

**Project/activity proposal in the field of youth work/non-formal education/media, e.g. training, international cooperation, etc.**

## **WOMEN'S ROLE AND EDUCATION IN TURKANA COUNTY, KENYA**

**SCARLINA**

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## **1. FACTS & FIGURES**

Our project deals with education issues for girls in Kenya, and in particular in Turkana County. We focused on a village in which the problem of high rates of school-dropping for girls is particularly high, as it is in all the County. This situation is due primarily to strong cultural constraints that force women out of school to take care of the household and of the family. This lack of opportunities limits their possibilities to have other aspirations and to empower themselves.

For this reason, the research question of our project is “How do cultural constraints influence and put barriers to the education and career possibilities of young women in Turkana County, in Kenya?”.

In order to find satisfactory answers to our question and to favor, in some ways, the empowerment and emancipation of the women of the community we will work with, we will conduct a Participatory Action Research that will involve mainly the girls of the village that will have the chance to speak freely about their feelings, hopes and fears.

## **2. FORMATS AND METHODS**

### **1. Participatory Action Research**

The levels of school attendance of girls in Kenya, and in particular in Turkana County, are very concerning. This influences also the possibilities that women will have in the future, relegating them mainly to housekeeping and motherhood roles. For this reason, we have decided to conduct our fieldwork in a village in Turkana in which the school-drop levels of girls are particularly high.

Our study will mainly involve two very different groups of people in a village in Turkana County. The first group will be composed by young girls in scholar age and young women, the second by some of their fathers and husbands; these two groups will be involved differently in the process. We chose these two groups in order to address the difficulties that girls face in attending school and how they feel about it, and also to understand the reasons behind those impediments. The main aim of our project, though, is not only to have a deeper understanding of the situation coming from the involved people, but to tackle these difficulties starting from them, by helping them acquiring awareness and to find the tools to do so. For this reason, our overall methodological approach will be Participatory Action Research (PAR).

In particular, PAR will allow us to actively include the members of the community by giving them, first of all, the possibility to be heard and then to be involved in the research process and, most importantly, in the process of change. This methodological approach, in fact, is very useful when it comes to address the problems of a certain marginalised group in order to help them to gain awareness of their resources and to use them to improve their lives. In our specific case, girls and women find a barrier in their participation to school and so also in the possibility of making career and participating in the political life of their community and beyond. This, of course, makes them marginalised and weak as a group. This is the reason why we think that the best approach for our project would be PAR, because only with their inclusion and active participation in the research process and in taking action they will be able to share their experiences and aspirations but also to improve their lives and manage to actively participate to school and to the community life.

Going back to our project, the first important thing to do is to negotiate the access to the village and asking permission to proceed with our research and to implement our activities. We will work with a group of peer researchers, and this will help us in gaining the access and the trust of the people we are going to work with.

As regards the activities we are going to implement, we intend to work both with focus groups and with visual methods, in particular, with participatory video. In particular, we will first generate a communicative space that will help us analysing the situation thanks to the focus groups, and then we will act with the help of participatory video, and so on in cycles.

## **2. Focus Groups**

A focal point of our research will be the focus group. We decided to use this method because, in our opinion, there is no better way to discover what are the real struggles that women face in everyday life and what are their feelings about it, making them discuss about it thanks to our inputs.

We chose to set up two focus groups: one will interest only a range of women from 14 years old to 25 years old. We thought about this range of age because from the teen age a huge number of women do not go to school anymore, so they have to work in order to help their family in the economic sphere since the age of fourteen.

The other focus group will be composed by men only. This was not an easy decision, but we thought that separate men and women would have been a good idea for two reasons: the first one was giving women the possibility to talk without filters, because they could have been intimidated by the presence of men, especially if the topic of the discussion is women's education and the possibility for them to make career. The second reason that bring us to split men and women in two groups is the fact that women are the ones who are hit by this situation, so it's important for us to hear what they say on the behalf of all women that are in the same situation; we also thought it would be easier both for us and for them to deal with these issues separately from men. Indeed, men are the ones who contribute to marginalize women, that's why in their focus group we will discuss about why in their opinion women don't deserve more respect and more space in the society and overall, why shouldn't they finish the education cycle. Furthermore, both focus groups will have a maximum of 9 persons, and they will be held by a facilitator, which will be one of the peer researchers, since none of us can speak Turkana: the facilitator will rule the focus group following our previous instructions; this way we will not need a translator (which would render the focus group discussion much slower and non-linear). Also, with the help of a trained local researcher the research will be based on what we, as researchers, want to understand.

## **3. Participatory video**

The second method that we will use is the participatory video (PV). This method will be very useful in our project because it allows to build knowledge on social issues from the perspectives of the people experiencing them and, this way, to foster social transformation. By building knowledge, in fact, the most marginalised groups will have the possibility to identify the key topics linked to their issues and transform them in a visual output that will help them raise their voices within and outside their community.

After having discussed and analyzed during the focus groups the challenges that girls and young women are facing in the lack of access to school and to other possibilities, and how this has an

impact on their lives, we will proceed by using PV in order to better explore their lives' experiences. We will do this by asking them to record some videos in which they will show their daily lives, especially in the aspects more relatable with the absence from school and their roles as housewives and mothers. This first step of our participatory video project will be useful because will allow them to share how they live this situation, how they feel about it and what it means to them.

Of course, the discussion of these activities will be held during the focus groups, in which they will discuss the outcomes. In this middle-phase, the girls involved will try to identify possible community solutions to their challenges and to the limits that they face.

In the second part of these participatory video activities, it will be asked to them to record videos linked to the first ones, but oriented to the future. They will show, in fact, what are their dreams, their aspirations, and how they would like to participate in school. It will also be asked them to do videos about the possible solutions that they found during the discussion.

This kind of activity will allow them to give a shape to their concerns and aspirations; it will also allow them to show their situation to other people. In fact, we aim to build awareness towards the government and among the other communities that face the same situation and so to those who promote the cultural constraints that impede women to have a proper education.

Most importantly, these activities will be useful because they will give to the girls involved a feeling of capability and of group-work, it will help them to empower themselves by reflecting on their issues and acting in order to overcome them.

In the specific case of our project, the above-mentioned is particularly important as the involved girls are excluded from an important societal dynamic and are rendered, in a certain way, more fragile by not having the possibility to study. This will help them to feel stronger, capable of improving their situation and also it will build an important group dynamic of mutual understanding and of empowerment.

#### **4. Peer researchers**

As already said, we will need the help of a group of local researchers. This is because peer researchers are people who already live inside the community, so they know how to deal with local people and how to not make them feel uncomfortable. Obviously, they know how to deal with the research field, and they can use their lived experience and contextual understanding of the community to help generate information about their peers for research purposes. There are many reasons why we decided to work with local researchers: first, the language issue. Turkana is not spoken in any other area of the world and nobody in our research team is speaking Turkana. Furthermore, the peer researchers will perfectly know the environment and which topics and questions focus on the most. Also, peer researchers can bring their life experiences during the research, this way people will be more open to dealing with it. Indeed, as stated above, it is possible that peer researchers will have something in common with local people, this will help the team to avoid some misunderstandings during the process of gathering data because they will know what is more important and what's not: this way only the relevant data will be taken into account. A substantial body of evidence indicates that people gain confidence and self-esteem by participating in peer research and finding that they add significant value to the process. It may also promote

social inclusion among groups who often experience exclusion and isolation such as those challenged by stigma or marginalization. Since our idea for the research is to use participatory video, peer researchers will help us in finding a way to encourage women to participate.

### 3. PRELIMINARY TIMETABLE

Time	Roles	Session	Activity	Materials/Notes
		<b>Objectives:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To build knowledge with the community</li> <li>• To help women to build self-consciousness and empowerment</li> <li>• To tackle the difficulties of the most marginalized</li> </ul>		<b>Remember communication needs and modes</b>
Week 1/2		<b>Training of the peer researchers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meeting and recruiting the local researchers</li> <li>• Explanation of the project</li> <li>• Guidelines of the research tools</li> <li>• Planning of the fieldwork</li> </ul>	It is fundamental that the peer researchers chosen are both Turkana and English speaking
Week 3		<b>Introductory week</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gaining the trust of the locals</li> <li>• Getting to know each other</li> <li>• Welcome activities (introductory activities, games, etc.)</li> <li>• First look at the effective situation</li> </ul>	

Week 4/5	Facilitators	<b>Men's focus groups</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brief explanation of the project</li> <li>• Introductory activities</li> <li>• Discussion on the socio-cultural beliefs and constraints</li> <li>• Data collection</li> </ul>	
Week 6/7	Facilitators	<b>Women's focus groups</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brief explanation of the project</li> <li>• Introductory activities</li> <li>• Discussion on their own situation regarding lack of literacy and possibilities</li> <li>• Data collection</li> </ul>	It is important to make them feel comfortable in order to allow them to speak freely
Week 8/9	All participants switch the roles during the recordings	<b>Participatory video</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recoding of daily routine</li> <li>• Recording of personal thoughts</li> <li>• Active participation of all focus group's women</li> <li>• Instructions on editing of the video and editing</li> </ul>	Only women will participate; it is important to ask for the consent for the further use of the videos; pay attention to the narrative
Week 10/11	Facilitators	<b>Women's focus groups</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion on the outcomes of the PV phase</li> <li>• Discussion on the wishes for the future</li> <li>• Data collection</li> </ul>	
Week 12/13	All cover and switch different roles	<b>Participatory video</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recording of the aspirations and expectations for the education</li> </ul>	Only women; ask for consent; pay attention to the narrative

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hopes for the future</li> <li>• Video editing</li> </ul>	
Week 14/15	Facilitators	<b>Women's focus groups</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion on the outcomes of the PV phase</li> <li>• Discussion on how they think things will change in the future</li> <li>• Data collection</li> </ul>	
Week 16		<b>Conclusion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing the videos with all the community</li> <li>• Public discussion on the outcomes</li> <li>• Final activities (discussions on how they felt during the research)</li> </ul>	Pay attention to the reaction and feelings of the community

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

### 1. Expected outcomes

With our project, we are expecting to raise two very important aspects for society: empowerment and consciousness.

As regards empowerment, as already mentioned, the participatory methods are very useful in order to make the participants feel capable of changing their own lives. For this reason, we hope that our project will help the women and girls involved to stand up for their rights and to feel more confident and legitimated to complete the education cycle and aspire to make a career. Indeed, the methods that we will implement contribute to shifting power, as participants enact agency through communicating in public space and thus are becoming social actors.

As regards the consciousness, by creating visual outputs that will show the struggles that women are facing in education and their expectations, we intend to show them to a wider public that comprehends not only the whole village, nor only other local communities that face the same issues, but we aim to reach also the government. By showing these videos to the local populations (including the one involved in the project) we hope to raise awareness among those that still carry on the cultural constraints that are an impediment to the education of girls; this way we hope to foster a change to certain values that are deeply rooted in the society. By showing them at the

governmental level, we aim as well to raise awareness in order to promote the inclusion of women through ad hoc policies and eventually through the construction of adequate infrastructures.

## **2. Obstacles**

For sure, we expect to find some difficulties along the way. One of the main obstacles might be the possibility that these people won't be comfortable with us trying to analyze their habits and trying to make them change them. This might happen especially with men not only because some of them don't want to change their habits, but also because it might threaten their privileged position. This might lead to a lack of collaboration on their side, and also women might be forced not to participate. The unwillingness of accepting external researchers might be mitigated by the presence of the peer researchers that will help to carry on the research, but also this might lead to some problems. Indeed, there is the risk for this local research team to face jealousy and comments from the other members of the group, maybe due to their privileged position.