

## 6 Learning to improve education policy for pastoralists in Kenya

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In Kenya, as in much of Africa, primary-education provision and participation expanded dramatically during the 1960s and 1970s. The number of primary schools doubled from approximately 5000 in 1965 to 10,000 in 1980; enrolment increased even more dramatically, from just over one million pupils in 1965 to nearly four million in 1980 (Eshiwani 1993). This expansion reflected policy changes which collectively represented major advances in Kenya's educational development and the strategic use of public expenditure in support of educational policy goals (Abagi and Olweya 1999; Makau 1995).

But the growth in provision and participation increasingly left behind the pastoral districts of Northern and Eastern Kenya (Nkinyangi 1982; Narman 1990). For although the policies that underpinned primary education expansion were responsive to the needs and interests of the majority, they proved to be inappropriate to the circumstances in Kenya's pastoral districts, and neglectful of the rights of children, especially girls, who lived there. The consequences are chronically low levels of educational participation among pastoralist communities, and marked disparities in provision and participation between pastoralist and other communities in Kenya.

This examination<sup>1</sup> of education policy focuses on primary-education provision and participation in Wajir District, North Eastern Province. It is in North Eastern Province that the lowest primary-school participation rates in Kenya are found. If education policy is to be an effective instrument of change, it will be in North Eastern Kenya that it is likely to be most rigorously tested. This study does not seek to dwell on the deficiencies and inequalities of the past – which are increasingly being acknowledged (Republic of Kenya/UNICEF 1999). For our purposes, learning to improve policy means identifying ways, based on a critical analysis of past policies and a consultative approach to pastoralist communities, in which education policy can be changed so as to enable Kenya to achieve the goal of Education For All. This goal is preferred to the more narrowly defined targets of the Millennium Development Goals.

The factors influencing provision and participation in Wajir are sometimes rooted directly in government policy and practice. Cost-sharing, for example,

was the policy that underpinned the financing of primary education for the entire period of the first decade of Education For All. Although the effects of cost-sharing were profoundly negative and inequitable (Makau *et al.* 2000), that policy may yet prove to have been a relatively transient problem, one that could be directly overcome by the implementation of a new financing policy. A decisive step in this direction was taken in January 2003, when the government of Kenya implemented its pledge to provide free primary education.

Other factors, however, are more durable and complex, because they are rooted in cultural values, social norms, and economic systems. Unequal gender relations – reflected in the marked differences in access between girls and boys – illustrate the power and resilience of obstacles to increasing access to education that are rooted in beliefs and practice. For in Wajir, as in N.E. Province generally, there is only a limited acceptance of the notion that girls have an equal right to education, and this attitude leads to a persistent and widespread reluctance to send girls to school.

## **The pastoralist context**

Pastoralism has long been the dominant feature of the regional economy, and it will remain so for the foreseeable future. The relationship between pastoralism and education is widely acknowledged to be problematic (Tahir 1991; Kratli 2000), leading some commentators (Alkali 1991) to assume that the continued pursuit of pastoralism is inconsistent with the provision of education. This way of thinking continues to exert a profound influence on governments and development agencies; its implication is that the attainment of education for all and gender equity in education provision is not possible among pastoralist communities. This line of argument underpins a policy approach which starts from the premise that pastoralists must settle down and stop being pastoralists. But it is a model that is fundamentally at odds with the demographic reality of Wajir and the other districts of N.E. Province, where more than 70 per cent of the population continue to live on, and move across, the rangelands. A different approach is needed, and this investigation into the factors that influence participation in education is intended to inform the policy choices that need to be made if Kenya is to make significant moves towards achieving education for all. Alternative models exist or can be developed. This investigation starts from the premise that a way needs to be found to reconcile the provision of education with the pursuit of pastoralism: an alternative approach which seeks to be responsive to pastoralists' needs and priorities, rather than seeking to transform pastoralism itself.

The World Declaration on Education For All (1990) drew attention to the need to remove educational disparities within countries. In addition to emphasising the importance of girls' education, the needs of particular groups – nomads are

specifically mentioned – was highlighted (*ibid.*: Article 3). The World Declaration also encouraged ‘learning through a variety of delivery systems’ and the adoption of ‘supplementary alternative programmes’ (*ibid.*: Article 5). In the light of the World Declaration, the government of Kenya had the opportunity to revise its policies and practices to tackle chronic gender-based and geographical disparities.

My research in Wajir investigated the changes that have occurred in terms of provision and participation since 1990 and sought to identify the role of public policy in explaining those changes. If more far-reaching changes are to be achieved, this study argues that educational policy will need to go beyond the conventional responses of the past. The challenge is to address in a coherent and comprehensive way specific issues – poverty, gender bias, and mobility – which are identified as being the principal influences on participation.

## **Provision and participation: the national context**

### ***Geographical inequalities in school participation***

Acting on a pre-Independence pledge to provide every child with a minimum of seven years’ free education, successive governments harnessed popular support to expand primary education (Makau 1995). Communities provided labour or cash to construct or expand schools, and the State accepted responsibility for most of the recurrent costs. Such a division of responsibilities encouraged community initiatives to set up primary schools and became the expression of a public policy that led to significant and sustained growth in provision and enrolment (Eshiwani 1993).

This expansion, however, soon reflected significant geographical inequalities (Nkinyangi 1982). By 1977 just six districts in the whole country were enrolling less than 50 per cent of their estimated school-age population. All of them were pastoral districts: Marsabit, Samburu, Turkana, and the three districts (Mandera, Wajir, and Garissa) of North Eastern Province. Twenty years later, in 1998, almost nothing had changed, and the six lowest-achieving districts were the same, with the exception of Tana River, which replaced Turkana (Republic of Kenya/FAWE 2000). In Wajir District, 75 per cent of children still do not attend school. The gulf between enrolment in N.E. Province and the rest of the country (Table 1) remains enormous. The disparity in provision and participation between the pastoral areas of Kenya and the rest of the country represents the biggest obstacle that will need to be overcome if Kenya is to make significant progress towards achieving Education For All.

**Table 1: Primary-school gross enrolment rates by sex and province, 1998**

	Coast	Central	Eastern	Nairobi	Rift Valley	Western	Nyanza	North Eastern	Kenya
Boys	79.6	96.3	91.7	61.6	87.7	102.6	93.9	32.0	89.4
Girls	66.9	100.1	96.1	52.8	85.6	104.2	91.9	16.8	88.2
Total	73.3	98.2	93.8	56.9	86.7	103.4	92.9	24.8	88.8

Source: Republic of Kenya/Fawe (2000:9)

### *Gender inequalities in primary-school participation*

In 1963 just over 300,000 girls were attending primary school in Kenya. Twenty years later, in 1983, there were well over two million. Perhaps even more impressive than the growth in the absolute numbers of girls attending primary school has been the growth in the proportion attending school. In 1963 girls represented just 34 per cent of the total number of students enrolled. That percentage increased steadily throughout the 1970s and 1980s, until by 1998 girls' participation had reached 49.4 per cent, leading the government to assert in its report to the World Education Forum (Republic of Kenya 1999) 'as a result of the general public awareness created on [sic] the importance of education for both boys and girls over the years, there has been parity between boys and girls at primary and secondary levels'.

National data may accurately reflect mainstream trends, but they are open to criticism when they inadvertently hide significant disparities at the margins. Contrary to the impression of equality that such figures give, profound levels of inequality are exposed when the data are disaggregated. In North Eastern Province, the female gross enrolment rate is half that of boys (see Table 1), and more than 80 per cent of girls do not attend primary school (Republic of Kenya/Fawe 2000).

High rates of non-participation may be tolerated, partly because they are more or less invisible at the national level, and partly because they can be explained by reference to 'traditional cultural values' (rather than shortcomings in policy and practice). That there is a deep-seated reluctance in many parts of Africa to provide girls with the opportunity to go to school is not in doubt. But by describing the problem principally in relation to cultural values, the temptation is merely to blame pastoralist communities for those disparities, and to absolve those charged with addressing those disparities from any responsibility for their perpetuation. Yet if the educational inequality of Kenya's pastoral districts is to be reduced, public policy is one tool that can help to transform social norms by introducing specific and sensitive initiatives (Stromquist 1997).

## **Provision and participation: the extent and limits of change**

### ***Provision***

The first primary school in Wajir was built in 1948 (Turton 1974). The number grew only slowly over the next 30 years, and by 1979 Wajir District had just 18 schools with approximately 4000 pupils (Eshiwani 1993). By 1998, however, there were 62 primary schools in the district, with a total of 14,000 pupils (Republic of Kenya/FAWE 2000). The rate of growth during the 1990s stands in marked contrast to that of earlier decades. Between 1993 and 1998 the number of schools increased by 38 per cent, from 45 to 62. The rate of increase was the highest in the country over the period (*ibid.*) and contrasts sharply with trends in provision before the 1990s.

The unprecedented expansion in primary provision in the 1990s is, on the face of it, remarkable and prompts the question whether it was a response to policy changes in the wake of the Jomtien Declaration. Any expansion of provision clearly needs the support of the government, particularly with regard to the appointment and payment of staff. But this is not the same as attributing the expansion to the adoption of new policies. At best, what seems to have happened is that government responded positively to an increased demand for schools. There is no evidence to suggest that it re-directed resources to the pastoral districts in a determined effort to reduce disparities. Nor does the government appear to have taken any steps to develop new 'delivery systems', as encouraged by the World Declaration (1990), or to have used the opportunity of schools expansion to increase the number of girls-only schools as a culturally acceptable and gender-sensitive response. By doing little more than approving the construction of schools in settlements, the government was content to perpetuate a decades-old, demand-driven approach that simply expanded the provision of formal schools. It reflected a view that if pastoralists wanted their children to go to school, they would have to make the necessary adaptations. Despite the rhetoric of the Jomtien Declaration, no effort was made to change the way in which education was made available.

It is notable that almost all of the schools that have been built during the past decade are day schools. This form of provision marks something of a contrast with the past, when primary boarding schools were built in a deliberate attempt to provide opportunities for children – almost always boys, it should be noted – from nomadic backgrounds. This policy of boarding provision goes back to colonial times (Turton 1974), but was actively promoted by the government during the 1970s and early 1980s as a way of catering for the children of nomadic parents (Abdi 1999). By making a specific effort to provide education for

children of pastoralist communities, policy was being used to address a key problem and to promote equitable educational development.

Commendable as such an initiative was in principle, it was a policy that has proved to be deeply flawed in practice. Drawing on research from other pastoral districts, Ponsi (1988) questioned whether boarding schools cater for the children for whom they were nominally set up to serve. More recently Abdi (2001) has demonstrated that boarding primary schools in North Eastern Province are severely under-utilised, while Obura (2002) suggests that, on grounds of cost and social acceptability, boarding schools are unlikely to make more than a marginal contribution to extending provision. Rather than simply condemning the policy as a failure (Nkinyangi 1981), one might use the unpopularity and inefficiencies of the boarding-schools approach to define the limits of mainstream responses and identify areas where less formal and more responsive approaches may be both necessary and more acceptable.

### ***Enrolment***

Table 1 on page 131 is a presentation of provincial gross enrolment rates for 1998 for the country. The rate for N.E. Province is very low, both absolutely and comparatively. Fewer than one third of boys attend primary school. Four out of five girls do not go to school. These statistics are remarkable for a country in which, since Independence, the demand for education has in general exceeded the places available, and increases in participation were achieved simply by increasing provision. Relevant and appropriate as such a strategy may have been for most parts of Kenya, there is a growing acceptance that it has not been effective in making basic education accessible to 'vulnerable groups' (Republic of Kenya/ UNICEF 1999). Nor has it been effective in reducing disparities between the pastoral districts and the rest of the country (Abdi 1999; Obura 2002). To continue to rely on the same strategy as a way of reducing disparities in the future is almost certainly doomed to failure. What is needed are policies that go beyond the boundaries of current practice and complement existing provision by adopting innovative, targeted, and specific measures to promote participation and to increase girls' participation in particular.

### ***Retention***

In keeping children at school so that they complete the full cycle of primary education, Kenya has performed much less effectively than in providing access in the first place. In a detailed analysis of the period between 1981 and 1998 Makau (2000: 35) concludes that 'the completion rate remained below 50% of the intake in Standard 1'. There is an absence of such longitudinal data for Wajir District, but Makau's conclusion is supported by an analysis of the 1991–98 cohort.

**Table 2: Primary-school completion rate for 1991–98 cohort: a comparison of Wajir District data and national data**

	Std. 1 enrolment			Std. 8 enrolment			% completing		
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
National (in 000's)	476	447	924	221	215	436	46	48	47
Wajir	956	588	1544	518	242	760	54	41	49

Sources: Makau (2000: 35) for national data; Oxfam (1999:10) for district data

While the overall level of completion for both boys and girls is low, it is notable that retention in Wajir District is slightly higher than nationally. The very wide gap between Wajir and much of the rest of the country in terms of enrolment is not repeated, suggesting that those parents in Wajir who send their children to school are as interested in keeping them there, and able to do so, as parents elsewhere in the country. There is however one major difference between the national and district data – and that difference is based on gender. Nationally, girls are more likely than boys to stay at school; but in Wajir, girls are more likely to leave school early.

## Factors influencing participation

### *Urbanisation, sedentarisation, and mobility*

Wajir is the largest district in N.E. Province and one of the most sparsely populated in Kenya. In 1979 its population was approximately 140,000, of whom 13,000, less than 10 per cent, lived in Wajir town (Republic of Kenya/Oxfam 1996). Twenty years later, the population of the district was estimated to be 325,000 and that of Wajir town 50,000.<sup>2</sup> Other urban centres have developed; their combined populations are approximately 25,000. With a total urban population of not less than 75,000, the demography of Wajir District has changed markedly in just 20 years, with at least 25 per cent of the population now being town-dwellers. This change in population distribution has had a direct impact on the demand for primary education, and on the potential for access to school. The increase in the number and size of towns and settlements is closely related to the growth in the number of schools which has been such a distinctive feature of the 1990s.

Table 3 demonstrates the relationship between participation and urbanisation. In 2000, two thirds of the children enrolled in primary schools in Wajir district lived in Central and Habaswein educational divisions.<sup>3</sup> Though not exclusively urban, these divisions include the two largest urban concentrations.

**Table 3: Wajir District primary enrolment by gender and division, 2000**

<b>Division</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% Girls</b>
Bute	1191	530	1721	31
Centra	4582	2683	7265	37
Habaswein	2078	957	3035	32
Griftu	1443	679	2122	32
Tarbaj	895	474	1369	35
Total	10189	5323	15512	34

Source: District Education Office, Wajir

On the question of who goes to school, urbanisation seems to exert a positive influence on girls' access, although the evidence here is more equivocal. Within Central Division, which includes Wajir town, there is a notable narrowing of the differential between boys' and girls' enrolment. On the other hand, Habaswein has the second-lowest proportion of girls in school, suggesting that there are tensions between what might be called the 'pro-school' influence of urbanisation and 'the anti-school' influence of gender bias.

The relationship between settlements in pastoral areas and the provision of education has been a contentious policy issue. The crux of the debate is whether education facilities (and other economic and social facilities, such as water supplies and health centres) are used to attract pastoralists as part of an overall, if not explicit, policy of sedentarisation. There is no doubt that such objectives have informed policy and practice in countries as diverse as Iran and Nigeria. From this perspective, the provision of education was not so much a right of citizenship but a way of weakening and transforming pastoralism, part of a strategy to modernise it and convert pastoralists into farmers, labourers, or watchmen (Kratli 2000).

An alternative approach seeks to understand pastoralist responses to educational policy and provision within a broader context of economic and social change (Dyer and Choksi 1997) and of pastoralists' adaptation to changing circumstances (Frantz 1990). From this perspective, education may be adopted as a way to diversify the pastoralist economy, even if it involves the settlement of some family members on a temporary or permanent basis.

The place that education occupies within a long-term pastoralist livelihood strategy will vary between households and from place to place. In Wajir, and in N.E. Province generally, individual decisions are shaped by a context in which pastoralism is under pressure because of population growth, insecurity, limitations on herd movements (RoK/Oxfam 1996), and a market system that is



both inadequate and distorted (O’Leary and Wakesa 2000). In these circumstances the possible benefits of education become more attractive, even to those still within the pastoral sector. Having an education may not yet be as prestigious as ‘having herds’ (Dahl and Hjort 1976); but both are increasingly recognised as being important as it becomes harder to survive by pastoral means alone (Salzman and Galaty 1990).

In judging how best to strengthen the household economy in the medium-to-long term, parents increasingly appear to divide the family labour force. Some children are sent to school, while others are kept at home to look after the animals and/or to be responsible for looking after the house. ‘The role of the town employee has become part of the division of labour’ (Kratli 2000: 41), providing a source of income which is not subject to the same vulnerabilities as herding. In return, family members who remain on the range will look after the animals of those in town. In effect, investing in education for some children represents a livelihoods-diversification strategy (Republic of Kenya/Oxfam 1996) which is designed to strengthen the household economy within the context of a continuing engagement – as a family – with pastoralism.

In considering the expansion of primary-school provision in Wajir in the previous decade, this study suggests that the relationship between formal education and pastoralism has not been wholly antagonistic, nor has it been part of a dominant strategy designed to settle and transform pastoralists. There has been a significant growth in the urban population – but poverty, not public policy, is widely acknowledged to be the most powerful driving force behind that growth. Those who move to towns are, by and large, pastoralism’s ‘forgotten people’ (Broch-Due 1999), driven to the point of destitution and possessing few alternatives. For such people settlement is not a threat to an otherwise viable pastoralist existence: it is a refuge to which they have moved in the hope that it will offer them a better future. And education, many of them believe, may open the door to employment opportunities that will help to secure that better future. From this perspective, education is not so much ‘instrumental to sedentarisation’ (Kratli 2000: 9), an inducement with which to attract pastoralists into towns, as it is a tool by which families can re-build their livelihoods and social networks.<sup>4</sup>

While education policy may not be primarily responsible for enrolment trends over the past decade or so, a fundamental policy goal – that attendance at primary school should be made compulsory – is challenged by these conclusions. Decisions about the education of pastoralist children, girls and boys, are based on their parents’ judgement of what is in the best interests of the family. Contrary to an approach that is based solely on the rights of individuals, these judgements are made by weighing up the wishes and abilities of individuals on one hand against the collective interests of the family as a whole on the other. These parental

decisions inevitably reflect the socio-cultural context in which they are taken – and in Wajir that means two things. First, it means placing an emphasis on strengthening the capacity of the family to preserve and build up its herds, social networks, and other economic safety nets. Second, and specifically in the context of gender relations, it reflects the importance that is attached to protecting what is perceived to be the honour and reputation of girls and to preparing them for their future roles as wives and mothers. The outcome is that some children – usually boys – will attend school for as long as is practicable. Others – some boys, but most girls – will remain at home to look after the animals and other members of the family who need to be cared for, and to do domestic duties.

These observations on parental decisions about access to schooling challenge the assumption that the population of Wajir can be neatly divided into families who have access to education and, on the other hand, those who are excluded or display a ‘negative’ attitude towards school. In reality the situation is more complex, and within any given family there are likely to be some children who are, or have been, attending school and others who are not. The extent of this relative engagement with education is reflected in the fact that only 30 per cent of the parents interviewed for this study had sent all of their school-aged children to school for at least part of the primary cycle. The others had decided to keep at least some of their children at home.

If Education For All is to be made meaningful, it surely requires policy makers to take steps – as they were encouraged to do by the Jomtien Declaration – to make available ‘alternative programmes’ and a ‘variety of delivery systems’. When provision means, in effect, attendance at a school in a settlement, it is inevitable that many parents who are practising pastoralists may choose not to exercise the right of their children to education. Expansion of just one form of provision effectively excludes pastoralist children and is consistent with neither the spirit nor the letter of the commitments made in Thailand and Senegal.

Abdi (2002) highlights the need for flexibility in the way in which education is made available. But in Kenya efforts to provide pastoralist children with an education on terms that are consistent with their lifestyle have been confined to small-scale, innovative projects that are often run by community groups, funded by external NGOs. These projects reflect the absence of government policy – not its expression. In essence, they are recent attempts to fill a policy vacuum.

The Mobile School project in Wajir (Hussein 1999) is an example of a small-scale initiative to develop practicable alternatives to mainstream education. It is modelled on the indigenous and widespread Koranic schools, or *dugsi*, which are specifically adapted to provide teaching in the context of mobility. The teacher lives and moves as part of a herding group and provides instruction at times that are consistent with herding and labour responsibilities. This model is based on a

fundamentally different premise from that which has informed formal 'schooling', in that it accepts the primary responsibility of children, both girls and boys, to look after the family's herd. Enrolment figures for the project indicate both a quick take-up of the programme and an approximate equivalence between girls and boys. Irrespective of a number of shortcomings in the implementation of the project (identified by Hussein, *op. cit.*), it provides evidence to suggest that there is a latent demand for education among pastoralists. It suggests, too, that non-formal types of provision may be particularly effective in addressing deeply rooted gender inequalities, by offering a way to reduce obstacles to girls' access.

This possibility is supported by the experiences of the Alternative Basic Education in Karamoja initiative in Uganda (Odada and Olega 1999). What is especially notable about this project is that many more girls than boys enrolled in the learner centres. This fact may be explained by reference to the division of labour between girls and boys in Karamojong society – where homesteads are much more fixed, cultivation is more common, and girls spend less time on the rangelands. But its significance is that it provides compelling evidence that rapid progress can be made to increase girls' participation in contexts where female enrolment has been chronically low. Mobile schools and similar innovative projects have tended to be justified on the grounds of making education more accessible to pastoralists as a group, rather than in terms of a gendered analysis of accessibility. Yet both the Wajir Mobile School project and the Karamoja programme suggest that 'supplementary alternative programmes' can be especially effective in terms of increasing girls' participation. To that extent, such initiatives may not only be of general benefit in terms of increasing enrolment, but may also be a good example of a gender-sensitive approach with enhanced benefits for girls.

### ***Gender inequality***

Gender inequality, rooted in individual and social bias against girls, operates in association with other factors. Three were mentioned time and again in this study in Wajir and are remarkably consistent with analysis based on research in other pastoral districts of Kenya (Makau *et al.* 2000). The three factors were poverty, gender bias, and the mobility of pastoralist families.

Given that attendance at school for almost all of the past 25 years has required payment of school fees and a variety of other charges and levies, the depth and extent of poverty means that few households can afford to educate all their children. Choices have to be made, and dominant values mean that parents are less likely to send their daughters to school.

Another explanation that is invariably offered to explain why girls are not in school is the contribution that they make to the running of the household. In a social context in which girls have been ascribed the role of providing domestic labour and child care, the contribution of girls to the household economy is often deemed to be too valuable to lose. The stage of economic development in Kenya is such that households depend on children's labour as a contribution to the production and consumption needs of the household. Unlike productive labour, which is a shared responsibility, domestic labour continues to be characterised by a sharp gender-based division, with men and boys making a minor contribution. From a very early age, girls are socialised into roles in which they prepare and cook food, collect water, and look after the young and the sick. The dependency of the household on girls' labour thus represents an opportunity cost of their attendance at school (Colclough *et al.* 2000). This cost lowers the enrolment of girls in school or, at the least, contributes to weaker performance and earlier drop-out.

Nevertheless, the argument that domestic labour responsibilities are a critical obstacle that prevents girls from attending or completing primary school in Wajir is not entirely persuasive. Girls who live in the district's towns and settlements are living within an urban or semi-pastoral context, rather than one typical of the rangelands, and their domestic duties are likely to be similar to those of girls in other parts of Kenya. In such circumstances the 'domestic labour' argument does not explain the gap between girls' enrolment in most of the country, with a national female gross enrolment rate (GER) of 88 per cent, and that in Wajir and N.E. Province, with a female GER of less than 20 per cent. The contribution of girls to herding, rather than to domestic labour, is likely to explain some of the difference, but the implication is that there is something else, another factor, that is critical.

That factor is summed up by the term 'status', a term designed to capture the ambiguous but powerful nature of gender inequality. It is the subordinate status of girls and women that explains why, to paraphrase the head-teacher of Wajir Girls Primary School, 'in all aspects of education, girls are left behind'. The notion that girls have a right to education, a right that is equal to that of boys, is not consistent with prevailing values and beliefs in Wajir or more widely among pastoralist communities in Kenya (Makau 2000) and elsewhere in Africa (Niles 1989; Csapo 1981; Wynd 1999). Schooling is thus either irrelevant or, in a context in which the separation of girls from boys is desirable as soon as a girl shows signs of maturity, a risk which leads parents to remove their daughters from school before she 'is spoiled' or 'develops immoral habits'.

While change will not happen until individuals modify their opinions and behaviour, public policy has an important role to play in stimulating and rewarding change. It is patently clear that the policies of the past have failed to

convince parents, and society at large, of the advantages of educating girls. Unless public policy is used in a more targeted and effective way to influence attitudes and norms of behaviour, the extent to which girls are excluded from access to basic education is unlikely to be significantly reduced in the foreseeable future. The inescapable conclusion is that initiatives designed to increase the participation of girls, rather than to increase participation generally, are needed if Kenya is to achieve gender parity in education provision in pastoralist communities.

During the 1990s there was a notable absence of such initiatives. The most significant measure that has been taken in Wajir in recent years goes back to the 1980s, i.e. even before the Jomtien Declaration. It was then that the decision was taken to build a primary school specifically for girls in Wajir town. It remains the sole girls-only primary school in the entire district. Opened as a way of reducing the dangers of road travel for girls, rather than as a deliberate attempt to increase access, the school has proved to be an outstanding success. The Girls Primary School increased its enrolment from 122 girls at its inception in 1988 to 469 in 2000. But this success has never been replicated. It is an example that demonstrates that public policy, by providing the kind of school most likely to be acceptable to the community at large and enjoyable for the girls who attend, can positively influence change. That nothing else like it has been provided is a measure of the failure of public policy that allows a pronounced gender inequality to persist unchallenged.

## **Poverty and the financing of education**

There has been a long tradition of cost-sharing in education in Kenya, epitomised by the phenomenon of *harambee* (or self-help) schools. During the 1970s the nominal commitment to providing free primary education sat uncomfortably with the practice of *harambee* collections, but in 1988 this contradiction was resolved when cost-sharing was formally made the basis of education financing. If access to education is conditional on the payment of fees of various kinds, it ceases to be a right, an entitlement of citizenship, but becomes instead a commodity that is available only to those with the money to buy it. And in a country as poor as Kenya, a policy that made parents responsible for maintaining the nation's primary education infrastructure as well as meeting the costs of school attendance was bound to lead to 'falling enrolments and failing schools' (Republic of Kenya/UNICEF 1999). Adopted two years before the Jomtien Declaration, cost-sharing was designed to address problems with the management of the national economy. It was not adopted as a policy designed to help Kenya to achieve education for all.

The vast majority of people interviewed during this study described cost-sharing, in all its manifestations, as the biggest single problem that limited children's participation in education. Teachers and parents alike argued that the removal of all fees and all charges would be essential if participation were to be significantly increased. There can be little doubt that the depth and extent of these feelings was a key factor in persuading the new government that its first policy initiative in education in 2003 should be the abolition of primary-school fees. It is important to acknowledge that the abolition of cost-sharing represents a fundamental policy shift on the part of the government. For the first time since the Jomtien Declaration was passed, Kenya has put in place a financing policy that addresses one of the most acute obstacles to the achievement of Education For All. It is equally important to bear in mind, however, that this policy change is national in scope and may prove to be of relatively tangential significance to the broader issues of pastoralists' participation in education.

Kenya's educational history shows that the abolition of fees has an immediate and positive impact on participation. Analysing enrolment data for the 1970s, when fees were formally abolished for a short while, Sibabi-Nyukuri (1989) demonstrates that increases in enrolment may be temporary, especially if fees are, in effect, re-introduced under another name. It is a little early to make judgements on the impact in pastoralist districts of the abolition of school fees and other levies in January 2003. Preliminary research (Sifuna 2003:7) concludes that in pastoralist districts throughout the country 'the free primary education programme seems to have (led to) a remarkable increase on overall enrolments'. There are, however, significant variations between districts, and in Wajir the increase was much lower than in all other sampled districts.

What is even more striking is the differential impact on the basis of gender. The enrolment of boys has increased far more dramatically than that of girls. In every district, without exception, the increase in enrolment of girls is lower than that of boys; and in Wajir a 19 per cent increase in boys' enrolment in 2003 should be compared with a 6 per cent increase for girls. If this trend continues, the outcome will be to increase the disparity in educational participation on the grounds of gender. It is a consequence that is directly at odds with the commitment to attain gender parity. This is not an argument for reversing or diluting the new financing policy; but it is a compelling argument to complement the policy of providing free primary education by introducing additional and specific policies which address the other obstacles to increasing access to education in pastoralist societies.

This study has argued that three factors are the principal cause of low rates of participation. These are poverty, gender bias, and the mobility of pastoralist families. The removal of school fees addresses the first of these obstacles and is a big step in the right direction. But, in isolation, it is an insufficient response. It

will not achieve maximum impact unless it is part of a comprehensive and imaginative set of initiatives. What are needed now are similarly bold policy initiatives that will address the other two problems. This means re-thinking provision in order to make education available to boys and girls who live on the rangelands, far away from any school. And it means recognising the depth and breadth of gender bias and finding ways to dilute its potency.

## **Policies for effective change**

The principal official reports generated during the first decade of Education For All (Republic of Kenya 1997; Republic of Kenya 1998; Republic of Kenya/UNICEF 1999) have little to offer in terms of policy changes specifically formulated for Kenya's pastoral communities, let alone to girls in those communities. The inevitable conclusion is that it is insufficiently recognised that these areas have distinct and chronic problems, over and above those faced by the sector as a whole. Treating the pastoral districts of Kenya and its peoples as if they were the same as the rest of the country is not an effective way of addressing decades-old disparities. Policy and practice changes are essential – and need to be targeted and consistent with a vision based on responsiveness, diversity, and innovation.

The Jomtien Declaration provided an opportunity to reflect on the shortcomings of previous practice and to support initiatives that are compatible with pastoral livelihood strategies and priorities. This study found little evidence to suggest that the opportunity had been grasped. Wajir, and most of the pastoral districts of Kenya, are as firmly fixed at the bottom of the table of primary participation as they were before Jomtien and Dakar. Although there has been a significant growth in provision in Wajir (compared with the past), it is a growth that reflects changes in population distribution and settlement patterns, not more imaginative ways of providing access to learning. Doing nothing more than building schools in settlements represents the continuation of a policy that has failed to acknowledge the diversity of cultural and physical contexts to which education has to adapt if it is to be accessible and meaningful.

If the inadequacies of current policies are to be effectively overcome, the particular needs of the pastoral districts – and of girls within them – will need to be accorded more visibility and significance. The recent publication of a draft policy on Gender and Education (Republic of Kenya 2003) suggests that there is a growing recognition that gender parity in education – in terms of performance as well as enrolment – will not be attained unless specific objectives are set and strategies defined. Like the new policy on financing, the production of a gender policy is a step in the right direction. But given that it is in Kenya's pastoralist

districts that the most glaring gender-based educational disparities in the country are to be found, the failure of this draft policy to highlight the particular needs of pastoralist girls is more than disappointing. Unless this omission is corrected, the gender and education policy is in danger of reinforcing their 'invisibility' and of being irrelevant to those who suffer the most profound levels of discrimination.

In addition to the need for a more pastoralist-aware gender strategy, there is an increasing demand for a national and comprehensive strategy for pastoralist education. Its substantive elements have begun to be debated (Karani 2002). A critical element – and one that distinguishes this debate from earlier attempts to provide education to pastoralists in Kenya – is that new modes of provision must be designed. For too long 'strategies have been biased towards supporting the expansion of conventional schooling, with few results' (Obura 2002: 6). It is a form of provision that is neither practicable nor cost-effective for mobile communities in areas where population density is very low. It needs to be supplemented by a range of alternatives that are responsive to the lifestyles of pastoralists. As we have seen, evidence from projects such as Alternative Basic Education in Karamoja (ABEK) suggests that the development of non-formal types of provision is not only effective in changing attitudes towards education but also effective in terms of learning (Hestad and Focas Licht, 2002).

The development of an education system that integrates both formal and non-formal provision will necessitate not merely expansion of provision – the underlying concept that has dominated thinking in the past – but a measure of education reform. Such an approach is consistent with the thinking that informed the Jomtien Declaration. The outstanding success of the Escuela Nueva in Colombia (Colbert and Arboleda 1990; Torres 1992) – admittedly conceived in quite different circumstances – may be a source of inspiration, though not necessarily a model to be imitated.<sup>5</sup>

One of the lessons to be learned from the Escuela Nueva programme is the value of having a dedicated unit within the central ministry. Perhaps reflecting the fact that the relationship between pastoralism and education has been fraught with problems for decades, there is currently no institution in Kenya specifically responsible for addressing those problems or for developing a policy to do so.

A second lesson to be learned is that the use of non-formal methods should not be undertaken in the expectation that it will provide education 'on the cheap'. Given that such an approach would be introducing new ideas and practices in Kenya, and given that it will be operating in areas of weak infrastructure and low population densities, there will inevitably be high investment and on-going costs. Similarly, non-formal education has too often been under-valued, offering a limited and second-rate service to those who have fallen through the net of



formal education. If non-formal education is to be established as an essential element of an integrated education strategy, those perceptions will need to be challenged. And one way to do so is to ensure that the quality of non-formal education is not an inferior imitation of ‘the real thing’. At the least this will mean working to the principle that non-formal education should be expected to provide good-quality learning outcomes in its own right, and not merely to function as a gateway to the formal sector. Transition to the formal sector should be possible as part of an integrated system. But it should not be seen as a failure – either of the system or of individuals in it – if this does not happen, provided that other and arguably more relevant learning outcomes are achieved.

## Conclusion

The relationship between education and pastoralism has been problematic for a long time. But this study did not confirm the common belief that pastoralism is inherently inconsistent with participation in education and is, by extension, an obstacle to education for all. There is a wide variety of reasons why pastoralists have not engaged with the education system in the past. Some are economic and financial; others are culturally defined or the product of historical experience. But as pastoralism adapts to new pressures, as well as to new opportunities, this study suggests that that it is untrue that pastoralists have a distrustful and negative attitude to education.

Instead of being adverse or irrelevant to the production system, education can have a complementary relationship to pastoralism. This complementarity reveals itself in the way that the household labour force is increasingly being divided so that some children are sent to school as a way of improving the well-being of the family in the short and long terms. It reveals itself too in the way that poor pastoralists, especially those who have been forced into the peri-urban quarters of Wajir’s towns, will try to use education as a way of re-building assets and social capital.

Limited participation in education is a consequence not only of pastoralism but also of the education system itself. And in contrast to the flexibility of pastoralism, the education system has shown a marked lack of adaptation. Few concessions have been made to adapt the form and content, the procedures and practices of primary education to make it more compatible with the particular circumstances of pastoral communities. Current policy represents a ‘take-it-or-leave-it’ approach to education, with communities having to adapt to the needs and demands of the education system, rather than planners working to make the system responsive to diverse contexts.

Despite the rhetoric of the Jomtien Declaration, little has changed in terms of Kenya's education policy in the past decade or more. The introduction of a new financing policy for primary education in 2003 may mark the beginning of a period when policy will be used more constructively. But if significant progress is to be made in the decade leading up to 2015, the Kenyan government will have to move decisively to overcome the remaining obstacles to participation. This will mean devising a policy framework that specifically recognises the extent of the bias against educating girls in North Eastern Province and other pastoralist districts, and supporting initiatives designed to increase access by changing dominant attitudes and behaviour.

But it is not only at the community level that change is needed. Just as important, policy makers need to listen to the concerns and opinions of pastoralists so as to develop policies and practices that will make education accessible to nomadic people. In ways that it has never done before, the education system in Kenya needs to learn to adapt. For too long the onus has been on pastoralists to adapt their way of life as the price for gaining access to education. It is a price that most pastoralists have not been prepared to pay. If pastoralists' right to education is to be fully realised, the education system will have to become more responsive and innovative.

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## Notes

- 1 This paper is based primarily on research conducted in 2001 as part of an MA course at the Institute of Education, University of London, reported in my dissertation 'Continuity and Change in Primary Education in the Pastoral Districts of Kenya: a Study of Wajir'. That work was supplemented in 2002 by a further visit to advise Oxfam GB on the development of its education programme for pastoralists and by participation in a workshop to stimulate policy debate.
- 2 Interview with Oxfam staff, Wajir, May 2001.
- 3 There are five educational divisions in the district, but 13 administrative divisions.
- 4 Interviews with Hashim Musa and Omar Jibril Hussein.
- 5 The origins and objectives of the Escuela Nueva programme are rooted in educational inequalities in Colombia. They reflected a creative tension between quantitative expansion and qualitative reform. They incorporated a belief that relevance and quality had to be addressed at the same time as considering how to increase access. This debate was applied to areas, similar to the rangelands of Kenya, in which population density was low and schooling did not easily fit with prevailing livelihoods and lifestyles.

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