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**Access and retention of girls in basic education in Rwanda:  
An exploration of stakeholder's views and perspectives**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Education of the University of Sussex**

**Charles GAHIMA**

**February 2012**

**Declaration**

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree, and to the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signed by

.....

## **Acknowledgements**

It is quite difficult to get the appropriate words to express my sincere and heartfelt thanks for the support I got throughout my doctoral studies. Thanks be to God who protects me daily and has enabled me to go through and complete this course.

My deep appreciation goes to my young family, the patience and support I got from my wife Rosette. To my children Fiona, Ronald and Raoul who missed me during the times I was away or busy working on this study.

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## **Abstract**

The focus of this work is an exploration of issues related to poor access and retention of girls across the Nine Year Basic Education (9YBE) level in Rwanda. This was accomplished through analysis of stakeholders' views and perspectives, informed by a constructivist ontological perspective and interpretative methodological stance.

Specifically, through interviews and conversations, the research, sought to explore different experiences, ideas, attitudes and views held by stakeholders in the educational up-take by girls. These stakeholders groups included the educationist group (Headteachers, Teachers, and Education Officers), NGO group (FAWE and Community Women Organizations - CWO), Parent group (Parents in general and Parents on schools' PTAs), Learner group (pupils in school) and Girl dropout group (girls who had dropped out of school). This study sought to explore the stakeholders' perspectives on the main barriers to girls' access and retention across the 9YBE, where accountability lay for keeping girls in school, and proposed strategies for ensuring gender equity in education.

The thesis is introduced from a geographical and an historical perspective as the context of the education provision in Rwanda. A literature review considers the challenges and solutions to girls' education provision and through this a conceptual framework is developed around equity and equality issues from which the research questions are formulated with respect to Rwanda. Following this the research design, methodology, data collection techniques and analysis are discussed. My constructivist methodology and interpretive-epistemological stance highlights the use of qualitative data mainly based on interviews.

In findings I show that issues regarding poor access and retention of girls in school revolve around economic challenges and associated household poverty, school based challenges, traditional and cultural gendered beliefs and the positioning of girls in the Rwandan society and argue that these challenges have been accentuated by effects of the 1994 genocide that are still manifest today. I also argue that there is a serious lack of accountability for keeping girls in school, and that the decentralised education provision has sustained gender discrimination which is heightened among the poor. This signals the emergence of a class

divide between those who are lucky enough to go to school, study and complete and those who do not. My analysis also indicates that issues of girls' poor access and retention in education revolve also around the lasting effects of war and genocide that Rwanda experienced 18 years ago. This has been accentuated by deep rooted family poverty that informs gendered choices on who goes to school under difficult circumstances. I show the implications of the conflict for current educational up-take and argue that in the Rwandan context there is a need for more informed and innovative work to solve the problems in addition to solutions suggested by interviewees that are mainly centred on the urgent need for government to eradicate poverty seen as a major setback to girls' education uptake.

This study contributes to the contemporary debates in Rwanda, about whether or not the government is doing enough to ensure girls' access and full participation in 9YBE. It also illuminates stakeholder perspectives on this contested debate on how best girls' education may be provided to solve the current low uptake and the ways forward. As this research was conducted in Rwanda, a post-conflict country, it also contributes to an understanding of issues that face girls' schooling in post genocide conditions. Further, this study makes an addition to the limited stock of educational research in Sub-Saharan African nations.

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## **Abbreviations and acronyms**

<b>CBO:</b>	Community Based Organisation
<b>CWO:</b>	Community Women Organisation
<b>EFA:</b>	Education For All
<b>EIMS:</b>	Education Information Management System
<b>ESSP:</b>	Education Sector Strategic Plan
<b>DEF:</b>	District Education Fund
<b>DGEA:</b>	District Girls' Education Alliance
<b>FBO:</b>	Faith Based Organisation
<b>ECD:</b>	Early Childhood Development
<b>ICT:</b>	Information and Communication Technology
<b>IGE:</b>	Inspectorate General of Education
<b>GETF:</b>	Girls' Education Task Force
<b>GER:</b>	Gross Enrolment Rate
<b>GOR:</b>	Government of Rwanda
<b>HLI:</b>	Higher Learning Institution
<b>MDGs:</b>	Millennium Development Goals
<b>MIGEPROF:</b>	Ministry of Gender and Promotion of Family
<b>MINALOC:</b>	Ministry of Local Government
<b>MINEDUC:</b>	Ministry of Education
<b>MINECOFIN:</b>	Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning
<b>MINISANTE:</b>	Ministry of Health
<b>NCDC:</b>	National Curriculum Development Centre
<b>NGO:</b>	None-Governmental Organisation
<b>RNEC:</b>	Rwanda National Examination Council
<b>NER:</b>	Net Enrolment Rate
<b>NYGE:</b>	National Youth Girls' Education Alliance
<b>PESF:</b>	Presidential Education Support Fund
<b>PTA:</b>	Parents Teachers Association
<b>RBS:</b>	Rwanda Bureau of Statistics

**RRA:** Rwanda Revenue Authority

**RSA:** Republic of South Africa

**SLE:** School Life Expectancy

**SNE:** Special Needs Education

**SSA:** Sub Saharan Africa

**TDM:** Teacher Development and Management

**TSC:** Teachers' Service Commission

**TVET:** Technical and Vocational Education Training

**UMWALIMU-SACCO:** A teachers Savings and Cooperative Society

**UNICEF:** United Nations International Children's Education Fund

**UNESCO:** United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

**VAT:** Value Added Tax

**WFP:** World Food Program

**9YBE:** Nine Year Basic Education

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Thesis overview**

This work is an exploration of issues related to poor access and retention of girls across the 9YBE level in Rwanda, through stakeholders' views and perspectives. The term 9YBE refers to uninterrupted compulsory education of primary and lower secondary education for all school going children aged between 7 and 15 years.

This thesis is introduced from a geographical and an historical perspective and reflects on gender relations and education provision in Rwanda. A conceptual framework is developed around equity and equality issues as a means to address the challenges to girls' education provision. This feeds into the formulation of research questions. The following discussion of methodology and methods used in the research also describes how the data collected was analysed. Three analytical chapters present the main arguments offered by the study which are drawn together in the concluding chapter.

The methodology used in this research is informed by a constructivist interpretative epistemological positioning, and the findings are mainly based on qualitatively generated interviews. Interview participants were composed of five stakeholders groups who are directly involved with education at micro level: Educationist group (Headteachers, Teachers, and Education Officers), NGO group (FAWE and Community Women Organisations - CWO), Parent group (Parents in general and Parents on schools' PTAs) and Learner group (pupils in school) and Girl dropout group (girls who had dropped out of school). The research intention was to find out the stakeholders' perspective on the reasons behind girls' poor access and retention across the 9YBE, where accountability lay for keeping girls in school, and their proposed strategies for greater sustained inclusion of girls in basic education.

The findings from my analysis of the data are discussed in relation to Rwanda's education provision to girls. In chapter 5, I discuss at length the major causes of girls' poor access and retention across 9YBE as viewed and experienced by stakeholders. I argue that issues of girls' poor access and retention revolve mainly around gendered social-cultural,

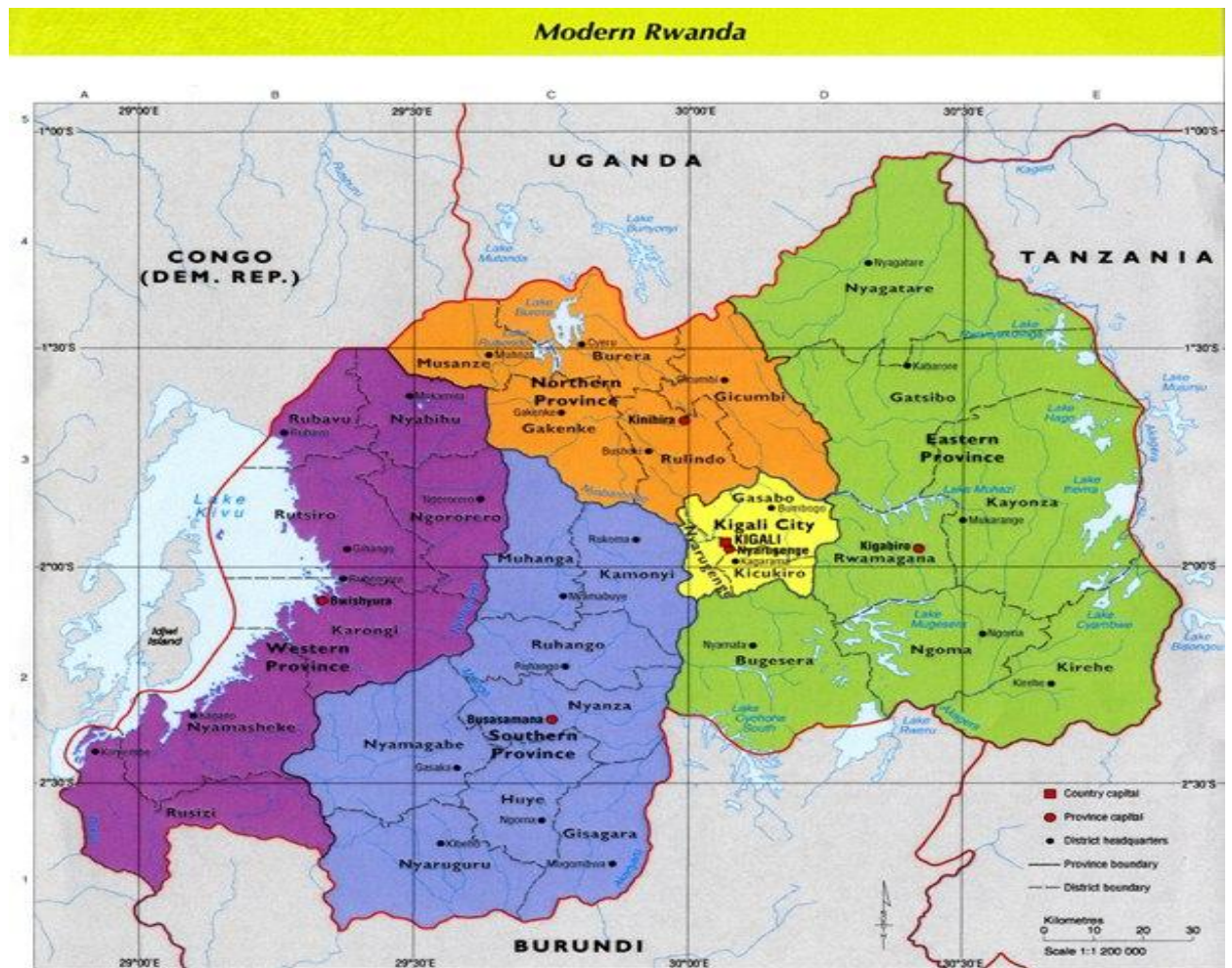
economic and school based factors that have been deepened by the overarching and lasting effects of conflict and genocide that the country experienced in recent times. In chapter 6, I show that although stakeholders appreciate the need for strengthening girls' education and the need to establish an accountability chain, a serious lack of accountability for girls' access to education prevails as none of the stakeholders accepts responsibility for girls' poor access and retention across 9YBE. In the same chapter, I also reflect on implications for lack of accountability for keeping girls in school and argue that this lacuna is translating into sustained gender discrimination that is accentuated among the poor. I argue that this marks the emergency of a class divide between those who are lucky enough to go to and complete school and those who do not. In chapter 7, I turn to the solutions to redress the gender inequalities suggested by the stakeholder groups. In the concluding chapter (8), I provide an overview of the whole study, summarise major research findings, reflexively engage with my research journey and point to areas of further research around girls' education provision in Rwanda.

## **1.2 Geographical and social context**

Rwanda is a small land locked country with a total area of 26,338 square kilometres and a population of 10.4 million people (RBS 2010). Rwanda is situated literally in the heart of Africa in Central Africa, on the eastern rim of the Albertine rift, a western arm of the Great Rift Valley and on the watershed between Africa's two largest river systems, the Nile and the Congo. It is a mountainous country famously referred to as 'the land of a thousand hills'. Rwanda has five volcanic mountains, twenty-three lakes and numerous rivers, some of which form the source of river Nile.

Rwanda lies 120 km south of the equator in the Tropic of Capricorn zone. It is located within 1,410 Km west of Indian Ocean and 2,000 Km east of the Atlantic Ocean. Uganda borders Rwanda to the north, Tanzania to the east, Burundi to the south and Democratic Republic of Congo to the west. Rwanda has an average daily temperatures range of 14-22 degrees centigrade (Adimola et al. 2008).

**Fig. 1: Map of Rwanda**



Rwanda was initially colonised by Germans who were replaced by Belgians after the First World War until 1962 when Rwanda became independent. The people of Rwanda are called Banyarwanda, comprising three ethnic groups: the Hutu, the Tutsi and the Twa, who all speak the same language, Kinyarwanda, and share a common culture. Rwanda has had a turbulent recent history which culminated in the 1994 Tutsi genocide that resulted in far reaching negative consequences on all sectors of national life. This catastrophe left the country with gender imbalances and inequalities. The current demographic setup shows that women account for 56% of the whole population and 60% of the productive labour force. Available data further reveal that 56% of the Rwanda population is illiterate, the majority of whom are females (GoR-MINEDUC 2001, RBS 2010).



## **1.1 Rationale**

My interest in issues related to girls' education emanates from my professional practice as a teacher and headteacher in four different countries (Uganda, Kenya, Lesotho and the RSA). It also stems from my recent involvement in education policy making positions as a Chief Inspector of Schools and as head of the National Curriculum Development Centre and my current position as a Principal of a College of Education in the Republic of Rwanda. Throughout my professional career, I have developed a curiosity about why learners especially girls simply drop out of school before the end of the school cycle. Specifically, evidence from my experience has consistently shown that girls' access to education and retention are problematic in all countries I have served. This, therefore, triggered my interest in researching issues surrounding girls' education provision in Rwanda.

Currently, there are debates and disagreements in Rwanda about girls' educational provision and different strategies that might be implemented in order to promote girls' education. To date, despite various efforts geared at improving girls' participation in education, it is evident that the expected positive results are rather elusive. Girls still meet obstacles in their quest for education and these setbacks as we shall see have a direct relationship with historical, social, cultural and economic realities of the Rwandan society.

According to Rwanda Education policy, both boys and girls should access and complete 9YBE phase (GoR-MINEDUC 2008b). This phase starts with primary one and ends at the completion of lower secondary education, officially involving learners from the age of seven to fifteen. Although this is an official age bracket, there are many cases where learners may be more than fifteen years of age at this level, due to the fact that they may have started late or have repeated a year. Much as the 9YBE is an acclaimed government policy, realities on the ground do not seem to rhyme with an all inclusive government objective. Girls remain disadvantaged compared to boys in terms of access and retention.

There are many conflicting views among education stakeholders and the government, concerning what needs to be done to improve girls' access to education. Practitioners on the one hand feel that the government has to initiate strict affirmative action in favour of girls while on the other hand the government emphasizes merit in the provision of

education (GoR-MINEDUC 2008a). The tension between policy and practice suggests that there is value in exploring how issues surrounding the provision of education to girls are viewed by different education stakeholders.

MIGEPROF (2000) reminds us that the issue of girls' education in Rwanda is complex and inextricably linked with society's history, socio-cultural, economic and political life. Any inquiry into contemporary Rwanda, therefore, must inevitably take us back through history. This is because in one way or the other, the past has a link with the current situation on education provision. Colonial and post colonial history of Rwanda shows trails of gender imbalanced education provision. This imbalance explains the current relatively higher percentage of illiterate female population compared to the male population in Rwanda (RBS, 2010). Current educational trends, which show a tilt in favour of boys against girls in retention and transition rates has a bearing on parents' levels of literacy as educated parents in most cases do not discriminate girls from boys. My wide reading on girls' education provision globally began while I was doing the Critical Analytical Study (CAS), a preparation for this research. This led me to a number of researcher studies on girls' education provision such as Warrington and Young (2006); Dunne and Leach (2005), Bourdieu (2001), Skelton (2001), Francis (2000) and Cammish (1997). They all suggest that despite concerted efforts geared into making a positive difference in girls' participation in education in many countries, to date, millions of girls remain excluded from schooling. The same is true of Rwanda despite the fact that the government has pledged to champion the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which, among other things, lay emphasis on the need for every child to access and meaningfully participate in education (UNESCO 2004).

#### **1.4 Significance of the study**

This study contributes to an important yet contested contemporary debate about whether or not the Government of Rwanda is doing enough to ensure that girls access and participate in 9YBE. Firstly, it adds to the general understanding of the dynamics and nature of education provision for girls across 9YBE in the Rwandan context, and secondly, explores views, ideas and perspectives of stakeholders in education, which may help clarify different

understandings or misunderstandings amongst Rwandans concerning meaningful participation of girls across the 9YBE. Thirdly, exploring the tensions and the degree of consensus on views amongst Rwandan teachers, parents and other people directly or indirectly involved with education provision will contribute to shaping future plans and interventions aimed at improving girls' education provision. As such, the views and perspectives that this research brings out may aid policy makers and education practitioners in developing a greater understanding and more focused strategies to address girls' education issues in Rwanda.

The study also contributes to practical knowledge as it seeks to illuminate best practices on girls' education provision. This research was conducted in Rwanda, a post-genocide country; it thus makes a contribution to understanding the problems that face girls' schooling in the special circumstances of a post-conflict country. Finally, as a researcher, I am also aware that educational research in the specific contexts of Sub-Saharan African (SSA) nations remains underdeveloped to date. This study aims at making a contribution to addressing this absence.

### **1.5 Structure of the thesis**

This thesis is structured as follows: after this introductory chapter, chapter 2 sets the study in the Rwandan context from pre-colonial, through colonial, post colonial to the contemporary period. This is followed by chapter 3, which is a conceptual framework in which I explore concepts of social equality and parity and how gender is conceptualised. I also look at issues and challenges to girls' education provision and discuss global solutions to girls' education provision. This feeds into the formulation of research questions.

In chapter 4, I discuss the methodology used in this research and describe how I analysed data collected during the research. In chapter 5, I discuss stakeholders' views of factors that are responsible for keeping girls out of school. This feeds into chapter 6, in which I look into issues of accountability for keeping girls in school, followed by chapter 7 in which I make an exploratory analysis of what stakeholders propose as solutions that may lead to gender balanced education delivery in Rwanda. Chapter 8 concludes the thesis, summarizing major findings. It also reflexively engages with the research process,

highlights limitations of the study and points to areas of further research on girls' education in Rwanda.

## Chapter 2: The Rwandan Context

### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I look at education in Rwanda during the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial periods. At the same time, I consider gender relations in the Rwandan society over time to provide an overview of how the current situation regarding the provision of education to girls has emerged.

### 2.2 Pre-colonial education in Rwanda: Indigenous education

Pre-colonial education in Rwanda, as in many parts of Africa, was traditional in nature by the time of Europeans' arrival towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Family elders passed on knowledge and information to young people through story-telling, poems, proverbs, dance and songs. In traditional Rwanda, all infants received general education from mothers. As boys and girls grew, however, education would begin to be gendered and stereotyped. Boys were taught elder males' skills in hunting, cattle keeping and military skills, while girls were taught elder women's skills such as cooking, looking after children, cleaning and decorating houses, handicrafts making, traditional dancing and knowledge in local medicine. This education was provided in formal traditional schools separated strictly on gender lines, '**Itorero**' school for boys and '**Ibohero**' school for girls (Bigir'umwami 1969).

'**Itorero**' school specialized in the development of physical aptitudes in boys through games such as jumping, racing, and wrestling. It also emphasised character formation and good manners such as honesty, courage, solidarity, endurance, dignity, honour and trust. Bigir'umwami (1969) emphasises that these values were constantly encouraged and demanded in accordance with the developmental stage of a boy child. He argues that mastery of language was of great importance in traditional education. Young men in particular had to learn to use appropriate and diplomatic language and to be eloquent speakers since this would exalt their status in society. On the other hand, '**Ibohero**' school trained girls to be submissive to men, to care for children and domestic duties. Traditional

education in general focused mainly on preparing young people to become respectable and productive adults who upheld morals and traditional values of the Rwandan society.

### **2.3 Colonial education in Rwanda**

Rwanda was initially colonised by Germans who were replaced by Belgians after the First World War. From the onset of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, education was entrusted to the Catholic missionaries led by French White Fathers. These missionaries introduced a new form of formal education in Rwanda whose main purpose was to train catechists to spread Christianity to the local population. It was also used to prepare local staff to assist in local administration and production of agricultural cash crops for export. The colonial education offered a five-year primary education course. Bigir'umwami (1969) observes that initial colonial education targeted boys only and girls were not allowed to go to school. He also notes that it was not until 1952 that a few girls were allowed to attend secondary schools. He adds that even then subjects taught were marred by gender stereotypes as girls were only allowed to train as nurses and midwives. Before then, girls would be trained in 'écoles ménagères', some sort of makeshift home-economics schools established with the sole purpose of training good housewives.

### **2.4 Post-colonial education and gender relations in Rwanda**

Rwanda gained independence in 1962 after 68 years of colonial rule. The new independent government concentrated on expanding access to education. By 1975 primary school enrolment was at 386,000 pupils while 11,227 students were enrolled in secondary schools. Disaggregated data however, indicate that girls formed only 35% of the total learners' population at primary level and 20% at secondary level of education (Bizimana 1998). This gender imbalance in education provision has roots in the nature of the Rwandan society in which male dominance is traditionally taken as the norm. Studies conducted by the MIGEPROF on beliefs, attitudes and social cultural practices related to gender, show that the Rwandan traditional society is highly gendered. The report shows that the pre-colonial Rwandan societies perpetuated a traditional legacy that stipulated gender differentiated roles in favour of males compared to females (GoR-MIGEPROF 2000 and Bizimana 1998). The study points out also that the advent of colonial education did little to change

these sexist and hetero-normative social trends. This was due to the fact that colonialists had similar attitudes towards girls as the Rwandan traditional society. Shabaya and Konado–Agyemang (2007) stress that colonial education targeted boys; it prepared them for public leadership and service jobs while it completely ignored girls’ education for 40 years. They observe that gender based discrimination in education provision was not only confined to Rwanda, but was also a common feature in other African colonies. They argue that the colonial administration carried over to Africa the Victorian-era values in which girls were not expected to participate in activities that would enlighten them and allow them to challenge male dominance and hegemony.

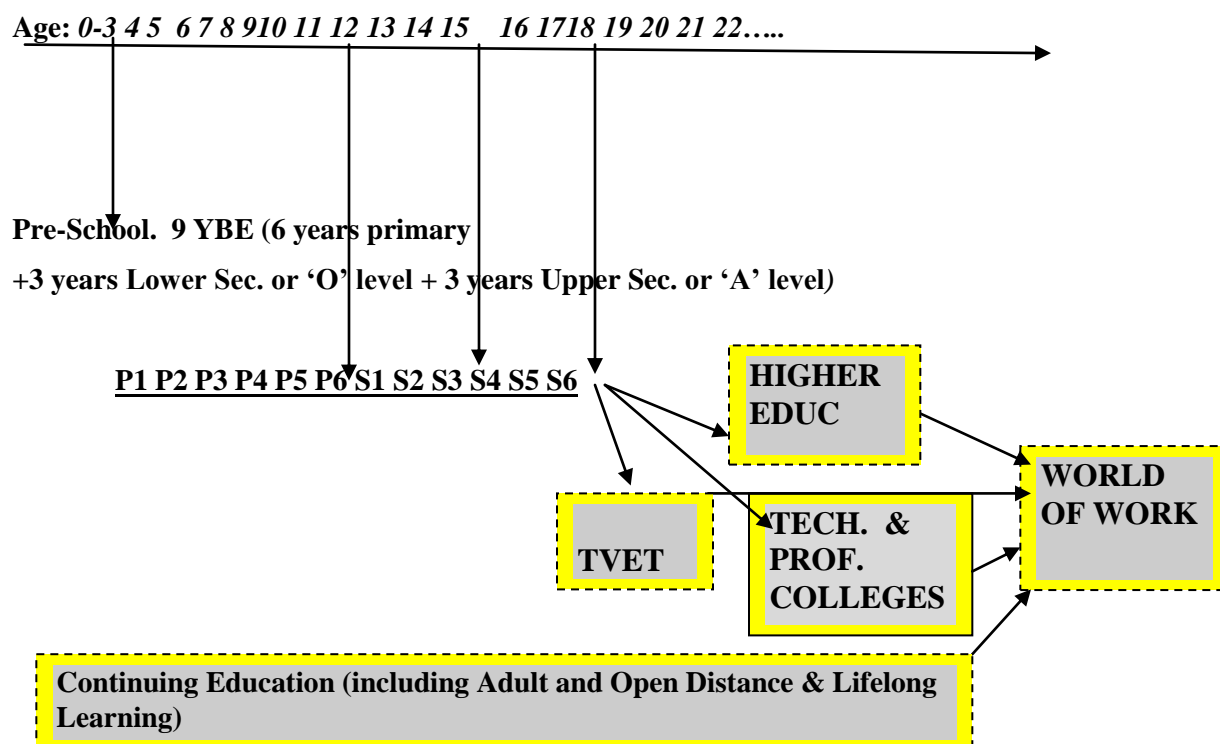
## **2.5 Contemporary trends in the provision of girls’ education in Rwanda**

50 years down the road after Rwanda gained its independence, girls’ education is still characterised by the old stereotypes. The Rwandan society still sustains stereotypes like looking at low status courses such as needlework, nursing and secretarial courses as a preserve for girls; while superior high status courses like engineering and medicine are perceived to be a male domain (GoR-MINEDUC 2008a), (Shabaya and Konado–Agyemang 2007) and (Lifanda et al. 2004). These preconceived gendered cultural norms have been largely used to impede girls’ access and retention in most SSA countries’ education systems. Dunne et al. (2005), Humphreys et al. (2005) and Mirembe and Davies (2001) agree and argue that girls’ education is further complicated by school based gendered and sexual identities which give way to sexual harassment. They also attribute this to the cultural norms of the school learning environment which, they argue, is highly gendered. In Rwanda, this situation was made worse by the 1994 Tutsi genocide which brought in new dynamics to the disadvantage of a girl child.

In 1996, the government that took over after the genocide commissioned a diagnostic study on the nature of pre-conflict education provision in Rwanda. Its findings indicated that the education sector was partly to blame for the conflict. This was especially so in the teaching of Rwandan History which had been distorted to emphasise societal differences rather than societal cohesion. It was generally felt that education had failed the nation (Obura 2003). As such, the post-conflict government saw education as the single most powerful

instrument to combat prejudice, to foster common citizenship and to achieve national reconciliation (GoR-MINEDUC 1996). It was, therefore, felt necessary to overhaul the whole education system and introduce new and innovative changes. The following new education structure that provided alternative and non-discriminatory education was introduced.

**Fig 2: The current structure of Rwanda's formal education system**



In the new education structure, formal education starts at the age of three in pre-primary schools. This stage lasts for three years after which children start primary one at the age of six or seven. There are numerous cases, however, where children go straight to primary one, as pre-primary schools are not available all over the country. In addition, parents are not compelled to take their children to pre-schools.

Primary education is divided into two levels; lower primary (P.1, P.2 and P.3) and upper primary (P. 4, P.5 and P.6). This stage of education has been fee-free since 1997. In 2007 a 9YBE was introduced and additional three years (S1, S2, and S3) of lower secondary education were also made fee-free. The 9YBE takes nine years, after which learners of



approximately 15 years of age may join Technical and Vocational Education Training Colleges (TVET) or may continue into the mainstream education and join advanced level of education, 'A level'. In Rwanda, this level takes three years (S4, S5 and S6) before students join Higher Learning Institutions. Students who complete 'A' levels may alternatively join Professional and Technical Colleges before they join the world of work and / or up-grade to University level at a later stage (GoR-MINEDUC 1999, 2008).

As soon as the new education structure had been institutionalised, resources were mobilised to improve the quality of education through improved teacher training and the provision of relevant textbooks. New cross-cutting institutions such as the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC), the General Inspectorate of Education (IGE), the National Examinations Council (NEC) and Teacher Training Institutions were established to support education reform efforts. Various policies were developed and implemented. These included: Integrated Technical, Vocational Education and Training (TVET), Teacher Development and Management (TDM), Special Needs Education (SNE), Early Childhood Development (ECD), ICT in Education, Civic and Political Education, School Health and Girls' Education (GoR-MINEDUC 1999). All these developments took place in an environment devoid of statistical information with weak education management and a demoralised teaching force. In an effort to strengthen education management and motivate teachers, a new Education Management Information System (EMIS) was established to monitor access, retention and performance in schools. In the same vein, a new Teachers' Service Commission (TSC) was introduced to solve teacher development and management issues. A Teacher Cooperative Bank called UMWALIMU SACCO was also established to give teachers loans and help improve their motivation and encourage them to commit to the teaching profession. It was hoped that these developments would help the Ministry of Education realise its core mission of transforming the Rwandan society into skilled human capital for socio-economic development by ensuring equitable access to quality education that focuses on combating illiteracy, promotion of science and technology, critical thinking and inculcation of positive values (GoR-MINEDUC 2009a).

Despite the introduction of various reforms aimed at the provision of education for all as noted earlier, reports by IGE (2000) and GoR-MIGEPROF (2010) indicate that there is still

a remarkable gender imbalance in education provision skewed in favour of boys. In a bid to solve gender disparities earmarked in education provision, the government put in place gender laws and gender policy implementation guidelines. A 10 year Girls' Education Strategic Plan (GESP) was introduced by the Ministry of Education and validated by education stakeholders in 2001. This provided the framework for interventions designed to enhance girls' participation and achievement at all levels of Education. The GESP would also support the Government's Education For All (EFA) commitment to ensure that all boys and girls will complete a full course of primary schooling by 2015. A new Girls' Education Policy that compels government to allocate 3% a share of the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (METF) to supporting girls' education was approved by the cabinet in 2002 (GoR-MINALOC 2008, GoR-MINEDUC 2008d). Other supplementary strategies to address girls' education were also put in place, such as the 'Girls' Education Task Force' (GETF), whose major role was to propose and implement interventions that would eliminate all obstacles that create imbalance between boys' and girls' education, and also to monitor girls' enrolment, achievement and completion of school across the 9YBE.

These strategies helped the Government register some progress in girls' education provision. Gender parity in primary net enrolment rate was achieved by 2003 and by 2005 Rwanda had achieved the EFA goal of eliminating gender disparities in primary education in terms of access. The following table depicts key gender in education indicators.

**Table 1: Gender and education at primary and level; with Key indicators**

Level of Education	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
<b>PRIMARY</b>					
GER	130.8	137.3	145.3	151.9	127.9
GER – Boys	130.6	136.7	143.4	151.3	127.3
GER – Girls	131.0	137.8	147.2	152.5	128.5
NER	93.0	93.5	95.0	95.8	94.2
NER – Boys	91.9	92.2	92.9	94.7	93.3
NER – Girls	94.9	96.7	97	96.8	95.1
Completion rate – overall	44.9	46.7	51.7	52.0	74.4
Completion rate – Girls	44	46.5	52	53	78.2

Completion rate – Boys	57.2	56.4	61.3	64.2	86.3
Repetition rate – overall	20.6	15.8	18.1	17.7	15.3
Repetition rate – Girls	18.8	15.8	18.0	17.8	14.9
Repetition rate – Boys	13	12.5	12.1	11.6	9.8
Drop-out rate – overall	15.2	14.6	14.3	13.9	15.2
Drop-out rate – Girls	13.6	13.8	14.4	13.1	14.7
Drop-out rate – Boys	10.6	11.4	12.3	9.4	9.7

*Source: MINEDUC –EMIS (2009)*

As the table above indicates, from 2005 on-wards, the NER had been persistently higher for girls than for boys. In 2007 for example, the NER was 96.8% for girls and 94.7% for boys and in 2008 the NER for girls was 95.1% while boys had a Net Enrolment Rate of 93.3%. The continuous growth in GER and NER for both girls and boys from 2004 to 2008 was an outcome of an intensive government campaign and the institutionalisation of girls' education campaign agencies such as the National Youth Alliance for Girls' Education (NYGE), District Girls' Education Alliance (DGEA) and the government's EFA campaign to ensure that all children go to school, including those that had dropped out of schools or who were older than the prescribed primary school going age (7- 12). In the 2008/9 academic year GER and NER suddenly reduced because by this time almost all children were already in school (GoR-MINEDUC-EIMS 2009).

Despite the encouraging GER and NER percentages, the dropout and repetition rates for girls were still comparatively higher than those of boys. A close analysis of the National Examination results from 2003/04-2009 indicates that boys consistently performed better than girls in national examinations at all levels. For example, in 2009 girls who passed were 42.3% compared to 51.2% for boys. This discrepancy persists up to upper secondary level, whereby the number of girl candidates becomes lower than that of boys especially for S6 National Examinations (19,539 girls compared to 25,001 boys in 2008/2009 academic year). Results for the same academic year indicate that the number of girls who passed was by far lower than that of boys at 35.7% for girls compared to 48.8% for boys. Worse still, analysis of the National Examination performance revealed that girls had lower scores than boys in all subjects, and this difference is more pronounced in Mathematics and Science subjects. In tertiary education during 2009, a total of 55,323 students enrolled in Higher

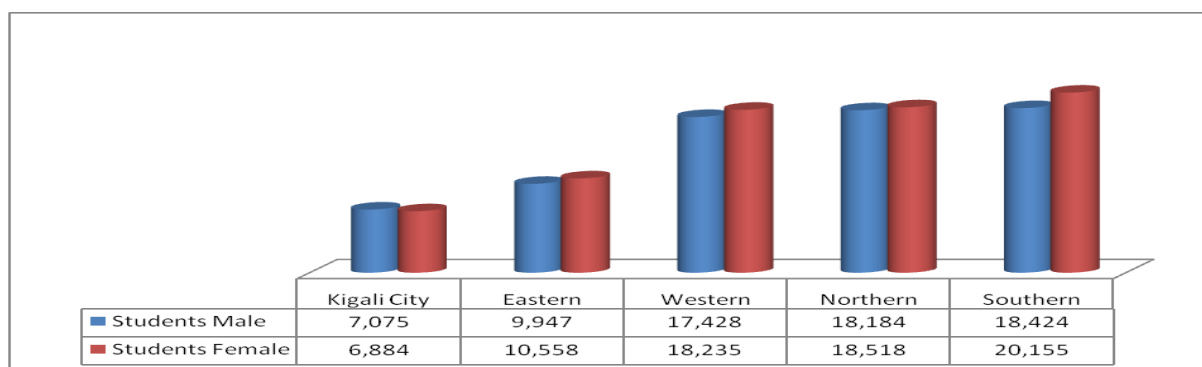
Learning Institutions. Out of this number, female students constituted 33% while male students constituted 67%. Other examples and the statistics that follow, vindicate the conclusion that there is still deep rooted gender imbalance in education provision in Rwanda (GoR-MINEDUC-EMIS 2009, RNEC 2009, IGE 2009).

**Table 2: Disaggregated transition rates from primary to lower secondary (2003/4 - 2008/9 academic years –for public schools only.**

Primary Public schools	2003/4	2004/5	2005/6	2006/7	2007/8
Boys	47.3%	52.22%	56.83%	51.53%	91%
Girls	35.8%	37.24%	38.17%	38.47%	92%
Total average	41%0	44.7%	46.8%	45%	94

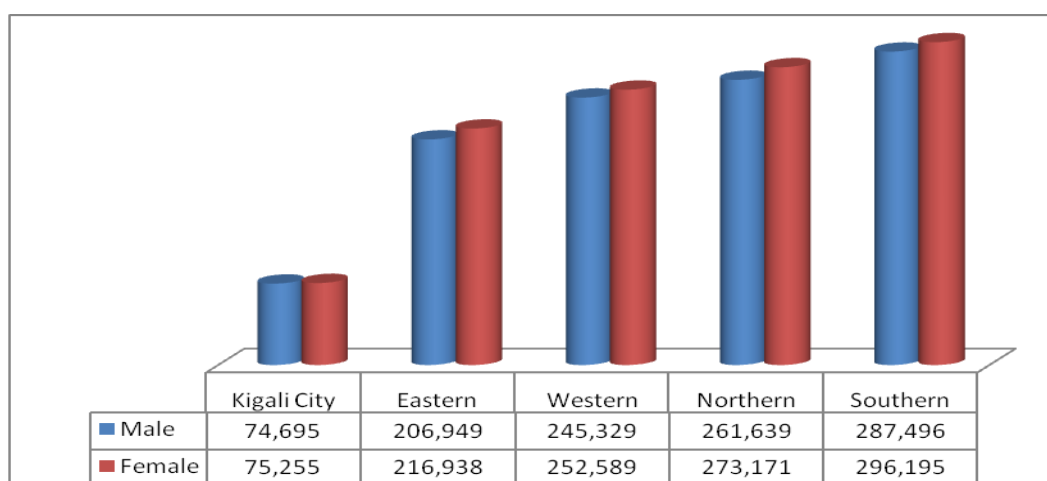
*Source: RNEC - Annual Report 2009*

The gender disaggregated data above on the nature of transition from primary to lower secondary level of education show that more boys than girls were transiting from primary to secondary level of education between years 2003 and 2007. There is however a drastic increase in transition for both boys and girls from 2007 to 2009. This is a result of the government move to make the lower secondary level of education fee-free, which is an indication that both boys' and girls' education was hampered by the necessity to pay school fees. Currently, the 9YBE policy facilitates every pupil to join the lower secondary level of education. This is undoubtedly a massive gain in educational provision especially for girls; however, the big issue that remains to be tackled is girls' poor retention and high rates of repetition in schools as emphasised by IGE (2007). This happens despite the fact that the number of girls accessing education is slightly higher than that of boys in primary level as indicated in Table 1 on page 12 and on the following two graphs.

**Fig 3: Number of pre- primary pupils by gender distribution per Province**

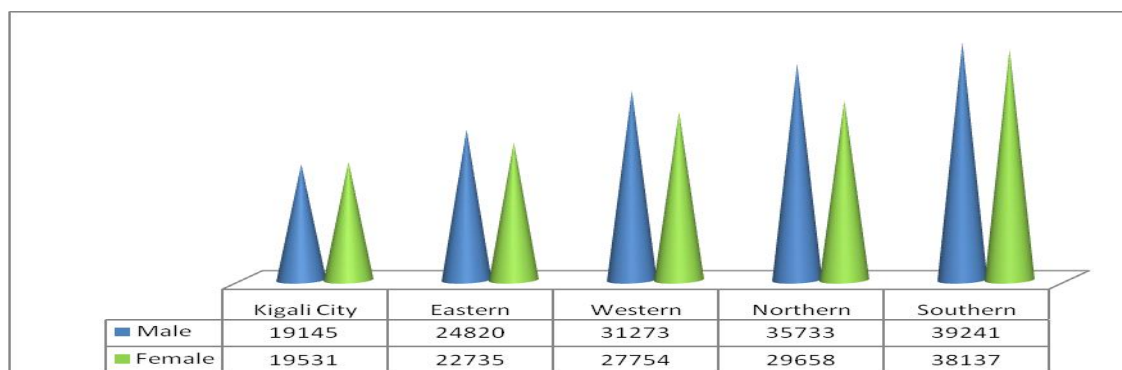
*Source: GoR-MINEDUC School Statistics,( 2007)*

From the graph above and the one below, it is clear that girls are more represented at pre-primary and primary levels than boys in all provinces except in Kigali city. These attendance numbers show that there are no major gender differences in terms of access at these levels, although it may also mean that there are fewer boys at birth than girls.

**Fig 4: Number of Primary pupils by gender distribution per Province**

*Source: GoR-MINEDUC School Statistics, (2007)*

The situation drastically changes at secondary school level of 9YBE as shown in the graph below, whereby numbers of boys are significantly more than those of girls. By 2008, secondary education had 288,036 learners enrolled, composed of 137,815 or 47% of girls and 150,221 or 52% of boys. This gender representation difference in favour of boys compared to girls is explained in terms of girls' poor retention or low transition from primary to junior secondary schools.

**Fig 5: Secondary school students according to gender distribution per Province**

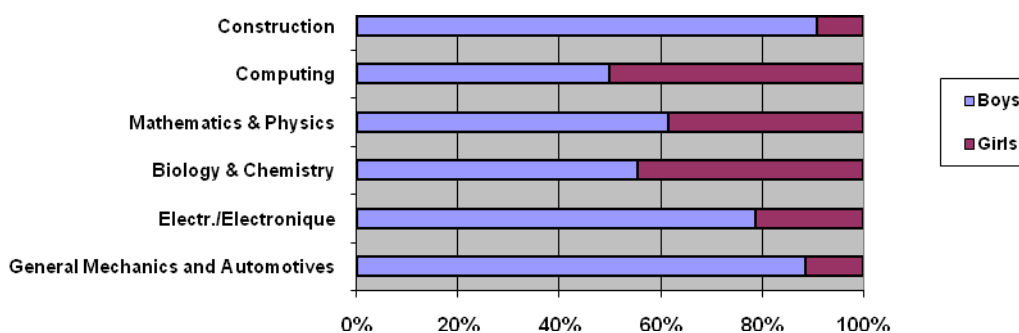
*Source: GoR-MINEDUC School Statistics, (2007)*

**Table 3: Number of secondary school students in successive years according to gender distribution.**

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008
Boys	115,350	125,857	139,699	150,221
Girls	103,167	113,772	126,819	137,815
Total	218,517	239,629	266,518	288,036

*Source : MINEDUC Annual report (2008)*

The graph and table above illustrate that there is a constant increment for both girls and boys at secondary school level. However, the female students' increment is still low in comparative terms. Also, as alluded to earlier, gender stereotypes still influence the choice of subjects taken at secondary levels of education. As more boys than girls take science and technology related subjects as the following bar chart indicates.

**Fig 6: Gender disaggregated participation in Science & Technology courses within a secondary school, 2007**

*Source: GOR/MINEDUC - EIMS (2009)*

The whole problem has bearing on the Rwanda society with its traditional gender positioning as seen in earlier sections of this chapter where it is indicated that boys outperform girls in all subjects and subject choice is stereotypically gendered. This is a major challenge for education providers who profess to provide equal opportunities to both girls and boys. However, these imbalances are known and in addition to the policies and strategies described earlier, the government has put in place mitigating interventions aimed at improving girls' retention. These include training primary and secondary schools' Headteachers in gender issues and school management; establishing a girls' scholarship and provision of support to girls from poor families and the Presidential Education Support Fund (PESF) to support girls that excel in science subjects (IGE 2004, FAWE 2007 & GOR/MINEDUC 2008a). Although these strategies and interventions should logically impact positively on girls' access and retention across 9YBE, realities on the ground still show that all these efforts are not producing the intended results in the expected time and magnitude (Imbuto Foundation 2007).

Social justice and human rights demand that every member of society is treated the same and gets what he/she deserves in life. Both boys and girls have the right to access and complete their education without hindrance. But, judging from the above context, this is not the case in Rwanda. The above contextual data reflects a particular understanding of gender as shall be discussed in the conceptual chapter (section 3.3). It is reasonable, therefore, as observed by the Imbuto Foundation (2007), to conclude that policies, strategies and actions geared at promoting girls' education are not hitting the right spots. This, therefore, presents a strong reason for exploring possible barriers to girls' education in Rwanda.

## **Chapter 3: Literature Review**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The previous discussion on the background to this study and the Rwandan educational context from pre-colonial period to date, has pointed to the complexity of gender issues and equity in as far as the provision of education to girls is concerned. There is therefore a need to explore what research says on concepts of social equality and gender conceptualisation in relation to challenges and possibilities associated with girls' education provision. This literature review feeds into the formulation of research questions that conclude the chapter.

### **3.2 Social equality and parity concepts**

Concepts of social equality and parity are in most cases contested and researchers may not agree on a fixed definition. Social equity and equality may be explained differently but they have one principle in common, fairness. Equality is equal treatment, equity is equal outcomes and parity is the sameness. Equality of treatment does not always bring equity.

One important basic aspect of social equality relates to equal treatment of all people. The benchmark is that people must be treated equally, have the same rights and status under the law and have equal opportunities in life such as access to education, services and other productive resources. Social parity is used as an indicator of equity with a simple reference to numbers, for example, economic parity between women and men, equal numbers in terms of representation or numbers in terms of girls' and boys' enrolment rates (Aikman and Unterhalter 2005, Grown et al. 2003).

The principle of fairness and equal treatment of people was remarkably absent in Rwanda before 1994. Inequalities manifested themselves in all aspects of Rwandan life. Education provision, for example, was characterized by discrimination and favouritism in such a way that equality issues were never considered. Access to education was for the privileged few. Access to secondary education was decided on a political quota basis and on regional and ethnic considerations. 90% of secondary school entrants had to come from the Hutu ethnic group, while a maximum of 10% of places in secondary schools was reserved for the Tutsi ethnic group. There were no places reserved for the pigmoid Twa minority ethnic group. Even then, these places were inequitably shared depending on the political whims of the



day. Examination results were never made public and as such learner performance was never used as a basis for admission (GoR-MINEDUC 1999, Obura 2003).

This bad situation was made worse by corruption that characterised the entire system. Within the politically and regionally determined quotas in education provision, a Minister of Education would have his percentage, usually not less than 20% of places in secondary schools to be given to whomever he wanted. The catholic clergy which controlled education delivery in Rwanda also had its own 20% of places to give away to relatives and friends as they wished. This situation left the country in the worst state of inequality in terms of education provision and with no principles for allocation of educational resources to the population. Under such difficult circumstances, most Rwandan families who as earlier seen have social-cultural and traditional attitudes that favour boys more than girls, would try to secure places in secondary schools for their sons first and girls last (GoR-MIGEPROF 2000 and GoR-MINEDUC 1996). The same inequalities were to be found in economic and political power controls. It is no wonder therefore that these historical inequalities bred social discontentment that resulted in war that culminated in the 1994 Tutsi genocide (Rutayisire, et al. 2004 and Obura 2003) which itself was highly gendered in terms of experiences and outcomes.

After 1994 the Government of National Unity had to reconstruct a devastated country. The single most important area that was identified to quickly heal the nation was the reorganisation of education curricula and delivery. This was necessary especially in the context where it was generally felt that the education system had failed the nation (Obura 2003). The new government, cognizant of the role education could play in the socio-economic development of the nation, focused on democratisation of education delivery. Access and continuity was to be based on merit and education provided on a level playing field for all. In 1997, school fees were abolished at primary level of education and the same was done for lower secondary education 10 years later (GoR-MINEDUC 2008a). This move tremendously increased educational access and the government was overwhelmed by challenges of keeping pace with the ever-growing numbers of learners, vis-à-vis providing adequate infrastructure, well trained teachers, learning and teaching materials. This intervention tilted the situation in favour of a better gender equity, equality

and parity in education provision. It is to be recognised, however, that much more still needs to be done because not every school going age child is able to access, continue and complete basic education and the majority of these are girls. This is the core issue of my study, the need to find out why and how some girls' education is hampered and what might be done to address the situation.

Gipps et al. (1995) observe that promoting social equity is not an easy task. They argue that the starting point has to be an analysis of different positions or social situation of the people for which social equity and equality are intended. This analysis is important because different people may be faced with different obstacles. If this fundamental difference is not considered, then, treating people equally may not always produce intended results. For example, it may be wrong to presume that treating girls in the same way boys are treated may produce similar results in terms of performance and retention in school. Acquiring relatively comparable outcomes for both boys and girls may require treating girls differently from boys. This is why different researchers such Gipps advocate for affirmative action. Gipps et al. (1995:272) arguing from an assessment point of view observe, "if people are all treated the same, the differential starting point will most likely produce disparate ends.... even with equality of resources" .

Warrington and Young (2006:268), however, contest the above argument reasoning that insisting on gender differences between boys and girls is not necessary. They argue that "if we have to talk about equal opportunities for both boys and girls then we do not need benchmarks rooted in gender differences". The argument is that policy makers should invest in ensuring that both boys and girls are given equal opportunities in order to enhance their potential rather than portraying girls as under-achievers who deserve special attention. This view on equal opportunities is supported by Niemi (2005) who argues using numbers, that parity between girls' and boys' academic achievement has in most countries been achieved, and as such 'the partnership that currently clouds the issue surrounding sex differences in schools should be repudiated and objectively educate all children fairly' (Niemi 2005:74).

Niemi's conclusion that academic parity between boys and girls has been achieved merely by looking at numbers may be the case in western countries but definitely not in SSA countries. In such countries, there are limitations of a pervasive biological understanding of gender, such that educational practices are still highly gendered. As seen earlier in chapter 2, the deep rooted cultural and traditional settings that make gender inequalities socially and culturally entrenched in most societies such as the Rwandan, put girls at a disadvantage. As such, assuming a starting point of gender equality and parity is fundamentally incorrect and strategies based on this are unlikely to produce gender equality. Before equality is achieved, there is a genuine need to eliminate deep-seated gender barriers to equal opportunities such as discriminatory laws, customs, practices, and institutional processes. If these barriers are not removed, then, girls shall remain disadvantaged and challenged in their quest for education. A recent study by Lewis and Lockhead (2006), demonstrated that 75% of the 55 million girls who remained out of school in the developing world in year 2000 were disadvantaged girls from excluded ethnic, religious, or caste groups characterised by endemic poverty. Duryea et, al. (2006) also discredit assumed gender equity, using Bolivia as an example. They point out that despite equal opportunity policies, gender gaps remain persistent in terms of attainment among indigenous children between ages 7-13 and deteriorated further after the age of 13. On the same issue, studies such as those undertaken by Kadzamira (1987) in Malawi, Appleton (1995) and Mensch and Lloyd (1997) in Kenya confirm that except for minor differences in certain years, boys outperform girls in all subjects in primary leaving examinations. This is a convincing evidence that something more than equal opportunity policies are required. As such, interventions would work after an initial interrogation of existing gender regimes and clearer understandings of gendered social constructs and stereotypes operating in specific social contexts. Dunne and Leach (2005), and Brock and Cammish (1997), referring to gender related research in SSA, attribute social challenges to cultural, poverty, violence, conflict and school based factors. All these factors shall be discussed later in this chapter.

### **3.3 Gender conceptualisation and girls' education provision**

The way society conceptualises gender is an important benchmark to understand associated male/female, boy/girl binaries that inform gender differentiated norms and social practices. Dunne (2007), Leach and Humphreys (2007), Aikman and Unterhalter (2005), Skeleton (2001) and Francis (2000) emphasise a performative rather than a biological social understanding of gender. They argue that rather than referring to an essentialised and biologically based notion of gender, it is better to conceptualise gender as 'doing', involving performances of masculinity and femininity in our routine and daily practices, shaped by institutional regulations and boundaries, rather than as a static biological variable. They all suggest that there is a need to interrogate the gender regime and contextualised social understanding of gender. This is because every society has preconceived and stereotypically differentiated gender constructs which in most cases translate into discriminatory practices that remain invisible or taken for the norm. It is through an exploration of how these socially conceived gender categorisations and assumed binaries are constructed in Rwanda, that understanding of how boys and girls are seen and how stereotypes operate to impede girls' access and retention across the 9YBE can be analysed. As shall be seen in the discussion of my findings (see Chapter 5-7) the social constructs of gender are linked to discriminatory practices which often remain invisible to stakeholders. In these chapters I will discuss how notions of gender are implicated in the efforts for girls' educational rights and the location of responsibilities for girls' poor access and retention and the ways that lack of access is at times blamed on girls themselves (see chapter 5 and 6).

An analysis of girls' access and their meaningful participation, retention and associated achievement in education must refer to the multiple understandings in social context. This is because as Liu (2006:493) argues, referring to Bourdieu (2001), "our sense of gender is socially constructed to produce a gender differentiated habitus". Accordingly, the division of gender is not only present in the 'objectified state but also in the embodied state' i.e. the habitus, and he argues that such division is largely based on gender stereotypes. Much policy discourse looks merely at numbers of males and females, 'objectified', rather than what masculinity and femininity are and do in different contexts. The argument raised by

Liu (2006) is that in any social environment, people look at themselves from a gendered lens as males or females first before giving consideration to common issues such as learning and being in the same school. This has a bearing on how teachers impart knowledge and on how individual students learn.

Gender identities need to be considered seriously when designing effective ways of strengthening learning processes in general and supporting girls' education in particular. In this connection, Liu (2006) argues that there is a need to unpack gender differences in an attempt to come up with effective interventions on girls' education. Niemi (2005: 487) agrees and adds that success in the promotion of girls' education may be registered more through mitigating interconnected context specific factors, which suggests that interventions in girls' education provision should focus on specific problems and groups rather than taking a generalised approach. Given the performative nature of gender the emphasis needs to focus on the micro-level in which schools as social structures have in-built gendered dimensions which require carefully analysis to understand the extent to which they may be contributing as an impediment or support to girls' education provision. As such, learners' identities and gendered identities have a bearing on school as they interact dynamically with the regulations and norms within a school situation.

Gender identity therefore has implications for the design of interventions to strengthen learning processes in general and in support of girls' education in particular. It is important to note however as this research shall show in analytical chapters, that while school level interventions might be an important element in addressing girls' rights to education there are many other social factors that impede their access to school. This echoes the need for contextually located analysis rather than a generalised approach to solving problems of the delivery of girls' education. This view is in line with Niemi's (2005: 487) who emphasises "the parts of the structure that make up the whole" and argues that schools have to be explained in terms of connection between context-specific micro actions and not as a generalised structure. Educationists and other education frontline providers should therefore strive to solve individual interconnected factors that may impede effective delivery of education. They should first of all understand gender specific problems as those confronting boys and girls not learners in general, and as those confronting female and

male teachers not educators in general. This is because that is how they look at themselves in the first place (Niemi 2005, Liu 2006).

### **3.4 Challenges to girls' education provision**

Recent research into gender and education in low income countries indicates that girls' education provision is still problematic and faces many challenges, see for example Dunne and Leach (2005), Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2003), Brock and Cammish (1997). They all explain that these challenges stem from social - cultural, economic and school based factors. In the sections that follow I discuss these factors separately and draw on insights from researchers studying contexts elsewhere.

#### **3.4.1 Socio-cultural and traditional challenges**

Different societies have unique ways in which they look at their members in terms of roles they play in their daily lives. Dunne et al. (2007) and Brock and Cammish (1997) argue that these roles to some extent determine the society's dominance patterns. They argue that it is from these social roles that gendered constructs and stereotypes are built which may have negative effects on some members of society, in this case, female members. Brock and Cammish (1997) observe that there is a near universal fundamental cultural bias in favour of males. They argue that the widespread operation of 'patriarchal' systems of social organization such as customary early marriages, heavy domestic and subsistence duties of females, all have a bearing on culture tradition and adversely affect the participation of girls in formal education. Oxaal et al. (1997) stress that culturally based challenges can only be overcome by a fundamental change of society's attitudes by influential males and progressive females in key social positions.

Other researchers argue that gender inequalities in schools resulting from religious and cultural practices play a crucial role in inhibiting girls' education Colclough et al. (2003), Stephens (2000), and Dunne et al. (2007). Stephens (2000) drawing from the research he conducted in Ghana, isolates cultural dimensional issues such as kinship, descent and extended families as playing a big role in impeding girls' education. He gives examples of young rural girls being fostered out as maids to relatives to care for young children. He also

identified early marriage as another cultural and gender dimension that impedes girls' education, pointing out that a traditional Ghanaian family thinks that longer-term schooling increases the likelihood of girls losing their virginity and rebelling. In very different contexts, similar views are presented by Warrington and Young (2006), Skelton (2001) and Francis (2000), all saying that their research findings on socio-cultural roles seem to suggest that society expects boys to acquire male attributes of leadership and social legitimacy for dominance over girls, while girls are expected to be respectful and docile. Family expectations of a girl child are also echoed by Dunne et al. (2007) who emphasise that socially constructed gendered expectations largely influence early marriage and negatively affect enrolment in school. The good news, according to a joint statement by WHO, UNICEF and UNFPA (1997:1) 'culture is not static it is in constant flux, adapting and reforming'. Many cultures are changing and girls are currently being allowed to access and complete education. Campaignforeducation (2003) and Rough (2000) also note that evidence from research on cultural influences on gendered practices, points to some significant cultural change among societies that have been known to inhibit girls' education.

Research by Shabaya & Konado-Agyemang (2007), Dunne et al (2005), and Gordon (1998) show that negative cultural aspects are not only confined to families alone but also extend to the learning environment, the school. Their research points to negative culturally engineered actions in class-rooms that are perpetuated by male students against girls, while teachers look on and do nothing. They seem to concur that both teachers' and male learners' attitudes which they say have a foundation in cultural norms tend to hinder progress of female learners. Incidentally, these cultural briefs are equally experienced by the female teachers from students. Dunne et al. (2005) observe that male learners openly contest female teachers' authority to the extent that female teachers ask fellow male teachers to administer punishment on their behalf. It is not surprising that some female teachers may do little or nothing to fight male domination in a school environment because they also find themselves trapped in the same cultural norms that discriminate against females.

Research by Joshi & Anderson (1994) in Nepal on female motivation in school and Brenner (1998) on gender and classroom interaction in Liberia, seem also to suggest that culturally influenced differences manifest themselves between male and female teachers at school. The two studies concluded that these differences were imposed voluntarily along gender lines whereby male and female teachers sit in separate groups at break-time, lunch and assembly, while boys and girls sit in separate areas in classrooms, and play in separate groups during break-time. The same situation is echoed by findings from a research report prepared for Zambia's Ministry of Education (1999), *'Learning from inside the classroom'* which shows that boys are often invited to answer questions while girls who want to answer are ignored by teachers or booed by fellow male students. The research also shows that male and female teachers alike give attention to and praise boys and as such provide them with more leadership opportunities than girls. School duties handed out by both male and female teachers are also seen to be gendered and discriminatory. Girls are given duties to sweep classrooms and clean toilets while boys are asked to pick papers and to water gardens.

The same attitudes are echoed by Shabaya and Konado–Agyemang (2007:414). They say that within the schools and classroom themselves, “the attitudes of both teachers and male students, which obviously have their foundation in cultural norms, tend to hinder the progress of female students”. They argue that the often held belief that “girls cannot think as boys” may make girls spectators in the classroom and discourage them from active participation while boys “exude more confidence and perform better”. Dunne and Leach's (2005:49) research findings agree with these views and explain them in terms of “socio-cultural gender constructs and stereotypes”. Their research on gendered school experiences and the impact on retention and achievement in Botswana and Ghana reveals that boys dominate the “physical and verbal classroom space”. It also reveals that boys and girls are segregated in terms of duties performed at school, space occupation in class and outside; and argue that gendered school environments and institutional practices provide “differentiated school experiences” for females and males that have a negative impact on the nature of girls' participation, retention and achievement. This was found to be true in the urban and rural settings among high performing schools in both counties, with an exception of low performing schools in rural Botswana where girls' performance and



retention works well compared to low performing schools in rural Ghana (Dunne and Leach 2005).

Rough's (2000:57) work resonates with the above findings, referring to a study conducted in Nigeria confirming that teachers, including female teachers, pay more attention to boys than girls. Worse still, female teachers are reported to unwittingly perpetuate these negative attitudes towards female students in the school environment. The big question is, if female teachers may not stand up against discrimination against female students in a school environment, who will? It is important to remember, however, that the same female teachers are also caught up in similar oppressive structures of gender. Rough (2000:57) laments that the unfortunate part of these findings is that policy makers and gender activists do little more than "cosmetic advocacy"; arguing that they in most cases discuss research findings with little emphasis on what can be done to make a fundamental change in socio-cultural attitudes against females amidst societies, which gap this research attempts to fill in chapter 7.

### **3.4.2 Poverty as a challenge to girls' education**

The 2005 UNESCO report blames society's favour of boys' to girls' education on poverty, poor economic situations and social gender disparities. The report shows that the problem is more pronounced among poor countries, especially those found in the SSA, Eastern and Southern Asia and Arab states. It further indicates that these are the same countries where gender gaps are highest and girls' School Life Expectancy (SLE) is lowest. Parents in such countries, when faced with limited resources and competing financial demands, tend to choose to send their sons to school at the expense of their daughters. Herz (2006), Seel & Clarke (2005), and UNESCO (2005) contend that this choice is caused by the high direct cost of education, whereby parents have to pay for registration fees, books, examination fees, uniforms, school fees, stationery and transport to and from school.

On the same issue, the UN Millennium Development Goals (2006) report notes that girls make up more than a half of all children not in school. The report says that in the developing world, one girl in every four never makes it past fifth grade mainly as a result of

economic problems faced by parents. The World Bank (2007), Herz (2006), UNESCO (2005) and Winter and Macina (1999) agree and explain that economic hardships translate into failure to send girls to school. They argue that when education costs too much, parents, especially those in poverty, may feel that the future returns on sending girls to school may not justify the cost. As such, girls are left out when it comes to making the choice about who goes to school under difficult economic circumstances. UNESCO (2005) advises that the problem can be solved by increasing family per capita income and reducing poverty. Herz et al. (2004), however, argue that UNESCO's view is debatable. They contend that concluding that increased per capita income may automatically increase girls' participation in education may in some cases be erroneous. They give examples of some Arab countries which have very low access and participation of girls in basic education despite having relatively higher per capita income compared to SSA countries, but do not use it to make a difference in girls' enrolment and meaningful completion of basic education. Again, for comparative purposes, they present several countries which have achieved remarkable improvements in female education with gender parity, their low per capita income and limited economic growth notwithstanding; and conclude that this is because in such countries, deliberate policy choices evidently make a difference.

Kane (2004) treats the role of poverty in impeding girls' education with caution. She argues that culture can play as an important a role as poverty. She insists that poverty alone cannot account for poor participation of girls in education. She gives an example of a study conducted in Benin in mid 1990s, which indicates that there is a 24% gap difference in favour of boys between the primary school enrolment rate for the richest girls and the richest boys. She argues that although she agrees that poverty contributes to the impediment of girls' education, there are other powerful factors such as culture that make the bad situation even worse. This view is supported by Rihani (2006) and Seel and Clarke (2005) who see cultural beliefs and associated hetero-normative gender stereotypes as a major issue when it comes to sending girls to school. It is important to note however, that although overall girls may be seen as being discriminated against, the way this works cannot be generalised from one culture to another. As such, there two cultures where girls' education problems are exactly the same and there can never therefore be a common formula for solving girls' education problems.

### **3.4.3 The opportunity cost of sending girls to school**

Associated with poverty and culture, is another cost of sending girls to school, the opportunity. This is basically the cost of girls' lost labour and other duties that may be allotted to her which the family loses when she goes to school. World Bank (2007), Herz (2006), Rihani (2006), and Winter & Macina (1999) agree that it is usually the loss of the girls' vital contribution to the household through domestic labour that makes parents reluctant to send their daughters to school. This is an indirect cost to parents. Parents often view their daughters' education as not cost effective especially in those countries where early marriages prevail and daughters join other households. Girls' labour in these societies is exploited before marriage. Campaignforeducation (2003:20) emphasises the labour issue in their reports on research conducted on girls' education in Mali and Pakistan. They point out that girls' education is commonly seen as a lost investment because it is the future husband who reaps the returns, not their own biological family. They quote Jafri in Ramachandran (1998), saying that "it is pointless to put gasoline into someone else's car," meaning that girls' do not belong to their biological families. As such, their natural families tend to exploit their labour before they are married off.

Pre-marital labour has taken another turn in some Asian countries whereby girls are used to earn money to pay for their brother's education and / or marriage. This kind of labour exploitation is stressed by Baden and Green (1994), citing Greenhaulgh's work on Taiwan (1985), showing evidence in many Asian countries where daughters' earnings are known to be used for paying for their brothers' education and marriages among parents with limited resources. UNESCO (2005:3) pointing to child labour in general argues: 'although the global picture that emerges is that child work is declining, girls' labour official and unofficial, continues to constitute a major obstacle to accelerating progress towards achieving gender parity and equality in primary and secondary education by 2015'. They advise countries to focus attention on progressively eliminating child labour and put in place an enabling environment that encourages girls' access to all levels of education.

#### **3.4.4 School based challenges to girls' education**

UNESCO (2005), Lifanda et al. (2004), UNICEF (1999), and Oxaal (1997) argue that school based factors such as failure to provide adequate physical facilities like toilets, running water and other sanitary facilities may impede or discourage girls from attending school regularly. Lack of educational resources and gender sensitive curriculum coupled with poorly trained teachers are among the supply factors that are also blamed for poor girls' participation in education. Lifanda et al. (2004) insist that teachers' unfamiliarity with gender issues and inability to render the needed support contribute to girls' poor participation in basic education. Added to the list, is teachers' lack of commitment and low morale resulting from poor pay. Bruns et al. (2003), however, dismiss poor remuneration as a major issue arguing that paying teachers an adequate wage does not automatically produce high standards. On the contrary, they advocate for careful recruitment, quality in-service training and performance management in order to turn teachers into an effective force. However, although it may be argued that adequate pay may not be the only motivating factor, it still is an important element. My professional experience shows that in countries such as Rwanda, poor pay has a demotivating effect contrary to what Bruns et al. contend.

Violence is another school based challenge to girls' education. Osler (2006) and Gulbenkian Foundation (1995) contend that schools can provide experiences which reinforces violent acts. The issue of violence is expounded further by Hulton & Furlong (2001) based on a study they conducted in four schools in Zimbabwe, and various similar studies on gender violence and harassment in schools, see for example Dunne, Humphreys and Leach (2006), Leach and Humphreys (2007), Leach and Mitchell (2006), Dunne and Leach (2005), Shumba (2001), Mirembe and Davies (2001), Leach et al, (2000), and Maimbolwa-Sinyangwe (1995). Their studies indicate that adolescent girls frequently encounter both sexual and non-sexual forms of abuse including aggressive behaviour, intimidation and physical assault. They say that young girls are frequently confronted with sexual advances by older boys and male teachers. Physical punishment and verbal abuse of girls by teachers are also reported in the same studies and lament that school administration

looks on and does nothing to stop or punish culprits. It is no wonder therefore that as a result, girls do not see school as a secure and comfortable place to be in.

Rihani et al. (2006) bring in another dimension of violence emanating from social conflicts and wars. They argue that in periods of social insecurity, parents are reluctant to send their daughters to schools, to avoid walking long distances to day schools for fear of rape and observe that this problem is more compounded at secondary school level whereby the number of schools reduce drastically, thereby increasing the distance students walk, which make girls more vulnerable.

Shabaya and Kondo-Agyemang (2007:415) bring in another dimension of sexual violence from outside the school, “Sugar Daddies” and to a lesser extent “Sugar Mammies”. These are adult working males and females that have sexual relations with school girls and boys respectively. While a complex set of factors, including adolescent peer group culture may also cause this relationship, they argue that the available evidence suggests that girls from poor families, all other variables being constant, are most likely to become victims of sexual violence from ‘Sugar Daddies’ offering financial favours than are boys from ‘Sugar Mummies’. Associated with this kind of sexual violence is a problem of pregnancy-related dropouts that feature in many Sub-Saharan African countries. Meekers and Ahmed (1999) present Botswana and South Africa as cases in point, where 50% of girls’ dropout is caused by pregnancy. This is compounded by strict school policies which stipulate suspension of girls from school in case of pregnancy. In many countries, however, including the Republic of South Africa where I worked for ten years, education policy stipulates that such girls are allowed to go back to school after one year. But this policy is not always respected. Girls who get pregnant find it difficult to go back to the same school. They are ostracised by fellow students and as a result, they do not feel like going back to school. In some cases, such girls are barred by school administration, despite clear regulations about their right to go back to school. It is evident therefore, that policy and practice may not always complement each other. Pronouncing good policies is one thing and implementing them is another. Dunne and Leach (2005), Hulton & Furlong (2001), and Leach et al. (2000) agree with the above assertion stressing that in most countries, policies relating to girls’ education are relaxed and rarely implemented. They cite examples of policies that are never

implemented such as re-admission of school girls who get pregnant, administration of corporal punishment, sexual relations between teachers and students and bullying at school.

The lack of parental involvement in school management and life may constitute another setback in the quality of education provision. Farrant (1990) observes that traditionally, schools tended to ignore parents on the pretext that professional skills such as teaching must be carried out without interruption. Farrant observes however, that this belief is changing and parents are encouraged to take a greater interest in schools and get a better understanding of what goes on in the classroom. He argues that learners tend to develop positive attitudes and succeed in school and life in general when schools work together with families to support learning, and concludes that when parents are involved in their children's education at home, children tend to do better in school.

Lewin (2007a:25) stresses that lack of enough places in schools accounts for a bigger percentage in learners' exclusion. Although he agrees that "the demand to remain in school may weaken as a result of high opportunity cost and a number of other powerful factors", he insists that most learners are excluded from joining secondary schools due to lack of enough places and not as a result of poor performance and achievement. He does not see low achievement levels as a strong factor for girls to drop out of schools, arguing that dropping out may be more influenced by "relative rather than absolute levels of performance, since it is partly socially determined". The argument Lewin is making is that when there are not enough places for all children, it is usually girls who miss out, either because they do not do so well in primary school or because parents withdraw them rather than boys. Again, he argues that when parents do not see a possibility of progression through secondary school they may not see the point in sending their children to secondary schools or may even withdraw them earlier.

Lewin's analysis is very relevant to Rwanda where access to higher secondary schools is determined by the number of places available in schools and not necessarily performance. RNEC (2007) observes that schools are forced to choose the best students not because the rest have failed but because they cannot take more than the available infrastructure can sustain. Headteachers of well resourced public schools in Rwanda are thus forced to choose

the highest achievers, leaving low achievers for poorly resourced schools. Since the majority of low achievers are girls, they end up joining poorly resourced public or private secondary schools or none at all. As such, lack of enough places remains a disadvantage to girls' participation in basic education. The challenge to Rwanda and indeed to other developing countries remains how to tackle the contradictions within education systems. There are inclusionary policies on one hand and exclusionary practices on the other. Inclusionary policies must go hand in hand with the creation of more places in schools. This should take a sector-wide approach because increasing places has financial implications as there must be a corresponding increase in infrastructure, teacher training, teachers' remunerations, learning and teaching materials.

Poor learning environment in schools has also been identified as a challenge to girls' education. The Global Campaign for Education (GCE), a grouping of educational and development NGOs based in South Africa, in its paper "Give girls a fair chance" (2003:28), insists that lack of funds, which is characteristic of most schools in developing countries, contributes to the impediment of girls' access and successful completion of basic education. They stress that "failure to provide physical facilities, like toilets and running water, is inconvenient for boys but a disaster for girls", and argue that during menstruation, most girls will not attend school if there are no basic toilet facilities.

The same problem is equally stressed by Kasonde-Ng'andu et al. (2000). Drawing from a study conducted in Zambia, they isolated poor sanitary facilities as particularly affecting girls' participation in schools. This research also shows that a number of girls miss school during their menstruation periods owing to lack of sanitary towels and separate toilets for girls. Lifanda et al. (2004), concur and reason that countries where girls' education participation is low are mainly characterised by lack of enabling factors like infrastructure well adapted to girls' needs; e.g. the need for separate toilet facilities. They also blame girls' failure to remain and successfully complete school on teachers' inability to render the needed support during the difficult adolescent years and their unfamiliarity with gender issues.

Lack of educational resources and gender insensitive curricula were also identified. Lifanda et al. (2004) and UNICEF (1999) all seem to agree that in most cases teaching and learning

materials are not only lacking in schools in required quantities, but even the few available are characterised by gender biased stereotypes which are not helpful to girls' education. They argue that curricula, both official and hidden, can transmit messages that girls are less important than boys.

### **3.5 Global solutions to poor access and retention of girls in schools**

UNICEF (2004:83) sees the solution to the girls' access and retention problem in "making education free and compulsory as a cornerstone of any national plan to eliminate gender disparity in education and achieve universal education". This is because as seen in previous sections, faced with an economically driven choice between sending sons and daughters to school, poor families often send their sons. UNICEF argues that removing fees or offering financial support to families with girls in school, as well as explaining the advantages of sending girls to school, can make a real difference. UNICEF (2004) advises further that these initiatives should be followed by classroom based strategies, for example, making the classroom more child friendly and gender sensitive, recruiting and training teachers who are sensitive to gender issues, eliminating gender bias from textbooks and learning materials and scheduling lessons flexibly, to cater for girls who often miss school due to family responsibilities or home chores. In line with UNICEF, Rwanda has abolished school fees and some needy girls are being supported to attend school, but as discussed in the context chapter a lot more needs to be done to ensure that all girls access and complete basic education.

Other solutions emphasised by UNICEF (2004) require specific measures for specific groups, especially in regions where ethnic minorities and / or people living in rural areas that are difficult to access may face discrimination and exclusion. In such cases, UNICEF points out that girls often suffer a multitude of disadvantages because of their gender. As seen in the earlier section on the need for affirmative action, they advise that education systems should reach out to them through special measures rather than just assuming that girls will be drawn in as part of a general drive for improved education for all. Such girls may include those who leave schools due to pregnancy and / or due to other causes like the impact of war that breeds orphaned children, socially vulnerable girls and those affected by



the effects of HIV & AIDS. UNICEF (2004) further advocates for the establishment of ‘catch-up schools’. These are special schools for children who are out of school due to different reasons. They are offered in the form of vocational training and learners from such schools may later be re-admitted into formal education. It is to be noted that where applied, these measures have proved useful and many girls have been reintegrated into schools. Cases in point are Turkey and Rwanda where these measures have worked successfully (GoR-MINEDUC 2010 b).

### **3.6 Role of educated women in the promotion of girls’ education**

The Global EFA (2003/4:63) report observes that young girls especially in rural areas need to see success stories of older girls and women in their milieu to emulate, pointing out that the follow-up made on EFA implementation indicates that countries where a big percentage of primary school teachers are women, have served as role models and enrolment of girls “especially in rural areas where women teachers are regarded in high esteem has consistently increased”. The report further emphasises that the presence of female teachers also has an effect of making parents feel more secure about sending their daughters to school. The same report recognises, however, that the situation is changing in such a way that currently rural areas are shunned by teachers especially females due to lack of facilities such as running water and electricity and proposes giving teachers hardship allowances and reduction of tax on income, as among strategies designed to attract and keep female teachers in rural areas.

If the presence of women teachers in rural schools is anything to go by, then Rwanda should enjoy the benefits since according to statistics from the MINEDUC-EMIS (2008), female teachers are the majority in primary schools in Rwanda with 67% representation in general and 80% rural distribution national-wide. This research is, however, yet to reveal whether or not this female dominance in primary education has any added advantage to girls’ education as the EFA report contends.

### **3.7 Research questions**

The context and the literature review in this study show a grim picture regarding girls' retention and completion of schooling in Rwanda. Statistics indicate that girls' education in Rwanda is still problematic especially where retention is concerned. Disaggregated data show poor transition and retention from primary to lower secondary. This happens despite considerable efforts invested by government into the promotion of girls' education, as seen in the introductory and context chapters of this thesis. It is evident therefore, that something somewhere is not right. There seems to be a knowledge gap that may explain the missing link between problems in girls' education provision and interventional strategies designed to solve them. This calls for thorough research into the issue that may inform policy and intervention strategies. Specifically, this study seeks to find answers to the following research questions:

1. How do different stakeholders explain issues that affect girls' educational access and retention across the 9YBE in Rwanda?
2. How do stakeholders view accountability for keeping girls in or out of school in Rwanda?
3. What solutions do stakeholders propose that may lead to the provision of a gender balanced education in Rwanda?

It is hoped that answers to these questions will generate insights into the problem, leading to professional action aimed at the provision of a gender-balanced education; as observed by Blaxter et al. (2002:71), "results built on studies, actual practices and experiences can be linked to action as their insights contribute positively to changing practice".

## **Chapter 4: Methodology, data collection and analysis**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I explored the literature on girls' education in order to identify the space for my research. In this chapter I locate my study methodologically. This chapter is concerned with my methodology, the research design and analysis that framed the field research. I explain the multiple aspects of the field research including the rationale for the choice of participants and who they are; the use of interview as the main research method and discuss ethical issues in this research. I describe how I embarked on my research journey, starting from how I piloted the interviews. I also consider my research design, participants, research instruments and the analysis that forms the basis for the discussion of data presented in chapters five, six and seven.

### **4.2 Situating my research**

Since the main focus of this research is to probe into views and perspectives of stakeholders regarding the provision of education to girls in Rwanda, the main substantive issue is girls' education. This study has been approached with constructivist ontology and interpretativist epistemological positioning and these comprise my methodological stance. Meaning has been qualitatively constructed from the lived experiences through interviews and conversations with participants who have direct influence on the provision of 9YBE at micro level, including the beneficiaries themselves. Specifically, interview participants included the educationist group (Headteachers, Teachers, and Education Officers), NGO group (FAWE and Community Women Organisations - CWO), Parent group (Parents in general and Parents on schools' PTAs) and Learner group (pupils in school) and Girl dropout group (pupils who had dropped out of school). In broader terms, my methodological positioning has been shaped and inspired by a number of writers including Coleman and Briggs (2002), Denzin and Lincoln (1998), Usher (1996), Rubin & Rubin (1995) and Smith (1983) who argue that interpretive and constructivists' approaches illuminate social reality as captured through interaction and conversation with stakeholders. This point is central to my research.

The study was conducted in a natural setting: schools, local villages and among local communities where I accessed teachers, pupils, parents, local education authorities and girls who had abandoned school. This naturalistic setting is consistent with my constructivist interpretive-epistemological position, and supported by Cohen and Manion (1985), who contend that educational research focusing on social practice is best undertaken in a natural setting. The argument is that it is in a natural setting that participants feel free to respond in ways that are unlike when they are interviewed in an unfamiliar environment. Given that I was interested in multiple perspectives, the interview was my main research method. In line with Kvale (1996:42) each interview was “a construction site of knowledge ... gathered through conversational, narrative, linguistic, contextual and inter-relationship nature of knowledge”. In addition to the qualitative data gathered through interviews, I also collected secondary-generated data from official documents and statistics for data triangulation purpose. For effective record keeping and easy referencing, I kept a digital recorder and a researcher diary which proved very helpful during analysis stage of this research.

### **4.3 Sample Design**

Cohen et al. (2000: 92) say that sampling is about “gaining information from a smaller group or subset of the total population in such a way that the knowledge gained is representative of the total population”. Sampling may be applied by using purposeful selection of respondents. In this case, a representative size of 150 comprising different stratified respondents was interviewed in the whole research comprising stakeholders group, the educationist group (Headteachers, Teachers, and Education Officers), NGO group (FAWE and Community Women Organisations - CWO), Parent group (Parents in general and Parents on schools’ PTAs) and Learner group (pupils in school) and Girl dropout group (pupils who had dropped out of school). This choice was in line with Cohen et al. (2000:93), who argue that a small size sample is suitable for “an ethnographic or qualitative style of research”. Since this research involved participants of different characteristics and roles, it was quite necessary to apply stratified purposeful sampling. The population was divided into groups or strata in which members share particular

characteristics, such as pupils, teachers, and parents who comprised different stakeholder groups.

The choice of schools and associated interviewees was also influenced by their location. In order to get a good mix of attitudes and opinions regarding issues of girls' access and retention, I thought it necessary to select schools in both rural and urban settings. Thus, two 9YBE schools in **Bugene District**, a pseudonym for one of the districts in the Northern Province in which two school were selected, hereafter code-named **Alliance school** in a rural setting and **Bridge School** found in a semi-urban setting. Two other 9YBE schools in **Gombe District**, a pseudonym for one of the districts in the Eastern Province hereafter code-named **Progressive school** in a rural setting and **Liberty school** in semi-urban setting were also chosen. The other categories of research participants were selected in the vicinity of participating schools to ensure that all respondents would be talking about issues in a common area of reference. I chose both the Eastern and Northern provinces because these are the most densely populated with varying population characteristics mainly as a result of returnees who had been in exile in neighbouring countries for more than thirty years (RBS 2008 and GoR-MINALOC 2007). I thought that these returnees were likely to exhibit different cultures, gender regimes and positioning likely to influence the nature of education provision for girls.

I interviewed teachers with a biased gender mix of four female teachers and one male teacher per school. This was deliberately done specifically to tap more views and perspectives from female teachers, because they themselves might have lived more or less a similar experience as girls. Female teachers as such were thought to be more conversant with specific problems that are faced by girls in school, and could be able to propose remedial interventions that might make a difference. Although I had initially thought that male teachers' views would only be used to validate and cross-check data generated from their female counterparts, I later discovered that male teachers had useful information that contributed significantly to my data.

#### 4.4 Participants and location

I selected four 9YBE schools with both primary (Grade 1 to Grade 6) and lower secondary (Grade 7 to Grade 9) character. I then sought interviews from participants as follows: Four Headteachers (one from each school), twenty teachers (five in each school), four members of PTA (one from each school), eighty pupils, twenty from each school (ten girls from Primary 5 class and 10 girls from senior 2 in each school) were interviewed in focus groups. I also interviewed two people from the local education authority, (one from each district), six parents in each district (two males and four females) and four representatives of community women groups (two from each district). I also sought views and perspectives from two senior workers of FAWE - Rwanda and interviewed twenty girls (ten from each district) who had dropped out of schools. Finally, I interviewed two high ranking officials, one from the Ministry of education and another one from the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion. The research involved a total of one hundred and fifty (150) participants. Since this research involved participants with different characteristics, I had to apply purposeful sampling in which respondents were divided into groups or strata that share particular characteristics as reflected in the following table.

**Table 4: Interview participants and location**

Participants	Code numbers	Location	District	Province
<b>Educationist group:</b>				
Headteachers	(MHT1)	Alliance School.	Gombe	Eastern
	(MHT 2)	Bridge School.	Gombe	Eastern
	(FHT 3)	Progressive Sch.	Bugene	Northern
	(MHT 4)	Liberty School.	Bugene	Northern

Teachers	5: (FT1,MT2,FT3,FT4,FT5) 5:(FT6,FT7,MT8,FT9,FT10) 5:(FT11,FT12,FT13,MT14,FT15) 5:(FT16,FT17,FT18,MT19,FT20)	Alliance School. Bridge School. Progressive Sch. Liberty School	Gombe Gombe Bugene Bugene	Eastern Eastern Northern Northern
Local Education Authorities	1: (MLEA1) 1: (FLEA2)	District Office District Office	Gombe Bugene	Eastern Northern
Education policy makers	1: (MPM 1) 1: (MPF 2)	MINEDUC MIGEPROF	Kigali Kigali	Kigali City Kigali City
<b>Parent group:</b> PTA Members	1 : (MPTA1) 1 : (MPTA2) 1 : (MPTA3) 1 : (MPTA4)	Alliance Sch Bridge School Progressive Sch. Liberty School	Gombe Gombe Bugene Bugene	Eastern Eastern Northern Northern
Parents	6:(FP1, FP2, MP3, MP4, FP5, FP6) 6:(MP7, FP8, FP9, FP10, FP11, MP12)	Village Village	Gombe Bugene	Eastern Northern
<b>NGO group:</b> CWO	2: (FCWO 1, FCWO 2) 2: (FCWO3, FCWO4)	District Office District Office	Gombe Bugene	Eastern Northern
FAWE	2: (FAWE 1. FAWE 2)	Kigali office	Kigali	Kigali City
<b>Learner group:</b> Pupils in focus Groups	20: (10 Group 1, 10 Group 2) 20: (10 Group 3, 10 Group 4 ) 20: (10 Group 5, 10 group 6 ) 20: (10 Group 7, 10 group 8 )	Alliance Sch Bridge School Progressive Sch. Liberty School	Gombe Gombe Bugene Bugene	Eastern Eastern Northern Northern

<b>Girl dropout group:</b>	10:(SDO1, SDO2, SDO3, SDO4, SDO5, SDO6, SDO7, SDO8, SDO9, SDO10)	Village	Gombe	Eastern
Girl learners who dropped out of school	10:(SDO11, SDO12, SDO13, SDO14, SDO15, SDO16, SDO17, SDO18, SDO19, SDO20)	Village	Bugene	Northern
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>			

#### 4.5 Interviews in this study

As this study was primarily concerned with understanding views held by different stakeholders, I chose interviews as the key method for data collection. The advantages of interviews in this respect have been highlighted by a number of researchers, see for example, Coleman and Briggs (2002), Cohen et al. (2000), Oppenheim (1999), Denzin and Lincoln (1998), Kvale (1996), Usher (1996), Rubin & Rubin (1995), McNamara (1999), Bell (1993) and Smith (1983). Kvale (1996) argues that a research interview seeks to describe and give meanings of a central theme in the life world of the subject. McNamara (1999) notes that interviews are particularly useful for they are able to unearth data around the topic by constructing meaning from the participant's own lived experiences. Another advantage of using interviews as a method of research is given by Oppenheim (1999) who observes that interviews can often succeed with respondents who have reading, writing or language difficulties. Borrowing from Oppenheim's views, and knowing potential participants in my investigation as an "insider" researcher, most respondents especially parents would have had difficulties in responding due to inadequate literacy abilities, if I had used questionnaires. In the same vein, I decided to conduct interviews in Kinyarwanda language (a local language) to ensure that nothing was missed due to language barriers, since I wanted to ensure that I tap maximally into the knowledge that has not been made public or has been assumed by policy makers.



As I planned to conduct interviews, I decided that I would personally interview all respondents except girls in and out of school, for whom I hired two young Rwandan female Research Assistants to conduct interviews on my behalf. These assistants were fresh graduates from the National University of Rwanda, fluent in both English and Kinyarwanda languages and who also well understood the culture of Rwandans they were to interview. I thought that my imposing physique and status, a relatively well-to-do government officer interviewing young girls who are poor, vulnerable, emotionally and socially deprived may inhibit free participation, resulting in failure to acquire the data I was looking for. Bearing in mind the gender positioning of females in the Rwandan society as soft, kind and care givers (see chapter 1), I was sure that female assistants would be in a better position to generate the required data from young girls in focus groups. I deliberately chose to divide girls in focus group of five because I thought that they would encourage each other to talk as a group and feel freer to interact with interviewees rather than when a single girl would be interviewed. Besides, they were many (80) and interviewing one to one would have taken a long period with high cost implication. I had to train my Research Assistants before embarking on the task, because I know that the interviewer can influence the quality of research outcomes and as such prior training was a critical necessity. One of my major tasks during the training and orientation process was to describe the entire study. This was because I thought that Research Assistants needed to know more than simply how to conduct the interview. I had to impress upon them the background of the study and why I thought the study was important. We had to go through all the rigours of interviewing processes in line with Williams (1993), Campion et al. (1994) and Kvale (1996) who emphasise the need for interviewers to ensure that the digital recorder is working, the need to ask one question at a time, the need to remain as neutral as possible, how to encourage responses, how to be careful about the interviewer's appearance, how to provide a transition between major topics during the interview and ensuring that the interviewer does not lose control of the interview. We looked into strategies and wording and presentation that may facilitate easy probing into behaviours, opinions, feelings and knowledge of interviewees. I had to organize in detail and conduct a number of rehearsals of the interview process with my Research Assistants before they were ready to begin formal

interviews. This was a useful process because it prompted me to remember interview processes and theories which I had taken for granted.

After my Research Assistants and I had conducted a few interviews, we would sit and critically discuss what happened and challenges that arose from the interviews. This would be done by reviewing all steps and discussions undertaken during interviews in order to gauge whether or not we had followed-up on explanations and / or disagreements generated during interviews. I particularly found this session very useful because by discussing data and how it was generated, there was always a way of getting into a pool of more potentially available data, making the next interviews more focused.

As a supplement to the interview data generated, I also consulted different documents and available statistical data. I analysed them carefully keeping in mind Silverman's (2000) and Robson's (2002) arguments that documents and statistical data are open to multiple interpretations due to cultural differences, and that they are highly dependent on the ability of the researcher to carefully generate meaning from them.

#### **4.6 Ethical issues in this study**

Issues to do with ethics in research have been stressed by many scholars, e.g. Kelly & Ali (2004), Blaxter et al. (2002), Cohen et al. (2000), Silverman (2000) and Kvale (1996). Kvale (1996:111) observes: "ethical issues revolve around informed consent, confidentiality of subject report and whether subjects have a say in how their statements are interpreted and reported". Blaxter et al. (2002) concur with Kvale, arguing further that informed consent is important as it may lead to facilitation of gaining access from 'gatekeepers' who may enable the researcher to access documents, people and or institutions. A number of authors have highlighted the need for ethical considerations in educational research to include participants' consent and knowledge. Emphasis is put on the need to explain what the research is about and ensuring that no harm is caused to participants' self esteem. Respect to participants' privacy through anonymity and confidentiality and treating all participants with recognition are also stressed (Cohen et al. 2003, Robson 2002, Kvale 1996).

Coleman and Briggs (2002) take a slightly different view, drawing a distinction between ethics and morals, arguing that ethics are the philosophical enquiry into the basis of moral judgments, whereas morals are concerned with what is the right or the wrong thing to do. They argue that researchers should look more into the morals of their research design other than ethics. They, however, agree on the necessity to uphold the principle of anonymity and non-traceability on the part of the participants. Cohen et al. (2000:62) however treat ensuring anonymity with caution arguing, “it is difficult to maintain an assurance of anonymity, where for example categorisation of data may uniquely identify an individual” and conclude that the best that a researcher can do is to reduce chances of participants being identified.

Borrowing from the above views, adult participants in this research were given full information to give or decline their consent in line with ethical principles of research and also in accordance with University of Sussex ethical guidelines in force at that time. Headteachers (school gatekeepers) were requested for clearance to interview pupils. This is an acceptable practice in the Rwandan school administration context (GoR-MINEDUC 2003). Again in line with ethical principles, I anonymised schools and names of individual participants involved in the research. I wish to acknowledge here, however, that bearing my identity as a person who occupies a senior position in the Ministry of Education, and having been a Chief Inspector of Schools and known to most Headteachers and teachers, I was afraid that most education practitioners (participants at school and district levels) would tell me what they thought I wanted to hear, good stories about girls’ education provision. My strategy to mitigate this most likely problem was to be honest with all of them. I, therefore, identified myself carefully as both an education officer and a student, who was not only seeking data for academic purposes but also with a possibility of my research findings contributing to improved girls’ education provision.

Apart from the difference in power relations between me and respondents, it is important to note that Rwandans in general are still skeptical about expressing themselves frankly and openly. Before 1994, Rwandans were barred from free speech and were discouraged from expressing their opinion on matters that affected them. This legacy is largely still apparent after war and genocide 18 years ago (GoR-MINALOC 2008). As such, getting full consent

and associated truth may prove to be very difficult. This prior knowledge and understanding of the Rwandan society was helpful in trying to gain confidence of interviewees of teachers, parents and all mature respondents by giving thorough explanation regarding reasons and benefits of the research. This initial contact would be done a day before the interview, when I would carefully choose a relaxed social interaction in the evenings and discuss with potential interviewees as equals, while at the same time promising confidentiality and non-traceability of responses to individual interview participants .

As regards interviewing pupils, I hired two young female assistants (fresh graduates) to conduct interviews on my behalf as explained before. This approach is important in Rwanda, bearing in mind its recent history. Rwandan's main problem of ethnic divide and post-genocide conditions, need an in-depth and careful qualitative methodological approach to find out people's views and perceptions on pertinent but sensitive topics without creating a sense of insecurity and unnecessary suspicions. It is, thus, prudent to imagine and go beyond the established paradigms of thought, by looking at alternative futures and approaches to research in a post conflict society such as the Rwandan.

#### **4.7 Research integrity**

Reliability refers to consistency in research and whether another researcher, using the same design could obtain similar findings. This does not suggest that different researchers' interpretations and conclusions will be the same. The chances are that they will be different, since this is where the judgment of individual's researcher comes into play. A research instrument is sometimes described as being reliable only if it consistently yields the same or nearly the same results over repeated application. Coleman and Briggs (2002), Kubiszyn and Borich (1996), Yin (1994), Bell (1993), and Sapsford and Evans (1984) point to similar conclusions that reliability refers to the extent to which a test or procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions, thus demonstrating that the operations of a study can be repeated with the same results. It is important to note however that getting 'similar results under constant conditions' as a notion of reliability is

associated with positivist rather than interpretive research methodology as is the case in this research.

The generation of uniform results is not possible in social research that deals with the inner feelings and lived experiences of research participants. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) and Bush in Coleman and Briggs (2002) agree and caution researchers that validity like reliability is a notion primarily associated with positivist research and may not be emphasized in qualitative, or interpretive approach. In fact researchers such as Kincheloe and McLaren (1998) have rejected traditional validity as unhelpful for qualitative research. They concur with Bassey (1999), in advocating for the alternative concept of trustworthiness, which they say is more ethical. Lincoln and Guba (1985) on the other hand, argue that in order for research to have higher levels of validity, they should instead incorporate auditing procedures by creating an auditing trail through keeping a full record of research activities, to help check clarity and consistence. In line with the above thinking, I made sure that auditing procedures were strictly followed. I referred back and forth, cross-checked the generated data from different individuals and groups and this approach ensured consistency in results generated.

#### **4.8 Data gathering in this study**

Schools and participants were selected using purposeful sampling and selection method as described earlier (see page 40). Patton (1990) provides guidelines for sampling and suggests that the logic and power behind purposeful selection of informants is that the sample should be information rich, and participants should be experienced and authorities in their areas of operation. As such, the primary feature of the purposeful sampling methods I used in the selection of participants was the similarity or closer to similarity of shared experience, characteristics and / or interests of participants. This is why I chose to group interviewees as Educationists, Parents, NGO, Learner and Girl dropout.

As I shall explain under the data analysis section, all along the data gathering process I looked for ideas that feed into categories, properties and dimensions developed in relation to the theoretical framework and in line with my three major research questions.

#### **4.9 Piloting the interview**

The necessity to pilot the interview was inspired by Bryman (2001) who reminds us of the need to pilot research questions, saying that piloting can provide interviewers with some experience and create greater sense of confidence. This was among my major aims, since as mentioned before; I had employed two young female research assistants to conduct focus group interviews among pupils and school dropouts on my behalf. Before embarking on piloting my interviews, I asked a critical friend to read and offer critique on interview questions before I administered them. His feedback was an eye opener and very useful, for I used it to adjust some of my questions before embarking on the pilot phase.

My Research Assistants and I undertook a small pilot research in a 9YBE school located near my place of work. I interviewed one Headteacher, three teachers (two females and one male) but I failed to get a parent representative on the school PTA I had planned to interview. My Research Assistants interviewed four girls, two from the lower level and two from the upper level of 9YBE. They also interviewed two girls in the vicinity of the school who had abandoned school. The major objective of piloting was to find out whether or not the semi-structured interview questions I had prepared were free from ambiguity, clear and understandable enough. As for research tools, we used electronic digital recorders to ease the difficulty of interviewing while at the same time taking notes. A diary was kept separately for making notes immediately after the interview. All interviews were planned to take a maximum of twenty minutes each. We went first to the Headteacher (gatekeeper) introduced ourselves carefully and gave reasons for undertaking the study. Being aware of the impact of power relations between me and the Headteacher, I laboured to explain that I would ensure that my interviewees are treated with confidentiality and that responses would never be traced to participants. I showed my University identity card and explained that the research was purely intended for academic reasons only. This seemed to go well until I produced a tape recorder. The female Headteacher's facial expression indicated to me immediately that she was not comfortable with the tape recorder. I tried to explain the need to record the interview without success until we settled for an interview without a tape

recorder. Interestingly, all others participants in the pilot study were comfortable with a tape recorder. In fact, one female teacher asked me to publicise her interview because in her words “I want people to hear and understand how girls’ education is neglected”. I took a mental note on the need to be very careful in subsequent interviews as I ask for permission to use a tape recorder.

The interview went well into 30 minutes, a time beyond that which I had estimated each interview to take. I made a note that I would have to allow more time in subsequent interviews and guide the interview in such a way that it would not deviate a lot to issues that had limited relevance to my research concerns. During the pilot stage, I failed to meet a parent representative on the PTA I had planned to interview. I had initially imagined that such a parent would be living in the school neighbourhood. I found out that I was wrong. I made a mental note that I would in future ask Headteachers to invite the parent to the school on the day of the interview.

The pilot gave my Research Assistants a chance to try interviews, which not only gave them experience but also raised their confidence in the undertaking. Another advantage of piloting the interview was to test questions and make sure they were not closed, as this would generate the same answers which would limit the scope. This pilot helped me identify such questions and gave me an opportunity to reformulate them in such a way that they would encourage diverse thinking and lead to variable responses. Another important element I realised was that it was extremely difficult to follow the semi-structured interviews as I had planned them. This is because an interviewee could easily divert my initial arrangements, and this is one of the reasons why interviews went beyond the twenty minutes I had planned. The pilot study therefore showed me that I could not strictly follow the pre-planned arrangements as this was seen to be unrealistic.

Another important element was to identify questions that might make respondents feel uncomfortable. I found questions such as ‘*How many children do you have? Do they go to school and does their father help you to support them?*’ created visible anxiety and discomfort to one female teacher participant. I later learnt that the female teacher had lost three children in the genocide and had later had two children from different men and her

children had no ‘official father’. Such direct questions and others that probed deep into private life of respondents were removed or reformulated in a way that they brought forward freely generated responses.

The pilot also helped me identify questions that were not only technical and difficult to answer but were also ambiguous and not very intelligible. I had asked one question: ‘*What do you understand by gender?*’ I realised that this question was blunt and hard to answer. I changed it in a way that it would easily draw the respondent into discussing gender issues without being tasked to give definitions. A question like ‘*Would you subscribe to the view that gender equity in girls’ education has been achieved?*’ This question created confusion and nobody knew what it exactly meant and how to answer it. Such a question and others were identified and removed or adjusted for the main project. Lastly, the pilot helped me judge how well my questions flowed and gave me chance to move some of them to improve this feature. In general, the pilot helped me determine the adequacy or inadequacy of interview questions, thus contributing to my getting better prepared for the main interview schedule that followed as is reflected in annexed examples of interview schedules from page 138 -153 of this thesis.

#### **4.10 Data analysis**

I collected thick data in form of taped transcripts, field notes, data collected from documents such as published literature, monographs, presented papers, grey literature, school based documents and available statistics on basic education provision. After using the secondary generated data in the context part of the second chapter, I moved into assembling all data generated from interviews in its raw form. Since my data had been recorded on an electronic recorder, the first step was to transcribe data from the tape recorder to my computer in Kinyarwanda language. This was followed by translating everything from Kinyarwanda to English. Though this was a tiring exercise, it was advantageous in that I was forced to listen to interviews again and again. This, coupled with the translation stage and repeated engagement with data, helped me construct meaning from it during analysis stage.



The second level of data analysis was to construct categories or themes that cut across major concepts of my theoretical framework, using a colour coding technique in which similar and / or related responses were grouped together and given one colour, e.g. “blame girls’ poor participation on family poverty” was given a red colour, while issues related to cultural impediments were given a green colour. The frequency of a particular colour appearance was analysed. I had set a minimum frequency of five as a basis of what I termed common views and perceptions. The most frequent views were then identified and grouped into categories. Less frequent and individual sensitive views were also taken into consideration and grouped with similar ones under the same colour to ensure that no voice was ignored. I then proceeded to compare the available data and what the literature says in relation to my three research questions. This was followed by identification of gaps between what the literature says and the available evidence. Depending on the outcomes, I isolated new issues and findings and aligned them with available evidence.

Evidence was presented through verbatim quotations from respondents. Identification of respondents associated with particular quotations were presented using abbreviations to represent respondents from different stratified groups as follows: HT stands for Headteacher, T for Teacher, S for pupil (s), P for Parent, PTA for Parent representative on school PTA, PM for Policy Maker, LEA for Local Education Authorities, SDO for Girl Drop Out, CWG - Community Women Group and FAWE for Forum for African Women Educationists. Under each quotation, I also showed the gender of the respondent, F for female and M for male. Direct quotations of participants’ responses are followed by one of the above abbreviations to show the source, followed by the respondent’s number and a line or lines that position(s) where the same wording may be found on the transcribed interview records. For example, “yes, sometimes teachers talk to us badly saying that there are things girls cannot do like Maths and Science” (FS1: 611-612), would mean **F**emale pupil number **1**, whose quotation may be found from line **611** to line **612** on the transcript record file as is reflected in sample interview annexes from pages 138-153. It is after this stage that I ventured into the analysis of research findings.

#### **4.11 The coding and development of the categories for analysis**

As I progressed to make meaning of the collected data, I contemplated on which appropriate approach to adapt. I decided that I would confine my approach to those advocated for by Silverman (2000), Kvale (1996), Miles and Huberman (1994) and Strauss and Corbin (1990). The four groups of writers provide almost similar approaches especially on categorisation of interviewees' responses during analysis. Kvale (1996: 187) advocates for five main approaches: "a. categorisation of meaning, b. condensation of meaning, c. structuring of meaning, d. interpretation of meaning and e. adhoc method to general meaning". All these stages of data analysis go hand in hand with clarification of data whereby, repetition and non-essential data is removed as the general meaning development of data proceeds. What the four proponents of data analysis agree on is the fact that all meaning making must not deviate from the subject's lived world, experience and perspective. This position is championed by Kvale (1996:52) arguing: "reality is what people perceive it to be", i.e. the way respondents understand and describe social phenomenon as they see and live it.

Basing on developed structures and clarifications, data is coded into categories from which sub-categories and dimensions are developed in order to further synthesise data. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), this can take the form of initial, axial and selective coding of data where by categories are broken further into subcategories and dimensions. Strauss and Corbin (1990:113) further suggest that while coding the data, all events, happenings, actions, and interactions that are found to be conceptually similar in nature or related in meaning are grouped together under more abstract concepts called 'categories'. They argue that this conceptual name "category" must be suggested by the context in which an event is located.

According to Miles and Huberman's (1994:161) account, qualitative data analysis has 'three concurrent flows of activities' within the process of analysis: "data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing and data verification". During the complete process of analysis, Silverman (2000) points out four basic operations: coding (attaching meaning to pieces of data by labelling them), keeping memos (recording ideas while coding),

abstracting and comparing data. All these categorisation techniques suggested by the four proponents of data analysis are basically similar.

I based my data coding process mainly on Strauss and Corbin (1990) by formulating categories, with their properties and dimensions. This is done first of all by interpreting concepts within the data and grouping them into categories, properties and dimensions.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) observe that since categories represent phenomena, they are named differently, depending on the perspective of the researcher and the research context. Accordingly, for example, my sub category such as 'poverty' may be interpreted from the causes or effects perspective. It is thus important to define categories and give them properties and clear meanings and dimensions to avoid different contextual interpretations of categories decided upon. This is because, whereas properties define and give meaning to a category, dimensions give specifications to a category for further clarifications. Dimensions as explanatory descriptors, helped me to give specificity to categories by defining each category's particular characteristics as demonstrated by the data. Probing properties and dimensions facilitated data examination. For example, with categories such as poverty, the cost of education, culture, social, school based issues, I was able to cross check the data to see whether any of these categories relate to my theoretical framework and research questions. Strauss and Corbin (1990) argue that through this delineation of properties and dimensions, categories are differentiated and easily analysed to generate meaning.

#### **4.12 Initial coding**

I coded the data after relating my research questions to responses, and after reading thoroughly through transcripts and generated an inductive theory from the interviewees' point of view. As I mentioned before, I examined and compared data and identified the most recurring and related concepts. After grouping similar ideas emanating from interviewees, I identified six concepts to which I tied categories with different properties and dimensions in accordance with my three research questions. Four concepts that emerged most frequently were identified and developed into categories that answered the first research question that sought to find out stakeholders' perceptions of factors that

impede girls' access and retention in 9YBE. The first concept that the data clearly showed considerable concerns by all interviewees were issues related to home based economic difficulties and the cost of education as a major impediment to girls' education. I categorized this as **'Poverty and the cost of education'**. The second area that attracted a lot of concern was an issue to do with in-school conditions that work against girls' participation in education. These included poor amenities, gender related issues, and sexual harassment, which I categorised as **'In-School issues'**. The third category was on the influence the Rwandan values, norms and traditions and related gendered heteronormativity have on girls' education provision, which I categorised as **'Traditional and Cultural issues'**. The fourth category that received a lot of stakeholders' concern was society related issues such as deep rooted effects of war and genocide and HIV and their negative impact on girls' education provision which I categorized as **'Social Issues'**. Traditional, cultural and social issues tend to overlap but I deliberately separated them because of contemporary social issues such as conflict, the genocide and HIV & AIDS that are different from the traditional culture issues. This difference is reflected in dimensions as descriptors of categories. Since the second research question sought to find out stakeholders' views on accountability for keeping girls' in school, I developed a fifth category which I called **'Accountability'**. The third question sought to know what stakeholders propose as possible solutions that might lead to the provision of a gender balanced education, I accordingly called the sixth category, **'Solutions'**. To all the six categories, I attached to their corresponding properties and dimensions as exemplified below:

**TABLE: 5.Categorised variables from field review and research**

CATEGORY	PROPERTY	DIMENSION
<b>1. Poverty and the cost of education</b>	-Home based poverty -High cost of education -Sanitary issues in homes - Food insecurity in Homes	-Food insecurity at home -Parents failure to support girls -Indirect cost of schooling -Opportunity cost of schooling

<b>2.In-School conditions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of amenities</li> <li>- Teacher competence and motivation</li> <li>- Gender insensitivity</li> <li>- Policies issue</li> <li>- Poor involvement of parents</li> <li>- Poor discipline</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of facilities, toilets water and other sanitary issues</li> <li>- Poor quality of teachers professional practice</li> <li>- Poor teacher motivation</li> <li>- Teachers and gender insensitivity</li> <li>- Students' unwanted pregnancies</li> <li>- Failure to enforce disciplinary policies in school</li> </ul>
<b>3. Traditional and cultural issues</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rwandan values,</li> <li>- Norms</li> <li>- Traditions</li> <li>- Patriarchic culture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Social-heteronormativity and gendered cultural roles</li> <li>-Gendered beliefs and ways of life.</li> <li>- Cultural values and norms</li> </ul>
<b>4. Social issues</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Effects of conflict, war and genocide</li> <li>- Effects of HIV and Aids</li> <li>- Poor discipline among the youth</li> <li>- Sexual defilement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Deep and lasting effects of conflict on girls' education</li> <li>- Orphaned and child headed families</li> <li>- lack of support to genocide victims</li> <li>- Effects of HIV and AIDs</li> <li>- Lack of support by destitute parents</li> <li>- Poor students' discipline among</li> </ul>

		<p>the youth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unwanted pregnancies</li> </ul>
<b>5. Accountability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of follow up and coordination by both centralized and decentralised education authorities</li> <li>- Failure to accept responsibilities for keeping girls out of School</li> </ul>	<p>Poor government and LEA intervention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Failure to implement Education policy and strategies</li> <li>- Poor teachers motivation</li> <li>- Poor school amenities and sanitary facilities</li> <li>- Family poverty and its Eradication</li> <li>- Responsibility for poor discipline</li> <li>- Responsibility for taking care of survivors of the genocide</li> </ul>
<b>6. Solutions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Government interventions</li> <li>-Local education Authorities roles, responsibilities and accountability</li> <li>-Parents Involvement</li> <li>-Improved Teachers' Involvement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Government intervention in all sectors</li> <li>-Improved family income Generation</li> <li>- Abolition of tax on sanitary pads</li> <li>- Parents' sensitization campaigns</li> <li>- Law enforcement</li> <li>- Strengthening Parents and</li> </ul>

		<p>Teachers' Association</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teacher motivation incentives</li> <li>- Construction of more classrooms to create more places</li> <li>- Institutionalised school feeding</li> <li>- More support to poor students</li> <li>- School based support to poor girls</li> <li>- Improved support from parents</li> <li>- Improved support from Local Education authorities</li> </ul>
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All these categories and associated properties and dimensions were derived directly from the collected data. Although I had my personal knowledge and feelings as an insider researcher, I avoided taking any stance towards the data. This is what Borg and Gall (1997) refer to as letting data speak. I thus took data as it came, trying to avoid my personal interpretation. I, therefore, reconstructed the broken data accordingly before I started developing an interpretive scheme.

#### **4.13 Axial and selective coding**

Having got my six categories, I revisited my data to evaluate it further, by identifying stand-alone and cross-cutting categories in relation to my three research questions, to gauge how the categories would answer them. This is axial and selective coding according to Straus and Corbin (1990). After I examined the relationships among different categories, I found similarities and differences in the causal conditions and consequences among these categories. I thus realised that almost all the first four categories relating to factors responsible for girls' poor access and retention had a close relationship. I then decided to tie cross-cutting categories together against my three research questions as informed by

stakeholders' views and interpretations of issues surrounding the provision of education to girls in Rwanda. This careful categorization of issues prevented me from jumping precipitously to possible personally biased conclusions influenced by my prior knowledge as an insider researcher. Finally, borrowing from Ary and Razavie's (1979) technique of category integration, I integrated all my categories to sum up what my research would look like. This formed a basis for the analysed stakeholder views that informed the three subsequent analytical chapters.



## **Chapter 5: Girls' poor participation in education - stakeholder views**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter explores issues that affect girls' access and retention across 9YBE in Rwanda through the perspectives and experiences of a range of key stakeholders. The focus of this chapter is on how various stakeholder groups explain why girls' meaningful participation in 9YBE in Rwanda continues to be impeded. This discussion is extended in the next two chapters where I focus on issues of accountability for ensuring girls' right to education, and what stakeholders perceive to be solutions that might lead to a gender balanced education. Discussions of the factors that contribute to girls' access and retention in education are not only important in their own right but are also significant for my professional concerns with finding lasting solutions that might reverse the continued discrimination against girls, especially from poor families.

As described in chapter four on Methodology, the data analysed in this thesis have been parents and community, including parent representatives on school PTAs. The third group is made of NGOs (Community Groups, Local Women Organisations and FAWE), the fourth group is composed of learners in school and the fifth group comprises girl dropout of school. captured from five groups of stakeholders. The first group comprises educationists (Headteachers, Teachers and Local Education Authorities); the second group comprises In order to illustrate the analysis, anonymised verbatim quotations from interviews have been translated and included throughout the next three chapters.

Following this brief introductory section, I present four sections that represent the dominant categories of factors that impede girls' education as expressed by the stakeholder respondents. These are poverty related issues, traditional and cultural issues, in-school conditions and social issues. Analysed data and previous literature are drawn together in the discussion in each section. The chapter concludes by drawing the main themes of the analysis together and reflecting how the specifics of the Rwandan context and recent

conflict and genocide have negatively impacted on girls' meaningful involvement in education.

## **5.2 Poverty and the cost of education**

Poverty and its negative influences on girls' education have been stressed by many researchers (e.g. Kane 2004, Seel and Clarke 2005, UNESCO 2005, Harz 2006, and Winter and Macina 2007). They all emphasise the negative influence of poverty and associated factors on girls' education provision. Poverty was an issue that surfaced frequently in all discussions about causes of girls' poor access and retention in schools. All the five stakeholder groups that I interviewed reiterated poverty as a serious impediment to girls' education. This is despite the fact that the government of Rwanda has attempted to reduce the effects of poverty on education by abolishing school fees across 9YBE (MINEDUC 2007). The evidence provided strongly suggests that this measure is not enough. As stressed by a number of researchers referred to in the literature review (see chapter three, page 28), poverty was a key issue and this was resonated by all the five groups of interviewees. They specifically pointed out that family poverty limits abilities of parents to support girls' schooling. As such, though there are other factors that contribute to girls' poor participation as shall be seen in subsequent sections of this chapter, solutions to girls' problems of access and retention may be partly found in reducing family and community poverty. This view is supported by several respondents. When Richard, the Headteacher of Alliance School was asked what he thought was the cause of girls' irregularity in school despite government interventions of abolishing school fees, he observed:

*I think we need to do more that we are doing. The government has abolished school fees in 9YBE but this is not the only problem. As a result of war and genocide, most families have become destitute and are too poor to afford basics like school uniform, shoes, books and other necessities for girls in their daily lives. These are not available and we simply sit here and think that girls will automatically come to school as a result of abolishing school fees. We are wrong (HT1: 61:66).*

Responding to a similar question, another educationist stakeholder David, the Headteacher of Bridge School reaffirmed his colleague's assertion:

*Theoretically, nobody should fail to go to school because of lack of school fees since the government pays capitation grant for students in all 9YBE schools, but the fact is that some fail to attend school because their parents cannot afford to meet other school costs (MHT2:203-206).*

Dominique, the Headteacher of Liberty School blames girls' poor participation in education on poverty and related hunger in homes, and advises other headteachers to initiate in-school feeding scheme to encourage girls' schooling:

*Poverty in homes breeds hunger which contributes a lot to students' failure to attend school. Hunger has been forcing many children especially girls to abandon our school until with the help of WFP, we agreed with all parents to introduce a school feeding scheme. I can only advise other schools to do the same because it really works" (MHT 4:4018 –4021).*

Dominique explains further how the scheme encourages girls' participation in the 9YBE through 'take-home cooking oil rations' given to girls on condition of regular attendance.

Teachers interviewed in all the four schools are also of the general view that the cost of education goes far beyond the capitation grant covered by the government. Phillip a teacher in Alliance School for example, concludes that some families may not be able to afford education for all their children and may be forced to make gendered choices on who goes to school:

*Such families find themselves unable to send their children to school regardless of the fact that 9YBE is fee free, and girls are the most victimised when it comes to choosing who attends school under difficult economic circumstances (MT 14: 1345-1349).*

The same view is echoed by Pamela, a Director in charge of education in Gombe district, arguing that education is not as free as people are made to believe; pointing to associated expenses that cannot be afforded by most parents due to poverty. Like Phillip above, she elaborates further on how poverty influences gendered choices to the detriment of girls' schooling, stressing:

*When parents are faced with economic problems, they choose to send boys to school, whom they look at as carriers of the family name and lineage at the expense of girls whom they see as belonging to another family after marriage (LEA 2: 3590. 3593).*

All school dropouts interviewed also echo poverty as a common reason for their abandoning school. Jane, a girl who had abandoned school in Gombe district blames lack of financial means for her plight.

*I studied up to P.4 but dropped out because my family was very poor. Here I am now without any kind of support (SDO1003:1004).*

The same reason is given by Joyce, another school dropout from the same district who also blames extreme poverty for her failure to participate in education.

*School is expensive. Apart from the fact that as an orphan I had to stay at home and look after my young sister and brother, even then, I could not afford school requirements such as uniform and other essentials. So I had no choice but to leave school at primary five (SDO7:6553- 6557).*

The negative role of poverty in inhibiting girls' education was equally corroborated by pupils interviewed in focus groups in all the four schools in which this research was conducted. They all had examples of cases of girls that had abandoned or failed to access school due to home poverty. Jemima in Focus group one in Alliance School pointed out that she knew five girls in her neighbourhood with whom she had started school but had to abandon because "all the five girls were orphans and too poor to afford school requirements and other necessities".

Additional cost of schooling and its negative effects on girls' participation as an important factor was reiterated by a number of parents and parents' representatives on school PTAs. They all argued that extra costs such as uniforms and transport are unaffordable by most poor parents and a major reason behind abandonment of school by girls. A female parent lamented: "With poverty out there, where would my daughter get all school requirements"? When asked whether she had a son who was equally affected, she responded: 'Boys do not need to be well clothed to go to school'. This response from a parent illustrates a more intense social gaze on girls and more attention to their presentation and dress. Girls are expected to be socially immaculate and failure to live up to expected standards as a result of poverty keeps girls in a specially disadvantaged position. On the same issue, a representative of 'Twiubake', a local women's income generation cooperative society in Gombe district, raised another dimension linked to poverty. She indicated that in a bid to

raise more food and income for families, girls' labour is exploited at the expense of their continued schooling:

*Most parents involve girls in home income generation activities and as such their continued regular attendance and participation in school is hampered (CWO: 3763-3764).*

The exploitation of Girls' labour was equally stressed by Gertrude, a representative of FAWE, an organisation that champions education for girls, who concluded that poverty encourages parents to exploit girls' labour especially among predominantly agricultural regions where some girls of school going age actively participate in food production while others are made to stay at home to look after their siblings and prepare food for those who are out working in the fields. This domestic labour by girls, which is not being demanded of boys, indicates that the distribution of labour in the home is already gendered.

Tuyisenge, a female representative of 'Duterimbere', a local women's organisation in Gombe district prescribed measures that ought to be undertaken by the government.

*The provision of capitation grant is not enough; the government should invest a lot in poverty eradication otherwise many more girls shall remain deprived of their right to education (CWO:5805-5807).*

Marianne, a head of a women's group organisation in Bugene district was more instructive when asked to explain the cause of girls' failure to attend and complete school:

***The answer is simply poverty. It is very surprising that local authorities and even the school administration do not seem to appreciate the suffering a girl child goes through as a result of home poverty. It appears that everyone involved in education is keeping a blind eye on poverty and imagines that the problem is minor and it will simply disappear on its own" (CWG 1 : 698-693). (Emphasis by the respondent).***

She argued that the first area to look for problems that impede girls' education is in homes, and concluded that improved family income can solve the problem if initiated at "grass-root level". Her argument, however, was completely at variance with a parent member of a different community income generating organisation (Dufatanye Sbl) who does not see poverty as a problem to girls' education any longer. She thinks that the girls' education

issue is exaggerated because low participation as a result of poverty had been greatly reduced;

*Government abolished school fees across the 9YBE and this has increased access at lower secondary level of education. We have also established girls' education support fund at district level to enable poor girls' access to secondary education. NGOs such as ours also give support to poor girls and encourage them to be competitive. So there is no problem (CWG2:781-784).*

The above variant view notwithstanding, the majority of respondents are in agreement with what the literature and previous research indicate (see chapter 3). Most stakeholders regard poverty as a key factor in poor access and poor retention of girls in school. The problem of poverty should logically affect both girls and boys equally since they are all in a similar community setting, but the fact that it is a girl child who loses out under economic difficulty conditions connotes entrenched gender discrimination in the Rwandan society to the extent of gendering the effects of poverty. The fact that poverty impacts differently on boys and girls is one manifestation of the gendered cultural norms and traditions in place in this context. As seen in chapter 3, poverty is not the only factor responsible for girls' low participation in education. There are other powerful factors such as traditional and cultural issues, in-school conditions and social issues, which were identified by interviewees to impede girls' schooling. It is these other contributory factors that I focus on in the next three sections.

### **5.3 Traditional and cultural issues**

The significance of traditional and cultural issues in social interactions and institutional life and their negative impact on girls' education has been asserted by many researchers. See for example Brock and Cammish (1997), Niemi (2005), Liu (2006) and Dunne et al. (2007). They all suggest that there is a near universal fundamental cultural bias in favour of males. In particular, they argue that the widespread operation of patriarchal systems of social organization is manifested in a range of practices such as customary early marriages and heavy domestic and subsistence duties of females. They all conclude that certain cultural traditions adversely affect the participation of girls in formal education. Consistent

with these views, my research in Rwanda also shows that traditional and cultural gender roles are still used by families as a pretext to determine who does what in local social life, to the detriment of girls' participation in education. In this research, respondents frequently stressed the negative influence of tradition and culture on girls' access and retention in schools. Both educationalist and NGO respondent groups interviewed insisted that parents' adherence to tradition and culture continues to encourage gender inequality in education provision within the Rwandan society.

Among the educationalist stakeholders, the Headteacher of Alliance School attributes these negative influences to:

*Traditional parents who still harbour old cultural thinking that girls do not have to go to school (MHT 1:24-28).*

This view was corroborated by the Headteacher of Liberty School who observed:

*Girls' education is still hindered by uneducated and traditional parents who still think that boys may attend school while girls should only be trained to be good mothers for the benefit of their future families (MHT2:106-108).*

James, a teacher in Alliance School, defends traditional parents' poor support to girls' education, arguing that their contribution is hampered by the fact that they do not have the requisite knowledge and understanding of education, its challenges and benefits. He reasons that it is not simple for some parents to appreciate education because it is still foreign to them. This happens despite constant advocacy by NGOs, activists and government to promote inter-relationships between schools, communities and school governance aimed at influencing access and retention of girls. Dunne et, al. (2007: 1 and 29) in their review of the literature that "contributes to understanding of local processes" within regions of South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, with particular focus on relations within and between schools, communities and local governance institutions and their combined influence on access within local context, concluded that increased community participation in schools is important for improving "children's enrolment and persistence in school". Assumpta, a female teacher in the same school (Alliance) observes that this important inter-relationship that would otherwise improve participation of girls in

education is hampered by low levels of literacy and clinging onto tradition and culture on the part of parents:

*Parents' poor involvement in schools is mainly because they are themselves not educated and do not see the need to work with other education stakeholders to promote education. This is aggravated by their clinging to traditions and culture that do not value education especially of girls. (FT1: 600-603).*

She further argues that as a result of cultural and traditional influences, girls in some cases are not sent to school early enough and may start school at a mature age, and observes that late entrance makes such girls feel out of place because they are studying with young children and may choose to leave school altogether.

The negative influence of culture and tradition was also the dominant perspective offered by the parent and community stakeholder group. Thomas, a parent representative on the PTA of Alliance School thinks that parents still cherish the marriage institution as a sine-qua-non for girls, arguing that parents think that it is waste of resources to educate girls as they eventually must be married off:

*Most parents are still so much traditional that they do not see girls' education as important. They think that taking girls to school is a waste of time since girls are supposed to get married and raise families on maturity (MPTA 1:791-793).*

This view is equally stressed by a female leader of a local women's income generating organisation in Gombe district, who points out that parents' ignorance coupled with outdated culture are responsible for their failure to value girls' education and advocated for an urgent need for sensitisation campaigns among all parents. There was no evidence in this research, however, to indicate that parents are encouraged by school administration to participate in school activities and planning meetings, or any deliberate campaign to bring parents on board. The significance of this becomes clear from comments of all stakeholder groups interviewed. Most parents feel they have no place in the school, especially those who never went to school themselves. If parents do not feel they have the right to know, comment on and contribute to what the school is doing to and for their children, they are unlikely to feel responsible for the decisions and actions taken or to send and spend money for children whom they perceive to be gaining no value from attending.



Despite the dominant view among educationalist stakeholder groups that the girls' right to education is often compromised by parents as they follow traditional practices, interviews with parent respondents produced evidence to the contrary. The majority of parents, both females and males insisted that they do not discriminate against girls and claimed to give equal treatment to both boys and girls. This stance was sustained even when parents were asked what choices they would make about who (a girl or a boy) goes to school in conditions of severe economic constraint. The suggestion that they might treat boys and girls differently was defensively rejected. For example, Jacqueline, a mother of five children from Gombe district defensively responded: "What do you mean? We treat boys and girls the same in everything". On a follow-up question on her views of the benefit of education to both girls and boys, she clearly had a gendered differentiated view. She pointed out:

*Boys' education is more beneficial to the family. But was quick to add: Of course education is also good for girls but girls are more helpful when they are still at home and this is good for their future (FP1: 4285-4291).*

Joseph, a male polygamist parent from Bugene district who was asked the same question brought in another dimension:

*Everybody knows that it is important to send girls **also** to school. We try to follow directives from our leaders but it is sometimes very difficult to support all children in school (MP 7:5044-5045).*  
(Emphasis made by the respondent)

When pressed to say if he would have any preference under difficult circumstances, he was non-committal:

*It all depends on different situations but at times we have to make choices which may not be popularly accepted (MP 7: 5046-5051).*

It was evident that these parents did not want to be seen to discriminate by gender. The fact that the male respondent stressed: 'we try to follow directives from our leaders', suggests that these parents are aware of a strong message about the importance of girls' education and perhaps comply because they do not want to contravene authority. In a positive light, however, the parents' responses do indicate an awareness of gender equality issues. On the

other hand, the reference to “girls being more helpful when still at home” which was rationalised as being good for their future and the proviso that sometimes unpopular choices have to be made, point to an implicit acceptance of gender asymmetries that are supported by traditional cultural practices that still hinder girls’ education.

Jane, a girl attending Bridge School described in a focus group interview, pressures from traditional practices and how they are in tension with the right to education:

*I have neighbours who stopped their daughters from schooling saying that they should get married and the families get ‘Inkwano’ (SG1: 8034-8036).*

Inkwano is a Kinyarwanda word referring to cows used as bride price for marrying a daughter off. Rebecca in another focus group in Progressive School equally illustrated family tensions about tradition and the right to education:

*I am lucky to be here at school. I would not be here if it was not for my Aunt who insisted that I should join my brothers in school, because my mother had refused saying that I should stay and help at home instead of wasting time at school (FSG 7: 3345-3348).*

Interviews with girls who had dropped out of school re-affirmed the influence of gender discriminatory cultural practices. Joanna, a school dropout in Gombe district explained:

*I left school in order to help look after my young siblings and cook for them at home because my mother is always at the market where she sells vegetables (FSDO11: 6456-6458).*

Another school dropout, Claudine, in Bugene district suggested that the conflict had exacerbated the gender asymmetries:

*We are war orphans. My uncle had to stop me from going to school so that I cater for my young sister and two elder brothers who are still studying (FSDO7: 6871- 6873).*

In Rwanda where the conflict left thousands of children orphaned, it is girls who have taken over the mothers’ duties in ways that have re-entrenched distinct gender positioning. In all cases in this research, and apparently without much agonised reflection, it was boys who were accorded the privilege of schooling and girls whose education was sacrificed. The fact that in the case cited above, Claudine was chosen to stop schooling and look after her elder brothers says it all. The absence of any apparent hesitation or consultation over this decision reinserts the automatic or natural gender positioning within households. This of

itself reflects deeply held and practiced gender discriminatory norms in post-conflict Rwanda.

#### **5.4 In-school conditions**

Having discussed stakeholder views on the role played by poverty and tradition and culture in girls' poor participation in education across the 9YBE in Rwanda, in this section I focus on stakeholder views of ways in which in-school based factors militate against girls' retention in schools. As reflected in the literature review (see chapter 3, pp 31-35), school based conditions and their negative effects on girls' education have been documented by many scholars e.g. Sinyangwe and Chilangwa (1995), Oxaal (1997), Shumba (2001), Lifanda et. al. (2004), and Dunne and Leach (2005). The same in-school factors were frequently expressed by interview respondents as among the significant causes of girls' poor participation in education. The interviewees raised several issues that put girls' education at risk. Five key issues that were highlighted and these are discussed below including poor school amenities, gender related violence and harassment, school induced repetition and dropout, poor discipline and girls' unwanted pregnancies. I also consider how these issues are deepened by the long lasting and far reaching effects of the conflict in Rwanda. These issues do not contradict what the literature says and are in many cases complementary apart from the unique situation resulting from the 1994 genocide.

##### **5.4.1 Poor school amenities**

Oxaal (1997), UNICEF (1999), Kasonde Ng'andu et al. (2000) and UNESCO (2005) emphasise the positive role of separate amenities in encouraging girls to remain in school. Consistent with their findings, my research in Rwanda re-affirmed the necessity for schools to have basic amenities such as separate toilets for girls and boys and other sanitary facilities. Two of the four schools (Liberty and Bridge) visited did not have separate toilets for girls; they shared with boys. This was identified as a source of discomfort to mature girls with negative repercussions on school attendance.

Charlotte, the Headteacher of Progressive School emphasises the need for separate toilets and points to negative implications that lack of separate amenities may have on girls' retention.

*I personally would not like to share toilets with male colleagues at school and this is why I have made it a point in this school to avail separate amenities. Girls equally get inconvenienced and this contributes to their irregularity in school (FHT: 379-382).*

Although two schools (Liberty and Bridge) had no separate toilets for girls and boys, the responses of the headteachers in both schools indicate that they know the negative effects of sharing sanitary facilities but put the blame on inadequate funding; while in fact they do not see separate amenities as a priority. This is supported by further probing on the same issue. The Headteacher of Bridge School rationalises:

*Yes, it is important but there are many equally important things that are not in place and as a head I have to make choices. With time, all these issues shall be solved (MHT2: 796-797).*

Officers in-charge of education in the two districts also seem to acknowledge the need for separate amenities in all mixed sex schools, but their responses regarding this issue makes it very clear that their contribution to solving this problem does not go beyond mere talk. The Director in charge of education in Bugene district hides behind the fact that standards in education which emphasise separate amenities are in place:

*All schools have been given school norms and standards provided by the Ministry of Education in which separate toilets are strongly emphasised. As an education office we usually stress the need for separate toilets for both girls and boys and all **schools know** the importance of separating these facilities (LEA: 3004-3006).(emphasis by the respondent)*

The parents group of respondents on the contrary do not share the same feelings about the need for separate toilets in schools. Four parents and a parent representative on Liberty School PTAs do not see separate amenities as crucially important. They do not see the reason for fussing over separate facilities arguing that girls and boys share toilets in homes. In fact one parent called the provision of separate toilets an unnecessary luxury.

*We all share toilets. Why should we pay for separate toilets? Schools should instead put resources into strengthening learning and teaching other than wasting our money in luxurious facilities (MP: 5078-5079)*

Womens' group organisations and FAWE representatives however stressed the need for separate toilets, pointing out that girls cannot be comfortable sharing with boys at that

particular age; emphasising naughtiness and immaturity of boys at 9YBE level. They argue that girls are likely to be stressed by harassments from boys resulting into abandoning schooling. They all advocate for separate amenities for boys and girls in schools and think that it is the duty of the Ministry of Education to avail the needed infrastructure.

Following up on the same issue with school dropouts, however, indicates that they blamed abandoning of school on many other powerful problems and did not see separate toilets as a main issue. Juanita, in Bugene districts for example, saw an infrastructural issue as a scapegoat for the spoilt with no major problems to grapple with:

*For me separate toilets were not at all an issue, I had more challenging problems that made me leave school. Those saying they can leave school simply because they share with boys are spoilt children who have no bigger problems (SDO 9:6496-6498).*

In contrast, girls in school expressed gender related harassment as a result of sharing toilets with boys at school. Juliet, a girl interviewed in focus group 3 at Bridge School points to verbal sexual harassment usually meted out by boys to girls as a result of sharing toilets:

*I do not like sharing toilets with boys, they are rude to us, they force doors open when we are in and write obscene things against us on toilet walls (FS3:2340-2342).*

The same gender related harassment is corroborated by Joy, another girl in Liberty School. She observes:

*Sharing toilets with boys is bad; they harass us that we leave blood on toilets and do a lot more bad things to us (FS 4: 2675-2676).*

Issues related to harassment and problems that emanate from girls' menstruation at school are noted by most teachers interviewed in all the four schools. Francine, a female teacher in Liberty school, elaborates at length how poor sanitary facilities have a direct negative impact on girls' health and regularity in schools:

*Girls especially in upper classes feel embarrassed to use the same toilets with boys, especially during their menstruation periods. As such, lack of separate toilets is not only an inconvenience to girls but also a reason for their irregularity and abandonment of school. This is mainly because poor girls who*

*cannot afford to buy sanitary towels are forced to stay at home for at least three days a month. (FT6:800-805).*

On a follow-up question regarding how girls manage the situation without sanitary towels, Mutamba, a female teacher in Liberty School responded that poor girls use home made 'Imbindo' as an alternative to the conventional sanitary pads:

*Girls sew pieces of Kigoma cloth together to make what we locally call Imbindo and have like three pairs which they use every month (FT1: 4269-4270).*

'Kigoma' is a thick cotton fabric manufactured in Rwanda and 'imbindo' is a name given to a homemade sanitary pad. She describes how the whole situation is managed and how 'Imbindo' is kept in a hidden place after being washed and why it may not be exposed outside to be dried in the sun, allegedly for security reasons:

*Avoiding malicious neighbours who might want to bewitch the girls by interfering with their imbindo and make them barren (FT1: 4272-4273).*

When I expressed wonder on the effectiveness of the method used, the same female teacher was quick to add:

*In some cases girls get infections if they are careless. Imbindo must be carefully ironed after washing and drying (FT1:4274-4275).*

Petronile, a senior female teacher in Liberty School also highlighted 'Imbindo's potential health risk when asked what they do to help girls who face menstrual problems at school. She explained that senior female teachers advise girls on how to handle menstruation; but equally lamented that most girls cannot afford to buy sanitary pads. She also explained about the use of local alternatives, but observed that the school generally discourages the use of homemade pads because of their health risk problem. Later, when I discussed this problem with a medical doctor, I learnt that such pads if not properly dried and ironed, may harbour a certain fungus which causes an infection called Candida Vaginitis, commonly known as Candidiasis or yeast Infection.

The controversial issue in this case is that Rwanda is one of the East African countries that levy 18% of VAT on sanitary towels (RRA 2009). The irony of this issue is that while this taxation contributes to the treasury of Rwanda, the expensive sanitary pads that lead to girls missing school ultimately hinder their ability to gain additional skills, earn higher wages,

and hence contribute to national resources through taxation of their wages later in life. Removal of the tax, therefore, would not only be an investment into girls but also in the economy.

#### **5.4.2 In-school gender related harassment**

Gordon (1998) is cited in chapter three of this thesis, observing that the attitudes of both teachers and male students, which have their foundation in cultural norms, tend to hinder girls' progress within schools. Dunne and Leach's (2005:49) research findings also concur with this view and highlight the importance of "socio-cultural gender constructs and stereotypes", pointing out that boys dominate the "physical and verbal classroom space" and that girls are often discouraged from active participation and may be reduced to being mere spectators in class.

In line with the above findings, data generated from respondents on questions related to gender relations in school, point to inhibited participation of girls mainly as a result of gender related harassment meted out by boys. The four Headteachers interviewed mentioned that the introduction of English language as a medium of instruction in all Rwanda schools was causing discomfort to learners and a source of indiscipline by boys against girls. Further probing into the issue revealed that inability to accurately use English language in classroom attracts verbal harassment from boys as girls try to communicate in English language. Teachers interviewed reaffirmed the existence of verbal harassment of girls by boys. Peter, a teacher at Progressive School observes:

*The poor background in English language does not only seriously affect enhanced learning abilities but also attracts some sort of gender related problems where boys boo girls whenever they make grammatical mistakes (MT:979:981).*

The issue of gender related harassment appears to be little appreciated by Gerald, the Director in charge of education in Bugene district, who downplays the seriousness of the problem claiming that girls simply crave for attention and sympathy; adding that girls are specifically weak in English language. His argument is however not supported by school records which actually show that girls, in most cases, perform better than boys in English language; suggesting that the same Director equally harbours gender bias. The Director's view deviates from what researchers take to be an almost worldwide phenomenon that girls

are more proficient in languages than boys (see for example Birgit Brock-Utne (2002). This stance is equally supported in contemporary Rwanda by almost all annual reports by the Rwanda National Examinations (see for example RNEC report of 2009). This report shows that girls perform better than boys in all the three official languages (Kinyarwanda, French and English) used in Rwanda.

Boys' dominance of "verbal classroom space" and associated verbal harassment was also a major complaint among pupils interviewed. Betty, a girl studying at Alliance School observed:

*Me, I cannot try to answer even if I know the answer for fearing to hit 'imbogo' (FSG1:1945).*

'Imbogo', is a Kinyarwanda slang coined by pupils for making terrible grammatical errors, literally meaning to hit a buffalo (imbogo), a wild animal locally known for its hostility. Another girl, Josephine in focus group 3 at Bridge School points to a negative gender dimension and implication for inability to communicate in English language:

*Boys are fond of booing when we make grammatical mistakes and they do not do that to fellow boys. This discourages us from participating. I think we should have gone to a girls' only school (FSG 2: 603 - 605).*

This issue and its implications are equally stressed by Faith, a girl from Progressive School:

*I am afraid to speak in English and I am always nervous and confused when asked a question in English. I am always afraid of being laughed at and booed by boys. I sometimes dodge classes or sit in the last row to avoid the humiliation of being called upon to speak (FS 76: 300-303).*

Verbal classroom dominance and gender related harassments have negative implications for girls' retention because they lead to loss of interest in school as indicated by Faith above, which translates into abandoning school completely. Interestingly, none of the teachers and headteachers interviewed, including Charlotte the female headteacher of Progressive School indicated that anything was being done to discourage the harassment, suggesting as alluded to in section 3.3 of chapter three, that they are themselves still trapped in traditional gender insensitivity and taking male dominance as the norm.



### 5.4.3 School induced repetitions

Repetition and dropout are two interrelated concepts in terms of both their causes and effects. Repetitions make pupils bored and lose interest in education and encouraging dropping out of school. Although this problem is gender neutral and affects both boys and girls, data collected from the General Inspectorate of Education (see chapter 2, page 15) provides evidence to show that the highest repetition rate for girls occurs at upper primary and lower secondary levels of education, just before the national primary and lower secondary school leaving examinations. Induced repetitions therefore have their negative gendered dimensions. The repetition and related gendered dimension gets another explanation forwarded by the headteacher of Progressive School who locates the problem in the individual (girl), rather than wider cultural norms, suggesting that educators themselves look and interpret girls' educational issues through gender biased psycho-social lenses. She explains that girls start experiencing problems at the onset of puberty, psychological and physiological changes:

*Girls are very good learners when they are still young. They actually even perform better than boys, but they change as soon as they reach puberty, start performing poorly, repeat classes and some abandon school (FHT3:331-333).*

Although other headteachers and most teachers interviewed held the same views as the above headteacher on the negative effects of the setting in of puberty, Josephine, a female teacher in Liberty School revealed the existence of school induced repetitions. She said that most schools' administration deliberately makes pupils repeat in order to raise success rates in national examinations. This issue was secretly confirmed by five more teachers who did not want to say it openly for fear of retribution from headteachers. Since boys perform better than girls, (see Context chapter 2, page 14) it is girls that mostly fall victim of the school induced repetition. In Rwanda, there are inter-district competitions whereby well performing districts and individual schools are praised and rewarded while the poorly performing ones are named and shamed. Josephine is of the view that Examination Council should stop ranking schools according to performance arguing:

*Otherwise, many more girls shall be deprived of chances to progress since they do not perform as well as boys and are thus made to repeat and may abandon school in due course ( FT9: 343-345).*

The teachers' concern is corroborated by all students interviewed in focus groups, when asked to give causes for girls' repetitions, poor performance and abandoning school. Jennifer, a girl interviewed in focus group 2 in Alliance school for example said:

*They (Headteachers and teachers) make us repeat. They even determine the number of those who shall be promoted and those who shall repeat before doing tests. Some students actually get angry and abandon school and nobody cares (FSG7:3345-3347).*

The claim of school induced repetitions was vehemently denied by all Headteachers and the Directors of Education in the two districts, discrediting the claim as an exaggeration. Parents on the four schools' PTAs had no knowledge of the problem. John, a parent on Bridge School PTA stressed that he did not believe that school administration can make pupils repeat without enough evidence that they are incapable of continuing. The denial by Headteachers and education authorities despite available evidence from both teachers and students, points to possible deliberate connivance between the education office and school administration in a misguided effort to improve quality, by ensuring good performance in national examinations at the expense of girls' progress and possible dropout.

#### **5.4.4 Poor discipline in schools**

Poor discipline as a main cause of girls' poor retention in school was one of the most consistent factors identified by most interview respondents. All Headteachers and teachers interviewed argued that girls' poor discipline contributes greatly to their poor retention in schools. The Headteacher of Alliance School observes:

*The whole issue of retention and performance of students in general has a strong bearing on levels of discipline in school. Most girls that have abandoned our school are the unruly type with lots of disciplinary issues (MHT 1:75-79).*

Disciplinary issues are equally stressed by the Headteacher of Liberty School who observed that poor discipline in his school contributes to poor retention of girls.

*Poor discipline among students is responsible for their abandonment of school, and girls are the most problematic. Girls keep asking for permission to leave school for different reasons. They long for things they cannot afford and this*

*brings in issues of Sugar Daddies and pregnancies while still in school (MHT4: 532-535).*

Interestingly, this male headteacher presented the problem in a gender insensitive manner that connotes acceptance of gender violence and sexual exploitation, while at the same time he individualises the issue as the fault of the girls; suggesting that he is still engrossed in a gender blind regime.

Most teachers interviewed think that parents have a big role to play in their children's discipline, but stress that parents do not seem to be concerned at all about their children's disciplinary issues. As seen in the literature review (see chapter 3 page 33), Farrant (1990) advises that parents need to be directly involved in schools in order to monitor achievements and progress of their children and get to know what happens in schools in general. He argues that parents' direct involvement and their close relationship and cooperation with teachers contribute positively to pupils' behaviour and to their smooth learning and achievement. Accordingly, this research has revealed that this type of engagement is largely lacking in the Rwandan education system, and may by extension have negative implications for girls' retention and meaningful participation in education.

Another issue related to poor discipline and poor retention was found to be the high rate of pupil absenteeism. Absentee rates are key both in assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of the system and in understanding the nature of inclusion and equity. Dropping out is more of a process rather than an event (Lewin (2007a). Therefore, as the period for which girl is absent from school becomes longer, eventually it becomes effectively a matter of dropping out. There appear to be no school based statistics on absenteeism and its extent and characteristics. All the schools I visited do not have accurate centrally held records of attendance and absence. It is a question I asked, and not one headteacher was able to provide a specific answer. They said that class teachers keep a register but this information is not collated or held centrally. Although all the four schools visited in the fieldwork confirmed having records of learners' absences, it was not clear whether or not the claimed statistics were being regularly communicated to parents and district education authorities, with a view to soliciting support for remedial actions. Still on lack of evidence, there were no statistics available to show evidence of individual learner's progress or lack of it in all

the four schools visited. This lacuna calls for a need to change the way statistics are collected and on which indicators they ought to focus, such as individual learners' absenteeism to inform decision making and interventions.

Parents interviewed indicated that they have limited interaction with schools claiming that matters related to education are better handled by educationists, but blamed teachers for their daughters' poor discipline. The majority of parents interviewed actually expressed fear that indifferent attitudes of teachers expose their daughters to risks. They highlighted unwanted pregnancies among risks faced by their daughters while schooling. One female parent interviewed on the same issue was very direct: "Although girls are unruly these days, teachers' don't-care attitude exposes them to even more risk".

Girls interviewed in all focus groups strongly protested against being branded rebellious by parents and teachers and instead blamed them for their failure to meet school demands. The discussion that ensued, unearthed complex tensions brought about by the need to balance the time for studying at home and doing domestic labour demanded by parents. Dusabe, a girl in focus group 5, was very defensive over the controversy:

*Parents do not want us to do any studies at home and insist that we do other home chores. When we insist on doing homework they think we are rebellious. So it is not true that we are undisciplined (SFG5:2923-2925).*

Related to indiscipline, girls' involvement into sexual affairs and associated sexual violence was equally blamed for girls' dropping out of schools. Maimbolwa- Sinyangwe and Chilangwa (1995), Hulton and Furlong (2001), Shumba (2001), see also Mirembe and Davis (2001) and Shabaya and Kondo-Agyemang (2007), all stress the negative effects of sexual violence and pregnancies on school girls' education. They all argue that school girls are defiled by adult working men, "Sugar Daddies", who give gifts to school girls in exchange for sex. This might also be an aspect of poverty that has already been discussed in previous sections although not in these terms.

Pregnancies were among the most frequent factors identified as a cause for girls' dropping out of school in this research. Nine cases of unwanted pregnancies were reported in one

year alone among the four schools in which I conducted the research. A female teacher interviewed on this issue said,

*It is true, some girls get pregnant and either withdraw from school on their own or are sent away by school authorities (FT16:1342-1343).*

Responding to a follow-up question on whether or not girls come back to school after giving birth, the same teacher said:

*It is very rare for girls who have had such problems to come back to school. To be frank with you, nobody ever comes back to school. With poverty out there, who would look after the baby? Besides, such girls are too embarrassed to go back to school. They simply disappear into society (FT 16:1345-1348).*

A male teacher responding to the same question brings in a cultural dimension relating to unwanted pregnancies by young girls, pointing out:

*As you know it is a taboo to become pregnant before marriage. How would you expect such a scandalous girl to come back to school after delivery? No one ever tries to come back (MT 8: 841-843).*

When I asked who they think is responsible for school girls' pregnancies, Ingabire, a female teacher answered:

*These young girls are tricked by unscrupulous men, Sugar Daddies, who take advantage of their poverty and lack of parental care since most of them are orphans and destitute (FT 11: 1097-1100).*

It can be concluded from the teachers' responses that girls who unfortunately get pregnant become psychologically, emotionally and socially traumatised by putting themselves in what was described as a 'scandalous' position. This is another dimension of the more intense social gaze on girls which militates against going back to school. As such, the issue of girls getting pregnant while still schooling is a serious problem that prevents continued access and which deserves concerted efforts to fight against. Surprisingly, one headteacher downplayed the seriousness of unwanted pregnancies among girls in his school. When I asked him whether unwanted pregnancies are among the major causes for girls dropping out of his school and whether he thinks that such an issue deserves specific attention. He was quick to dismiss it as a non-issue:

*We have had a few cases of girls getting impregnated by sugar daddies, but these things happen in any society. The numbers of girls falling pregnant is negligible; there is no cause for alarm (HT 2:193-194).*

The fact that this headteacher belittles school girls' unwanted pregnancies, the casual way he expresses 'a few cases of girls getting impregnated' and his conclusion that the number of girls getting pregnant is 'negligible' left me wondering how many girls must get pregnant before this Headteacher qualifies the problem as serious enough to warrant concern and attention. When I probed further whether or not he had similar cases of boys being misled in the same way by sugar mummies, the same Headteacher was defensive:

*We do not have cases of Sugar Mammies. We hear that those are problems found in the capital city but not in villages. No!! There is nothing like that here ( MHT 2 : 201-202).*

I thought that this headteacher had something to hide, but the same stance was sustained by one female and two male teachers when I cross-checked them over the same issue.

Respondent parents blamed unwanted pregnancies on economic hardships experienced by girls, mostly the orphaned ones. One parent for example pointed out:

*Realities show that most of these girls are either from destitute families or are orphans; who are prone to fall for gifts and money from people who are interested in having sex with them (PF: 5092-5093).*

NGO and women organisations were more vocal when it came to issues of girls' unwanted pregnancies. A FAWE representative stressed that unwanted pregnancies account for more girls dropping out of schools than authorities care to accept. She cited at length a research undertaken by FAWE-Rwanda that uncovered the fact that most dropouts are related to unwanted pregnancies and sexually related violence. Local women's organisations in the two districts were equally vocal on issues related to girls' unwanted pregnancies. Margaret, a head of 'Twikorere', a women's income generating group in Bugene district, not only confirmed that unwanted pregnancies among girls are responsible for most dropouts but also accused teachers of being responsible for some of the pregnancies.

*There is a big number of young girls who leave school every year as a result of pregnancy, but you may not get this information from schools because teachers are in some cases implicated (WGO: 695-696).*

Whoever is responsible, the fact remains that pregnancy among school girls is a big challenge to girls' participation in education. This happens despite the fact that the sensitisation campaigns have been intensified in all schools and the government of Rwanda has put in place harsh punitive measures against men found guilty of such atrocities.

### **5.5 Social issues: Long lasting effects of conflict on girls' education**

From 1990 to 1994, Rwanda was engulfed in war that devastated the country and brought the economic and social life to a standstill. The bad situation was made worse in April 1994 when the country was plunged into the worst genocide the world has experienced in recent times, the Tutsi genocide. Around one million people were killed; millions were displaced and /or exiled. After the war and genocide in July 1994, almost all the social and economic infrastructure had been destroyed. There were thousands of orphans and vulnerable children who found themselves without shelter and other basic necessities of life. The most affected were girls and women who were also targeted for rape and other untold dehumanisation. After the conflict, hundreds of families found themselves headed by children who were equally unable to fend for themselves. Most of this burden fell on the shoulders of girls who were among the majority of survivors (MINALOC 2006).

The post-conflict Government quickly revived public institutions and social services, including education. 9YBE was made fee-free, mainly to enable access. But 18 years down the road, a huge proportion of girls do not complete basic education. This problem is mainly attributed to deep and lasting effects of the conflict and genocide, which makes Rwanda's case unique. The conflict is responsible for deep rooted family poverty that not only limits support for girls' education in terms of essential needs but also contributes significantly to their consistent irregularity in school that leads to repeated repetition and abandonment of school. The conflict has created persistent vulnerability of unsupported orphaned children whose major burden falls on the shoulders of girls as family heads. In Rwanda, therefore, there are many more problems that contribute to poor participation of girls in education than what is commonly experienced in other countries. Girls who dropped out of school provide evidence to persistent deep and lasting negative impact of conflict on girls' education. Jeannette, a 17 year old school dropout, gave the following testimony when asked why she dropped out of school:

*I could not stay in school since I had to look after my surviving young brother and sister. These two were going to school but had to terminate it also because of problems. You cannot study when you have not eaten; we have huge problems only known to us. What can we do? (SDO 11: 7056 -7059)*

Lillian, another school dropout explains:

*Our surviving uncle remarried after the genocide, took everything that belonged to our deceased parents and chased us away. The two of us, me and my elder sister had to survive by looking for jobs as house girls. That is how we abandoned school (SDO 18: 2011-2114).*

It ought to be noted that much as the literature has pointed to social and economic factors as major causes for girls' poor participation in education across the globe, in Rwanda these causes are widely evident and further deepened by the special circumstances of a post-genocide country that have uniquely affected girls in multiple ways. The above testimonies and more, show that the fee-free 9YBE introduced by the Government is not enough. All the 20 school dropout girls interviewed told different stories mainly around family poverty but had one thing in common; they were all victims of the 1994 conflict.

Again, as a result of genocide, there are parents (hundreds of thousands) who were among the killers who are currently serving prison sentences. Their large number has constrained the capacity of local authorities to feed them. This leaves their families having to cater for their food and in almost all cases, it is the girl child who alternates with the mother to prepare and take food to prisons. This issue alone contributes significantly to their absenteeism from school. Justifying that most girls are faced with a multitude of problems that eventually force them out of school, Charlotte, a female headteacher explained:

*This absenteeism as a result of prison visits alone accounts for a minimum of two days a week and this may not be the only reason for absenteeism. In totality therefore, these girls spend more days outside the school than inside. Eventually reality shows that they are wasting time and choose to abandon school altogether (FHM3: 1076-1079).*

A female parent interviewed sounded completely resigned with a seemingly justifiable fate of her daughter being out of school:

*Of course I alternate with my daughter to take food to prison. If she does not, when would I get time to look for and cultivate the*



*very food we all eat? I think school is not possible for her given the circumstances (FP 11:5075-5078).*

The interesting part of this finding is that it has been widely taken for granted in Rwanda that only survivors of the genocide still carry the burden of post-genocide trauma. This study brings to the fore the fact that even daughters, sisters, sons and relatives of the genocide perpetrators are also traumatised for being associated with killers. Some of these relatives of genocide perpetrators were very young during the genocide, but after growing up and realising what their relative had done, some of them cannot handle it. They are traumatised. Others are harassed by fellow learners at school for belonging to a family of 'killers'. As a result, some opt out of school. Naomi, a school dropout in Bugene district exemplifies such cases:

*I left school because I hated being called a daughter of 'Interahamwe' (genocider) at school. This made me hate school. I kept telling fellow students that they must know that I am not the one who killed people, but they kept harassing me. Anyway, I hate my father for what he did and is making us go through all this torture (SDO 9: 6480- 6484).*

A female parent interviewed corroborated what the school dropout (above) had said when explaining why her daughter was not in school. She said that her daughter had to leave school because her teacher was always rebuking her for being absent on pretext that she takes food to 'interahamwe' (genocider), meaning her father. She further observed that her classmates followed their teachers' example and kept calling her the killer's daughter and she decided not to go back. These testimonies add to the humiliation of young girls being forced to visit a place occupied by thousands of men in order to carry food to their relatives. This alone can create enough trauma that diverts them from concentration on school work and eventually force them to abandon school altogether as in the case highlighted above.

### **5.5.1 Conflict and effects of HIV&AIDS on girls' education**

Effects of HIV and AIDS as an impediment to girls' education were also among factors that featured prominently in interviews. Rape of women and girls was one of the weapons used by perpetrators of the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda to torture and dehumanise their victims. The effects of these heinous crimes are still felt to date. Most of the victims of rape

were infected with HIV & AIDS while others were made pregnant by their tormentors. Thousands were left destitute because bread winners had either been killed or were too incapacitated to do any gainful work. To date, most of these victims of rape and HIV & AIDS have died or are dying and have left families headed by young girls and boys of school-going age. Offspring of rape are either infected and / or have been rejected by their victim mothers or relatives. This has created tension between the official right to 9YBE and unofficial social legitimacy that justifies denying educational support to such learners. This societal rejection has accumulated its own victims; the following quotation clearly shows resignation to the fate of the daughter's education by a female parent living with conflict-originated HIV & AIDS:

*I am a destitute without any help. Who would support her schooling? Everybody looks at her as a daughter of a killer rapist. Education for her is a forgotten business, she will have to suffer for her father's sins (FP:3987-3988).*

The fate of such a girl and more in similar situations pass largely unnoticed by authorities and most of education stakeholders. A local education authority in Bugene district was taken aback when asked if he knew cases of genocide rapists' offspring being ostracised and not supported to attend school. He responded "Never heard such a case! Everybody is in some way a victim of the genocide. We do not have special cases". Special cases notwithstanding, the effects of HIV& AIDS on girls' education remain a big issue to date. All teachers interviewed indicated that learners who are either affected or infected are forced to cut short their education. This is especially so for a girl child whose gender positioning in Rwandan society is assumed to be the bona fide care giver (see context chapter page 7). Mary, a teacher in Bridge School was more elaborate about the issue:

*Most of these girls you see here are orphans either because their parents were killed during the genocide or died of HIV and AIDS. Others are either infected or affected by HIV & AIDS. They stay at home because they are either sick themselves or are busy taking care of sickly family members. It is not surprising therefore that they come and disappear after a short time in school (FT 14: 1559-1563 ).*

Pupils interviewed were visibly too nervous to talk about their personal experience with effects of HIV & AIDS. They all however indicated that they knew fellow girls who had to drop out of school because they were either infected or affected by the HIV & AIDS

scourge. All girls interviewed in focus groups reported that their school had what they called ‘Anti HIV & AIDS Clubs’ in which they get advice from teachers and others who come from outside the school to advise them on how to avoid HIV & AIDS. But, if what was said on unwanted pregnancies among school girls in the previous section is anything to go by, then, one would not fail to question whether or not girls really understand or take the sensitisation campaigns seriously. The simple fact that some young school girls still get pregnant, is a pointer to the fact that these lessons are yet to be internalised. It may also be the case that the campaigns need to include males of all ages as they too are implicated in school-girl pregnancies and the spread of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

## **5.6 Reflections**

Making connections with subsections 3.2 and 3.3 of chapter 3 on equity and gender conceptualisation respectively, I cannot fail to note that respondents in this research reflect an individualised understanding of the learner and they tend to explain issues from a biological rather than a social approach. This is influenced by the Rwandan gender regime and positioning informed by social-cultural and traditional values that attach low priority to girls’ education especially in the case of poverty and a number of other contemporary factors such as the effect of the genocide that have been illuminated by this chapter.

While a number of factors and perspectives identified in this research have been highlighted in the conceptual framework chapter to be pertaining in other countries especially in SSA, Rwanda remains a case in its own category. This is largely due to unprecedented circumstances that Rwandan girls find themselves in as a result of war and genocide. Deep rooted family poverty, coupled with outdated cultural and traditional gendered embodiments in Rwandan society, school based challenges plus other social problems like persistent vulnerability of unsupported orphaned children, untreated traumatism of survivors of genocide, effects of HIV & AIDS and unwanted pregnancies, all contribute to a gender imbalance in educational provision and access in Rwanda. It has become clear that any solutions aimed at solving deep rooted inequalities in education provision must take these and other micro-social factors into consideration.

It is important to point out that although I had initially thought that sampling schools in different environments ( rural and semi-urban) and demographically varying districts would yield differences in perceptions and or perspectives from interview respondents, the analysis of data does not appear to illuminate any particularities for different cites and environments. All respondents seemed to exhibit similar preconceived gendered constructs and hetero-normative social trends that seemed to inform the way they looked at issues related to the provision of education to girls across 9YBE.

Having catalogued the multiple causes of low educational participation of girls, in the next chapter, I turn to explore, first, issues of accountability for keeping girls in school and in chapter 7, I look into stakeholders' proposals of strategies and solutions that might lead to a more gender balanced education provision in Rwanda. This is important, not only to gauge stakeholders perspective on girls' rights to education, but also to explore who they think is or should be held accountable for girls' being in or out of school and what stakeholders think are possible solutions to identified problems. These views become critical to inform the design and effective implementation of future interventions to ensure Rwandan girls' right to education.

## **Chapter 6: Accountability and girls' schooling: Stakeholder views**

### **6.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I provide exploratory evidence of the five stakeholder groups' views and perspectives about the accountability for the access and retention of girls' across the 9YBE in Rwanda. I have organized this chapter so that it corresponds with factors that the stakeholder groups identified as impeding access and retention which I presented in the previous chapter. In the conclusion, I reflect on the whole chapter, discuss implications for major findings, and summarise the main ideas expressed by stakeholders regarding accountability for girls' educational access and retention in Rwanda and look at possible influence of power relations in my probing accountability.

### **6.2 Overview of stakeholder insights on accountability**

Preliminary analysis of the data indicates that all the five stakeholder groups (the educationists, parents, NGOs and Learners in school and School dropouts) appreciate the necessity for effective collaboration among different players. They recognized the need for well-coordinated interventions aimed at ensuring that girls have sustained access to school and participate meaningfully in the 9YBE. Their general argument is that effective collaboration among different stakeholders would enhance monitoring, evaluation and accountability for keeping girls in school. In this connection, respondents expressed the need to institutionalise an accountability chain in order to avoid duplication of interventions and to ensure that no girl is left behind. Despite this general awareness, however, none among the five interviewed groups of stakeholders was ready to accept his/her own responsibility for keeping girls out of school. Views on who should be answerable for girls' poor access and retention increasingly became characterised by blame and counter-blame. Failure to accept personal and collective responsibility notwithstanding, responses gathered from various stakeholder groups provide an understanding of levels of accountability for keeping girls in or out of school.

As might be expected, educationist stakeholders in general were more vocal and analytical on issues of accountability than any other group. They were of the view that improved communication and consultation among local education stakeholders and the central government on policy options and their implementation strategies would greatly improve education delivery to girls. In particular, they thought that sensitization of parents on the need to support girls' education would promote their responsibility and accountability for keeping girls in school.

Parents' views on the other hand expressed concerns that educators do not take much care of learners' discipline especially that of girls, whom they feared were being exposed to personal risks. Parents clearly located the responsibility with the local and central governments who should ensure that girls from poor families are adequately supported to access and remain in school. These same views were sustained by local women's organizations and NGOs, who put responsibility for girls' access and retention squarely on the central and local governments' shoulders.

Girls in school blamed their poor retention on inadequate support from parents, mainly due to cultural and traditional gendered reasons. They also put responsibility on teachers for failure to solve their problems while at school. Girls who had dropped out of school blamed their problems on poverty and on the over-arching effects of the 1994 Tutsi genocide. They lamented that neither the central nor the local government takes responsibility for their plight. As a whole, the necessity for coordinated efforts aimed at keeping girls in school is clearly appreciated in this chapter. However, it is abundantly clear that since no stakeholder group seems ready to accept and take responsibility for keeping girls out of school, implementing stakeholder suggested solutions that shall be discussed in the next chapter may prove difficult, such that the end point remains elusive.

### **6.3 Stakeholder views on accountability for keeping girls in school**

The roles and responsibilities in education provision with specific reference to girls' education are stressed in major International Human Development reports, see for example the Universal Declaration of Human Rights - UN (1996), the Convention on the Rights of the Child - UN (1998), the UN Millennium Development Goals (2006) and OHCHR - UN

Special Rapporteur (2006). Scholars such as Lewis et al. (2001), Cambell and Razsnyai (2002), Hallak and Poisson (2006) and by the Ministry of Education Education's Girls Education Policy (2003) in Rwanda, have also discussed getting girls into school, but few stipulate exactly who is responsible for this. This chapter addresses this absence by exploring the perspectives of local stakeholders as a driver of the analysis in order to understand who exactly they think is or should be responsible for the delivery of the basic right of education to girls.

Interviews conducted indicate that every participant from the five stakeholder groups: the educationists, parents, local community organisations and NGOs, pupils in and out of school, generally appreciate the necessity for accountability, and have ideas of who they think should be accountable for keeping girls in or out of school. Analysis of the interview data however, shows that they all fall short of accepting their own responsibility for failure to counteract factors identified in chapter five, that cause girls' poor access and retention in school. In this chapter, these factors (in-school conditions, home poverty, gendered cultural and traditional beliefs and over-arching effects of conflict on girls' education) are discussed in terms of who stakeholders think should be responsible and accountable for interventions aimed at reducing their negative impact on girls' access and retention in schools.

### **6.3.1 Accountability for stakeholder collaboration**

Interviews with the educationist group, which comprise Headteachers, Teachers and District Education Officers, produced mixed reactions. Both the central government and parents are seen to be prime movers of sustained girls' access and retention in school. This conviction remains despite schools alleging poor support they receive from parents and the government. When the Headteacher of Alliance School was asked whom he thought was responsible for keeping girls out of school, he was quick to exonerate himself and colleagues within the school, bemoaning the lack of adequate external support. While he suggested the need for a collaborative effort, he also firmly located the key responsibilities with government's poor support and parents' insensitivity to girls' education.

*We play our part and everything runs smoothly, but of course without support from the government and local authorities to help us mobilise parents, the problem persists and girls keep abandoning school (MHT 1: 308- 310).*

The Headteacher of Progressive School had a different view of government interventions. She praised the government for multiple efforts aimed at the promotion of girls' education, giving abolition of school fees as a case in point. She expressed reservations however about government intervention inadequacies. She critiqued the government for lack of adequate consultation and collaboration with stakeholders on essential policies and assumptions about what is preventing girls' access and retention in schools. Her views on the need for consultations amplify her conviction that the solution lies with collective responsibility among all stake holders, arguing that the number of girls missing school would drastically reduce "if every education stakeholder played his/her part". She was quick to lament however, that no one seems to be in charge of rallying every stakeholder together for a common purpose.

*There is currently no systemic way of focusing interventions aimed at keeping girls in school. There is thus, an urgent need for the Ministry responsible for education in close collaboration with local government to design effective means of ensuring that everybody involved in education accounts for his/her role in ensuring that girls access and progress through the 9YBE. (FHT3:373-376).*

Like observations made by many other respondents, she also indicated that there are many more issues to do with girls' poor access and retention other than school fees alone, over which stakeholders need to discuss and prioritise.

*Although the government has introduced important reforms such as abolition of school fees, a lot more measures need to be put in place because fee free education may not on its own solve girls' education problems. There is a need for consultations in order to agree on priorities and associated interventional strategies (FHT3:384-387).*

The 'many more issues' alluded to by the above headteacher, were in essence identified in chapter five as factors that cause poor access and retention, against which this chapter seeks to find out who stakeholders think should intervene to reduce their negative influence on girls' schooling.

Like headteachers, teachers also thought that collaboration with both parents and district education officers would enhance accountability, but most of them were of the view that parents in particular do not play their part and advocated for intensive sensitisation



campaigns. They suggested that parents' poor collaboration is caused by their poor education background that limits their appreciation of the need to get meaningfully involved in their children's education. This view is articulated by Narcisse, a male teacher in Liberty School.

*It should be remembered that the majority of parents are illiterate. It is therefore, not simple for some of them to get meaningfully involved in education delivery and support even if they wanted to. It is difficult for a parent to get meaningfully involved in his/her children's education when the parent is illiterate. The same applies to supporting the school. They need to be able to appreciate school before they give support. As such, we need to raise levels of parents' understanding before we expect them to contribute to education (MT9: 788-794).*

Parents' illiteracy as an impediment to their collaboration with school administration in the promotion of girls' education was probably the only area of agreement between educationists group of participants and parents. Parents equally blamed illiteracy for their limited involvement in education and were of the view that support to education should remain the business of the government. Emma, a middle aged female parent vindicates the above point.

*I think it is an exaggeration that parents do not like to work with schools. We wish our children to have good education, but it should be remembered that the majority of us parents are illiterate. How can I get involved in her education when I do not know anything about books? I think it should be the duty of government and local authorities to give the necessary support to schools (PF5: 959-963).*

From the foregoing, it would appear that although the government decentralisation policy (MINALOC 2002) clearly stipulates the collaboration framework, there is minimal encouragement for the different stakeholders to engage with one another. As such, there is a need for stakeholder sensitisation aimed at improving this important aspect.

### **6.3.2 Accountability for inadequate school funding**

Most headteachers rationalised that their schools' capacity to handle in-school problems that militate against girls' education, such as failure to provide separate toilets and other sanitary facilities are constrained by poor financial abilities. They all seemed to accept the

situation as it is without any effort to seek innovative solutions to the problem. They sustained a firm stance that it is only the government that can help address in-school problems that impede girls' education. This position is portrayed by a seemingly resigned headteacher of Bridge School lamenting:

*With the kind of funding constraints we face, it is difficult to cater for the girls' needs such as separate toilets and other personal needs (MHT4: 541-542).*

Interestingly, the same headteacher argued, apparently without much agonised reflection on the acknowledged high poverty levels in most homes, that the situation in schools would be different if government had not abolished school fees.

*I do not see any reason whatsoever for the government to stop parents from paying fees for their children's education, knowing well that the government cannot afford to provide adequate funding to schools. This has resulted in our inability to cater for girls' needs such as separate toilets and sustained water supply to keep high standards of hygiene (MHT4:559-562).*

Like the headteacher of Bridge school above, the headteacher of Liberty School also seemed to accept the girls' situation as inevitable. Much as he recognised what needs to be done, he equally claimed that remedial interventions were beyond a school administration's capacity.

*Everybody knows that we cannot do better under the circumstances. The school cannot be held responsible for girls' poor attendance because factors responsible for their irregularity such as home poverty and parents clinging to traditions that impede girls' schooling are far beyond our control (MHT2:327- 329)*

These responses from headteachers point to partial acknowledgement for accountability, with a clear view of what needs to be done to solve in-school based girls' issues. Despite this, they all use the financial stalemate as an excuse for not discharging their responsibilities. In this connection, it is evident that the girls' situation has unfortunately been sort of accepted and that there is little that can be done under the prevailing circumstances. This therefore, points to a contradictory tension between the government school fees waiver and other complementary efforts aimed at getting more girls in school, and the poor school funding that negatively impacts on the quality of school conditions

seen among the key reasons quoted in the literature as a big barrier to girls' access and sustained schooling.

Whereas headteachers had wider vision and sense of accountability regarding girls' schooling or lack of it mainly as a result of inadequate funding, teachers' views were on the other hand narrower. They focused less on the bigger picture of accountability and responsibility for keeping girls in school. Most teachers chose not to discuss issues resulting from poor financing arguing that their role was only limited to teaching. They were of the view that it is the responsibility of other stakeholders to play complementary roles including school funding and creation of an enabling environment that encourages continued girls' schooling. Pendo, a female teacher in Progressive School for example, was clear about the confines of teachers' responsibilities:

*Ours is mainly teaching, I think it is the duty of the parents, local education authorities and the central government to sort out problems that discourage girls' schooling and leave us to concentrate on teaching, which is our core business (FT 5: 1884- 1889).*

Her views were shared by many other teachers who similarly saw their role as only limited to imparting knowledge in classroom. The implication is that teachers appear not to be aware that aspects of their pedagogy might deter girls from attending school. They tend to deflect attention outside their remit either to school or educational management and the home and parents. As seen in earlier discussions in the previous chapter, teachers acquiescence to bullying of girls in the classroom confirms their limited understandings of the gendered environment in school and the negative implications this lack of awareness may have on girls' continued schooling.

Like teachers, parents think that it is the government's duty to fund schools and avail them all the necessary facilities. They have interpreted government abolition of school fees as an exclusive exoneration from parents of all their responsibilities related to supporting schools. Efforts made by school administration and local education authorities to rally parents' support are not taken in good faith. Parents think that they should not be pulled into school financial issues since the government has abolished school fees. Kanamugire, a male parent in Bugene district presents this understanding of government efforts.

*We know that the government pays for everything because it is well known that parents have no money, why should school administration try to extort money from us (MP6:2014-2015).*

It appears then that the heads, parents and teachers reduce the issue of access largely to a question of school facilities. These views act to block collaborative innovations that might otherwise address the school funding issue and associated negative effects discussed in chapter five as setbacks to girls' access and retention.

Turning to the third stakeholder group, NGOs saw their role as mainly advocacy for girls' inclusion in education, and like parents, they thought that it is the duty of government to provide adequate funding for schools. Gertrude, a FAWE representative boasted of the impact of their advocacy role concluding "I am sure that things would be different if we had not convinced the government to abolish school fees". Lack of evidence for this claim notwithstanding, her comment exemplifies a clear position taken by other local non-governmental organisations that it is the government that is accountable for school financing.

### **6.3.3 Accountability for poor discipline**

Poor discipline seen in the previous chapter as contributing to poor retention of girls in school and related questions regarding who stakeholders think ought to be held responsible bred controversies. This was especially so among the educationists group who exonerated themselves and instead accusing parents of abandoning their responsibility over their children's discipline. Parents, as seen in the literature review (see page 33) are known to contribute enormously to learners' achievement if they are actively involved in their education. Specifically, parents are expected to collaborate and work closely with the school administration in order to know their children's progress and help in resolving any obstacles to their effective learning and achievement, such as poor discipline. This research has however revealed that this important attribute is largely lacking in Rwandan schools. Headteachers interviewed indicated that only a few parents show interest in their children's discipline and education in general. Charlotte, the headteacher of Progressive School thinks that as a result of poor educational background, "parents do not understand their role and

think that it is the duty of school administration to correct their children's unruly behaviour". She reasoned that parents' negligence contributes greatly to girls' poor performance and dropping out of schools.

Like headteachers, teachers also were of the view that parents need to take their responsibility for children's discipline more seriously. They all pointed to laxity on the part of parents when it comes to children's discipline. Jorum, a male teacher in Liberty School pointed to an apparent indifference on the part of parents when it comes to children's behaviour, arguing:

*Parents no longer care about the discipline of their children. They have completely abandoned their role of checking their children's bad behaviour (MT19: 457-458).*

Janette, a relatively inexperienced teacher in Alliance School pointed to a shift in attitudes of 'current parents' in relation to children's behaviour, lamenting:

*Our own parents used to care about our behaviour and punish us for bad behaviour, but the current parents do not seem to care about their children's behaviour. They even come to ask us to punish children on their behalf (FT1: 680-683).*

As observed by the educationist group, parents interviewed indeed thought that schools should be held responsible for learners' poor behaviour. Parents were of the view that schools' failure to enforce discipline puts learners, especially girls, at risk of falling pregnant while still schooling. Some parents have apparently given up, claiming that children are too unruly to listen to their counselling. Most of them, as a last resort, look to schools to make a difference. It was only two parent representatives on the school PTAs who took the dominant school perspective to locate responsibility with parents and sided with the school administration. David, a member of Alliance School PTA argued:

*Parents are to a greater degree more responsible for poor discipline of the youth. Things would be different if all parents attended to their children's behaviour, but it is rare to find parents who are seriously concerned about their children's behaviour (MPTA: 1460-1462).*

James, another parent on the Bridge School PTA took a similar stance against fellow parents, accusing them of failure to take disciplinary issues seriously.

*These days, there is some sort of laxity on the part of parents. They are no longer serious about their children's discipline. This lack of seriousness encourages girls to do mischievous things that eventually translate into abandoning school (MPTA2:1423-1425).*

Agnes, a parent in Bugene district was more reflective. She took a different stance, arguing that it should be every adult's responsibility to discipline errant children. She advocated for going back to 'the old African traditional communal family', where every parent in society was responsible for every child's development and behaviour:

*We need go back to our traditions. It used to be every adult's responsibility to discipline children. No parent could tolerate any child found in the wrong place or doing the wrong thing and ignored him or her. It used to be the responsibility of every adult to remind and discipline including administering corporal punishment where necessary to any child found not doing the right thing (MP3: 4263-4267).*

It is to be noted, however, that although collective responsibility is potentially helpful as argued by Agnes above, the Rwanda General Inspectorate of Education (2009) cautions against corporal punishment, citing cases in which over-protective parents have taken 'volunteer discipliners' of their errant children to courts of law.

Pupils interviewed argued to the contrary, claiming that their failure to remain in schools has nothing to do with indiscipline but mainly lies with parents' poor support for their continued learning. NGOs representatives saw indiscipline as a major cause of unwanted pregnancies and advocated for concerted efforts by all stakeholders to discourage the vice. Like Agnes above, Josephine also from FAWE saw enforcing discipline as the "responsibility of every mature citizen". This, points to the lack of collaboration between stakeholders in the education of children. Again, this could be related to the breakdown of social cohesion resulting from the conflict.

### 6.3.4 Accountability for girls' poor schooling in general

Most teachers were of the view that girls' problems were beyond their handling capacities, arguing that girls' failure to access and remain in school is in most cases linked to their parents' inadequate support while at home. They advocated for an intensive sensitisation campaign blended with sanctions. Jeremiah, a teacher in Progressive School advocated for an end to impunity, arguing that parents seen to discourage girls' schooling should be seriously punished. Emphasising this approach he argued:

*If only local authorities can punish a few parents, then, all girls would be in school. The laws are in place to ensure that whoever neglects and / or stops children from attending school is punished but nobody applies them (MT: 894-896).*

Vivian, a teacher at Alliance School was more strategic in her ideas. She was of the view that regular meetings aimed at cross-checking stakeholders' roles and reviewing their responsibilities of ensuring that girls' access and remain in school ought to be convened. She reasoned that such evaluations would keep stakeholders alert and would enhance a culture of accountability in education provision.

Unlike teachers' sustained stance that their responsibility for teaching was being performed to their best abilities, district education officers interviewed accepted the fact that their own role of ensuring that girls access and remain in school was not performed effectively. They blamed their poor involvement on lack of adequate staff. The Gombe district education officer rationalised her inability to support girls' education, protesting:

*What am I supposed to do? I am solely responsible for education in this district and do everything possible to ensure that teaching and learning take place. But of course there are many challenges such as failure to mobilise parents. One cannot work single-handedly and solve girls' education problems alone (LEAF2: 764- 767).*

In resonance with what his colleague had said, the officer in-charge of Bugene district sustained a similar complaint, adding a different dimension that although he was aware of gendered cultural and traditional beliefs that militate against girls' education, he was unable to undertake effective sensitisation campaign among parents because he was overstretched:

*I am the only one working for education in the whole district, and although I am aware of traditional and cultural impediment*

*among parents, I cannot be able to sensitise them, much as I know that these issues are among those responsible for girls' failure to attend school (LEAM: 649-650).*

Whereas the education officers above may rightly argue for the need to have more staff to help them deliver on their job, Organic Law number 20/2003 of 03/08/2003 on education organisation and management puts the sole responsibility for managing education on the shoulders of local education officers at district level (GoR-MINEDUC 2004). They are therefore expected to deliver on their assignment. Here, again issues seem to boil down to inadequate funding and limited resources that most probably limit initiatives that would otherwise make a difference. This is a contradiction since education delivery like many other services has been decentralised in Rwanda and emphasis is put on devolution of both human and financial capital to decentralised entities (GoR-MINALOC 2003).

Contrary to educationists' dominant stance on parents' poor involvement and inadequate support to girls' education, the parent group of stakeholders maintained that it is teachers' laxity that puts girls at risk of dropping out of school. The apparent tension between the two supposedly important partners in education provision (Educationist and Parents), points to loopholes in accountability for solving girls' education setbacks; suggesting that it may be difficult to come up with lasting remedial interventions. Christella, a female parent, had a solution based on collaboration despite her apparent strong conviction about teachers' bad attitude:

*Current teachers' don't care attitude exposes girls to risk, especially of unwanted pregnancies. This would change if they worked together with us but they do not seem to be bothered at all (FP6:2564-2565).*

John, a male parent in Bugene district had a more lenient rationale for cause and effect of teachers' supposedly 'don't care' attitude. He attributed the teachers' insensitivity to a general societal degeneration, in which moral ethics and professionalism are issues of the past:

*Teachers are no exemption to current social degeneration trends. Teachers, like many other professionals, have lost their old ethics and responsibilities and are relaxed when it comes to learners' behaviour. It is no wonder therefore, that learners abandon school as a result of lack of proper guidance (FP6:4203-4205).*



Collective responsibility as advocated by Christella above was equally shared by Gaspar, a parent representative on Bridge School PTA who also thought that success lies in joint efforts by all stakeholders:

*There is a need for educationists, parents, NGOs and local authorities to come together, own girls' education problems and find lasting solutions other than counter-blaming each other over problems they can handle if they worked together (MPT4:1779-1780).*

When probed further, into his personal role and that of fellow PTA members, unlike other respondents, he was quick to accept their weakness:

*Oh yes! I also think that we PTA members should become more proactive and find out what exactly happens in schools other than coming to the school only when invited. We seem to concentrate on the use of the capitation grant, but do little else. We need to seriously look into children's enrolment, general behaviour and learning processes (MPTA4: 1785-1790).*

Most school girls interviewed had a different perspective on issues of accountability and responsibility. They complained mainly against school based inadequacies and insensitivity to their problems. Evelyn, a pupil in Alliance School, did not mince her words when complaining about non-responsiveness and negative attitudes held by school administration and teachers especially in as far as in-school harassment is concerned:

*School administration and teachers in general give little attention to our problems. For example, they purposely refuse to punish boys who harass us, claiming that we crave for unnecessary attention (FS 10:793 – 794).*

The same teachers' negative attitude, bias and apparent refusal to take responsibility for solving girls' problems while at school was a common complaint from almost all pupils' focus groups interviewed in all the four schools. In a similar pattern, some girls blamed insensitivity and irresponsibility on parents for their poor participation in school. They were at a loss with regard to what should be done to ensure that parents take the responsibility for their schooling seriously, except Colette, a girl in Progressive School who took the dominant legal-wise approach by advocating for putting an end to impunity against parents:

*Parents who force their daughters to abandon school are supposed to be put to task by local government, but they continue to stop girls from schooling with impunity. It appears that nobody cares at all. Most girls currently out of school would remain in school if local government would enforce the relevant laws (FS7:632-635).*

Girls who dropped out of school thought that government and local authorities can make a difference, but observed that nothing is being done: Jemima, a dropout in Bugene district, observed;

*If the government and local authorities can support girls from poor families, then most of us would be in school, but who cares? It is like every person is on her own (SDO: 6564-6565).*

Acute poverty identified in the previous chapter as a major factor in impeding girls' access and continued schooling, was unanimously seen as the responsibility of government by all dropouts. Unfortunately, they all concluded that nobody seems to do anything about the issue. As such, girls from poor families remain marginalised and technically excluded from schooling. Failure to study and complete school has negative implications for the poor girls' and their children's future, as continued life in poverty is most likely to have a domino effect limiting their children's chances of accessing and completing school.

In a similar pattern to other stakeholders, NGOs representatives were also unanimous on the need for parents' support to girls' education, but reasoned that this can only be achieved if local authorities and central government can provide "substantial economic support" to poor families. NGOs did not think they should also be accountable for girls' poor participation in education, some arguing that education is not their area of intervention, while others rationalised that their work restrictions do not allow them to intervene. Interestingly, they all recognise the problem and think that everybody else should be held accountable, including the central Ministry of Education. A respondent from the Local Community Women Organisation in Bugene district clearly distanced her organisation from accountability and responsibility for girls' problems:

*What can an NGO do? We have restrictions in what we do. There is nothing we can do although we recognise the problem (CWO1: 694-696)*

A FAWE representative did not run short of advice to leaders responsible for education, although she also fell short of accepting her organisations' share of responsibility in ensuring that girls access and remain in school. She advised:

*Education leadership should recognise the need for change by first diagnosing the current reality and taking stock of problems that characterise girls' education provision. This would bring them to face the reality that girls are discriminated against. It is after this realisation that they can find lasting solution and effective interventions (FAWE1:1170-1176).*

As a follow-up on levels of accountability, I interviewed two policy makers at the macro level of education provision. The responses I got indicated that there is no systematic follow-up on the effectiveness or not of policies and strategic plans put in place for the promotion of girls' education, as evidenced by the seemingly complacent attitude held by one of the Director in the Ministry of Education:

*The Ministry has abolished school fees at 9YBE and sends capitation grant for each school going child. So, girls are also catered for. All decentralised education authorities have been empowered to handle any educational issues at local level, and they are doing well so far (MPM 2: 1023- 1026).*

If this response from a high ranking officer at the central administration level of education is anything to go by, then, it in essence indicates that accountability for ensuring that girls access and remain in school is not only weak at micro level but also at macro level of education provision. This finding corroborates the initial conclusion in previous sections that although all respondents had in theory an idea of who should be accountable for girls' access and retention, in reality nobody is held to account. As such, poor accountability may mean that more girls are likely to continue being excluded from effective participation in education. This, by extension effectively translates into sustained discrimination against girls especially those from poor families, who find it difficult to access and remain in school.

## 6.4 Reflections

As I reflect on my professional identity as a senior government officer invoking concepts of and probing accountability among a relatively junior educationist group of respondents, I realise that this could have triggered a defensive mechanism as a result of power relations. It is likely, therefore, that this may have encouraged apportioning blame for girls' poor access and retention to other stakeholders as seen in the foregoing sections of this chapter, despite my effort to discuss issues in a more social way. However, this chapter has illuminated issues on accountability for girls' education provision which may be tapped into to enhance remedial interventions.

Discussions around accountability seem to suggest that stakeholders, especially parents, headteachers and teachers are convinced that lack of adequate finances is the main problem that impedes girls' participation in education and seem to ignore other contributory issues, whereas the girls themselves talk about social conditions in school and poor encouragement from home. Neither of these are about finances but more about interactions, social gender positioning and poor attitudes towards girls' access and sustained schooling. This tension is in itself problematic since it deflects focus on major issues and relevant interventions that would otherwise make a difference between access and retention or not. As a result girls' schooling continues to be impeded.

The controversial issue surrounding girls' access and retention across the 9YBE is the fact that Rwanda is internationally acclaimed as the forerunner of gender mainstreaming, having the biggest number of women in parliament (54.6%) and in other decision making bodies both at local and national levels. Logically, this is a remarkable indicator of effective gender mainstreaming since the female population comprises the majority of the Rwandan population (56%) RBS (2008). As argued, there is no country that can develop leaving the bulk of its population behind (GoR-MINALOC 2007). When the whole Rwandan situation is deeply analysed, however, it becomes clear that girls' access and retention across 9YBE as seen in the previous two chapters remain highly problematic. The implication, therefore is that the current achievements in gender mainstreaming in Rwanda which apparently focuses on adult and educated women, is doing little else in terms of

looking at ways and means of ensuring that all young girls access and successfully complete the basic levels of education. If a large number of girls do not effectively participate in education, then they are most likely to be inhibited from future contribution to nation building and good governance. It would not be far-fetched to conclude therefore, that gender mainstreaming in Rwanda is at best superficial, cosmetic and at worst unsustainable and urgently needs redress. The evidently weak accountability for keeping girls in school is tantamount to sustaining gender discrimination as poor girls cannot participate fully in education and exploit their full potential to contribute to their personal development and the nation's at large.

If the current situation is not rectified, it is likely to lead to an emergence of two groups, educated women involved in decision making and enjoying all benefits associated with education and uneducated girls and by extension women who remain poor, vulnerable and exploited. This is in essence developing and sustaining a gender class divide between those who are lucky to study and complete school and those who do not complete school. Reversing this inherent discrimination can only be achieved first of all, by stakeholders not only recognising the existence of the problem but also by accepting to take collective responsibility within each group and between different groups. This would lead to coordinated efforts aimed at designing and implementing relevant and effective interventions. But, as seen in preceding sections of this chapter, these attributes seem to be largely weak especially at micro level of education provision in Rwanda.

## **Chapter 7: Keeping girls in school: Stakeholder solutions**

### **7.1 Introduction**

In the literature review (see chapter 3, p.35) I examined global solutions and possible interventions aimed at solving problems associated with girls' poor access and retention in school, based on research findings by a number of scholars and international organisations, (see for example Farant 1990, Oxaal 1997, KasondeNg'andu 2000, Rough 2000, UNICEF 2004, EFA 2003, Lifanda et al. 2004 and UN World report 2004). They all propose numerous solutions to girls' education problems. UNICEF (2004) however, critiques these solutions for being far-fetched, non-contextual and in some cases irrelevant to the country's specific context. As such, finding contextualised home grown solutions to the specific and unique case of a country like Rwanda becomes one of the major objectives of this study. It is in this context that in this chapter, I present an overview of stakeholder insights on solutions to girls' education problems. I also explore detailed solutions suggested by each of the five groups of stakeholders: the Educationists, Parent group, NGO group, Learner group and Girl dropout group, in relation to identified impeding factors discussed in chapter 5 and make an overall reflection on the whole chapter on stakeholder proposed solutions and emerging issues.

### **7.2 Overview of stakeholder insights on solutions to girls' poor access and retention**

Each of the five groups of stakeholders had varying and often complementary views about key problems and their solutions. It was clear however that each group seemed to locate the blame within one of the other groups including most notably the government. These solutions were mainly around effective collaboration, increased government intervention and adequate school funding to improve facilities. Other solutions included teacher support to girls, gender training and sensitization, increased parental involvement in support to girls, action against poverty and the increased numbers of female teachers in schools.

From the professional point of view, the educationists group thought that closer collaboration with parents and local authorities would go a long way to improve girls' access and participation in 9YBE. Like all other stakeholders, the educationist group was

unanimous on the necessity to combat family poverty, seen in chapter 5 as an impediment to girls' access and retention in school; but were defensive about their own role in the exclusion of girls despite evidence to the contrary seen in chapter 5. The Parent groups on the other hand, saw solutions in the increased professionalism of teachers, especially in regard to learners' discipline, but were equally firmly defensive about their own role in keeping girls out of school, and of the relevance of traditional and cultural beliefs to the educational exclusion of girls. Like all other stakeholders, parents' views often referred to issues of poverty and its deep rooted effects against girls' access and retention across 9YBE. They also thought that the solution to poverty and by extension to girls' education problems lay with government interventions. NGOs equally advocated for both strong collaboration and central governments' interventions especially in combating family poverty, but like other stakeholders did not want to own up to their own responsibility for girls' poor access and interrupted schooling as seen in the previous chapter. Girls in school thought that parents' poor support and teachers' negligence of their in-school problems, such as harassment by boys needed to be addressed. Like other stakeholders, girls were vehemently defensive against any blame for their own role in poor retention especially in as far as their allegedly poor discipline was concerned, claiming that they were instead victims of societal gender positioning. Girls who had dropped out of school seemed to have lost touch with school related issues and only saw salvation in government intervention especially against poverty and the over-arching effects of war and genocide, which as explained in chapter five were in a way gendered in terms of experience and outcomes.

### **7.3 Stakeholder proposed solutions to girls' poor access and retention in school**

#### **7.3.1 Educationist group's views**

As would be expected, professional educationists (headteachers, teachers and district education authorities) in this research were more vocal with well thought-out proposals of solutions that can mitigate girls' poor access and retention across 9YBE. All professional educationists interviewed called for greater and effective collaboration among stakeholders for sustainable positive outcomes. The argument put forward is that educational issues are too complex to be handled by individuals or a single group in isolation, and they saw

solutions in collaborative efforts. Pushing home this view, the headteacher of Alliance School argues:

*There is a great need for building better internal coherence around wider consultation among stakeholders especially between the decentralised levels of education provision and the central ministry of education; to work more collaboratively on common approaches to supporting girls who are at risk of being excluded from school (MHT1: 189-191).*

The argument here is that improved collaboration would synergise interventions other than having uncoordinated and in some cases duplicated efforts and that better collaboration would provide checks and balances at the implementation level. The headteacher of Progressive School identified lack of capacity to handle educational problems as a big issue that hampers education delivery. She was of the view that interventions aimed at strengthening capacities of frontline education providers such as teachers, district education officers and inspectors would enhance the greatly needed interventions that would make a big difference in girls' schooling. She in particular pointed to weak capacities on the part of local education authorities. Emphasising this lacuna, Charlotte, the headteacher of Progressive School links weak capacities to poor support rendered to schools:

*Although the Local Education Authorities are mandated to oversee learning and teaching, and inspect schools under the decentralisation policy, some of them lack the capacity to give the required service and the guidance schools need because they are not qualified enough. Capacity building for most professionals would go a long way to help resolve girls' education problems (FMT3:1065-1068).*

The headteacher of Bridge School also acknowledged the positive role of effective collaboration but again pinpointed lack of capacity to make effective contributions. He gave an example of the role played by PTAs, arguing that their contribution to school development in general and to girls' participation in particular is hampered by their weak capacities. He was of the view that training would improve their ability to make meaningful contribution at school and community levels, but bemoaned poor collaboration with educational leadership that would otherwise be central in the provision of such capacities. Referring to an apparent rift between PTA members and school administration as a result of lack of training, the same the headteacher observed:



*Through training, roles and responsibilities of PTAs in school and communities would be defined and would ease the tension normally created, because some PTA members think that their main role is to control and give instructions to school leadership; while in fact they are the eyes and ears of the community. Such training would enhance collaboration for improved education delivery (NHT2: 1267-1270).*

The headteacher of Alliance School was equally supportive of the need for effective collaboration among education stakeholders. He saw collaboration specifically with parents as the only way to gain parents' support for girls' education. He also argued that collaboration across the board would create a common understanding of the need to seek out girls missing from school and give support to those most vulnerable and those at risk of dropping out of school. In general terms, all the four headteachers interviewed recognised the potentially positive role concerted efforts may bring in terms of improved access and retention of girls in school. They were quick to deny the role they themselves played in the girls' exclusion and specifically blamed parents for clinging to traditional gender positioning and role allocation to the detriment of girls continued schooling; while at the same time they advocated for intensified gender sensitisation at family level.

Like headteachers, teachers also acknowledged that effective collaboration among stakeholders would make a big difference to girls' access and retention. Most teachers reasoned that PTAs can be of great help if they would be made to understand their role in encouraging parents to support girls' education. Peter, a teacher in Bridge School saw compensation for PTAs services as a strong strategy that would enhance their effective collaboration and delivery on their responsibilities. He suggested intensive training of PTAs and the need to support them to acquire means of transport and be given other job relates facilities. Mary, a teacher in the same school however did not see the additional value that might be brought by enhanced cooperation with the PTAs, arguing that their capacity to make a big difference is limited by their low levels of understanding education and what it entails. This in essence reinforces the need for training earlier suggested by headteachers. She saw girls' salvation in government interventions:

*The Government through MINEDUC in close collaboration with the local governments ought to do better than they are currently doing. They are the only ones capable of*

*implementing policies, strategies, laws and interventions that can adequately address girls' education issues (FT: 220-222).*

Her views are shared by many other teachers in this study, suggesting that teachers as stakeholders do not appreciate their own role in finding solutions to girls' education problems and instead seek solace in external interventions. Again, all teachers, like headteachers vehemently denied their own role in girls' exclusion. Veronique in Alliance School for example argued:

*We teachers have no role in the exclusion of girls, we **try to understand their problems and help them where we can**, but at times we cannot do much (FT:997-998). **Emphasis by the respondent.***

“We try to understand their problems” as emphasised by Veronique above and outright denial by other teachers and headteachers of their role in the exclusion of girls, points to a need for sensitising all educationist stakeholders on their expected roles in ensuring girls' continued schooling; and the need for collective responsibility for the generation of lasting solutions to girls' educational exclusion.

Parents' poor support to schools was also observed by all teachers, much as they appreciated their potential role, classifying it as 'highly crucial'. They claimed that only a few parents give the necessary support and attend school meetings. This happens despite the whole educationist groups' appreciation of the necessity for effective collaboration and intra-stakeholder communication as affirmed by Florence, a teacher in Progressive School:

*Good communication between school and parents, holding regular meetings, giving feedbacks and encouraging constant informal discussions are crucial and among effective strategies that keep girls in school (FT3:1667-1669).*

All teachers interviewed highlighted the need for outreach programmes aimed at encouraging parents to support girls' education especially the need to inculcate gender awareness among parents. Documents available in all the four schools, however, did not show any evidence that school administration invites parents or encourages them to visit schools regularly. There appeared to be some strains between the school administration and parents and visits to the school were dependent on individual initiative. This was further complicated by the lack of understanding of the representative work of the PTA by the school administration and local community. Exactly who the PTA represented and to

whom they were answerable was unclear. This is a mockery of decentralisation because in a sense there is no dialogue but rather a dictate of the school system and local authorities. As such, the suggestion that enhanced communication and interaction between parents and schools and local authorities might serve to ease the tension would be a first step in addressing the access issues for girls.

As seen in chapter 5, poverty in homes was regarded as a major factor that forces girls to abandon schools. A poverty stricken home is unable to feed its children and thus acts as an impediment to continued attendance of school. All headteachers pinpointed the negative effect of home poverty in keeping girls out of school. As a short term intervention, all the four schools investigated adopted school feeding and praised the positive role it plays in maintaining girls in school. The headteacher of Liberty school maintains:

*Poverty in homes contributes a lot to students' failure to attend school. Hunger has been forcing many children especially girls to abandon school, until we agreed with all parents to introduce a school feeding scheme in which parents contribute food and alternate to cook for students ( MHT 4 :458 –461).*

Related to school feeding as a way forward in support of girls' retention in schools, the headteacher of Alliance School who had also adopted a school feeding scheme advised:

*Schools need to develop school-feeding programmes in order to keep learners in school in general and girls in particular. Our school adopted a feeding programme in collaboration with WFP, and it is making a big difference in terms of girls' retention and regular attendance in school (MHT1: 145-147).*

In these schools, all pupils are given a mid-day meal. In addition to the school feeding initiative, the headteachers of the four schools in collaboration with World Food Programme (WFP), have designed a strategy to encourage girls to stay in and attend school regularly; by giving girls a weekly take-home ration of four litres of cooking oil as an incentive.

*The condition is that if a girl attends school without absenting herself for a whole week, then she is given the cooking oil. This strategy has had a tremendous impact in raising regularity and retention of girls in our school (MHT4: 4036-4038).*

Evidence from school attendance registers corroborated the above claims. One reason given is that parents encourage their daughters to attend school regularly in exchange for

cooking oil given for consistent attendance, which parents sell to supplement their meagre income. This in essence reinforces the hidden Rwandan societal gendered role and positioning, whereby girls are exploited for the benefit of their families. The fact that their continued schooling is tied to family benefits explains it all.

Related to the exploitation of girls, the headteacher of Progressive School observed that girls' domestic labour at home is in most cases exploited especially among the poor to the detriment of their continued schooling. She explained that such exploitation is in the form of either domestic labour in their homes or family income generation from girls' hired labour as domestic workers to well-to-do families. She observed:

*In view of the rights of girls to education, families should be sensitised to ensure that domestic labour is a shared responsibility by both boys and girls and that the government should declare illegal, the hiring of girls of school-going-age as domestic servants ( FHT3:401-403 ).*

Regarding the impact of school feeding, the headteacher of Liberty school noted that much as school feeding was yielding positive results in terms of learner retention in general and girls' consistency in attendance in particular, he observes that school feeding is putting pressure on existing facilities such as classroom space, books and teachers, materials and human resources, which have not been increasing at the same rate:

*We are receiving many under-age and over-age children from families whose major aim is to bring their children to school in order to get fed and this has put more pressure on existing facilities. It has all of a sudden increased the student-teacher ratio (MHT 4:562 -565).*

What the headteacher is not detailing is that school feeding has depopulated other non-feeding schools. Whereas the feeding schools are over-stretched, non-feeding schools are being made redundant. This was revealed by Gaudance, a female teacher in Alliance School, saying:

*Some schools are becoming redundant because parents are shifting their children from non-feeding schools and we are carrying the burden of teaching double shift as a result (FT1:146-146).*

Another important issue to note is that, much as the school feeding strategy is currently successful in raising enrolment and retention of girls in some 9YBE schools, it is

questionable whether or not the strategy is sustainable in future. The chances are that the WFP support may be stopped in future and this would have a profound effect on girls' participation. Jacob, a teacher at Progressive School thinks that the solution lies:

*In developing a fundamental strategy for poverty eradication to solve poverty related problems in the long run, other than encouraging temporally but unsustainable measures to solve problems related to girls' education (MT 5: 524:526).*

Like Jacob above, the two education officers in the two districts pinpointed poverty eradication as a long term solution, arguing mainly that a rise in income levels would, among other things, reduce opportunity cost and other economic related setbacks seen in chapter 5 to impede girls' effective participation in education.

Questions related to the much acclaimed educated women role model theory as seen in the literature review of this study, where the EFA-UN World report (2003) observes that in countries where a big percentage of primary school teachers are women, more girls have been encouraged to attend and complete school, were upheld by all respondents among the educationist group with some scepticism from a few disgruntled female teachers. The Head teacher of Bridge School for example praised the role model theory explaining:

*Women teachers and successful educated women are regarded in high esteem by young girls and their parents in villages who develop the urge to emulate their success stories (MT2: 447-448).*

Joanna, a senior female teacher in Liberty School also sees the role of women teachers as important in the promotion of girls' education, but blames 'current teachers' for a lack of professionalism, in essence contradicting the educationist group's earlier denial of their own role in girls' exclusion. Agatha, a female teacher in Progressive School added a different dimension associated with the positive impact the presence of female teachers in schools has on girls' education. She observed:

*The presence of female teachers in schools has a positive effect of making parents feel more secure about sending their daughters to school, because there are cases, although not in our school, where male teachers have defiled girls they teach and this makes male teachers suspect ( FT 11:405-407).*

Although all interviewed participants were basically in agreement on the positive role the presence of female teachers may contribute to girls' improved schooling, the whole idea

may not be taken for granted. As Tengera, a female teacher in Bridge School indicates, there are reservations about the attractiveness of the profession for many:

*Well, I teach as a last resort. Surely I would not like to continue working here for the rest of my life. What is in this profession or in this village to keep me around? (FT 18: 1364-1346).*

Marianne, another female teacher in the same school sounded perplexed by my reference to women as role models and their influence in encouraging girls' access and retention in school, she also used the opportunity to emphasise the poor remuneration for teachers and her job dissatisfaction.

*What role model are you talking about? With the kind of poor salaries we get, what is there for girls to emulate? I would not hesitate to leave the profession at the earliest opportunity (FT 6:368-370).*

Despite the suggestion from other stakeholders that more female teachers might improve access of girls, the above two teachers are basically questioning the role model theory and were silent on any influence on girls' access.

The two district local education officers interviewed were in unison about the positive role played by women teachers as role models. Pamela, the Director in charge of education in Gomber district observed:

*The role of women teachers in influencing girls' education cannot indeed be questioned. I was personally encouraged to like school by my wish to emulate my female teacher while I was still in lower classes (FLEA1 3596-3597).*

The social context both in and out of school drew out the over-arching effects of the genocide that Rwanda went through in 1994 as an impediment to girls' education. It is to be remembered that most survivors of the genocide were females and in some sense its effects were gendered. Some survivors were victims of rape, whose effects still haunt victims in form of HIV & AIDS, unwanted children of rape, orphaned and vulnerable girls who in most cases head households of equally vulnerable siblings. In relation to this social reality, the solution emanating from professional educationists is that the central government needs to put in place special support systems to help survivors of the genocide and other affected persons in order to cope with its repercussions. As a long-term strategy, they also advocated for institutionalisation of harsh and punitive measures against whoever

is found guilty of harbouring genocide ideology. The majority of educationist respondents also felt that more efforts ought to be put into mass civic and political re-education. The headteacher in Liberty School for instance advocated for the need to:

*Urgently establish a fully fledged institution in which every mature citizen would be trained and sensitised on nationalism and patriotism to avoid a repeat of the same catastrophe (MHT2: 1363-1365).*

Some teachers thought that the genocide legacy is still too big to be ignored. They advocated for more investment in its eradication. John, a teacher in Liberty school suggested the establishment of “a fully fledged ministry with special responsibilities to handle the effects of the genocide”.

Local education authorities viewed the social effects of the genocide from a wider perspective. Gerald, the Director responsible for education in Bugene district argued that the impact of the genocide on society has not only led to “the impediment of girls’ education but has also affected the entire social fabric and negatively affected the life of the citizenry in general”, citing orphaned and vulnerable families and the general poverty rampant among the Rwandan society as examples.

### **7.3.2 Parent group’s views**

Like the educationist group, parents interviewed also appreciated the need for improved collaboration although the majority questioned the quality of their contribution mainly due to poor educational background. Some, however, thought that education should be left to educationists who are well versed to handle educated related issues.

*What can I contribute to education? Most of us parents cannot do much because we are not educated. I think educational issues should be left to educated people like teachers and others (PF: 3235-3236).*

This revelation shows that parents’ involvement in education development is largely misunderstood by all stakeholders. There is thus a need for sensitisation on the expected minimum input of every stakeholder as a contribution to effective education delivery especially to girls. Parents are also unanimous on the view that eradication of family poverty is the surest way of ensuring that girls access and complete school without

interruption. They maintained their stance however against the alleged influence of traditional and cultural gendered factors in the impediment of girls' participation in education as seen in chapter 5, brushing it off as a thing of the past. Veronique, a single mother of six argued:

*If only poverty would be eradicated, I can assure you no girl would remain at home without going to school. No one should cheat you and tell you about cultural and traditional gendered reasons, every problem relating to girls' poor access and attendance has a bearing on poverty (FP5: 4180-4182).*

On a follow-up question on who she thought would eradicate poverty, she was very straight with an answer: "the government". Another parent, Rebero, apparently resonating what many others had proposed, was more elaborate, proposing that the government should find a way of supporting income generating projects such as 'cash crop cooperative farming' and finding markets for produce and encourage rural vocational training in income generating activities, as a way of reducing the effect of poverty on girls' continued schooling.

Despite the two female teachers' negative perspectives articulated earlier about their role model aspect as an encouragement to girls continued schooling, parents interviewed on the issue praised the positive influence of female teachers especially on the security of their daughters which they claimed was better in the hands of women teachers rather than male teachers. Pedro, an elderly male parent also expressed both of these aspects about the presence of women teachers in his community. He sounded very convinced, although with obvious traditional male gendered positioning and dominance undertone:

*I like women teachers, apart from the fact that they are safe with our daughters, I definitely would like my daughters to command respect **even among men** because they would be as educated as their teachers are. **Emphasis by the respondent (MP3:3681-3683).***

Parents interviewed were also unanimous on the fact that the effects of war and genocide are still felt to date and all looked up to the government as the only redeemer of all its repercussions. Like all other respondents, parents thought that the old legacy of impunity needs to be eradicated, advocating for severe punishment to offenders, while at the same



time they all advocated for intensification of national unity and reconciliation programmes.

George, a parent survivor of genocide stressed:

*We need to forgive but not forget what happened. It is only the government of national unity that can heal the nation through eradication of impunity that characterised the past regimes and intensification of unity and reconciliation programmes (MP 7:4210-4212).*

### 7.3.3 NGO group's views

Like other respondents, NGOs and women's local organisations were all in favour of better collaboration aimed at improving girls' participation in education, but bemoaned the evident lack of coordination, stressing that it is the role of government and local education authorities to rally together all stakeholders. NGOs were perhaps the most instructive group of stakeholders that stressed the need to train the educationist group in gender issues. One, Magdalene, reasoned:

*Socio-cultural gendered positioning characterised by male dominance and in-school harassment of girls by boys and sometimes teachers, which definitely contribute to girls' hating of school would reduce drastically with intensification of gender training especially to male teachers and headteachers. (FCWG 5:1056-1058)*

NGOs and local women's income generating associations were also of the same view that direct government interventions aimed at poverty reduction among poor families would be a sure way of facilitating girls' schooling. Pascaline, a head of a local women income generating association in Bugene district reasoned:

*Government intervention in poverty reduction especially among very poor families would eliminate the excuse held by many that their daughters continued schooling is hampered by extreme poverty (FCWG3:893-894).*

On the much acclaimed role of women teachers acting as role models to girls, NGOs were convinced that women teachers contribute a lot to the liking of school by young girls. Gertrude, a FAWE representative, for example, believes that the dominant female teacher workforce within 9YBE schools is an added advantage as "counsellors to young girls and as role models". She quoted a study that FAWE Rwanda undertook (no evidence) which allegedly showed that girls in school with more female teachers than males study more

consistently and pass national examinations better than those studying in male teacher dominated schools. She added a different complementary solution that schools need to share experiences using senior women teacher counsellors. She suggested that the idea could be achieved through formally clustering neighbouring schools under education zones:

*Clusters would bring together schools and enable them use experiences of senior female teachers in counselling girls and encouraging them to remain in school (FAWE1:1183-1184).*

On the issue of solving the overarching effects of the 1994 genocide, the general view of NGOs was that there is a genuine need for reconciliation among Rwandans, although they were also unanimous on the necessity to give serious punishments to perpetrators of the genocide in order to eradicate the legacy of impunity as the only long term solution. This rather dominant stance on meting out serious punishments is beside a genuine need to support genocide survivors especially girl-headed families. The general feeling by NGOs was that this can effectively be done through establishment of a Ministry specially charged to rehabilitate survivors of the genocide. As argued by Jackie, a leader of a women's income generating organisation in Gombe district:

*The government ought to give unequivocal support to genocide victims in general, and specifically to girl-child-headed households which are the most vulnerable, give counselling services to traumatised victims who still find it difficult to live with their recent past. This can be done through the establishment of a specialised ministry in charge of social rehabilitation (FCWO: 5891-5895).*

#### **7.3.4 Learner group's views**

Pupils interviewed in focus group in schools also stressed poverty as a cause for most of their peers to abandon school and saw the solution in "abolishing" poverty among affected families. On the issue of whom they thought would take the responsibility of eradicating poverty, most girls in school did not seem to be sure of who, but they still saw family poverty as a serious problem.

While cross-checking girls' views on female teachers as role models, the indication was that the majority of girls interviewed in focus groups admitted that they felt more

comfortable and safer with female teachers than males. Only a few did not see any difference. Two girls actually preferred being taught by males. Related to in-school harassment seen earlier in chapter 5, in which teachers are accused of ignoring girls' complaints against boys' harassment, they all advocated for a change in teachers' attitude although they were at a loss as to how this would be done.

Varying responses notwithstanding, data collected from all the four schools indicate that more than a half of teachers are female, mainly teaching at lower levels of 9YBE. This might explain the relatively small number of dropouts in the schools visited. As expressed by parents earlier, it seems that female teachers make schools safer. This again points to the ways that teachers can contribute to the retention of girls even though not all of them seem to recognise it. This begs the question of what happens when there are no women in the school. How can the danger that women's presence in school seems to counteract be overcome in their absence?

Although the pupils interviewed in focus groups had not been born during the 1994 genocide, most of them were directly or indirectly affected. Every girl in school knew other girls who had left school or who could not enrol themselves because they are genocide orphans. Others are infected or affected by the HIV & AIDS scourge emanating from rape during the genocide. When girls were asked what they thought were possible solutions that would mitigate the effects of the genocide, most of their facial expressions indicated that they were uncomfortable to discuss the genocide. However, they all wished that it never happens again and looked to the Rwandan leadership to consolidate efforts towards national unity and reconciliation. Rosaline, a girl in focus group 2 in Progressive school was very innovative in her advice on ways and means of ensuring that every citizen understands the need for reconciliation and respect for human rights:

*I think the government should buy a radio for each family to ensure that everyone gets reconciliation messages and the need to respect other people's rights and know the punitive effects of disrespecting other people's rights (SF5:481-483).*

### 7.3.5 Girl dropout group's views

Girls who had dropped out of school seemed to be more specific on whom they thought would deal with poverty as a major obstacle to girls' schooling. This was because they were either older than those found in school or perhaps had been taught by difficult times. They all pointed to both local and the central government for solutions. They were equally unanimous on the need for the creation of income generating activities and the provision of short period vocational and technical training that would give them skills which would help them get employment. This rather popular solution related to poverty reduction as a long term intervention in enhancement of girls' education is supported by UNESCO (2005) in their publication '*Getting girls out of work and into school*'.

A question regarding women as role models to young girls unearthed a big difference in the way the issue was viewed by girls who were still in school and girls who had dropped out of school. The latter indicated that they had more burning issues to talk about other than any preference for female or male teachers. The following response from a rather disgruntled dropout serves as an example:

*For me the big issue is that I dropped out of school not really about the teacher whether female or male. I had bigger issues such as being an orphan without any support for my schooling. The female-male teacher issue is simply a luxury (SDO: 6490-6491).*

Again, girls who had dropped out of school were more vocal and more concerned with their own problems, which evidently have a direct bearing on the 1994 war and genocide. All dropouts interviewed were orphans of the genocide and headed families. They seemed to have lost touch with education and were more concerned with their daily survival. These girls have special burdens that have contributed to their abandoning school, such as the need to feed their relatives and avoiding being made fun of within school due to poor clothing. They all saw redemption in government interventions, which they claimed were not forthcoming.

#### **7.4. Reflections**

All in all, the foregoing stakeholder suggested solutions and ways forward focussed on effective stakeholder collaboration, elimination of poverty, addressing effects of the genocide, support to poor families, adequate school funding and gender sensitisation. These suggested solutions appear to have the potential, if carefully exploited, to contribute to the provision of a gender balanced education. The snag to effective exploitation of stakeholder suggested solutions however, is the fact that every respondent thinks that someone else out there has the responsibility to implement them. This lacuna is problematic in itself because girls' education problems and related interventions must be owned by all stakeholders as a first step towards finding lasting solutions. The government Education For All policy rhetoric should be followed by strategies framed in a way that they address the access and retention problem identified in chapter 5.

This chapter has illuminated possible interventions in the Rwandan context as a post conflict country with a unique and somewhat contradictory character. Its uniqueness relates mainly to the country's recent history of genocide that left behind persistent vulnerability of unsupported orphaned children survivors. The contradiction lies in the government's acclaimed world leadership position in gender mainstreaming, the undeniable efforts geared at promoting education for all across 9YBE, and the reality out there that not all girls access and / or complete 9YBE. This is mainly because of the culturally sedimented nature of the gender regime in the Rwandan society, the overarching effects of the genocide and the endemic poverty characteristic of most families in Rwanda.

## **Chapter 8: Conclusion**

### **8.1 Thesis overview**

This study was informed by a multi-perspective research design, approached from a constructivist and interpretive methodological stance using interviews as the main research tool. It was also informed by a contextual analysis of the current provision of education across the 9YBE in Rwanda, viewed against available literature on girls' education provision globally as the main substantive focus of the research. It has in particular addressed a relatively unexplored terrain of girls' education provision in Rwanda. This is of accentuated importance given that Rwanda has recently emerged from one of the worst conflicts at the end the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As such, this thesis makes a contribution to filling gaps in our understanding of issues that face girls' schooling in SSA and in the special circumstances of a post-conflict country.

This research sought views and perspectives from a cross-section of education stakeholders at micro level, to find out which factors operated to impede girls' access, retention and completion of school, the allocation of accountability for keeping girls in school, and proposed solutions and ways forward towards gender balanced education provision in Rwanda. The data were collected mainly through interviews with participants drawn from 5 stakeholder groups: the educationist group (Headteachers, Teachers, and Education Officers), the NGO group (FAWE and Women Income Generating Organisations), the Parents group (Parents in general and Parents on schools' PTAs) and Learner group (Pupils in school) the Girl dropout group (Girls who had dropped out of school).

In the introductory part of this study, through an historical review, the research reveals that the pre-colonial period through the colonial era to the contemporary times have all been characterised by persistent exclusion of girls from education, a future that is sustained in current times of inclusive policies but with exclusionary practices. The dimensions of this exclusion include household poverty, traditional and cultural gendered beliefs and positioning of girls in the Rwandan society, school based challenges, and social problems emanating mainly from the 1994 conflict and genocide that the country went through.

The study reveals a serious lack of accountability for keeping girls in school. Different stakeholder groups scapegoat others for national and local failure in girls' access and persistence in school. This situation is made worse by the lack of follow-up on the part of the government to ensure that girls' education provision policy and associated strategies are implemented. This lack of accountability translates into sustained gender discrimination as poor girls in particular cannot participate fully in education and thus are denied their educational rights with consequences for their future life chances and opportunities to exploit their full potential. This, points to the development of further social stratification in which educated women enjoy all the benefits associated with education including being involved in decision making and uneducated girls and women who remain poor, vulnerable and exploited.

Stakeholder suggested solutions and ways forward converge mainly around the need for effective stakeholder collaboration, adequate school funding, gender sensitisation, elimination of poverty, giving support to poor families and addressing effects of the genocide. Although the entire five stakeholder groups suggested different strategies aimed at improving girls' participation across 9YBE, none of them believed they would be part of solution implementation. Some claimed that these tasks were beyond their capacity while others argued that it was outside their mandate. They all, however, looked at the government for intervention. By implication therefore, finding lasting solutions to girls' poor education up-take will remain elusive, if such attitudes are sustained by the frontline education deliverers.

## **8.2 Findings revisited**

The literature review Chapter (3) brought to surface a global picture of the prevailing circumstances and factors that work against girls' access, retention and completion of basic education. While Rwanda shares these factors and circumstances with many other developing countries, Rwanda, remains a case in its own category. This is largely due to unprecedented circumstances that Rwandan girls find themselves in as a consequence of war and genocide experienced 18 years ago. Deep rooted family poverty, school based challenges plus other social problems like persistent vulnerability of unsupported orphaned

girls, untreated traumatism of girl survivors of genocide, effects of HIV & AIDS, child headed families and unwanted pregnancies, all have special bearing on the 1994 conflict and genocide and these significantly contribute to gender imbalance in educational provision in Rwanda. The overarching effects of the conflict are deepened by economic difficulty and associated poverty coupled with outdated cultural and traditional gendered practices in the Rwandan society.

This study has shown that issues of girls' access and retention in school remain largely at the level of ideas within government policy rhetoric and that this is not reflected in practice. This was evident among the educationist group, who in general take no responsibility for girls' poor access and retention. In-school issues such as poorly trained teachers, their gender insensitivity, inadequate school funding, inadequate amenities such as separate toilets for girls and boys were among the commonly highlighted push factors that work against girls' educational up-take. Educators in particular give little attention to gender related concerns in schools. This is reflected in explanations and rationalisations that issues that face girls within schools, such as looking at separate toilets facilities was "unnecessary luxury" and describing the girls' complaints as "craving for attention" ( see chapter 6 p. 71). As such, there is an urgent need for gender sensitisation among the educationist group. The provision of separate toilets for girls and boys was identified as a factor that would encourage girls' regularity in schools.

Equally problematic, are serious weaknesses exposed by this study among decentralised education authorities. Although they are poorly supported by the central government, their gender sensitivity and ability to analyse the special situations girls find themselves in were found to be wanting. The effort towards educational equity within the Rwandan system is based largely on assumptions that any inclusion strategies, such as abolition of school fees, should automatically cater for all learners' needs without consideration for the specific circumstances of particular groups and in this case that of girls' special circumstances especially those who are poor and the most vulnerable.

This research has reinforced what has been seen in the literature review that girls' continued schooling is in most cases negatively influenced by the families girls come from.



Parents' poor involvement in the running of schools and their clinging to traditional and cultural gender positioning that discourage girls' continued schooling were emphasised in interviews conducted in this research.

This research had made it abundantly clear that traditional and cultural gendered positioning, informed by gendered social constructs and stereotypes work against girls' acquisition of their right to education. As argued before, these traditional and cultural gendered stereotypes and practices are accentuated by endemic family poverty that makes it even more difficult for girls to access school.

This study has confirmed the importance of women teachers discussed in the literature review. The positive role played by senior women teachers has been reinforced by headteachers, learners and parents. This begs the question of what happens when there are no women in a school. How can these threats to girls' education that women's presence in school seems to counteract, be overcome in their absence?

Poverty as a major impediment to girls' education provision was also echoed in this study. The solution suggested by most interviews with stakeholder groups was in raising household per capita income through poverty alleviation strategies. Unfortunately, putting this solution into practice remains a great challenge because most developing countries including Rwanda may not adequately afford the kind of interventions required. There are, however, some affordable innovations that have made a difference as alluded to in Chapter 7. When well packaged, school feeding has been seen to encourage more girls to access and remain in school. We are cautioned in this research however, (see Chapter 7 p.112 ) that replication of good practice such as school feeding needs to be carefully analysed, to include considerations of the local contexts and realities to ensure that they are supportable and sustainable.

This study also recognises the gaps in communications and the need for better internal coherence based on wider and stronger consultations and collaboration among stakeholders. Interviewees expressed the need for stakeholders to work more collaboratively on common approaches to supporting girls at risk. In addition, the study has highlighted the need to give special support to genocide victims living with effects of

HIV/AIDS, and to give support to child headed orphaned families living with post-conflict traumatic disorder and stress. It emphasises the need to invest in sensitisation campaigns which would militate against socio-cultural and traditional gender positioning that remains a key vehicle for gender discrimination in Rwanda.

In general, the most encouraging aspects of this study are that all stakeholders were aware of the main barriers to girls' education; that, to some degree, the concept of girls' inclusion and their right to education was understood and appreciated by the local community; and that notions of gender equality have already begun to be integrated into the Rwandan culture at local levels. Poverty however, remains the single most influential impediment to a fully functional girls' inclusive education system in Rwanda. This is because the direct, indirect and opportunity costs of having girls in school are not supportable. Interviews confirmed that removing tuition fees has not been sufficient to ensure girls' access to school as other more powerful factors continue to hamper them. Many of these factors are part of the legacy of the genocide that are still manifest 18 years down the road.

Making connections with the literature review (see p.19 section 3.2 and p.23 section 3.3), the social concepts of equality, equity and parity which emphasise, among other things, equal treatment of members of society and their right to equal opportunities, services and productive resources are still facing challenges in the Rwandan environment. This is because the Rwandan society still harbours gender constructs that are linked to discriminatory practices; which stems largely from the Rwandan society's poor understanding of gender as a fixed biological variable rather than what masculinity and femininity does, and what institutionalised stereotypes do to impede access and continued schooling of girls. This attitude and poor understanding of gender and what it entails, informs the logic behind refusal to accept personal responsibility in keeping girls out of school, personal avoidance of being implicated in implementing suggested solutions. This negative attitude informs the rampant blaming of girls, seen in this research, for failure to remain in school, whereas in fact issues surrounding girls' education provision result from social constructs, institutionalised regulations, boundaries and gendered roles that work against girls' access, persistence and meaningful completion of 9YBE level in Rwanda. Failure to accept responsibility notwithstanding, this research has come up with relevant

findings especially regarding accountability and suggested solutions, which are potentially transferable beyond Rwanda to neighbouring countries and even further, especially among the post-conflict countries which are likely to be faced with similar problems.

### **8.3 Research reflexivity**

At this conclusive stage of the thesis, I highlight challenges experienced by engaging with this study. I wish to recognise that this study had limitations. First of all, my position as senior education officer soliciting information and probing accountability from a relatively junior group of participants, Headteachers, Teachers and District Education Officers is likely to have compromised the truthfulness of research responses. It is possible that some of these respondents could have told me what they thought I wanted to hear. Although I tried to mitigate this problem as I explained earlier in the methodology chapter, still, the issue remains an unavoidable challenge in this study.

Associated with this, I was aware of my position and its possible influence on the practical, methodological and theoretical aspect of this study as a practising educationist probing stakeholders' views on girls' educational provision. My position and prior knowledge must have influenced my interpretation of results, much as I tried to be systematic, self-critical and objective.

While my attempts to deal with the above dynamics included the use of Research Assistants as explained in the methodology chapter, this presented further challenges. My distance from the interviews of pupils and school dropouts means that I did not have access to non-verbal clues to help me understand the meanings within recordings. The facial and emotional responses would have added to the quality of the interpretation and eventual analysis of outcomes. Although I trained the Research Assistants and had rehearsal sessions before they started the interviews, I remain unsure of the quality of this aspect of the data collection although I do feel that this was an appropriate strategy.

Again, being a male interacting with and probing female respondents, this sometimes made the task difficult. There was often a certain uneasiness and at times it was difficult to make the encounter more relaxed. Again, in some ways this kind of interaction might have inhibited freely generated responses that could have helped to further enrich my research.

Associated with this, within the interview encounter I also had to respond to the interviewee to act in an encouraging way even when participants' points of view differed from my own. This adoption of a researcher stance required me to ensure that the interviewees' voices were heard and to guard against my own judgment and position that, would have led to misrepresentation of their ideas.

Interaction with the families of girls who had dropped out, in order to explore the factors that led them to abandon school is one omitted aspect of the research that might have been extended. This was however usually problematic as many of these girls were orphans who actually headed families. Again, many dropouts were not found in their original home areas such that accessing parents (for those who have them) would have been very difficult.

Again, I had a double image in this research as an "insider" researcher who wanted to appear as an "outsider" researcher. The challenge was that my respondents, especially those in education circles were not likely to see me as an outsider researcher, which as explained might have affected the credibility of their responses. As an insider researcher, I had prior knowledge and experience of the Rwandan education system. This prior knowledge influenced my starting point, conception of the thesis and the interpretation of results. The movement between a position as an insider researcher, concentrating on details and as an outsider researcher concerned with the big picture was an important part of my critical reflexive attitude to the research. Throughout the research process I tried to assume the position of both an insider and an outsider and attempted to look at the bigger picture while at the same time I cared for important details.

In the initial part of this study, I reviewed the literature especially that derived from empirical research based on small scale studies. The similarity of findings despite certain contextual differences in these small studies firstly made critical analysis difficult. Secondly it led me to question possible issues of trustworthiness of the literature and the replicability of findings in the Rwandan context. While I am convinced of the systematic approach to my study, I face the same issues of the potential to generalise findings from a small sample of schools (4) and a limited number of respondents (150) in total. I do not

doubt the value of this research but I do acknowledge that a bigger sample might have generated more divergent information. This was not practicable in this study due to resource constraints.

On a more positive note, as one of the education policy makers in Rwanda, I feel that this study has enriched my understanding of how the relationship between policies, strategies and interventions may work in reality. I have learnt to interrogate theories and their practical implications and the importance of regular monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of any policy. This is important for the benefit of my country which is developing very fast and involved in formulation of various policies and associated strategies for effective implementation within which gender is a highlighted priority.

#### **8.4 Personal role as a stakeholder in education and areas for further research**

As a practicing educationist (currently a Principal of a College of Education) and a former head of the National Curriculum Development Centre in Rwanda, this study has instilled in me the need to carefully and institutionalise systematic reviews teaching and learning material with a view to checking possible hidden gender bias and gender insensitive language that may negatively impact girls' participation in education. At personal level, having engaged with this research and produced this thesis, bearing in mind my position in the Rwandan education system as one of the education policy makers and as a practicing educationist, this research is going to influence change that shall make a difference in girls' access and retention across the 9YBE, rather than joining the interviewed education stakeholder groups in the scapegoat-blame game. First, I intend to use my current position in the Rwandan higher education system to influence change in curriculum design to emphasise gender mainstreaming and the understanding of gender as a social construct that can be repackaged in a way that it discourages gender discrimination in education. Second, through personal engagements and discussions about my research findings with education policy makers, I intend to use my position in the Ministry of Education to influence girls' education policy implementation, monitoring and evaluation mechanism; seen in this thesis to be lacking at both macro and micro level of education delivery in Rwanda. Third, through dissemination of my research findings, I intend to play a leading role in influencing

positive change in girls' education provision through such fora as the annual Joint Review of Education Sector (JRES) and Policy Development and Implementation Workshops (PDIW) for education stakeholders. These stakeholders include but are not limited to the Ministry of Education's top management, the Development Partners, Civil Society, NGOs, FBOs and CBOs. Lastly, I shall use my research findings and discussions to influence the Ministry of Local Government's top leadership to support decentralised structures in sensitising parents and communities on the importance of the girls' education and the need to change cultural negative gender positioning seen in this research to work against girls' access and persistence in school.

Finally, although this study is in itself important its value may be in follow-up studies that may move from this base to explore more aspects of girls' education. This has implications for practical approaches to girls' education, theoretical considerations and its place in policy formulation. There is a need, for example, to undertake more in-depth and focused research into girls' education and to analyse how this informs not only equal but also effective representation in national policy and decision making bodies. Other areas of future research might focus on adequacy or inadequacy of interventions in support of girls' education. Future studies may focus on girls' education enabling policies and practice in reality. Further research may also focus on a comparative study of the effect of poverty on poor boys, aimed at heightening their voices and right to education. All or any of these studies would go a long way to address gender inequalities in education in Rwanda and may inform education practitioners who may be faced with a similar situation. This is in line with Rough (2000) who observes that discussions of issues in gender education equality will continue to be abstract rather than real, if there is no technically and empirically based rigorous analysis of issues to inform policy and practice for change.

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## **Annexes**

### **Annex 1: Sample interview questions and responses from a Headteacher (Educationists stakeholder group)**

**Qn. 1. Can you describe your professional and personal relationship with the school?**

**HT 1: Ans. line 1.** I see my personal and professional relationship with the school in terms of a pedagogic and a human resource leadership aimed at delivering education to the youth in my school. **L:3**

**Qn. 2. How is the gender distribution of learners and teachers in your school?**

**HT 1: Ans. line 4.** We have 906 girls and 890 boys. We have more girls than boys in lower grades and more boys than girls in higher grades. We also have more women teachers than males 30:20 respectively **L:6**

**Qn. 3. As you may be aware there has been lots of interest in the schooling of girls, what are your views on girls' participation in education?**

**Ans. Line 7.** Girls access school as well as boys, but as girls progress through higher grades, they perform poorly, repeat and dropout more than boys, especially in upper primary and lower secondary. **L:8**

**Qn. 4. What do you think are the main factors that are responsible for girls' poor performance, repetition and dropout?**

**Ans. Line 9.** The main issue is lack of regularity in school on the part of girls. I think, I am actually sure that the problem is in their homes; they are not supported by their parents, who give them lots of work and responsibilities that deviate them from studying. Parents still think that girls' education is not important. Of course this may be aggravated by economic problems but parents still have cultural convictions that girls do not have to attend school. Another main problem is home based poverty that forces them to get out of school. They either go to look for jobs or simply stay and help at home. Others become pregnant and leave school. But I think the biggest problem is the effects of war and genocide. Most students are orphans and even some head families. In this case, soon or later most of them dropout and the majority are girls. There is also the

setting in of puberty and associated psychological and physiological problems that are responsible for girls dropping out of school. Girls are very good students when they are still young. They actually even perform better than boys, but they change as soon as they reach puberty. Most of them at this stage start longing for things they cannot afford, and thus may give out their bodies for gifts and get pregnant. This is especially so with orphans who do not have parental care. **L:25**

**Qn. 5. Do you experience any gender related problems at this school and do you think these issues deserve specific attention?**

**Ans. Line 26.** Oh yes, we do sometimes experience gender related problems such as boys harassing girls calling them names and other classroom based problems such as booing girls when they make mistakes. Male teachers are sometimes accused of being gender insensitive and giving more pedagogical support to boys than girls especially when it comes to science subjects. But we do not condone any kind of harassment. We punish whoever is responsible. **L:31**

**Qn. 6. Do you dialogue around girls' behaviour, performance and retention in your school? If you do who participates in these debates?**

**Ans. Line 32.** We discuss students' performance and general conduct as a whole, but there are cases where we confine the dialogue only to girls because they are the one that experience more problems, such as pregnancy, harassment within the school and abandoning school. We also discuss with the PTA representatives on the need for parents to give more support to girls. We try to work closely with parents but they are not always responsive, saying that it is the work of the school administration. We play our part and everything runs smoothly, but of course without support from the government and local authorities to help us mobilise parents, the problem persists and girls keep abandoning school **L: 40.**

**Qn. 7. In your view, do you think all teachers understand the need for supporting girls' education provision in your school? What about girls' themselves, do you think they appreciate the value of schooling?**



**Ans. Line 41.** I think that some teachers may be biased against girls and their ability to support may be limited. But we sensitise them constantly to give support to girls. Girls are currently aware of the need to work hard and achieve in their education endeavour, but at times they are distracted by poverty problems and people out there who mislead them to do mischievous things that lead them to leaving school. **L:45**

**Qn. 8. What kind of support is given to girls?**

**Ans. Line 46.** We give advisory support to girls especially on issues related to puberty, like when they menstruate at school or get sick as a result, they are advised by senior women teachers on how to handle such issues, but for those who cannot afford sanitary pads we allow them to stay at home until they are fine and come back to school. We also try to support girls to enhance their retention and performance, but the whole issue has a strong bearing on levels of discipline in school and definitely on how the school administration follows up on everything that takes place in school. We ensure that teachers teach in accordance with the time table and ensure that students attend and do their homework as well. Any problem is reported and sorted out by senior teachers and administration immediately. This culture keeps our school focused and performs well, with relatively low level of dropouts. **L:55**

**Qn. 9. You mentioned earlier that some girls get pregnant. How do you support such girls who are unfortunate to get pregnant while still schooling? Are they allowed to come back to school after giving birth?**

**Ans. Line 56.** To be frank with you, when these girls get pregnant, they abandon school though according to regulations they are supposed to come back to school after giving birth. Nobody ever comes back to school. With poverty outside there, who would look after the baby? Besides, such girls are too embarrassed to go back to school. They simply disappear into society. **L:60**

**Qn.10. Some people say that the current strategies to increase girls' access, retention and performance are not working? What do you think?**

I think we need to do more that we are doing. The government has abolished school fees in 9YBE but this is not the only problem. As a result of war and genocide, most families have become destitute and are too poor to afford basics like food, clothes, shoes and other necessities for girls in their daily lives. These are not available and we simply sit here and think girls will automatically come to schools as a result of abolishing school fees. We are wrong. **L:66**

**Qn.11. What would you recommend as strong strategies in general that would lead to increased gender balanced education provision across the 9YBE?**

**Ans. Line 67.** I think this can only be solved by the government, the government must find some way of reducing poverty among families. This is because girls from very poor families cannot effectively attend school. More sensitisation campaigns have to be done by government and local authorities to increase awareness among parents who are also still conservative to ensure that they get involved in the schooling of their children. The Government also needs to improve communication with school administration. We should not simply get instructions on what to do with less regard to inputs needed for such activities. For example, government wants all schools to start school feeding without providing the necessary support. How can we feed children without money, yet we are not supposed to charge money because education is free? Education authorities should also give directives to all schools' leadership to identify senior women teachers and entrust them with only one responsibility of supporting girls in school. Girls' poor retention and eventual dropout is mainly due to lack of support from educationists themselves. There is a need for the Ministry of Education to redesign strategies for strengthening decentralised education systems with specific focus on school leadership and district education officers. There is also a need for in-service training to acquire professional knowledge, understanding, skills and attributes necessary for managing a public institution and stakeholders effectively and to deliver on their core mission, imparting knowledge to the youth, making sure these girls are constantly occupied and attended to by their teachers. Parents also should play their roles and ensure discipline of and support to their children. **L:87**

**Annex 2: Sample interview questions and responses from a parent (Parents' group of stakeholders)**

**Qn. 1. Can you tell me about yourself and family?**

**Ans. Line 939.** I am called Rose, I am a single parent. I have four children. I lost my husband during the 1994 genocide. **L:940**

**Qn. 2. Do your children go to school?**

**Ans. Line 941.** I have two girls and two boys. The girls are older than the boys. Only boys go to school, they are all in secondary schools. **L:942**

**Qn.3. Why are girls not in school?**

**Ans. Line 943.** They left school because of school fees. That was before the government abolished school fees. **L:944**

**Qn.4. But they can go back since the government has waived school fees. What do you think?**

**Ans. Line 945.** They are too old to go to school. One of them has a child and the other helps me to cultivate food for the family. **L:946**

**Qn.5. Do you think education for both girls and boys is important?**

**Ans. Line 947.** Education is good for both girls and boys, but education or not, girls are more helpful at home even if they may not go to school. They help in cooking and their house chores which is good for their future. Of course boys' are not very helpful at home but their education is more important for the family in future. Anyway both girls and boys are unruly these days, some of them simply refuse to study and there is nothing we can do. **L:952**

**Qn.6. Who do you think should deal with the children's bad behaviour?**

**Don't you think as a parent you have to shape your children's behaviour?**

**Ans. Line 953.** OK. We have to do something but teachers are more relaxed when it comes to children's behaviour. They do not seem to care. We should go back to our traditions. It should be every adult's responsibility to discipline children. No parent could tolerate any child found in the wrong place or doing the wrong thing and ignore him or her. It used to be the responsibility of every adult to remind and discipline where necessary including corporal punishment to any child found not doing the right thing. **L:958**

**Qn. 7. In your opinion, what would you say about the opinion that parents do not support schools and their children at home in the promotion of education?**

**Ans. Line 959.** I think it is an exaggeration, parents wish their children to have good education, but it should be remembered that the majority of us parents are illiterate. How can I get involved in her education when I do not know anything about books? I think it should be the duty of Government and local authorities to give the necessary support to schools and girls. **L:963**

**Qn.8. Apart from school fees, are there any other problems that may have stopped your daughters from going to school?**

**Ans. Line 964.** Oh yes! School uniforms, exercise books, pens, shoes and in some cases hunger at home are among extra burdens that made my girls abandon school. It is very difficult to raise money for their clothes, food, shoes and books etc. I think the government ought to do something about it. The main problem is poverty. Families are too poor to support their daughter's education. Most families have been made destitute as a result of the genocide while others are incapacitated because of poor health and HIV & AIDS, Malaria etc. **L:970**

**Qn. 9. What would you like to see changing in your family and community to improve girls' education?**

**Ans. Line 971.** I would like to see family income augmented because every problem has a relationship with poverty. The government and local authorities should support us to generate

more income and reduce poverty which is, I think, the root cause of parents' poor support to girls education. I would also like free education from primary to university because it is very difficult for poor families to support children in higher education. **L:974**

**Annex 3: Sample interview questions and responses from an FAWE (NGO group of stakeholders)**

**Qn. 1. Can you introduce yourself and describe the nature of your work?**

**Ans. Line 1124.** I am Josephine, I work for Forum for African Women Educationists, an NGO that champions and advocates for girls' education. We sensitise different stakeholders to support girls' education national-wide. We follow up on implementation of girls' education policy and we give support to poor girls and help them go to school. **L:1128**

**Qn. 2. In your view, how do you assess the current provision of education to girls in Rwanda?**

**Ans. Line 1129.** We in FAWE think that Rwanda has done a lot to promote girls' access to education across the 9YBE level but has done little to ensure that girls remain in school. Despite the fact that the government has abolished school fees across 9YBE many girls abandon school due to various problems. I think that something more needs to be done apart from abolishing school fees **L:1132**

**Qn. 3. Now that you mention that something more has to be done, what in your view are the fundamental causes of the poor participation you have described?**

**Ans. Line 1133.** The underlying cause of poor girls' participation in education is ignorance on the part of parents. Here parents do not value education and as such absent their daughters from school in order to do home chores, including taking care of the sick, young ones and even getting involved in domestic food production. Another issue is traditional culture, which make parents value boys more than girls, in such a way that boys are favoured under all circumstances including provision of education. Another big problem is poverty. Family poverty is so much entrenched that it is a major cause of dropouts when it

comes to making choice of who goes to school. Constant absenteeism from school makes girls perform poorly and repeat more than boys. They thus became mature while at lower levels of education and may get pregnant and leave school altogether. **L:1142**

**Qn: 4. Do girls go back to school after delivery? Do you think that they are encouraged to go back to school?**

**Ans. Line 1143.** I think no body encourages them. Not parents and not school administration. Besides who would look after their babies. I think it is only a few of those who get pregnant at secondary level who may go back but it is rare for those at primary level to go back. Perhaps as a result of a psychological shock because they are relatively young at this stage. **L:1146**

**Qn. 5. Now that FAWE seems to know the causes of dropping out, what is being done to remedy the problem?**

**Ans. Line 1146.** A lot is being done. We have mobilised organisation such as IMBUTO FOUNDATION, UNICEF, and donors in close collaboration with MINEDUC to come together and form a school campaign task force aimed at training leaders at Provincial, district, sector and cell levels on girls' education. This task force also includes a cross section of decision makers and security forces to help in the implementation of girls' education strategies. FAWE has institutionalised school clubs such as TUSEME that encourages girls to come out and talk against injustices perpetrated against them within school and outside. FAWE also gives psychological support by discussing with girls on topical issues such as HIV& AIDS, pregnancy, and also gives them material support such as school requirements. **L:1154**

**Qn. 6. What is you reaction to a statements like: Menstruation seriously affects girls' attendance, attention, and achievement in schools and that the absence of clean and sanitation facilities may discourage girls from attending school.**

**Ans. Line 1155.** This may be a problem but we have not really focused on this as a big issue. I think we have to investigate and if found to be true we shall advocate for something to be done. **L:1157**

**Qn. 7. In your view, what do you think should be done to encourage girls to remain in**

**school and who should do it?**

**Ans. Line 1158.** I think it should be a combined effort. Girls' problems are caused by many factors as I have already said. The central Government, local authorities and NGOs should all work together to ensure that girls attend and complete school. They should sensitise parents and even punish those that ignore to send girls to school. Poverty being one of the fundamental causes of girls' poor participation, the government should find ways of reducing family poverty. This would go a long way to encourage parents to send girls to school. The unfortunate part of the story is that nobody seems to care among education stakeholders and girls keep marginalised in as far as education is concerned. **L:1164**

**Annex4: Sample interview questions and responses from a student focus group (S.2 Student group of stakeholders)**

**Qn.1. How many are you in your class, and how many are boys and girls?**

**Ans. Line 578.** We are 58 in total with 23 girls and 35 boys

**Qn. 2. Who performs better? Boys or girls, and why?**

**Ans.1. Line 579.** Boys perform better because they get enough time to study at home while we girls are involved in other home support work such as helping in cooking and cleaning the homes.

**Ans.2.** Even here at school, you find teachers favouring boys asking them to answer and ignoring girls. Teachers think we are not clever but we can do better. We have formed reading groups and we want to challenge boys. **L:585**

**Qn. 3. In your opinion what would you say is the use of school to you?**

**Ans. Line 586** I find school very important because it is a key to the future. You cannot get a good job if you are not educated. So I must study hard so that I become someone important in future

**Ans. 2.** These days you cannot become a powerful person if you are not educated. Look at women leaders they are all educated. I want to become a leader and as such I have to get educated.

**Ans. 3.** Education is the key to the outside world. My sister is educated and works with the UN. You cannot get that job if you are not educated.

**Ans. 4.** If you are not educated it is like you are blind and deaf. You cannot understand what is happening in the world because of ignorance.

**Ans. 5.** I think education is good for everybody but there are problems. I wish we can study in our language. I do not like studying in English. **L: 597**

**Qn. 4. You said you do not like English. What is wrong with English?**

**Ans. 1. Line 598.** Me, I cannot try to answer even if I know the answer for fear of hitting ‘IMBOGO’ (*a word coined for making terrible grammatical error*).

**Ans. 2.** Boys are fond of booing when a girl makes a grammatical mistake when answering and they do not do that to fellow boys. This discourages us from participating. I think we should be taken to a girls’ only school.



**Ans.3.** I am afraid to speak in English and I am always nervous and confused when asked a question in English. I am always afraid of being laughed at by my peers. I sometimes 'dodge' classes or sit in the last row to avoid the humiliation of being called upon to speak in English.

**Ans.4.** We have to work hard and talk in English although it may be a problem. Me, I do not fear, I simply blast English. **L: 608**

**Qn.5. Do you face any other major problems either at home or at school that may discourage you from studying?**

**Ans. 1. Line 609.** Yes, sometimes teachers talk to us badly saying that there are things girls cannot do like Maths and Science.

**Ans. 2.** To me that is nothing. I simply ignore and concentrate on my studies, but boys disturb us a lot in class. They boo you when you answer questions and teachers do nothing to stop them. They only tell them not to be stubborn.

**Ans.3.** To me I find more problems at home. I cannot get time to read. I go straight to house work as soon as I am at home. I wish to join a boarding school but with this 9YBE where can you go?

**Ans. 4.** Yes my father always harass me saying that I am only wasting my time that I shall soon get pregnant and / or marry and leave school. It is only my mother who encourages me. But I shall prove to my father that he is wrong after all.

**Ans. 5.** I have no major problem at home. My parents are educated and encourage me to study hard. It is only at school that I think the headmaster should do something against teachers and boys who disturb us. **L:622**

**Qn.6. What is your preference: a male or female teacher? Any reasons for preference of male or female teachers?**

**Ans. 1. 623.** Me I prefer female teachers because they do not harass us so much.

**Ans. 2.** I do not like female teachers, they talk to you in a bad way when you make mistakes and cannot forget, they keep harassing you for the same mistake. Male teachers forget easily.

**Ans.3.** I hate male teachers who tell us that we are not the right material for sciences. I want to become a doctor. I simply ignore him.

**Ans. 4.** I think I like male teachers, they do their work and just go away without calling anyone names. You feel good when you are told what you should do without being ridiculed.

**Ans.5.** I hate teachers who harass students, that is all. Otherwise I think they are all the same.

**L: 630**

**Qn.7. Given the chance, would you prefer a mixed school or a girls' only school? Can you give reasons for your choice?**

**Ans.1. line 631.** I would prefer a mixed school because that is where you feel you are competing. A girls' only school would be dull and no strong competition.

**Ans.2.** I would prefer a girls' only school. I do not like boy making fun of us when by bad luck they realise that you are menstruating. They make fun of you as if you have done something terribly bad.

**Ans.3.** I would prefer a girls' only school because, I do not like the way boy boo us whenever a girls has proved to be better in class. You know they do not like to be defeated by girls, they feel challenged.

**Ans.4.** I would only prefer to study with boys at university because there they would be mature but at secondary school I do not like them because they feel they are the bosses. I do not know what makes them think there are special. I do not like the way they put themselves in a position of control.

**Ans. 5.** I do not mind studying with boys but I do not like the way teachers treat them as if they are better and we girls are sort of not important. Anyway, me I do not care. I want to stay and challenge them and show them that we are also strong. **L:645**

**Qn.8. Do you participate in discussing problems that cause girls' poor attendance and performance at school with your teachers?**

**Ans. 1. Line 646.** Yes at times we discuss with the headteacher and senior female teachers. They encourage us to work harder so that our future is better.

**Ans.2.** We get advice from our teachers and others who come from outside on important issues such as how to avoid pregnancy, HIV& AIDS and how to behave generally.

**Ans. 3.** We have a discussion session which we call life skills here at school. That is where we discuss problems girls meet and how to avoid them.

**Ans. 4.** We talk to senior women teachers and they tell us how to behave, avoid men and boys who want to trick us into sexual relationships. **L:653**

**Qn. 9. Do you feel the infrastructure in your school such as classrooms and toilets, are adequate?**

**Ans. 1. line 654.** They are not enough. We are too many in classes and the toilets are worse because we share with boys, which I hate most. I do not like sharing toilets with boys at all. They talk a lot of bad things; I think we should have our own toilets.

**Ans. 2.** I hate sharing toilets with boys. They make noise that girls leave blood on toilets which is of course false. We use pads and if there are not enough, we help each other. Anyway I do not like to share with boys, that is all.

**Ans 3.** Classrooms are not a big problem although we are very many in class, but toilets, my God, I wish the administration builds some for girls alone.

**Ans. 4.** Of course we share toilets at home with boys but those are our brothers. I hate sharing with these boys here, they write nasty things about us on toilet walls and nothing is done to find who do it and punish them. We need our own toilets.

**Ans. 5.** I do not mind the issue of sharing toilets, but we really need water here. Imagine soiling yourself and fail to clean up because of lack of water. **L:666**

**Qn. 10. Do you face any other major problems either at school or home that may discourage you from studying?**

**Ans. Line 667.** The major problem I face is that my father really does not care about my schooling. Given the chance he would withdraw me. It is only that he fears authority. He says that I am wasting time; I shall get pregnant like my elder sister did.

**Ans. 2.** The big problem at home is that we are very poor and my mother cannot afford to buy me school necessities and I feel like stopping school. Imagine I do not have shoes and other things. My friends help me with sanitary towels when I have problems.

**Ans. 3.** I do not get time to do revision at home. We are orphans of genocide and I have to do all the work with my other sister so that we can be able to survive. At school I get embarrassed because I do not have the necessary things to use. It is difficult anyway both at home and here at school.

**Ans.4.** My parents are illiterate; they do not see the importance of school although I try to talk to them. They want me to stay at home and get married. At times I have to ask my teacher to talk to them otherwise it is a big problem. I cannot read at home; they only want me to do house work every time.

**Ans. 5.** My parents are educated and want me to study hard, but my father hates seeing me with boys from the neighbouring homes saying that they will teach me bad things. Anyway, it

is OK at home. Here at school, at times boys and even male teachers harass us girls. But we have learnt to speak about it in our TUSEME club and things are improving. **L:684**

**11. What would you like to see changing in your school and / or families in order to improve girls access, performance and retention?**

**Ans.1. Line 685.** I think both Teachers and parents should be sensitized on gender related issues so that girls are looked at and favoured as boys.

**Ans. 2.** Poor families should be helped with school requirements because it is a real problem for us girls from poor families.

**Ans. 3.** Teachers and boys who harass girls should be discouraged and punished where necessary to stop the bad behaviour.

**Ans. 4.** A lot of sensitization on HIV & AIDS needs to be done, because if girls still leave school because of pregnancy and may as well have got HIV and AIDS.

**Ans.5.** Poverty in homes should be eliminated because it is the root cause of girls' failure to go to school. Who would refuse to take his daughter to school if he is very rich? **L:694**

**Annex 5: Sample interview questions and responses from a student dropout**  
**(Student dropout group of stakeholders)**

**Qn. 1. Can you tell me a little about yourself and why you are not in school?**

**Ans. Line 1000.** Why do you want to know? What can you do for me? Any way, I am called Resette, I am an orphan; my parents were killed during the 1994 genocide. I am the only survivor in my family. I stay with other girls who are also orphans. It is like we joined efforts to be able to live and we do all sorts of work to survive. I had started school and went up to P.4 but I dopped out. This was because I could not go to school because, being an orphan, I could not afford school uniform books, shoes and food. I decided to abandon school especially to avoid being ridiculed for walking to school with dirty clothes, without uniform and being bare footed. **L:1007**

**Qn. 2. Given chance can you go back to school?**

**Ans. Line 1008.** How? Which primary school can take me? I am now seventeen years old. Perhaps if I can get a vocational school, where maybe I can learn something to support me in future. **L:1010**

**Qn.3. In your view do you think education is important? Give reasons.**

**Ans. Line 1011.** I think education is important because you cannot get a good job these days if you are no educated. As for me, I do not expect to live well, who would give me the job when I have nothing to give back? **L:1013**

**Qn. 4. What would you say are the major problems that stop girls from continuing education in general?**

**Ans. Line 1004.** I told you before, it is poverty. If you are poor you cannot go to school. There are many things you may not have and as such you fail to attend school. Genocide made things even worse. It is difficult to go to school if you are an orphan or staying with a single poor parent. **L:1007**

**Qn.5. Is that all?**

**Ans. Line 1008.** Of course there other problems related to poverty; poor girls get easily pregnant and leave school, because they are given gifts in terms of money and they fall pregnant; and this comes with HIV and AIDS. Poverty and being a genocide orphan is a big

issue to me and there are many other girls like me. Do not think I am alone. **L:1011**

**Qn.6. In your view, what do you think should be done to encourage girls to remain in school and who do think should do it?**

**Ans. Line 1012.** I think the government can do a lot if it cared. The government should find homes for the likes of us and provide support to the genocide orphans and provide essentials for enabling them to go to school. The rest of the girls should be sent to school by parents and local authorities should punish them if they refuse. The government should provide vocational training for those girls who have left school due to different reasons; but who cares? Nobody!