

Cultural Practices in Africa: Still a Barrier to Girls' Education in the 21st Century?



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Abstract

Culture has been identified as one of the pillars of sustainable development. However, it is well known that not all cultural elements are positive and that some cultural practices have an outright negative impact in the society. This paper examines some of the cultural practices in Africa that continue to be hindrances to girls' education on the continent. These include female genital mutilation/cutting; early marriage and disco matanga. The paper recommends the need for evidence-based approaches to remove these barriers. This calls for more research to establish what works and what does not in eradicating these practices. For example, more success can be achieved through multi-stakeholder approaches by identifying the unique contribution each category of player can make in eradicating the vices. It also recommends 'alternative rites of passage', in the case of FGM which do not violate the integrity of the female body. Above all, the paper underlines that education is the most effective weapon against these practices and that if efforts were concentrated in enhancing girl education major strides towards eradicating these harmful cultural practises on the continent can be achieved.

Keywords: African cultural practices; disco funerals; disco matanga; female circumcision and infibulations; female genital mutilation; FGM; FGC;

Introduction:

In the last five decades, there has been increasing recognition that there exists an important link between culture and development (Portolés, 2013; UNESCO, 1970; UNESCO, 1982; UNESCO, 1990; de Cuellar, 1995; United Nations General Assembly, 2010). This relationship has been the subject of many studies and discussions as development experts, governments and agencies seek to mainstream culture in development discourse and practice. These efforts culminated in several world declarations which firmly entrenched culture on the global development agenda (UN, 2010; UNESCO, 2012). As a result of these efforts, today culture is recognized as the fourth pillar of sustainable development, others being economic, social and environmental aspects. Notwithstanding the positive role of culture in development, there is also the awareness that some elements of culture are pernicious to efforts to achieve progress.



This paper examines three cultural practices in Africa namely: - female genital mutilation/cutting, early marriage and disc matanga which, despite decades of efforts to eradicate them, continue to hinder girls' education on the continent. First, the paper defines the concept of culture and the justification of its infusion in development discourse. Secondly, each of these cultural practices is examined in terms of meaning context, prevalence and their impact on girls' education. Finally, some recommendations are made on how to mitigate these harmful cultural practices. The paper underlines the importance of multi-stakeholder involvement in the fight against these practices, improvement of the environment in which girls learn and adoption of alternatives to these practices such as alternative rites of passage for girls, in place of FGM/C.

The key arguments for the entrenchment of cultural perspectives in human and sustainable development are that culture shapes how the environment is viewed, lived, shapes what we mean by development and determines how people act in the world in the pursuit of development. Culture is viewed as the very foundation of development aspirations of any society and therefore for success in the objectives of development such as poverty alleviation, promotion of health and education, equity and environmental conservation have to be linked with the culture of the people. Secondly, culture is viewed in itself as a resource that can be exploited, a sector of investment that can yield substantial revenues to the community (UNESCO, 1982; UNESCO, 1990; Sen, 1996).

Methodology

This paper is based on a systematic review of current literature guided by the stated purpose, objectives and the emerging thematic issues namely:- the role of culture in development, the importance of education and especially girls education in sustainable development, and finally current status of identified cultural practices and their negative impact on the education of girls on the African continent. The relevant articles were analyzed to establish trends and implication of these practices. The findings were synthesized into a paper under various thematic issues. Arising from the results of the analysis, some recommendations are made on the way forward in confronting these cultural practices and avert their negative impact on girls' education.

Definition of Culture and its Role in Development

For a long time, the word culture has been used to refer mainly to art and literature. However, with the inroads of the concept into the discourse on development, a broad definition of culture has been put forward by UNESCO (1982) which states that "culture is that which offers the context, values, subjectivity, attitudes and skills". This definition is further explained that first, "culture should be considered as a set of distinctive features inherent to society or a social group: spiritual and material, intellectual and emotional ones". Contrary to the earlier definition, this definition includes not only the arts and literature but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs.



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Various sources and thinkers have brought out key elements of culture:

- i. Culture comprises the way of life, of self-perception, systems of values, attitudes, mentalities, customs, practices, traditions and beliefs of the people and therefore determines the rules of conduct and social relations
- ii. Culture is not a static set of values and practices but rather possesses dynamism and therefore changes in diverse contexts and time slots. In other words, culture is continuously recreated as people question, adapt and redefine their values and practices when faced with changes and the interchange of ideas
- iii. Cultures are complementary in that they can co-exist and are not mutually exclusive and therefore “cultural diversity is inherent to human beings (UNESCO, 1982; UNESCO, 1990; Sen, 1996; Lopez-Claros A. (2014; UNESCO, 2015).

Over the years there have been efforts to show evidence that culture is of key importance to sustainable development and therefore a useful tool in efforts towards poverty eradication, and improvement of education and health. The main reasoning is that it is culture that makes us human, rational beings, “endowed with critical judgement and a sense of moral commitment” and above all with aspirations for development. UNESCO (1982) noted that “It is through culture that we discern values and make choices. It is through culture that man expresses himself, becomes aware of himself, recognizes his incompleteness, questions his achievements, seeks untiringly for new meanings and creates works through which he transcends his limitations which can only be ensured by making cultural factors an integral part of the strategies designed to achieve it”.

The United Nations General Assembly (2010) stressed that “development interventions that are responsive to the cultural context and the particularities of a place and community, and advance a human-centred approach to development, are most effective, and likely to yield sustainable, inclusive and equitable outcomes”. This underlines the need to consider critically all the activities linked to economic, social, scientific and technical development. According to de Cuellar (1996), part of the failure of various development projects can be attributed to the fact that they neglected to address some key issues related to culture namely; - human relationships and beliefs, values and motivations

According to Sen (1996), culture has four main roles in development efforts: foundational; constitutive, instrumental, evaluative. The *foundational role* is based on the notion that culture is the *raison d'être* for our ability to aspire for progress, our creativity, desire for novelty, and sense of aesthetics which means that culture can be an ‘end in itself’. In the opinion of Sen (1996), culture is so critical that if human beings are not enabled to develop some key elements of culture such as creativity, then culture itself becomes a barrier to sustainable development.

The *constitutive role* implies that culture is a sector like trade or education and therefore part and parcel of development agenda. Therefore it cannot be ignored. The *evaluative role* of culture implies that what we value in life is largely



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determined by our culture and therefore the intrinsic value of what we set up as targets of development and our efforts to achieve it will largely be determined by culture. Finally, the *instrumental role* of culture is that the success of our objectives will ultimately be determined by some cultural factors such as ethics, skill and attitudes.



These roles of culture in social-economic development have been affirmed by sustained calls for mainstreaming of culture in development projects (Lazareva, Efremova, Rusetskaya, Ulibina, and Okorokova 2018). Barasa (2017) for example has argued that integration of African culture in the economic development policies will accelerate the attainment of sustainable development. UNCTAD (2000) posits that to achieve rapid economic growth, there is need for technological innovations that resonate with the African culture. Granato, Inglehart and Leblang (1996) hold that cultural and economic factors are complementary to economic growth. McClelland (1961) argues that achievement motivation results from the values that are emphasized in children by their parents, guardians, schools and other socializing agencies. In the same vein, Njoh (2006) has advocated for adaption the of strengths of some of the African cultural practices to boost development. In his view even some of the African practices such as polygamy, rites of passage, kinship patterns present dynamics that can speed up development.

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At the same time as culture makes inroads in the development discourse, it is well known that there are some aspects of culture that are barriers to development. Even as he advocates for some of the African cultural practices, Njoh (2006) is quick to note that some of these cultures are repugnant and therefore cannot be adopted wholesale and need to be redefined or dropped altogether. He further observes that some aspects of the African culture and traditions are retrogressive and therefore they should be discarded or be changed (Njoh, as cited in Thuo, 2008). Hussein (2016) has for example identified pastoralism, a cultural practice among the Somali in Kenya as negatively impacting on enrolment in primary school among the Somali.

Selected Cultural Practices which are barriers to Girls' Education in Africa

Overview

Education is important not just because of its contribution to economic growth, but because it is an essential part of cultural development. According to Marana (2010), both education and health are key factors in human development because they increase the capacities of individuals and communities to make choices about their lives. According to Power (2014) education leads to improvement of incomes, assimilation of technology, improvement of health and increases the capacity for innovation and problem-solving. Particularly, education for adolescent girls is critical in the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) #4 which calls for access to quality education and lifelong learning for all and SDG#5 which targets achieving gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls (World Bank, 2016). It is widely acknowledged that girls who receive quality education lead healthier and more productive lives as adults. They are also less likely to marry at an early age, more likely to find



formal employment and earn higher salaries. From this perspective, therefore, as underlined by Parsitau (2017) education is a catalyst for the improvement of the status of women, as well as the health, economic and social well-being of their communities and their countries.



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Despite the critical role of girls' education and the substantial progress over the last two decades, girls still have on average lower levels of educational attainment than boys at the secondary level in many countries (Wodon, Male, Onagoruwa, Savadogo, and Yedan, 2017). In 2012 it was estimated that globally, 62 million girls, mostly adolescent in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia were not attending school and that sixteen million girl between the ages 6 and 11 did not start school at all (World Bank, 2016). The two developing regions with the most number of adolescent girls out of school are South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore identifying and addressing barriers to education should be a priority to stakeholders in the regions.

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Female Genital Circumcision/Cutting or Female Genital Mutilation (FGC FGM):

Definition and prevalence of Context of FGM/FGC in Africa

Bamgbose (2002) defines female genital circumision as the removal of the clitoris, some or all of the labia minora and incisions in the labia majora to create a raw surface. A universal definition of female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) and adopted in this paper was issued by WHO which stated that FGM/C is a practice that involves the complete or partial removal of the female genitalia for non-medical reasons (WHO, 2008). One key character of FGM is that the process leads to the stitching together these raw surfaces or kept in contact until the skin heals to be able to act as a hood that eventually covers the urethra and most of the vagina. It should be noted that FGC or FGM will be used interchangeably in this document because the two terms are somehow interrelated and they both affect girl child in a similar way.

Prevalence and Persistence of FGC in Africa

FGM/C is one of the most common traditional practices among African societies and in some other parts of the world (Mpinga E. K., et al, 2016; Parsitau, 2017). There is evidence of its practice highly concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa whereby two-thirds of all women who have experienced FGM/C reside in just four countries: Egypt, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Sudan (Shell-Duncan et al., 2016). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), an estimated 92 million girls aged 10 and older have undergone FGM/C (WHO, 2018). The FGC is widely and deeply rooted in the African practice held with much pride in most African cultures as highlighted by Bamgbose (2002). The prevalence of FGM/FGC varies in different communities ranging from 98% in Somalia to 5 per cent in Zaire. It is also indigenous to some Middle-Eastern countries, including Egypt.

In most cases FGM/C is performed on children and adolescents, age and varies widely but there is evidence that some girls have undergone the practice during infancy, while others undergo FGM/C later in life, often in marriage



preparation. In some countries such as Egypt, Kenya and the Central African Republic, FGM/C happens around the teen years (Shell-Duncan et al., 2016). The factors that drive FGM/C are mainly sociological and cultural traditions, such as those signifying a girl's coming of age or passage into womanhood (UNFPA, 2015). Some communities also argue that FGM/C is necessary for hygienic reasons (UNFPA, 2015). In other cases FGM/C has been associated with marriageability, maintenance of family honour and respect, community acceptance and ethnic identity, religious requirements, control of women's sexual desires and fidelity and other social-cultural norms (Kavulya, 2010; ICRW, 2016; Kang'ethe, 2013; WHO, 2016; Parsitau, 2017).

In Kenya, 21 per cent of women reported having undergone FGM/C according to the Kenya Demographic Health Survey (KDHS, 2015). It is especially popular and prominent among the Somali (97 per cent), Kuria (96 per cent), Kisii (96%), Maasai (89%), Kalenjin, (62%), Taita Taveta (59%) and Meru/Embu (54%) groups, and to a lesser extent among Kikuyu (43%), Kamba (33%) and Mijikenda and Swahili (12%) according to the (KDHS, 2004). Among the Samburu and the Maasai culture FGM is a long-standing social-cultural process as a rite of passage in which the girl is formally initiated to womanhood soon and afterwards, they are married to a man chosen by the father, in exchange for cattle (Winterbottom, Koomen, & Burford, 2009; Parsitau, 2017).

Initially, young girls are intentionally informed at a very young age about the importance of circumcision through songs and dances designed to have this message sunk deep into them as observed by Bamgbose (2002). Along with the preparation message that is deep-rooted into the culture, the circumcision ceremony is organized in a home and friends are invited to share in the "joy" of the family and the passage of the young girl into adulthood. Among the Somali tribe in Kenya, for example, FGM is captured in the saying that "an uncircumcised girl is like a rotten carcass in the centre of the house" and a circumcised girl is like a rose flower in a desert shrub." Another case showing the importance of FGM is drawn from the Senegal society in West Africa where FGM prevalence is 70%.

Some stereotypes that are embedded in certain cultures in Africa, assert that no eligible man would consider marrying a girl who has not undergone the procedure because, in the eyes of these communities, FGM makes a woman culturally and socially acceptable. In this way, genital mutilation is supported and encouraged by men and even highly supported by some societies (Mashua, 2010).

The Tanzanian Demographic and Health Survey (TDHS) of 2004–05 reports that roughly 15% of Tanzanian women ages 15 to 49 are circumcised, down from an estimated 18% in 1997). On the contrary, the study conveys a different picture based upon the same study findings by TDHS Survey of 2004–05 in Arusha region on the northern part of Tanzania where the prevalence of FGC in Manyara remains and is still at 81%.



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While FGM/C is regarded as highly important among tribes like the Maasai tribe, on the other hand, the practice violates the rights of girls to health, security and physical integrity, to be free from torture, and sometimes the right to life in cases where the procedure claims individuals' lives through injury and excessive bleeding. Several studies have established that, although it is globally recognized as a violation of women and girls' rights, FGM/C is invested with much cultural significance especially in African communities where it is practised (Winterbottom, Koomen, & Burford, 2009; Parsitau, 2017)

There is overwhelming evidence that in areas where FGM/C is prevalent, it harms the education for girls. Several evaluations that have been done have established that there exists a relationship between girls' education and the practice of FGM/C especially on issues such as academic progression, retention, academic performance and completion (International Center for Research on Women, 2016). A study by UNESCO (2016) established that in countries with a prevalence of FGM/C such as Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Mali adolescent girls do not attain the same number of years of schooling as adolescent boys (UNESCO, 2016). Indeed in most cases, after a girl has been cut, her studies end because she is withdrawn from school and most likely married off (Magangi et al. 2015; Nyabero et al., 2010). According to GIZ (2011b), FGM/C fuels early/child marriage since after undergoing FGM/C, notwithstanding their adolescence, girls are regarded as mature and ready for marriage. Studies done in Kenya indicate that girls discontinued school after the cut as they are forced to get married or became more involved in the role of a wife to the detriment of schooling (Magangi, 2015; Nyabero, Omwenga, & Okari, 2016).

Similarly, the FGM/C-related medical complications have been found to lead to school drop-rate out among girls leading to low school completion rates and grade progress (Nyagah, 2016). A study by GIZ (2011b) for example established that complications experienced by girls upon undergoing the cutting such as bleeding, infections, pain and distress made them lose focus in school or perform poorly and eventually drop out from school. In Sierra Leone, sometimes the high cost of FGM/C ceremonies made parents unwilling to spend more money on girls' education (GIZ, 2011b). Ironically in areas with a high prevalence of FGM/C, those who refuse to undergo the practice are ostracized by family members, stigmatized by the society and often are no longer supported by their parents in the academic endeavour (Pesambili, 2013).

Disco Matanga (Disco funerals)

Meaning and context of 'Disco Matanga'

According to Njue; Voeten and Remes, (2009) 'Disco funerals' or 'disco matanga': is a collective term used to describe dancing parties that accompany funeral festivities in many parts of Kenya. They are especially common in Nyanza (among the Luo), and western regions (among the Luhya) of Kenya and parts of the Kenyan coast. 'Disco funerals' can be defined as "parties held by the relatives and neighbours of a recently deceased person as a way of honouring the deceased,

pass time during funeral night vigils and also raise funds for the funeral” (Zolnikov, 2014a). A study by Njue (2011) established that during the study period, there are at least 3 disco funerals per week in various estates of Kisumu town, lasting up to a week. The study observed that community members, including adolescents and children, congregated at the home of the deceased. This means in any given locality in the above regions there could be several disco matanga taking place simultaneously.

The young people view disco funerals as a cheap form of entertainment and an opportunity to meet the opposite-sex partners. For them, the death of a person in a certain village is an opportunity to meet and make friends. The question that stands out is whether these youth have the sense of the type of friendship they make. The study findings carried out by Njue, Voeten and Remes, (2009), in Kisumu, Kenya, reported that disco funerals [was] an important place for young people to hang out; they increased the opportunities to meet and engage in (risky) sexual activities including sex with multiple partners. In some cases, girls were forced into sex with several accounts of gang rape and sex in exchange for money. On interviewing one of the young people, this is what he has to say:

“You know death is rampant here. You will find that someone has died here, another one there and another one also there. It is in these funerals that boys and girls meet that is where they meet mostly...at the funerals” (19-year-old male).

Impact of Disco Matanga on Girls Education

Several studies have been undertaken on the impact of the practice of *disco matanga* on the lives of girls which in turn affects their education negatively. They create an environment that encourages youth to engage in pre-marital sex and to be sexually active. Kamaara (1999) confirms that, in sub-Saharan Africa, the majority of young girls are sexually active, sometimes with multiple partners. Studies in sub-Saharan Africa also indicate that youth are initiated into sexual activity as early as age 12 for girls and age 13 for boys.

The ‘disco funerals’ are characterized by loud music, singing, dancing, bidding games. At the same time besides dancing, *disco matanga* have over time acquired another dimension whereby participants, mostly young people both girls and boys engage in wanton transactional sex. For the young people, the more numbers of deaths the more social gathering, dancing and engaging in wanton sex intercourse. Voeten and Remes, (2009), note that disco funerals put people especially girls at significant risk of becoming HIV-infected.

Njue; Voeten and Remes, (2009), also observed that disco funerals were not only seen as a great occasion to meet the other sex, but also to engage in sexual intercourse as cited below:

“...during funerals there are those girls who have been left in no hands [no one is responsible about these girls], you find that someone takes them [for sex] every day, at times someone takes her at around 10 pm then returns her at



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midnight... somebody else also takes her at that very time...at times this person knows that so and so is going with her but he also goes with her” (18-year-old male).



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According to Njue; Voeten and Remes, (2009), gang rape was also reported to occur during and after disco funerals: 16 of 44 respondents interviewed had heard of or knew someone who had undergone gang rape, and one boy admitted to having participated in gang rape. It was very sad to learn that some girls agree to sex, but others are forced into sex at disco funerals. A 16-year-old female respondent said: *“You’ll find a lot of rape cases here especially during funerals... you may be walking and then you are raped [...] Yes, it happens a lot.”* What is also evident is that *“... people see but they don’t do a thing”* (17-year-old male). During one funeral, fieldworkers witnessed one rape attempt (which was thwarted by bystanders).

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The disco funeral cultural practice has become a cause for HIV/AIDS transmission within this particular community and beyond (Hardy, 1987). This is indicative of putting so much emphasis on maintaining the cultural practices that continue to marginalize the girl within the African communities. Unfortunately, young girls are exposed to these cultural practices that continue to interfere with their education focus and human personal values.

Similar stories are reported from Kibera slum one of the largest slums in Africa in outskirts of Nairobi. Based upon the study which was conducted in 13 villages of Kibera by Population Council, 43% of girls were coerced to have sex with their partners who did not want to hear anything contrary to their demands” (Namele, 2008, p.1). It is another form of violence against young girls who are already in school. The fact that one is a girl is vulnerable to sexual violence when going and coming back from school and even at the school grounds. As highlighted by Christie (1986), each individual has the right to learn and to get to his or her destination safely regardless of gender and colour.

Fundraising is known as a process of soliciting and gathering contributions for a certain cause of an event. The activity of fundraising is usually carried out acceptably and respectfully for the noble cause. Contrary to the above description, in some communities in Kenya such as the Luo sex is used as part of fundraising in form of disco funerals whereby the girl becomes a victim in the fund-raising games. A lack of gender equality in making decision victimizes the girl to dance and have sex to the highest bidder during the disco funerals. Similarly, girls have no choice but to be “bought” during fundraising and be available after the function for sexual business.

It is highlighted from Njue; Voeten and Remes, (2009), that there is an occurrence of transactional sex during disco matanga. In this case, disco funerals affect girls’ future aspirations. In the long run, girls find themselves as victims of AIDS, school drop-outs and orphans and are more likely to engage in transactional sex to continue schooling or simply to survive. For the sake of seeking financial support, these young girls, tend to sell their bodies for cash to men so that they can continue with schooling. While it is shocking to hear what is being encouraged as part of culture ‘disco funerals’ among the Luo Community



in western Kenya, it is also high time for girls' rights activists to intervene and educate women in this particular culture on the negative consequences of what takes place during the disco matanga. Good and open communication between parents and children should be promoted as part of good parenting styles. Safe sex is to be emphasized among youths and adults. It is also highly required to talk to parents about monitoring the moral behaviour of their children for the sake of maintaining a healthy society both physically and morally.



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Studies indicate that community is oblivious of the side effects of social gathering during disco funerals or choose to ignore it. *Disco matangas* result in:

- ❖ Early pregnancy and marriages
- ❖ Increased risk and incidences of contracting infectious diseases (HIV transmission, sexually transmitted infections).
- ❖ Avenue of drug abuse among the youth (alcohol, miraa, marijuana, and “homebrew” contribute to risky sexual behaviour.
- ❖ Increased abortion rates,
- ❖ Cases of rape and gang rapes.
- ❖ Stress and trauma among girls
- ❖ The practice of transactional sex including sex for money
(Williams (1992); Owuor, 2009; Njue, Voeten & Remes, 2009; Zolnikov, 2014b),

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The above outcomes of *disco matanga* are a major hindrance to girls' education in that they lead to:

- ❖ High drop-out rates for girls
- ❖ Poor performance due to stress, trauma and lack of focus on academic work
- ❖ Low academic progression among girls

Early/Child and Forced Marriages

Meaning and context

A general definition of marriage is that it is a social contract between two individuals who willingly unite their lives legally, economically and emotionally. In contrast, early or child marriage is defined as “any form of union where one or both partners are less than 18 years of age. Studies have indicated that early marriage” is a global phenomenon and a common practice in many parts of the world (Parsitau, 2017). For example, according to McCourtie (2017), each day, 41,000 girls marry before they reach the age of 18 years old which translates to 15 million girls every year. It is estimated that during the period between the years 2011-2020 more than 140 million girls will have become child brides and drop out of school (UNFPA, 2008; World Bank, 2016)

Despite the government and civil society efforts of eradicating forced marriage or early marriage, Bamgbose (2002) has argued that some rural communities remain defiant. While the motive behind early marriages could be cultural it has been perpetuated by other factors including economic ones such as the parents' desire to collect bride price which can be termed as greed on the part of some parents at the expense of girls' live opportunities. In the cultural practice of early/child and forced marriages girls find themselves in a marriage that involves deception, abduction, coercion, fear, and inducements, performed under duress and without their full and informed consent or free will and with no choice of attending school to pursue their professional career.

The factors driving child marriage are countless, including poverty, gaps in-laws, and lack of education, religious beliefs, and fear of teenage pregnancies. According to *Plan International* (2008), lack of education is a major driver of the practice with 67% of women age 20–24 without education married as a child, in comparison to only 6% of women with secondary school education or higher. In Kenya, the rates for marriage before 18 years and 15 years of age are 26% and 16% respectively. Typically, among the Maasai girls are married between the ages of 10 and 18, soon after they undergo FGM (Parsitau, 2017).

In many African societies, there is a cultural provision for parents to marry off their daughters when and to whom they choose. In Northern Nigeria, girls as young as 13 continue are married of without their consent or freedom of choice. These young girls find themselves being married off as third or fourth wives to polygamous men who are old enough to be their grandfathers..

In Zimbabwe, *The Herald* newspaper reported the story of a 14-year-old girl from who had been forced into two marriages by her parents. The story is very shocking that it is hard to believe that the young girl was first married off at the age of 13, to a much older man whom she said she did not like. When she finally managed to free herself from the first forced marriage, the poor girl was returned home to her very angry parents who forced her into the second marriage as a second wife. The girl was five months pregnant at the time. The girl was saved from the illegal marriage by police officers after one month. The 'husband' appeared in court on charges of rape and violating provisions of the Child Protection and Adoption Act of Zimbabwe.

In Kenya, Benyawa (2010) indicated in a newspaper article that:

Police in Kwale have arrested a man for allegedly marrying a schoolgirl. The girl, 10, from Loitoktok, was in Class Four when her parents forcefully married her off to the man, 40, in Diani, Msambweni District. A Good Samaritan, Ms Deril Nyawera, said the girl had been married as a second wife after the man paid Sh13,000 (about \$180) dowry to her family. "The girl came to me crying and asked for help. She told me her father had married her off to an old man as a second wife," Apparently, her parents had also given her a four-year-old brother to take care of in her new home. Nyawera told The Standard. She took her to Diani Police Station and reported the matter to the OCS. When The Standard visited her in Nyawera's home in Diani on Monday, she said she had been living with the man for three weeks. (The Standard, March 16, 2010)



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On asking the young girl about her feelings on this situation, she sadly responded that “I didn’t want to get married. I wanted to continue with my education but my father forcefully married me off to that old man,” When Kwale OCPD Nelson Okioga interrogated the man (who forcibly married the young girl), he said his culture allows him to marry as many wives as possible.



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Impact of Early, Child and Forced marriages on Girls Education

Early, child and forced marriages force girls into painful circumstances that negatively affect the girls physically and psychologically. Some of the effects include disrupted childhoods, trauma, contraction of HIV/AIDS, domestic abuse, rape and difficult childbirth that in severe cases results in maternal death. This practice is therefore an extreme form of violation of human rights made worse by the fact that it forces girls to miss their education opportunities. Various analyses on the cost of child marriage indicate that early/child marriage has very negative impacts on fertility, education and earnings, and child health among others (ICRW, 2016; World Bank, 2016). A study among the Maasai found evidence that marrying too young denies many girls an opportunity to get an education as it is a major cause for high school drop out in the community (UNICEF 2016). According to McCourtie, (2017), early/child marriage is very devastating because, in the long term, it leads to lost education opportunities as well as health risks associated with underage pregnancy.

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Conclusion and Recommendation

From the foregoing analysis, a wide range of conclusions can be reached. However, the main conclusion is that educating girls is very beneficial to the girls themselves and also women empowerment as well as their families, communities and countries around the world. Worldwide, these benefits would be a major contribution to sustainable development to communities. Educated women are able join the labour market, earn better salaries and contribute to the economic well-being of the societies they live in. Educating girls, is also important in delaying the age of childbearing which entrenches girls agency, as wives, mothers and in other roles and improving better health for their families.

At the same time, many girls across Africa are victims of several cultural practices notably FGM/C, early marriages and disco matanga which are major hindrances to girls’ education especially in Africa. The immediate outcomes of disco matanga are teenage pregnancy, sicknesses like HIV and other venereal diseases and ultimately poor academic achievement, low completion rates and drop-out from schools. Early/child marriage leads to early childbearing, school drop-out rates, low educational achievement for girls with many negative repercussions not only for themselves but as well as their children, their families and the society they belong to.

In the final analysis, therefore, FGM/C, early marriages and disco matanga lead to low educational attainment, child marriage, and early childbearing. Girls marrying or dropping out of school early are more likely to experience poor health, have more children over their lifetime, and earn less in adulthood. This makes it more likely that their household will live in poverty. Other risks include intimate partner violence and lack of decision-making ability within the



household. Fundamentally, girls marrying, having children, or dropping out of school early are disempowered in ways that deprive them of their basic rights. This, in turn, affects their children who in are likely to lead poor-quality lives.

Over the years several measures have been proposed and continue to be implemented to eradicate cultural practices that are barriers to girls' education. A number have noticeable positive outcomes results while others have limited success. The limited success of these measures underlines the importance of further research to understand better the underlying dynamics of these cultural practices as a prerequisite to finding effective approaches to eliminating them. This will form a good foundation for evidence-based discourse and practice in the find against these barriers.

Another promising way forward in fighting these evils is to adopt broad-based approaches that incorporate all the key stakeholders in these practices. A good example of this is the inclusion of community elders who are the custodians and gatekeepers of culture in various communities and therefore very influential in the continuity and eradication of these practices. There is also a need to reconfigure the way education for girls is provided with the view to ensure continued attendance and improvement of academic performance. A good example of this is the creation of safe spaces where girls can grow and realize their potential.

Finally, since some of these cultural practices fulfil certain useful community requirements. For example, accompanying FGM/C in some communities such as the Abagusii in Kenya is a rite of passage from adolescence to womanhood and involving useful teaching such as personal health, reproduction, hygiene, communication skills, self-esteem and dealing with peer pressure. There is a need to evolve alternative rites such as the *Ogosemia Gwekiare* or "circumcision through words" among the Abagusii which involves teaching girls positive values just like the traditional ritual, except that there is no cutting of the genitalia.

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