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Corrective Measures for Mitigating Doctoral Attrition in a Kenyan Public University: Voices of Recent Graduates

Joseph Wairungu and Faith Maina

Texas Tech University, Department of Curriculum & Instruction, Lubbock, TX 79409, USA
Corresponding Author: joseph-mbogo.wairungu@ttu.edu

Abstract

This article documents the experiences and perceptions of doctoral graduates on doctoral attrition and discusses a university's corrective measures in mitigating doctoral attrition in Kenya. The study was conducted using virtual individual interviews with seven recently graduated doctoral students (five women and two men) from Kenya. Analysis of the data revealed that doctoral students attributed unmet expectations and supervisory relationship to low doctoral completion rate, and believed the university's corrective measures needed to be improved to increase the doctoral graduation rate. This study recommended that the university: a) provide potential and current students with the information necessary to succeed; b) facilitate positive student-faculty relations, and c) promote student cohesiveness in the programs.

***Keywords**:* Attrition, corrective measures, Kenya, policy, supervisory-relationship, recommendations

INTRODUCTION

Completion of a doctoral degree represents an individual's progress and a country's prosperity. At the individual level, enrolling and completing a doctoral degree increases the chances of getting a better job and an opportunity for self-actualization (Brill et al., 2014; Haynes, 2008; Rigler et al., 2017). Thus, holders of doctoral degrees contribute to societal sustainable development, especially in Kenya (Odhiambo, 2018). Despite the growing societal and individual benefits, doctoral program attrition is a global problem (Allum et al., 2014). For example, Lovitts (2001) considered attrition a loss to a society's scientific or social advancement and a risk to the "existence of doctoral programs and the faculty who teach them" (p. 3). Lovitts (2001) further noted that non-completers suffer from psychological stress, massive debt, and limited career choices. Consequently, the failure of Ph.D. students to graduate is a zero return on investment and an immense waste for an individual, the institution, and the national resources (Smallwood, 2004). It is, therefore, a concern that Kenya's doctoral graduation rates remain low compared to other countries like Canada, United States, and South Africa (Sowell et al., 2008; Tamburri, 2013; Matheka et al., 2020a, 2020b; Mukhwana et al., 2017).

Increasingly, doctoral attrition has gained the attention of researchers globally as institutions seek understanding of the factors that cause attrition and ways of developing corrective measures to demonstrate continuous improvement (Devos et al., 2017; Levitch & Shaw, 2014; Matheka et al., 2020a, 2020b; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014). Several qualitative studies have recommended students' integration and socialization into the university as a corrective measure to address doctoral attrition (Devos et al., 2017; O'Meara et al., 2013). Researchers, like Devos et al.

(2017), Jones (2013), and Rigler et al. (2017), have emphasized the significance of supportive human relationships (faculty-student relationship, program culture or environment, and level of cohort/collegial support) in determining the outcome of doctoral experience. Particularly, doctoral students have attributed isolation, disappointment with advising, and a lack of conducive departmental climate to doctoral degree attrition (Rigler et al., 2017). Tinto (1997) argued that the quality of faculty guidance and interaction contributes to a shift in program culture that can determine how students progress in their degree program. However, many of the approaches for improving completion rates are piecemeal in nature, targeting a single aspect of doctoral education. More so, what these studies have failed to consider while addressing attrition is that different regions differ on circumstances leading to doctoral attrition and retention, affecting policymaking and implementation.

As an area of study, doctoral attrition is highly complex, due to the lack of systematic data collection and to earlier, questioned research findings on causal factors. In Kenya, the continued awareness of doctoral attrition has seen many institutions of higher learning and departments try to implement programs and reverse attrition. Efforts to establish a doctoral completion rate have been difficult, due to universities' failure to monitor and document graduation time (Matheka et al., 2020a). Lack of sufficient information can hinder decisions and policymaking aimed at increasing graduation rates in doctoral programs. For example, Mukhwana et al. (2016) noted that Kenya lacked a national policy on postgraduate training, leading to few guidelines "on budgeting, students' loans, admissions and priorities on programs and research" (p. 4). However, Kenyan universities have made efforts to improve the process and,

> … benchmark best practices from selected countries in Africa, Europe, Asia, and America. Emphasis was placed on applicability in the Kenyan context. The identified practices inform[ed] the development of the Kenya policy with a view to learning from others to ensure that the policy's desired outcomes are met (Mukhwana et al., 2016, p. 3).

Mukhwana et al. (2017) opined that "The basis of any policy development is to first have a thorough understanding of the current situation, the challenges faced, successes experienced as well as opinions of those who are engaged in the activity" (p. 2); thus, the need to design data-driven policies to address Kenya-based doctoral completion and attrition phenomenon.

In reviewing literature for this study, the following themes emerged: a) funding and its effects on higher education in Kenya; b) state of doctoral education in Kenya; and c) current national and institutional policies (i.e., best practices) to improve doctoral education in Kenya.

Funding and its effects on Higher Education in Kenya

As with other Sub-Saharan African universities, Kenya's universities struggle with inadequate financing, unmet demands, and weak institutions (Stromquist, 2017). Over the past decade, the operating costs for public universities in Kenya have risen, but government support has declined or flattened (Michubu et al., 2017), making it difficult to meet the demands of the soaring student population. Higher education funding has been ignored at the expense of elementary and secondary education due to the government's belief that there is no empirical evidence of higher education's impact on poverty eradication and economic growth (Odhiambo, 2018). Uetela (2017; as cited in Odhiambo, 2018) noted that investment in higher education in Africa has been considered a serious burden to African countries.

Financing Kenya's university education is a challenge, given the low and diminishing budget allocation and the government's struggle to maintain public infrastructure, security, and support for the country's youthful population. Further, there is little or no input from the private sector, and the cost of providing university education and research is skyrocketing (Odhiambo, 2018). Inadequate financial support has continued to undermine the universities' ability to offer quality education and training (Aduda, 2016; Odhiambo, 2018).

In addition to financial issues, university education has experienced other serious challenges, such as the inability to sustain academic staff, which has resulted in poor service delivery, as many lecturers are not properly qualified. The mismatch between the number of qualified faculty and the rapid growth of higher education in Kenya has raised questions of the "ability of Kenya's universities to produce the kind of graduates who can drive the country forward" (Odhiambo, 2018, p. 192). The quality and relevance of university education in Kenya is at risk (Odhiambo, 2011) and if unaddressed, Kenyan public universities will fail to generate education and research and contribute to social, cultural, and economic development in the country.

State of doctoral education in Kenya

Many public universities in Kenya offer Ph.D. programs initiated by departments in different schools and approved by the university senate and management (Barasa & Omulando, 2018). Ideally, most programs depend on the current gaps in the doctoral programs, demand from students and faculty, availability of qualified teaching staff, and a response to the stakeholders' needs (Barasa & Omulando, 2018). The recent increase in Ph.D. programs has seen a growth in student enrollment; however, the continued increase in enrollment has overstretched instructors to their limit (Commission for University Education [CUE], 2018; Matheka et al., 2020a, 2020b). Barasa and Omulando (2018) reported a lack of qualified faculty to effectively sustain Ph.D. education and research in Kenyan universities. To give students value for their money, universities require qualified individuals to provide quality administrative, teaching, research, and outreach duties (Barasa & Omulando, 2018; Sifuna, 2010). Nonetheless, Mukhwana et al. (2016) noted that "universities are not allocating adequate resources to the development of postgraduate programs" (p. 4).

The current inadequacy of qualified faculty has also created a dire need to build Ph.D. capacity in higher education. Thus, many departments are under pressure to ensure that all faculty hold a Ph.D., which can boost internal capacity and help initiate new programs (Barasa & Omulando 2018). The ability of Kenya to address persistent deficiencies in universities' postgraduate training and research and produce over 10,000 doctoral graduates annually is uncertain. The CUE directive calling for all university academic staff to be Ph.D. holders by 2019 (CUE, 2014) was not met. The doctoral completion rate in Kenya's public universities is estimated at 11% (Barasa & Omulando, 2018), producing fewer than 7,000 Ph.D. holders annually (Nganga, 2019). This shortage validates Matheka et al.'s (2020a, 2020b) call for public universities in Kenya to produce more Ph.D. holders.

Kenyan universities experience low enrollment numbers, inadequate preparation and supervision of graduates, and low graduation rates at the Ph.D. level, which leads to fewer graduates to meet national needs (Mukhwana et al., 2016). Furthermore, Barasa and Omulando (2018) reported that doctoral students in Kenya take a longer time to graduate due to personal challenges (for example, work circumstances, funding constraints, part-time teaching, and family commitments). Matheka et al. (2020b) differed with Barasa and Omulando (2018) on why Kenyan doctoral students drop out or take longer to graduate. They used secondary data on students' background and program characteristics (i.e., age, nationality, gender, financial support, and marital status) from 21 universities offering Ph.D. programs. This research established that while the nature of the program determined students' success, their background had no significant effect on their success.

Further, in a cross-sectional study involving 628 Ph.D. students enrolled between 2010 and 2018, Matheka et al. (2020b) explored the relationship between motivation and self-efficacy and Ph.D. student success. The researchers found no relationship between extrinsic motivation and students' pace, while intrinsic motivation positively predicted the students' pace. Additionally, they argued that self-efficacy did not have a positive and significant relationship with the students' pace and success. However, age affected their pace, with younger students completing their programs faster than older ones. They concluded that "gender, financial support, and mode of the study were not significant predictors of students' pace" (Matheka et al., 2020b, p. 126). To improve the Ph.D. education system in Kenya, researchers recommended that universities monitor and track the students' progress and generate strategies to mitigate factors considered detrimental to their success.

Current national and institutional policies to improve doctoral education in Kenya

The CUE was established through an Act of Parliament (Universities Act No. 42 of 2012) to help universities with their weak regulatory framework. The CUE used a peer-review approach to work with universities and formulate policies (i.e., regulations, standards, and guidelines) to address aspects of Kenya's university education (Mukhwana et al., 2017). While best practices were suggested, issues continue to remain, as follows:

Access and equity: The government provides financial support through the Higher Education Loans Board (HELB) to ensure that students can access university education. Universities have also introduced Open, Distance, and E-Learning (ODEL) programs to provide more study opportunities for prospective students. Improved access has led to the higher enrollment of students, creating competition for limited physical and academic facilities, compromising the quality of skills required in the job market.

Quality and relevance: To ensure the quality and relevance of university education, CUE recommended improving the teaching staff by hiring Ph.D. holders only for faculty positions. However, universities have not overcome quality compliance challenges (Odhiambo, 2018). Although CUE has put in place internal and external quality assurance structures, the "culture for this is still largely missing" (Mukhwana et al., 2017, p. 345). For example, CUE canceled five fraudulent doctoral degrees for Ph.D. students who had studied only for six months before receiving their doctorates in a Kenyan university (Wanzala, 2016). The fraud is an indicator of the compromised quality education and training of university education in Kenya.

Postgraduate training and professional development: Most Ph.D. students are self-funded. Those employed by the university receive funding and scholarships (Barasa & Omulando, 2018). Other sources may include HELB and employer-related funding; however, many of those who enroll do not graduate. In many institutions, doctoral students can enhance their teaching skills through teaching undergraduate courses. Furthermore, they are exposed to research techniques and methodologies through workshops and seminars. However, Mukhwana et al. (2016) noted that these opportunities are available only to tutorial fellows and graduate assistants.

Supervision and communication: Ph.D. students in Kenya have little input in selecting their supervisors (advisors), as it is determined by their departments. Mukhwana et al. (2016) noted that supervisors must sometimes deal with unfamiliar research topics and an increased workload. For example, some supervisors also have administrative duties, making their supervision workload much higher. Doctoral students require information, guidance, and clear strategy from the graduate school and their advisors to complete their degree programs with minimal stress. While universities have policies and regulations guiding postgraduate student training and research, they are often inaccessible to students and staff (Mukhwana et al., 2016).

Monitoring student progress: University graduate schools require supervisors to give regular update reports on their Ph.D. students' progress. Unfortunately, these reports are not always presented, making it difficult for the school to provide support due to scanty data (Mukhwana et al., 2016). Despite the aforementioned challenges, new institutional policies requiring each university to account for the progress of its doctoral students have helped lower the time to graduation (Barasa & Omulando, 2018).

Research gap and current study

The literature reviewed for this study addresses the challenges that Kenyan universities experience as they endeavor to provide quality and accessible doctoral education. Some of the challenges include: inadequate financing, unmet student demands, and weak institutions (Stromquist, 2017); rising operating costs (Michubu et al., 2017); rising enrollment and lack of qualified teaching staff (Mukhwana et al., 2016); and missing quality assurance culture (Odhiambo, 2018). However, only a few studies advocated for strategies to mitigate factors that hinder students' progress and success in Kenyan universities (Matheka et al., 2020a, 2020b). While doctoral degree attrition rates are a topic studied globally, there are few accounts from Kenya on the voices of recently completed doctoral students and how their perceptions can inform policymaking. This study, therefore, aims to draw on a dataset generated from seven recent doctoral graduates to make recommendations that may give insights in designing policies to help mitigate attrition and low graduation rates in Kenyan public universities.

In this study, we draw on a dataset generated from recently graduated doctoral students to offer insights into the students' perceptions and experiences. Next, we discuss them in the light of student integration as a corrective measure to address the low graduation rates in a Kenyan public university. By placing the analytical focus on former doctoral students with earned degrees, we argue that, although the graduation rates are low in Kenya, there are ways to address this issue. Understanding the causes of doctoral students' attrition can benefit the various sectors of society and provide educators with evidence-based recommendations for future improvement. This study aimed to answer the following research questions: a) What are the experiences and perceptions of recently graduated students towards their doctoral education? and b) What would the recently graduated students consider as corrective measures to doctoral attrition in Kenya?

METHODOLOGY

Kenyatta University is a research-based institution in Nairobi County and offers undergraduate and graduate education programs; however, its doctoral education is structured by colleges and departments. The university has an annual enrollment of over 1,000 doctoral and professional students. The Department of Special Education, where this study was conducted, is the pioneer of special education at the university level in Kenya and started offering courses in 1995. The department offers majors in education for learners with disabilities and courses in eight areas of specialization (emotional and behavioral disorders, speech and language pathology, physical disabilities and other health impairments, emotional and behavioral disorders, mental retardation, gifted and talented, learning disabilities, and hearing impairment). The programs attract many students pursuing competitive doctoral programs in Special Needs Education offered through full-time/regular, open-learning, part-time, and school-based modes. The students engage in dissertation research to demonstrate their ability to conduct independent research on a discipline-related topic. The faculty members are obligated to guide doctoral students through their coursework, examination, and research during their doctoral program. Although the Ph.D. degree in special education program is four years, most doctoral students in this university take between five to ten years to complete their terminal degrees.

Participants: After gaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to conduct the study, we used criterion and snowball sampling to find participants. Participants were chosen intentionally with an effort to find those who could provide significant information regarding attrition, persistence, and university best practices. The former doctoral student participants were required to have completed their doctoral degrees within five years of their enrollment. All seven participants (five women and two men) agreed to participate by signing a consent form.

Data sources and analysis: The interviews took place in Summer 2020, with seven former doctoral students in the College of Education, Department of Special Education at a flagship university in Kenya. To comply with COVID-19 pandemic preventive measures, such as social distancing and self-isolation (Ngumbi, 2020; Mustafa, 2020), we conducted virtual interviews using Zoom. We used a loosely (semi) structured interview protocol to allow participants to diverge from the main topics and to further explore concepts and ideas. Interview questions targeted participants' experiences throughout their programs, including the time of admission through the dissertation experience. The virtual interviews lasted for 45–60 minutes and were audio-taped and later transcribed verbatim.

We analyzed the data using the constant comparative method that allowed data collection and analysis to occur simultaneously (Glaser, 1978). After completing an interview with each participant, we transcribed the interview verbatim, then read the entire transcript several times to make sense of the interview (Creswell, 2018). Due to the volume of the interview data, we used computer software for data analysis-NVivo 12 to analyze the collected data. NVivo computer software has a sophisticated code that retrieves functions and modeling capabilities to help manage large data. Using the computer software, we were able to link and map related data, thus, managing and speeding the data analysis in four steps. First, we uploaded the transcribed interviews into the software and sorted them into nodes (collection of references about a specific theme or person) based on each participant and interview question. Second, we used NVivo (verbatim) coding where we identified keywords and phrases spoken by the participants and related to doctoral experiences and their frequency using word cloud: a visualizing text method. We highlighted these words and phrases using different colors. Third, we categorized the different phrases and words (merging the codes) and linked related categories into initial themes. Finally, we consolidated the emerging topics into overarching themes. To realize trustworthiness, we used member checking (Creswell, 2018) where several participants were sent copies of the interview synopsis to verify the emerging themes.

RESULTS

In reviewing the data collected for this study, the following key themes emerged: a) what students considered causes of attrition or delayed completion; b) what students considered the university's best practices, and c) gaps in the university's best practices.

What students considered causes of attrition or delayed completion

Unmet expectations: Some students dropped out of the education doctoral program because it was wrong for them, or they had unmet expectations. In one case, a participant informed us that a student dropped out of the Ph.D. program for a master's course to secure employment at the university as a lecturer. According to the participant, the student felt that the Ph.D. in education "was not moving in that direction. So, she opted to take a master's in her area of specialization because she felt that that would give her that opening" (Personal communication, June 9, 2020). A mismatch between a student's goals for enrolling in a program can lead to dropping out:

> So, I would say [basing my argument on her feelings], that openings for doctoral students could be an issue that is making people drop out or lag. That is, if their interests in taking the program are not met, they will drop out. (Personal communication, June 14, 2020)

Unhealthy supervisory relationship: Participants linked murky supervisory relationships to students dropping out or delayed completion. For example, an unhealthy relationship between a student and her supervisor led her to drop out of the program at the concept level. The student reportedly claimed that "she had requested to have her supervisor changed as the supervisor kept on telling her that the work is lost, the work is lost. So finally, she sort of gave it up" (Personal communication, June 9, 2020). The supervisory relationship with this particular student was marred by lack of trust, especially with her dissertation drafts. According to most participants, students who lag or dropout of their programs mistrust their supervisors for losing or not reading their works. One participant noted, "Why would the supervisor be losing my work all the time? If I do not trust that the supervisor read my work, I am not able to move along. And that would come from the kind of comments, you know, vague statement" (Personal communication, June 14, 2020). The participants considered it ironic that some students end up lagging to an extent that they depend on former colleagues for mentorship to overcome supervisory challenges. One participant noted:

> So, they started their Ph.D. together, the mentor has already graduated and joined the university while the supervisor is still losing the work. So, we can talk of supervision being an issue that is making students lag and even drop out (Personal communication, June 9, 2020).

Participants observed that supervisors were overwhelmed by the number of students they supervise, leading them to ignore or forget students who lag. One participant noted:

> I realized … I think the supervisors have very many students to supervise. I was speaking to some peers the other day, and in a group of nine …We had a Zoom class, and then after class, we were grouped in breakaway rooms. We were nine, and six of us were under the same supervisor, and that is for that day. You do not know who else. And that is for Ph.D. You know! There is also a master's class, and others. (Personal communication, July 14, 2020)

Therefore, because of their heavy load, the participants felt that supervisors experienced a hard time reading and internalizing the work of students under their care. Thus, it is only active students that capture the attention of the supervisor who progress with their dissertation. For example, “they will only follow-up the work of the student who follows them” (Personal communication, July 14, 2020). This is also illustrated by one of the participants:

> You do not keep them on their toes, keep pushing them. They will not ask you where you are or what happened to you? You just get lost and forgotten. When you finally wake up, you meet them and they say ok, remind me what you were doing. You start all over again. (Personal communication, June 9, 2020)

Some participants suggested that students who were on study leave and were full-time managed to complete their degrees sooner since they could meet with their supervisors regularly. Specifically, “… international students tend to clear very fast because they are on campus full time and they meet with their supervisors regularly. You find students from Ghana, from Rwanda, graduating very fast compared to those of us who are part-timers” (Personal communication, June 24, 2020).

Going by the participants observations, supervisory relationships contributed significantly to how the students’ progressed during their doctoral journey. Although the students tend to mistrust their supervisors with their work, it emerged that supervisors are overwhelmed with the number of students and workload that they only pay attention to students who are persistent.

What students considered university best practices

Admission made easier: The participants noted that the university administration has made the admission process easier and informative: “The registration process is quite smooth. Let me start there. Because all you need to do is present your papers and if you are qualified you get admission within a few days. You get brochures that inform you what is expected of you” (Personal communication, June 28, 2020).

Resource center: The university has provided doctoral students with a state-of-the-art library, making it easier for them to access research materials. One participant showed great appreciation of the university’s effort:

> We have a specific repository section for dissertations and journals for a postgraduate student, you know. There are three specific areas for postgraduates that undergraduates should not access. So, I feel that the library is well-equipped for the study and the university has tried to link up the students with many of these international libraries online to assist. (Personal communication, July 2, 2020)

A fitting curriculum: Some participants felt the university provides a doctoral program in education with a curriculum that prepares students to become independent researchers as noted by one of the participants, “Currently, in the education department, a Ph.D. student must undertake a one-year coursework program whereby you sit in class, learn with the lecturers, and sit an exam and I feel that helps the student to understand what is expected of them in the future” (Personal communication, June 11, 2020). To meet the growing students’ demands, the university “also attempted to ensure that we have enough faculty to fit in for these different units” (Personal communication, June 29, 2020). One participant felt that the part-time faculty “made a good effort to prepare me for the dissertation” (Personal communication, June 20, 2020). The new curriculum introduced course-work units that students felt necessary to “understand what it is that is expected of me … in helping the student to open up towards the dissertation writing” (Personal communication, June 18, 2020).

Faculty promotion pegged on the number of graduands supervised: The interview data indicated that the university has a mechanism for tracking students' progress in their doctoral programs. Participants reported that the university has measures in place to ensure that enrolled students graduate on time by "pegging their promotion to the number of students whom they graduate" (Personal communication, June 10, 2020). The participants shared that the university keeps them "on their toes" and constantly reminds them "that your time is running out" and made to explain "why they're not moving or why they should not be struck out of the register. And one must prove that they have been having meetings with their supervisors" (Personal communication, July 18, 2020). They considered the tracking as "evidence that you are moving on, even though you are taking longer than expected" (Personal communication, June 29, 2020). The participants reported that the university also ensured that students could have their supervisors changed if they were not coping well.

Financial support and professional development: The university provides doctoral students with opportunities to improve their teaching skills by offering part-time and full-time tutorial jobs, while others are enrolled as examination supervisors. The participants embraced the employment opportunities, as they were empowered financially and professionally. However, these opportunities were only for those students who had completed their coursework.

Peer mentorship program: The college of education, at departmental levels, had initiated mentorship programs to motivate and advise students who were lagging behind. The effect of the mentorship program was positive since some students had considered rejoining the program, as one participant reported: "so she gave it up until the mentorship program came up, and she was inclined to redo it" (Personal communication, June 14, 2020). The mentorship program involves former doctoral students, who graduated and are working as faculty, and those new to the graduate program, but progressing at the right pace to mentor other students who were lagging or had dropped out, but willing to re-join the program.

Gaps in the university's best practices

While the university made efforts to ensure its doctoral students transitioned with minimum stress, participants found gaps in the best practices of the university.

The *orientation program* was found to be inadequate, since it catered only to full-time students, while part-time students had to depend on peers to find their way around the university. Participants shared that part-time students "do not get as good orientation as the full-time students" (Personal communication, July 14, 2020). One participant said "it took me quite a while to realize [and] to learn my ways around. I must get it from peers. But that orientation program that my peers had gotten was very good" (Personal communication, June 28, 2020). The university orientation is inadequate, as it does not consider part-time students. While the participants considered university orientation good for new students, they said "that part-time students do not get as good orientation as the full-time students. It is assumed that part-time students know their way around or they will make up their time to ask questions" (Personal communication, June 9, 2020).

Another gap was on the available *time and the quality of faculty* who taught coursework. The participants felt inadequately prepared to cover the coursework units and students were left on their own to complete the remaining readings. Part-time students "don't have time to read through, so they find themselves having several gaps" (Personal communication, June 28, 2020). The participants recommended the university to ensure that "If it would be possible, maybe the lecturer should be in a position to follow-up the individual students and ensure that they get to graduation before they can get others" (Personal communication, June 14, 2020).

Communication is another gap. Participants felt that besides the university providing different resources to help students in their doctoral journey, they lacked proper communication structures and channels, as one participant shared "So, the resources are there. Unless you know how to access these resources, you may not benefit. The resources are available unless you have the time to use them. Other times you may also need guidance in using them, something that is not within the curriculum" (Personal communication, July 10, 2020). Therefore, participants felt the university assumed that the doctoral students would maneuver their way through the university. Furthermore, they reported that students spend or wasted time trying to familiarize themselves with the university in order to benefit from available resources. A similar scenario was cited where doctoral candidates did not know who their supervisors were and had to rely on departmental secretaries who informed them that "you have been allocated supervisors" (Personal communication, June 9, 2020). There is little or vague communication on "Who they are [supervisors] and how to get hold of them. You have no idea what you are dealing with" (Personal communication, June 26, 2020). This supervisory dilemma complicated the doctoral students' progress and calls for redress. Participants thought that "the structure itself needs to be made a little bit more comprehensive" to enable students "to meet [with their] supervisors" (Personal communication, July 10, 2020).

Participants also identified *a lack of collegiality and collaboration in research* as a serious gap. They felt isolated from their peers and faculty on research development. Loneliness during seminar and conference proposal writing is evident in the interviewees' data. One participant compared her master's experience with her doctoral experience:

> You would have to make sure that you [are] either presenting or you are in a team that is presenting. You could not present two consecutive presentations when others have not. But with the current situation, as I said, it is so much on your own that you do what you must do, and nobody is following you up. You are an adult (Personal communication, June 9, 2020).

According to the participants, Ph.D. students are considered mature and should explore their academic world on their own. There is laxity and little to no support accorded to them during professional development programs, with supervisors accused of blaming students through rhetorical questions like "How come you are not participating in the study and you are a Ph.D. [student]?" (Personal communication, June 20, 2020).

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the perception of recent doctoral graduates on the university's best practices used to mitigate low graduation rates and attrition. We established that students considered unmet expectations and unhealthy supervisory relationships as the major causes of attrition and low graduation rates. Further, the students acknowledged the university's effort to mitigate attrition and enhance progress with minimum stress (e.g., the admission made easier, peer mentorship program, fitting curriculum, financial support, and progress tracking). However, they pointed out gaps in the university's best practices (e.g., poor communication, inadequate orientation, inadequate faculty, and lack of collaboration and collegiality). The discussion is guided by the two research questions that this study aimed to answer.

Experiences and perceptions of recently graduated students towards their doctoral education

Although, Ph.D. programs are initiated by departments, based on the availability of qualified staff, this study established that the flagship university experienced a shortage of qualified staff that affected the coursework unit training, concept writing, and dissertation supervision quality. The findings align with Barasa and Omulando's (2018) and CUE's (2018) observations that the continued absence of qualified and necessary staff has significantly impacted the quality and relevance of doctoral programs in public universities. The literature informs that the continued demand for Ph.D. training has overstretched the limited faculty in doctoral programs in Kenya (Barasa & Omulando, 2018; Mukwana et al., 2017). This observation corroborates this study's findings that supervisors were overwhelmed by the number of doctoral students they were supervising. The mismatch between the number of qualified faculty and the number of doctoral students is associated with doctoral lagging and dropout, especially the Ph.D. program in special education at the flagship university.

We established that participants attributed unhealthy supervisory relationships to their colleagues' dropping out or lagging behind. According to Tinto (1997), a relationship exists between the quality of faculty guidance and how students progressed in their degree programs. The supervisors play a central role in students' experience and the students expected support to manage their work. Devos et al. (2017) observed that supervisors failed to offer help, either because they had little time to offer the students, had little knowledge about the students' work, or were barely blocking students' progress. This study established that doctoral students doubted their supervisors' abilities to help with dissertation writing and feedback. Thus, they considered their supervisors as offering little to no help or hindered their progress altogether. This was coupled with poor communication from the departments on supervision allocation. The findings also aligned with Odhiambo's (2018) conclusions that associated the lack of financial stability to poor service delivery due to the university's inability to sustain academic staff, which resulted in employing unqualified lecturers.

We also established that students were dropping out of their programs due to unmet expectations. Mukhwana et al. (2016) attributed the university's inability to meet the demand of its doctoral students to its lack of resources for the development of its doctoral program. The university's failure in providing outreach duties to its candidates led them to enroll in programs that did not meet their goals. For example, in this flagship university, a student dropped out of her Ph.D. program and enrolled in a master's program because she felt a master's degree would provide her with the specialization required to secure a faculty job, while a Ph.D. degree did not guarantee the same employment opportunity.

What recently graduated students considered as corrective measures to doctoral attrition in Kenya?

Regarding corrective measures, the university currently understands the factors associated with attrition and has endeavored to develop corrective measures. It emerged that participants accepted the university's best practices to mitigate low graduation rates. Among the key corrective measures was tracking doctoral students' progress by associating faculty promotion with the number of graduates. The findings corroborated Barasa and Mulondo's (2018) observations that CUE's institutional policy of each university accounting for doctoral progress would help reduce time to graduation. The university also initiated a peer mentorship program to help students. The initiative had a positive impact on encouraging doctoral students to reach out to fellow students for guidance. Through their peer mentorship, doctoral students understood how they overwhelmed their supervisors.

Nonetheless, there are significant gaps in the university's best practices that could contribute to delayed graduation or dropout rates. This study established that poor communication, orientation to the program, collegiality, collaboration in research, and the quality of faculty affected doctoral students' success. Mukhwana et al. (2016) identified similar gaps in institution policies arguing that when students and faculty fail to access university policies and regulations, due to poor communication and collaboration, it makes it difficult for the graduate school to offer support to struggling students.

Limitations of the study

This study had several limitations that might have influenced the findings. For example, we used a small sample of seven participants from the special education department that could have influenced the representation of the larger population under study. Second, we used snowballing sampling to recruit this study's participants that, once again, could lead to biased data sources. Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling method where not everyone has an equal chance of being selected. Sampling continued until we realized data saturation (Ghaljaie et al., 2017). Finally, the use of virtual interviews due to COVID-19 could have influenced the natural behavior of the participants and denied us the ability to make clear participant observations. However, snowball sampling was based on the availability, doctoral experience, and time to graduation of the participants. The study, thus, used a sample size of seven doctoral graduates. Despite these limitations, our study provides some valuable insights for improving doctoral graduation rates in Kenya's public universities.

Recommendations for improving doctoral completion

This study explored the perceptions of recently graduated doctoral students to shed light on their experiences; the study may also play a significant role in designing new policies to help improve the future of one's doctoral journey. The interviews underscored participants' experiences on their research projects, and how they perceived the university's best practices. We considered their experiences as crucial insights needed to inform recommendations for improving university policies and increasing graduation rates. We advance three recommendations: a) education doctoral programs to provide students with the information they need; b) education programs to facilitate positive student and faculty relationships; and c) education programs to encourage student cohesiveness in the programs.

Education doctoral programs to provide students with the information they need

The university needs to provide information that is helpful to potential and current students. In our study, we found that lack of proper orientation and poor communication hindered students' progress. Similarly, we advocate for providing graduate students with information about various aspects of their study. To mitigate unmet expectations, programs must communicate to potential students the skills and knowledge they are expected to possess for future careers.

Additionally, because a key predictor of program completion is whether the student knows the program's expectations, faculty must communicate this knowledge through orientations and formal handbooks, rather than through word-of-mouth. Students must also be integrated into the formal processes of the program (e.g., through their participation on committees for potential faculty hire). Student-faculty mentoring relationships can also have a significant impact on a student's successful integration into the university.

Education programs need to facilitate positive student and faculty relationships

A faculty-student relationship is considered key to enhancing the supportive relationship in doctoral programs. In our study, we identified advising and alienating departmental climates as key factors for doctoral attrition. Departments should take a proactive approach to improve doctoral student-faculty relationships through social events, seminars, and research collaboration. As stated earlier, students should also be integrated into the program through participation in committees for faculty hires, student admissions, and curriculum development. Student-faculty mentoring relationships can also have a significant impact on a student's successful integration.

Encourage student cohesiveness in the programs

In this study, participants reported that they benefited from peer support and their department-initiated peer mentorship program. However, students' cohesiveness declined as a result of isolation felt from their peers and faculty on research development. Improved access to higher education has led to the high enrollment of students, creating competition for limited physical and academic facilities, leading to isolation. The flagship university has initiated a peer mentoring program that brings together students to share their experiences. The faculty and department heads should consider designing plans to provide students with opportunities for social interactions, including symposiums, seminars, conferences, and informal gatherings.

CONCLUSION

Kenya has continued to benchmark its national university policies based on those from other countries; however, this has not helped address the low graduation rate in doctoral programs. One way to do so is to design data-driven corrective measures. As Mukhwana et al. (2016) noted, there is a need to understand the current situation in our universities, identify the challenges, and get opinions of those engaged in doctoral research to inform policy. This study presented the experiences and opinions of doctoral students that may inform institutional policies and perhaps mitigate attrition in public universities. The study documented three major themes linked to low doctoral graduation rates: a) what students considered causes of attrition or delayed completion; b) what students considered the university's best practices, and c) gaps in the university's best practices.

One, that students' unmet expectations and unhealthy supervisory relationships contributed significantly to low graduation rates in the flagship university. Two, that doctoral students sought help from their peers to overcome the challenges they faced with their supervisors. The peer mentorship program enhanced student understanding of supervisor workloads and encouraged sharing of their experiences and social integration. The findings of this study inform university administration and faculty on the importance of enhancing student-faculty interaction to build a healthy, working relationship to reduce doctoral-related stress.

Enhancing students' voices is one way of understanding their lived doctoral experiences. This study emphasizes doctoral students' opinions on what the university did best to improve doctoral graduation rates. The participants attributed their success to the university's improved admission system, quality resource center, financial support, and tracking of doctoral students' progress. However, students were not contented with the university's communication once a student is enrolled. There was evidence that students lacked proper program orientation, and that communication between them and their supervisors and departments were inadequate and affected their progress. Lack of collaboration affected students' professional development and their research skills. The study recommends that: First, the university should provide potential and current students with the information they need to complete their program; second, the university must facilitate positive student-faculty relations; third, the university must promote student cohesiveness; and fourth, the university should consider doctoral supervision as a teaching unit to help supervisors ease their teaching load.

There is a need for further research to explore doctoral attrition from a different scope, using multiple data sources and collection methods, a representative sampling, and a bigger sample size as more knowledge is required to inform national and institutional policies to improve doctoral graduation rates in Kenya.

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Twenty Years of the U.S. African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA): Policy Lessons from Kenya's Experience

Francis Owusu[1] and Kefa M. Otiso[2]

[1] Iowa State University, Department of Community & Regional Planning, Ames, IA 50011, USA
[2]Bowling Green State University, School of Earth, Environment and Society, Bowling Green, OH 43403, USA
Corresponding Author: kmotiso@bgsu.edu

Abstract

The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) is a United States policy that seeks to help diversify Sub-Saharan Africa's export production, expand its trade and investment with the U.S., and accelerate its economic growth. Using Kenya as a case study, we examine whether AGOA is achieving its objectives and what African countries can do to improve their AGOA implementation, diversify their exports and markets, and develop their long-term trade strategies. We find that a large share of U.S. imports from Kenya and exports occur under AGOA, with textile and apparel products dominating the exports. Although the non–textile and apparel sectors have also grown under AGOA, their growth rate has been less impressive though they weathered the U.S. recession of 2009 reasonably well. We also highlight AGOA's economic impact, in terms of private investment and employment and explore the implications of the foreign ownership of most AGOA-related enterprises. We also underscore AGOA's social impacts through wages and entrepreneurship opportunities for women and youth. We recommend institutional restructuring to ensure the coordination of Kenya's trade and industrial policies and strengthen its capacity for policy formulation, monitoring, and evaluation. The Kenyan government should also enhance its trade negotiation skills to benefit from AGOA. It should work towards a multi-sectoral and globally competitive trade and industrial policy that can move the country past its dependence on AGOA and the U.S. market. It should also make the apparel industry globally competitive and diversify its exports to include high value-added products. We also call for investing in better infrastructure, including transportation and electricity systems, to help reduce Kenya's industrial production costs, to ensure that AGOA benefits Kenyans by, for instance supporting local entrepreneurs and improving working conditions in AGOA firms, especially those that predominantly employ women and youth. [1]

***Keywords*:** African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), Export Processing Zones (EPZ), US-Africa relations, industrialization, Africa

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INTRODUCTION

The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) is a United States law that provide beneficiary countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) with liberal access to the U.S. market. It is intended to help diversify Africa's export production, expand trade and investment between the U.S. and SSA, and accelerate Africa's economic growth. However, SSA countries must qualify for AGOA benefits based on criteria that include establishing a market-based economy, the rule of law, and the enactment of poverty reduction strategies. Since its implementation, AGOA has had a significant impact on stimulating Africa-US trade. For instance, exports from AGOA-eligible countries grew by over 300%, from US$ 21.5 billion in 2000 to US$ 86.1 billion in 2008. It has created over 300,000 jobs, many of which are in the apparel sector, which provides employment opportunities for women and youth.

Much of the growth in exports under AGOA in several non-oil exporting SSA countries, including Kenya, have come from the textile and apparel sector with a relatively tepid response from the non-textile and apparel sectors of the economy. However, the latter better withstood the 2009 economic crisis in the U.S.

This case study's overall objective is to understand Kenya's experience with the implementation of AGOA, including its impacts on trade, the economy, and to offer recommendations for its improvement, in diversification of its exports, and development of its long-term trade strategies. Using publicly available data from the Kenya and U.S. governments and international agencies in the 2000-2017 period, we analyze the US-Kenya trade dynamics, focusing on trends in the textile and non-textile industries, trade diversification, investment and employment, and the social impacts of AGOA firms. Based on our study findings, we offer recommendations to help Kenya and other SSA countries benefit from AGOA.

The rest of the paper is divided into five sections. Following this introduction is a brief overview of AGOA, focusing on its objectives, country-qualifying criteria, and its general impacts. We then present the study's objectives, our data sources, and methods of analysis. This is followed by discussing Kenya's trade policies and regimes to help situate AGOA within the country's development policy context. We then discuss AGOA's impact on Kenya, focusing on its trade, economic, and social impacts. We end with policy lessons for Kenya and other Sub-Saharan African AGOA beneficiary countries.

AGOA – A brief overview

AGOA came into force on May 18, 2000, and, unless it is extended, it will expire on September 30, 2025 (Mathey, 2015). It was signed as Title 1 of the U.S. Trade and Development Act of 2000, which provides beneficiary countries in SSA with the most liberal access to the U.S. market available to any country or region with which the U.S. does not have a free trade agreement. Its objectives are to diversify Africa's export production, expand trade and investment between the U.S. and SSA, and accelerate Africa's economic growth. These are to be achieved through (i) the reduction of tariff and non-tariff barriers, (ii) the negotiation of trade agreements, (iii) the integration of the region into the global economy, and (iv) the expansion of U.S. assistance to Africa's regional integration. Also, AGOA was designed to use investment guarantees to mobilize private foreign investment for Africa. AGOA provides preferential access to the U.S. market above and beyond the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) and Most- Favored Nation (MFN) systems, including many critical developing world exports such as textiles and apparel. Local content restrictions (e.g., fabric) were also subsequently eased for particular products (e.g., apparel articles). In many ways, AGOA's main aim was to support African economies' ability to use the textile and apparel sectors as potential engines of industrialization and economic growth, as it historically happened in South and Southeast Asia. A 'special rule' permits lesser developed AGOA beneficiary countries to utilize fabric manufactured anywhere in the world, unless if the fabric is designated as being in 'abundant supply' from within SSA. However, countries must qualify for AGOA benefits based on criteria such as establishing a market-based economy, the rule of law, and the enactment of poverty reduction strategies.

Since its implementation, AGOA has had a significant impact on stimulating Africa-US trade. For instance, exports from AGOA-eligible countries grew by over 365%, from US$21.5 billion in 2000 to over US$100 billion in 2014 (https://agoa.info/). As of 2017, AGOA had also created over 300,000 jobs, many of which were in the apparel sector, providing much-needed employment opportunities for women and youth. However, much of its growth in exports in the non-oil exporting SSA countries, including Kenya, have come from the textile and apparel sector, with a relatively tepid response from the other sectors of the economy.

Objectives and methodology

The overall objective of this case study is to understand Kenya's experience with the implementation of AGOA and other trade agreements before (the period up to 2000) and after AGOA (from 2001 to 2017) and to offer recommendations for (i) improving its AGOA implementation, and (ii) diversifying its exports and markets, and developing its long-term trade strategies. The specific objectives are: (a) to explore Kenya's economic policies, including its trade policies, strategies, approaches, and initiatives, especially under the AGOA; (b) to assess AGOA's impacts on Kenya's exports and imports, economy, and social sectors before and after AGOA; (c) to explore the country's strategies for implementing AGOA, including the roles of key stakeholders; and (d) to offer recommendations for the effective implementation of AGOA to ensure the overall increase in Kenya's trade performance.

This study is primarily based on library research on Kenya's AGOA trade, policies, practices, achievements, and socioeconomic impacts. Data from the AGOA website (https://agoa.info/) provided the context for this report, while more detailed analyses relied on data from the Kenya and U.S. governments and various international agencies. The study covered the 2000-2017 period. The data sources we used include:

- Annual Statistical Abstracts and other data sources from the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (www.knbs.or.ke).
- U.S. Census Bureau data foreign trade (www.census.gov/foreign-trade/data/index.html), which provided overall trade data and US-Kenya bilateral trade data for the period up to 2017.
- The International Trade Center's Trade Map (www.trademap.org), which included trade data up to 2014.
- the World Bank's World Integrated Trade Solution (wits.worldbank.org), which included Kenya's export trade data.
- The United States International Trade Commission (www.usitc.gov) data on AGOA up to 2016, which covered the aggregated two-digit Harmonized Schedule (H.S.) categories down to ten-digit subcategories. Much of the analyses in this report were based on the two-digit, four-digit, and in some cases, ten-digit categories.

- Data for the economic and social impacts came mostly from the Kenya Export Processing Zones Authority (EPZ) Annual Performance Reports for the 2012-2016 period.

In terms of analysis, we employed basic quantitative analysis techniques (such as graphing and calculation of basic statistics) to assess the impacts of AGOA in Kenya. We paid attention to Kenya's trade patterns with the U.S. before (pre-2000) and after AGOA came into force (post-2000). We also explored AGOA's impact on the Kenyan economy, including foreign direct investment, job creation, value addition, and domestic resource mobilization. In addition, we examined its social implications on vulnerable groups (such as women and youth) and working conditions in the country's export firms.

Kenya's trade policies and regimes

Kenya is like other SSA countries in many ways. It is a lower-middle-income country in East Africa, with a youthful population and a large, underutilized labor pool due to high unemployment and underemployment rates. In 2020, Kenya's GDP of US$ 101 billion made it the 6th largest economy in Africa (Statista, 2021). Kenya's major economic sectors include services (43.2%), agriculture (34.2%), and industry (16.2%) (O'Neill, 2021). Kenya's strong service sector partly stems from its role as East Africa's economic, financial, tourism, and transport hub. Despite being the second-largest contributor to Kenya's economy (in terms of GDP composition), agriculture is the country's most prominent, important, and dominant industry, with its main products being tea, coffee, corn (maize), wheat, sugarcane, fruit, vegetables, cut flowers, dairy products, beef, fish, pork, poultry, and eggs. In addition to textiles and apparel, Kenya's other main exports to the U.S. include coffee, tea, nuts, cut flowers, fruit juice, vegetable-based materials, processed fruits and nuts, and telephony electrical apparatus. Leather and shrimp are also important, but minor Kenyan exports to the U.S. (https://agoa.info/profiles/kenya.html). Many of Kenya's agricultural products (e.g., tea and cut flowers) are also exported to other regions like Europe.

Kenya's post-independence trade policies are also similar to those of many African countries. A review of the policies shows significant shifts in Kenya's national, regional, and international policy environment in relation to trade. At the national level, the policies have ranged from the post-independence state-led import substitution (1960s-1980s), trade liberalization under structural adjustment (1986-90s), and other government-initiated industrial-oriented policies, including the Vision 2030. Kenya's membership in trade agreements has also shaped its trade policies. Regionally, Kenya has participated in various integration efforts, such as the East African Community (EAC) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) that have significantly influenced its trade policies. Kenya's bilateral and multilateral trade agreements, including AGOA, have also affected its trade policies. Since 2013, the government has positively moved forward to implement economic reforms and improve the business climate. Particularly, the 2015 enactment of the Companies Act, the Insolvency Act, and the Business Registration Service Act significantly improved Kenya's business climate, in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business report of 2015. In 2020, Kenya was ranked 56th on this score, with one being best, out of the 190 ranked national economies, having risen from 61 in 2018 (World Bank, 2020). In addition to influencing trade policies, these agreements can help build a country's capacity to participate in other trade negotiations and derive maximum benefits, including the current Free Trade Area negotiations that Kenya and the U.S. are engaged (Schneidman & Dawson, 2020).

Kenya is a good case study for assessing the bilateral impact of AGOA on US-Africa relations. Like many other SSA countries, Kenya faces the challenge of diversifying its trade beyond textiles and apparel within the AGOA framework. The excellent performance of its textile and apparel sector, since AGOA's enactment and the resistance of its non-textile and apparel sector to fluctuations in the U.S. economy, makes the study of Kenya's experience with AGOA relevant for other non-oil exporting African countries. Similarly, the dominance of the textile and apparel sector under AGOA raises the question of whether Kenya (and other SSA countries) can be competitive in this sector against major global rivals such as China, India, Bangladesh, and Cambodia when and if AGOA ends in 2025. Thus, the Kenyan experience is relevant to discussions of AGOA's impact on SSA countries beyond 2025. The non-textile and apparel sectors' potential ability to diversify the country's exports also make Kenya a good case study for economic diversification under AGOA. Besides, as a bilateral trade regime that provides a competitive edge to Kenyan (and SSA) firms, AGOA can provide Kenyan leaders with the experience needed to better negotiate and implement other non-AGOA trade schemes with, for instance, China, India, and the E.U.

AGOA was created to stimulate Africa's economic development by granting its countries preferential duty-free access to the U.S. market for 6,421 tariff lines (https://agoa.info/). To an extent, AGOA has achieved its objectives for Kenya and a few other African countries by significantly boosting trade between them and the U.S. and by spurring innovation and job creation. In particular, AGOA, through its various qualifying and continuous eligibility requirements (such as the entrenchment of the rule of law, property and labor rights, and democratization), has since 2000 helped Kenya to (i) democratize substantially, (ii) increase and diversify its trade basket to include textiles and apparel, and (iii) grow and diversify its major export market destinations to include the U.S. Moreover, AGOA has helped the country to implement several political, economic, and social policy reforms that have streamlined its business environment and raised its World Bank ease-of-doing-business rankings (World Bank, 2017, 2018, 2020), and to improve its standard EPZ and Special Economic Zones (SEZ) incentives to include express online processing of customs documentation (African Cotton & Textile Industries Federation, 2013).

Despite these changes, Kenya, like many other African countries, is far from utilizing AGOA's full benefits. Indeed, the overall AGOA utilization was 65% in 2013 for trade in all products and across all countries; however, when crude petroleum imports are excluded, the overall utilization rate falls to 31% (United States International Trade Commission [USITC], 2014). Several factors account for this low utilization rate (ibid). For instance, as Kenya's National AGOA Strategy cautioned, the strong trade regime-based advantage that AGOA offers has meant that Kenya has developed an industry whose competitive edge is based on policy advantages and not firm-level advantages (USAID/Ministry of Trade, 2012). Moreover, outside of textiles and apparel, AGOA has not dramatically impacted Kenya's other exports.

To address these and other challenges, Kenya developed a National AGOA Strategy in 2012 to support the ability of local firms to successfully sell into the U.S. market and leverage every opportunity that AGOA provides. It, therefore, identified the following as key strategic priorities: (i) a trade policy that is focused on the U.S., especially regarding AGOA's extension to 2025; (ii) business support for Kenyan firms to further their exports to the U.S. market; and (iii) general business support to address constraints faced by Kenyan exporters. The document argues that AGOA has played a catalytic role in directing increased technical assistance toward export readiness for the U.S. market and identifies the organizations shown in Table 1 as being key in enabling the country's exporters to take advantage of AGOA's trade opportunities

(USAID/Ministry of Trade, 2012).

Table 1: Key Kenyan agencies that facilitate AGOA

Agency	Role
State Department for Trade[2]	Falls under the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Cooperatives and is responsible for the country's overall trade policy.
Kenya Embassy in Washington, DC[3]	Promotion of Kenya-US trade, education of U.S. investors about investment opportunities, and promotion of the country as an excellent location for U.S investment.
Export Processing Zones Authority (EPZA)	State corporation under the Ministry of Trade and Industry that develops and manages export and special economic zones.
Export Promotion Council (EPC)	The focal point for the development and promotion of Kenya's export trade
The Kenya National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KNCCI)	Not-for-profit private company. Membership-based trade support group that protects the commercial and industrial interests of Kenya's business community and advocates for the creation of a favorable commercial, trade, and investment climate that can support enterprise expansion.
Fresh Produce Exporters Association of Kenya (FPEAK)	A horticulture export industry trade association. Represents and coordinates its 100 growers, exporters, and service providers who are involved in the growing and/or export of fresh-cut flowers, fruits, and vegetables.
African Cotton & Textile Industries Federation (ACTIF)	A non-profit regional trade and industry promoting body, established by the cotton, textile and apparel actors from Eastern and Southern Africa.
East Africa Trade Hub (EATH)	Helps African businesses to take advantage of AGOA's trade opportunities by providing them and their governments with technical assistance to enhance their competitiveness in global markets.

While Kenya has made a lot of progress in its trade policies, there is much room for improvement. According to a recent review of Kenya's national trade policy, the country still lacks a coherent framework for coordinating the formulation and implementation of its trade policy. As a result, its

[2] http://www.industrialization.go.ke/index.php/departments/state-department-of-trade
[3] http://kenyaembassydc.org/investinkenya.html

trade policies are scattered in various government documents and regulations characterized by lack of clear harmonization and coordination mechanisms. Moreover, the country suffers from weak policy implementation, the inability of its policies to correct the deteriorating balance of trade or spur the full use of its unexploited trade potential in the domestic, regional, and global markets (Ministry of Industry, Trade and Cooperatives, 2017).

AGOA's impact on Kenya

Kenya is one of AGOA's major non-oil producer beneficiaries. Between 2012 and 2016, it dominated the apparel/garments export sector, followed by Lesotho, Mauritius, and Madagascar. In that period, its exports in this sector rose from US$ 254 million to 339 million. AGOA has also significantly influenced Kenya's economy and society. Economically, by 2016, AGOA had enabled Kenya to have 111 firms in its export processing zones that produced most of its apparel/garment exports and employed over 52,000 workers. Collectively, these firms had slightly more than KES 64 billion in exports, over KES 68 billion in total sales, over KES 25 billion in local resource use, over KES 71 billion in total investments, and slightly more than KES 30 billion in imports (EPZA, 2017). Moreover, AGOA has enabled Kenya to revive its textile industry (USITC, 2014) and to expand and deepen its trade and investment with the U.S. by, for instance, developing an apparel export sector that is overwhelmingly dependent on the U.S. market (EPZA 2015). Some American apparel and clothes retailers, such as the PVH Corp, which owns the Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger brands, have created additional jobs in the country through their local buying centers in Nairobi (USITC, 2014). Socially, AGOA has helped create jobs for marginalized groups like women and youth, especially in the EPZ firms. Nevertheless, EPZ work also comes with many challenges, including poor working conditions, low pay, temporary work, and sexual harassment for female workers. Below we expand on these impacts.

AGOA's trade impact

There was an overall growth in US-Kenya bilateral trade. U.S. imports from Kenya fluctuated, but increased significantly since AGOA's introduction in 2000 from US$ 110.2 million to US$ 591.3 in 2014 before declining to US$ 574 in 2017 (Table 2). The most significant decline during this period was in 2009 when Kenya's exports to the U.S. dropped to US$ 280.6 million because of the U.S. economic slowdown. U.S. exports to Kenya have also seen increases since the AGOA's introduction; they have increased from US$ 237 million in 2000, to a peak of US$ 1640.8 in 2014, before declining to US$ 456 million in 2017 (Table 2). A large share of U.S. imports from Kenya (over 85%) occurs under AGOA.

Table 2: US-Kenya trade in goods (US$ at nominal prices in millions)

Year	Annual U.S. Imports	Annual U.S. Exports	Trade balance
1992	72.9	124.2	-51.3
1993	92.2	131.2	-39.0
1994	108.7	169.5	-60.8
1995	101.5	114.0	-12.5
1996	106.4	104.6	1.8
1997	113.9	225.6	-111.7
1998	98.5	198.9	-100.4
1999	106.4	189.0	-82.6
2000	110.2	237.5	-127.3
2001	128.1	577.6	-449.5
2002	188.6	271.3	-82.7
2003	249.3	196.5	52.8
2004	352.2	347.5	4.7
2005	348.0	573.4	-225.3
2006	353.7	430.7	-77.0
2007	325.4	520.4	-194.9
2008	343.5	442.4	-98.8
2009	280.6	653.6	-373.0
2010	311.1	375.3	-64.2
2011	381.6	461.4	-79.9
2012	389.5	568.6	-179.1
2013	452.3	635.7	-183.4
2014	591.3	1640.8	-1049.5
2015	573.1	943.5	-370.4
2016	552.4	396.9	155.5
2017	574.0	456.0	118.0

Source: Compiled by authors from U.S. Census Bureau and AGOA.info.

Sectorally, textile and apparel products have dominated Kenya's exports to the U.S. under AGOA. Since AGOA's passage, its contribution to U.S. exports grew from zero, reached its peak in 2005, declined until 2011, before picking up again. Kenya was not the only country to experience a decline in this sector after 2005, which was driven partly by the rise in the U.S. market share of Asian apparel suppliers and the uncertainly and short-term renewals of the AGOA third-country fabric provision. Textile and apparel products accounted for 87% of Kenya's export value in 2016, followed by agricultural products (13%). While non-textile and apparel sectors have also shown some growth under AGOA, their growth rate has been less impressive (Table 3).

Table 3: Kenyan exports to the U.S. – major sectors, AGOA vs. GSP (2014-2016)

Sector	Category	Value in US$ '000			% of sector's total		
		2014	2015	2016	2014	2015	2016
Agricultural products	Imports by US	115,381	136,359	127,263			
	Combined AGOA imports (including GSP provisions)	44,370	61,672	51,320	38.5	53.5	44.5
	-- US GSP imports	2,575	3,544	2,613	2.2	3.1	2.3
	-- US AGOA imports	41,795	58,128	48,707	36.2	50.4	42.2
Forest products	Imports by US	982	728	635			
	Combined AGOA imports (including GSP provisions)	642	465	424	65.4	63.9	66.8
	-- US GSP imports	642	461	408	100.0	63.3	64.3
	-- US AGOA imports	0	4	16	0.0	0.5	2.5
Textile and apparel	Imports by US	379,300	369,059	340,930			
	Combined AGOA imports (including GSP provisions)	373,821	367,283	339,338	98.6	99.5	99.5
	-- US GSP imports	110	119	106	0.0	0.0	0.0
	-- US AGOA imports	373,711	367,164	339,232	98.5	99.5	99.5
Footwear	Imports by US	161	348	144			
	Combined AGOA imports (including GSP provisions)	113	307	112	70.2	88.2	77.8
	-- US GSP imports	0	0	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	-- US AGOA imports	113	307	112	70.2	88.2	77.8
Miscellaneous manufactures	Imports by US	6,597	8,648	7,644			
	Combined AGOA imports (including GSP provisions)	3,543	3,832	3,767	53.7	44.3	49.3
	-- US GSP imports	2,015	1,215	1,094	30.5	14.0	14.3
	-- US AGOA imports	1,528	2,617	2,673	23.2	30.3	35.0
All sectors	Imports by US	591,319	573,208	552,480			
	Combined AGOA imports (including GSP provisions)	423,484	434,021	395,630	71.6	75.7	71.6
	-- US GSP imports	6,336	5,797	4,884	1.1	1.0	0.9
	-- US AGOA imports	417,148	428,224	390,746	70.5	74.7	70.7

Source: https://agoa.info/profiles/kenya.html

The growth of the textile and apparel sector has also been accompanied by diversification within the industry, expanded growth in existing product lines, and launch of new products. Various lines of knitted clothes, which Kenya did not export before AGOA, came online in 2005. Simultaneously, products (such as woven women's clothes and woven men's shirts) that dominated Kenya's pre-AGOA exports all saw declines after their 2005 peak (most dramatically so in the case of men's shirts) until they started picking up after 2011 (Table 4).

Table 4: Top 10 Kenyan textiles and apparel export to U.S. (1999, 2002, 2009, 2016) in US$ '000

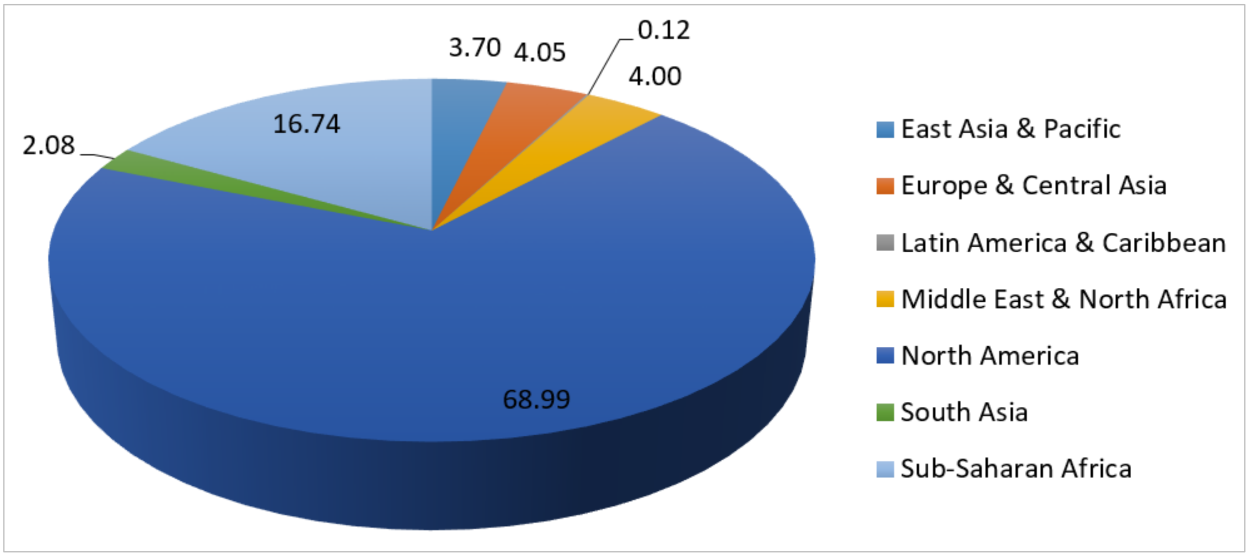
Pre-AGOA (1999) Top 10 T&A products	**Early AGOA (2002) Top 10 T&A products**	**US economic downturn (2009) Top 10 T&A products**	**Current situation (2016) Top 10 T&A products**
6204: Women’s or girls’ suits, ensembles, suit-type jackets, dresses, skirts, divided skirts, trousers, and etc. (no swimwear), not knitted or crocheted	6204: Women’s or girls’ suits, ensembles, suit-type jackets, dresses, skirts, divided skirts, trousers, and etc. (no swimwear), not knitted or crocheted	6204: Women’s or girls’ suits, ensembles, suit-type jackets, dresses, skirts, divided skirts, trousers, and etc. (no swimwear), not knitted or crocheted	6203: Men’s or boys’ suits, ensembles, suit-type jackets, blazers, trousers, bib and brace overalls, breeches, and etc. (no swimwear), not knitted or crocheted
6205: men’s or boys’ shirts, not knitted or crocheted	6203: men’s or boys’ suits, ensembles, suit-type jackets, blazers, trousers, bib and brace overalls, breeches, and etc. (no swimwear), not knitted or crocheted	6110: sweaters, pullovers, sweatshirts, waistcoats (vests) and similar articles, knitted or crocheted	6204: women’s or girls’ suits, ensembles, suit-type jackets, dresses, skirts, divided skirts, trousers, and etc. (no swimwear), not knitted or crocheted
6203: men’s or boys’ suits, ensembles, suit-type jackets, blazers, trousers, bib and brace overalls, breeches, and etc. (no swimwear), not knitted or crocheted	6110: sweaters, pullovers, sweatshirts, waistcoats (vests) and similar articles, knitted or crocheted	6104: women’s or girls’ suits, ensembles, suit-type jackets, blazers, dresses, skirts, divided skirts, trousers, and etc. (no swimwear), knitted or crocheted	6110: sweaters, pullovers, sweatshirts, waistcoats (vests) and similar articles, knitted or crocheted
6206: women’s or girls’ blouses, shirts, and shirt- blouses, not knitted or crocheted	6104: women’s or girls’ suits, ensembles, suit-type jackets, blazers, dresses, skirts, divided skirts, trousers, and etc. (no swimwear), knitted or crocheted	6203: men’s or boys’ suits, ensembles, suit-type jackets, blazers, trousers, bib and brace overalls, breeches, and etc. (no swimwear), not knitted or crocheted	6104: women’s or girls’ suits, ensembles, suit-type jackets, blazers, dresses, skirts, divided skirts, trousers, and etc. (no swimwear), knitted or crocheted
6202: women’s or girls’ overcoats, raincoats, cloaks, anoraks (including ski- jackets) and similar articles, not knitted or crocheted, nesoi	6205: men’s or boys’ shirts, not knitted or crocheted	6103: men’s or boys’ suits, ensembles, suit-type jackets, blazers, trousers, bib and brace overalls, breeches and shorts (no swimwear), knitted or crocheted	6105: men’s or boys’ shirts, knitted or crocheted

6201: men's or boys' overcoats, raincoats, cloaks, anoraks (including ski- jackets) and similar articles, not knitted or crocheted, nesoi	6208: women's or girls' singlets and other undershirts, slips, panties, nightdresses, pajamas, negligees and similar articles, not knitted or crocheted	6209: babies' garments and clothing accessories, not knitted or crocheted	6103: men's or boys' suits, ensembles, suit-type jackets, blazers, trousers, bib and brace overalls, breeches and shorts (no swimwear), knitted or crocheted
6105: men's or boys' shirts, knitted or crocheted	6206: women's or girls' blouses, shirts and shirt-blouses, not knitted or crocheted	6111: babies' garments and clothing accessories, knitted or crocheted	6211: track suits, ski-suits and swimwear, not knitted or crocheted
6208: women's or girls' singlets and other undershirts, slips, panties, nightdresses, pajamas, negligees and similar articles, not knitted or crocheted	6103: men's or boys' suits, ensembles, suit-type jackets, blazers, trousers, bib and brace overalls, breeches and shorts (no swimwear), knitted or crocheted	6105: men's or boys' shirts, knitted or crocheted	6205: men's or boys' shirts, not knitted or crocheted
6103: men's or boys' suits, ensembles, suit-type jackets, blazers, trousers, bib and brace overalls, breeches and shorts (no swimwear), knitted or crocheted	6102: women's or girls' overcoats, carcoats, capes, cloaks, anoraks (including ski-jackets), and similar articles, knitted or crocheted, nesoi	6109: t-shirts, singlets, tank tops and similar garments, knitted or crocheted	6209: babies' garments and clothing accessories, not knitted or crocheted
6211: tracksuits, ski-suits and swimwear, not knitted or crocheted	6109: t-shirts, singlets, tank tops and similar garments, knitted or crocheted	6114: garments nesoi, knitted or crocheted	6109: t-shirts, singlets, tank tops and similar garments, knitted or crocheted

Note: Highlighted cells indicate new to the top-10 category
Source: Compiled from www.usitc.gov

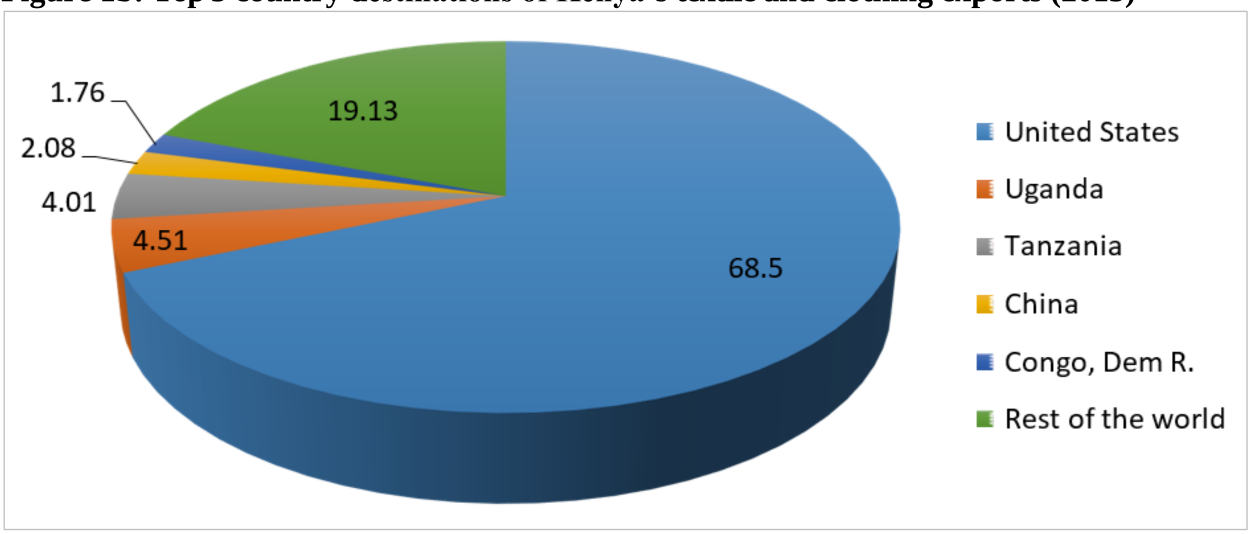
The destinations of Kenya's textile and clothing exports highlight the importance of trade agreements in this sector. Before AGOA's introduction, the COMESA countries were the primary recipients of Kenya's textile and clothing exports. Under AGOA, the U.S. has replaced COMESA countries as the dominant destination (68.5%) for Kenyan textile and apparel products. This is followed by SSA (16.74%), led by exports to COMESA countries, including Uganda, Tanzania, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Figure 1a and 1b).

Figure 1a: Global destination of Kenya's textiles and clothing exports by region (2013)



Source: Based on data from World Bank, World Integrated Trade Solution (https://wits.worldbank.org/)

Figure 1b: Top 5 country destinations of Kenya's textile and clothing exports (2013)



Source: Based on data from World Bank, World Integrated Trade Solution (https://wits.worldbank.org/)

Although the non-textile and apparel sectors have also experienced growth under AGOA, their growth rate has not been impressive. For instance, coffee exports to the U.S. were significant before AGOA and have continued to do well under AGOA, but tea exports have not done as well during the study period. Nuts (specifically, macadamia) and cut flowers also experienced the fastest growth rates, averaging over 50% a year since AGOA's launch. The macadamia nuts markets represent a growth opportunity for AGOA. The U.S. market for nuts is growing at an average 13% a year. Although the top three suppliers have all been experiencing good growth, this has not been the case for Brazil and China, the 4th and 5th largest suppliers, which have experienced low to negative growth (Kenyan National AGOA Strategy, 2012). Thus, Kenya's increased production of this not-so-fast-perishable product can potentially compete favorably in the U.S. market. Even though Kenya's cut flower exports to the U.S. started from a negligible base, they have increased rapidly since 2008. AGOA contributed to this growth through increased U.S. government-funded technical assistance to Kenya's horticultural sector, with a particular focus on increased exposure to U.S. markets. However, these non-textile and apparel exports seemed to have weathered the U.S. recession's storm in 2009 reasonably well. Netherlands remains the leading importer of cut flowers from Kenya, accounting for over half of the exports, with the U.S. ranking as the 12th largest importer with about 28% of Kenya's exports. U.S. imports of leather and leather products so far have not been significant. Since the Kenyan National AGOA Strategy (2012) does not even mention this sector, it has not explored its potential in penetrating the U.S. market.

AGOA's economic impact

Based on data from Kenya's EPZ firms, AGOA has had a significant effect on private investment and employment. Cumulative private investment from local and foreign sources in operating EPZ enterprises stood at over KES 71 billion in 2016. Overall, foreign investment in the EPZs generally accounted for over 70% of the total investments in 2010-2016, though it declined in percentage terms from a high of 81% in 2010 to 68% in 2016 (Table 5). The number of jobs in the EPZs has been consistently high and increasing, with over 98% of the jobs going to Kenyans (Table 5). Yet, there is the question of who benefits from AGOA. An examination of EPZ firm ownership and employment provides some answers to this question. Using EPZ firms as a proxy, we see that although the share of Kenyan-owned EPZ firms has increased since 2013, partly due to the Export Business Accelerator (EBA) work, most of the firms are foreign-owned (Table 6). In terms of employment, while most EPZ workers are Kenyans (Table 5), it is not clear what proportion of foreign-owned EPZ firm profits are reinvested in the country. Some would argue that Kenya is being used as a staging post for what are fundamentally foreign businesses.

Table 5: Value of EPZ enterprises' investments and employment: 2010 - 2016

Indicator	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Value of Kenya/local investments (KES million)	4,529	6,869	11,513	13,057	10,747	12,788	22,783
Value of foreign investment (KES million)	19,034	19,599	27,021	34,947	33,460	35,340	48,459
Total investment (KES million)	**23,563**	**26,468**	**38,534**	**48,004**	**44,218**	**48,128**	**71,242**
Ratio of value of Kenya/local investment to total (%)	19.2	26	29.9	27.2	24.3	26.6	32
Ratio of value of foreign investment to total (%)	80.8	74	70.1	72.8	75.7	73.4	68
Employment (Kenyans)	31,026	32,043	35,501	39,961	46,221	50,302	52,947
Employment (Expatriates)	476	421	428	472	517	597	618
Total Employment	**31,502**	**32,464**	**35,929**	**40,433**	**46,738**	**50,899**	**53,565**

Source: Export Processing Zones Authority, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017

Table 6: Ownership of EPZ Enterprises

Ownership	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Kenyan	25.6	30.6	33.7	33.7	35.1
Joint venture	24.4	29.4	25.6	22.3	24.3
Foreign	50.0	40.0	40.2	43.8	40.6

Source: Export Processing Zones Authority, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017

AGOA's social impact

We assessed AGOA's social impact through its effects on wage levels and its creation of jobs and entrepreneurship opportunities for women and youth. First, the overall monthly average wage for local employment within the EPZ has been on a steady increase over the years, from the equivalent of US$ 122 in 2008 to US$ 143 in 2016, which represented a 17% increase over the period. However, a comparison of the wages of Kenyan workers in the EPZ with those of expatriates show that although the average Kenyan wage is increasing, the gap between the two remains significant (Table 7).

Table 7: EPZ wage comparison Kenyans and expatriates (2008-2016)

Year	Average monthly wage locals (US$)	Average monthly wage expatriates (US$)	Wages of Kenyans as % of expatriates' wages
2008	122	881	13.85
2009	117	814	14.37
2010	122	1,464	8.33
2011	111	821	13.52
2012	125	924	13.53
2013	147	959	15.33
2014	154	985	15.63
2015	142	973	14.59
2016	143	1,021	14.01

Source: Export Processing Zones Authority, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017

Compared to others, the two sectors that dominated AGOA exports (garment and agro-processing) have the lowest wages (less than KES 20,000). Second, AGOA's social impact includes opportunities created for female entrepreneurs, even though the country's discriminatory and outdated labor laws are yet to address the gender issues that deny women and the youth from benefiting from AGOA. For female entrepreneurs, inequalities in accessing resources (such as land, credit, and the ability to control additional income generated by trade) can determine whether they can accrue benefits or not. Third, anecdotal evidence shows that women and young people dominate EPZ employment in the garment and agro-processing sectors. However, women in the textile and clothing sector are often employed in low-skilled jobs, such as sewing and finishing. Male workers in the industry are generally older and employed as supervisors. Nevertheless, EPZ employment helps female workers improve their individual and family welfare and decision-making power, especially in patriarchic households. Finally, EPZ firms have been criticized for their harsh working conditions, prevalence of sexual harassment, and limited union representation. Women's employment conditions, including their lack of long-term employment opportunities, relatively low wages, non-provision of maternity and sick leaves, and long working hours, are all unfavorable to female workers in the sector.

Policy lessons

This analysis has shown that although Kenya has benefited from AGOA, several challenges are preventing the country from taking full advantage of this U.S. trade law. This section offers recommendations that can enable Kenya and other SSA countries to benefit more from AGOA.

Beyond AGOA and the U.S. market

Given that Kenya's opportunities under AGOA are driven more by U.S. trade policy than by the country's competitive advantage (Otiso, 2004), with the U.S. dominating the terms and conditions of the pact's renewal, Kenyan (and other African) leaders and investors should, for pragmatic and strategic reasons, think beyond AGOA and the U.S. market. Moreover, AGOA should not be allowed to become a substitute for the formulation of comprehensive and competitive industrial policies that can spur innovation and the product quality and process improvements to enable African products find markets beyond the AGOA-circumscribed U.S. market. This would ensure that the Kenyan economy and its exports are better cushioned from the global competition. The Kenyan government, through the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Cooperatives, with the support of other public and private stakeholders, including academic institutions, should spearhead this effort.

Make Kenya's apparel industry globally competitive

Kenya should make its apparel industry globally competitive by, among other things, benchmarking it against major global players (like Cambodia and Bangladesh) by "providing [it with] reliable and cheap electricity and water; improving access to good roads; reducing corruption that adds onto the cost of doing business; and providing incentives to foreign companies to establish plants in [Kenya and in] the [EAC] region" (Bekele, 2016: no pp).

Diversify Kenya's exports

Diversifying Kenya's exports would require looking beyond textile and apparel by exploring opportunities for exporting more coffee, tea, nuts, flowers, and home and fashion accessories to the U.S. (Omondi, 2018), and processing these raw materials into higher-value export products. Kenya should also take greater advantage of products such as tropical fruits, tobacco, fruit juice, and processed fish because these are potentially competitive based on its product space metric (Growth Lab, 2018). Similarly, given the country's high number of cattle and large exports of raw and semi-processed hides and skins, there is room for developing a vibrant and globally competitive leather industry like Ethiopia has done (World Bank, 2015).

To successfully diversify its exports and markets, Kenya should endeavor to increase its global market knowledge by, for instance, engaging in international market research and regularly participating in trade exhibitions to identify and cultivate new markets in Europe, Asia, the Middle East, the EAC, and the rest of Africa. Concerning the EAC, this can be done by raising the ceiling for domestic sales from 20 to 70% for partner states and removing any duty surcharges that may impede sales in this common market (EPZA, 2013). Moreover, the country could grow tea exports by developing procedures to facilitate tea exports to Kenya's world-famous tea auction in Mombasa (EPZA, 2015). Although lobbying the U.S. to make AGOA permanent (EPZA, 2013) is another market growth and extension option Kenya could pursue closer to AGOA's expiry in 2025, the country would be better served by improving the efficiency and global competitiveness of its manufacturing sector, including its textile and apparel industry. Even if Kenya's ongoing Free Trade Area talks with the U.S. succeeds (Schneidman & Dawson, 2020), the country would still need to improve the efficiency and global competitiveness of its manufacturing sector lest it drown in U.S. exports.

Provision of adequate infrastructure

Kenya should improve its transport infrastructure to ensure timely, cheap, and efficient delivery of its export products to the global market. In this regard, it is noteworthy that Kenya commissioned the first section of its standard gauge railway from Mombasa to Nairobi in mid-2017 and is working to improve its Mombasa port facilities. Equally important is the need to improve its road network, which plays a critical role in determining the cost of inputs such as cotton. A crucial part of making its export sector globally competitive is the development of the entirety of Kenya's transport sector; it is the circulatory system of any economy. This network would also need to be extended regionally if Kenya (and the broader EAC) hopes to grow its economy, lower the cost of its manufactured products, and make them affordable to the region's relatively poor population. Good transport is also central to making Kenya's exports globally competitive and developing local and regional markets that would protect its export firms from the vagaries of unpredictable foreign markets such as the U.S. to which it currently over-relies.

Additionally, while Kenya has invested substantially in its power generation and distribution in the last decade and has surplus power, it still has a substantial gap to close in providing its economy with reliable and affordable energy. This gap is due to many factors, including aging generation and distribution infrastructure, poor maintenance, low system redundancy, weather, reliance on seasonally variable hydropower supplies, vandalism, and inefficient power markets (Nation Team, 2018; Kenya Power, 2018; Vidija, 2018). Moreover, instead of just extending power subsidies to some firms, the country would be best served by supplying cheap and reliable power to all of its firms.

Making AGOA benefit Kenyans

Given that over 70% of Kenya's EPZ investments are foreign-owned with a huge pay gap between Kenyan and foreign EPZ workers, the government should explore ways to make Kenya benefit more from AGOA rather than merely being a staging post for foreign businesses. To achieve this end, there is a need for indigenous training and capacity building to produce a critical mass of professionals who can drive the country's textile and agro-processing industries to maximize its benefit from the US-Africa trade pact. This will also require ensuring the availability of affordable loans to the country's export enterprises. Therefore, the country should encourage its commercial banks to loan money to small and medium-sized export enterprises that are more likely to be owned by locals. For this to occur, the government should curb its appetite for domestic borrowing to encourage the country's banks to lend more money to individuals and small to medium-sized enterprise (SMEs), thereby fostering a more robust and redistributive economy. Evidence from the Export Business Accelerator (EBA) pilot program in the Athi River EPZ shows that this is a promising model that can help more local entrepreneurs to benefit from AGOA. The program should be resourced and scaled up across the country and encouraged to work with SMEs to transition to export production.

Ensure enough domestic sources of cotton and other raw materials

Because of the importance of textile and apparel products in Kenya's AGOA exports, the country should maximize its gains from this sector by reviving and developing its domestic cotton supply chain industry. Encouragingly, cotton (and industrial crops like tea, coffee, sugar cane, sunflower, pyrethrum, barley, tobacco, sisal, coconut, and bixa, which together account for 55% of Kenya's agricultural exports) is one of the crops that Kenya's Agriculture and Food Authority is working to revive as it implements its 2016-2021 strategic plan. Among other goals, the plan seeks to boost Kenya's agricultural growth and productivity and to upgrade its agricultural value chains for an increased job and income creation (Agriculture and Food Authority, 2016).

Improve working conditions in AGOA firms

To improve working conditions in its AGOA firms, Kenya should strengthen its regulatory framework, including mechanisms for enforcement of laws regarding labor and other forms of human rights protections as envisaged under AGOA. This includes paying attention to gender and different social dimensions in EPZ enterprises to ensure that women and youth benefit from this trade program. For instance, because of entrenched gender and other social imbalances, few powerful women and youth entrepreneurs work in the country's major AGOA export sectors. Moreover, it is evident that female workers are neither well-protected nor remunerated for their labor in many country's export sectors. Additionally, women, who comprise the bulk of the labor force in the country's cut flower and textile and apparel sectors, are reportedly subjected to high sexual harassment incidences. Therefore, EPZ firms should be required to address any reports of sexual harassment promptly and effectively, mandated to provide sexual harassment sensitivity training to all its employees, and to employ more women in supervisory roles to address some of these challenges.

Improve policy environment and strengthen policy formulation and regulation

Kenya needs to create a competitive and stable economic policy environment, more so as it pertains to the export sector. Once established, the policy should be enforced consistently lest it, for instance, undermine foreign direct investment in the country. These conditions are currently undermined by high levels of corruption, mismanagement, and a fair amount of political instability (PBS, 2016). Besides, while Kenya is a leader in policy formulation in East Africa, thanks to its well-developed human resources, it has many policy regulation challenges that are more political than technical. As a result, its best technocrats are often overruled and demoralized by the appointment of politically connected policy novices to high-level positions. In addition to improving the management of the EPZs and ensuring that they are operating as efficiently as possible, the government should also fast-track the transformation of Kenya's EPZ program into the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) program (EPZA, 2013) to enable it to compete more favorably with China and other Asian countries.

Create a sustained stable political environment

Kenya needs to create a sustained stable political environment to achieve its socioeconomic development goals with or without AGOA. The country now has a new devolved government structure that promises to contribute to a more tranquil national political environment. Moreover, the country's overly competitive winner takes all presidential system should be tempered by, perhaps, diluting its presidential powers and making the country's political apparatus more inclusive and, thus, potentially more stable and less disruptive of its economy. If well attended to, this would encourage domestic and foreign investment, increase the chances of benefiting from AGOA, and help create more socioeconomic opportunities for its citizens.

Strengthen the country's trade negotiation ability to maximize gains from trade deals

In today's world, the difference between winning and losing comes down to one's negotiating skills. For Kenya to do well in this area, it must not only invest in high-quality negotiation capacity-building training for its negotiators, but it must also hire, keep, and empower the right people for these roles. As noted earlier, this is currently difficult to do because of the undue influence of corruption, cronyism, and negative ethnicity in the nation's affairs. Merit should be the overriding criteria in the country's trade negotiators' appointment as much as possible. Effective enforcement of anti-corruption laws and policies will also help deter conflict-of-interest instances among the country's trade negotiators.

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Humanity and Mother Nature: Ecological Reading of Ole Kulet's *Blossoms of the Savannah*

Andrew Nyongesa

St. Paul's University, Department of Social Sciences, P.O. Private Bag, Limuru - 00217, Kenya
Email: asp0816@spu.ac.ke

Abstract

In the recent past, literary critics have had varied readings of Henry Ole Kulet's literary oeuvre from radical feminism to ecocriticism. Although some underscore Kulet's focus on the nexus between humankind and nature, and the environmental consciousness and responsible exploitation of natural resources, the general attitude has been that the writer is a mouthpiece of the civil society and donor agents. Other critics have dwelt on selective ecocritical studies of Kulet's novels that leave out *Blossoms of the Savannah,* which is greatly acclaimed for winning prestigious awards. It is the contention of this study that whereas ecological readings of Kulet's other works of fiction has been exhausted, *Blossoms of the Savannah* has been neglected. The focus of this analysis is on the nexus between humankind and the ecological environment in Kulet's *Blossoms of the Savannah*. The continued association of the novel with radical feminism with scanty or no application of the tenets of ecocriticism runs counter to its subjects. This analytical study is, therefore, a close textual reading of the primary and secondary texts while L. Buell (2005) serves as a theoretical framework for the interpretation. One major finding of the study is that its feminist content, notwithstanding Kulet's *Blossoms of the Savannah,* occupies an essential place in ecocriticism.

***Keywords*:** Kenyan literature, feminism, climate change, eco-criticism, Ole Kulet

INTRODUCTION

> [Ole Kulet] is a self-conscious modern writer who demonstrates that women who live in cultural backgrounds that cause them suffering shall be their own liberators. (Muriungi & Muriiki, 2013, p. 118)

Henry Ole Kulet is a Kenyan novelist whom some literary critics consider as primarily a feminist writer with a craving to appease voices of the civil society. Such critics view this writer as a smart aleck whose oeuvre cannot be placed alongside Kenyan classics' authors, like Ngugi wa Thiong'o or Meja Mwangi, owing to Ole Kulet's obsequious attitude towards Western ideas that present some Maasai values in the negative light. This is possibly why Muriungi and Muriiki (2013) consider Kulet a writer whose principal concern is to elevate the position of a woman, particularly in the Maasai community and African societies in general.

Kulet's insistence on Western radical feminism has prompted literary scholars, such as Migudi (2019), to investigate the influence of civil society and donor agents in his fiction. From Migudi's perspective, Kulet lacks an original voice in his attempt to dissuade African audiences with regard to gender disparities, female circumcision and other outdated cultural practices. As much as Evan Mwangi singles out "ethnocentrism" to account for Kulet's relegation from Kenyan literary scene (Lusinga, 2016, p. 3), Migudi's assertion could suggest the major reason Kulet's works have not occupied the same rank with those of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Meja Mwangi and Francis Imbuga.

Emerging voices, however, do not just exhibit divergent views on Kulet's literary oeuvre, but identify him with other literary canons aside from feminism. Kabaji (2013) writes:

> If Chinua Achebe brought Igbo culture to the world [,] then Ole Kulet did the same to the Maasai culture [;] he started by experimenting on the biographical mode and slowly and steadily found his unique style. His subject is culture and he writes about it with the sensitivity of a surgeon. (p. 22)

Kabaji challenges Migudi's association of Kulet's fiction with foreign voices and instead views it as a representation of Maasai values. In other words, Kabaji crowns Kulet as the voice of Maa subalterns in post-colonial literatures rather than previous identification with radical feminism and Western voices that jeopardize Maa culture and African traditions. While Muriungi and Muriiki delimit the cultural subjects to Kulet's constant assault on patriarchal traditions and female circumcision, Kabaji possibly takes Anderson's (2009) definition of culture as what humans do (p. 3), including their exploitation of natural resources and their effects thereof. Kulet does not explore the social aspects of the Maasai people without their land, forests, rivers, and animals and how they influence the destiny of characters. Lusinga (2016) observes that "Kulet's works celebrate the rich biodiversity of Maasai's natural environment. He has a knack for knitting powerful images of the community's flora and fauna in his fiction" (p. 3). Whereas Lusinga's focus is on ecological representations in Kulet's *Vanishing Herds* and *The Hunter*, the focus of this analysis is on the impact of the natural environment on characters in *Blossoms of the Savannah.* The choice of this text is based on the premise that literary critics have demonstrated a dearth of works on ecological criticism in Kulet's other novels, such as *To Become a Man*, *Moran No More* and *Vanishing Herds*; however, most scholarship on *Blossoms of the Savannah* is largely feminist.

Blossoms of the Savannah is the story of Resian Ole Kaelo, the central character and second born of Ole Kaelo. Right from birth, Ole Kaelo is bitter because he had expected his wife to beget a boy to perpetuate his family name given that his firstborn, Taiyo was female. Disappointed, Ole Kaelo develops colossal distaste for Resian and constantly discriminates against her in front of other family members. Taiyo takes note of her father's tantrums in the presence of Resian. When she sits down to study a book, he accuses her of laziness. When she trembles in his domineering presence almost letting her glass fall, he calls her an idiot. Consequently, Resian undergoes internal fragmentation and gradually becomes a grumpy and hypercritical child. After being laid off at Agribix Limited in Nakuru, Ole Kaelo moves to Nasila, a village with conservative dwellers at the heart of Maasailand and relapses to the practice of Maa traditions. Resian is also surprised at his father's decision to enter a business partnership with a despicable man named Oloisudori. He becomes a guarantor to enable Kaelo take loans to invest in his business. When he fails to pay his loans, Kaelo gives Resian to the man to get rid of her. Resian refuses and, in the ensuing conflict, she flees from her Nasila village home with the help of an eccentric man called Olarinkoi. During her flight from Nasila to Inkiito (Olarinkoi's home), Resian is shocked to see the dust, aridity and other aspects of environmental degradation. The place looks neglected without roads and vehicles. Before their departure, Olarinkoi orders her to sit at the back of his pickup truck. As the truck picks pace through the dusty and bumpy road, Resian realizes that the two men, Olarinkoi and the driver, are very harsh and too absorbed in their troubles to notice her. When they speak to her, they are terribly insolent. When they reach Inkiito, Olarinkoi's village, Resian is shocked at the poverty in Olarinkoi's hut. Even the food he provides is not the kind Resian was used to in Nakuru. Shockingly, Olarinkoi takes advantage of Resian's desperate situation and attempts to rape her. Resian fights back and bites Olarinkoi's thumb. She is taken in by Enkaabani, who cares for her and finds means by which Resian is taken to Minik Ene Nkoitoi, a female manager of a sheep ranch and patron of a home that looks after girls fleeing early marriage and female circumcision. The story ends after Minik Ene Nkoitoi saves Resian from a forced marriage and makes arrangement for her to further her education at Egerton University, Nakuru.

Thus, in spite of having started publishing in 1971, Kulet has captured the attention of literary critics belatedly. His first novel, *Is it Possible,* was released in 1971 and followed it with six others: *To Become a Man* (1972), *The Hunter* (1985), *Daughter of the Maa* (1987), *Moran no More (*1990), *Bandits of Kibi* (1999), *Blossoms of the Savannah (*2009*)* and *Vanishing Herds* (2011). With his belated recognition on the Kenyan literary scene, Kulet won the Jomo Kenyatta Prize in 2011 and 2013 with *Blossoms of the Savannah* and *Vanishing Herds* respectively. *Blossoms of the Savannah* became the first of his works to be selected by Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development as a set text in high school in 2017. He died on 17th February 2021 after a short illness just after he had started making an impact on the Kenyan literary scene. Although *Blossoms of the Savannah* has mostly been identified with the feminist discourse, this analytical study adopts Buell (2005) trajectory to show how Kulet establishes the nexus between humanity and the ecological environment. From Buell's perspective, ecological texts demonstrate that "the human interest is not the only legitimate interest, human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation and the nonhuman environment is not just a framing device" (9). This analysis will, among other tenets, ascertain these three attributes of ecological tenets with reference to *Blossoms of the Savannah.*

Mother Nature and humanity: Culture and economic condition of characters in Kulet's *Blossoms of the Savannah*

> Nature or ecosystem contributes to human well-being. Nature affects the physical, mental, spiritual health, inspiration and identity. (Russell et al., 2013, p. 473)

It is quite conventional among some literary critics to analyze cultural context of works of art with little or to no consideration of the ecological conditions from which they are set. The cultural and economic practices among characters in Kulet's *Blossoms of the Savannah* have been appraised or condemned in equal measure with least attention to the role Mother Nature plays in their lives. Muriungi and Muriiki, for example, single out female circumcision as oppressive to women with least consideration to the connection between the ecological environment and the cultural practice. This is the trajectory Russell et al. (2013) reject when they suggest that the environment "contributes to human well-being" (p. 6) and by extension human suffering. In this regard, the cultural practices that exacerbate the plight of women and children in literature should not be condemned in isolation from the ecological environment as it affects the "physical, mental, spiritual health, inspiration and identity" of people (p. 6). Indeed, in *Blossoms of the Savannah*, the heroine, Resian, enjoys her life in Nakuru town, located in the Rift Valley. Resian tells her sister, Taiyo, that she prefers Nakuru to Nasila village at the heart of Maasai land because cultural rites, such as female circumcision common in the village, are not practiced in town. When Taiyo praises Nasila village as quieter than Nakuru, Resian says, "I would rather live in the noisiest place on earth than live anywhere near a vagabond who would accost me in the most quiet and serene atmosphere with the intention of mutilating my sexuality" (p. 33). Resian's comment refers to an ordeal she and Taiyo experienced in one of their strolls in Nasila when a young man accosts and insults them for being uncircumcised. Resian does not just detest infibulation, highly cherished in Nasila, but also the callous nature of young men in this rural setting. Ironically, while Resian's father leaves his daughters uncircumcised in Nakuru, but insists on them being circumcised in Nasila suggests the correlation between the ecological environment and the existence of this cultural practice.

To understand the complexity of female circumcision in Maa culture, one must first consider its origins. Based on the myth of origin of female genital circumcision, as told from the perspective of Joseph Parmuat (a young man Ole Kaelo hires to teach Resian and Taiyo Maasai culture in *Blossoms of Savannah*), Kulet suggests that there is a nexus between female circumcision and the hostile ecological environment in which the Maasai live. Because most parts of Maasailand are hot and dry, crop farming (as an economic activity) is non-existent, making nomadic pastoralism and raiding the backbone of Maasai economy. Western and Nightingale (2003) assert "[n]omadic pastoralism is [a] highly specialized system adapted to the harsh ecological and social conditions of the dry savannahs" (p. 4). Thus, using the character of Parmuat, Kulet suggests the impact of Ilarinkon raiders on the Maasai and how nomadism influenced the community to introduce female circumcision. The hot and dry natural environment that promotes nomadism also encourages communities to cherish patriarchy and the warrior system in their defense against would be raiders. As an adaptation to survive in the harsh climatic conditions that border the wild, nomadic communities elevate patriarchy and militarization. Njogu and Orchardson-Mazrui (2013) observe that some African communities that practiced crop farming embraced matrilineality, but patriarchy pervaded pastoralist communities (p. 4). This assertion confirms that there is a nexus between ecological conditions and patriarchy in nomadic communities such as the Maasai.

In communities that mainly depended on crop farming, such as the Agikuyu, women play a central role such that their nine clans are based on the nine daughters of their patriarch. Contrarily, nomadic pastoralists underscore the central role of the man to protect land, women, cattle from the hostile environment, and raiders from neighboring communities. Raiders not only steal cattle (perhaps to pay for bride price), but also girls and women from "enemy" communities. Narrating the origins of the myth of infibulation in Maa culture, Kulet describes the militarized nature of Ilarinkon invaders and their lewd motives:

> As they (Maasai morans) descended lltepes hills, they could see files and files of tall muscular Olarinkon morans resplendent in their red ochre-soaked *shukas*. Tall monkey skin head gear swayed as they walked. They carried their heavy decorated shields while their long spears gleamed in the simmering hot afternoon sun. The jingles fastened onto their thighs made a terrifying clanging sound […]. It was obvious that the Maa warriors were disadvantaged. (p. 84)

The above excerpt suggests that communities in the hot and dry savannah have bolstered patriarchy through a formidable warrior system. Living is such a hostile natural environment, it would be far-fetched for Maasai people to elevate matrilineality as some feminist scholars suggest. The Ilarinkon invaders are a trained army of men who raid Maasai villages, abducting their women and pubescent girls. Kulet indicates that in this hostile and wild savannah, communities have to consider patriarchy because women are vulnerable against human predators. Olarikoi, the leader of the invaders, is described as "more of a monster than human" (p. 85). He is eight feet tall and with a hairy body. Defeated and hopeless, the Maasai watch helplessly as their women and girls are easily lured into sex by the Ilarinkon raiders. Although the women do not love the invaders, Maa people believe they cannot control their sexual desires because they have within them “the source of the salacity that caused the involuntary gravitation towards men when provoked” (p. 87). Kulet, in this context and subtly, refers to the clitoris, which is assumed to ensure a high libido among women in presence of men. Parmuat concludes that the women meet and appoint a female circumciser, *enkamuratani,* giving her authority to circumcise them to have the ability to resist advances of the Ilarinkon invaders (p. 85). On the surface, it appears women have a say by appointing a circumciser to exact the practice, but patriarchy still remains its core. Henceforth, Maasai women have always been circumcised, which confounds Resian because Ilarinkon reign ended centuries before.

Kulet’s myth of origin on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), as told from Parmuat’s perspective, gives a hint into the representative attributes of Ilarinkon invaders. They possibly symbolize men from most, if not all, rival pastoralist communities that seek Maasai cattle and women. Since the Maasai men are nomadic pastoralists, who travel far and wide in search of pasture and water, their wives are easily lured into sex by men from rival communities because they are uncircumcised, justifying the practice of FGM. A study by 28TooMany (2013) indicates that FGM in Kenya is prevalent among the pastoralists, with 97.5% among the Somali in North Eastern and 0.5 % in Western Kenya (p. 20):

> FGM is often motivated by beliefs about what is considered appropriate sexual behavior, with some communities considering that it ensures and preserves virginity, marital faithfulness and prevents promiscuity/prostitution. There is a strong link between FGM and marriageability with FGM often being a prerequisite to marriage. (p. 9)

The high prevalent rates of FGM among the pastoralists suggest the existence of a nexus between it and the ecological conditions in which communities live. Contrarily, communities in cool and wet weather conditions (e.g., Luo and Luhya in Western Kenya) have the least prevalent rates and hardly practice nomadic pastoralism. Since they practice crop farming, the Luo and Luhya are settler communities, in which men live with their wives without worrying about raiders who might abduct their women and girls.

Aside from being one of the causes of infibulation, there is a nexus between the hostile weather conditions and the behavior and destiny of characters in Kulet’s *Blossoms of the Savannah.* Characters’ hostility and insolence is not necessarily derived from societal norms, but the prevailing weather conditions. When Resian leaves Nasila with Olarinkoi to flee from a forced marriage, she is confounded at the insolence of Olarinkoi and the driver as the narrator suggests:

> At one point, the driver, a short thin man of forty or so with brooding eyes and a twitching mouth–stopped the vehicle, glanced at the back and growled a rude remark at Resian. Like Olarinkoi, he seemed callous and irritated for reasons she did not understand. ‘You woman, the driver called rudely, would you want to stretch your legs?’ (p. 214)

Although at the face value one could associate the two men’s reactions with male chauvinism, the hostile weather conditions are the most probable cause. Resian is honest to conclude that she “did not understand” the men because she had not witnessed such behavior among the men in Nakuru. According to Mullins and White (2019), “cold temperatures lead to decreases in the incidence of negative mental health outcomes and hot temperatures lead to [their] increases” (p. 2). The hostile ecological environment has exposed the driver and Olarinkoi in *Blossoms of the Savannah* to psychological stress, which results in anger and irritability towards Resian. In a psychological study among desert workers in China, "12.54 % of the workers showed mental abnormality" (Ning et al., 2018: p. 1). The study concludes that although psychological stress exists universally, it can be accentuated by certain "work and life environments" (p. 1). The choice of Xianjiang Desert, as an area of study that mirrors the Maasai landscape, suggests the nexus between ecological conditions and psychological stress amongst its inhabitants.

In the *Blossoms of the Savannah*, Kulet uses the hostile environment as a backdrop to Olarinkoi's irritability towards Resian, highlighting Buell's assertion that the "nonhuman environment is not just a framing device" (p. 9). Resian, in this context, can only contrast the degraded environment in her new setting to that which she is accustomed in Nakuru:

> The farther they drove towards Nasila, the drier the land became and the dust was appalling. Instead of fresh green pastures that she looked forward to seeing, her eyes were met with a sprawling limitless stretch of brown bare ground with patches of tawny grass. In the distance were hillocks covered by desiccated bushes of *Oleleshua* and *olkinyei* and stunted shrubs […] Resian saw a lonely and nearly desolate land that stretched as far as her eyes could see […] By five o'clock, they were still on the road. The road by then had become so rough that the driver had to stop […] Flies and mosquitoes crawled into her nostrils in search of moisture. (pp. 213-214)

In this scene, Resian, like the men, is also irritated by the dust, heat, flies (insects), desolate land, and the long journey in pick- up truck. The flies do not appear because of dirt, but in search of water. The narrator associates their disturbing presence to the water scarcity arising from the hostile ecological conditions. As much as Resian accuses the men of irritability, the narrator clarifies that she, too, is affected by the "heat" (p. 214) being at the back of the pick-up truck. The conspicuously absence of *matatus* (public service vehicles) like those in Nakuru is attributable to the rough roads that only accommodate four-wheel drive pick-ups. Upon her arrival at his home, Olarinkoi demonstrates irritability towards Resian typical of desert inhabitants when he blurts, "[w]hat are you doing at the back of the vehicle? [...] alight quickly, the driver doesn't have the whole night to wait" (p. 216). This attitude is contrary to that which she is used from her parents and neighbors in Nakuru and Nasila. Unlike the Nakuru young men Resian and her sister Taiyo know as being romantic and communicative, Olarinkoi maintains a pathological relationship with Resian upon arrival in his village. His attitude reiterates Ning et al. (2018) and Mullins and White's (2019) assertions that hot environments affect people's mental health. Upon arrival, Olarinkoi leads Resian silently, believing she is his wife (according to his mother's prediction) with least attempt to woo or persuade her. As a "wife," Olarinkoi believes Resian has to cook for him and flings a "piece of meat" her way (p. 218). When he realizes Resian is unwilling to take his directions, since he has reneged on his promise to take her to Minik Ene Nkoitoi, he gets irritated and snarls at her:

> 'You woman, look here!' […] 'you can either cook or keep standing stupidly and die of hunger. The choice is yours. Should you choose to, here is a piece of meat. The knife is over there. Of course, you are not blind you can see the *sufurias*. There is a whole bag of maize meal there and water in that container. There is paraffin in that can and you can collect firewood from the stack outside the house. (p. 218)

After haranguing Resian, Olarinkoi, who now views himself as her newly-wedded husband against a Maasai norm to marry an uncircumcised girl, goes out to drink. It is, therefore, probable that

Olarinkoi is an alcoholic and pathological based on the perspective of psychological scholars. Kohut and Wolf (1978) refer to this disorder as the *understimulated self,* a self-devoid of vitality, boring, apathetic and is experienced by others the same way (p. 418). Both Resian and Taiyo view Olarinkoi as boring and aloof (p. 74) from his first appearance in their home.

Desperate for happiness, victims of the *understimulated self* "stimulate themselves by addictive and promiscuous activities, perversions, gambling, drug and alcohol induced excitement and lifestyle characterized by hyper sociability" (p. 478). Olarinkoi's perverted nature is evident when he returns from the drinking spree and declares Resian his wife without any courtship:

> You silly thing […] I tell you to prepare food and you refuse to do so, eh? Today you will know who the owner of this home is. If you are still in doubt, let me tell you frankly that from today you are my wife, hear that eh? You are my wife. For a long time, you have been sneering at me, showing how highly educated you are. Today we shall see how highly educated your body is. Yes, we shall see! (p. 221)

As much as Olarinkoi claims to be a Maasai conservative, his behavior in this instance demonstrates a deliberate contravention of Maa traditions and pathological tendencies. Once again, using the character of Parmuat, Kulet demonstrates how the Maa culture forbids premarital sex and outlines traditional customary guidelines observed before a girl becomes a wife. Love relationships, for example *patureishi* were platonic and those who violated these codes were forbidden from marrying the betrothed (p. 125); however, after Olarinkoi snarls at Resian in the above excerpt, "[h]e got hold of her hand and began dragging her into another room" (p. 221). He unfastens the buttons of his trousers and when she tries to get away, he holds her down brutally and in spite of her screams, he tears "her garments and begins to push her towards the bed" (p. 221). Olarinkoi is determined to rape her until she "thrust his thumb in her mouth and sunk her teeth into his flesh" (p. 221). Olarinkoi's behavior in this scene is consistent with what most recent studies reveal that "mental health issues underlie sexual violence and offending, particularly rape" (Sarkar, 2013, p. 1). Often, rapists experience "attachment and intimacy problems" (p. 2), which characterizes Olarinkoi from his first appearance in the novel. He would appear in the house, friendless and lonely and give Milanoi (Resian's mother) a piece of meat (p. 74) without introducing himself. He would disappear for two or three days and then reappear, intruding on Parmuat's lessons to the girls. His eccentric behavior is possibly derived from his mother's prophetic lifestyle and training in *moranism.* The latter refers to the warrior system, which is a tenet of patrilineality that Njogu and Orchardson-Mazrui (2013) associate with pastoralist communities in arid areas.

Enkoiboni is another character in the novel who exhibits irritation and mental health issues. She is Olarinkoi's mother whom Resian meets after surviving attempted rape at the hands of her son. What perplexes Resian is Enkoiboni's constant lamentations against her. Enkoiboni "[r]ailed against Resian complaining that she was deliberately refusing to eat so that she did not gain strength to enable her undergo circumcision" (p. 235). When Enkoiboni visits Resian, the temper tantrums prompt her to violate Resian's privacy. She had to "hold the hem of her tattered dress […] pull it up and then thrust and callous claw-like hands under it to feel her stomach" (p. 235). Her intention is to confirm if Resian is pregnant following her son's attempted rape. When she realizes Resian is not expectant, she resorts to verbal abuse, "[i]t is even better so, for who wants *entaapai* for a wife for her son?" (p. 235). *Entaapai* is a derogatory term in Maa culture for a girl who gets pregnant before being circumcised. Furthermore, Enkoiboni rants against leaders and those who are well-to-do in her society, especially those in urban cities:

> 'Tell me, are not people like those in towns?' she would complain bitterly. 'You saw the rutted and dilapidated road that you travelled through the other day. Can you compare that road with the roads in town? What about the hospital?' (p. 236)

As much as Resian assumes her fury is instigated by the leaders' tendency towards graft, Enkoiboni is a victim of the heat stress arising from the hostile weather conditions of her environment. It would, therefore, be unreasonable to exonerate her from similar challenges the driver and Olarinkoi experience whose unpredictable temper tantrums emanate from the harsh weather conditions of Inkiito.

Furthermore, while Enkoiboni utterly condemns the government and its leaders for neglecting Inkiito without investing in its infrastructure, Berg (2015) affirms that construction of roads is meant to link "producers to markets, workers to jobs, students to schools […] which are vital to any development agenda" (p. 1). This assertion is an indictment of Enkoiboni's observation because neither schools, markets, industrial nor agricultural production can be traced to her village. Berg further suggests that the economic viability of a region influences government policies (e.g., to build infrastructure); therefore, environmental degradation has delimited the economic potential of Inkiito and averted government investments. In other words, the government finds it economically viable to construct a road to a tea rich Kericho County to transport produce to factories and to ferry workers to tea plantations than to Inkiito where desertification has dealt a blow to its economic productivity. In a study in Saudi Arabia on road construction, Aldagheiri (2009) observes that roads "bring direct benefits from their role in development of activities such as agriculture, industry, commerce and mining and by bringing in indirect benefits from the enhancement in the value of property and the change it sets in the way of life and thinking of its people" (p. 277). Whereas Enkoiboni focuses on the benefits of roads, she negates the factors that attract road construction, which conspicuously lacks in Inkiito. Aldagheiri enumerates these factors as agriculture, industry, commerce and mining. The government may not build a sophisticated road network to and in Inkiito, an arid region without agricultural potential, commerce or minerals as in oil rich countries like Saudi Arabia. If the region were productive, the government would have built infrastructure and benefited from the taxes emanating from the economic activities from the area.

Kulet demonstrates Aldagheiri's assertion through the character of Oloisudori, who migrates from Nasila to Nakuru County, where the government has invested heavily in infrastructure, bolstering commerce, and leading to the "enhancement in the value of property and the change it sets in the way of life and thinking of its people" (p. 277). When Oloisudori takes Ole Kaelo and his wife to his home, the narrator observes that:

> Ole Kaelo and his wife were not prepared enough to behold the splendid buildings that stood before them. They were humbled. They were in a cluster of red tiled houses whose tall outer walls painted in brilliant white surrounded one large two storied building that was also of the same color. A few meters from the fence that enclosed the homestead was the expansive Lake Naivasha and across it was a scenic sight of hills and a forest that covered them. (p. 189)

Kulet's description of Oloisudori's home illustrates that the quality of life and economic condition of his characters is partly determined by their ecological environment. Oloisudori's affluence is associated with the ambience of Lake Naivasha and the forests, while Olarinkoi's indigence is associated with land degradation and desertification. The hostile weather conditions have contributed to the helpless economic condition that, to a greater extent, compel Resian to distaste Olarinkoi. On their arrival at Olarinkoi's home after tedious journey through the degraded land, the narrator describes Olarinkoi's hut as "a small mud plastered house with a rusty tin roof. Around the house was a small wooden gate that was shut" (p. 216). Unlike their well-furnished modern home, Resian takes notice of the furniture in Olarinkoi's hut with "three legged stools that stood next to the wall and a rough wooden rack that stood at a corner where the unwashed dishes, utensils and pots with dried remains of food stared back at her" (p. 217). Burrow and Mogaka (2007) contend that widespread poverty in Kenya notwithstanding, "instances of poverty are particularly pronounced in Arid and Semi-Arid Lands –ASAL" (p. 13). This is accentuated by "intercommunity conflicts over water and rich patch vegetation" (p. 13). Burrow and Mogaka, therefore, establish a nexus between the economic condition of people and their ecological environment.

Kulet creates a number of poverty-stricken characters living in the dry lands such as Nasila and Inkiito, which bolster Burrow and Mogaka's proposition. Enkoiboni is one of these characters. Her first appearance in the story is associated with "flies, and mosquitoes [...] rats, lizards and snakes" that are said to get "into the house at will from outside the fence" (p. 235). These insects, cockroaches and crickets, represent the poverty and misery typical of Enkoiboni's home owing to her failure to exercise any control over the ecological environment. These insects further signify the supremacy of the hostile environment over humankind, hence the rampant poverty. Enkoiboni, in her earlier remarks, tells Resian that they "have looked for a silver spoon […] in the last few days" (p. 228) without any success to demonstrate the extent of poverty in Inkiito.

Moreover, the new hostile Inkiito environment transforms Resian from the blossoming beauty she was in Nakuru to what Enkabaani describes as a "poor thing" (p. 231). The old lady proceeds to comment that "mosquitoes must have sucked your veins dry" (p. 231). One of the main causes of her frailty is nose bleeding, which is a predisposing factor in hot and dry climate like that in Inkiito. When she regains her consciousness in Enkaabani's care (after Olarinkoi's assault), Resian is described in such a way that the reader infers another miserable and helpless self:

> She was lying on a makeshift bed that was built into a corner of a room; in a desolate filthy house. The bed was covered with dirty bloody rags. And she was naked. Her head throbbed with excruciating pain that nearly blinded her. There was a trickle of blood in her nostrils, indicating that she had nosebleed. (p. 222)

The condition of the makeshift bed and the bloody stained rags (possibly from Resian's nose bleeding) further illustrates Enkaabani's impoverishment. One can infer from the above scene that Resian's constant nose bleeding in Inkiito is something she has not experienced in either Nasila or Nakuru. Indeed, studies have established a nexus between nosebleeds and dry, heated indoor air. Comelli (2015) observes that there is a strong correlation between nose bleeding and "indoor heating…" (p. 4), which might lead to the bursting of blood vessels in the nose. Therefore, it is probable that the hot and dry air of Inkiito is the sole cause for Resian's nose bleeding while her nakedness represents her vulnerability, destitution and misery. In this context of harsh climatic conditions in Inkiito, Enkaabani undresses her to fast track recovery from illness. The headache is a symptom of both dehydration and Malaria, which are prevalent in hot and dry weather conditions. The ecological conditions, therefore, contribute to Resian's poverty and misery in Inkiito.

Finally, the three young women Resian meets in Inkiito are victims of abject poverty in an environment ravaged by Mother Nature. The narrator states that the women live in a homestead "three to four kilometers away" (p. 239) to demonstrate the sparse settlements in the village. This suggests that Mother Nature's constant onslaught on the land has turned it into unwanted wasteland; therefore, people have no use for it. One of the women aged eighteen is married to "a seventy-five-year old man with a four-year-old" (p. 239), with an infant that cries incessantly with "swarms of flies" crowding around its eyes. Of the women, the narrator notes:

> The other two women were even younger. They were probably fifteen or sixteen, but they had all prematurely aged due to poor diet and hardships. Resian was glad to meet them for solitude had bred loneliness in her heart. (p. 239)

As much as most feminist literary scholars single out patriarchy as the cause of early marriages in girls like those described in *Blossoms of the Savannah*, the prevalent indigence arising from hostile climatic conditions cannot be ignored. Buell's assertion that in ecological texts "human accountability to the environment is part of their ethical orientation" (p. 9), applies to Kulet's novel. Unless the inhabitants of Inkiito adopt environmental conservation, they will continue to be victims of Mother Nature's wrath. Since there is no single school in Inkiito (due to government neglect of the arid wasteland), the girls cannot acquire formal education perceived as a deterrent to early marriages. Even the hardships and poor diet Kulet's narrator describes are a consequence of environmental degradation. The high temperature and breeding rates of mosquitoes, and obstruction to crop farming in Inkiito accentuate people's hardship. Most only survive on animal products, making them vulnerable to conditions arising from high cholesterol. Their use of *shukas*, which Resian embraces, is dictated by the hot and dry weather unlike the skirts, blouses and dresses women wear in urban areas. When Oloisudori and his friends from Nakuru pay Resian's home a visit, the narrator describes them:

> Right from the designer shoe thrust out of the high–sided vehicle, the blue pin-striped designer business suits, the golden watch that dangled from his hand, the golden bracelet matching cuff links and the golden chain that adorned his neck, all were flaunted in a show of opulence. (p. 177)

The way these individuals described passage is significantly different from the way people in Inkiito dress. Given their gold adornments, the narrator illustrates that Oloisudori and his friends are wealthy unlike most Inkiito residents who live in abject poverty.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing discussion, literary scholars who associate Kulet's *Blossoms of the Savannah* solely with radical feminism negate his arguments on the role of the ecological conditions in the lives of his characters. The plight of women, such as Resian and those from Inkiito, can be attributed to the hostile ecological environment. Importantly, current analyses of patriarchy and female circumcision in Kulet's works, outside ecological conditions from which they emerge, could potentially misrepresent the Maasai culture. Furthermore, readers need to consider the total setting of Kulet's *Blossoms of the Savannah*, especially the hot natural environment, which paves way for nomadic pastoralism and the warrior system that encourages cultural practices such as female circumcision.

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Poetry

Isaac Kilibwa

Gavudia Primary School & Editor in chief for *Poetica Magazine*
Email: kilibwai@gmail.com

Riziki

The bold fishermen set out at twilight
With old paraffin lamps and boats of hope,
They brave the cold and the howling of night,
The colic sea and her ship - wrecking mop.
The fishermen with shooting stars for kith
Sing somber songs and can't pitiable chants,
As the poor stars fall to their drowning death
And the irascible sea growls and rants.
On good nights the brave fishermen behold
The lovely sight of enchanting mermaids
Whose serenading crooning bears the cold
Till when dawn heralds the end of the raids.
They seek you, Fortune, fair cousin of mine,
They seek you, animating vintage wine.

Riziki – (Kiswahili) fortune, livelihood

A Double Lesson on Castles

Mr Khamadi droned in the sleepiness and heaviness
Of the aftermath of the truce of lunch,
In the stuffy 7 West at Nasianda. About
Ouagadougou and the winds of Mombasa,
About flags painted with dreams and ideals.

"You Kenyans are building castles in the air!"
He remarked and drew me out of my stupor with his lofty English
And despite my sweaty armpits and thuddy heart beats,
I'd built quite a tidy castle complete with a fine flag of red, black, white and green,
I was in fact
Out shopping for windows of perfect constitution.

"How far along is your castle?" She comments
On the poetry acceptance celebration, I post on my status
And I still marvel that she remembers,
That she used to speak such fine English in class 7.

And amidst a crowd of teary smileys, hysterical with laughter, I tell her it
Soon became a gothic temple with crows in the ceiling.

I say, "We walked barefoot onto cold tiles

And were made to wait upon appointments,
In houses where strange weeds were guests, then hosts,
And dust settled on consciences once pure.
We waited till the marrow in our legs
Died. The white walls had their skin peeling
And bleeding out in silent, spilling rills;
And we sat and waited, unbelieving
For what else is there for a man to do
When his banner's rags drift, fall like brown leaves?
Plenty was sure found within our borders,
We haven't tired of talking about right
For countrymen must seek to dream, to hope
Else will these castles glitter in darkness?"

Dust, life, pain and peace ...

Mr. Khamadi droned and the only thing keeping me awake
Was Musavi, my tremor-invoking, Nairobi-born-town-drawling crush from 7 East pressed next to me
Like a very willing sardine in a suffocating can, canned.

A Place of Forgetfulness

I walked down a lane, a mid-morning of uncertain
sun and timid dilute mist
In the first heaviness of day, when her canter is a trot then a jog, then a trudge.

The seconds would not come of age, morph into
minutes in time.

A bell rung and a woman in red gown
slid into a cafe for a glass of cool peace,
Her ankles starting to swell in her shackled heels. She sat and sighed, and as if she felt her eyes on me
She looked up and out through the glass, and into me
And back into her glass of contemplation.

A pastor, hoarse and parched, bellowed at
the stop sign
Before a shop that sold gold and diamonds, and other worldly things. He dipped into his pocket,
Pulled out a handkerchief, wiped his face with dust
And swallowed dry musty air.

A cloud of dust flew after a trailer
Into hair and nostrils, eyes, I cried muddy tears.

The screaming of children could be heard, a gate to a school talked to me
Of tardiness and missed appointments, consequences demanding, unyielding.
If only I'd walk the street all day, miss such a prison-like place,
If only I'd find a shade to sleep this heavy drifting away!

A pot turned upside down sulked in a corner, it
looked like a man whose torso was buried
And the stoners had left in haste before
granting him justice, raising a monument, a hill of ballast and gore, boulders, bolden rocks
In his (dis)respect.

I walked into a place, a world long gone,
It is a room labeled 'store.'

Corruption and decay had crawled from the garbage can
to the table, where files lay yellowed by the urine,
Defiled by the droppings of rodents.
Algae crawled her walls, choked her pores like a flood,
a colony of dermatitis on neglected skin.

Backless seats moaned in silence of broken spines
and toil gone unappreciated, taken advantage of
A few bricks meant for nation building wondered what would become of them
as they stared up at the ladders under the rafters -
a beam of sorts.

I walked into a country with torn, unwashed shawl,
Shriveled breasts, the black glory of her hair thinned.

With lightning to light my path and thunder to dispel the sleep of distraction
I contemplated my past.

Drifting

Shut-downs are extended in bundled gifts of 21 days each, the world might stand still, but the clock ticks off, tocks on, obstinate. Could time be the death of beauty?

Time surely is an untiring tide. Unfazed, time being but a count of beats of a dispensation that is ever existing whether time halts or not, it clings onto relevance - ever resilient; and ever insisting on the mime of its counting.

Days blur into an oblivion, past and future, the present lulling in the mundane, yet the tide defies tardiness. Loved ones fade into memories fuzzier and fainter, tears of months make years, and it is 'Thank You For The Memories, Wakini!' before you know it.

It couldn't be. Because beauty is eternal. Time is but beauty's garment, worn and tattered;
yet new days are new jewels, new moments, new gowns.

Despite the aches we encounter in our times, we too are stubborn to leave our etches on this canvas. The tide might apparently succeed to carry us away from the places we've made homes, but our souls are left carved in the alcoves of moments.

We stop looking for signs in stars
We gaze inside for strength and we find it in dreams.

Often

often after a whim I went
to find reprieve for restless words
and found only questions more doubt
deeper indulgence of my ache

often after a page I tried
to shroud my nakedness in rhyme
but not until when these rags peeled
I stood in the hairless unskin

glared at the red touch of feeling
did this lair growl for those stubborn
who left for literary streets
who often went to find a home

often after a bloom I cried
and sulked with swollen lips, soft eyes
tender to child's uncertain touch
and the flutter of a bee's wings

I was the why in family
fleeting on the fringes of warmth,
questions sometimes sometimes reason
often than not a homely poem.

Danson Oduori Shirumba

Hongwe Secondary School, Lamu, Kenya
Email: prinzedanson@gmail.com

Accept and move on

For how long
Shall we shake hands
Turn our backs
Accept and move on?

Accept and move on!
Our clarion call
To every wound and sore
Inflicted upon

I stood by mine
You stood by yours
And now yours MUST be mine
To accept

And move on
From the dream of mine
Why?
For the good of the nation!

What good?
When I'm not even part of your nation
You live in yours
I live in mine

Worlds apart
In the same space
But I must accept
And move on

Yes! Maybe I should
Move on
Chart my own way
Accept my fate

Yes, you and I
Should shake hands
Turn our backs
Each to his own

I will have mine
You will have yours
At last
We will accept and move on!

Annah Mueni Mutio

Content creator at Global Oak Media
St. Paul's University, Limuru, Kenya
Email: annahmutio3@gmail.com

Would I Could

Would I could question
The absurdity of life,
So long a breath do I wish
To be a fungus on a rocky ground
That complains not,
Of the somberness of the skies as I do!
Would I could quickly find you
And if only to hold your hand tightly
So that I may forget hunger
And thirst, and loneliness
So, depression, and sadness would disappear
Suddenly to be replaced by feelings of plenitude
And expansiveness.
Envy do I you, Trees of the mangrove
Looking so reinvigorated,
Yet, you came second after me!
Oh creation,
When the wind blows,
You know how to be tender, you sway;
As if to fathom every thought, every desire
As virility and fineness of your features
Harmoniously blend, as if to mock me
It's a world of nothingness and meaningless
That lives recognize themselves.

Visual Art

Family Sharing

"Family Sharing," a special tribute to the late Dr. Margaret-Otenyo Matanda, former chair, Department of Fine Art, Kenyatta University, Nairobi County

Ubuntu Connectedness

Anne Namatsi Lutomia

Purdue University, Department of Entomology
Email: alutomia@purdue.edu

The three paintings, dubbed "*Ubuntu* Connectedness" (Images 1-3), were put on display from May 21 to August 28, 2021 at a community exhibition at the Museum of Grand Prairie for the Pandemics as Portal for Change: A Community Exhibition sponsored by Krannert Art Museum, the Museum of the Grand Prairie, The Urbana Free Library, Urbana Arts and Culture Program, the College of Fine and Applied Arts at Illinois, and Urbana-Champaign Independent Media Center.

The pieces explore the current struggles—COVID-19, systemic racism, and other social injustices, which led me to visualize a world without violence, but where peace, justice, and unity thrives. I recalled the philosophy of *Ubuntu*, a Zulu, Xhosa and Ndebele word for humanness used to capture ways of being moral, ethical, and advances communal relationships. These pieces highlight the essence of how, in the spirit of *Ubuntu*, we are connected, especially to our ancestors and those who have recently passed on, but are forever present in our midst even though absent. The silhouetted haziness of each painting reflects their invisibility and omnipresent nature.

Image 1: *Ubuntu* Connectedness

Image 2: *Ubuntu* Connectedness

Image 3: *Ubuntu* Connectedness

Opinions

Foreign-Born Faculty and Academic Leadership in America: The Myths, Realities, and Opportunities

Francis T. Koti

Department of Global Studies and Human Geography, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, TN 37132, USA
Email: Francis.Koti@mtsu.edu

INTRODUCTION

The presence of foreign-born faculty (FBF) in university campuses across the United States has grown exponentially in the last half century (Cole, 2017). It is estimated that more than 22% of faculty in post-secondary institutions in the U.S. are foreign-born (Furuya et al., 2019). This number is significant compared to the population of international students enrolled in American universities at 6% or the population of foreign-born teachers in non-post-secondary institutions at 11% or just the total population of immigrants in the U.S. at 13.1% (Furuya et al., 2019; National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2015). This number is, however, not matched by a similar representation of foreign-born faculty in higher education academic leadership (Kim et al., 2020).

Academic literature is replete with studies investigating various aspects of FBF in American universities, including, but not limited to: integration of FBF into the American society and institutional support (Gahungu, 2011; National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2015; Theobald, 2008); equity issues (Whitford, 2020); contribution of FBF to the American society (Cole, 2017); professional and cultural experiences, talent importation, and job satisfaction (Foote et al., 2008; Hernández and Damián, 2019; Kim et al., 2011; Lin, 2009; Omiteru et al., 2018); and career mobility (Kim et al., 2020). More recently, there has been a sustained interest in FBF involvement in academic leadership. While Skinner (2018), Marklein (2016), and Foderaro (2011) focus on globalizing the American university presidency, Kim et al. (2020) and Whitford (2020) have focused specifically on academic leadership and administration. According to Kim et al. (2020), for example, despite similar career mobility patterns with their U.S-born counterparts, FBF are less likely to move into administration and academic leadership, for both voluntary and involuntary reasons. Despite sustained interest in the topic, however, there has been limited work devoted to the factors that hold back FBF as regards to academic leadership or the benefits of their involvement in academic leadership in American institutions of higher learning.

In this paper, I offer a personal opinion why more FBF should consider academic leadership as a career aspiration. The piece opens with some operational definitions followed by my personal story and leadership career trajectory. I use my own experience as a foreign-born faculty member to offer thoughts on the underrepresentation of FBF in academic leadership – demystifying persistent myths and uncovering some realities. I also use personal experiences to offer advice on leadership preparation for FBF. Later in the piece, I highlight opportunities that open with involvement in academic leadership and also identify potential challenges. I conclude by offering a personal take on and encouraging FBF to consider academic leadership as part of their career trajectory.

Definitions

Foreign-born faculty (FBF) refers to faculty members in American Universities who were born in countries other than the U.S. (Furuya et al., 2019). This includes faculty who have been naturalized into U.S citizens as well as those who have retained their original citizenship. FBF does not include children of immigrants born in the U.S. or American citizens born outside the U.S. Faculty is used to refer to instructors in post-secondary institutions, including community colleges and 4-year degree granting intuitions. These include, but are not limited to fulltime lecturers, assistant, associate, and full professors. Due to the temporary nature of their contracts, part-time adjunct faculty members are not included in this assessment. Academic leaders in general refers to individuals with responsibility over academic units such as departments, colleges, and universities. While academic leaders range from department chairs, deans of colleges, to provosts, this piece will focus primarily on department leadership, which is the most immediate academic leadership opportunity for faculty members.

Why focus on department leadership?

Department leadership is perhaps the most important leadership position in a university. Gmelch (2015, p. 1) puts it this way, "… the department chair position is the most critical role in the university, and the most unique management position in America." In his assessment of the critical role of academic department leadership, Lane (2018) notes:

> … academic departments are to universities what mitochondria are to cellular organisms. Each cell is full of these little entities called mitochondria, which collectively are responsible for regulating the metabolism of the cell through respiration and energy production …. academic departments serve as the regulators of an institution's metabolism — they ultimately determine whether an institution operates at peak performance or not. (para. 3)

As every institution looks to improve student success, increase enrollment, and grow their reputation in the face of declining funding for public universities, the department chair's role has become even more important. Furthermore, the department chair position still remains the only leadership position in the university that deals with all of its constituents. These include, but are not limited to students, faculty, staff, central administrators, alumni, parents, industry, professional and local communities. Departmental leadership gives an individual a complete picture of how the university functions at all levels. It is no surprise that 80% of university decisions are made at the department level (Hecht et al., 1999). Additionally, department level leadership is selected due to one's first-hand personal experience within an institution, which then leads to the fundamental question: What exactly is involved in department leadership? Therefore, in the section that follows, I discuss the role of department leaders using a more generalized approach.

What is involved in academic department leadership and why does it matter?

Gmelch and Miskin (2004) developed the ten most important duties and responsibilities identified by 75% of department chairs. Using their framework, I condensed the roles of chairs into eight categories including, but not limited to: providing vision and direction, curriculum and instruction, constituency relationships and communication, faculty matters, department growth and health, department resources and budget matters, department governance and office management, and research and scholarship. While this list is not exhaustive, the duties outlined touch about every aspect of the university. Similarly, academic department leaders deal with a diversity of stakeholders from the students, staff, faculty, central administrators, parents, alumni, industry, professional and local communities. As such, participation in academic department leadership offers FBF a glimpse into the inner workings of the university. In the next section, I highlight my academic leadership story, as a foreign-born faculty, to provide a snapshot of my FBF leadership experiences, thus, setting the tone for subsequent observations.

My leadership story

Upon graduation from West Virginia University (WVU), Department of Geology and Geography in summer 2004, I was offered a tenure-track position in the Department of Geography at the University of North Alabama (UNA) in Florence, Alabama beginning August 1 of the same year. The Department of Geography at UNA was a mid-size undergraduate program with over 60 majors, a dozen minors and comprised of four full-time faculty members (including me). When I hired in, I was on an immigration visa status known as Optional Practical Training (OPT), a one-year permit accorded to foreign students to work in the U.S. before returning to their home countries. Because I was on a tenure-track position, the university petitioned for me another immigration visa status known as H-1B visa. H-1B is three-year renewable visa that allows foreign-born professionals to work in the U.S. I acquired my permanent residency (a.k.a. Green Card) in 2008 and later U.S citizenship in 2015. Alongside navigating the immigration landscape, I simultaneously worked towards my tenure and promotion to associate professor, both of which I attained in 2010. Four years later in 2014, I was promoted to the rank of full professor.

How did my leadership come about? Within my first eight years at UNA, I was involved in various leadership opportunities including, but not limited to: developing and directing the first study abroad to an African country, co-founder of Kenya Scholars and Studies Association (KESSA), founder of Diaspora Community of African Geospatial Scientists (DCAGS), Chapter President of the Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society, member of the President's committee on diversity and inclusion strategic planning, shared governance committees, faculty and senior administrator's search committees, member of various funded research projects, faculty advisor to African Students Organization, chaired faculty searches, organized student events, and volunteered and took lead on various other departmental initiatives. During this period, I also earned a campus-wide Excellence in Teaching Award. In the community, I had been nominated to serve in the City of Florence as a Planning Commissioner.

The appointment: In summer of 2011, I conducted the first ever study abroad trip to an African country for UNA. When I returned from study abroad, I found a note in my mailbox asking me to make an appointment to meet with the dean of the college. Scary as that sounded, I made the appointment and met the dean on a Friday morning where I received the 'shocking' news that my department colleagues had approached him to appoint me as their next department chair with a start date of fall 2011 – in three months' time. Not knowing how to respond to the unexpected news, I requested to be given time to think it over. Like many other FBF, department leadership was not even remotely on my radar as a career aspiration. Of course, I believed I was not ready because I assumed there were others more qualified than me and better suited for the job. It was only in a matter of time before I could convince everyone that they had better options. After negotiations, I agreed to serve for one-year, which, in my mind, meant 'watching' for a year hoping they would find a more suitable candidate. Fast forward, I assumed the chair position in fall 2012. At the time, the department comprised of eight full-time faculty members (including myself), three adjunct faculty, one staff, undergraduate and MS programs, and about 130 majors. Four years later in 2016, I was awarded the most Outstanding Department Chair Award for my college. When our associate dean left the university on a short notice in 2017, I was appointed as an Interim Associate Dean in the College of Arts and Sciences, which I served for a year. Later in 2019, I applied and was hired as the Chair of the Department of Global Studies and Human Geography at Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro, TN, a position I held for one year.

Accomplishments: Under my leadership at UNA, we were able to accomplish a lot together in the Department of Geography. In a matter of seven years, we were running a department with 4 major and 8 minor programs; we had developed three new programs; implemented both the undergraduate and graduate programs 100% Online; implemented over 77 major curriculum initiatives; maintained an enrollment at about 110 majors for both the graduate and undergraduate programs; maintained the highest student job placement in the entire university; initiated three study abroad programs; hired four new faculty members and successfully supported five faculty through tenure and promotion; oversaw and managed annual budgetary transactions in excess of US$ 200,000; secured travel funding for both faculty and students; supported faculty to acquire in excess of US$ 250,000 in research funding; established a Geographic Research Center in the department; developed a five-year departmental strategic plan; integrated diversity efforts as part and parcel of departmental culture, including student and faculty recruitment, curriculum programing, research initiatives and community outreach; hosted six UNA Geography Alumni Association conferences; and oversaw more than 24 community outreach activities by faculty and students. It came, therefore, as no surprise when in 2016, I was awarded the most Outstanding Department Chair Award in the College of Arts and Sciences, which comprised of 19 academic departments. I report these accomplishments here not as bragging points, but to contrast my leadership contributions in a 6-year period against my initial reservations towards my leadership preparedness in 2012.

But what does my department leadership story tell us about FBF and academic leadership in American universities? Why was academic leadership not in my career aspirations? What did I do to prepare myself for academic leadership? What did I have to do to earn the trust of my colleagues and administrators? What opportunities opened up from my leadership experiences? These questions are addressed below.

Why is leadership not a career aspiration for foreign-born faculty? The myths and realities

Job security: Getting and securing a tenure-track position for a FBF in the U.S is a long, stressful, and complex process. Setting foot in the door is a relatively straightforward part of the process because it is merit-based. The tenure and promotion process is, however, messy and likened to ‘walking on egg shells,’ highly political, and almost entirely dependent on the vote of tenured colleagues who are predominantly U.S-born. Furthermore, the tenure and promotion process can take place simultaneously with another complicated, but often expensive process of petitioning for work visas and permanent residency. In fact, some universities choose not to hire FBF for this reason alone. While these two processes are simultaneous, the waiting period is lengthy, stressful, and political – and sometimes riddled with uncertainty and unpredictability. For example, it took me four years to gain permanent residency and six to go through the tenure and promotion process to associate professor status. Because majority of FBF have young families during these two processes, job security is a high priority. To maintain good relationships with, and to earn the trust and confidence of their colleagues and supervisors, most FBF play it safe and conveniently avoid potentially controversial issues, such as openly showing leadership ambitions.

Not my turn attitude: ‘It is someone else’s turn’ is another immediate and for some good measure, logical reason why leadership is not in the radar for any new faculty member – foreign-born or American. Most new faculty, especially fresh PhDs, consider it too early in their careers to think about getting into administration. However, most FBF, who in most cases start their academic careers in mid and late 30s, take it a step further to exclude leadership from their career aspirations altogether (Kim et al., 2020). This is compounded by the politics of tenure and promotion, which almost entirely rest on the vote of tenured colleagues. As a foreign-born faculty member, however, change of immigration status that enables them to work in the U.S on a permanent basis is often a top priority. Because this depends on a petition by the department, FBF are careful not to harm relationships with their colleagues by openly showing leadership ambitions. Secondly, one must demonstrate effectiveness as a faculty member to be awarded tenure. The amount of time and effort involved in gaining the trust of colleagues for the award of tenure and promotion requires one to walk a very fine line, and especially for FBF. As a result, leadership is often beyond reach and not a career aspiration.

Pursuit of scholarship goals: Another logical reason is pursuit of scholarship goals. Every young professional, foreign or native, desires to make a name and to build a strong professional profile. Therefore, department or academic leadership is generally considered an unnecessary distraction towards this goal. For FBF who must fulfil ‘highly qualified’ scientist status in the eyes of the U.S immigration to earn permanent residency, concentration on scholarship takes precedence over academic leadership.

The academic department can be a toxic place. Maintaining good relationships with colleagues, who must vote for your tenure and promotion, becomes a priority especially for FBF who must protect both their jobs and also immigration status. Because department leadership role, at times, involves making difficult decisions, most FBF avoid it altogether. I have heard FBF remark, “I don’t want to step on people’s toes,” referring to harming relationships with or perceived threats from colleagues.

Compromise candidate mentality: Foreign-born faculty, myself included, tend to live under the assumption that department leadership is preserved for their American (mostly white male) colleagues and that FBF become an option only when others are not interested or qualified. This compromise candidate mentality can be true sometimes, but also false. It is an open secret that most academic department leadership positions in the U.S are held by middle age white males (Bystydzienski, 2017). While there is some truth to this view, however, my appointment as chair in 2012 suggests that this assumption could be misleading, but in my case was faulty.

Outsider perspective: ‘I am an outsider’ is another common assumption. FBF tend to have the “good guest” mentality – that because they are not citizens or permanent residents of the U.S., being offered a job, in and of itself, is a good enough gesture of kindness, and therefore leadership aspirations would be asking for too much – a wrong assumption for any professional in the first place. Others are intimidated by the demands of the department leadership position itself, especially dealing with difficult colleagues, making difficult decisions, and taking responsibility for failure. Unfortunately, and rightly so, there are some FBF who do not believe they can be supported by their American colleagues to lead a department and, therefore, do not bother with academic leadership even if offered. As unfortunate as that sounds, this reality does not make it a firewall to academic leadership for FBF.

Other reasons FBF do not consider academic leadership in their career aspirations have to do with cultural differences, perceived threat to their American colleagues, the general stress of life for foreign-born individuals, inadequacy feelings and lack of confidence, especially among female FBF, language barrier, fear of failure, and lack of encouragement from their peers, and mentors.

What can foreign-born faculty do to raise their leadership profiles and earn the trust and confidence of their American colleagues to lead them?

Most department positions are appointments by a college dean. In most cases, deans consult with faculty in the department before they make chair appointments. Other department chair positions are elected by their colleagues while others ascend to the position through a leadership rotation among tenured senior faculty members. In other cases, department chairs hire in through competitive national searches. Regardless of the method through which faculty members assume the position, academic leadership appointments involve significant input from faculty colleagues. This leads one to ask: what can a FBF do to earn the trust, respect, and confidence of their colleagues to lead them?

Be good in your craft: To earn respect from your colleagues good enough to be trusted with leadership, you must perfect your craft. Whether it is teaching, research, or service, you must demonstrate effectiveness in your faculty duties. As faculty members tend to look up to their leader as a standard, you must make sure you are effective in your instruction and scholarship. As a department chair, I learned quickly that faculty constantly ask themselves why they should follow you. Excellence in your duties is always a good reason.

Be an outsider insider: A foreign-born faculty comes in with an outsider label. To crack the insider shell, FBF must get involved in and significantly contribute to their department business. The hard reality is that as a FBF member, your colleagues see you as an outsider and do not necessarily have you on their leadership radar. Good news: I learned through my experiences that while your colleagues may not publicly float your name as a potential leader, privately they are not necessarily opposed to the idea. A FBF, therefore, bears the burden of proving himself or herself in order to earn the trust and confidence of other colleagues by getting involved in department business in a significant way. Furthermore, they say 'leadership starts at home.' To earn the confidence and trust of their colleagues, FBF must show that they can lead by performing other leadership tasks in the department. These include chairing faculty searches, organizing student events, managing labs, coordinating internships, coordinating graduate program, planning field trips, and so on. It is the sum of the small internal responsibilities that will convince your colleagues that you can be trusted with bigger responsibilities such as department leadership. Put differently, a FBF has to give his or her colleagues enough reasons to be trusted with leadership.

Be a team player: 'Minding my own business' attitude is not a good leadership trait for anybody. Furthermore, you are less likely to earn the trust and respect of your colleagues by being a lone ranger. Get involved in department initiatives, collaborative research projects, team teaching, volunteer to do things and sometimes make sacrifices for the sake of others, and these things will gain you more trust in the department.

Stay away from factions and camps: Many academic departments tend to have factions sometimes based on ideological, philosophical, and petty personal differences and preferences. This creates awkward situations for FBF who may not identify, especially with ideological inclinations of other faculty colleagues. Unfortunately, these factions and camps have a bearing to elections, appointments and other departmental decisions. Staying away from factions and camps is perhaps the best advice anyone ever gave me as a fresh-from-college FBF member. It is not worth the energy, it is not good for your mental health, and does not advance good relationships with your colleagues.

Build a strong professional network: A strong professional network is essential, especially for mentorship purposes. Furthermore, those that wish to seek leadership outside their own institutions will need support from others in their discipline. You can build extensive professional networks by joining professional organizations, participating in training opportunities, and through collaboration. There comes a time when you are not sure whether to make a career move and professional mentors always come in handy. Some of these considerations are not necessarily unique to FBF members, but it does not work the same as for a native-born American faculty.

Why should more foreign-born faculty consider academic leadership in their career aspirations?

Career advancement: By the time they earn tenure and promotion, most faculty members have sufficient institutional knowledge, seniority, and the requisite leadership skills needed to lead an academic department. FBF are no exception to this rule. While academic departments should utilize FBF as leadership resource on one hand (Gahungu, 2011), FBF should make academic leadership as career option in their own professional development. Academic department leadership also opens many opportunities for training in various aspects of leadership. Furthermore, faculty productivity tends to plateau upon attaining full professor status, making academic leadership a logical career choice.

For equity reasons: Data from the Institute of Immigration Research at George Mason University indicates that FBF constitute over 22% of faculty in post-secondary institutions in the U.S. (Furuya et al., 2019). In other words, one in five faculty members in the U.S. is foreign born (Lin et al., 2009). Unfortunately, the high turnover rate at department leadership position makes it difficult to determine the percentage of FBF in academic leadership positions. Generally speaking, however, the number of FBF in department leadership positions is abysmal compared to the proportion of faculty that is foreign-born. For purposes of fair and proportionate representation, I argue that more FBF should consider leadership in their career options.

Increased global leadership and perspectives: To be clear, one does not have to be foreign-born to possess a global leadership instincts and perspectives. However, FBF possess lived global experiences that bring unique perspectives to the leadership arena (Gahungu, 2011; Hernández and Damián, 2019; Lin et al., 2015). With increased globalization of the American academy, from student population, faculty, to the top leadership, it makes logical sense that mid-career foreign born faculty in post-secondary institutions should consider leadership in their career options. A similar trend in the rise in recruitment of foreign-born leaders has been seen at the presidency level in American universities as well as in tech companies. In his article “Globalizing the Academic Presidency: Competing for Talented Leadership,” Skinner (2018) confirmed a report appearing in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* in 2011 that of the 61-member institutions of the Association of American Universities (AAU) at the time, 11 of them were led by foreign born chiefs (Foderaro, 2011; Skinner, 2018). In my opinion, foreign -born faculty represent a valuable pool of leadership talent that is severely underutilized.

Diversity in university leadership: Foreign-born students, faculty, and staff in post-secondary institutions in the U.S. comprise a large proportion of the academic community. These students make up more than 6% of the student body in post-secondary institutions while foreign born faculty comprise more than 22% of the faculty body. Unfortunately, this is not matched by a similar diversity in the leadership circles. Understanding the value of diversity in the workplace, and increased participation of FBF in academic leadership, would add a crucial element of diversity at any given institution (Cole, 2017; Gahungu, 2011; Kim et al., 2020).

Learn the system from inside: Most foreign-born faculty have grown up and educated in systems and cultural settings different from those in America. Many have only an outsider perspective of the American system and how it works. Participation in academic leadership offers an opportunity for FBF to get an insider's perspective of the American higher education landscape. From faculty development, curriculum programing, student recruitment and enrollment, budgeting, to communicating with multiple constituents, FBF would gain an insider knowledge of the American system. This knowledge would be useful to themselves, their students, and their institutions.

To give back: Most FBF received their undergraduate degrees from academic institutions from their home countries. For some, attending an American university was an investment from their country of origin and institutions. Involvement in academic leadership in the U.S. would be a fertile ground for FBF to acquire leadership skills transferable to their home countries through writing, workshops, symposiums, training during sabbatical leaves, and other mentorship platforms. Therefore, in the last nine years, I have been involved in academic leadership in some American universities and, as a way of giving back, participated in leadership mentorship of faculty in universities in Kenya and Tanzania.

CONCLUSION

In this opinion piece, I offered my personal take on why more FBF should consider academic department leadership as their career options. I first identified various aspects of the role of an academic department leader. My personal leadership story is not provided as a model of success, but as an example to illustrate positive FBF leadership experiences and contributions. I identified some of the reasons why FBF do not necessarily consider academic leadership as a career option. While some of their reasons are real and present actual challenges, I argued that, for the most part, there are other strategic ways FBF can navigate the landscape and still participate in academic leadership. I offered personal advice on various ways one can earn the respect, trust, and confidence of their colleagues in order to be considered a credible candidate for departmental leadership. Finally, I highlighted opportunities that may open up for FBF's participation in academic leadership, arguing that its benefits far outweigh the perceived costs and, in most cases, extend beyond personal career development. Thus, academic leadership has tangible benefits not only for the FBF, but also the department and university as a whole.

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Is it time to Abolish Boarding Schools in Kenya?

Charles G. Manyara

Radford University, Geospatial Science Program, Radford, VA 24142, USA
Email: cmanyara@radford.edu

In 2019 the Ministry of Education inaugurated the Competency Based Curriculum (CBC). The following year (June 2020), a Taskforce was announced to undertake a critical analysis of the national rollout of the CBC and advise the minister on key implementation issues. At the core of the changes is a strategic plan to transition from basic/primary to tertiary education and training by 2029, including infrastructural and human resource requirements. Among the proposed changes in the taskforce report was the scrapping of boarding in all (junior) secondary schools.

According to the report, boarding facilities will be reserved for a few institutions that will admit learners across the country to pursue various pathways in senior secondary schools as envisioned under the new system. Using this model, learners will spend two years in pre-primary education, six in primary, three in junior secondary, three in senior secondary school and another three in university (tertiary institution), dubbed 2-6-3-3-3 education system. All children leaving Grade Six, at the end of primary education, will be required to enroll in a nearby secondary school for the three-year junior secondary education (Grades 7, 8 and 9), which will be domiciled at the high school level. Students will be required to enroll in secondary schools within a radius of about five kilometers from their place of residence. The recommendation was based on the understanding that most primary schools have a nearby secondary school, making it easier to transition children to available spaces in adjacent facilities.

The proposal to abolish boarding schools is in line with the views of the former Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT) Secretary General, Mr. Wilson Sossion, an ardent voice in boarding school abolition in Kenya (Siele, 2020). Sossion wrote an opinion piece in 2020 in which he stated that boarding schools had outlived their usefulness and argued that it was time to reform Kenya's education system to completely day schools and be accessed at the local level. This recommendation was not just at the secondary level, but also from kindergarten to Grade 12. His view is an interesting development in the history of education reforms, but it is not new. The Koech Commission of 1999 (GOK, 1999) stressed the need to make secondary education more accessible through the establishment and expansion of more day schools. The reason behind this was to reduce costs and hence increase access to secondary education. The reality is that many developed countries, like Britain that introduced (boarding) schools in Kenya, have fully adopted the day school system as the prime mode of secondary (junior and senior) schooling.

Both the 2020 Taskforce and Sossion converge on the idea that it is time to run public schools from nursery to Grade 12 locally and together. It is doable. In fact, in many localities for every other primary school, there is a nearby high school. Furthermore, almost all elite schools, some of which run the British and USA education systems, have no option than to contain lower and upper or secondary (and in some case Advanced) levels in the same institutions. For instance, Brookhouse School (in Langata and Runda) operates a co-educational day and boarding school, which offers nursery, primary and secondary schooling. This same approach is used at St. Andrews Turi School that admits children aged five to thirteen in the Preparatory school and thirteen to nineteen at the senior school and college level. Similarly, Greensteds International School (in Nakuru), which is a private day and boarding school, serves children from Early Years Foundation

Stage (EYFS) to sixth form (senior schools).

So, what does Sossion mean by outdated 'usefulness' of boarding schools? In my view that goes back to the history of boarding schools and the purpose they served then and now. Most well-established boarding schools are a legacy of British colonial engagement with the natives. The colonial administration and the church policed the cultural protocols and competencies in pedagogic institutions designed to shape young minds to suit the imperial policies and their self-fashioned rationalities. Mission schools got funding to help mold Africans into craftmanship and other skill sets. Those in the confines of boarding schools adopted better. Kenya's past experience was not different from boarding schools for native 'Indians' in the USA that were built with the clear intention of assimilating them into the mainstream American way of life and intended to eradicate all vestiges of Indian culture (Lewy, 2004; NPRA, 1993). The Indian Residential School (IRS) system in Canada did the same by destroying native languages, religions, and cultures (Triffterer, 2001). It is, therefore, time to have an education system responsive to the unique needs of Kenya and its people in the 21st century.

The post-independence expansion of boarding schools was born out of the need to meet the competitive job market and admission to the best schools available. The haste for parents to send their children to boarding schools picked up in the 1970s and more so in the 1980s. The prevailing perception in Kenya is that anyone wishing to raise successive children ought to send them to a boarding school as *harambee* schools and private schools mushroomed.

Parents send their teenagers to boarding schools primarily for better education and to learn to live independently. It is also true that some parents send their children away because they cannot handle them. We saw how unmanageable some children became during the COVID-19 lockdown. The need and desirability of boarding schools has continued unabated, particularly at the secondary school level. Zachariah and Joshua (2016) did a study to test whether there was a significant difference in availability of study time, between day and boarding schools. Their results indicated that boarding schools generally performed better than day schools. Boarding school students enjoy more than double the time per week with teachers, coaches, and staff members outside class than private day and public-school students. They also found that more than 50% of the learners in boarding schools had better supervisory support, study room facilities, and twice as much time for their studies during the week and about three times on weekends.

Apparently, while parents may desire their children to benefit from the culture of discipline and structure of boarding environments, these students miss out on valuable time with their families. The desire for academic success through boarding school is justified; however, it is also true that the long-extended isolation of children from society makes it harder for them to learn and appreciate their culture, relationships and bond with their families. The role of the family in a child's formative years cannot be duplicated by an educator. Scholars in epigenetics explain that children's physical, cognitive, and emotional health is shaped, in part, by their environments in those early years. As Sossion (2020) argues, "The socio-psychological effects of parental separation with their children at a tender age extend into adulthood and manifest as violent or abusive people, emotional detachment and passive-aggressive behaviour." Granted, some parents see boarding schools as a way out of their busy and hectic day-to-day lives, but the effects from missing out on raising their children are irreversible. Holidays and weekends cannot make up for the lost quality family time. Likewise, boarding school experiences can neither replace the parents' nurturing care of their children nor instil proper upbringing. Unfortunately, it breaks the most sacred and fundamental of all human ties: the parent-child bond.

The boarding school mania and the associated success still grips society. Maina (2020) in her opinion piece, "Educating Kenyan children for productive citizenry: Cultural relevance in curriculum development," observes that "The question to ask then is whether the focus on passing national examination is a detriment to Kenya's ability to harness the human resource endowed in our children by labelling them as failures while inflating the sense of achievement for those who pass the exams based on access to more resources and social class!" Do we *really* need to go on like this? In fact, the 2020 Taskforce recommended that the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) be scrapped.

Boarding schools universally are known to inculcate elitism and corrupt young minds (Turner, 2015). Scutts (2018) argues that when students are separated from their families at a tender age, some develop what psychotherapists call "Boarding School Syndrome," a defensive and protective encapsulation of the self in which they learn to hide emotion, fake maturity, and assert dominance over anyone weaker. Alumni of the elite Eton School in Britain are famed for identifying each other with the ancient joke or question, "Did you go to school?" as though there is only one school worthy of the name (Bullmore, 2020; Verkaik, 2018). That culture of success associated with some of these well established and often elite boarding schools is quietly creeping into the Kenyan society. No offence to the reader, but those who attended expensive private schools (like Brookhouse School, Peponi School and Saint Mary's School or 'national' public schools such as Alliance, Nairobi School and Maseno School) are synonymous with success. Day local schools as proposed will level the playing ground.

With the abolition of boarding schools nationwide, bullying, too, will come to an end. Even though bullying was illegal, endemic and structural in most boarding schools, especially amongst boys, it affected some students' individual performance. More concerning also is that those who were bullied considered school life unsafe, had increased risk of depression, and had low self-esteem tendencies that progressed into adulthood (Mutiso et al., 2019). Such students are apt to be anti-social, break school rules and are generally defiant or oppositional towards adults.

Recent spontaneous strikes and suspected arson cases occurred at boarding schools or schools that combined day and boarding students, most of which were at all-boys and mixed schools. Sossion (2020) believes boarding schools are a security hazard. A key finding by a team formed to investigate a spate of cases of school unrest in 2016 was that boarding schools are criminal training groups that shield children from the reality of life. The team report recommended that the rational alternative would be a meaningful transformation of day schools, if they were made more attractive through adequate funding, provision of qualified and motivated teachers, and restore sanity in public schools.

Aspects of the misconduct among students in boarding schools can be understood by reflecting on the excessive expectations placed on students by both schools and parents. Studies have shown that boarding schools put unnecessary pressure even on the best students and are not, therefore, an ideal place for academically weak students. So clearly the pressure is on all students. It is no surprise then that arson cases in schools spike around national exam time.

The transformation of boarding to day schools may also be timely in a country whose economy is struggling. Studies have shown that it is costlier to run boarding schools in the country despite the high rate of learners in day schools. When free Primary Education was introduced in 2003 (MoEST, 2003), it led to a steadily growth in net school enrolment in basic education (from

Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) to 12th grade). The report on the Taskforce on Affordable Secondary Education in Kenya (Ministry of Education, 2007) indicated that among the challenges facing secondary education were: (1) lack of enough and quality day schools many of which lacked essential facilities, (2) high cost of secondary education, and (3) longer distance to school. In 2008 Free Day Secondary Education (FDSE) was introduced (GOK, 2012) to cut down on the cost of education, especially on parents and to give children access to basic education. Since then, the Ministry of Education releases FDSE funds to schools at a capitation rate.

With all that is ailing boarding schools, day schools are not a panacea. The idea that by 2029 most Kenyan students will be living within five kilometers of school is too idealistic and, in some case, impractical. Even for children in urban areas with an increased influx of students for public or school transport in the morning and evening will potentially be a nightmare, if not planned properly. Countries like the UK & US have elaborate school bus system to transport students from home to school in the morning and afternoon. Kenya's infrastructure is not optimal yet. Traffic jams and impassable roads make time-space convergence a long shot. Further, it is common knowledge that one of the contributing factors to poor performance, especially in rural schools, are the long distances students must walk every day to-and-from school.

Day schools can sometimes be unsafe, especially for teenage girls. Two years ago, the country experienced one of the highest rates of teen pregnancies in primary school. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of young girls lured or defiled by irresponsible men spiked. Certainly, boarding schools are often safe havens for students from the outside influence and social risks. The question is: Is Kenya ready to handle this age group responsibly?

The reality of our education system today is that the government's role in secondary level education has become increasingly limited to provision of teachers' salaries, which take up almost 90% of recurrent expenditure for education. Parents are left to meet the balance of the remainder of the costs: maintenance, physical facilities provision, electricity, water, non-teaching staff emoluments, school uniforms, food stuff, and etcetera. The cost of education becomes even higher in boarding schools compared to day schools. In a comparative study on cost effectiveness ratio (CER) for a day and boarding student, Jagero (2011) noted that improving the performance of a day student by one point requires KES 7,748 compared to KES 10,005 for a boarder. Therefore, educating a student in a day school is more cost effective and a more efficient way of using scarce resources available, which aligns with the findings of the 2015 Taskforce led by Kiremi Mwiria (GOK, 2014).

As the curriculum transition from 8-4-4 to 2-6-3-3-3 the debate should continue on how to provide for the needy and those from marginalized regions, particularly the arid and semi-arid areas. A practical option for them is to provide sufficient and adequately supported schools to avoid overburdening parents economically.

There is no one school or school structure that is perfect for all students. Students bring with them a variety of intelligences, dispositions, learning styles, cultures, religions, family backgrounds, and personal tastes and preferences. Therefore, there is need to re-think and have an education system responsive to the needs of Kenya and its people in the 21st century.

Kenya's boarding schools are predominantly same sex. The proposal to scrap boarding secondary schools would certainly be a game changer as most, if not, all will give way to public co-ed institutions. Same-sex education is controversial. Advocates argue that it aids student outcomes such as test scores, graduation rates, and solutions to behavioral difficulties. Opponents insist there is evidence that such effects are inflated or non-existent, and instead argue that segregation increases sexism and impairs the student's development of interpersonal skills. Whatever the argument, teen years are a critical time when children learn how to handle responsibility and independence, navigate relationships on a deeper level, and make decisions that impact their future. These are all junctures that are best guided by parents, not advisors or teachers. Teenagers need more time with their parents than they do with peers and teachers. Sossion argument for the abolition of boarding schools will enable parents to spend more time with their children and contribute to their holistic growth, which may not be achieved in the current educational set up. It makes perfect sense.

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Kenya Scholars & Studies Association
Bowling Green State University
Department of Geography
Bowling Green, OH 43403 USA
Email: secretary@kessa.org
Phone: 419-372-9352
Fax: 419-372-0588

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