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**'The AIDS is coming and there is nowhere to run...': Culture, gender, and the politics of Kisongo Maasai women and girls' vulnerability to HIV/AIDS (Immune deficiency, Tanzania)**

V. Corey Wright  
*Wilfrid Laurier University*

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*"The AIDS is coming and there is nowhere to run..."*  
Culture, Gender, & the Politics of Kisongo Maasai Women and Girls' Vulnerability to  
HIV/AIDS

by  
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B.A. Sociology/Religious Studies, University of British Columbia, 2001

THESIS  
Submitted to the Faculty of Social Work  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis outlines the research findings and implications for practice generated from the, “A Gender Issue: Reducing the Vulnerability of Kisongo Maasai Girls to HIV/AIDS” project, which was a participatory action research (PAR) study in collaboration with the Kisongo Maasai in Northern Tanzania. The objectives of the study were to explore the factors that may contribute to girls’ vulnerability to HIV/AIDS, and develop a culturally-specific framework that may contribute to effective design and administration of program and policy-level interventions.

The findings of this study illustrate the ‘politics of health’ that determine girls’ vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. It presents a cultural analysis that identifies some of the cultural/ideological values, customs, institutions and the subsequent social order that undermines girls’ social, sexual, economic, and political power. The paper illustrates the relationship between socio-cultural phenomena, unequal power, and girls’ vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. It illustrates socio-cultural phenomena that may potentially facilitate transmission and expose girls to transmission networks, and it highlights girls’ structural vulnerability, impeding their access to essential instrumental factors, such as educational opportunity and activities; social services; health training, information, and services; access to economic resources and activities, and representation and participation in the structures that manage and govern community affairs.

Following the cultural analysis, the paper shifts emphasis from the Maasai community to the political economy that has shaped contemporary cultural phenomena. It briefly explores the impact of extrinsic and external factors, such as colonialism, state expansion and control, the infiltration of the market economy, and ‘development’ schema, on the construction and reproduction of Maasai ethnicity. It illustrates the intimate and dynamic relationship between “external factors”, ethnicity, and girls’ vulnerability, and specifically emphasizes the relationship between girls’ vulnerability and the ‘politics of development’. It proposes an Anti-Oppressive

Development model that may facilitate intercultural solidarity and guide the content and process of prevention programs.

Lastly, the paper presents a Prevention Program Model that integrates the findings of this research. It attempts to mainstream culture and process into HIV prevention programming, combining technical assistance with self-help/dialogical approaches to facilitate technical capacity, socio-cultural adaptation and a redistribution of power. The model emphasizes the distinction between technical assistance and other approaches, and suggests that, independent of other approaches, technical assistance will not substantially reduce girls' vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.

In general, this paper reorients attention to the social-determinants of health and the 'politics of development'. Too often, HIV prevention programs are characterized by Western assumptions concerning sexual behavior and choices, which assumes that sexual behavior and choices is a personal issue, mediated by cognitive processes and personal attitudes. In contrast, this paper illustrates that girls' sexual behavior and choices is also a social issue, mediated by socio-cultural, economic and political factors that facilitate their exposure to transmission and impede their access to resources, services and opportunities that are instrumental to reducing vulnerability.

In relation to Kisongo Masai girls' vulnerability to HIV/AIDS, the personal is political. The 'politics of health' of Maasai girls is facilitated by the intra-community power relations that characterize their immediate socio-cultural environment, as well as the intimately related 'extra-community' power relations that have characterized development schema and foreign intervention. Reducing girls' vulnerability will therefore, first and foremost, focus on transforming the 'politics of development', in order to re-empower the Maasai community with the intention of collaboratively administering locally-generated strategies to redress the impact of contemporary socio-cultural, economic, and political influences.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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My family has also been an important source of support. I’m grateful to them all – they are not only my family but also my best friends. Most significantly, I am sincerely grateful for the support, mentorship, and technical guidance of my father, Tim Wright. In a variety of direct and indirect ways, this study is a product of my relationship with him, his enduring support and



investment into my life. I must also provide acknowledgment to my late mother, Lillian Wright, who first introduced me to the Maasai of Tanzania. In part, it was her life and heart that instilled in me a respect and compassion for diverse cultural communities, which ultimately facilitated the essential relationships that characterized this study.

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Lastly, I thank the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). I am grateful to CIDA for awarding this project an Innovative Research Award and subsequently, providing all the funds necessary for implementing this research in Tanzania.

## ABBREVIATIONS & GLOSSARY

CDC	Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Canada)
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FHI	Family Health International
TGNP	The Gender Networking Program (Tanzania)
UNAIDS	The Joint United Nations Strategy on HIV/AIDS
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Human Rights
WHO	World Health Organization
WVC	World Vision Canada
WVI	World Vision International

<i>alaigwanani</i>	traditional leader
<i>atabatata</i>	sexual assault, rape
<i>boma</i>	a household complex, consisting of several households organized around a central corral.
<i>esoto</i>	designated household residence for Ilmurran, and associated activities
<i>engi'konya</i>	the term used to refer to sexual coercion; usually in reference to the sexual relations between Ilmurran and new Esoto initiates.
<i>Ngamuratani</i>	the woman who is responsible for performing the genital cutting during the circumcision ceremony.
<i>Korianga</i>	specific name designated to a current ilmurran age class.
<i>olmurran; pl. ilmurran</i>	age-class of young circumcised males (aka. "warriors", Morani)
<i>Oresuki</i>	specific name designated to a very senior age class.

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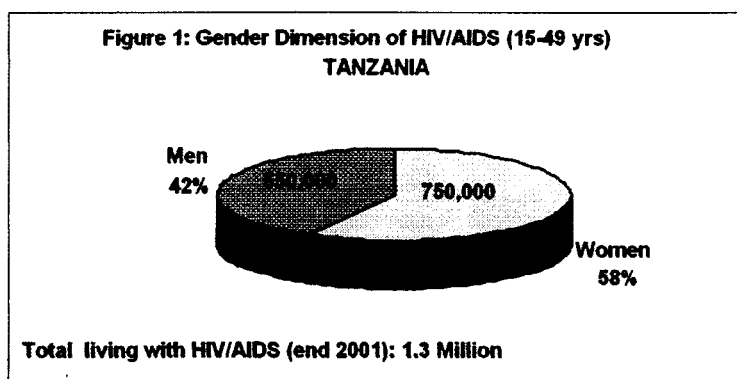
## **SECTION I**

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

According to the most recent report released by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), 37.8 million people are living with HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS, 2004). Despite growing cooperation and efforts, in 2003, an estimated 4.8 million people became newly infected with HIV. Alarming, this rate of new infections is higher than any year since the discovery of the disease.

As a global community, we have to confront the fact that we are not succeeding, in spite of all our efforts, to control the epidemic spread of HIV. We are especially failing to do so in certain culturally complex and indigenous environments; and in general, our efforts have failed women and girls of all ages. This is particularly the case for the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, where 70 percent of the global population infected with HIV/AIDS is living (UNAIDS, 2002a), and the overall proportion of HIV-positive women has steadily increased: "nowhere is the epidemic's 'feminization' more apparent than in sub-Saharan Africa, where 57% of adults infected are women, and 75% of young people infected are women and girls" (UNAIDS, 2004).

Tanzania, East Africa is a case in point. It is one of the most affected African countries (Prime Minister's Office, 2001). According to a United Nations report, there are approximately 1,500 000 adults and children infected with the disease (UNAIDS, 2002a). Fifty-



eight percent of the adults living with HIV/AIDS are women. Adolescent girls are the

most vulnerable group. The prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS in young girls (15–24 yrs) is estimated to be up to ten percent in some areas of Tanzania, as compared to a possible four percent prevalence rate among young boys (15-24 yrs) (UNAIDS, 2002a).

This has highlighted the gender dimension of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. As Noeleen Heyzer, the Executive Director for UNIFEM, has put it, "gender inequality is at the heart of the epidemic... we must address power imbalances in every single policy, strategy and programme related to prevention, treatment and care, if we seriously want to tackle this global challenge" (UNAIDS, 2001). Gender, it is argued, has become one of the most significant contributing factors to the escalating spread of the epidemic.

As it is intrinsically related to gender construction, culture and its corresponding elements have complicated girls' vulnerability. Challenging culture, and subsequently, collective identity, "has proven to be a complex and often painstaking undertaking, demanding a great deal of sensitivity to social dynamics. It is a process that requires patience, a willingness to listen carefully and respect for diversity" (UNFPA, 2004a).

The complexity of engaging cultural communities and specifically indigenous groups, is further exacerbated by these communities' common experience with 'development'. In many cases, 'development' has undermined and disempowered communities, disregarded their culture, and violated their cultural autonomy and self-determination. It is within this context, that HIV prevention programming is often located, which further complicates effective interventions.

The following dissertation predominantly represents a cultural analysis of the Kisongo Maasai. It represents an exploration of gender and the socio-cultural phenomena that contribute to girls' vulnerability. This was, in fact, its original and

primary intention. However, in response to many research findings, participant observation, and general field experience, this study also presents some insights related to development 'process', reported experiences with 'development', and the historical impact of historic development interventions on the Kisongo Maasai. As a result, it introduces a political economic analysis to Kisongo Maasai girls' vulnerability.

Its analysis, therefore, not only involves what James Ferguson refers to as "the people to be 'developed'", but also reorients a focus on critically evaluating "the apparatus that is to do the 'developing'" (Ferguson, 1990). As illustrated in this study, many socio-cultural phenomena within the Kisongo Maasai community facilitate women and girls' disproportionate vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. Illustrating and discussing these issues dominate the majority of this dissertation. Nonetheless, it further illustrates that, in many cases, the contemporary phenomena and vulnerability of Kisongo Maasai women and girls is fundamentally related to the extrinsic force and external impact of 'development', and suggests that, in addition to certain elements of Kisongo Maasai culture, the 'apparatus of development' must also be critically evaluated and transformed. As illustrated in the study, reducing girls' vulnerability to HIV/AIDS among the Kisongo Maasai will not only involve adaptation and change of 'culture', but will also involve a transformation of 'development' itself.

*Over 20 years of AIDS provides us with compelling evidence that unless we act now we will be paying later... AIDS demands that we do business differently; not only do we need to do more and do it better, we must transform both our personal and our institutional responses in the face of a truly exceptional global threat to security and stability.*

*AIDS is likely to be with us for a very long time, but how far it spreads and how much damage it does is entirely up to us.*

*(Peter Piot, Executive Director, UNAIDS, 2004)*



## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 HIV/AIDS: The disease and its transmission

HIV/AIDS refers to a complex viral infection that destroys the human immune system (HIV), and refers to the subsequent vulnerability to infections (AIDS). HIV stands for *human immunodeficiency virus*, and is the virus that causes AIDS. When a person is infected with HIV, the virus begins a process of destroying the cells that are responsible for fighting off infections in the person's immune system (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention [CDC], 2002). As a result, the immune system of individuals with HIV can weaken to the point that it has difficulty fighting off certain infections. These types of infections are known as "opportunistic" infections - they take the opportunity a weakened immune system offers to cause illness (CDC, 1998). When an individual's immune system is weakened to this degree, an individual can be diagnosed with AIDS – Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (CDC, 1998).

Although some medical treatments can slow the rate at which HIV weakens the immune system, and can prevent or cure some of the illnesses associated with AIDS, ultimately, there is no cure for HIV/AIDS. Currently, prevention from being infected with HIV is the only manner of protecting oneself from AIDS. The only transmission route research has identified is from one human being to another through blood-to-blood and sexual contact (CDC, 2002). In addition, infected pregnant women can pass HIV to their baby during pregnancy or delivery, as well as through breast-feeding (CDC, 2002). The following body fluids have been proven to spread HIV: blood, semen, vaginal fluid, breast milk, and other body fluids containing blood (CDC, 2002).

In general, the most common forms of transmission throughout the world is through sharing needles and/or syringes (primarily for drug injection) with an infected person, and sexual contact – heterosexual and homosexual contact - with an infected person (CDC, 2003). In Tanzania specifically, transmission is most commonly through unprotected sexual intercourse between a male and female (Prime Minister's Office, 2001, p. 15). Tanzania's National Policy on HIV/AIDS identifies that 90% of HIV infections are transmitted through sex between males and females, and has prioritized this form of sexual transmission as the key to controlling the epidemic (Prime Minister's Office, 2001, p. 7, 15).

## 2.2 Prevalence and Impact in Tanzania

The prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Tanzania, East Africa is substantial – it is one of Sub-Saharan Africa's most affected countries. As mentioned in the introduction, the United Nations has estimated that at the end of 2001, approximately 1,500,000 adults and children were living with HIV/AIDS – a prevalence rate of 7.8 percent among the Tanzania population (UNAIDS, 2002a). Children constituted 170,000 of those infected (UNAIDS, 2002a). The approximate number of deaths recorded at the end of 2001 was 140,000 (UNAIDS, 2002a).

It's an epidemic that has created a major development crisis in Tanzania, and is perpetuating its *underdevelopment*<sup>1</sup>. On a national level, economic and social development has been undermined. Economically, AIDS has impacted development

---

<sup>1</sup> I borrow this term from Andre Frank (1984, 71). It refers to the unequal development of the capitalist world economy, which has generated development for some nations at the expense of others: the inter-relationships throughout the world system benefit some nations while exploiting others, which results in their *underdevelopment*. The HIV/AIDS epidemic is now perpetuating this process, and threatens to further the polarization of rich and poor.

because it has significantly affected the most productive segment of the population: women and men between the ages of 20-49 years. This demographic dimension of HIV/AIDS reduces institutional productivity, reduces Tanzania's Gross National Product<sup>2</sup>, and increases national poverty levels (Prime Minister's Office 2001, Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2003a). Further, it ultimately raises infant and child mortality rates, and raises the number of orphans (Prime Minister's Office, 2001). According to the United Nations, at the end of 2001, approximately 810,000 children (0-14yrs) have been orphaned in Tanzania as a result of AIDS-related deaths. This significantly affects the productivity of the next generation of producers, as well as undermining social capital: it hinders knowledge and expertise from being passed on to subsequent generations (United Nations, 2001).

In terms of social development, the above economic impacts ultimately affect investment in social services. For one, a decrease in general welfare of communities puts an added pressure on the system (Prime Minister's Office, 2001, p. 1). Second, a decline in GNP often results in fewer funds available for investment in social services (Prime Minister's Office, 2001, p. 1).

More specifically, social development is undermined due to the disproportionate impact HIV/AIDS has had on the education sector. The National Policy on HIV/AIDS in Tanzania illustrates that an increasing trend of HIV/AIDS related absenteeism and deaths of schoolteachers and school dropouts is a serious threat to education development, and

---

<sup>2</sup> Although this document portrays GNP as an indicator of development, it must be noted that the GNP is a problematic indicator for many reasons, including modernist and capitalist assumptions that economic development indicates progress, and further, that the GNP is limited solely to certain economic developments, and in no manner indicates quality of life for the people within a country (Peet, 1999, p. 10; Lewellen, 1995, p. 76).

has contributed to a decline in the quality of education (Prime Minister's Office, 2001, p. 15).

On the household level, HIV/AIDS contributes to further impoverishing families, undermining food security and deteriorating the general health and well-being of family members. The illness or death of a family member means compromising other important financial expenditures for spending on medical care and funerals (United Nations, 2001). Further, the loss of assets and productive workers due to AIDS affects household capacities to produce, and purchase food (International Food Policy Research Institute, 2003; FAO, 2003a). This is a particular concern in context of countries such as Tanzania, where the majority of households depend on agricultural production for subsistence, and the farming systems are labour-intensive with low levels of mechanization.

The general health and well-being of the family is undermined for two reasons. For one, the health of families affected by HIV/AIDS declines due to poor nutrition (International Food Policy Research Institute, 2003), which is directly related to the food security factor mentioned above. In addition, the well-being of family members declines due to increased burden of domestic and agricultural responsibilities (which often means withdrawing children from schooling), and a general decline in the time contributed to caring for children (FAO, 2003b).

### 2.3 The Gender Dimension

Women and girls are the most impacted members of AIDS-affected households. Women and girls face the greatest burden of work. For the most part, traditional responsibilities of growing food and caring for the sick and dying are ascribed to them

(FAO, 2003a; FAO, 2003a; United Nations, 2001). Moreover, in most cases, girls rather than boys are withdrawn from school to contribute to domestic duties and to lighten the family's financial burden (FAO, 2003b).

In addition to the disproportionate impact of HIV/AIDS on Tanzanian women and girls, women and girls are also disproportionately infected with HIV. Similar to the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa, in Tanzania, women constitute 58 percent of the infected adult population (See Figure 1)(UNAIDS, 2002a).

Throughout Sub-Saharan Africa, the situation is even more daunting for girls. In some areas of Sub-Saharan Africa, a UNIFEM study found that teenage girls are six times more likely to

be infected than

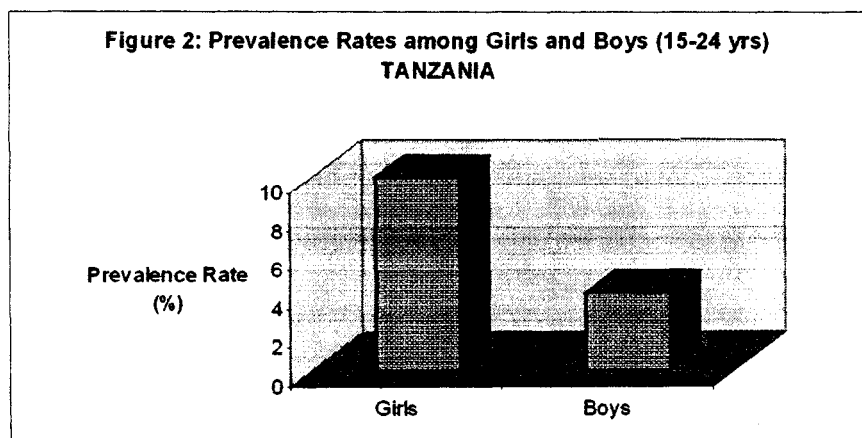
teenage boys (UN

Office for the

Coordination of

Humanitarian Affairs,

2001). The



prevalence rates among Tanzanian children and youth reflect a similar trend. The HIV prevalence rate in girls and young women (15-24 yrs) is estimated to be up to ten percent versus a possible prevalence rate of four percent in boys and young men (15-24 yrs) (see Figure 2) (UNAIDS, 2002a). At a conference in Arusha, Tanzania, Hilde Basstanie of UNAIDS said that female youth between 15 and 19 in Tanzania were now six times more likely to be HIV-positive than male youth in the same age bracket (United Nations, 2003).

As an aside, it is important to note that although gender is a significant contributing factor to the transmission of HIV/AIDS, there are many other contributing factors that supersede gender. Oppression, in fact, is interwoven throughout social organization and encompasses all social locations beyond those related to gender. Factors, such as class, age, physical ability, and socio-cultural expectations, such as fertility or virility, also create oppressive forces that contribute to males' and females' vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. In this sense, it may be problematic to isolate gender as the factor contributing to vulnerability. It is important, therefore, that vulnerability to HIV/AIDS is addressed in a comprehensive approach that considers gender as only one of the interwoven factors of oppression, and involves both males and females in preventative measures (UNFPA, 2003).

Nonetheless, the evident vulnerability of women and girls, illustrated in the disproportionate number of those infected, has illuminated the gender dimension of this epidemic. Gender is a significant compounding variable to vulnerability in Tanzania, especially for women and girls. Gender refers to the socially constructed differences between males and females (Curtis, 1999, p. 161; Muszynski, 1995, p. 21). The United Nations defines it as, "what it means to be male or female, and how that defines a person's opportunities, roles, responsibilities, and relationships" (UNAIDS, 1998, p. 3). It refers to the culturally based attitudes, beliefs, and values illustrated within norms that ascribe manners of particular thinking and behaving to men and women (Ganasinghe, 2001; Shahabudin, 2001). Basically, "what it means to act or think in a feminine, as opposed to masculine, way depends on social expectations that vary both in time and space" (Curtis, 1999, p. 161). Hence, gender is separate from biology. Whereas biology

is genetically determined, gender develops over a life-time; we are not born knowing what is expected of our sex – we learn it in our families and communities (UNAIDS, 1998, p.3).

Gender must be further understood in its intrinsic relationship to power and extrinsic forces that contribute to the construction of gender. Dorothy Hodgson, an associate professor with the Department of Anthropology at Rutgers University who has authored and edited numerous books related to gender relations, states that,

Gender... is produced, maintained, and transformed through the cultural and social relations of power between women and men (but also among women and men)... At a given time and place, a particular configuration of gender ideas and practices prevails that is the historical product of certain power relations. Power is central to the maintenance, reproduction, and transformation of such a configuration and to the relations between its elements. As such, gender inequality is never merely a matter of economic, political, or religious prestige or other power differences but a complicated, tenuous interaction between these and other relations. Furthermore, since these multiple terrains of power are embedded in regional, national, and global landscapes, any configuration of gender shape and is shaped by these broader sets of structures and relations. (Hodgson, 2001, p. 14)

Gender contributes to the vulnerability of women and girls to HIV/AIDS for two inextricably related reasons. For one, gender contributes to individual risk: culturally produced personal factors that affect women's ability to influence their environment (Lee, 1999, p. 6; UNAIDS, 1999). Beyond the individual level, women and girls face a societal vulnerability. Institutional and structural inequities produce and perpetuate an

unequal distribution of power between men and women (Muszynski, 1995, p. 19).

Women face a confluence of sociocultural, economic, and political factors and realities that compound individual risk by significantly limiting individual's choices and options for risk reduction (UNAIDS, 1999; Saunders, 1999). In general, while personal factors produce differences in personalities, behaviors, and motivations of women and men, societal forms maintain gender stratification.

a. Individual Vulnerability: Personal factors

In terms of individual risk, there are several gender-related personal factors that may contribute to the vulnerability of Tanzanian women and girls to HIV/AIDS. For one, social norms often undervalue women and dictate that females should defer to males. Females are expected to adopt roles characterized by submissiveness, passivity, docility, and dependency<sup>3</sup> (United Nations, 2003; UNAIDS, 1998). In some Maasai cultures, women are described, by both men and women, as relatively inferior (Bodley, 2000, p. 117). In any case, such cultural attitudes and subsequent gender roles result in expectations surrounding sexual subservience. Women are generally unable to determine when, where, and whether sex occurs (Masindi, 2003). A UNAIDS study in Zambia, illustrated that, "less than 25 percent of women interviewed believed that a married woman could refuse to have sex with her husband, even if she knew he had been unfaithful and was infected. Only 11 percent thought that a woman could ask her

---

<sup>3</sup> This document adopts the term dependency to illustrate the social and economic context women sometimes face in Tanzania in relation to men. However, it must be noted that such an application of this term denotes a patriarchal social construction. The term 'dependency' should also be noted in the reciprocal circumstance: in context of patriarchal social organization, it is the male population, in fact, that is dependent on women in many cases. This application of the term is often more applicable in particularly the Tanzanian context.



husband to use a condom" (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2001).

Further personal factors relate to gender norms that determine what women are supposed to know about sex and sexuality. For example, in many cases, gender expectations of virginity inhibit young girls from seeking education on issues relating to sex because it is believed that knowledge on these issues may undermine their "purity". In these cases, ignorance is a sign of innocence (UNAIDS, 1999, UNAIDS, 1998). Ultimately, this limits women and girls' ability to accurately determine their level of risk and to acquire accurate information and means to protect them from HIV. Another contributing factor to women's individual risk include the significant value of fertility and the expectation to reproduce (United Nations, 2003; Masindi, 2003 UNAIDS, 1999; UNAIDS, 1998). This gender expectation creates barriers to implementing risk reduction behaviors, such as condom use or abstinence.

The gender norms that males are socialized to adopt, compound women and girl's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS (United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA], 2003). Promiscuity is often implicitly or explicitly condoned (Ganasinghe, 2001; Kayoka, 2002; UNAIDS, 1999). Sexual prowess, multiple partnerships, and control over sexual interactions in many cases define masculinity (UNFPA, 2003). In addition, masculinity norms make it difficult for men to admit having a lack of knowledge related to sexual issues (UNAIDS, 1998). Further, in context of culturally ascribed power and control, sexual coercion is often accepted, and widely experienced by women and girls (Masindi, 2003; United Nations, 2003; Shahabudin, 2001). Many males are raised to exercise authority over women, and in some cases, violence is deemed legitimate (UNFPA, 2003;

Ganasinghe, 2001). This not only increases women and girl's direct risk, but also creates environments where women are not safe to communicate or negotiate.

Traditional customs are another personal factor that sometimes undermines women's ability to influence their environment. Some of the customs, like female circumcision, directly contributes to their vulnerability (United Nations, 2003; World Vision, 2001). Female circumcision contributes directly to women's vulnerability because unsterilized instruments infect them, and the likelihood of bleeding during sexual intercourse is increased (United Nations, 2003; World Vision, 2001, p12). It also creates "psychological complications" (World Vision, p. 12).

Other traditional customs may determine women's interpersonal relationships with men, and subsequently, they foster sexual exploitation and transmission of the disease. Some examples relate to marriage customs. One particularly significant custom is early marriage practices, in which very young girls are expected to enter marriages with significantly older men (World Vision, 2001). This fosters their sexual exploitation, and places them at risk because many of the men who they are required to have sex with, have had many sexual partners and many wives (re: polygamous customs) – increasing the chance that they carry the HIV virus. Moreover, as the young girls' bodies have not fully matured, they are more likely to bleed during intercourse, and therefore, transmission of the virus is facilitated.

b. Societal Vulnerability: Structural factors

In terms of societal vulnerability, the vulnerability of women to HIV/AIDS in Tanzania is related to the social structure of Tanzanian society<sup>4</sup>. Structural factors, relating to social status and roles, economic status, and political exclusion, may contribute to the transmission of the disease<sup>5</sup>. In many cases, these structures impede women's access to instrumental factors, like education, adequate health care, nutrition, economic autonomy, decision-making, and/or property rights. For many women, this may compound the problem and perpetuate their vulnerability.

As subordinates to men, women generally have little social status. They are, for the most part, marginalized into undervalued domestic roles, with little autonomy and self-determination. As a result, they are often disadvantaged in terms of power to negotiate sexual relationships, and seeking out and utilizing educational and health services (UNAIDS, 1999; Amaro, 1995). They have limited access to instrumental factors like information and education about HIV/AIDS, gender roles, sexuality, and reproductive health, as well as limiting their access to treatment facilities (Shahabudin, 2001). This is a significant impediment to reducing women's vulnerability because, "education functions to establish conditions that reduce HIV vulnerability and provides a mechanism for delivery of AIDS education, care and support" (UNAIDS, 2002b).

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<sup>4</sup> I use the term *social structure* to refer to the "experience of being up against something, of limits on freedom" (Connell, 1987, p. 92). It expresses the constraints that lie in a given form of social organization (Connell, p. 92).

<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that the following discussion presents cases that are not common to all women in Tanzania. The fact is that, in light of the interwovenness of oppression and subsequent power, depending on a women's social location (i.e. urban or rural, socioeconomic status, social status, level of education, physical ability, etc.), many Tanzania women have significant power in relation to social, economic, and political spheres of Tanzanian society. Further, it is important to note that all Tanzanian women have power – no person is powerless. Power is expressed in fascinating and admirable manners and experiences different limitations, unique to each person's social context.

This also contributes to the economic discrimination women may face in Tanzania. Women tend to be vulnerable because of unequal access to economic resources, and unequal opportunity to receive income outside the home (Shahabudin, 2001; UNAIDS, 1999; UNAIDS 1998). In context of capitalist class relations, Tanzanian men often share a privileged economic status relative to women because economic resources are allocated to them – they own the ‘means of production’, which offers “the resources necessary to realizing one’s livelihood” (Saunders, 1995, p. 22). Furthermore, women’s economic status is depleted further because they have little to no property rights in many cases (UNAIDS, 1999). In cases that the Government of Tanzania has enacted legislation on their behalf, it is rarely enforced and/or women are sometimes unaware of it (TGNP, 1997).

Consequently, in terms of economics, women are often unable to influence their environment to their favor and are vulnerable to HIV/AIDS for two reasons. For one, they lack any economic autonomy for the most part. They are dependent on men and therefore, they cannot leave relationships that put them at risk of HIV/AIDS. Second, in context of the increasing number of female-headed households – exacerbated by the epidemic - they are often impoverished. As a result, women are often forced into high-risk sexual behavior for survival (Prime Minister’s Office, 2001, p. 8) – informal coercion and exploitation and/or the commercial sex trade.

Political factors also relate to structural inequality and ultimately impede women from instrumental factors like gender-sensitive policies and programs, female-controlled prevention technologies, and decision-making bodies (UNAIDS, 1999; UNAIDS, 1998). For the most part, women and their issues have been excluded from the political arena.

They've faced discriminatory practices, programs and policies. For example, women's rights have not been significantly incorporated into legislation; women's participation in decision-making is neglected at every level of society; gender implications of prevention, treatment, and support strategies have often been neglected; and funds are not fairly allocated to research and programs directly addressing women's issues (UNAIDS, 1999). It all functions to compound their vulnerability – they have no 'voice'. A conference in Arusha, Tanzania determined that bills that might improve women's lot are not being passed or even debated because a male dominated parliament simply wouldn't accept them (United Nations, 2003).

Despite the evident challenges women often face in Tanzanian society, there has been many developments within the country and the region that have recognized these challenges and have been pro-active in addressing them. On the national level, for example, the government has created a National Policy on Gender and Equity (Prime Minister's Office, 2001); has included gender equality as an issue within one of its attributes of quality livelihood in The Tanzania Development Vision 2025; The National Policy on HIV/AIDS has prioritized HIV/AIDS in the government's agenda, and has highlighted the gender dimension of the epidemic; and many policies have been reformed to address the challenges women face, such as the Sexual Offences Special Provision Act that stipulates the age of sexual consent as 18 years of age.

More specifically, the Longido region – the context of the current study (see proceeding sections) - has also undergone many developments that have focused on increasing the opportunities for girls and women in the community. A World Vision Tanzania report (2002) indicates that in the past few years the percentage of girls selected

to join Government Secondary Schools has increased from 2% to 34% - 151 girls were selected in 2002. In the same period, there was a 40% increase in girls enrolled in primary school. In addition, several meetings were conducted between traditional and religious leaders/elders and government officials that focused on traditional customs that created vulnerability to HIV/AIDS (World Vision Tanzania, 2002). All the above points make it evident, that although many girls and women continue to face significant barriers, the Government of Tanzania and the Longido community are committed to addressing the issues.

#### 2.4 Prevention and Barriers

The common methods of prevention in Tanzania are predominantly related to raising public awareness about HIV transmission, and in some cases, condom distribution (Prime Minister's Office, 2001; Kayoka, 2002; Kabalimu, 2002). Almost exclusively, therefore, prevention is related to building the technical capacity of individuals and communities.

The Government of Tanzania's primary objective for prevention is following:

All the sectors will be involved in enhancing public awareness at all levels and particularly at the community level and empower the community to develop appropriate approaches in prevention of HIV transmission. These include being faithful to the same partner, practicing abstinence, correct and consistent uses of condoms, voluntary counseling and testing, and delaying engagement in sexual practices according to well informed individual decision. (Prime Minister's Office, 2001)

This objective makes reference to the 'ABC approach' that characterizes the majority of prevention programming throughout Sub-Saharan Africa (Green, 2002; Masindi, 2003). This approach stands for three prevention principles: **A**bstinence, **B**eing faithful to one partner, and **C**ondom use. Prevention programs following these principles encourage participants to delay sexual debut, and abstain from sexual relations; maintain monogamous relationships versus promiscuous behaviors; and to consistently and correctly use condoms during sexual intercourse.

Another approach or prevention model, which is also gaining international attention and is reflected in some approaches of NGOs and groups within Tanzania, is the 'CNN' prevention approach. 'CNN' stands for **C**ondoms, **N**eedle exchange, and **N**egotiation skills. This approach differs from the ABC approach in that it represents a focus on harm reduction strategies. In contrast to the 'ABC approach', its emphasis is on appreciating the barriers that individuals' face in regards to primary behavior change (Sinding, 2004). It recognizes that certain contextual conditions, such as culture, or unequal social and economic power, create significant barriers for some individuals to reduce their risk via behavior change. For some individuals, the cultural, social, or economic realities they face impedes their opportunity to adopt behaviors, such as abstaining from sex or being faithful to one partner. A similar emphasis exists in relation to drug addiction and injection drug use, which is identified by the 'Needle exchange' component. As a result, the 'CNN approach', while not excluding the ideals of abstinence and being faithful, places emphasis on harm reduction measures, which includes an emphasis on education and access to affordable condoms as well as the provision of clean needles for drug injection users.

The reference to 'negotiation skills' refers to the approach's focus on empowering disempowered segments of the population. Unlike many conventional 'ABC approaches', the 'CNN approach' places an emphasis on the recognition that many segments of the population (i.e. girls and women) are unable to negotiate and adopt harm reducing behaviors. Consequently, programs focusing on cultural, religious, social, economic, and/or political empowerment are intrinsic to the 'CNN approach'.

The differences or conflicts between these approaches are often a matter of emphasis. In practice, those agencies adopting an 'ABC approach' may also incorporate strategies common to the 'CNN approach', and vice versa (Green, 2004; Sinding, 2004). Nonetheless, in many cases significant differences or conflicts arise due to the emphasis that 'ABC approach' advocates place on abstinence and being faithful. In many cases in Tanzania, for example, NGOs and most commonly FBOs and religious groups marginalize condoms or even eliminate condoms from prevention programs. In particular reference to these cases, advocates for the 'CNN approach' argue that the 'ABC approach' denies individual human rights related to access to information and resources that may reduce their risk to infection, and furthermore, argues that the outcome does not substantially reduce the risk related to disempowered segments of the population (Sinding, 2004). In effect, perpetuating the risk of disempowered groups, such as women and girls.

In both cases, the 'ABC approach' and in many cases the 'CNN approach' face criticism in regards to their emphasis on the individual rather than societal change, which is often the root of unequal power distribution and the subsequent capacity to change behavior. In context of the gender dimension of HIV/AIDS, programs that raise general



awareness of HIV/AIDS, and focus exclusively on modes of transmission and safer sexual practices, such as the ABC strategies, will not be sufficient (United Nations, 2003; UNAIDS, 1998). A conference in Namibia, consisting of educators and trainers on Sexual Rights, Gender and HIV/AIDS from several African countries, highlighted gender-related cultural barriers as significant impediments to the utility of ABC strategies for women (Masindi, 2003). The conference concluded that due to prevailing gender norms and subsequent social structures, women are not empowered or free to determine abstinence or faithfulness. Similarly, negotiating, or even communicating about, condom use is often unacceptable. Men are still considered the custodians of sexual norms who sanction everything related to sexual relationships (Masindi, 2003).

The general impediment to behavior change and a subsequent reduction in the vulnerability of women and girls is, therefore, gender norms and social structures. These are the intervening variables that contribute to HIV transmission and create a barrier between knowledge/awareness, and behavioral change. Insofar as gender is rooted in culture and permeates all aspects of society and social relations, strategies to address the vulnerability of women and girls to HIV/AIDS must incorporate an expanded response that includes gender awareness, with the ultimate objective of social transformation – program and policy interventions that transform the realm of cultural attitudes and expectations and redistribute power through expanding the substantive freedoms of women and girls.

## 2.5 Context: The indigenous community of Kisongo Maasai<sup>6</sup> in the Longido Division of Northern Tanzania

The Longido Division refers to a geo-political area of Northern Tanzania. It encompasses a large geographical region that is divided into thirteen smaller geo-political areas called Wards. The research outlined in later sections predominantly focused on the Engarenaibor Ward, but to a lesser degree included participants from the Tingatinga Ward.

The Longido Division consists of approximately 97,000 people. It predominantly consists of rural-based communities situated in the Monduli District of Northern Tanzania. It is a relatively impoverished community with limited access to basic amenities. In a World Vision Tanzania report (2002), 60% of households were identified as not having sufficient food throughout the year, and there is an 82/1000 infant mortality rate. In addition, %60 of households has to walk over .5 km to get water for drinking and domestic use (World Vision Tanzania, 2002).

Public primary schools are common throughout the Division, and attendance rates for primary school are relatively high. However, relative to other areas of Tanzania, very few primary school students proceed to secondary schooling for reasons related to academic performance, school expenses, and cultural barriers. In addition, similar to other places in Tanzania, other barriers to effective education exist: education is facilitated exclusively in Swahili, which is a language frequently unfamiliar to students;

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<sup>6</sup> This study is using the name, 'Kisongo' to distinguish the Maasai who participated in this research from other Maasai groups who habituate other areas of north-central Tanzania and southern Kenya. The term Kisongo, or 'Ilkisonko', refers to a territorially demarcated sub-division - literature suggests there is up to 22 of these sub-divisions among the Maasai - of the Maasai people that predominates much of north-central Tanzania (Sommer & Vossen, 1993). Although the use of the title, 'Kisongo', is not commonly used in much of contemporary discourse about the Maasai, in acknowledging the sometimes significant cultural differences that exist among differing Maasai groups, this study has adopted the use of 'Kisongo' for practical purposes.

teachers are rarely familiar with the Maa language; and pedagogical training related to student-centered and participatory learning strategies is generally not accessible.

In relation to HIV/AIDS, there is no existing statistics or documentation in regards to HIV prevalence in this area. In general, community members argue that prevalence is low, and in some cases, community members deny that HIV exists within their community. According to a quantitative study currently being administered by World Vision Tanzania that involved 475 participants throughout the Longido Division, 61.9% of children and youth respondents stated that they either didn't know or felt that HIV/AIDS was not a problem facing their community (World Vision Tanzania, 2004). Among the adult participants, 73.3% responded similarly.

In relation to awareness of HIV/AIDS, the same study found that a high proportion of the population has a basic awareness of HIV/AIDS. For example, approximately 95% of the respondents indicated that they understood sexual intercourse as a mode of HIV transmission, and 85% of children and 80% adults agreed that sharing piercing instruments could spread the disease (World Vision Tanzania, 2004).

Nonetheless, despite awareness, the World Vision Tanzania study indicated that knowledge about the disease has not translated into any substantial behavior change (World Vision Tanzania, 2004).

Whatever the current prevalence or community awareness, it is generally agreed that the members of the Longido Division represent a very vulnerable group in relation to HIV/AIDS due to the cultural norms that pervade the community. The population consists almost exclusively of the Kisongo group of Maa-speaking people, herein called the Kisongo Maasai. They are a semi-nomadic, pastoralist indigenous group that

continues to depend predominantly on livestock production. However, due to general impoverishment, expanded need related to globalization, and unjust land appropriation policies implemented by the Tanzanian government (Hodgson, 2001; Talle, 1988; Arhem, 1985), the Kisongo Maasai's economy has expanded to marginally include other economic and subsistence activities, such as micro-enterprise, agriculture, and employment opportunities.

Among the international community, the Kisongo Maasai are most commonly associated with their cultural aesthetic characteristics. Their characteristically bright red and blue colored dress, their spectacular beaded ornaments, and the beaded, long, red-dyed hair of the distinguished 'warrior' are common characteristics associated with the Kisongo Maasai, and have fascinated millions of tourists and plenty of photographers over the past half century. In relation to this research, the more noteworthy attributes of the Kisongo Maasai relate to their prevailing cultural customs and institutions, which includes female and male circumcision, polygynous family structures, permissive extra-marital sexual norms, early sexual debut, arranged marriage exchange, brideprice, and early marriage practices (Talle, 1988; Spencer, 1988, Mitzlaff, 1988).

The most significant institution that deems special mention is the age-set system, which defines the entire social order and relations within the Kisongo Maasai community. The Maasai age-set system refers to a formalized system in which, upon circumcision, male members of a society collectively progress through a series of age-sets. Each age-set is initiated via elaborate ritual ceremonies, and is characterized by differing social customs and expectations. The Maasai age-sets are considered a linear type, which "means that the age-sets do not work in recurring cycles but come into

existence when they are required" (Talle, 1988). Most commonly, cycles consist of a period approximating 15 years. Paul Spencer explains that, "an *age-set* comprises all those within a broad range of ages who are formed into a group of peers with their own separate identity... All Maasai men belong to an age-set following their initiation, and with their peers they pass as a body from one age-grade to the next" (1993, p. 140). The three major age-categories for males are as follows: "boys" (*olayoni*, pl. *olayiok*) refer to young non-circumcised males; "warriors" (*olmurrani*, pl. *ilmurran*)<sup>7</sup> refer to the category of males who have undergone circumcision (note: males often remain "warriors" until the approximate ages of 20-25yrs); "elders" (*olpayian*, pl. *ilpayiani*) refers to adult males from the ages of 30 years and onwards (Talle, 1988). Although every age-set is socially and politically significant, it is generally understood that, with the exception of young girls, members of the Ilmurran age-set are the most vulnerable to HIV/AIDS due to the gender norms associated with this age-set and their permissive sexual customs.

Women and girls are not formally associated with the Maasai age-set system that orders male social hierarchy. Nonetheless, women and girls are distinguished by age-categories, which are referred to as life-stages in later sections of this document. Similar to the age-sets of men, life-stages define social hierarchy and are associated with differing norms or acceptable behavior. Life stages "comprises those women of roughly the same age, who are in a certain social and biological time of their lives (i.e. uncircumcised girls, young wives, etc.) without being institutionalized as a group" (Mitzalff, 1988, p. 153). The most significant and ritualized progression within the female life stages is facilitated through the circumcision ceremony. It is this ceremony and surgery that clearly defines a girl from a woman, which represents the most

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<sup>7</sup> For the remainder of this document the Maa terms for "warriors" will be used: *olmurrani* or *ilmurran*.

significant distinction in the life stage phenomenon (Talle, 1988). In general, the life-stages can be categorized as the following: non-circumcised girls (*entito* pl. *intoyie*); circumcised married women without young children (*esiankiki*, pl. *isiankikin*); married women with children (*enkitok*); married woman with circumcised children (*entasat*, pl. *intasati*) (Talle, 1988, Mitzlaff, 1988).

Another noteworthy cultural attribute of the Kisongo Maasai is the concept of patriarchy. Although a contentious issue, it is generally accepted throughout discourse that patriarchy predominates the Maasai’s contemporary social order; Maasai women and girls, and more specifically Kisongo Maasai women and girls, are prescribed very little social, economic or political status relative to men (Hodgson, 2001; Talle, 2001; Spencer, 1988; Mitzlaff, 1988).

Notably, however, many scholars have recently argued that ‘patriarchy’, in the simple sense of the economic and political domination of men over women, is a newer phenomenon in Maasai history. Scholars, such as Dorothy Hodgson and Aude Talle, who have undertaken some of the most extensive work related to the history of Maasai gender relations, traces the emergence of ‘patriarchy’ among Maasai to colonial and post-colonial ‘development’ and state formation (Hodgson, 2001, 1999a, 1999b, 1999c; Talle, 1988). In effect, ‘development’, most notably the imposition of the market economy, and other extrinsic forces “shifted the contours of male female power relations, resulting in the material disenfranchisement and conceptual devaluation of Maasai women as both women and pastoralists” (Hodgson, 2001, p. 16). In Women at a Loss: Changes in Maasai Pastoralism and their Effects on Gender Relations, Aude Talle argues that historically women played significant roles in cattle production and were attributed

significant autonomy to manage and dispose of the livestock that were associated with their house (1988). Nonetheless, similar to Hodgson's studies, Talle illustrates that, "the recent trends which undermine the separate economic and social status of the house within the agnatic family structure are likely to restructure gender relations in decision-making processes to the disadvantage of women – and thus ultimately to leave them at a loss" (Talle, 1988).

Another important concept relevant to the discourse surrounding the Kisongo Maasai is traditionalism. For the purpose of this study, traditionalism is being used to refer to a philosophical and ideological worldview that places emphasis on dominant interpretations of history to organize the contemporary social world. It is a paradigm that depicts a particular social order as being innately valuable and important due to its revelation through history, and subsequent connection with the past, ancestors, and God. Subsequently, communities characterized by traditionalism often resist change and are skeptical of the validity of critical reason as an exclusive determining factor of morality and the social order (Khan & McNiven, 1991). Similar to the concept of conservatism, communities underpinned by traditionalism may tend more towards the collective experience revealed through history as a valid determinant and reference for evaluating contemporary socio-cultural phenomenon (Khan & McNiven, 1991).

Some political science and development discourse suggests that traditionalism is a response to two significant variables. For one, some authors have suggested that it relates to a people group's cosmology. In cases where people groups have experienced and perceived their environment as relatively arbitrary and unmanageable, "a stable social structure attempts to counter an arbitrary world" (Khan & McNiven, 1991, p. 50).

Another explanation relates to cultural groups' social-psychological need to safeguard identity. Thierry Verhelst (1990), for example, argues that what is often perceived as resistance to change and traditionalism is a reaction to extrinsic forces and impacts, such as 'development'. When extrinsic forces are perceived as a threat to cultural identity and determination, traditionalism functions to preserve this socio-psychological need.

One further element of traditionalism must be highlighted. Traditionalism is inherently an ideology. The perceptions of history that are imbedded in traditionalist ideology are products of conflict and power relations: "knowledge is power" (Foucault, 1999); the dominant perceptions and interpretations of history as reflected in 'knowledge' is inherently related to power relations in Kisongo Maasai communities. Emmanuel Wallerstein (1999) explains the phenomenon in the following excerpt:

The political struggle is often phrased in terms of tradition versus change. This is of course a grossly misleading and ideological terminology. It may in fact be taken as a general sociological principle that, at any given point of time, what is thought to be traditional is of more recent origin than people generally imagine it to be, and represents primarily the conservative instincts of some group threatened with declining social status. Indeed, there seems to be nothing which emerges and evolves as quickly as a "tradition" when the need presents itself. (p. 396)

On a last note, the concept of "indigenous people" is also important in relation to discussions surrounding the Kisongo Maasai. This concept is sometimes confusing in relation to the African continent. Applying it to people groups in Africa is more complicated compared to its application in other contexts, such as North America. In



North America, the distinction between First Nations groups and other occupying people groups is relatively simpler than the distinction between racially similar African groups. Nonetheless, the distinction between groups in Africa remains an important activity that can contribute to politicizing the experiences and claims of historically oppressed groups, such as the Kisongo Maasai.

According to the characteristics, presented by David Maybury-Lewis (1997), that describe indigenous groups, the Kisongo Maasai may be categorized as indigenous groups due to three important characteristics. First, the Kisongo Maasai have occupied the territory they live on since time immemorial, and subsequently, they have rights of prior occupancy to their lands. Second, they have maintained their own language, which differs from the language spoken by mainstream populations, Swahili; and, likewise they have struggled to preserve their culture, which also differs significantly from the mainstream. Lastly, and most important, the Kisongo Maasai's history overwhelmingly illustrates their subordination and incorporation into an alien state. According to Maybury-Lewis (1997), "the salient characteristic of indigenous peoples, then, is that they are marginal to or dominated by the states that claim jurisdiction over them" (p.8).

In part, a consequent of these characteristics, Maybury-Lewis further explains that indigenous groups often experience forms of ethnocide – the destruction of a people's way of life. Indigenous people groups have often been treated as inferior and perceived as "backward". As in the history of the Kisongo Maasai, "it is presumed that their ways must be changed and their cultures destroyed, partly in order to civilize them and partly to enable them to coexist with others in the modern world" (Maybury-Lewis, 1997, p. 9). This theme has predominantly characterized development interventions in explicit and

implicit ways throughout recorded history (Arhem, 1985; Talle, 1988; Hodgson, 2001). Furthermore, the experience of this study indicated that similar themes continue to pervade the attitudes and practices of many state and non-state development stakeholders.

## 2.6 Summary

The HIV/AIDS epidemic is currently the most significant crisis facing sub-Saharan Africa, and more specifically, Tanzania. On a micro level the pandemic is devastating millions of individuals and their families and undermining their capacity to sustain themselves. On more macro levels, communities and nations have been and will continue to be undermined as growing numbers of individuals are unable to participate in productive spheres of society and are further straining already limited economic resources for the purpose of health care.

As a predominantly sexually transmitted disease, gender is fundamentally related to the epidemic. Women and girls are affected and infected at a disproportionate rate to men. The ideology of gender perpetuates detrimental norms and personal factors, while simultaneously underpinning social structures that impede women and girls' access to the instrumental factors that may reduce their vulnerability. Prevention, as a result, must raise awareness, educate individuals, and provide access to condoms, while also adapting notions of gender and altering social structure in order to redistribute power in society to substantially reduce women and girls' vulnerability.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic in Tanzania poses a particular threat to the Kisongo Maasai community of Northern Tanzania. In fact, as an indigenous group that has been relatively undermined by 'development', marginalized by the State, and which upholds

certain customs and institutions that may facilitate the disease, the Kisongo Maasai, and particularly the women and girls, represent one of the most vulnerable people groups throughout Sub-Saharan Africa.

Therefore, the primary research question that underlies the study outlined in the remaining sections of this document is essentially two-fold. First, the primary question is, "what are the factors that contribute to women and girls' vulnerability to HIV/AIDS in the Kisongo Maasai community?" In accordance with this question, the research explored the perceptions of children and youth as a means to explore and understand the gender dimension of HIV vulnerability among the Kisongo Maasai. Second, given the participatory action nature of the following study, the essential concomitant question to the first is, "how do we reduce the vulnerability of Kisongo Maasai women and girls to the epidemic?"

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY, IMPLEMENTATION, CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS.**

### 3.1 Methodology & Implementation

#### a. Background Information

The primary motivating factor that initiated this project has been the interests and experiences of the principal investigator, who has lived and worked in Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda; and subsequently, has grown interested in advocacy and community organizing that aims at reducing the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic on East African communities. The specific focus on women and girls' vulnerability grew out of an interest in adolescent sexuality, gender, and the growing international discourse concerning the gender dimension of the epidemic.

The principal investigator of this project, Corey Wright, is a Master's of Social Work (MSW) candidate at the Faculty of Social Work in Wilfrid Laurier University (WLU). The implementation of this study was contingent on the approval of the MSW program, and was facilitated through the "thesis option" and international practicum program that are offered as part of the MSW curriculum. Consequently, the study's duration in Tanzania simultaneously facilitated the completion of the field research, while also facilitating the completion of the practicum requirement of the MSW curriculum.

Another important facilitating factor has been the essential role of Sara Austin of World Vision Canada (WVC) and David Makala of World Vision Tanzania (WVT). The opportunity to implement this project was in a large part due to the collaborative relationships that were developed with these two individuals and agencies. This study has essentially collaborated with a WVC Gender and HIV/AIDS project in Tanzania.

The WVC project consisted of an initial phase involving research, which effectively accommodated the objectives of this study, and a second phase that is planning to pilot innovative programs to reduce girls' vulnerability. WVT and specifically, David Makala agreed to host the principal investigator in Tanzania and provide in-kind services and resources to facilitate this study. The general agreement that defined this relationship with World Vision was that the research findings from this study would be provided to WVC and WVT in order to contribute to the aforementioned Gender and HIV/AIDS project. At the time of completing this study, this agreement and relationship is continuing. The findings of this study have been integrated into recent reports disseminated by World Vision, the findings are informing World Vision's program development, and the principal investigator of this study provides consulting to WVC's ongoing gender and HIV/AIDS project.

In regards to funding, it is important to acknowledge the role of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The funding of this project was provided through CIDA's Award Program for Canadians. In February 2003 this study was awarded an "innovative research" award that provided \$15,000CAN to the field research in Tanzania. These funds were essential to the implementation of the study.

#### **b. Research Goal and Objectives**

The goal of the research was to develop a culture-specific theoretical framework that will contribute to program and/or policy level interventions that reduce the vulnerability of Kisongo Maasai women and girls to HIV/AIDS. In this regard, an important component of this study is its collaborative relationship with World Vision Canada, and

World Vision Tanzania. Although the study presented in this document represents a research project, the relationship between this study and World Vision Canada and World Vision Tanzania is ongoing and the findings of this research continue to be integrated into the program design and planning of these two agencies.

The general and specific objectives of the research were as follows:

- i. General Objectives:
  - a. To explore Kisongo Maasai children and youth's perceptions of gender norms in their community.
  - b. To develop a further understanding of the relationship between Kisongo Maasai culture, gender, and vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.
  - c. To develop an understanding of culture-specific program and policy level interventions that Kisongo Maasai children and youth believe will contribute to reducing the incidences of HIV/AIDS.
- ii. Specific Objectives:
  - a. To identify the perceived gender expectations of Kisongo Maasai children and youth.
    - i. The research focused on social/cultural, economic, and political dimensions.
  - b. To determine if Kisongo Maasai children and youth believe their gender norms put them at risk of HIV/AIDS.
  - c. If Kisongo Maasai children and youth do not believe that their gender norms put them at risk of HIV/AIDS, then to determine what they believe are the factors that put them at risk.

- d. If Kisongo Maasai children and youth believe that their gender norms put them at risk of HIV/AIDS, then to determine how they believe the norms contribute to their risk of infection.
- e. To determine what interventions Kisongo Maasai children and youth believe will reduce their risk of HIV/AIDS.

c. Design

The paradigm that guided the research design was Participatory Action Research (PAR). It was characterized by three significant factors. It facilitated the development of critical consciousness of both researchers and participants, to improve the lives of those involved in the research process, and transform fundamental societal structures and relationships (Maguire, p. 29). In its participatory nature, the research process involved a high degree of cooperation between researchers and stakeholders with structures and methodology that facilitated constant feedback and substantial involvement throughout the entire research process (Lee, 1999; Nelson, 2001).

Community members – children, youth, and adults - were consistently consulted and substantially contributed to the methodology and implementation strategies. For example, community members assisted in identifying the concepts to be explored, contributed to the development of the focus group discussion guide, and were quintessential in organizing the focus groups into culturally relevant and appropriate divisions. In addition, by following a multi-phase approach to the data generation process, participants were provided opportunity to inform the analysis process. As a

foreigner with little experience with the Maasai, the community members, research participants, and Maasai youth research assistants were essential to this project.

An essential characteristic of this methodology was qualitative data generation (Morris & Copestake, 1993; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Tutty, 1996; Yegidis, 1999; Neuman, 1994). Of particular importance was the qualitative research characteristic of social context (Neumann, p. 321). The principle of this focus is that social phenomena can have different meanings in different cultures and historical eras. As specifically related to this research, the gender dimension of HIV/AIDS must be understood in the culture-specific context of the Longido community, or more specifically, the Kisongo Maasai. The interpretation of the data relied on how the Kisongo Maasai children and youth see the world, how they define the situation, and what it means for them (Neumann, p. 324).

Given the nature of this study, which inevitably included some degree of cultural analysis, and given the foreign identity of the principal investigator, participant observation and ethnographic methods (Bodley, 2000) were also adopted in this study's methodology. Both of these methods were essential to exploring cultural phenomena, and analyzing the findings that were generated by the study. These methods involved immersion into the Maasai culture, a committed effort to suspend Western assumptions concerning cultural phenomena, and working closely with members of the Maasai community to facilitate the research and more importantly, understand the phenomena relevant to this study. Participant observation and ethnographic methods were facilitated most notably by the relationships between the principal investigator, and members of the Maasai community, including the Maasai members of the research team who provided



incredible insights and explanations about the Maa culture. In addition, this aspect of the research was further facilitated by integrating anthropological literature about the Maasai into the reflection and analysis.

d. Participants

As originally proposed, the research participants represented the following groups of the Longido community:

- i. Male children between the ages of 14-17 years
- ii. Female children between the ages of 14-17 years
- iii. Male youth between the ages of 18-25 years
- iv. Female youth between the ages of 18-25 year

The participants from these groups were exclusively from the Engarenaibor Ward, which is located in the North Western region of the Longido Division. These groups represent the core of the research. In addition, however, to these originally proposed groups, the research also included children participants between the ages of 8-13. These groups were included on the one hand, to accommodate the interests of project stakeholders, and on the other, to explore the impact of gender ideology on young children. This was of particular interest in relation to sexual debut phenomena, which involve girls within the 8-13 age group. Children's focus groups were administered in the village of Maiowa in the Engarenaibor Ward, as well as in the villages of Sinya and Tingatinga in the Tingatinga Ward.

In accordance with cultural custom and social organization, the focus groups loosely accommodated the age divisions illustrated above<sup>1</sup>, but more importantly, were organized in accordance with Kisongo Maasai age-sets and age-grades. After consulting with members of the Longido community, it was evident that our strategy to group the focus group participants must consider the Masai age-set and age-grade system: cultural conventions discourage non-circumcised males and members of the Ilmurran age-set (circumcised males), from freely and openly interacting/discussing issues. Similar conventions apply between non-circumcised and circumcised females, and females with and without children.

Therefore, in order to generate quality data via a focus group discussion, it was important that the groups did not integrate these age-sets or grades. This cultural sensitivity in the focus group discussion design was consistently affirmed and participants commonly expressed appreciation and gratitude for organizing the groups in accordance with their cultural customs.

The following table illustrates the organization of the focus groups:

**Table 1: Focus Groun Design**

	Male			Female		
Age (approx.)	8-13	14-17	18-24	8-13	14-17	18-25
Age-Class	Uncircumcised Boys	Ilmurran Age-set	Ilmurran Age-set	Uncircumcised girls	Women without children	Married women with children
Group size	5	10	10	5	10	10

<sup>1</sup> Note: years of age is not a significant factor in the social organization of Kisongo Maasai. Consequently, it was evident that many participants were not aware of their actual ages. Their recorded ages were approximations, and for the purpose of this research, their cultural age-sets or age-grades were more relevant to design of the focus groups.

As noted below, in contrast to the core focus groups, the focus group discussions corresponding to the 8-13 males and females were administered in an integrated format, that included gender segregated small groups and gender integrated large group discussion.

v. Key Informants

Key informant interviews were administered with the following individuals:

- Non-married Maasai Woman
- Primary School Teacher
- Female Political Representative
- Ngamuratani (aka. Female Circumciser)
- Traditional Leader: Korianga Age-Set
- Traditional Leader: Ormesuki Age-Set
- Girl Esoto Participants [Note: this interview was administered as a group interview consisting of 10 girls]

These interviews served to explore and further elaborate on phenomena relating to women's experiences, girls' access and participation to the public school system, representation and participation within the village political process, as well as the impact of traditional institutions, practices and beliefs on women and girls.

In regards to sampling, participants were selected based on a theoretical sampling process (Neumann, 357; Strauss & Corbin, p. 73), that consisted of nonprobability, purposive sampling (Yegidis, p. 184). The process involved sensitizing the village leadership to the research, and collaborating with them in identifying and

recruiting participants. The research integrated a dimensional range representing the following factors: various age-sets and age-grades, gender, married, unmarried, with and without children, orphaned, non-orphaned, enrolled in school, and not enrolled in school. The sample size amounted to 85 individuals: forty individuals corresponding to the originally proposed focus groups, forty children<sup>2</sup>, and five key informants.

e. The Research Team

Characteristics of a research team are often not mentioned as a component of methodology. However, within this study, the characteristics of the research team were quintessential to the methodology of this cross-cultural research. A significant part of the field research involved training the research team to coordinate, facilitate, and ultimately, lead the study while engaging the Kisongo Maasai community.

The success of the study was undoubtedly contingent on the selection of the research team. The most pertinent characteristic of the research team was that four of the members were Kisongo Maasai. One of the female members, in fact, was a member of the specific research community, Longido. In addition to their ethnic identity, the members were all post-circumcision. In other words, in accordance with Maasai custom, they were awarded the respect ascribed to Maasai adults, and in the case of two of the males, as Ilmurran, they were respected peers of the majority of the research participants, who also belonged to the Ilmurran age-set. Although the study is indebted to every member of the research team, including the non-Maasai members, a lot of the success of the study must be attributed to the Kisongo Maasai members. Ultimately, they were

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<sup>2</sup> This number includes thirty children who participated in the children's focus group discussions, as well as ten girl children who represent the Esoto Participant Key Informants.

essential to mobilizing the community, building relationships with the community, facilitating incredible discussions that generated rich data, and educating the non-Maasai members of the research team, including the principal investigator, on Kisongo Maasi culture. They were essential to the ethnographic characteristic of this study.

#### f. Data Generation

The research consisted of four core focus groups: male/14-17yrs (FGD/M14-17); female/14-17 (FGD/F14-17); male/18-25 (FGD/M18-25); female/18-25 (FGD/F18-25). These groups represent the primary focus of the research. A multi-phased approach (Nelson, p. 48) was administered with these groups. In accordance with 'research with children' principles (Boyden & Ennew, 1997), the children's focus groups were designed and administered differently from the core groups.

The multi-phased

*One of the most significant challenges that the principal investigator faced was to reduce the insider outsider bias, which characterizes cross-cultural research and sometimes distorts cultural realities. The following actions and strategies were implemented to address the concerns around insider outsider bias:*

- ◆ *Recruited four members of the Maasai community to participate as research assistants. They provided essential guidance to the whole research process.*
- ◆ *Consulted community members in every phase of the research.*
- ◆ *Organized a children's advisory committee to advise the design of the research tools.*
- ◆ *Ensured cultural competence while engaging research participants (i.e. organization of FGDs).*
- ◆ *Provided an opportunity for research participants to provide insights and guide the analysis of the data.*
- ◆ *Collaborative transcription translation (i.e. two Maasai youth researchers & the principal investigator).*
- ◆ *Administered intensive and time-consuming microanalysis of the data that focused on uncovering cultural nuances and interpretations.*
- ◆ *Maintained critical reflexivity.*
- ◆ *Adopted ethnographic methods and analytical tools strategies to "look behind" the perceptions generated in the data, with the intention of further understanding the complexity of socio-cultural phenomena and realities.*
- ◆ *Consulted secondary literature to further enrich the analysis, comparing and contrasting other research, and exploring other 'voices' on the subject.*

approach consisted of three phases or successive sessions with each of the four core focus groups. This served three primary purposes. For one, it provided the opportunity to generate data in correspondence with the research's specific objectives. For example, Phase I provided a forum to explore gender values and norms relating to tradition and culture, and social, economic, and political organization. Phase II provided opportunity to explore the participants' risk perceptions and suggestions relating to interventions.

The second purpose relates to the Participatory Action Research model.

Administering successive groups provided a feedback structure. At the beginning of each successive group, the group facilitator presented a preliminary analysis of the findings from the prior phase, and provided the participants opportunity to share their feedback. In so doing, the participants participated in the analysis of the data, as well as the conclusions drawn.

The third purpose relates specifically to the third phase: dissemination of the findings. As indicated, this phase consisted of presenting the findings and conclusions to the participants. Likewise to the second purpose identified above, this offered participants and other community members opportunity to further contribute to the project's goal: the development of interventions to reduce girls' vulnerability.

Within the core groups, the data generation process involved a combination of two strategies. It involved conventional focus group strategies that were characterized by facilitation strategies that fostered group interaction (Krysiak, 1999), which was guided by a semi-structured interview guide. The guide was organized to explore pre-determined phenomena according to the practice and behavior in the community, attitudes, impacts on women and girls, and in some cases, knowledge of the phenomenon (i.e. condoms).

A participatory learning and action (PLA) activity was also used to generate discussion. The concept of participatory learning activities is founded in the research and strategies established by Paulo Freire in the 1970s. Generally, these types of activities are administered as tools to effectively engage communities in the process of assessing needs and developing locally generated solutions and strategies. In their participatory nature, PLAs reduce power dynamics that impede genuine participation and facilitate the empowerment of participants.

The PLA adopted for the focus group discussions was a gender matrix, which consisted of three columns: males, females, and both. The matrix was displayed on the front wall of the focus group room so as to provide a visual aide and guide. The purpose of this activity was to stimulate participation and facilitate a discussion in accordance with the topics and questions illustrated in the Focus Group Discussion Guide. The process of this activity involved participants periodically being invited to place 'gender cards' on the matrix. Specific social/cultural, economic, and political phenomena were written on the gender cards. For example, cards represented phenomena like having "no say", "housework", "primary school", "selling cattle", "village leadership", etc. Although some phenomena were identified from information gained from the literature review, many of the phenomena were selected and identified by Maasai community members. Upon placing the cards under the appropriate column, the group leader facilitated discussion relating to the phenomena. See Appendix I for a visual illustration of the gender matrix.

It is noteworthy here to recognize the process of designing the focus group discussion guide and the gender matrix activity. In both cases, the design process

included extensive consultations and dialogue with community members, and the research assistants – every component of these tools was discussed and accommodated to the recommendations from these participants.

In addition, another important element was the development of a Children's Advisory Council (CAC). The CAC was developed to assist in the development of the research tools. They were consulted on two occasions during the design phase of the project. This group of children provided a forum for the research team members to practice the implementation of these tools, while concurrently facilitating discussion concerning their effectiveness. Likewise to the discussions with other community members and the research team members, the dialogue with the children contributed to catering the research tools and strategies to the Maasai cultural context.

The importance of the gender matrix activity cannot be understated. It was very effective in empowering participants in the data generation process, created high involvement, and participation in the discussions. In addition, by color coding the gender cards, the matrix served as an effective visual aide that illustrated women and girls' unequal power and access to resources. Ultimately, the opportunity to participate in producing a visual representation of the inequality that women and girls face served a consciousness raising and empowerment function.

Some other important factors to note in relation to these focus group discussions relate to the characteristics of the group facilitators, and the language that was used. Regarding the facilitators, it was important that the facilitators exhibited 'peer characteristics' of the groups they were involved with. In other words, it was important



that the facilitators were Maasai, and their gender and cultural status (re: age-set or age-grade) corresponded with those of the group's participants.

The language used to facilitate the groups was Maa. Although the research originally proposed that Swahili would be used, it became evident that using Maa would be more effective. After consulting with community members and during pre-testing, it was evident that Swahili represents the dominant culture and an oppressive history for the Maasai, and subsequently is used reluctantly, and only in correspondence with non-Maasai. As well, it was evident that many participants were not capable of participating in Swahili. As a result, the Maa language, which is the participants' mother tongue, was the only effective language to use. On several occasions, these characteristics of the research design - the facilitators' characteristics and language - were affirmed by research participants. They frequently expressed support and gratitude for this cultural sensitivity. It became very evident that the research process would have been otherwise impeded significantly.

The core groups' discussions (males and females age 14-17 and 18-25) were audio-recorded, and the translation/transcription of the tapes from Maa into English was a time-consuming process. It involved a collaborative effort between the group facilitators and the principle investigator. The facilitators worked together to first listen to a short section of an audio-taped discussion, translate it into English, explain the cultural nuances that existed in the discussion, and then the principle investigator would transcribe the oral translation into intelligible and legible English. In total, the audio-tapes (including the recorded key informant interviews) amounted to approximately 27 hours, and took, in total, up to 4 intensive weeks to complete.

Although time-consuming, this process proved to be essential to the research analysis process. Simultaneous to translating and transcribing, the collaborative process, which involved two Maasai youth, served to provide a line-by-line analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) of the data generated by the participants. Most importantly, it provided an essential means for the principal investigator, who is a foreigner, to understand the cultural phenomena and nuances that pervaded the data. This depth of understanding was crucial for data analysis, and is highly recommended for any intercultural research that is administered by a principal investigator who is foreign to the culture and language of the research participants.

The children's focus groups differed significantly from the core focus groups. For one, the groups were administered as gender-integrated. The purpose of integrating the genders was to facilitate dialogue between boys and girls. It provided an environment in which participants could compare and contrast attitudes and experiences concerning gender. Most significantly, it provided a space for young girls to express to their male counterparts the challenges they face.

Second, the group design and process differed from the core focus groups. The research adopted different strategies to better foster children's participation. The research team was particularly conscious of creating an informal group climate and environment. Periodically playing music with the tape recorder during strategic intervals; incorporating games, songs, dancing and riddles into the data generation process; and even sharing candy effectively established an informal environment. In addition, youth researchers were responsible to engage very informally with the participants and make efforts to reduce the power dynamic between themselves and the child participants. This included

fully participating in the games, songs, and other activities with the children, adopting child-like mannerisms, and engaging in culturally appropriate physical contact (i.e. holding hands, placing an arm around a child's shoulder, etc.)<sup>3</sup>.

The children's groups schedule consisted of a child-led, gender-segregated small group activity, which involved organizing 'gender cards' on the gender matrix (similar to the PLA activity above). It then involved reconvened, gender-integrated large group discussion, which adopted contrast comparison methods to explore similarities and differences between the matrix produced by the boys and girls' groups. Lastly, the children's groups involved drawing and written activities, that served to provide a non-intimidating medium for the children to express their concerns relating to the problems girls and women face in their community and their perception of girls and boys' risk to HIV/AIDS. After the children were given a chance to complete their drawing or writing, each child was provided a one-to-one opportunity with a youth researcher to explain their drawings and writings. Using written recording, the researchers recorded the children's explanations as well as other experiences or elaborations that were generated by the researchers' probing. The drawing and writing activities ultimately served to provide an effective and participatory means to explore children's perceptions and experiences.

#### g. Data Analysis

The process of data analysis was an intensive process. The principal investigator had primary responsibility for the analysis, with extensive collaboration with the Maasai members of the Longido research team. In addition, the preliminary analysis of the

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<sup>3</sup> Contrary to Western customs, this physical contact was of special importance between the male participants. These forms of expression are visibly significant among male age-mates.

findings was also presented to the core focus group participants in order to engage the participants in the analysis process. Following this stage, the participants' feedback was incorporated into the analysis.

In general, data analysis followed the guidelines and strategies of Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin (1998). The process involved open, axial, and selective coding, and a line-by-line or microanalysis was administered periodically throughout the analysis process. As mentioned in the above discussion concerning translation and transcription, the microanalysis component of the analysis was quintessential to this process.

In the axial coding process, Strauss and Corbin's (1998) analytical tool, known as the *paradigm*, was loosely adopted in order to conceptualize the findings. The *paradigm* seeks to provide an organizational scheme that analyzes phenomena according to conditions that create situations, issues, and problems pertaining to phenomena (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 130); actions/interactions in which persons handle situations, problems, and issues (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 131); and consequences, which refer to the results, impacts or effects of actions/interactions and general impacts of the phenomena on individuals (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 134).

It is worth noting that analyzing the data with attention to actions/interactions was important to facilitate a deeper understanding of phenomena identified in the research. Most importantly, it drew attention to the fact that, although women and girls often experience a general lack of power, they adopt behaviors that, at least to some degree, either mitigate the consequences of lack of power or contest the consolidation of power by their male counterparts. It was an important component of the research that served to

counter detrimental images of 'powerless African women' that pervade international discourse.

The central category that arose in the analysis was 'power', or more specifically, the general lack of power that Maasai women and girls experience, which can be categorized as social, sexual, economic, and political. In Chapter 4, the research findings are presented by first providing a descriptive overview of the cultural/ideological values and particular customs and institutions. In the remaining sections, however, the central category and more specifically, the sub-categories of social, sexual, economic, and political power are presented.

Adopting Strauss & Corbin's paradigm, the power subcategories are organized in terms of describing the phenomenon itself (i.e. limited social power); the conditions or factors that cause or contribute to the phenomenon (i.e. low status is a contributing and causal factor to women's limited social power); contestations, exceptions and mitigating circumstances - this reflects a discussion on actions/interactions (i.e. women's economic provision to the household is a factor and mitigating circumstance to their social power); and the consequences or impacts that the research participants reported as a result of their lack of power (i.e. a sense of powerless and limited self-determination). As the reader will note, the findings related to cultural/ideological values and customs and institutions are interwoven throughout the review of the power sub-categories. In many cases, for example, the cultural/ideological values and customs and institutions represent conditions that affect or determine women's lack of power.

It is noteworthy to mention that the analysis process has involved several characteristics beyond the conventional process of simply analyzing transcribed data.

First, in accordance with the participant observation and ethnographic methods of this study, the analysis involved the integration of observations and insights learned through living amongst, building relationships with members of the Maasai community, and persistently conducting informal inquiries about cultural phenomena. Second, the analysis included insights that were gained from reviewing ethnographies and studies that have previously worked with the Maasai community. Studies, such as Dorothy Hodgson's and Aude Talle's, were crucial for developing a more in-depth understanding of certain phenomena. Lastly, and in relation to the first point, the analysis was facilitated by the use of field notes. Field notes refers to all of the notes that were recorded during the field research, which were often generated by consultations with the Kisongo Maasai youth researchers as well as community members. In most cases, these notes provided important insights into cultural phenomena. Besides typical field notes that were recorded while working in the field, in the case of this research, they also refer to the multitude of notes that were recorded during the dialogical process of translation/transcription. It was during this process that the members of the research team invested many hours in explaining the cultural phenomena that pervaded the data. As a result, field notes are interspersed throughout the transcribed data (see Appendix IV for an excerpt from the transcribed data).

#### h. Ethics

The Review Ethics Board (REB) of Wilfrid Laurier University reviewed and approved the project's ethics prior to administering the field research. In addition, any substantial changes during the field research were communicated to the REB chairperson.

Due to the cross-cultural nature of this research, a few ethical considerations are worth mentioning. In regards to free and informed consent, conventional strategies of written consent were deemed inappropriate. In the context of rural Maasai communities, signing official documents is relatively foreign, and subsequently, research colleagues in Tanzania suggested that implementing signed consent may provoke anxiety and suspicion, and impede the recruitment, participation and more general community mobilization. Instead of written consent, the research invested attention into a clear oral invitation script, which was adopted in the recruitment phase. Often, this involved clear communication and sensitization of the village leaders who cooperated in the recruitment process. Additionally, time was provided at the beginning of each focus group in order to attain oral consent from the participants. In this regard, group facilitators were responsible to present the issues outlined in the "informed consent script" that was approved by the REB, and provide adequate time for questioning and decision-making. With regard to the children's group, an additional feature was administered: the facilitator reviewed the oral consent script with the children and youth prior to their actual attendance in the focus group. For example, in many cases, the facilitator would invite the children and review the consent script one day prior to the actual focus group meeting. The intention of this step was to facilitate the opportunity for children to make a more genuine free and informed consent.

A further ethical consideration that is worth mentioning refers to research with different cultures, countries, ethnic groups. According to the observations of this research, researchers in the Maasai community often neglect a consideration of ethics surrounding the procedures to ensure sensitivity to divergent values, traditions, concepts

of privacy, etc. While working with the Maasai, this ethical consideration is paramount. For example, this study identified and incorporated issues related to Maasai social hierarchical organization and gender into the project design. For example, the research excluded male participation from research involving females, and vice versa<sup>4</sup>. In addition, the study designed the focus group discussions with a consideration of customs surrounding Maasai social hierarchy, which is illustrated in the age-set system for males and the life-stage organization among females (see Chapter 2.5). Integrating these cultural values proved to be an important ethical consideration, which is seemingly compromised in most research and programs within the community.

### 3.2 Implementation challenges and considerations

The process of effectively implementing this study faced some challenges and generated some key issues that needed to be considered. The following discussion seeks to highlight a few of the process issues that were identified during the field research. The purpose of presenting these challenges and considerations is to assist other researchers or development workers in effectively administering research and/or programs in the Maasai community. The acceptance of this project within the community, the effective community mobilization, the genuine participation of community members, the generation of extensive data, and the incredible relationships that were built during the administration of this study may be attributed, at least in part, to a consideration of the following issues:

- a. Involvement of Foreigners/non-Maasai researchers or workers

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<sup>4</sup> One exception to this was with school-going children. With school-going children, segregating gender was not a significant ethical consideration.



It became evident early in the research that involving non-Maasai in the research process introduced significant power dynamics that could impede the process of constructively engaging the community and meeting the research objectives. In general, it was evident in discussions with community members, as well as attitudes portrayed within focus group discussions, that due to associative tendencies, non-Maasai were commonly treated and perceived with ambivalence. According to the experience of this study, many Maasai engage non-Maasai with reluctance and reservations. There were three categories of foreigners that were relevant to this study: the Swahili, Warusha, and the Wazungu.

i. The 'Swahili'

The term 'Swahili' was used by the research participants to refer to all non-Maa speaking Tanzanians, or in other words, all non-Maasai Tanzanians. With very few exceptions, the Maasai engaged in this study illustrated negative experiences with and portrayed negative attitudes towards the Swahili. Possibly, these experiences and attitudes relate to the Maasai's historical relationships with non-Maasai Tanzanians, associated with the state and 'development'. For the most part, secondary literature suggests that these relationships have often been characterized by oppression and a disregard for the Maasai's culture and identity. The following quote conveys an experience with Swahilis and reflects the subsequent attitude and resentment that was commonly portrayed in this research:

If you look at the nurses in our clinics, it is all Swahili women, and if we would have sent our daughters to school it would be Maasai girls that are helping us in the clinics. We pray that God will open the minds of all our children – boys and

girls, because we are tired of this kind of treatment we get from the Swahili in the hospital. (FGD/F14-17)

According to some experiences in this study, many Maasai are suspicious of Swahili motives, reluctant to accept the Swahili, and in some cases may even resist their involvement. The following comment, from a male participant, further illustrates this phenomenon, as well as reiterating the concern made above:

Many Swahilis are mistreating us in the hospital and the only reason is because no Maasai girls are working in the hospital and the only reason is because no Maasai girls are working there. In relation to boys, when they go to primary school, they will be doing like girls. Some will become doctors, teachers, and leaders, and we want them to hold as many positions as possible because sometimes a Swahili leader might accept something or introduce something and he never judges whether it will bring effect to the pastoral people simply because he knows nothing about caring for cattle. (FGD/M18-25)

Throughout this study community members portrayed similar experiences and attitudes. Negative stories were shared regarding oppressive experiences in the school system, within Christian churches, and within government and NGO development schemes. As a result, it was evident that due to the tendency to associate Swahili with these historic and contemporary experiences, involvement of Swahili in community research and work may impede development objectives. At best, Maasai community members will reluctantly and reservedly engage a Swahili<sup>5</sup>, and at best, superficially

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<sup>5</sup> One notable example may be the research coordinator of the project that this current study collaborated with. He was a Swahili medical doctor that, at least superficially, engaged certain community representatives in a constructive manner. According to my observations, his interactions were characterized by mutual respect.

accept them. At worst, it was evident in this research that they may outright reject or resist their objectives and their participation.

ii. The Warusha

The title Warusha was used by the participants of this research to refer to their Maasai neighbors, whose primary means of production is not necessarily cattle but also includes agrarian activities. The relationship between the Warusha and the pastoralist Maasai is rooted in a complex history and relationship and exceeds the scope of this research. Suffice it to say that, according to the attitudes portrayed in this research, many pastoralist Maasai perceive the Warusha as inferior due to their association with agricultural production rather than pastoralism and they're criticized for their willingness to acculturate into 'Swahili' culture, purportedly giving up their Maasai identity.

My first exposure to this attitude and animosity was during an interview between two male Maasai youth, one Kisongo Maasai (Kisongo) and one Warusha. These youth were interviewed together. They looked similar, both identified as Maasai, both spoke the Maa language fluently. However, their 'difference' was illustrated when I asked them, for clarification purposes, if they were both Maasai. When the Warusha answered, "yes", this instigated some animosity. The Kisongo youth seemed offended that the Warusha youth had identified as a Maasai, and consequently, made it clear to the interviewers that, while he was "pure Maasai", the Warusha youth he was not "pure Maasai" (Field Notes).

I also recall a scenario in which a Warusha was invited to participate in a local development project. It was evident in my correspondence with some of the community members that the participation of this man was resented and his contributions were

generally rejected. Therefore, in terms of implications for involving a Warusha, it was evident that as a result of ethnic conflicts, involving Warusha may create similar limitations to those described in the preceding discussion about Swahili.

iii. Mzungu/Wazungu: a white person/white people

It was evident in the research that a white person - Mzungu in the Swahili language - also faces limitations and is accepted with some ambivalence. According to the principal investigator's experience, although the participants in this research were generally accepting and hospitable, there were some incidences in which the participants apparently associated him with some negative experiences. There were two significant associations that pervaded that community. First, it seems that the Wazungu are commonly associated with 'anti-FGM' propaganda and programs. This observation correlates with the evident 'anti-FGM' sentiment and priorities that pervade many international NGOs. Reportedly, the community has been objects of many anti-FGM campaigns that have often been associated with foreign, white 'development' workers, and in most cases, participants in this study conveyed that these 'interventions' have often been intrusive and culturally insensitive.

The other limitation relates to the common perception among the Maasai that Wazungu are associated with research (academic and photographic) that usually offers very little benefit for the community. In other words, the Maasai have been subjected to many projects over recent history that appropriated their images, traditions, and cultural identity. Most of these projects benefit foreign academic knowledge production, as well as the foreign art culture, while offering no actual benefit for the Maasai subjects and

participants. See the proceeding Action Research section for further elaboration of this issue.

b. Power dynamics within Maasai culture: implications for research and programming

Power hierarchy characterizes the social organization of contemporary Maasai communities. In some cases, the power is overt and institutionalized, such as in cases relating to gender, age-sets, or life stages for women. In other cases, it is more covert and subtle, such as the following concept of 'charisma'. The following section will focus on power dynamics related to gender, age-sets, life stages, and 'charisma'.

i. Gender

A significant power dynamic exists between males and females in accordance with certain customs and conventions. Consequently, for the most part, engaging males and females in dialogue is implausible. This was confirmed throughout the observations in this study. Although Maasai women and men were often juxtaposed for the purpose of performing community functions, such as village governance and community work associated with local NGOs, women were less likely to contribute to the group's discourse. This phenomenon was also visible within the dynamics and interaction patterns among the research team recruited for this study, which consisted of three males and three females. Without exception, the male research participants were more likely to present their opinions and concerns, and in most cases, the female participants contributed only after invitation and encouragement from the group leader. In many cases, research participants commended the gender segregation that characterized the

research design, and reported that this was uncommon in many of the projects they've participated in.

The only exception to this is in reference to younger children who are enrolled in primary school. For those groups that consisted of child participants that were recruited from primary school, gender integration was effective. With appropriate facilitation skills, good interaction and involvement was generated<sup>6</sup>.

## ii. Hierarchical power structures

As illustrated in the literature review, the Maasai are traditionally organized into age or life stage related structures – age-sets for men and life stages for women - that allot differing degrees of status and power and are characterized by cultural mores that determine behavior within the group and between groups. Consequently, these structures have significant implications for organizing groups within research or programs. In general, this cultural phenomenon must be given adequate consideration and integrated into research or program design. According to the experience of this research, if these considerations are not integrated, a project or research will not successfully create group environments characterized by dialogue, high involvement or interaction among participants, which are key characteristics of any qualitative research and programs.

The following sections highlight a few issues that were generated in this study.

### 1. Age-sets

After consulting with Maasai community members, it was evident that age-sets had to be considered in defining the focus groups. It was evident that due to cultural

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<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, for small group work, children were assigned groups according to gender. It was speculated that similar to the barriers discussed in reference to the older groups, effectiveness of gender-integrated small group work, which did not include a group leader or facilitator, may be limited.

customs surrounding these age-sets, genuine dialogue is not customarily permitted between these groups. For example, a non-circumcised boy will not freely communicate with Ilmurran, and in fact, a lot of their inter-relationships with Ilmurran are characterized by spitefulness. Within the Ilmurran age-set, members are customarily free to interact. However, it was evident that a power dynamic does exist between the more recently circumcised group of Ilmurran, sometimes referred to as junior Ilmurran, and the senior Ilmurran. Likewise, although not as significant as the dynamic between the non-circumcised and circumcised, a similar power dynamic occurs between Ilmurran and more senior age-sets. Cultural customs generally proscribe the nature of these interactions as respectful and non-confrontational, which may not be conducive to genuine dialogue.

In regards to the latter example, one male participant expressed gratitude that the research had organized the groups according to age-set. He argued that this format was unique in his experience, and more productive than the typical projects he had experienced. It provided a forum in which they were free to speak without customary concerns relating to age-sets (and gender): "we wouldn't have been able to share openly if there were older people or females in the group" (FGD/M18-25).

## 2. Life stages

Similar to the phenomenon described above in reference to males and age-sets, organizing groups for women required similar considerations in accordance with their life stages. According to the study's consultations with the community, customs impede genuine dialogue between non-circumcised girls and circumcised women. Likewise, a

similar barrier exists between women who have given birth to children, and those who have not.

One example of the implications of this dynamic is in the female focus group discussion corresponding to the approximate ages of between fourteen and seventeen. Although the intention for this group was to recruit female participants who represented the demographic criteria of early adolescence and females without children, and despite the project's efforts, community leaders recruited some females who were older than the designated ages and who had children. According to the research team's observations, and as illustrated in the transcribed material, the older women with children were more likely to contribute to the discussions. Furthermore, in one case, it was evident that an older participant 'with children' ridiculed one of the younger participants 'without children', and according to the transcribed data, the younger participant evidently transformed her perspective at later point in order to accommodate the older participant. The above examples and other experiences confirmed that the life stages of female Maasai must be considered in organizing a group.

As an aside note, the considerations of life stages and age-sets not only apply to organizing groups, but also relate to the selection of group facilitator. One must consider the barriers that a Maasai facilitator may face if they are requested to facilitate a group that contravenes the cultural customs described above. One example evident in this research was in regards to the female facilitator who facilitated the groups corresponding to the ages between 14-17 and 18-25. She is a Maasai woman who is not married and 'without children', and as a result, reported to facing some barriers and discomfort while facilitating groups with participants who were married and 'with children'.



### 3. The concept of 'charisma' and 'black stick' men

Within each focus group, it was evident that a more subtle form of power existed among the specific groups. It was evident that certain members of the groups were ascribed superior status, and it was generally accepted and recognized that these individuals were wiser, expected to talk more (sometimes on behalf of others), and were frequently deferred to within the group discussions. These group members were commonly referred to as 'black stick men', which is indicative of their status: the title, 'black stick men', officially refers to the revered position of traditional leader (none of the group members were, in fact, traditional leaders).

As a result of this phenomenon, facilitating discussions was sometimes challenging. Some members sometimes made little contribution, and when questions were directed to them, they often deferred, and when further pressed, other participants would question the facilitator's motive because, according to them, the individuals were 'non-talkative' people. As a result, it often seemed that the participants did not support the facilitator's attempts to solicit insights and experiences from all members. According to group observations, some were recognized with a role to talk and share, while others were not, and according to some of the participants' reactions, it seemed abnormal to reconfigure these relationships.

#### c. Language

For practical reasons relating to administration and translation issues, this research was originally going to be facilitated in Swahili, which is the national language in Tanzania. Nonetheless, it became evident in our consultation with the community as well as in the pre-testing period, that many of the participants were not fluent in Swahili,

and for those who were fluent in the language, they were reluctant to use it, especially among their fellow Maasai. For example, during pre-testing, the Maasai facilitator was criticized for using Swahili. The participants seemed offended and challenged the facilitator to use his mother tongue while speaking among his peers. Despite the facilitator's explanation for using Swahili, the participants remained critical and persisted to use Maa in their interaction with each other and the facilitator. This experience suggests that Swahili would have significantly undermined the research's objectives.

Despite the evidence of this experience, most programs and interventions within this community continue to be administered in Swahili. As this project originally did, these programs neglect the fact that Swahili is a second language for Maasai, and for those who have not attended secondary school, their education consists only of their experience in primary school, which is often not an effective institution – many who complete a number of years of primary school remain without a competent level of Swahili. Furthermore, programs frequently neglect that, for the most part, the Swahili language is an imposed language that, for groups like the Kisongo Maasai, may be associated with an oppressive history and State.

d. Cultural competence and sensitivity

During engagements with the community, individuals frequently commented on the lack of cultural awareness and sensitivity that has pervaded development initiatives from the government and NGOs. Some of the participants criticized NGOs for process issues, such as providing seminar-type programs that didn't consider gender or age-set factors. As a result, they reported that the programs were not very effective because the participants were not often free to discuss the issues amongst themselves.

In other cases, individuals expressed frustration with the lack of cultural awareness within many 'development' programs' objectives and content. One young traditional leader, for example, explained his frustrations in the following quote: "many agencies and many other people, they just come and they say, 'stop this!' They tell us to go and stop this according to their perception of the culture, they will create conflict between the young Ilmurran and me if I go there and just impose all things. They tell us to stop this and stop that, but they must learn the culture" (Key Informant: Alaigwanani/Korianga). Among the female research participants, they expressed similar frustration, especially in regards to 'anti-FGM' programs. In reference to these programs, one participant exclaimed the following: "you know what I hate the most, is when they bring an example of a girl who is not a Maasai, but is of another tradition to explain the impact of circumcision. I hate this because she has no experience with the way the female circumcision is done in Maasailand" (FGD/F18-25)<sup>7</sup>.

e. Participatory development and dialogical relationships<sup>8</sup>

It was commonly illustrated that the participant's experience with development research or projects has rarely been characterized by participation and dialogical relationships. According to many participants and community members, the integration of these principles within this study was highly appreciated and considered more effective than previous experiences.

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<sup>7</sup> As an aside, this frustration was frequently validated through the observations made in this research. For example, according to correspondence with some 'anti-FGM' development workers from a renowned international NGO who had been administering 'anti-FGM' programs among the Maasai for a few years, these workers were ignorant of the type of circumcision done by Maasai, as well as the cultural significance of the practice. It was an appalling observation.

<sup>8</sup> 'Dialogical relationships' refers to a form of inter-relating that is non-authoritarian and focuses on exchanging, comparing, and communicating, rather than indoctrinating, proselytizing and generally issuing a communique (Mullaly, 1997).

The traditional leaders were particularly adamant about the importance of these principles and critical of their previous experiences. The following excerpt is a quote from an interview with a traditional leader from the Ilmurran age-set. It illustrates his previous encounters with 'development', the deficiencies of historical approaches, and the solidarity achieved within this project, which adopted more participatory and dialogical approaches:

This is the third seminar<sup>9</sup> about HIV. The first one it was the one World Vision started about Esoto. They called them. World Vision came up and started this preaching. They didn't just call us and say we want to solve this problem... we were called again about Esoto, and then at that time they [World Vision] said, 'let's try to educate about AIDS'. We wanted to go and try to educate about AIDS, and then later on we meet and listen to what individuals have accepted, what they say about condoms, but in fact, we have never, we were never involved in meeting in seminars that give us freedom to share, to form strategies. We are appreciating you, we are supporting you, and we are uniting. It is as if we have the same head as you<sup>10</sup>. (Key Informant: Alaigwanani/Korianga)

The senior traditional leader shared similar sentiments to the Korianga traditional leader. He explained the importance of the participatory process using an allegory of defending oneself against a lion:

Normally, when you see a lion coming running to you and you do not have any weapon, what you can do, you need to make a lot of noise to call other people to

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<sup>9</sup> 'Seminar' is commonly used to refer to any meeting or gathering focusing on development. In this case, the participant is referring to the key informant interview as a 'seminar'.

<sup>10</sup> 'Same head as you' is an expression that is used to express a likeness in thoughts and ideas. In this case, the participant is communicating to the principal investigator that he agrees and shares the principal investigators concerns, ideas, and values relating to strategies to engage the Maasai community.

help you, make a loud noise to call other people to help you. This AIDS is like a lion, which is running to us, and we don't have weapons, there is no cure, you can never go to the hospital and get treated, that is life, you don't have a weapon. But to make noises, it is to call people and to try to make solutions to make our strategies on how to overcome that disease. (Key Informant:

Alaigwanani/Ormesuki)

The most succinct expression of the Maasai's general experience with 'development', as well as an affirmation and testament to the value of participatory and dialogical approaches, was articulated in one participant's closing statements following a focus group discussion:

Let's now listen, because we are about to depart. In my opinion, I thank you very much, because something which is discussed is very good, especially when it is those affected who are the ones discussing it. When I refer to what you said in the very beginning, you told us that when we meet and if we produce something that will take us to the pit, it is our responsibility and you will not be the one who directed us into the pit [referring to the facilitators opening remarks]<sup>11</sup>. We have now seen that this is a very good thing [referring to the focus group discussion process], and we are very thankful because we have seen something bad, and we have seen something good because we are the ones who are involving ourselves, and we have seen a light and we know now what is bad and what is good. And again, I am very thankful and we have never seen any seminar like this that listens to the voices of those people. This seminar is very good because we are the ones

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<sup>11</sup> The facilitator's opening remarks involved an encouragement and challenge to the participants to cooperate in the research process. He was highlighting each participant's own agency in addressing the problem of HIV/AIDS.

who decide what we want, it listens to us, and we wish that it continues this way. When it continues this way, we will have many things to share, we will continue to be free to share. Because, in other seminars, we are not given a chance to talk, and they don't know that we have very good ideas for ourselves. So, I conclude.  
(FGD/M18-25)

f. Action Research

As previously mentioned, one of the barriers that this research faced was the tendency of participants to associate the principal investigator, a foreign Mzungu, with historical research-orientated academic or photographic projects that, according to their perspective, did not contribute anything to the Maasai community. As previously indicated, the Maasai have been historically subjected to numerous projects that have exploited them, appropriating their tradition, their history, their cultural worldview, their ascetic beauty, and their art. The product has filled libraries, museums, and art galleries in the West, but has had little substantive benefit to the Maasai people.

In my experience, I witnessed two such projects within Longido. In one case, for example, a professor from a university in the UK was administering a research project concerning the migration of Ilmurran into urban centers. The research could be very valuable in its contribution to the Maasai community's current process of understanding and managing the recent phenomenon, which is contributing significantly to the vulnerability of Ilmurran to HIV/AIDS. Nonetheless, from my correspondence with representatives of that project, including the principal investigator, the project's objectives were far from any notion of community development or the values of action research. On the contrary, it seems the objectives of the project lie in professional

indulgences and the pages of academic journals or periodicals buried in academia. The principal investigator visited the village on several occasions, administered arguably unethical and culturally insensitive interviews, and reportedly, not yet disseminated any findings to any of the participants or the community.

Subsequently, participants commonly expressed legitimate reluctance to participate in research or projects that do not substantively contribute to their community in a manner that they deem important. It necessitates clear objectives within research or other projects that reflect goals regarding substantive contributions to the community. According to the experience of this study, only by highlighting and exemplifying a commitment to action and transformation were many of the participants' reluctances and concerns appeased, and their collaboration secured.

The following anecdote represents the most confrontational case, but adequately reflects the general concern and criticism that was commonly confronted by the research team and the principal investigator. At the beginning of a focus group discussion, a few female focus group participants expressed concern about their participation and suggested to other participants, that unless they were paid for their time, they should not participate. Given their history with projects facilitated by foreign Wazungu, the participants had legitimate concerns about the objectives of the research and the foreign principle investigators involvement in the project. They accused the principal investigator of benefiting financially and professionally through the research, while neither they nor their community would receive anything in return for their participation and contribution. The situation was only resolved after a discussion was facilitated that further explained the objectives of the study, the principles of action research, the nature of the Mzungu's

involvement (i.e. facilitating the research component so as to contribute to program development within the Window of Hope project), and the study's commitment to working with the Maasai to reduce their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS<sup>12</sup>. Ironically, the conflict ultimately served to build awareness about the project's objectives and, according to the comments of some participants, further establish commitment among participants. It provided a forum for participants to share their concerns and negotiate their interests. As a result of this lesson, all of the proceeding focus groups were provided the same opportunity, which served to have the same effect.

In summary, the field experience suggested that 'development' has commonly disregarded process issues like the ones presented in the above discussion. As previously mentioned, the relative success of this project was, at least in part, due to consideration and integration of these values and experiences. As a response to this field experience and the appalling nature of 'development' that was conveyed by the participants' historic experiences, Chapter 6 of this dissertation compiles the 'lessons learned' from this study's experiences into a development model that may contribute to facilitating intercultural solidarity and an anti-oppressive approach to 'development'.

### 3.3. Limitations of the Research.

The following limitations of this research are worth highlighting:

- i. Cultural analysis versus political economic analysis.

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<sup>12</sup> These issues had been presented in the original engagement with participants and were included within the informed consent statement that preceded each focus group. Evidently, however, participants needed further elaboration and affirmation in regards to some of the issues.



This study primarily focuses on a cultural analysis of girls' vulnerability. It predominantly explores cultural values, customs, institutions, and the intra-community politics of gender construction, while not presenting a significant political economic analysis of women and girls' vulnerability. Although Chapter 5.3 presents some very important political economic analysis, it is only a marginal component of this dissertation.

The reader is encouraged to recognize that, despite the predominant focus on cultural analysis in this dissertation, the vulnerability of the Kisongo Maasai to HIV/AIDS, and specifically the vulnerability of women and girls, is in a large part the product of the political economy. The cultural values, customs, institutions, the intra-community politics, and girls' subsequent vulnerability, is ultimately a product of the political economy. The contemporary cultural, social, economic, and political phenomena that are explored in this dissertation are fundamentally the product of extrinsic forces and external impacts. As illustrated in Chapter 5.3, extrinsic forces, such as colonial history, state expansion and control, and development interventions are fundamentally related to the phenomena and the construction of gender observed in contemporary Kisongo Maasai communities.

As a result, the objectives of this dissertation include reorienting 'development' not only to cultural analysis, but more importantly, to the politics of intervention that have historically oppressed the Kisongo Maasai, and inadvertently contributed to women and girls' vulnerability.

- ii. Foreign identity of principal investigator: creating the "Other"

The foreign identity of the principal investigator intrinsically limits the research.

As a foreign, non-Maa speaking, white, male Canadian the identity of the principal investigator limited the research in three fundamental ways. First, as compared to a research involving a Maasai principal investigator, it is likely that the foreignness of the principal investigator limited or affected the mobilization of the community, the participation of community members, and the data generated. Second, as the principal investigator is foreign to Kisongo Maasai culture and does not understand Maa, the research was limited for obvious reasons. Lastly, another limitation concerning identity is that in some cases, the principal investigator, despite self-scrutiny and self-reflexivity, may impose a foreign worldview and social categories onto the phenomena identified in this research.

Inherently, this research has involved the artificial creation of the "Other" (Hartstock, 1999). As a result, it therefore assumes the risks of this activity, and recognizes the adverse impacts this activity has imposed on communities throughout the globe, and especially on colonized communities, such as the Kisongo Maasai of East Africa.

**Reflection:**

*Although the foreign identity of the principal investigator represents a limitation for the reasons mentioned in this section, in some respects, it has been an asset to this project as well. As a foreigner, the principal investigator was able to vacillate between the "insider"/"outsider" role and the emic/etic perspective. Consequently, this functioned to develop a more comprehensive understanding of phenomena – acknowledging, considering, and balancing inevitable "insider" bias as well as "outsider" bias. Furthermore, it served practical advocacy functions for negotiating and mediating the relationship between external development agencies and the Maasai community – being an "outsider" and an "insider" (to some degree) was important for administering this project, and communicating the findings to development stakeholders.*

This limitation, although admittedly insurmountable, was mitigated through critical reflexive practice. The principal investigator was committed to pursuing an emic perspective, cultural competence<sup>13</sup> and most importantly, identifying the often-unconscious assumptions that correspond to the multiple elements that formulate the principal investigator's identity, including socio-cultural worldview. Furthermore, another notable mitigating factor involved the pursuit of dialogical relationships with research participants, community members, and Kisongo Maasai youth researchers.

In reference to the latter, without question, the success of the study was contingent on establishing relationships with these research colleagues that were characterized by mutual trust, genuine respect, equality, and a focus on mutual learning. In addition, it was contingent on building the capacity of these youth so they could essentially lead the project while implementing the research in the communities. As a result, the product of this study is intrinsically a reflection of not only the principal investigator's analysis, but to a large part, the perceptions, experiences, and analysis of the Kisongo Maasai youth researchers.

iii. Time limitation – limited field research.

The duration of the field research component of this project was approximately 7 months. However, in specific reference to actual time with the Maasai community, the field research is closer to 5 months. Although this period of field research may be sufficient in other research contexts, the cross-cultural nature and topic of this study necessitates a longer commitment. Sufficiently immersing oneself in a foreign culture, understanding the complexity and richness of Maasai culture and more specifically,

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<sup>13</sup> See Chapter 6 for a description of this concept.

determining the production, management, and transformation of gender among the Maasai, is an ambitious task that requires more time than was available in this study.

Nonetheless, the principal investigator and corresponding team of researchers hope that the findings generated by the study remain useful. Although all stakeholders regret the short field research, the research team pursues its objective of applying the findings to developing and transforming programs that involve Kisongo Maasai communities.

#### iv. Conceptualization of 'power'

In general, the conceptualization of 'power' illustrated in this study reflects a simplistic and modernist conceptualization of power. Within the following discussions, it sometimes illustrates power as an attribute that characterizes some people rather than another. In the case of this research related to gender, it frequently illustrates power as an attribute of Kisongo Maasai males, and in some cases, an attribute of females. It often purports a conceptualization of power as "something that is acquired, seized, or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away" (Foucault, 1999).

This conceptualization of power served practical purposes for exploring and discussing social phenomena. Nonetheless, an actual understanding of power should surpass the modernist conceptualization that pervades this dissertation. Power must ultimately be understood in a more fluid and relational manner than is sometimes depicted in this dissertation. Despite often adopting modernist conceptualizations of power for the aforementioned practical purposes, this study, in fact, espouses a conceptualization of power more similar to Michel Foucault (1999):

The omnipresence of power: not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relativism from one point to another. Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere. And "Power", insofar as it is permanent, repetitious, inert, and self-reproducing, is simply the over-all effect that emerges from all these mobilities, the concatenation that rests on each of them and seeks in turn to arrest their movement. One needs to be nominalistic, no doubt: power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society.

v. Issues surrounding public ideology/perception versus private reality

A further limitation to this research may be the degree to which it relied on the perceptions and attitudes conveyed in the focus groups and interviews, rather than primarily relying on ethnographic exploration. As a result, the findings may be limited by the degree to which the study managed to distinguish between public ideology/perception and private reality and "social fact". The lack of this distinction in cross-cultural studies, such as this one, has historically contributed to many misrepresentations of culture, and more specifically, African women. For example, recent studies of women in pastoralist cultures has argued that "although the public ideology may be one of male 'ownership', further investigation usually shows that women in fact exercise substantial, recognized rights which may vary according to the category of livestock, its source, and the purpose of its disposal" (Hodgson, 2000). In

other words, often members of a community may report a popularized ideology or perception, while in reality, the phenomena is more complex. In many cases, misrepresenting dominant ideology and public perception as social fact has perpetuated negative images of African women that characterize them solely as powerless victims.

In specific reference to this research, although care was taken to explore phenomena beyond public ideology and perception, it is possible that the research, at times, reflects public ideology and perception rather than social fact or private reality. For example, in almost every case concerning discussions of power, both males and females generally responded by illustrating women and girls as powerless in comparison to men. However, with further exploration and analysis, it was generally discovered that although the distribution of power remains unequal in most cases, women and girls frequently aspire to characteristics or adopt behaviors that represent forms of power; the social fact is that they appropriate many means of expressing power within the community and their inter-relationships with men.

This study has attempted to avoid the misrepresentation of Maasai women by highlighting their actions that represent their power. Although the findings generally confirm an unequal distribution of power, the review of findings attempts to also illustrate methods that women and girls use to attain power and/or contest male power. It is the desire of the principal investigator and the research team that the reader recognize these components. The reluctance of disseminating this research is that it could be misappropriated and used to perpetuate the common 'powerless' images of African women.

Two other examples that are of some concern relate to the prevalence of violence, sexual customs and behavior. In regards to violence, participants often portrayed that violence was commonly inflicted on women and girls. For example, one woman exclaimed that, "we're beaten all the time". Contrary to this participant's perception, the observations that accompanied this study suggest that this comment may distort the social reality of most Maasai women and girls. Although violence towards women and girls is indeed a significant and devastating issue for many Maasai women and girls (similar to many women and girls throughout other global contexts), violence does not characterize all women and girls' relationships, and is likely an exception rather than the norm. Furthermore, it is important to remember that the study identified that violence towards women and girls fundamentally contradicts the values of Maasai culture, and it is often regulated by social control mechanisms.

Similarly, given the nature of this study, exploration of sexual customs and behaviors also relied predominantly on the experiences and perceptions generated within focus group discussions. Consequently, this may, at times, distort social fact. For example, although public perception indicates that Kisongo Maasai males commonly maintain many concurrent sexual partners, this may, at least in part, reflect cultural values, popular perception about Kisongo Maasai males, and self-posturing, rather than actual social fact. It is difficult to determine the actual prevalence of some sexual phenomena, and in some cases, the perceptions presented in the focus groups and interviews may misrepresent sexual phenomena. Future research on this matter may be necessary to determine the validity of this public perception<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> See Chapter 10.2 for further discussion on this matter.

## **SECTION II**



## INTRODUCTION

Section II reviews and discusses the findings generated from the study. The majority of this section represents a cultural analysis. It focuses on the politics of health as it relates to cultural phenomena and the power relations that characterize girls' immediate socio-cultural environment. It also provides a conceptual framework that will guide the content of HIV/AIDS prevention programming.

Beyond a cultural analysis, the discussions in later parts of this section direct the focus to a political economic analysis. It discusses the intimate and dynamic relationship between extrinsic and external forces and the construction and reproduction of Maasai ethnicity. In many cases, this discussion reorients the focus of girls' vulnerability from a cultural analysis to an analysis of 'development' and the politics of intervention. The last chapter of this section highlights the important principles of 'development' that have generally eluded interventions within Maasai communities.

Chapter 4 represents the review of findings corresponding to the cultural analysis component of this study. Part 4.1 and 4.2 are mostly descriptive sections that focus on reviewing relevant cultural phenomena. Part 4.1 discusses ideological factors that underpin and often perpetuate women and girls' vulnerability. Part 4.2 reviews specific customs and institutions of the Kisongo Maasai culture. The intention of these sections is to provide a basic understanding and awareness of certain cultural phenomena. In so doing, these parts introduce the proceeding sections.

The remaining parts of Chapter 4 present an analysis of each power sub-category – social, sexual, economic, and political power. As previously mentioned in the methodology section, this analysis attempts to review the general responses concerning

women and girls' social, sexual, economic and political power; suggest some of the conditions that participants indicated contribute to the power phenomena; highlight mitigating factors, social regulatory mechanisms, and behaviors that women adopt to contest male power; and lastly, present some of the impacts on women and girls of unequal power that participants identified.

Chapter 5 of this section will provide a discussion and synthesis of Chapter 4. part 5.1 will revisit the elements within Chapter 4 with a specific emphasis on HIV/AIDS vulnerability. In accordance with the original objectives of this study, part 5.2 supplements the discussion with a presentation of the study's findings related to the research participants' assessment of risk, which was a key component within the second phase of focus groups. Lastly, part 5.3 synthesizes the findings presented in this section into a Model of Vulnerability, which provides a conceptual framework for understanding women and girls' vulnerability, and situates women and girls' vulnerability into the political economy that has profoundly impacted the construction and reproduction of Maasai ethnicity.

Chapter 6 concludes this section with a discussion and presentation of an Anti-Oppressive Development Model. In response to the challenges, considerations, and findings generated in this study, Chapter 6 proposes a model that may guide 'development' in a manner that will reduce the adverse impacts of 'development' (discussed in Chapter 5), and facilitate constructive relationships and intercultural solidarity with Maasai communities.

## CHAPTER 4: REVIEW OF FINDINGS

### *A Personal Reflection from the Principal Investigator:*

*I've continued to become more and more cognizant of the limitations of cultural analysis representation activities and overwhelmingly cognizant to the fact that, although often unintentional, such activities have had devastating impacts on African communities in general, and specifically, on the Maasai of East Africa. Consequently, it has often been a difficult and enduring process, and I have taken many precautions, tried to be vigilante in my critical-reflexivity, and tried to provide a just representation of the Kisongo Maasai community in the following document. However, given the nature of this study, some limitations are insurmountable. Therefore, some words of concern and caution to the reader are as follows:*

- 1) The nature of this topic – exploring factors that contribute to vulnerability – inevitably leads to 'problematizing' and critically evaluating the Kisongo Maasai culture. This has generated significant discomfort and concern for me. Without a persistent consideration of the nature of this study, the findings in the following section could be appropriated by the reader in a manner that misrepresents the Kisongo Maasai culture and community; 'problematizing' the culture without acknowledging the incredible strengths, assets, and positive attributes of Maasai culture, and the overall quality of life that pervades the Maasai community for the most part.*

*In the case of women and girls, despite the lamentations and negative portrayals that often characterized the focus group discussions, this should not be misunderstood as conveying a poor quality of life for all Maasai women and girls. On the contrary, my experiences during this study generally revealed a positive quality of life characterized by vitality, enriching relationships among women and girls, a strong sense of pride and gratification in their capacity to reproduce and care for children, a strong sense of identity as Maasai, an acute awareness and pride regarding their essential roles in the community, and a strong sense of agency in their collective strength as Maasai females.*

*Although not naïve to the detriment of some cultural phenomena among the Maasai, my experience, nonetheless, left me with an overwhelming respect for the Maasai culture and ethnicity, and often with an acute awareness to the negative attributes of my own culture. I have complete admiration for the communitarian principles that underly many of their values and social organization; their elaborate system of community governance and social regulation; their strong inclination towards collectivization; their persistent strength to resist globalization; their pervasive sense of interdependency; the utmost value they place on dialogue and critical reflection; their strict adherence to community values and customs; their complete dedication to the well-being of their children; their dedication to ceremony and ritual; and their complete resilience and vitality despite the oppression that characterizes their relationship with external extrinsic forces over the past century or more. Ultimately, despite challenges and certain deleterious cultural phenomena (not unlike all other cultural groups around the world), it will be regretful if the international community persists to 'problematize' the Maasai while neglecting their incredible attributes and strengths.*

- 2) *Because the following findings rely predominantly from the data generated in focus group forums, there are some noteworthy considerations:*
- a. *Sometimes the findings may represent public perception and ideology, which can inadvertently distort actual social reality and individual experience (i.e. participants' comments illustrating certain 'public ideology' that conceptualize women as powerless, whereas, in reality, women and girls' power varies significantly according to many contextual conditions, social regulatory mechanisms mediate unfair power dynamics, and lastly, women and girls' adopt many behaviors that contest and negotiate the power dynamics that characterize their relationships with males) .*
  - b. *Understandably, at times, participants may have used these forums to lament certain socio-cultural phenomena (i.e. women lamenting certain unjust and prejudicial practices), or as a forum for self-posturing and reproducing power (i.e. male participants' emphasis on extensive sexual networks, superiority, exclusive authority, etc.).*
  - c. *In some cases, the descriptive nature of particularly parts 4.1 and 4.2 may misrepresent the Maasai culture if understood in isolation of the proceeding sections, discussions, and interpretations in this dissertation. Understanding certain detrimental cultural phenomena (i.e. corporal punishment of women, sexual coercion, etc.) in isolation of other phenomena (i.e. cultural assets relating to complex social regulatory mechanisms, mitigating conditions, contestations, etc.) may inadvertently facilitate misconceptions, misrepresentations, and negative stereotypes of the Maasai community. I have tried to counter this by frequently acknowledging dissenting voices, and presenting some of the mitigating and regulating socio-cultural phenomena. The reader is encouraged to read the sections following this one to fully understand the complexity of women and girls' vulnerability, understand women and girls' agency, recognize the social regulatory values and structures that exist among the Maasai, and understand the intimate and detrimental relationship between contemporary phenomena and "development".*
- 3) *Discussing socio-cultural phenomena in isolation and independent of the extrinsic and external factors (i.e. expansion infiltration of the market economy, state expansion and control, the politics of development, etc.) that are discussed in later sections (i.e. ch. 5) may facilitate misconceptions concerning the construction and reproduction of ethnicity and culture. As illustrated in proceeding sections, contemporary ethnicity and cultural phenomena are products of the intricate and complex relationships with 'extrinsic and external' factors. In fact, categorizing these factors as 'extrinsic and external' fosters a false dichotomy – these factors have been and continue to be fundamental to the construction and reproduction of the socio-cultural phenomena discussed throughout this dissertation.*

#### 4.1 Cultural and Ideological Values

##### I. Traditionalism

As illustrated in the literature review, traditionalism refers to a philosophical system or ideology that often attributes significant authority to the dominant perceptions of 'tradition'. Within people groups, such as the Kisongo Maasia, 'tradition' predominantly defines the characteristics of a community and functions as a significant factor that determines the social order.

As an aside note, it is important to highlight the fact that, in contrast to the popular perceptions that are conveyed in the following discussion, there is often nothing traditional per se about 'tradition'. Although 'tradition' is often perceived as the unchanging attributes of a society, secondary literature suggests that this is often a misconception of history and misrepresents the complexity and fluidity of ethnic identity construction. As illustrated in the literature review, rather than the preservation of a genuine and authentic cultural identity, 'tradition' often is more indicative of the power relations that have monopolized the production of knowledge and purported preservation of historic identity. See the discussion concerning traditionalism in the literature review for an elaboration of this subject.

The research participants corresponding to this study commonly illustrated that traditionalism functions as a powerful ideology within the Kisongo Maasai community. Participants frequently provided justification for behaviors and structures by making reference to ancestors, or more generally, the 'beginning' or 'tradition'. For example, in one interview with a traditional leader from the second most senior age-class, his explanation for behavioral rules and mores was that, "from the origin there was a person

who was created first, so the rules were started by the person who was first created". In context of discussing the age-set system, one female participant commented that, "it is good because it is what the ancestors started". Similarly, another participant argued that men have authority over women because, "since the beginning and the creation of man, he is the one who has authority". Sexual norms relating to initiating sex were also justified with reference to tradition: "it is just because from the beginning it was just the man who asks for sex" (FGD/F18-25).

In some cases these traditionalist perspectives were further justified by associating them with God. For example, in one case, a participant argued that women must perform household duties, "because in the beginning, God created woman to do this. God created the woman to do all the housework, and the men to do all the caring for cattle" (FGD/M14-17).

The significance of traditionalism is particularly relevant to attitudes towards change. On several occasions, participants indicated that because tradition was attributed significant authority and importance, changing customs and behaviors that are perceived as 'tradition' is difficult. The following quote represents a common sentiment illustrated among many participants: "We cannot stop our tradition, so I don't think the Maasai people will stop it. It will go on" (FGD/F14-17). According to some participants, they experienced shame if they behaved in a manner contrary to dominant perceptions of 'tradition': "it is very hard to stop this because it is one of our traditions and if I try to stop it, there is a kind of shame" (FGD/M14-17).

Nonetheless, in contrast to the attitudes and perceptions just mentioned, and despite the prevailing notions of traditionalism, it is noteworthy that attitudes and

opinions of many participants illustrated attitudes and perceptions that nurture social change and challenge traditionalism. Participants frequently contested the dominant perceptions of 'tradition', challenged the authority ascribed to it, and illustrated the evolutionary nature of tradition. For example, in discussing some of the practices associated with the Esoto institution, one female participant argued that, "Esoto did not have any significant meaning but it has continued to be a part of our heritage, every age-set practices it. But, from my experience I think that it was there mistakenly" (FGD/F18-25). Contrary to some popular perceptions concerning permissive sex as a 'tradition' within Esoto, a traditional leader argued that, "Esoto was not meant for sexual relations... Ilmurran and young people are assigned to go to Esoto where they gather and feel free according to tradition. Sex is out and not the essence of Esoto" (Key Informant: Alagwanani/Korianga). The traditional leaders also frequently illustrated attitudes and perceptions that contrasted with the assumptions within traditionalism. One traditional leader, for example, expressed resentment towards their purported unwillingness to change. He explained that, "we accept everything that is coming now, we accept and we see how it works, and we judge it, and provided that it doesn't affect us, then the tradition accepts and we are ready to join... some might correct the tradition at some point if the tradition is wrong" (Key Informant: Alaigwanani/Ormesuki). As illustrated by these perspectives and attitudes, despite the prevailing dominant ideology of traditionalism, it is contested and, albeit slowly and cautiously sometimes, it is perpetually evaluated and changed.

## II. Conceptions/Ideals of femininity

It was evident in many of the focus group discussions as well as some of the key informant interviews that women are conceived as inferior to men. As indicated in later sections of this document, dynamic interrelationships with extrinsic factors, most notably the interrelationships with state expansion, the market economy, and 'development', has negatively impacted women and girls. In specific reference to the current subject, these dynamic interactions have reinforced and produced some of the following conceptions/ideals of femininity that have been detrimental to women and girls.

Generally, women and girls were often illustrated as having an inherent deficiency compared to their male counterparts, which is manifested in their capacity of intellect and performing certain roles in the community. For example, a traditional elder explained that, "if you take the mind of a man and the mind of a woman, the way they imagine in tradition, women are not smart" (Key Informant: Alaigwanani/Ormesuki). One seventeen year old male participant illustrated women's inferior status in the following quote: "Normally we consider women as children. We believe that they cannot participate in traditional meetings and make good decisions. In a traditional aspect women are children before men. Women before men are children and they cannot respond back to men" (FGD/M18-25).

Participants illustrated several implications for women derived from this ideology. Participants illustrated implications relating to inability to perform important functions surrounding the care of cattle, managing or leading a household, managing capital, and performing leadership roles in community politics. For example, in relation to their inability to participate in community politics, one participant explained that, "a woman is



not ideally strong to stand and convince people in the traditional meetings" (FGD/M14-17).

From this ideological base and context, women's marginalization is understood and given validation; their relegation to passive, subordinate, and disenfranchised roles are given justification. For example, a female participant identified that prejudicial attitudes have been a barrier to enrolling girls in education: "in the beginning, a woman was said to be weak, and so this weakness had been a great impact for a girl to go to school". In relation to women's marginalization to domestic roles<sup>1</sup>, the following quote clearly illustrates the implication of these conceptualizations on women: "we never consider women because these things, like conflict and traditional meetings are very difficult for a woman, and the role of the woman is very limited except around the fire" (FGD/M18-25).

There are two things that must be recognized in relation to the above discussion. First, it is important to note that these conceptualizations were identified by male research participants. Although some female participants would identify similar conceptualizations of women, it was always in reference to what the community or men think about women rather than identifying these conceptualizations as a valid appraisal of women: "our community sees us that we are incapable" (FGD/F18-25).

In contrast to the ideology illustrated among most male participants, female participants frequently contested these negative conceptions/ideals of femininity. For example, women often expressed that they were confident in their capacity, but were

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<sup>1</sup> In discussing the marginalization of women to domestic roles, it is important to recognize that the domestic sphere is not, in Maasai communities, the isolated sphere that it is commonly conceptualized as in the West. Although it represents marginalization from public spheres in some degrees, it is not appropriate to apply Western public-private and domestic-market dichotomies in conceptualizing the life of Maasai women (Talle, 1988).

denied opportunity to fulfill this capacity: "we also have authority<sup>2</sup>, but we are not given the chance" (FGD/F18-25).

The second thing that is important to identify is that although prejudicial attitudes in regards to femininity pervaded the discussions with male participants, there were also indications of perspectives that contrast with the dominant ideological view. For example, in reference to the educational context, male participants commonly acknowledged that girls performed better than boys and that it was more common for girls to pass the national exams, which permitted them to attend secondary school: "it is girls who go to secondary school" (FGD/M18-25). Further, in the younger male focus group discussion, a few participants noted that women were capable of performing purported 'non-traditional' roles. For example, in meetings where women are permitted to participate, such as within the village government system, it was noted that they played important roles and made important contributions: "we have witnessed them citing good things. They say things that a person cannot believe<sup>3</sup>" (FGD/M14-17). Similarly, in relation to business, positive attitudes towards women's capacity was illustrated. The following quote is one example: "nowadays, we have women who are doing business just like men" (FGD/M14-17).

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<sup>2</sup> The Maasai term used translates into authority, but the Maasai term denotes more than a power ascribed to a person. Unlike the English word, it denotes a characteristic of having ability or capacity associated with authority and leadership. In other words, a strong ability to make decisions, manage environments, and influence people.

<sup>3</sup> 'They say things that a person cannot believe' is referring to saying things that surpass the preconceived notions of a woman's ability to be insightful.

### III. Conceptions/Ideals of Masculinity

Conceptions or ideals of masculinity pervaded the data generated by the research. The most significant characteristics of masculinity that were illustrated relate to division of labor, superiority over women and girls, violence towards women, and the relationship between status and sexual behavior. In relation to the contemporary division of labor, which is predominantly a product of market economy expansion, it was evident among the participants that males exclusively associated masculinity with caring for cattle. Subsequently, jobs associated with domestic labor, which were associated with femininity, were considered shameful. This is illustrated in more detail in the part 5.2, "Shame associated with reproductive work for men".

Concomitant to the attitudes referring to women as children and inferior, male participants illustrated a conception or ideal of masculinity that defined males as superior to females. Sentiments similar to the following statement from one male participant were sometimes explicit and frequently implied throughout the discussions: "all in all, a woman is normally below a man" (FGD/M18-25). Such superiority often translated into attitudes and perceptions concerning a general incapacity of females, which was identified in the above discussion. One male participant generalized that, "a woman does not have the ability to do things" (FGD/M14-17).

One of the most potentially detrimental conceptions or ideals of masculinity relates to gender-based violence. In several cases, it was evident that masculinity has sometimes become associated with violence. Focus group participants, for example, sometimes illustrated that males commonly express or maintain their authority through violence, which maintains an environment of fear within their interrelationships with

their wives. Discussions among male participants indicated that some males treat women violently because they witness this behavior in their peers. To further complicate this phenomenon, participants conveyed that males who are feared by women, and particularly their wives, are ascribed a certain respect. One participant explained this phenomena in the following statement: "A person may beat a woman because sometimes people may say 'this man is very strong, the women will never say a word to him' ... people will be saying, 'this man is very strong, women fear him a lot', and when you hear this, a man becomes arrogant and he goes back and beats the women... he beats his wife because of the arrogance he gains from people" (FGD/M18-25).

Masculinity is also frequently associated with permissive sex. As illustrated in part 5.2, "number of partners and social status", the masculine ideal is sometimes associated with having multiple concurrent partners. In addition to this, masculinity is associated with needing sex. Participants illustrated that, "a man is the one who asks because he has no shame" (FGD/M18-25), that "a woman is the one with the thing that is needed by a man" (FGD/M14-17), and comments that shared similar sentiments to the following: "there is a poison<sup>4</sup> within his body that makes him to wander asking for sex" (FGD/F18-25). It was evident in the discussions that these conceptions of masculinity sometimes offered justification for some males' tendency to persistently pressure women and girls to have sex, and in general, may sometimes contribute to permissive sexual phenomena among Kisongo Maasai males.

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<sup>4</sup> 'Poison' was used in the figurative sense in this statement. It is used to refer to a sense of lust that men have that drives them to seek sexual relationships (Field Notes).

## Summary

In summary, traditionalism and gender ideology were frequently illustrated throughout the research. Commonly, in discussions surrounding conceptions of femininity and masculinity or in discussions surrounding contemporary customs and social order, participants invoked dominant perceptions of 'tradition' to justify and explain contemporary phenomena. Evidently, despite that it is often embedded in misconceptions of history (see Chapter 6), traditionalism functions as an ideology that maintains the status quo, and subsequently, it may compound women and girls' vulnerability.

Conceptions or ideals of femininity and masculinity, which are often perpetuated by traditionalism, similarly function as a powerful ideology. The conceptions/ideals sometimes ascribes detrimental conceptions of males and females that determines social relations, sometimes socializes males and females to adopt characteristics that perpetuate inequality, and ultimately, facilitates behaviors that entrench women and girls' vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.

Nonetheless, as illustrated in later discussions, these ideologies are contested. Many participants illustrated attitudes and perspectives that challenge the dominant ideology. It was evident in discussions that although products of gender ideology, the participants in this research made it clear that they are also agents in reproducing and transforming it.

## 4.2 Customs, Institutions, and Norms

### I. Supremacy of cattle in Maasai culture<sup>1</sup>

One of the gender cards that were placed on the gender matrix was 'caring for cattle'. The activity and subsequent discussions made two things evident that are relevant to the study. One, although women participate in caring for cattle in a variety of ways, 'caring for cattle' is ultimately, associated with males. With few exceptions, the 'caring for cattle' card was always placed under the male category; "it is not their [women's] responsibility" (FGD/F18-25). Second, within contemporary Maasai culture, cattle and the subsequent responsibilities surrounding the care of cattle are paramount and superior in comparison to female's roles. Although women never illustrated this sense of reverence, it was common in all the male focus group discussions. Participants argued that caring for cattle "is important because that's why we have life in the Maasailand, and that's why we are in the world" (FGD/M14-17). Likewise, in the other focus group, a participant echoed this theme: "If there were no cattle we would have no life. That is why we are living in this world, because of cattle" (FGD/M18-25).

In context of the dominant perception that women are not associated with caring for cattle, and given the exclusive reverence for cattle and caring for cattle, implications for women's status were apparent in the focus groups. In particularly one male focus group, participants illustrated men's roles of caring for cattle as quintessential to Maasai livelihood, and although often identified as important, some male participants identified women's roles as secondary and ultimately, of less significance: "cattle is the source of everything. If there were no cattle, we would not talk about housework. Cattle is the one

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<sup>1</sup> This topic is duly noted throughout the literature on Maasai, and hence, I will not go into detail on the topic.

that brings a husband and a wife together. And cattle is still the source of food for that woman, and she works because she eats" (FGD/F18-25).

As an aside, it is noteworthy to acknowledge two considerations here. First, despite this predominant perception, as illustrated elsewhere in this document, women and girls, in fact, perform many roles related to cattle production – associating pastoral production with exclusively males is a significant misconception, and a historical distortion. Second, although cattle have always been a central component of Maasai livelihoods, the exclusive reverence for cattle and more importantly, the subsequent status allotted to male's roles as compared to female's roles, may be, at least in some capacity, a product of the commodification of cattle that has been produced by the market economy expansion. See Chapter 5 for further elaboration on this subject.

## II. Marriage exchange and bride price

The institution of marriage in the Maasai culture is a complex system of exchange. It involves booking<sup>2</sup>, selection/arrangement, bride-price negotiation, bride-price acceptance and consumption, and finally, the integration of the woman into the husband's family unit through the marriage ritual. In relation to this research, the most important components of this exchange system are the concepts of bride price and integration into the husband's family. Bride price refers to the capital, predominantly consisting of livestock, that is transferred over a period of time – often a long time prior to the actual marriage - to a male head of household in order to secure a marriage

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<sup>2</sup> Booking refers to the process in which a father selects a desirable family from which his son will accept a wife. A women's offspring may have many people that have 'booked' her, but the actual selection of the family or husband that the daughter will marry is based predominantly on the father's discretion. Once a family is selected, the negotiation of the bride-price begins. The consumption of the bride-price may occur shortly after – sometimes well before the girl is of marriageable age.

relationship with one of his daughters. As it refers to the exchange of capital for a wife, the concept of bride price is important and implications for women were identified throughout the research.

The phenomenon of integrating a woman into her husband's family involves a marriage ceremony in which the woman leaves her father's household and is led to her husband's household. The most significant aspect of this phenomenon, for this study, is that when a girl is integrated into her husband's family, she leaves all property (i.e. livestock) that is associated with her name<sup>3</sup>, at her father's household. As a result, she enters a relationship with her husband relatively devoid of capital wealth. As illustrated in later sections, it seems that a girl is provided some livestock gifts upon entering her husband's home, and additionally, she maintains access to capital wealth through her external relationships (i.e. family members, boyfriends), and other economic activities. Nonetheless, as conveyed by the participants in this research, the marriage custom and institution facilitates economic inequality.

The purpose of this section is not to illustrate this system of exchange but is to highlight the potential effects of it on women and girls that were indicated in the research. The possible effects that were illustrated in the research were related to social power, access to education, and economic power. The relationship to social power and economic power is discussed in the analysis of power sections, and as a result, this section will exclusively focus on access to education.

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<sup>3</sup> 'Associated with her name' is making reference to the capital that the girl 'owned' while living in her father's household – meaning the cattle that a father designates or gives to his daughter. Instead of referring to genuine ownership, 'associated with her name' highlights the fact that the girl has no power to ultimately use this capital or transfer it with her to her husband's household. Therefore, she does not own the cattle per se, but it is, instead, just 'associated with her name'.



a. Access to education

The most common implication for girls as a result of the marriage exchange and bride price system discussed in the focus group discussions and key informant interviews was that the marriage customs inadvertently impede girls' access to education, especially secondary education. This impediment is due to three factors. The most obvious factor identified by participants relates to the bride price and the capital accumulation that a girl represents for the father. The most common reason given for why girls are prevented from going to secondary school is that it's because father's don't want to risk losing the bride-price a girl represents: "it's our ignorance and mostly men's selfishness. They only think on gaining more wealth by selling their girls". A teacher asserted that, "the Maasai they prefer to admit the boys more than girls, this is because they are used to send the girls to the husband, so they get dowry: some cows, some goats. So they prefer to admit boys more than girls" (Key Informant: Primary School Teacher).

If a girl is permitted to go to school, particularly secondary school, then it often complicates the bride-price system. The girl may not return to be married: "after they are married, a father will get cows, so they increase the wealth of the boma, but if she goes to school she will not come back and be married to the man who booked her" (FGD/M18-25). The 'husband-to-be' may decide not to wait, and request the return of the bride-price capital, which in most cases, has already been consumed to some degree by the father's household: "When a girl is booked her father starts eating the bride-price. Then, if the man or family who has 'booked' the daughter chooses not to wait for the daughter to finish secondary school they will ask for the father to return the dowry he has used, which create a problem and conflict" (FGD/M14-17).

Lastly, it is evident that, for some, educating daughters is apparently perceived as an unwise investment. Most often, a boy remains within the father's household, but due to the marriage exchange, a girl is not a permanent member of the father's family: "a girl, while at her father's home, is just a guest" (FGD/M14-17). Therefore, because education is often seen as a family investment, the daughter's value is transferred to the household of her husband, rather than remaining with the father's household. In response to a question regarding who the father would send to school, one participant argued, "a boy because he is the one he [the father] believes will benefit the boma afterwards, but a girl is there to be sold" (FGD/F18-25).

A few things must be noted in reference to the phenomena illustrated in the above discussion. First, the impediments to girls' education is mainly in reference to secondary education, which involves attending schools that are most often far distances from the Maasai community. In regard to primary education, observations associated with the research and a key informant interview with a teacher indicated that for the most part, girls and boys are enrolled in school at a similar rate. The bride price complications mentioned above are not commonly implicated in relation to primary school.

Second, it is noteworthy that, in contrast to prevailing stereotypes about the Maasai, in all of the focus group discussions participants supported and advocated for the value of girls' education. For example, some participants argued that, whenever possible, girls' tend to continue to contribute to their mother's household. In this regard, many participants made comments similar to the following: "because she will never forget her mother" (FGD/M14-17). Further, research participants identified more general community benefits for educating a girl. These benefits mainly related to the opportunity

for Maasai girls to work within educational and medical institutions in the Maasai community. One male participant, for example, explained that, "it [education] is important for both because if you look at girls, they can go to primary and then later they join secondary. Some of them will go for teaching. Some will go for medicine and become nurses, and then when they come back, they will be working in our local hospitals" (FGD/M18-25). As reflected in the above quote, despite prevailing barriers to girls' education, with few exceptions, the attitudes among the focus group discussions were of equal preference for sending boys and girls to school, and at least in reference to primary schooling, girls' are equally provided the opportunity to attend.

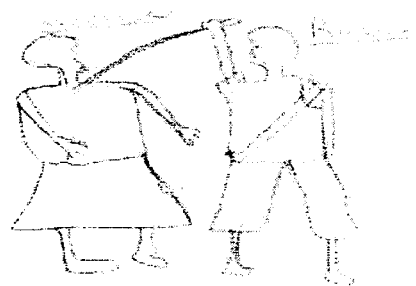
As a last note concerning marriage customs, it is important to acknowledge that it may be simplistic to reduce the barrier's girls experience to the 'selfishness of fathers', as was sometimes purported in the discussions. According to the experience of this study, it may be more appropriate to suggest that the marriage customs and institution serve complex social, economic and political functions in the Maasai community. Furthermore, given the complexity and function of the customs, it is sometimes an enduring process to adapt this institution and its customs to the foreign and only recently introduced government system of education. Reducing the barriers to exclusively the egocentric interests of fathers may reflect simplified foreign representations of the phenomena that neglect the social, economic, and political functions of this custom and institution.

### III. Corporal punishment & gender-based violence.

Participants throughout the focus group discussions indicated that corporal punishment and violence sometimes characterizes husband and wife relationships, as well as sometimes the illmurrans' relationships with young girls. Figure 3 illustrates one of the drawings created by a male child participant. In response to the question, 'what is the most significant problem that women and girls' face in your community?', several children produced similar drawings that depict violence against women.

In the husband-wife context, there were some differing opinions about the prevalence of corporal punishment and violence perpetuated towards wives. Ultimately, the findings of this research cannot determine the actual prevalence of this phenomenon. Nonetheless, according to many perceptions, it is a relatively prevalent phenomenon: "it's not very rare, they beat them a lot and very well" (FGD/F14-17). Similar to above female's experience, a male participant suggested that, "they are beaten all the time" (FGD/M18-25).

**Figure 3**



*This picture was drawn by a 13 year old boy in response to the following question: "what are the most significant problems a woman or girl face in your community?" It portrays a father inflicting violence on a mother.*

It was evident among both male and female participants, that corporal punishment was an acceptable and legitimate form of discipline. In relation to the violence experienced by wives, most of the discussions emphasized conditions surrounding their completion of tasks. The key theme that pervaded the discussions was that if a wife

never completed her tasks to a satisfactory level, violence was legitimate. The following statement from one male participant from the children's focus group discussion illustrates a common theme throughout many discussions, especially discussions with males: "when the mother speaks rudely this causes her to be beaten. When she is looking after cattle, and when they get lost and she does not know where they are, this causes her to be beaten because of not being more careful about the cattle, so if she does not look after them, she is supposed to be beaten" (Children's FGD/Maiowa). Female participants often seemed to accept the legitimacy of corporal punishment, but exclaimed that in most cases, it was unfairly administered and unjustified: "even if he is aware that I've been away, busy with other important responsibilities, if he comes home, and I have not cooked or not cleaned the calabashes he will still beat me" (FGD/F14-17).

Apart from discussions that emphasized the corporal punishment nature of violence, many participants commented that violence occurred in circumstances unrelated to cases of discipline. One Maasai boy stated that, "sometimes the mother is beaten for no reason, whether or not she has made a mistake and a mother is a person who will be beaten always" (Children's FGD/Maiowa). Although not always the case, for the most part, this phenomenon was identified in relation to alcohol consumption. Many participants suggested that alcohol has contributed to the prevalence of this violence: "a man, he goes, and when he comes back drunk, he just beats you" (FGD/F18-25).

In relation to the ilmurran-girlfriend context, girls' fear of violence was commonly illustrated in the focus group discussions. It was identified as a punishment, under certain circumstances, towards specific young, and newly attending, girls who refused sexual relationships with a Moran in the Esoto context. Similarly, for those girls

who are expected to attend Esoto, violence apparently serves punishment purposes for not attending. In the focus group discussion with female Esoto participants, the facilitator asked, "what if a girl refuses to have sex with a Moran?" and a participant responded, "you will be beaten" (FGD/Girl Esoto participants). Another participant in this group suggested that the consequences of not attending involved physical repercussions: "We know that if you don't go one night, then the next night you will be beaten" (FGD/Girl Esoto participants).

The participants identified a few impacts of this violence. The key impact that was identified was physical harm. In addition, however, in a few cases, participants identified that women may be less likely to behave contrary to expectations or create conflict due to the fear of violence. For example, in context of discussing violence, one participant illustrated that the imminence of violence is always considered: "When a husband takes you, you will always have this in mind" (FGD/F18-25). This study proposes, therefore, that the fear of violence often maintains the subordinate position of women and represents a contextual condition to women's lack of social power, which is discussed in later sections.

To conclude this discussion, it is important to highlight that although the perceptions and exclamations that were generated in discussions about gender-based violence conveyed it as a relatively prevalent phenomenon, the nature of this study's methodology does not permit us to make any conclusions about prevalence. In addition, the methodology may distort social reality because of its reliance on the perceptions and exclamations of focus group participants, who may have conveyed 'public perceptions' about the phenomenon rather than social fact.

Also, in discussing this issue it must be further recognized that besides certain corporal punishment incidences, violence towards women is not a permitted Maasai custom. In every focus group discussion, participants clearly conveyed that, "it is not acceptable" (FGD/M18-25). It is also important to recognize that status and likely the associated experience of violence, significantly varies for women in accordance to many contextual conditions (i.e. life stage, economic status, affinity with husband, etc.).

Lastly, in context of this discussion it is important to consider social regulation mechanisms that exist, as well as the evident behaviors and structures that women use to contest the misuse of violence perpetrated by their husbands. It was indicated in several comments that women may run away from the household to protest abuse, they may seek external support from relatives or age-mates, and they may request that punitive measures are enforced by the traditional governing council. In specific reference to seeking external support, for example, one male participant explained that, "first of all, a husband cannot discipline his wife for just any reason because when a wife is beaten she may go to her male relative to explain that she was disciplined without reason, and when that happens the relative will come and complain a lot and tell the husband that he has done a wrong thing and that if it happens again they will 'do what they can'<sup>4</sup>". As illustrated by this comment, regulatory values and structures do exist in the Maasai community, which often provide women the means to contest abusive treatment and seek the appropriate interventions.

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<sup>4</sup> 'do what they can' is an idiomatic expression meaning that they will inflict harm on the person.

#### IV. Social Organization of Production

##### a. "Productive" and "reproductive work"<sup>5</sup>

It was very evident throughout the research that Maasai tradition involves a distinctive, gendered division of labor that has historically served interdependent functional purposes. Most evident was the fact that reproductive work is associated with females. As noted earlier, this division is rooted in religious conceptions: "God created women to do all the housework, and the men to do all the caring for cattle" (FGD/M14-17). In every gender matrix activity that was facilitated, the gender card, 'housework' was placed under the female category. One male participant stated that, "in the Maasai communities, all this housework belongs to a woman. She is the one who cooks, the one who milks, she's the one who collects firewood, and she is the one who fetches water" (FGD/M18-25).

Subsequently, productive work, such as caring for cattle or earning income, was generally associated with males throughout the research. However, as illustrated in following sections, this association isn't as distinct. Women do many roles relating to the maintenance of the livestock herds, they often perform traditionally male roles of herding cattle, and as well, are involved in income generating activities.

##### b. Functional interdependence

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<sup>5</sup> I've adopted these terms from the Ministry of Education and Culture in Tanzania. According to this document, productive work involves the production of goods and services for consumption and trade. In the Maasai context, this predominantly refers to all of the activities surrounding the maintenance of their livestock herds and livestock business, but may also include earning income via employment or selling products (i.e. milk sales) (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2003). Reproductive work refers to the care and maintenance of the household and its members, including child bearing, caring for children, food preparation, water and fuel collection, shopping, and housekeeping (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2003). It must be noted, however, that the application of these terms should not presuppose that the work assigned to women is not "productive work". In actual fact, although not recognized as such, women's roles and responsibilities are quintessential to the general productive capacity of families and communities.



Although, the research indicated that the contemporary division of labor has detrimental impacts on women and girls, it was evident in the research that division of labor provided an important functional interdependence that, at least historically, facilitates pastoralist production. For example, in reference to women's responsibility to complete work associated with the domestic sphere, one male participant explained that, "normally a woman is the one with the responsibility to do the housework. A man also has his duties, so it is appropriate that she fulfills her responsibilities" (FGD/M14-17). Another participant concluded that, "a man has his own responsibilities, and a woman has her responsibilities" (FGD/M18-25). Likewise, although many groups identified women as being dependent on men, one male group suggested that, "I think it is a man. Because if you refer to housework, or caring for children, a man cannot do this alone" (FGD/M14-17). As these quotes suggest, it was evident that the division of labor was perceived as an important element of facilitating functional interdependence within the family unit.

c. Shame associated with reproductive work for men

It was evident in many cases and implicit throughout the research that there is a degree of shame for men that inhibit them from assisting women in reproductive work or other work traditionally assigned to women. It was often indicated that in situations where a woman was unable to fulfill her roles (i.e. illness, pregnancy) and there were not a sufficient number of wives or children, fathers will often persuade female relatives to perform the tasks before he would consider completing the tasks himself. One female child illustrated this concept of shame in the following quote: "[men] believe that when you marry a wife, she should do all the housework, they have not married a wife to come and idle about. They believe that these are women's jobs and if they do these tasks it is

shameful" (Children's FGD/Mairowa). A male participant similarly suggested that doing purported 'women's work' was shameful in the following statement: "the father cannot assist the mother, as people will ask if he is a woman" (Children's FGD/Sinya).

Interestingly, however, some female participants identified that, in some cases, younger generations convey different attitudes from the common ones just mentioned. Some participants conveyed that, in some cases, it is no longer considered shameful for males to perform roles ascribed to females. One participant explained, for example, that, "for the younger women, even cooking and milking, they believe that a man can even do these things" (FGD/F18-25).

d. Double standard of work distribution

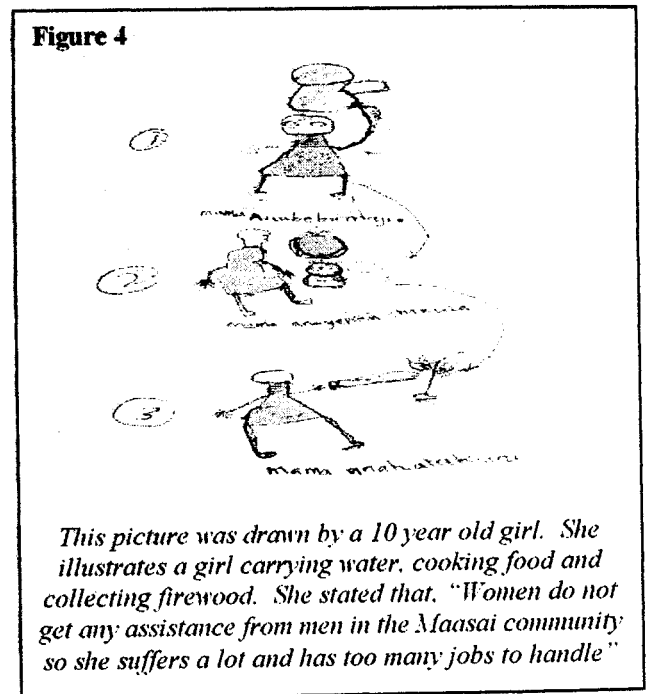
One common theme that became very evident in the focus group discussions was a double standard in the distribution of work. For the most part, participants illustrated that women are expected to perform traditionally ascribed male roles, while similar expectations were not placed on males: "a woman does all the housework as the above one said, and we consider them their responsibilities, but when you come to men's responsibilities we see that women participate, but these men take this for granted that the housework is only the women's responsibility while women are doing work that is beyond the housework" (FGD/M18-25). One female participant complained that, "once he [her husband] comes he expects the food to be ready even though he is aware that I was doing all of his cattle work" (FGD/F18-25).

e. Impacts on women and girls

The impact of the division of labor and the double standard within it, is that women and girls are often overburdened with unfeasible workloads. This was a frequent

complaint among the female groups, and especially highlighted in the children's focus group discussions (See Figure 3). One participant complained that, "a Maasai woman always has many activities and a man does not help. She is like a sick person who always has problems"<sup>6</sup>. The following quote from one young boy testifies to the difficulty specifically girls face: "I am glad I am not a girl. She never gets free time for her private things. She works a lot like washing clothes, children, plates, bedding and cooking. A girl cannot refuse to work, when she refuses then she can even miss meals for the whole day...she may even get very tired that day, and yet when she comes home she is expected to do all the housework" (Children's FGD/Mairowa). Another woman illustrated the following day as a common struggle:

There is tiredness, because a woman wakes up early in the morning to work. Because there is no food sometimes she postpones her other duties like collecting firewood, sweeping, or washing dishes because she must go to the village and try to earn money to buy food. The husband remains asleep, and when she comes back, even if she is away



all day, she is tired, and she will then fulfill the tasks she had postponed from the morning. The husband just sits and waits for her to finish the tasks, and cook food for him. (FGD/F14-17)

<sup>6</sup> The analogy to a sick person is used to illustrate that women face a difficult life (Field Notes)

There were many consequences for unfeasible workloads identified by women<sup>7</sup>.

The most common things identified were physical exhaustion and physical harm (i.e. back injuries from carrying water). In addition to these impacts, however, women identified these workloads, their cultural obligations to fulfill these roles and the additional demands of their husbands as significantly restricting their self-determination and freedom: "The men have authority. A woman cleans the goat pen, cleans the calabashes, they clean the calve pen, and then a man also needs his food ready at the time that he designates and also you still have to wash his clothes, and he just wants to come when the food is ready to eat. So, we are not different from those people in jail" (FGD/F18-25).

Another impact of the division of labor concerns socio-economic status. As illustrated in later sections, due to extrinsic and external factors relating to state expansion, culturally incompetent 'development', and more significantly, the commodification of cattle and market economy, the historic division of labor has tended to facilitate the consolidation of power to men and marginalize women from their historic influence on socio-economic activities. As secondary literature suggests, the division of labor may not have represented social stratification in the past and it did not necessarily marginalize women from essential socio-economic activities. However, in the context of the market economy, the customary social relations of production have inadvertently contributed to the inequality that characterizes most contemporary wife-husband relationships (see chapter 5 for further discussion of this topic).

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<sup>7</sup> Generally, with a few exceptions, male participants did not identify these consequences. In cases where they did identify consequences, they made reference to the physical harm, and neglected the concept of restricting self-determination.

V. Curses and implications for women's sexual efficacy

The phenomenon of curses within Maasai tradition is complex and an in depth analysis exceeds the parameters of this research. For the purpose of this research, the curse phenomenon is understood as involving three components: a behavior that deviates from traditional mores relating to customary treatment of other people, an individual's anger that is instigated by the deviant behavior, and the harm supernaturally inflicted on the guilty deviant. For the purpose of this study, the belief in curses is interpreted as an important social control mechanism. In effect, the belief and fear of curses manages human behavior and serves to prevent deviations from dominant perceptions of 'traditional' norms.

As noted in the literature review, the Maasai's life is dictated by adherence to mores. Their behavior is dictated by the behavioral laws that correspond to age-classes for men and life stages for women. In most cases, it is deviation from these customary laws or rules, which instigate the curse phenomenon. A traditional leader explained that, "this curse of an age-set is only truth, like if you break it, if you don't fulfill those rules, those laws, there is no option, you will get the curse" (Key Informant: Alaiwanani/Ormesuki). Another research participant stated the phenomena more generally: "curses happen when you mistreat a person" (FGD/M14-17). In reference to the customary laws relating to hospitality towards age-mates, one participant described the consequences of violating this social convention as follows: "if an age mate comes as a visitor and you refuse not to leave the house and he goes with anger and within a few or couple of months or weeks you will become sick" (FGD/M14-17).

One of the complexities of the curse phenomenon is that, in some cases, the validity of customary norms and subsequent social expectations are disputed. While some rules and 'laws' are universally recognized and assumed, others are disputed. As a result, adherence to them sometimes differs from one person to another.

This is the case in regard to age-mates and women's hospitality responsibilities and expectations. Hospitality to one's age-mate<sup>8</sup> is very important in Maasai tradition and universally accepted as an important more. As part of this custom, if an age-mate visits a household, the husband is responsible to leave his house in order to allow the visitor to reside there. In absence of the husband, the wife of the husband is responsible to show the age-mate absolute hospitality, which is universally understood as providing him domestic service, like preparing him a bed, cooking him food, and providing water for bathing (Field Notes).

Beyond the domestic responsibilities just mentioned, however, many participants identified that an expectation to provide sex to an age-mate visitor is also a component of hospitality mores. One participant, for example, repeated a saying that states, "make sure you warm that man"<sup>9</sup>. The participant further explained the implication of this saying in the following statement: "this saying affects the woman and she is forced to have sex with the visitor" (FGD/M14-17). As illustrated by this statement, due to the real and/or perceived cultural expectation to provide sex to age-mate visitors and the fear of curses, it was evident throughout every discussion group that many women feel obligated to submit to sexual advances from age-mates. One female explained her experience as follows:

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<sup>8</sup> 'age-mate' is a term used by the Maasai males to refer to other Maasai males who belong to the same age-class. In other words, all males that were circumcised during the same time period are considered 'age-mates'.

<sup>9</sup> 'warming' the man is referring to having sex with him

"you might have a guest, you've prepared water for a bath, prepared a bed, and food, but still, during the night, you will be much disturbed, he will wake you with the purpose of wanting sex with you, and when you ignore him, you will be cursed" (FGD/F14-17). A male participant clearly illustrated the relationship of this phenomenon to HIV/AIDS in the following quote: "for women, they are also at risk, because when an age-mate comes, sometimes when they are afraid of curses, as a result, they permit sex and so they get AIDS due to their fear of curses" (FGD/M14-17).

Most participants echoed the belief that women can be cursed if they refused to have sex with an age-mate visitor. It remains a relevant and contributing factor to married females' vulnerability. However, it must be recognized that it is a disputed cultural phenomena. Several participants disputed its legitimacy, and argued that it is a misconception of tradition. For example, one female participant argued that, "nothing will occur to you unless you believe that it will...for example, if you have a visitor and you treat him well, prepare food, a bed, and if again he wants something extra, and you refuse, nothing bad will happen to you" (FGD/F14-17). In the following quote, a senior traditional leader repudiated claims that women are responsible to have sex with age-mate visitors. He explained that visitors are, "free to eat, they are free to stay for a longer time, just to sleep, but they do not have authority, sexual authority, only that man who marries her has" (Key Informant: Alaigwanani/Ormesuki).

As a last note, similar to other phenomena outlined in this dissertation, this study did not determine the prevalence or frequency of this age-mate visitation phenomenon. In addition, the experience of this study suggests that although many participants conveyed that visitors may theoretically have sexual entitlement to their age-mate's

wives, it may be naive to assume that this commonly occurs. Although participants did not commonly discuss intervening factors, it was evident in a few comments that regulating and protective measures exist. For example, in one case, a male participant suggested that in cases where women are feeling pressured by a visitor, they may seek intervention from other males in the boma. As well, in one focus group, the Maasai facilitator probed the group about the possibility of a visitor being cursed for pressuring a woman. In response, a few participants suggested that in response to a visitor's threats, women, in fact, can also 'curse': "she can, a woman can curse, and even when a man hears those words he fears it a lot" (FGD/M18-25). As evident by these statements, it is important to recognize that although it remains relevant and very significant to the topic of this study, the curse phenomena and its implications on women may be more complex than some of the popular perceptions generated in this study sometimes conveyed.

#### VI. Esoto: its functions and sexual implications for girls

Specifically, the term Esoto refers to a geographical location: it refers to a specific house within a boma<sup>10</sup> that is designated as a residence for Ilmurran. More broadly, however, it also refers to the communal, and social activities associated with this residence. The Esoto and its activities are exclusive to non-circumcised girls and Ilmurran. Four functions can be identified within the research: residence and communal provision, community service, social function, and reaffirming traditional identity.

##### a. Ilmurran residence and communal life and provision

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<sup>10</sup> A 'boma' refers to a collection of household units. In the simplest form, it consists of several houses designated to the wives of the husband, and possibly some immediate relatives, as well as, in most cases, the Esoto housing unit (i.e. the male-head's mother). The boma represents a community of semi-autonomous household units that are organized around a central coral for the boma's livestock herds.



As previously mentioned, the Esoto is a residence for Ilmurran. It is, “meant to be a station to serve the Ilmurran” (Key Informant: Alaigwanani/Ormesuki). Beyond providing living spaces for this age-class, it serves to accommodate certain customary rules of the age-class, such as never eating alone: “Esoto was meant to reduce the incidence of eating alone so the little girls collect milk from the mothers of the Ilmurran’s houses. They take the milk there to the Esoto and all the Ilmurran and the girls drink together” (FGD/M14-17).

The Esoto also facilitates the custom of equitably distributing resources among the Ilmurran. Participants commonly reported that the importance of age-sets, and particularly the Ilmurran age-class, was to reduce inequality with the purpose of producing a strong and able age-class: “An age-class is a very good thing because for poor and rich people, if they all belong to one age-class, there will be no difference because they eat the same and they share what is available” (FGD/M18-25). Within this context, one understands the importance of the Esoto as an institution that facilitates this purpose: “the community cooperates, they participate together in feeding those who are unable” (Key Informant: Alaigwanani/Ormesuki). One participant further explained that, “Esoto started a time long ago and originally it was a place where girls bring milk for Ilmurran, and the purpose is when visiting Ilmurran come, they have a place to eat and drink” (FGD/M14-17).

b. Safety/community service function

The purpose and function of Esoto is also the provision of safety and security to the community. The analogy that one traditional leader used was of a police or military station: “Ilmurran are regarded as soldiers or police, or warriors of the Maasai and that’s

why they have stations. When you got to Arusha, you find a special place for the soldiers, or for the police" (Key Informant: Alaigwanani/Ormesuki). Besides community protection, participants claimed that the Esoto provided an effective means to recruiting Ilmurran during any times of crisis, such as when cattle are missing, death of cattle, or attacks on cattle from wild animals: "Esoto, as a gathering of Ilmurran, is good because when the cattle may get lost, it is easy to get the Ilmurran to find the cattle because they are congregated at the Esoto" (FGD/M18-25).

c. Social and recreational function

The other function commonly referred to in context of discussing the Esoto is the social function. As previously mentioned, the Esoto involves extravagant social activities of dancing and singing. In every research discussion, participants identified singing, dancing and other recreational games as key components of the Esoto: "people meet at the Esoto, the Ilmurran and girls, they dance, they play activities" (FGD/M14-17).

The social dimension of the Esoto should not be understated. Although sexual implications have shadowed the social value, it must continue to be recognized. It was illustrated in all of the focus group discussions. In the girl's Esoto participant FGD, one explained that, "it is good because there is dancing", and another argued, "it is good because we stay with Morans".

The social value was particularly reflected in young girls' desire to attend Esoto, which was frequently mentioned. For example, one young girl noted, "the girls themselves desire to go for Esoto and cry for it and parents allow them to go at last" (Children's FGD/Mairowa). Another woman explained how difficult it is to deter her

girls from attending: "I've tried my level best to prevent them from going, but I've failed. They even cry" (FGD/F18-25).

d. Reaffirming traditional/cultural identity: propagating ethnicity<sup>11</sup>

As it involves traditional dance and songs, the Esoto is an important institution that serves to affirm participants' cultural or ethnic identity<sup>12</sup>. The dances and songs not only propagate Maasai culture in the form of fine arts, but also serve to propagate traditional values. For example, many of the songs and dances reaffirm traditional religious beliefs, and traditional values of respect and equality (Field Notes). The observations of these Esoto activities represent the most fascinating and privileged experience of the study, and reinforced the importance of the Esoto in its association with singing and dancing, and subsequently ethnic identity. According to participant observations, singing and dancing strengthened bonds of solidarity and community, and concurrently strengthened identity for participants (Field Notes). At a time of globalization and persistent external pressure to change, the song and dance activities associated with the Esoto are important in safeguarding the Maasai identity.

e. Sexual behaviors and norms

Besides the above functions of Esoto, a phenomenon that is commonly associated with the Esoto is permissive sexual relationships. It was evident in the research that the institution facilitates sexual relationships among the participants - Ilmurran and young girls. There are two types of relationships that are associated with the Esoto context:

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<sup>11</sup> Participants did not explicitly identify the affirmation of cultural identity as a purpose or function of Esoto. This concept represents an interpretation of my observations and field notes derived from attending the Esoto and discussions with the participants.

<sup>12</sup> I refer to affirming cultural or ethnic identity in this context as a process of gathering together with other Maasai individuals that share a belief and commitment to similar cultural/traditional values, and norms in a manner that demonstrates and highlights these values and norms via activities, such as dancing, signing, and games.

sexual relationships between girls and Ilmurran who are not in formal relationships – casual sexual relations, and sexual relationships between formalized girlfriend-boyfriend relations. In both cases, but particularly in reference to the casual sexual relations, the sexual implications for girls are very relevant to this study.

The sexual relationships have, in some respects, become a sanctioned component of Esoto. It is commonly understood and accepted that Ilmurran and girls engage in sexual relationships while residing at the Esoto. "They play, and they have sex" (FGD/F14-17) was a common theme in all of the discussions.

One of the more common characteristics of the sexual relationships associated with the Esoto was permissiveness<sup>13</sup>. Participants commonly conveyed that although most of the relationships were between formalized girlfriends and boyfriends, Ilmurran's freedom to pursue relationships with any attending girls is theoretically unconstrained. This is particularly the case in regards to young girls who have more recently begun attending Esoto and who have not formalized any boyfriend relationships. The following statement from a traditional leader from the Ilmurran age-class conveys the popular perception concerning sexual relationships at the Esoto, "they [ilmurran] are free, like some have a few girlfriends at Esoto, but usually will have sex with girls who are not even their girlfriends" (Key Informant: Alaigwanani/Korianga).

The negative implication for girls is significant. In general, most participants stated that many girls' efficacy to determine sexual relationships is minimal within the Esoto context: "if an Olmurran wants to have sex then there is no option" (FGD/Girl

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<sup>13</sup> This term is being used to denote sexual behavior that allows or conveys relative freedom from customary, normative or conventional restraints.

Esoto participants)<sup>14</sup>. Furthermore, many participants reported physical manipulation as common. Referring to *engi 'konya*<sup>15</sup> a female participant stated that, "little girls face this problem as Ilmurran can force them, they have no say" (Key Informant: female political representative).

It is noteworthy here to mention that upon further exploring the sexual phenomenon associated with the Esoto, it is much more complicated than commonly conveyed by the research participants. Contrary to some of the popular perceptions relating to permissive sex and girls' agency, the research sometimes suggested that, in fact, the sexual permissiveness of Ilmurran's relationships is mediated by many variables, including their own personal concerns regarding vulnerability to disease. As illustrated in the analysis of sexual power section, the sexual behaviors in the Esoto are complicated and often regulated. For example, girls' sexual agency varies according to social hierarchy, the length of time a girl has attended Esoto, the degree of status she has attained, and whether or not she has developed boyfriend relationships with other Ilmurran. As discussed in later sections, it is mostly the youngest girls who lack sexual agency.

Furthermore, it is important to further point out that, in one focus group discussion, male participants suggested that although girls may provide domestic services to the Esoto, and although they may attend the social activities at the Esoto, they may not necessarily spend the night. Some of the comments in this discussion seemed to contrast from popular perceptions, and suggest that besides the girls who have a boyfriend

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<sup>14</sup> There are mitigating factors to the level of girls' efficacy, which is discussed in the sexual power section.

<sup>15</sup> See the Sexual Coercion, Force and Assault section below. *Engi 'konya* refers to using physical manipulation or 'force' to engage in intercourse with a person – it is most commonly used in reference to the Ilmurran's relationships with young girls. The Maasai clearly distinguish it from sexual assault, which is *atabatata*.

present, other girls may not frequently spend the night at the Esoto. In other words, the 'casual sex' phenomena mentioned above may not be as common as sometimes conveyed. In response to a question about whether all girls spend the night and have sex after the social activities associated with the Esoto, one participant stated, "no, some go back and stay at their houses. Only the girlfriends stay with their boyfriends" (FGD/M18-25). According to a few participants in the discussion, besides the girlfriends of some of the Ilmurrans, other girls return to their household to spend the night.

In regards to this latter point, as mentioned in Chapter 8, sometimes girls' choices are limited by the fact that they are customarily not permitted to sleep in their household if their father is present. Therefore, some participants mentioned that this complicates girls' ability to avoid sleeping at the Esoto – some may have nowhere else to spend the night. As a result, participants identified a strategy of building a separate household for girls.

For many girls (and males as well) an implication of these sexual norms at the Esoto is vulnerability to disease. In context of discussing disease vulnerability, one male participant rhetorically exclaimed, "An Olmurrans from town stops there and has sex, is that not an impact? He has sex, and then he leaves. Another from Narok comes to the Esoto, has sex, and leaves, can't you see that this have a very big impact?" (FGD/M18-25). All of these implications will be further illustrated and explored in other sections of this document (i.e. Sexual Worldview, Analysis of Sexual Power)

It is important to note that, contrary to the four functions first illustrated (i.e. communal residence, safety/security, social/recreation, and reaffirming cultural identity), it was commonly argued that sex is not a traditional or essential component of Esoto.

Contrary to some popular perceptions, a traditional leader stated that Esoto was, "meant to be something that was meant to gather us together, and it was not traditionally meant to have sex" (Key Informant: Alaigwanani/Korianga). Another traditional leader argued the same: "Esoto was not meant for sexual relations...sex is not the essence of Esoto" (Key Informant: Alaigwanani/Ormesuki). In a similar notion, a female participant argued that, "there are things that are not significant but they just do for pleasure" (FGD/F18-25).

As implicit in the comments just illustrated, it was apparent in the research that the Esoto institution is undergoing change, the sexual practices are being disputed, and in addition, community members are beginning to prevent girls from attending. It was indicated in several cases, for example, that some bomas no longer permit the Esoto: "We don't have Esoto these days at my place...we just broke it" (FGD/M14-17). In relation to preventing girls' participation, the latter point was often reported as subsequent to their participation in primary school because teachers have seemingly prohibited girls from attending Esoto. One participant even misunderstood teachers' actions as indicating that going to Esoto was against the law: "The law does not allow a school girl to come to Esoto".

## VII. Female Circumcision

Female circumcision was indicated as a very prevalent practice. Generally, girls go through the circumcision ritual in early pubescence, after their breasts begin to visibly develop (Field Notes). The specific age can vary. In many cases, a father may postpone the circumcision ceremony until he has a few daughters who are ready for circumcision.

The most significant notion illustrated in the research is that female circumcision is a highly valued component of Maasai tradition. All of the women and men strongly asserted its value and importance, and rejected foreign claims and interventions to eradicate the practice. “We circumcise because it is something that is very important to our tradition” (FGD/M14-17), was a common theme. In addition, contrary to foreign charges, the participants did not identify any harms or risks associated with the practice: “female circumcision does not have any impact, it is tradition, and everyone has a belief about their tradition” (FGD/F18-25).

a. Type of circumcision and harm implications

The type of circumcision administered to Maasai girls is clitoradectomy, which refers to a form of genital cutting that intends to remove the clitoris, but does not include the worst forms of genital cutting: infibulation. An Ngamuratani<sup>16</sup> illustrated the form of circumcision in the following quote: “We just cut a small part of the clitoris” (Key Informant: Ngamuratani).

No participants identified any harm caused by female circumcision. Further, in one female group particularly (FGD/F18-25)<sup>17</sup>, many refuted any charges popular in ‘anti-FGM interventions’<sup>18</sup>. In contrast to foreign claims, these participants argued that they have not experienced nor witnessed any immediate harm caused by the surgery: “We grew with these practices being done, and those who practiced it, they didn’t die, so we can’t see the disadvantage” (FGD/F18-25). In reference to the trauma produced by the surgical process, one participant in the research argued that, although the surgery and

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<sup>16</sup> This is the term used to refer to a Maasai female who is trained in female circumcision and performs the genital cutting during the circumcision ceremony.

<sup>17</sup> NOTE: this group consisted of 10 circumcised females.

<sup>18</sup> It was evident in the research that some participants had participated in ‘anti-FGM interventions’ that were administered by government and foreign NGOs.



recovery period was painful, it did not produce psychological trauma or any lasting physiological pain (Key Informant: Maasai woman). The participant argued that, "if pain was the key concern, foreign interventions should focus on eradicating the traditional practice of removing their front incisor teeth, rather than eradicating female circumcision" (Key Informant: Maasai woman). Participants also argued that they never experience scarring implications that are commonly identified, in foreign media, as creating birth complications: "in the seminar, they told us that a person who is circumcised, if she gives birth, due to elasticity the scar may break and may lead to serious bleeding that may cause death, which is not true because we have never witnessed this in the Maasai community" (FGD/F18-25).

In regards to harm created in cross-infections<sup>19</sup> - of particular concern with HIV cross-transmission, participants in every discussion group identified that different instruments are used for each girl so to avoid cross-transmission. Participants argued that, "if female circumcision is practiced in a safe way, it does not bring HIV/AIDS" (FGD/F18-25). One female participant exclaimed that, "During circumcision, if two girls are circumcised in a household, the one who is circumcising should have two razor blades – one for each girl, so as to avoid sharing" (FGD/F14-17). The Ngamuratani, who is trained to administer the surgery, explained that, "We use the razor blades, one for each girl. If we circumcise three girls, we use three different razor blades, one for each girl" (Key Informant: Ngamuratani).

Despite the apparent awareness illustrated in this study, one cannot presume this level of awareness is representative of the Maasai community. The Ngamuratani

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<sup>19</sup> If the same unsterilized instrument is used to circumcise more than one girl, there is a high risk of transmitting infections, such as the HIV virus.

indicated that many are not aware. In reference to other Ngamuratani and awareness of cross-transmission risks, she stated that, “Not all know that except a few who have attended a seminar at the government dispensary” (Key Informant: Ngamuratani).

In reference to sexual pleasure implications, it may be relevant that sexual pleasure implications – meaning a reduction in sexual pleasure - was never identified as a harmful or negative aspect of circumcision by the participants. According to traditional customs, most of the female participants in the research have experienced sex prior to circumcision and following it. In other words, they’ve experienced sex with and without clitoral stimulation<sup>20</sup>.

b. Traditional value and importance

i. Rite of passage: an essential rite and basis for the status of women.

All participants highlighted the importance of female circumcision as a rite that facilitated the process of a girl becoming a woman, and consequently, being married and bearing children: “A girl is circumcised, she will be married, and after being married, she will bear children” (FGD/F14-17). It is important to recognize the significance of this rite of passage for Maasai women. Being married and bearing children is intrinsic to a Maasai woman’s status and value (Field Notes).

One participant explained the importance and value of circumcision by suggesting that, “According to our tradition, normally when one is circumcised, people become a new person” (FGD/M18-25). Similarly, a participant argued that, “circumcision is an important thing and if one is not circumcised, he [in context, this comment is not referring exclusively to men] will never be a person” (FGD/M14-17). In specific

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<sup>20</sup> Understanding sexual norms may be important in understanding the current argument. The sexual norms do not include a focus on clitoral stimulation, and hence, may help understand these women’s perspectives. See the Sexual Norms section below for further elaboration of this subject.

reference to the passage into womanhood, a female participant explained, "it is done in order for a girl to become a woman because she won't be regarded as a woman until she is circumcised" (FGD/F18-25).

The consequences of not being circumcised and not 'becoming a woman' as a result were very evident throughout the discussions. One woman explained that a girl "will never be married. She will never be considered a woman for the rest of her life" (FGD/F18-25). In response to a question regarding what will happen to a girl if she is not circumcised, one participant exclaimed, "who will marry you? Nobody will see you, even though you are beautiful, no one will see you...if this one tells us every time we make a mistake that, 'I have paid a lot of cattle for you' and we are circumcised, then what about the one who is not circumcised?" (FGD/F18-25). The significance of the last part of this quotation is in reference to status. The participant is arguing that generally, circumcised Maasai women lack status and are treated poorly by their husbands, and that non-circumcised 'women' would be attributed far less status and treated even more unfairly (Field Notes).

ii. Safeguarding traditional identity

In all of the discussions relating to female circumcision, an evident theme was the participants' resistance to foreign pressure to eradicate the process. All participants echoed the concept of maintaining female circumcision as a means of safeguarding traditional identity. The following quote from a circumcised female illustrates the concern and implications: "Nowadays, they want us to stop this kind of practice, but we refuse because they want to wipe out our traditional practices. If we agree, our tradition

will move to another tradition. You will never meet a circumcised Swahili<sup>21</sup>, and that is them maintaining their culture, but they want us to stop our female circumcision which is our tradition. Can't you see that our tradition would be moving to another tradition?" (FGD/F18-25). Similarly, a young male participant argued, "We circumcise because it is something that is very important to our tradition and something that has been practiced since we've grown up, so we cannot leave it" (FGD/M14-17). The Ngamuratani exclaimed the following:

The culture demands that a girl be circumcised to fulfill the values of our tradition...it is not possible for me to leave my cultural traditional practice, which is very important to us. Others may decide to leave their tradition but not the Maasai... it is the loss of our culture. I will not leave this tradition. Leaving it is the loss of our culture. (Key Informant: Ngamuratani)

c. Misconceptions

Although the predominant purpose and value of circumcision is rooted in the concepts described above, participants also identified other factors that perpetuate the practice. The factors represent misconceptions about the clitoris physiology and relationship between the clitoris, promiscuity, hygiene, and birth. In relation to interventions targeting female circumcision, as misconceptions, these issues represent important areas of focus in educational programs.

i. Clitoris physiology: perpetual growth of the clitoris

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<sup>21</sup> The term 'Swahili' is used by the Maasai to refer to all Tanzanians who are not Maasai. It refers to all cultural groups foreign to the Maasai.

In most cases, it was evident that participants shared a belief in the perpetual growth of the clitoris. Participants believe that if the clitoris is not cut via circumcision, that it will grow into a sizeable mass. "The clitoris will become large" (FGD/18-25), one participant explained. Participants indicated that this was undesirable for two reasons: it may obstruct pregnancy (see below), and men find it unattractive. In regards to the latter, a male participant expressed its unattractiveness in association with a penis-like appearance. He stated that, "if you are given a girl who is not circumcised, then you may say, 'oh, this is a boy'" (FGD/M18-25). The Ngamuratani argued that men will fear it: "the clitoris will grow long and curls itself...the men will fear the long clitoris" (Key Informant: Ngamuratani).

ii. Causal relationship between clitoris and promiscuity

One of the misconceptions identified among participants is that the existence of the clitoris will lead to a greater promiscuity among women. It is noteworthy that, with the exception of one reference among the women's groups, it was only within the male focus groups that this misconception was illustrated.

The logic illustrated by participants is that if the clitoris is the source of pleasure, then women will be seeking sex more frequently if it is not removed. The underlying misconception within these arguments is that sexual drive is unmanageable or uncontrollable for women who have retained the clitoris. For example, one participant explained, "a girl is circumcised because clitorises are the most significant part that stimulates a woman. Every time a girl will look for sex, so we circumcise them in order

to reduce promiscuity" (FGD/M14-17). Similarly, another participant argued that, "they prostitute<sup>22</sup> a lot because of this thing" (FGD/M18-25).

iii. Causal relationship between clitoris, poor hygiene and disease

Another common concept that arose in discussions about female circumcision is personal hygiene and prevention from the 'itching disease'. 'Itching disease' seems to refer to a vaginitis of some form (Field Notes), and participants indicated that retaining the clitoris makes women more vulnerable to the disease: "the big purpose is that this 'itching disease' does attack them a lot when they still have that horn" (FGD/F18-25). As a result, in most of the focus group discussions, participants identified female circumcision as an important prevention method. The Ngamuratani stated that, "we get the disease causing organisms out by cutting the clitoris and a child gets healed" (Key Informant: Ngamuratani). One participant even recalled a story about a non-Maasai child who was cured via cutting the clitoris: "there is a little Swahili girl that was suffering from that disease, and before we cut her, she was very slim, and she was not happy, and she was sick and was not eating, but when we just cut the thing, within two days, the girl started to play" (FGD/F18-25).

iv. Barriers to giving birth

It was evident that many participants believed that the clitoris represented a barrier to the birth process. The root of this belief seems to relate to the physiological misconception mentioned above: "clitorises grow until they are big enough until it blocks the hole" (FGD/18-25). In most cases, other participants refuted these beliefs by identifying the fact that non-Maasai, who are not circumcised, give birth.

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<sup>22</sup> The term 'prostitute' does not refer to the exchange of sex for money. Instead, the term was used by the translators to refer to a promiscuous woman who pursues sexual relationships with many men and submits to any sexual advances.

Nonetheless, many participants still presented the misconception, and a factor relating to the value of female circumcision. In response to a question relating to why Maasai circumcise their girls, one male participant stated, "I don't think they can give birth if it is not removed" (FGD/M18-25). A female participant claimed to have even witnessed the clitoris obstruct birth: "I have witnessed an uncircumcised girl giving birth and she failed to give birth because of the clitoris" (FGD/F18-25).

## VIII. Marriage Structure

### a. Polygyny

In most cases, the formal marriage structure is polygynous, involving one male with more than one wife. This prevailing custom is related to the nature of pastoralist production and subsequent values. There is a general value among Maasai men to pursue large families, which brings prestige and facilitates cattle production (Field Notes). It was generally conveyed by female participants that due to these values, males resist any notions of monogamy. One female participant articulated that, "once the husband is told that he should not have other partners, he will say 'no, because I want my boma to be big'" (FGD/F18-25).

Besides the portrayed value that men place on polygyny. Female participants also conveyed polygyny as a valuable custom. Several participants identified that having co-wives has a practical value in relation to workloads. For example, one female participant stated that, "it is good in order to help each other, for example, when one is sick or when one is giving birth, someone can do their responsibilities" (FGD/F18-25).

### b. Competition between wives

One significant impact of polygyny that was identified throughout the focus group discussions was in relation to competition and favoritism among wives and the subsequent economic consequence for women and their immediate family. Names to distinguish between favored and unfavored wives were commonly used: "we have the loved one and those who are hated. 'Endingi' is the name that is given to the one who is hated, and 'angoratani' for a loved one" (FGD/F18-25). One young boy's comment illustrates the struggle this creates for women: "I would not want to be a co wife because of problems as sometimes the husband favors one wife only" (Children's FGD/Mairowa). One married female stated that, "our husbands are polygamous. They have many women, and a man always chooses one wife that he loves the most. As a result, this wife and her offspring are privileged among the wives" (FGD/F14-17).

The economic consequence of this phenomenon was identified in all of the focus group discussions. One participant argued that, "they [favored wives] often have more access and control of resources. The other wives and their children starve" (FGD/F14-17). In general, participants indicated the favored wife's privilege as relating to the management of the household resources<sup>23</sup>, access to money, and power to influence the husband's decisions. For example, one participant argued, 'for a woman who is loved, a husband may sell a cow and give her 15,000 shillings of the profit...but this happens to a woman who is loved very much" (FGD/M14-17).

c. Extramarital relationships and 'polyandry'

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<sup>23</sup> Each household unit manages a number of livestock, which are used to sustain the household and accumulates wealth for the male children of the household. The husband, however, has authority to sell, trade, or reallocate the livestock. In so doing, participants argued that these decisions deplete the resources of unfavored wives while privileging and increasing the resources of the favored wife.



As a last note, although not a formal component of the marriage and family structure, extramarital relationships need also to be identified in this discussion – they are a reality in most relationships and serve functions that are essential to the sustainability of the general marital structure. As mentioned in chapter 5, the formal marriage structure plays primarily a practical function in relation to reproduction and pastoral production, but in contrast, extramarital relationships serve important psycho-emotional needs.

In addition, in specific reference to women's extramarital relationships, these serve important financial and economic purposes. As illustrated in the analysis of economic power section (4.5), these relationships often provide women financial support. As a consequent to this phenomenon, the experience of this study suggests that using the category of polygyny to describe the marriage structure may misrepresent the complexity of the socio-sexual organization of Maasai society. Although polygyny may be suitable for describing the formal marriage structure, the informal patterns of relationships, which include extramarital relationships, suggests that polyandry may also be suitable. Possibly, this further reflects the complication and limitation of using Western categories to represent non-Western cultural phenomena.

#### IX. Sexual Worldview<sup>24</sup>

The sexual worldview of the Maasai is distinctly different to internationally predominant and popularized worldviews that are rooted in conceptions of sexuality that reflect monogamous principles and purport values relating to virginity and pureness,

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<sup>24</sup> I adopt the term 'sexual worldview' to highlight the complexity of a person's orientation to sexuality and sexual relations. For the purpose of this study, the term encompasses an individual's general beliefs and values surrounding the purpose and value of sexual relations, and the subsequent structures and dynamics that determine these relationships.

delaying sexual debut, faithfulness, consent between individuals, non-coerciveness, and mutual pleasure. As a foreign researcher, understanding the sexual worldview of the Maasai and managing the personal responses to their worldview, was one of the most significant challenges presented to the principle investigator. It represented a process of critical reflexivity - revealing the subconscious assumptions about sexuality and sexual relations that are produced and internalized in the socialization process within dominant Western culture and ideology, and reconciling these assumptions with the Maasai context. The reader of this document is encouraged to participate in a similar process.

a. Values concerning virginity

It was evident in the research that abstinence and virginity are not valued characteristics. In contrast to popular Western assumptions, retaining virginity is not something that is encouraged by the community or a valued aspiration. On the contrary, participants predominantly indicated that retaining virginity was a negative attribute. Traditionally, in fact, it was punishable via a fine: a virgin's father may be fined a cow for offering a daughter who was still a virgin (Field Notes). One participant further argued that it presented a problem for the husband: "it is a heavy task for her husband to break her virginity" (FGD/F18-25). A male participant stated that if a virgin was given in marriage to a man, the husband would complain by asking, "why did you give me a girl who is not ear-pierced yet?" (FGD/M18-25). According to many participants, a virgin girl even risks being rejected by the husband and sent back to her family. In reference to joining the husband's household, a female participant stated that, "if you have your virginity you will be sent back until you lose it" (FGD/F18-25).

Although the above conceptualization of virginity persists, there is evidence that attitudes are changing. According to some members of the community, the tradition of fining the girls' family is no longer common (Field Notes). Further, due to the fear of current diseases, like HIV, the value of virginity has increased. In one female focus group discussion, the participants discussed their objectives for sending their daughter to her husband as a virgin. Similarly, in another group, one participant explained that, "nowadays, a girl will go to her husband and he will break her virginity" (FGD/F18-25).

b. Sexual Debut

Sexual debut among Maasai girls is very young<sup>25</sup>. Throughout the research participants identified the ages of sexual debut as between 7 and 10 years of age. One children's focus group agreed that it is, "when the girl is about 10 years". One woman said, "I can approximate that it is when a child is about 8 or 9" (FGD/F14-17). During a focus group discussion with non-circumcised girls who participate in Esoto and presented as sexually active, the research team observed that the girls were as young as seven or eight. Likewise, the participants in this group identified one girl who they argued was seven years of age.

It is important to note that the above approximations refer mostly to girls who participate in Esoto, which facilitates an early sexual debut. It was apparent in most cases, that the participants were approximating the age of sexual debut by identifying the age in which girls begin attending Esoto and thus engaging in sexual relationships (see

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<sup>25</sup> As it is taboo to engage in sexual relationships with a non-circumcised boy, and for the most part, boys are prevented from any sexual relationships until they become Ilmurran, the sexual debut of boys is relatively later than girls.

the above section on Esoto for elaboration on this issue): "it is when a child is 8 or 9, and that is the age that they normally begin Esoto".

The research did not determine sexual debut outside the Esoto context. As the ilmurran's sexual relationships are almost entirely within the Esoto context (Field Notes), it is fair to assume that girls who don't attend Esoto develop sexual relationships at a later period in their life. Observations of one focus group consisting of school-going girls between the ages of 8-13, confirmed this assumption: they reported that they were not attending Esoto and were not involved in sexual relationships. Consequently, early sexual debut among girls may not be a universal phenomenon, but specifically associated with Esoto participants, which this study seems to suggest correlates with school enrollment.

c. Initiating sexual relationships

It was identified in all focus groups that males were the instigators of sexual relationships. In every case, the 'asking for sex' gender card was placed under the male category. As one young girl indicated, "in Maasai culture, girls do not make sexual advances...it is only boys who make sexual advances in Maasai communities" (Children's FGD/Mairowa).

However, several participants felt that although girls or women do not approach men directly for sex, they sometimes initiate relationships in other manners, like sending a message through a friend, or sending a gift, like beaded jewelry: "because a woman can never approach a man direct, she can prepare some bracelets and she sends it to that person, and then that person will know that the girl loves him" (FGD/M14-17).

d. Concurrent sexual partnerships

In every gender matrix activity, the gender card, 'promiscuity' was placed under the 'male and female' category'. According to the research participants, maintaining more than one concurrent sexual partner is very common, and is commonly assumed as universal characteristic of Maasai relationships. According to the perceptions of the research participants, it is generally understood that everyone, whether sanctioned or unsanctioned, has concurrent sexual partners. As fidelity in marriage is not an essential value, this includes married men and women. While discussing the notion of fidelity to sexual partners, "no one can have no partners"<sup>26</sup> (FGD/M14-17) was a common theme in every focus group discussion. Similarly, in a women's discussion group, and in reference to married women, a participant stated that, "this started a long time ago and began with the very first woman who was created, and so you cannot find one who is without a boyfriend".

Participants generally agreed that the number of concurrent partners varied with age and gender. Although there were some that argued females had more partners, it was predominantly argued that males were considered to have more: "they [men and women] are both promiscuous but a women's promiscuity is limited to 2-3 partners, but a man can have 10. Having seen this range I can conclude that a man is more promiscuous" (FGD/M14-17).

In relation to age, it was generally argued that the youth are the most active. In response to a question about who has most partners – younger or older - a participant said, "this seems to be young people, because once they get older this act of sex reduces"

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<sup>26</sup> In the context of this discussion, 'partners' was referring to sexual partners aside from your formalized relationship partners (i.e. girlfriends/boyfriends, husbands/ wives)

(FGD/F18-25). More specifically, participants identified the Ilmurran as being the most sexually active and maintaining the most concurrent partners. A traditional leader explained that, "the Ilmurran are the ones with many partners, because they might be having 10 partners from Esoto and another 10 partners unmarried women and others might have more partners, even 30" (Key Informant: Alaigwanani/Korianga).

In response to this last statement, it is important to recognize that although the research participants commonly conveyed that it was common for people to maintain many sexual partnerships, the social reality may be contrary to the public perceptions commonly conveyed in this study. For example, a quantitative study that was administered in the community that corresponds to this research at a similar time as this study suggested that although the range of reported concurrent relationships varied from 1 to 10, the average number of concurrent partners is closer to 2 (World Vision Tanzania, 2004). In most cases, although males are theoretically permitted to pursue many concurrent sexual relationships, their choices and opportunities are likely limited by many factors, including their feelings of affinity for their formalized girlfriends, girls' and women's sexual agency (see the analysis of sexual power in 4.4), and concern about sexually transmitted diseases (see section 5.2).

- e. Number of partners and social status: the vulnerability of Ilmurran and their partners

As previously mentioned in preceding sections, having many sexual partners is a common aspiration among Ilmurran. Virility and many partners is associated with masculinity ideals, and influences social status. According to participants, an olmurran with many partners is publicly recognized as an *olmurran loondoyea*, which is directly

translated as 'a man of many girls' (Field Notes). In response to a question about who is considered favorably in the community, a male participant articulated, "those who have many partners. Because there is a good name and a positive one that the community gives them, 'olmurran loondoye'. And it is prestige and you here everywhere you go that somebody is a man because he has these partners, he drinks 'engipot'<sup>27</sup> many times" (FGD/M14-17). Similarly, a traditional leader explained that, "a man with many girlfriends will be known all over, even among old women" (Key Informant: Alaigwanani/Korianga).

Contrary to these notions, those without partners face public shame. The term *osinoni* is given to those Ilmurran who have few or no partners: "if you refer to tradition, there is a name given to those who do not have many partners, and you will feel shame if you are called 'osinoni', and that is tradition" (FGD/M18-25). One key informant illustrated the shame associated with the name: "it is very annoying and nobody has peace when they are called like that... some would even try to find girls, day and night in order not to be called that name" (Key Informant: Alaigwanani/Korianga).

There were some indications of contrary views among a few male participants. Some participants, in fact, challenged this conceptualization of masculinity. A few participants, for example, recognized that although the community my favor individuals with many partners, the *ilmurran loondoyea* were more vulnerable to conflict and disease: "from my opinion, I would lower him because he gets into trouble many times, for example, he might be caught with somebody's wife and be fined, and also he may get

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<sup>27</sup> 'engipot' refers to a ceremony in which girlfriend-boyfriend relationships are formalized. It consists of an Olmurran drinking milk from the 'engipot' offered to him by his girlfriend's mother.

diseases. The one who has lower status [osinoni], they are the one's who are winning even though the community has given a negative name" (FGD/M14-17).

Similarly, the anxiety surrounding HIV/AIDS has also undermined the aspiration towards many concurrent partners. It was evident in the comments of several participants that the value of multiple concurrent partners is being disputed. As a result one participant suggested that, "with the fear of AIDS, some have started considering the issue of having many partners" (Key Informant: Alagwanani/Korianga).

f. Sanctioned and non-sanctioned sexual relationships

Although participants indicated that it was universally expected that everyone, with the exception of very young girls, elderly and non-circumcised boys, maintained more than one concurrent sexual relationships, some relationships are more sanctioned and acceptable than others. As may be expected, the sexual relationships between husband and wife are the most sanctioned.

In terms of extramarital relations for married individuals, the acceptability differs significantly. For men, it is acceptable, while for women, they face serious repercussions if it is revealed to their husbands that they have illegitimate partners: "a woman is the one who is discreet because the woman is married and it is trouble when the husband hears it, but a man, if he has ten partners, he will still expose it to everybody, even the wife" (FGD/M18-25). As a result, female participants expressed the importance of secrecy: "although many have boyfriends, it is done secretly because once you are caught you will be slaughtered<sup>28</sup>" (FGD/F14-17).

In reference to non-married individuals, the relationships between ilmurran and non-circumcised girls are the most acceptable and are traditionally sanctioned. In the

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<sup>28</sup> 'Slaughtered' refers to a severe physical beating.



following statement, for example, a traditional leader explained that Ilmurran's relationships with girls is acceptable but their relationship with circumcised women is not: "it is acceptable with girls, but you will find men that have secret circumcised partners [referring to married women]" (Key Informant: Alaigwanani/Korianga).

Relationships between Ilmurran and circumcised non-married women are also acceptable (Field Notes). As most relationships are facilitated through the Esoto, these relationships are less common, but they do exist. What is often the case is that the girlfriend-boyfriend relationships that are developed within Esoto while a girl is uncircumcised are continued following the circumcision of the female (Field Notes).

g. Extramarital relationships and economic implications for married women.

A very common complaint among female participants as well as an impact identified in the male groups was the detrimental impact of a husband's extramarital relationships on the husband's wives. A male participant illustrated the dilemma a man may face: "when you have ten and they all face problems at the same time, they all run to you and they all want you to solve their problems, so you will use a lot of cattle to resolve the problems" (FGD/M18-25). One female participant exclaimed, "A man might even mistreat his wives because his relationships with his girlfriends. He will love his girlfriends the most, and will not even care about the wives he bought with cattle" (FGD/F14-17). Consequently, many participants argued that husbands will often prioritize girlfriends over his family: "a husband may sell a cow and instead of bringing money home, he will stay in town drinking and give some money to his girlfriend, while at home there may not be food and the children are naked" (FGD/F18-25).

As illustrated in the analysis of economic power section, women often rely on their own external relationships, including boyfriends, in order to counteract the lack of provision and support they sometimes experience from their husbands. For example, in one discussion about economic support from boyfriend relationships, a woman commented that, "it is common for that man [referring to a boyfriend] to provide many things to his girlfriend" (FGD/F14-17).

h. Sexual coercion, and assault

A concept of 'force' in relation to sexual relationships arose in all of the discussions. It is important to understand, however, that the concept of 'force' or coercion had a very different meaning and instigated reactions among participants that were very different from the meanings and reactions common in the West. In fact, Western categories of 'force' are not effective in interpreting the phenomena, with the possible exception of interpreting *atabatata*. The phenomena and its social meaning are complex and cannot be understood easily. The understanding of these phenomena is further complicated by the use of Western concepts and categories, which have also been redefined and re-constructed in different times and contexts in the West. Further research and inquiry is necessary to fully understand and interpret the phenomena illustrated in the following parts.

The purpose of the following section is not to instigate or facilitate moral judgments. It seeks to identify and describe, at least in part, these phenomena so as to understand them in context of women and girls' vulnerability to HIV and lack of efficacy in exercising control over her sexuality. These phenomena must be illustrated in order to understand the environment that women and girls face and the implications for their

ability to negotiate sexual relationships – their sexual efficacy. As one participant explained, “they [men] have a lot of capacity to influence women to have sex with them” (FGD/M14-17). The following three concepts represent different phenomena relating to sexual pressure and coercion, as well as sexual assault.

i. Psycho/social manipulation: ‘forcing in conversation’

In some cases, male participants indicated notions of coercion in characterizing their sexual advances towards women and girls. Participants indicated within both male groups that sometimes the nature of their sexual advances involve persistent verbal persuasion. One participant articulated it as ‘forcing in conversation’: “I am saying a man cannot force, but he does try to force in the conversation” (FGD/M18-25). This was articulated further by another participant in saying that, “they [men] are the ones who convince women even though the woman is not willing but he will convince her no matter how long it takes until he wins” (FGD/M18-25).

ii. *eng’ikonya*: physical coercion/manipulation

In one of the male focus group discussions, some participants discussed a form of sexual coercion that involved physically coercing and manipulating a woman or girl. The term commonly used in context of these discussions was *eng’ikonya*. The term is most often used to refer to particular sexual relationships between Ilmurran and young girls within the Esoto, but also was used on one occasion in reference to a sexual relationship between a man and woman.

Besides the sexual context, *eng’ikonya* is broadly used to refer to situations in which you’ve been manipulated or pressured to do something you don’t want to do, such as selling a cow for a low price (Field Notes). This study’s interpretation of the word

denotes two important components. For one, it denotes pressure from an external source and second, it denotes a circumstance in which a person has no real alternatives but to submit to the external source. In sexual relationships, the components are obvious: a man initiates a sexual relationship with a girl or woman, which explicitly or implicitly involves pressure or coercion, and a woman or girl submits, as she may not perceive any real alternatives.

The *eng'ikonya* phenomenon was most commonly identified throughout the research in reference to sexual relationships between young girls and Ilmurran in the Esoto context. In this context, certain young girl participants<sup>29</sup>, who are new attendants at the Esoto, are expected to be submissive in relation to sexual advances by Ilmurran. One young girl stated that, "it is not a must, but if an olmurran wants sex there is not option" (Children's FGD/Mairowa). Another participant echoed this point: "if the Ilmurran make sexual advances during Esoto, the girls cannot refuse" (Children's FGD/Mairowa). A key informant explained that, "that's [referring to *eng'ikonya*] common in little girls... little girls face this problem as Ilmurran can force them, they have no say" (Key Informant: Female Political Leader). Similarly, one girl participant stated that, "there is *eng'ikonya* in Esoto because you might be forced to have sex with an Olmurran that you don't like to have sex with" (FGD/Girl Esoto Participants).

These sexual relationships are a difficult phenomenon to understand from a Western perspective. They seemingly do not involve verbal communication between partners nor any concept of mutual consent (Field Notes). As one participant indicated, "during Esoto, Ilmurran and girls have sex and they don't usually ask for sex"

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<sup>29</sup> As indicated elsewhere in this document, it is important to recognize that this discussion is not referring to all young girls. The *engi'konya* phenomenon in the Esoto is regulated by many variables. See the Analysis of Sexual Power discussion in 4.4. for an elaboration.

(FGD/M14-17). Implying a similar notion, one female participant stated that, “within that [referring to the Esoto] they [girls] are surprised by sex”. Although it differs among girls depending on their status in the Esoto (SEE the sexual power section for further elaboration), the research indicated that passively accepting sex from Ilmurran is a customary expectation of young girls while residing at the Esoto, and these relationships often do not involve inter-relational factors such as communication, persuasion or verbal consent.

Given the realities represented by the HIV epidemic, it is noteworthy that in many cases, research participants identified the *engi'konya* phenomenon as a custom that needed to be changed. For example, in one discussion with a young traditional leader, he was adamant that the curse phenomenon should be used to reduce girls' vulnerability: “from the very beginning the Maasai were stopping things that seem to be threatening lives by the use of curses. They make a lot of noise and say we have to stop this, this, and this needs to be cut down more, this and this are not fit and if anyone goes against that then you will die, and that is something which has been used by the Maasai and it has worked out” (Key Informant: Alaigwanani/Korianga)

iii. *Atabatata*: sexual assault

*Atabatata* is similar to Western conceptions of sexual assault, and was clearly distinguished from *eng'ikonya* by participants: “*eng'ikonya* that is what is done to girls in Esoto and *atabatata*, this is when even sometimes unknown people assault women along the ways” (FGD/M18-25). The key difference between *eng'ikonya* and *atabatata* is that *atabatata* occurs in sexual engagements in which there is no customary expectation of the woman or girl to provide sex and therefore, resistance from a woman or girl is legitimate

and should be respected. In these contexts, forcing sex is harmful; it is *atabatata*, is unacceptable, and is deemed a punishable act (Field Notes).

Participants used *atabatata* to refer to two different situations. For one, it was used by some male participants to refer to situations in which a man coerces a woman into sexual relations even though the woman has expressed no interest or attraction – she has not expressed or shown approval of the relationship. In response to the facilitator's question concerning cases in which a woman has not expressed interest, a participant explained, "in that case, we consider it *atabatata* and the person must be beaten because it is obvious that you've forced the woman in a harmful way" (FGD/M14-17).

The other context that it is considered assault is in cases of an unknown perpetrator. For example in the case of a man raping a woman in the forest<sup>30</sup>, one participant argued that, "The circumstance of the forest is very different. He will be caught because he is now a lion... there is a big fine. There's a lot of beating, and finally, he will be sent to jail" (FGD/M18-25).

This study did not determine the prevalence of this phenomenon. However, in both women's group, women discussed the phenomenon as a real threat. One participant illustrated their vulnerability in saying, "there are times [referring to incidences of sexual assault] because women, we face many problems, because we are like a ready made food. There are men who are hiding along the ways waiting for eating us" (FGD/F18-25). Nonetheless, likewise to the discussion concerning gender-based violence, it must be recognized that the Maasai community is vigilante in punishing perpetrators of sexual assault towards women. "He will see all the colors" (FGD/M18-25) was a popular theme, which essentially means that the perpetrator will be punished severely.

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<sup>30</sup> 'Forest' is a term used to refer to isolated places, often far from any human settlements

X. Elders, Traditional Leaders, and 'educated ones'<sup>31</sup>

Throughout the research, participants frequently illustrated the significant role of elders, traditional leaders and 'educated ones'. In the Maasai community, there are strict mores that determine respectful treatment towards the elderly (Field Notes). The Maasai elder carries a significant status and power within the community. This is not only reserved for elder males but also females. As the following quote indicates, it is custom for younger community members to respect and obey the older members of the community: "first, an old man can easily tell his boys not to do this because it is bad. An old woman will easily tell the girls not to do this, it is bad" (FGD/M18-25). Another participant furthered this illustration in the following quote relating to behavior change: "an old man can, for example, tell me to stop Esoto" (FGD/M18-25). The significance of this more is confirmed and maintained by the cursing belief system: "an old person will curse you if he gives an order and you refuse" (FGD/M14-17). Even more important than the role and power of elders, traditional leaders maintain universal power within their communities. The Maasai term that refers to traditional leaders is *alaigwanani*. The system of traditional leaders is complex, and will not be discussed in detail. The key issues are two fold. One issue is their role and responsibility in Maasai communities. Basically, traditional leaders represent the governing body for Maasai communities. They judge cases entailing conflict between community members, play crucial ceremonial functions, and most importantly, establish the laws and rules that dictate social behavior (Field Notes).

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<sup>31</sup> 'Educated ones' is an in vivo code that refers to Maasai who have been educated in the public school system.

Second, a key issue is the system of representation. As an aside, it is important to recognize that because women are not organized into age-classes, they are not represented in the formal traditional leadership structure. For men, there are *alaigwanani* that are designated to represent each age-class (Field Notes). Each leader is designated power over vast geographical areas and has 'assistants' that represent specific geographical parts of the vast area (Field Notes). Overall, it represents a power system that greatly influences all members of the age-classes, and other community members.

As a result, many participants highlighted the importance of engaging the traditional leadership. A teacher that was interviewed suggested that, "first of all is to use these leaders of the society, the *alaigwanani*... if you will use them you can succeed, because the Maasai they listen very much to these leaders" (Key Informant: Primary School Teacher). A similar notion is illustrated in the following quote: "if the government wants maybe to introduce something into the society, the government leader has to select the traditional leaders and teach them first about what is going on, what will happen, so it will be easier for the society to accept what their traditional leaders says" (Key Informant Interview: Female Political Representative).

'Educated ones' refers to those Maasai that have been educated in the public educational system. It was evident in comments made by participants as well as in the study's observations that 'educated ones' are offered significant status and allotted power to influence their peers and communities. The observations in the study illustrated that the research participants appreciated their peers – the Maasai researchers – for facilitating the research process. They were frequently praised and respected for sharing their knowledge and contributing to raising awareness, educating, and accompanying their



community in the process of change (Field Notes). One participant stated that, "an 'educated one', just like you [referring to the Maasai facilitator], can tell us, girls, boys, and even old people, can explain and give a full picture about AIDS and will be listened to and understood" (FGD/M18-25).

### Summary

In summary, the data generated from the research illustrated many pertinent customs and institutions within contemporary Kisongo Maasai communities. This section has predominantly been a descriptive activity to provide the reader with some background knowledge of certain customs, institutions and norms. The remaining parts of this dissertation will analyze, interpret, and critically reflect on these values and customs, further illustrating their complexity and the expansive social regulatory structures, values, and provisions that influence and mediate socio-cultural phenomena.

Many of the cultural phenomena previously discussed in the last two sections will be implicated in the proceeding discussions. As illustrated in these discussions, at times the values, institutions, customs, and norms indirectly relate to vulnerability in their relationship to determining and organizing social structure and power, and other cases, inadvertently, they directly facilitate disease transmission.

### 4.3 Analysis of Social Power

#### I. Social Power

- a. Limited degree of influence within their inter-relationships with men

In general, the most common theme within the focus group discussions was that women and girls' social power was significantly limited in relation to men. Two phenomena illustrated on the gender matrix activity were "no say" and "command/authority". As one of the facilitators explained to a focus group, a person with "no say", "is a person that when he or she gives advice that person's voice is not very much considered, many people do not hear" (FGD/M18-25). "Command/authority" was explained as the opposite phenomenon: a person who is listened to and whose 'voice' affects inter-relationships, situations and environments. Without exception, every focus group discussion concluded that the "no say" gender card was associated with females, while the "command/authority" card was associated with males.

- i. No say and not listened to

Participants commonly discussed concepts relating to women and girls not having a say or influence upon their counterparts, and likewise, not being listened to. One young Maasai girl explained that, "If a woman says something, she is overruled by the father, but if the man speaks he is not overruled" (Children's FGD/Sinya). Within a woman's group discussion, a participant stated that, "a woman has no say because she tells or advises her husband but he does not listen" (FGD/F14-17). In relation to family decisions, one commented that, "the husband is the one who makes decisions in the family, because we really have no say, we cannot decide what to do" (FGD/F14-17). The following quote illustrates the suppressive nature of this phenomenon. In response to a

question relating to women's desire to have a say, a woman stated "yes, because sometimes we are suppressed when we have things to share" (FGD/F18-25). The boys and men's groups echoed the above experience and phenomena. One stated that, "a husband will not listen to anything the wife advises" (FGD/M14-17).

Generally, the male participants explicitly or implicitly illustrated their cultural beliefs and conceptualizations of women when discussing this phenomenon. For example, one participant explained that, "normally, a man doesn't want a woman's voice to be considered first or given priority. And that's the truth. So, I conclude that a man's advice or idea is given priority" (FGD/M14-17). Male participants often recognized that women may have substantive and valuable advice and ideas to contribute, but they, nonetheless, are marginalized from influencing male counterparts and decision-making processes: "a woman sometimes makes good suggestions, but it is very hard for a man to realize it, because they never even listen and they never believe that a woman can give good advice" (FGD/M18-25).

ii. Command/authority

A concomitant phenomenon to 'no say' and 'not listened to' is command/authority. Participants illustrated that command and authority is exclusively ascribed to men: "it is simply the man with all authority" (FGD/M14-17); "because a man, what he says, must pass" (FGD/M18-25). Some female participants stated that, "what he says is always done" (FGD/F14-17) and likewise, "all of men's wishes are always fulfilled" (FGD/F14-17). A young girl similarly described her experience as follows: "when a father plans anything, it must be done" (Children's FGD/Sinya). In specific reference to decisions made in the family, a male participant explained, "it is the

man who has all authority, and that is why we say that he makes all the family decisions” (FGD/M18-25).

It is important to note in reference to the above phenomena that although it was evident that the prevailing norms allotted social power predominantly to men, this was not a reflection of capacity. This point was particularly stressed in the women’s groups, but was also periodically illustrated in the men’s groups. In the women’s groups, the underlying theme within the discussions was commonly that they had similar capacity to men, but were just not permitted to exercise it. In a discussion about authority<sup>1</sup>, for example, one woman stated: “We also have authority, but we are not given the chance” (FGD/F18-25). As previously illustrated, in the men’s group, they periodically referred to women’s capacity to generate constructive ideas, but that it isn’t offered equal consideration: “what I am saying is that a woman tells or advises something very true, but they consider her advice last” (FGD/M18-25).

## II. Causal Conditions and contributing factors to limited social power.

### a. Low status as an element of power.

Status is an element that contributes to one’s social power (Lee, 2001, p. 27), and can be defined as a person’s social position in relation to others. It denotes a person’s stature or importance that is culturally and socially ascribed to a person. In the case of this study, the ascription is based on gender, and the cultural conceptualizations of masculinity and femininity. Women’s and girls’ low status is determined and compounded, in varying degrees, based on the following factors:

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<sup>1</sup> As is evident in this context, ‘authority’ not only denotes power ascribed to a person, but also denotes a characteristic or capacity of leadership (I.e. making good decisions, managing people and events) (Field Notes).

i. Conceptualization of women and femininity.

Women and girls' status relative to men is influenced in part by the traditional and cultural manner in which femininity is conceptualized. As is evident in the Chapter 4.1 section, femininity is often conceptualized as inferior to masculinity. Women are "normally below a man" (FGD/M18-25), and are considered children before men (FGD/M18-25).

ii. Condition relating to cattle supremacy, and the division of labor<sup>2</sup>

In the Maasai context, where cattle are central to their livelihoods - it is "why we are living in this world" (FGD/M18-25), and caring for cattle is paramount because it is, "the source of everything" (FGD/M18-25); women's association with domestic labor rather than caring for cattle, influences their status. Generally, my communication with community members indicated that, as a result of the exclusive association of men with caring for cattle, women's status is undermined, to some degree, relative to men<sup>3</sup> (Field Notes).

iii. Age-class system

It was evident among participants that the age-class system is a highly valued component of the Maasai tradition that serves to ascribe respect and regulate behavior. As one participant explained, "one of the purposes of the age-set is respect" (FGD/M18-25). Status in the community is significantly related to the age-class one belongs to. For example, in reference to the status of old people versus younger people, one participant

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<sup>2</sup> Participants did not make explicit reference to the concept of cattle supremacy, the division of labor, and its influence on women's lower status. However, it was implicit within some of the comments made by male participants, and was confirmed in my communications with Maasai women in the community.

<sup>3</sup> NOTE: it must also be recognized, however, that this does not mean that women's role in reproductive work is not also valued. In fact, in the men's groups, participants periodically recognized the value of women's roles and one participant indicated that they were similar in importance: "They are almost equally important. The work of women is important and that of men is important" (FGD/M14-17).

illustrated that the age-class system, "was meant for maintaining respect between old people and young people and it is easy, as a result, for an old man to send an Olmuran anywhere or to tell him to do something for him, and he will do it to respect him" (FGD/M18-25). Women do not formally belong to any age-class<sup>4</sup>, and although women receive some status in accordance with the life stages phenomenon, which is described below, the status that males enjoy through their membership in age-classes is not accessible to women, and ultimately, further compounds their unequal stature (Field Notes).

iv. The system of marriage exchange and bride price

The Maasai system of marriage exchange and bride price impacts women and girls' status, and more generally, directly undermines their social power. In relation to status, one participant illustrated in the following quote that the marriage exchange and bride price contributed to men's general lack of consideration for their wives: "no matter how much you care for his cattle, no matter how many children you bear, even until you die, he will never consider you and every time you do a mistake, he tells you that he bought you and spent a lot of cattle because of you" (FGD/F18-25).

The most predominant theme was that that the husband owns<sup>5</sup> the wife via the bride price, and as a result, they have limited influence on their inter-relationships with

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<sup>4</sup> NOTE: women are associated with an age-class through their marriage relationship. In other words, a woman is associated with or belongs to the age-class of her husband. Nonetheless, the status this ascribes her is not similar to the status it ascribes formal membership ('formal membership' is referring to the traditional and ceremonial process that a male participates in to acquire age-class status: i.e. male circumcision ceremonies initiate boy children into the Olmuran age-class).

<sup>5</sup> Terms associated with economics, such as 'owning' and 'buying', were commonly used in reference to the marriage exchange system. Nonetheless, it would be negligent to impose Western conceptualizations of these terms onto the Maasai context. The concepts of 'owning' and 'buying' are different in the Maasai context, than foreign contexts, and therefore, one must be skeptical of assuming they have similar connotations. For example, using concepts like 'owning' and 'buying' in association of humans may not

men. In reference to authority and freedom to make decisions, one female participant explained: "I am not permitted because he is the one who married me" (FGD/F14-17). Similarly, the following male participant argued that, "a woman is the one who has no say. They are the ones who are married and they are brought from far away" (FGD/M14-17).

The bride price was also illustrated as contributing to domestic violence, which maintains and limits women and girls' social power (see below). The following quote, which reflects a common theme throughout the focus group discussions with women, identifies the connection between bride price and violence: "you are always beaten because he owns you" (FGD/F18-25). Likewise, another participant argued that the explanation for physical punishment is as follows: "the reason is that men are the one's that marry" (FGD/F14-17). According to male and female participants, the logic that men sometimes demonstrate is illustrated in the following quote: "in the sense that he gave away a lot of cattle to marry her, he owns even your bones. So, if he breaks them, it doesn't matter because it is his property" (FGD/F18-25).

#### v. Domestic violence as maintenance of the status quo

Domestic violence is a contextual condition that contributes to women's limited social power. It maintains the status quo by relegating women to their inferior roles and stature. In general, the imminence and fear of violence limit women's freedom to influence their environments – it limits their real opportunities to speak or behave in a manner contrary to the expectations imposed on them by men. This was best encapsulated in one woman's story about a wife who returns to her father's household in

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denote a devaluation of humans (Field Notes). Determining this would necessitate a thorough study of Maasai linguistics, which this study does not include.

protest of the treatment she has received from her husband. When the husband comes to demand her return, he argues that she is defiant and "wants to lead the boma". The wife was then beaten. The participant concluded saying, "There's no way to complain because we grew up seeing our mother treated the same way. The day you are given in marriage to the husband, the night before, your father will come to give a few blessings for a farewell, but the main thing he says is that if you don't treat your husband well you will be beaten. When the husband takes you, you will always have this in mind" (FGD/F18-25). Likewise, in another case, a woman described a situation in which after running to her father, the father explained that the use of corporal punishment maintained her mother as his wife: "he will tell you that this is how it was done with your mother [referring to corporal punishment] and this is why I have her as my wife" (FGD/F18-25). The participant concluded by saying that as a result one is forced to accept her environment, "when the husband beats you, you don't go anywhere, you just stay" (FGD/F18-25).

### III. Mitigating circumstances and contesting male power:

Although participants generally concluded that women's social power is limited, participants also identified some mitigating circumstances or characteristics that provided some exceptional degree of social power. In addition, some of the following behaviors that women and girls commonly adopt represent important forms of contesting male power; it represents important elements of women and girls agency in negotiating power dynamics. As one woman declared, "I cannot control the man all the time, but sometimes I can" (FGD/F14-17). The most common factors mentioned are as follows:



i. Life stages of women and subsequent status

The phenomenon of life stages among Maasai women is illustrated in the literature review (see Chapter 2.5). As described in that section, women and girls are ascribed a degree of status and power relative to their age and stage of life. For example, a circumcised female is allotted considerably more status than a non-circumcised girl, likewise for a married woman compared to a non-married woman, a woman with children compared to one without, and an elderly woman and a younger woman (Field Notes). Subsequently, life stages represent a mitigating factor that, at least to some degree, influences a woman's social status and subsequent power. In the following statement, for example, a male participant explains the significance of a girls' circumcision ritual and the transformation that is facilitated: "she becomes a new person, and a wise one" (FGD/M18-25).

The progress of women's status and power is also reflected in the correlation between life stages and sexual efficacy, as well as life stages and the power of women's curses. The correlation between life stages and sexual efficacy is illustrated in the sexual power section so will not be discussed here. In regards to curses, it was evident in the research that although participants did not express any fear concerning curses in relation to their relationships with girls, in the case of women, curses affected their relationships: "a woman can curse, and even when a man hears those words he fears it a lot" (FGD/M18-25). In the case of elderly women, the fear is apparently exacerbated further (Field Notes).

Lastly, it was also evident in the research that elderly women represent a distinct life stage and they often exercise significant social power. In context of discussing if

there were any exceptions to women's limited social power, one female participant argued that in the case of elderly women, they often gain power: "when a husband and wife grow old, for example, it is often the wife who has control" (FGD/F14-17). In an informal conversation with a community member, one female recalled the privilege she experienced while growing up under her grandmother's guardianship. She reported that she experienced significant privilege in the boma because no one, not even the male head of the household, would challenge her grandmother's authority (Field Notes).

ii. External support

Gaining support from external sources, such as male relatives or the husband's age-mates, is also a manner in which women exercise social power (Field Notes). In discussions relating to social power, female participants would commonly make reference to gaining external support as a means of influencing the husband. One woman, for example, explained that, "if my husband wants to sell my cow and I disagree, and I notify my relatives, they will come to talk with my husband" (FGD/F14-17). In the context of domestic violence, the following male participant similarly illustrated that seeking external support contributes to a woman's ability to effect her husband's behavior: "when a wife is beaten she may go to her male relative to explain that she was beaten without reason, and when that happens the relative will come and complain a lot and tell the husband that he has done a wrong thing and that if it happens again they will do what they can<sup>6</sup>" (FGD/M14-17).

iii. Leaving the boma/running away

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<sup>6</sup> Expressing that someone will 'do what they can' is an expression that serves to threaten the person it is directed towards. It is predominantly used in reference to severe physical punishment (Field Notes).

Similarly, a woman's capacity to leave her husband's boma serves a protesting function that also may allot her some power to influence her husband. The act of leaving or returning to her father's household shames the husband and in some cases, necessitates the family to persuade the husband to treat her differently (Field Notes)<sup>7</sup>. In one male group, a participant explained that the potential consequence of treating his wife inappropriately is that, "the woman runs away. So, this is like destroying your own boma" (FGD/M18-25)<sup>8</sup>.

iv. Advising/educational role of women

Within the female discussion groups, it was clear that although marginalized, women often did not accept absolutely passive roles in their inter-relationships with their husbands. It was often evident that through advising, sharing information or educating, women managed to influence their male-counterparts. Male participants particularly highlighted that men heeded women's advice in regards to child-care: "in regards to children, women are listened to when they make suggestions in relations to sickness, because a man spends very little time with children and it is not easy for him to know when a child is sick" (FGD/M18-25). In reference to decisions surrounding sending a girl to school, the following female participant explained her advising role as follows: "I may advise him about the importance of school for her and as a result he may send her, so this is some evidence that I have some control" (FGD/F14-17). The following quote identifies concepts of persuasion and covertness to characterize a woman's influence over

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<sup>7</sup> Contrary to this, some participants argued that their fathers were not supportive, and as a result, returning to their father's boma risked further physical punishment from the husband (FGD/F18-25).

<sup>8</sup> 'destroying your own boma' is referring to the fact that a husband depends on his wife to perform her functions in the household, and if he treats her so badly that she leaves, the boma may not function without her. In which case, he has indirectly destroyed the boma by disturbing the functional interdependence between the husband and wife.

men, which was commonly identified in reference to women's social power:

"Sometimes, if you encourage your husband in a respectful way to do something<sup>9</sup>, you can persuade him to do things that, in fact, no one would believe were rooted in the advice of a woman" (FGD/F14-17). In reference to decisions relating to a daughter's marriage, a male participant explained that, "a woman has all the rights to complain, and a complaint by the woman does influence the whole process" (FGD/M14-17). In context of a similar discussion, another male participant argued that in some cases when a husband ignores the wife's advice and therefore lacks her support, the marriage won't occur: "if a woman is unhappy it won't materialize" (FGD/M18-25)<sup>10</sup>.

v. Economic provision to the household

It was evident that the degree of economic provision to the household also influences a woman's social power. In context of a discussion concerning the possibility or likelihood of Maasai women influencing their husbands, one participant responded, "Today, is different. In the past years, women usually stayed at home, and the men provided everything. Nowadays, women are playing this role" (FGD/F14-17). The participant's response was intended to illustrate that providing for the household impacted the degree to which a woman may influence her husband (Field Notes). Another participant echoed this idea and further argued that economic provision reduced the incidence of domestic violence:

In the old days, women had no say. These days, although men are still in control, and we are still beaten, it isn't as common -it more commonly remains at

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<sup>9</sup> The Maa phrase that was used here was very difficult to translate. According to the Maasai translators, 'encourage your husband in a respectful way' is referring to a covert manner that a woman may employ to subtly encourage a husband to do something she wants (Field Notes)

<sup>10</sup> NOTE: according to the majority of participants, this example represents an exceptional case. According to other participants, in most cases, a woman is rarely consulted or her advice is not considered.

quarrelling, which is common. In the past, they beat the women because they were the only ones providing for the household. Now, however, we've been developed, and now we provide for the household sometimes." (FGD/F18-25)

vi. Legal protection

In a few cases, it was evident that, according to some women's perceptions, the government's advocacy and legislation to protect women is a relevant factor influencing women's social power. For example, in a similar context to the one stated above regarding the likelihood of influencing husband's, one participant stated, "there are laws that control the men" (FGD/F14-17). In other words, some participants felt that government intervention protects them and subsequently, offers them opportunities to influence the husband or exercise social power. This concept also arose in discussing economic power, which is illustrated in the Analysis of Economic Power section.

vii. Angoratati

Angoratati is the name given to the wife who is shown favor by the husband. This wife is ascribed a higher status compared to the other wives, and as a result she exercises some degree of power in her relationship with the husband. In context of discussing women's 'no say' and lack of 'command/authority', one participant argued that it isn't always the case: "our husbands are polygamous. They have many women, and a man always chooses one wife that he loves the most. As a result, this wife and her offspring are privileged among the wives" (FGD/F14-17). More specifically, one participant explained that there are exceptions to women's lack of social power because, "sometimes a loved woman can convince or advise her husband" (FGD/M14-17).

#### IV. Consequences

Several significant consequences of limited social power were identified within the discussion groups:

##### a. Unfeasible workloads

In context of the division of labor, having a limited degree of social power is the compounding factor that ultimately, leads to the unfeasible workloads and physical exhaustion illustrated in Chapter 4.2. In general, women have limited opportunity to negotiate their workloads with their husbands. Many discussions illustrated that men are generally inconsiderate about how overburdened they are, and in some cases, women face the risk of violence if they do not complete the tasks assigned to them. One female participant stated that, "all he cares about is that you do all the activities that he has assigned". One young boy described the problems that he observed women and girls facing in the following quote: "she may return late while looking for either firewood or fetching water but the husband won't listen to her excuses. If the cattle come, no matter what her other duties are, she must identify any missing cattle, even though she may be busy milking and cooking at the same time. A husband still might force her to do even more tasks" (Children's FGD/Mairowa). One woman explained that although caring for cattle is not their responsibility, their husbands order them to perform this task despite their burden of domestic work: "if they tell you in the morning that you need to go and you complain that you do not have firewood, they tell you to go with the cattle and on your way back, collect the firewood" (FGD/F18-25). Other women recalled instances in which they had to carry their young child on their back and carry firewood while

attending cattle. Many exclaimed the difficulty of such a responsibility: "it is very difficult to carry a baby and firewood while caring for cattle" (FGD/F18-25).

A primary school teacher as well as children participants within the Children's FGD, illustrated that unfeasible workloads had implications for free time and subsequently girls' education. As one young boy explained, "I am glad because, as a boy, I am free from jobs and work... she never gets free time for her private things" (Children's FGD/Mairowa). The primary school teacher's concern was specifically related to the implications of their workloads on their education. He explained that the division of labor, "can affect girls more than boys because girls have so many family things to do at home, they go to fetch some water far away, sometimes they go to graze some cows or goats, sometimes there is some domestic work like to cook and so on, they go to fetch firewood, so their time to rest is very little time" (Key Informant: Primary School Teacher). In response to a question concerning the impact on school performance, he stated that, "there is some effect because they have no time to do homework at home until they are back to school. They have got not time" (Key Informant: Primary School Teacher).

#### b. Health implications

As a consequence of their workloads, participants commonly illustrated health implications related to women's workload. For example, physical ailments related to muscle strain, and long term structural damage were reported. One male participant, for example, explained that, "if she fetches water she may get a back problem" (FGD/M14-17). For female participants, they less frequently focused on the physical injury aspect, but instead argued that women's diet is undermined. Women commonly argued that

malnourishment was an issue as they frequently missed meals because they did not have time to eat: "do to having to do all of this housework during the day, a woman may suffer from malnutrition. Meaning that she begins doing the housework from morning to evening and she doesn't get time to eat. Even though one might have a lot of food it doesn't seem like she has, because she has so much work that she can't eat" (FGD/F18-25).

c. Marginalization from public affairs

Female participants often indicated that they felt marginalized. Their limited ability to influence their husbands and male counterparts often impeded their participation in public affairs. As one exasperated woman expressed in context of discussing 'housework', "we are no different from those people in jail" (FGD/F18-25). A female key informant expressed that this lack of power has implications for participating in community events. According to this informant, men may prevent them from attending community events, such as health education events: "for example, in a school there might be a seminar about a certain disease. If a woman tells her husband that she has to go there to watch the film, she will not be allowed. She will use a trick<sup>11</sup> because if he realizes that she was there, she will be in trouble" (Key Informant: Female Political Leader).

d. Girls' marginalization from education

Having limited capacity to effect male-counterparts is also a factor that compounds girls' marginalization from education (see Chapter 4.2). It was evident throughout the discussions with females that a major impact of not having a 'say' in

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<sup>11</sup> a 'trick' refers to deceiving the husband. For example, in the above case, the woman may tell her husband that she is going to the mill to grind maize, but instead, she attends the school program (Field Notes)



household affairs was that they could not determine decisions affecting their daughters, which included the enrollment of their daughters into school. For example, one participant illustrated the concern in the following quote: "if I advise my husband to send my daughter to school, he will not listen. However, if he wants her to go, then she will go" (FGD/F14-17).

Women's desire for power in regards to determining their children's educational opportunities was universal. One participant stated that, "for example, regarding taking children to school, I really wish I had authority so I could determine things" (FGD/F14-17). Likewise, another stated that, "I would really love it if I would be given freedom to care for my standard five children. For example, I would care for her with all my efforts, because I know I will benefit later on" (FGD/F14-17).

e. Sense of powerlessness and limited self-determination

In general, the most common consequent identified in the male and female groups was that women experience a sense of powerlessness and limited self-determination. One young woman expressed the following: "I really wish I had authority so I could determine things. Because sometimes you might have an idea, but because you don't have authority, your idea will not be fulfilled" (FGD/F14-17). In the same group, in response to a question concerning why they can't change their overburdened situation, one woman stated that, "The reason is that I don't have control over myself. I am not the one who decides" (FGD/F14-17). In the older female group, this theme was also prevalent. For example, one participant explained, "He [her husband] doesn't want me to go anywhere, so I sit at home, because I'm not allowed to go" (FGD/F18-25). A few of the male participants also identified women's lack of self-determination: "Women are

suppressed. Sometimes they are prohibited from doing things that they want to do simply because they do not have authority" (FGD/M18-25). Similarly, the following quote also indicates women's lack of self-determination: "it [referring to women having no 'command/authority'] has negative impacts because when a woman has her own plans she will not do them simply because she must first receive authority from the husband" (FGD/M14-17).

#### 4.4 Analysis of Sexual Power

##### I. Sexual Power

A girl or woman's ability or right to control or influence their sexual relationships with men varies according to the life stage of the girl or woman and the specific context of the relationship. Their power varies from having very little sexual efficacy to relatively significant power to determine relationships, and it represents a life cycle of sexual efficacy. The following discussion is organized into the most relevant life stages of a Maasai female: pre-circumcision and post-circumcision. The contexts that will be discussed are the girl-olmurrans relationship within the Esoto, the woman-husband relationship, and extramarital relationships.

##### a. Non-circumcised girl

According to participants, non-circumcised girls' sexual relationships are entirely associated around the Esoto institution, and their relationships are exclusively with Ilmurrans<sup>12</sup>. Participants indicated that sexual relationships are rarely developed apart

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<sup>12</sup> NOTE: their peers, non-circumcised boys, are considered unclean and one of the greatest sexual taboos indicated by the participants is engaging in sexual relationships with a non-circumcised boy.

from the Esoto – the Esoto is a key institution that provides girls and ilmurran opportunities to interact socially, develop relationships and engage in sex (Field Notes).

As an aside, it is important to note that the following discussion predominantly refers to non-school going girls. As indicated elsewhere in discussions about Esoto, in many cases school-going girls are often sternly advised and sometimes threatened (Field Notes) not to attend Esoto, and likewise, not to participate in sexual activities.

Consequently, it was difficult to make any definite conclusions regarding school-going girls' participation in Esoto and similarly, the prevalence or nature of their sexual interactions. In most cases, many of the school-going girl participants reported that they do not attend Esoto and that they had not begun participating in sexual activities.

Nonetheless, despite the correlation between attending school and not participating in Esoto, or more generally, not participating in sexual activities, which was indicated in the focus group discussions; other evidence indicates that attending school is not always relevant to determining girls' attendance nor their sexual activity. For example, the primary school teacher who participated in this research suggested that school-going girls often continue, at least periodically, to participate in Esoto and furthermore, he argued that, "pregnancy is a very big factor" that contributes to girls dropping out of school.

For those attending Esoto, their sexual efficacy varies significantly in this context. The intervening conditions that impact girls' sexual power are discussed below. For the most part, however, participants generally referred to these relationships as involving very little to no efficacy for girls. According to the discussions, it is generally expected that girls will accept the sexual advances of the ilmurran while residing at the Esoto. It seems to be a girl's obligation. As is illustrated elsewhere, this is especially the

expectation in relation to young girls who have no formalized boyfriend relationships. One woman explained the experience of girls in the following quote: "she [non-circumcised girl] faces problems in Esoto because she has no control over her body. Everybody who wants to have sex with her, he does it" (FGD/F18-25). For the most part, although there was some disagreement (which may be explained by the intervening conditions discussed below), the young girls who participate in Esoto reported that they are not free to refuse sex. One girl explained that, "it is not a must, but if an olmurran wants sex then there is no option" (FGD/Girl Esoto participants). This sense of little efficacy was commonly illustrated in the discussions with young girls, and was further confirmed throughout the groups with older participants.

The discussions surrounding these relationships illustrated two significant concepts that characterize these relationships: *engi'konya* and corporal punishment for refusing. *Engi'konya* is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.2, so will not be elaborated here. For girls at Esoto, especially for younger, new initiate girls, this type of sexual engagement predominantly characterizes their sexual relationships with ilmurran: "for me, I think we only force girls [*engi'konya*]... girls come to Esoto and can be forced in that way" (FGD/M18-25). The following young girl corroborated that *engi'konya* is common in the following quote: "there is *engi'konya* in Esoto because you might be forced to have sex with an olmurran you don't like to have sex with" (FGD/Girl Esoto participants).

For the most part, participants described an environment in which girls are not free to refuse sex and reportedly, they risk punishment from Ilmurran if they refuse. The discussion groups with girls indicated that corporal punishment for refusing sex is

common. In response to the question, "what if a girl refuses to have sex with an *olmurrann*?" one girl stated, "you will be beaten" (FGD/Girl Esoto participants). Although one girl argued that "some are beaten and some are not", the majority of the group argued that, "all are beaten" (FGD/Girl Esoto participants).

It is important to qualify the above section by noting the exceptions and mitigating circumstances section. The above section outlines how the participants generally portrayed and explained girls' efficacy. The above depiction seems to be the most common and popular understanding of girls' sexual experience within the Esoto. However, further exploration into the subject indicated that, unlike commonly held assumptions, a girls' sexual efficacy varies significantly within the Esoto. A status hierarchy apparently exists among girls in Esoto that is determined by the amount of years they've attended Esoto (or age) and the existence of formalized relationships with *Ilmurrann*. These factors, in fact, significantly mitigate girls' sexual power in Esoto. Consequently, it is negligent to generalize girls' sexual efficacy. As previously mentioned, this point is illustrated in more detail in the exceptions and mitigating circumstances section.

Another issue worth qualifying refers to the public ideology versus private reality and social fact dilemma mentioned in the limitations of the research section in Chapter 2. Although, the popular perception is that girls rarely exercise power and violence is common, in some cases the research was unable to determine to what degree these perceptions reflected public ideology versus social fact. This is particularly the case in reference to violence within the Esoto. Although the research indicates that violence, or at least the fear of violence, exists for young girls in the Esoto, the prevalence of the

violence was difficult to determine. However, for the most part, the study indicated that contrary to public ideology, violence is not as prevalent as popular perception sometimes indicates.

b. Circumcised women

i. Non-married women

In most cases, a girl is exchanged in marriage following her circumcision and recovery period. It is not common for a circumcised woman to remain unmarried for very long, and the discussion groups did not generate any information on this life stage. However, a few things were explored in informal discussions with community members. For one, women are excluded from Esoto, and therefore, their relationships with Ilmurran are no longer facilitated through this institution (Field Notes). Nonetheless, it was reported that relationships with their previous boyfriends often continue and are generally acceptable – it isn't a discreet relationship, such as those between ilmurran and married women (Field Notes). In regards to sexual efficacy, apparently a non-married woman exercises considerable efficacy and further, her unmarried status does not subjugate her to the challenges that married women face with husbands and the age-mate phenomenon (Field Notes).

ii. Marriage context

For married women, unless they are pregnant, menstruating or ill, they have very little to no sexual efficacy in regards to their sexual relations with their husband. In context of discussing sexual norms in marriage, one participant stated that, "in the case of marriage, a woman has no say to her husband, so her husband will want her to do

whatever he assigns<sup>13</sup>" (FGD/F18-25). A male participant explained the same notion regarding sexual efficacy in the following quote: "a married woman can't say no" (FGD/M14-17).

iii. Extramarital relationship context

In regards to their extramarital relationships, participants indicated, for the most part, that women have relatively significant power to determine these relationships. In discussing the 'authority' gender card, one male participant explained that, "if you take the situation of sex, it is women who have most of the authority" (FGD/M14-17).

Likewise, another participant in another group stated that, "she is the one who has all the authority about the thing<sup>14</sup>" (FGD/M18-25). In the following quote, one woman explains the experience of some women in regards to their obligation to husbands versus their freedom to determine extramarital relationships:

Sometimes a woman feels very happy when they have sex with an outside partner because sometimes husbands force them and they don't argue, but an outside partner, it is the woman's choice. Many submit to their husband saying, 'this is what my father has given me so I can't argue'. And of course, an outside partner is the one you've chosen yourself. (FGD/18-25)

II. Conditions causing or contributing to sexual power

a. Life stage

As evident in the above illustration, the focus group discussions illustrated that a female's life stage is a contextual condition that affects her degree of sexual power. This

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<sup>13</sup> In context of the discussion, 'whatever he assigns' is referring to a wife's absolute sexual obligation to her husband.

<sup>14</sup> Explicitly, 'the thing' refers to a woman's vagina. Implicitly, it is reference to a woman's control and power to determine and choose her sexual partners (Field Notes).

is particularly evident in the stark contrast between non-circumcised girls versus circumcised women – married and non-married. In addition, participants indicated that even within the non-circumcised category of girls, life-stage influences efficacy. While older girls exercise power in the relationships, participants indicated that younger girls have no efficacy and their relationships are frequently characterized by *engi'konya* (see above). However, on the contrary, for a woman in context of her extramarital relationships, "she is the one who allows this, she refuses this, she returns this, and then she welcomes this"<sup>15</sup> (FGD/M18-25). Likewise, a participant also stated that, "a woman is the one who owns herself" (FGD/M18-25).

### III. Aggravating factors and mitigating circumstances

There are four conditions or factors that aggravate or mitigate the above phenomena. The first aggravating condition refers to the coercive and manipulative behaviors of men. The second refers to the age-mate visitation phenomenon, which significantly undermines married women's sexual power, the third condition refers to the relationships between lacking economic power and sexual power, and the last mitigating condition refers to the formalized boyfriend phenomenon among girls in the Esoto.

#### a. Males' persistent pursuit

The pressure exerted upon women and girls by men aggravate and undermine women and girls' sexual power. Although women and girls exercise relative efficacy within certain contexts, it was evident within many of the discussions with the male participants, that their manner of pursuing sexual relationships with women is sometimes

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<sup>15</sup> This statement was made in context of discussing sexual norms. In context, therefore, the participant was illustrating that women have the capacity to determine decisions surrounding sexual engagements (Field Notes).



characterized by relentless pressure, coercion, manipulation, and sometimes physical force. In Chapter 4.2, this is illustrated within the discussions surrounding psycho/social manipulation and *engi'konya*, and will not be further discussed here.

Suffice it to say that male participants commonly illustrated relentless persistence in their sexual pursuits. The following anecdote, discussed in a male group, graphically illustrates the relentless pressure a female may face and subsequent sexual exploitation that sometimes occurs. In response to a question regarding if women are ever forced, the participant stated:

Let me explain. If you understand forcing in this way, it is like this: when a woman attracts you and you sit on her bed and start asking and then she's undecided you will force her, but not in a harmful way because a man encourages her and she kind of says no, but not a strong 'no' and even when a man opens the legs she doesn't resist and she continues to say 'no' until a man is finished.

(FGD/M14-17)

Following this anecdote, another participant responded: "and a man cannot actually leave when she's saying 'no' in this manner" (FGD/M14-17). The frequency of coercion and manipulation, as described above, was not determined in the research, but remains a relevant concern and issue.

Nonetheless, the concept of relentlessly pursuing a woman characterized by what participants called 'forcing in conversation' was common throughout the discussions with male participants. According to observations from the Maasai members of the research team, males commonly take pride in their ability to convince women into having sex with them (Field Notes). In response to a question concerning how Ilmurran may respond to a

girl who refuses to have sex with them, the young traditional leader explained that, "they can even continue to persuade a girl for ten days" (Key Informant: Aaigwanani/Korianga). Although this may not be interpreted literally, the implication represents a common theme among male participants: males sometimes may relentlessly pursue and pressure women and girls to engage in sexual relationships, which may undermine the theoretical power women and girls are ascribed.

In regards to non-circumcised girls, it was evident within the discussions that Ilmurran periodically pressure and shame young girls who avoid Esoto, and more specifically, those that resist the sexual pursuits of Ilmurran. In regards to avoiding Esoto, one male participant, for example, stated that if girls avoid Esoto, "there will be follow up" (FGD/M14-17). 'Follow up' may refer to physical violence or shaming (Field Notes). In reference to the latter, one participant explained that, "she will just be teased and sometimes they neglect her"<sup>16</sup> (FGD/M18-25). More specifically, the teasing concept, which was commonly illustrated, refers to name-calling. According to participants, girls who avoid sexual relationships with the Ilmurran are given the name 'endito oolayok', which translates to 'a girl of boys': "the Ilmurran will be teasing her saying, 'ah look at this girl of boys'" (FGD/Girl Esoto participants). The significance and shamefulness of this name is that it accuses girls of engaging in sexual relationships with non-circumcised boys, who are traditionally considered unclean and subsequently, it is a taboo to engage in sex with them (Field Notes). In any case, the social pressure caused by shaming potentially undermines girls' capacity to resist relationships with Ilmurran.

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<sup>16</sup> 'neglect her' apparently refers to social exclusion: Ilmurran may refuse to talk to her or accept her participation in social activities (Field Notes).

As an aside note, it is important to recall the correlation between number of partners and social status for men in understanding the above phenomena (See Sexual Worldview within Chapter 4.2). Ilmurran with few partners are shamed and ascribed a name that is generally understood and recognized throughout the community – osinoni. It is shameful to carry this title, and as the traditional leader of this group stated, "some would try to find girls, day and night in order not to be called that name" (Key Informant: Alaigwanani/Korianga)

Whatever the causal factors related to the sexual conquest phenomenon, it was evident that the environment created by males' attitudes and the nature of their pursuits substantially undermined and eroded the sexual efficacy that women and girls may otherwise exercise. It represents an important distinguishing factor between *de jure* versus *de facto* capacity to influence sexual relationships.

b. Lack of economic power

The unequal access to economic resources and subsequent impoverishment that participants reported (see analysis of economic power) also serves to undermine women's efficacy. Similar to the above factor, although women and girls' theoretical sexual power may remain the same, their actual opportunity to exercise this power is undermined by their real economic need. Male participants, in fact, illustrated that males will use their economic power and take advantage of women's economic need in order to persuade women: "a man is the one who follows and no matter how a woman refuses, even if all words fail, he even uses money to have sex" (FGD/M18-25). Another participant supported this notion concluding that, "nowadays money matters, if you have money, you have more partners" (FGD/M18-25).

c. Age-mate visitation and the fear of curses for married women

This phenomenon is described in detail in the Chapter 4.2 section so will not be discussed in detail here. As illustrated in the Chapter 4.2 section, for many married women, their sexual power is significantly undermined in regards to their ability to refuse sexual relationships with visitors who belong to their husband's age-set. The specific mitigating factors are two fold. One relates to the perceived expectation that some evidently maintain, to provide sex to an age-mate visitor as part of the hospitality custom. Second is the fear of being cursed if one doesn't fulfill this obligation. As one woman explained, "if you try to refuse he will curse you" (FGD/F18-25). The following quote from a male participant illustrates the attitudes regarding age-mate women: "a woman who belongs to a certain age-set is quite different from other women because she has no option to give reasons why she is refusing or not wanting to have sex" (FGD/M18-25). As this quote indicates and was frequently corroborated by males and female participants, women are expected to submit to age-mate advances; it is obligatory. If they refuse, it is believed that they will experience the ill effects of a curse. Consequently, for those women who maintain a belief in the curse phenomena, which included almost all of the women in this study, they have no real alternatives in this context, and thus, their otherwise high degree of sexual power in extramarital relations is negligible.

As an aside, according to the discussion in one focus group, age-mate visitation phenomenon affects wives unequally. As the following quote illustrates, husbands are more likely to direct a visitor towards the houses of his less favored wives: "women can be affected, especially the 'un-favored ones' because visitors are most often directed to her house and she cannot refuse" (FGD/M14-17)

d. Non-circumcised girls and formalized boyfriends

After further exploring girls' sexual efficacy with Ilmurran in the Esoto, it became evident that some of the more senior girls<sup>17</sup> are not forced to have sex and have a higher degree of sexual power than younger girls who are newer participants and have not developed formal boyfriend relationships with Ilmurran (Field Notes). Contrary to common conceptions and generalizations concerning girls' lack of sexual power, a traditional leader explained that, "there are girls who can have only one boyfriend and can refuse to have sex, the girl is free and nobody will beat her" (Key Informant: Traditional Leader/Korianga). He went on to explain that the factor that mitigates this freedom relates to having a boyfriend: "if one forces a girl and then she tells her boyfriend about it, this may cause conflict at Esoto" (Key Informant: Traditional Leader/Korianga). One participant explained the different degrees of sexual power as follows:

When a girl is big enough and ready, that is what we call a knowledgeable girl<sup>18</sup>. She will have a recognized boyfriend so she will only participate in sexual activities with that boyfriend, and not every Ilmurran can go and have sex with that girl. However, these little ones, every Ilmurran can pressure [engi'konya] these girls into sex. So, when this little girl grows up, she grows up knowing this engi'konya. (FGD/M18-25)

As a consequence of these findings, analysis of sexual power of non-circumcised girls can be qualified by distinguishing between girls who have achieved a degree of status

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<sup>17</sup> 'Senior girls' refers to girls that have attended Esoto for a few years, are relatively older in age (i.e. 10-12 yrs), and have formalized boyfriend relationships with ilmurrans

<sup>18</sup> The translation of this phrase was difficult. According to the Maasai translators, the girls being referred to in this phrase are those girls who have attended Esoto for a relatively long period, and have begun to develop specific and sustained relationships with particular ilmurrans.

through their seniority in Esoto and their formalized relationships with specific Ilmurran, and younger girls who have not been allotted similar status, and therefore, have minimal right or ability to determine their sexual relationships with Ilmurran. In regards to the latter category, these girls' relationships are predominantly characterized by the *engi'konya* phenomenon.

#### IV. Consequences

##### a. Nonconsensual early sexual debut

One of the consequences to the limited sexual power of young girls, who participate in Esoto, is non-consensual early sexual debut. As is illustrated above and in Chapter 4.2, young, new initiate girls who participate in Esoto are sometimes pressured to engage in sexual relationships with Ilmurran (recall the *engi'konya* phenomenon) - sometimes at very young ages. Some participants indicated that most often, these young girls begin attending Esoto without sexual intentions or awareness of the sexual implications. They only learn about sex through their relationships that are characterized by the *eni'konya* phenomenon. One participant articulated this as 'being surprise by sex': "if you look at these young girls, they go there [Esoto] and they like playing but within that they are surprised by sex<sup>19</sup>" (FGD/F18-25). Likewise, another participant argued that attending Esoto, "causes her [a young girl] to do things that she didn't aim to do<sup>20</sup> at the Esoto" (FGD/F14-17).

##### b. High vulnerability to disease

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<sup>19</sup> 'Surprised by sex' indicates the phenomenon of *engi'konya*, which is not characterized by communication and consent. On the contrary, it includes an *olmurran* physically manipulating a girl into a position that permits sexual intercourse without any communication. Hence, girls are 'surprised by sex'.

<sup>20</sup> In context of the discussion, 'to do things that she didn't aim to do' is referring to having sex with Ilmurran.

Participants commonly made reference to vulnerability to disease as a significant impact of girls' lack of sexual power in Esoto and women's lack of sexual power in context of their marriage relationships. In regards to married women, participants indicated that women's obligation to have sex with their husbands may contribute to their vulnerability because they are obliged to have sex with them despite their awareness of their husband's multiple partners. One woman articulated the following concern: "if he [referring to her husband] goes out and finds many partners, then he brings disease to me. So, you see, as a wife, I will now have to suffer. If my husband hadn't gone out, then I would not have suffered" (FGD/F14-17). One male participant illustrated the predicament women face in the following quote: "one man can have seven wives, and he will get married to another young lady, and maybe that young lady is HIV positive, so because he is the one with the power, all the other ladies will be affected because he will transmit HIV to them" (FGD/M14-17).

Young Maasai girls were commonly recognized as the most vulnerable group among the Maasai. Their vulnerability is associated with their general lack of efficacy and the significant transmission networks as a result of their relationships with Ilmurran. As one participant explained, "it is very hard for a girl to know who is safe because today she spends a night with one olmurran and then another night, she spends the night with another and it is not possible to know who is safe" (FGD/F14-17). One young girl explained girls' vulnerability as follows: "they [girls] are at risk because at the Esoto they have sex with different people and they can contract diseases" (Children's FGD/Mairowa).

#### 4.5 Analysis of Economic Power

##### I. Limited Economic Power

Generally, research participants conveyed that women and girls experience a significant lack of economic power. It is men who maintain almost absolute control of capital resources, and women's opportunity to income generating activities is limited. Women may own and manage capital resources, but according to participants, men, in most cases, control the use of these resources. The only significant exception to this is the access, and control of milk, which represents a degree of economic power, and serves as a productive means for women. The following section outlines women's economic power in relation to access, ownership and control of resources.

As a preface to the following discussions, it is important to recognize the influence that the market economy has had on women's access, control and use of economic resources and opportunities. As discussed in Chapter 5, many historical processes, but most notably the infiltration of the market economy, has tended to facilitate the males' monopolization of economic activities, while marginalizing females' historic and substantive role in economic activities.

##### a. Access to resources/income-earning opportunities

##### i. Access to milk as a capital resource

Milk, and the capital generated from milk, represents the most significant access to economic power, albeit marginal power, for a Maasai woman: "the major source of female's money is by selling milk. This is the only thing that they have authority over" (FGD/M18-25). The following quote from a female participant corroborates this point:



"we don't even have a goat to sell in order to get money. We only have money if one sells milk" (FGD/F18-25).

Unlike other economic activities, for most women, selling milk is, generally, one of their only acceptable or sanctioned economic activities. For the most part, it is one of the only activities that their male counterparts permit: "A husband may know about this money and will not appropriate it<sup>21</sup>" (FGD/M18-25). The degree of economic power this provides was not determined in the research, but it may be deduced from the observations and participants' responses that the capital generated from milk sales is marginal.

Women's access to milk as a capital resource relies on the fact that the role of milking and providing milk to the household is exclusively a woman's role. The following quote explains this point and illustrates how women use milk as a profitable resource:

A woman owns milk. She owns because she is the one who milks the cow, and she is the one who knows how much milk she gains, and using wisdom<sup>22</sup>, she can take it to a hotel in town and start a bill, and at the end of the month you are paid money, and a wise woman can use the money to buy things, start business, or to buy cattle. If you do this intelligently, by giving a husband enough calabash<sup>23</sup>, then a woman will take the remaining milk to where she chooses (FGD/F14-17)

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<sup>21</sup> NOTE: in most cases, women's economic activities are not sanctioned and in cases where the husband accepts his wife's contribution to earning money, the husband generally appropriates the product and control of it. For example, a woman is generally expected to hand the money she earns over to her husband to manage it.

<sup>22</sup> A 'wise woman' refers, in this case, to a woman who is business-minded. It refers to a woman who uses her money in a manner that multiplies her profits and accumulates capital, or in other cases, provides for her children (Field Notes). The same concept is being referred to in the statement, "if you do this intelligently". 'Intelligently' is referring to the same notion of business-mindedness (Field Notes).

<sup>23</sup> This is referring to a woman's strategy to give the husband a satisfactory amount of milk (i.e. giving a husband enough calabash), while reserving some milk for her economic activities (Field Notes)

As the above quote illustrates, there is a degree of covertness that is involved in women's use of milk as a productive resource: she provides the husband a satisfactory amount while reserving some for her economic activities. Consequently, this is sometimes a risky business because women are expected to manage the milk in a manner that allows her to always provide milk to the husband upon his demand. In cases, where there is no milk when the husband demands it, women risk punishment for poorly managing the resource: "children and men and everyone in the household depends on her to distribute milk, and if the milk is not enough, then that woman will be beaten by the husband"(FGD/M18-25).

ii. Access to income-earning opportunities<sup>24</sup>

Generally, participants indicated that women's access to income-earning opportunities were marginal. This phenomenon is compounded by issues relating to conceptualizations of women (see the causal conditions and factors section below), limited social power, and marginalization to the domestic sphere. The latter two concepts are illustrated in the following quote:

A man has many ways of getting money. The first way is that he is free to sell cattle, and second, he is free to go anywhere to work for money, but if a woman asks him if she can go somewhere to work for money he will say that you are going to get lost<sup>25</sup> (FGD/F18-25)

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<sup>24</sup> For the purpose of this study, 'income earning opportunities' refers to opportunities for women to participate in activities that generate money (i.e. opportunities to sell milk, making profit through buying and selling products, formal or informal employment opportunities, etc.).

<sup>25</sup> 'getting lost' shouldn't be interpreted literally. The implicit meaning of this phrase is that women who pursue income earning opportunities, may focus on these external activities and subsequently, neglect her husband and children (Field Notes).

Although the access to income-earning opportunities are marginal, participants did refer to some occasions in which women did participate in income-earning activities. For example, one male participant explained that, "a woman may work for somebody and earn payment and then she continues until she makes a lot of money" (FGD/M14-17). The following quote illustrates that, on some occasions at least, women have gained some recognition in the sphere of business: "nowadays, we have women who are doing business just like men" (FGD/M14-17). These opportunities to earn income are further discussed in the exceptions and mitigating circumstances section under the hidden economy topic.

It is important to note that in most cases, women's access to income-earning opportunities is contingent on the approval and support of the husband, and female participants generally indicated that it was not common for a husband to support these endeavors, and if he did, he appropriated or controlled the income generated. In fact, according to some participants, it is only acceptable if the wife reports her activities to the husband: "...and later on when she returns, if she shows her husband that she's earned some money, then it will be acceptable" (FGD/M18-25). Consequently, if a woman generates income, in most cases, she cannot autonomously use it (Field Notes).

b. Ownership and Control of livestock

Discussions about ownership of property almost exclusively focused on ownership of livestock, particularly cattle, which represents the form of capital that is central to Maasai economics. No other forms of property (with the exception of children as property, which is also under the males' ownership) were expressed by the research

participants. Ownership of land is not economically significant, as none of the participants reported agricultural activities.

In almost every case, the "owning property" gender card was placed under the male category. The following quote reflects the most common response in discussions surrounding owning property: "he [referring to the male household head] owns most of it. He owns children, women, cattle, goats, so I conclude that the card should be under males because he owns almost all of the property in the boma" (FGD/F14-17). This phenomenon was confirmed throughout the discussion groups. One participant declared that, "a man is the owner of everything, including the children and woman herself" (FGD/M18-25). Women's experience corroborated this: one exclaimed that, "the only property I own is the clothes that I wear, and the milk that I milk, because I am the only one who knows how much I have milked...that is the only property I own" (FGD/F18-25).

- i. Ownership by name: nominal or theoretical ownership of property by women and girls

Within discussions about owning property, the most common phenomenon that was frequently identified by female participants was the concept of "ownership by name". "Ownership by name" refers to the phenomenon of owning livestock, but not having any authority to use the livestock in terms of consumption or economic production. In other words, it is a theoretical ownership.

The term "ownership by name" is used to refer to the fact that in many cases, cattle is referred to as *Person X's*, who may be a woman or girl, but *Person X* has no authority or control of the cattle. The following quote illustrates this concept and the

experience of the female participants: "men are the ones who have authority over a female and the cattle. So, a woman only owns cattle by name" (FGD/F14-17). Similarly, another explained the phenomenon as follows: "what does she really own if she only owns something by name? They call something yours and use your name in reference to it but, in fact, it is not yours" (FGD/F18-25). In one of the female discussion groups, some of the participants explained that even in cases where a woman has been given a cow from a relative, the husband appropriates ownership and control of it:

Even if, when you ask for a cow from your relative, when it comes through the gate of your husband, it is no longer yours. And when you bring some cattle, and when a cow gives birth, even if it is ten times, you will not own one. And so, when you bring a cow, you're just bringing it for him. (FGD/F18-25)

Consequently, although livestock is often referred to as being owned by a woman or girl, the use of the concept does not translate into control of the resource. Instead, the term is adopted to refer to the household, woman, or more specifically the wife, who is the custodian of the livestock being referred to<sup>26</sup>.

## II. Conditions causing or contributing to limited economic power

### a. Marriage exchange and bride price

As illustrated in the Chapter 4.2 section, the marriage exchange and bride price may contribute to women's limited economic power. For the most part, women leave any capital (i.e. livestock) that was previously allotted to them in their father's boma, and subsequently, enter into marriage relationships relatively devoid of capital: "we only own

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<sup>26</sup> NOTE: For the most part, a boma's accumulated livestock is allotted to specific households within the boma. Each household, and more specifically, the female household head (i.e. the wife) becomes the custodian of these livestock.

the cattle while we are residing in our parents' boma. When we leave, we forget them" (FGD/F14-17). As participants indicated, this persistently serves to justify male ownership of household property. In context of a discussion related to why property ownership is exclusively associated with men, one participant explained that it is, "because it is a man who has owned this cattle from the beginning before the woman was married" (FGD/M14-17). Likewise, another participant explained that women don't own property in the household because, "women are just brought" (FGD/M18-25).

b. Division of labor and functional interdependence

One of the conditions contributing to women's economic power is that traditionally women and men were ascribed specific roles that served to complement each other. As illustrated in this study, within contemporary Maasai communities, males are primarily responsible for economic provision, while women and girls are proscribed roles surrounding reproduction, childcare, and household management. As a result of this contemporary division of labor, participants illustrated that women don't need economic power per se, because it was the role of their husbands to play this role: "women are just brought and they don't have any responsibilities in the boma<sup>27</sup>" (FGD/M18-25).

Similarly, another male participant argued that, "a man is the one who has all the responsibilities like buying food, buying cloth, treating anyone who is sick, and in that case, women should not have money" (FGD/ M18-25).

c. Shame associated with female provision

In a few cases, participants indicated that one of the reasons that women are prevented from economically providing for the household, is that it is a shame for

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<sup>27</sup> In the context of this quote, having no responsibilities in the boma is meaning that women are not responsible for economic related activities and capital production. The implication is that women are brought for reasons related to reproductive roles, but are not responsible for productive roles.

husbands to have their wives provide for them. This relates to the shame associated with division of labor, as discussed in the Chapter 4.2 section. In this case, women's provision to the household may reflect incapacity of the male head to perform his productive role, and therefore, her provision shames the husband (Field Notes). One female participant explained that her husband discourages her by rhetorically asking, "who should wait for a woman to support him?" (FGD/F18-25).

d. Limited social power

Limited social power, or more specifically, women's lack of self-determination in regards to their relationships with their husbands contributes to their limited economic power. They are not provided the autonomy in their relationships with their husbands that permit them to pursue economic activities. Their participation and therefore, their economic power, are contingent upon the husband's approval, which is often infrequent. The relationship between self-determination and access to economic resources is illustrated in the following quote from a young girl:

I would not like to be a woman because she has very hard jobs but a man does not, and if he gets problems and needs money he just sells cows, gets the money and does what he wants with it, but a woman has to ask for money and she can be or not be given money, and if she wants to go and look for work, in order to get money she will not be allowed (Children's FGD/Sinya).

In the following quote a woman corroborates the above experience and relationships between social power and economic power through contrasting the experience of wives to the experience of widows who are not as impeded by their relationships with husbands: "If I was a widow, I would be free to go to anywhere I want and bring everything that I

need for my children, because I would not have someone to refuse me or block me. I would be free in comparison to when I have a husband" (FGD/F18-25).

More specifically, women's lack of social power directly contributes to their limited ability to control resources or influence the decisions of the male counterparts in relation to economic activities. For example, the following interaction between the facilitator and a participant illustrate this relationship:

Facilitator: Why are you not listened to? For example, if you ask your husband to sell a cow, why does he refuse to listen to you?

Participant: The reason is that the cow belongs to him and the daughter belongs to him.

Another participant expressed the same sentiment in the following quote: "sometimes we are suppressed when we have things to share. For example, maybe if you advise your husband to sell a cattle you won't be listened to" (FGD/F18-25).

e. **Myths of women's incapacity and behavior of empowered women**

Another factor that contributes to women's limited economic power is myths regarding women's capacity and the behavior of women who attain economic power. In terms of women's capacity, participants indicated that men most often assume that women don't have the capacity to earn money and manage resources effectively. One woman, for example, stated that women are prevented from participating in income-generating activities because, "what they [men] believe is that a woman cannot find anything even if she will be working" (FGD/F18-25). A male participant stated that women don't own property, "because she misuses it. For instance, if a woman sells a



cow, she will only think of two things, buying dishes and clothes. So, she doesn't know how to use resources" (FGD/M18-25).

These conceptions of women are illustrated and supported by myths regarding the beginning of the world and early ancestors. It is commonly believed that women were originally the ones who owned and controlled the cattle. "They were the ones who were blessed from the beginning", a traditional leader explained, "but because they are not very smart, then men have overtaken them a long time ago" (Key Informant: Traditional Leader/Oresuki). According to this myth, although they originally were the more powerful sex, women lacked capacity and mismanaged their resources, which resulted in men overcoming them and taking over the resources and leadership (Field Notes).

In some cases, male discussions illustrated reluctance to provide women access to economic power. It was evident in some of their comments that they anticipated that women would treat men negatively if they attained economic power. One participant, for example, expressed that, "when a woman gets money, she will mistreat the husband: she will require everything she says to be obeyed" (FGD/ M14-17). Likewise, another participant argued that, "when a woman gets money, she becomes very complicated and acts negatively towards a man" (FGD/M18-25).

### III. Exceptions, mitigating circumstances, and measures to contest male power

#### a. Widows

Although there are some exceptions, according to participants, women assume ownership and control of the resources allotted to her household after her husband dies: "when a husband dies she owns the cattle and she owns the children" (FGD/M14-17). As

a result, participants commonly mentioned widows as being exceptions to women's general lack of economic power: "she will not have the same problems [in comparison to other women], because she will own the cattle and her sons also if she has any" (FGD/F18-25).

b. Angoratati

Similar to social power, favored wives enjoy significant privilege that translates into a higher degree of economic power in comparison to other women. One participant described their privilege as follows: "they often have more access and control of resources. The other wives and their children will starve" (FGD/F14-17). The privilege is often related to the husband's unequal consumption<sup>28</sup> and distribution of resources. The following quote illustrates the unequal distribution of profit from livestock sales, and the subsequent opportunities provided to the favored wife: "for a woman who is loved [angoratati], a husband may sell a cow and give her 15,000 shillings of the profit. If she's intelligent enough she will use the money for business, like buying sugar and starting a canteen and when she makes more profit then later on, she may buy cattle and goats. But, this happens to a woman who is loved [angoratati]" (FGD/M14-17).

c. External Support

In relation to economic power, there are two predominate forms of external support that women seek in order to contest their husband's misuse of economic power:

i. Relatives

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<sup>28</sup> In regards to unequal consumption, this is referring to the husband's consumption of livestock. A husband will tend to select livestock for consumption, trade, gifts, or sales from the households of the unfavored wives versus his favored wife. As a result, the unfavored wives' livestock is consumed while the favored wife's livestock continues to accumulate.

Relatives provide external support and mitigate women's limited economic power in two ways. Indirectly, they mitigate women's economic power because women may seek their support to influence their husband's economic decisions, such as decisions related to selling their cattle<sup>29</sup>: "if my husband wants to sell my cow and I disagree, and I notify my relatives, they will come to talk with my husband, and he will, as a result, not sell the cow" (FGD/F14-17).

Directly, relatives mitigate women's degree of economic power by lending women money or livestock, which provides an avenue of access to resources for women: "A woman has money because I may go to my relatives or to my home, and I ask them to give me a cow, and when I sell it I get money" (FGD/F14-17). The following participant illustrated similar support from relatives: "I get money from relatives. And when I get this money, I don't misuse it. I use it carefully" (FGD/F18-25).

#### ii. Boyfriend relationships

It became apparent in the focus group discussions that resources provided to women by their boyfriends also contributed to women's access to resources and subsequent economic power: "it is common for that man [referring to a boyfriend] to provide many things to this girlfriend" (FGD/F14-17). Within the discussions, participants referred to boyfriends providing staples, such as sugar, money, and on few occasions, livestock to their girlfriends: "he gives different gifts like money, goats, and even cows" (FGD/F14-17). The following interaction is in context of discussing economic provisions from boyfriends, and indicates the potential importance of these

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<sup>29</sup> "their cattle", as well as the "my cow" in the following quote, refers to cattle that are allotted to a woman's household. Although these cattle are allotted to a woman's household, the woman does not really 'own' them or 'possess' the cattle – recall the 'ownership by name' phenomenon illustrated above. Nonetheless, this section explains that under certain circumstances and through external support, the woman exercises some control over the livestock allotted to her household.

relationships, and the pressure for some women to maintain good relations with these boyfriends:

Facilitator: "So, do you mean that this girlfriend will do anything to please her boyfriend?"

Respondent: "yes, because she finds any way that she can to get money to feed her children" (FGD/F18-25)

The male participants also made reference to this phenomenon. As illustrated in the following quote, these relationships are at times costly for men due to the resources they are expected to provide: "when you have ten [girlfriends] and they all face problems at the same time, they all run to you and they all want you to solve their problems, so you will use a lot of cattle to resolve the problems" (FGD/M18-25).

d. Hidden economy

For the most part, income-generating activities are male's responsibilities. As illustrated in Chapter 4.2, women and girl's roles are predominantly reproductive roles relating to the maintenance of the household and its members. Nonetheless, it was evident in the focus group discussions with females that many women participate in income-generating activities as part of their role in maintaining their households. As one participant declared, "it is women, nowadays, that are providing for families" (FGD/F14-17). Women indicated that they participated in the following earning activities: milk sales, receiving gifts from relatives or boyfriends, business enterprise, and service provision. As such, the hidden economy represents one of the most significant examples of women and girls' agency in contesting their marginalization from economic activities.

An interesting theme that arose was that these activities are often done without approval from the husband; it represents a hidden economy that serves to provide women some access and control of resources. They are often discreet in their economic activities so as to maintain autonomy and to avoid having the product (i.e. financial profit, wage money, purchased or lent livestock) appropriated by their husbands (Field Notes). One example of this is in context of receiving gifts of livestock from relatives or boyfriends. In the following quote, the female participant illustrates this concept of discreetness, and its importance to maintaining possession of one's earnings: "when you ask for a cattle from you relative, when it comes through the gate of your relative, it is no longer yours. If you made a mistake and didn't sell before you returned, then you're finished"<sup>30</sup> (FGD/F18-25). The phenomenon of the hidden economy and the frustrations women face is illustrated in the following quote from one female participant:

In the past years, women usually stayed at home and the men provided everything. Nowadays, women are playing this role. Men do not care for kids, and women come up with ideas to provide for their children. For example, a woman may fetch water for a 'swahili' in town, and earn some money for providing food and other things for her children. She can also use this money to purchase sugar and tea and then sell it for a profit. She will then bring more provisions to the household for children. During all of these activities, the husband is only sleeping in the house. We want this to be acceptable and official because, in fact, we have lies only because of women's work. (FGD/F14-17).

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<sup>30</sup> In this context, "you're finished", means that you will not fulfill your objective to earn money (Field Notes).

As a last note concerning the hidden economy, it is interesting to note that the 'hidden economy' is intimately related to the historical expansion of the market economy and its affect on women. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, the expansion of the market economy and the integration of the Maasai into it, has had devastating effects on the economic power women and girls have previously exercised historically. It has marginalized and undermined the agency that married females historically had in economic activities, including the use and disposal of livestock. Consequently, women's lack of power as described in this section is largely a product of the market economy. Women's contemporary 'hidden economy', therefore, reflects their vitality and innovativeness in their attempts to regain some of their economic power. Through their discreet economic activities, women are ironically using the system that subverted their power to regain it.

e. 'Time of Development', change, and legal provision

'Time of Development' was a term often used to illustrate or make reference to social reconstruction within the discussions. It was most often used in reference to the changing position of women, which included their influence over economic resources, as well as the role of government legislation in this transformation: "nowadays, we have attended many seminars and nowadays, there are a few men who listen to their women. And when a woman brings something, they don't own it. This time, I call it a time of development and we are guided by laws" (FGD/18-25). Likewise to the phenomenon illustrated in the former quote, one participant explained, in reference to retaining ownership of livestock that is given to her, that laws prevent the husband from appropriating ownership:

we have laws that protect us. You get them in that office over there [referring to village government office]. Nowadays, it is a time of development, and the government is fighting for equality, so when it comes to a situation where the husband wants to bring in the old system, then I simply tell him that these days education matters, and lets go to the office and talk and reconcile. These days it is a pen that talks<sup>31</sup> (FGD/F14-17).

#### IV. Consequences

##### a. Economic dependency

Although it was evident in the discussions that women maintain some economic power through earning activities, with very few exceptions, male and female participants indicated that females are economically dependent on men. As one woman articulated, "I do depend on him because he does not allow me to go anywhere to find something I need" (FGD/F18-25). In the following quote, a woman recalled her reliance on men for food: "you will just be following him and maybe when food is needed he'll take you to town to buy food but he will never give you money. This repeats. Once you have finished the food, then he takes you to town again" (FGD/F18-25). One young boy articulated the experience of dependency by saying, "it is a loss because the man owns all the property and so she has to tell him if she needs anything" (Children's FGD/Sinya).

Women generally lamented the circumstances in which they were required to rely on the husband. One woman compared herself to a young, dependent girl: "while I have

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<sup>31</sup> This expression – "it is the pen that talks" – is making reference to government documents and implicitly refers to their legally binding nature, which supersedes everything else in this participant's opinion (Field Notes).

the ability to work, I'm not allowed. I am not different from a school child who follows her father to buy her a uniform" (FGD/F18-25).

b. Unequal access to money

Money' was illustrated on one of the gender cards. This card often stimulated discussion and conflict amongst group members. The conflict generally related to whether 'money' could be associated with women. With the exception of two cases, all of the group discussions concluded that 'money' is associated with both. However, especially in the male groups, participants had reservations about associating it with women because although women sometimes had money, it was generally agreed that it was rarely a significant amount. One male participant explained the subsequent inequality in the following quote: "the major source of female's money is by selling milk...compared to men, who have power to sell cattle and get money. So, I can see that men have much more money compared to women" (FGD/M18-25). Likewise, female participants commonly exclaimed similar notions: "women don't have money because we don't have ability to own and sell cattle" (FGD/F18-25).

c. Material deprivation

In some cases, participants articulated that women suffer material deprivation as a result of not having access or control of resources. Participants expressed deprivation in relation to livestock, food, and clothing. In relation to livestock, this deprivation is illustrated throughout this section, so will not be further illustrated. In reference to food and clothing, in the following quote, a female participant illustrates food and clothing deprivation as a consequent of women's lack of control of resources: "there are great impacts because a husband may sell a cow and instead of bringing money home he will



stay in town drinking with friends, and give some money to his girlfriend. And at home, there may not be food, and the children are naked. Can't you see that it is a major problem?" (FGD/F14-17). Another participant exclaimed a similar experience: "due to this situation of a man having the money, you may run out of clothes, and you tell your husband that my clothes have run out but still he may take up to three or four months before buying you new clothes" (FGD/F18-25).

d. Limited access to medical services and health implications

On a few occasions, participants mentioned that a lack of access to and control of economic resources created health implications for women because they were reliant on men to provide them money for medical care. As women are the primary caregivers of children, this also produces health implications for children. This is illustrated in the following quote: "when a child gets sick, a woman will tell the husband, and again when she gets sick, she tells the husband, she can't sell a cow to solve the problem, and even if a child gets sick when the husband is on a journey she must still wait until the husband comes" (FGD/M14-17). Another male participant illustrated the same phenomenon in the following quote: "if a child gets sick a man is the one who decides whether to sell a cow or not to sell, but a woman can never convince him" (FGD/M14-17). A female key informant similarly expressed that, "these goats belong to me but just by name, this means that I have no authority to sell them, and I may be sick, but my husband will say that he doesn't have any money. But if those goats belonged to me not really just by name but really belong to me, I can sell them and get money to go to the hospital" (Key Informant: Female Political Leader).

#### 4.6 Analysis of Political Power

Political power refers to the ability to control or influence the public affairs that affect a group of people or community. For the purpose of this study, these public affairs may include conflicts between members of the community, including husband and wives, or affairs relating to addressing identified problems through community development initiatives. For the most part, it is indicated by representation and participation in groups or bodies that govern the community affairs.

In the Maasai community, there are two formal political bodies that concurrently function to manage community issues – the traditional governing bodies and the state governing body. The traditional governing body consists of the *alaigwanani* previously mentioned in the chapter 4.2. The *alaigwanani* hold their leadership status for life. In most cases, they are identified by senior traditional leaders around the time following their circumcision and entry into the age-class system. For the purpose of this study, the most significant role of the traditional governing body is 'judging cases', which refers to managing conflicts that arise within families (i.e. between the husband and wife) or between other community members. As such, the traditional governing bodies represent an important social regulatory mechanism in the Maasai community. It is a management body, responsible for community affairs and conflicts.

The state-sponsored government members are nominated and elected periodically through a community election process. The following analysis focuses solely on the village government, which consists of a few administrative positions, such as the village chair and village secretary; and a village committee made up of approximately ten volunteer community representatives. The significant roles of the village government are

enforcing government legislation and allocation of government resources for community development related purposes.

The dynamic between these two governing bodies varies. In a few cases, participants, participants indicated conflict. However, for the most part, participants indicated that these entities function somewhat complimentary of each other. According to participants, most cases of conflict or offenses are generally taken to the traditional leaders, prior to engaging the village government. There seemed to be a common reluctance to engage the government to settle conflicts or administer penalties prior to first bringing the case to the traditional leaders: "it is not acceptable for anyone be it a woman, be it a man who runs to the government offices without bringing a case to the traditional leaders" (Key Informant: Alaigwanani/Ormesuki). For the most part, the village government is engaged in cases where the traditional governing body is not successful in reconciling the conflict. For example, one woman recalled a story in which a man severely beat his wives. The case was brought to the traditional leaders, and they encouraged the man to change his behavior, but after the man's behavior persisted, the incidents were reported to the village government, and the government threatened to put the man in jail. Reportedly, as a result of the threat, the husband quit beating his wives. In the following quote, a female political leader explained a similar process, "if they [traditional leaders] will fail to talk, because the husband might not care about what they are saying, the woman will go to the government" (Key Informant: Female Political Leader).

Although the above case reflects the most common practice, there was some evidence in the discussion groups that, in some cases, attitudes and practices are changing

and some people engage the government without bringing the case to the traditional leaders: "in these days it depends on the emotions of the individual, if one sees like I think the traditional leaders will help me in this case, then he goes there and the traditional leaders will solve it in a traditional way, but if he goes straight to the government, fine" (Key Informant: Alaigwanani/Ormesuki).

Unfortunately, the tendency to disregard the traditional governing council is reflective of the subversive tendencies within development processes in the Maasai community. Historically, 'development' interventions and state governance has commonly disregarded the authority and significance of the traditional leaders. As a result, it has facilitated their disempowerment. The adverse impact of this, unfortunately, may be the undermining of a very important social regulatory mechanism in the Maasai community.

#### I. Political power

The following discussion will focus on the agency and power that women exercise in relation to the aforementioned governing bodies:

##### a. Traditional governing bodies

Traditional governing bodies consist of exclusively males: "it is only men who hold these positions" (FGD/F14-17). As one participant explained, "men are the one's who judge and watch over tradition, so about tradition, it is only men who have influence" (FGD/F14-17). Therefore, in terms of political power relating to judging cases of conflict or offenses within the traditional governing body, women are completely marginalized from the process. In cases where a woman has raised a complaint, similar to the role of the defendant, her only role in the judging process is to offer a narrative of

the incident: "they will only allow that woman to come and if there is a gathering here they allow her to sit her just to give her a place, and to say, like, I was mistreated, this man did this and this. Now the crowd will judge" (Key Informant: Alaigwanani/Oresuki).

b. Village government

In regards to the village government, the government policy determines that women are equally represented on village committees. As one male participant explained in relation to male and female representation, "it is both because this is associated with the government, and so men and women are treated the same" (FGD/M14-17). Likewise, one female participant stated that, "women seem to participate in this community leadership. We are all now given this kind of leadership. Males are given and women are given" (FGD/F18-25).

Although the equal representation policy seems to be actualized in most cases, the focus group discussions illustrated some concerns in relation to the potential barriers women may face in attaining positions, access to administrative positions, and the degree of participation women experience once they are elected onto the committee.

i. Potential barriers to women's representation

The most significant concern that was illustrated in the discussion groups is that women's opportunity to be represented in village politics is contingent on their husband's approval: "the only problem is that she has to gain permission from the husband, and if the husband allows, then she can contest" (FGD/F14-17). As a result, it was commonly indicated that this opportunity is not accessible to most women: "most of the women are not allowed by their husbands to be the members of the committee...there are men that

don't like their women to be a member of the committee, so during that meeting day, they won't let their women attend the meeting so that they won't be chosen" (Key Informant: Female Political Leader).

Another concern relating to potential barriers women face concerns the election process. The process of nominating someone to the village committee consists of a process illustrated in the following quote:

Maybe someone will stand up and say I will like that person to be the member of the committee, one member, one village member, and then the rest, they might like him or her, one or two people then might stand up and say no, we do not like this lady. She cannot be a member because of this and this, mentioning something, or that problem. (Key Informant: Female Political Leader)

The concern about this process that was clearly evident in one of the female focus group discussions is that certain community members, such as empowered women that may challenge the status quo, are easily excluded from nominations. For example, in one of the female focus groups, one very outspoken participant explained that, despite her interest in participating, the nomination process served to exclude her:

I can talk and I know how to challenge, but they will never allow me to stand because they will say I have no discipline, they will say I've intimidated my husband, so in that case, I am not permitted to stand in front of them and share what I have. So, for example, on the day of election, if I would be elected the males will pull me down. (FGD/F18-25)

Another participant argued that male administrators tend to coerce the process so that only women who do not challenge their authority or the status quo are represented on the

village committee. She stated, for example, that, "those who can't read, and can't understand Swahili are those who are chosen by the government leaders" (FGD/F18-25).

ii. Access to administrative positions

Another concern regarding women's representation in village politics is that, in most cases, their access to representation is exclusively confined to the village committee, rather than more powerful administrative positions. In relation to the village chair position, for example, one participant exclaimed that, "it has never happened [referring to a woman in the village chair position] in our village, so we have never witnessed this" (FGD/F14-17).

iii. Degree of participation

The third concern that was illustrated in the women's focus groups is in relation to the degree of participation that female committee members' experience. Although the decision making process requires consensus, the experiences varied from tokenism to genuine participation. For the most part, it seemed from the discussions that women's participation was tokenistic – they were accepted as committee members to fulfill the government requirements, yet the male committee members and administrators dominate the decision making process. One woman explained her experience as follows: "the men are just forced to give us this community leadership, but they believe that if, for example, a country was led by a woman it would always fail" (FGD/F18-25). My observations in meetings with the committee corroborate this experience: although women were present, interactions were solely between male representatives (Field Notes).

However, some participants expressed that they felt the process of decision-making within the village committee represented genuine participation. For example,

one female committee representative argued, "during the conversation between the members of the committee, women, both sides, male and female, will reach the conclusion together, they will discuss something and if men have reached a conclusion and women are not satisfied, they will ignore the conclusion" (Key Informant: Female Political Leader).

As opinion varied, it is difficult to determine the degree to which women experience genuine participation in the village committee, and each village committee may differ significantly depending on the male administrators and committee members. Nonetheless, given the conceptions of women and the marginalization that pervades other spheres of the community, it is likely that genuine participation is rarely offered to female committee members.

## II. Conditions causing or contributing to political power

### a. Age-set system

In relation to access to traditional leadership, one of the conditions that contribute to women's marginalization is the age-set system. The traditional leadership structure is rooted in the age-set system – leaders are selected as representatives of their age-class – so women are excluded from the selection criteria: "men are the one's who judge and watch over tradition, and they are the ones designated in the age-set systems, women do not have an age-set system. So about tradition, it is only the men who have influence" (FGD/F14-17). A male participant explained women's exclusion in the following manner: "every age-set has its own traditional leader to guide that particular age-set, and women do not have age-sets" (FGD/M18-25).



b. Conceptions of women's capacity<sup>32</sup>

It was commonly illustrated that one of the factors impeding women's representation and participation in traditional and state political bodies was conceptions concerning women's lack of capacity to perform the required roles: "our community sees us that we are incapable" (FGD/F18-25). One male participant asserted that, "a woman cannot stand and talk like men" (FGD/M14-17).

The role of these conceptions seemed particularly significant in reference to women's exclusion from traditional leadership. In reference to their capacity in state governing bodies, there were some positive appraisals of women's capacity among the male participants. However, this was not the case in reference to traditional leadership<sup>33</sup>. For example, one male participant explained that, "it is a man who qualifies because a woman is not ideally strong to stand and convince people in the traditional meetings" (FGD/M14-17). The following quote illustrates several of the conceptions held by male participants:

These traditional meetings are very complicated. For example, in meetings, a woman could not resist the fingers<sup>34</sup>. As well, it is very difficult for a woman to bring a meeting to one opinion. For example, if in this meeting, you were a woman [referring to the male facilitator], a woman could not have stood for two hours and also, we would not have reached a consensus. Look at the way we've

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<sup>32</sup> These conceptions were not supported by women, the conceptions illustrated in this section were solely conceptions that men had about women.

<sup>33</sup> The reason for this difference seems to relate to the structure of the state government meetings versus the traditional meetings. The former is governed by rigid protocol and decision-making procedures while the latter is more of an unstructured debate forum (Field Notes).

<sup>34</sup> 'resisting the fingers' refers to the following belief: in context of an argument involving intense emotions, including anger, if a participant shakes or points his finger at another participant, that latter participant risks ill effects similar to the effects of a curse. It is believed that women are inherently more susceptible to these ill effects than men.

found consensus now. It is because you are a man. If it was a woman, within 5 or 10 minutes, you will hear men saying, 'what is this woman doing?' So can't you see that a man is the only one who can manage all of these complications?"

(FGD/M18-25)

c. Government Advocacy

The condition contributing to women's representation on village committee is the Tanzanian government's advocacy for women: "the government is the only reason we are participating in government politics, because in a group of men we are not seen. The government is the only thing that is making us to be seen within men" (FGD/F18-25). A male participant similarly explained that, "in the beginning, women were not participating. But after this time of development, the government is putting a lot of pressure that women should also participate in leadership" (FGD/M18-25). Consequently, women commonly expressed appreciation for the government's advocacy: "the government sees that we are not incapable, but our community sees us as incapable. We are thankful that our government is now considering us and nowadays we can participate in this community leadership" (FGD/F18-25).

III. Exceptions and mitigating circumstances

a. Informal collectivization of women

One mitigating factor to women's marginal political power is the phenomenon of informal collectivization among women that served to influence community phenomena. Women's informal collectivization is reflective of the general vitality and agency of Maasai women. Furthermore, it represents an incredible community asset that may be

mobilized to address social issues and concerns. In specific reference to the topic of this study, the value of Maasai women's tendency to mobilize each other into powerful collectives cannot be overstated. The following discussion outlines three examples of collectivization.

One example of informal collectivization is in reference to managing or resolving conflict between female community members. Apparently, in circumstances in which there is significant conflict between two females within the community, women gather together to judge the case and resolve the conflict in a manner similar to traditional governance. When the senior traditional leader was asked about women's lack of involvement in traditional politics, he stated that, "it is different, women have their own meetings. If there is something wrong, maybe a woman was mistreated, she goes to call women and they sit as a meeting, a traditional one, but that is just a fight between women. Maybe one woman mistreated another one" (Key Informant: Alaigwanani/Oresuki).

Another form of collectivization that occurs among women is in relation to the formation of lobbying groups. Participants did not discuss this phenomenon. However, I observed on one occasion and was informed about another, in which Maasai women mobilized each other into a group to lobby the government. In reference to the former case, I observed a group of approximately fifty women gather in order to strategize a plan to lobby against the recent price increase of maize flour (Field Notes). Reportedly, another group of women lobbied the government to terminate its 'anti-FGM' campaigns in their village (Field Notes).

In one discussion among a group of males, the participants identified that women may also mobilize to administer a curse. They may meet in order to establish a curse that functions to establish control over some phenomenon<sup>35</sup>: "they [women] can sometimes have their own meeting if they don't want a certain thing and they create a curse. Women can participate in these meetings and they can curse something and prohibit something" (FGD/M18-25).

#### IV. Consequences

The consequences, expressed by the participants, of women's exclusion from traditional politics and their limited role in government politics are limited access to information, limited influence relating to developing community interventions, and a limited influence regarding allocation of resources.

##### a. Limited access to a key information network

Participants commonly expressed that knowledge and information is often transferred to the community via the village leaders. The government system represents a very significant information network. The representatives, most commonly the men, attend seminars and conferences sponsored by the government that function to train and educate them. Consequently, participants expressed concern that women are less likely to access this knowledge. One woman expressed the importance of women's attendance in the following quote: "if there is a conference then it is good for a woman to be there so that they learn their rights and then the woman can tell the rest, because men will not inform us about all of our rights. But, the woman will inform us completely" (FGD/F18-

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<sup>35</sup> The practice of establishing a curse is illustrated in the Chapter 4.2 section. It involves a specific ritual that functions as a social control mechanism – it controls or limits behavior by establishing a curse on any individual who contravenes the moral norm established within the curse ritual.

25). Another participant used the example of education around female circumcision to illustrate the problem arising from women's marginal involvement: "maybe some people attend a seminar in which they are taught that it is not good to use the same instrument to circumcise girls, but because not many women are in these political positions, like the circumcisers for example, many will continue using the same instruments for many girls and that way it is easy to transmit HIV" (FGD/F14-17).

b. Limited influence regarding the allocation of resources

Women participants indicated concern that they had very little influence on the allocation of resources due to their marginal role in government politics. In one group specifically, some of the female participants were very outspoken in their criticism of the male village leaders. In the 18-25 female focus group, participants recalled a story about an NGO that donated money for the strict purpose of addressing issues that concern women. According to the women, the money was not allocated to these issues, but was reallocated by the male administrators to other development initiatives (FGD/F18-25). Consequently, one participant exclaimed that in terms of funding, "the government should take any of the money and take it to the women because our political leaders won't give it to us, and they won't even tell, so we won't even hear what is going on" (FGD/F18-25).

c. Limited influence relating to development initiatives

A concomitant phenomenon to the above one is that women have a limited influence relating to identifying and selecting development initiatives. If they are marginalized from the decision-making process, and they have little influence on the allocation of resources, they have limited influence on development initiatives as a

consequent. The following quote refers to the traditional governing bodies. It illustrates the aforementioned concern: "women will face risk because sometimes men meet in these traditional meetings in order to discuss matters relating to HIV/AIDS, like interventions, but because they are not in these meetings, they will miss these things" (FGD/M14-17).

### Summary

As indicated in the preceding discussions, the phenomenon of power among the Kisongo Maasai is complex. In general, the research participants conveyed an unequal distribution of power between males and females, which is facilitated by numerous values and customs. As well, participants generally conveyed that the inequity between males and females negatively affected women in numerous manners. Nonetheless, participants also conveyed that women and girls' power is mediated by a number of contextual conditions and contesting behaviors.

Therefore, although participants conveyed that, for the most part, women and girls' have less power than their male counterparts, further exploration and analysis suggests that it may be negligent to universally apply this assumption. Differing contexts and status affect their social, sexual, economic, and political agency, and in addition, Maasai women and girls' often adopt many actions and behaviors to contest males' attempts to monopolize power.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION & SYNTHESIS

### 5.1 Discussion of women and girls' vulnerability

As evident in the literature review, females' vulnerability to HIV/AIDS is related to a confluence of cultural, social, economic and political factors that produce and perpetuate prejudicial conceptions of femininity, and social, economic and political inequality. It creates an individual vulnerability facilitated by personally internalized beliefs and subsequent behavior, and a societal vulnerability facilitated by cultural values, customs, and subsequent structural factors that impede women and girls' access to instrumental factors, such as education and health services.

The following discussion will revisit cultural/ideological values, traditional customs and institutions, as well as social, sexual, economic, and political power. In accordance with this study's objectives, the purpose of revisiting these elements is in part, to summarize the data, but more importantly, to explicate their relation to HIV/AIDS vulnerability.

#### I. Cultural/Ideological Values

There are three cultural/ideological values illustrated in this research that significantly facilitate women and girls' vulnerability to HIV/AIDS: conceptualizations of tradition and social order - the barrier of traditionalism, conceptions/ideals of femininity, and conceptions/ideals of masculinity.

- a. Conceptualizations of tradition and social order: the barrier of traditionalism

The first value relates to the participants' conceptualization of tradition and social order. As illustrated in the findings, participants perceived certain phenomena, institutions, and general social organization as originating from their ancestors, the origins of earth, and God. The participants illustrated beliefs in a sovereign God that originated the institutions and social organization, which was then transmitted through their ancestors into the contemporary period. Participants frequently invoked tradition to provide justification for social phenomena.

The significance of this conceptualization of the social world is that it can represent a unique and onerous challenge to reducing women and girls' vulnerability in indigenous communities, such as the Kisongo Maasai. When a phenomenon is perceived as being rooted in ancestral wisdom and/or ultimately a religious deity, the phenomenon's validity is compounded and subsequently, its transformation is complicated. Social relations and organization may take on an almost sacred order. A recent United Nations publication, in reference to culturally diverse communities, stated that, "it [change] can be especially difficult when their lives are bound by centuries-old traditions and complex cultural constructs that may be difficult for outsiders to understand" (UNFPA, 2004).

Ultimately, the worldview illustrated by many participants in this study reflected notions of traditionalism; a paradigm that depicts a particular social order as being innately valuable and important due to its connection with the past, ancestors, and God, which is intrinsically important to cultural identity, and represents a cultural complexity in relation to HIV/AIDS prevention.



Although tradition and social organization are not static, and historically the Kisongo Maasai have continually redressed their tradition, traditionalism may function as a powerful ideological force that impedes change and maintains the status quo (United Nations, 2003)<sup>1</sup>. More specifically, it may be invoked to justify ideology, institutions or practices that are prejudicial to women, foster the historical consolidation of males' power and disenfranchisement of females, and subsequently, contribute to women and girls' vulnerability to HIV/AIDs. For example, as illustrated in Chapter 4, women's general exclusion from the capital generated from income-earning opportunities and livestock sales was justified by arguing that the division of labor originated from God. Interestingly, contemporary research has indicated that, in fact, the contemporary division of labor and women's marginalization from influencing economic activities is a more recent phenomenon produced and facilitated by the Kisongo Maasai's interaction with foreign development policy and initiatives, encroachment of the market economy, and androcentric research that has imposed Western categories and concepts in understanding Maasai pastoralism and neglected the influential role that women have traditionally played (Hodgson, 2001; Talle, 1988). Nonetheless, it was evident in numerous cases within the focus groups that males persistently invoke the 'traditional division of labor' to justify women's marginalization from the economic sphere.

b. Conceptions/ideals of femininity

Conceptions of femininity refer to the characteristics that are perceived as ideal or most suitable for females to adopt and manifest. It refers to the characteristics that are produced and socially constructed within a specific cultural context. Through a process that includes socialization, internalization, and sometimes imposition these characteristics

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<sup>1</sup> See the discussion on Traditionalism in Chapter 2.5 for further elaboration on this subject.

are commonly aspired to or at least accommodated by members of the cultural group in order to find acceptance and secure membership within a given social group.

As an aside note, although conceptions of femininity are often aspired to and accommodated for purposes relating to acceptance and social membership, these conceptions are often overtly or subtly contested within a social group – gender and conceptions of femininity are always undergoing reconfiguration and change (Hodgson & McCurdy, 2001). In the case of this research, for example, the analysis of power sections illustrated that although popular conceptions of femininity often impeded their access to power, Kisongo women and girls transgress these conceptions in sometimes overt, but often subtle, contestations of male power. Historically, research, which has been predominantly administered by men, has not only neglected women and girls' traditionally ascribed forms of power, but has also overlooked women and girls' contestations of unequal power distributions (Hodgson, 1999a). Consequently, perceptions and knowledge of Maasai women and girls has been significantly distorted, propagated throughout Western academia, and sadly, through interaction with foreign 'development' and research, internalized by the Maasai community themselves (Hodgson, 1999a).

In any case, many conceptions of femininity contribute to women and girls vulnerability to HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS, 1998; Lugalla et al., 1999). In the context of the Kisongo Maasai, women are associated with children (Hodgson, 1999a), and generally, are expected to adopt characteristics related to submissivity and deference. Male participants exhibited perceptions of women and girls as innately inferior to their male counterparts and incapable of performing certain functions, such as making important

household decisions, caring for cattle, or community leadership. This facilitates women and girls' vulnerability to HIV/AIDS because women and girls' experience a social pressure to adopt these characteristics, which ultimately, impedes women and girls' capacity to influence their sexual relationships, as well as the super-ordinate/subordinate nature of the social relations that pervade their environment.

Another conception of femininity that contributes to women and girls' vulnerability is the paramount importance of fertility and motherhood. Producing children is central to women and girls' identity as Maasai; it represents an essential contribution in relation to the functional interdependence that propagates the family and Maasai communities. In relation to HIV/AIDS vulnerability, such conceptions create significant barriers to prevention measures, such as condom use: "because motherhood...is considered to be a feminine ideal, using barrier methods or non-penetrative sex as safer sex options presents a significant dilemma for women" (Gupta, 2000).

For non-circumcised girls, the social prestige and value associated with their affinity with Ilmurran presents complications in reducing their vulnerability. As illustrated in the research, many girls adamantly oppose their mother's interference with their relationships with the Ilmurran, facilitated through their attendance at Esoto. It became evident that developing affinity with Ilmurran, which in most cases includes sexual relationships, was an important and aspired after ideal among many girls. Aude Talle argues that, "the sexual play between the very young girls and the adolescent boys at these events [referring to Esoto activities] has a societal meaning transcending

pleasure”. As a result, their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS is facilitated and reducing their risk associated with their relationships with Ilmurran is complicated.

c. Conceptions/ideals of Masculinity

The conceptions of a masculinity illustrated in the findings also contribute to women and girls’ vulnerability. As illustrated in the literature review, research has frequently highlighted the importance of addressing destructive forms of male socialization and its relationships to HIV/AIDS (United Nations Population Fund, 2003; Kayoka, 2002). Among the communities corresponding to this research, deleterious conceptions of masculinity related to sexuality ideals, and notions of gender roles, authority, and violence. In terms of sexuality ideals, males’ status is commonly associated with virility and developing sexual relationships with multiple concurrent partners. This was particularly illustrated in the *olmurran loondoyea* (‘man of many girls’) and *osinoni* phenomenon. These ideals pressure boys and men, especially those belonging to the Ilmurran age-set, to develop multiple sexual relationships and exacerbates the manipulation, pressure, and force that women and girls are subject to (Masindi, 2003). Therefore, as mentioned in the sexual power section, these ideals undermine women and girls’ sexual power, and in addition, it introduces women and girls to extensive transmission networks. Thus, significantly contributing to women and girls’ vulnerability.

Notions of gender roles, authority and violence also contribute to vulnerability (UNAIDS, 1999; United Nations Population Fund, 2003; Amaro, 1995). The male notion that domestic labour is solely for women, and that it is shameful for men to contribute, facilitates the unfeasible workloads women and girls experience and

compounds their poor health, and their marginalization from participation in community and economic activities.

Their marginalization from economic activities is further exacerbated by the notion that a man should not rely or even permit a woman to contribute economically to the household. The association of masculinity with authority over women and girls is also a detrimental conception of masculinity as men may resist the participation and influence of women and girls in making decisions related to their relationships or household management. Ultimately, it exacerbates females' limited power to negotiate their relationships with men and manage their environment in order to reduce their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.

Lastly, the association of violence with male authority is particularly detrimental to women and girls' vulnerability (UNAIDS, 1999). As indicated in the research, male participants illustrated that within their community violence and instilling fear into their female counterparts was positively appraised and provides a degree of status to men. Mitzlaff's study illustrated that for many Maasai men, they believe that a husband will only be able to maintain the authority over his wife if she is afraid of him, and hence, they inflict violence on them (1988, p. 135). Within such an environmental context, women's unequal status and access to power is maintained. Ultimately, it perpetuates violence and deters women from contesting their super-ordinate/subordinate social relations (Garcia-Moreno & Watts, 2000).

## II. Customs and traditional institutions

There are several customs and institutions that disenfranchise women and contribute to their vulnerability. The following section will outline the most significant ones that were illustrated and identified as concerns by the research participants:

### a. Marriage exchange and bride price

As illustrated in the research findings, participants illustrated that the marriage exchange system, which includes a process of 'booking' and bride price, undermines women's social status, is often used by men to justify women's economic disenfranchisement, and complicates girls' access to public education. As a result, it represents an impediment to social and economic power. According to the participants, women's 'bought status' causes men to treat them with less respect, which undermines their social power. Their husbands substantiate their ownership and control over resources by claiming that the marriage exchange cost them many cattle and that women entered the household without any ownership or capital contribution. In both of these cases, women and girls' vulnerability is compounded, which is further discussed in the social and economic power discussions below.

In relation to education, the research illustrated that the marriage exchange system impedes girls' access to education. This significantly compounds girls' vulnerability as they miss the empowerment opportunities intrinsic to educational processes, and are excluded from the health and sexuality-related education that are sometimes provided in the public school system (UNAIDS, 2002b).

An additional issue for young girls is that they have little to no capacity to influence the selection of the partners. As a result, competing interests relating to the bride price and social alliances may supersede the interests of young girls and may jeopardize their health concerns. In addition, due to customs surrounding the age-class institution, girls are married to men who are much older than they are, which exacerbates issues related to power dynamics, and exposes them to sexual relationships with men who have most likely maintained extensive sexual networks throughout their life.

**b. Polygyny**

There is a direct relationship between HIV/AIDS and the polygynous organization of the family institution. Polygyny facilitates women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS by subjecting women to the sexual network that characterizes the family institution (Buseh, Glass, & McElmurry, 2002). In this context, their risk is ultimately beyond their own control as it is not only contingent upon the husband's behavior, but also the sexual risk behavior of their co-wives.

**c. Social organization of production/Division of Labor**

The division of labor illustrated in this research may facilitate women and girls' vulnerability due to the unequal distribution of work that women and girls' experience. As the research illustrated, women and girls are traditionally responsible for labor associated with domestic work, caring for children, and particular tasks relating to the care of livestock. In addition, traditionally male tasks, such as herding livestock, are often imposed on them without consideration of their other tasks. This situation is facilitated by their limited social power and gender-based violence. Participants illustrated that they generally do not resist or negotiate the expectations imposed on them,

and further, the fear of violence if they do not satisfactorily complete the tasks often deters them from contesting the situation.

Women and girls' vulnerability is compounded by this phenomenon for three reasons. For one, women and girl participants argued that their extensive workloads undermine their general health, which is a phenomenon confirmed in studies related to women's health issues in Africa (Mella, 2003). General poor health, potentially, may contribute to their biological susceptibility to HIV/AIDS (Ankra, 1996, TGNP, 1997).

Second, their self-determination is significantly compromised by the demands imposed on them. As a result of their workloads, women are less able to negotiate space to attend community activities, such as HIV/AIDS educational seminars, forums to discuss intervention strategies, or participate in community political bodies. Similarly, women under these circumstances, may be less likely to attend to their health needs as they may place more priority on their social role than their individual well-being (Travers & Bennet, 1996). The third issue is specific to school-going girls. As indicated in the research, the workload that is imposed on girls impacts their educational performance. This contributes to their vulnerability as it reduces their opportunities to pass the national examinations, and subsequently, advance to secondary education opportunities, which can further develop their awareness and education about the disease, further facilitate empowerment, and in the long-term, may provide economic opportunities.

#### d. Corporal Punishment and Violence

As indicated in the findings, gender-based violence characterizes women and girls' environment. The findings of this research illustrates many phenomena that studies have identified as determinants for violence against women, including male dominance



and histories of gender-based violence, male control of family wealth, social and economic dependency of women, heavy alcohol consumption, economic stress, notions of masculinity, and approval of physical chastisement of women (UNAIDS, 1999).

The prevalence of gender-based violence greatly facilitates women and girls' vulnerability (Heise, Pitanguy, & Germain, 1994; UNAIDS, 1998). As previously indicated in the division of labor discussion, and as illustrated in the research findings, the act of violence as well as the fear of violence ultimately deters women from contesting males' power, which exacerbates the risk this produces in their lives, which may include direct risk related to their sexual relationships (i.e. negotiating a condom, or resisting sexual encounters) or indirect risk related to more structural issues like access to education, health services, economic resources, and political participation. Heise, Pitanguy, and Germain (1994) similarly argue that internalizing the fear of violence control's women's minds and ultimately, reduces females tendency to be self-determining.

#### e. Age-Sets

The age-set institution facilitates women and girls' vulnerability to HIV/AIDS for reasons relating to social status, access to the traditional leadership structure, and traditional customs that correspond to the age-set, such as marriage customs, the collective regard for women, as well as the age-mate hospitality more and its implications for married women. In regards to social status, although women and girls belong to a parallel age-grade social organization that allots them certain degrees of power during their life cycle, the age-set system corresponding to male organization is fundamental to social organization and ultimately, provides men a greater social status. In her exhaustive

anthropological study, Aude Talle argues that, "women are associated with this system but are not part of it; for this reason women are, by definition, subordinate to men in all aspects of cultural subtlety" (1988, p. 94). As a consequent to this inferior status, women and girls' social power is undermined, and subsequently their vulnerability is facilitated.

As indicated in the research findings, the age-set system also impedes women and girls' access to traditional governing councils. Participants argued that the traditional leadership structure is organized around the age-set system, and therefore, women and girls' cannot be included or considered. Subsequently, their vulnerability may be facilitated because they are not involved in judging cases of marital dispute, which could serve to mitigate male consolidation of power and use of violence. Additionally, they are marginalized from the educational seminars that are sometimes provided to the traditional leaders, and the prevention strategizing that may occur.

Customs corresponding to the age-set system also contribute to women and girls' vulnerability. One issue relates to the customary tendency to regard married women as "age-mate women" (FGD/M18-25). When a woman marries, participants indicated that she not only 'belongs' to her husband, but to her husband's age-set. The implications, sometimes indicated in the focus group discussions, were that the super-ordinate/subordinate nature of a woman and girls' relationship with her husband, similarly is expected to characterize her relationships with her husband's age-mates. Moreover, in some cases, participants indicated that the sexual subservience that women and girls are expected to adopt in their relationships with their husbands are also expected within their relationships with age-mates. It is noteworthy to mention, however, that this perspective was not universal among participants, and, in fact, many members of the

Maasai community, most notably the traditional leaders, disputed such notions and argued that such perspectives were deviations from traditional morality.

Nonetheless, the sexual implications of being 'age-mate women' remain relevant in some cases. Specifically, and most importantly, they are particularly significant in context of visiting age-mates, in which hospitality mores and the curse phenomenon undermines women and girls' sexual efficacy (discussed below).

f. The curse phenomenon and age-mate visitation

As illustrated in the research findings, a curse occurs when an individual behaves contrary to the moral principles imbedded in the customary principles that determine the nature of interrelationships. Aud Talle explains the curse phenomenon as an important aspect of the age grade hierarchy that characterizes the Maasai social organization. She explains that a curse is essentially, "an appeal to God (*Enkai*) to punish a wrongdoer so that he/she either dies suddenly, becomes seriously ill or dies destitute (i.e. without children and cattle)" (1988, p. 92). It has to be "morally justified in order to be effective" (1988, p. 92).

The curse phenomenon is relevant to women and girls' vulnerability in context of visiting age-mates. In this context, and in combination with disputed hospitality mores, women and girls' fear of curses greatly undermines their sexual efficacy. Although many research participants, including the traditional leaders, were adamant that women and girls were not customarily required to submit to an age-mate visitor's sexual advances, the fear of curses has persisted among women and girls and as a result, most women reported that there was no actual alternative to accepting the sexual advances. Ultimately,

the risks associated with being cursed surpass their personal concerns and safety and therefore, compounds their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.

g. Esoto

Similar to the findings illustrated in the research, in one of her studies with the Kisongo Maasai, Aude Talle also identified that the Esoto is an assigned household where "the 'morans' and the girls meet to sing, dance, and have sex" (Talle, 1994, p. 282). She argues that the sexual activities at the Esoto have significant cultural value and meaning, and "are an important institution in the Maasai society preparing boys and girls for married life and procreation" (Talle, p. 282).

As illustrated in this research, the permissive sexual relationships that are facilitated by the customs surrounding Esoto make it a significant contributing factor to HIV/AIDS transmission in general, and girls' vulnerability specifically. It is evident that Ilmurran often maintain extensive sexual networks within different Esotos, masculine ideals prestige those who develop many girlfriends, and furthermore, girls experience social pressure and sometimes force to be sexually subservient to the Ilmurran. Even though some of the girls theoretically have sexual power, the conceptions of masculinity and femininity and the ultimate power imbalance that characterizes these relationships, may undermine their actual power and efficacy to determine their sexual relationships. Consequently, non-circumcised girls that attend Esoto remain the most vulnerable group to HIV/AIDS in the Maasai community.

Of most significance is the phenomenon of *engi'konya*. The non-consensual nature of *engi'konya*, the ideals of absolute subservience that girls are expected to adopt, and the power dynamic between the Ilmurran and young, new initiate girls, fosters a

significant vulnerability for girls to HIV/AIDS. In the context of *engi'konya*, girls have very little to no capacity to negotiate sexual relationships. They are rendered powerless to the transmission risk that these relationships represent.

It is important, at this point, to draw attention to Aud Talle's study and article entitled "the making of female fertility" (1994). This study is relevant because it is one of the only other studies that have published findings in relation to a similar group of Maasai, and specifically, a study that focused on sexual customs, the Esoto and the sexual activities associated with the institution. For the most part, Talle's study corroborates the findings of this study. However, the study is relevant because some of the findings differ to some degree from the discussions, experiences, and findings generated from this study. The relevance and significance of these differences has not been determined. The differences may reflect a limitation of this study (i.e. limited field research, language and translation factors, and limited anthropological or ethnographical inquiry). However, reviewing the extensive data generated in this study seems to suggest that the differences are more likely to relate to possible geographical and time period factors that contributes to relatively diverse customs among Maasai communities. Whatever the case, in no cases were some of Talle's findings indicated or even alluded to throughout the extensive discussions and observations that corresponded to this research.

The key area of interest that illustrates some difference is in regards to the process of sexual initiating young girls. Two issues deserve particular mention. For one, Talle's study illustrates that girls' sexual initiation is a highly regulated manner that involves a girls' mother and Ilmurran who are designated for the action. The following quote illustrates the general findings in Talle's research:

For the morans, a girl's attractiveness is largely determined by her physical maturity, as it is only with the older girls that they may have full-blown sexual relationships. The penetration of a girl, however, is usually done gradually, beginning when she is still quite small, but not consummated till she is considered sufficiently mature. The decision as to the girls' readiness for penetration is taken by the mothers in collaboration with the morans. Depending upon her physical constitution and the size of her genitals, the adult women, who check the girls, will direct the morans how far they may penetrate in a given case.

Although this research did not specifically inquire about a progressive process of sexual penetration and initiation, in all of the discussions about sexual relationships with young girls, which included discussions with the Ilmurrans, young girls, and mothers, there was no indication of a process relating to sexual initiation, nor was there any indication relating to regulations concerning penetration. In all of the discussion about *engi'konya*, for example, girls, boys, men and women did not differentiate this sexual activity as different from other sexual activities in the Esoto except for the forceful and non-consensual nature of the phenomenon. In relation to the role of mothers, in discussions that specifically focused on the role of mothers in facilitating the girls' early sexual debut, women and girls indicated that mothers share some responsibility because some encourage girls to go to Esoto, and they are the ones who prepare the girls with ornaments in order to attend. In no cases, however, did any participants indicate that they were involved in the regulatory manner described in Talle's research. Therefore, as mentioned above, the evident differences illustrated in the findings of Talle's research as

compared to this study, may be attributed to the differing time periods of these studies, and more likely, the geographical difference.

h. Female Circumcision

Female circumcision remains an important concern in relation to HIV/AIDS vulnerability (United Nations, 2003). It is evident in the research findings that it remains a prevalent practice and despite intensive propaganda and programming to "eradicate FGM"; the tradition of genital cutting will remain a characteristic of the female life cycle. Similar to the findings of this research, Aud Talle's studies argue that, "the change in the appearance of the girl's genitals constitutes the social and cultural difference between a woman and a girl" (Talle, 1994, p. 282).

Contrary to the concept of FGM that has been popularized and perpetuated throughout international discourse, not the least of which has been the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993) which defines it as a violence against women, it is not, at least for most Kisongo Maasai women and girls, a violation of their human rights, it is not a patriarchal oppression, and it is not considered a "violence against women". Like the circumcision of males, female circumcision facilitates the transformation of girls into "new" women; it facilitates a re-birth (Talle, 1988). Similar to the ritual tree essential to the ceremony, female circumcision "symbolizes the growth and prosperity of the people" (Talle, 1988, p. 106). According to the findings of this study, any programs administering typical 'anti-FGM' propaganda must address the issue of competing human rights. 'Anti-FGM' programs must genuinely engage and reconcile international discourse with the claims of Kisongo Maasai women and their inherent

indigenous human rights. It will remain a difficult activity for the international community.

In specific reference to HIV/AIDS transmission, the findings of this research indicate that the risks of transmission are not as considerable relative to other cultural contexts. The type of cutting, clitoradectomy, does not inflict similar harms as other forms of circumcision. For example, the clitoradectomy surgery does not create impediments to sexual penetration that tear or bleed, causing higher risk of transmission. Unlike other cultural groups who practice female circumcision, the number of girls that concurrently undergo circumcision are few - often between one and three at the most - relative to the vast numbers in other cultural groups. And, according to the interview with the Ngamuratani, the cultural significance of the ritual knife that has historically been used has lost its importance. As a result, circumcisers have commonly adopted the use of razor blades, which, compared to the historical use of a ritual knife, may facilitate the use of different instruments for each girl. In addition, as the research illustrated, awareness of cross-transmission risks is seemingly common, and as a result, participants reported that most often, different razor blades are used for each girl.

Nonetheless, although the risk may not be as considerable compared with other groups, the custom remains a concern in regards to HIV transmission. According to the perception of the Ngamuratani illustrated in the research findings, many circumcisers are not educated about the risks. In some cases, participants indicated, and other observations confirmed, that "anti-FGM" campaigns that have highlighted risk of HIV have confused community members. For example, in one case a young girl who had participated in an "anti-FGM" program did not understand risk related to cross-



transmission, and instead, believed that the act of genital cutting itself somehow caused HIV/AIDS. With her circumcision apparently approaching, the young girl was exasperated with her perceived inevitable risk. Consequently, knowledge and awareness about cross transmission remains sporadic, and therefore remains a factor in girls' vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.

i. Sexual customs and norms

The sexual customs and norms that were illustrated in the findings of this research arguably makes the Kisongo Maasai one of the most vulnerable groups to HIV/AIDS across Africa and even globally. Given the nature of HIV/AIDS and its primary mode of transmission in Tanzania, heterosexual sex, their customs and general socio-sexual organization significantly facilitates disease transmission. The cultural context fosters a susceptibility to high degrees of transmission and high prevalence rates.

However, on an aside note, contrary to the predominant assumptions in popular discourse, their susceptibility is not related to 'lax morals', but instead, it is due to a diverse socio-sexual organization and corresponding customs. Therefore, unlike many other culture contexts (i.e. North American Judeo-Christian culture), their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS must not be understood as rooted in aberrant behavior of some sort, but the opposite - a commitment to the moral principles defined by their cultural context. This focus represents a distinctly different orientation to evaluating behavior, than what is commonly reflected in international discourse relating to HIV vulnerability. Furthermore, the implications of this orientation to developing programs are especially important. The plausibility of typical behavior change programs that focus on abstinence and being faithful is negligible, at least in the short-term.

The most significant sexual customs and norms that will be addressed in this discussion relate to the custom of multiple concurrent partners, socio-sexual organization, early sexual debut, and *engi 'konya*. As illustrated in the research findings, maintaining multiple concurrent partners is a custom for both males and females, that begins during pre-pubescence for girls and following circumcision for boys – those of the Ilmurran age-class. Although the degree of sanction varies according to life cycle and relationship context (Mitzlaff, 1988, Talle, 1988, Spencer, 1988), research participants indicated that maintaining multiple concurrent partners was a universal feature within their communities. Mitzlaff argues, for example, that, “illegitimate relationships are not an exception, they are an institution” (p. 145). The custom is facilitated by conceptions of masculinity and femininity, general socio-sexual organization, and economic disparity for women, which are discussed elsewhere in this document.

Whatever the case, the prevalence of multiple concurrent partners greatly facilitates the HIV/AIDS epidemic (UNFPA, 2002), and places all of the Kisongo Maasai community at great risk of HIV/AIDS. However, as HIV is more easily transmitted sexually from men to women than vice versa (UNFPA, 2002), and in accordance with custom, males generally have more partners than their female counterparts, women and girls are at a disproportionate risk to HIV/AIDS.

The sexual customs and norms relating to the socio-sexual organization of the Kisongo Maasai community also place women at greater vulnerability. One element relates to the institution of the family and prevalence of extramarital relationships. It was apparent in the research findings that sexual relationships played a variety of functions. Further, it was indicated that the function and value of extramarital relations is distinct

from marriage relationships. In the marriage context, the purpose of sexual relationships primarily related to procreation. For the most part, the family unit functions as an economic structure in which procreation is essential. On the contrary, the research findings illustrated that extramarital relationships were valued because they served to meet more personal psychosocial needs (and economic needs for women, which is discussed in the economic power section below). Extramarital relationships are associated with 'love', while the marriage relationship was generally not associated with feelings of affinity (Mitzlaff, 1988, p.79)<sup>2</sup>. In addition, in specific reference to women, Mitzlaff argues that, "women's solidarity in keeping love affairs secret strengthens their self-confidence. By sheer defiance they obtain a piece of self-determined personal life beyond the power and control of their husbands" (p. 145). As a result of this element of socio-sexual organization (i.e. procreative functions associated with the marriage context in contrast to the psycho-social function of extramarital relations), women and girls, as well as their male counterparts, are reliant on their extramarital relationships. Regrettably, although these relationships provide essential needs and meaning, they also contribute to vulnerability as they further the sexual network that women and girls are exposed to. In most cases, their extramarital male partners maintain extensive sexual networks that often include multiple wives and girlfriends.

Another element of the socio-sexual organization that contributes to women and girls' vulnerability is the age, status, and power disparity that characterize women and girls' sexual relationships. As illustrated in the research findings, sexual customs strictly

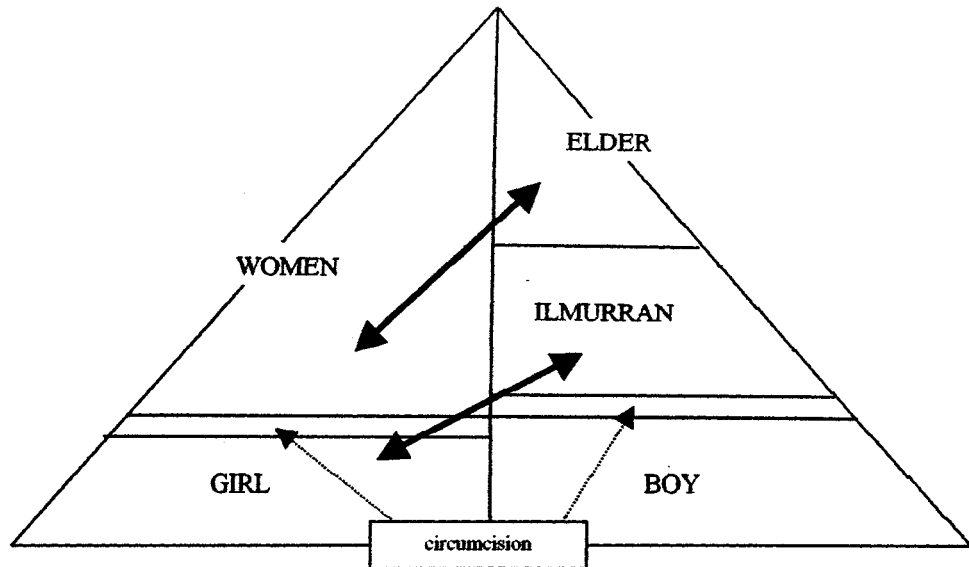
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<sup>2</sup> This socio-sexual organization is in stark contrast to the historical models and organization in the West, which tends to combine, most often unsuccessfully, the procreative and psychosocial functions of sex in the marriage and family institution. This distinction is commonly not considered in HIV/AIDS prevention programming.

regulate the legitimacy of sexual partnerships. According to the customs relating to the age-set system, "relationships between women and men are necessarily relationships between people from different generations" (Mitzlaff, 1988, p.79). The following model in Figure 5, adopted from

**Figure 5: Age-grades & Socio-sexual organization**

Aud Talle (1988), illustrates the age dynamic within women and girls' sexual relationships that are socially sanctioned and culturally legitimated.



The left side of the pyramid represents females while the right represents males. Each segment of the pyramid represents a different age-class or age-grade. The arrows represent the sexual interactions that are culturally sanctioned and legitimated. As illustrated in the model, women and girls' sexual relationships are most commonly exclusive to males that are older and have attained superior status in relation to the age-set system. Consequently, "sexual interaction between Maasai women and men is prescribed between partners who are structurally non-equals in terms of authority and economic power" (Talle, p. 115). This custom, therefore, indirectly facilitates women and girls' vulnerability as it may serve to undermine their sexual power, and more directly, because their sexual relationships are with older male counterparts who most likely have extensive sexual histories.

The sexual custom relating to girls' early sexual debut also contributes significantly to women and girls' vulnerability. As indicated in the research, non-circumcised girls often enter sexual relationships at very young ages, and in most cases, their most active period is during pre-pubescence. Their early sexual debut is, in part, facilitated by several factors. For example, virginity is neither socially nor culturally valued, and, contrary to the predominant customs throughout other global contexts, retaining virginity is socially awkward and in many cases, brings embarrassment on a girls' family (Talle, 1988, p. 110). Aude Talle argues that, "it is the responsibility and work of the morans and their mothers to ascertain that a girl is properly prepared for marriage, most importantly that her virginity is broken" (Talle, 1994, p. 282). As well, misconceptions regarding girls' physiological development persist in some cases. For example, in some cases, the belief that sex with a man is a prerequisite to developing breasts and physically maturing remains a contributing factor to encouraging early sexual debut (Mitzalf, 1988, p. 80).

The vulnerability related to girls' early sexual debut is twofold. For one, the power dynamic within these relationships (i.e. the age and status factor mentioned above) may undermine their sexual power. The second issue relates to biological factors. Biologically, young girls are the most vulnerable to HIV/AIDS as their genital tract has not matured, and therefore, are more likely to sustain tears or abrasions that may foster HIV transmission (Turmen, 2003). Consequently, girls' susceptibility to HIV/AIDS is facilitated significantly due to the customs surrounding their early sexual debut.

The last sexual custom that must be highlighted is the *engi'konya* phenomenon and more generally, the coercive nature of many sexual encounters. As illustrated

previously, *engi'konya* involves coercive, forceful, and generally non-consensual sex with young girls. It, therefore, represents one of the most detrimental customs that facilitates serious vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. Girls are subjected to coercive encounters with potentially many Ilmurran who may be involved in permissive sexual lifestyles.

Besides this phenomenon with young, new initiate girls in Esoto, the research illustrated more generally that males, and specifically Ilmurran, often adopt coercive behavior in order to initiate sexual relationships. Whether in reference to young girls or other girlfriend contexts, the male participants frequently illustrated attitudes that may be deleterious to women and girls' sexual efficacy. For example, the concept of 'forcing in conversation' indicated relentless pressure and coercion. As a result of this behavioral norm, women and girls' actual power to negotiate sexual relationships or resist relationships that may represent risk is diminished significantly, and subsequently, compounds their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS, 1998).

### III. Social Power

In general, the research findings indicated that according to both female and male participants, women and girls' ability to influence their inter-relationships with males was limited and unequal relative to males. For the most part, women and girls' lamented the fact that they are generally subordinate to their male counterparts. Participants argued that females are generally not listened to, that they have little to no influence on family decisions, and that, in most cases, males most often exercised seemingly absolute command and authority. The discussions illustrated that this was facilitated by inferior status, which is determined, at least in part, by negative perceptions about women and

girls, disenfranchisement from cattle production, and exclusion from age-class system.

As previously illustrated, their lack of social power is also related to the marriage exchange and domestic violence.

Nonetheless, upon further analysis and investigation, although women and girls social power is generally limited as illustrated in the discussions surrounding "no say", "command/authority" and "family decisions", particular conditions mitigate their disempowerment. Furthermore, they acquire social power through several means that serve to contest the power exercised, and often abused, by their male counterparts. In relation to mitigating circumstances, the research illustrated that women and girls' social power is mitigated by the functional interdependence phenomenon, and their power varies according to factors, such as their life stage or age-grade, their affinity with their husbands (i.e. the *angoratati* phenomenon), and the degree to which they provide economically to their household.

In addition to the primary data findings just mentioned, women scholars who have studied similar Maasai groups have identified other factors that contribute to females' social status in Maasai communities. Hodgson, for example, argues that domains, such as cultural production and ritual practice are arenas for the exercise and expression of female power (Hodgson, 2000). In regards to the former, researchers have highlighted the importance of creating beaded personal ornaments as an important "social resource" that concurrently produces ethnic identity and negotiates social relations (Kratz & Pido, 2000): "beadwork is a Maasai woman's personal wealth, comparable in many ways to a man's cattle. Like cattle, beaded ornaments also become pawns in sociopolitical relations" (Klumpp & Kratz, 1993, p. 202). In regards to ritual practice, scholars have

argued that in their ritual/ceremonial roles, Maasai women are essential to the age-set rituals which mark the life-stage transitions of men: "transformations in food taboos, clothing, appropriate sexual partners, hairstyles, residence and so forth, which are central to age-set distinctions and promotions, are all signaled through ritual activities involving women" (Hodgson, 2000, p. 15). Talle, and other scholars, have also highlighted the social status and power allotted to women via their association with and management of household units. As a result of their role as primary managers of the household units, they "control the main areas of productive and reproductive activities and this role constitutes the basis of their autonomy and gives them a strong identity as pastoralists" (Talle, 1988, p. 248).

The unequal distribution of social power illustrated in the research findings is also mitigated by numerous actions, which challenge their super-ordinate/subordinate relationships with men, and contest males' use and abuse of power. For example, the research illustrated that the commonly contest the prevalent power dynamic that exists in their relationships with husbands by performing advising or educational roles that influence decision-making; they consult, develop alliances with, and gain support from relatives or age-mates of their husbands in order to influence matters effecting them; they disrupt the household inter-dependence by running away from their husband's household in cases of mistreatment; where necessary, they adopt deceptive means to attend their needs; they protest negative treatment to the traditional leadership council; and in some cases, they invoke legal provisions provided in state legislation. In every case, women and girls manage to challenge their disempowered status and hence, exercise some degree of social power.



However, according to the experience and findings of this research, despite mitigating factors and evident efforts to contest male power, in most cases, women and girls degree of power and influence remains inferior relative to their male counterparts. As a result, the distribution of power to influence inter-relationships remains a factor that contributes to women and girls' vulnerability to HIV/AIDS (Blanc, 2001; UNAIDS, 1998; Turmen, 2003). As participants indicated in the research, a lack of social power facilitates the unequal distribution of workload, which may diminish their general health (Mella, 2003). Male dominance and unequal work distribution marginalizes women and girls to the domestic sphere and generally undermines their capacity to autonomously decide how to use their time, which is an important resource when it comes to attending and participating in income generating activities and community activities, such as HIV/AIDS educational programs. Ultimately, a lack of social power compounds HIV/AIDS vulnerability as it reinforces the cultural expectation to defer to males; undermines women and girls' self-determination, which may determine decisions that compromise their sexuality and health; and impedes women and girls' access to resources, including economic resources, educational resources, and health services (UNAIDS, 1999; Amaro, 1995, Shahabudin, 2001)

In specific reference to young, unmarried girls, they are subject to their father's choices in relation to marriage and education. As a result, girls' are subject to decisions that, in some cases, reflect an interest in the capital generated from bride price rather than a concern for girls' health (i.e. exposure to HIV/AIDS via the marriage exchange) or the potential benefits of attending educational institutions, where they may learn about HIV/AIDS and develop life skills to reduce their risk (Tanzania Gender Networking

Program (TGNP) & Women in Development Southern Africa Awareness (WIDSAA), 1997).

#### IV. Sexual Power

The concept of sexual power refers directly to women and girls' vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. It indicates their capacity to determine their sexual relationships – the primary mode of transmission. Whereas social power generally refers to a woman or girl's ability to influence their inter-relationships with men, sexual power refers specifically to the power dynamic within their sexual relationships. Social power indirectly facilitates vulnerability, while sexual power directly facilitates it. An imbalance of sexual power between females and their male partners facilitates HIV vulnerability as males have greater control than females over when, where, and how sex takes place (Gupta, 2000).

The sexual power of Kisumu Maasai women and girls is complicated as it varies significantly according to their life stage and the context of the relationship. Their sexual relationships are prescribed and regulated by a system of interactional categories (Talle, 1988, p. 112). In cases where women and girls are theoretically allotted power, it is difficult to determine the efficacy they actually experience.

As indicated in the research, non-circumcised girls who attend Esoto are the most vulnerable group to HIV/AIDS. According to custom, their legitimate sexual relationships are solely with the Ilmurran age-class (see the Sexual Customs section above), and in which case, they are exposed to the high-risk behavior of most Ilmurran. As illustrated in the research, the sexual power of these girls differs significantly. The

research indicated that an informal age-grade and social hierarchy exists between the female Esoto participants. The new initiates are allotted much less status and power, and are perceived as subordinates to the older and more senior participants. One of the significant distinguishing factors between these two groups seemed to be the existence of formalized boyfriends.

Ulrike von Mitzlaff's study of the Parayuko Maasai, a neighboring Maasai group, observed that girls organized themselves in a group, which is independent of the adults and has its own rules of behavior (1988, p. 72); and includes an informal, but strict social hierarchy between younger girls (*imbarnot*) and older girls (*inkereyani*). Although other observations from Mitzlaff's study differed from the findings of this research, a similar social hierarchy was evident among the Kisongo Maasai girls who participate in Esoto.

Sexual power among girls corresponds to this social organization. As has previously been discussed, the younger new initiates are allotted negligible power to determine their sexual relationships. They do not have formal boyfriend relationships, and are subject to the *engi'konya* phenomenon. They are apparently unable to refuse the sexual advances of any *Ilmurran*; they are expected to passively accept the sexual interactions, which may frequently expose them to HIV transmission.

The older, senior girls' sexual power is in stark contrast to the younger girls. It became evident in the research that these girls are ultimately allotted the authority to choose sexual partners, which in most cases, refers to their boyfriends who are formally recognized in social and ritual customs (Mitzlaff, 1988). Mitzlaff, in fact, argues that, "up to the time of her marriage, a girl can do what she wants with her body and her sexuality" (Mitzlaff, p. 79). She further argues that, "although *Ilmurran* are grown up,

independent and have the advantage of the girls by virtue of their age, their experience and their social position, they have to submit to rules of behavior concerning the relations between these two groups which ensure the independence and the self-determination of the girls" (Mitzlaff, p. 132). As an aside note, although this study confirmed similar norms that regulate Ilmurran behavior within their sexual interactions with older girls, this study also indicates that Ilmurran's status, and other social norms undermine girls' actual self-determination and independence within sexual relationships.

In any case, this category of girls is not as vulnerable to HIV/AIDS as the category discussed above. Theoretically, at least, they have sexual power to determine sexual relationships, and are not expected to passively submit to sexual advances. Nonetheless, they remain disproportionately vulnerable due to the conceptions of masculinity and sexual customs that most often lead their Ilmurran partners to maintain many multiple concurrent partners. As illustrated in the research, while a girl is expected to develop up to three boyfriends, the number of girlfriend relationships is not limited for Ilmurran and they are socially encouraged to develop many. Therefore, despite their relative sexual power, girls are still exposed to high-risk sexual behavior via their relationships with Ilmurran. They remain a highly vulnerable group to HIV/AIDS.

In reference to women and girls who are circumcised and most commonly married, their sexual power also varies significantly depending on the context of the relationship. Besides the evident vulnerability of younger girls, married women and girls represent the most vulnerable group to HIV/AIDS. Besides their capacity to avoid sexual relationships with their husbands when they are sick, menstruating, pregnant or lactating, they are generally not permitted to refuse or resist sexual relations with their husbands.

They are responsible to accept any sexual advances as part of their procreative role. Additionally, due to the value of fertility, in most cases, research participants indicated that in the marriage context condoms were not an option under any circumstances. In context of these marriage relationships, and in combination with factors relating to ploygyny, and sexual customs that sanction multiple concurrent partners, married women are exposed to high-risk sexual behavior, but in most cases, are powerless to reduce this vulnerability.

In addition to the exposure to HIV/AIDS that married women may be subjected to within their relationship with their husband, a married woman is also subjected to similar vulnerability with her husband's age-mates. As illustrated in the traditional customs and institutions section, age-mate often claim an entitlement to the wives of their age-mates, and women's sexual power is negligible in this context due to the curse phenomenon associated with angering or treating age-mates unfairly. As a result, according to the findings in this research, women and girls often engage in sexual relations with these individuals, and subsequently, are susceptible to HIV/AIDS.

In regards to extramarital relationships, women and girls are allotted a relatively high degree of power. Participants in the research indicated that women and girls are ultimately the ones who have authority to accept or decline sexual relationships with extramarital partners. Nonetheless, as in all of the other sexual relationships illustrated, women and girls vulnerability remains disproportionate compared to males because of biological factors and the likelihood that their male partners may be involved sexually with numerous wives and girlfriends.

Despite the theoretical power of some women and girls, such as in extramarital relationships, their actual power may differ significantly from the power customarily allotted to them. The prevailing sexual norms and notions of masculinity illustrated in previous sections ultimately undermine women and girls' theoretical power.

Subsequently, norms and notions of masculinity, such as those prevalent among the Kisongo Maasai, are significant contributing factors to HIV/AIDS (Gupta, 2003; Blanc, 2001). In addition, women and girls' actual sexual power is complicated by the economic disparity, impoverishment, and dire need that women and girls commonly experience. Relationships that women and girls may theoretically be permitted to refuse, may provide them a necessary means to meeting economic needs for herself and her children. As a result, research participants indicated that women and girls might be subjected to high-risk relationships and vulnerable to HIV/AIDS because their theoretical sexual power is undermined by their economic contexts; their personal risk and vulnerability to HIV/AIDS is often not prioritized in relation to their economic security and the well being of their children.

#### V. Economic Power

The social, economic, and political change that the Kisongo Maasai has experienced over the past century has disproportionately affected women and girls. Although a diversity of extrinsic forces has led to a general decline in the economic security of males and females (Talle, 1988, Hodgson, 2001), for women and girls the effect has been disproportionate. Scholars, most notably Aud Talle (1988) and Dorothy Hodgson (2001), have illustrated in their extensive researches that historical processes

have instigated a general consolidation of economic power by men, which has had a diminishing effect on the economic power that women and girls have historically maintained:

They had few options in a world where British patriarchal practices overlapped with and reinforced Maasai patriarchal tendencies to exclude them, not only for the emerging male-dominated political and economic domains, but also from a sense of cultural identity that was increasingly defined by male ideologies and activities. (Hodgson, 1999c)

The findings of this research has confirmed and provided further evidence for this historical process and the deleterious effect it is having on women. In general, as illustrated in the findings, women and girls are structurally disadvantaged and impeded from access, ownership and control of economic resources. Their access to income generating activities is generally impeded, and in circumstances in which they are permitted to participate in these activities, men appropriate the money or product.

In terms of ownership of property, participants indicated that women were significantly disenfranchised. According to the discussions in this research, women seemingly lack any meaningful ownership of property that will substantially alter their economic status or their subsequent vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.

Talle and Hodgson argue that historically the role of women as managers of the household unit provided them power to dispose of livestock products independently, and exerted substantial pressure and influence on the use of the livestock allotted to their household (Talle, 1988, Hodgson, 2001, Hodgson, 1999a). On the contrary to this historical status, participants in this research indicated that under no circumstances were

women permitted to independently dispose of livestock, nor did they indicate a significant sense of efficacy in relation to their husband's use of their livestock. Women lamented the fact that any ownership of capital was solely "ownership by name" and therefore, was not meaningful in relation to their economic autonomy and status.

According to the data generated in this research, their economic disenfranchisement is caused and facilitated by numerous factors. The marriage exchange system privileges male ownership. Men maintain prejudicial and negative attitudes about women and girls' capacity. Males fear that women's economic autonomy may destabilize the status quo, and as a result, husbands resist and prohibit women from participating in economic activities. Furthermore, their limited social power and general lack of autonomy impede any substantial influence on their husbands' decisions; and their extensive domestic workloads make it difficult to participate in economic activities.

The only significant and culturally legitimate exception to women and girls' general exclusion from capital generating activities that was identified in the focus groups is ownership and control of milk. According to custom, women and girls are solely responsible for milk and milk products (Talle, 1988, Mitzlaff, 1988, Hodgson, 2000). As confirmed in this research, women are solely responsible for milking and distributing milk, and are permitted to use excess milk to generate income. According to most participants, however, the amount of capital or income generated by milk, in most cases, is marginal and does not sufficiently meet women and girls economic need.

Although not mentioned among research participants in this study, secondary data sources indicate that in addition to milk, women exercise rights over other products. For example, women and girls may process hides, they produce and own beadwork



paraphernalia, they make and sell tobacco, as well as alcoholic beverages (Hodgson, 2000).

Participants identified two conditions that may mitigate, at least to some degree, women and girls' economic status and power. For one, participants argued that in some cases, following a husband's death, wives gain economic status. Although their power may vary depending on the age of her sons, the findings of this research indicated that upon the death of the husband, a woman may gain control of her household's livestock or at least, share authority with her elder sons in relation to managing and disposing of livestock. Likewise to social power, another mitigating factor for women's limited economic power is their affinity with their husband. According to participants, the *angoratati* enjoys higher economic status and power. They are generally privileged in relation to the husband's economic decisions, and are more permitted to exert influence on decision-making in the household (i.e. selling livestock).

In addition to these mitigating conditions, women and girls attain a degree of economic power through contesting their husband's economic power, developing extramarital relationships, and discreetly participating in income-generating activities. Likewise to the social power section, women and girls contest male power by creating supportive alliances with relatives or their husband's age-mates in order to protest their husband's appropriation and use of the cattle that has been designated to their household. In addition, in some circumstances, participants indicated that they might seek legal intervention to protect the economic rights provided by state legislation.

The research illustrated two other avenues that women may pursue in order to attain some economic status and subsequently, provide for themselves and their children.

For one, it was evident that women and girls may strategically develop extramarital relationships that provide access to economic resources and economic support during periods of need. Second, women and girls participate in what has been referred to as a 'hidden economy' that provides some degree of income. Although in many cases women may not adopt discreet measures, many participants argued that in order to avoid having their income appropriated by their male counterparts, women and girls discreetly participate in numerous income generating enterprises, such as milk sales, providing services to people (i.e. collecting water), and small business ventures.

Despite some mitigating factors, and evident enterprise and contestations adopted by women and girls, for the most part, they remain disenfranchised from economic resources relative to men. As previously mentioned, the disparity illustrated by participants in this research represents the dire consequences of the historical process that has generally undermined women and girls' economic power and served to consolidate males' power. Despite the recognition that women and girls have maintained and created some economic power, it remained evident in the research that access, ownership, and control of resources was unequally distributed to males. With very few exceptions, women and girls lamented their impoverished status and the relations and structures that facilitate it.

Women and girls' vulnerability to HIV/AIDS is facilitated by economic inequity. Unequal access to money resources, material deprivation, and economic dependence are all contributing factors that facilitate vulnerability (UNAIDS, 1999; Travers & Bennett, 1996; Ankara 1996): "research has shown that the economic vulnerability of women makes it more likely that they will exchange sex for money or favors, less likely that they

will succeed in negotiating protection, and less likely that they will leave a relationship that they perceive to be risky" (Gupta, 2000, p. 88). According to all participants in this research, one of the most significant factors, just mentioned, is women and girls' need to develop and sustain relationships with men who provide access to economic resources and support. Participants argued that given the economic need of women and girls' and their children, concern regarding HIV/AIDS is diminished. Impoverishment also impedes access to education and health services (Travers, 1996), which often serve to reduce vulnerability by developing awareness, increasing general health, and treating sexually transmitted infections/diseases that may facilitate HIV transmission.

In every case mentioned above, the economic disparity that Kisongo Maasai women and girls experience significantly facilitates their disproportionate vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. Their male counterparts generally do not face similar degrees of personal and societal vulnerability. Personal factors and structural factors most often privilege them while concurrently disempowering women and girls. As the case with social power, their limited economic power undermines their ability to negotiate the relationships, adopt preventative behaviors, or access instrumental factors that may reduce their risk, such as education and health services, and hence, is a major contributing factor to HIV/AIDS vulnerability.

## VI. Political Power

As illustrated in the research, political power in the communities corresponding to this research may be categorized as traditional governing councils and state governance. In the case of traditional governing councils, women and girls participation is negligible.

They are excluded from representation as traditional leaders, and their participation in decision-making consists only of presenting their complaints that arise from interpersonal conflicts, which usually concerns their husbands. They are permitted to raise complaints, but are ultimately excluded from 'judging cases'.

In regards to state governance, the Government of Tanzania has created policy that necessitates female representation on village government councils. According to the observations of this research, the village councils generally have female representatives. However, their roles are marginalized into relatively insignificant ones. They are excluded from the paid administrative positions, which are allotted most of the governing power. Furthermore, representation does not equate genuine participation. Given the prevailing gender norms and negative conceptions of women that were illustrated throughout the research, this study remains skeptical in regards to how much women participate in the decision-making process. As some participants indicated, their representation and participation may reflect a tokenistic attempt to accommodate government policy without a genuine commitment to female's participation. Nonetheless, some of the attitudes among male participants generate optimism: after witnessing women's capacity to contribute to decision-making, they evidently valued their contribution and illustrated positive attitudes concerning the value of women and girls' participation.

One of the most significant concerns generated by the research is in regards to the selection/election process. It was evident that women and girls' access to political representation was determined for the most part by men. For one, women and girls' participation is contingent upon the approval of their husbands. Additionally, men

seemingly dominate the process of selecting representatives. Subsequently, according to some participants, male community members create barriers for women and girls who may challenge the status quo. The female representatives who are permitted access to the village council representation are generally those women and girls who accommodate the male leadership structure and paradigm. According to the observations associated with the field experience, the female representatives are often characterized by subservience or passivity. Alternatively, they are outspoken women who enjoy the power allotted to them via their association with the male leadership structure and therefore, are seemingly unlikely to challenge the leadership at the risk of losing their privilege. In any case, the election process is far from democratic and the socio-cultural context generally impedes women and girls genuine participation. As a result, it may be unlikely that women and girls' representation will substantially influence the political process.

One mitigating condition to women and girls' political marginalization is informal collectivization. The research indicated that women and girls might mobilize to mediate conflicts among female community members, and to exert influence on public policy and/or events. Their informal collectivization represents important means in which women and girls protest unjust events and activities and exert influence on matters that affect them. It indicates that despite their marginalization from the formal power structures, they nonetheless exercise a degree of power through informal collective mobilization.

Secondary sources, such as Spencer's study of Matapato Maasai (1988), indicate that the collectivization of women functions to define and manage public morality, which can be interpreted as a form of political power. Spencer, for example, argues that through

collective expressions of songs and prayers, women and girls criticize deviant forms of behavior and notions of masculinity (1988). In addition, women and girls may mobilize as 'angry mobs' to inflict physical harm on men, and their property, who have mistreated their wives or violated their rights (Spencer, 1988; Mitzlaff, 1988).

As illustrated in the literature review, women and girls' general marginalization from political structures and power contributes to their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS, 1999; TGNP, 1997). Their capacity to create informal space to influence events or activities in their community is a strong community asset that offers a potential strength that may be mobilized in regards to HIV prevention, advocacy, and care. Nonetheless, the implication of women and girls' marginalization from formal structures remains a significant factor that contributes to their vulnerability. Susan Membe Matala describes the issue as follows:

One of the major reasons for failure to develop education, prevention strategies, research and development priorities, adequate allocation of resources for treatment and social support and in health care delivery is that women themselves are not found where it matters: on the drawing board where major and critical decisions are made. One of the most important contributions that can be made to combating the pandemic is to guarantee women's participation at all levels. (Matala, 2003)

In specific reference to Kisongo Maasai communities, the political organization contributes to their vulnerability in several manners. In regards to the traditional governing councils, their exclusion raises two key concerns. For one, the traditional leaders often judge cases relating to domestic conflict. These matters may relate to

important issues concerning female's ownership and control of economic resources as well as domestic violence. As females are excluded from judging these cases, the decisions and judgments may, at least potentially, propagate cultural ideologies, institutions and customs that are prejudicial to women (Hodgson, 2001). Although participants indicated that the traditional councils often protect women and girls, there remains a concern that it may intentionally or unintentionally consolidate male power rather than facilitate substantive change in relation to gender equity. As a result, the traditional governing councils may facilitate women and girls' social and economic vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.

A second concern is that the traditional leadership structure is often used to facilitate development objectives. NGOs or government initiatives often focus on mobilizing the traditional leaders in order to devise strategies, train and transmit information. Although this focus is good intentioned and important, without concurrently mobilizing women and girls, they remain marginalized from important opportunities that may provide instrumental means to reducing women and girls' HIV vulnerability. In fact, scholars, such as Dorothy Hodgson, argue that this sole focus on male leadership structures has inadvertently facilitated the further consolidation of males' power and undermined women's power (2001).

In regards to the village government, women and girls' vulnerability to HIV/AIDS is facilitated in three significant manners. For one, likewise to the point above, the governing councils offer an important access to information. Government initiatives to educate and train communities are often facilitated via seminars and training opportunities provided to the government representatives, which may include education

related to HIV/AIDS. Second, as indicated by some participants, women and girls' marginalization significantly affects the allocation of resources. Due to their marginalized status, women and girls may not effectively influence the allocation process in order to meet their general needs or reduce their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. Further, in more serious cases, funds may be misappropriated. A third issue is that in cases where resources have been allocated to address an issue related to women and girls' needs or vulnerability, their lack of representation and participation may undermine the effectiveness of the allocation and initiative. As indicated in the above quote from Matala, without substantial influence, developing and evaluating strategies or activities may prove ineffective, as women and girls' experiences and insights have not been adequately included.

Consequently, the political structure represents a significant characteristic of women and girls' societal vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. They have less access to the information, training, and knowledge generated by state-sponsored programs, they lack influence in regards to allocating resources, and in cases where resources are allocated to address women and girls' issues, their lack of influence on the development, evaluation and administration of initiatives undermines the effectiveness of any intervention.

## 5.2 Participants' Assessment of Risk

As illustrated in the methodology section, assessing the perceived risk and awareness of women and girls' vulnerability was a specific objective of this study, and was explored during the second round of focus group discussions. In general, the participants' perception of risk was significant. According to the discussions, most, if not



all, of the participants were familiar with HIV/AIDS as an incurable disease transmitted through sexual intercourse, prior to their participation in this research. The general attitude among participants was one of anxiety and frustration. One key informant, for example, made the statement illustrated below. The implication within the statement is that many are fearful and anxious, but simultaneously, denial exists because they have not been educated about the disease and/or because they have not been informed of any way to avoid the disease:

They [referring to his fellow Maasai] fear a lot, but there is no alternative. In the beginning people didn't take it seriously because the level of their understanding of HIV/AIDS was very low. Some of them couldn't believe that there was AIDS...No one has a spare heart. If there is an alternative, the Ilmurran will not say there is no AIDS, because everybody fears AIDS.

As illustrated in many of the quotations presented in the preceding document, awareness of risk and subsequent anxiety was commonly expressed surrounding the following issues: the fatal nature of the disease, their vulnerability to the disease due to their and/or their partners' patterns of multiple concurrent partners, anxiety over particular traditional institutions that they identified as fostering vulnerability (i.e. marriage institution and customs, Esoto, female circumcision), and frustration due to lack of knowledge, understanding, and prevention measures.

Within the second round of focus groups, the participants' risk perception was explored after a presentation of the preliminary analysis. The preliminary analysis that was presented was similar to the findings illustrated in the preceding analysis of power sections of this document. After each section (i.e. after reviewing the findings of social

power), participants shared feedback and then the facilitator proceeded to facilitate discussion regarding their perception of women and girls' risk. Each section (i.e. social power, sexual power, economic power, and political power) was facilitated in the same fashion: presenting preliminary findings, feedback from participants, and discussion on risk perceptions.

Men and boys' risk was also explored in the discussions, but these findings will not be illustrated in this section. In general, men's risk was commonly highlighted in discussions and attributed to their desire for sex, their relentless search for sexual partners, and the subsequent frequency of multiple concurrent partners. With the exception of young girls, the Ilmurran were frequently identified as the most vulnerable group due to the characteristics of their relationships within the Esoto: "all the Maasai are at risk of HIV/AIDS but the Ilmurran are at most risk because they go to Esoto" (Key Informant: Alaigwanani/Korianga).

Boys were not readily identified as being at risk, which most likely relates to the taboo that surrounds sex with boys. Nonetheless, in every discussion, participants would identify boys at some risk due to what participants referred to as "stealing sex". "Stealing sex" refers to the phenomenon of young boys discreetly sneaking into or hiding in the residence of a woman and girl, and engaging in sexual intercourse with the targeted woman or girl while they are asleep during the night. This phenomenon was universally presented and illustrated in the focus group discussions. Given the nature of the phenomenon, the current study remains skeptical in regards to the plausibility of the phenomenon. It is interesting to note, however, that in every formal or informal discussion the principal investigator had on this subject, participants adamantly rejected

any criticisms concerning the plausibility of this phenomenon. According to this study, it is universally believed to be a plausible phenomenon that places young boys, and their 'partners', at risk of HIV/AIDS.

For the most part, participants' awareness of risk was predominantly associated with personal factors, or more specifically, the risk associated with an individual's sexual decisions and relationships. Although there are some exceptions (i.e. influence of limited economic power on women's sexual relationships), which are illustrated below, the participants' awareness of more structurally related factors was not common, and in some cases, the identification of structurally related vulnerability or risk was instigated only after the facilitator probed or, in some cases, offered examples to the participants.

The participants assessment of risk in relation to sexual, social, economic, and political power is as follows:

#### I. Sexual Power

As sexual power is directly related to risk and vulnerability because it involves the ability to influence or determine sexual relationships, participants were most likely to identify women and girls' risk in discussions related to sexual power (versus their identification of risk relating to the following sections, which involve more structural factors). The two categories of females that were discussed by the participants were non-circumcised girls and married women.

Non-circumcised girls were commonly identified as the most vulnerable and at risk group in the participants' community. This was universally attributed to the nature of their sexual relationships with the Ilmurran in the Esoto. As previously illustrated, their relationships are almost exclusively with Ilmurran who frequently maintain significant

networks of sexual relationships, may involve several partners, and are characterized by very little efficacy. In response to a question about girls' risk, one participant emphatically responded, "a girl is always at risk. How can she not be at risk while she is the wife of Morans?" (FGD/F18-25). In a writing activity during a children's focus group discussion, one young girl wrote the following: "I think they [girls] are at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS when they have sex with anyone who convinces them. Some are forced to have sex without wanting to" (Children's FGD/Mairowa).

In addition, participants argued that girls' risk is compounded because the Ilmurran who attend Esoto are sometimes foreign to the community<sup>3</sup>, and may originate from geographical areas where HIV is prevalent: "for girls, they are at serious risk because they don't have freedom to refuse sex, and we often have visitors from other places at the Esoto so it is easy to transmit HIV/AIDS in these cases" (FGD/M14-17). One participant identified visitors from the adjacent mining region, which is associated with high HIV prevalence, as compounding girls' vulnerability: "even Ilmurran from the mining area can come and stay at the Esoto and have sex with the girls" (FGD/F14-17).

Regarding women, participants identified their risk as associated with their almost complete lack of sexual efficacy in relation to their husbands and age-mate visitors. In discussing wives' risk and vulnerability, one male participant explained, "she has no authority. If she has no authority she will not be able to refuse a man"<sup>4</sup> (FGD/M18-25). In regards to age-mates, participants generally reiterated comments previously made in the first round of discussions: "for women, they are also at risk, because when an age-

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<sup>3</sup> In accordance with the Ilmurran hospitality custom, any Maasai male belonging to the Ilmurran age-set is permitted to participate in any Esoto. Consequently, visiting Ilmurran even from distant regions of Maasailand, which stretches from southern Kenya into central Tanzania, may participate in Esoto, which may include having sex with the girl participants.

<sup>4</sup> In this context, "refuse a man" is referring to a woman's lack of sexual efficacy.

mate comes, sometimes when they are afraid of curses, as a result, they permit sex and so they get AIDS due to their fear of curses" (FGD/M14-17).

Interestingly, on a few occasions, participants identified the favored-wife phenomenon as influencing the degree of vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. One participant argued that the favored-wife is more vulnerable because the husband may tend towards having sex with her more frequently: "I think that the angoratati [favored wife] is at high risk because entingi [non-favored wife] won't have sex with the husband, so if the husband is infected, it is angoratati that is most at risk" (FGD/F18-25). However, according to many participants, the non-favored wives are at greater risk in context of age-mate visitation because the husband is more likely to send visitors to their homes: "A woman can be affected especially the non-favored ones because visitors are most often directed to her house and she cannot refuse" (FGD/M14-17).

## II. Social Power

In relation to women's limited social power (aka: their limited opportunity to influence or impact the decisions of male counterparts), participants identified issues relating to their ability to determine factors relating to their marriage relationship, girls' lack of efficacy related to attending Esoto, and girls' marginalization from school.

In relation to marriage relationships, participants identified women's inability to choose whom they marry, inability to determine or influence husband's sexual behavior, inability to affect a husband's further marriage choices, and inability to control co-wives' behaviors as contributing to their HIV vulnerability. In regards to the first concern, the following quote illustrates the disproportionate power men have in regards to choosing

marriage partners and the unequal risk they experience as a result: "I can say that a man can use this power to be protected from AIDS... A man can tell his father that he does not want to marry this time... a Moran can tell the father that he doesn't want to get married to this or that girl but that he wants to marry another. So, because a man is having all of this power, he can be able to protect himself from HIV because no one forces him" (FGD/M14-17). Contrary to the power that males yield in determining their marriage relationships, girls are often provided no opportunity to influence the process of partner selection, and therefore, are subjected to the decisions of her father, which may not consider health-related concerns. One participant argued that, because women are forced to marry partners that they generally do not love, have no power in the selection process, they are required to marry husbands they do not love, which fosters extramarital relationships and further vulnerability: "she is forced to get married to a husband whom she does not love. Therefore, it will result in her finding outside partners in which she feels happy in her sexual relationships" (FGD/M14-17).

Female participants identified their inability to influence their husband's sexual behavior also as a risk factor. They argued that they had no control over their husband's sexual relationships outside of marriage and that this makes them vulnerable. In the following quote, the participant was illustrating the double standard that exists and the subsequent vulnerability of women: "in the sense of marriage, a girl has no say to her husband, so her husband will want her to do whatever he assigns. He will tell her not to do sex with anyone except him. However, he may have ten girlfriends, and due to that, he will bring HIV to her" (FGD/F18-25).

The remaining two concerns regarding marriage relations is related to issues arising from the polygynous marriage structure. For one, participants expressed that in the same manner they cannot influence the husband's sexual choices, they cannot influence his future marriage choices. As a result, every additional marriage renders them helpless to protect themselves from HIV: "one man can have seven wives, and he will get married to another young lady, and maybe that young lady is HIV positive, so because he is the one with the power, all the other ladies will be affected because he will transmit HIV to them" (FGD/M14-17). Second, participants illustrated that a married woman's risk is compounded by her co-wives sexual behavior, which they cannot determine or influence. The following quote illustrates the complexity that this factor contributes to married women's vulnerability: "if my husband agrees with me not to have outside partners, I will agree, but I'm still not confident that I'm not at risk of HIV/AIDS because my co-wife might have outside partners that will bring AIDS. How can I avoid AIDS in that case?" (FGD/18-25).

In more specific reference to young girls, a few participants mentioned two issues that relates to social power. One relates to girls' efficacy in relation to attending Esoto. Participants argued that girls are at risk of HIV because they are often forced to attend Esoto<sup>5</sup>, or in other cases, their power to avoid Esoto is undermined or influenced by the shaming they're subjected to from the Ilmurran. Regarding the first case, one participant articulated this factor in the following quote: "Girls are forced to go to the Esoto... and this act of forcing girls to go to the Esoto will force them to get HIV easily" (FGD/M14-17). One young girl similarly noted in a written activity that, "there are parents who

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<sup>5</sup> NOTE: although participants identified cases in which girls were forced to attend Esoto, it was more often the case within the focus group discussions that the opposite was presented: mothers more often try to dissuade their daughters from attending.

force their children to go and have sex with the Ilmurran. This causes children to contract sexually transmitted diseases" (Children's FGD/Mairowa).

The second issue related to social power is girls' marginalization from primary school, which was identified as a consequence of limited social power. Participants argued that girls' vulnerability is related to their access to the HIV education that is sometimes provided in primary school programs. One example is the following quote from a young male: "she will miss the lesson about AIDS that is in school. There is even a video sometimes about AIDS. So, how can a girl learn about AIDS if she is prohibited from school?" (FGD/M14-17).

### III. Economic Power

In discussing women's risk in association with their limited economic power, every focus group discussion identified the relationship between impoverishment and engaging in risky sexual behavior that secures economic support. Participants argued that because women have little substantive access to economic resources, they are more likely to develop sexual relationships with men that are willing to provide them economic support in order to meet their and their children's basic needs. The predicament some women reportedly face is illustrated in the following quote:

Poverty. This can lead a woman to be at risk of HIV because 'a child has nothing to compare with'. If you see children crying because they may be starving, you will even wish to die to avoid seeing these children crying. A woman is different compared with a man. So, if an HIV infected person convinces you to have sex in exchange for food and other things you may need. You will be happy to see your



children not starving even though you have taken on a disease. All of this is due to poverty...it is the stomach that instigates a Maasai woman to involve herself in a sexual relationship. (FGD/F18-25)

In a discussion group with males, a participant echoed the risk illustrated above in the following comment: "A woman may come to the village and because of all of these problems [referring to women's limited economic power], she will be easily convinced to have sex by anyone who can provide them necessities. And in that way, she can easily get AIDS" (FGD/M14-17).

Similar to other phenomenon, participants argued that non-favored wives' vulnerability is disproportionate in comparison to favored wives. This is a consequent of the economic privilege often allotted to favored wives, which is illustrated in the Analysis of Economic Power section. One participant explained the inequality as follows: "I think a non-loved one is at risk because she doesn't have money. She will find money in any way in order to satisfy her needs. So, I think she will be at risk more than the favored wife" (FGD/F14-17).

#### IV. Political Power

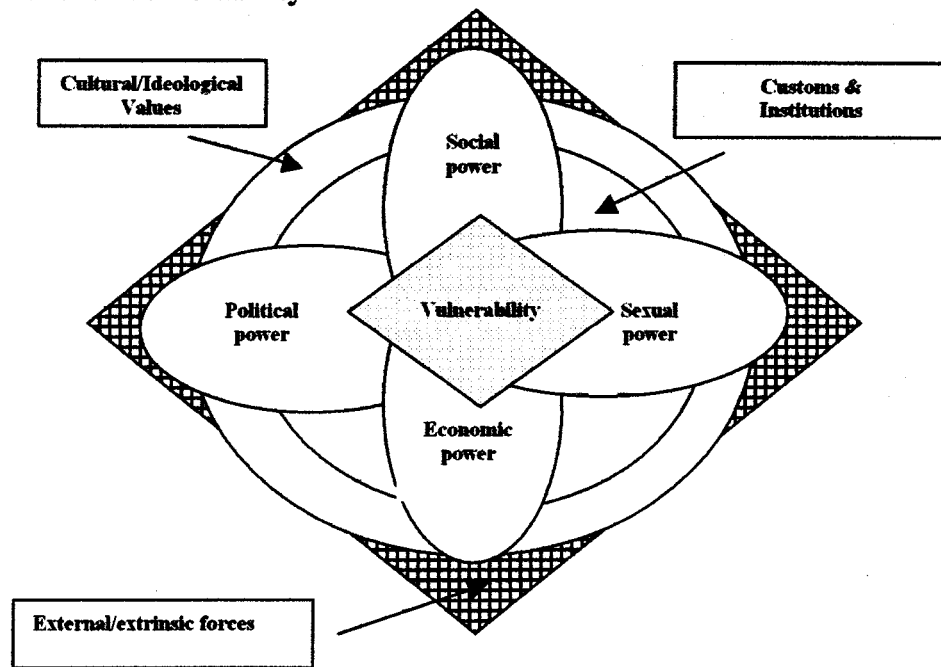
In general, participants did not commonly identify women and girls' risk as associated with political power. One woman, for example, rejected the facilitator's suggestion that it may contribute to women's vulnerability, and responded by saying, "that doesn't matter. A woman having the biggest position in the village and to participate in making decisions doesn't affect vulnerability. And one who is not involved, it still does not matter" (FGD/F14-17).

However, two participants did identify a relationship between political power and women and girls' risk to HIV/AIDS. One male participant highlighted the relationship between participation in village politics and access to information through seminars sponsored by the government. In addition, he argued that due to women's workload, those women who did attend the seminars were less able to disseminate the information: "In the government, because they have limited positions and many seminars are provided and therefore, mostly attended by men. At these seminars people are educated about AIDS, and because of the responsibilities that women have at home, the few who attended do not have the time to teach what they've learned to others while for men, they can organize public meetings in which other men are easily educated" (FGD/M14-17). Another female participant similarly argued that due to their marginal political power women are less likely to access important information: "some people attend a seminar in which they are taught that it is not good to use the same instrument to circumcise girls, but because not many women are in these political positions, like the circumcisers for example, many will continue using the same instruments for many girls and that way it is easy to transmit AIDS." (FGD/F14-17).

### 5.3 Synthesis & the Model of Vulnerability

In accordance with the prior discussions, women and girls' vulnerability to HIV/AIDS can be conceptualized in the manner illustrated in the following Model of Vulnerability. Kisongo Maasai women and girls' vulnerability is generated and compounded by particular cultural/ideological values, customs and institutions, as well as unequal social, sexual, economic and political power, which is produced and reinforced by the cultural/ideological values, customs, institutions, and other structural phenomena.

**Figure 6: Model of Vulnerability**



The following discussion will outline a few remarkable attributes of this model and its configuration:

a. The Foundational Element of Cultural Phenomena

The general value of this conceptual framework is that it illustrates the fundamental importance of cultural or ideological values and customs and institutions that underpin the other elements and contributing factors to vulnerability – unequal

social, sexual, economic, and political power. It highlights the importance of culture-specific programming. If cultural or ideological values, as well as customs and institutions, underpin women and girls' general vulnerability, then programming must explore, engage, accommodate, modify, and/or transform the cultural elements of vulnerability. According to the findings and observations of this study, culture and 'tradition' are integral elements to vulnerability, and integral to effective HIV/AIDS programming. These elements represent that gap between knowledge or cognitive issues and behavior change. Without genuinely incorporating these elements into program considerations, programs will remain ineffective and will not substantially or sustainably reduce women and girls' vulnerability to HIV/AIDS (Buseh, Glass & McElmurry, 2002; Masindi, 2002; UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2003; Setel, 1996).

The significance related to the configuration of the cultural elements of vulnerability within the above model, corresponds to Bob Mullaly's structural view of society. In his book, Structural Social Work, Mullaly conceptualizes society as characterized by a substructure and superstructure that determines and reinforces social phenomena. The substructure of society includes ideology "that underpins all social institutions and determines the nature of social relations" (Mullaly, 1997, p. 135). The superstructure consists of social institutions that carry out society's functions, and the social relations among all social groups (Mullaly, p. 135). The relationship between these elements is one of production and perpetuation: "the social institutions and social relations of a particular society will be determined by the dominant ideology, and, in turn,

will operate in a manner consistent with and supportive of the dominant ideology”  
(Mullaly, p. 134).

In relation to Kisongo women and girls’ vulnerability to HIV/AIDS, the cultural/ideological values that pervade the community represent the substructure of Kisongo society. The customs and institutions and other structural factors, which facilitate unequal social, sexual, economic and political power, represent the superstructure. The importance of this conceptualization is the quintessential importance of understanding and addressing particular cultural values and conceptualizations, such as traditionalism and gender, as ideological forces that underpin women and girls’ vulnerability.

b. **The Dialogic Relationship between Ethnicity, Cultural Phenomena and Extrinsic/External Factors**

Besides the cultural element, another valuable component of the above model is the external impacts/extrinsic forces element. As illustrated by the model, women and girls’ vulnerability cannot be understood in isolation of their community’s relationship to external factors or extrinsic forces, such as state domination/expansion, market economy, and ‘development’ interventions and policies. Secondary sources suggest that the Maasai ethnicity and corresponding cultural phenomena are, at least in part, products of this dynamic and intimate relationship. The political economy of the Kisongo Maasai is ultimately, one of the most significant contributing factors of the community’s vulnerability and more specifically, girls’ vulnerability. According to many scholars, the well being of indigenous groups, such as the Kisongo Maasai, has been perpetually undermined by the extrinsic forces that have characterized the colonial and post-colonial

era (Maybury-Lewis, 1997; Hodgson, 2001; Talle, 1988). As Hodgson explains in Once Intrepid Warriors, the history of the Maasai is embedded in 'development':

"Development, was never a peripheral project of the colonial or post-colonial state but was central to the expansion and maintenance of power" (Hodgson, 2001, p. 10). She further stipulates that, "a certain representation of 'Maasai-ness' came to dominate colonial imaginations, shape colonial policies, and eventually, with the collaboration of some Maasai themselves, shape Maasai realities" (Hodgson, p. 13).

The purpose, therefore, of embedding the cultural and ethnic elements of girls vulnerability into the matrix of extrinsic/external factors is to illustrate that the 'realities' existing in contemporary communities are not products of Maasai 'tradition' or a history isolated from extrinsic forces, such as competition with neighboring tribes, colonization, state expansion, and 'development'. Instead, the cultural phenomena observed in contemporary Maasai communities must be acknowledged as a product of the complex political economy and the 'politics of intervention'.

The impact of these extrinsic forces has disproportionately affected the female population. Generally speaking, the impacts of extrinsic forces and the subsequent history of the Kisongo Maasai, is characterized by the feminization of poverty, disenfranchisement, and general disempowerment of women and girls. In Women at a Loss, Aud Talle highlights the historical significance of the household unit as a key economic unit that allotted women a considerable degree of socio-economic power and autonomy. However, extrinsic impacts, mainly the encroachment of the market economy, have transformed the Maasai's historical system of production. Concurrently, the same changes have transformed gender roles and undermined the power women

historically exercised as managers of the household units: "the commercialization of the economy favors and strengthens the male control of means of production, while at the same time reducing the control maintained by women" (Talle, 1988, p. 248).

Dorothy Hodgson's extensive work on similar topics has corroborated and expanded on Talle's findings. In her work, Hodgson illustrates the disenfranchisement and disempowerment that Maasai women have experienced over the past century. According to her analysis, although women may have occupied structurally subordinate roles as wives, they, nonetheless, exercised substantial social, economic, political, and ritual power. She illustrates that historical documents, such as Moritz Merker, a German military officer who lived and traveled among the Maasai between 1895 and 1903, "clearly documents women's powers as pastoralists, mothers, sisters, and mothers-in-law through their involvement in the care and management of milk and livestock, marriage, bride wealth transactions, active prayer life, relationships with sons and brothers, and control over daughters and daughters-in-law" (Hodgson, 2001). Contrary to this historical status and power, she illustrates that extrinsic forces have disproportionately undermined Maasai women's status, power and autonomy. She explores impacts relating to the disease epidemics that threatened cattle production in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, German colonial rule, British colonial rule, and post-colonial 'development' that facilitated the disempowerment of women (Hodgson, 2001). Her most extensive work relates to the 'modernizing' and 'development' initiatives instigated by British colonial rule and the post-colonial Tanzanian government. The following excerpt will serve as an overview of some key issues illustrated by Hodgson:

Throughout the years, first the British government and then the Tanzanian government tried to encourage, bribe, coerce or force Maasai to perceive their cattle as commodities and sell them. The cumulative impact of the policies and practices... was significant. Gender-specific taxation forced men to seek a source of cash, and monetization and commodification made them aware of a lucrative commodity in their own midst – livestock. Furthermore, as barter was replaced by commodity purchase, men usurped women's roles as traders; instead of women bartering livestock products, men began selling livestock to meet their growing cash needs. Capitalist values, which required the alienability of a product, privileged individual male control of cattle, collapsing the multiple, overlapping use-rights of men and women in livestock in an idea of male 'ownership' of property. Veterinary services and livestock 'development' projects directed only at men, facilitated men's appropriation of women's rights by providing new means for men to legitimate their control of livestock. In their new roles as 'taxpayers', 'property owners', 'buyers' and 'sellers', Maasai men consolidated their exclusive control of livestock and reinforced their own sense that being Maasai meant being a pastoralist. In contrast, the marginalization of women from the 'economic' categories undermined women's roles in pastoral production, dispossessed them of their rights over livestock and eroded their sense of being pastoralists... Women's access to, and participation in, political decision-making processes were curtailed, and they were relegated to the domestic concerns of home and homestead. As a result, the spatial and conceptual differences between the formerly interconnected spheres of 'domestic' and



'political'/'public' were reconfigured as gendered hierarchies. (Hodgson, 1999b, p. 64)

Consequently, it is evident that historical and contemporary extrinsic forces are significant contributing factors to women and girls' vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. As Hodgson and Talle have identified, the inequality and disempowerment witnessed in this study is a consequence of the oppression and 'development' that has characterized foreign engagement with Maasai communities.

As an aside note, the reconceptualization of females' roles in pastoral society indicated in studies such as Talle's and Hodgson's is important in relation to the concept of tradition that pervaded the focus group discussions. It corroborates the concern previously expressed in this document that concepts of tradition and traditionalism may be invoked to legitimate unequal power distribution. Despite the evident inaccuracy of many concepts or ideas of tradition, traditionalism remains a powerful ideology that maintains the status quo and can impede a reduction in women and girls' vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. A case in point is participants', especially males', tendency to invoke tradition in order to justify women's exclusion from economic and productive activities. Nonetheless, accounts that date back to the nineteenth century indicate that, contrary to popular ideology, there was not such an exclusive division between male and female roles. As discussed below, developing a critical consciousness in relation to these popularized assumptions about tradition and history will be essential in gradually transforming gender relations and social structures.

Another important point illustrated in Hodgson's work is the role of 'development' in producing and perpetuating women's vulnerability. Hodgson's studies

clearly illustrate the importance related to a cultural approach to development and more generally, prioritizing process-related issues in development schema. Historically, 'development' has neglected a genuine understanding and awareness of cultural custom as well as the social, economic, and political organization of the Maasai. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, it has imposed Western assumptions and values onto Maasai communities at the expense of the general well being of these communities, and more specifically, women. In addition, it has generally neglected essential values related to genuine participation and dialogical relationships in the development process. As a result, the effects of 'development' have been at best, ineffective, and at worst, catastrophic. It has impoverished the Maasai community in general, disrupted their social relations and organization, and subsequently, facilitated the disempowerment of Maasai women and girls.

Thierry Verlhest identifies another consequent of misguided 'development' and the 'politics of intervention'. In his work, No life without roots: culture and development, he argues that the oppressive nature of historical and contemporary 'development' has instigated a strong need to safeguard identity among culturally diverse or indigenous communities. In his discussion on the failures of development, he makes the following statement:

Are there perhaps obstacles to development and resistance to the spread of social consciousness which are beyond the tools of analysis of economists and political scientists and which baffle the understanding of social activists and NGOs? The origins of this kind of resistance may well lie in the cultural uniqueness of each of

the populations in question and in their need to safeguard their identity. (Verhelst, 1990, p. 16).

Verhelst's analysis of development concludes that,

the indigenous cultures of the peoples of the Third World have been largely neglected. There is an urgent need to pay much greater attention to these than we have in the past... Without this, we will be unable to appreciate the extent to which they succeed in putting up a fearful resistance to development projects conceived in the West, a resistance which often explains the mishaps that befall such projects... But indigenous cultures are more than just obstacles to a development that tries to impose cultural alienation. They are also economic, social, and political sources of life. As such they can be matrixes of endogenous development in every aspect of life. (Verhelst, 1990, p. 22).

Verhelst does not, however, discredit the value of 'development'. Instead, Verhelst advocates for and illustrates the importance of reorienting development to a focus on culture and the 'process' of development.

Similar to Verhelst's arguments, Manuel Castell's concept of "resistance identity" is also particularly relevant to the construction and reproduction of Maasai ethnicity, especially the traditionalism and resistance that sometimes characterizes Maasai communities. In his book, The Power of Identity, Castell argues that for marginalized groups that have been stigmatized and/or devalued by dominating systems, collective identity is characterized by resistance to the principles or values that characterize the dominating system. Therefore, similar to the phenomena of traditionalism and resistance in Maasai communities, he argues that, "the constitution of cultural communes is not

arbitrary. It works on raw materials from history, geography, language and environment. So, they are constructed, but materially constructed, around reactions...reaction against globalization, which dissolves the autonomy of institutions, organizations, and communications systems where people live" (Castells, 2004, p. 8). Castell further argues that, "these defensive reactions become sources of meaning and identity by constructing new cultural codes out of historical materials" (Castells, p.69). Therefore, similar to Verhelst, Castell's theories further support the argument that the oppressive and dominating nature of 'development' is intimately related to contemporary characteristics of Maasai ethnicity, including the characteristics of safeguarding identity, traditionalism, and resisting change. Inadvertently, therefore, the political economy, and more specifically, the 'politics of development' are indirectly related to women and girls' vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.

### Summary

In conclusion, Mullaly's structural view of society provides some important insights into conceptualizing women and girls' vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. It is useful to conceptualize the cultural/ideological values of the Kisongo Maasai community, which include traditionalism and conceptualizations of masculinity and femininity, as facets of a dominant ideology that ultimately determines and perpetuates the contemporary nature of social relations, reinforces customs, institutions and other structures, which accounts for the unequal distribution of social, sexual, economic, and political power in contemporary Kisongo Maasai communities. Although, women and girls' often illustrate incredible agency in negotiating power dynamics and contesting the consolidation of power by men,

they ultimately face a disproportionate vulnerability to HIV/AIDS because they are commonly disempowered by prejudicial attitudes about femininity, and impeded by customs, institutions, and general structural factors that reduce their capacity to influence their environment in a manner that facilitates access to the agency or resources necessary to reduce their vulnerability.

In addition, the somewhat ironical element of women and girls' vulnerability is 'development' itself, which includes corresponding issues of state expansion, market economy expansion, and other interventions. Unethical, and misguided 'development' has facilitated the consolidation of power and resources to Kisongo Maasai men for over a century. As well, the blatant disregard and/or ignorance of Kisongo Maasai culture that continues to characterize development has contributed to subverting historical social change mechanisms (i.e. traditional leadership structures), and entrenching the traditionalist ideology and need to safeguard identity that pervades contemporary communities. 'Development', for many Maasai, has become associated with cultural imperialism; it is a threat to the most cherished and necessary element that defines their existence: their cultural identity. Consequently, these associations relating to 'development' must be overcome and replaced before developing intercultural solidarity and facilitating social change will ever be plausible.

## **CHAPTER 6: MODEL OF ANTI-OPPRESSIVE DEVELOPMENT**

### 6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to compile the lessons learned in this study into a potential development model that offers a conceptual framework of key development principles that may guide development and facilitate intercultural solidarity. It compiles the findings and experiences that correspond to the challenges and considerations that this study faced in its implementation (see chapter 3.2), as well as the secondary literature identified in the preceding chapter (ch. 5.3).

As illustrated in Chapter 5.3, reducing the vulnerability of women and girls to HIV/AIDS necessitates not only a focus on the cultural elements illustrated throughout this section, but also necessitates a critical evaluation and transformation of development interventions. 'Development' in itself must ultimately be reoriented in order to redress the adverse impacts that it has historically instigated. The experience of this study suggests that genuine intercultural solidarity and subsequently, effective HIV prevention, will only occur if interventions reorient the paradigm and process of 'development' to an anti-oppressive approach.

As indicated in the preceding chapter, a focus on process issues and cultural competence has generally eluded 'development' initiatives with the Maasai throughout their history. According to secondary sources like Hodgson and Talle's work and the experience of this research, 'development', including more recent HIV prevention programming, has perpetuated marginalization and disregard for the Kisongo Maasai. In many cases development interventions have not only been ineffective, but, at times, oppressive. As Hodgson's and Talle's studies suggest, poor 'development' has

contributed to women and girls' vulnerability by undermining their historical status and power. In addition, as Verhelst and the experience of this research suggest, poor 'development' has also been a catalyst to entrenching traditionalism, and resistance, which sometimes has perpetuated values, customs and institutions that are prejudicial towards females. In effect, the dynamic relationship between 'development' and the construction and reproduction of Maasai ethnicity has contributed to the inequity that women and girls' currently face, while simultaneously entrenching the traditionalism that perpetuates the inequity – the paradox of 'Maasai development'.

## 6.2 Anti-Oppressive Development

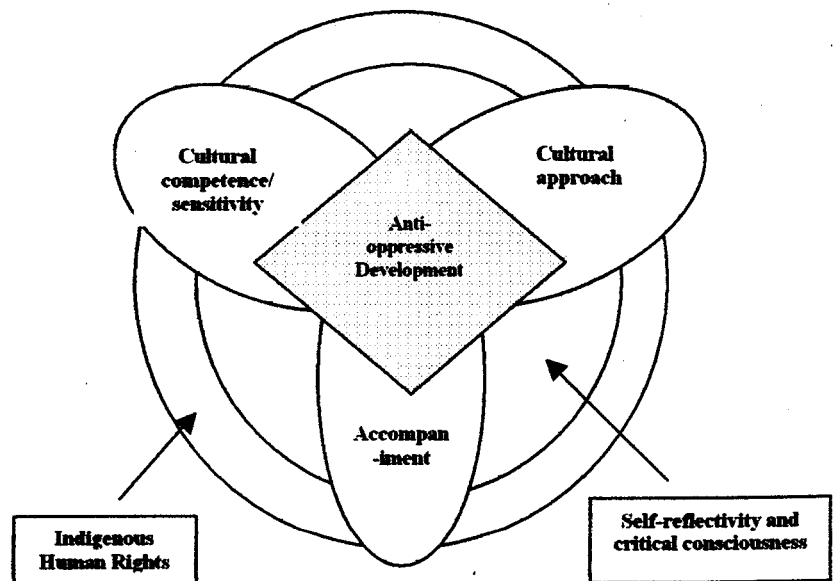
The experience of this research has highlighted several process related issues and development principles that are important to consider in engaging the Kisongo Maasai communities, as well as other diverse cultural groups and indigenous people. It was apparent in this study that 'development' has marginalized critical reflexivity and critical consciousness, implementing programs that do not effectively consider power dynamics and are characterized by Western assumptions and agendas. In addition, it was apparent that programs have not been characterized by cultural competence - often negligent of cultural realities and ignorant of cultural complexities. 'Development' has also tended to disregard the significance of cultural identity, ignored cultural assets, and subverted indigenous knowledge, structures, and practices. Lastly, genuine participation and dialogical relationships have generally alluded the development process, which has perpetuated processes that have been characterized by directing, imposing, or administering other intrinsically patronizing approaches. Corresponding to these

findings, this study has formulated the Anti-Oppressive Development Model for guiding the process of engaging diverse communities and facilitating genuine intercultural solidarity.

The concept of 'anti-oppressive development' is adopted from the term "anti-oppressive practice" used within Canadian social work. "Anti-oppressive practice" has been used to refer to a diversity of practices, but its general characteristics relate to a focus on empowerment and social transformation; egalitarian value systems; person-centered philosophy; identifying the relationship between personal issues and structural or political issues; structuring relationships between individuals that aims to empower; reducing, undermining and eliminating discrimination; as well as encouraging, supporting, and 'centering' the knowledge and perspectives of those who have been marginalized

(Dominelli, 1998; Thompson, 1993). As such, it represents a form of practice that ideally reflects and encompasses the elements outlined in this development model.

**Figure 7: Anti-Oppressive Development Model**



The Anti-Oppressive Development Model illustrates five recommended elements that can reorient development to a focus on process and subsequently, a more effective



means to designing and administering 'development', such as HIV/AIDS programming.

The following discussion will outline the characteristics of and importance of each element.

a. Cultural Competence/sensitivity

*"They tell us to stop this and stop that, but they must learn the culture"*

Cultural competence refers to several issues related to understanding and awareness of the cultural context in which 'development' is situated (Toseland & Rivas, 2001; Green, 1999). It necessitates that stakeholders aspire to the following characteristics:

- i. The ability to perceive others through their own cultural lens
- ii. Knowledge of specific beliefs and values in the community
- iii. Personal comfort with differences
- iv. A willingness to change previous ideas and stereotypes
- v. The ability to be flexible and adapt one's thinking and behavior in novel settings
- vi. The skill to sort through diverse information about a community to understand how it might apply to particular individuals

The importance of cultural competence was frequently identified throughout the research. As indicated in the research findings, for example, participants were very grateful for organizing group discussions in accordance with gender and age-class customs. In general, the experience within the field research was one of acceptance and support from research participants and community members. It was evident that a significant attribute

that facilitated the process was a competence and comfort with the diversity that pervades the Kisongo Maasai culture.

One example is in regards to female circumcision. The project adamantly opposed any association or affiliation with 'anti-FGM' propaganda or programs. The project was committed to portraying a capacity to understand the cultural significance of this tradition, portrayed comfort and acceptance of diversity, and rejected the ideas and stereotypes about the issue that have been propagated throughout international discourse. Although the research team faced some criticism for their stance, from foreign NGO development workers for example, this approach was quintessential to facilitating a dialogue among participants in which they could share their experiences and critically reflect. Such a dialogue, it may be argued, is critical to processes of consciousness-raising, empowerment, and potentially, change.

b. The Cultural Approach to Development

*"...and again, I am very thankful and we have never seen any seminar like this that listens to the voices of those people. This seminar is very good because we are the ones who decide what we want, it listens to us, and we wish that it continues this way. When it continues this way, we will have many things to share, we will continue to be free to share. Because, in other seminars, we are not given a chance to talk, and they don't know that we have very good ideas for ourselves."*

The cultural approach to development is another important element to anti-oppressive development. This approach goes beyond the cultural competence of stakeholders and identifies the importance of affirming cultural identity and recognizing the value of indigenous knowledge and cultures as foundations for alternatives (Verlhest, 1990, Wane, 2000). As previously illustrated, Thierry Verlhest has argued that development schema has historically failed because it has subverted cultural identity and

structures. Consequently, many indigenous groups have resorted to safeguarding their identity in the face of 'development' that has inadvertently, or at times intentionally, disregarded and undermined their identity and organization.

This study proposes that the general apprehension or resistance by the Kisongo Maasai community to foreign involvement that was reported or observed is a subsequent of their historical relations with misguided foreign 'development'. The general exclusion and spite for 'Swahili', the reluctance to use Swahili, their reported reluctance to engage dialogue about female circumcision, and other resistance efforts, all suggest a need to resist extrinsic pressures, and ultimately, safeguard identity. The experience of this study suggests that the community's history of relatively oppressive experiences with development initiatives is perpetually facilitating the ideological force of traditionalism, and ultimately, creating impediments to the process of critical reflection and change that has historically guided the evolution of the Kisongo Maasai community.

The value of the cultural approach, therefore, is two-fold. For one, a cultural approach that affirms, rather than disregards, cultural identity is more likely to facilitate critical reflection and evaluation, which, ultimately, may contribute to transforming structures and relationships that contribute to women and girls' vulnerability. According to the experience and findings of this research, the alternative is to perpetuate traditionalism and the tendency to safeguard identity despite the costs (i.e. women and girls' vulnerability).

The second value of the cultural approach is that it represents a reorientation to culturally diverse communities, such as the Kisongo Maasai. Contrary to historical orientations, which have been characterized by approaches and attitudes focused on the

deficiencies of Maasai culture, a cultural approach focuses on the assets of Maasai identity and culture, and is an impetus to explore existing cultural assets for alternative ways of managing change, or more specifically, reducing women and girls' vulnerability. In this sense, it is similar in focus to an asset-based approach to development (McKnight & Kretzmann, 1993). The premise of asset-based community development (ABCD) is the "people in communities can organize to drive the development process themselves by identifying and mobilizing existing (but often unrecognized) assets" (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003, p. 475). As one UNFPA document entitled, "Working from Within", stated, "social and cultural realities present challenges, and also opportunities, for advancing development goals and human rights" (UNFPA, 2004a).

In specific reference to the Kisongo Maasai, their traditional structures and cultural values relating to knowledge transmission, collective mobilization, as well as certain social control mechanisms represent potential assets that may contribute to reducing the vulnerability of women and girls to HIV/AIDS. In regards to the former, it was generally observed and reported that formal and informal transmission networks exist within the Kisongo Maasai community. Formally, the traditional leadership structure represents an essential knowledge transmission network that operates to disseminate information to broad geographical locations. On a more informal basis, knowledge is disseminated via the informal discussions and dialogue that pervade social groups. Women, men, boys, and girls are commonly part of informal or formal (i.e. the age-classes) discussions, which serve to facilitate critical reflection, and dissemination of knowledge. The collective discussions that occur between Ilmurran at the Esoto are a case in point. In fact, one of the concerns among participants in regards to eliminating

Esoto was that they would no longer have a location and gathering that consistently facilitated discussions that shared experiences and knowledge. Among women and girls, their daily collectivization surrounding domestic labor also represents an informal transmission network.

The informal collectivization exhibited among women, which is illustrated in the Analysis of Political Power section, is another asset. The collectivization among Kisongo Maasai women is an asset for several reasons. According to Mullaly, for example, collectivization, may serve therapy purposes by normalizing experiences, the pursuing dialogue facilitates consciousness-raising, and, as illustrated in this research, it facilitates political action (Mullaly, 1997). Consequently, the collectivization reported and observed in this research may serve a powerful means to advocating for change and protesting prejudicial institutions, structures, or treatment of women and girls.

Lastly, traditional social control mechanisms may also represent alternative modes of reducing women and girls' vulnerability. For one, the hierarchical organization that pervades social relations allots power and authority for members of the community to manage the behavior of those in inferior positions. The formally or informally recognized leaders within age-classes have the authoritative capacity to instruct and even control the behaviors of their peers. For example, as a result of the authority invested in traditional leaders, one traditional leader of the Ilmurran expressed confidence in himself and his assistants to reduce or even eliminate sexual exploitation of young girls. In addition, reportedly, this leader had instituted a policing strategy to reduce the sexual relationships between Ilmurran and 'Swahili' women, who are often barmaids that frequent the urban centers.

The traditional custom of 'cursing' may also represent an effective indigenous alternative to managing or facilitating behavior change. The implications of this custom exceed the parameters of this study. However, according to participants, the ritual curse that may be established by traditional leaders is an effective way to control and eliminated undesirable behavior within the community. As indicated elsewhere, in several cases, participants identified the administration of the ritual curse as an effective means to eliminate *engi'konya* and other sexual behavior that is facilitating HIV/AIDS vulnerability.

c. Accompaniment

*"we have never, we were never involved in meeting in seminars that give us freedom to share, to form strategies...something which is discussed is very good, especially when it is those affected who are the ones discussing it..."*

The element of "accompaniment" illustrated in the above model refers to the 'Accompanying the Process' model presented by Maureen Wilson and Elizabeth Whitmore in Seeds of Development: Social Development in an Era of Globalism. Within the accompaniment model, "the threads of traditional social work skills, feminist process and a structural analysis combine to form a powerful approach to international collaboration" (Wilson & Whitmore, 2000, p. 139). Respectively, this means a focus on the quality of relationships, which are characterized by good communication, empathy, respect, caring behavior, being non-judgmental, etc; it means a process characterized by mutuality, sharing, respect for each person's experience, the need to be in control of one's own process of understanding and development, and the linking of individual with collective action, the personal with the political; and lastly, it means examining individual

situations in the context of larger structural forces which shape people's lives (Wilson & Whitmore). As Wilson and Whitmore explain: "this model can help to make our Southern partners genuine architects of their own change processes, rather than passive recipients of development assistance" (p. 103). The following is a list of principles that characterize the accompaniment approach:

- i. Collaboration must be non-intrusive. The host must retain ownership both of what occurs and the process.
- ii. Mutual trust and genuine respect are basic to successful collaboration. These involve a basic attitude toward people and their ability to understand and deal with their own realities, however different this may be from one's own.
- iii. There needs to be a common analysis of what "the problem" is.
- iv. Northerners must understand that we also have a stake in what happens in other parts of the globe. This is what solidarity comes from: an understanding of our common destinies, our common purposes and our common humanity.
- v. "Accompaniment" implies mutuality and equality in the relationship.
- vi. An explicit focus on process in international development collaboration.

(Wilson & Whitmore, p. 115)

The intrinsic focus on process and relationships of the accompaniment approach directly relates to the frustrations exhibited by participants and community members in this research. The experience of this study suggests that the accompaniment approach offers the values and principles that facilitated the relative success of this study, and similarly, would redress the ineffective and/or oppressive development processes that have historically undermined the Kisongo Maasai community. As illustrated in the process

findings, members of the Kisongo Maasai community lament the historical relationships and processes that have been administered because they've lacked any genuine participatory nature and dialogical relationships. Consequently, as indicated by the traditional leaders, 'development' has, in fact, subverted their otherwise effective system of dialogue, participation, and collective problem-solving, which has historically compounded women and girls' vulnerability and facilitated ineffective programming.

Ultimately, the accompaniment approach will facilitate the principles and strategies that accommodate the Kisongo Maasai cultural principles and processes and furthermore, were frequently expressed and suggested by the research participants in this study. It will actualize a process similar to the analogy presented by the traditional leader:

Normally, when you see a lion come running to you and you do not have any weapon, what you can do, you need to make a lot of noise to call other people to help you, make a loud noise to call other people to help you. This AIDS is like a lion, which is running to us, and we don't have weapons, there is no cure, you can never go to the hospital and get treated, that is life, you don't have a weapon. But to make noises, it is to call people and to try to make solutions to our strategies on how to overcome that disease.

In particular regard to the above elements of cultural competence/sensitivity, cultural approach, and accompaniment, UNFPA's recent publications concerning HIV prevention efforts with culturally diverse communities is important to mention. The documents entitled, "Culture Matters" (2004b) and "Working from Within: Culturally Sensitive Approaches in UNFPA Programming" (2004a) highlight the importance of



mainstreaming culture and process into HIV/AIDS programming. Similar to this study, these publications illustrate the limitations of contemporary programs, which do not incorporate process elements similar to those described above, and the paramount importance of addressing cultural issues in reducing women and girls' vulnerability. The general premise of the documents directly corroborates with the findings of this study: "changing attitudes, behaviors and laws – especially those dealing with gender relations and reproductive health and rights – has proved to be a complex and often painstaking undertaking, demanding a great deal of sensitivity to social dynamics. It is a process that requires patience, a willingness to listen carefully and respect for cultural diversity" (UNFPA, 2004a).

d. **Critical Reflexivity and Consciousness**

The critical reflexivity and consciousness element of anti-oppressive development differs to some degree from the other elements, and is too often neglected in discourse and training in the international development field. This element differs from other more conventional elements of the development process because it involves a high level of personal responsibility for stakeholders, particularly foreign stakeholders, to maintain a personal, self-critical, reflexive, and introspective process throughout development collaborations. Whereas other more conventional elements of development focus on external factors, critical reflexivity and consciousness refers to a personal and internal process. It refers to the necessary responsibility to reflect critically on the influence of oneself on situations and relationships. As such, it is, in fact, one of the most crucial aspects of developing the relationships and processes outlined above.

As an aside note, we must revisit one of the above statements: "it involves a high level of personal responsibility for stakeholders, particularly foreign stakeholders". Unfortunately, the concept of 'foreign' has in most cases, only been applied in reference to the North/South or developed/undeveloped dichotomies. In other words, development stakeholders from Northern partners are most commonly considered foreign, while the foreignness intrinsic to the culturally diverse nature of Southern partner countries is ignored. It must be noted that the use of 'foreign' in the this discussion refers not only to Northern partners or stakeholders, but to any stakeholders involved in development who are foreign to the cultural context existing among local partners. In reference to this study, therefore, 'foreign stakeholders' refers not only to the Canadian principle investigator, but also to all those involved in the study who are not members of the Kisongo Maasai community, such as those representatives from World Vision Tanzania and some of the research assistants who are not Kisongo Maasai. The significance of this is illustrated below.

Jan Fook (1999) outlines three relevant principles or guidelines for developing personal critical reflexivity and consciousness. The fundamental principle is the ability to acknowledge and appreciate the influence of oneself in determining and changing a situation. Concomitantly, it involves the recognition of personally held, often hidden or unconscious assumptions, and their role in influencing a situation. In accordance with these principles, being self-reflective and developing a critical consciousness, "involves the ability to locate oneself in a situation through the recognition of how action and interpretations, social and cultural background and personal history, emotional aspects of experience, and personally held assumptions and values influence the situation" (Fook,

1999, p. 199). The third principle relates to the action generated by the above reflection process. It involves, "a sense of responsibility, of agency, an appreciation of how each player can act upon to influence a situation... Coupled with this is an ability to interweave analysis with action, to engage in a process of inductive and creative thinking..." (Fook, p. 200).

In general, critical reflexive practice involves the commitment and characteristics exlaimed by Paulo Freire in his famous book, Pedagogy of the Oppressed. One of the principles he espoused and argued was necessary in creating dialogue and solidarity is as follows: "those who authentically commit themselves to the people must re-examine themselves constantly" (1970, p. 60).

The importance of critical reflexivity in developing intercultural solidarity cannot be understated. 'Development' is often impeded by a lack of awareness and agency concerning the influence one's behaviors, emotional responses, and assumptions on the inter-relationships that are intrinsic to effective and ethical development. The importance of critical reflexivity was frequently recognized in the fieldwork experience corresponding to this study. In Tanzania, the Maasai have historically been portrayed as primitive, backwards, and ignorant (Hodgson, 2001). In fact, derogatory jokes and terms have flourished in reference to the Maasai. According to the observations of this research, many of the Tanzanian 'development workers' administering programs that involve the Maasai have internalized the patronistic and oppressive attitudes and behaviors that have pervaded Tanzania. As a result, on several occasions, Maasai community members and colleagues expressed resentment and were offended by the attitudes and behaviors that were, albeit unconsciously, displayed by non-Maasai

'development workers'. The underlying message was consistently that, whether conscious of it or not, 'development workers' often engaged Maasai individuals and communities with derogatory assumptions, beliefs and attitudes and subsequently, their behavior, often inadvertently, communicated disrespect or disregard for the members of the Maasai community.

One case in point regards a planning meeting corresponding to this study, which included the Canadian principle investigator, non-Maasai members of the host institution, non-Maasai members of the research team, and Kisongo Maasai research assistants. The nature of the meeting was to develop awareness of the Maasai culture and the implications for the research. It inevitably led to frequent consultations with the Kisongo Maasai representatives in order to understand and build awareness about their culture. Unfortunately, some explicit and many subtle behaviors, emotional reactions, and verbal responses from the non-Maasai participants were derogatory. According to later reports from the Maasai team members, the meeting unintentionally patronized the Maasai participants, undermined the partnership among stakeholders, and exacerbated pre-existing ethnic conflicts and barriers. The experience was a testament to the paramount importance of developing an awareness of the assumptions or beliefs one has internalized, and concurrently, being aware of the subsequent, and often unconscious behavior that influences situations and relationships. In this case, due to the historical and cultural context of non-Maasai Tanzanian participants, the critical reflexive process was especially important, as they had evidently internalized many of the negative stereotypes about the Maasai that have pervaded media and discourse in Tanzania.

**e. Indigenous Human Rights**

The final element of the Anti-oppressive development model is indigenous human rights. Although the previous four elements are relevant and applicable to development involving any culturally diverse community or group, indigenous human rights is an element specific to the Kisongo Maasai or other indigenous groups. The value of imbedding the development process in the concept of indigenous human rights is two-fold. For one, it links efforts with a growing international indigenous rights movements, and demands with international networks and institutions that are engaged in ensuring and strengthening the rights of indigenous peoples. Hodgson (2002) argues that,

for Maasai, and other groups, 'becoming indigenous' is one of the only politically viable strategies currently available in a time of radical dislocation. By reframing their long-standing grievances and demands against their states in the terms of the indigenous rights movement, they have gained greater visibility, increased legitimacy, and enormous resources" (p. 1094).

Besides the evident utility of framing development with the Maasai within the indigenous human rights framework, the value also relates to process and approach. It facilitates anti-oppressive development by reorienting development from a needs-based approach or paradigm to a rights-based approach. The needs-based approach dominates the international arena, and is characterized by notions of charity, meeting needs, and tends to define issues in micro or individual-related manners. Whereas, the rights-based approach represents an important paradigm shift towards actualizing rights and entitlements, empowerment, participation, and focuses on the structural roots of social problems (Pearson, 2002, p. 2).

More specifically, a rights-based approach to development is a conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights; it involves an express linkage to conventions and declarations established by the United Nations, or other international bodies (UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2004). In specific reference to the Kisongo Maasai community one of the most relevant human rights conventions is the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples that was drafted in 1994 and expected to be passed this year. This declaration outlines many important human rights specific to indigenous human rights, such as the right to self-determination, to freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development, the right to be free from any discrimination based on their indigenous origins, and the right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, economic, social, and cultural characteristics (UNHCR, 1994). Additionally, it affirms that "indigenous peoples are equal in dignity and rights to all other peoples, while recognizing the right of all peoples to be different, to consider themselves different, and to be respected as such" (UNHCR, 1994). Furthermore, it recognizes that, "respect for indigenous knowledge, cultures and traditional practices contributes to sustainable and equitable development and proper management of the environment" (UNHCR, 1994).

### Summary

As the previous discussions have indicated, integrating anti-oppressive practice into 'development' is essential. Elements, such as cultural competence, the cultural approach, accompaniment approach, self-reflectivity, and indigenous rights, are all

characteristics of a 'development' process that may effectively facilitate intercultural solidarity. While working in culturally diverse environments, such as the Kisongo Maasai's, these elements may redress the negative features that have become associated with 'development' among indigenous groups. In so doing, relationships may be reconciled and the mutual process of 'development' may ensue. It is a necessary transformation that may reduce the adverse impacts that 'development' has historically produced, and subsequently, 'development' will less likely be a factor in compounding women and girls' vulnerability and most importantly, become an effective contribution to social change, empowering women and girls, and abating the HIV epidemic.

### **SECTION III**



## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of Section III is to begin exploring strategies or interventions that may reduce women and girls' vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. In accordance with the specific objectives of this study, Chapter 7 presents the insights or suggestions that were identified by the research participants. Chapter 8 integrates the participants' insights, and integrates the other research findings from previous sections into a prevention model. It offers a conceptual framework for developing HIV prevention programs. It's an example of a program model that mainstreams gender, culture, and process, which are key issues that underlie the research findings presented throughout this dissertation.

The chapter discusses some specific recommendations. However, the purpose of Chapter 8 is not to outline specific content of programs. The development of specific program content is beyond the parameters of this research, and ultimately, these aspects of programs need to be developed in collaboration with community members. Nonetheless, the discussion illustrates the general facets of a prevention program that the findings of this study have identified as essential to administering effective programs that reduce women and girls' vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.

## **CHAPTER 7: PROPOSED INTERVENTIONS FROM PARTICIPANTS**

The last objective within the second round of focus group discussions was to provide a forum for the research participants to discuss interventions that would reduce the vulnerability of women and girls to HIV/AIDS. This was also an objective in the key informant interviews. The following section outlines the interventions proposed by the research participants. In most cases, this section is not accompanied with quotations. As a result of time impediments, the audio taped forum on interventions within the second round of focus groups was, with some exceptions, not translated and transcribed similar to other sections of the focus group discussions. Instead, translators summarized the points made by participants, and the summaries were transcribed. The following list represents a compilation of the summaries, as well as some of the relevant comments provided by key informants and the children's groups.

The following section does not assess the plausibility or effectiveness of the interventions presented by the research participants. It solely serves to present the participants' propositions. Assessing the plausibility or effectiveness of any of the presented strategies or interventions will necessitate further research characterized by intensive and genuine involvement of all relevant stakeholders – males, females, boys, and girls, in order to understand the plethora of barriers and complexities that are involved with implementing any of these interventions in the context of Maasai tradition and culture.

The section regarding condom use differs from the other parts. In fact, condoms were not an intervention that participants identified, which is reflective of the lack of awareness about condoms that was evident throughout all of the focus group discussions.

Nonetheless, without exception, when the concept of a condom was explained and the facilitator raised this as a potential intervention, participants agreed that it is an important intervention. Due to the relevance of this topic, the condom part of this section will provide a more in-depth portrayal of participants' comments and attitudes. This part will not exclusively illustrate discussions during the forum on intervention in round two. Many of the quotations that are presented are representative of the discussions that occurred in the first round of focus group discussions.

The last section, the role of traditional leaders, also differs. Unlike other sections, this section does not relate to content of interventions, but relates to process. It illustrates participants' sentiments in regards to the importance of incorporating traditional leaders as crucial components of any intervention process.

#### I. Interventions related to girls' vulnerability associated with the Esoto

Participants presented four interventions or strategies to mitigate and eliminate the impacts of Esoto on young girls as a result of the sexual vulnerability fostered by the activities within Esoto:

- i. Provide girls an alternative residence through building huts designated as a girls' residence.

This initiative was particularly highlighted within the women's focus group discussions. The implicit concern relates to traditional customs that prohibits girls from residing overnight in the same household as their father or their father's visiting age-mates (Field Notes). One key informant explained this phenomenon as follows, "this is the culture, the culture of Maasai, because sometimes at the boma, there are some

strangers, so if the strangers come to my house, and always the children have got no right [meaning no right to remain in their house], they have got no specific house to sleep...they are told 'go', 'go find somewhere'" (Key Informant: Primary School Teacher). As a result, participants argued that this custom facilitated and encouraged girls' residence at the Esoto.

Therefore, on several occasions throughout the research, and specifically during the forum on interventions, participants argued that building a hut that is exclusively designated for girls' residency would provide girls an alternative residence to the Esoto, and therefore reduce their residency at the Esoto and subsequent vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.

As a side note, it is important to highlight that women participants made it very clear that in regards to the above intervention, and in regards to other strategies related to changing girls' behaviors, that it is women who have the capacity to facilitate change. They argued that men, or more specifically husbands, do not engage with children and are not responsible for caring for children. Therefore, women should be engaged to facilitate these types of strategies. The following quote illustrates one participant's insights regarding women's agency in Esoto and the aforementioned intervention:

Women are the ones who are in control of Esoto. Women are the ones who decorate them with jewelry and allow them to go. Fathers are not the ones supporting it. Women are the ones to be taught how to rescue these children. To build a hut special for their children. And if an outside Olmurran comes and wants

to hunt<sup>1</sup>, he must be jailed. So, women are the ones to be taught, not men.

(FGD/F18-25)

- ii. Eliminating or reducing the sexual phenomena associated with Esoto:  
changing the behavior of the Ilmurran

Specifically in the male focus group discussions, participants discussed the importance of changing the behavior of the Ilmurran. The objectives implicit or explicit within the discussions included a total elimination of sexual relationships within the Esoto, or alternatively, a reduction of sexual relationships with a specific focus on eliminating eng'ikonya.

There were two approaches presented by the participants: a coercive approach and an educational approach. The educational approach refers to participants' suggestions to educate the Ilmurran regarding the fundamental purposes and importance of Esoto<sup>2</sup>, their vulnerability and their agency and contribution to the vulnerability of girls to HIV/AIDS. According to some participants' perceptions, providing adequate education to the Ilmurran would effectively serve to transform their sexual behaviors at the Esoto.

A more coercive approach recommended by participants involves the traditional leaders in the creation of behavioral regulations that function to prohibit behaviors identified as contributing to the vulnerability of girls. According to participants, this approach represents the traditional manner of regulating behavior. They further argued that historically this approach has effectively functioned to dramatically change behavior

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<sup>1</sup> 'Wants to hunt' refers to seeking a girl to engage in sex with (Field Notes).

<sup>2</sup> SEE the discussion about Esoto in the Tradition and Culture section to understand the relevance of this education: mainly that sex is not the traditional purpose of Esoto, but is merely a secondary and non-essential phenomenon that has developed.

in the Maasai community<sup>3</sup>. It includes a ritual performed by traditional leaders, the Alaigwanani, which establishes a curse on anyone that performs the concerned action or behavior. In this way, the traditional laws that dictate behavior with age-sets evolve in order to address issues that arise within the community. One traditional leader explained this intervention as follows: "in the Maasai land we have something that curses do work out, there is a kind of pot, they break it, they just say, anyone if you are a Maasai or anyone if you do this, you will die and they break it, the old men come and they bless it" (Key Informant: Alegwanani/Oresuki). Another traditional leader explained that, "from the very beginning, the Maasai were stopping things that seems to be threatening lives in terms of curses, they make a lot of noise and say we have to stop this, this and this need to be cut down more, this and this are not fit and if anyone goes against that then you will die, and that is something which has been used by the Maasai and it has worked out" (Key Informant: Alegwanani/Korianga). In specific reference to the Esoto, the traditional leader recommended the following intervention to reduce the vulnerability created by visiting Ilmurran: "if the girls are at a very big risk, so what we do, is we say, all visitors if you know that you want to have sex, all those that are from town, you will not be allowed to come to Esoto and have sex with these young girls and then you make it as a curse and then you will see its effect" (Key Informant: Alegwanani/Korianga).

iii. Completely terminate Esoto

This intervention was raised on one occasion within the male focus group discussions and periodically within the female discussion groups. As illustrated elsewhere, this strategy has been historically propagated by NGOs, such as World Vision Tanzania,

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<sup>3</sup> See the reflection box that illustrates the domestic water source anecdote in the Tradition and Culture section within the discussion on traditional leaders and their power.

primary school institutions, and government programs. In one case, one male participant reported that his boma had terminated Esoto. He stated that, "we don't have Esoto these days at my place... we just broke it" (FGD/M14-17). In response to the facilitators question about how they gather, where they meet for meals, and discussions, the participant stated, "we meet and have meals, we dance, and then we disperse" (FGD/M14-17). According to his experience, Esoto is not an essential institution, and he assessed this intervention in the following manner: "it is a very good thing" (FGD/M14-17). This notion was also illustrated in the women's focus group discussions.

Most of the male participants, and many female participants, rejected this intervention. For example, in the 14-17 focus group discussion when one participant proposed terminating the Esoto, other participants immediately expressed their disagreement. One participant argued that it should not be terminated because, "Esoto isn't the cause of AIDS. It existed far before AIDS ever existed" (FGD/M14-17).

## II. Economic empowerment of women

Participants did not discuss specific economic strategies, but economic empowerment was nonetheless identified in both female focus group discussions. As was evident in the focus group discussions, participants commonly identified that women's lack of access to economic resources fostered their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. The current proposal is a reaction to this vulnerability. One participant exclaimed, "Decrease poverty. If poverty will be decreased, women will not be at risk of HIV/AIDS" (FGD/F18-25).

III. Reducing women's vulnerability in relation to age-mate visitation: building huts to accommodate visitors

This intervention was proposed to reduce women's vulnerability in relation to age-mate visitation. Similar to the case of eliminating Esoto, this intervention has commonly characterized government and NGO interventions. As illustrated elsewhere, the fear of curses and hospitality expectations undermine women's sexual efficacy and place them at risk of being infected by HIV through their sexual obligations to visiting age-mates. Consequently, participants proposed to build huts that are designated for visitors. Women explained that they could provide all of the necessary hospitality obligations, such as preparing a bed, cooking, cleaning, and other domestic duties, for the visitor, but would not face sexual conflict if the visitor was not accommodated in their household. According to the participants, the demands for sex only arise during the night and therefore, women would be freed from this obligation if the visitor was not residing overnight in her household; women would be able to avoid the obligations otherwise imposed on them during the night.

IV. Education

Participants commonly highlighted the importance of educational programming in order to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS so that, "a person will be able to make informed choices about their behaviors" (FGD/M18-25). In a children's focus group, their response to the question, "how can we prevent or control the spread of HIV/AIDS on our Maasai community?" the children asserted that it is, "through the provision of education on HIV/AIDS" (Children's FGD/Mairowa). A Maasai primary school teacher also



stressed the need for education: "The community needs to be educated, when they get this education about AIDS, they accept it" (Key Informant: Primary School Teacher).

Despite the apparent awareness illustrated in the focus groups, it was commonly asserted that many Maasai have little awareness of the disease and that this impedes their capacity to change their behavior. Participants universally illustrated optimism that if people were educated, they would make healthier decisions: "we don't want to die, so we want a person to tell us how to prevent this disease" (FGD/M18-25). The following quote illustrates the lack of education that continues to pervade the Maasai community, and the attitude of a traditional leader towards education:

You don't have to despair. When you explain this to the Maasai community, that this thing has not alternative, you don't do this and you do this right, they will accept it fully, but the biggest problem among the Maasai right now is the question of AIDS, it is just a myth, nobody has ever come fully and explained fully in details, how it looks like, the way it affects people, how dangerous it is, it has never ever been preached to the Maasai. So the way they take it, they take it as a myth, some of them take it like maybe its not even true, so there is a big problem of information to the Maasai, nobody has ever heard about it, but if the news were spread and this disease was preached about, and tell exactly what AIDS is, tell the way it effects, tell the way it is dangerous, it will not go without an effect. (Key Informant: Alegwanani/Oresuki)

In relation to specific strategies to educate the community, participants frequently recommended the traditional leader network to facilitate the education process. They suggested a process of mobilizing traditional leaders, providing them education on HIV/AIDS, and building their capacity to educate their assistants, who subsequently, can

provide education to their communities. A traditional leader explained, "when anybody belongs to an age-set or even when a certain age grows up they know that there is this traditional leader and he is recognized and whenever they call a meeting, if it is a public traditional meeting, they are the ones to communicate and pass the message on" (Key Informant: Alegwanani/Oresuki).

## V. Condoms

As indicated in the introduction to this section, during the forum on interventions, participants did not identify condoms as an intervention, but after the facilitator raised it as a possible intervention, participants universally supported and recommended this as an important intervention. The following discussion will outline relevant themes within the discussions surrounding condoms that occurred during the first round and second round of focus group discussions. The discussion will focus on the male condom. Reportedly, it is the only condom that is available in the community. In no cases when asked by the facilitator did participants illustrate awareness of the female condom.

One of the greatest disappointments this study uncovered is that, after twelve years or more of HIV prevention programming that has existed in the community<sup>4</sup>, participants illustrated minimal, sometimes negligible awareness of condoms and in no cases, did any participants report the use of condoms in the community. In most cases when the facilitator asked participants if they knew what a condom was the response was commonly that many did not know what it was. In every group, however, there was at

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<sup>4</sup> The illustrated time period (i.e. 12 years) is in reference to an HIV/AIDS prevention project, funded by World Vision Canada, that, according to their records, World Vision Tanzania administered in the Longido community over a five year period beginning in 1992 (Field Notes). In more recent years, the Longido Area Development Program representatives have been responsible to administer HIV prevention programs in the community. The ADP is also funded by World Vision Canada.

least one participant that knew what a condom was and could explain its basic purpose: "it is a kind of plastic that men wear when they have sex" (FGD/F18-25).

According to participants, the use of condoms in their community was not common. In every case when the facilitator inquired about use of condoms, participants reported that they have never used condoms. When the facilitator asked one women's group if condoms were ever used, one participant responded, "No. We have just seen the rubbers but we've never seen people put them on. We just saw them on the streets<sup>5</sup>". In the interview with the traditional leader of the Ilmurran age-set, he argued that although the Ilmurran may be aware of the purpose of condom, they have never used them: "they think it protects the spread of HIV/AIDS and its transmission. They are aware of condoms, but have not put to test their use" (Key Informant: Alegwanani/Korianga). One participant exclaimed the following in reference to their knowledge and use of condoms: "I've heard many people talking about this thing called condom. And we hate that thing very much. We hate it because we don't know how to use it" (FGD/M18-25). This quote is indicative of the general attitude prevalent among research participants: frustrated with their lack of access to and knowledge of a technology that claims to prevent transmission of HIV/AIDS (Field Notes).

For the most part, participants were supportive about the concept of a condom and illustrated willingness, and even eagerness, to use it in their sexual relationships: "there would be no problem provided that we are told how to use it, it does not harm anyone, meaning that if it is put on it doesn't bring any effect to either person, and again, if it is something for prevention, who should avoid using it?" (FGD/F18-25). In response to a question regarding willingness to use a condom, one female participant asserted, "Yes!

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<sup>5</sup> The participant is referring to her experience of seeing a condom lying on the street (Field Notes).

Because who likes to die? The AIDS is coming and there is nowhere to run" (FGD/F14-17). Another female participant similarly exclaimed the following quote to illustrate her interest in using a condom, "Life is not something to play with" (FGD/F18-25).

Male participants echoed the same attitudes that were apparent in the women's group. However, unlike female participants, male participants were very clear to articulate their support only in reference to their extramarital relationships. In regards to their sexual relationships with their wives, they rejected the use of condoms because it inhibited reproduction and therefore, the development of their household: "I also would like when my outside partner asked [to use a condom], but for my wife it is impossible because I will not make a boma" (FGD/M14-17). Another participant similarly explained, "If it is my outside partner, I would support her because I might have, or she might have diseases. So, it is good, because if I am the one who has it, then I won't transmit it to her, and if she has it, she won't transmit it to me. But, with a wife, it is difficult" (FGD/M18-25). One participant indicated that he would punish a wife if she requests him to wear a condom, but would accept it in extramarital relationships: "If my wife tell me to wear a condom while having sex, I will beat her, but with my outside partner I will agree" (FGD/M18-25)

Female participants echoed this complication and a concern that their husband's may not accept the use of a condom: "it is hard when the husband is not in agreement" (FGD/F18-25). Nonetheless, they commonly illustrated a desire for their husband to use a condom. In response to a question about the use of condoms with a husband, one

participant explained, "why not? If this is our life, why not?"<sup>6</sup> Will the husband agree that we should leave our children as orphans? He must agree" (FGD/F18-25).

For the most part, participants expressed accepting attitudes in regards to introducing condoms into their sexual relationships, specifically their extramarital sexual relationships. In one male group, participants almost unanimously argued that a girlfriend is doing the right thing by refusing to have sex without a condom: "she's right", participants argued (FGD/M18-25). In addition, in cases where the facilitator presented hypothetical situations, participants' responses indicated that introducing condoms into these relationships is plausible. In responding to the notion of asking partners to use condoms, one female participant optimistically stated, "it's easy because you know, men are the ones who come to us. We just tell them that I love you but if you don't have a condom then that's all. And because he loves me also, he will go and he will bring it back because he must come back. So we all come to one line"<sup>7</sup> (FGD/F18-25).

Likewise, a male participant stated that when his partner refuses to have sex without a condom, "I will go, and find a condom, and come back because I don't have much authority with my outside partners because it might be somebody's wife" (FGD/M18-25).

Despite the commonly asserted support and positive attitudes towards condoms illustrated above, there were some cases in the male focus group discussions that participants portrayed non-supportive attitudes, and an unwillingness to use condoms. For example, in two cases, participants indicated that if their partners request them to use condoms, they would no longer engage in sexual relationships with that person – they would reject the woman and their relationship: "I will quit having sex with her"

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<sup>6</sup> This rhetorical question is implicitly stating that if the consequence of not using a condom is death, then surely, their husband will permit a condom (Field Notes)

<sup>7</sup> 'Coming to one line' means being in agreement or both parties having the same idea (Field Notes).

(FGD/M18-25). In other cases, participants portrayed reluctance or unwillingness to use condoms. Their reasons relate to two different phenomena: a fatalistic belief relating to God has their sole protection, and a misconception concerning ability to identify HIV positive individuals. Regarding the former phenomenon, in two cases, participants rejected the use of condoms because they believe they were unnecessary, as God will protect them from HIV/AIDS. For example, one participant argued that, "I still don't need a condom, God is the only one who will help me" (FGD/M14-17). Another participant articulated the same notion: "I also don't like it because God will prevent me from getting these diseases" (FGD/M14-17). Participant that stated the earlier quote illustrated fatalism in his following assertion: "you know what, I go, I have sex with a woman, whether she has disease or does not have, God knows that, and He will protect me from that. So, because of this, I won't stop, I'll be praying while I do it. And if I got it, okay fine, I accept it" (FGD/M14-17).

It was evident on several occasions in the discussion group that participants believed they could visually identify HIV positive individuals. For some participants, this misconception undermined the necessity of condoms because they argued that they will avoid having sex with sick people rather than being concerned about condoms: "I don't need it, because I can tell if someone is sick" (FGD/M14-17). The same misconception is illustrated in the following rhetorical question one participant stated, "I don't need because what should I do with a person who is sick?"

As a last note, a few participants illustrated barriers to condom use. One barrier regards a common myth that pervades Tanzania: a belief that some condoms are actually infected with HIV and therefore present a significant risk to condom users. Although not

presented in the discussions, other myths of similar nature also commonly exist throughout Tanzania. Understandably, these myths represent a significant barrier to condom use. In this study, the only myth presented is the formerly illustrated one concerning a belief in the myth concerning infected condoms. For example, during a discussion about condoms, one male participant expressed concern over the risks involved in using condoms due to the likelihood of them transmitting HIV/AIDS to the condom wearer. He asked the facilitator the following question: "How can you tell if that condom has that disease?" (FGD/M18-25).

Another barrier that was identified in the research was accessibility and affordability. In terms of accessibility, as many Maasai communities are rural and because the use of condoms is so low, there are often very few shops that sell condoms. In Mairowa, for example, all of the shops visited by the principle investigator did not sell condoms<sup>8</sup>. In addition to accessibility factors, affordability is also a barrier. The traditional leader of the Korianga age-set expressed particular concern about this barrier. In discussions with him, he expressed eagerness to provide leadership in facilitating the use of condoms by Ilmurran in his community. However, he was pessimistic about the plausibility of the intervention because condoms are not affordable: "the obstacle will be to buy them since they cannot afford them" (Key Informant: Alegwanani/Korianga)

## VI. The role of traditional leaders

One of the most common comments made during discussions about interventions was in regards to the importance of collaborating with traditional leaders. In most cases,

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<sup>8</sup>There was no formal inquiry made by the principle investigator, and one should not deduce from this experience that none of the shops in the community carry condoms. It is possible that some of the other shops, that were not visited, sold condoms.

participants argued that they were crucial to the process of administering any intervention. Their importance, degree of influence, and structure is illustrated in the Tradition and Culture section.

In general, participants argued that as a result of their status, people are more likely to listen and adopt the insights or recommendations of these leaders, and in addition, the structure of leaders and assistants represents an effective information network that covers broad geographical distances. One traditional leader explained that, "the best thing or strategy is to call these assistants, all of these assistants and tell them about AIDS" (Key Informant: Traditional Leader/Korianga). He argued that to call everyone together in a public manner, "is not possible, there is no way you can get them and have talks except through their leaders and if you can meet a few people who are representatives [referring to the leaders and assistants] in order to help, it is better, it's the easiest way we can make strategies, and form the implementation" (Key Informant: Traditional Leader/Korianga).

### Summary

In general, discussions concerning interventions presented insights surrounding the provision of technical assistance, insights in regards to cultural adaptation, as well as suggestions about 'process issues'. Concerning technical assistance, participants proposed that educational initiatives remain a paramount priority. In addition, discussions with participants overwhelmingly identified that providing information about, and affordable access to condoms is also an essential element of technical assistance. In addition to information, education and commodities (i.e. condoms), participants also proposed that particular customs and institutions needed to be adapted, modified, or

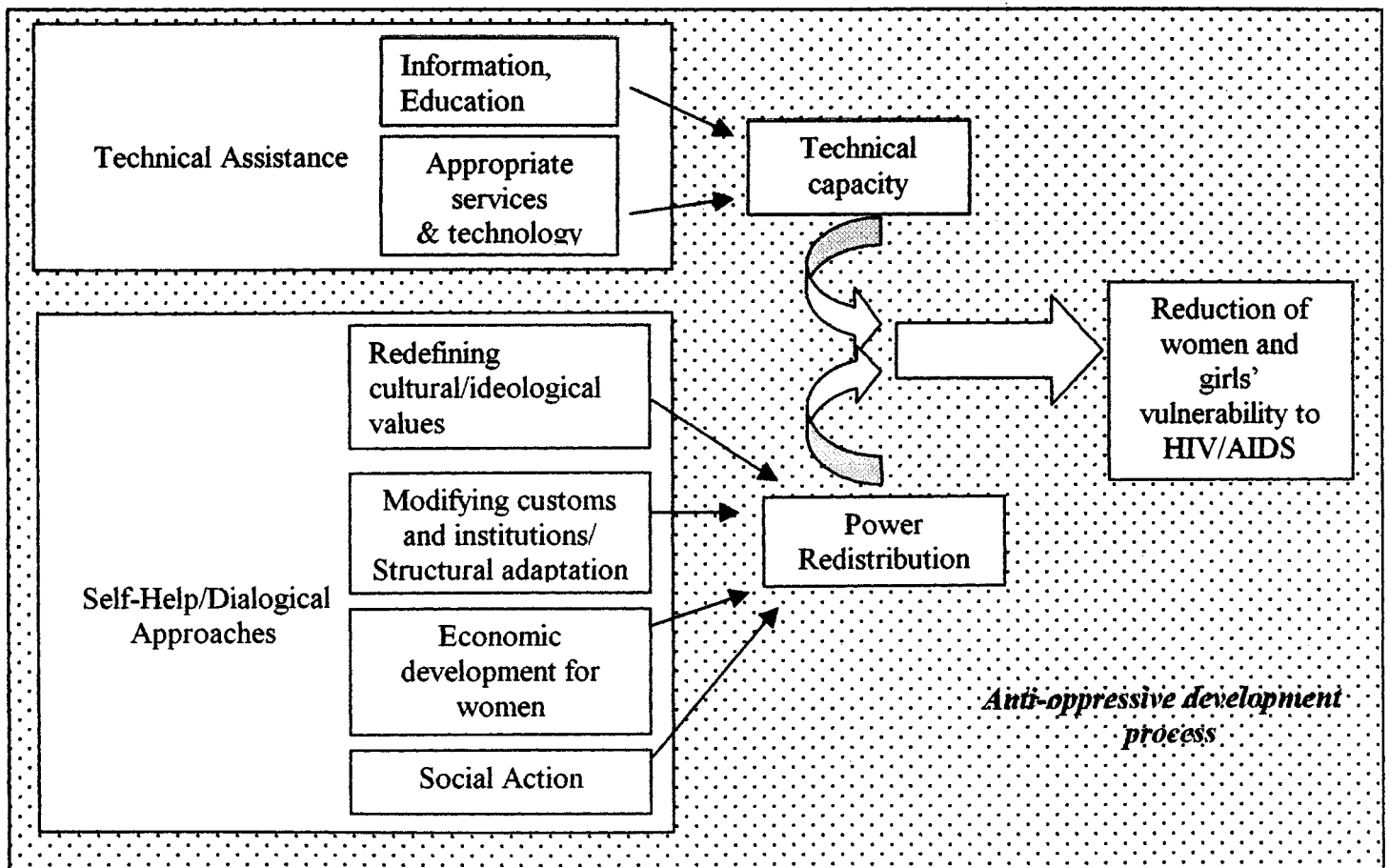


eradicated completely. Specifically, girls' vulnerability related to the sexual activities at the Esoto institution were of particular concern to participants. Lastly, in relation to process, participants consistently remarked on the importance of engaging and collaborating with traditional leaders. Participants universally claimed that this was integral to administering an effective intervention.

## CHAPTER 8: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR HIV PREVENTION

The following Prevention Program Model in Figure 8 outlines a comprehensive program strategy and model. It integrates the findings and implications generated by this study, with a focus on not only the content of programs, but also integrating process characteristics.

**Figure 8: Program Model**



The value of this model is threefold. For one, it integrates the dual nature of women and girls' vulnerability. Its elements address individual vulnerability as well as

societal vulnerability. It addresses cognitive issues in providing information and education. It addresses attitudinal issues in facilitating critical dialogue and consciousness-raising in relation to the cultural/ideological forces of traditionalism and the culturally and historically produced conceptions or ideals of femininity and masculinity. In addition, it focuses on societal vulnerability by facilitating structural adaptation, providing economic opportunity, and cooperating with social action initiatives. As the model proposes, addressing these issues will contribute to changing prejudicial customs and institutions, and reducing the structural inequalities that contribute to women and girls' unequal access to social, sexual, economic, and political power, which are integral to expanding their access to the instrumental factors that may reduce their vulnerability.

The second value of this model is that it mainstreams the consideration and integration of culture into HIV/AIDS programming. Culture, and more specifically, the cultural/ideological values, customs, and institutions identified in this research, represent the foundation of women and girls' vulnerability as well as the key barriers to reduction. Hence, redefining cultural/ideological values and modifying customs and institutions is quintessential to redressing cultural factor and facilitating structural adaptation.

Lastly, one of the most important elements of this program model is its integration and mainstreaming of process. As illustrated in the model, the entire program is embedded in the anti-oppressive development approach proposed by this research. It represents the importance of incorporating the elements of cultural competence and sensitivity, a cultural approach to development, an accompaniment approach, critically reflexive practice, and indigenous human rights into HIV/AIDS programming. As

illustrated previously, effective programs, of any type, must consider these elements in order to create effective programs, mobilize the community, and establish genuine participation and collaboration.

In addition to the general process issues intrinsic to the Anti-oppressive development approach, the model goes a step further by identifying two key approaches to community development. The model indicates the complementary relationships between technical assistance and more self-help and dialogical approaches to community development. It represents an attempt to further integrate and mainstream aspects of process into program development and implementation. The purpose of illustrating and distinguishing these two approaches relates to one of the limitations of contemporary programs illustrated in the implications for practice section (See Chapter 9). As indicated in that section, programs predominantly rely on technical assistance type approaches that provide information, knowledge and/or skills. However, this study suggests that although this type of intervention may be an important component of any prevention program, it will not sufficiently address the issues of culture and traditionalism, which underpins and reinforces the social relations and organization of the Kisongo Maasai community. Therefore, the above model seeks to identify the importance of self-help orientated approaches that brings individuals together in order to facilitate dialogue and raise consciousness. As indicated in the implications for practice section, facilitating dialogue and raising consciousness is the first step in creating environments where the underlying issues of culture may be redressed. This model, in fact, proposes that redressing the issues relating to culture through a self-help and dialogical process is the only effective

strategy to redistribute power, which is integral to reducing women and girls' individual and societal vulnerability.

Consequently, as illustrated in the model although technical assistance is important, the technical capacity that it produces will not substantially affect power relations. Without affecting power relations, without empowering women and girls, which is in effect a redistribution of power between males and females, HIV prevention programs will continue to be ineffective. They will continue building technical capacity while having little affect on the fundamental issue facilitating disease transmission: cultural/ideological values, customs and institutions, social structure, and women and girls' subsequent unequal power.

With the exception of the anti-oppressive development component, which has been discussed at length elsewhere, the following discussion will briefly discuss the other components of this model. As previously mentioned, the parameters of this document will not permit an extensive discussion on specific content or strategies of HIV programming. For interested practitioners, the data and discussions illustrated throughout this document should provide sufficient material and insights to developing the specifics of an HIV/AIDS program.

a. Technical Assistance

Technical assistance characterizes most of contemporary HIV/AIDS programs. It refers to programs that seek to provide information, education, technology and/or services that may contribute to reducing women and girls' vulnerability. These programs are often not focused on building capacity or facilitating the genuine empowerment of

participants, but instead, are focused on providing the necessary technical assistance in order to address the problem (Green & Haines, 2002). In most cases, community workers act as consultants that identify and administer the relevant assistance.

The following three parts illustrate some important elements of technical assistance:

i. HIV/AIDS information/education

One of the first components of any prevention is, of course, is to provide information in regards to HIV/AIDS. As indicated in the findings, although many of the research participants had a basic awareness of HIV/AIDS and its key mode of transmission, sexual intercourse, participants were adamant that awareness is low and that education was important to further understand risk and make informed choices. Furthermore, in many cases, myths and misconception persist in the community. For example, the disease remains a phenomenon associated with other locations, such as cities or towns. Participants indicated that they believed they could visibly identify an individual infected with HIV/AIDS. This study suggests that because the community has not readily identified infected individuals, participants seemingly continue to deny its existence in the Kisongo Maasai community. In any case, the findings of the research indicated that enhancing the community's cognitive capacity to understand the disease, its modes of transmission, prevention strategies (including condoms), understand its relation to sexuality, and understand the potentially devastating affects it can have on their community is an important component of prevention interventions.

There may be several different means to providing education. For one, the public school institution may be the most efficient way to educate young children. One key

informant teacher indicated that teachers were eager to incorporate HIV/AIDS education into their curriculum, but were awaiting training on how to educate children about HIV/AIDS. Therefore, one practical intervention may be to train the local teachers to administer HIV education in the schools.

However, there are several limitations to school administered HIV education. For one, the environments within the schools observed in this study are not conducive to participation and dialogue, which may impede that actual cognitive development of participants. In this sense, a more effective way of providing education may be to form health groups that are administered in a peer education format and are facilitated or supervised by individuals that are not a part of the school system, such as local women and men or NGO representatives. Perhaps, members of the parent committee may be relevant.

One possible strategy in regards to the school institutions may be to train teachers to provide information and education in accordance with national policy and strategies. However, to supplement this intervention, discussion groups could be facilitated outside the classroom context that offer more opportunity for children to ask questions and discuss the issues generated by the information and education.

The second limitation is that many members of the community do not have access to the public school system. Adolescents and adults who are beyond school-going age must be educated in formats other than school programs. Similarly, and most importantly, young non-school going girls, who are also more likely to be involved in the Esoto institution, must also be engaged in education programs. Educating the non-school going population will be more challenging, and may consist of community workshops

and small group discussions. One of the key issues to recall is the cultural competence component of the anti-oppressive development model, and the importance of organizing groups in accordance to Maasai age-set and age-grades.

The traditional leadership structure may be an important and practical means to informally and/or formally providing education to non-school going members of the community. These structures may be effective due to the authority associated with them, the geographical expanse they cover, and the peer-peer nature of the information transmission. A very important limitation to these structures, however, is that women and girls are marginalized for the most part from this transmission network. Therefore, a parallel focus and strategy with locally identified women and girls is important.

On a separate note, a cultural approach and taking advantage of the community's assets is important to consider. For example, targeting the Esoto institution as an important means to facilitate the transmission of information may be effective. It involves the participation of pre-organized social groups and customarily fosters dialogue between participants. Posting educational propaganda and facilitating peer-led discussions with Esoto participants may contribute to building awareness and facilitating consciousness-raising.

- ii. Evidence-based information regarding the epidemic and its potential impacts.

In addition to providing information on HIV/AIDS, education must also focus more broadly on raising awareness about the imminent effects the epidemic may have on the community. This element of prevention will not only contribute to facilitating an awareness of risk for individual participants, which may contribute to behavior change,



but is also integral to gaining support and mobilizing the community into collective action. A study with a culturally diverse group in Guatemala, for example, reported that, "in culturally complex environments, evidence-based data on issues of common concern can help to bring stakeholders together" (UNFPA, 2004a). This may be particularly effective in mobilizing local leaders, such as the traditional male leaders and recognized female leaders. UNFPA reports that, "gaining the support of cultural or religious leaders is often necessary before engaging effectively with communities. One way to accomplish this is by presenting evidence-based data on issues of concern to the community, such as health of mothers and children, the impact of violence against women, and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS, as an entry point for discussions".

More specifically, educating members of the community on the vulnerability of women and girls to HIV/AIDS is an important contribution to addressing the gender dimension of the disease. If community members' awareness of the issue is increased, perhaps, this will contribute to mobilizing them to cooperate and participate with strategies to reduce their vulnerability. This must include a focus on not only the individual vulnerability factors, but also the societal vulnerability that women and girls' face. As indicated in the risk assessment, the latter vulnerability is often not recognized or understood by community members.

### iii. Appropriate services and technology

There are several services and technology that will contribute to reducing women and girls' vulnerability. This discussion will focus on two. For one, health services that focus on diagnosing and treating sexually transmitted disease are important. Although not identified or discussed in this research, secondary data suggests that diagnosing and

treating STIs is an important contribution to reducing HIV vulnerability (UNAIDS, 1998). In the context of the Kisongo Maasai it is not only important to provide access to health services but it is also equally important to provide access to health services that are sensitive and culturally competent. As indicated in this research, the hospital institutions that currently administer health services are perceived as oppressive institutions. The findings suggest that Maasai community members are very reluctant to access the hospital services, with the exception of cases that involve severe medical problems. As a result in addition to advocating for health service provision in Maasai communities, advocates must also focus on training health workers in regards to ethical treatment of patients, and cultural competence and sensitivity.

Services relating to condom distribution are also important to reducing women and girls' vulnerability. As previously indicated, given the cultural customs and institutions associated with Maasai cultural identity, providing education about condoms may be quintessential. In the context of Kisongo Maasai communities, however, the relevance of providing information about condoms while neither providing affordable access nor the skills to use condoms is dubious. Programs must include the advocacy for and/or provision of services that distribute affordable condoms and provide social marketing that facilitates community acceptance.

This will necessitate investigation into innovative programs that have successfully marketed and provided condoms in other communities, especially rural, resource poor communities, in Tanzania or elsewhere in Africa. In addition, it will necessitate significant creativity and collaboration with Maasai community members to identify realistic and practical measures. Given the cultural context, the often rural environments,

and the general lack of access to cash, the strategies will have to be very innovative in order to be effective. Perhaps, for one example, the Esoto institution may be a key delivery point to the most vulnerable groups - Ilmurran and young girls. A member of the household complex, such as one of the co-wives, could be designated to maintain a supply of condoms within the Esoto, which are accessible and distributed to Esoto participants. Of course, an essential component of an intervention such as this is the participation of local NGOs or other organizations that will supply condoms at a subsidized rate that is affordable to the Kisongo Maasai. In any case, it will be important to strategize with local members of the Kisongo Maasai community, try innovative ideas, and monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions. In so doing, the use of condoms may become more prevalent and the vulnerability of women and girls may be reduced.

b. Self-help/dialogical approaches

As previously mentioned, providing the technical assistance outlined above will not substantially reduce the vulnerability of women and girls' vulnerability. These program elements will not facilitate genuine empowerment of participants because they will not address the cultural/ideological values that underpin women and girls' vulnerability. Furthermore, due to the evident safeguarding identity phenomenon and traditionalism, technical assistance type approaches will have little effect on structural change. As indicated elsewhere, the changes that are required to reduce women and girls' vulnerability relate to fundamental aspects of Kisongo Maasai identity and social organization, and as a result, change will most likely occur only if it is locally generated

by members of the Kisongo Maasai community: "in an environment characterized by ethnic and religious diversity, it is important to assume the role of facilitator. This sends a clear message of neutrality" (UNFPA, 2004). Consequently, a self-help approach, which corresponds to the 'accompaniment' element of the Anti-oppressive Development model and is characterized by facilitating dialogue and consciousness-raising, is important. The experience of this study suggests that these characteristics may be essential to transforming the attitudes, conceptions, and subsequently, the social organization that contributes to women and girls' vulnerability; in other words, essential to creating the enabling environments that will foster women and girls' agency and empowerment.

The following discussion will outline three possible components within the self-help facet of prevention programming:

i. Redefining cultural/ideological values.

Facilitating dialogue and consciousness raising in regards to traditionalism and conceptions/ideals of femininity and masculinity is necessary in order to redefine and/or mitigate the negative impact these have on women and girls' vulnerability. Something similar to the "community conversations" intervention discussed in the implication for practice section is important in order to undermine the ideological power of traditionalism and culturally produced notions of gender.

In regards to undermining notions of traditionalism, dialogue and consciousness raising may be a key factor in transforming attitudes about change. As suggested in the implication for practice section, programs should facilitate discussions and provide education concerning the historical influences on contemporary phenomena, address the

misconceptions evident in the notions of traditionalism that pervade the community, and raise awareness about the fluidity of culture.

The conceptions of femininity and masculinity, which also represent an ideological force perpetuating vulnerability, must also be addressed. These conceptions and ideals are at the core of gender and represent the foundational element that determines the nature of not only social relations, but also customs, institutions and more general social organization. Likewise to the traditionalism phenomenon, facilitating dialogue and consciousness-raising in regards to the fluidity and socio-historic nature of gender may be a requisite for developing a critical consciousness and empowerment to redefine these conceptions.

Two possible elements to be introduced into the consciousness-raising dialogue may be developing awareness of the socio-cultural roots of gender (i.e. conceptions of masculinity and femininity), and the socio-historic factors that contribute to changing conceptions of gender. In regards to the former, the experience of this research suggests that one important activity may be to develop awareness and capacity to define the concept of gender and distinguish between gender and sex.

In this regard, the training of the youth research team hired for this project, who were predominantly Kisongo Maasai, is a case example. Throughout their experience with this project, the principal investigator challenged the youth to understand and distinguish the difference between gender and sex; between culturally produced phenomena (i.e. gender roles, ideals of femininity) and phenomena rooted in innate characteristics. Initially, it was evident that there was little capacity to distinguish the two. However, as the field research and training proceeded, it was evident that team

members began to understand the difference. According to the observations of the principal investigator, the evident progress in raising consciousness also influenced the attitudes concerning change. The experience suggests that raising awareness about the concept of gender fosters critical reflection and attitudes that are more conducive to considering change and redefining gender.

Similarly, this study suggests a similar consciousness raising process in relation to traditionalism may create a similar outcome. Perhaps, for example, introducing community members to findings generated from extensive studies, such as Hodgson's or Talle's, may be useful in undermining notions of traditionalism. Their studies outline the socio-historic nature of contemporary gender values, norms and relations. Their studies have two important implications that may contribute to consciousness raising and transforming attitudes. For one, their studies indicate the misconceptions within notions of traditionalism that are frequently propagated in the community. For example, claims to tradition often purport that women's contemporary marginalization from economic activity, whereas, Hodgson's and Talle's studies illustrate that, in fact, women's marginalization is a more recent phenomenon instigated by extrinsic factors and the market economy.

Second, they indicate the socio-historic nature of contemporary gender phenomena, which illustrates two important issues. Conceptions of femininity and masculinity and other gender phenomena have changed significantly over time. Gender is not a static issue, but is fluid and socially constructed. Furthermore, contemporary gender phenomena are not reflections of authentic Maasai identity, but instead, have in fact been socially produced largely by extrinsic forces, such as oppressive development

and the market economy. Similar to the ideological value relating to traditionalism, raising consciousness in this manner may identify the fluidity and socially constructed nature of gender, and subsequently, facilitate empowerment and potentially, the redefinition of gender ideals and relations.

ii. Modifying customs and institutions/structural adaptation.

A concomitant objective to redefining cultural/ideological values is to modify customs and institutions and facilitate structural adaptation. Redefining the cultural/ideological values that underpin social relations and organization is fundamentally important, but concurrently, it must translate into social change in order to reduce the potential harms of customs and institutions and redistribute social, sexual, economic, and political power so as to reduce vulnerability.

A note on the language being used is important. "Modifying", "adaptation", and social "change" are consciously being used in purposeful contrast to the more common concept of social "transformation" that pervades the discourse and development objectives of many NGOs and the Tanzanian government. According to the findings of this study, adopting ideals and objectives of social transformation, which denote an overhaul of social organization and relations, is dubious, and in some cases, may be culturally imperialistic and reflect a disregard for the importance of cultural identity. Although the HIV/AIDS epidemic represents a significant challenge to Kisongo Maasai culture and social adaptation will be crucial to their survival, the radical nature intrinsic to the concept of "social transformation" may not be effective, and possibly counterproductive, to facilitating change and developing intercultural solidarity. For example, despite the efforts of many mission organization, NGOs and government

programs, it is unlikely that the Kisongo Maasai will adopt monogamous values and customs. Although such a transformation may reduce their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS, the experience of this research suggests that the need to safeguard identity and retain their cultural identity supersedes the radical transformation that monogamous socio-sexual organization represents. As a result, this study argues that programs will be more effective by 'accompanying' locally generated initiatives to modify, adapt and change current phenomena, rather than imposing lofty claims to radical transformation.

A comprehensive discussion on modifying customs and institutions and structural adaptation is beyond the parameters of this study. Throughout the illustration of findings and the discussions, this document has provided extensive analysis and identified numerous customs and institutions that contribute to women and girls' individual vulnerability (i.e. customs related to sexual relationship dynamics), as well as societal vulnerability (i.e. division of labor, marriage exchange and bride price). Practitioners wishing to develop a program must collaborate with local stakeholders to identify customs and institutions that represent the most immediate concern, develop further awareness of the customs or institutions under consideration, and collaborate with local stakeholders to develop plausible interventions. Some interventions suggested by participants in this study have been illustrated in the preceding chapter.

The sexual customs illustrated in the research are, of course, some of the greatest immediate concern in relation to prevention programming. The findings of this study suggest that the general orientation in facilitating dialogue in regards to sexual customs is to mitigate the most harmful customs and generate realistic strategies to reduce vulnerability. As indicated elsewhere, solely relying on asserting the value of



monogamy, abstinence, and being faithful will likely create very little behavior change.

The overwhelming barriers to adopting these behaviors will more likely induce an attitude of fatalism rather than creating a constructive dialogue about the matter and generating realistic strategies to reduce the harm. Therefore, although programs may provide information about behavioral ideals, it is important to facilitate the development of locally generated and more realistic strategies. The Alaigwanani key informant, for example, reported that if Ilmurran are genuinely engaged and educated, they reduce their number of partners. This solution, it was claimed, is plausible, while more radical change may not be.

Relating to sexual customs, a key focus of any intervention must be to address the vulnerability of young girls to HIV. Consequently, issues concerning the Esoto institution, the Ilmurran age-class, and specifically the *engi'konya* phenomenon must be integrated into programming. In this regard, Ilmurran must be genuinely engaged in discussions

**Reflection:**

*The Esoto is a widely misunderstood institution in the development field. Its associations with sexual relationships between girls and ilmurran are exaggerated, while the significant and primary communal and social functions are neglected. Good-intentioned NGO's have administered programs to eliminate the Esoto to reduce the "sexual exploitation" of girls.*

*Although the sexual implications for girls needs to be addressed, there must be alternatives to completely eliminating the institution. The Esoto plays many important roles, and to eliminate the Esoto will eliminate an important institution that safeguards the Maasai identity (Field Notes).*

that focus on conceptions of masculinity, their behavior, and the impacts of their behavior on young girls, as well as themselves. According to the experience of this research, engaging the Ilmurran in dialogue, providing information concerning risk, and raising awareness about power dynamics effectively facilitated a critical consciousness and potential opportunities for change. For example, proceeding one focus group discussion,

a discussion ensued concerning the vulnerability of girls, the Ilmurran' behaviors, and customs within the Esoto. After lengthy discussion, the principal investigator raised the question, "who is most responsible for contributing to girls' vulnerability?" After some discussion, the participants seemed to establish a consensus that it was they, the Ilmurran who were mostly contributing to their vulnerability. At which point, one participant asked, "what should we do then?" This suggests that facilitating dialogue and consciousness-raising that increases awareness of one's agency in the problem, can effectively facilitate critical reflection on customs, change attitudes, and potentially, change customs that contribute to girls' vulnerability.

In regards to the custom of circumcising females, as illustrated in the discussion section, programs must address the risks of cross-transmission. This study suggests that female circumcision is well entrenched in the community, and subsequently, a focus on harm-reduction is important: circumcisers must continue to be educated about cross-transmission risks and provided access to affordable razor blades. Ideally, this will represent an interim strategy, while concurrently education and community dialogue will serve to facilitate change in regards to this custom.

The most popular contemporary strategy of change is reflected in the popularized concept of Alternative Rites of Passage (ARP). ARP interventions are common among many NGOs working with tribal groups that practice female circumcision. These interventions seek to eliminate the genital cutting, or at least replace it with superficial incisions, while, symbolically at least, maintaining the traditional rite and its cultural value. Although these interventions are well intentioned, and may be a valid and legitimate goal while working with communities, there was some concern expressed by

Maasai community members about this contemporary intervention. Basically, given the cultural significance of the genital cutting, a symbolic ritual or superficial incisions, may not effectively produce the cultural values associated with the rite. Within this study, community members suggested that a girl who participates in an ARP might ultimately not be fully accepted as a woman within her community (Field Notes). Community members argued that although there have been seemingly successful implementation of ARPs, the acceptance of this alternative rite of passage is only superficial, and therefore, these girls will ultimately be ostracized from their communities.

Consequently, NGOs must consider the fact that unless the entire community is sensitized and has genuinely accepted ARPs, especially the traditional leaders (which one may anticipate taking a number of years), the girls who participate in ARP interventions may face significant stigmatization and may be ostracized from meaningful participation in the Maasai community, including marriage. According to this study, it is a consideration that has not been provided enough attention, and as a result, well-intentioned ARP interventions may have adverse impacts on young girls.

Whatever the nature of interventions that focuses on modifying cultural phenomena, traditional leaders must play a significant role. Traditional leaders are the custodians of culture, and as indicated in the research, they have a significant capacity to influence the attitudes and behaviors of their peers. Therefore, educating and engaging the traditional leaders may be quintessential. For example, engaging the traditional leaders in this study indicated that they have many insights and are eager to gain more education so as to facilitate their leadership. They indicated informal social control measures, such as reprimanding or criticizing harmful customs and behaviors, which,

reportedly, are very effective. As well, they indicated more formal, traditional measures that may be administered, such as performing a curse ritual. In accordance with the cultural approach to development illustrated in the Anti-oppressive Development model, the cursing phenomena may be an important alternative resource for facilitating behavior change. More specifically, and

as indicated by the traditional leaders, it may be a very effective way to reduce or eliminate the incidences of *engi'konya* within the Esoto.

In relation to the process involved in transforming or modifying tradition, the interview with the aforementioned traditional leader offered important

**Reflection**

*Traditional leaders have significant ability to influence social behavior over vast geographical areas. One Alaigwanani interviewed in the research was of the junior Ilmurran age-class, the Korianga. His position allotted him power and influence throughout our research area, which constituted hundreds and hundreds of square kilometers. He had the ability to mobilize his assistants that represented this vast area, educate them, and even dictate behavioral mores (Field Notes).*

*In one discussion involving an Alaigwanani from a very senior age class, a story was relayed concerning the ability to dictate behavioral mores. The theme of the story was how a group of traditional leaders used their power to protect a body of water that was used for domestic purposes – their objective was to prohibit people from bathing or watering cattle at this body of water. According to the story, a group of Alaigwanani gathered and performed a ritual that established a curse over anyone who used the water for anything besides the designated purpose: drinking water collection. Consequently, the participants in the discussion reported that community members have never compromised this due to the fear of curses and its harmful effects, and the body of water has remained preserved for domestic use (Key Informant Interview).*

insights. In general, this key informant argued that the Maasai are not against change and traditional leaders do not resist change, but instead, represent a body that manages the change process. He used an analogy to a tea filter to explain their role, and further illustrated the importance of analyzing development: "we accept everything that is coming now, we accept and we see how it works, and we judge provided that it doesn't affect us, then the tradition accepts and we are ready to join them, to work together.

Some might correct the tradition at some point if the tradition is wrong" (Key Informant: Alaigwanani/Ormesuki).

iii. Economic development for women

As indicated in the research findings, providing access to economic resources is a crucial component of reducing vulnerability. The female research participants, in fact, argued that economic empowerment is one of the most important factors in reducing their vulnerability. As mentioned in the implication for practice section, HIV prevention must be mainstreamed in programs relating to economic development. Prevention has to be an integrated approach. This study has not generated any specific strategies for economic development. The findings suggest that economic empowerment may be facilitated on the one hand, by modifying the marriage institution and the customs related to division of labor and participation in household economic activities (i.e. ownership and control of cattle). On the other hand, developing new economic initiatives for women in order to generate income is also relevant. In most cases, the rural context of Maasai women may limit the plausibility of many conventional economic development initiatives. Nonetheless, as illustrated in the 'hidden economy' concept, the research participants indicated that they are involved in economic activities. Further exploration and initiatives of these activities may be a starting point for economic initiatives.

iv. Social Action

Social action refers to initiatives that facilitate the mobilization and collectivization of community members in order to lobby or make demands for more fair and just treatment, as well as access to resources and opportunities. As illustrated in the

findings, women's informal collectivization is an asset of the Kisongo Maasai community, and may be mobilized to facilitate change.

It is with caution, however, that social action is incorporated into this program model. The reason it is incorporated corresponds to the indication in the research findings that collective lobbying is a pre-existing asset among the community, especially among women. This study has illustrated some examples, and secondary data also indicates that women's collective power is often influential (Spencer 1988, Mitzalff, 1988). Nonetheless, HIV prevention programs that incorporate social action into their objectives must do so with caution and sensitivity. Although in some cases social action may contribute to change, in other cases they may be perceived as intrusive, and create divisiveness and conflict within the community. Therefore, social action may be counter-productive to the general orientation of the above program components, and more specifically, it may be counter-productive to the process of development presented in this study. For example, if the initiatives cause significant divisiveness between men and women within the community, the mutual trust and collaborative relationships with male leaders and community members may be undermined and be detrimental to long term change objectives. In particular relation to cultural norms or phenomena, social action may be ineffective and possibly counter-productive to the objectives of development programming. It may further entrench traditionalism and a process of safeguarding identity, rather than facilitating effective change.

Nonetheless, there were a few key areas for social action identified by participants in this study. One is the government political structure. As illustrated in the research, female participants expressed great concern about lack of accountability and

transparency, the election process, marginalization of empowered women who challenge the status quo, degree of participation, and allocation of resources.

Another area for social action may be in regards to legal protection. As expressed by some participants, legislation that, for example, protects women's property rights can be a factor in contesting the appropriation of women's resources. A social action initiative, therefore, to firstly, raise awareness about these rights and legislation, and secondly, to lobby the government officials to better protect women and girls may be effective. However, in regards to this example, community workers must recognize that within environments, such as Kisongo Maasai communities, "legal action by itself is not enough to eliminate harmful traditional practices. To be effective, legislation should be part of a broad and integrated campaign that involves opinion makers and custodians of culture" (UNFPA, 2004a). This study suggests that legal action or prevention that focuses on legislation may contribute to change. However, as mentioned above, in facilitating or supporting this type of action, one must be aware of the impact these may have on the trust and relationships that this study suggests are integral to substantial long-term change.

Lastly, another recommendation in relation to social action, which was implicit within the discussions and observations of this study regards the administration of public services and 'development work' in Maasai communities. According to this study, the attitudes and behaviors of public servants and development workers is, for the most part, appalling. In general, the attitudes, behaviors and, in some cases, policies of government officials, foreign (i.e. Tanzanian and/or international) development workers, and their programs/services reflect a general ignorance and disregard for the Kisongo Maasai

culture. As a result, members of the community often face demeaning treatment and oppressive administration of programs/services. Consequently, the effectiveness of programs/services that may be of benefit to the community is often negligible. Three examples that were frequently mentioned in the discussion groups are related to health services, public education, and HIV prevention programs administered by NGOs. In every case, this study suggests that the demeaning attitudes and disregard for culture that often pervade these institutions and their programs/services limited their relevance and effectiveness significantly. An important social action initiative, therefore, may involve lobbying these institutions and their representatives to incorporate cultural awareness and sensitivity into the administration of their programs and services. In so doing, the programs and services may become more accessible to and effective for the Kisongo Maasai community.

### Summary

In summary, HIV prevention programs have not sufficiently addressed fundamental aspects of the epidemic. Despite substantially increasing resources and radically transforming strategies, the epidemic continues to escalate. According to the most recent UNAIDS' publication, in 2003 the number of people living with HIV dramatically increased at a rate higher than any other year (UNAIDS, 2004). More specifically, the overall population of HIV infected women in Sub-Saharan Africa has continue to disproportionately increase as compared to men. UNAIDS reports that the 'feminization' of the epidemic has increased with 57% of the adult population consisting of women and 75% of the youth population consisting of girls.



This study suggests that one of the factors that contributes to this escalation is the nature of predominant HIV prevention programs. Specifically, programs rely on technical assistance. They rely on targeting cognitive and technological factors, which does not address the key barriers to behavior and/or social change: gender and cultural ideology, customs, institutions, general social structures, and unequal power. In cases where these factors are considered or integrated into programs, programs have generally lacked the necessary process that may facilitate change. They have tended to integrate issues surrounding culture into a technical assistance framework, which has rarely been effective.

In light of the evident gap between building technical capacity (i.e. knowledge, awareness, provision of condoms) and a substantial reduction in women and girls' vulnerability, the above Prevention Program Model provides a more comprehensive framework to address the issues. It mainstreams gender, while concurrently mainstreaming the fundamental aspects of culture and process. According to the findings and experiences of this study, mainstreaming these three aspects in the manner illustrated in the proposed model will complement popular technical assistance approaches, and address the core issues that represent the gap between knowledge and behavior or social change.

## **SECTION IV**

## INTRODUCTION

This section concludes the thesis. The discussion in Chapter 9.1 synthesizes the findings of this research into an outline of the most important implications for designing HIV prevention programs and building intercultural solidarity. Section 9.2 provides a general discussion concerning the topics of future research that may further contribute to reducing the Kisongo Maasai's, and specifically Kisongo women and girls', vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. Chapter 10 consists of the concluding remarks.

## **CHAPTER 9: IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE & FUTURE RESEARCH**

### 9.1 Implications for Practice: A Review of What We've Learned

#### I. The complementary elements of content and process

The findings of this study suggest that mainstreaming issues relating to the process of engaging communities is integral to HIV/AIDS programming. Content, in the sense of providing information, education and, in some cases, skills remains important. It is necessary, for example to educate individuals about the disease, its modes of transmission, as well as its relationships to sexuality and gender. In addition, providing evidence-based data is important for sensitizing and mobilizing the community to change strategies. UNFPA, for example, argues that one way of mobilizing the community is, "by presenting evidence-based data on issues of concern to the community, such as the health of mothers and children, the impact of violence against women, and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS" (UNFPA, 2004a, p. 3). Several case studies performed by the UNFPA illustrated that providing this type of content in programs was an important "entry point for discussions" (UNFPA, p. 3).

In addition to content, however, the nature of the HIV epidemic necessitates a strong focus on process. This study has illustrated some important elements to guide and foster the implementation of anti-oppressive practice and the development of intercultural solidarity, which, this study proposes, will effectively mobilize and facilitate change in the Kisongo Maasai community. The general principles of this model are cultural sensitivity, affirmation of difference, a recognition of the assets within every community and cultural group, self-determination, anti-discrimination, and the development of genuine relationships characterized by cooperation and dialogue. The data generated in

relation to process reprioritizes the importance of relationships, collectivization, and dialogue as necessary elements of development that involves solidarity and collaboration with groups of people from diverse cultures who are managing the complex dilemma of maintaining their identity, maintaining a respect for the past and, in some cases, God, while concurrently managing the tumultuous affects of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Indigenous groups, such as the Kisongo Maasai, are a community that faces the complexity of this dilemma to an incomparable degree and a degree that is incomprehensible to most foreign individuals. As illustrated in this study, their culturally complex context necessitates as strong and sensitive focus on content, but most importantly, patience, perseverance and a focus on the process of reconciling the inherent dilemma, and facilitating change to reduce the vulnerability of the community in general, but more specifically, the vulnerability of women and girls.

## II. The dual nature of women and girls' vulnerability

One of the most general implications of this research is that women and girls' vulnerability involves personal factors as well as structural factors. This division was indicated in the literature review, which borrowed from United Nation's conceptual framework. Personal factors, or individual vulnerability, relate to prescribed gender norms, and cultural customs that determine their capacity to reduce their vulnerability within inter-relationships. According to a UNAIDS publication, Gender and HIV/AIDS: Taking stock of research and programmes (1999), prevention relating to individual vulnerability has three important elements: cognitive, attitudinal and behavioral (UNAIDS, 1999). Structural factors, or societal vulnerability, on the other hand, refer to

the manner in which the society is organized. The society's institutions (i.e. marriage exchange, traditional governing councils) and manners of organizing social functions (i.e. division of labor) disadvantage women and girls and impede their access to elements (i.e. income) or processes (i.e. decisions to allocate resources) that may provide resources or power that would reduce their vulnerability.

Similar to the UNAIDS publications, this study suggests that prevention programs must on the one hand, address personal factors by raising awareness, and transforming attitudes. On the other hand, programs must be integrated with initiatives that address issues that have conventionally not been identified as contributing to HIV/AIDS prevention, such as economic development for women and girls, or advocating for political participation. The findings confirm the importance of mainstreaming HIV/AIDS into a variety of development programs. According to Elizabeth Madraa of the Ugandan Ministry of Health, the relative success witnessed in parts of Uganda has largely been a result of integrating appropriate and relevant HIV/AIDS issues and interventions in the vision, mission, objectives, and programs of all sectors within organizations and government (Madraa, 2003).

Although prevention cannot neglect the factors contributing to individual vulnerability, substantial and, in many cases, sustainable change must involve an integrated approach that mainstreams HIV/AIDS into fields relating to economics and politics. Perhaps, prevention programs should address these two forms of vulnerability in a complimentary fashion. Increasing knowledge, providing information or evidence regarding the epidemic, and transforming attitudes will likely compliment and facilitate concurrent structural change initiatives.

### III. The foundational elements of culture and traditionalism

The implications identified by the research findings primarily refer to the importance and value of culture-specific programming. Mainstreaming culture is essential to effective programming: "[development] is a creative social process and its central nervous system, the matrix which nourishes it, is located in the cultural sphere" (Kennedy, 1996).

As the research illustrated, notions of traditionalism, and cultural values and customs underpin women and girls' vulnerability. In general, the research indicated that cultural factors represent the gap between knowledge and behavior change. Although increasing knowledge and awareness about the epidemic may, at times, induce change in attitudes and behavior, the cultural/ideological values that pervade cultural communities will supersede and obstruct any substantial and sustainable change. Similar findings are corroborated by many studies administered in diverse cultural contexts (UNAIDS, 2000; Gupta & Weiss, 1993; Buseh, Glass & McElmurry, 2002). One study administered in the Kagera region of Tanzania, for example, stated that, "an in-depth understanding of sexual behavior and how it facilitates HIV transmission in any society must be embedded in a very thorough in-depth understanding of that society's norms, values and patterns of social organization" (Lugalla et al, 1999, p. 397).

Effective programs, therefore, must first, and foremost, reflect a genuine cultural competence, and mainstream the fundamental element of culture into prevention programs. As illustrated in this research, and corroborated by other studies, negotiating, mitigating, and, perhaps, transforming culture, is the most significant component of

HIV/AIDS prevention programming while working in culturally diverse, and more specifically, indigenous communities (Lugalla et al, 1999; Ortiz-Torres et al, 2000; UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2003). As indicated above, in culturally diverse environments, facilitating critical dialogue concerning cultural/ideological values as well as customs and institutions, becomes integral to an effective program.

In addition, identifying and engaging the custodians of culture, such as the traditional leadership structure, is important to a cultural approach. Similar to the frequent exclamations from participants in this research, other studies have consistently identified that, "gaining the support of cultural or religious leaders is often necessary before engaging effectively with communities" (UNFPA, 2004a). In the context of the Kisongo Maasai, in absence of a formal religious structure, the notion of religious leaders may not be relevant (with the exception of women's informal religious roles and custodian role relating to moral adherence), but the cultural leaders, represented by the formal leadership structure, is of paramount importance.

#### IV. The obstacle of traditionalism and safeguarding identity

Another implication for practice generated by this study is the significant obstacle of traditionalism and safeguarding identity. Although traditionalism and safeguarding identity are legitimate and rational responses to the oppressive history that has eroded Maasai identity and culture, the findings of this research suggest that it contributes to HIV/AIDS vulnerability and must be circumvented in order to reduce risk. This study suggests that traditionalism is often based on misconceived notions of history, and is an



ideology that compounds women and girls' vulnerability by maintaining the disempowerment that females have experienced over the past century. Community members, and particularly males, make claims to the past and tradition that, according to contemporary research, is, in fact, erroneous, and facilitates the consolidation of male power.

This context presents a complex and unique challenge to HIV prevention programming. Although culture is frequently a barrier throughout many diverse contexts, the traditionalism that pervades the Maasai community compounds it to a more significant degree, which necessitates a unique approach to reducing vulnerability.

One factor that may mitigate the barrier of traditionalism is exposing the misconceptions within traditionalist claims. This would involve consciousness-raising and raising awareness about the socio-historical process that has determined and produced current conceptualizations of femininity and masculinity, gender roles, and corresponding traditional customs and institutions. Perhaps, by developing awareness in regards to the social construction of current phenomena, and exposing the socio-historic development of gender, one may undermine misconceptions about tradition, and may circumvent traditionalism. In any case, traditionalism must be undermined, and concepts of identity and culture must be re-orientated to the fluidity and changing nature of culture.

One study, among Puerto Rican and Dominican women, that related to challenging cultural norms that place females at risk of HIV/AIDS, corroborate the above recommendation. In "Subverting Culture: Promoting HIV/AIDS Prevention Among Puerto Rican and Dominican Women", Blanca Ortiz-Torres et al outlines the importance

of raising awareness of the socio-historic context and its implication on norms and values related to gender (Ortiz-Torres et al, p. 859). The study further explored a successful program that engaged culture and facilitated discussions and activities, which explored diversity within the historical and contemporary culture. Ultimately, according to Ortiz-Torres, the project fostered an environment that empowered women to develop new cultural values, beliefs, and norms. In the case of the Kisongo Maasai, although safeguarding identity, and affirming the difference it represents, remains important, absolute forms of traditionalism must be circumvented in order to create an environment that may critically reflect on contemporary values, customs and institutions and collectively develop strategies to transform harmful phenomena.

Similarly, Stephen Lewis has recently issued a statement in regards to a project he witnessed in indigenous Ethiopian communities that further corroborates the insights generated by participants in this project, and subsequent recommendations. The title of the project witnessed by Lewis was "Community Conversations". The objective of this project is indicated by the title: mobilize stakeholders and members of the community to engage in dialogue or conversation. Presumably, the premise of the project is similar to the implications and recommendations generated from this study: collectivization and dialogue facilitates consciousness-raising, critical reflection, collective problem-solving and subsequently, facilitates locally-generated strategies to address deleterious issues in the community. Reportedly, the 'conversations' have effectively facilitated change concerning cultural phenomena that have otherwise been maintained by traditionalist ideology. The main themes, for example, were reported as female circumcision, use of condoms, bride sharing, polygamy, early marriage, and sexual violence (UNDP, 2004)

The success of the project is, in fact, a testament to the value of appreciating indigenous knowledge and customs as valuable, and sometimes alternative, forms of intervention. The "community conversations" approach is identical to the traditional process of change that is intrinsic to the Kisongo Maasa community, yet has been marginalized and undermined by 'development' over the past century. The traditional leaders who participated in the research indicated that a similar process has always been an existing cultural asset among the Maasai and has always played a role in the community's history. The "community conversation" process is, for example, reflective of the suggestion illustrated in the statement and analogy of an attacking lion. The leader exclaimed that individuals cannot defend oneself against a lion; they must rally and mobilize the community in order to fend off the threat. The traditional leader indicated that the "noise" created by the community, is analogous to the collective dialogue and problem-solving that is necessary to redress the values, customs, and institutions that underpin and determine the "lion", which is analogous to the threat of HIV/AIDS to the Kisongo Maasai community.

V. The relationships between 'development', traditionalism and safeguarding identity.

An important implication for practice in relation to the traditionalism and safeguarding identity phenomena discovered in this research, is its relationship with 'development'. As illustrated in Chapter 5.3, the oppressive and culturally incompetent forms of 'development' that have characterized the historical, as well as many current, interventions among the Kisongo Maasai have inadvertently reinforced traditionalist

ideology. In their apparent disregard and negligible appreciation for preserving culture, the 'development' that pervade the community are perceived as threats to core elements of the community's livelihoods, security, and cultural identity. In effect, therefore, this study suggests that, contrary to popular discourse, the Kisongo Maasai have traditional structures to manage and implement change, and the community has historically conceived tradition as an evolving phenomenon, in which change is positive. Nonetheless, 'development' has ironically often been a catalyst for solidifying indigenous' communities' need to safeguard their identity and, in effect, entrenching the traditionalism commonly witnessed in contemporary Maasai communities.

#### VI. Time/Program length

Given the nature of women and girls' vulnerability – meaning that it is embedded in cultural/ideological values, customs and institutions that are intrinsic to their collective identity, HIV prevention will be a long and arduous process. Facilitating the adaptation of culture is not conducive to short-term programs. Instead, programs in these types of environments must be characterized by patience, endurance, and long, persistent program periods. A recent UNFPA study in nine countries, for example, determined that "a great deal of dialogue and sensitization may be required to break new ground on issues that are deeply rooted" (UNFPA, 2004a). Likewise to this study, the UNFPA study concluded that given the fundamental element of culture in HIV prevention, and the nature of cultural change, facilitating change in diverse cultural contexts necessitates a greater investment of time.

VII. The paramount importance, but potential limitations to, condoms.

One of the most important implications of this research's findings is related to the issue of condoms as an important component of prevention and reducing women and girls' vulnerability. This study suggests that within the cultural context of the Maasai community, condom literacy and access to affordable condoms may be the most important prevention measure. While the cultural context facilitates substantial transmission networks and impedes women and girls' power to reduce their vulnerability, and likewise, the ideological force of traditionalism and the fundamental importance of safeguarding identity present obstacles that will hinder any radical transformation.

As a result, providing information, raising awareness, and providing access to condoms may represent the only immediate measures that may mitigate the harmful effects of the HIV/AIDS epidemic on the Kisongo Maasai community, and more specifically, reduce the vulnerability of women and girls' to HIV/AIDS. Realistically, given the notions of traditionalism and the sexual values and customs that exist within this community, dramatic behavioral or social change will be arduous and will only occur over lengthy periods of time. Therefore, programs focusing on condom education and advocating for affordable accessibility are quintessential mechanisms for reducing the potential harm that the epidemic will soon inflict on the Kisongo Maasai community.

In many ways, the findings of this research indicated that adopting condoms as a harm reduction measure within extra-marital relationships is, theoretically at least, plausible. As indicated in the discussions surrounding interventions, participants were generally supportive and illustrated positive attitudes in relation to adopting condoms. One notable exception to this, however, is in reference to marriage relationship contexts

in which the value of fertility and women's procreative roles may, at times, supersede the concerns of health and use of condoms.

Additionally, the cultural context, as compared to other contexts, may facilitate the seemingly plausibility implementation of condoms. The most significant factor that distinguishes the Kisongo Maasai community from other cultural communities is the general recognition and the explicit or implicit sanctioning of permissive sexual relations that involve multiple concurrent partners. This is significant because in other cultural contexts that value monogamy and faithfulness, introducing a condom into the relationship is associated with infidelity and mistrust (Lugalla, et al, 1999; UNAIDS, 1998). As one UNAIDS report stated, "in cultures where condoms are associated with illicit sex and STDs, women who attempt to introduce them into a relationship encounter problems such as being perceived as unfaithful" (1998, p. 5).

In contrast to this, however, the findings of this research indicated that similar associations would not create barriers to condom use. At least among the participants in this research, it is generally understood and expected that, in accordance with customs, their partners will be sexually involved with other people. Condoms are not, therefore, associated with illicit sex. Although they may be associated with multiple partner sex, this is an accepted and, for the most part, a supported phenomenon. Therefore, this study suggests that it would not be a barrier to introducing condoms into a relationship, as compared to other cultural contexts.

The anticipated barriers and limitations to successfully mainstreaming condoms as a prevention measure are related to fertility values, the value of sperm in female's physical development, affordability and accessibility. As indicated in the findings, values

surrounding fertility as well as sexual customs significantly impede the introduction of condoms into marriage relationships. Participants illustrated that in most cases, it is unlikely that married women, and more so men, will use condoms.

In relation to the value allotted sperm in facilitating girls' physical development was not identified in this research. In this research, there was some indication of beliefs that assert a relationship between sexual initiation and physical development. In a very few cases, participants illustrated a belief that sexual initiation of girls was a requisite to developing breasts and physical maturation. Sperm was not specifically mentioned, and in conversations concerning condoms, blocking sperm was not a concern identified by participants. Nonetheless, in research conducted by Aude Talle, she found that it was the transmission of semen that instigated the physical maturation process of young girls, and subsequently, the preparation of girls for marriage and motherhood (Talle, 1994). If similar beliefs exist throughout Kisongo Maasai communities, this will present a significant limitation to mainstreaming condoms. Programs will have to first ascertain the prevalence of this belief, and then address it through the consciousness-raising activities illustrated elsewhere.

Besides these limitations relating to cultural values and beliefs, accessibility and affordability relate to geographic, economic and political factors. Kisongo Maasai predominantly reside in rural settings with very few health services, and are often impoverished with relatively little access to money. Consequently, a key limitation is providing access to condoms, and more specifically, providing access to condoms that are affordable enough to effectively market them to an impoverished community. Given their general disenfranchisement, their marginal status, and the cutbacks in health

services following the Structural Adjustment Programs over the past decade (TGNP, 1997), it is highly unlikely and unrealistic to expect that the government will invest the necessary resources to providing accessible and affordable condoms to rural Maasai communities in the short-term.

As a result, civil society must play an important role in implementing interventions, and more specifically, providing affordable access to condoms. In this regard, Faith-based Organizations (FBO) must reconcile their dilemmas and contradictions surrounding the implementation of condoms in prevention programming. In many cases, FBOs are the only non-governmental organizations that are administering programs in Maasai communities. Consequently, as in the case of the Longido community, the communities have been provided little to no information and education about condoms. Similarly, their remains very little access to affordable condoms in these communities despite decades of HIV/AIDS interventions. Similar to the observations of this study, in a study administered in the Kagera region of Tanzania, it identified that religious worldviews represent one of the most significant barrier to condom prevention measures: "they argue that advocating condom use to youth amounts to teaching them promiscuity" (Lugalla, 1999, p. 390).

Faith-based organizations, such as the partnering organization of this study, must address the inevitable contradictions that exist in their resistance or reluctance to include condoms as a key prevention measure. By persisting in marginalizing condoms from prevention strategies, FBOs continue to withhold information and technology that in many cases, may prevent or mitigate the devastating impacts of the epidemic, and more specifically, the vulnerability of women and girls.



According to the experience of this study, given the overwhelming evidence in regards to the complexity of behavior change, the contributing structural factors, and the evident vulnerability of relatively disempowered groups, the position of many FBOs is not only contrary to human rights, but it is also contrary to the values of love and compassion that FBOs reportedly espouse. At least in the case of the Kisongo Maasai, this study suggests that it is paradoxical to espouse love, compassion, and a commitment to the communities' well-being, while simultaneously withholding information and potential access to condoms. Using the Longido community as a case example, despite over a decade of HIV prevention programming, the Kisongo Maasai's vulnerability persists. The programs, administered by an international FBO, focused almost entirely on criticizing local customs and institutions, advocating monogamous principles, with little to no mention of condoms as prevention measure. This study suggests that the members of this community, and more significantly women and girls' vulnerability persists, at least in part, as a direct consequence of the religious worldview propagated by the international FBO that has almost exclusively administered programming in the area for almost two decades.

The issue of female condoms has not been discussed at any length throughout this document, but deserves mention. Unfortunately, research in relation to implementing the female condom as a prevention tool has been limited and has not generated conclusive findings. Nonetheless, if further inquiry indicated that the female condom could be plausibly marketed and distributed, it may be an important prevention strategy to consider. Participants frequently indicated that females were the counterpart in a sexual relationship that were allotted authority and responsibility to determine the sexual event.

For example, one participant argued that, in reference to sex education, it was women who should be educated, "because she is the one who allows this, she refuses this, she returns this, and then she welcomes this" (FGD/M18-25). Consequently, mainstreaming the female condom as a prevention measure and providing affordable access may be an effective strategy to reduce their vulnerability. If nothing else, research has suggested that by expanding the range of prevention options, including the female condom, it is likely that the number of unprotected sexual episodes will decrease (UNAIDS, 1999).

### VIII. The potential limitation of FBOs

In the context of the Kisongo Maasai, this study suggests that the culturally absolutist values intrinsic to many FBOs' worldviews are conflictive and, according to the experience of this study, may represent a paradox in the 'development' facilitated by FBOs. This study suggests and proposes that anti-oppressive development, intercultural solidarity, and promoting the well being of culturally diverse communities in general, and indigenous communities in particular, first and foremost, involves an affirmation of difference, and fundamental respect for rights to self-determination. It proposes that only in affirming difference, and supporting self-determinative change, which in many cases will generate outcomes that contrast with religious-based cultural absolutist values, will communities, such as the Kisongo Maasai, experience and nurture the empowerment that reducing their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS must entail. The findings of this study suggest that until FBOs reconcile the conflict and paradox that is inherent in their worldviews, their relevance and effectiveness with communities like the Kisongo Maasai is dubious. More importantly, and of greater concern to this study, is that the form of 'development'

that some FBOs administer may continue to be oppressive and subsequently, represent a barrier to the development and reduction of vulnerability proposed in this research.

Consequently, this study suggests that the relevance and effectiveness of many FBOs may be contingent on cultural contexts. In communities that have been relatively acculturated to Western religious values, FBOs have proven to be effective in administering 'development', or more specifically, HIV prevention. However, in contexts where communities aspire to a value system in stark contrast to the religious worldviews of FBOs, the dilemma, for FBOs, between facilitating effective and ethical 'development' and remaining accountable to their religious worldviews may be insurmountable. Consequently, their effectiveness in building intercultural solidarity and facilitating effective change may be limited in some contexts, and in many cases, the 'development' administered by many FBOs may perpetuate the deleterious affects that 'development' has historically produced. Although FBOs often represent remarkable allies in relation to reducing women and girls' vulnerability, in some contexts, the cultural absolutism that is fundamental to their worldviews corresponds to 'development' that is intrinsically in contrast to the anti-oppressive development that this study proposes is essential to effectively building relationships, mobilizing the community, and collaboratively administering HIV Prevention programs.

#### IX. Limitations of contemporary programming.

The findings of this study challenge some elements of many contemporary programs. A discussion relating to three significant elements follows.

##### a. Conceptualization of sexual behavior and choices

One of the most significant limitations to contemporary prevention programming is the common conceptualization of sexual behavior and choices that underpin many of them. For the most part, programs are conceptualizing sexual behavior and choices as individual or personal issues. They commonly convey assumptions that suggest that sexual behavior and choices is mediated by personal issues relating to cognitive factors (i.e. knowledge and awareness of HIV/AIDS), personal skills, or access to commodities (i.e. condoms). As illustrated in this document, this is a fundamental misconception of sexual behavior and choices. In contrast to these popular assumptions, participants in this research ascertained that sexual behavior is predominantly mediated by numerous social-determinants originating in the socio-cultural and economic environment.

b. The "ABC approach"<sup>1</sup>

The effectiveness of predominant program strategies that merely rely on identifying modes of transmission, and promoting behavioral change towards monogamous values of abstinence and being faithful may be negligible in the cultural context of the Kisongo Maasai. As previously discussed, the objectives of these programs are in stark contrast to the sexual values and customs that pervade the community and subsequently, are in stark contrast to their cultural identity. Therefore, entering communities with programs that merely provide technical-type assistance in the form of providing information and teaching individuals that abstinence and being faithful are ways of preventing HIV/AIDS is negligent on the part of administering organizations and will not reduce the vulnerability of the Maasai, and specifically women and girls, to HIV/AIDS.

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 2.4, Prevention and Barriers, for more discussion concerning the limitations of the ABC approach.

In fact, such an approach may be counterproductive and further contribute to vulnerability. This study suggests that in culturally complex and sensitive environments, such as communities like the Kisongo Maasai, promoting propaganda that focuses on potentially unrealistic behavioral ideals may induce a sense of fatalism, which may exacerbate a poor sense of self-efficacy, and subsequently, create a barrier to behavior change.

In contexts similar to the Kisongo Masai, organizations must recognize the cultural nature of sexuality and HIV/AIDS transmission, and facilitate processes focused on addressing the issue of culture rather than merely offering information about behavioral ideals that will eliminate risk. In addition, instead of merely investing resources into teaching people that abstinence and being faithful will reduce their vulnerability, organizations must adopt strategies and objectives that will offer more practical and realistic alternatives. For example, although it is unlikely that the Kisongo Maasai community will adopt the monogamous principles of abstinences and being faithful, the experience of this research indicates that they may be willing to reduce their numbers of partners. Given the cultural context and the potential devastating and immediate effects of the epidemic, a focus on mitigating the impacts and reducing harm may be more suitable and effective. Similar to the implications identified in this study, case studies from around the world administered by the UNFPA suggest that re-orientating prevention to smaller incremental change objectives that are culturally plausible, may be more effective than the idealistic approaches and objectives evident in conventional ‘ABC approaches’ (UNFPA, 2004a, 2004b)

- c. Centralized planning and technical-assistance versus accompaniment:  
working from within.

Another limitation of contemporary programs made evident by this research is the centralized planning and technical assistance nature of most initiatives. In most cases, programs are planned from a centralized location that is isolated from the local community and it generally involves a technical-assistance type approach that offers information or technical 'know how'. These approaches are often characterized by groups of 'experts' that plan a program based on the notion that solutions to the prescribed 'problem' are due to a lack of technical 'know how', or in the case of HIV/AIDS, a lack of information. These types of programs then often include providing the skills and information necessary to resolve the 'problem'.

In specific reference to the "ABC approach", technical assistance-type programs often involve 'experts' that identify behaviors or customs that are 'problems' in local communities, and then proceed to educate communities about the benefits of abstinence and being faithful as solutions to the 'problems'. The targeted communities often become objects that are provided the information and 'know how' from the perceived, and often self-proclaimed, 'experts'. Often in these approaches neither the obstacles, dilemmas, and barriers, such as the complexity of cultural determinants or structural vulnerability, nor issues concerning process, are considered or addressed adequately. If they are addressed, they unfortunately remain tokenistic (Verhelst, 1990).

In this sense, popular programs are often reminiscent of Paulo Freire's lamentations concerning the "banking concept" of education. Banking education refers to education that is characterized by "depositing" information/knowledge into

individuals. While the educator performs the role of subject and 'expert', the 'student' remains the object of the process (Freire, 2003). In his famous work, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire identified the detriments of banking education. Instead of facilitating dialogue, fostering the development of critical consciousness, and empowering individuals to engineer transformation, he argued that banking education maintains participants as objects, perpetuates their passivity, and inadvertently, reinforces the status quo. Ultimately, he argued that this form of education offers little contribution to any substantial social change. This study suggests that in culturally complex environments, the effectiveness of banking-type educational programs is particularly insufficient.

For the most part, according to the participants of this study, prevention programs in the Longido community reflect the above characteristics of centralized planning, technical assistance, and 'banking education'. A case in point regards the participation of this study's principal investigator in an extensive HIV prevention program that was being administered by an international FBO during the same period as this study. Part of the project involved an advisory committee that would contribute to the development of the FBO's initiative. The principal investigator of this study was initially a member of this committee. In general, the experience was disappointing, disillusioning, and illustrated the aforementioned deficiencies of HIV prevention programming. The meetings, which were held in an urban center one hundred kilometers from the community, included no representatives of the Kisongo Maasai community. Instead, the committee consisted of individuals, such as members of government ministries, other NGOs, or community development institutes that were deemed as 'experts' by the FBO hosting the meeting. As a result, it was evident that in addition to an evident lack of awareness of the local

context (if anything, in fact, the discussions reflected common misconceptions and demeaning attitudes towards the Masaa community), the project perpetuated the centralized planning and technical assistance issues mentioned above. As evident by the nature of the membership and the discussions, the project perceived the members of the Kisongo Maasai community as objects of 'development' that needed technical assistance from 'experts' in order to resolve their problems.

As indicated in the findings of this research, such an approach to 'development', and more specifically, to reducing women and girls' vulnerability to HIV/AIDS will contribute very little to any substantial reduction of vulnerability. For one, given the isolated nature of centralized programs, they rarely have the capacity to understand and mediate the cultural complexities that underpin and represent the key contributing factors to vulnerability (UNFPA, 2004)

Second, the technical assistance type approach offers little contribution because it does not engage the 'targeted groups' as subjects, does not facilitate dialogue and reflection that sufficiently addresses the ideological factors of culture and traditionalism, and does not empower participants to engineer strategies and solutions. As illustrated elsewhere, the cultural nature of women and girls' vulnerability, which engages the fundamental notions of identity and traditionalism, necessitates participatory approaches that facilitate locally generated strategies and solutions. This study suggests that contrary to merely a technical assistance approach, approaches must adopt the accompaniment approach illustrated in the Anti-oppressive development model. In contrast to the 'banking nature' of technical assistance, this approach represents a more self-help approach that engages the community as subjects and is focused on facilitating critical



dialogue and assessment of cultural values, norms, and customs. Although providing technical assistance in the form of providing information, education, skills, and evidence-based rationale for the need to change, it is insufficient in addressing the fundamental barriers of HIV vulnerability, which include the cultural/ideological values as well as customs and institutions that involve fundamental aspects of cultural identity: "in most countries the emphasis for the reduction of sexual risk has been placed on the delivery of information and knowledge about HIV transmission and safe sex techniques. However, a number of community studies have demonstrated that knowledge may be a necessary, but not sufficient condition for significant behavior modification" (Le Franc, et al., 1996).

## 9.2 Future Research

The research presented in this document will hopefully provide some practical information and implications for practice that will guide HIV prevention programming and strategies. Nonetheless, in many cases, the phenomena illustrated in this study deem greater attention and research. The following discussion highlights a few recommended areas for future research that will further contribute to understanding and reducing HIV vulnerability among the Kisongo Maasai.

### a. Prevalence of HIV/AIDS among Kisongo Maasai communities.

Future research must, in some capacity, determine the degree of prevalence in Kisongo Maasai communities. There seems to be very little research that has focused on HIV prevalence, and little information and knowledge exists in relation to the subject.

Notably, in absence of the structures necessary for HIV testing, ultimately, the research may only be based on well-informed and educated conjecture that uses illness factors and opportunistic infections as proxy indicators. Such research will likely

include, the sensitization, mobilization, and collaboration with formal and informal health personnel that work in the community. Through such channels, research may be able to postulate, in some capacity, the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the community.

The value of this research relates to the Health Belief Model of behavior change. According to this model, behavior change presupposes that individuals feel an immediate and personal threat to their personal health and well-being. Consequently, providing evidence that HIV/AIDS is prevalent and is a threat to the community, will dispel myths that suggest it does not exist in the Kisongo Maasai community, and provide an important foundation for mobilizing the community and facilitating behavioral and, potentially, social change.

- b. Further exploration of private realities and social facts related to certain socio-cultural phenomena

In accordance with the limitation of practice described in Chapter 3, "Issues surrounding public ideology/perception versus private reality", certain socio-cultural phenomena that were discovered in this research need further exploration. As illustrated in Chapter 3, in some cases, given the nature of the research topics and the methodology, the findings may represent public perception rather than the actual social and private realities of Kisongo Maasai. As a result, in some cases, where there is concern regarding this distinction, more research is necessary.

One example is in regards to the sexual customs and behaviors of the Kisongo Maasai. Further research into these phenomena is important. Specifically, it may be important to facilitate research that focuses specifically on the sexual behavioral patterns of Ilmurran, as well as non-circumcised girls. As illustrated in this report, focus group

participants' perceptions overwhelmingly conveyed that permissive sex and multiple concurrent partners characterize the sexual behaviors of Ilmurran. Likewise, public perception indicated that Ilmurran are commonly involved in coercing young girls in the Esoto. Although these sexual behaviors undoubtedly exist among the Ilmurran, it is difficult to determine the actual prevalence. The nature of Ilmurran's sexual relationships and the prevalence of some associated customs and norms, may contrast from popularized public perception. Consequently, future research that explores these phenomena in more detail, and that use different methodologies from this study, will be a valuable contribution to discourse surrounding the Kisongo Maasai.

**c. Plausibility and barriers of condoms as an effective intervention**

As illustrated in previous discussions, given the cultural realities surrounding sexual values, customs and norms, condoms may represent one of the most important technology/commodity that can mitigate the impact of the epidemic on Kisongo Maasai communities. However, as mentioned in Chapter 9, numerous contextual issues, including the rural and resource-poor factors, will challenge effective interventions that involve condoms.

As a result, some of the most important research that may contribute to mitigating the immediate impact of the epidemic will be exploring innovative and context-specific strategies to provide effective information, education, and communication regarding condoms, as well as concurrently providing affordable access. Future research must not only explore innovative and strategic strategies, but also more importantly, evaluate the implementation of these strategies.

**d. Plausible economic interventions**

As the findings illustrated, women and girls' marginalization from economic resources, is a significant contributing factor to their vulnerability. As a result, one valuable focus in future research will be to explore plausible and sustainable economic interventions that will contribute to women and girls' economic power and autonomy. Besides further exploring the experiences of women and girls, research must include an exploration of the numerous interventions that have, often unsuccessfully, been administered. Moreover, future research should focus not only on business-related interventions, but also on strategies that may reconsolidate the economic power that married women and girls historically had over the disposal of their household livestock.

e. Socio-cultural assets of Kisongo Maasai

Numerous socio-cultural assets were identified in this research that may represent effective channels that contribute to reducing vulnerability. However, this research did not explore these elements in detail, and, therefore, further research is necessary. Specifically, future research should explore customary forms of information transmission, such as the traditional leadership network, and rite of passage ceremonies. In addition, research could explore customary social change mechanisms that have historically managed and instigated change. One example that was identified in this study is the implementation and function of the curse ritual.

f. Barriers and solutions to accessing health services

The participants in this research expressed concern surrounding health services. For example, it was commonly conveyed that they experienced negative treatment by health professionals. As access to health services is an important factor in mitigating the impact of the HIV epidemic, future research should explore the barriers that Kisongo

Maasai experience in accessing health services, and additionally, explore the community's suggestions related to health service reform.

- g. Barriers to implementing HIV/AIDS education within the public school system.

Observations from the research indicate that despite national policies and curriculum, HIV/AIDS education in many public schools often does not exist, and when it does occur, it is not providing adequate knowledge and awareness. The teacher interviewed in this study, suggested that teachers need adequate training prior to implementing a program.

Future research should determine the barriers that are preventing the integration of HIV/AIDS education in the public schools and explore the reasons that it is often ineffective. This may involve exploring teachers and student's perspectives, and evaluating current curriculum and pedagogical strategies.

- h. The relationship between traditionalism, safeguarding identity, and development interventions.

This research postulates that misguided, non-participatory and culturally incompetent development interventions ironically contribute to girls' vulnerability by instigating collective responses that reinforce traditionalism. The research postulates that this is ultimately underpinned by the communities' need to safeguard identity.

Although this was discussed in this research, it deems more attention in future research. It will be valuable to further explore and substantiate this postulation. In so doing, research may contribute to an important impetus for reorienting development interventions towards more anti-oppressive strategies. Exploring this phenomenon may

significantly contribute to transforming the development interventions that have historically disempowered the Kisongo Maasai community.

## CHAPTER 10: CONCLUDING REMARKS

The personal is political. Girls' vulnerability is intrinsically related to the 'politics of health'. It is not only a private or personal issue, but a social and public issue. Although girls' vulnerability is mediated by personal awareness, concern, knowledge, and subsequent practices, this study suggests that environmental issues mediate their vulnerability more significantly.

The "personal is political", and sexual behavior is intrinsically a social behavior. Cultural values and ideologies transformed into powerful systems of convention proscribe characteristics and behaviors to girls and boys that facilitate the gender dimension of the HIV epidemic. Their vulnerability is related to ethnic and gender identity. The construction of these identities is a product of power relations and subsequent cultural production of gender ideology and corresponding values.

Environmental factors, such as traditional institutions, customs, and norms further undermine girls' capacity to adopt behaviors that reduce their risk, and in addition, foster social organization that disproportionately impacts girls' power. As a result, this facilitates an unequal access to instrumental factors that are essential to decreasing vulnerability, such as education, social services, health services, economic activities, resources, and political affairs.

In contrast, therefore, to many conventional forms of prevention programming, the paramount issue is not the personal issues of awareness or knowledge, but social issues related to power-relations, ethnic and gender construction, and subsequently, prevailing cultural phenomena. As Dr. Rao Gupta stated in her address to the XIII International Aids Conference, "an understanding of individual sexual behavior, male or female, thus necessitates an understanding of gender and sexuality as constructed by a complex interplay of social, cultural, and economic forces that determine the distribution of power" (Gupta, 2000).

As illustrated by the findings of this research, individualistic focuses and explanations of girls' vulnerability are a fundamental misconception of the problem, and will not substantially reduce girls' vulnerability. Programming needs to be reoriented to innovative strategies that facilitate change in girls' socio-cultural environments. Enabling environments are at the root of facilitating sustainable behavior change (Family Health International, 2002). In this regard, technical assistance-type approaches that focus on information, education, services, and technology/commodities will often not be significantly effective. Developing technical capacity, although essential, will not significantly affect the environmental issues highlighted in the cultural analysis presented in this dissertation. It will not facilitate the redistribution of power that is quintessential to reducing girls' vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.

HIV prevention programming, therefore, must be reoriented to facilitating enabling environments. As the personal is political, so must the focus of HIV prevention programming. In accordance with the cultural analysis provided in this study, technical assistance must be combined with collaborative organizing that facilitates socio-cultural adaptation and modification; facilitates access to instrumental factors, especially economic resources; and social action to affect public policy, legislation, and service/institutional reform.

In addition to the intra-community politics and power-relations that facilitate girls' vulnerability, the 'personal is political' in a more macro sense as well. As Mauel Castells' opening statement in The Power of Identity states, "our world, and our lives, are being shaped by the conflicting trends of globalization and identity" (2004, p. 1).

The political economy analysis presented in this study suggests that girls' vulnerability is not only facilitated by the environmental factors identified by this study's cultural analysis, but is also related to macro environmental factors: the extrinsic forces and external impacts predominantly facilitated through state and non-state sponsored 'development'. Consequently,



the politics of girls' vulnerability to HIV/AIDS is not solely based on the "the people to be 'developed'", but also "the apparatus that is to do the 'developing'" (Ferguson, 1990, p. 17). It is, in fact, the history of 'development' and the power-relations that have pervaded this process are at the core of the vulnerability to HIV/AIDS witnessed in contemporary Kisongo Maasai communities. Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, colonization and 'development' has affected the socio-cultural construction of gender and ethnic identity, it has imposed foreign social and economic structures, it has undermined customary structures, and facilitated the entrenchment of traditionalist ideology. In many historic cases, and commonly in contemporary cases, 'development' has and is adversely impacting the Kisongo Maasai community and subsequently, further compounding their general capacity to access the necessary instrumental factors that may mitigate the impact of the HIV epidemic on their community.

In general, 'development' has disproportionately affected Kisongo Maasai women and girls. Their historic gender identity and access to economic resources has profoundly changed, and entrenched traditionalism has impacted attitudes towards change and undermined cultural change mechanisms that have historically contributed to socio-cultural adaptation and change.

'Development' must transform its approach, process, and paradigm in order to facilitate a reduction in girls' vulnerability. 'Development', and specifically HIV prevention programming, must be characterized with cultural competence and the other principles highlighted in the Model of Anti-Oppressive Development in Chapter 7. Anti-Oppressive development is not only intrinsically important, but is instrumental to facilitating intercultural solidarity, and subsequently, effectively facilitating enabling environments. Anti-Oppressive development is instrumental to creating collaborative relations that are not perceived as a threat to cultural identity and autonomy, but instead, re-locate members of the Kisongo Maasai community as

subjects of 'development' rather than objects, and empower community members to become agents in the socio-cultural adaptation that must occur in the face of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

In conclusion, therefore, this study proposes that given the imminent and disastrous effects of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and given the socio-cultural phenomenon identified in the cultural analysis of this research, elements of the Kisongo Maasia culture must adapt to the new conditions presented by the epidemic. It is an immediate and overwhelming necessity, which can be facilitated by 'development'. However, first, 'development' must itself be transformed.

As a symbolic measure, this dissertation will now conclude with the "voices" of the Kisongo Maasai. They are an incredible community with an incomprehensible vitality to overcome the extrinsic forces and impacts that have characterized their history. With the same vitality, and with effective intercultural solidarity, they will overcome the force and impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

*This seminar is very good because we are the ones who decide what we want, it listens to us, and we wish that it continues this way. When it continues in this way, we will have many things to share, we will continue to be free to share...*

*We have very good ideas for ourselves...*

*We want to go and try to educate about AIDS, and then later on we meet and listen to what individuals have accepted, what they say about condoms, but in fact, we have never, we were never involved in seminars that give us freedom to share, to form strategies...*

*We are uniting...*

*Normally, when you see a lion coming running to you and you do not have any weapon, what you can do, you need to make a lot of noise to call other people to help you, make a loud noise to call other people to help you. This AIDS is like a lion, which is running to us, and we don't have weapons, there*

*"The AIDS is coming and there is nowhere to run..."*

Section IV

*is no cure. You can never go to the hospital and get treated, that is life, you don't have a weapon.*

*But to make noises, it is to call people and to try to make solutions, to make our strategies...*

*There is no spare heart...*

## EPILOGUE

This study has focused its analysis on the Kisongo Maasai of Longido, Tanzania. Their ideologies, values, customs, institutions, social order, and dynamic relationship with external forces have been dissected, exposed, and critically analyzed. It is my hope and desire that this study will contribute to building intercultural solidarity and constructive, culturally-sensitive relationships with Maasai communities, and in so doing, facilitate the necessary change to reduce and mitigate the imminent and devastating impacts that the HIV/AIDS epidemic will inflict on the Maasai community, and specifically, women and girls. I remain committed in my current work to sensitize development stakeholders to the findings and implications of this study, so as to foster intercultural solidarity and translate the findings of this study into practice – transforming the ‘development apparatus’, building constructive and empowering relationships with the Longido community, and collaboratively implementing culturally competent prevention programming.

It has been a privilege to participate in this study. Most importantly, it has been a privilege to live and work with the Kisongo Maasai community in Longido, and more specifically, the communities within the Engarinaibor Ward. The focus of my attention in this project was, of course, exploring the Maasai community, but undoubtedly, it simultaneously facilitated an exploration of my ‘self’. As I dissected, exposed, and critically analyzed the Maasai community, I inevitably underwent my own process of dissecting, exposing, and critically analyzing my ‘self’. Faced with the history, cultural diversity and worldview of the Kisongo Maasai, my own assumptions about the world were challenged and transformed, and my own identity reconstituted to some degree. I have been fortunate to personally experience the intimate and dynamic struggle to maintain cultural identity in the face of foreign ideological pressure. I entered the community with stereotypical and simplistic assumptions about the

Maasai's "irrational" resistance to 'development', and left with an appreciation and sympathy for their struggle to safeguard their collective identity and a deep respect for their vitality and collective resistance. I entered the community with an internalized, subconscious attitude that assumed the "problem" was solely the "deficiencies" of the Maasai culture. In contrast, I left with sympathy for the oppression this community has historically faced, and a deep sorrow and guilt for my association with the 'development' and domination systems that have been instrumental in creating the vulnerability in contemporary communities. I became intimately aware how 'my history' has systematically undermined and disempowered the Maasai communities' structures and mechanisms for regulating inequality, mediating conflict, and managing change. I entered the community with patronizing assumptions of charity and 'needs', but left the community with an appreciation of autonomy, strength, and human rights. I entered this project with disbelief about the sexual customs and socio-sexual organization of the Maasai. In fact, I entered with the idea that the customs I had vicariously learned must be a distorted misrepresentation perpetuated by foreigners. I intended to clarify these misrepresentations and disprove the falsified stories. Instead, my experience in the community exposed me to sexual diversity and uncovered my own biases and assumptions - my erroneous assumptions concerning the "superiority" of Judeo-Christian values concerning delayed sexual debut, abstinence, monogamy, and fidelity. I left the community with a new appreciation for the socially constructed nature of my own moral values, a renewed sense of agency to evaluate and reconstitute my values, and a revitalized respect for diversity, plurality, and a commitment to advocate for the autonomy of diverse cultural groups. I left the community in stark contrast to how I entered it, and for that, I am indebted to the Maasai community.

*Reconstruct the image of the other in his or her integrity as other,  
both same and different*

*Value the other as other.*

*Respect the other once again.*

*Discover myself in the confrontation.*

*Discover that before the confrontation I had yet to discover myself.*

*Understand that the self is only formed in the face of the other.*

*Understand that I am other to another self.*

*Realize that we are all others.*

*(An excerpt from a poem by Alfredo Lopez Austin)*

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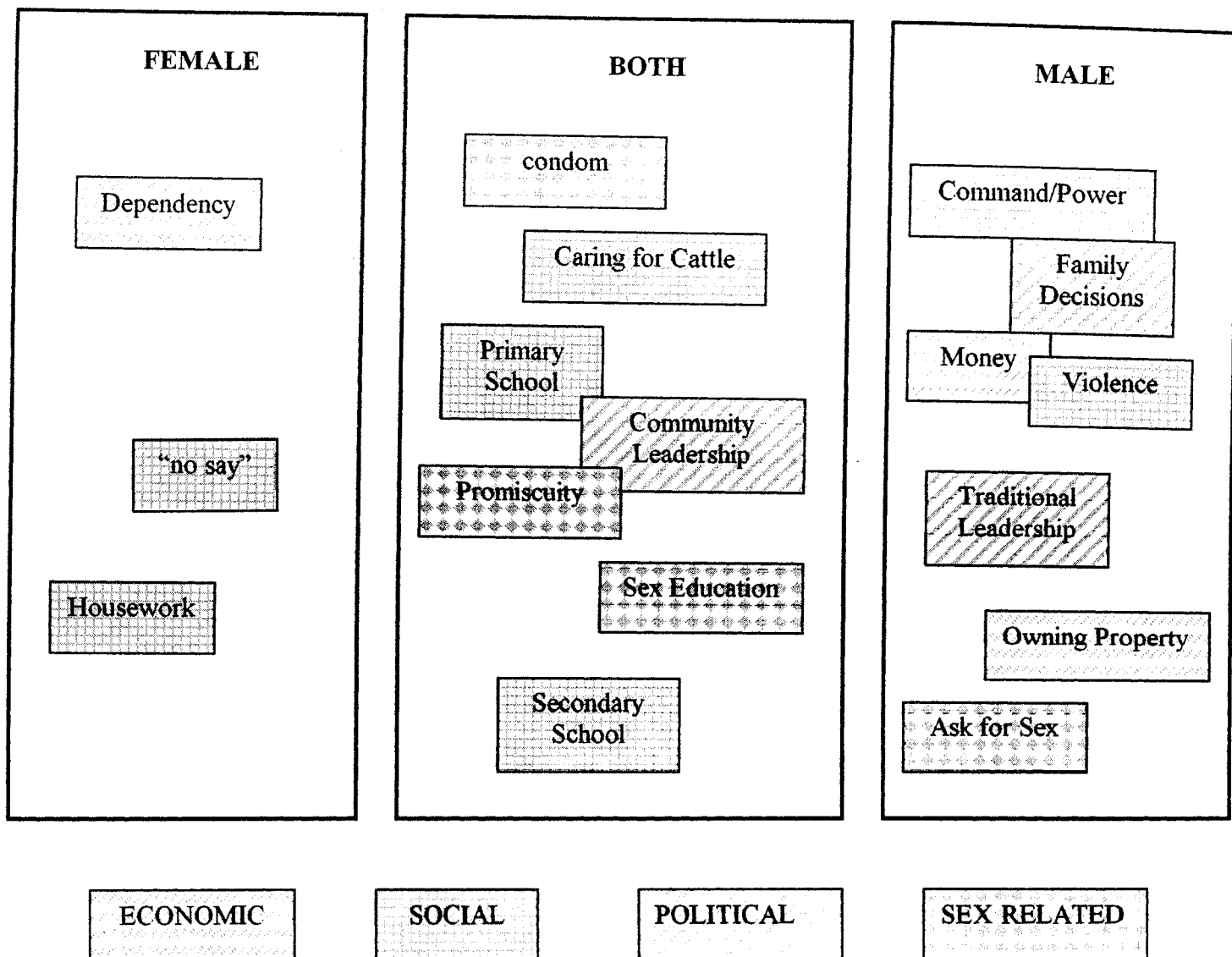
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**APPENDIX I**  
The Gender Matrix Activity



The above illustration represents the gender matrix that was displayed on the front wall during focus group discussions. The purpose of this activity was to stimulate participation and facilitate a discussion in accordance with the topics and questions illustrated in the Focus Group Discussion Guide. The process of the activity involved participants being periodically invited to place the above illustrated 'gender cards' on the matrix. Upon placing a card under the column that was perceived appropriate by the participants, the group leader facilitated discussion relating to the phenomena.

The importance of this activity cannot be understated. It was very effective in empowering participants in the data generation process, created high involvement, and participation in the discussions. In addition, by color coding the gender cards, the matrix served as an effective visual aide that illustrated women and girls' unequal power and access to resources. Ultimately, the opportunity to participate in producing a visual representation of the inequality that women and girls face served a consciousness raising and empowerment function for participants.

**APPENDIX II**  
Focus Group Discussion Guide: Phase I

*[Note: The following FGD guide is a translated version of the Swahili original. It was designed in collaboration with the Kisongo Maasai youth researchers. The general design loosely adopts the Knowledge, Attitude, and Behavior (KAB) conceptual framework. For each phenomena, facilitators explored the actual practice/behavior that exists in the community, the perceived reasons for phenomena, and relevant attitudes/perceptions. The text boxes illustrated at the beginning of each section represent the gender cards that were placed on the gender matrix. The following questions were intended only as a guide for the facilitators. The facilitators were provided substantial leeway to pursue whatever questions they believed relevant. In which case, the list of questions in this guide does not encompass the breadth of questions that actually unfolded in the facilitation process.]*

**Social/Cultural Phenomena**

- A. 

<b>No Say</b>
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<b>command/power</b>
----------------------

Practice/Behavior and Reasons

- 1) Is it true that women/men have 'no say'?
- 2) Who is the one with more command and authority?
  - a) Why do you think this is so?
- 3) Are there any circumstances in which women control men?

Attitude/Perception

- 1) Is this situation, of men perceiving themselves as superior to women, positive or negative?
  - a) Why do you say this?
- 2) How does this situation impact/affect women?

**For Women Ask:**

- 1) *Would you like to have more 'say' and command?*
  - a) *Why do you say this?*
  - b) *Is it possible for women to have more 'say' and authority?*
  - c) *What prevents women from having more 'say' and authority?*

- B. 

<b>housework</b>
------------------

Practice/Behavior and Reasons

- 1) Do men do housework?
  - a) (If yes) what types of housework do men do?

- b) (If not) why do they not do housework?
- 2) Do women do housework?
  - a) What types of housework is done by women?
  - b) Why are women responsible for most of the housework?

Attitude/Perception

- 1) Should men do housework?
  - a) (If no) Why shouldn't they?
  - b) (If yes) Why should they?
  - c) What household tasks should men do?
- 2) Given the difference in tasks between men and women, what effect does this have on women?

C.

**caring for cattle**

Practice/Behavior and Reasons

- 1) Who is more likely to receive primary education? A boy or a girl?
  - a) Why do you say this?
  - b) What are the reasons that girls are prevented from receiving primary education?
  - c) What are the reasons that boys are prevented from receiving primary education?
- 2) Who is more likely to receive secondary education? A boy or a girl?
  - a) Why do you say this?
  - b) What are the reasons that girls are prevented from receiving secondary education?
  - c) What are the reasons that boys are prevented from receiving secondary education?

Attitude/Perception

- 1) Is there a need for girls to get primary education?
  - a) Why do you say this?
- 2) Is there a need for boys to get primary education?
  - a) Why do you say this?
- 3) Is there a need for girls to get secondary education?
  - a) Why do you say this?
- 4) Is there a need for boys to get secondary education?
  - a) Why do you say this?
- 5) Who needs to get primary education more? Boys or girls?
  - a) Why?
- 6) Who needs to get secondary education more? Boys or girls?
  - a) Why?

D.

**Violence**

Practice/Behavior and Reasons

- 1) Is it common for men to beat their girlfriends?
  - a) Why do they beat them?

Attitude/Perception

- 1) Is it acceptable for men to beat their girlfriends?
  - a) Why do they beat them?
  - b) (If this is acceptable ASK) Under what circumstances is this behavior acceptable?

- 2) How does this affect women?

## Economic Phenomena

### A. **money**

#### Practice/Behavior and Reasons

- 1) Do women have money?
  - a) How do they earn it?
- 2) Do men have money?
  - a) How do they earn it?
- 3) Who has more money? Men or women?
  - a) Why?

#### Attitude/Perception

- 1) How does not having money effect women?

### B. **Owning property**

#### Practice/Behavior and Reasons

- 1) What property do women own?
  - a) How do women gain ownership of land?
- 2) What property do men own?
  - a) How do men gain ownership of land?
- 3) Do women control the use of land?
  - a) (If not) why?

#### Attitude/Perception

- 1) How does land ownership affect women?

### C. **Dependency**

#### Practice/Behavior and Reasons

- 1) Are women dependent on men?
- 2) How do they depend on men?

#### Attitude/Perception

- 1) Are women affected by being dependent on men?
  - a) Why?
- 2) Can women survive without depending on men?

## Political Phenomena

### A. **Family decisions**

Practice/Behavior and Reasons

- 1) Who makes the most decisions within the family?
  - a) Why?
- 2) What types of decisions do men make?
- 3) What types of decisions do women make?

Attitude/Perception

- 1) Who makes the most important decisions in the family?
- 2) How does this affect women?

**For Women Ask:**

- ◇ What type of family decisions would you like to make?
  - Why?

**B. Community Leadership**

**Traditional Leadership**

Practice/Behavior and Reasons

- 1) Who is more likely to lead the community? A man or a woman?
- 2) Who is more likely to hold positions of traditional leadership? A man or a woman?

Attitude/Perception

- 1) How does leadership effect women?
- 2) Is it important to have women leaders?
  - a) Why?
- 3) Is it important to listen to women's views when making decisions?
  - a) Why?

**Reproductive Health and Sexual Behavior**

**A. Asks for Sex**

Practice/Behavior and Reasons

- 1) Do men approach women for sex?
  - a) What are the reasons that men have sex?
- 2) Do women approach men for sex?
  - a) What are the reasons that women have sex?
- 3) Are there times when men force women to have sex?
  - a) When do men force women to have sex?
- 4) What steps are taken against a man who uses force to have sex?

Attitude/Perception

- 1) Are women able to refuse to have sex with a man?
- 2) Is it difficult for a woman to refuse?
  - a) Why?
  - b) Can a woman be cursed if she refuses to have sex?

**B. Promiscuity**

Practice/Behavior and Reasons

- 1) Do men have many sexual partners?
- 2) Do women have many sexual partners?
- 3) What groups are involved in sex the most? (I.e. Morans, uncircumcised girls, etc.)

Attitude/Perception

- 1) Is it good for men to have many partners?
  - a) Why?
- 2) Is it good for women to have many partners?
  - a) Why?
- 3) Is it acceptable for married women to have many partners?
- 4) Is it acceptable for married men to have many partners?
- 5) How does this effect men?
- 6) How does this effect women?

**For Women, ask:**

- ◇ Is it common that your husband has many partners?
- ◇ Is this good or bad?

**For Men, ask:**

- ◇ When men travel to go to town, do they have sex with women?
- ◇ Is it common?

**C. Sex Education**

Practice/Behavior and Reasons

- 1) Who is responsible for education youth about sex in your community?

**For Women Ask:**

- ◇ Are women educated about sex?
  - How?
- ◇ Is it important?
  - Why?

**For Men Ask:**

- ◇ Are men educated about sex?
  - How?
- ◇ Is it important?
  - Why?

**D. Condoms**

Practice/Behavior and Reasons

- 1) Do you know what a condom is?
- 2) Are condoms used during sex?
  - a) Why?

Attitude/Perception

- 1) How would you feel if your husband or wife used a condom?
  - a) Why do you say that?
- 2) Can you tell your husband/wife to use a condom when have sex?
  - a) Why do you say that?

## Traditional Beliefs and Practices

### A. Esoto

- 1) What is the purpose of Esoto?
- 2) Who participates in Esoto?
  - a) Why?
- 3) What happens during Esoto?
  - a) Does sex take place at Esoto?

#### **For Women Ask:**

- Why do girls go to Esoto?
- Is Esoto a good or bad thing for girls?
  - Why?

### B. Age-Sets

- 1) What is the reason for 'age-sets'?
- 2) Is it positive or negative?
  - a) Why?
- 3) Is it necessary for a man to leave his house to accommodate an age-mate visitor?
  - a) Is this positive or negative?
- 4) Can the visitor ask a woman for sex?
  - a) Can a woman refuse?
  - b) If a woman refuses, what will happen?

#### **For Women Ask:**

- How does 'age-sets' effect marriage?
- Is there anyone married to an older man?
  - Is this positive or negative?
- Is there anyone with more than one husband?
  - Is this positive or negative?

### C. Curses

- 1) What causes a person to be cursed?
- 2) What happens when a person is cursed?
- 3) When a woman refuses to have sex, can they be cursed?

### D. Female Circumcision

- 1) Is female circumcision practiced in your community?
  - a) Is it prevalent?
- 2) Why are girls circumcised?
- 3) What are the benefits of being circumcised?
- 4) What are the negative impacts of women being circumcised?
- 5) If women are not circumcised, what will happen?



## APPENDIX III

### Focus Group Discussion Guide: Phase II

*[Note: Phase II focus groups were much less structured than Phase I. As illustrated below, Part I consisted of clarification of some phenomena from the data generated in Phase I. The objectives of Part II was to present the preliminary findings from Phase I and seek feedback and elaboration of the findings. In accordance with the preliminary analysis, 'power' was determined as the central category. Therefore, after explaining and discussing this concept, facilitators presented the findings in accordance to the designated sub-categories: social, economic, political, and sexual power. Following this, they sought feedback and elaboration from participants, and proceeded to explore risk perceptions. Part III focused on interventions.]*

Note to facilitators: ongoing informed consent must be established prior to discussions.

#### **PART I**

Clarification and elaboration of phenomena that is unclear in the data generated thus far.

For **MALES** ask:

1. According to our previous discussions, we understand that Esoto has a few functions/purposes: a social function, communal provision function, as well as a sexual function. In relation to the sexual function we have the following question:
  - a. Are girls continuing to reside overnight at the Esoto?
  - b. Are the number of girls that are residing overnight decreasing?
  - c. [If the number is decreasing:] Why are girls not residing overnight?
    - i. Who is preventing girls from residing overnight?
    - ii. Is this a positive or negative 'development'?

For **WOMEN** ask:

1. In our previous discussions, it was indicated that boyfriends often provide support to their girlfriends.
  - a. What types of support do boyfriends offer girlfriends (women)?
  - b. Do boyfriends provide economic support? (I.e. giving cattle or goats, giving money)
  - c. Is this support important for girlfriends?
  - d. Do women develop or maintain boyfriends for the purpose of getting support?
  - e. What are the other reasons for developing boyfriend relationships?
2. Participants indicated that sexual relationships for girls are often started before circumcision.
  - a. At what age do girls generally begin having boyfriends?
  - b. What is the youngest age that they begin having boyfriends?
  - c. Does this have negative impacts?
  - d. Should it change?
  - e. How can this be prevented?
3. Participants indicated that women are offered 'teachings' from their mother and father on the night prior to marriage.
  - a. What are they taught?
  - b. How are they taught to treat their husbands?
  - c. What are they taught about sexual relationships?
4. It was indicated that girls often reside overnight at the Esoto and are engaged in sexual relationships with Morans.
  - a. Are girls continuing to reside overnight at the Esoto?
  - b. Some participants indicated that they did not allow their children to reside overnight at the Esoto.
    - i. Is it common for parents to disallow their daughters to reside overnight at Esoto?
    - ii. Is it acceptable to prevent their daughters? Is their pressure from Morans or fathers to allow their daughters to reside overnight there?

## **PART II**

Review of preliminary analysis; feedback and elaboration from participants; and subsequent discussion on risk assessment.

### INTRODUCTION

1. Review of General Objective and Specific Objectives
    - a. General Objective
      - i. Reducing vulnerability of Maasai to HIV/AIDS, with a focus on women and girls
- [NOTE: it may be important to review the concept of women and girls' vulnerability: biological and social, economic, political vulnerability]
- b. Specific Objectives
    - i. Gaining clarification of preliminary analysis and interpretation of findings.
    - ii. Exploring the perceptions of women, men, girls and boys
    - iii. Exploring ideas for interventions and potential barriers.
2. Power: the organizing principle/central category (SEE *Overview of preliminary findings*)
    - a. Definitions
      - i. Social Power and sexual power
      - ii. Economic Power
      - iii. Political Power
    - b. Examples

### SOCIAL POWER

1. Review of findings.
2. Feedback and elaboration from participants
  - a. NOTE: the focus of this component is to establish whether the participants agree or disagree with our interpretation and organization of the data. It is most important to explore any disagreements and perspectives contrary to our findings.
3. Risk Assessment: a discussion of perceived risk in relation to social power
  - a. How does 'social power' impact women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS?
  - b. How does 'social power' impact girls' vulnerability?
  - c. How does 'social power' impact men's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS?
  - d. How does 'social power' impact boys' vulnerability to HIV/AIDS?

### ECONOMIC POWER

1. Review of findings.
2. Feedback and elaboration from participants
  - a. NOTE: the focus of this component is to establish whether the participants agree or disagree with our interpretation and organization of the data. It is most important to explore any disagreements and perspectives contrary to our findings.
3. Risk Assessment: a discussion of perceived risk in relation to social power
  - a. How does 'economic power' impact women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS?
  - b. How does 'economic power' impact girls' vulnerability?
  - c. How does 'economic power' impact men's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS?
  - d. How does 'economic power' impact boys' vulnerability to HIV/AIDS?

## POLITICAL POWER

1. Review of findings.
2. Feedback and elaboration from participants
  - a. NOTE: the focus of this component is to establish whether the participants agree or disagree with our interpretation and organization of the data. It is most important to explore any disagreements and perspectives contrary to our findings.
3. Risk Assessment: a discussion of perceived risk in relation to social power
  - a. How does 'political power' impact women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS?
  - b. How does 'political power' impact girls' vulnerability?
  - c. How does 'political power' impact men's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS?
  - d. How does 'political power' impact boys' vulnerability to HIV/AIDS?

## SEXUAL POWER

1. Review of findings.
2. Feedback and elaboration from participants
  - a. NOTE: the focus of this component is to establish whether the participants agree or disagree with our interpretation and organization of the data. It is most important to explore any disagreements and perspectives contrary to our findings.
3. Risk Assessment: a discussion of perceived risk in relation to social power
  - a. How does 'sexual power' impact women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS?
  - b. How does 'sexual power' impact girls' vulnerability?
  - c. How does 'sexual power' impact men's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS?
  - d. How does 'sexual power' impact boys' vulnerability to HIV/AIDS?

## **PART III**

Discussion on Interventions and potential barriers.

1. How can we reduce the vulnerability of Maasai to HIV/AIDS?
  - a. How can we reduce the vulnerability of women and girls?
2. What types of interventions would be most effective?
  - a. Are programs about condoms a good intervention?
3. Who should implement these interventions?
  - a. What institutions, agencies, or people are most effective/influential in the Maasai community?
4. What are the anticipated barriers to these interventions?
  - a. Are there any members of the community who will resist these interventions?

## **Part IV**

Conclusion, expression of thanx, and explanation of ongoing project: dissemination and intervention development.

**APPENDIX IV**  
Illustration of transcribed data

The following is an excerpt from the transcribed data corresponding to the 18-25 year old female focus group discussion (Phase I). The purpose of this illustration is to supplement the explanation of the translation, transcription, and micro-analysis process described in Chapter 3. As discussed in Chapter 3, translation and transcription included the concurrent participation of Kisongo Maasai researchers and the English-speaking principal investigator. Sections of the audiotapes were listened to, discussed, and then transcribed in English onto the computer. As a result, the transcription process also included a micro-analysis of the data. As indicated by the key below, the italics represent explanations, clarifications, and elaborations provided by the Kisongo Maasai translators. All of the transcriptions were done in a similar manner. Although time-consuming, given the cross-cultural nature of the research, it was an essential component of the data analysis.

**EXCERPT (FGD/F18-25):**

(F) Why don't they do it?

(P) They don't do because they don't want to.

(P) They don't because they are busy.

B – You know, men think they just don't need to help with this work. *The word that is used to describe this is similar to saying that a child is 'spoiled'. It's meaning that the participant believes that the man can do the work, he has the capacity, but he is just not interested and doesn't feel he needs to help, so even if asked he just ignores the question.* The men have authority. A woman cleans the goat pen, clean the calabashes, they clean the calve pen, and then a man also needs his food ready at the time that he designates and also you still have to wash his clothes, and he just wants to come when the food is ready to eat. So, we are not different from those people in jail.

C – Yes, once he comes he expects the food to be ready even though he is aware that I was doing all of his cattle work.

(P) A woman goes and finds grass for the calves

(P) A woman collects firewood.

(P) A woman collects grass for roofing.

(P) She gets water

(P) And he says that this is your responsibility, and he never even considers it. *Implication: a man does*

*not even consider or think about the impacts of all the work he assigns. He will continue to assign additional jobs or duties and gives no consideration to the work they already have to complete, because he just sees these duties as 'women's business' and therefore, their problem.*

(F) Okay so for example, cleaning the goat pen. Can a man do this?

B – Yes, he can do it, because he can use a shovel. He just doesn't want to so he doesn't do it. *Implication: the use of a shovel would normally be a man's job due to the heavy labor it involves, so there is no shame in a man doing this job, but they still refuse to do it.*

**KEY:**

(F) = Facilitator

A, B, C, etc = Identified participant

(P) = Unidentified participant

(G) = group response

*italics* = represents elaborations or clarifications given by the translators