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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

## SITUATION ANALYSIS OF SCHOOL SAFETY AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS; KENYA

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#### ABSTRACT

This study investigated the participation of secondary school administrators in school safety and implementation of safety policies with regard to physical infrastructure and waste disposal in some selected public schools in Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design; purposive sampling was used to select the respondents comprising of school administrators i.e. 35 Head Teachers (HT), 28 Deputy Head Teachers (DHT) and 12 Head of Departments (HOD) drawn from 75 public secondary schools and 3 Quality Assurance and Standards officers (QASO) as key informants. Data collection instruments included head teachers and QASOs questionnaires, interview schedules and observation schedule. Data collected was analyzed by use of descriptive statistics and presented in tables. The study found out that only 20% of the schools had constituted safety sub-committees, none (0%) of the HTs and DHTs served as secretary or member of the sub-committee respectively as required by policy. All respondents ranked school safety last with curriculum, extra-curriculum and guidance and counseling respectively being given more priority. The study also established that HTs attitude on implementation of school safety was positive with an average score of 64.29%. Whereas 92% and 82.67% of the schools had fitted fire windows/doors without grills and fire extinguishers respectively, a paltry 16% had fitted fire alarms while none (0%) posts evacuation maps in its buildings nor has established a monitoring and evaluation system of school safety. With regard to waste disposal, a majority 65.33% employed unsustainable means of waste disposal where they would abandon pit latrines once they are filled up and excavate others and another 21.33% manually emptying them with buckets exposing workers to the risk of contracting communicable diseases. Further, only 29.33% provided learners with gloves wherever they cleaned their sanitation facilities while none (0%) undertook waste segregation. Based on these findings, it was concluded that the participation of school administrators in school safety issues was low and the overall implementation of safety policies was way below the requirements as stated in the safety manual. It was therefore recommended that: Ministry should enforce school safety programmes by ensuring all schools institute school safety sub-committees to implement safety policies and carry out induction of all school administrators on school safety.

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#### INTRODUCTION

Safe and secure schools are fundamental to students' school successes and achievements. Threats to the safety and security of schools can arise from natural hazards – for example earthquake, floods and storms or from human actions such as vandalism, arson and violent crime. While catastrophic events and human tragedies cannot be eliminated entirely, there is a role for facility designers, institutional managers, emergency response teams, and post-crisis intervention in mitigating their negative impact (OECD, 2006). Consequently, providing a safe and orderly school environment should remain an ever-present priority of the school administration.

School safety requires planning and constant vigilance and has to be everyone's responsibility. Everybody, from the head of school to the maintenance staff should be involved in school safety. School safety should be addressed through a comprehensive approach that focuses on prevention, intervention and response planning. Safe schools are a shared responsibility with administrators, teachers, support staff, students, and parents (Mississippi Department of Education, 2008). Administrators in particular are key actors as they are bestowed with much of the obligations pertaining to comprehensive school safety. The school administrators have a responsibility to ensure that the school environment is conducive for learning (Day and Golench, 1995). As Trump (2008) points out, today school safety is not only a "money"

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issue" but also a "leadership" issue. Administrators must prevent potential challenges to their safe school environments and their reputations, recognize safety gaps, plan and budget for security, and exercise caution in selecting consultants to strengthen their safety leadership. Although School board and administrators set the climate of safety within schools, teachers must also be directly involved, trained and supported in all stages of developing and implementing programs that accomplish safer schools.

The Kenyan government's commitment to the safety and overall welfare of learners and especially children culminated into a Safety Standards Manual for Schools in Kenya (Republic of Kenya, 2008) in addition to circulars as indicated in the Ministry of Education Circular No. G9/1/169 (Republic of Kenya, 2001). This manual among other things emphasizes on safety in physical infrastructure, school environment and the participation of school administrators in implementing these policies. Knowledge of school safety laws and regulations provides administrators with the authority to know what is allowed, what is forbidden, as well as what actions are considered to be an obligation of the school. According to a report by Otieno (2010), it is emerging that most schools on Kenya have no capacity to handle emergencies, and are yet to even implement safety standards manual produced two years ago. Schools management and some parents admit that some schools are sitting on a time bomb should there be an emergency.

Day and Golench (1995) classified policies that would promote school safety into four types as: response or dealing with misbehavior; expectations in form of a model for appropriate behaviour which students should follow; preventive strategies and programs that inhibit misbehaviour and lastly community focus where community groups are included in initiatives to address the problem of school violence. A study done in Turkana District Kenya affirmed that safety preparedness depends on safety training and awareness programs (Rono and Wambua, 2009). School physical infrastructure refers to any built facility for use in the school to facilitate the provision of services. The Safety Standards Manual for Schools in Kenya (2008) describes physical infrastructure as facilities which include structures such as classrooms, offices, toilets, dormitories, libraries, laboratories, kitchen and playground equipment among others. These facilities can be either permanent or temporary structures. Such physical structures should be appropriate, adequate and properly located, devoid of any risks to users or to those around them. They should also comply with the provisions of the Education Act (Cap 211), Public Health Act (Cap 242) and Ministry of Public Works building regulations/standards. It also describes environmental safety as the proper and sustainable management of the physical surroundings of the school. Proper management of the school environment entails appropriate mechanisms of waste management, orderly use and replenishment of plants and animals within the school compound and enhancing a sustainable balance of biodiversity.

According to a study done the World Bank (2004), in sub-Saharan Africa alone it is estimated that up to US\$30 billion will be required to address the shortfall in provision of suitable and safe learning environments. Typically, classrooms are

overcrowded, many buildings and other facilities are inadequate, sites are poorly planned and there is little maintenance. This situation is not conducive to good teaching and learning. A basic minimum package of school infrastructure which is accessible, durable, functional, safe, hygienic and easily maintained therefore needs to be part of any strategy to meet the Millennium Development Goal for education. In its progress report, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC, 2010) emphasizes that school projects, whether for new schools construction or renovations, are further prioritized at the regional level based on the following criteria: health and safety, overcrowding and curriculum requirements. In view of the foregoing there was therefore need to conduct a study on the participation of school administrators in and the implementation of safety policies with regard to physical infrastructure and waste disposal in secondary schools.

### **Purpose and objectives of the study**

The main purpose of this study was to determine the participation of secondary school administrators in school safety and establish implementation of safety policies with regard to physical infrastructure and waste disposal in some selected schools in Kenya.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Research design**

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design with an attempt to collect data from the members of a population in order to determine the current status of that population with respect to one or more variables. A survey can also be used to describe, explain or explore the existing status of variables at a given time (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003). Survey research design was suitable because it sought to obtain information that describes existing phenomena by asking respondents about their perceptions, attitudes, roles and values on safety policies in schools. Data collected was analyzed to make comparisons of the various school categories administration participation in relation to school safety.

### **Sampling procedures**

Purposive sampling was used to select school administrators and key informants. Respondents selected for this study were post-graduate candidates in Executive Masters in Education in Leadership and Policy, Moi University Kenya comprising of school administrators i.e. Head Teachers (HT), Deputy Head Teachers (DHT) and Head of Departments (HOD) drawn from various public secondary schools distributed in 12 counties in Kenya. The schools were further stratified as boarding, day and day/boarding for ease in comparison. Quality Assurance and Standards officers (QASO) were selected as key informants since it is their responsibility to ensure implementation of safety policies, monitor and assess school safety as part of their advisory visit to schools.

### **Sample size**

The sample size drawn was 78 which constituted 35 HTs, 28 DHTs, 12 HODs and 3 key informants thus, 75 schools and

administrators were targeted for sampling comprising of 56 boarding, 13 day/boarding and 6 day schools distributed as

questionnaire contained 2 parts. Part A was used to collect general information about the school like existence of a school

**Table 1. School administrators' distribution**

Designation of respondent	School category			Total (%)
	Boarding	Boarding/Day	Day	
HTs	21	9	5	35 (46.67%)
DHTs	24	3	1	28 (37.33%)
HODs	11	1	0	12 (16%)
Total (%)	56(74.67%)	13(17.33%)	6(8%)	75 (100%)

**Table 2. School administration participation in school safety**

Factor	Designation	School category			Total(%)
		Boarding	Boarding/day	Day	
School safety sub-committees instituted	YES	12	3	0	15 (20%)
	NO	44	10	6	60 (80%)
Member of safety committees	HT	7	2	0	9 (25.71%)
	DHT	0	0	0	0 (%)
	HOD	1	0	0	1 (8.33%)
Awareness on existence of safety manual	HT	26	4	0	30 (85.71%)
	DHT	9	3	0	12 (42.86%)
	HOD	2	0	0	2 (16.67%)
Knowledge of content in safety manual	HT	12	3	0	15 (42.9%)
	DHT	3	1	0	4 (14.29%)
	HOD	1	0	0	1 (8.33%)
Trained in school safety	HT	1	0	0	1 (2.86%)
	DHT	0	0	0	0 (0%)
	HOD	0	0	0	0 (0%)
Participated in school safety awareness	HT	3	1	0	4 (11.42%)
	DHT	1	0	0	1 (3.57%)
	HOD	0	0	0	0 (0%)

**Table 3. Challenges facing implementation of safety policies (n=75)**

Factor	HT	DHT	HOD	TOTAL (%)
Lack of finances to implement safety policies	22	8	0	30 (40%)
Unaware of policy requirements	2	1	1	4 (5.33%)
Safety is beyond my job mandate	0	2	11	13 (17.33%)
Safety is not a priority	11	17	0	28 (37.33%)
Totals	35	28	12	75 (99.99%*)

\* The total percentage does not add up to 100% due to round off error

**Table 4. Head teachers' attitude towards safety policy implementation (n=35)**

Item	SA	A	U	D	SD	TL
School safety policies should be prioritized	60	40	12	10	4	126
Implementation of school safety is a responsibility of the Ministry	8	24	18	28	10	88
Safety policies should only be implemented in boarding schools	4	16	15	40	40	115
Implementation of safety should be done by non-teaching staff	5	12	24	48	20	109
Implementation of school safety may affect curriculum implementation	2	8	16	40	65	131
Disciplinary action should be undertaken against defaulting HTs	10	8	24	24	11	77
Disaster mapping and management training should be done in schools	40	68	6	12	2	128
All teachers should be trained in first-aid skills	50	24	12	12	4	102
School safety should be recognized as a department alongside others	1	8	18	24	90	141
Full implementation of the safety standards manual for schools in Kenya can never be achieved	6	16	15	36	35	108
Grand total	1125					

The Average Percentage score = 64.29%. KEY: SA=Strongly Agree; A=Agree; U=Undecided; D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree TL=Total

shown in Table 1. Three key informants were purposively chosen from the counties with the highest tally with respect to number of respondents sampled.

### Research instruments and data collection procedures

The research instruments used for data collection in this study were: questionnaire; interview schedule and observation schedule. Questionnaires were administered to the post-graduate candidates, while interviews were used for key informants, on issues concerning safety procedures. Whenever two or more of the respondents came from the same school, only one questionnaire was filled to avoid duplication. The

safety sub-committee, membership capacity of the respondents and their role in implementing safety policies (where sub-committees existed), awareness of the safety standards manual for schools in Kenya (2008), main challenge in implementing the safety manual, vulnerability of the school location to environmental hazards, waste disposal methods adopted among others. Part B consisted of a ten item Likert type scale in which respondents were required to state their level of agreement or disagreement with the items. The items had options with weights (w) as follows: Strongly Agree (SA) = 5, Agree (A) = 4, Undecided (U) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2 and Strongly Disagree (A) = 1. The scales were reversed for negatively stated items. Observations of the physical

infrastructure and school environment with regard to waste disposal were done on randomly selected schools to authenticate the information given by the respective respondents for data validation.

### Data analysis

Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics in the form of frequency counts, percentages and were then presented in tables for easy interpretation. The frequencies and percentages extracted from the analysis were used to evaluate the participation of school administration in school safety and the extent of implementation with regard to physical infrastructure and waste disposal safety.

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS' PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL SAFETY

Questions were asked to determine the existence of school safety sub-committees and the participation of the school administrators in implementing the safety policies. Of the 75 schools sampled, only 15 (20%) had constituted safety sub-committees distributed as shown in Table 2. Six of the HTs served as ordinary members in the committee, 3 in-attendance while none (0%) served as secretary as required by policy. None (0%) of the DHTs sampled was a member of the sub-committee though they are obliged to serve as members while only 1(%) HOD served as an ordinary member. None of the respondents was in-charge of school safety in their respective schools. This points out to the low participation of school administrators in school safety issues. Only 2 of the HTs convene meetings of the school safety sub-committee and the same HTs ensure accurate and up-to-date records of incidents relating to school safety are kept. Surprisingly 3 (%) of the schools without safety committees also kept safety incident related records. When the respondents were asked on the awareness of the existence of the safety manual, 30(86%) of the HTs were aware of its existence, among which 15(43%) of them were fairly versed with its requirements while the rest 57% reported to have received it from the Ministry but were not aware of its content. Of the 30 HTs, 26 were from boarding schools while the remaining 4 (%) were from day/boarding schools. 12 of the DHTs were aware of its existence among which 4 had fair knowledge of its contents while only 2 HODs had knowledge of the existence of the manual with one of them having fair knowledge of its content. It was noted that the HOD who had fair knowledge of content is the same one who served as a member of safety sub-committee. None of the schools had all their teachers trained in first-aid skills and none had an adequately trained teacher in health education as required by safety policies. Only 1(1.33%) HT had attended a refresher course in school safety while 4(5.33%) of the schools had formed a students social organization named Red Cross club to sensitize on safety issues. Participation of the school administrators with school category is illustrated in Table 2.

Vulnerability of the school to climatic hazards and mitigation measures taken by the school administrators to lessen risks that could result from the hazards was also assessed. 23 (30.67%) schools were reported to be vulnerable to hazards in some part of the year. Of these, 11 were

vulnerable to wind effects, 6 to floods, 4 to lightning and 2 to landslides. 6 of the schools had taken mitigation measures with 4 having planted wind breakers and 1 school having fitted a lightning arrester. None of the schools had undertaken hazard/disaster mapping, monitoring and evaluation. When asked to prioritize school programmes implementation, school safety ranked fourth with curriculum, extra-curriculum and guidance and counseling respectively being given more priority. The main challenge to implementing the safety policy requirements, responds varied depending on the respondents position held in the school as illustrated in Table 3. An interview with QASO found out that their participation was mainly in the dissemination of government policy manuals. Organization of seminars and workshops on school safety was hardly done and none had taken action on defaulting head teachers. When asked to rate their priorities in implementation of government policies, all ranked curriculum implementation as a priority followed by extra-curriculum, guidance and counseling while school safety was ranked least in priority.

### Head teachers' attitude towards safety policy implementation

Attitude of the HTs on school safety was evaluated by use of Likert scale. Their responses were as shown in Table 4. The statement with the highest score against it was the one that stated that: School safety should be recognized as a department alongside others with a score of 141 out of a possible 175 points. The one with the lowest score was: Disciplinary action should be undertaken against defaulting HTs. The average percentage score on safety for head teachers was found to be 64.29%. This score was slightly above average and implied a positive attitude.

### Safety in school physical infrastructure

Respondents were asked questions on the schools physical infrastructure with regard to construction and fire safety among others. 15(20%) of the respondents were in agreement that physical infrastructures mainly classrooms, dormitories and administration blocks were constructed or occupied with consultations with and approval of the Ministry of Public Works, Ministry of Education, and Ministry of Health (Public Health Department). None of the schools had a school site plan in place. 69(92%) of the respondents affirmed that the schools classrooms and/or dormitories windows were without grills and easy to open outwards. 62(82.67%) of the schools had fitted fire extinguishers, 12 (16%) had fire alarms while none of these was a day school. Further, 36(52.22%) of the schools with boarding facilities affirmed that their schools had fitted a door at each end of the dormitory among which 22(31.88%) of those kept one (emergency) of the doors locked to limit access by students in order to avert theft cases. None (0%) of the schools posts evacuation maps in its buildings and none (0%) has established a monitoring and evaluation system of the school safety programme. 9(13.04%) of the boarding schools admitted to students sharing beds though it is a requirement that admission be pegged on bed capacity at all times. Of the 72 schools with libraries, 18(25%) of them ensured that books were regularly dusted, majority dusting them once monthly while the rest dusted whenever the administration deemed it necessary. When asked to rate their libraries with regard to sufficient space, ventilation, health and

safety, as required by the Safety Standards Manual for Schools in Kenya (2008), 15(20.83%) of the respondents rated them as excellent, 35(50.72%) as good and the rest 22(30.56%) as poor.

### Safety in school waste disposal

Questions were asked on the methods adopted in waste disposal and their appropriateness in terms of environmental sustainability and safety. 56 (74.67%) of the schools utilized pit latrines, 15 (20%) combined both pit latrines and flushable toilets drained to open pond systems while 4 (5.33%) of the schools were served with municipal sewerage systems. The student toilet ratio of 30:1 was exceeded in 63 schools indicating a high failure rate of 84% a scenario also noted by Omolo and Simatwa (2010). Of the schools utilizing pit latrines, 49 (65.33%) of them would abandon the latrines once they were filled up and excavate others. This was environmentally unsustainable as it led to land resource wastage as the abandoned sites were not rehabilitated. 16 (21.33%) would manually empty them using buckets exposing the workers to risk of contracting communicable diseases, while the remaining 6(8%) would hire services from the local authorities. Where learners cleaned their sanitation facilities, 22(29.33%) of the schools provided them with gloves and all these were noted to be boarding schools. Other than the 4 schools served with municipal services, all the rest (94.67%) utilized open pit systems for solid waste disposal. None of the schools undertook waste segregation depending on waste types (biodegradable and non-biodegradable) while only 10(13.33%)of the schools had their solid waste disposal sites fenced. On the safe and effective disposal of sanitary wear, 12 (16%) of them all boarding schools had hired private sanitary wear disposal services that were safe and effective. When asked to rate their state of waste disposal as required by the Safety Standards Manual for Schools in Kenya (2008), 8 (%) inclusive of the 4 schools served by municipal services were rated as excellent, 15 (%) as good, 21 (%) and the rest 31 (%) as poor.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study the following conclusions were made:

1. There was no deliberate induction or capacity building programmes targeting school administrators on school safety
2. Constitution of school safety sub-committees depended on the school category with notably boarding schools having more committees compared to mixed/day and day schools.
3. Membership of the school safety sub-committees in place did not adhere to set requirements and indicated low participation of school administrators in the sub-committees
4. Knowledge of school safety policies was low and positively correlated with the position held by the respondent and school category
5. There was no training of school administrators in first-aid skills nor were teaching staff trained in health education

6. Majority of the schools had implemented provision of fire extinguishers and fitting of doors without grills
7. Schools did not undertake hazard/disaster mapping, monitoring and evaluation
8. Schools did not undertake segregation of wastes according to waste type and majority utilized environmentally unsustainable and inadequate methods of waste disposal
9. Schools did not have site plans nor post any evacuation maps on buildings

Based on the findings of the study and conclusions made, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. School safety should be prioritized by school administrators just like curriculum implementation
2. All school administrators should be inducted on safety policies. Head teachers should take initiative to be well versed with all safety policies and disseminate the same to other teaching staff and stakeholders
3. All schools should form school safety sub-committees as required by safety policies
4. School administration should set aside finances for implementation, monitoring and evaluation of school safety programmes
5. School administration should post safety instructions and evacuation maps at strategic areas
6. QASO should ensure school safety policies are disseminated to all schools and implemented
7. QASO should ensure school administrators are trained on disaster mapping, monitoring and evaluation
8. Ministry should ensure that admissions are pegged on bed space to avert overcrowding and stern measures taken on school heads flouting this requirement.
9. Schools should adopt sustainable methods of waste disposal such as use of ecosan toilets in place of the conventional pit latrines

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