Are School Principals ‘the Bad Guys’?
Nuancing the narrative of school re-entry policy implementation in Kenya

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Show people as one thing over and over again, and that’s what they become.
The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete.


INTRODUCTION

This chapter documents initial findings from an intervention research effort in Homa Bay County in Kenya’s former Nyanza Province. The research endeavour represents a first step toward understanding how to expand access to education for out-of-school teenage mothers in the region. Kenya’s now defunct Nyanza Province is an area characterized by high, unintended teenage pregnancy rates, and low completion and transition rates by females at the primary and secondary school levels, respectively. Nationally, levels of teenage childbearing are second highest in Homa Bay County, at 33% (KNBS et al. 2015). The primary school completion rate for girls in Homa Bay County is 54% (KNBS 2013). Fifty-two percent of girls in the county transition to secondary school (ibid), while nearly half (48%) are out of school. Further, 40% of girls aged 15–19 have begun childbearing.

Pregnancy and school dropout are often presumed to occur in tandem. Nonetheless, school dropout levels in Homa Bay County are still surprising, given the education policy environment in Kenya. Kenya’s school re-entry policy for girls was passed in 1994 (Republic of Kenya 2007, Muganda-Onyando & Omondi 2008), and in 2009 the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Health and Sanitation, launched the National School Health Policy (Republic of Kenya 2009). Collectively, these policies emphasize permitting girls who become pregnant in school to continue with their education for as long as possible, and allowing pregnant learners to return to school after childbirth. This enabling policy milieu for teenage mothers calls into question the high school dropout and low school re-entry rates among teenage mothers in Homa Bay County; a recent study carried out in this context found that nearly 70% of out-of-school teenage mothers reported leaving school due to pregnancy (Undie et al. 2015).

Our attempt to understand and address barriers to school re-entry for girls in Homa Bay County who named pregnancy as their reason for leaving school began in 2013. It began with a review of the literature, and our review findings were not heartening. Studies repeatedly highlighted the fact that the implementation of the school re-entry policy has been poor (Muganda-Onyando & Omondi 2008, Wanyama & Simatwa 2011, Wekesa 2011). Barriers to the effective implementation of this policy converged on three main issues: a lack of clarity on the re-entry policies among school personnel, and/or the practicalities of implementing them (Omwancha 2012); a lack of clarity on rights to re-entry among teenage mothers, their parents, and communities ((Muganda-Onyando & Omondi 2008); and a neglect of re-entry policy monitoring on the part of the Ministry of Education (Wanyama & Simatwa 2011). Notably, a complementary portrait of school principals did not emerge from our review. Rather, we were left with a generally negative impression of school principals in the context of school re-entry policy implementation. Yet principals (ought to) play a pivotal role in shaping educational policy. Situated at the nexus of educational policy and practice, the principal ‘acts on a daily basis as the connecting link between a large bureaucratic system and the individual daily experiences of a large number of children and adults’ (Rousmaniere 2013). Few individuals are better placed to both understand the needs and realities of vulnerable learners, and to ensure that the larger educational system grasps and appropriately responds to these needs via effective policies.

Nonetheless, a common theme across the available literature on school principals and the implementation of the school re-entry policy in Kenya had to do with stigma emanating from school principals themselves. Stigma was brought about by many factors, including the notion...
held by principals that parenting girls would negatively influence other students and result in even more school-based pregnancies (Muganda-ONYANDO & OMONDI 2008). School-based stigma (including from principals) was seen as a protective measure to help mitigate further pregnancies (ACHOKA & NGERU 2012), and pregnant girls were essentially 'stamped out' of the school environment, in the sense that their pregnancies, school departures and school re-entries were not officially documented by schools (WEKESA 2011). The portrait that emerged from our readings was that of school principals who simply refused to implement the school re-entry policy, even when they were aware of it (OMWANCHA 2012); forced girls to take pregnancy tests (ibid.); deliberately refrained from divulging policy information, for fear of encouraging early sexual activity (WEREJI 2015); and held low expectations for the academic performance of parenting girls in their schools (WEKESA 2011). In a word, the general picture presented of school principals was not encouraging.

Our argument is that while this body of information or evidence can be said to be 'true' (and, indeed, corroborates some of our own findings), it is imbalanced and incomplete. Our goal in this chapter is to bring nuance to the narrative of school principals and their efforts to implement Kenya's school re-entry policy. We argue that school principals are not a monolith, but are, rather, a heterogeneous group carrying out heterogeneous actions. By so doing, we hope to complete the 'unfinished' story about school principals in Kenya and their engagement with the school re-entry policy implementation process. The chapter is about the surprises we found along the way in the course of intervening on parenting girls' school re-entry. The latter underline the need for a multiplicity of narratives on the issue in order to understand and address school re-entry in a comprehensive manner.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Our findings are derived from several data sources obtained in Homa Bay County. Firstly, on 1 August 2014, the Homa Bay County Department of Education convened a policy dialogue for secondary school principals in collaboration with the Population Council. All principals in Homa Bay County heading public, secondary day schools that were either co-educational or girls-only were invited to participate in the dialogue.

Nearly two hundred participants (n=171) attended the one-day dialogue, the objectives of which were to provide a forum for school principals to be reminded of, and to deliberate upon, existing education policies developed to ensure continued schooling for pregnant or parenting learners. The event was also geared toward unearthing the prevailing attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions about such policies among school principals, and understanding the challenges to policy implementation. Copies of the school re-entry policy implementation guidelines and the National School Health Policy were made available to each participant. School principals’ narratives of policy implementation were hand-recorded by rapporteurs during the meeting. In addition, school principals themselves documented key issues emerging from their discussion on flipcharts during the small group discussions that formed part of the dialogue. Notes from the meeting deliberations and flipcharts were typed up, forming the study's qualitative dataset.

We analyzed these qualitative data by reading carefully through the transcripts and identifying the most recurrent issues that principals dwelt on in their discussions. Narratives related to a recurrent theme were pasted together in a single section and reviewed repeatedly as a coherent whole. The repeated reviews facilitated our discovery of patterns and helped us arrive at conclusions about how principals were conceptualizing and handling the implementation of the school re-entry policy, and the reasons for this. This chapter also draws on survey data collected from the majority of school principals who participated in the policy dialogue (n=167). The baseline data were collected from August to October 2014 via handwritten, self-administered questionnaires. The data were then entered in EpiData and analyzed using STATA software. The principal procedure for data analysis involved descriptive statistics on each variable.

In the next section, we present findings from this study. Our analysis of qualitative data derived from the policy dialogue suggested that principals’ narratives of school re-entry policy implementation revolved around six key themes, namely: Sensitizing, Reframing, Rethinking, Resolving, Collaborating, and Innovating. While each theme emerged as a core area during the dialogue, it became apparent that they could each serve as action points as well. They each pinpoint and describe an area or ways in which the implementation of the school re-entry policy could be strengthened. We present each theme separately, introducing them with
verbatim quotes from policy dialogue participants to 'give voice' to school principals' realities, struggles and stories as a way to provide an alternative to the dominant discourse of school re-entry implementation (one marked by simply unsupportive school heads), and to make sense of the challenges and successes associated with this process.

NUANCING THE NARRATIVE: WHAT WE LEARNED FROM SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Sensitizing

_We were never told what to do…_

The school re-entry policy was passed in Kenya over two decades ago in 1994. The process of sensitizing school principals on the policy at that time is unclear, as documentation based on the policy is sparse. Studies have indicated that the monitoring of the policy's implementation has been weak in Kenya (Wanayma & Simatwa 2011). Follow-up sessions to ensure that new cohorts of teachers are informed about their role in the implementation of this policy, and that old teachers are reminded intermittently, do not appear to have occurred. Indeed, our policy dialogue with nearly 200 secondary school principals from Homa Bay County provided strong indications of lapses in policy implementation monitoring. When asked to indicate by a show of hands how many principals in the room had ever seen a copy of Kenya's school re-entry policy or implementation guidelines, not a single hand was raised. The policy dialogue held on 1 August 2014, represented the first time that any of the school principals in attendance had seen a copy of the school re-entry policy implementation guidelines. Moreover, baseline survey results show that 20% of the school principals who participated in the survey (n=167) were not aware of the policy. As one participant put it: 'We have gone through a hard life because of policies that we were not involved in. ... We were never inducted. We were never told what to do.'

While it is possible that some principals participated in developing the policy in 1994, the current generation of principals in Homa Bay highlighted their own non-involvement in this process as a barrier which led to a lack of understanding of the policy, its rationale, and its implementation procedures. Questions posed by dialogue participants also confirmed the lack of a sustained, systematic process of follow-up and moni-

toring to guide the implementation of the policy. A recurrent question from principals, for instance, had to do with the timing of readmission for parenting girls re-entering school. When was the proper time for such readmission to occur? As part of the meeting activities, the principals in attendance examined the school re-entry policy implementation guidelines along with the National School Health Policy. The joint review of these policy documents raised further questions around the proper timing of readmission for re-entering girls. While one policy seemed to suggest a more flexible readmission period, the other gave a recommendation for six months after childbirth: The school re-entry policy implementation guidelines indicate that readmission should be sought 'after the baby is weaned' (Muganda-Onyando & Omondi 2008), while the National School Health Policy stipulates that '[n]ewborn babies must be allowed the benefit of breastfeeding as much as possible including exclusive breastfeeding for six months and introduction of complementary feeding at 6 months of age while continuing breastfeeding' (Republic of Kenya 2009: 23). Following much discussion, participants agreed that the timing of readmission should be decided on a case-by-case basis, and should depend on several factors, including the point at which the student left school, the duration of her time away from school, and her own perceived capacity to cope academically at a particular stage of readmission.

The issue of when pregnant learners should be asked to leave school was also a major theme of principals' discussions. Part of the discussion centered on the fact that, while the school re-entry implementation guidelines simply state that pregnant learners should be 'sent home' (Muganda-Onyando & Omondi 2008), the National School Health Policy indicates that such learners 'shall be allowed to continue with classes for as long as possible' (Republic of Kenya 2009: 23). This instance of policy misalignment is arguably at the core of the policy implementation problem, leaving school principals uncertain of how to effectively implement the school re-entry policy.

These discussions underscored the need to institutionalize the periodic sensitization of principals by the Ministry of Education, in addition to making actual policy documents available to new cohorts of stakeholders. A plan for continuous monitoring of the policy's implementation (coupled with support for this process) is also critical.
Reframing

How many times should a re-entering girl be allowed to ‘re-enter’?

A permeating feature of school principals’ narratives during the policy dialogue was the tension between viewing school pregnancy as a disciplinary problem, and embracing it as a rights issue. In many ways, the ethos of Kenya’s school re-entry policy implementation guidelines is built on the notion of rights and parenting students as rights-bearers. The guidelines, for instance, contain a clause providing for the ‘unconditional re-admission’ of parenting students into schools after childbirth. The rights-based rationale for this clause is presumably that all children have a right to education, and that their pregnancy history or parenthood status should not negatively affect their ability to return to school, should they so desire. However, in practice in the African region, expulsion is commonly cited as a disciplinary measure meted out by school principals to pregnant learners (African Development Bank n.d.).

Ironically, Kenya’s National School Health Policy prescribes pregnancy testing at least once per term—a prescription that raises questions about the voluntary nature of periodic pregnancy testing (Undie et al. 2015). In accordance with this policy, 41% of Homa Bay secondary school principals who participated in a baseline survey (n=167) reported that girls at their school are required to undergo an annual medical examination. Of these, nearly all (96%) indicated that this examination includes a pregnancy test. The periodic pregnancy testing mandated by the National School Health Policy is arguably geared toward ensuring that the health needs of pregnant learners are addressed, particularly given that this policy allows such learners to remain in school for as long as possible. Nonetheless, many girls are excluded from the education system once they are discovered to be pregnant through such testing (Muganda-ONYANDO & OMOND 2008, UNESCO 2014, Birungi et al. 2015)—a contradictory reality which underscores the need for continuous monitoring of the implementation of the re-entry policy. The policy dialogue highlighted this reality as most principals initially struggled with the idea of unconditional readmission. Indeed, nearly half of the school principal participants in the baseline survey (46%) assumed that the school re-entry policy guidelines stated that the admission of re-entering girls to school should be conditional (rather than unconditional). As earlier indicated, not a single principal had ever actually seen a copy of the guide-

lines before the dialogue in August 2014. The erroneous assumption (regarding conditional readmission) among some principals signals not only moralizing undertones on their own part, but also, the broader gender ideology and structural constraints that shape their understanding and practice of discipline.

In line with these moralizing undertones, the majority of principals voiced their opinion that parenting girls should only be readmitted if they demonstrated remorse for falling pregnant. They also observed that parenting students were more likely to be readmitted by schools if they were known to be well-behaved, showed academic promise, or were particularly talented in some area. Sending a pregnant girl away from school was also seen by some principals as a measure to help ensure that their peers ‘learn a lesson’ and refrain from becoming pregnant themselves. The concern that readmitting teenage mothers into schools would have a negative influence on other students was a prevalent one among participants. This apprehension is encapsulated in a question posed by a principal during the policy dialogue: ‘How many times should a re-entering girl be ‘re-entered’? In other words: How many times (per student) is this “offense” pardonable, and where do we draw the line on ‘discipline’?

These concerns and tensions obviously derive from the training of school personnel, which frames school-based pregnancy in educational institutions as a disciplinary or moral issue, deserving or requiring disciplinary measures (Dahl 2011). The tensions also highlight the policy vacuum created by ineffective or non-existent monitoring of the school re-entry policy. Unattended, this vacuum fosters moral attitudes and gendered social norms in the school context which are detrimental to the ethos of re-entry policies. Clearly, concerted efforts must be made to reframe the treatment of school pregnancy as a ‘rights’ issue, as opposed to a ‘disciplinary’ one. This will necessarily involve reframing moral prescriptions and addressing inconsistencies found in current re-entry policies. In addition, the question of how many times a re-entering girl should be allowed to re-enter school underlines the issue of repeat pregnancies among parenting students in Homa Bay County. This important issue emerged as a key area of discussion among principals and is discussed further in subsequent sub-sections of this chapter.
Rethinking

We've been asked [by parents] if our schools are maternity wards or pregnancy centers.

Discussions during the policy dialogue revealed that school principals are concerned about protecting their reputation, and underscored the fact that implementing the school re-entry policy is perceived to pose considerable reputational risk for them. This issue is alluded to by Wanyama and Simatwa (2011) in another Kenya-based study, and partly explains the reticence of some principals toward implementing re-entry policies in general.

The attitudes of some principals with regard to their reputation arguably align closely with their own moral principles, and with wider gender ideologies in Homa Bay County that hamper school re-entry for parenting girls. Firstly, principals argued that they have their own professional reputation to protect. Some policy dialogue participants who had tried to encourage school continuity for pregnant learners reported suffering damage to their reputation in the eyes of the community, and facing accusations of promoting immorality in school. Principals also pointed to the difficulties of maintaining their professional reputations before prospective parents when visibly pregnant learners are present in school. A number of principals mentioned that parents and other community members began referring to their schools as 'maternity wards,' rather than educational institutions. One policy dialogue participant (who had allowed a pregnant girl that procured an abortion to return to school) said: 'The community is looking at me as the one bringing immorality into the school.'

When faced with the reality of pregnant learners in school, prospective parents tended to choose to enroll their children in other schools instead. Additionally, principals voiced concerns about the prevalent assumption in Kenya that schoolteachers and even school heads are often perpetrators of sexual violence and are therefore usually responsible for the pregnancies experienced by their students. These concerns provided further incentive for some school principals to remain opposed toward having pregnant learners in the school environment.

In addition to their own professional reputation, principals spoke of their professional obligation to uphold their schools' academic reputation as well. Secondary school reputation in the Kenyan public education system is built on the attainment of a high 'Mean Grade.' The Mean Grade is an average score/ranking given to each school annually, based on the combined average grade of its students. There was a strong perception among principals that pregnant learners were more likely to suffer ill-health, experience poor concentration, and therefore to be absent from school more often, or less likely to demonstrate a strong academic performance. This assumption led to the perception that pregnant learners would affect the Mean Grade of schools. As a respectable Mean Grade draws the positive attention of prospective parents and students, and ensures that the school concerned remains in demand, principals saw minimizing the presence of pregnant learners as being in the school's best interest. Balancing the Ministry of Education's expectation for schools to produce good grades with policy expectations for schools to keep pregnant learners in school was seen as a major challenge by many principals. Given that the norm was admittedly to send pregnant girls back home until delivery, this framing by principals of 'pregnancy-as-disability' seemed to be a preconceived notion, rather than a fact derived from personal experience.

Some principals called for the Ministry of Education to re-think its approach to ranking secondary schools. In the words of one school head: 'Ranking should be done according to the value added by the school, and not because of "A" grades.' Another participant supported this argument with the following solemn warning: 'Until education is all-round [holistic], rather than focused on "The Mean," this [school re-entry] policy will never move [progress] anywhere.' It is clear that school principals have a role to play in challenging the Ministry of Education to rethink its approach to school ranking by demonstrating the value of supporting pregnant and parenting girls. Yet, low awareness of school re-entry policies in the first place, and weak support for implementing them, must be recognized as key barriers.

Resolving

I have had 15 pregnant girls in my school in one term.

During the policy dialogue discussions, the deep concern of school principals regarding unintended pregnancy in schools, in addition to repeat pregnancies became apparent. Baseline survey results demonstrate that the frequency of school pregnancy in Homa Bay County schools is in-
deed an issue of concern. As shown in Figure 1, a quarter of the 167 school principals who participated in the survey reported that 5 or more girls in their school experienced pregnancy in the last year, while over a third reported that 3–4 girls in their school had the same experience during this period.

![Figure 1: Number of school pregnancies in the last one year]

<table>
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<th>Number of pregnancies</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 and above</td>
<td>34.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>37.3</td>
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</tbody>
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School principals noted with consternation that many re-entering girls (who initially left school due to unintended pregnancy) ended up pregnant again. This partially explains the futility that some principals associated with implementing the school re-entry policy. Furthermore, school heads voiced concerns about pregnancy-related illnesses and dietary needs of pregnant learners, pointing out that they were ill-equipped to attend to such matters in their school contexts. Unsafe abortion by students was also a recurrent theme of these discussions. A number of principals viewed early and proactive detection of student pregnancy by schools as a means of mitigating unsafe and late-stage abortions, which could adversely affect the health of students. With its emphasis on periodic pregnancy testing, the National School Health policy supports the proactive detection of pregnancy. However, principals sensed that pregnancy detection did not actually resolve the issue of pregnancy prevention. Indeed, some principals raised the need for accessible contraceptive services for students in general. On the other hand, a number of principals pointed out that some of their female students were married and therefore ‘needed’ family planning. There were arguments that principals could not afford to continue ‘burying their heads in the sand’ in regard to students’ need for contraceptive services, and that there was a need for schools to be more proactive on the issue. However, the majority of school principals remained silent on the issue of contraception during the dialogue, and only one principal publicly argued against making contraception accessible to students.

Without question, the issue of unintended and repeat pregnancies in schools is one that needs to be resolved. While no resolutions were made by school principals or by the Ministry of Education during the two policy dialogues, it was evident that a critical mass of principals were amenable to considering innovative and effective solutions to this predicament.

Collaborating

I think the principal is a lone-ranger in the fight against teenage pregnancy.

While some principals certainly seemed keen on maintaining the status quo and aligning with moral prescriptions for pregnant or parenting learners, there were other principals whose support for such learners was apparent. A common refrain from such participants during the policy dialogue centered on the argument that school principals need cooperation from and collaboration with other stakeholders in order to effectively implement the school re-entry policy. Some principals opined that attempting to implement the policy was a lonely process for which there was little support from others. Parents and the wider community were specifically pinpointed as stakeholders that needed to be involved in and held accountable for the policy implementation process, in addition to principals themselves. Principals pointed out that while schools are often accused of having inadequate responses for mitigating unintended pregnancy, the roles and responsibilities of parents and homes are usually overlooked. Representing the sentiments expressed by other school heads, one participant in the policy dialogue stressed: ‘Let’s start with the parents. … A lot of the factors that lead to pregnancy should be addressed at home’.

Parents were noted to have several capacity-building needs which need to be addressed to promote girls’ education. For instance, school heads observed that some parents associated with their schools would benefit from parenting classes that provide support and know-how for
raising teenage girls. As the teenage years can be turbulent and challenging, principals observed that some parents lacked the tools to support their children during this period of rapid physical and psychological change. Furthermore, in Homa Bay County, the teenage years actually represent a period of partial separation between girls and their parents. Principals highlighted the cultural taboo of parents sharing a dwelling unit with daughters of reproductive age. As a consequence of this taboo, adolescent girls in Homa Bay often share dwelling units with their much more lenient grandmothers. Consequently, parents are less able to monitor activities that could lead to unintended pregnancy. School heads emphasized that parents also required skills-building to assist in maintaining strong relationships with school administration. They pointed out that such relationships would facilitate easier access to school re-entry support for parenting girls. In addition, parents needed to be sensitized on the fact that a girl’s pregnancy should not spell the end of her education.

Drawing attention to other cultural issues in Homa Bay County, principals noted that childbirth is generally celebrated by the community. The experience of childbirth raises a teenage girl’s status and that of the newborn’s father in the eyes of the community. While this cultural reality may pose challenges for girls’ education, school principals noted that it could also be helpful in ensuring that school re-entry by parenting girls is not hindered by a sense of ‘shame’ (due to early pregnancy) on the part of parents. Participants also indicated that parents who take pride in their daughters’ pregnancies would be more likely to provide childcare support.

While parents and communities should shoulder some responsibility for the gendered norms that pose challenges for healthy sexuality in girls (and for stronger linkages between homes and schools), wider structural issues such as poorly resourced schools (which are unable to maintain better linkages with girls’ homes) are undeniably within the purview of the government. Schools, parents, communities, and the government alike must collaborate effectively in order for girls to truly realize their right to education.

Innovating

Let us not bury our heads in the sand as principals.

Although none of the school principals in attendance had ever seen a copy of the school re-entry policy, and a considerable proportion (20%) had not heard of it, many principals were responding to girls’ school re-entry and retention needs in useful, innovative and inspiring ways. Interestingly, principals’ informal responses are also an indication that reputational risk (alluded to previously) does not necessarily trump all other factors for all school heads. Part of the policy dialogue was devoted to giving school heads an opportunity to share their individual practices with one another. A summary of good practices being implemented by principals in their individual schools is provided here:

Students as resources

Some principals realized that parenting students could actually serve as a resource for other students. They spoke of having their parenting students talk to other girls in school about the realities of being pregnant or a teenage mother, as a means of steering them away from early pregnancy.

Flexi-time

A number of principals had introduced flexi-time for parenting students. This involved giving such students longer recess periods each day in order for them to return home to nurse their babies.

Extra tutoring

Flexi-time for nursing often meant that parenting students would miss parts of classes due to the length of time it takes to go home and return to school. Some school heads mentioned that they also made arrangements for extra tutoring of parenting students with selected teachers.

Mother-friendly zones

A few principals had set up special ‘nursing zones’ where parenting girls could nurse their babies, instead of having to return home to do so. Their babies were allowed to be brought by a caregiver to the school for this purpose. This helped minimize interruptions in girls’ classroom time.
Fostering access to contraception

One principal narrated how he periodically granted special permission to married, parenting students to leave the school premises for a few hours in order to attend a family planning clinic and obtain contraceptives.

Maintaining communication

Principals also highlighted their practice of proactively inquiring about pregnant learners’ expected due dates, and advising them to leave school two months prior to prepare for delivery. They also spoke of maintaining contact with pregnant learners’ parents after they have left school, to ensure that school re-entry occurs seamlessly.

These positive, independently-implemented practices demonstrate a great extent of willingness on the part of school principals to play a key role in implementing the school re-entry policy. Such efforts can and should be encouraged, supported, and built upon to ensure optimal implementation of the policy.

FINAL THOUGHTS

In her now famous TEDGlobal Talk of 2009, Nigerian author, Chimamanda Adichie alerts us to the danger of a single story. In her words, ‘[T]here is never a single story about any place.’ This chapter has not aimed to absolve school principals of their responsibilities as policy implementers and influencers. Rather, its goal has been to dissect the school re-entry policy implementation exercise in Kenya (and the associated role of principals) as a complex and nuanced process that is not well served by the imbalanced portrayal in the current body of literature. In showcasing the range of challenges and tensions that principals encounter in navigating policy implementation (including their own positive and negative attitudes and beliefs), the chapter makes room for principals to be shown as more than ‘one thing.’ Importantly, it highlights the range and potential of principals’ rights-based innovations and moderates the singular narrative of unsupportive school heads whose aim is to exclude pregnant and parenting girls from the school system. In practice, several informal solutions exist to support such learners. These merit further investigation and hold great potential for possible scale-up.

Allowing for a nuanced account of policy implementation has helped to highlight deeper issues around school re-entry policy implementation in Kenya and the weaknesses associated with this process. Despite the potential of re-entry policies in general to ensure girls’ realization of rights to education, poor monitoring of their implementation curtails full access to these rights. It is imperative for Kenya’s Ministry of Education to have a plan for monitoring and following up periodically on the implementation of re-entry policies. This process would do well to include the action points discussed in this chapter—i.e., sensitizing principals on the existence and content of the re-entry policy; revising the moralistic and disciplinary framing of school pregnancy and reframing it as a rights issue; totally rethinking education as that which cannot simply be reduced to a ‘Mean Grade’ which invariably excludes some learners; working toward resolving the issue of school pregnancy and repeat pregnancies by considering new pregnancy prevention approaches; collaborating with other stakeholders to achieve school re-entry goals; and giving attention to the ways in which principals are already innovating to support girls’ re-entry despite resource constraints.

Our experience in facilitating the two policy dialogue fora for school principals in collaboration with the Ministry of Education (the first on 1 August 2014, and the second on 5 April 2016) has left us convinced of the importance of such discussions. Policy dialogues serve as a powerful platform for initiating conversation and achieving traction around all of the aforementioned action points. As evidence of this, in July 2016, the Homa Bay County Department of Education institutionalized and awarded a prize for the top two primary and secondary schools in the county that had shown massive support for girls’ school re-entry.

There is never a single story.

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