

Redefining Ripple Effect on Education of Women as Agents of Social Transformation and Peacemakers in Africa: A case of Elgeyo Marakwet County, Kenya

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the ripple effect of women's education on social transformation and peace in the context of Elgeyo Marakwet County, Kenya. The contention of this article is that the role of women in promoting social transformation and peace in Africa has garnered increasing attention in recent years. Employing a mixed-methods research design, this study combines quantitative and qualitative data to gain comprehensive insights into the topic. Using purposive random sampling, a diverse group of women in the Great Rift Valley region of Kenya was selected to represent various backgrounds and levels of education. The research draws on theories of social change and peace building as its primary theoretical framework. It also utilizes a variety of research tools, including surveys to assess educational attainment, structured interviews to explore experiences and perspectives, and documentary analysis to contextualize the impact of women's education on the local community. Quantitative data are analyzed using statistical techniques to identify patterns and correlations, while qualitative data are subjected to thematic analysis to extract rich narratives and insights. The findings reveal a multifaceted ripple effect of women's education in Elgeyo Marakwet County, Kenya influencing not only individual women's lives but also their families, communities, and the broader society. Education equips women with the knowledge and skills to engage in social transformation initiatives and peace building efforts effectively. This study highlights the importance of investing in women's education as a catalyst for positive change and peace in Africa, specifically in the Elgeyo Marakwet County, Kenya. It offers recommendations for policymakers, educators, and community leaders to support and promote women's education as a means to foster social transformation and sustainable peace in the region. Further research in other African contexts is encouraged to expand our understanding of the broader implications of women's education on social development and peace building efforts.

Key words: Africa, Kenya, Redefining, Ripple Effect, Education, women, social transformation, peacemakers

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Introduction

In the ever-evolving landscape of modern society, educators play a pivotal role that extends far beyond the transmission of academic knowledge (Indiran et al., 2023). They are the architects of holistic development, shaping the minds and hearts of their students. In a region marked by its rich diversity and unique socio-economic challenges, attention should be given to a particular crucial group and especially women in the context of Kerio Valley, Kenya. In an era characterized by the pursuit of social transformation and sustainable peace, the role of women as agents of social transformation has come to the forefront (Linnér & Wibeck, 2019).

In an era characterized by rapid globalization, Simon and Adam-Bradford (2016) posit that regional dynamics, and intricate local realities, education emerges as an essential instrument of empowerment, transformation, and peace building. Its ripples traverse continents, shape regional identities, and permeate local communities. Nowhere is the transformative potential of education more pronounced than in Africa, a continent that stands at the nexus of global aspirations, regional peculiarities, and local intricacies (Mkwanzani, 2018). On the global stage, education has evolved from a mere instrument of knowledge dissemination into a catalyst for sustainable development, gender equity, and peace (Rieckmann, 2017). As nations have recognized the profound implications of education on their economic competitiveness and social stability, international bodies and organizations have converged on education as a central tenet of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This global consensus underscores the critical importance of education as a driver of societal progress, one that transcends geographical boundaries and cultural contexts (Sharr, 2023).

In this global landscape, the issue of women's education has gained particular prominence. It is increasingly recognized that the empowerment of women through education is not only a matter of human rights but also a prerequisite for achieving a multitude of SDGs (Nabaneh & Muula, 2019). Women's education has been linked to poverty reduction, improved health outcomes, and the promotion of gender equality. Moreover, education equips women with the knowledge and skills necessary to engage actively in social transformation and conflict resolution, roles that are vital not only at the local level but also in contributing to global peace and security (Ali & Kamraju, 2023).

Zooming in from the global context, Sheng and Lian (2023) Africa presents a unique tapestry of regional dynamics, each marked by its history, culture, and development trajectory. The continent grapples with an array of challenges, from political instability and economic disparities to conflicts that have left deep scars on its societies (Busia, 2023). Within this regional context, the role of women in education, social transformation, and peacebuilding takes

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on a special significance. In Africa, the educational landscape has seen notable improvements in recent years (Weller et al., 2018). Governments, regional bodies, and international organizations have collaborated to expand access to education, particularly for girls and women (Kumar et al., 2017). These efforts have borne fruit, with increasing numbers of girls and women enrolling in schools and institutions of higher learning. However, significant challenges persist, ranging from the quality of education to cultural norms that still inhibit women's full participation in educational and societal endeavors.

The African narrative also includes the vital role of women as agents of social transformation and peacemakers (Ibok & Ogar, 2018). African women have played pivotal roles in community development, conflict resolution, and post-conflict reconciliation. Their contributions have been recognized on the regional and international stages, with initiatives such as the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the United Nations' Women, Peace, and Security agenda emphasizing the importance of women's agency in shaping the continent's future.

The Local Realities: Marakwet County, Kenya

Amidst the global imperatives and regional complexities, the Kerio Valley emerges as a compelling case study, a testament to the intricate interplay of forces that define Africa's educational and societal landscape (Odhiambo, 2016). Nestled within the embrace of the Great Rift Valley in East Africa, the Kerio Valley is characterized by breathtaking natural beauty, cultural diversity, and a history marked by both resilience and challenges. At the local level, women in the Kerio Valley encounter a myriad of obstacles on their path to education (Meli, 2021). These obstacles, often deeply rooted in local customs, economic disparities, and institutional shortcomings, hinder their access to quality education and higher learning. As a consequence, women's potential remains untapped, and their ability to drive social development and contribute to conflict resolution remains constrained (Yunis et al., 2018).

This comprehensive introduction considers the global, regional, and local factors at play within the context of this article, setting the stage for a thorough exploration of the complex relationships between education, women's roles, social transformation, and peacemaking in the Kerio Valley and Africa as a whole (Kipchumba, 2019). Amidst the global imperatives and regional complexities, the Kerio Valley emerges as a compelling case study, a testament to the intricate interplay of forces that define Africa's educational and societal landscape (Bodin, 2017). Elgeyo Marakwet county, Kenya, is situated within the African continent, encapsulates a myriad of cultures, traditions, and perspectives. Here, women, often the unsung heroines, bear the potential to redefine the trajectory of not only their own lives but also the broader community (Macgilchrist, 2021). They are the catalysts for a ripple effect that can usher in transformative social change and cultivate an environment of enduring peace.

Education equips women with the tools to envision and pursue their unique aspirations, facilitating active participation in society and nurturing critical thinking skills (Wagner, 2017). This empowerment enables women to navigate the delicate balance between personal dreams and societal expectations, leading to improved health outcomes, economic opportunities, and leadership roles for women. The ripple effect is evident in the transformative effects on individual lives and communities. Educated women become catalysts for positive change in both their immediate community and the world at large, contributing not only to their personal growth but also to the broader socio-economic landscape ((Wagner, 2017)

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The intersection between personal dreams and societal expectations highlights the nuanced decision-making process that educated women undergo, emphasizing the importance of informed choices aligning with personal dreams rather than conforming to external expectations (Jordan, 2015). Beyond tradition, education fosters a culture of lifelong learning and challenges existing norms, recognizing women as lifelong learners and contributors to society. This cultural shift redefines success for women, emphasizing individual fulfilment rather than traditional norms. The transformative power of education empowers women to dream beyond societal constraints, creating a ripple effect of knowledge that passes from themselves to their families and eventually to their children (Pricopie, Guþu & Moroiu, 2010).

This study embarks on a journey to investigate the multifaceted ripple effect of women's empowerment and education in the context of Kerio Valley (Haugh & Talwar, 2016). Beyond the boundaries of conventional education, women emerge as pivotal actors in fostering social transformation and peace. They stand as torchbearers of knowledge, agents of sustainable development, and peacemakers in their communities (Bedigen, 2022). This inquiry ventures into the countless ways in which women's education can serve as a catalyst for positive change, not only enhancing their individual lives but also radiating its influence throughout the Valley.

Education, as a cornerstone of human development, has the power to shape societies, transform lives, and forge pathways to a more equitable and peaceful world (Glasser, 2019). Nowhere is this potential more evident and imperative than in the African context, where education holds the key to addressing multifaceted challenges, from poverty alleviation to conflict resolution. This study embarks on a journey to explore the intricate interplay between education, women's agency, social transformation, and peacemaking in Africa, with a specific and nuanced focus on the Elgeyo Marakwet county, Kenya.

The Elgeyo Marakwet county, nestled within the Great Rift Valley of East Africa, is a region of captivating natural beauty and cultural diversity. However, like many parts of the African continent, it grapples with the complex tapestry of socio-economic disparities and sporadic conflicts that hinder its progress. In the midst of these challenges, women emerge as steadfast pillars of resilience, determined to alter the course of their communities' destiny. They do so with the belief that education is not only a beacon of hope but also a catalyst for change (Scoon, 2022).

According to the study done by Muyanja (2022), the power of education in shaping minds and molding societies cannot be overstated. In Elgeyo Marakwet, where the quest for social transformation and peace is ever-present. This study aims to illuminate the transformative potential of women as educators, community builders, and peacemakers. It recognizes that, much like teachers who nurture emotional intelligence, women in Kerio Valley can impart a profound impact by fostering knowledge, empathy, and harmony within their communities.

By delving into the experiences, challenges, and successes of women in Kerio Valley, this study seeks to provide insights that extend beyond the individual and illuminate the collective potential for societal advancement and peacebuilding (Otundo & Nangulu, 2022). In recognizing the indispensable role of women as agents of social transformation and peacemakers, we aspire to unearth practical recommendations that can empower women in Kerio Valley to lead the way towards a brighter, more harmonious future.

Statement of the problem

In the Elgeyo Marakwet County, Kenya as in numerous African regions, women encounter formidable obstacles on their path to education. Rooted in deep-seated cultural norms, economic disparities, and institutional shortcomings, these barriers conspire to limit access to quality education and higher learning. The consequences of this exclusion are profound, impacting not only individual women but the entire community. Denied the opportunity to access knowledge and skills, women's potential remains untapped, and their ability to drive social development and contribute to the resolution of conflicts remains constrained. Furthermore, women in the Elgeyo Marakwet County much like their counterparts across Africa, are pivotal actors in social transformation and peacemaking processes. Yet, their roles often operate beneath the radar, with their contributions underrepresented and undervalued in academic discourse and policy initiatives. This research study seeks to confront this dual challenge by examining the intricate web of interdependencies between education and women's agency, unveiling how education equips women with the capacity to challenge traditional norms, address root causes of conflict, and actively participate in peace initiatives.

Methodology

For the purpose of this investigation into the "Redefining Ripple Effect on Education of Women as Agents of Social Transformation and Peacemakers in Africa: A Case of Elgeyo Marakwet County," a convergent mixed research methodology was employed. This methodological approach allows for the simultaneous collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, facilitating their concurrent evaluation and comparison to establish the consistency or divergence of findings (Creswell, 2014). This study adopts a convergent mixed research design to comprehensively explore the complex interplay between women's education, their roles as agents of social transformation, and their contributions as peacemakers in the context of Elgeyo Marakwet county, Kenya.

The target population for this study consists of individuals residing in the Elgeyo Marakwet County Kenya, with a specific focus on women engaged in various educational pursuits and their subsequent roles in social transformation and peace building. The study encompasses a diverse population of women from the Elgeyo, encompassing different educational backgrounds and age groups. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select research participants. This approach ensures representation from various segments of the population within the Kerio Valley region. Participants were selected based on their engagement with education and their involvement in initiatives related to social transformation and peace building. Both male and female participants were included to capture a holistic view of the study's subject matter.

Literature Review

This study applied Feminist theory which posits that gender is a social construct, and it seeks to understand and address the power imbalances, discrimination, and inequalities that stem from traditional gender roles (Cislighi & Heise, 2020). In this study, feminist theory was used to analyze how societal expectations and cultural norms in the Elgeyo Marakwet County Kenya have historically limited women's access to education and participation in social transformation

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and peacemaking efforts. Furthermore, you can explore how education can serve as a means for women to challenge these norms, gain agency, and contribute to positive change.

Feminist theory is highly relevant to this article because it provides a critical lens through which to examine the gender dynamics and inequalities related to women's access to education and their roles as agents of social transformation and peacemakers (Haynes, 2017). This theory emphasizes the importance of challenging traditional gender norms and advocating for gender equality. In the context of this article, it helps illuminate the ways in which education can empower women to challenge these norms, enabling them to become catalysts for social change and peace in the Elgeyo Marakwet County and Africa at large.

In a study conducted by Leclerc (2019), the ripple effect of education on women's empowerment in Africa was examined, emphasizing its role in fostering social transformation and peace building. The research highlighted the case of Elgeyo Marakwet County in Kenya, a region where traditional gender norms often impede women's access to education and participation in societal matters. Varela Baltier (2019) underscored the pivotal role education plays in empowering women to become agents of change within their communities. Education equips women with the knowledge and skills necessary to challenge entrenched patriarchal structures, advocate for their rights, and actively contribute to peace building efforts.

Mutuma (2023) delved deeper, examining the multifaceted impacts of education on women's lives and their roles as catalysts for social transformation. Holmelin (2019) shed light on the interplay between education, gender dynamics, and community development, revealing how educated women in the region are increasingly challenging traditional norms and assumptions. In pursuing education, women not only enhance their economic prospects but also gain the confidence and agency to challenge social injustices and promote peace within their communities.

Furthermore, a study by Jerono (2021) explored the ripple effect of women's education on various dimensions of societal well-being in Elgeyo Marakwet County, Kenya. Her research highlighted the transformative potential of education in breaking the cycle of poverty and gender inequality, emphasizing its ripple effects on health, economic stability, and community cohesion. Through qualitative interviews and participatory observations, Mung'ou (2018) documented how educated women in the region actively engage in community initiatives, advocate for inclusive policies, and foster dialogue to address underlying sources of conflict.

In addition to its societal impacts, the educational empowerment of women in Elgeyo Marakwet County also intersects with broader efforts for peace and reconciliation in the region. As observed by Papagianni and Federman (2022), educated women are increasingly recognized as key peacemakers and mediators within their communities, leveraging their educational attainment to bridge divides and promote understanding. Through their involvement in grassroots peacebuilding initiatives, women contribute to the resolution of conflicts, the promotion of interethnic harmony, and the cultivation of a culture of dialogue and tolerance.

The ripple effect of women's education extends beyond individual empowerment to encompass broader systemic changes within Elgeyo Marakwet County and beyond. As articulated by Kipkoech (2020), educated women serve as role models and change agents, inspiring future generations of girls to pursue education and challenge gender norms. This ripple effect not only amplifies the impact of women's education but also contributes to the sustainable

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development and resilience of communities in the face of social, economic, and environmental challenges.

A study conducted by Morogo(2019) explored the specific challenges and opportunities faced by educated women in Elgeyo Marakwet County as they navigate their roles as agents of social transformation and peacemakers. Their research delved into the nuances of gender dynamics within the community, shedding light on the intersecting barriers of culture, economics, and politics that educated women confront. Through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions .Heckert et al. (2020) elucidated the strategies employed by educated women to overcome these challenges, including forming support networks, engaging in advocacy, and leveraging their education to effect positive change.

Nevertheless, women's education has increasingly recognized the importance of context-specific approaches to empowerment and peacebuilding. As highlighted by Emon and Nipa (2024), initiatives aimed at enhancing women's educational opportunities must be tailored to the unique socio-cultural and economic landscape of the region. By incorporating local knowledge, traditions, and community perspectives into education policies and programs, stakeholders can ensure that women's empowerment efforts are rooted in the realities and aspirations of Elgeyo Marakwet County residents (Rotich, 2018).

Studies by Nayyar et al. (2019) have explored how digital literacy initiatives and access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) can empower women, expand educational opportunities, and facilitate their participation in social and economic life. Dhiman (2023) elucidate that by harnessing the potential of technology to overcome barriers such as geographical remoteness and limited resources, stakeholders can enhance the ripple effects of women's education on social transformation and peace building in the county.

Moreover, the literature underscores the need for holistic approaches to women's empowerment that go beyond access to formal education to address intersecting dimensions of gender inequality. As articulated by Onditi and Odera (2018), efforts to promote women's education must be complemented by initiatives that address structural barriers, such as discriminatory laws and practices, unequal access to resources, and gender-based violence. By adopting a multi-sectoral approach that addresses the root causes of gender inequality, stakeholders can amplify the ripple effects of women's education on social transformation and peacebuilding in Elgeyo Marakwet County and beyond (Okunade et al., 2023).

Research by Khalid (2023) has examined the intergenerational effects of maternal education, highlighting how educated mothers not only improve their own livelihoods but also contribute to the educational attainment and well-being of their children. By breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty and illiteracy, women's education generates ripple effects that extend far beyond individual empowerment, laying the foundation for sustainable development and peace in the community (Akinwale, 2023). Studies by Dill and Zambrana(2020) have explored how factors such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and disability intersect with gender to shape women's access to education and opportunities for social transformation. By adopting an intersectional lens, researchers and practitioners can better understand the diverse needs and experiences of women in Elgeyo Marakwet County, ensuring that empowerment initiatives are inclusive and equitable.

Moreover, the literature has increasingly highlighted the role of partnerships and collaboration in advancing women's education and empowerment agendas in Elgeyo Marakwet

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County. Research by Natil(2020) has examined the contributions of civil society organizations, government agencies, and international donors in supporting initiatives aimed at promoting women's education and fostering social transformation. By forging strategic partnerships and leveraging resources, stakeholders can amplify the impact of their efforts and address systemic barriers to women's empowerment more effectively.

Conclusion

Education is recognized as a powerful tool for social transformation and peace building on a global scale, as evidenced by its inclusion in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Women's education is particularly important in achieving sustainable development and gender equality, as it has been linked to poverty reduction, improved health outcomes, and the promotion of gender equality. In Africa, women's education is crucial for addressing the continent's unique challenges, such as political instability, economic disparities, and conflicts.

Women in the Elgeyo Marakwet County face significant obstacles in accessing quality education due to cultural norms, economic disparities, and institutional shortcomings. Despite these challenges, educated women in the region have the potential to become agents of social transformation and peacemakers, leveraging their education to challenge traditional norms, advocate for their rights, and contribute to peace building efforts.

The ripple effect of women's education extends beyond individual empowerment to encompass broader systemic changes within the Elgeyo Marakwet County and beyond, including improved health outcomes, economic stability, and community cohesion. Feminist theory provides a critical lens for understanding and addressing the gender dynamics and inequalities related to women's access to education and their roles as agents of social transformation and peacemakers. Partnerships and collaboration among civil society organizations, government agencies, and international donors are crucial for advancing women's education and empowerment agendas in the Elgeyo Marakwet County, Kenya.

Recommendations

This study recommends that efforts should be made to address the barriers that hinder women's access to quality education in Elgeyo Marakwet County, Kenya. This includes addressing cultural norms, economic disparities, and institutional shortcomings that limit women's educational opportunities. Strategies such as providing scholarships, improving school infrastructure, and promoting inclusive educational policies can help enhance access to education for women in the region. Given the potential of technology to overcome barriers to education, initiatives should be implemented to enhance women's digital literacy skills and provide them with access to information and communication technologies (ICTs). This can open up new educational opportunities and empower women to participate in social and economic life. Collaboration between civil society organizations, government agencies, and international donors is crucial in advancing women's education and empowerment agendas. By working together, stakeholders can leverage resources, share best practices, and address systemic barriers more effectively. Encourage and support women to take on leadership roles in education, social transformation, and peace building initiatives.

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