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## **Effects of *Murran* System's Indigenous Knowledge on Maasai Youth's School Attendance in Narok District, Kenya (Pp. 1-23)**

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### **Abstract**

*Kenyan Maasai is a pastoral society that lives in arid and semi-arid lands across the Kenya — Tanzania border. The society has a barracks-like institution called the Murran system where male youths are formally trained in preparation for community life. The study was conducted among the Maasai of Narok District, Kenya. Being a qualitative study, its data was collected through respondent interviews and examination of primary and secondary documentary sources. The study found that the Indigenous Knowledge of the Maasai Murran system has comprehensive and diversified community-focused attributes that have profound effects on school*

*attendance by male Maasai youths of Narok District. The attributes of Indigenous Knowledge learned during Maasai Murran system make male Maasai youths who had already enrolled in school to drop out and those who had never enrolled to shun school for good.*

**Key words:** *Murran* System; Indigenous Knowledge; School-based Education

### **Introduction**

The Kenyan Maasai is a trans-humant pastoral society that lives in a vast arid and semi—arid land (ASAL) that straddles the Kenya—Tanzania border. The society exhibits a great love and concern for livestock especially cattle (Hollis, 1905; Galaty, 1977; Karehed and Odhult, 1997; Ronoh, 2008). Maasai people's lifestyles revolve around animal husbandry and related activities. This cultural inclination is a product of unfavorable environmental factors as many parts of Maasailand are arid and semi—arid (Ronoh, 2008).

To cope with their environment and ascertain sustenance of their survival, the Maasai conduct training and learning experiences through the medium of Indigenous Knowledge (IK). Generally, IK refers to local knowledge that uniquely functions in a society. In Maasai society, IK is an epistemological vehicle that provides useful values, skills and attitudes that make recipients functional members of the society (Ronoh, 2008).

For Maasai youths, elaborate training and learning through the medium of IK take place just after circumcision. Upon being circumcised, Maasai girls receive intensive terminal education on their culture and expectations before getting married. In contrast, Maasai boys receive less intense education immediately after circumcision. Instead, after recuperation newly circumcised Maasai boys proceed to the *Murran* system of barracks life during which they obtain comprehensive indigenous teaching, learning and training on indigenous subjects whose attributes are of particular interest to the Maasai as a pastoral society living in a harsh environment (Ronoh, 2008).

In the early years of colonial rule, the Maasai of Kenya and the British struck some cordial, yet suspicious relationship (Ronoh, 2008). With some enthusiasm, the Maasai participated in School- Based Education (SBE) that had just been introduced by the early colonialists and Christian missionaries. Paradoxically, the Maasai enthusiastically demanded SBE while continuing to resist it in favour of their age-set system and pastoral values that formed the bedrock of their indigenous learning and training activities (Sena, 1986;

Ronoh, 2008). When the earliest school was opened in Narok Township in 1918, the Maasai warriors (*il-murran*) violently resisted it. The Maasai and especially the *il-murran* have exhibited resistance of SBE from colonial era to the present.

### **Statement of the Problem**

It has been observed that Maaasi boys exhibited marked disinterest in schooling soon after circumcision rites and after joining the *Murran* system (KC, 1950a; Ronoh, 2008). This disposition could be attributed to learning and training activities and outcomes based on IK. Therefore, there seems to be an intricate relationship between male Maasai youths' participation in the *Murran* system and school attendance.

The problem of this study therefore is two-prolonged: First is to analyse the attributes of IK of the *Murran* system of the Kenyan Maasai with particular reference to the acquired training and learning outcomes in terms of values, skills and attributes. The second part of the problem of the study is to examine the effects of the *Murran* system and its IK training activities and results on school attendance by male Maasai youths in the Narok District of Kenya.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study sought to achieve the following objectives:

- a) To analyse the attributes of IK subjects offered to male Maasai youths in the *Murran* system.
- b) To determine the effects of the IK subjects' attributes on school attendance by male Maasai youths in Narok district of Kenya.

### **Significance of the Study**

The study is significant in some ways. It can provide useful insight that can inform our understanding of the basis of the Maasai people's reluctance to accept change in general, and acceptance of SBE in particular. It therefore, has information that can be used by policy makers to appreciate the need to customize school curricula in line with specific society's IK.

### **Literature Review**

Researchers such as Gorham (1979); Nkinyangi (1981); Sena (1986); and Ronoh (2008) believe that the pastoral economy and lifestyle of the Kenyan Maasai have contributed to that society's resistance to change in general and

adoption of SBE in particular. The irrelevance of SBE to pastoral people's lives could have contributed to the society's resistance to educational change (Schneider, 1959; Tignor, 1976; Sobania, 1979). Writers such as Sifuna (1990) and Bogonko (1992) stated that indigenous learning and training were meant for living and survival. Ly (1981) has underscored the utility of this local knowledge to its recipients. Sperling (1984) and Otiende *et al* (1992) observed that a pastoral society related to the Maasai called Samburu of north central Kenya has intimate knowledge of their physical environment and socio-cultural activities intended for their own survival and that of their livestock.

Curiously, none of these research findings and writings except Ronoh (2008) has delved into the learning experiences of the *Murran* system and how they affect male Maasai youths' attendance of school. Nevertheless, Ronoh's work does not provide a comprehensively insightful examination of the problem. This study therefore, seeks to delve into the problem and fill the knowledge gap that exists.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The investigations for this study were guided by Culture theory, which focuses on a people's socio-cultural processes. The theory maintains that in every society, several biases exist, some of which have pronounced effect on the rate of social change. These biases are learned or acquired through the process of socialisation within a cultural context. Culture is both distinct attribute(s) and a process. D'Andrade (1984) explained that culture is a process because it involves the passing on of what has been learned before to succeeding generations purposely to construct reality. As Le Vine (1984) observed, culture is a consensus on a wide variety of meanings, including biases, among members of an interacting community. The Culture theory informed this study in as far as the effects of cultural biases learned from IK attributes of the *Murran* system on male Maasai youths attendance of school in Narok District of Kenya.

### **Research Methodology**

This study was a qualitative research that was part of a larger research project. The study was conducted among Kenya's Maasai people of Narok District. The study area consisted of three research sites, namely: Olorurto Site among the Purko sub-ethnic group of the Maasai in the northern part of the district, Morijo Site among the Loita sub-ethnic group in the south, and Narok/Ololulung'a Site in central Narok District. The Olorurto and Morijo

sites were selected because they had the lowest school enrolment and highest school drop-out rates in Narok District in 1997 and 1998 (ROK, 1997a; 1998a). Olorurto had an enrolment rate of 60 per cent and a drop-out rate of 20—25 per cent; Loita (Morijo) had an enrolment rate of 30 per cent and a high drop-out rate of 70 per cent (ROK, 1997b; 1998b).

The targeted population consisted of male Maasai elders and youths, primary and secondary school headteachers. Others were the deputy District Education Officer, and Area Education Officers (AEOs). When this study began in 1999, there were 16 secondary schools in Narok District and 12 primary schools in Olorurto and Morijo research sites.

Respondents for the study sample were selected using purposive sampling technique of the non-probability sampling strategy. From the 16 secondary schools in the district, headteachers of six schools were deliberately selected. These were two boys' schools, namely Narok High School and Ololulung'a Secondary School, and two girls' schools, which included Maasai Girls' Secondary School and Ole Tipis Girls' Secondary School. This selection resulted in over 66 per cent of the single-sex secondary schools being selected. Only two mixed-sex schools, namely Olorurto Secondary School and Moi Naikara Secondary School, were purposively selected. The two schools represented 100 per cent of secondary schools located in the Olorurto and in Morijo sites respectively. However, the two schools formed 20 per cent of all the mixed-sex schools and only 12.5 per cent of all the secondary schools in Narok District in 1998. Out of the six primary schools in each of the Olorurto and Morijo (Loita) sites, headteachers of only three schools were selected, using purposive sampling technique. In Olorurto Site, the headteachers of Olopirik, Olorurto and Ilpolton were selected, while in Morijo Site, those of Morijo Loita, Ilkerin Loita and Entasekera were chosen. When selecting the headteachers, care was taken so that those selected represented schools in different localities within the research sites. The deputy District Education Officer and the AEOs of Olorurto and Loita (Morijo) Divisions were purposively selected to participate in the study.

The selection of respondents was based on the age and public office held in the Maasai society. Male Maasai respondents whose ages were 40 years and above were treated as elders, while those with less than 39 years were considered as youths. In each research site, nine male elders were selected. Nine male youths were also selected, including six who had never enrolled in school and three who had dropped out of school. The numbers of

participating elders and youths were increased using snowball technique by which the already selected participants were requested to recommend other participants who had similar characteristics as themselves.

Purposive and snowball techniques were preferred to probability sampling strategy because for this study not everybody in the population was knowledgeable. In addition, it ensured selection of a small sample that is convenient for a qualitative study since it would be difficult to analyse a large amount of data collected from a sample that is proportional to the entire population.

The selection of nine elders and the same number of youths in Olokurto and Moriyo sites had scientific justification. The number was slightly higher than the normal maximum number (seven) of a focus (discussion) group if these categories of the sample were placed in groups. The selected nine members provided for variability of information supplied, and the same time, the number was small enough to ensure the saturation of information obtained from the members.

The selection of various categories of respondents had some justifications. The elders' were selected because they are custodians of traditional culture in the Maasai society. The youths represented relatively immediate recipients of learning experiences through IK, under the *Murran* system, and SBE as the case may be. The reason why youths who had not enrolled in school were considered more important than those who had dropped out was that the former had a stronger bearing on the research problem. As a result, twice as many of youths who never enrolled in school were selected as opposed to those who dropped out of school. The dropping out of school could most likely have occurred before joining *Murran* system. Headteachers and education officials could have witnessed the effects of the *Murran* system on school attendance by male Maasai youths in their schools or areas of jurisdiction.

This study obtained its basic data through two techniques namely, interviews of respondents and archival/museum/ library research. Respondent interviews were based on an Interview Guide. This Guide consisted mainly of open-ended questions based on the research problem. The Guide was designed in such a way that responses could be probed further and more deeply. Interviewing technique, based on Interview Guides, was used to collect data from these respondents. The respondents were interviewed individually and their responses were recorded accordingly. This approach ensured a holistic

view of the study. Each technique was chosen depending on the type of data required. For example, through interviews, the study sought to elicit in-depth responses, which illuminated Maasai beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviour as far as the research problem was concerned. Since these attributes could not easily be quantified, they appeared more amenable to qualitative description and explanation.

To help the researcher to collect data, especially from illiterate respondents, two research assistants were identified and trained, one for the Olokurto Site and the other for Morijo Site. The basic qualifications were that they had completed form four and were attending or had attended post-secondary educational institutions. In addition, they had to be familiar with the local people and environment, exude confidence, and display enthusiasm. They also had to be articulate speakers of both Maasai language and English and have good writing skills. The researcher personally interviewed and recorded responses from headteachers and education officials.

Archival, museum and library search was another technique that was used to collect data for this study. This technique focused on the search and the study of documentary sources and material culture that illuminated past life and activities of Kenyan Maasai. Data obtained through interviews was supplemented and corroborated with data from documentary sources. Documentary sources examined for this study included both primary and secondary sources obtained from public and private libraries, archives and museums. Documentary sources provided records about SBE and socio-cultural activities, including *murranism* in Kenya's Maasailand during colonial and post-colonial periods. The documents included records kept and written by actual participants in, or witnesses of the phenomena.

Primary sources of documentary data, on one hand, included published or unpublished articles, records, letters (official or unofficial), memoirs, diaries and minutes. Other primary sources were local government reports, District Education Officer's reports/records, District Commissioner's reports, Provincial Commissioner's reports, Provincial Education Officer's/ Director's reports, Director of Education's reports, statistics from the Central Bureau of Statistics and other Government documents. Secondary sources of documentary data, on the other hand, were books, theses and dissertations, and census reports among others authored by people who were not eyewitnesses or participants. These documents were intensively and extensively studied. They spanned the colonial and post-colonial periods.

Their analysis provided the context of the study as well as documented evidence. All these sources were particularly useful to this study.

Data analysis involved studying, classifying, and comparing the data in order to establish inherent facts and information. The data derived from various categories of respondents and focus groups of this study was analysed, compared and contrasted. This data was also compared and contrasted with that obtained from documentary sources. After the analysis was done, the researcher qualitatively interpreted the findings in light of the research objectives. While doing this, the researcher carefully and critically examined the findings, their meanings and significance.

## **Results and Discussion**

### ***Murran* System of the Kenyan Maasai**

The *Murran* system is an impregnable Maasai institution that arises from deliberate pedagogical processes related to warriorhood, among other subjects. Such processes entail indigenous learning and training experiences, which emphasise the importance of the institution as a significant aspect of Maasai identity. In addition, and most importantly, the institution serves as the society's defence force. It is a stage into which male Maasai youths enter soon after concluding their circumcision rites. Previously, the *Murran* system took as long as six or seven years, but presently it takes two to three years. This system is more or less comparable to secondary school stage and it is a period during which teaching and training are formal (Ronoh, 2008).

The system is an institution that adolescent Maasai boys yearn to enter. While yearning to join the system, many school-going Maasai boys display sudden disinterest in the school. The various subjects offered in the *Murran* institution enhance communalistic as well as individualistic values. It is through these subjects that corporate and personal efforts are exalted.

The *Murran* system (*Murranism*) is a significant adolescent stage in the growth of Maasai boys. Circumcision rites for boys in Maasai society take place between the early teens and mid twenties (Vavra 1991). Unlike girls, boys receive lesser instructions during initiation. This is because they are yet to join the warriorhood (*il-murran*) stage during which the training and learning activities were not only formal but also more vigorous and highly diversified and relevant to community life. Indigenous instruction during the *Murran* system, unlike other previous forms, are quite formal and are offered in school-like encampments called *i-manyat* (singular: *e-manyatta*). Thus, according to this study, the teaching and learning activities, which take place

after circumcision of Maasai boys merely, serve as stimuli to psyche them for the impending *Murran* system stage.

Circumcision rites are thresholds to *Murran* system and are distinct obsession to the male Maasai youths who subsequently portray a marked disinterest in schooling. As Saitoti (1986:39) vividly observed, "... many students would run away to be circumcised. Many never returned". Majority of the male youths join *Murran* system soon after circumcision rites are over.

Ronoh (2008) further observed that this disinterest is in contrast to the enthusiasm in schooling displayed by precocious small boys who invariably were able to sit the primary school leaving Kenya African Preliminary Examination (KAPE) at Government Masai School (GMS) at Narok, and even join Form One before they were circumcised. About this group, the Principal of GMS noted "... that the brightest KAPE candidates were the rather precocious little boys who had not reached circumcision age, and hence were keen on schoolwork, and not yearning to be in the Moran Manyatta" (KG, 1950a:2).

The *Murran* system is a stage during which Maasai warriors (*il-murran*) are offered diversely comprehensive IK with subjects derived from culture and nature. IK offered during *murranism* are meant to produce people who proudly project Maasai identity and personality. To achieve this role, warriorhood training emphasises a variety of subjects, including civics and leadership, social and family life, military studies, economics as well as environmental studies.

### **Attributes of Indigenous Knowledge of the Murran System of the Maasai**

Various subjects offered to male Maasai youths under the *Murran* system enhance several values and develop certain skills and attitudes among male Maasai youths. Indigenous Civic Education promotes and fosters patriotic values in Maasai youths. Through the subject, male Maasai youths learn to be patriotic members of their society. Ronoh (2008) asserts that *il-murran* training inculcates in male Maasai youths a distinct love for their society, a disposition that is marked by unswerving loyalty and readiness to defend it at all costs. In addition, they are taught to respect and obey their leaders. A few of them are selected to become age-set leaders and are especially given training on leadership styles and command. This is how the age-set spokesman (*ol-aiguenani*) and his assistant (*ol-otuno*) obtain their basic training on leadership and governance. The subject enhances loyalty to

Maasai society, its social institutions and systems. The subject also fosters values of leadership and command as well as responsibility for conflict resolution and reconciliation (Ronoh, 2008). Through Indigenous Civic Education, offered during *Murran* system, male Maasai youths learn the art of resolving conflicts and the skills of effective communication. This finding matches with Bernardi's (1948).

Similarly, Indigenous Civic Education also develops social skills that include styles of leadership and techniques of conflict resolution by careful examination of pieces of evidence. Also, the art of effective communication through debates and stimulus variation such as the use of gestures, intonation and inflection, and body movements are also developed through this subject (Ronoh, 2008).

Important attitudes are fostered through the Indigenous Civic Education under the *Murran* system. For example, in the subject, Maasai youths develop distinct readiness to defend their society (people and property) and exhibit total respect for their leaders, to whose commands they respond. Through the subject the youths develop commitment to solve problems facing the society. Other attitudes enhanced by the subject, are joy of debates and love for effective communication skills.

Another indigenous Maasai subject called Social and Family Life is taught and learned in the *Murran* system. The current study found that male Maasai youths learn about Maasai ceremonies and virtues of corporate unity, comradeship, social cohesion and the principle of sharing. They also learn gender relations and marital responsibilities, including family life. These, according to Ronoh (2008), are virtues scantily taught in SBE.

From the subject of Social and Family Life, Maasai warriors (*il-murran*) obtain lessons in corporate unity, comradeship, and social cohesion based on mutual trust and cordial relationship to each other. The subject also enhances in the warriors the values of civic and marital responsibilities. In addition, the subject of Social and Family Life enhances the value of sharing among the *il-murran*. They learn to share practically everything including food, water, and company and at a latter stage, even their wives. One of the main skills learnt through the medium of Social and Family Life is that of courtship and interpersonal relations. For instance, Maasai warriors are taught the art of seduction as well as the techniques of courting women.

Certain attitudes are developed in the *il-murran* through lessons in Social and Family Life. Some of these attitudes include desire and yearning or looking forward to fulfilling the social responsibilities expected of them. In addition, an attitude of commitment to sharing is fostered in the *il-murran*. They learn to commit themselves to the practice of sharing everything with the members of their age-set. No subject under SBE prepares boys as much as this particular indigenous Maasai subject of Social and Family Life.

Other subjects that are offered to male Maasai youths in the *Murran* system include Economics and other productive arts, as well as Ecological/environmental Studies. Ronoh (2008) established that with respect to Economics, male Maasai youths are taught the importance of becoming rich in livestock. In addition, they obtain skills for the sustenance and expansion of this wealth. Mature male members of the Maasai society take it upon themselves to instruct young boys and youths how to carry out activities related to IK and skills of Animal Husbandry, for example, herding, identification of nutritious grass and browse as well as treatment of diseases. According to all respondents and focus groups, under the *Murran* system male Maasai youths are given elaborate training about all facets of animal husbandry. The subject matter for indigenous Animal Husbandry covers specific knowledge, distinct skills and appropriate attitudes in that field of study.

In the *Murran* system Maasai instructors instill in the male Maasai youths the fear that SBE does not focus on any particular productive life, hence its irrelevance and subsequently persistent rejection by the society. The irresistibly exiting indigenous training engagements obviously cannot be accomplished when one is attending school. As a result, male Maasai youths who had enrolled in school earlier opt to drop out in order to pursue learning experiences provided under the auspices of the *Murran* system.

Wealth in livestock as well as the pervasive indigenous learning processes made the Maasai to be complacent with their way of life to the extent that they did not aspire for anything better. They engaged fervently in traditional ceremonies like circumcision and *murranism*. About this issue, the District Commissioner (DC) of the neighbouring Maasai district of Kajiado observed in 1931 that the Maasai had in fact reached the height of their ambitions and had no real desire for anything more (KG, 1931a). They desired to be left alone in pursuit of the IK as they feigned support of government initiatives, including SBE.

In Maasai society, the subject of indigenous Animal Husbandry as a subject is offered around the home and in the range lands. All respondents and focus groups agreed that the aim of this subject is to bring forth a proficient Maasai pastoralist. To achieve that aim, values of responsibility and productivity in livestock keeping, livestock wealth and sustenance of such wealth are imparted. .

All respondents and focus groups noted the skills developed through indigenous Animal Husbandry, which include livestock management, such as herding and treating. These skills include identification of missing stock using skin colour, and branding tattoos for purposes of identification.

Ronoh (2008) observed that indigenous Animal Husbandry enhances core attitudes in the Maasai society. For instance, it develops a strong commitment to livestock production as a distinctly Maasai activity. The subject also enhances attachment to livestock keeping. Besides, according to most respondents and focus groups, indigenous Animal Husbandry inculcates in Maasai learners a unique desire to participate in pastoral praxis from an early age. Most of the economic and productive activities revolve around pastoral praxis and related engagements. This implies that in the traditional settings, Maasai people deliberately educate their children and youths about the knowledge and skills based on their economic mainstay.

In contrast, the generally negative attitude of the Kenyan Maasai towards the effect of SBE on indigenous Animal Husbandry has been an expression of fear. This expression is clearly depicted in the following excerpt from one male Loita elder:

#### **Excerpt No 1**

School educated youths hate cattle; they prefer crop production to animal husbandry. This activity (crop production) is not a priority in Maasai tradition. Therefore, we fear that acceptance of SBE will change our way of life. For instance, crop cultivation will equate us to the Kikuyu (Sulul, O.I., 13.12.2000).

Through the Economics, Maasai warriors promote and foster values, skills and attitudes that enhance the acquisition of cattle wealth and management of livestock. For example, they learn how to organise and actualise raids to acquire cattle. In livestock management, they are trained how to control the breeding habits of livestock especially sheep and goats. An attitude of

profound love for livestock and livestock products is strengthened under the *Murran* system.

Through the medium of productive work, Maasai children and youths learn to be prudent by carefully identifying their advantageous opportunities and avoiding occupational risks. They learn as they work and they also work as they learn. Either way, Maasai children and youths learn to be responsible and productive members of their society. Thus, the medium of economic and productive work provide a significant pedagogical duality in Maasai society. Economic and productive activities in Maasai society provide very valuable learning opportunities and educational experiences that are instrumental to support the economic structure. Participation in such activities leads to enhancement of the means of survival in the society.

Another subject offered to the *il-murran* is Ecological/environmental Studies. Through the subject, male Maasai youths learn about plants and animals, various land features and their importance, different human and bovine diseases and their treatment, quality of pasture and browse as well as the significance of salt earths (salt licks) and saline springs, among others. One civic leader summarised the diversity of *murranism* training in the following excerpt:

### **Excerpt No 2**

It is a kind of formal educational practice during which young Maasai men learn a lot from the field that stretches as far as Tanzania. The subjects offered are varied from military prowess to social responsibilities, from good conduct to projection of an ideal Maasai identity and personality (Rotiken, O.I., 6.5.2000).

This study found that Maasai people comprehensively learn a lot through their indigenous ecological/environmental knowledge. On this finding, one secondary school headteacher attested thus: "If there is an ethnic group that has an excellent knowledge of their habitat, then it is the Maasai" (Nchoe, O.I., 6.7.2000). This observation supports what Miaron (1997:52) wrote about this intensive ecological knowledge: "Evidently, the pastoral Maasai's deep knowledge of the living components of the ecosystem, allowed him to exploit the ecosystem sustainably".

The importance of geographical features such as highlands, plains, rivers and other water bodies is also taught. As one male Loita elder observed, "Maasai

children and youths are also taught the importance of the plains (*Ol-purkel*) as wet season grazing zones and mountains and highlands (*O-supuko*) as dry season grazing areas as well as strategic points for defence and security of their lands, property and people" (Nengoshe, O.I., 14.12.2000).

During rainy seasons, livestock are driven to the plains (*Ol-purkel*) where there is plenty of pasture, browse, water, saline springs and salt licks; during dry seasons, livestock are moved to forested highlands (*O-supuko*), which abound with grass, browse and water.

This subject also stresses an obligation to conserve the environment. On the importance of indigenous geographical knowledge, Anderson (1995:26) noted:

... the physical environment forms such a central element in Maasai perceptions. The symbolic geography of this landscape is redolent in the variety of Maasai place names that refer to the quality or type of grazing, the purity and freshness of water, and the general suitability of an area to the pursuit of pastoralism. The success of every herder hinges upon his knowledge of the landscape, its ecology, and his livestock.

All respondents and focus groups stated that the Maasai have profound knowledge of their rangelands. They are deeply aware of pastoral use of a variety of flora of their environment. As Hollis (1905:289) put it, "cattle feed on grass, and the Maasai love grass on this account". This, the study established, is why the Maasai have incisive knowledge of which plants make good pasture. Miron (1997) reported a similar finding. Through the subject of pasture and browse, most respondents and focus groups stated that the Maasai teach their children and youths to identify and know the nutritive value of various grasses, trees, and shrubs found in their immediate environment. In particular learners are taught to identify and recognise various species of pasture and browse and their usefulness in animal husbandry.

Male Maasai youths obtain intensive training on pasture and browse while they are in the *Murran* system. The subject is significant to them as herders and shepherds. The subject on pasture and browse enhances certain functional attributes including values such as recognition of the variety and nutritive significance of grass and browse in as much as they lead to production of milk and beef. It also engenders an appreciation of the

importance of floral resources, of which pasture and browse are part, as food for livestock. Further, respondents and focus groups stated that there were distinctive skills and attitudes enhanced by the subject of pastures and browse. These include the skill of identifying various species of grass and browse for livestock use and an awareness of the various habitats of such grass and other flora. In addition, this subject developed the attitude of love for pasture and browse as significant factors in the pastoral praxis and one male elder stressed that the subject creates a desire to conserve pasture and browse.

Sustainable livestock production in the society is founded on pasture and browse. However, like many other subjects in the school curriculum, the Maasai society does not find one that teaches about pasture and browse the way they do it traditionally. This further explains why the Maasai have persistently opposed SBE since it does not help them learn to identify and utilise good pasture and browse for their pastoral economy.

The words *il-keek* and *ol-chani* are also used to refer to trees and shrubs as well as herbal medicine. According to one secondary school headteacher, herbal medicine is derived from roots and the bark of plants but, rarely from the leaves. Indigenous Knowledge and skills on herbal medicine are elaborately developed on male Maasai youths during the *Murran* system. The youths are trained to identify various trees and shrubs with medicinal values. In addition, they are trained to diagnose diseases, prescribe treatment and prepare appropriate herbal concoctions.

Herbal concoctions are administered as digestives and excitants, especially for Maasai warriors. Many respondents added that the popularity of herbal medicine had declined some years back but recently, their use has increased because pharmaceutical drugs have become unaffordable. In many instances, the respondents stated, the Maasai seek treatment in hospitals and dispensaries after which they take herbal doses to 'purify' their body systems. Maasai people, the respondents further observed, have a lot of faith in the efficacy of herbal remedies, besides being cheap or free of charge compared to pharmaceutical drugs that are expensive. The respondents stressed that unlike pharmaceutical drugs, herbal medicine was always available free of charge and that herbalists were honest people who provided a valuable service to the society.

Ecological/environmental Studies are offered to the *il-murran* during their protracted training and learning sessions. A distinct value enhanced by this

subject is the promotion of an appreciation of the importance of the natural environment in sustaining human life. Ronoh (2008:148) observed that male Maasai youths are particularly trained "... to understand the intricate relationship between soils, plants, animals, climate and land on the one hand, and human existence on the other".

A number of skills and attitudes are developed in the Maasai warriors through Ecological/environmental Studies. For instance, they acquire the skills of identifying nutritious grass and browse for livestock as well as skills of diagnosis and preparation of herbal medicine for the treatment of ailments in people and livestock. Some of the attitudes developed by ecological/environmental studies in the warriors include a commitment to pastoral lifestyle and faith in the efficacy of herbal medicine (Ronoh, 2008).

Military Studies is yet another very ubiquitous subject offered to male Maasai youths during the *Murran* system. Through this subject, male Maasai youths learn the theory and practice of warfare. They also learn the values of good warriorhood, military strategy, discipline and chain of command (Ronoh, 2008). Specifically, Maasai warriors learn to defend their people and property against attack from enemies. About the importance of *murranism* as a social institution in Maasai society, one civic leader observed: "*Murranism* is like a school to young Maasai men. It is at this stage that they are taught how to protect and defend the community, among other subjects" (Shuma, O.I., 16.12.2000), Male Maasai youths also learn that in the event of war, warriors are not supposed to attack women, children and livestock, however, unbearably they may have been provoked. Indigenous Military Studies has subject content that is missing in the SBE, leading to its widespread rejection.

The skills and strategies of fighting form the core of the competencies enhanced by Military Studies. Various fighting skills and sports are taught and the warriors practice them for many months before applying them in real situations. While learning the fighting skills, male Maasai youths are also taught skills of alertness, dexterity and agility. In addition, they learn about the circumstances during which various types of weapons are used.

Hunting is an important pastime and also a significant aspect of the learning and training process among Kenyan Maasai. Maasai warriors and boys participate in hunting, especially the lion hunt (*ol-amaiyio*), since it provides them with opportunities to display their bravery in preparation for military combat.

Courage and readiness to defend the Maasai society are two basic attitudes developed through Military Studies and hunting. Maasai warriors (*il-murran*) are trained and encouraged to be brave. They are also encouraged to be ready at all times to defend the Maasai society, livestock and land. Under SBE, no subject prepares boys to defend their society. Instead the issues of security and defence are left to police and military officers employed by the State, a rather remote arrangement indeed. A comparison between the nature of Maasai people's IK subjects — which include: structure, duration, curriculum, and instructional methods — offered to male Maasai youths are shown on Table 1. It can be noted that Maasai IK and SBE compared very well on account of their formality and the lengthy duration they took.

Socialisation of Maasai males to despise females begins at a very early age and this phenomenon is not without strains on socio-cultural relationships, including SBE. So effective are these socialisation and training processes that Maasai boys and men even despise their own mothers, whom they frequently defy. One AEO captured this disposition very well as follows: "Older boys and men consider all women, including their mothers and lady teachers as inferior or simply children who should never have any control over them, let alone punish them" (Mungata, O.I., 4.5.2000).

As a result, older boys and men do not take lady teachers seriously. Many respondents and focus groups agreed that initiated Maasai school boys despise women teachers and hate being instructed and punished by such teachers. At times, initiated Maasai school boys react violently towards women teachers who punish them, and very often, such boys drop out of school. One Loita youth stated that this was the cause of his dropping out of school. He narrated the incident thus: "On the last day I went to school, I differed with a woman teacher. She punished me by caning. I grabbed the cane, beat her and then I fled to join *murranism*, which I liked very much" (Sonkori, O.I., 26.3.2001).

The fact that schools are staffed with female teachers and as long as the subjects offered under the *Murran* system continue to be relevant to life in Maasailand, male Maasai youths will continue to shun schools. Instead, many of them would rather join the *Murran* system and never to go back to schools if they had once been enrolled, than be taught and punished by female teachers.

All the subjects taught to Maasai warriors under the *Murran* system have functional attributes, which enhance Maasai culture and identity. Most of

these attributes have utilitarian qualities. Subjects offered through *murranism* are comprehensive and very relevant to life in Maasailand. Learning through these subjects is all-inclusive and strengthens ethnic cohesion, features that SBE scarcely performs.

### **Effects of IK Learning Outcomes of *Murran* System on School Attendance**

Commitment to *Murranism* and other attributes of IK have contributed to the low rate of school attendance among the male Maasai youths since the advent of colonisation. One secondary school headteacher keenly observed: "Newly initiated Maasai boys drop out of school in order to join *murranism*, an institution that offered exciting learning and training experiences. *Murranism*, therefore, make many adolescent Maasai boys to drop out of school" (Kabiru, O.I., 21.7.2000). Thus, *murranism* is a formidable force that discourages Maasai male youths from continuing with SBE.

Maasai boys who are circumcised together, exhibit a marked feeling of affinity towards one another, an attitude that was also observed and recorded by Fosbrooke (1938) and Bernardi (1948). Maasai male initiates also desire to join warriorhood (*murranism*) immediately after circumcision. The onset of the warrior status soon after circumcision causes Maasai school boys to lose interest in schooling. This is because circumcision rites and *murranism* provide relevant and exciting learning experiences unlike SBE, whose curricular contents are drawn from quarters outside the immediate environment of Maasai youths as pointed out on Table 1. Similar findings were recorded by Tignor (1976) and were frequently reported by the Principal of GMS (KG, 1950a).

During the colonial and post-colonial periods, the *Murran* system has continued to discourage Maasai male youths from continuing with schooling. For example, between 1940 and 1963, the effects of this cultural practice were as strong as they had always been before. It inculcated in the initiates beliefs about the superiority of their culture and the significance of Maasai identity and institutions such as *murranism*. This cultural activity bolstered negative attitudes toward SBE among Maasai youths.

Over the years, Maasai warriors acted as a significant force that blocked several government initiatives, including SBE in Maasai society (EAP, 1918-19; KG, 1920; 1922; Tignor, 1976, Rigby, 1985; Holland, 1996; Ronoh, 2008). For instance, Tignor (1976) elaborated: "Among the Maasai, this warrior mentality was so pervasive and so antithetical to educational

receptivity that the State in the 1930s began to shy away from educating adolescent Maasai because the onset of warrior status caused students to lose interest in schooling..." (p. 285). The explanation for this attitude was that immediately before and soon after circumcision, "...adolescent Maasai boys were held in suspense, hoping to attain soon after the rite, the coveted status of *il-murran* and the exciting indigenous learning and training experiences, which accompanied such a status" (Ronoh, 2008 p. 149). For this reason, the government educators began to prefer very young boys (*il-ayiok*, *sing*, *ol-aiyioni*) for school recruitment since, unlike the older boys, they were not supposed to defend the society and look after livestock. These young boys were quick to learn, less likely to desert, and could complete an elementary course before the circumcision age and *il-murran* stage were attained. (Tignor, 1976; Ronoh, 2008)

In the 1930s, however, there was divided official opinion over the question of allowing the *il-murran* to continue with their customary activities of blocking government initiatives, including SBE unabated. F.G. Jennings, the Narok District Commissioner (DC) who succeeded Major J.V. Dawson in June 1934, supported the disbandment of the *Murran* system. He stated: "... I am of the opinion that the recognition of the 'Moran system' is tantamount to recognizing organized crime which includes murder, assault, theft, disobedience of orders of administration and elders...." (KC, 1934:1). As a result, the government forced the *il-murran* to hold early their *Ol-Ngesher* ceremony of milk drinking preceding their graduation into elderhood, thus effectively smashing their blocking habits. The government policy of forcing the *il-murran* to *drink milk* early so as to mark their graduation into elderhood became a regular event and was subsequently reported, for instance, in 1939.

Generally, *murranism* and initiation rites have been some of the major causes of school dropouts in Kenya's Maasailand. Once they were circumcised, Maasai boys get initiated and upon graduation, they enter into *Murran* system — an institution that offers several apparently exciting and meaningful IK in a holistic manner. Once they obtained indigenous lessons under the *Murran* system, male Maasai youths develop an even stronger disinterest in school attendance.

Specifically, the training and learning activities that take place during the *Murran* system engendered negative attitudes toward SBE and social development in general. For that reason, the Narok District administration

officials called for the modification of the *Murran* system. In this connection, the colonial administration in the district urged that the *Murran* system be re-organised into a national service. It was suggested that this system should provide training opportunities for secondary school leavers in subjects such as "... citizenship, comradeship combined with hard work and sport in a manner suitable to the time and conditions" (KC, 1950b:3).

The potential benefits of this suggestion were apparently limited. This was because, very few Maasai boys passed through the GMS, the only junior secondary school in the district during colonial era and fewer ever graduated from secondary schools outside Narok District. Furthermore, it was proposed that mutual respect should be cultivated between the *il-murran* and school educated boys. To this end, it was suggested, "... we have to teach the moran not to despise the educated boy and call him 'Kikuyu', and teach the educated boy to appreciate the others' point of view" (KC, 1950b:3). Thus, it can be seen that the youthful *il-murran* despised boys who had been to school, an institution that they themselves detested. In a way, SBE brought divisions in a community that emphasised comradeship, social cohesion, teamwork and consensus.

### **Conclusion**

Indigenous learning experiences offered to male Maasai youths during the *Murran* system intended to enable them to cope with environmental factors and enhance their cultural knowledge and skills pertaining to animal husbandry and related activities. These knowledge and skills are highly diversified and relevant to community life. Unlike other forms of indigenous instructions, which were mainly informal, those conducted during the *Murran* system were formal. They were offered in school-like encampments called *imanyat* (singular: *emanyatta*)

Many male Maasai youths join the *Murran* system soon after circumcision rites. Youths who were already enrolled in school displayed some disinterest in schooling as they joined the system. After joining the system and undergoing its diversified learning and training activities they portray an even greater affinity for community life and a marked disinterest in school attendance. This was because IK offered to male Maasai youths under the *Murran* system was quite relevant to life in Kenya's Maasailand. Male youths who had not enrolled in school shun it for good as they apply the indigenous knowledge and skills learned during *Murran* system. Over the years, the Maasai *Murran* system the together with its learning and training

experiences, have become surmountable stumbling blocks to school enrolment and attendance by male youths in Narok District of Kenya.

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**Table 1 Comparison between Maaai *Murranism* IK and SBE**

	Nature	<i>Murranism</i> IK	School-Based Education
1	Structure	Formal and institutionalised without cycles for youths of 18 to 30 years old	Formal and institutionalised with two distinct cycles: Primary for children and, secondary for youths
2	Duration	Six to seven years of <i>Murranism</i> Training	Eight years of Primary Education and four years of Secondary Education
3	Curriculum	Content drawn from immediate environment. Curriculum that was very relevant	Drawn from further a field. Curriculum not quite relevant
4	Instructional Methods	Mostly learner-centred and activity-based	Mostly teacher-centred. Learners are generally passive recipients.

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