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Gendered Aspirations
The Role of Education in Amplifying the Constrained Voices of South Sudanese Refugee Girls in Kiryandongo Settlement in Uganda

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List of Acronyms

DEO	District Education Officer
DfID	Department for International Development
ECW	Education Cannot Wait
IASFM	International Association for the Study of Forced Migration
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISS	Institute of Social Studies
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NAS	National Salvation Front
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NUFFIC	The Dutch Organization for the Internationalization of Education
OKP	Orange Knowledge Programme
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SPLM/A	Sudan Peoples' Liberation Movement/Army
UNEB	Uganda National Examinations Board
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scienctific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WIU	Windle International Uganda
WPDI	Whitaker Peace and Development Initiative

Abstract

Aspirations have been associated with educational interventions geared towards raising the level of educational attainment among communities with low socioeconomic status (SES). It has taken root in most Western countries in the past few decades as a means of bridging the economic inequality gap in these societies. Using Appadurai's *Capacity to Aspire* theory, I discuss how South Sudanese girls and their parents, in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement, express their and their daughters' educational and the future possibilities for the future such as good life, getting rich and helping others. Challenges to access, retention and graduation from schools was explored. The notion of empowerment through education was also examined specifically about how it is understood by the teachers, NGOs staff and parents. I conducted focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews, document reviews, and observations as data collection methods among 50 participants. Adopting intersectional lens to analyze their views, it became apparent that girls in the settlement have high aspirations. Gender roles, relations and ideologies, and refugee environment play a major role in influencing these girls' aspirations. Female and male parents have different ideas about which children to take and keep at school. This gives us a sense of how aspirations are gendered. Despite a host of literature pointing the non-linearity of education leading to empowerment most of the teachers, NGOs staff, District Education Officer and a few parents still highly believe that girls' empowerment can be achieved through formal education. The implication is that the girls aspire for things that are somewhat different from what the resource holders/providers want to give them, hence rendering educational and empowerment initiatives ineffective when girls' views are not considered. Although sensationalized in Europe, United States and Australia, it should be noted that aspirations are context specific. South Sudanese refugee girls find themselves in a constrained environment which influences what they aspire to be or have in the future. Whether they will achieve those aspirations is again something entirely different.

Relevance to Development Studies

Aspirations have received prominence in the educational policy circles in Australia, United Kingdom and the European Union as governments try to get rid of poverty among communities with low socioeconomic status (SES). High aspirations by children at younger ages are said to be more likely translated into achievement of the educational levels and career choices in future (Archer et al. 2014: 57). The poor aspire less compared to their rich counterparts, and to fight poverty means also raising their aspirations (Appadurai 2004). Although aspirations have come to be associated with the West, the concept should not be ignored by development studies. It is important to note that the context in Western nations is different from that in the countries in the Global South. But to understand how it may or may not contribute to the eradication of poverty in the refugee context, aspirations of

young refugee girls need to be examined in how and why they articulate them in the way they do in tandem with their empowerment.

Key Words

Aspirations, girls, education, empowerment, gendered displacement, South Sudan, Uganda

Chapter 1
Introduction: Contextualizing the Case of South Sudanese Girls in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement

1.1 Girls without a future?

Keji, a soft-spoken 20-year girl, was one of the South Sudanese youths attending self-help trainings with Whitaker Peace and Development Initiative (WPDI) Center, a non-governmental organization (NGO) in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement. She had completed Senior 4 after partly self-funding her studies by working in a restaurant. She lives with her stepmother because her father split with her mother when she was four years old. Pursuing further studies is now a distant, if not an impossible, dream. She had aspired to go up to the university but now she said she would settle for anything that would help her make a living. Keji's story is similar in many aspects to the majority of young girls who dropped out from school that I interacted with in the settlement. This story also links to the wider realities of South Sudanese girls' access to formal education during their different stages of displacement, war and conflict, and at times return to South Sudan

A report by a US-based charity ONE ranked South Sudan number one in the *Top 10 Toughest Places for a Girl to Get an Education* (ONE 2018). This is not to say that South Sudan has ever had impressive education indicators before the current civil war but these statistics have worsened over time. For example, according to a report by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) published before the 15 December 2013 war, South Sudan ranked the lowest in world rankings for secondary school enrolment: there were only 400 girls completing their secondary education in 2010 countrywide; a girl was three times more likely to die during pregnancy or childbirth than completing her primary education; only twelve percent of teachers were females (UNESCO 2011:1).

The Dakar Framework for Action made gender parity and equality in education as one of its priorities (Subrahmanian 2005: 396). The United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which were adapted in 2000, among others, provide the following pledges to be achieved by 2015:

- Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education[1]
- Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women[2]

When the MDGs' mandate expired in 2015, they were replaced by Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that are expected to be accomplished by 2030. Gender and education still featured prominently in the now revamped global pledges as seen from the below SDG goals:

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[1] https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/education.shtml (accessed 12 July 2019)

[2] https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/gender.shtml (accessed 12 July 2019)

- Goal 4: Providing quality education for both boys and men, and girls and women[3]
- Goal 5: Gender equality in all spheres of life[4]

Governments and international organizations have taken upon them to put these pledges into practical terms and chief among them is the UN Refugees Agency. The *UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) Policy of the Refugee Women* is meant to "provide a catalyst through which they can have access to better employment, education, and services and opportunities in their society"[5]. This is meant to be applicable in the refugee setting. Grabska (2011; 2014) critically examines how much initiatives, such as the Angelina Jolie Girls' School in Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya, by aid and donor agencies do not pay attention to these girls' gendered needs and aspirations.

The rationale for this research paper is outlined in the challenges above. This research looks in particular at the educational aspirations of South Sudanese refugee girls in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement in Uganda as well as exploring the challenges that they encounter when trying to access, while studying, and when they try to go to the next academic levels as well as choosing their future careers. I also look at how education is often perceived as empowerment in relation to these girls. It has to be borne in mind that the context in which these girls' aspirations are expressed is different from that in the West. Whether these aspirations will be achieved is also a different story. The social context in which these girls imagine their future is a major factor in shaping them.

1.2 Research Objectives and Questions

Objectives

The main objective of this research is to shed light on the South Sudanese refugee girls' educational aspirations in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement in Uganda. Second, I highlight the challenges that these girls face in relation to enrolment, retention and graduation from primary and secondary schools. Lastly, the research aims to contribute to the existing knowledge in the field of gendered displacement and educational interventions while focusing specifically on the way girls' empowerment has been conceptualised in relation to education.

Main question

The main research question that guides my research is as follows:

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[3] https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/education/ (accessed 12 July 2019)

[4] https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/ (accessed 12 July 2019)

[5] https://www.unhcr.org/3ba6186810.html (accessed 12 July 2019)

- How do South Sudanese girls in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement express their educational aspirations despite the challenges with access, retention and graduation from school that characterise their environment?

This question is answered by the following sub-questions:

- What challenges do these girls face to access, stay in school and complete their primary and secondary education?
- Which are the educational aspirations expressed by the South Sudanese refugee girls, and sometimes parents for their children, in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement?
- How is formal education perceived for girls and how, if at all, is it connected to empowerment for them?

1.3 History of South Sudan Refugee Crises

South Sudan is the third largest refugee crises in the world after Syria and Afghanistan – all three make up 57% of the total world refugees (UNHCR 2018: 3). By December 2018, Uganda was hosting half of the 2.4 million South Sudanese refugees (UNHCR 2019). Of the displaced, 64% are children below the ages of 18 – many unaccompanied minors who have parents and/or siblings killed or have lost contacts with them while fleeing violence (McKeever 2017; Human Rights Watch 2017). These reports by the UN's refugee agency do not say how many of these refugee children in Uganda are girls and how many are also out of school.

Although it is not the focus of this research, it is important to note that (South) Sudan wars have existed for decades since 1955, a year before Sudan's independence in 1956, mainly between the southern rebel groups and the Government of Sudan. With them came untold suffering and loss of lives resulting into displacement of large number of people both within and to other countries in the region and beyond. Therefore, the current refugee crisis is a continuum of these wars. Many of the refugees have been displaced multiple times, and some were born in exile and never returned to their or parents' places of origin. Many scholars (Grabska 2014; Hovil 2018; Sharkey 2012; Collins 2007; D'Agoot 2019) have documented the history of the wars and multiple displacements of South(ern) Sudanese over the time.

A peace deal was inked in 2005 between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) which provided for the referendum for the people of the south of the country to choose whether to secede or remain part of the whole Sudan. After the southerners overwhelmingly voted on January 2010 to form a new country, South Sudan became an independent country on 9th July 2011. Barely three years after independence, South Sudan plunged into a fully blown bloody civil war on 15th December 2013. This time it was over power wrangles between President Salva Kiir and his former Vice-President Dr. Riek Machar. As the fighting started to spread across the country by mid-2014 the number of South Sudanese who fled to the neighbouring countries swelled from 114,500 to 508,600 with Uganda receiving 141,400 (UNHCR 2014: 5) alt-

hough the numbers continued to grow as the war raged throughout the country. Within the country, there were 1.3 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) (UNHCR 2014: 10).

A subsequent peace deal where Machar returned to Juba as new Vice-President did not last (D'Agoot 2019: 10) while another former Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army General Thomas Cirillo Swakka formed National Salvation Front (NAS) led to more refugees streaming across borders to the neighbouring countries including Uganda (Reuters 2017).

In the subsequent years after the outbreak of war in 2013, education - like other social services in South Sudan - was hit hard. A United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) report indicated that one in two children in South Sudan was affected by war in one way or the other; 2.4 million children were among those who had fled the country; 72% of children were out of school – the highest in the world (UNICEF 2017) with Uganda hosting the second largest South Sudanese refugee population. A UNHCR (2019) report showed that there are low enrolment rates among refugees in Uganda. And for those who have enrolled at schools, there are 154 pupils per classroom and 85 pupils per teacher (UNHCR 2019: 57). Majority of the refugees in Uganda are South Sudanese with a large proportion of them being children. It is worth noting that these girls' aspirations will be studied in the refugee context.

1.4 Justification of the Study

The importance of this research is located in the rational outlined at the beginning of the introduction, but more importantly it is also linked to my own personal story. I attended Agangrial Primary School, a Catholic missionary school established in 1994, in southern Sudan. By the time I completed primary school level in 2002, there was no single girl in our class of 17 pupils even though it was a mixed school. We had one girl in our class who had started her education in a refugee camp in Kenya before returning with her mother to Southern Sudan but two years before she could complete her primary education, she was married off. Most classes after us had fewer than three girls each. The school was also the only one functioning in that area. Although there has been an improvement in girls' enrolment in primary schools, majority do not complete them (UNICEF 2017). This is evident where I live in South Sudan where many young girls do not attend or complete primary education for reasons ranging from poverty (families not able to afford paying school fees), early marriages, lack of education facilities, wars and social biases against girls/women.

I have navigated my way through challenging situations to be where I am today but if I were a South Sudanese girl, I would have been married off at a very young age or at worst I would have died while giving birth. I was allowed to leave my family and live alone while studying, a liberty most South Sudanese girls do not enjoy.

Having daughters myself, I feel I need to do something for girls in South Sudan to help them pursue education and hopefully change their lives for the better in future. One way I could do this is by doing my thesis on girls' education and raise awareness

about the plight of South Sudanese girls with regards to access, retention and graduation from primary and secondary school levels – and hopefully inform decisions made by different actors (Ugandan Government, institutions implementing educational programmes and donors). My research findings can also be used to inform further research and contribute to the existing literature on gendered aspirations, education, and displacement.

1.5 The State of Academic Field in the Research Area

The rationale for this research is located in the literature and the gaps that I have identified. The paper looks at the wider literature that speaks to the following four themes: aspirations, South Sudanese refugees in Uganda, refugee's education, and empowerment and education. This is because the issues that are discussed in this research are an intersection of the above themes. I will discuss each of them in turn below. Given the limited scope of my research and also aware that the current South Sudanese refugees in Uganda situation is a continuation of the events that started in 1955, I will only concentrate on the recent literature on post-2013 events by paying more attention to educational aspects of South Sudanese refugee girls.

1.4.1 Young People's Aspirations

Aspiring to be or do something in the foreseeable future is one thing while whether they will be achieved is another. But what one aspires to be or do is mostly determined by circumstances and the social contexts surrounding an individual. Here I will present literature that talks about young peoples' aspirations in the refugee circumstances.

St Clair et al. (2013) conducted research among children between the ages of 13 to 15 in three schools in the United Kingdom to investigate why great attention has been put on aspirations in the education policy arena. Their findings noted that aspirations are heterogenous across people from different social backgrounds with the poorer communities recording higher aspirations. The authors suggest that aspirations should be backed by action so that these young people realize what they aspire to achieve (St Clair et al. 2013).

On the other hand, McDonald et al. (2011) did their research in a similar age group in 19 schools in Australia about their aspirations and other selected economic and social aspects. The researchers found that many boys wanted to take on careers different from those of girls. Although girls aspired for caregiving jobs, they also aspired for jobs that would have them lead independent lives (McDonald et al. 2011).

Grabska et al. (2019) in their book also wrote about migrant Bengali girls in Bangladesh, and Eritrean and Ethiopian girls in Sudan noting that one of the reasons why the girls decided to migrate was also to access quality education. These aspirations became futile given the living conditions the ended up finding themselves in as they had to make ends meet on their own. The authors showed the importance of looking at girls' aspirations and how education is not only located in formal access to education. Girls ended up using their

life experiences that they acquired during migration to develop themselves and to find ways of increasing their capacity to act despite their constraining circumstances.

Van Heelsum's (2017) study revealed the frustrations of the refugees especially from Syria and Eritrea who arrived in the Netherlands with the hope of realizing a better life for themselves experience. Their aspirations were constrained by factors including the Dutch asylum process and the reception they got from the receiving communities.

Research also done by Khawaja et al. (2008) among Sudanese refugees who resettled in Brisbane, Australia looked at how the challenges these refugees face before and after migrating to Australia and what coping mechanisms they used to overcome them. Their findings revealed that one of the coping mechanisms used by these refugees was having aspirations for their future.

Taking the case of the 2010 English schoolchildren's demonstrations in 2010, Young (2013) has argued about implications of raising students' aspiration to attain higher education without being matched by the government's action. Instead, a counterproductive measure was adopted to raise school fees for higher education which in essence limits the children's chances to continue further with their studies. Raising students' aspirations could act as a bait to encourage students to go to higher education which has become more commercialized in the current era.

This strand of literature is mostly about comparative studies between the marginalized and the rich communities, and between boys and girls while a chunk of others such as Cooke (2008), Sellar et al. (2011), and Dubow et al. (2009) is drawn from studies done in wealthy countries of the world. The other bit of literature (van Heelsum 2017; Khawaja et al. 2008) is also about general refugees' aspirations before and during their time in the countries of the Global North, Brown (2013) has a critical take on aspirations, while (Grabska et al. 2019) dealt with educational aspirations of adolescent girls before they decided to migrate and how they were transformed during the migratory process.

1.5.2 The Relationship between Girls' Empowerment and Education

In this section, I highlight the literature that talks about how girls' education is conceived in relation to empowerment and whether programmes designed to empower girls really achieve their intended purposes.

To ascertain whether education leads to girls' empowerment and thus gender equality, Holmarsdottir et al. (2011) conducted their research in South Sudan and South Africa to compare the grassroot realities and international gender initiatives. In addition to the fact that what is being said and what takes place on the ground are two different things altogether, the researchers conclude that girls' empowerment is not a direct result of education.

The article by Dejaeghere and Lee (2011) on children from poor backgrounds in Bangladesh also claims that education can be used to entrench gender equalities. In

other words, schools can be used to empower or disempower girls, and it all depends on social environment that these girls find themselves in.

Seeberg's (2011) research among girls in rural China concluded that education empowered girls as they were able to give their stance despite the existence of constraining gender norms and ideologies and were able to manoeuvre their way to continue studying. The girls felt after studies that they were able to make decisions about their own future.

Most of the literature has cast doubt on the assumption of a linear relationship between education and girls' empowerment. There has been talk and initiatives by donors, multilateral and aid agencies about empowering girls through formal education. Whether this translates to tangible results on ground especially in the refugee situations needs a closer look. The empowerment through education rhetoric also informs activities geared towards elevating the status of girls in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement, something that this research touches on.

1.5.3 South Sudanese Refugees in Uganda

This body of literature sheds light on what has been written about South Sudanese refugees in Uganda. Not much has been written about South Sudanese refugee girls and education in Uganda but a sizeable amount of literature about other aspects of South Sudanese refugees' lives in general exists.

On mental health issues, Adaku et al. (2016) have written about inadequate medical services in Rhino Camp despite a variety of mental problems prevalent among the South Sudanese refugees. Meyer et al. (2017) also found a relationship between violence and severe mental conditions among South Sudanese refugees and those from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Mogga (2017) documented how gender-based violence has exacerbated psychosocial problems among refugees in Adjumani and Yumbe Districts.

Hovil (2018), Zakaryan and Antara (2018) have advocated, among other things, for political participation of refugees on issues affecting them as one of the long-term solutions for the South Sudanese and Democratic Republic of Congo's refugees in Uganda although this has never been the case. The researchers cite the Uganda's Refugees Act 2006, a document that sets out the rights of refugees in Uganda, that it does not provide for political participation for refugees.

Other issues that have been covered by this set of literature include the fact that there is competition for resources between the young refugees who have been in the settlements in Uganda for some time and the new arrivals (Meyer et al. 2019). Schiltz et al. (2018) discuss about how young South Sudanese refugees in Adjumani Refugee Settlement in Uganda imagine what the future holds for them while the stay resilient in the face of hardships as the humanitarian agencies seem not to be doing enough to meet their needs.

1.5.4 Refugees' Education

The other strand of literature explored is about refugees' education. It talks about issues surrounding refugees' education in the first and final countries of asylum as well as the general issues that affect both categories of refugees. Refugees' education has become a feature of multilateral institutions that deal with refugees because many of these refugees do not go back to their countries of origin for years if not decades. Dryden-Peterson's (2016) article investigates the notion of universal education for children as a right for all citizens as provided by international conventions and frameworks. Tracing how refugee's education has been handled since World War II to present, she explains the complexity in providing education for refugees outside their nation-states and how international bodies such as UNHCR try to bridge the gap that non-statehood provides.

Sometimes specific educational needs for refugees are taken for granted because little is known about their past lives. Mendenhall et al. (2017) document experiences of refugee children in an 'international' high school in New York City in an attempt to shed light on the specific challenges that these children face while schooling. The authors found out that refugee students have language, academic and emotional problems. They made a number of suggestions that should be adopted by the educators to remedy these issues. Drawing on the case of Australia, Matthews (2008) provides the similar arguments as Mendenhall et al. (2017) have written about. He advocates for long-term solutions for refugee children in Australian schools because they face challenges beyond academics.

The story of Lost Boys of Sudan has been sensationalized for decades and, according to El Jack (2010), has made South Sudanese girls 'invisible'. El Jack did her ten-year research among Sudanese refugees in Kenya, Sudan, Uganda and North America on education. She claims that girls and women lag behind in terms of education compared to their male counterparts. She also claims that education equips women with the necessary knowledge and skills to secure better jobs and pay.

For further discussions on this set of literature, see Fresia and Von Kanel (2015) on refugees' school governance, Bellino and Dryden-Peterson (2018) on integrating refugee children into national schools, and Waters and Leblanc (2005) on the complexity of educating refugees outside their nation-states.

The literature discussed above talks about practicalities in providing education for refugees taking note of challenges that come with that. There are also challenges that refugees face which are sometimes not paid much attention because their past experiences are not put into consideration by educators. El Jack (2010) tackled the case of Sudanese refugees both in North America taking on gender lens by shedding light on how southern Sudanese girls were more disadvantaged compared to their male counterparts in terms of pursuing education and resettlement to North America.

1.6 Contextual Background

The research is located in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement. The settlement is a 27 square-mile land along the Kampala-Gulu highway in Kiryandongo District (Atari and McKague 2019: 40). It started hosting refugees as far back as 1950s with people running away from the Mau Mau war in Kenya being its first population of this kind, and in the latter years it has been hosting refugees mainly from southern Sudan (ibid.). The latest statistics from the Office of Prime Minister (OPM) of Uganda put the refugees at Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement at 56,456 of whom 29,382 are women and 27,074 are men – 35, 516 (17,148 girls and 18,368 boys are below 18 years (OPM 2019).

The main players in the education field for refugees in Kiryandongo Settlement include Uganda's Ministry of Education and Sports, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Windle International Uganda (WIU), Whitaker Peace and Development Initiative (WPDI), Save the Children United Kingdom, Education Cannot Wait (ECW), among others (Education Response Plan 2018: 3). Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement included, less than half of the school-age refugee children in Uganda are attending some form of formal schooling (UNHCR 2017: 79).

The Ugandan education system is divided into pre-primary (2 years), primary (7 years), secondary (4 years for ordinary and 2 years for advanced levels) and post-secondary school with children starting from the ages of between 3 to 24 years of age (Education Response Plan 2018: 9). However, this is not usually the case for South Sudanese refugee children who can begin attending school at older ages for reasons ranging from lack of educational facilities in their places of origin, poverty and insecurity. South Sudanese refugee children follow the Ugandan syllabus developed by the Ministry of Education and Sports. They also sit for primary and secondary leaving examinations administered by the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB). Although the refugee children were meant to study in the existing education infrastructure found among the Ugandan host communities, the number of refugee children outnumbered the existing human and material capacity of the Ugandan Government. New schools were constructed and funded by UN agencies, NGOs and other local and international partners. These new schools are also open to host community children.

1.7 Choice of the Research Location

Refugee camps or settlements are the places where aid agencies are more active and can easily implement (if they choose to) the girls' empowerment agenda which is preached by the international community led by United Nations, International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID), among others. In that sense, I would be able to examine if and how these initiatives help girls to pursue education for empowerment.

I also chose Uganda among other countries which are hosting South Sudan refugees because, by the time I undertook the research, it had the largest South Sudanese refu-

gee population. I have also stayed in Uganda for 17 years and have a fair knowledge of the South Sudanese refugee situation there. It is important to note that Uganda has 12 refugee settlements (UNHCR 2019) but I chose Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement because of the history of settlement as having hosted refugees over the decades and provision of education and other facilities is stable although new arrivals are being accommodated there. The settlement can easily be accessed from Kampala and has better social services such as accommodation and electricity in the nearby town of Bweyale.

Because animosity exists among ethnic groups in South Sudan as a result of the current civil war, most refugee settlements in Uganda have been segregated based on the tribal or regional basis except Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement where most tribes in South Sudan live peacefully with each other. As a researcher, I felt safe to gather data in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement.

1.8 Outline of the Research Paper

This research paper has six chapters. Chapter 1 provides general introduction including the research topic, objectives, research questions, contextual background, and literature review. Analytical and theoretical frameworks are presented in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 is made up of methods and methodologies. Chapters 4 and 5 are where I present the findings, data analysis and discussions. Then Chapter 6 is composed of general conclusions, and general thoughts regarding the thesis' material.

Chapter 2: Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks

This research paper is grounded in the theoretical debates about aspirations, empowerment, gender and gendered displacement. The conceptualization of the terms and how they are used in this thesis are spelt out herein. Arjun Appadurai's theory of *Capacity to Aspire* is used to hold the concepts together.

2.1 Theorizing Aspirations

Aspirations has been defined variously but the most common tenets in all the definitions are that it is futuristic and mostly for young people. Oxford English dictionary defines aspirations as, "A hope or ambition of achieving something."[6] They are metaphysical expressions and assumptions based on future intentions of the youth with regards to what level of schooling the students want to accomplish (Khattab 2015: 733). "Distinct from expectations, they reflect what someone would like to achieve rather than what they think they will achieve" (Moulton et al. 2015: 926). St Clair et al. (2013) write thus, "…..[a]spirations are, at minimum, an important component of the imagined future towards which young people orientate themselves and their current efforts."

Below I present how aspirations has been theorized by other writers before I turn to Arjun Appadurai's work on the *Capacity to Aspire* which I adopted to conceptualize the refugee girls' aspirations for education.

St Clair and Benjamin (2011: 504-505) look at aspirations not just as 'inert factors' in school development but as 'inherently performative'. This means that aspirations are non-static as well as multidimensional. They are dynamic and determined by a variety of circumstances. The authors add that: "Aspirations also reflect the cognitive and social resources available to young people when they formulate their response" (St Clair and Benjamin 2011: 505). It implies that aspirations are ever changing and shaped by factors other than the those only intrinsic to the young people.

On the other hand, Gottfredson (2002) explains aspirations using her *Theory of Circumscription, Compromise, and Self-creation*. Gottfredson contends that people are the creators of themselves by charting their own futures (Gottfredson 2002: 87). She defines the key words in her theory as:

> "*Circumscription* is the process by which youngsters narrow that territory. They progressively eliminate unacceptable alternatives in order to carve out a social space from a full menu that the culture offers. *Compromise* is the process by which youngsters begin to relinquish their most preferred alternatives for less compatible ones that they perceive as more accessible" (Gottfredson 2002: 92 – 93).

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[6] https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/aspiration

She goes further to provide four stages of aspirations which keep dwindling as the child grows to be an adult (Gottfredson 2002: 94 – 95). However, she views aspirations from an occupational lens.

It is important to note that aspirations have also been conceptualized using the Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach (Campbell and McKendrick (2017); Conradie and Robeyns (2013), and social capital (Holmes et al. 2018).

Throughout this paper, aspirations are conceptualized using Appadurai's (2004) Capacity to Aspire theory. He claims, "The capacity to aspire is thus a navigational capacity" which the rich have used often to survey the future to exchange ideas with one another compared to their poor counterparts (Appadurai 2004: 69). He continues to write that the weak "have a more brittle horizon of aspirations" (ibid.). And the reason for this difference is:

"Because the better off, by definition, have a more complex experience of the relation between a wide range of ends and means, because they have a bigger stock of available experiences of the relationship of aspirations and outcomes, because they are in a better position to explore and harvest diverse experiences of exploration and trial, because of their many opportunities to link material goods and immediate opportunities to more general and generic possibilities and options" (Appadurai 2004: 68).

Where the opportunities exist for the poor they are inflexible, malleable and invaluable because they have never experienced these chances before (Appadurai 2002: 69). To empower the poor means increasing their capacity to aspire (Appadurai 2004: 70). Appadurai goes on to acknowledge that his theory is akin to the capabilities approach advanced by Amartya Sen and call them as "two sides of the same coin" (Appadurai 2004: 82).

The claims of this theory are that aspirations are not individualistic – the immediate environment in which a person finds oneself in such as the culture, school, refugeehood, parents, guardians, peers and teachers shape them. It also indicates that socially and economically deprived groups, and those with more resources experience them differently. Impliedly, this can mean that aspirations are gendered as they are uniquely experienced. Although policies and discussions on aspiration has been criticized as another example of neoliberal ideas in play (Brown 2013) but fail to address the underlying socioeconomic needs of the youth (Sinclair et al. 2010). In this research paper, I use the concept of aspirations as theorized by Arjun Appadurai to explain South Sudan refugee girls' educational aspirations in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement in Uganda.

2.2 Empowerment

Here I am looking at empowerment in relation to the concept of aspirations. It goes that through education girls can aspire more which is an ingredient for girls' empowerment.

Empowerment has become a controversial concept and a buzzword at the same time while it has not been given proper analytical framing (Monkman 2011:5). It has been equated to mean self-worth or positive self-image, or as an immediate consequence of education. This simplification renders it hollow by paying no attention to the social under-pinnings that influence empowerment (ibid.) In the same manner, Rocha (1997: 31 - 32) agrees that the definition of empowerment has been evasive since it came to its first use in 1960s. Carelessly thrown around, it has been presumed that the use of the concept is just applicable worldwide. She went on to present five stages of empowerment starting from the individual to community level. Her analysis of empowerment is meant to inform development practitioners in their intervention plans (Rocha 1997: 34). This assumption risks giving development agencies the license to still abuse the term even more.

Cornwall et al. (2007: 5) have rained in on how words such as empowerment have crowded the development practitioners who us them as if, "They were becoming punch drunk with the reassertion of key axioms under different labels such as 'poverty reduction', 'empowerment', 'rights, 'exclusion' and 'citizenship'". These terms are empty and fantasy words usually attached to 'gender' and stuffed into the development programmes.

Kabeer (2005: 13) puts empowerment as the opposite of disempowerment. Elaborating on the two concepts, she goes on to say that disempowerment is when a person is not given the opportunity to choose and on the other hand empowerment is a mechanism that enables an individual to achieve that capacity. Said differently, it encompasses transformation (Kabeer 2005: 14).

Keeping in mind the above theorizations, I take the definition provided by Cattaneo and Chapman (2010: 647) who define empowerment as:

"….[a]n iterative process in which a person who lacks power sets a personally meaningful goal oriented toward increasing power, takes action toward that goal, and observes and reflects on the impact of this action, drawing on his or her evolving self-efficacy, knowledge, and competence related to the goal."

Taking note of the common feature of the definitions of empowerment where the element of power being inherent in them, Cattaneo and Chapman (2010) have taken our understanding of the concept further where individuals' aspirations form the basis of the interventions. It is a process where those who are to be empowered take the centre stage from the outset. Their definition shows the dynamics that are in play when talking about empowerment and debunks the assumption of linearity between empowerment and initiatives adopted to achieve it.

2.3 Gender and Gendered Displacement

Gendered aspirations have received little attention and more so in the refugee settings. Putting it into focus in this research paper will give us a nuanced understanding of how it plays out in these constrained environments.

Gender is a term that has been contested and also misused over the years (Cornwall 2011; Scott 2013). Scott (2013) defines gender as "purely sociological status" (Scott 2013: 72). In other words, it is about gender as social relations, or power relations in the communities. It is context specific, but also fluid over time and space.

Aware of the suffixes attached to gender such as mainstreaming, empowerment, equality, and parity by most development institutions which have received criticisms in their own right, I use the term as defined by Grabska (2014:18) as, "….[a] constraining social concept for both women and men, boys and girls. It determines relations not only between, but also among, the same sex."

In the field of conflict-induced migration, a lot of terms have been used interchangeably without paying much attention to their implications. In this regard, I first shed light on some of these definitions and how I use them in this research. This helps us to have a nuanced understanding of the meaning of gendered displacement. The 1951 UN Convention defines refugee as a person who:

"…….[o]wing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it" (UNHCR 2019).

Grabska and Mehta (2008) take forced migration to include all types of migration irrespective of whether it is within the boundaries of the nation-states or being a result of giving way to development purposes, contrary to the usually limited view of looking at refugees as people who are made to run away for their lives.

Taking on board all those 'blanket' definitions, I turn to what gendered displacement will mean throughout this research paper. In refugee environments, gender becomes a complex term as the refugee situation itself. Hyndman and Giles (2011) have characterized the protracted refugee situations as akin to feminization – irrespective of being male or female, child or adult because of the inhumane conditions they find themselves in as they wait to be resettled to other countries mostly in the West. This definition distorts arbitrarily the binary definition of gender being male or female (Hyndman and Giles 2011: 369). In a similar line, Grabska (2014) writes: "Wars and displacement have had ambiguous effect on gender relations, giving rise to both weakened and reinforced femininities and masculinities" (Grabska 2014: 22).

Drawing on Grabska's assertion, gendered displacement in this paper will mean the different experiences of refugees as a result of their gender. It is also im-

portant to keep in mind how gender becomes fluid in the refugee environments, and how displacement alters gender relations.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

In order to answer my research questions, I adapted qualitative methodology which is according to Monique et al. (2011) is a collection of methods such as focus group discussion, interviews, observation, among others. These data collection methods were selected for ease of use and their appropriateness for the sample size and population under study. The total number of respondents was 50 people. It was composed of 2 focus group discussions of 5 and 7 girls each, 1 group of 6 young girls where I gathered data from primary school girls using drawings and responses listed on the blackboard, 8 schoolgirl dropouts, 5 school-going girls – all girls were between 12 and 24 years, 10 teachers, 6 parents (2 males and 4 females), 2 NGO representatives, and the District Education Officer.

I discuss below the selected methods I chose to collect the data with, and other aspects of the methodology pertinent to the research that I carried out in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement.

3.1 Time and Location of the Interviews

The research was conducted between July and September 2019 in Kiryadongo Refugee Settlement in Uganda. Doing my fieldwork at this time meant that pupils and students were still at school for their school term. It was also easy to conduct FGDs for the girls because I could find more girls at school at once. In addition, it was easy to interview teachers before they travelled back to their respective towns which were located away from Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement. It was also to ascertain if one was not studying by moving around the settlement and meet girls who were not at school at those particular days – meaning they may have dropped out at least for that school term.

I conducted interviews with teachers and schoolgirls at schools, parents and girl dropouts in their homes, restaurant, tea-making place, refugee reception centre, next to the WPDI football pitch before the girls started playing football. In other words, I did the interviews wherever was convenient for the respondents. I just made sure that there was no distraction or loud noise nearby.

3.2 Data Collection Methods

Given the nature of my research which I conducted in a refugee settlement among a diverse group of participants, I adopted a number of methods and that helped me gather the data that I needed for this paper. Although not exhaustive, I will highlight the major methods that I went about getting the data as explained below.

Semi-structured interviews

I carried out semi-structured interviews with five schoolgirls, eight girls who dropped out of school – all between the ages of 12 and 24 years old, ten teachers (both primary and secondary schools), six parents as well as one representative each from Windle Internation-

al Uganda, Whitaker Peace and Development Initiative, and Uganda's Ministry of Education and Sports, Kiryandongo District. I chose this methodology because, according to Monique et al. (2011), interview is where two people carry out one-way meaningful conversation with the person telling the 'story' while the other is probing. I had to query and listen to them (O'Leary 2017: 311) to hear their stories as I probe them to get a more understanding of what they just said. I was interested in individual's own narratives. Majority of the parent participants were women because I could not find more men to interview as most of them were in South Sudan or had died and therefore were not with their children in the settlement. It is also important to note that many households were also child-headed so finding parents to interview meant I had to walk in many houses before I could get one. The choice of the interview participants was purposive where I selected people that I wanted to interview and not leaving it to chance (Polkinghorne 2005: 140). Interviews were conducted in four languages (English, Arabic Juba, Dinka and Nuer) in which I had to get an interpreter for one in Nuer who happened to be the daughter of the participant. Her daughter was also studying in one of the primary schools in the settlement.

Focus group discussions

I conducted three focus group discussion (FGD) rounds with five, and seven schoolgirls respectively both in a secondary school. The schoolgirls were between the ages of 16 and 21 years. According to Monique et al. (2011) focus group discussion is a research methodology where a selected number of people talk about a particular issue in a given time and place. I had to use this method because I needed a wide range of data at one go because I did have much time to spend talking to each girl. The girls were also doing exams and one free time for all of them was enough to gauge their views. As noted by a report, some of these South Sudanese refugee girls enrol in schools at older ages (Education Response Plan 2018: 11). The focus group discussions solicited more ideas from these girls as they were at ease with each other compared to when it was done in one-on-one interviews which were a bit intimidating for most young children. The selection was on purposive basis and in most times the school administration handpicked for me the girls I would interview although I had a say on the number, age range, representation from different classes in the school, as well as being from different ethnicities within South Sudan. This may have been a biased selection as the teachers may have picked those that they thought were eloquent enough. The girls may have given me the answers that they thought the school administration would like to hear although I assured them before the discussions that no one in the school was going to know what each one of them said – at least the statements were not going to be attributed to any of them.

Drawings and Lists

Another 'FGD' was done with young girls who were between 12 – 16 years in a primary school. After securing a library room from the school administration and having a female librarian and I explain to a group of 6 young girls of what I was going to do, they sat down in silence while the librarian walked away and busied herself in a distant corner of the li-

brary. This was to create the environment that they were not alone with me but also that one of the school staff was not listening to their answers. When I asked them the first question regarding the things the like about the school just to get the conversation going, the room went quiet for about 30 seconds or so.

I had brought along with me drawing aid just in case a scenario like that would occur. I asked them if it would be okay to give them pencils, rulers, manila papers and rubbers to draw anything that comes to their mind when they thought about education. They nodded in agreement while a couple of them mumbled "yes". I walked away from them and let them do what they wanted. This was a bit of giving them the ownership of the process and express themselves in drawings where they are more adept at compared to the adults (Thomas and O'Kane 1998: 342). Glancing initially from afar, I could see them drawing similar objects and thought to myself if I really made them understand what I wanted from them. In the end, each one of them came and handed to me what each of them had drawn and I tried to control my smiles of amazement about what I had just seen. I asked some of them about why they had drawn certain figures to help me understand the stories behind them in which they were now at ease to share with me although shyly. Afterwards I requested them to sit down and I got a piece of chalk and wrote on the blackboard under each heading "good things about schooling" and "bad things about schooling" and asked to say things related to each category. The combination of drawings and the list on the blackboard were analysed simultaneously.

Review of documents

I reviewed documents from the Ministry of Education and Sports of the Ugandan Government to have a better sense of the performance of the girls in comparison to the boys in the national exams, number of girls who registered for national examinations but did not sit for them in the end, number of girls who sat for national exams compared to boys. I also looked at the same statistics in the different schools I visited in the refugee settlement from the school reports and attendance books for each class. I also looked at the documents of the UNHCR and OPM which were online to check on the general number of refugees as well as the demographics of the refugee population. O'Leary (2017: 124) explains why literature review is important: "The production of new knowledge is dependent on the previous knowledge."

Observation

I did observation in the schools, the refugee environment and daily activities in the refugee settlement. It included visiting some refugee schools and observe the environment, number of children in classrooms, attending ladies football trainings which were organized by Whitaker Peace and Development Initiative, observing on the information boards in the refugee settlement, messages on the school compounds, among others. Monique et al. (2011: 170) define observation as a "….[m]ethod that enables researchers to systematically observe and record people's behaviour, actions and interactions." O'Leary (2017: 332)

emphasizes the use of senses to obtain data. Observation gives researchers the chance to have a feel of how people conduct themselves in a given social setting. There is a lot that went on in the settlement in which I had to keep an open eye to know why certain things happened the way they did. For example, I visited the settlement's food distribution centres to see how many young girls attend them while they skip going school. I also looked around for the messages on sign boards in the schools and read the messages and what they convey, and which institutions actually put them up. School infrastructure was also inspected to see if girls had adequate facilities such as changing rooms.

3.3 Challenges and Limitations of the Study

The limitations and challenges of this research were both related to the issues I encountered while doing the research or those that I came across as a result of the mere fact that I did the research in the way I conducted it. For example, I cannot say that some of the girls that were identified by the teachers gave me better data, it could even be the opposite because of the inherent bias of the teachers who selected them. But most of the time that I wanted to select them on my own, I was told that it was the protocol of the school administration to do so and I could not do anything about it. I had to explain before the interviews that the girls were free to leave the interview at any time they wanted to not participate.

The sample profile was also tricky because I was collecting my data mostly from young refugee girls who may not have been at ease to express themselves given the power relations between me and them. My presence as an adult male could have prevented them from opening up and speak up freely. I had to make sure that I devised innovative data collection methods that kept me removed somewhat from them as they 'take over' the process such as the use of drawings for the younger girls.

The time I spent doing the interviews may not have been enough to immerse myself fully in the community as this would have stimulated their sincerity during my interviews because this would mean that they knew me better. I however had to walk on foot in the settlement most of the times and visited families I had conducted interviews with and would chat away on other social topics. This gave me a better understanding of their daily lives. I remember one day when I was visiting a family I had conducted an interview with only to find out that the wife of one of my respondents had been hospitalized in a nearby medical facility. I had to visit her daily in the hospital and when she was brought home until I left Kiryandongo and kept in touch with them on phone.

The major challenge I had was dealing with the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM). Despite the fact that I submitted my application for a research permit to the Commissioner for Refugees weeks before travelled to Uganda, I had to go to their office again in Kampala to lodge a physical application which I had to wait for about two weeks before it was approved. This meant that I had to go to the office multiple times because that was how I would know the status of the application. While in Kiryandongo I had to go the OPM offices and sent numerous text messages for me to get refugee data for Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement, but I have not been furnished with that information up to date.

On another note, I was unable to interview organizations operating in the settlement that I had identified before fieldwork. UNHCR turned me away from the security reception after identifying myself on grounds that they do did not give interviews and all the information that I needed was with OPM. Save the Children on the hand said that I had to get permission from Kampala in order to do interviews with their staff in Kiryandongo. Although I was given two email addresses for the staff in Kampala, no one responded to my email and reminders. Most other NGOs I had written never replied to my emails even when I had attached the International Institute of Social Studies' (ISS) letter of introduction as well as the approval from the OPM plus my assurances that the responses would be anonymous.

3.4 Ethical Considerations and Dilemmas

My research concentrated on refugee girls of school-going age between 12 and 24 years. Collecting data from refugee children whom Voutira and Dona (2007: 163) call a 'complex category' raised a lot of ethical issues. My time as a researcher in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement was a paradox at best. On one hand, I was a South Sudanese attaining education in a Western country, a young man whom the girls could view as a potential candidate for a marriage, of higher social status – a disadvantage on its own right. This gave responses such as "You can take her[7]" from one of the parent respondents. I may have also taken some information for granted assuming that I knew it all when I should have queried my respondents further. This led me not to account for complexities of each situation (Taylor 2011: 5).

On the other spectrum, I was a 'local'. I spoke some South Sudanese local languages, I assumed knew much of the local South Sudanese culture (I am aware that this a big claim to make), and I enjoyed the local food. No one ever bothered to ask me why I was there. When I introduce myself during the interview, some would say: "Oh I have been seeing you walking around here although I never knew you. I thought you were a new arrival (refugee)." I was inherently 'one of them'. Some of the advantages of being from the same background as the researched are summarized by Taylor (2011:6) as having "deeper levels of understanding afforded by prior knowledge; knowing the lingo or native speak of field participants and thus being 'empirically literate'."

Issues related to consent, anonymity, confidentiality, data protection were taken seriously. Consent forms were drawn up to be signed by the participants after I had explained why I was doing this research. How the data collected through audio record and notes taken would be kept and used were spelt out in the consent form as well as the liberty of the participant to pull out from taking part in the research at any time they wanted (until one month after participation). Consent was jointly agreed by the girls below the age of 18 years and the school administration for the ones in school,

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[7] Interview with Kon, a male parent in his house. Full quote is later analyzed in Chapter 4.

and between the girl and the parent, or spouse for the ones who had dropped out from school.

In addition, I was armed with advice from the following literature: Mackenzie et al. (2007) advise that researchers should go beyond the 'do no harm' mantra when doing research among refugees and those in war situations. The authors advise the researchers to be aware of complex issues that are involved in such environments and to be ethical in their dealings with these groups (Mackenzie et al. 2007). Clark-Kazak (2009) picks up from the same line and goes further by creating relationships with children. This was a bit tricky for me because some of my sample was selected from young girls, and the limited amount of time I had in the settlement. I circumvented this by befriending their relatives, teachers and acquaintances who were of older ages whom they trusted and I believed (maybe wrongly) had children's best interests at heart.

Drawing on two research examples conducted among refugee children from Rwanda and Bangladesh, Dona (2006) encouraged participatory approach while doing research among children. This could be done through making them as research advisors. I had to allow the primary school girls tell me how they wanted to tell me their stories – in which they chose to do it through drawings and not through semi-structured interviews like I did for the rest of the older girls, teachers, parents and representatives from NGOs and Ministry of Education.

Thomas and O'Kane (1998) on the other laid out how to innovatively collect data on children while making sure that care is taken at all times to uphold the research ethics among children. The authors also call for children to verify the data collected on them (Thomas and O'Kane 1998), something I observed throughout the data collection process.

These readings were supplemented by the document titled: *International Association for the Study of Forced Migration (*IASFM*) Code of ethics: Critical reflections on research ethics in situations of forced migration; Child Safeguarding Standards and how to implement them*[8]. This is a mini step by step guide to doing research among refugees. It lays out how to approach the field and how to conduct oneself while there.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data collected was qualitative in nature. I had three sets of data: the recorded data from the interviews, the ones which were drawn by the primary school girls, and the pictures I took both from the documents shown to me by the District Education Officer, and those I took while I walked around the settlement. The analysis was done by transcribing the recordings, and downloading the pictures that I took. I did the coding manually using the main themes and grouped similar responses under those themes before doing the interpretation of the findings using a separate word document. I then highlighted with similar colours the responses that fell under the same themes before I moved and grouped them together. Those responses that fell under more than one theme were noted and I attached

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[8] It is a 3-page guide that was shared with me by my supervisor, Dr. Katarzyna Grabska

comments to them. The responses that did not fall under any theme were segregated and revisited from time to time and later were used to make counterarguments for the themes. The main themes that emerged included issues to do with access, retention, and graduation of girls from primary and secondary schools; challenges that these girls face; gendered aspirations; how empowerment was conceived by the teachers and representatives of the institutions implementing educational programmes in the settlement. It is also to mention that I use the intersectionality lens to discuss my data and findings.

Chapter 4: Access, Retention, Graduation of Girls from Primary and Secondary School Levels: Girls Navigating Thorny Paths

When the war broke out, most South Sudanese refugees fled to Uganda on foot avoiding main the roads for fear of being raped and/or killed. Many fled with barely any belongings. As they traveled sometimes barefooted over the long distances through the forests, being pricked by acacia thorns on the way was part of that journey. And talking about girls' education in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement, their education is akin to the trek narrated above. Although boys and girls in refugee settings face a host of obstacles, girls face gendered challenges (El Jack 2010: 24). Here I present the gendered challenges that they face with regards to access, retention and graduation to the next levels of their school lives.

4.1 Challenges of Girls' Access to School

I met Ayen, a young lanky girl who did not know her age but must have been below 20 years, in the refugee reception center. She was in company of two elderly ladies as they came to claim a lost ration card. She was reluctant to talk to me and it took the nudging of her elderly companions to assent. She said she had never been to school and was married. She was not the only girl in the settlement who did not go to school. Many of the schoolgirls I interviewed knew at least one girl who was not attending school. Through interviews with the teachers and looking at attendance records of the schools that I visited, the ratio of girls to boys in some classes was as low as one to two. In those schools as well as the records of the office of the DEO, there was no class in which the ratio of girls was higher than that of boys. The reasons for these numerical differences are diverse.

Some parents in the settlement are unable to provide school fees to their children. It is important to note that primary schools in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement are not free but are subsidized. Parents and guardians are supposed to pay 45,000 Ugandan shillings (approximately 15 US dollars) per school term in addition to providing scholastic materials to their children. Secondary school fees are much higher. When a parent is faced with the choice of sending one or a few of his or her children to school, boys are preferred over girls. It follows the gender norms among some South Sudanese communities where men are said to be superior to women (Deng 1971: 138). El Jack (2010: 24) observes, "Historically, when resources are limited, (South) Sudanese families tended to send their sons to school, not their daughters, and this privilege carried over into the refugee camp." Gimigu, a single mother, who had more than 12 children (some are nieces and nephews as well as stepchildren) that she was taking care of by herself did just that:

I don't have the power but my plan is, if I had the power and their father didn't die, that they go as far as the university, to have diplomas and degrees so that they get good jobs. But there is no way that these plans of mine will work out…... I am now struggling with only three because there is no way for the others. I have

talked to them (girls) to let them first remain because I don't have the power. I will struggle with the rest even if they complete university degree, then they will come back and support me and the other young ones. This is my only plan (Gimigu, Female Parent).

Akur never went to school because her mother died, and she stayed with the stepmother as the family waited for the suitor to marry her. That way the bride wealth would be used to take care of her siblings. Akur, was indeed married by the time I interviewed her and had a very young child. Many girls, like Akur, are used to relieve resource burden on their families. This is a common phenomenon among South Sudanese in the refugee situations (Grabska 2010: 480). Marrying off girls at early ages provides families with the bride wealth (Grabska 2010: 485) which is at times used to fund boys' education. This is mostly done without or against the girls' will (Grabska 2010: 487). According to an Oxfam (2019) report, three quarters of South Sudanese girls are out of school as a result of early and forced marriages (Oxfam 2019: 5). Girls are married within the settlement, to other settlements as well to residents in other countries. Girls, teachers and DEO all mentioned this practice which is so common within the settlement:

I am the first born of my mother. At the time I reached puberty, my sister and brother who were following me were taken to school by my maternal uncle, then we remained with my dad. That one (pointing to a breastfeeding woman sitting under the shade of another hut) is my father's young wife, my mother is dead. So there was no chance for me that my father allowed me to go to school together with his young children (Akur, 19).

With gender norms, relations and hierarchies; and financial burdens playing a huge role on whether girls go to school or not, many girls become disadvantaged and prevented from attending school as a result. Although there may be chances for the South Sudanese girls to access educational services in the refugee settlements, gendered burden placed on girls as a source of supporting family and boys' education get in the way (Grabska 2011: 90), hence not being unable to formulate their educational and employment aspirations as the bulk of their life choices are determined by the family members leading to their empowerment prospects becoming shrunken.

4.2 Challenges to Retention and Graduation from School

The teachers and girls all mentioned that they know at least one girl who has dropped out of school during the past year. In one school there were 15 girls who dropped out since last year. The documents I was given from the office of the DEO, two girls from the refugee schools did not sit for their Uganda primary leaving examinations after registration. The reasons why many girls drop out from schools in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement are discussed below.

South Sudanese have had history of displacements since 1955 when the first civil war in then Sudan began (Hovil 2018; Sharkey 2012; Collins 2007). Some have been displaced multiple times and to many different countries in the region and beyond crisscrossing borders (Grabska 2014: 38). Girls, like their relatives, undertake these almost endless journeys. These movements are as a result of running away for fear of being killed to seeking for better living conditions elsewhere. This renders girls to attend multiple schools with different syllabuses along the way, stay out before rejoining other schools, or drop out altogether. In Kiryandongo majority of the girls I interviewed did not begin their education in the settlement. Some studied in multiple locations before coming to Kiryandongo. It has been cited by many girls and teachers as one of the reasons they perform poorly and sometimes some of them drop out. Unlike boys, the girls are not left behind alone or with some of their relatives to complete their studies before relocating for fear of getting 'spoilt'. Because girls also do household chores for their parents and young siblings, leaving them behind is not always an option. This picture is painted below by one of the teachers:

Then people are also moving, you know. The issue of repatriation, this voluntary repatriation. Some parents go back there and now when they decide that we should go back as a family the children will not have a choice, they will have to go back even if they are already at school. You find in such cases they automatically drop out of school not because they wanted to but because their parents have decided for them (Lado, South Sudanese Male Teacher).

Deacon and Sullivan (2009: 273) claim that women (and girls) are more susceptible to rapes during war by a host of perpetrators compared to men. South Sudan wars have been violent with women also bearing the brunt of brutality. Many of these girls have been raped; seen relatives killed, raped, kidnapped; and had to flee for their lives over long distances hungry. It is not surprising that researchers (Hoffman et al. 2018; Adaku et al. 2016) have found trauma to be a major problem among South Sudanese refugees especially adolescent girls. Studying with such experiences unattended to given the meagre medical assistance available in the settlement is almost impossible. The girls and teachers have mentioned trauma time and again during my time in Kiryandongo as one of the major challenges affecting girls' studies:

Some of them (girls) who have seen the war situation (are) traumatized. You find even this one affects them in their education. Someone is just traumatized. She is in school and the mind is very far because she is thinking about this. Some of them have seen the scenario of fighting so you find that thing is still in their head (Akello, Female Teacher/Matron).

Early pregnancy is not a new phenomenon among South Sudanese girls or other third world countries as well as in refugee settings. During my time in Kiryandongo doing this research, four out of the seven out-of-school girls that I interviewed had children. They were all between the ages of 16 and 20. Although having a child at a very young age is already a burden itself with regards to not being able to take care of kids themselves given the biting poverty, getting pregnant without being married is frowned upon by most com-

munities in South Sudan. Once pregnant, majority of the girls drop out of school in order to dedicate most of their time to taking care of the children and also to avoid meeting other people on the way to school or in school itself given the stigma associated with it and instead stay in the house most of the time. The circumstances under which they get pregnant shows that it is not always girls' own making although they have to bear lifelong suffering including not attending school. While some get pregnant as a result of rapes, others lack sex education from parents because majority of the girls are not with their parents or if they have parents it is a taboo for most communities in South Sudan to talk about sex; lack of contraceptives as medicines are usually scarce in the settlement; or oddly being ill-advised by 'medical practitioners' which may indicate moral decay or local belief in the settlement where the nurse/doctor advises that sex relieves menstrual cramps. Girls who have never had sex education would take the nurse or doctor's advice without thinking about the consequences. The responses below represent some of the views of the participants on the causes of girls' early pregnancies in the settlement:

I know all of us we are girls, there are some parents who are too shy to speak about body changes to their girls. And you find girls are taken abruptly when they've received any change. Maybe a girl starts developing breasts, maybe a girl starts developing maybe the waist pain in menstruation period, you go to the hospital the first question a doctor asks you is: "Do you have a boyfriend?" I think they've asked to all of us when we go to the hospital. Now a young girl who has never been taught about menstruation period will opt for a boyfriend, sex straight away – you go for it you find yourself that you have conceived. So that is the real problem hindering most girls and I feel the pain in my heart (Akoth, 20, Senior 6, FGD 2).

When you look at the wars that happen in South Sudan, some girls have been sexually harassed. Some girls were harassed coming here not knowing of themselves maybe they've conceived. And though you have that interest of coming to school when you've already given birth no any man or even your own parents will wish to keep you. So you say: "Now if my parents have abandoned me, where can I go?" (Gune, 20, Senior 6, FGD 2).

Despite attempts by the institutions that provide educational services in the settlement to furnish girls with sanitary materials, they are always not enough for the girls and in most cases their supply is irregular. The parents are also not able to provide them to the girls given their financial conditions. Teachers and girls that I interviewed pointed out this issue time and again. The issue of sanitary materials affecting school attendance has been well-documented by Hennegan et al. (2017), Hennegan and Montgomery (2016), Dolan et al. (2014), and Montgomery et al. (2016). Not having sanitary materials comes at a cost of girls' school attendance as stated by one teacher below:

……[y]ou know these menstruation periods sometime also affects their studies. They don't have money for their pads, you know. And when they are going through that thing (menstruation), they'll have to be away from school. And that means their performance will be affected (Lado, South Sudanese Male Teacher).

But not all things have gone against the girls in Kiryandongo Settlement. The social context in which these girls find themselves in play both negative and positive roles. On the positive side, gender roles and gender ideologies sometimes shift in favour of girls. Based on my observation in the settlement and comparing it to the experience in South Sudan, more girls go to school in the settlement than in South Sudan. It could be, as written about by Grabska (2011, 2014) and Kaiser (2008), because of the changing gender roles and ideologies in these refugee situations. Girls have more freedom to go to school in the settlement because they are not the only carers, but boys and men have taken up these roles too freeing up time for the girls to be able to attend school. Another reason why more girls attend school in the settlement compared to South Sudan (UNESCO 2011, UNICEF 2011) could also be because of availability of more educational facilities in the settlement as well as the advantages of schooling that their parents and relatives could have seen while in Uganda. Another factor is the role of the Ugandan Government in trying to safeguard these girls. This may have reduced the rate of girl dropouts as a result of early and forced marriages. And as a result, parents and relatives have found it hard to continue with these practices in the settlement and have opted for other, but difficult to execute, alternatives for fear of being caught and face the negative consequences that their actions may attract from the Ugandan legal systems as the DEO explains below:

The fear is that here if the child is married here and within (the settlement), she can easily be traced and the parents can easily be brought to book for such practices (early and child marriages) (District Education Officer, Uganda Government).

In sum, South Sudanese refugee girls in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement face a lot of gendered problems that prevent them from accessing, continuing their studies in, and graduating from primary and secondary school levels. These challenges not only prevent them from aspiring but quash their aspirations. Many of these issues that affect them are rooted in the gendered consequences of displacement and war, social norms and ideologies, and lack of attention to girls' particular sexuality issues. Lack of concentration in class, irregular school attendance or dropping out from school not only rob these girls of quality education but aspirations which would have acted as a springboard for empowerment. Girls' refugeehood alienates them further because of the gendered challenges that come with it.

But the social contexts in which the girls find themselves in is different from what it is in South Sudan. Girls in the settlements in Uganda have more chances of going to school than their counterparts in South Sudan as a result of the host government's policies as well as well the changes of gender norms and ideologies. The current context could be a fertile ground for their aspirations which could help in the cultivation of their empowerment.

Chapter 5: Education a Catalyst for Aspirations and Empowerment?: Mapping the Voices of Girls and Others

Although aspirations have come under criticisms for being used to shift the responsibility away from the service providers such as the governments and NGOs and making young people as determinants of their own future (Brown 2013; Sinclair et al. 2010), other writers (Campbell and McKendrick 2016; Prodonovich et al. 2014; St Clair and Benjamin 2011; Bok 2010; Burke 2006) have pointed out how educational policies meant to bolster young people's participation in higher education in the United Kingdom, European Union and Australia have been informed by the concept.

In this chapter I first present what the girls' aspirations are and how they are expressed in relation to education. These diverse views from the girls who are in school as well as those out of school plus the parents make us understand how they envision their future - and sometimes what blurs this vision. The drawings and the list made by the primary school girls will also be discussed. On the other hand, empowerment will also be brought to focus with specific attention on how it has been linked to education as expressed by the teachers, NGOs and the DEO. I then sum up the implications of these different views.

5.1 Aspirations for Girls

Interviews with girls and their parents on what the girls or their parents wanted them to achieve in future yielded a cluster of responses. For the girls, education is a steppingstone for them to aspire to get higher education and land jobs thereafter leading them to live a good life; a platform to help their community and change their country after their studies. Female and male parents have the same aspirations for their children to complete schooling till university levels or beyond if material resources permit but however differ on whom they want to invest on. Parents, most of whom have never been to school before, have placed their hopes on their children's education and subsequent employment to help lift them out of poverty as well as securing their daughters good future spouses.

5.1.1 Whether Girls' Education is Better than that of Boys: Parents' Current debates about their Daughters' Future

Nyariek agreed, in consultation with Canrom Primary School Headteacher, that I could wait for her to finish her classes in the evening so that she could take me to their house and translate my interview with her mother from her native Nuer language to English and vice versa. She was a candidate and was preparing for Uganda's primary leaving examinations later in the year. They had to stay in school for longer hours than those in the classes below them. While waiting, I kept wondering if her mother would just talk about all good things about girls' education because of the presence of her daughter. It proved true during the

interview but Nyariek's mother was not a lone voice. She was my first parent participant but the subsequent female parents I interviewed sounded like Nyariek's mother despite the fact that none of their daughters were around when I interviewed them.

The parents were unanimous in the level of education that they wanted their daughters to achieve contingent on the availability of finance/money, resources, or 'power'. The parents were wishful of their daughters reaching higher levels of education but they were fully aware of the circumstances that they find themselves in. These parents' aspirations for their children have a bearing on what their children also aspire to achieve. Moulton et al. (2015) note that, "Parents are another major influence on children's aspirations" (Moulton et al. 2015: 927). This influence could be through material and morale support:

If it is not for the issue of money, I would have wanted them to reach university level (Nyapak, Female Parent).

When asked whether girls' education is important, three important elements emerge in the parent's answers. One, female parents think that girls' education is better than that of boys while the male parents think the opposite. While female parents think that girls will come back and support their parents unlike the boys, male parents believe otherwise. Female parents have a more nuanced view of what 'support' means as the married daughters would still provide material support in addition to their bride wealth paid to the relatives of the girls which depends on the level of education that the girl has achieved. The higher the level of education, the higher the bride price paid for the girl (Grabska 2014: 152). But male parents believe that the boys who bring extra members through marriage and begetting more children with them is the best. Educating them will make them get paid jobs, accumulate wealth and use it to marry their future wives in addition to be being around the house all the time and taking care of the family. It also feeds back to the gender hierarchies where boys are believed to be more important than the girls. Two, their explanations are linked to their children's future marriage lives. Evans-Pritchard (1940: 49) and Deng (1971: 134) note that the most important thing in the lives of the Nuer and Dinka respectively is marriage. About eight decades later and nothing much has changed regarding the Nuer and Dinka beliefs. Most South Sudanese tribes are *patrilocal*, a term that denotes "a cultural norm in which sons provide care for their elderly parents, and daughters leave the home following marriage to provide care for their in-laws" (Ebenstein 2014: 3). Deng (1971) provides further context with regards to the marriage arrangements among the Dinka thus, "The final stage is *geem nya*, literally 'the giving away of the girl'. The bride then goes to the home of the bridegroom's father accompanied by a group of her age mates" (Deng 1971: 167). Below are two contrasting views from parents:

Yeah, you know if girl is in school she thinks of the whole family, the mother, the father, her children. But if you only support the boy, boy cannot actually think of all this. If he gets a wife then you will be able to support his family alone. But girls, always support the mother, the father even her family also (Nyawut, Female Parent).

Because a girl goes to another place. A girl is like a cloth in a shop. When you like a cloth in a shop, you just go and pick it. This is what the girl is like in this house because if you like her you can go with her. The girl will go. But the person who will be of help to me in case I have any problem is a boy because he remains at home, he remains at home with his father (Kon, Male Parent).

As Campbell and McKendrick (2017: 133) note, parents and relatives have considerable influence on children's future choices. These aspirations by parents for their children are gendered. Since most resources are controlled by fathers among the South Sudanese, girls have slim chances of making it in education which puts them at a disadvantage while boys have a much wider arena within which they can aspire and be able to realize them. Male parents would rather spend their resources in educating boys but not the girls because boys remain with them at home and help the parents accumulate family wealth while the girls, when married, go to their in-laws' families.

5.1.2 Bleak Horizons for the Girls?: School Dropouts Express their Aspirations

Akur, a 19-year old but married, kept looking away as I asked her questions. She was cagey as her answers were always never longer than two lines after transcribing them. I also met Ayen, 20 years and also married, at the refugee reception centre in company of two elderly women. Foni, 17 years old, was living with her mother when I went to interview her in their house. Although the girls who were out of school that I interviewed were not all married or single mothers, majority of them were in these categories. Many of them did not complete primary education with some dropping out as early as third grade. Another common feature was that their aspirations were expressed vaguely. One said that she would have studied until she reached where 'others end their studies' or as another put it succinctly, "to the end". Foni wanted to do a 'course' while Akur did not have an answer and instead asked: *"Do I know really? Do I know where I would end?"* (Akur, 19, Married).

In contrast, girls from Senior 4 and above who were 18 years or older had higher aspirations and were clear and articulate about what they wanted to be and do in the future. They had more concrete answers. This is validated by the research that was carried out by Holmes et al. (2018) where they analyzed aspirations for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) professions. They concluded that, in addition to other factors, age and level of education influence aspirations as older children with higher levels of schooling were articulate and had substantial aspirations with regards to STEM occupations (Holmes et al. 2018: 672). A 20-year old Senior 4 dropout had this to say:

Really in my dream I'd wanted to at least study because I had a dream of going to A'Level (advanced level) and then from there I continue to the university. But now since I stopped in O'Level (ordinary level) now there's no any other opportunity that can make me to go for further studies or maybe going for a course it

would be better with me (Keji, Trainee, Whitaker Peace and Development Initiative (WPDI) Center).

The girls who were out of school did not have enough 'space' to express their aspirations. The environment they find themselves in such as being in the refugee settlement do not give them the opportunity to navigate the different 'paths' that would have been available to them if they were daughters of rich parents.

5.1.3 Multiple Journeys, Different Imagined Destinies: Schoolgirls Articulating their Aspirations

Aluel's, 17-year old, educational journey took her from South Sudan to Kenya, then Kampala in Uganda before ending up in Panyadoli Self-Help Secondary School in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement. She wants to study and earn a PhD, if conditions allow, and become a role model for other girls. She is not the only one with such meandering journeys who still have their hopes on education to give them the leverage to change themselves, families or communities. Almost all the girls I interviewed started their education in different places before moving to Kiryandongo, most times in different countries other than Uganda. Such journeys are not new among South Sudanese refugee girls. They span from South Sudan to the neighboring countries, sometimes to the countries in the West and back to South Sudan (Grabska 2014; El Jack 2010) as they escape wars and also in search of better education. Sometimes they have to undertake these journeys to escape arranged marriages. Avoiding one problem leads to encountering another in form of missing classes and going different educational systems. Here is one such journey:

I began my primary (school) in Kampala…..my nursery school known as Brenda Nursery School. And I went furthermore and I changed my school. I went to Kato Summit. I started from P.3 and I changed again and I went to Masindi and I joined the school called Upman where I completed my primary 7. Then I joined here (Kiryandongo High School) (Doro, 16, Senior 1).

With regards to their educational aspirations, all the girls interviewed individually or took part in the focus group discussions wanted to go up to the university level or further. But, like their parents, their dreams hinge on the availability of material means to realize them. This is because if the resources are inadequate, which is always the case, boys will be preferred to continue with studies in the expense of girls. The girls choose the level of education and jobs they believe the can achieve given the circumstances. St Clair and Benjamin (2011) agree that, "Aspirations represent a compromise between the desired and the possible and different people may hold aspirations closer to pragmatic expectations or cling to escapist hopes" (St Clair and Benjamin 2011: 505). This is the case with many girls:

If my parents are still there and they really be paying for me school fees I want even to finish up to the university – at least up to university (Doro, 16, Senior 1).

Many of the girls wanted to become doctors, nurses, and so forth in order to help their communities and country at large. Some girls said that personal wealth is secondary to the wellbeing of others. These aspirations are gendered and are informed by what the parents, relatives and teachers tell the girls. Girls are taught to be caring and responsible people. Social contexts are always in play in determining what to do or be in the future. For the girls, this could be the parents, relatives, teachers or the settlement environment itself. When the girls articulate their aspirations, they do so having in mind what they hear and see at home or in the settlement. For example, in the settlement nurses maybe be mostly women and the girls want to be like them, or parents want them to be like the doctors they see around. Appadurai (2004) agrees that, "Aspirations are never simply individual. They are always formed in interaction and in the thick of social life" (Appadurai 2004: 67). For one girl, it is what she sees in the settlement that she wants to change:

For me I'm studying hard in order to become a doctor. Like some doctors here you see a person is really in coma but you also go for your other things. You see a person is really suffering like for those ones who go for operation. Instead of first saving someone's life you will first ask for the money that: "If you don't pay the money I'm not doing this." But for me I'm studying hard to save people's lives. Then after me saving someone's life I then ask for money but should not ask the money before the person is being saved (Nyakoang, 16, Senior 1, FGD 1)

Girls have high aspirations about the level of education as well as the professions that they wanted to pursue. Parents also have future visions for their children although it depended on whether one was a male or female. Teachers and the NGOs staff on the other hand have other ideas of what the girls should do be and do in the future. Aspirations are gendered as girls aspire for caregiving and reproduction jobs – something grounded in gender norms and ideologies which are reinforced by the parents, relatives and teachers, in addition to what the girls observe in the settlement.

5.1.4 Sketching Futures: Young Girls Presenting their Aspirations through Drawings

I present two sets of data collected from primary school girls. The first set is about the drawings that the young girls sketched in response to the question that asked about what came to their mind when they thought about education. The second set is the list of items that were recorded on the blackboard under the headings: 'good things about schooling', and 'bad things about schooling'.

When I set up an appointment with the Headteacher of Arnold Primary School in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement so that I could interview six girls from his school, I was not sure how much data I would get from the 16-year old and below girls. I chose a more participatory method for this focus group discussion. The girls chose to illustrate their aspirations on manila papers. I had asked them to draw what

school meant to them. I could not include the analysis of their aspirations together with the older girls that I did above because I felt that their voices would be drowned out.

Their drawings have a modern feel to them. They do not look like ordinary houses in Kiryandongo Settlement. They are characterized by huge compounds and fences lined with beautiful flowers. Some had additional structures and facilities nearby such as a clinic, and a school with South Sudan flag raised in the middle ground. There are also social elements to them such as friends visiting, children standing in the compound, healthy women visiting each other (a friend and the participant). When I asked one of the girls what the school meant, she replied: "I'm the owner." I asked another about what the flowers were for, and without looking at me she said: "I'm rich nah!" Although I did not ask all of them about what they meant with their drawings, some have written additional sentences besides their drawings (and some behind the manila papers).
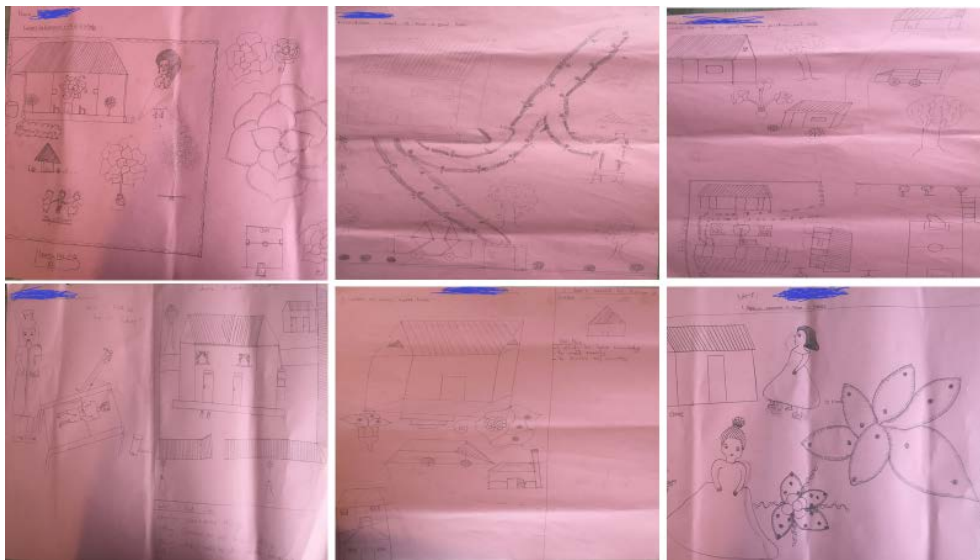

Figure 5. 1: Drawings of the young primary school girls   *Source: Author*

Some of these girls started their education in Kiryandongo Settlement or similar environments and have witnessed all the poor living conditions that have characterized their lives. Majority live in mud houses without electricity. Others go to school on empty stomachs while schools do not have meals as well. Schools are also crowded with few teachers leaving them with substandard education. Through their drawings, the girls show that education will help them change all of that and secure them better living standards. For example, flowered gardens and compounds complemented by magnificent houses are a sign of affluence. Although some of these young girls' aspirations may sound "altruistic" (Archer et al. 2014: 67), they are also gendered as they want to be nurses and teachers which are characterized by caregiving that is a socially-constructed gender role linked to reproduction.

I also gauged them to list the things they liked about education and those that they did not like. They mentioned several challenges they face while studying which included, caning by teachers, dropping out of school, hunger, poverty, not being able to study. On the other hand, they aspire to study and be able to secure jobs, gain knowledge and life skills, and become literate. Again, they want to get away from their own and parents' cur-

rent state. Many of their parents are illiterate and they might believe quite rightly that it could be one of the reasons why they are poor. They also believe that education will help them overcome the challenges, provide them with the platform to aspire, and empower them to make best choices for their future.
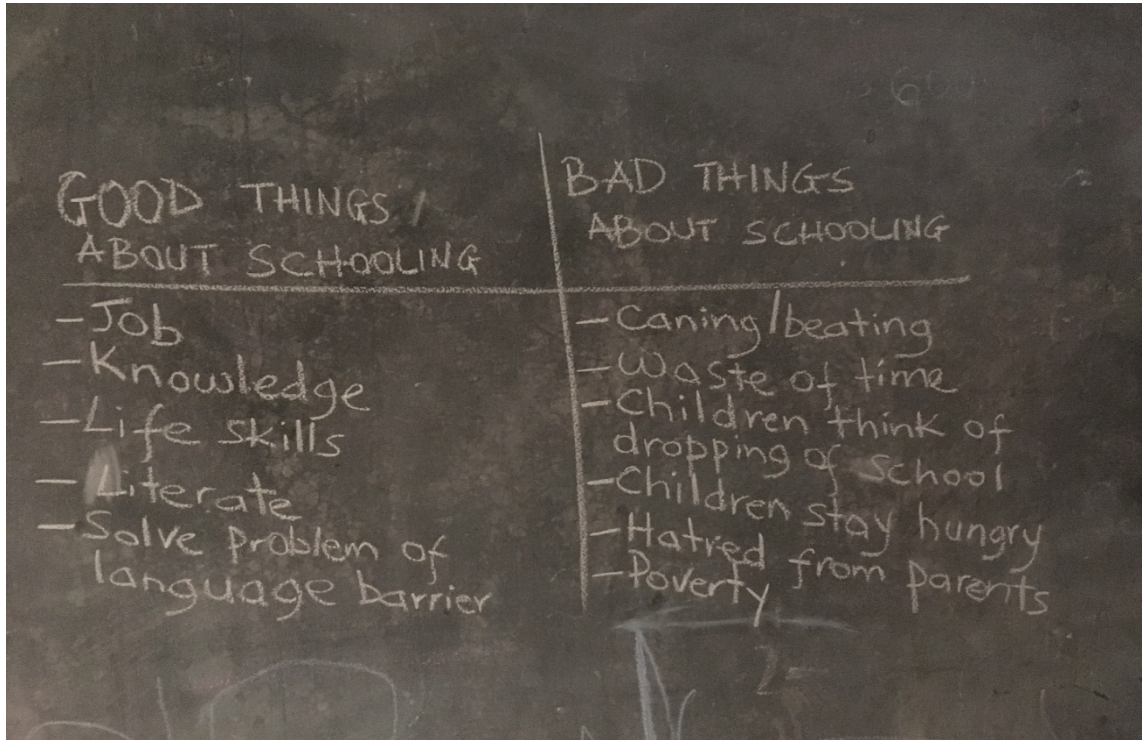

Figure 5. 2: Responses from young girls listed on the blackboard   Source: Author/James

In summary, girls (younger, older, in school, out of school) have verbally and using drawings articulated aspirations. Parents also aspire for their girls to reach certain levels of education and select certain gendered professions. Although these aspirations are heterogenous, they are informed by the immediate environment these girls find themselves in. Education takes center stage in what these girls aspire to achieve because without it they believe that they may not get to the next step which is better lives which could mean empowerment.

5.2 Education as Empowerment Narrative Revisited

Here I look at empowerment in the way it is conceptualized by the teachers, NGOs and the Government of Uganda's education official. I will provide a critical analysis of how the views, such as the ones they hold, have misled initiatives meant to bridge gender inequality or have actually led to the disempowerment of girls. This is true especially when the girls themselves are not consulted on what they think will benefit them.

Empowerment is a slippery notion like many mainstream phrases used by development community. On the other hand, education has also been championed as almost the magic bullet that solves the problem of girls' disempowerment. The rela-

tionship between education is made to sound like a linear thing. Monkman (2011:5) bluntly puts it this way:

"The term *empowerment* is a contested concept, one that suffers from general usage that is often not theoretically grounded. For example, it is often used as a synonym for self-esteem or self-confidence, or is assumed to be a direct result of schooling".

Although in my methodology I deliberately made sure that I do not ask any question that contained the term 'empowerment' but that did not stop respondents spitting it out every time and advancing it as one of the reasons why girls need to be educated. Their understanding and interpretation of empowerment is as fuzzy as any hyped phrase in the development lexicon. Educators and government officials have joined the craze. Empowerment for them means girls doing certain things they never 'did' before such as contesting for leadership positions, standing up against gender-based violence, making independent decisions, being able to speak for themselves. One teacher describes what empowerment means:

Then when I talk about empowering them, they have a side to stand and make decisions because you know this is not right and this is right for me (Akidi, Female Teacher).

Responses from teachers, NGOs staff and government official suggested that education for girls leads to empowerment which will in turn prepare them to become better future mothers. This is again a stereotypical assumption where women are viewed only as childbearing beings that their childcare job can be improved through education. Some male teachers went as far as explaining how educated women take good care of their children compared to their uneducated counterparts. These statements reinforce gender norms and stereotypes that have kept women in prejudiced position. Evaluating an adult literacy programme sponsored by an international agency geared towards women empowerment for the internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Sudan, Greany (2008) discovered that, "Women in circles frequently referred to themselves as 'stupid' and in need of 'knowledge'" (Greany 2008:54). Furthermore, a book purposely developed for the 'empowerment of women' and titled "*How wives can help their husbands*" contained a list of how women should be submissive to their husbands as well as specifying women's domestic roles that they should uphold (Greany 2008: 58). This shows that education does not necessarily reverse power hierarchies but rather brainwash girls to accept the status quo or worse as shown by this quote:

Speaking to these girls, empowering them, encouraging them each day, you tell them: "You are the future mothers of tomorrow" (Akello, Female Teacher/Matron).

5.2.1 "When You Educate a Girlchild, You've Educated a Nation"

While doing interviews, I have heard time and again the phrase about how educating women is like educating a whole nation. In essence, it means that educating girls is turning them into home educators for their children especially at younger ages. It feeds into the gender ideologies where women are meant to stay at home and take care of children as their most important contribution to the society. This phrase "*And we always have this saying that when you educate a girl child you've educated a nation*" (Yine, Female Teacher) is a donors and NGOs' mantra (Gabska 2011: 85) which can take on different meanings. Teachers and NGOs staff see the role of girls as that of 'making a nation' by producing children who will be future citizens. It becomes something that is always expected of a woman to do and it is believed to be 'normal'. Therefore, girls have to be prepared through education to be able to take good care of the children that they are bound to produce. Although Yuval-Davis (1996: 17) warns that seeing the "role of women – to bear children" as the main thing they were born to do robs them of their agency to decide. The participant below sums up what majority of the teachers and one NGO staff think as the major reason why girls needed to be educated:

And the reason…..girls when they progress to become mothers. Most of the time they are with their children, the young ones compared to men. Now, these young ones between the age of one year to seven they need that education, that home education. And that home education is very vital in upbringing to an adult (Ogwang, Male Teacher).

Formal education for girls will make them 'compete' favorably with men, secure them better jobs, build a status for themselves are the claims made by the participants I interviewed. These claims are not just simplistic but smell like mainstream narratives about girls' empowerment. Taking the examples from the initial educational initiatives for girls in Nigeria, Ethiopia and Rwanda by the Nike Foundation in collaboration with the World Bank, Boyd (2016) claims that these interventions are neoliberal approaches that prepare girls to be future economic agents, consumers and inexpensive workforce. This 'instrumentalization' of girls does not only deviate from the feminist approaches but alienates and disempowers the girls more (Boyd 2016: 146). Chant (2016) draws examples from similar undertakings that have branded girls as 'smarter economics' if investment was made in them (Chant 2016: 2). One of these investments is formal education under the disguise of empowerment. The following statement from one of the teachers is an embodiment of these Eurocentric ideas:

We find now the women are taking up bigger responsibilities in the communities and if they are not educated, if they've not gone to school, then you find many will be left out. They will not be able to perform similar duties as the men perform. So for women to do the work that men can do they need to also go to school and study so that they get the qualifications for the works that men do. Because without qualification you are not going to be given works (Lado, South Sudanese Male Teacher).

5.2.2 "God Created Women as Caring"

Many participants made reference to God to explain why girls do the current gender roles even if they are educated. To empower them through education is to perfect their God-given trait. In other words, these roles were assigned from the time of creation. It validates the ideologies which assign hospitality work to women. Deng (1971: 122) quoted a song composed by a young Dinka boy about how he could not wait to grow up and marry a wife who would cook for him day and night. It is worrisome that the teachers and parents still believe that girls and women as households 'servants' despite their education as it is something decreed by God. Although Cornwall et al. (2007:14) call these notions "gender myths and feminist fables", they are in practice in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement as indicated by the following response from one parent:

Actually, let's say the way God created women they are responsible, more responsible than the men (Wani, Male Parent).

As seen above teachers, NGOs staff and a few parents look at empowerment as the only route to empowerment. But authors such as Holmarsdottir et al. (2011: 4) have cautioned that education does not always lead to girls' empowerment. And Appadurai (2004: 67) agrees that the easiest route to empowerment is unavailable. It should be a nuanced concept that needs to be employed from the grassroots by first dismantling traditionally ascribed gender roles, norms, and stereotypes that act as impediments to the good intentions of feminist and development approaches.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

This research paper does not argue that empowerment through education is a myth. But rather I agree with other authors (Holmarsdottir et al. 2011; Boyd 2016; Chant 2016) that it is not a simplistic undertaking. One way of doing it is to raise the aspirations of girls through formal education. Education provides a room for girls to aspire while aspirations in turn give them the capabilities to make choices. This study mapped 'voices' of young girls and their parents about how they envision their future educational and life trajectories. I also examined the role that the challenges related to access, retention and graduation from school play to dim these girls' aspirations in the refugee setting. The notion of empowerment was also explored especially how it is understood by the teachers, NGOs staff, and sometimes parents in relation to girls' education. Using drawings and a list, supported by further questioning, the aspirations of young primary school girls were looked at as well as the challenges that they face as they go about their education and the reasons why they want to study.

The study reveals that many girls, especially those in secondary schools, in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement have high aspirations to achieve higher education and lead 'better' lives after their studies. Whether they will achieve these aspirations in future remains to eb seen. These aspirations are dependent on the availability of material resources to aid them in their pursuit. In addition, there is a gendered aspect to aspirations where certain professions were chosen over the others by the girls. These aspirations are informed by gender norms and ideologies. Parents and teachers play a great role in maintaining these gendered hierarchies. The environment in which these girls operate is rife with complex constraints. Given the poverty and the fact that it is a refugee setting make some girls to drop out or obtain substandard education. Many teachers, NGOs staff and some parents believe that education leads to empowerment despite studies showing that it is not a quick fix. Others such as Dejaeghere and Lee (2011) and Greany (2008) have also shown that education could be used to disempower girls and women.

There is also context to aspirations. Aspirations for the girls in the Global North countries is different from how girls living in the refugee situation, where resources are so limited, may enunciate their aspirations. It is also different how girls living in South Sudan express their imagined futures compared to the ones in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement. As Grabska (2014, 2011, 2010) and Kaiser (2008) have written about, gender norms do change in the refugee camps and more girls could be allowed to go to school and have the platform compared to when they were in South Sudan. Girls in the settlement may aspire more as a result of having the chance to go to school compared to their counterparts in South Sudan but whether it translates to empowerment is a different matter altogether given other factors such as specific programmes designed to help girls and how much social norms and ideologies have shifted in favor of girls.

Educational aspirations have also received not-so-much attention in the refugee situations especially among young children. With donor and aid agencies

preaching girls empowerment, one of the starting points (though not always the case) is to create an enabling environment, such as provision of education, for these girls to help them raise their aspirations. Archer et al. (2014: 58) contend that aspirations can provide resilience among the disadvantaged children – something these girls need given their circumstances. And Appadurai (2004) agrees: "This is the map that needs to be made more real, available, and powerful for the poor."

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Map of Uganda showing the location of Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement and the refugee figures as of 31st August 2019

Source: UNHCR 2019
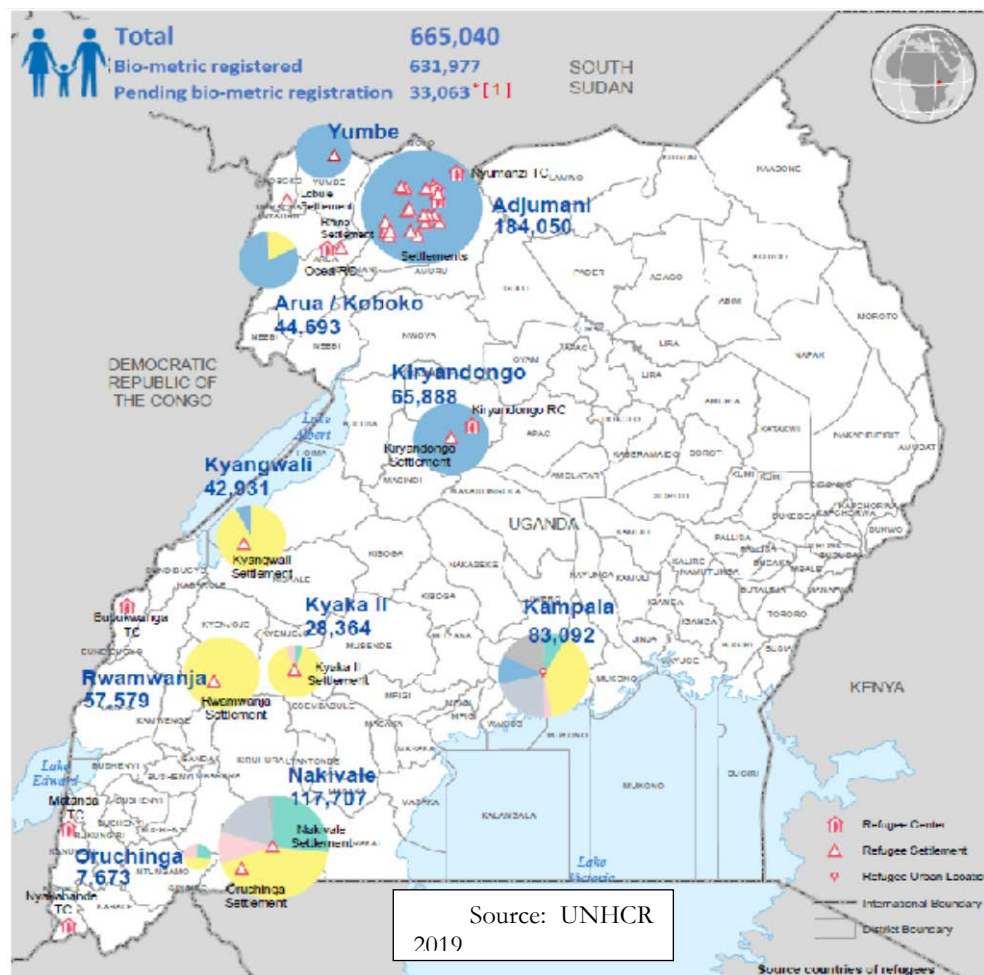
Appendix 2: Interview Questions' guide for different categories of participants

Focus group discussions and semi-structure questions for the research covering different categories of repondents

1. Girls

- In which class are you?
- How old are you?
- When did you start your education and where?
- What do you like most about going to school?
- What don't you like about going to school?
- Whose idea was it to go to school and start education?
- Why did you want to study? And now? (Put differently: What will education do for you?)
- Did everyone at home agree with the idea of you going to school? If no, who did not and why?
- How far do you want to go with your studies.....Primary 7, Senior 4, Senior 6/College/Tertiary Institution, University, etc? Why?
- What are the challenges that the you face?
- Do you know of girls who do not go to school? Why they do not go to school?
- What kind of help do you think will make it easier for you to achieve your dreams (aspirations)?

2. Parents/Guardians

- How many children are of school-going age in your house?
- How old is/are he/she/they?
- How many are in school and how many are out of school?
- Why is this child/are these children out of school (If a child/children are out of school)?
- Did you go to school yourself? Till what level? Why did you stop?
- Till what level do you think your children, especially daughter(s) should stay in school?
- Which challenges do you face in providing education for the child/children?
- What kind of assistance do you receive from NGOs, UN, institutions implementing educational programmes, MoES, schools, etc. to help you keep your children at school?
- Are there any specific assistance that are provided to girls in the settlement to keep them in school?
- Why did you decide to send your children to school?
- Is the education for girls important in your view? Why?
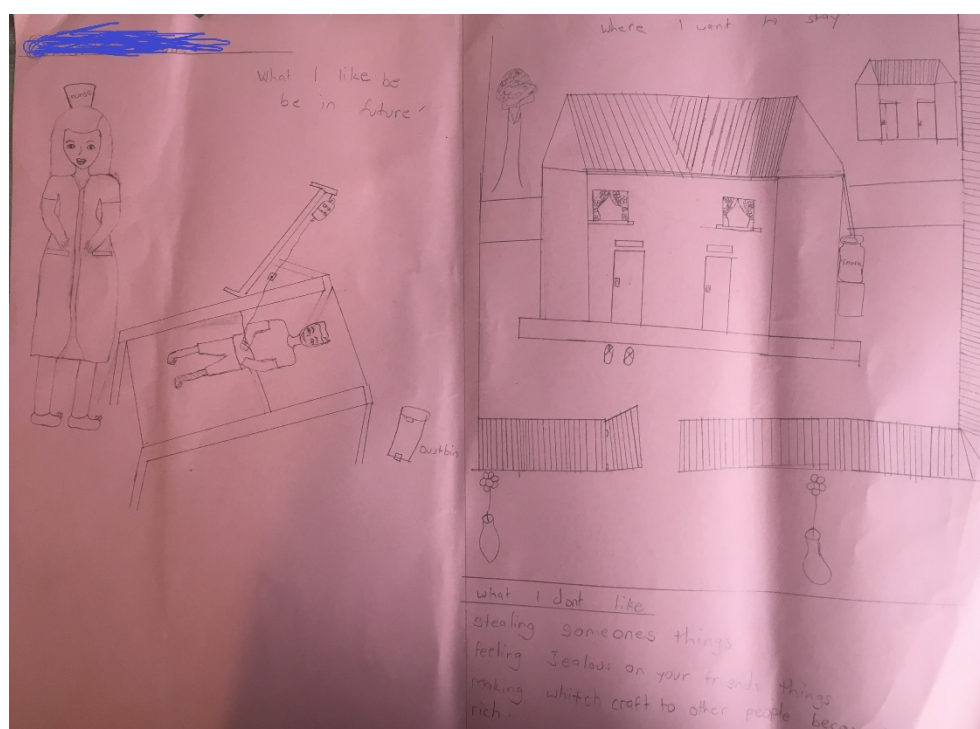- Is the education for girls and boys the same? What is the difference in your view?

3. Teachers

- Which grade are you in charge of and what do you teach?
- What is the ratio of girls to boys in the classes (school) that you teach in (in charge of)?
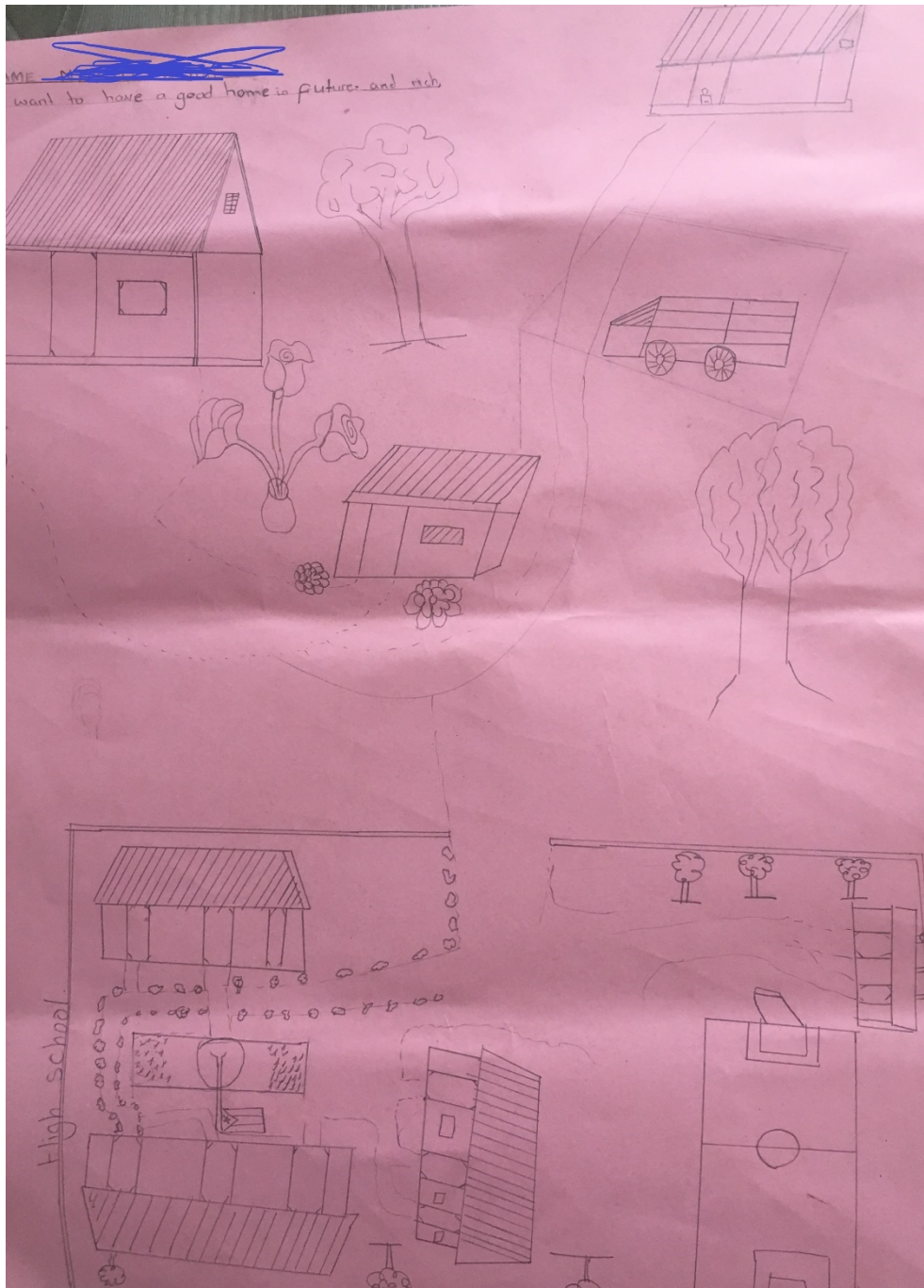- Is there a difference in terms of education for girls and boys?

Annex 3: Summary of the participants' information

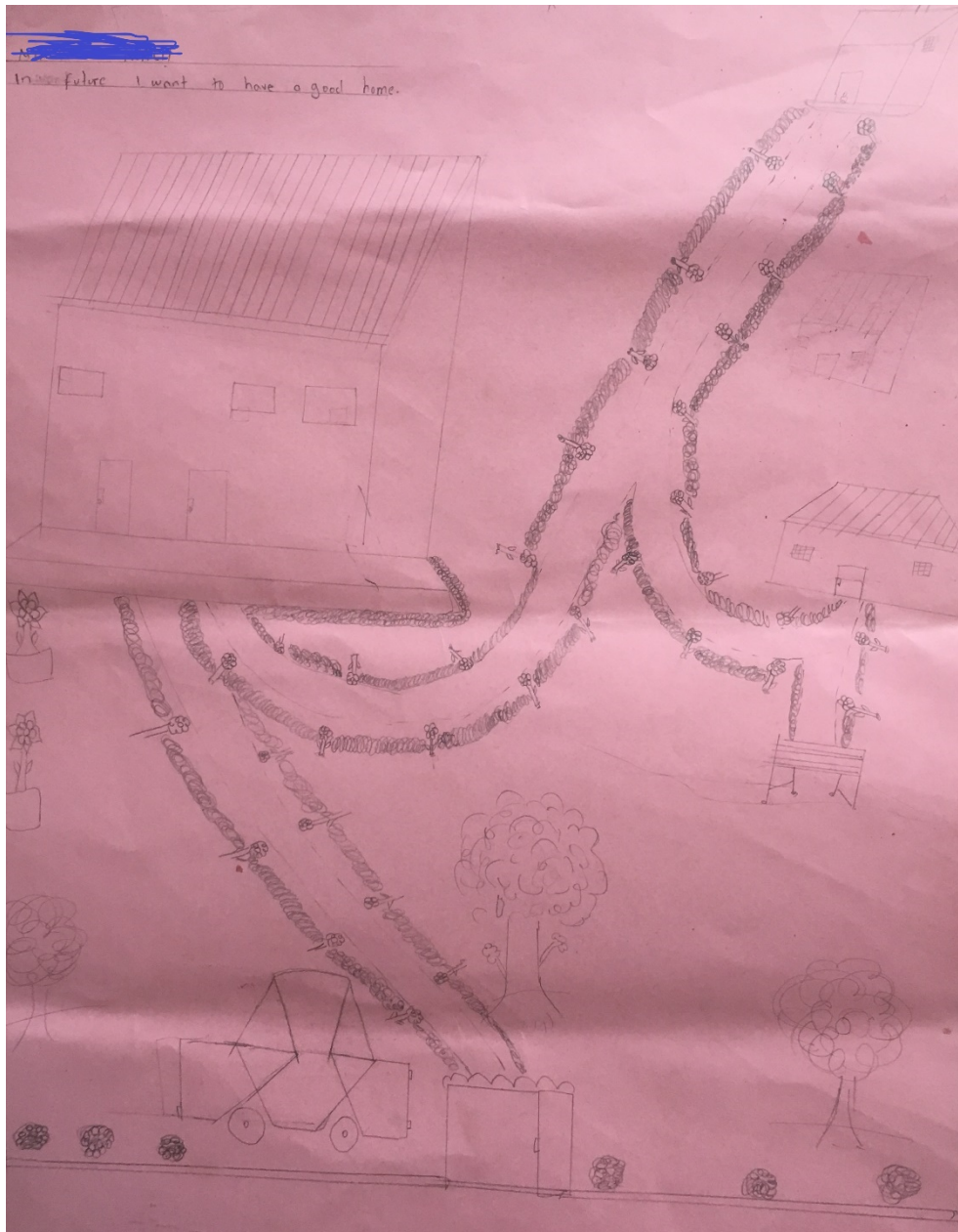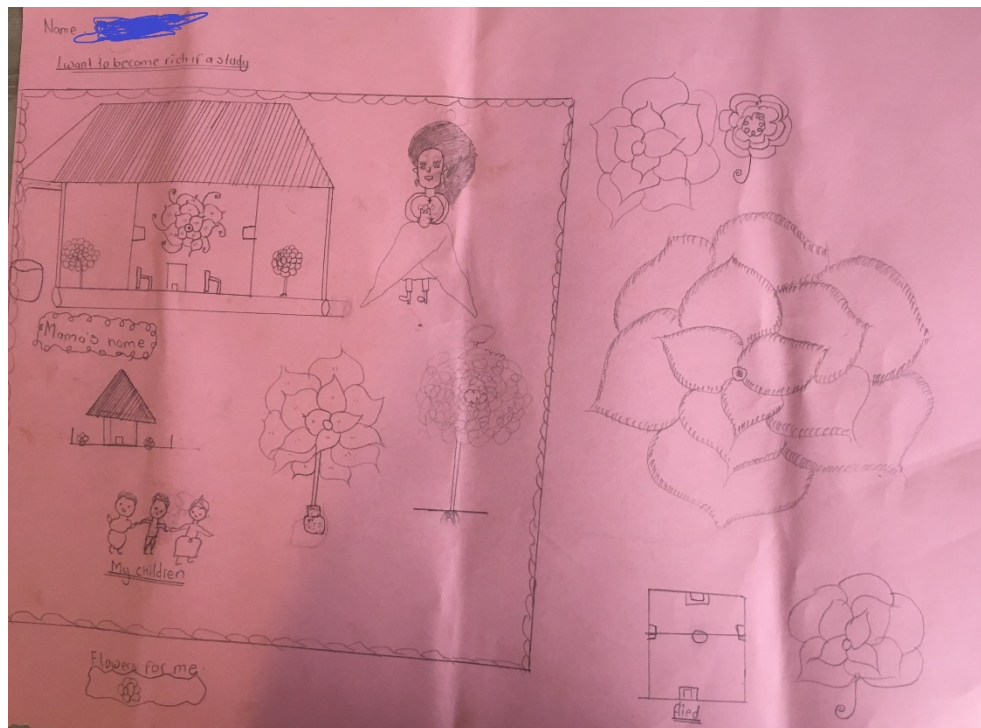| Participants' Category	Number of Participants	Age Range	Level of Education	Remarks	Data Collection Method Employed
Secondary school girls	17	16 – 24 years	Senior 1 to Senior 6		2 FGDs and 7 semi-structured interviews
Primary school girls	6	12 – 15 years	Primary 6 to Primary 7		1 FGD (6 drawings and a list)
School dropouts (girls)	8	17 – 20 years	Primary 3 – Senior 4; 2 never went to school	4 married, 2 single mothers, 2 neither married nor had children	Semi-structured interviews
Parents	6	Adults	n/a	4 females and 2 males	Semi-structured interviews
Teachers	10	Adults	n/a	5 females (1 South Sudanese) and 5 males (1 South Sudanese)	Semi-structured interviews
NGOs staff	2	Adults	n/a	1 female and 1 male	Semi-structured interviews
District Education Officer	1	Adult	n/a	Male	Semi-structured interview

Annex 4: Drawing of primary school girl 1

50

want to have a good home in future. and rich.

Annex 8: Drawing of primary school girl 5

I want to have a good home

I don't want to have a home like this

like this
- I study to have knowledge
- To avoid poverty
- To develop my country.
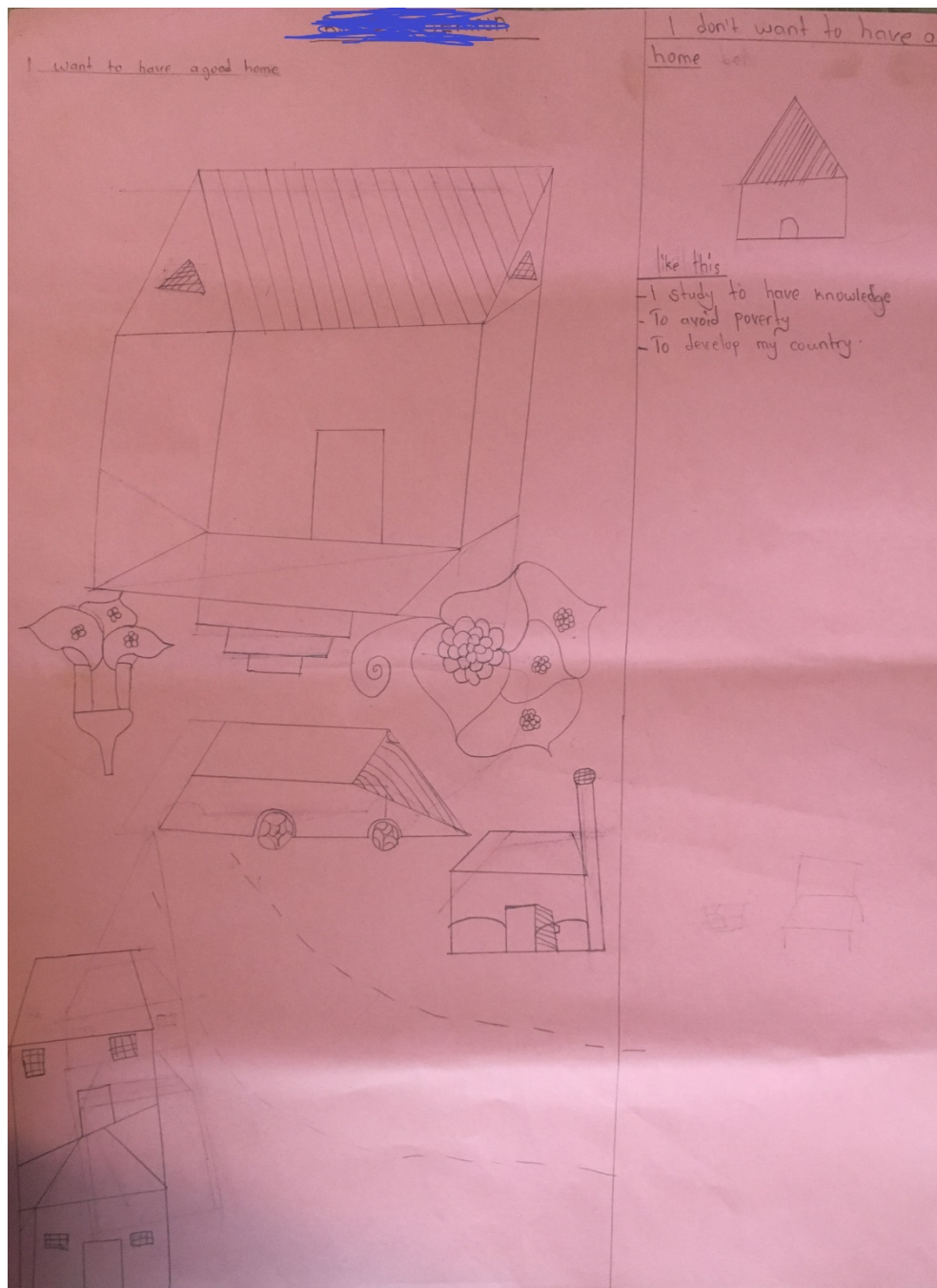
Annex 9: Drawing of primary school girl 6
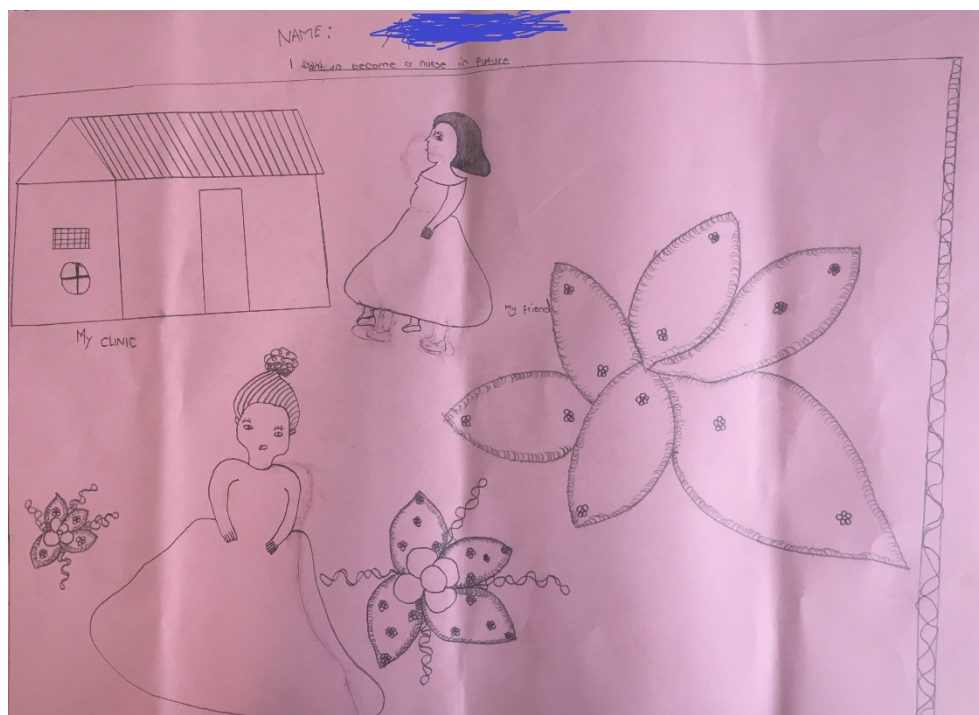
Annex 10: Consent form

Master degree's thesis on *Access, retention and graduation of South Sudanese refugee girls in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement*

Consent to take part in the research

I,.., give my consent to take part in this research project. In giving my consent I acknowledge that:

i) The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me.

ii) I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary – I am not under any obligation to consent.

iii) I understand that my involvement is strictly confidential. I understand that any published research data gathered from the results of the study may be published; however, no information about me will be used in any way that is identifiable.

iv) I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time or refuse to answer some questions, whenever I want.

v) I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within one month after the interview, in which case the material with be deleted.

vi) I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.

....
Signature of participant Date

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

....
Signature of researcher Date