings, which prevents them from attending school consistently or at all. As a result,

many girls drop out of school, leaving them with limited skills and reduced opportunities for future employment or independence. For example, in some rural areas of Kenya, when families face financial hardships, boys are often prioritized for education, while girls are expected to remain at home or contribute to income-generating activities such as farming. This practice not only curtails their educational prospects but also reinforces cycles of inequality and poverty.

3. **Gender-Based Violence (GBV):** Girls who are not empowered are particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence (GBV), including physical abuse, sexual exploitation, and harassment, both within and outside of school. Many of these girls lack the confidence or power to report such incidents or seek the necessary support, leaving them trapped in situations of abuse. The impact of GBV on girls is profound. It undermines their mental and physical health, disrupts their education, and reinforces their sense of disempowerment. In addition, the fear of violence can deter girls from attending school or participating in social spaces, further limiting their opportunities for growth and development. For instance, in underserved areas such as informal settlements in Nairobi, cases of sexual harassment—whether on the way to school or within school premises—often discourage girls from pursuing education, perpetuating their vulnerability and marginalization.
4. **Teenage Pregnancies:** Lack of agency often prevents girls from making informed decisions about their reproductive health, increasing their vulnerability to early pregnancies caused by peer pressure, exploitation, or limited access to sexual education and health services. Many are forced into motherhood before they are emotionally or physically prepared to handle its demands. For instance, government statistics reveal that teenage pregnancies are particularly prevalent in counties like Kilifi and Homa Bay, where cultural norms and economic challenges further restrict girls' autonomy over their bodies. This scenario means girls often cannot make informed decisions about their reproductive health, increasing their vulnerability to early pregnancies due to peer pressure, exploitation, or lack of access to sexual education and health services.

4.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

By scaling up proven approaches and addressing existing gaps, organizations can further empower girls and enhance their educational opportunities in Kenya, East Africa, and across the continent as follows:

1. Enhancing holistic community engagement by strengthening partnerships with local leaders and cultural influencers to change perceptions of girls' education. They should engage boys and men as allies in promoting gender equality.
2. Focusing on Lifelong Learning by expanding initiatives to include higher education and technical/vocational training. This can be achieved by introducing mentorship programs that guide girls through different stages of their educational journey.
3. Leveraging Technology through implementation of e-learning platforms accessible in rural areas and training girls in digital literacy to prepare them for modern careers.
4. Strengthening monitoring, evaluation and learning by developing robust mechanisms to measure the impact of interventions and adapt strategies accordingly. Using data to highlight success stories and advocate for more funding.
5. Improving sanitation and health by ensuring the accessibility to menstrual hygiene products and safe school environments and providing health education to address reproductive health issues.
6. Addressing financial barriers by introducing more scholarship opportunities targeting girls from extremely poor households and supporting income-generating activities for families to reduce economic pressures.

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