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**THE AVAILABILITY AND UTILISATION OF GIRLS' HOSTEL SERVICES: THE CASE OF SELECTED RURAL-BASED COMMUNITY SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN IGUNGA DISTRICT, TANZANIA**

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This paper is based on findings on the availability and utilisation of girls' hostel services in Igunga Rural Community Secondary Schools. The mainly qualitative study with some elements of the quantitative employed a cross-sectional research design. A sample size of 84 respondents—67 students, one District Secondary Education Officer, four heads of schools, four school board chairpersons, four hostel supervisors and four hostel prefects—was used to generate data through interviews, questionnaires, documentary review and observation. Out of 25 schools under study, only eight (32%) had hostel services to house 544 girls. Yet, only 285(10.5%) girls were in the hostels, with 259(47.6%) hostel places unoccupied. Most needy girls lived at home or rented unsecured private rooms mainly because of the high unit costs coupled with shoddy services. Superstitious beliefs and witchcraft fears also scared many girls away. Thus new innovative ways are necessary to increase both the quality and uptake in the girls' hostels.

**Keywords:** Rural Community Secondary Schools, Girls Hostel Services, Utilisation.

**1. Background**

Girls' secondary education is recognised as a critical global priority in engendering women empowerment and equitable development (UNICEF, 2014; Levine *et al.*, 2008). Evidence from various countries shows that the provision of accommodation facilities for girls is one of the strategies that promote enrolment and retention in secondary schools, particularly in developing countries where the girl-child remains largely marginalised. In Nepal, for example, the government has been providing accommodation services for decades to help girls from marginalised communities (UNESCO, 2006). Similarly, in Africa, efforts are being made to improve accommodation facilities in schools. For instance, the governments of Botswana and Zambia in collaboration with UNICEF have made significant attempts to curb the accommodation problem that adolescent girls face and had been forced to rent rooms in unsecured quarters and environs or had to walk over long distances to schools (UNICEF, 2001).

In Tanzania, the provision of educational opportunity for girls has been an important endeavour since independence. In particular, the Education Act Number 25 of 1978 with its amendments Number 10 of 1995 empowers every child with a legal right to access education (United Republic of Tanzania [URT], 1978; 1995a). Moreover, the Education and Training Policy (ETP) of 1995 articulates the quest for creating convenient accommodation facilities and learning opportunities to girls (URT, 1995b). In fostering this endeavour, the government of Tanzania in collaboration with local authorities and donor partners has remained devoted to constructing girls' hostels in community day secondary schools in every administrative ward through the Secondary Education Development Programmes (SEDP) Phases I& II that is 2004-2009 and 2010-2010, respectively (see URT, 2010; 2004).

Moreover, different organisations have been providing invaluable support in the construction of school hostels in the country, particularly to cater for the interests of girls who tend to be more affected in day schools than their male counterparts. For example, the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) under the programme known as Centres for Excellence has been supporting the construction of hostels in the country's day secondary schools (FAWE, 2005). Also, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) injected USD 1,136,308 into a five-year project to construct girls' hostels in Ngara, Kasulu and Kibondo districts (UNHCR, 2005). Similarly, Japan's Grant Assistance for Grassroots Human Security Projects (GGHSP) had also been supporting the construction of school hostels in the country (URT, 2012).

Despite the ongoing construction projects to boost the availability of hostel facilities in Tanzania, little is known about strategies deployed to foster the utilisation of accommodation facilities in RCSS. Such rural-based community secondary schools have been touted as one of the means for bridging the gap in accessing secondary education among the poor, yet the role that hotels can play to improve the education fortunes in such schools in Tanzania, particularly for girls, remains largely unexplored. Studies available such as by Jidamva (2012) focused on the improvement of academic performance through the provision of accommodation facilities whereas Nteko (2007) generally dealt with improving the living conditions for girls in secondary schools through hostel projects. What remains unanswered is whether there are viable hostel accommodation facilities in RCSS, which are sprouting in largely underdeveloped areas and catering for largely poor segments of society, who live on less than a dollar a day. Moreover, it remains largely unknown how the available school accommodation facilities being utilised by students, and neither are the strategies that are being used to ensure effective and sustainable utilisation of hostel accommodation facilities in RCSS. This study was an attempt to address some of these issues with regard to RCSS and specifically in Igunga District of Tanzania, which was used as case study.

## **2. Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study were to:

- (a) Assess the availability of girls' hostel services in rural-based community secondary schools.
- (b) Examine the manner in which girls' hostel services are utilised in rural-based community secondary schools.
- (c) Identify factors behind the underutilisation of hostel facilities in rural-based community secondary schools.
- (d) Investigate strategies for effective utilisation of girls' hostel services in rural-based community secondary schools.

## **3. Methodology**

The study employed a cross-sectional survey to generate the required data in connection with the research objectives. This mainly qualitative study also benefited from elements of the quantitative approach particularly to capture some statistical information that supported the qualitative data. The study was conducted in Igunga district, Tanzania at four purposively selected sampled RCSS in March 2014. The study involved 84 participants, 67 of whom were students randomly selected to obtain a fair representation whereas 17 participants were purposively selected according to the role they play in the management of school hostels. These other 17 purposively selected respondents were the District Secondary Education Officer (DSEO), four heads of school, four school board chairpersons, four hostel supervisors and four hostel prefects. Questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observation and documentary review were deployed to collect essential data in a triangulated fashion. Questionnaires

were administered with students whereas interviews were held with the DSEO, heads of school, hostel supervisors and hostel prefects. To complement data generated through the use of the questionnaire and interviews, the study also reviewed hostel admission registers, school reports, joining instructions, district reports and the district strategic plans in addition to making field observations. These multifaceted or triangulated data collection methods helped to crosscheck the findings through the use, for example, of questionnaires and interviews.

To ensure reliability and validity of the research tools, a pre-test of the research instruments was carried out. Specifically, this step helped to determine the usefulness and worthiness of these research tools before they were employed in the main study. Ethical values in the research were also considered. Informed consent of participants was secured prior to participation in the study. In addition, the participants were assured of the confidentiality of information they provided. Data processing and analysis was done by using both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Qualitative data was subjected to content analysis whereas quantitative data were analysed for frequencies and percentages before being presented in tabular form for easy interpretation alongside the narrative presentation.

#### **4.0 Discussion of the Study Findings**

##### **4.1 Availability of Girls' Hostel Services in Rural-based Community Secondary Schools**

To assess the availability of girls' hostel services in RCSS, questionnaires, interviews, and documentary review were employed. Through closed-ended questions in the questionnaire, 56(83.6%) students indicated that hostel spaces were fewer than the number of girls enrolled in the RCSS.

To get more clarity of the issue, the same questions were posed in separate interview sessions. Responding, all (100%) the head of schools, all (100%) the hostel supervisors and all (100%) the hostel prefects concurred that hostel accommodation was too inadequate to meet the high demand for them among girls. As a result, many of the girls either lived at home with parents or rented rooms near schools. The heads of school claimed that hostel construction had not been as prioritised by local communities as the construction of classrooms. To a large extent, hostel construction was made possible through development grants from the central government whereas the construction of classrooms also benefited from self-help schemes and parents' volunteer efforts. Similarly, the DEO reported that accommodation facilities for girls were still under established because local communities were too overburdened with school contributions as part of education cost-sharing while struggling to meet other incidentals with their largely paltry earnings.

To cross check the information obtained through the questionnaire and interviews, documents were reviewed. Through documentary review, it was established that, Igunga district had 25 RCSS which had enrolled 2,721 girls, of which 17(68%) schools had no hostel services for girls. The findings show that only 544 hostel places could only accommodate 19.9 percent of the girls enrolled in RCSS. Even then, there was a discrepancy between the available hostel accommodation and actually occupied places. Indeed, only 285(10.5%) of the girls were accommodated in the hostels. This implies that despite the scarcity of school hostel places, there were 259 (47.6%) hostel places that remained vacant as Table 1 illustrates:

**Table 1: Profile of Girls' Hostel Services in Igunga District**

Number of RCSS	Number of Girls' Admitted in RCSS	Number of Girls Accommodated in Hostels	Number of RCSS with Hostels	Hostel Capacity	Vacant Hostel Slots
25	2721	285 (10.5%)	8 (32%)	544	259 (47.6%)

**Source:** DEOs Office (2014).

On the one hand, these findings imply that many of the schools in the RCSS did not have girls' accommodation facilities. On the other hand, even the few available places went begging as a result of a variety of reasons such as the high costs (for girls from poor backgrounds) and shoddy services available in the hostels (for girls from better-off homes). The girls are forced to stay in non-secured accommodation, either at home or in private rooms, are subject to risks such as sexual abuse, early marriages, pregnancies, forced marriages and poor academic concentration in rented but largely unconducive rooms designed for other purposes other than studies. At home, gender-constructed roles forced them to spend more time on domestic chores than studies. In the rural areas, the girls outside school hostels also have to contend with entrenched beliefs that the girls' place is at home and that girls are simply there for marriage. These findings concur with Rajani (2001) whose situational analysis of children in Tanzania found that secondary school girls were still vulnerable to many risks in rented accommodation due to lack of accommodation facilities in community day secondary schools. Indeed, no one is there to protect the girls when situated far from the watchful eyes of parents or custodial care of teachers and other overseers of the school hostels.

#### **4.2 Utilisation of Hostel Accommodation Facilities in Rural-based Community Secondary Schools**

Findings obtained through the use of questionnaires indicate that 21(31.3%) of the students agreed that some girls vacated from hostel accommodation for different reasons and returned home or rented rooms instead. Some 43(64.2%) students indicated that there were still vacant slots in their hostels despite the high demand for them coupled with the paucity of hostel accommodation. The findings from the questionnaire were triangulated through interviews. Responding, three (75%) school heads, three (75%) school board chairpersons, three (75%) hostel supervisors and three (75%) hostel prefects indicated that there was under-enrolment in the school hostels.

Through observation, researchers found that one dormitory in School 'C' was completely unoccupied, while schools 'B' and 'D' had vacant beds in dormitories but School 'A' had all the dormitory spaces occupied. The findings from a documentary review show that only one (25%) of the sampled schools had utilised its full hostel capacity. The remaining three schools under study all reported under-enrolments of varying degrees as Table 2 illustrate:

**Table 2: Hostel Enrolment in Sampled Schools**

School	Year of Hostel Services Establishment	The girls admitted at school	Available Hostel Chances	Occupied Chances	Vacant Chances
School A	2005	284	112(39.4%)	112(100%)	00(00.0%)
School B	2007	191	48(37.2%)	40(83.3%)	08(16.7%)
School C	2013	129	96(74.4%)	47(62%)	49(38.0%)
School D	2013	291	48(16.5%)	22(45.8%)	26(54.2%)

Source: Field Data (2014).

These findings indicate mixed results in the utilisation of the girls' hostels. It emerged during field work that the school that which had operated the hostel for a number of years had better school hotel utilisation than the schools with newly-established hostels, which largely reported low utilisation rates. This anomaly has more to do with the type of hostel facilities at the disposal of students coupled with the cost element. However, it was also established even in schools, which had operated hostels for years ago, there was no substantial expansion of hostel services so as to accommodate the teeming numbers of students in search of such school quarters. Indeed, such schools have remained with very minimal accommodation places that paled before the huge numbers of girls enrolled in the schools.

#### 4.3 Factors Behind the Under-utilisation of Hostel Facilities in Rural-based Community Secondary Schools

To examine the factors behind the under-utilisation of hostel accommodation facilities in RCSS, questionnaires, interviews, documentary review and field observation were used. The findings obtained through questionnaires indicate that 21 (31.3%) percent of the respondents agreed that some girls left hostel accommodation for different reasons and went returned to their parents' or guardian's homes or rented private rooms instead in unsecured areas. Another 43(64.2%) of the respondents indicated that there were vacant slots in their hostels despite their being only few accommodation spaces available for the huge numbers of hopefuls. This implies that hostels in community-based secondary schools were largely underutilised and operated under complex situation which needed immediate intervention to address the obstacles that influence poor enrolment, particularly in rural areas.

The questionnaire results were also crosschecked with findings from interviews. Responding, all (100%) the school board chairpersons, all (100%) the school heads and three (75%) hostel supervisors indicated that the issue of the construction of girls' hostels was neither well-addressed nor prioritised by the Ward Development Committees (WDCs). In consequence, the interviewees claimed, some operating hostels had no sustainable expansion of infrastructures and other supportive facilities that would make hostel accommodation palatable to the students. Similar information was obtained from the DEO, who insisted that decision-making on school development was basically vested in the local communities. As such, communities and the WDCs which are sensitive to girls' welfare and with enough resources are more likely to prioritise the construction of hostels than others.

These findings imply that there is a possibility of local differentiation in planning and utilisation of hostel services because local communities and WDCs differ from one another in terms of resources, priorities and awareness of the importance of spearheading girls' education to bring about gender parity at all levels of the education ladder. These findings are in line with those established through a study by

Winkler and Yeo (2007) who found that variation in fiscal capacity among local communities tend to lead to disparities in educational development planning, spending and ultimately education achievement.

Another factor that was reported to influence the under-utilisation of girls' hostel services is competition from free renting of accommodation in residence surrounding the schools. Findings from three (75%) school heads, three (75%) school board chairpersons, three (75%) hostel supervisors and three (75%) hostel prefects indicated that school hostels faced competition from cheaper private accommodation. They claimed that, although renting of accommodation in public residential areas is insecure the cheaper private accommodation continued to attract parents who could not afford the high hostel expenses. This implies that as long as the majority of parents in rural areas remain in abject poverty, they are forced to rent cheaper but insecure accommodation for their daughters. Under this set-up, secure school hostels for girls remain for those who are economically better off. This scenario may dictate the exclusion of girls from poor families who are the majority from enjoying their right to accessing education in a conducive living and learning environment. To make matters, they would further continue being exposed to temptations from moneyed men who want to exploit their naïveté and poverty, which makes them also vulnerable to HIV/AIDS.

Another factor reported as being behind the under-utilisation of hostel accommodation services was inadequate supportive services. The information gleaned from interviews with all (100%) the hostel supervisors and all (100%) the hostel prefects indicate that hostels had inadequate social supportive services, hence subjecting the girls in the hostels to hardships. They explained that hostels constantly experienced a shortage of services and facilities that could otherwise make living and learning conducive and effective.

In the same vein, three (75%) head of schools indicated that the construction of girls' hostels in community secondary schools was not preceded by a proper feasibility study of school sites to affirm their potentials in accessibility and availability social services. These findings correspond with the findings by the Republic of Namibia (2014) on the performance audit report of school hostels which revealed gross under-utilisation of hostels in four out of five regions surveyed mainly due to lack of proper services and social amenities, renovation and security. A similar experience was found by Carr-Hill's (2005) study on the education of nomadic peoples of East Africa, which found that the under-utilization of hostel services was due to the reluctance by parents to entrust their daughters to those hostels, claiming they had poor services and were dogged by insecurity.

Furthermore, the respondents reported that social and cultural beliefs that victimise girls also influenced the under-utilisation of hostel services. During interviews, all (100%) the school heads, two (50%) school board chairpersons and three (75%) hostel supervisors said that cultural barriers coupled with the low value attached to the girls' education, particularly in the rural areas, prevented a big number of parents to let their daughters leave their families and stay in school hostels. The informants claimed that some parents decided not to pay hostel fees as a way of withdrawing girls they believed to have come of age after undergoing initiation rites into adulthood from school hostels to protect them in readiness to entrap them in early forced marriages.

The least mentioned factor for the under-utilisation of hostel services was superstitious beliefs. In this regard, two (50%) hostel supervisors and two (50%) hostel prefects indicated that witchcraft also made some girls hesitate to seek accommodation in school hostels. It was claimed that the girls from within the locality were more affected by witchcraft beliefs and other superstitions than non-local girls. The



information from documentary review indicated that incidents believed to have occurred in the school hostels related to witchcraft affected the girls psychologically. For example, some of the girls were reported to have been affected by demons or evil spirits, hence making some girls withdraw from the school hostels. These findings concur with the study by Kokota (2011) on the episodes of hysteria among girls, who were found crying out loudly, falling inexplicably down and rolling over among the girls in African schools; these acts were associated with superstitious beliefs and fear of witchcraft. Such psychological confrontation made some girls fear staying in school hostels.

#### **4.4 Strategies towards Effective Utilisation of Girls' Hostels in Rural Community Secondary Schools**

Information obtained from the questionnaire indicates that 43(64.2%) of the respondents suggested that hostel services should be available free of charge to needy girls as most of the parents in rural areas were economically marginalised and culturally not inclined to spend their meagre resources on a girl-child's education. In separate interviews, three (75%) hostel prefects and two (50%) hostel supervisors suggested that girls accommodated in school hostels should be charged the same relatively lower amounts charged to girls selected to join boarding schools. Meanwhile, three (75%) school heads and two (50%) school board chairpersons suggested that the central government and local governments should find new sources of funding to run hostels because the actual hostel unit cost was beyond the reach of the majority poor parents who survived on subsistence farming. These findings concur with the findings of a study by the Educational Resources and Development Centre (2011) in Nepal on the effectiveness of girls' scholarship programme. The study found that the provision of stipends and hostel facility increased girls' participation in secondary education. The study also recommended that the girls from marginalised groups and from areas with low human development index should be provided scholarships, including free board in school hostels.

Furthermore, in separate interviews two (50%) head teachers and two (50%) school board chairpersons proposed that the allocation of hostel accommodation be administered during Form One selection. They contended that the regional selection committee would fairly allocate girls to ensure that no hostel opportunities went begging when there many needy students to be accommodated. They further argued that under this centralised system, school hostels would gain a regional status rather than being localised. They said in the absence of ample publicity, some of the hostels have been missing out on occupants. From these findings, it can be affirmed that the regional authority has a great role to play in monitoring the allocation of hostel accommodation, hostel management and school hostel policy. These findings concur with options by the Province of the Eastern Cape (2013) where the Provincial Department of Education was responsible for all matters pertaining to administration and management of students' hostels in ordinary public schools. In the meantime, the districts made close supervision in collaboration with school governing bodies.

Another strategy by the informants was the identification of girls whose homes were located far from community secondary schools. During interviews, three (75%) heads of school and two (50%) school board chairpersons suggested that girls whose homes were located far from schools must be given preferential treatment in the allocation of hotel accommodation. In this regard, the informants claimed that some school hostels lacked occupiers because the schools had no established criteria for selecting girls entitled to hostel accommodation. The informants also suggested that the application forms filled in by pupils aspiring for secondary education also need to collect information on the distance of the pupils' home to the neighbouring secondary school. It was argued that, such information would be useful in determining the placement of pupils in hostels during Form One selection. This finding corresponds with the performance audit report by the Republic of Namibia (2014), which recommended

the strengthening of the 5km to school policy to ensure students living far away from schools were accommodated in students' hostels.

Also, two (50%) heads of school suggested that analysis of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) must be incorporated during strategic planning for girls' school accommodation. The informants argued that, the SWOT matrix services should be used as a basis for determining how viable, suitable, dynamic, needs-based and responsive hostels for girls can be developed and promoted. These findings agree with Alptekin's (2013) study on the integration of a SWOT analysis in strategic decision-making, which found that strategic factors are derived from the weaknesses and strengths of the organisations as well as opportunities and threats imposed by the external environment. The study concluded that an appropriate SWOT analysis is an ideal strategy for ensuring a good performance of an organisation in its endeavour to achieve its goals, in this case in the effective provision of hostel accommodation for girls.

## 5. CONCLUSION

It is apparent that the provision of girls' hostel services in RCSS would be better achieved if issues underlying the under-utilisation of hostel spaces are effectively addressed. Generally, this study found two scenarios, firstly, hostel facilities were available in only a few RCSS, thus forcing many girls to rent rooms, get attached to relatives and family friends or walk over long distances to attend school. On the other hand, there was an overall under-utilization of the few available hostel services in schools, which appears contradictory since in the presence of few hostels one expects over-subscription. This raises questions regarding efforts being made to ensure that the living and learning environment for marginalised adolescent girls is taken into account and ensure they can the much needed secondary education. Therefore, to promote the effective utilisation of hostel services in schools, particularly by girls, new sources of funding for operating hostels should be found to make them affordable to the poor majority and ensure that they provide quality services. Relying on direct costs incurred by parents has proven ineffective for the majority of the girls from poor backgrounds. Also, the study found that the school-based system of accommodating students in hostels contributed to the under-utilisation of hostel facilities in many schools and, hence, it was the need for hotel allocation to be made a core function of the regional selection committee which also oversees Form One selection. This system would help to check inequalities and local differentiation in hostel admission and participation in secondary education. Furthermore, the findings of the study point at the importance of establishing a database on girls' socio-economic background. This database should include the students' destination and social status, so that needy girls are identified and allocated hostel accommodation under terms that they can afford. The SWOT analysis could also be deployed in strategic planning and evaluation of girls' hostel accommodation in rural-based community secondary schools to curb the problem of under-utilisation of hostel services in RCSS and enhance access to such school accommodation for needy girls. Such measures would go a long way not only in promoting the education of girls from poor backgrounds but also shield them from unwanted social attention and social problems.



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