Being Untaught: How NGO Field Workers Empower Parents of Children with Disabilities in Dadaab

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Abstract

Roughly 350,000 refugees, over 90% of them Somali, lived in five sprawling camps in Dadaab, Kenya in 2015. In the Dadaab refugee camps, families had unique experiences of disability, education, women's roles, and involvement with International Non-Governmental Organization (INGO) programming. INGOs provided a variety of basic services including education such as the program analyzed here for parents of children with disabilities. Many children with disabilities in the refugee camps faced social stigma and lacked access to education. This research draws on practices and literature in family literacy and parental involvement programming to explore how one NGO training sought to empower women learners to send their children with disabilities to school in Kambioos, the smallest and newest refugee camp in Dadaab. Using ethnographic methods, one training program involving parents and children was video-taped. The video was used as a cue to interview field workers about how the training empowered parents, particularly mothers. The study found that empowerment of women through training for parents of children with disabilities centered on parents' interaction with formal schools and engagement in their communities.

Keywords

Dadaab, INGOs, parents of children with disability, parental involvement, family literacy, empowerment, refugee, Kenya

Introduction

In the Kambioos refugee camp in Dadaab, Kenya, roughly 100 kilometers from the Somali border, children with disabilities were not going to school and parents were not aware of the available education services. On a sunny, breezy morning in the camp, a group of 40 parents and children, and four international non-governmental organization (INGO) field workers gathered for training. Shared Global Connections (SGC),[1] the agency in Dadaab organizing the training, had recently hired several Kenyan teachers with specialization in teaching children with disabilities. SGC staff were eager to begin to make parents aware of the new services that they could access. Drawing on this training as an example of parental involvement and family literacy programming, this article seeks to understand how NGO field workers teach and conceptualize empowerment through training for Somali refugee women who are family members of children with disabilities in Dadaab. To do so, I also investigated disability constructions in Dadaab.

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Background

The precolonial history of eastern Kenya was documented through trade routes that continue today, unabated by drought, forced migration, nor border closure. The British colonial government viewed predominantly Somali pastoralists in the region with distrust and interacted with mobile populations with force, "to halt raids by unruly pastoralists into the settled districts, or to prevent them from displacing more tranquil livestock-keepers like the Oromo" (Cassanelli, 2010, p. 135). Since the end of British rule, there has been conflict between ethnically Somali eastern Kenyans and the Kenyan government. Beginning with the Shifta War in the 1960s, secessionists in the eastern provinces of the new Kenyan state fought for autonomy from arbitrary colonial borders. Secessionist efforts failed but reinforced the view of the borderlands as wild and uncivilized (Cassanelli, 2010). The current Kenyan government's policies towards nomadic Somali Kenyans and Somali refugees in Dadaab have roots in this colonial mistrust and conflict.

Throughout the 1970s, Somali refugees began to arrive in Kenya fleeing drought. Eventually tens of thousands fled the collapse of the Somali government under Siyad Barre in 1991. By the drought in 2011, hundreds of thousands of Somalis traversed the arid region seeking sanctuary in eastern Kenya. In Dadaab, roughly 350,000 refugees, over 90% of them Somali, live in five sprawling camps around a central market and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) compound. In this refugee settlement, which has grown since 1991, families are dependent on education and other services provided by UNHCR, which oversees camp operations, and affiliated organizations such as SGC. The extreme poverty in Dadaab and the harsh windy, hot, sandy, and flood-prone environment

perpetuate difficulties for children to attend school regardless of ability. Moreover, many children with disabilities face social stigma, sometimes in the home and often in the community. They frequently are confined to the home with little access to education.

International development programming is part of an "enlightenment project" with historic roots and goals of universality, state sovereignty, and Western scientific methods (Appadurai, 1990; Buck & Silver, 2013, p. 122). The UN's enlightenment project continues historical constructions of the state as well as "the triumphantly universal and the resiliently particular" (Appadurai, 1990, 308). For instance, NGOs and the UN (co)construct women's empowerment as a universal goal, such as Millennium Development Goal 3, and localize it in practice (Batliwala, 1993). Women are targeted in empowerment programming and must navigate between traditional or conservative values, and the enlightenment projects in which they participate (Buck & Silver, 2013). In the day to day, women balance traditional roles as caretakers, including time consuming household tasks, with new responsibilities and access to resources provided by organizations like SGC (Smith, 2004).

Empowerment's definition in Dadaab and in many refugee settings is part of an international discourse that spans varied definitions from "a synonym for enabling, participating, and speaking out" to an emphasis on individual or community power (Murphy-Graham, 2010, p. 321). Functionally, empowerment has been defined as ensuring that refugee women have "basic skills, knowledge, and access to information" so as to "reduce their immediate vulnerability and dependence on outside assistance" related to protecting their families (Foster, 1995, p. 2). It also is a personal process, where the learner who is empowered is an active agent or their power, such as self-confidence, is coming from within (Prins, 2008).

Empowerment can also relate to family life or being able to make decisions and influence relationships (Murphy-Graham, 2010; Prins, 2008). Empowerment is inextricably linked to power, gender, access to resources, social status, and environmental variables.

In addition, NGOs provide training programs such as the one analyzed here to address universal goals to increase access to education for children with disabilities in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The UNCRC includes reference to disability and emphasis on child protection (UN, 2004). In addition, the Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Convention calls for educational access for all children, especially in emergencies (UN, 2004). International law frames NGO's practice in Dadaab as NGOs contribute to and translate legal norms in practice.

I defined disability in this research as related to perceived or experienced "physiological or behavioral statuses…socially identified as problems, illnesses, conditions, disorders, syndromes, or other similarly negatively valued differences, distinctions, or characteristics which might have an ethnomedical diagnostic category or label" (Kasnitz & Shuttleworth, 2001, para. 2). This article examined how disability was constructed in social relations in training for Somali refugee women, depending on "societal discrimination and internalized oppression…and on cultural and situational views of cause and cure and of fate and fault" (Kasnitz & Shuttleworth, 2001, para. 2). SGC localized women's empowerment related to parental involvement, frequently mothers, in education for children with disabilities in training to increase their likelihood of enrolling their children with disabilities in school.

Theoretical Framework

Overall, the theoretical framework for this research has roots in critical theory from feminist readings of Habermas (Meehan, 2000) from which I developed an approach that recognizes intersubjectivities, or one's felt interconnections and tensions of identity, power, and empowerment in the home, classroom, community, local institutions, and national and international refugee systems. Empowerment is defined through individual, collective, and action-oriented approaches focusing on the power to do something with others (Stromquist, 2009). Empowerment is also related to enlightenment discourses about the role of UNHCR and INGOs in pursuit of equality in line with MDG3. In line with feminist methods (Kindon, 2003), co-researchers in the data collection process defined empowerment, building on definitions cited in the literature while keeping a framework that places the term in everyday relationships of power. Through a feminist ethnographic approach, this research highlighted "the everyday experience of people" relating to educational access of "those forced to live on the margins" at the intersection of refugee, gender, and disability, and identity (Davis, 2013, p. 27; Checker, David, & Schuller, 2014). The theoretical framework is contextualized in family literacy and parental involvement literature, particularly considering constructions of disability and goals of programming for empowerment in Dadaab.

Literature review

Family literacy programming may aim to increase parents' involvement in their children's schooling or focus on learning involving multiple members of the family. These programs typically have three (overlapping) approaches, intervention prevention, multiple-literacies, and social change (Auerbach, 2005). Intervention prevention approaches are often linked with

"deficit" approaches, or the idea that parents, communities, and other groups require training to increase parental involvement because they are unable to become adequately engaged without it. This approach sees a gap in practice and proposes to fill it by changing how parents act. The multiple literacies approach emphasizes that rather than a deficit, there is "a mismatch between culturally variable home literacy practices and school literacies" (Auerbach, 2005, p. 651). Finally, family literacy programming using the social change perspective centers the "problems of marginalized people … in a complex interaction of political, social, and economic factors in the broader society rather than in family inadequacies or differences between home and school cultures" (Auerbach, 2005, p. 654). Since this article emphasizes power, and women's empowerment particularly, the social change approach is interwoven in my analysis. It is not, however, the only approach identifiable in the training.

Parental involvement in schools has been cited as one of the main factors influencing school outcomes (Carpentieri, 2013). However, parental involvement literature "suggests that changes in families may take considerable time" to impact children's school readiness, particularly in areas and social environments where educational access is low (Carpentieri, 2013, p. 548). Much of the literature on family literacy assumes that parents are already engaging in their children's formal education (Schaub, 2010), something that the training studied here did not assume.

Parents in Dadaab and other refugee camp contexts have different expectations for their children that may or may not include formal education. The lack of parent involvement in schools amongst refugee families presents a point of disagreement in the literature, with some scholars arguing that refugee parents are less likely to engage in schools, and therefore value education less, while others argue that

refugee parents may have different approaches to school but highly value education (Ariza, 2000; Lightfoot, 2004; Nderu, 2005). In the literature, these arguments relate to populations outside of the protracted refugee camp setting like Dadaab. Little scholarly literature discusses parental involvement in schooling in protracted refugee camps. Another component of family literacy, and parental involvement literature and the training for parents described here, is the gendered construction of parenting. Much of family literacy programming emphasizes mothers, who are frequent participants reached by programming (Dudley-Marling, 2001; Gadsden, 2012). I situate parenting, particularly mothering, in the environment in which it occurs, considering all of the influences and social expectations placed on mothers, fathers, caretakers, and children in Dadaab.

Parental involvement in Dadaab in programs, such as the one studied here, are further complicated due to constructions of disability. Although a full review of literature on disability studies in forced migration is outside the scope of this research, the definition of disability with which I approach the learning environment takes into consideration alternate social constructions of what disability is and how it is experienced by family members. In Dadaab, a review of the literature on disability connected the training studied here with mothers' gendered experiences. Devon Cone of Mapendo International, an organization that worked in Dadaab in 2010 remarked that:

> Persons with disabilities, especially children, often face frequent protection problems including being beaten, stoned and facing verbal abuse. Often mothers who give birth to children with impairments are abandoned by their husbands who take the other children with them, leaving the mother alone with the disabled child. Alarmingly, in Dadaab

some of these mothers tie their children to trees when they have to fetch water or conduct other activities. The idea in doing so is to protect children from hurting themselves or running away. In reality, however, these children often become an even easier target for the rest of the community. While unable to escape they are often stoned, beaten and burned, and sometimes sexually abused. (Cone, 2010, p. 19)

Similarly, Rachel Reilly of Women's Refugee Commission (WRC), another agency conducting programming and advocacy in Dadaab, elaborated on the difficulties women may face while raising children with disabilities:

Mothers are often blamed for their children's disabilities and may suffer physical or sexual abuse from their husbands or other family members, and be harassed, stigmatised and abandoned as a result. (Reilly, 2010, p. 8)

Worldwide, women are stereotypically caregivers and in Dadaab, motherhood entails responsibility for children's disability.

This literature review revealed critical gaps surrounding refugee parents' involvement, or lack thereof, in education of children with disabilities. Although WRC had conducted similar interventions, as the training studied here, the only data available was from a brief description in an organizational report (Pearce, 2014). No studies were found in *Disability Studies Quarterly* that directly focused on refugee parents' involvement in the education of children with disabilities. There were studies about parental involvement related to children with disabilities in the United States (U.S.), but these do not take into consideration the unique positions of low resources settings (Banks & Miller, 2005) like Dadaab. Available studies have found that children with disabilities were

much less likely to enroll in school in "low and middle income countries" (Kuper, Dok, Wing, Danquah, Evans, Zuurmond, & Gallinetti, 2014, p. 1). However, there are no known figures of how many refugees are disabled and no systematic or systemic studies of disability in Dadaab or other refugee settings (Reilly, 2010). This is despite claims that "disability and displacement go hand in hand" with refugees having more risk of "physical and psychological trauma" as well as having less access to health infrastructure to address poor nutrition or injuries (Karanja, 2009).

Disability is traditionally constructed in the camps as a curse, where Somali refugees "believe that an impairment is a punishment in response to behaviour of the parents which has offended Allah" or that "the person with the disability would harm people if physically able to do so, and therefore Allah curses him or her with a debilitating condition as a way of protecting the community" (Cone, 2010, p. 19). Complicating the social construction of disability as generally negative and a poor reflection on the individual or family, is the high prevalence of disabilities in Dadaab and other refugee settings due to the emergency context and trauma (Reilly, 2007). The construction of disability in refugee settings in the literature, though limited, reflects the views discussed below of NGO field workers and the necessity of training.

In order to overcome some of these obstacles to children's and persons' with disability full participation in society, training to improve social integration is often listed as a key factor for improving circumstances (Reilly, 2010). Part of the emphasis on education is linked with UNHCR's enlightenment goals of equality though inclusion of persons with disability "to raise awareness of disability and attitudes about it and the rights of persons with disabilities" (UNHCR, 2011, p. 6).

Training in NGOs often follows a "knowing how" model, where training "leads to

high proficiency in a specific skill" as opposed to "knowing why," where learners gain methods to "deal with and solve a broad range of problems" (Essenhigh, 2000; Moore, 1998). In the project analyzed here, the intent of the training was to teach parents how to care for their children and "empower them" to send their children to school. The training was specifically aimed at women due to the common understandings of child rearing described by Cone (2010) and Reilly (2010). Mothers are assumed to be primarily responsible for their children's wellbeing and educational access.

Training is assumed to be a tool for the empowerment of women (Malhotra & Schuler, 2005). However, much of the use of empowerment in this study focused on the ability to do something, e.g., send children with disabilities to school. Conceptions of empowerment in international development and humanitarian programming focus on individual, collective, and action-oriented goals (e.g. Stromquist, 2009, 2015). Women's empowerment may involve making decisions in one's life, family, and community that actively change traditional gender roles (Rowlands, 1997). There is a gap in the literature on refugee education and defining empowerment in NGO training that intends to increase parental involvement of children with disabilities in school.

Methodology

In June 2014, I arrived in Dadaab to conduct program evaluation for an INGO working in the camps and to do my own research on women's empowerment. As a scholar/practitioner, I was privileged with the opportunity to work and stay on the UNHCR secure compound in Dadaab, 10 to 30 kilometers from the refugee camps that sprawled around the town. I was in Dadaab with two purposes, personal research and INGO evaluation work. I approached other field

workers first as colleagues and then as potential partners in the research process, using snowball interviews to identify programs to study, such as the training for parents of children with disabilities. My colleagues were co-researchers (Reason & Bradbury, 2001) who took time out of their work to explore empowerment in training with me. SGC staff members at the Dadaab headquarters invited me to study the training for parents of children with disabilities as they believed it was an ideal place where I could explore women's empowerment.

I approached the training ethnographically with the classroom presenting a micro-culture with shared norms, a temporal belief system that governed behavior, and larger representations of understood and agreed upon folkways (Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009). I utilized visual ethnographic methods to allow for a multi-vocal data collection with field workers through video of the training and video-cued interviewing.

Data Collection

Through snowball sampling, I conducted informal interviews with staff at eight organizations working in Dadaab, recorded in field notes. Through interviews, I gained written consent from field workers at SGC to conduct research in the training. Preliminary informal interviews also led me to the realization that *all* NGO field workers intend to empower participants in programs in the camps. The staff interviewed at SGC suggested I collect data at the training for parents of children with disabilities to better understand what field workers meant when they intended to empower women learners. The program's emphasis on parental involvement in education and disabilities presented nuances of everyday experiences of life in Kambioos.

I conducted participant observation during the two months in 2014 (June to August) and the two months in 2015 (May to June) that I

lived in Dadaab to better understand field workers' practice of empowerment in educational programs, the role of NGOs in the camps, and the day to day lives of refugees. Given security protocols and INGO policy, I could not spend more than three hours in each of the refugee camps in 2014. Training was conducted in Kambioos refugee camp and hour-long interviews were conducted in the UNHCR compound in Dadaab and SGC's compound in one of the other camps.

After receiving written permission from field workers and oral permission from learners in the learning environment,[2] I observed and filmed the three-hour training. Immediately after the program, I reviewed the film following the multi-vocal visual ethnographic method established by Tobin (1989) and Tobin, Hsueh, and Karasawa, (2009). Through this method, I interpreted and shortened the video of the training program to identify and present different elements of the shared norms in the program, including introductions, lectures, and interactive activities in a 20-minute edited film.

I then met with three of the field workers, Abdi, George (who had organized and was observing the training without facilitating for much of the time), and Hassan,[3] for a group interview. We met at the SGC compound in the oldest refugee camp in Dadaab. One field worker, Alex, was unavailable to meet with the group and I interviewed him individually in a subsequent meeting at the UNHCR compound in Dadaab where we both resided. During the interviews with field workers, I showed the shortened film and followed the interview protocol (see Appendix) to identify whether the video accurately portrayed the learning environment and what particularly was empowering in the training. I also conducted one group interview with women learners and an interpreter. However, due to concerns regarding interpretation, I did not use that data for analysis.

Data Analysis

I analyzed data from the video-recorded training and group and individual interview with field workers to identify themes using NVivo. I first entered jottings from my field notes into full field notes, then connected field notes to interview transcriptions. Through linking these files, I connected my subjective interpretation of the training with the views of field workers as they responded to different points of the training presented in the film. Given that this research investigated parental involvement in the lives of children with disability and women's empowerment, I specifically searched the data for narratives and descriptions directly related to these themes. I attempted to stay as close to the data as possible, drawing directly on my field notes, interview transcriptions, and visual data.

Findings

Overall, my findings focused on the role of education in Dadaab, constructions of disability in the program under study, and the nexus of education, disability, and empowerment presented in the educational environment and interviews. In particular, I found that disability's relationship with education focused predominantly on basic needs and parents' recognition of the right to educational access. Empowerment was defined by field workers as parents ability and knowledge to recognize their children's needs and rights.

The Educational Program

In SGCs primary school compound in Kambioos, the training began with a word of prayer, led by an older man who spoke quickly and rhythmically. Abdi, unsettled by children on the playground of the primary school outside the classroom, stepped outside to survey the space and ensure that any parents lagging behind had entered the room. Abdi interpreted most of the

training materials while two other NGO field workers, Alex and Hassan discussed mostly in English, with Hassan providing interpretation occasionally. The three discussed the rights of people with disabilities, the importance of children's ability to take care of themselves (emphasizing hygiene), and in a hands-on activity with learners using a Braille typewriter.

Although men were involved in the program studied here, and SGC recruited men and women, more women were in attendance. Men and women sat on separate sides of the room, except for male children who sat with their mothers. The buzzing of talk in Somali was ongoing throughout the program. It was unclear if the talk was about the training or other topics, since the field workers who were interpreting did not ask. The room was casual with the woman sitting to my right frequently spitting on the ground and wiping it up with the sole of her shoe. Throughout the training, the parents talked, babies cried, people got up, left, and came back seemingly irregularly, and the facilitation and interpretation continued.

Despite the goal of training that focused on educational access of children with disabilities, the field workers spent the majority of time emphasizing how to care for and integrate children with visual impairments into the home, community, and schools. Abdi described the rights of children with disabilities as "cleaning himself, toilet training, … bathing, personal hygiene, and washing" (Transcript from training, 17 July 2014). Rights translation centered on survival for persons with disabilities, rather than the more specific rights enshrined in UNCRC.

Education

The history of education in Dadaab informs the purposes of the educational program as well as the facilitators' goals. Hassan (2014) described the role of education in Dadaab as the following:

the education system in Dadaab began in 1992 when the campus expanded from one to three… Later on, UNHCR…formalized the education system. It was 1996 when the education system was formalized. Then during that time there were gradual things … Some of the challenges included girls' education. The other challenge we had was children with disability, education for children with disability. … The others include the infrastructure of the schools. There were times when children were learning under shade [tree]s. Later on we had a sort of classroom and at the moment we have permanent classrooms. And these other challenges that include girls education and education of children with disabilities, there were also gradual changes year after year. (Group interview, 18 July 2014)

The history of the camps shows a shared experience of "gradual change" from this history of deprivation and humanitarian emergencies to more infrastructure and development. It echoed other stories I heard throughout observation of programs in Dadaab about starvation in the early days of the camps, the slow creation of a health system the could respond to the needs of ever increasing populations, and the huge influx of refugees in 2011 following drought in Somalia (Field Notes, June 25, 2014). In Hassan's experience, NGOs have been influencing the educational system to gradually include more girls and children with disabilities, which he identifies as his work. SGC runs schools in all of the camps, including Kambioos.

Near the end of the program, Hassan concluded with a stirring lecture, (mis)quoting Mahatma Gandhi, about how it is "better to be unborn than untaught" (Field notes, 17 July 2014).[4] Hassan drew on an earlier lecture that Abdi gave the parents: "if you die as a parent or as a leader,…he [your child] will be

independent," or that their children with disabilities would be left to fend for themselves without their care (Transcript from training, 17 July 2014). Abdi and Hassan referred to the particular survival needs of children with disabilities in Dadaab. Training content focused on the Assisted Daily Living (ADL) practices of parents with information regarding how to bath and care of children's daily needs.

Disability

Focusing on children's basic needs, disability was framed in particular ways during the training. First, field workers described albinism and the problems faced by albino children. This was not part of the structured facilitation that was described. The digression from the agenda at the very beginning of the training signified, to me as an observer, that the learners in the room, particularly the young woman who had brought her baby with albinism, influenced the direction of the field workers' facilitation. The field workers discussed how SGC gives students with albinism scholarships to receive education outside of the camps, and transportation to and from school to mitigate the social stigma they face in camp schools. They also described how children with disability access private classes within the blocks that make up the refugee camps. Then, they returned to the agenda, defining terms, such as "special needs" and "handicap" and listing 13 types of disability. The list that they presented, albeit abridged, matched the categories listed in the "Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)" a U.S. government document outlining special needs education (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). In the interviews, Alex, who led the section on the 13 types of disability, described the list as extraneous information for the learners, since "those are local things that they know" (Individual interview, 24 July 2014). For Alex, learners knew how to identify disability in Somali and in local constructions; describing

each of the disabilities, they believed, did not help them to understand their own children.

Education, Disability, and Empowerment Nexus

SGC staff presented the goals of the educational program as empowering parents of children with disabilities to send their children to school. Field workers specifically wished to empower to mothers reasoning that mothers "assist" the family, staying with children with disabilities more than fathers, because

> as our community, the fathers they go and get the daily bread for the family....We target especially mothers and we train them ... to assist those children who are disabled and staying with them. To show how to wash themselves, clean themselves and to go the toilet for independence. ... And to do any other personal activity. So mostly the parent is the mothers who we have seen in the [video]. (Group interview, 18 July 2014)

Abdi discussed motherhood throughout the interview, particularly emphasizing caretaker responsibilities for children's survival, educational access, and the possibilities of independence of children with disabilities.

Alex complicated motherhood in the training here as linked with disabilities. He described how in Kenya, and in Dadaab particularly, "we refer to [children with disabilities] as children of the mothers" (Individual interview, 24 July 2014). In this way, even the field workers internalized that "we kind of blame the mothers" for disability (Alex, Individual interview, 24 July 2014). Placing the responsibility of children's education on the mothers, Alex explained that if SGC were to train the fathers, the father then "has to go again and teach the mother until the mother accepts to release the child" to go to school (Alex, Individual interview, 24 July 2014). Viewed this

way, it is almost irrelevant to train the fathers, since they would need to convince their wives of what they learned. Alex did not merely remark on refugee parenting practices, but placed himself in this construction of fatherhood as well when he pointed out that "even me, I'm a father, I'm like an absent father, I'm here" in Dadaab, rather than with his family (Individual interview, 24 July 2014). Through discussing the roles of mothers in training, Alex reiterated that when "we empower women" the children are "likely to succeed more" (Individual interview, 24 July 2014). The empowerment that the field workers identified included the direct learning and encouragement from the training. Field workers hope that parents will learn about disabilities and tell their family, friends, and neighbors what they have learned, encouraged to send children with disabilities to school. Hassan believed programs that "sensitize the community" for "community involvement, parent involvement" are empowering for parents to send their children to school (Group interview, 18 July 2014)

Abdi added to this conversation in the group interview, returning to the idea that education is necessary for children with disabilities' survival in the camps. "Those parents who we have trained" understand disability and "how to train, or how to educate" so that they can train their children to build skills to "work for himself" and "even produce livelihood" (Group interview, 18 July 2014). Abdi concluded that with this training, children with disabilities who lose their parents or caretakers "can survive still instead of dying because he miss[es] the two parents" (Group interview, 18 July 2014). Abdi reiterated that it is better to be unborn than untaught, since without education children with disabilities would not be able to survive in Dadaab on their own.

The field workers believed there was no risk to disempower the learners because once

the parents discovered the potential of their children there was no returning to seeing them as unable or incapable. Alex believed that the parents "are eager to help their children" and only needed some "small pieces" of information to help them in acceptable ways (Individual interview, 24 July 2014). There was no question of whether their work empowered learners, though with limitations. Alex was the only field worker who spoke of limitations in the training, and also the only field worker interviewed individually. He was particularly aware of different pedagogical techniques, a factor he attributed to his educational background and his experience teaching blind students, and as a preacher. Because of this knowledge, he was critical of the lack of hands-on activities in the ADL training. He was also critical of his own teaching, which he thought was unnecessary as he led the lecture on the 13 types of disability and recognized that learners already had ways of identifying disability in the camp.

Analysis

For Alex (Individual interview, 24 July 2014), disabilities were "local things that" parents already understood to an extent. The change that the field workers sought, or the "empowerment" as they called it, was a process in which parents become aware of their children's potential and are encouraged to bring them to school. In their view, learners are empowered when they are involved in their children's lives and as they spread the information they have learned to others, increasing other parents' understanding. Finally, they are empowered when they question the systems in which they live, for example, when organizations have gaps in service to children and parents know how to report those gaps to ensure quality service (Individual interview, 24 July 2014). In interviews field workers gave

hygiene, self-care, and other ADL activities as empowering for children. Children being able to wash themselves in itself is empowering.

The field workers believed another component to empowering parents was supporting them to question the quality of schools and to monitor the progress of their children. However, once children are in formal education, many of them are sent to schools far from the camps so they are not ridiculed or harassed because of their disability. Although the training has created changes in some lives, it has not eliminated prejudice and stereotyping, nor has it changed community-based notions of disability. Finally, the training reflects a larger system of dependency in the camps where parents must rely on UNHCR, SGC, and other organizations to access services and to support their children.

Refugees are dependent on SGC and other organizations to provide teachers, educational access, and other services. Alex asked this from the parents' perspective: "for children with special needs, if he's [the SGC teacher] the only person who's teaching our children, if he goes away, will we get another person? So we are empowering them but our hands are still tied" (personal communication, 2014). Once parents recognize that their children can care for themselves and have capacities to go to school, they are reliant on a system in flux, the humanitarian response organizations like SGC working in Dadaab.

The field workers and content of the training focus on gendered constructions of parenting and disability. Local understandings of disability, discussed by Alex, also help to frame what the field workers hoped learners would take away from the training. Field workers framed their goals of empowerment, in part, related to the enlightenment ideals of INGOs but also connected with what they saw as the rationale for the program, as stated by Abdi, that it is better to be unborn than untaught. If children with disabilities continue to be denied education their very survival is at stake, particularly given the circumstances many children with disabilities live in throughout the camps regarding abuse. In analyzing the training content, which focused specifically on ADL, it also appears that field workers did not believe parents were bathing or taking care of their children's daily needs that are linked with survival.

Discussion

What occurs in the learning environment is linked to, reflecting, or contesting regular day-to-day ways of being and belief systems of NGO workers including the concept of empowerment. The goals of the training were described in terms of increasing children's educational attainment and thus productivity in the community, from basic hygiene to independence from parents. The findings of interviews with field workers defined women's empowerment contextually. Empowerment had less to do with parents making decisions in their lives and the lives of their children than ensuring that their children access formal education and could take care of themselves. Parents begin to question the systems in which they lived, but they were not led to any conclusions and did not, in this training, develop their own conclusions about how best to change the system when it presented obstacles to the success of their families Figure 1 is a flow-chart that shows the development of empowerment from the training).
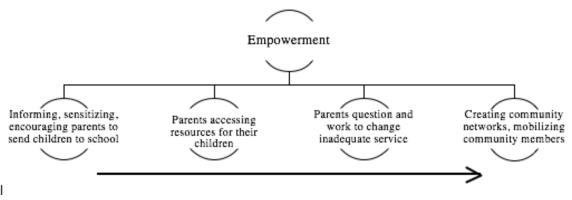
Figure 1. *Development of Empowerment From Training*

Figure 1 shows how field workers construct the empowerment process. First, parents become aware of the rights of their children. Second, they learn how and from whom they can access resources for their children. The final constructions are interwoven-parents question the services provided, and work with others in their community to ensure adequate services as well as to increase awareness of the rights of people with disabilities. Empowerment was also linked to power within the community and classroom, where parents could gain the power to demand educational access for their children and to address grievances. All of the definitions link empowerment to perseverance and survival, with the ideal of supporting parents to create change. The connection to survival and perseverance relate to Hassan's lecture on being untaught. Education is not merely necessary for community building, but for children's and families' survival.

Through defining empowerment, field workers linked it to power in the home in terms of knowledge about hygiene and ADL that would support parents and their children's survival. Paradoxically, women have power in the family as active agents of change in their children's lives, but are viewed as powerless and yet responsible for their children's disabilit(ies). Women's empowerment was discussed as

particularly important given that women are the primary caretakers of children with disability. Field workers did not make distinctions between women's and men's empowerment other than women most likely need more power to have greater impact on the lives of their children. The power dynamics between men and women were not explained nor discussed by the field workers.

Beyond local settings, the power of parents in the training dissipates as parents may find the institutional setting of the refugee camps to be unresponsive. Organizations that provide services such as SGC have limited funding and tight regulations on programming, resulting in programs that may run for a short time and then end abruptly. Moreover, the refugee camps in Dadaab are technically temporary and UNHCR and the government of Kenya have vested interests in repatriating refugees to Somalia and other points of origin. Educational programming for children with disabilities may not be available upon repatriation. Thus, parents are dependent on SGC and other organizations to provide educational access and services; meanwhile, they are participating in larger international refugee policies that will eventually lead to their departure from Dadaab and loss of SGC provided services.

In line with the literature on parental involvement and family literacy, parents became

more involved in community activities in and around their children's school. First, 'parents' in the training studied here were predominantly mothers, supporting international notions that mothers are the first teachers responsible for their "children's cognitive development" (Dudley-Marling, 2001). Second, field workers believed that parents' involvement was crucial to the success of children with disabilities, defined as their ability to enter school and become "productive" in society. Although field workers may not be familiar with parent involvement and family literacy literature, they presented a practice of intervention prevention as described by Auerbach (2005). Field workers and training project developers assumed that parents know very little about caring for their children, as evident in the emphasis on ADL techniques. The intervention prevention approach was most evident in the lack of field workers' questions about the current practices of parents, their current hygiene practice, and parents' specific needs. Alex described how he wished to better understand disability from parents' perspectives, but lacked the time and resources to do so.

Alex also hinted at multiple literacies approaches in the training through his discussion of the 13 types of disabilities. Overall, the field workers approached the training drawing on the U.S. Department of Educations' list. There were expectations that parents would want to know about each type of disability. It was assumed that the typology from the West could explain disability in Dadaab, regardless of local knowledge of customs around disability. This presumption that the information from the West was superior has roots in SGC's relationship to UN enlightenment projects, as well as reluctance to embrace local knowledge about disability. Alex questioned this presumption, recognizing that the parents had local ways of knowing what disability was and of understanding disabilities in their context. Construction of disability is one local way of

knowing that could be viewed as part of the multiple literacies model, were it considered in more depth in this training.

Although I approached this research emphasizing power and empowerment, I recognized during my field work that much of the work conducted by agencies such as SGC was not intended to address "complex interactions of political, social, and economic factors in the broader society" (Auerbach, 2005, p. 654). The nature of the refugee camps and funding cycles of agencies informed my belief that organizations would not attempt to pursue social change. However, through interviews with field workers, it became evident that part of what the field workers thought was empowering about the training was based on social change and linked with larger interactions. For instance, when Alex emphasized that parents could feel empowered to question the teachers of their children and to demand services, he was referring to exerting power in social systems that were outside the domain of the family or school. Empowerment may be collective (Prins, 2008) as parents encourage others to recognize the ability of children with disabilities and to send children to school. Although it is unclear what the collective ramifications of empowerment are from this limited study, it is clear that field workers hope learners have a new understanding of their role in their children's education and of their children's abilities.

Limitations

As an adaptation of other visual ethnographic methods to the refugee context, part of the method of this project was iterative and further testing of the tools is necessary. For example, the 20-minute film was a bit long for cuing and reference. Field workers were visibly anxious to return to work while watching the video and had to be asked several times to remain in the group interview. Shorter clips that directly relate to

questions could elicit more detailed responses and focus. The connections during the group interview were further complicated due to difficulties of interpretation with learners. It is also important to include women's voices. When I conducted the group interview with the learners, my field notes were littered with concerns of the parents understanding of my questions: Was the interpreter describing this correctly? Why was the interpreter summarizing the participants' points rather than translating their words? Was I understanding what they wanted me to? These doubts plague the data analysis of the group interview with the learners. As the method draws on feminist frameworks (Kindon, 2003), it would be inappropriate and unethical, to include data that may have been drawn from miscommunication or misrepresentation due to interpretation. Further data collection is ongoing with stricter interpretation guidelines, such as word-for-word interpretation as opposed to summaries, and more emphasis on gathering women's voices through auto-photography and other visual ethnographic techniques address risks in interpretation. This was an exploratory study. Follow-up studies and larger samples are needed to increase information about empowerment in INGO training in Dadaab as it relates to disability, community implications, and intended social changes.

Conclusion

In the training for parents of children with disabilities, empowerment included parents' ability to ensure their children's survival. The training supported this by providing information regarding approaches to childcare and obtaining assistance. Field workers linked information dissemination and empowerment with action by encouraging parents to speak with other parents, and by ensuring that all children with disability attended school. For the field workers,

empowered parents were those who engaged with the school and community. As parents began to interact with formal education and agencies such as SGC, they were encouraged to ask questions, make demands, and ensure that their needs and rights were met.

Empowerment as a process of systemic change reflects a critical and social change approach to parent involvement in education and family learning programs. Part of this systemic change is engaging parents in their children's education and parents' recognition that their children with disabilities can achieve educational and other social milestones. This research connected one training for parents of children with disabilities in Dadaab with literature on family learning, parental involvement in schools, and disability studies. The findings are unique in many ways to Dadaab, but also could speak to other refugee and low-resource settings where disability is constructed negatively and parents are only beginning to engage in formal education. The empowerment of parents in the training, particularly mothers, connects to power in the home, community, camp, and larger national and international systems in which refugees live.

Notes

1. SGC is a pseudonym for the organization sponsoring the training used to protect the identity of the field workers and other organizational staff, as well as learners in the training.
2. Oral consent is documented in audio recording of the training and confirmed in writing by field workers who interpreted.
3. All names are pseudonyms.
4. Walsh (1921) sites the quote "It is better to be unborn than untaught: for ignorance is the root of misfortune" to Plato (p. 377).

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Appendix

Group Interview Questions: IRB Exempt Instrument (with NGO workers)

1. Please describe what you see in this video?
   a. Is this a typical day in your class? Why or why not?
   b. What did you want the participants to learn in this class?
   c. Tell me about how learners change after completing the training/ course/ workshop(s) here.

2. Please describe 'empowerment'? What do you think of when you hear 'empowerment'?
   a. Please describe 'agency'? What do you think of when you hear the word 'agency'?

3. Please describe how education provides empowerment from this video? How does your class refer to the video) 'empower' learners?
   a. Describe an example of when your work does not 'empower' learners? Why?

4. Please describe what a learner from your training or work who is empowered via training would look or act like (from this video or another experience)? How do you know?

5. Please describe an empowered woman.

6. Is 'empowerment' different for men and women? What are the differences? Similarities?

7. How do you/ the organization measure empowerment? What would you ask to measure empowerment?

8. Do you know of any other organizations who are providing education for women's empowerment?
   a. If so, which organizations?
   b. Do you know the staff of those organizations who are involved in this training?
   c. Can you refer me to them?