

**A CRITIQUE OF ABAKHAYO'S CONCEPTION OF  
THE GIRL CHILD'S RIGHT TO EDUCATION IN THE LIGHT OF  
THOMISTIC CONCEPT OF PERSON**

**DANIEL WABWIRE**

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## DECLARATION

I declare that this research thesis is my original work and has not been presented in any other university/institution for the consideration of any certification. This research thesis has been complemented by referenced sources duly acknowledged. Where text, data (including spoken words), graphics, pictures, or tables have been borrowed from other sources, including the internet, these are specifically accredited and references cited using the current APA system and in accordance with anti-plagiarism regulations.

Signature ..... Date .....

Name: Daniel Wabwire

Registration number: E83/37945/2017

Department: Education Foundations

Supervisors' declaration:

This research thesis has been submitted for appraisal with our/my approval as University Supervisor(s).

Signature..... Date .....

Dr. Francis Murira Ndichu

Department of Education Foundations

Kenyatta University

Signature ..... Date .....

Dr. Francis Likoye Malenya

Department of Educational Foundations

Kenyatta University

## **DEDICATION**

To

My late Dad (RIP) Opio Matayo (1912-1925)

My late Mum (RIP) Makokha Getruda (1924-1936)

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## ABSTRACT

This study offers a philosophical reflection on the Abakhayo community's conception of the girl child's right to education, examined in light of the Thomistic concept of person. Guided by four objectives, the study sought to; first, explain the concept of personhood in the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, second, elucidate the Abakhayo people's understanding of the personhood of a woman, third, assess how this conception has impacted the girl child's access to education as a human right, and finally, propose a person-centred model that affirms girls' right to education. The research adopted a qualitative, phenomenological approach enriched by philosophical analysis. Primary data were gathered through focused group discussions and key informant interviews with elders, educators, women, and girls from Nambale and Matayos sub-counties of Busia County, while secondary data came from literature, policy documents, and scholarly works. The analysis was reflective, interpretive, and guided by Thomistic thought. The findings reveal that Aquinas' conception of personhood emphasizes rationality, dignity, and incommunicable individuality, implying that both men and women share equal capacity and rights. By contrast, the Abakhayo community's conception is retrogressively shaped by socio-cultural practices that privilege men and marginalize women and girls. Attributes of personhood, such as wisdom, leadership, and entitlement to property, are predominantly associated with men, while women are often regarded as "lesser persons." This perception has profoundly influenced educational opportunities, as boys are prioritized for schooling while girls face systemic barriers, including early marriage, child labour, discriminatory traditions, and policies that reinforce cultural bias. The study concludes that the denial of education to girls among the Abakhayo is rooted in a distorted communal conception of personhood that undermines their dignity and rights. However, the Thomistic concept provides a normative lens through which these cultural limitations can be critiqued and corrected. Based on these insights, the study recommends a reorientation of cultural values and policies toward a person-centred model that recognizes the girl child as a full human person with equal educational entitlements. This requires integrating values of dignity and justice into curricula, enforcing legal frameworks on gender equity, and fostering awareness within communities to dismantle stereotypes and harmful practices. The study also calls for further research into the interplay between personhood, gender, and ethics across other African contexts where similar patterns of exclusion persist. Ultimately, the study underscores that the sustainable transformation of the Abakhayo community and, by extension, many African societies depends on affirming the intrinsic worth of the girl child as a person and ensuring her right to education is fully protected.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

This chapter introduces the study and situates it within its scholarly context. It delineates the background of the investigation and articulates the research problem, followed by a statement of the purpose, the overarching objectives, and the guiding research questions. The chapter also addresses the significance of the study, its limitations and delimitations, and the key assumptions that underpin the inquiry. Finally, it presents the theoretical and conceptual frameworks and provides operational definitions of the principal terms used throughout the work.

#### **1.1 Background to the Study**

The notion of the correlation between duty and rights, and how it defines a person and personhood in philosophical thought, has persistently provoked theoretical and philosophical-anthropological discussions. John Rawls (1971) sees rights in the context of justice as a duty assigned to the state and the community. In his view, rights are essentially associated with equal justice, fundamentally constitutive of human beings, with recognized equality. Rights are categorized as entitlements that engender duties to a right-holder (Donnelly, 2009). Feinberg (1970) states that rights as entitlements are prior and distinct from duties, but that to have a right is to be empowered to make claims, assertions, and demands that one's duties be fulfilled. Rights are an expression of forms of social living that express respect for a human being's dignity (Donnelly, 2009). These entitlements of a person include rights to education, a good life, inheritance, opportunities for work, family, etc.

Several scholars clash on whether or not normative force associated with rights has any place in African moral thought (Molefe, 2017). This thought stresses the need to promote the well-being of others. Molefe argues that “the duty for one to realize their true humanity takes centre stage in African moral thought and this is essentially connected to the promotion of the well-being of other human beings.” However, the scholar contests the view that the community should define the parameters of those rights. For that matter, Molefe’s views are that “if rights would take central place in African thought, this would threaten the very possibility of individuals attaining a status of personhood that entirely depends on them prioritizing the social goal of securing the well-being of all.” The point being made here is that rights focus more on duties owed to the subject, the rights-holder. Whereas, the very prospect and possibility of attaining personhood is essentially connected to purely other-regarding duties to secure the well-being of all. Hence, what takes priority in the moral theory is the social goal of securing the well-being of all, which befits the personhood of a human being.

### **1.1.1 Education as a human right in a global perspective**

Education in the US is considered critical for participating fully in the life of the nation. To have this knowledge, every American is expected to know their rights; otherwise, they lose them. The highest law of the land is the US Constitution, which has some amendments, known as the Bill of Rights. The Bill of Rights guarantees that the government can never deprive people in the US of certain fundamental rights, including the right to freedom of religion and to free speech and the due process of law. The Bill of Rights applies to young people as well as adults. All children living in the United States have the right to a free public education, and the Constitution

requires that all children be given equal educational opportunity, no matter what their race, ethnic background, religion, or sex, or whether they are rich or poor, citizen or non-citizen. Both the Constitution and federal law require that boys and girls also be provided with equal educational opportunities.

Critics such as Nils Muiznieks (2017) have divergent views regarding the much-talked-about free education in Europe. In a *Position Paper, School segregation still deprives many children of quality education*. The Commissioner argues that the right to education is a fundamental human right, yet many European countries still deny thousands of children, including children with disabilities, equal access to it by keeping them in segregated schools. When criticizing the way education has been handled with the EU, Muizniek provides an overview of school segregation in Council of European Member States, as well as its main causes (Muiznieks, 2017). It then reviews the risk that separate education entails and outlines the key principles that should underpin any policy to eradicate segregation and promote inclusive education.

Finally, the report sets forth twelve recommendations to develop more inclusive education policies, in particular through improved anti-discrimination legislation, school desegregation strategies, and better regulation of school admissions. In the Commissioner's view, "School segregation harms children's learning opportunities and is a clear injustice against minority and other vulnerable groups of people, which also perpetuates their marginalization. States should adopt a combination of strong anti-discrimination measures and policies that promote more inclusive education systems where all children learn together. This is not a utopian project, but an achievable goal that can ensure more equal treatment of all children and, in the long term, improve social cohesion" (Muiznieks,2017).

The 1982 Constitution of the People's Republic of China (PRC or China) declares that a citizen has not only the right, but also the obligation to receive an education. Specifically, Article 46 of the Chinese Constitution states that citizens of the People's Republic of China have the duty and the right to receive education. The State promotes the all-round development of children and young people, morally, intellectually, and physically (Zhonghua Renmin, 2004). Article 46, however, does not explicitly provide for a fair and equal right to education. Equality is provided by paragraph 2 of article 33 of the Chinese Constitution, which states that "all citizens are equal before the law." The PRC Law on Education (Education Law) was promulgated in accordance with the Constitution. In addition to repeating the constitutional declaration of the right to education, Article 9 of the Education Law explicitly provides for the equal right to education: Citizens of the People's Republic of China shall have the right and obligation to receive education. All citizens, regardless of ethnic group, race, sex, occupation, property status, or religious belief, shall enjoy equal opportunities for education according to law.

Situated in the context of the Thomistic conception of a human person, one sees a possibility of the relationship between what the various jurisprudences state in the Constitutions across the globe and what Aquinas may have had in mind. But the link is not obvious. Based on Thomistic philosophy and theology, the right to education is fundamental to everyone insofar as people will be empowered by it to contribute to the common good. Hence, discriminating against a cross-section of the community based on gender would not be morally justified. However, one can also see just the opposite of Aquinas' position from his negative feminist anthropology of a woman. He holds a defective image of the woman ontology when he attributes what he views as weak gender to the accidental creation of the woman, and attaches primacy to the

male gender. Hence, linking the right to education with the Thomistic concept of person remains fundamentally problematic.

### **1.1.2 St. Thomas Aquinas and His Idea of Person**

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) was an Italian Philosopher, theologian, and a Catholic priest. Aquinas is ranked among the most influential thinkers of Medieval Scholasticism. He produced a comprehensive synthesis of Christian theology and Aristotelian philosophy that influenced Roman Catholic doctrine for centuries.

Aquinas conceives of the human person as a “distinct subsistent of a rational nature,” emphasizing individuality, reason, and moral responsibility (*Summa Theologiae* [S.T.], I, q.29, a.3). His account unfolds in three interrelated dimensions. First is the dimension of absolute constitution, where each person is a unique unity of body and immortal soul created by God, not a product of chance. The soul, as the body’s spiritual form, grounds human dignity and enables rational reflection, self-knowledge, and freedom. Autonomy and rationality are therefore essential to personhood. Second, the relational constitution notes that although distinct, the human person is naturally social. Aquinas, drawing on Aristotle, holds that friendship, community, and political society are necessary for human flourishing and the “progressive practice of perfection” (S.T. II–II, q.188, a.8). Social bonds enhance, rather than diminish, personal dignity. Finally, there is the dimension of transcendental constitution according to which persons are oriented beyond themselves. Horizontally, they reach out in love and service to others; vertically, they seek communion with God, the infinite source of their being. This self-transcendence expresses the human longing for the divine and participation in the eternal law.

In sum, Aquinas presents the person as an autonomous yet relational and God-directed rational being, whose individuality, social nature, and transcendent destiny together define the fullness of human dignity.

### **1.1.3 Thomas Aquinas and African philosophical thought**

The issue of human rights, as understood and interpreted today, is not an obvious one in Aquinas. For him, natural rights must be taken within the context of natural law and justice. Justice, rights, and the common good define the human person within society. Individual rights must not sacrifice the rights of others, but rather contribute to the well-being of society, whereby everyone must be allowed the opportunity to contribute to the common good. This is a position adopted by Gyekye (2004), who sees the idea of personhood as entailing a dialogical morality where the chief moral goal is self-realisation, but this goal can only be achieved by fulfilling other duties. For this reason, Gyekye holds that African ethics concerns the idea of others owing a duty to promote and protect individual rights.

If this is true, then it follows that the idea of personhood entails a morality of duties to others. The morality of duties must be taken within a broader scope of both the Thomistic and the African conception of individual human beings. African philosophers capture the scope of the other, which is targeted by our duties in terms of the idea of the 'common good'. By the common good, African scholars do not talk in terms of aggregating the interests as is typical in Utilitarianism, but laterally refers to a basket of goods that are necessary for an ordinary or even a flourishing life for each human being (Gyekye, 2004).

Central to Aquinas and the idea of natural rights and justice is the notion of the common good. Aquinas views person and personhood in terms of moral duty by everyone to each other, which transcends the Utilitarian idea of duty and rights. The idea of the common good represents a conception of a good life fundamental to African moral-political thought. At the heart of a good life is the idea that all human beings have some basic needs they share in common (Molefe, 2017). These are needs considered crucial for their well-being (Wiredu, 2009), and if they go unsatisfied, life is compromised. For this reason, Gyekye (2004) argues that a morality of duties is concerned about ‘social living’ and he also observes that it is ‘related’, ultimately, to the basic desires and needs of human beings. Rights such as education fall within this analysis. Education in this context is understood as the formal acquisition of positive attitudes, abilities, and skills that help to develop the community (Fafunwa, 1974). As a human being who should enjoy entitlements such as education, the girl-child’s right to education in Africa must be upheld. However, the African basic right to education landscape indicates the opposite, since thinkers such as Menkiti and the rest do not see it that way and instead assign the progress of an individual human being to the community. In their thinking, the community decides who gets what since the fullness of the personhood of a person can only be attained within the community, a view contested by Gyekye.

The Abakhayo community resides in Busia County and is one of the sub-tribes of Luhya . Given this context of education, one would imagine that it would help to develop the community if attention is given to all genders as opposed to an emphasis on the male gender. Abakhayo, as a community, lives with a belief that the society at large has a right to decide who gets that education and thus does not see the need for the girl child to go to school.

The concept of person or personhood has drawn the attention of a great many scholars in African philosophy, as read in a diverse range of literature. Discussions about a person from an African perspective cannot be concluded without the views of Abraham (1962), Busia (1954), Danguash (1944), Rattray (1916), Parrinder (1951), Tempels (1959), Kagame (1989), Mbiti (1969), Wiredu (1987), Gyekye (1995), and Gbadegesin (1998). These African philosophical thinkers have developed different views about person and personhood, rights and duties, community, and the individual human being. Their different positions on the subject under study show how complex the idea of person, personhood, and rights is. It is on this basis that one understands why contestations have been emerging from the notion of the morality of duties and rights in the context of individual human rights, such as the right of children to education and gender differences.

Article 42 (1) of the EU states that everyone has the right to education. School attendance is compulsory. Its period and age limit shall be laid down by law. (2) Citizens have the right to free education at primary and secondary schools and, depending on their abilities and society's resources, also at higher educational establishments. Article 2 of the protocol No.1 states that everyone has a right to go to school. This right is crucial to the exercise of other human rights and to the freedom and independence of every person. The State has a duty to respect the right to teaching in accordance with its religious and philosophical convictions.

#### **1.1.4 Education as a right vis-à-vis Abakhayo's concept of the girl child**

The 2014 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey noted with concern how the African girl child is likely to face several barriers in pursuit of her brighter future. Some of the barriers included, but not limited to: harmful gender stereotypes and wrongful gender stereotyping, child marriage and early and unintended pregnancy,

gender-based violence against women and girls, lack of inclusive and quality learning environments, and inadequate and unsafe education infrastructure, including sanitation. In the laws of Kenya, therefore, gaps have emerged showing that the constitution does not have the rights of children expressly spelled out or guaranteed. This has negative implications for the enforcement of other related laws on the protection of children, clearly spelled out in international and regional instruments. However, a clash between Afro-cultural discourse and Eurocentric jurisprudence has complicated and widened non-compliance with those instruments in many of the African countries, which are signatories to the laws and policies protecting the African girl child.

In Africa, there are four human rights mechanisms responsible for hearing cases on gender equality in education. The African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) can adjudicate on the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the rights of women in Africa. The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) was established by the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. It has 41 member states, to which Kenya is a signatory. It is mandated under Article 42 of the ACRWC to promote and ensure the protection of the rights of the child enshrined in the ACRWC. Africa is the only region that has a human rights treaty dedicated specifically to women and girls. Article 12 of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa tasks state parties with the following: protect women and girls from all forms of abuse, including sexual harassment in schools and other educational institutions, and provide for sanctions against the perpetrators of such practices. Further, they are to provide access to counselling and rehabilitation services

to women who suffer abuse and sexual harassment, but also integrate gender sensitization and human rights education at all levels.

Under the Protocol, states must promote: literacy amongst women, education and training at all levels, in all disciplines, particularly in the sciences and technology, enrolment and retention of girls in formal and non-formal education settings, including fundamental education programmes. The Protocol also commits State parties to taking action on several issues affecting women and girls' right to education, such as eliminating discrimination against women, banning female genital mutilation, and setting the minimum age of marriage for girls at 18. The right to education of girls is also comprehensively protected by a number of other African treaties. More recently, human rights instruments have explicitly referenced the practice of FGM. Others include acts of violence against women and mandating state parties to prohibit the practice. Some of these human rights instruments aimed at protecting girls and women against gender based discrimination, FGM, right to education, etc. are: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948; The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (1966); The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1976); The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 1979; The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 1989.

Concerns leading to the establishment of the above human rights instruments decades ago are still felt by women today, with the number of girl-child enrolment in schools still declining at a high rate. Since efforts to rehabilitate the African woman and the girl child, particularly from centuries of subordination, have not been given priority treatment, especially by African scholasticism, it is only imperative that this study critiques and understands the African anthropology of the woman and girl child

among the Abakhayo community in light of Thomistic anthropology of woman and person.

After independence, the colonial-oriented system of education did not favour the female gender across the country, with some communities considering Western education as irrelevant, and a community such as the Abakhayo one relegating the future welfare of the girl child to socio-cultural practices and values, which blocked women from acquiring formal education. This resonated well with cultural belief systems that defined gender socio-cultural as well as economic roles at the time. As the male gender was ranked high in duties and obligations as head of the family, the female gender was confined to micro household and home management roles. Hence, girls would be prepared to assume roles fundamental for women, including initiation into childbearing and raising, to ensure continuity and sustainability of lineage and culturally approved practices and values within the Abakhayo community. Over the years, the community lived to believe that women were meant to leave their fathers and mothers for husbands, and therefore, educating them would only benefit the in-laws of her husband's side. This has not changed much today, as the girl child still suffers from surrogate treatment from the community, making her person and ontology appear of less value, hence supporting the false belief that, as a person, a woman can only be valued within defined community bounds, as well as independent decision-making where life options are concerned.

The Abakhayo concept of women in relation to community must be situated in the context of its approval or disapproval of the essentialist characterization of the gender-specific image of women's ontology. The contention at this point is that the problematic reality the Abakhayo community faces today, more than ever before, is not new in the context of persistent negation of the woman as a person held by

essentialist theories of feminism, which constantly obscure constructive discourse on the woman's course in Africa. It is clear from the discussions on St. Thomas's understanding of women as persons that the female gender in Africa suffers from negative characterization by set cultural conditions just as much as the medieval woman did. This study interrogates the Abakhayo concept of woman as a person, systems, structures, cultural dogmas, and taboos, which continue to subordinate her to the male gender. Other areas for interrogation include ethical and moral norms that are central to the plight of the girl child's right to education among Abakhayo and intervention strategies and methods that have been used in attempts to liberate her from intellectual slavery. Some of these interventions have been legal in nature.

Lack of appropriate address of the girl child's right to education has consequences not only to the girl child concerned, but to the gender agenda which persistently dominates feminist discourses in Africa. Failure by African governments in general and Kenya in particular to prioritize the girl child agenda has seen major setbacks in efforts to rehabilitate the African woman. The Abakhayo community stands to lose out on development by failing to centralize the girl child's right to education agenda. The consequences of not taking as a priority the research area, the girl child issues, will not only characterize the community as anti-girl child progress, but also subject it to ridicule, since today, more than ever before, a community that denies the girl child the right to education is bound to lag in terms of respect for fundamental human rights. As a community, the Abakhayo people have their own cultural norms that define a human person in terms of gender. Each gender has a distinctive role to play in defining the future of the community. The distinctiveness of these roles has worked against women, with women relegated as subordinate to men, thereby continuing the patriarchal structure that systematically works against the progress of women. Failure

to deconstruct the thinking around these cultural norms and practices has and will continue to submerge the community into poverty if women are not allowed to advance in education.

The community stands to benefit from prioritizing the girl child's education because today, more than ever before, communities that allow the girl child or women to access education have seen a reduction in the cycle of poverty. The beneficiaries of allowing women to develop intellectually would be the entire community, since educated women are likely to contribute immensely to the discourse of community development, but also empower others by opening them up to opportunities that come with girl-child education. With higher education, women are assured of leadership more than ever before. The three-third gender debate will only make sense if education for women is viewed within a broader context of development, and will require a fundamental change in the attitude of society towards women.

There is therefore a need to carry out a study to establish whether the Abakhayo people's concept of the female gender may have contributed to their negative attitudes and practices in regard to the availability of access and progression of the girl child in education.

### **1.1.5 Natural law as the basis for rights and duties**

Thomas's concept of rights is embedded within his broader theory of natural law. Natural law is the rational creature's participation in the eternal law. Rights, in a Thomistic sense, are claims that are necessary to fulfil fundamental human goods and our nature as rational beings. Conversely, duties are the moral obligations we have to respect these goods in ourselves and others. Therefore, rights and duties are two sides

of the same coin of justice; a right to life implies a duty not to kill, a right to education implies a duty for the community to provide it.

St. Thomas is often misinterpreted as subjugating the individual to the collective. Rather, his view is more nuanced. The common good is not merely the aggregate of individual interests (as in Utilitarianism) but the total of social conditions that allow individuals and families to reach their fulfilment more fully and easily (Aquinas, C.a., 111, ch.113). This includes peace, justice, and the material necessities for a dignified life. The common good is for the sake of the person, but it requires that individuals orient their actions towards the good of the community. As correctly noted, individual rights must be exercised in a way that does not harm the community but rather contributes to its well-being. The right to education, for instance, is not just a private good for the individual but a public good essential for a virtuous and functioning community (Clarke, 1993, p. 18).

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Despite Kenya's constitutional commitment to universal education, some communities continue to record low enrollment and retention rates for girls. Among the Abakhayo people, cultural perceptions of womanhood and personhood strongly influence attitudes toward the girl child's right to education. These perceptions often determine whether girls are viewed primarily as autonomous persons entitled to full human development or chiefly in terms of traditional roles and obligations. At the same time, the Thomistic concept of person emphasizes rationality, intrinsic dignity, and a transcendent orientation, offering a philosophical framework that affirms the equal worth of every human being, male or female. However, little scholarly work has examined how the Abakhayo understanding of personhood compares with this Thomistic perspective or how it shapes practical decisions about girls' education. The

absence of such analysis hampers the development of culturally grounded yet philosophically robust strategies to enhance girls' educational access. This study, therefore, seeks to critically reflect on the Abakhayo conception of the girl child's right to education in the light of St. Thomas Aquinas's philosophy of personhood.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to offer a philosophical reflection of the Abakhayo's conception of the girl child's right to education in the light of Thomistic concept of person.

### **1.4 Research Objectives**

This study will be carried to achieve the following specific objectives:

- i Explain the concept of personhood in the light of the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas.
- ii Elucidate the Abakhayo people's understanding of the concept of personhood of a woman.
- iii Assess the extent to which the understanding of the Abakhayo concept of person has impacted on the girl child access to education as a human right
- iv Propose a person - centered model of the girl child access to education as a human right among the Abakhayo people.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

- i How can the concept of personhood in the light of the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas be explained?
- ii How can the Abakhayo people's understanding of the concept of personhood of a woman be elucidated?
- iii To what extent has the understanding of the Abakhayo concept of person impacted the girl child's access to education as a human right?

iv What person centered model of the girl child's access to education as a human right among the Abakhayo people do you propose?

### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

This study carries important implications for both theory and practice regarding the concept of personhood and the girl child's right to education within an African context. At the policy level, its findings can guide the institutionalization and implementation of legal frameworks and community-based mechanisms that promote awareness of international and regional obligations on girls' education, particularly within the Abakhayo community.

Beyond policy, the study encourages members of the Abakhayo community to engage inclusively and actively in championing the welfare of the girl child. By affirming her inherent dignity and entitlements as a person, the research highlights education as a vital means of realizing her full human potential.

Dissemination of the findings will occur through local forums such as community seminars, church gatherings, and chiefs' barazas and through broader academic channels, including conferences, scholarly journals, books, and local newspapers. These efforts aim to deepen public understanding of personhood and to foster a culture that respects and protects the educational rights of every girl.

### **1.7 Limitations of the Study**

This research is primarily philosophical and interpretive rather than empirical, although it has an empirical component. As such, its conclusions depend on textual analysis, oral testimonies, and critical reflection, which may not capture every nuance of the Abakhayo community's diverse beliefs and practices. Specifically, there was, first, a limitation related to the scope of evidence where the study relied on selected

interviews, focus group discussions, and available literature. What this implies is that the perspectives gathered may not fully represent all Abakhayo sub-clans or generations. Second, there was a limitation in relation to conceptual interpretation arising from the fact that Thomistic philosophy and indigenous worldviews originate in different historical and cultural contexts, such that aligning them requires interpretive judgments that are open to debate. Finally, there were some temporal constraints given that fieldwork and data collection were limited to a specific period and therefore, evolving attitudes toward girls' education or new policy interventions arising after the study might not be reflected.

These limitations did not, however, invalidate the findings but only served to indicate areas where caution was needed in generalizing the results beyond the immediate context. For instance, on the question of the scope of evidence, the researcher made an effort to broaden data sources by recruiting participants across different age groups, clans, and social roles (elders, parents, educators, youth). And after collecting the views and analyzing them, the researcher shared key interpretations with community representatives to confirm accuracy and completeness. On the issue of conceptual interpretation, we noted that it draws from the fact that integrating Thomistic philosophy with Abakhayo worldviews requires interpretive judgments that could be contested. Accordingly, in the course of this study, the researcher sought to clearly explain how concepts are translated and compared so that readers can follow the reasoning and assess its validity. Besides, the researcher further reached out to both local cultural experts and as well, consulted some scholars of Aquinas to review drafts and provide critical feedback. Finally, for temporal constraints, they emanate from the fact that fieldwork is limited to a specific time frame, potentially missing later changes in attitudes or policy. For this case, the researcher made a

comprehensive schedule in which field visits were planned to coincide with key community events (e.g., school terms, cultural gatherings) to capture a wide range of perspectives.

Therefore, by deliberately widening sources of evidence, clarifying interpretive methods, and carefully and considerately planning for data collection meetings, the researcher significantly reduced bias and strengthened the reliability and relevance of the study's conclusions.

### **1.8 Delimitations of the Study**

The study intentionally focused on ensuring depth and coherence. Geographically, the study examined the Abakhayo people of western Kenya only, and not any other Luhya subgroups or Kenyan communities. In terms of the **Philosophical framework**, the analysis was anchored in the Thomistic concept of personhood, leaving aside other philosophical or theological traditions that might also illuminate the topic or have a bearing on the same. While a study of this kind might have various dimensions to it, this study's attention centred on the girl child's right to education as a human right, not on broader gender-related issues such as health or economic empowerment. These delimitations helped to maintain a clear focus on how the Abakhayo conception of personhood, viewed through a Thomistic lens, influences the educational rights of girls.

### **1.9 Assumptions of the Study**

The study assumed that the targeted respondents understand the concept of person, and the entitlements thereof in the community to help enrich the study. It was assumed that they could quantify and sample some individual girls who have been denied the opportunity for education due to culturally approved but obsolete values

and practices among the Abakhayo community, which have continued to diminish the girl child's use of her potential for the benefit of her community. Lastly, it was assumed that the affected girls in the community openly described their situation freely without fearing intimidation from the custodians of cultural norms and values among the Abakhayo community.

### **1.10 Theoretical Framework**

This study employs the Thomistic conception of the human person, as developed by Thomas Aquinas, to examine the philosophical foundations of personhood and educational rights. Aquinas defines a person as an individual substance of rational nature, possessing three essential characteristics: rationality, substantiality, and intentionality. Unlike philosophical approaches that view individuals as isolated entities or merely as products of their social environment, the Thomistic framework presents the human person as a complete ontological being whose identity and purpose emerge through participation in community life and contribution to the common good.

Central to Aquinas's philosophy is the integration of natural law theory with his understanding of personhood. He argues that human beings, by virtue of their rational nature, participate in the eternal law through natural law. This participation grants them certain fundamental rights that flow from their nature as persons, including the right to education, which enables the full development of their rational capacities. For Aquinas, rights are not arbitrary social constructs but are grounded in human nature itself and oriented toward enabling individuals to flourish and contribute to the common good.

Furthermore, the Thomistic framework recognizes both the autonomy and relationality of persons. While each individual possesses inherent dignity and worth as a rational being, this dignity is realized and expressed through relationships and social participation. The community exists to support the flourishing of persons, not to absorb or diminish their individuality. This balanced view provides a middle ground between extreme individualism and collectivism, making it particularly relevant for analysing tensions between individual rights and communal obligations in the Abakhayo context.

This theoretical framework structures the study in three fundamental ways. First, it establishes the human person as the central unit of analysis. By emphasizing each individual's inherent rational capacity and dignity, the Thomistic approach enables examination of how the girl child is conceived as a person within the Abakhayo community, independent of socially constructed roles or limitations. It provides philosophical grounds for questioning any cultural practice that denies the girl child recognition as a full person with corresponding rights.

Second, it provides analytical tools for examining social relationships and structures. Aquinas's understanding of justice as a social virtue that creates relations of equality offers criteria for evaluating whether community practices and institutional arrangements genuinely serve the common good or perpetuate inequalities that deny girls their educational rights. His distinction between distributive justice, which concerns the fair allocation of resources and opportunities, and commutative justice, which governs interpersonal exchanges, helps identify where injustices occur in educational access.

Third, it establishes normative standards for assessment. The Thomistic principles of human dignity, natural law, and the common good serve as benchmarks against which

this study evaluates the Abakhayo conception of female personhood and educational access, revealing gaps between philosophical ideals and lived reality. These principles also guide the development of practical recommendations that respect cultural identity while upholding universal human dignity and rights.

### **1.11 Conceptual Framework**

In this study, the dependent variable is identified as the girl child's right to education, or more precisely, the denial of this right. This variable represents the primary problem under investigation and is influenced by the interaction of various independent factors.

At the center of the framework are the Abakhayo socio-cultural practices, which serve as the central independent variable. These practices, rooted in the community's conception of a person, are shaped by psycho-culturally approved traditions and values. Through mechanisms such as stereotyping, gendered expectations, and pseudo-socialization, these practices work to undermine the status of the girl child, often resulting in the systematic denial of her right to education.

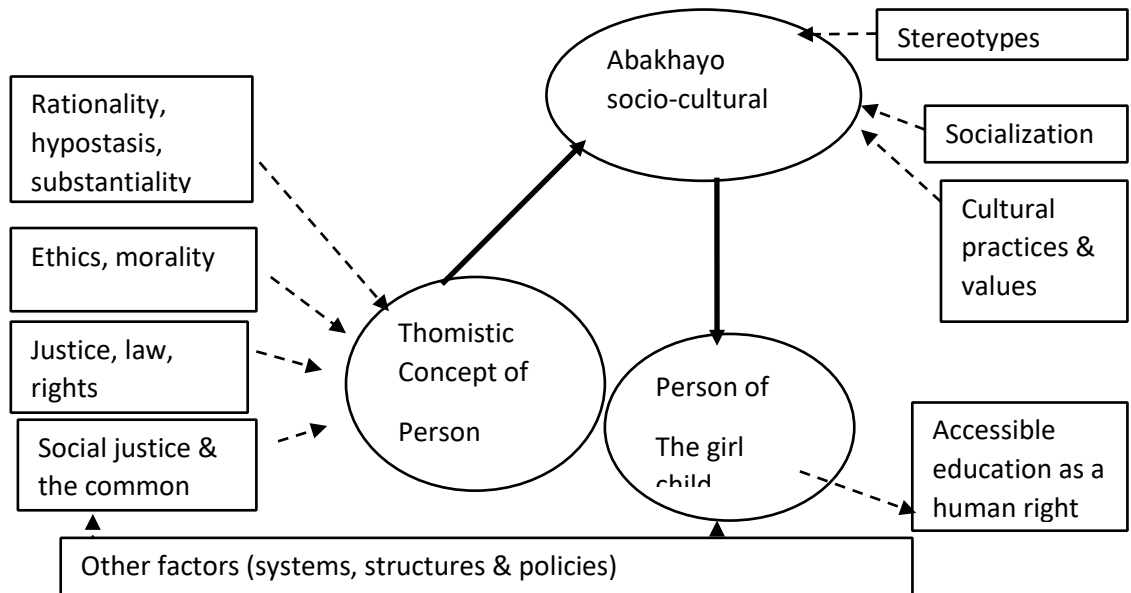
Complementing these cultural dynamics are the systems, structures, and policies that exist within the community and the wider societal context. Rather than acting as neutral mechanisms, these institutional frameworks frequently reinforce the effects of socio-cultural practices. When policies fail to address gender equity or when educational systems are structured in ways that accommodate cultural biases, they inadvertently strengthen the forces that exclude girls from accessing education. In this way, systems, structures, and policies act as reinforcing independent variables, compounding the effects of cultural norms.

The Thomistic concept of a person occupies a distinct role within the framework. Unlike the other variables, it does not operate as a causal factor in the denial of education. Instead, it functions as a philosophical lens through which the Abakhayo conception of personhood can be critiqued. By emphasizing the intrinsic dignity and worth of every individual, the Thomistic framework exposes the limitations of the cultural practices and institutional arrangements that devalue the girl child. It provides a normative ideal against which the existing socio-cultural and systemic realities can be measured, thereby offering a basis for reimagining personhood in a way that affirms and protects the girl child's right to education.

Generally, therefore, the interaction of these variables shows that the denial of the girl child's right to education is primarily driven by socio-cultural practices, reinforced by systems and policies, and critically evaluated through the Thomistic conception of a person. Together, they establish both the causal factors of the problem and the philosophical ground for addressing it. This interaction of variables is represented in the following schematic diagram.

Figure 1.1: Conceptual Framework

Source: researcher, 2021



## **1.12 Operational definition of Key Terms**

**Abakhayo:** a sub-ethnic Luhya community currently occupying Nambale and Matayos sub-counties in Busia County

**Education:** the basic entitlement that enables young members of the community to acquire positive attitudes, abilities and skills that help individuals live meaningful lives.

**Right to education:** the basic education entitlement that each child is expected to receive in the community

**Thomistic** - refers to the ideas of St. Thomas Aquinas regarding his understanding of the concept of person

**Human Rights** are entitlements that accrue to human beings insofar as they are human. They are claimable and justifiable

**A human person** - is a being that has certain capacities or attributes such as reason, morality, consciousness or self-consciousness, and being a part of a culturally established form of social relations, such as kinship, ownership of property, or legal responsibility.

**Personhood** is an analytical term used by anthropologists to indicate who, within any given culture, is considered to be either a fully functioning and accepted member of adult society. It is used in this study as a condition particular to a person or human being.

**Phenomenon:** An occurrence as it appears to human experience. How human beings experience the concrete physical world.

**Mundu:** The equivalent of person in Kikhayo language

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter highlights some literature that was considered relevant to the topic under study. The chapter will follow a Thomistic approach guided by the study objectives. Four major areas will be reviewed, namely; i) to explain the concept of personhood in the light of the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, ii) to elucidate the Bakhayo people's understanding of the concept of person of a woman iii) to assess the extent to which the understanding of the Abakhayo concept of person has impacted on the girl child access to education as a human right, iv) to propose a person centered model of the girl child access to education as a human right among the Abakhayo people. It also brings to the fore the link between basic human rights, gender parity, social justice, law, and the girl child as an ontological being.

#### **2.1 Thomistic Concept of Personhood**

Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) was a Dominican priest who combined the theological principles of faith with the philosophical principles of reason. He was ranked among the most influential thinkers of Medieval Scholasticism. He produced a comprehensive synthesis of Christian theology and Aristotelian philosophy that influenced Roman Catholic doctrine for centuries and was adopted as the official philosophy of the church in 1917 (Encyclopaedia). This study isolates and uses his conception or the understanding of the concept of person to help mirror the Abakhayo's understanding of the same.

The concept of person has a history of its own that spans back many years. The term person originally referred to the role an actor would play in a Greco-Roman drama. It was simply seen as a mask. Then it made its way into Roman legal parlance where it distinguished between a Roman citizen who possessed full Roman rights and a slave who lacked those rights (Clarke, 2006). Later the meaning of person developed more in a Christian theological context. In this context of Christianity, Boethius in the early sixth century defined the person as an individual substance of a rational nature. This definition later became very popular in the Medieval period for it recalled the Aristotelian ideas. It tallied with Aristotle, where rationality was a distinguished aspect of personhood. Clarke (2006) goes to explain that the reason in this context meant consciousness, understanding, intuition and imagination. And so in this sense, rationality did not exist on its own right.

Having had some familiarity with Boethius, Aquinas agreed with his definition but emphasized the existential dimensions of personhood. To Aquinas, therefore, person signifies that which is self-subsisting in a rational nature (Clarke, 2006:28). To Aquinas 'person' signifies an intellectual nature possessing its own act of existence. What Aquinas insists on is the fact that this self-possession manifests itself basically through the faculties of intellect and will. Where intellect is in order of knowledge and it shows itself through self-consciousness, while in the order of the will, is through self-determination (Clarke, 2006). So to Aquinas it's within this capacity for self-possession that we find the key to each person's unique individuality.

Here, what Aquinas is saying is that matter is the principle of individuation. If you take two material beings, each having the same intellectual intelligible organizing principle (form), what will separate them is its matter, the physical stuff. Take the situation of two chairs as an example. Both chairs have the same structure (form).

That is the chair-ness, but each chair is made of its own particular matter. Person therefore is matter that is unique with similar organizing principle. Person in this sense share same form but each with particular matter

### **2.1.1 Aquinas and the Problem of Person**

In his Doctoral Dissertation ‘The Concept of Personhood in the Phenomenology of Edmund Husserl’, Colin J. Hahn (2012) has argued that the problem of personhood, and by extension the entire problem of subjectivity, has appeared in many guises throughout the history of philosophy. Referring to Aristotle and quoting Shakespeare’s Hamlet II, Hahn continues to say that the problem of personhood stems from the issue of selfhood. Since ancient times, philosophers as well as ordinary individuals have suggested that there is something unique about the human self. For Aristotle, there is a function particular to the human being that is not shared with other animals. In the Biblical tradition, human beings are created in the image of God. Shakespeare calls attention to the uniqueness of the human situation throughout his plays (Hahn, 2012:5).

Therefore, in order to understand the construction of Thomistic philosophy, one must pay attention to Christian scholasticism that shaped his philosophical and a humanist anthropological trend of thought. His pursuit of authentic anthropology must be situated in the context of his metaphysics, which was fundamentally Aristotelian and characteristic of medieval thinking (Barnes, 1984). Aristotle created a dichotomy between a person and community. Hence the central idea of Aquinas’ philosophy and theology of a person in the light of his anthropology provides a possibility of understanding the concept of person in relation to the symbolic characterization of man and woman image in pursuit of happiness within and outside the community. Hence the underlying meaning of the symbiotic relationship between individual

person and community can be explained by two parallel yet interlinked methods: metaphysical-transcendental method, which is a priori and historical-anthropological method, which is a posteriori.

### **2.1.2 The Metaphysical-transcendental method-apriori**

In an attempt to explain theoretical difficulties emerging from person-community interactions and relationships, philosophical approaches have had divergent views with regard to the understanding of the concept of person and society. However, it is important to argue that Thomas Aquinas develops his anthropological doctrine on the foundations of the *Metaphysics of Being*. The notion of real being is very fundamental to the thought of Thomas, and the idea of the distinction between the act of being and essence constituted his major innovation as one of his proponents. Makumba (2002:141) observes arguing how this can only be understood from a metaphysical-transcendental perspective, a method, fundamentally apriori.

Thomistic metaphysical conception of person therefore problematizes the ontological identity of person on the basis that, person cannot be something universal, despite aspects shared in common. Hence the person cannot simply be defined because his personhood cannot be shared with any other. As specific to Thomistic metaphysics, the ontological identity that is proper only to one person permits him to make his life a duty and calls him to its fulfilment (Makumba, 2002:145). The possibility of this fulfilment draws attention to the very idea that substantiality of person and the dynamic-relational side of his need do not stand in direct opposition to each other. In fact, in Aquinas' thinking relationality is the person's ability to create a rapport with others opens a person to the world of possibilities in his journey to self-fulfilment (Makumba, 2002:146).

To clarify Thomistic concept of person, Eleni Procopiou (2016) argues in the article “The Concept of Relation in the Thomistic perception of a person” that the connection of the metaphysics of being with Aristotle’s philosophy of nature allows for the composition of anthropology per se which involves the concept a person as it emerges from the two fundamental issues: the metaphysical approach to a person ontologically connected with nature, and the concept of a person as relation. Procopiou concludes with the claim that in Thomistic anthropology, the supernatural world of persons coexists with the natural world of persons who are subject to cosmic order and legal relations. Thus, a person’s inclusion in the framework of legal relations and its ontological liberation in the supernatural field open up the way for the social acknowledgement of the human person (Procopious,2016:632).

In Aquinas’ understanding therefore, a person as natural person is a carrier of relations of justice, and as such is subject to the common good. In this sense, a person, as protagonist of cosmic order, is born within law and is connected to enter a status of individual roles that safeguard individual benefit. In other words, in the context of justice, persons are again juxtaposed with the world of “having,” because, through actions and external interactions man can communicate with each other. (Procopiou (2016:630). Looked at from this perspective, Aquinas sees a communitarian dimension in every human interaction, be it person to person interactions or between person and society or community. Fundamental to this discussion therefore, is that, ‘the ontological foundation of a person as relation dismisses metaphysical individualism,’ (ibid: 631).

### **2.1.3 The Historical-anthropological method-aposteriori**

The modern era of philosophy, inaugurated by Descartes' famous existentialist turn to the subject, shifted the model of selfhood from the divine to the human. Hahn (2012) explains that while Descartes does not use the philosophical concept of personhood in the strictest sense, he nevertheless states that the starting point of philosophical inquiry must be the certainty of the existence of the ego: "I must finally conclude that this proposition, I am, I exist, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me" (Descartes, translated by John Cottingham, 1996:17 quoted in Hahn (2012)). For Descartes, Hahn continues, the legitimacy of all knowledge is grounded on the necessary truth of an individual subject's existence. The thoughts and representations of the individual subject, in turn, are built upon the foundation of self-certainty. Thus, although Descartes' concept of the ego remains much thinner than the concept of personhood, this shift towards selfhood as a focus of philosophical inquiry makes possible the thematic development of personhood.

In political philosophy, Hobbes draws upon the Latin tradition to develop the notion of a person as the entity to which words and actions are attributed (Hobbes, edited by Curley, 1994 quoted in Hahn (2012)). While Descartes focuses on the ontological nature of the human being as a thinking being, Hobbes considers the subject in a political context. For Hobbes (1958), the most critical issue is who is to be included or represented historically and concretely within the state, and he uses the term "person" to identify this group. Hobbes recognizes natural persons-individual human beings- as well as artificial persons, such as religious institutions and a commonwealth (which may be personated, or represented by religious and political/sovereign leaders respectively). This Hobbesian concept of person and society seen at different levels of interaction, appeals to the persistence in the relational dimension of the person, which

according to Aquinas, leads, in the final analysis, to a denial of the individual personal or ontological self-identity.

According to Procopiou (2016:628), ‘in the Thomistic interpretation of a person, the human person is not just the final product of a procedure of historical change, a transformation of one’s “self” and his relations’, as postmodernist believe, but rather a person fully identifiable with sociological life, existence and order. Aquinas believed that a person’s contribution to the common good was based on truth, law and justice. ‘Justice, according to Aquinas and following Aristotle, is a social virtue concerning a social group; it specifically serves natural and social order seeking a “just relation,” that is a “relation of equality” concerning things (Procopious: 629).’

Other key proponents of Aquinas are Susanne M. DeCrane (2004). The scholar provides a vivid picturesque of Aquinas feminist anthropology from the standpoint of the ethics and justice of the common good, arguing that Aquinas provides a feminist hermeneutical method that could be used to properly interpret the principle of the common good, and through which the struggles and contribution of both woman and man can be equally recognized. Focusing one of Aquinas’ great intellectual contributions, the fundamental notion of “the common good”- in short, the human will toward peace and justice – DeCrane demonstrates the currency of that notion through a contemporary social issue: women’s health care in the United States and, specifically, black women and breast cancer. In her skillful re-engagement with Aquinas, DeCrane shows that certain aspects of religious traditions heretofore understood as oppressive to women and minority groups can actually be parsed, “retrieved,” and used to rectify social ills.

One of the most persistent gaps emerging from reading Aquinas' conception of person and related problems of personhood has been general descriptions literature reviewed presented. Each scholar discussing the idea of a person has taken a different position depending on which philosophical epoch is writing in. While one would have expected common standpoints in terms of understanding of person across all the periods of the history of philosophy, the discontinuity of the notion of person across those periods, has generated many questions than answers about the problem the idea poses especially for Neo and post-Scholastic philosophical trends such as modern and contemporary periods. These periods tried to redefine who the person was from different approaches, although attempts to do so generated more problems and questions than solutions and answers. Therefore, for purposes of the scope of this study, in-depth discussions about the concept of person as presented by scholars in those periods have been limited to Aquinas, a few of his proponents and critics. However, this in itself is a gap which this study seeks to fill in by developing a philosophical discourse based on phenomenological analytical approach that will make the notion of person more concrete, than has been tradition for many philosophical discourses.

#### **2.1.4 Thomas Aquinas' concept of person, anthropology of woman and integral feminism**

From early life as a young philosopher and theologian, Aquinas' quest for the true understanding of person was founded on scholastic interpretation of the idea of person, family, community and society. For Aquinas, person is hypostasis, rationality, substantiality and intentionality, in other words, person for him is integral humanist ontological whole. These aspects form the corpus of Thomistic understanding of person. However, the point missing attention in the whole discourse on person is, the

characterization of gender category in Thomas Aquinas. In *The Integral Feminism of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Joseph Hartel (1996) argues that the area of feminism or of the philosophy of a woman has not been seen as one of Thomas' greatest strengths. For example, Janet Radcliff Richards writes in *The Skeptical Feminist: A Philosophical Enquiry*: "Aristotle, Aquinas, and the like contrived by some feat of their highly sophisticated reasoning process to...see her (woman's) whole essence as a series of inadequacies and absences" (1982:162).

These views are shared by Mary Daly (1985) in *The Church and the Second Sex*, where she argues that Thomas held that women were naturally defective. She then states: "Thomas, of course, shares the feelings that women as such are not quite human". These scholars tried to emphasize the positive, though culturally and scientifically limited philosophy of a woman that St. Thomas held. This is developed in what they call 'hermeneutics of integral feminism' at two levels: first, they explain as clearly as possible, the integral feminism of St. Thomas Aquinas. Second, they argue that an 'old' integral feminism actually exists in his writings and must therefore be understood within the context of his integral humanism. Integral humanism and feminism are key components and quite fundamental to the understanding of Aquinas' concept of person, which draws heavily from the paradigm provided by Jacques Maritain (1968), who explains the essential structure of integral humanism and its analogous application to different historical periods (Hartel,1996).

Another area connected to the discourse of person in Thomas is his anthropology of a woman. Two levels of analysis are important here: First, the discussion focuses on the anthropology of a woman in general. Second, her constitution as ontological person and being in a more particular way, focusing on how St. Thomas distinguishes woman from man both in nature and in domestic activity. Basic arguments are: First, for St.

Thomas, woman like man, is a person. She is an integral whole composed of two elements: body and soul. Her body individualizes her soul. And her soul is the very form or act of the body. It establishes the kind of body that she has—a living human body (Hartel, 1996). Second, a woman is one being composed of these two elements. Her vital acts are performed by means of what St. Thomas calls powers. These powers may be divided into three areas: A woman has vegetative powers, sensitive powers, and intellectual powers (Summa Theological, I, 77, 4). Aquinas makes a clear distinction between these powers as discussed in great depth in other works.

For purposes of this critique, one among the three power areas is discussed here, and that is the woman's intellectual powers, which Aquinas does not directly distinguish from that of man. The difference is indirect. Thus, because a woman has a stronger sense appetite, she is less likely to control this appetite with reason. St. Thomas believed that practical reason, in woman, is indirectly weaker than the corresponding rational power in man. It is weakened accidentally by the very force: of her sense appetite.

In the continuum of anthropology of woman, Aquinas makes a distinction of her in the realm of domestic ethics. He holds that, in the household, the female gender is subordinate to the male one. Again, the man is the head or governor of woman. These follows, he says, from the perfection of the male and imperfection of the female sex (S, T, II-II, 164, 2). Though sounding outrageous as they are, these views are simply reasonable consequences of ancient and medieval science, but quite relevant to the African discourse on the anthropology of woman today. Thomas simply means that since a woman has been perceived as subservient more than man, she should be under man's power. Ontologically, subordination would follow from the view that male as one sub-specific type has greater actuality than female as another sub-specific type.

This, in turn, would be based upon the view that the male has more actuality in generation and less of a disorder in practical reason. In other words, the subordination of woman to man, follows directly from Thomas' understanding of Aristotle's qualitative physics, biology, and cosmology. As can be seen then Thomas' position is reasonable given the science of the middle ages, and his belief must be understood within that context. However, to rehabilitate his views from criticism, one must then agree with contemporary critics of Thomistic feminism by confirming Weisheipl's statement that: "... Unless the teaching of Aquinas is seen in its true historical perspective, there is not only the danger of misunderstanding his teaching, but also of rendering Thomas irrelevant to our age..." (Weisheipl, 1974).

Three arguments are basic to this critique as formulated by Hartel (1996): First, that St. Thomas formulated a very clear anthropology of women. And, this anthropology of woman takes place within the context of his integral humanism. It seems obvious, then, that this specification of integral humanism by a Christian anthropology of women may be designated as an old integral feminism. This feminism is representative of medieval Christendom's view of women. It is old because it is analogous of a new integral feminism which should come into being in modern times. Second, the term feminism itself may be taken as a specification of humanism into one of its concrete analogies.

Third, that the followers of St. Thomas (Neo-Thomists) are challenged to develop a new integral feminism which would apply analogously today. Thus, the old qualitative physics and biology of Aristotle should be rejected. Another term to be rejected should be perfection vs. imperfection. These terms simply do not apply today. Lastly, as a consequence of the latter position, a woman's subordination must

be dismissed to buttress the assumptions of modern integral feminism, which would retain the basic biological distinction between active and passive generative powers.

There are two basic texts necessary for consideration in the critique of St. Thomas' concept of woman as person. The first text occurs in the *De Veritate*. Thomas argues that a thing is provided for in two ways: (1) some things are provided for as a means to other things. For example, animals and plants are provided for only because of the species. The species is that which lasts and has an enduring value; (2) other things are provided for as individuals. They have an enduring value in their very individuality. In this sense they are like a quasi-species. They are, therefore, ends in themselves which are provided for in themselves. These things are spiritual creatures. And, among these creatures Thomas includes men and women. In this context, when Thomas says that God provides for women in terms of her very individuality, he means that God provides for her as a person. He provides for her, as a metaphysical whole, in her full individual reality.

The second text, occurs in the *Summa Theologiae* (S.T, II-II, 64, 1, obj. and ad, 2). St. Thomas says: "... in rebus humanis personae sunt principaliores quam res quia res sunt proper personas, et non e converso. In human affairs, people are more important than things because things are for people, not people for things". A critique of these two text reveals the full force of St. Thomas' integral feminism, which takes its starting point in woman as person. In human situations, people are more important than things because people are ends in themselves; things are only a means to an end. This is why Thomas says that people who are ends are not to be reduced to things that are means. Woman, as person is a metaphysical whole provided for as an end. She is more important than money, more important than sex, more important than fame, and more important than political power. Hence, integral feminism must take its starting

point in woman as person. When it does so, it will ground her rights on the foundation of her incarnate spirituality- the spirituality of a subsisting feminine substance of rational nature.

The question of whether or not the anthropology of a woman should be conceptualized beyond the limits of cultural definitions, philosophical questions as well as sociological characterization, has preeminently arisen in this section, with scholarly views diverging on the topic. The gaps in the literature reviewed seem wider on the exact identity of the woman person understood from the viewpoint of her position in the scheme of creation, purpose and finality. From Weisheipl (1974) to Hartle (1996) and from *Summa Theologica* to *De Veritate*, the discourse on the woman person remains unclear as far as her ontological being in society is concerned. Though Aquinas' attempt to affirm the need to recognize the undeniable ontological existence of the female being can be appreciated alongside the argument that women, like men, must be conceived as ends in themselves and not merely means to an end, as supported by his proponents. However, the position that women are fundamentally subservient and subordinated to men, which Aquinas held strongly remains a contested one among his contemporary critics, such as integral humanists and feminist liberationists, who reject the dichotomy created by Aquinas's doctrine of perfection versus imperfection between men and women. However, when criticizing Aquinas, these critics have failed to propose an alternative discourse to the doctrine of perfection vs imperfection as a way forward, which then constitutes the point of departure for this current study.

## **2.2 The Abakhayo people's conception of the personhood of a woman**

Some of the moderate Afro-cultural critics, such as Kwame Gyekye (1987), consider some interpretations both of the metaphysics of the person and the status of the individual person, especially the female gender in the African social order, as antithetical to the true interpretation of the ontology of womanhood in Africa. This, in his view, has worsened the woman condition, when primacy to the community vis-à-vis the individual person has been upheld with two basic outcomes: i) metaphysically, the reality of the person is held as secondary to the reality of the community, ii) socially, the individual is held as less significant, or rather his status has been diminished, while that of the community augmented and made more prominent. This therefore explains the reason why, the female gender category of person in general, and the girl child in particular in the African social thought remains theoretically, philosophically and methodologically problematic.

In "Models in the construction of female identity in Nigerian postcolonial literature" in *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* (on-line publication), Omotayo Oloruntoba-Oju and Taiwo Oloruntoba-Oju (2013) have criticized the presentation and characterization of the African womanhood in African literature series. They challenge Senghor's presentation of the famous first lines of the poem "Naked woman, black woman/clothed with your color which is life with your form which is beauty." Senghor was also famous for his formulation of the African person's identity in general as a species governed by intuition and emotion, which tended to imply the absence of logical reasoning or scientific analysis. Distancing themselves from views and positions such as Senghor's, the two scholars' views are that early African attempts to counter racist colonial narratives resorted to imagery and categorizations that ironically reinforced the colonial tags of African intellectual inferiority,

effeminacy and ineffectuality that were employed to justify the conquest and slavery of Africa in the first place.

In the article “On the Ontology of African Philosophy” published in *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, Francis E. Ekanen (2012) argues that philosophy, a discipline as old as the human faculty of reason, has its thrust on the good life for man for several reasons. First, that it employs the instrumentality of contemplation, reflection, analysis and criticism to arrive at truth. Second, those African thinkers tailor their thoughts towards addressing the lacuna in the schemata of things as it affects the general existential lives of her people. Third, that African philosophy has its orientation in communalism, as contradistinguished from Western philosophy which is individualistic in outlook. This is also reflected in the African and Western ontology respectively. All these arguments require theorization and methodology reliability.

Commenting on the role of theory and methodology in African philosophy, Ekanen presents a litany of African scholastic output but fails to explain why the outcomes of their efforts remain wanting. He argues that theories and African Philosophy are not only inseparable but quite complementary in the analysis of phenomena. However, he sees major problems associated with different philosophic theorization of African philosophy.

Ekanen pours accolades on African philosophical scholarship. He develops a theoretical discourse that rehabilitates African philosophic thinking to compare with other civilizations. What in his view matters is the fact that to understand theoretical and philosophical trends in Africa, one must first understand the school of thought each scholar subscribes to. He emphasizes the need for theory to instrumentalise a

discourse that would help scholars develop frameworks for African socio-political and economic development and tackle many problems bedeviling the continent.

From the above observation of Francis Ekanen, the discourse on whether or not theoretical, philosophical and methodological gaps in the ontological development of the female gender category in Africa, can arguably be established, is not in doubt. Critiques of a wide range of African scholarship on philosophy and its relationship with gender question in Africa have always been short of contents and methods for the liberation of African womanhood from essentialist cultural objectivist collectivism. They have instead been more focused on the metaphysics of being in abstract terms, widening the gaps in the de-feminization discourse of the female character in the African philosophy of education. The consequences of the condition of African womanhood have been manifested through the self-devaluation of the woman with adverse implications on her psychological wellbeing and diminishing the chances of success of the life strategies they adopt.

In a paper “African Ontology, Radical Feminism and Sustainable development in Africa” Francis Etim (2012, 2013) discusses how feminism as a belief, philosophy, movement and advocacy for equal rights, power and opportunities for women as their men counterpart is of contemporary concern and that cannot be overlooked. In this breath, the fact that traditional African attitudes towards women are presumed anti-women, examination of the relevance of radical feminism to Africa’s drive towards achieving sustainable development is critical. The belief that some schools of feminism are antithetical to African ontology hierarchically structured can help explain the basis of emerging radical African feminist discourse (Etim, 2013).

In examining feminism and its implications for liberationist strategies for the gender equality agenda in Africa, Etim raises some fundamental questions. He attempts to critically examine feminism in its differing strands with the backdrop of African ontology to see how it can lead to a better perception of women by their male counterparts and by women themselves, how it can enhance a better appreciation of the tremendous role women play among the array of existents and within the economy of existence and how it can facilitate the much desired sustainable development in Africa. But even with this position, Francis Etim, like any other African scholars, has not adequately addressed the core ontological questions and possibilities for the African girl child and her right to education to enable her fight for own course. On the question of African Ontology and the “women Question”, Francis Etim (2013) conceptualizes and theorizes ontology from a metaphysical perspective, giving both etymological and functional definitions of ontology. Referencing his book *African Philosophy: The story so far*, Etim (2013), argues that there are no cultures without an ontological conception. The issues that constitute reality in each culture may be universal, but the treatment of them is relative to a people. And the treatment is also influenced by the environment that makes the realities meaningful.

Despite Etim’s discussion attempting to deconstruct false conceptualization of the African woman and her ontology, theoretical-philosophical gaps, which have continued to diminish the ontological possibility and concreteness of the female gender category of person in general and the girl child in particular, remain unresolved. This problematizes further possible attempts by contemporary African scholastic thinking to deepen the African woman’s ontological discourse. A discourse whose relevance can only be possibilized by a construction of genuinely Afrocentric theory of the true ontology of African womanhood, by correcting past scholastic

mistakes responsible for the present theoretical-philosophical and methodological gaps.

The above literature review discusses how the woman person has been conceptualized by scholars ranging from philosophy to anthropology, sociology etc, but in general terms. How the Abakhayo community conceives the idea of a woman remains unclear, but what is fundamental to their worldview does not uniquely differ from the rest of the African cultures. In Gyekye's Akan discourse, the image of a woman is taken critically in the broadest context of what essentially constitutes the woman person in the community. And while the scholar criticizes Senghor and Menkiti of their demeaning characterization of the woman being in the African context, he at the sometime fails to provide a way forward to the plight of the anthropology of the African woman, which abhors her identity and essence as an ontological concrete being.

Regarding the Abakhayo community's view of the woman, one cannot duly understand the thinking without reference to Vincent Ongidi's portrayal of men and women in his songs. This is clearly presented by Bernard Francois Anyango (2014)'s MA dissertation on "gender presentation among the Abakhayo in Ongidi's songs." François points out the motivation that led him to conduct the study as the realization of how ordinary language as spoken could be harnessed by music to bring about harmony among the genders. And therefore his objective was to analyze Ongidi's portrayal of men and women in his artistic works, whereby the language and style enabled him to effectively bring out this image, showing how significantly this influenced the way the two genders perceived each other. The scope of the study as the author indicates, was limited to the portrayal of women and men among the Abakhayo with interest on the style and language that made this portrayal have an

effect on how the genders related to each other. Anyango's (2014) study findings established that Ongidi's songs were not only received favourably across the genders but even considered the standard texts of the Luhya community. The language and style adopted made it possible for both genders to like the music and alter the way they perceived each other. From this standpoint, one sees the instrumentality of art in creating an equal gender environment and the use of symbolism to demystify gender superiority, and instead upholds the use of imagery to foreground gender equity. The study however fails to explain why despite efforts to narrow the gender gap, the negative characterization of the woman image still persists among the Abakhayo community to the detriment of the girl child's right to education.

### **2.3 The Impact of the Abakhayo concept of personhood on the Girl Child's Access to Education**

In the article "Theorizing Women's Cultural Diversity in Feminist International Human Rights Strategies" in *Journal of Law and Society*, Annie Bunting (1993:6), explains how international human rights strategies could be more responsive to the needs of women in diverse cultural settings. In her article entitled: 'Laws and policies that protect the girl child in Kenya and Africa', Anisha Simutowe (2018) argues that despite progress in the number of girls going to school, women and girls continue to face multiple barriers based on gender, age, ethnicity, poverty, and disability, in the equal enjoyment of the right to quality education. The situation talks big regarding the way Abakhayo people handle issues of girls in relation to education. But despite, the scholars' efforts to point out how the ineffective implementation of the child's right to education has been a reality in Kenya in campaigns towards the realization of universal right to education, they have failed to provide alternative to the intervention strategies which seem to have failed to achieve results, thereby creating more gaps

with regard to what needed to be done to eliminate those gaps so that the girl-child could access education across Kenyan communities in general and Abakhayo community in particular.

### **2.3.1 Abakhayo's concept of a woman and the girl-child right to education**

The Abakhayo community is one of the four Luhya sub-tribes living in Busia County of Western Kenya. The people are referred to as Abakhayo; their geographical location is called Ebukhayo, while their language- is known as olukhayo. They share the linguistic classification of Bantus because of the way they speak. Their cultural and historical value systems are similar with Abamarachi, Abasamia and Abanyala who are their Luhya neighbours in Busia County.

After independence, colonial oriented system of education did not favour the female gender across the country, with Abakhayo community in particular. For instance, all schools that were started during the colonial time to educate the Africans were for boys; that is Maseno school, Mangu school, Alliance school and St. Mary's school. This resonated well with cultural belief systems that defined gender socio-cultural as well as economic roles at the time. As the male gender was ranked high in duties and obligations as head of the family, the female gender was confined to micro household and home management. Hence girls would be prepared to assume roles fundamental for women including initiation into child-bearing and raising to ensure continuity and sustainability of lineage and culturally approved practices and values within the Abakhayo community. Over the years, the community lived to believe that women were meant to leave their fathers and mothers for husbands, and therefore educating them would only benefit the in-laws of her husband's side. This has not changed much today, as the girl child still suffers from surrogate treatment from the community making her person ontology appear of less value, hence supporting the

false belief that, as person, a woman can only be valued within defined community bounds as well as independent decision-making for life options were concerned.

The Abakhayo concept of woman in relation to community must be situated in the context of its approval or disapproval of the essentialist characterization of the gender specific image of the woman ontology. The contention at this point is that, the problematic reality the Abakhayo community faces today more than ever before, is not new in the context of persistent negation of the woman as a person held by essentialist theories of feminism, which constantly obscure constructive discourse on the woman course in Africa. It is clear from the discussions on St. Thomas' understanding of woman as person that the female gender in Africa suffers negative characterization by set cultural conditions just as much as what the mediaeval woman went through. This study interrogates the Abakhayo concept of woman as a person, systems, structures, cultural dogmas and taboos, which continue to subordinate her to the male gender. Other areas for interrogation include ethical and moral norms that are central to the plight of the girl child's right to education among Abakhayo and intervention strategies and methods that have been used in attempts to liberate her from intellectual slavery.

Numerous gaps emerge from the above narration of the evolution of the Abakhayo people as a community in relation to other sub-ethnic communities of the Luhya tribe. Nowhere has it been pointed out regarding the community's strategies to combat gender imbalance that continue to discriminate against women, especially the girl-child seen as a person meant to stay away from school, and instead informally educated to manage homes. Les, if not nothing at all, has been documented as reasoned scholarship on the Abakhayo community, apart from artistic works such as the Vincent Ongidi's songs meant for entertainment. There is therefore a need for a

scholarly work that would address the community's worldview of the woman in contemporary times whose engagement is predicated on quality education for all.

#### **2.4 A person - centered model of the girl child access to education as a human right among the Abakhayo people**

The question whether a human being exists as a person or personhood follows after the human condition exists has been a philosophical discussion. John Locke, in accepting the concept of the soul, views the personhood of the individual as a consciousness and he gives the example of a person who is asleep as not conscious (Locke, 1849). Swinburne (1986) disputes this idea and says that a conscious person consists of body and soul and that the person continues to exist with both aspects while asleep. However, Denneth (1981) argues that there are categories where you could claim that a human being can be exempted from being a person and enumerates them as infants, mentally defective human beings and insane humans. This way of looking at a person leads to a conditional personhood where for instance when the human body deteriorates, the personhood dissolves. If by accident, a woman was created as Aquinas would want us to believe, would it mean that a female person has less personhood or none at all?

Conditional personhood is flawed. You cannot argue that a lesser expression alters the very state of personhood. It is as if one argued that the dim light of a candle is different light or not light at all due to the existence of the light of the sun. Light is light in whatever expression it is found and so is human personhood (White, 2013). In proposing a person centered model of a girl child is to say that existential personhood calls upon a society to recognize the dignity and worth of the individual. It places the dignity and worth of the individual above the collective power of the society. Cooley

(1902) holds that society and individuals do not denote separable phenomena, but are simply collective and distributive aspects of the same thing.

This relational construct is expressed in Aristotle's view on slavery. That person who thinks like a child becomes a slave by nature as compared to one who is a master of certain knowledge (Schofield,1999). Other examples can be cited of inferior and superior, or dominant that grants rights to the subordinate beings. In this respect, therefore, existential personhood views rights as possessions of the individual and not as properties which define the individual. Some rights in this respect are intrinsic to individuals, for instance the right to self-defense, while others are created and dispensed by the society. In this context, would education be a right created and dispensed by society? This opens a gap that requires reflection.

To understand the importance of the interaction between the variables, it is imperative to take into account the fact that Person according Thomas Aquinas is defined by rationality, hypostasis and substantiality (Clarke 2006; Makumba, 2002; Procopious, 2016). In Aquinas' view, to ontologize person one must view him/her within the context of a community run on the basis of ethics, morality, justice, law and rights (natural and human), which are foundational to social justice and the common good (Donnelly, 2009; Molefe, 2017). But this seems to be the ideal, the practice is that it contradicts Aquinas feminist anthropology which presents the female gender as weak and defective in the creation scheme (Hartel (1996).

However, the Abakhayo community's true conception of person generally, especially the woman and the girl child in particular, has been retrogressive determined by psycho-culturally approved practices and values that have since time immemorial legitimated stereotyping, and pseudo-socialization and characterization of the woman

image and person among Abakhayo community (Anyango, 2014)). Hence the denial of the girl child opportunity for education as a human right has also been fundamentally determined by other factors such as systems, structures and policies that have been glorified among the Abakhayo community for centuries. These are obstacles that must be tackled and deconstructed in order to promote the girl child education as a human right.

The Community's resistance to change is not only antithesis to the rights of the child, but also in violation of the constitution of Kenya, 2010 the international human rights law which guarantees everyone the right to education as captured by the Universal Declaration for Human Rights (UDHR).

## **2.5 Summary and Research Gaps**

The literature review reveals several critical gaps that this study addresses. First, while Aquinas offers a comprehensive philosophical framework for understanding personhood, his description remains largely abstract and theoretical. His treatment of the person and associated problems of personhood lacks concrete application to specific cultural contexts, particularly regarding gender and educational rights. This study seeks to bridge this gap by applying Thomistic concepts to the concrete situation of the girl child among the Abakhayo people.

Second, Aquinas's feminist anthropology presents a fundamental contradiction that undermines contemporary efforts to promote girl child rights. His doctrine establishing a dichotomy between perfection and imperfection, which assigns ontological superiority to males and characterizes females as defective or accidental in creation, cannot be reconciled with any genuine commitment to the girl child's rights and welfare. While his proponents attempt to contextualize these views within

medieval science, the persistence of such hierarchical thinking continues to influence cultural attitudes toward female education. This study critically examines this contradiction and proposes an interpretation of Thomistic personhood that affirms equal dignity regardless of gender.

Third, the Abakhayo community's specific conception of womanhood and personhood remains inadequately documented in scholarly literature. While the fundamental elements of their worldview appear consistent with broader African philosophical characterizations by scholars such as Gyekye, Senghor, and Menkiti, who describe the woman in African contexts as a disadvantaged entity requiring more than legal intervention for liberation, no detailed philosophical analysis exists of how the Abakhayo specifically construct female personhood. This gap leaves intervention strategies without cultural grounding and philosophical depth.

Fourth, existing cultural expressions, particularly Vincent Ongidi's musical portrayals of gender relations among the Abakhayo, while valuable as artistic documentation, do not provide philosophical frameworks for transformation. Ongidi's songs, though popular and influential within the community, were created primarily for entertainment and cultural preservation rather than critical analysis or advocacy for change. Consequently, they fail to challenge or propose alternatives to the negative characterization of women that perpetuates educational discrimination against girls. This study goes beyond cultural description to offer philosophical critique and transformative proposals.

Fifth, despite the existence of strong legal frameworks such as the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, significant implementation gaps

persist. These regional mechanisms have not established effective follow-up procedures or accountability measures to compel member states, including Kenya, to prioritize children's rights in practice. The disconnect between international commitments and local realities remains unaddressed, leaving communities like the Abakhayo without practical pathways to realize constitutional and treaty obligations regarding girls' education.

Finally, a fundamental philosophical question remains unresolved in both scholarly literature and community practice: Is education among the Abakhayo understood as a right that the community dispenses selectively to individuals based on gender, social status, or other criteria, or is it recognized as an inherent right belonging to every individual person by virtue of their humanity? This question goes to the heart of how personhood and rights are conceptualized within the community and determines whether girls can claim education as an entitlement or must depend on community discretion. This study addresses this gap by examining the philosophical foundations of educational rights within both the Thomistic and the Abakhayo frameworks.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents the methodological approach to the study. The study is a philosophical one that predominantly employs philosophical methods of data interpretation. Nonetheless, since it adopts a phenomenological approach that analyses human lived experiences, its methodological approach has a social science dimension. In this regard, the two approaches were used complementarily.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

As philosophical research, this study employed the Phenomenological method as a philosophical method of inquiry. However, since this method required some primary data for analysis, the study, at the stage of data collection, adopted some Social Science approaches to allow the researcher to gather information, summarise, present and interpret in-depth for clarification (Orodho, 2008). Mugenda and Mugenda (1999). As such, the qualitative methodological paradigm will be the main approach in generating data using dialogue schedules for four elders and four groups (FGDs), but also a mainly ethnographic approach with selected resource persons. Guided by philosophical design, which involved a philosophical method of phenomenological analysis (Malenya, 2006).

The qualitative approach provided the means of grounding the study in the lived experiences of the selected elders and groups of women and girls. Stakeholders such as educated women and long-serving educationists in Ebukhayo will also be persons of interest.

### **3.2 Study Location**

The study was conducted in Nambale and Matayos, which are sub-counties of Busia County, Western Kenya. This area is predominantly occupied by the Abakhayo sub-ethnic community of the Luhya tribe. It neighbours other communities such as the Marachi, Samia, and Teso communities. Matayos and Nambale sub-counties have several state-owned primary and secondary schools as well as a few private ones. The main income-generating activity in the area has been agriculture, but with climate change and variation in the pattern of rainfall, the community has had to shift from exclusive agro-activities to others, such as brick making. There are a few countable colleges and polytechnics in the sub-county serving young people who drop out of school for different reasons. The number of girls in those colleges remains at a record low, with many of them dropping out of school and college due to early pregnancies and then eventually cohabiting.

The Abakhayo people pride themselves on several learned men and women, but there are very few. The trend in the number of young children enrolling even in primary schools has not been inclusive and equitable to meet the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs) threshold of providing lifelong education for all. This situation is becoming of major concern as education policy-makers and other stakeholders view it as a case calling for urgent interventions. Such interventions include studies such as the one underway, whose objectives include inter alia identification of the policy making, formulation, and implementation gaps and scope of the problem, as well as their implications for the girl child's right to education, the County generally, Matayos, and Nambale sub-counties in particular. Therefore, some of the characteristics unique to the community that are relevant to this study include, but are not limited to, the conception and characterisation of female gender and

womanhood in the Abakhayo community. The portrait of the female gender category in oral literature remains a major impediment to the women's empowerment agenda that would transform culturally approved practices and values in the community for the betterment of the girl-child. The narratives could be responsible for the marginal percentage of girls pursuing higher levels of education. This explains why the researcher should conduct the study urgently, because cultural norms that submerge women are still commonplace, and therefore, the findings will inform policy change at the county level to help create awareness among the surveyed community on the need to allow girls to pursue education at all levels for future development.

### **3.3 Study Population**

The target population is defined as all the members of a real or hypothetical set of people, events, or objects to which a researcher wishes to generalise the results of the research study (Borg & Gall, 1989). The study will target girls, both in school and those who might have dropped out of school, professional women, teachers, policymakers, etc., in the County, and who may have experienced denial of their right to education in one way or another. The 2009 census approximates Matayos and Nambale Sub-counties' total population at 150,000 residents. Of this figure, about half constitute young people either in school or at home, as a number of them are engaged in small-scale entrepreneurship. The residents in this sub-county can be described as low-income earners, with many of them engaged in small business enterprises and subsistence agro-activities that earn them little to cater for basic household needs and education for their children.

### **3.4 Sampling Techniques**

The notion of sampling is often understood as a process of selecting a given number of subjects from a defined population as representative of that population (Malenya, 2006). Accordingly, any statement made about the sample should also be true of the population (Orodho, 2002). The sample population of this study will typically be residents of the Matayos and Nambale sub-counties. Fundamental to the targeted population or respondent will be knowledge of traditions and cultural heritage, especially on the position of womanhood and the girl child among the Abakhayo as a people. Sampled respondents will provide knowledge of cultural dynamics, such as practices and values seen as antithetical to the progress of the girl child.

### **3.5 Sample Size**

The study employed a combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques to select 118 participants drawn from diverse categories relevant to the research objectives. Knowledgeable elders from the Abakhayo community were identified through purposive and snowball sampling, with an initial focus on members of the Chief's Council of Elders. These individuals then guided the researchers to other elders outside the council who possessed a deep understanding of Abakhayo cultural issues. Seventy girls were selected purposively from ten sampled schools, with seven participants drawn from each school to form Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). In addition, five out-of-school girls, who had dropped out of either primary or secondary education, were purposively selected to provide perspectives from outside the formal school system. Twenty teachers were purposively selected; ten from each of the two sub-counties of Matayos and Nambale, with gender balance taken into consideration. Finally, ten head teachers were included in the sample, drawn from schools randomly selected within the same two sub-counties, with five head teachers representing each.

This sampling approach ensured the inclusion of participants with relevant experiences and insights necessary for the study. The sampling procedures adopted are represented in the following table.

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Sample size</b>	<b>Sampling Technique</b>	<b>Criteria</b>
<b>Knowledgeable elders from the Abakhayo community</b>	13 elders	Purposive and snowballing	Those who are in the Chief's council of elders also led us to their colleagues who may not be in the Council but understand issues of Abakhayo culture.
<b>Girls</b>	70	purposive	From the 10 selected schools, seven girls were selected for an FGD
<b>Out-of-school girls</b>	5	purposive	Both primary and secondary levels of studies.
<b>Teachers</b>	20	Purposive	10 from each of the two sub-counties of Matayos and Nambale, balanced gender.
<b>Head teachers</b>	10	Purposive	Randomly selected schools from the two sub-counties (i.e., five from each sub-county).
<b>Total</b>	<b>118</b>		

Table 3.1 Sampling procedures

### **3.6 Data Collection Methods**

The study adopts both primary and secondary methods as its main data collection methods. Primary data will be obtained from practical experiences of respondents by scheduled dialogues in focused discussion Groups (FDGs) and Key Informants (KIs), while secondary data was obtained by reviewing books, journals, articles, policy documents, and the internet, as well as media reports. The study adopted focus groups and personal interviews to collect data.

### **3.7 Logistical and Ethical Considerations**

A research authorisation was obtained from the Department of Educational Foundations. The letter is a key requirement in applying for the research permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation [NACOSTI] (see appendix), so as to be allowed to carry out research in selected institutions. Once the permit has been obtained, the researcher will report to the County and sub-County areas where data will be collected. The researcher visited the Ministry of Education headquarters to pay a courtesy call before data collection. Upon visiting any institution or target research subjects, the lead researcher will always produce the permit as part of the introduction of the purpose of the visit. The lead researcher will then seek informed consent of each respondent, explaining the nature and purpose of the research (see appendix). A commitment will always be made to the confidentiality and anonymity of those involved, and respondents will be reassured that data or information collected will be for the sole purpose of the current study and that, for confidentiality reasons, their identity will remain anonymous. Self-volition shall form the basis for selecting the respondents, who will then sign the consent form.

The Researcher and the Research Assistant explained the research objectives and tasks to all participants in the research in a way that was understandable to them. Respect for all participants' dignity and abilities will be observed throughout the research. Confidentiality and the respondents' right to say no to participation in the research will be observed. The identity and privacy of each participant will be adhered to as per the research ethical code. The Researcher/Research Assistant will respect the culture and tradition of each respondent. In this regard, voice-recording of dialogues will only be done in cases where informed consent is given, and where it is declined, the researcher will only take notes.

### **3.8 Phenomenological Analysis**

Unlike natural science, which emphasises observations and experimentation with things in the external world, Phenomenological inquiry is a qualitative research approach that seeks to provide a condensed description of a lived experience- a description of the lived “essence” and invariant structures of an experience, before it is later categorised or conceptualised by a person (Mihas & Odum, 2019). For example, someone might have an extremely productive day but not think of it as “productive “until after it is over. While they are in the “flow” of being productive, they are living an experience rather than conceptualising it. The first step is reading data with a heightened attentiveness to lived experience. This close reading requires “bracketing,” putting aside one’s previous knowledge as much as possible to avoid perceived interpretations interfering with someone’s own descriptive sense of experience. Phenomenology is one of the philosophical traditions in philosophy whose historical evolution has been characteristic of philosophical thought, and which can be traced back through the centuries coming to full sight in the first half of the 20th century, with its proponents such as Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) and Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) coming to the fore. The immensity of these scholars’ contributions to phenomenology as a field can be demonstrated as follows:

According to Husserl (1931), phenomenology is a philosophical method that deals with essence. It investigates the most radical, fundamental, and original evidence of conscious experiences (Malenya, 2006). In Husserl’s phenomenological discourse, knowing is possible through pure consciousness, with the mind directed towards objects of consciousness that can be reflected upon. His transcendental phenomenology is at the basis of an individual’s ability to go beyond experience the

ordinary to the essential meaning of phenomena. The human mind transcends the natural world into a philosophical act of pure reflection using transcendental methods.

As his point of departure, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) rejects Husserl's reductionist phenomenology by proposing a hermeneutic phenomenology, which is fundamentally interpretivist in approach. Hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on the relationship between the event and the person, and how meaning is formed in relationships as opposed to seeing human relationships with things in a subjective/object relationship (Malenya, 2006).

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) and Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980) joined Heidegger in rejecting Husserl's metaphysics of the phenomenology of transcendence, whose essentialist objectivist collectivism submerges the ontology of an individual human being. Instead, they propose existential phenomenology as an attempt to rehabilitate a humanist anthropology that upholds the sanctity of a concrete ontological individual human being conditioned by time and space. In other words, existential phenomenology concretises ontological human beings' life experiences determined by socio-political, economic, and cultural systems, structures, and policies by rejecting the historical dichotomy of social constructivism, which dehumanises and alienates authentic humanism (1962). As Merleau-Ponty (1952) sees phenomenology in terms of a method to change human-cosmos relationship, seeking to reconstruct essence through a humanized ontology of an individual human being, Heidegger (1962) on the other hand, sees phenomenology as a method to rehabilitate an individual ontological human being to an authentic level of a humanized anthropology, concrete, visible and quantifiable in time and space, and who has been submerged by objectivist metaphysics, through dehumanizing and alienating socio-

political, economic, cultural, and structural institutionalism, that denies people the opportunity to maximize their potential for authentic existence.

The phenomenological understanding of the person lends credence to the wider view of gender characterisation of the woman person among African social thought, and the Abakhayo people in particular. And from an anthropological standpoint, gender questions and the right of the girl child in particular, are not adequately answered by this theory, even though the methods used by the theory in the interpretation of the person and gender category focus on the ontological dimension of the woman person. For phenomenologist, human nature appears to consist of four main attributes: human beings as rational/thinking beings, conscious beings who chart their own destiny, beings with values, rights, and freedom whose denial makes them feel alienated and the fact that human beings are in a state of continuous self-transcendence as they work towards being more complete beings (Malenya, 2006).

The Phenomenological Method in educational research has a rich history that interweaves well with the development of phenomenology as a philosophical movement. The method has roots in the broader field of phenomenology, a philosophical approach concerned with the study of human consciousness and phenomena as they are experienced.

Phenomenology as a philosophical method was developed by Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938), who was later referred to as the father of phenomenology, a philosophical movement of the 20th century. This way of looking at reality discarded the framework of thought of medieval philosophy, which was built upon Christian faith. In the sphere of epistemology, it meant the refusal of revelation as a source of knowledge and an attempt to validate knowledge by reason and experience. Martin

Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in the early to mid-20th century, laid the ground for this new way of seeing reality and applied phenomenology to various disciplines of knowledge. (Heidegger M. (1927/2011)). Heideggerian ideas that informed the initial development of this study's theoretical framework included the lived experiences of everyday persons. This meant the daily encounters of man and how man interpreted these encounters.

Phenomenology later developed as a research method for investigating the lived experience of science teachers. Not only did it provide a means for accessing subjective knowing and pure perception, but it also became sufficiently rigorous and systematic to represent the lived experiences of research participants with a high degree of accuracy (Koopman, O., 2017).

Contemporary use of phenomenology in educational research is oriented towards understanding the meaning held within particular educational situations. The method emphasizes the lived, concrete, situated experiences for understanding and solving problems. The method has evolved to include a reflective attitude that gives rise to methods and directs research, aiming to educational thinking and practice. The method in educational research is a vital approach for exploring the depth and richness of educational experiences, focusing on the significance of personal and cultural remembrance of what it means to be a child in educational settings (Saevi (2011)).

### **3.8.1 Strength of Phenomenological Analysis**

As a method of inquiry, phenomenology recognises the role played by both the descriptive approach of natural and social sciences on one hand, and the abstract and reflective approach of philosophical inquiry of phenomena on the other. In other

words, phenomenology enables the inquirer to employ quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry, describing concrete individual human life experiences, whose meaning is real.

### **3.8.2 Weaknesses of Phenomenological Analysis**

Just as it has strengths, phenomenological analysis has weaknesses as well. One of the weaknesses is that the findings drawn from data analysed may not be easily generalised, as has always been traditional of other methods in analytic philosophy. This is because each ontological experience is subjective, and therefore any attempts to objectivize it may not yield dependable conclusions about phenomena. Therefore, instead of employing the deductive method to arrive at general conclusions, phenomenology arrives at conclusions by using an inductive method.

### **3.8.3 Applicability of Phenomenological Analysis in this Study**

The question of the relevance of this theory that arises has to do with whether or not it applies to the present study. If the findings of any research based on phenomenology as a method and theory cannot be generalised, how then can it be relevant for the current study investigating education as a human right of a girl child among the Abakhayo people? Are there existential conditions that are experiential elsewhere, which are noticeable, applicable to the community under study? Emotions, attitudes, reactions and stereotypes are common among cultures, but are they universally applicable to justify generalisation of data from one context to another? Afro-cultural apologetics, such as Senghor and Menkiti may argue for the universality of phenomenology as a theory and method, while Afro-cultural critics such as Gyekye (2004) may reject it based on its Eurocentric orientation by proposing a cultural relativist position. Cultural relativism rejects the universality of human rights by

assigning each civilisation its own set of human rights, which may not be transferable from one cultural context to another.

How does phenomenological methodology interweave with the methods of the social sciences? Phenomenology, as a philosophical approach, seeks to understand and describe human experiences from the perspective of the individual, emphasising the subjective nature of perception and consciousness. Social sciences, on the other hand, encompass disciplines like sociology, anthropology, psychology, and others, which study human behaviour, societies, and cultures through various empirical methods.

When these two realms converge, it often leads to rich insights into the lived experiences of individuals within social contexts. Phenomenological methods can offer a deep understanding of the subjective meanings people attach to their experiences, while social science methods provide frameworks for systematic inquiry and analysis within social contexts.

For example, in qualitative research, phenomenological approaches like in-depth interviews or participant observation can be employed to explore the lived experiences of individuals within specific social phenomena or cultural contexts. Researchers may seek to understand how individuals perceive and make sense of social structures, relationships, or cultural norms.

Additionally, phenomenology can complement quantitative methods in social sciences by providing nuanced insights into the subjective dimensions of social phenomena that may not be captured through statistical analysis alone. By integrating phenomenological inquiry with quantitative approaches, researchers can develop a more comprehensive understanding of complex social dynamics.

Overall, the marriage of phenomenological methodology with social science methods offers a holistic approach to studying human experiences within social contexts, enriching our understanding of the intricate interplay between subjective perception and societal influences.

### **3.9 Summary**

The chapter has discussed the methodology and methods behind the study. It has used the phenomenological method as its main philosophical method in analysing the phenomena of the study. The study utilised social science methods of data collection that provided information for a philosophical interpretation. Nambale and Matayos sub-counties formed the main study locale because it's the areas that house the Abakhayo. Finally, the researcher kept to the research ethics by meeting all requirements for logical and ethical considerations.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE ABAKHAYO CONCEPTION OF PERSONHOOD

#### 4.0 Introduction

The study's main aim was to find out what the underlying cause of the Abakhayo people's opposition to change in their society is, especially regarding girls' education rights and opportunities. This is to be understood against the backdrop of the concept of person as understood by St. Thomas. In general, the understanding of a person among the Abakhayo people has been presented as one that disregards the totality of a person when a girl child is the subject. Without a doubt, some factors contribute to the hardships faced by girls in the Abakhayo community who wish to exercise their constitutional right to some aspects including education. The purpose of the study is to determine why, despite being obligated by the UN sustainable development goals, among them, universal provision of education, the girl's right to education is still not fully granted within the Abakhayo community. Instead, girls have continued to be subjected to several barriers. This brought forth the need to investigate whether the Abakhayo people's conception of personhood, particularly concerning the female gender may be a contributing factor to their unfavourable attitudes regarding access to and advancement in education.

This chapter, therefore, constitutes an attempt to explain how these lived experiences in the context of understanding the concept of person from the Abakhayo people's perspective and more so, how this perception compares with the concept of personhood as presented by St. Thomas. The presentations from elders, girls and school administrators serve as opinions on the topic at hand. These opinions are not only representations of cultural thinking but also, a collection of experiences of what it is like to be a girl or a woman among the Abakhayo people. They are thus,

presentations of identity and personhood as understood from the perspective of the Abakhayo people of Western Kenya. In a way, therefore, the chapter presents the Abakhayo community's conception of personhood vis-à-vis that of St. Thomas in a manner that seeks to expose some of the strengths it has but also the weaknesses/inadequacies in it particularly when applied to women and girls and their access to education. Precisely, the chapter will examine the nature and concept of personhood among the Abakhayo community, nature of personhood of the women and girls in the Abakhayo community and thereafter, look at this conception vis-à-vis the conception of personhood as presented by St. Thomas Aquinas.

Essentially, the chapter constitutes an attempt to provide both a descriptive and a normative concept of a person as is known to and understood by the Abakhayo people to, later, determine how this understanding affects the community perception of women and girls particularly in matters related to access to education.

#### **4.1 The girl child among the Abakhayo**

The concept of personhood (or who is a person) as held by the Abakhayo people is fundamental in understanding how a person in the community views him/herself, how others view him/her as well as how he/she views others. At the same time, it is fundamental in how other ideas of being; like morality, knowledge and truth affect the person. This is what informed and guided the sampling procedure adopted in identifying the respondents. For instance, in Table 1.2 below, the researcher sampled two elders; EA and EB purposively. These are the elders who participate in most community matters such as pursuing cases of families that make it hard for girls who have qualified to join school. In return, the community members regard them highly for the responsibilities they carry within the community. Beyond this, EB has also been involved in politics but largely as a community organizer. There were also some

girls and even women that were sampled for the study and they gave their views that clearly reflected their experiences as women as perceived by the community. There were also some school administrators whose view was both cultural as well as modern but more importantly, they illuminated more on the manner in which the cultural views held by the community are impacting on women' identity and girls in particular. And for the girls, as we shall see later, the school administrators' voices also hinted on the effect of the cultural conceptions of personhood by the Abakhayo on the provision of education for the girl-child.

*Table 1: Elders EA and EB*

Respondent	Age	Profession
Participant 1_EA	65 years	Retired teacher
Participant 2_EB	67 years	Community organizer and former politician

The elders involved in the dialogues were fairly of age above 70 years and the table below shows:

*Table 2: Focused group members*

Respondent	Age	Profession
Participant 1 _AM	72 years	Retired teacher
Participant 2 _JM	68 years	Former politician - councilor
Participant 3 _DW	76 years	Community organizer Bukhayo association
Participant 4 _WT	79 years	Retired sub-chief
Participant 5 _MD	70 years	Retired teacher
Participant 6 _NJ	70 years	Retired teacher
Participant 7 -CO	59 years	Head teacher-primary

## **4.2 Abakhayo Concept of Personhood**

Indeed, the central theme in the dialogues held with the sampled informants was about what it means to be a person in the context of the Abakhayo people. Is there a characteristically Abakhayo concept of personhood to be found in traditional people's thought and practice? If there is any that is identifiable, what are the attributes it prescribes for personhood?

To begin with, when asked to explain who a person is in the context of the Abakhayo community, one of the elders in an interview started off by pointing out that:

‘A person is a creature of God created and brought on this earth which is very different from other creatures, and a person as a word, differentiates animals and human beings (WT table 2 appendix A3)

It is interesting to note that while this is one of the community elders who are expected to exclusively hold a traditional or cultural worldview on issues, he starts by exploring the concept of a person from a Christian religious perspective. He therefore starts at a point of identifying the characteristics that set the human person apart from the other creatures – animals, thus a person is one created by God, different from other creatures (unique) and a person as opposed to an animal. In essence, at this point, it would still be rather early to talk of a clear concept of a person, particularly from the Abakhayo community. A similar view was also held by the two school principals who, upon the interview opined that:

According to Abakhayo, (Mundu) a person is a creature created in the likeness of God, a given wisdom and powers to have dominion over other creatures in the world that God had created (School Principal 2, Busia, 2023)

To add to the opinion of Principal 2, the other principal - Principal 1, asserted that:

...a person is something that has a life which is in contrast to an animal in terms of walking, thinking and thinking comes with responsibility... Now if we refer to a person, we look at the responsibility of who is in charge of a home. So now if you ask that, you are basing on this. (appendix B1)

Although Principal 2 indicates that the view he gave of who a person is represents the Abakhayo people's understanding, it is evident that this conception has a lot of Christian religious undertones. The foregoing conception of person was however deepened by another (Elder 5) when he agrees with Elder 4 but adds that:

.... secondly, when a person has become a person they start calling him this is a particular person maybe according to how that person has learnt or maybe the wealth the person may have or the number and kind of children the person may have, so that way you can call that person a person (MD, appendix A2)

Beyond just being a unique creature created by God, there is an apparent indication, at least from the submission by Elder 5, that possession of knowledge (or education for that matter) is another attribute of personhood as indicated by the seeming knowledge condition as implied in the phrases "...according to how that person has learnt...", "as given wisdom and powers to have dominion over other creatures..." (see Principal 2 above) and intellect as noted in the view that "... a person is different from an animal because he is considered as "isolo ili namakesi" [meaning- an animal with intelligence] (see FGD with girls). There is also the idea of having some wealth (which includes children). But more importantly, in one of the interviews with a head teacher of one of the sampled schools, one other attribute that came through was that of 'the brain' (implying the capacity to think). That is to say, according to the Abakhayo community, a person is a creature that can think. This is aptly captured in the following quotation:

...Yes, that brain is what makes human beings to be very different from other creatures. (appendix B1).

Although in identifying the attribute of possession of the brain the head teacher emphasized the uniqueness of human beings that sets them apart from other creatures,

he appeared to imply at the same time that possession of the brain (or thinking capacity) is, also, an aspect of personhood. Simply put, a person is one with an enhanced thinking capacity.

Therefore, to this extent, it would appear that from the Abakhayo people's cultural perspective, a person is a human being (as opposed to an animal) and one who is endowed with the capacity to think, possesses some wealth and has children. It is also notable that Principal 1 introduced another attribute; that of responsibility, when he asserted that "...when we talk of a person, we look at the responsibility..." To give more credence to this view, the discussion held with the elders maintained that if there are issues in the homestead, the person (a man) is the one who takes the responsibility to address them. This, in a way, intensifies the idea of apportioning more attributes of personhood to the man, manifested in many fronts within the Abakhayo community.

This is further confirmed in the FGD with the elders thus:

Female is a person of lesser value compared to man. This is partly so because she does not belong to the clan and so she cannot be consulted. In the absence of the husband, a brother of the husband is consulted. Like if any child has issues with marriage, she cannot discuss the issues. They will want a person to discuss, and the person in this case is the brother of the husband (FGD with elders, Busia, 2023).

In this way, the Abakhayo view the man to be more of a person than a woman. The woman is a lesser person. One of the main reasons behind this is that the woman does not belong to the clan. She is, in some way, adopted into the clan through marriage. And in case of death, she gets buried as guided by the customs of the clan to which the husband belongs.

So far, the foregoing discussion appears to attribute the thrust of the concept of personhood to a man. In fact, upon probing further into these attributes of a person,

one elder brought out this in a more precise manner when he pointed out that in essence, a person is just a man and not a woman, thus:

**Interviewer:** So according to Abakhayo, how would you define a person based on this discussion?

**Elder 1:** Now from this discussion, a person is a man. Yes, a person is a man and the owner of the home because it's believed that everything that is owned by the man including wife and children. (appendix A1)

This introduced a demographic dimension to the conceptualization of personhood, especially gender and age. In this respect, a person is a man and not so much a woman. Children are upcoming persons since they still are growing and that they do not have the other aforementioned attributes yet. But even as they grow towards personhood, boys appear to have their path to becoming persons readily charted while the fate of girls hangs in the balance. In fact, for the girls, the greater possibility is that they may never become persons given the view that a person is a man. Since the Abakhayo culture does not seem to have a provision for a woman inheriting or even owning property means that by their own cultural standards, a woman can never be a person since they cannot or are not expected to accrue and own wealth.

It is notable that some of the ideas that came through in these interviews, particularly from the head teachers and school principals were not purely cultural but had some aspects or influence of modernity and Western civilization in particular, since they had undergone some schooling. Again, since many of the informants are operating in an environment that is not exclusively steeped in the Abakhayo culture, many of them are Christians and hence their views are bound to exhibit that kind of influence.

From these dialogues, it is apparent that the Abakhayo conceptualization of a person presents various facets in different contexts. In an FGD involving another set of

village elders, the concept of person was discussed in the context of a home. In the local language, the word for a person is ‘Mundu’. Accordingly, it was noted that ‘Mundu’ is understood in two ways in reference to the family. First, let us consider a case of a household. In such a context, discussions in the FGD revealed that ‘Mundu’ in a household is essentially used to refer to father and mother. These are the ones to whom it would be meaningful to refer to as *Mundu* (person) partly because they are parents. During the discussions, one elder gave the example that whenever a stranger visited a homestead and found children he would ask a question like “are there persons in this home?” Literally, referring to the presence of parents. Apparently, a person (mundu) is not just a human being, at least from this perspective, but one who is mature and if possible a parent. It might appear therefore, that even if the children were adults by virtue of their chronological age, but are still under the household of their parents, the community would be hesitant to consider them to be ‘mundu’ (person).

In a situation, where the father is absent and the mother is present, the stranger is likely to probe further wanting to see the person, meaning the ‘father’ of the home even when the mother is present. Accordingly, there is a sense in which beyond age (hence maturity), the probe adds another dimension to the conception of a person, that of authority. Here, the meaning of person shifts from the mere fact that one is a parent to being (particularly) the father, who in this case wields some authority in that family, at least in the understanding of the Abakhayo community. One participant mentioned that;

“... but when one visits a household and finds the mother present, he/she will have to go ahead and ask for “mundu”, who in this case is the male in the household., ...” (Appendix A3).

Following this view, it would therefore appear that the aspect of authority, or power for that matter, is a fundamental attribute in the Abakhayo conception of *Mundu* (person). Notably, this power is closely associated with not just chronological age and status, but also the fact that one is a man. A man therefore has a higher chance to be considered as *Mundu* compared to their female counterparts. In the same vein, there is another dimension implicit in the foregoing excerpt; the gender dimension. According to the elder (in the excerpt), even when the visitor has found a mature adult who is a parent in the house, this does not, to the visitor, adequately add up to *Mundu* and perhaps, that is why they will still go ahead in their quest for *Mundu* who, in this case, is the mature adult male – the father of the house (especially if he is not deceased and is expected to be in the home as at the time of the visit). The mature adult female, at this point, seems not considered as *Mundu*. It becomes even more difficult if the woman is barren. In such a case, she is considered a child. She no longer takes the position of a person because she never gave birth to any ‘Mundu’.

To reinforce the gender aspect and its emphasis on the men in conceptualizing personhood among the Abakhayo people, elders in the FGD made reference to the eldest son of the homestead as the preferred alternative for *Mundu* in case the father of the home is not there. It will therefore not be uncommon for a mother to introduce her first born son as having given birth to *Mundu*. But if the child is a girl, she remains a mere newborn child. This is how early the community begins to look at the girl child as a lesser or simply not a *Mundu* and one of less importance. This was clearly brought out by one of the participants in the FGD thus:

“... a woman would say that she has given birth to *Mundu* (meaning person in singular) when the child is a boy, but would not say so if the child is a female (a girl) ...” (Appendix A3).

Probing further into the plight of the girl-child in the Abakhayo community, it was noted that when young girls die at their home, they are usually buried like any other child of the clan. However, if the girl was of the age of marriage and was not married, she would be buried like an alien - outside the compound but near the fence. One other stark contrast between men and women can be seen upon death and more particularly, at burial. Usually, when they die, women will be buried after 3 days while men after 4 days. This signifies the differential value placed on the men as compared to that given to the women. The *Mundu* is the vision carrier of the family. Since the woman is not a vision-career, she becomes a little lesser as a person, at least by the Abakhayo definition.

In economic terms, a government collects taxes and levies to get money to run its affairs. Traditional societies were organized in much the same way as the current ones, after all, the current forms of government have evolved from traditional ones. In the traditional Abakhayo way of life, taxes were also collected. However, such taxes were never charged or collected from homes without a man. For a home to qualify to pay taxes, there needed to be a man. In cases where the man was deceased, the family too never paid taxes. This was affirmed by one of the participants who informed the researcher that;

...For a home to qualify to pay tax, there must be a man. In a situation where the man is deceased, the family too never paid tax (appendix A1).

One other dimension of personhood introduced by the participants, in particular, a head teacher, is that of rights. Rights, as we know them, are things or conditions to which we (as human beings) are entitled to fundamentally in such a manner that if they are denied from us or compromised, then our humanity (or even personhood) is devalued or compromised too. Therefore, a person is a human being with rights in the community. However, in the case of a female in the Abakhayo community, their rights are rather limited compared to their male counterparts. For this reason, they are regarded as less of persons. An interview with a female head teacher revealed thus:

As a woman in the community, my rights end in the kitchen. I am just a cook for my family (husband and children)” (Female head teacher, Busia, –see appendix)

The researcher had some time to talk to the girls who were not in school. These included girls who had dropped out of school at various levels or were through with their primary cycle of education awaiting to join secondary school. Table 4.3 below gives some of the demographic information of these girls.

**Table 3: Girls’ focused group in Mabunge village**

Respondent	Age	Profession
Participant 1_SA	17 years	Form one drop out with a baby
Participant 2_JA	15 years	Class 8 graduate to join high school
Participant 3_HN	14 years	Class 8 graduate waiting to join high school
Participant 4_JN	15 years	Dropped from class 7 with a small baby
Participant 5_AO	16 years	School drop out with a baby
Participant 6_MW	17 years	Form 2 in secondary school

When confronted with a situation where an adult comes home asking if there is a person at home yet they can see them, the girls responded by confirming that elderly people in the community do not consider girls as persons, thus:

...elders do not consider us girls as persons. They see us as those who are there today and tomorrow they will be elsewhere perpetrating other families to grow in the population (AO table 3).

Even if the community was to bring the girls and women to the same level as that of men, certain cultural expectations work to the women's and girls' disadvantage. The fact that a girl will one time get married outside their family means that she is never seen even by her own family to hold any serious stake in the family hence as a person. Secondly, even when she gets married, she is a visitor or a stranger in the land where she is getting married and as such not considered so much of a person there in that land but an alien or sort. This tends to compromise the value of the person that women and girls are, at least from the perspective of the Abakhayo people.

In general, therefore, the Abakhayo people have a number of attributes they associate with personhood. These include the fact that; a person is a unique creature that was created by God, has powers over other creatures (unique), they possess knowledge, wisdom and intellect or simply, have the capacity to think (as a result of education). At the same time, a person is one who possesses some wealth (including children) and is characterized by the fact that they take responsibility (of their actions). Above all, a man, in the Abakhayo worldview, is the one considered to be a person (and a woman is a lesser person). Finally, a person is characterized as one who has some rights (entitlements).

#### **4.3 The Abakhayo Concept of the Personhood of a Woman**

The foregoing sub-section has addressed the issue of Abakhayo's concept of personhood. In doing so, it has identified some attributes of a person. This sub-section narrows down to the concept of personhood with particular focus on the woman.

The understanding of personhood of a woman as conceptualized by the Abakhayo people from the individual elders assumed a normative dimension in terms of respective roles in the community. In this regard, all married persons are in-charge of the family and grow to become an elder, once he brings up children to maturity, his role becomes to pay a dowry for his sons and receive dowry for the daughters which is Kikhayo: Akhwera khandi akhwerwa (meaning that he pays dowry and he is paid dowry). Here dowry comes in twofold; one who qualifies to pay dowry for his sons also qualifies to receive dowry from his daughter. This brings or is a source of wealth. The term Omwami is often used to refer to a leader who is endowed with wealth, or one with a recognizable (higher) status and is only used on males. It therefore implies a person with some amount of wealth and has a home that he has built himself. He becomes the owner of the home.

On the contrary, there is no equivalent term for a woman. She is therefore regarded as a person of a lower degree. This is manifested in the various cultural expectations and practices associated with women. For instance, in the absence of the husband, she cannot pay or receive the dowry of her children. She must use brothers or cousins of the husband. This is done so in respect of the person of the home who is the husband. Nevertheless, a woman has the following array of roles; entertain the husband, cook for the family, collect firewood, fetch water, clean the house, look after the children, storekeeper that is built by a man, and adviser for young adolescent girls. One of the participants mentioned that;

“...this is a person of lesser value compared to a man. This is partly so because she does not belong to the clan and so she cannot be consulted” (AM appendix B1).

Another participant added that;

“...in the absence of the husband, a brother of the husband is consulted. Like if any child has issues with marriage, she cannot discuss the issues. They will want a person to discuss, and the person in this case is the brother of the husband”. (JM table 1 appendix A3)

Still at the household level, a woman is the manager caretaker of the house, she milks cows and when a goat or a cow is slaughtered, she is allowed to eat the upper part of the animal that is from the ribs to the neck; as for the chicken, girls are allowed to eat it until the age of marriage. When she gets married, she is not allowed to eat chicken meat but allowed to cook it for her children and the husband. The thinking of the community is that chicken is a small bird to feed the whole family. In this respect, the person in the home can eat with the children. As a girl, she is only allowed to eat chicken wings for she will fly away. The Gizzard of a chicken represents the homestead and girls are not allowed to eat it. Only the person of the home and his absence, the elder son can eat it. A woman is treated as a servant on the homestead. If she does not bear children, her clan has to replace her with another young girl capable of bearing children. If she dies childless, she is taken to "the grave through the backdoor. One of the elder asserted that;

“A woman is treated as a servant in the homestead. If she does not bear children, her clan has to replace her by another young girl capable of bearing children. If dies childless, she is taken to the grave through the backdoor...” (WT 79 appendix A3)

In terms of ownership of property, girls and women own nothing in the family and the mother too can only till the land but cannot own it. As long as the children existed, if the husband died, the woman would till the land waiting to leave it to the son. In the absence of the son, the land is taken by a brother of the husband or even a cousin in the absence of the brother. The woman too can be inherited when the husband dies. Traditionally, even elderly women would be inherited by the grandson not necessarily

for conjugal purposes but just for ritual purposes. A situation where a couple dies at the same time, like in the accident, a woman is buried first. Then the burial of the husband would come as the last event.

“...as long as the children existed, if the husband died, the woman would till the land waiting to leave it to the son. In the absence of the son, the land would be taken by a brother of the husband or even a cousin in the absence of the brother...” MD 70 appendix A3)

“The woman would also be inherited when the husband dies. Elderly woman would be inherited by the grandson. The inheritance was not necessarily for sex, but just a ritual that needs to pass”. (NJ 70 Appendix A3)

The roles of a man in the community as the provider of the family, entrusted with looking for the resources, the person is responsible for acquiring land on which the homestead is put up, provides security to the homestead and gives direction to the homestead by making crucial decisions in the family. On the contrary the women’s responsibilities entailed that person of lesser value compared to man. This is partly so because she does not belong to the clan and so she cannot be consulted. In the absence of the husband, a brother of the husband is consulted. Like in a situation a child has issues with marriage, she cannot discuss the issues. They will want a person to discuss, and the person, in this case, is the brother of the husband. Her roles included being a helper, expanding the lineage by giving birth to children who would belong to the man and acting as a worker on the homestead. Quotes from the elders;

“...in the absence of the husband, a brother of the husband is consulted. Like if any child has issues with marriage, she cannot discuss the issues. They will want a person to discuss and the person in this case if the brother of the husband”.

“Helps the person to expand the lineage by giving birth to children who would belong to the man” (DW, 76 appendix A3)

In terms of decision making, girls and women, in general, are not allowed in meetings where serious matters are being discussed. Leadership is more of a male affair. Women are not involved, though they can only offer her opinion privately when a man consults her. Also, they are not allowed to attend community public meetings unless she is a witness. Their specific responsibilities include offering guidance to female children in the household, cooking for the family, working in the family garden and keeping chicken and milking cows. Under community roles, particularly in funerals, women are expected to be cooks, look for firewood, water, serve guests, etc, and guide newly married girls. Quotation from the elders;

“... a woman is not allowed to attend community public meeting unless if she is a witness ... in the community funerals, women are expected to be cooks... look for firewood, water, serve guests, etc” (DW a 76 year appendix A3)

Another elder added the missing aspect by adding that:

“... role of women was also to guide newly married girls... to understand their roles and expectations in the clan...” (WT 79-year appendix A3)

Concerning inheritance, girls and women are not allowed to inherit any property; all the children belong to the man, thus the community in a situation where the man dies. In a situation where the husband dies, the woman still remains as the property of the clan. In addition, land as the property belongs to the man and in the situation of death it's transferred to the sons and in case he never had sons, it would belong to the husband's brother or the clan.

“...girls and women are not allowed to inherit anything, all the children belong to the man, thus community in a situation where the man dies. In a situation where the husband dies, the woman still remains as the property of the clan. Land as property belongs to the man and in the situation of death its transferred to the sons and in case he never had sons, it would belong to the husband's brother or the clan” (WT, appendix A3).

Concerning matters of food and nutrition, food in a home was shared in such a way that boys would be separated to eat with the father and they would be given more food compared to what is given to the girls who would eat with the mother or the grandmother. Only young girls and adolescent girls are allowed to eat chicken when slaughtered at home. Once married, a girl would be stopped by the orders of the community to stop eating chicken. The reason for this was that a chicken is a small bird that cannot feed a big family. And since the girl is expected to have boys then it would be reserved for the husband and the boys. She needs to prepare herself psychologically to give up the practice. If a cow or goat is slaughtered, girls would eat kidneys and for the chicken, they would be served with wings. Newly married girls, when they get their first child, the community has the practice of offering her family a younger girl regardless of whether she goes to school or not for the purpose of looking for or helping the sister or cousin with the child and house chores. The sentiments are clearly stated by one of the elders as:

“...only young girls and adolescent girls are allowed to eat chicken when slaughtered at home. Once married, a girl would be stopped by the orders of the community to stop eating chicken. The reason for this was that a chicken is a small bird that cannot feed a big family. And since the girl is expected to have boys then it would be reserved for the husband and the boys. She needs to prepare herself psychologically to give up the practice...” (NJ 70, appendix A3)

A retired sub chief clearly adds in the conversation that:

“...newly married girls, when they get their first child, the community has the practice of offering her family a younger girl regardless whether she goes to school or not for the purpose of looking or helping the sister or cousin with the child and house chores” (WT79 appendix A3)

The practice of the family sending a young girl to take care of the child is child labour, but at the same time denies the girl from attending school. This important aspect of child labour and one which robs the school chance to girls in the community will be discussed and more elaborated in the next chapter.

The roles and responsibilities of a woman included acting as the custodian of the house, the home supervisor who takes care of the things that belong to the family, the storekeeper or looks after milk but what is kept in the store is brought by a man and milking cows. Additionally, a woman cannot own land as a form of property. When the husband dies, she becomes the custodian or the holder of land on behalf of the sons. She is inherited after the death of the husband and that person to inherit her has to come from the clan of the husband. However, she is free to choose the one she wants and even drop the one who inherits her to another choice of her. In the family, girls would be treated differently when eating. They would be denied eating things like chicken and where chicken is slaughtered and there is no man, the gizzard would be thrown away. If married and a woman eats chicken it would be taken as a sign of disrespect to the husband. From yet another interview with a village elder who mentioned that;

“...to entertain the people they would sing, dance and ululate. After the death of the husband, the woman would be allowed to choose her inheritor. That is the person to take charge of the position of the husband and the process would be candidates would be identified and the one chosen to go to her house. She would cook for them put the food under the feet of the man she wants, that would be her choice...” JM, appendix A3).

On property, a person was responsible for all the property. In his absence, the clan members would take charge. The family here connotes family members, male and females plus the cousins of the father’s side. The male person was considered the pillar of the household. Moreover, any adult male who was unmarried had no value in the community thus not considered a person. For inheritance, brothers and cousins on the side of the father would take charge of the property in case the man did not sire a boy. The focused group discussions with village elders indicated that;

“...the role of a person is to provide security, protection, food, shelter, and clothing to date. He was also charged with the responsibility of giving direction on the issues at home. And he was responsible for property sharing and solving disputes in the family”.

“On the roles of women, they asserted that women give birth to children, take care of the property, look after the children by cooking for the family, advice girls giving them what they expect when they get married and ensure that her son gets a cook (wife) through talking to aunties, grandmother, sister, mother, etc. She also was responsible for talking to other people in the community to understand their opinion regarding the husband and she would release secrets to the husband” (AG 65 appendix A2).

That is, whatever she would get being talked about the husband, she would tell her husband. That is how husbands or persons knew what opinion community people had towards them. Other roles include, entertaining the people, they would sing, dance, and ululate.

Otherwise, there were times when women could make decisions, particularly when choosing the inheritor, and when making sure that dowry paid from her daughters went for the marriage of her sons in the absence of the husband. In this case a man inheritor would assist by his presence. Other roles for women after the husband dies depend on her age by the time the husband dies. If over sixty, she would become an organizer in the family/community, and if young she must be inherited.

From the foregoing discussion, it can be summarized that the Abakhayo people perceive girls and women as not fully enjoying the entitlements that their male counterparts enjoy in the community. They perceive them as lesser persons. This is because they perceive them as creations of God but of a slightly lesser degree compared to boys. The boy (or the males) is seen as the one who will take over from the father and perpetuate the clan while the girls are meant to go away and get married. Mothers would equally be happy bearing sons than daughters despite the fact that daughters are expected to fetch wealth through dowry when they get married.

Considering the concept of personhood as suggested by St. Thomas Aquinas, a person is one who possesses some attributes. One of these attributes is rationality. That human beings possess the intellectual capacity for reason, thought, and self-awareness. As rational beings therefore, human beings locate themselves between matter and spirit. What this means is that other than existing in the world, humans also interpret it, discerning order within it, deriving meaning from it and acting decisively upon it. To Aquinas, this includes the ability to understand concepts, make judgments, and have free will. This is thus considered to be a defining characteristic of personhood. Accordingly, humans possess intellect, which allows them to reason, understand, and make choices based on moral principles. According to Aquinas, these attributes come together in what he referred to as hypostasis -the underlying essence that makes something an individual thereby grounding their unique existence and is inseparable from their rational nature. According to St. Thomas, this is an attribute that distinguishes human beings from other creatures in the natural world thereby assigning humans to a higher status within the world.

On this aspect of personhood, it is notable that the Abakhayo people also consider it as an attribute of personhood. This is evident in the dialogues with the various respondents who pointed out that a person is one who possesses the brain and therefore can think. To the Abakhayo people, a personhood entails possession of the capacity to think and reason. However, despite the identification of this aspect of possession of thinking capacity as an attribute of personhood, the Abakhayo people do not seem to treat girls and women as persons in this respect. For instance, women are not involved in decision making, an example of an activity that applies thinking and weighing options before making a conclusion. They are not expected to take up leadership roles within the community. The only time they are expected to take up a

leadership role is at the household level when advising girls on their roles as future women. Women and girls are not expected in meetings where issues of community concern are being examined and discussed – possibly because they are not capable of the thinking needed at that level. Even when their spouses die, women never take up the leadership of their households. Instead, the late husband’s brother or the eldest son will.

Alongside the attribute of rationality, St. Thomas Aquinas emphasized the importance of free will in defining personhood. This is the attribute that enables individuals to make moral choices and act autonomously, without coercion or determinism. Through the exercise of free will, humans have the capacity to pursue virtuous actions and fulfill their potential as moral agents. This extends to the aspect of the inherent dignity of the human being as a person. Personal dignity arises from human rationality, moral agency, and capacity for humans to determine their own actions. In the dialogues we realize that the role of keeping law and order is a preserve of the males. Women are neither disciplinarians in the Abakhayo community nor are they expected to take up any leadership roles. Men are the ones who make laws, at least from the Abakhayo perspective. It is possible that these laws take care of more of men’s interests and welfare than they do for the females. For instance, there are more restrictions on the foods that women can eat in the Abakhayo community than there are for the men. Women’ and girls’ diet appear to be constrained by the laws of the community which were certainly made by men and without consultation of the women. At the same time, if men do something that goes against the norms of the community, women cannot discipline them but in the reverse case, men take it as their right to reprimand and even punish women. There are therefore much less opportunities for women to exercise their free will as compared to their male counterparts. In other words, women

are seen to have less moral agency - ability to discern right from wrong and to act in accordance with ethical principles. And men have therefore taken up the role of discerning for the women what is right from what is wrong so as to act in accordance with the moral principles. But according to St. Thomas Aquinas, humans, whether men or women, are endowed with a conscience that guides their moral decision-making, allowing them to pursue the good and avoid evil. In so doing, the Abakhayo men elevate their moral agency, dignity and worth to a higher level compared to that of the Abakhayo women and their (men) dignity and worth as higher. In essence, while the women could also be considered persons, their sense of personhood is evidently limited.

The final attribute of personhood as presented by St. Thomas is that of the spiritual dimension of personhood. Aquinas situated personhood within a theological framework that acknowledges the spiritual aspect of human nature. To him, while humans possess a material body, they also have an immortal soul created by God. This spiritual dimension of personhood imbues humans with a transcendent purpose and destiny beyond the physical realm.

Looking through the lenses of the Abakhayo people, we notice a convergence on this spiritual aspect. In their conceptualization of a person, dialogues held with the various informants sampled for the study, they appeared to work towards a consensus that a person is one created by God and has a soul. The soul being non-material but spiritual clearly represents this dimension. One fitting expression of this dimension in the Abakhayo worldview is the belief in life after death. However, the differential treatment given to women and men by the Abakhayo is clear evidence of how the personhood of the women is considered to be less than that assigned to men. For instance, when a young lady (girl) dies while still in her father's compound, she is

buried out of the compound and the other related rites are like those done for children. It is important to note that children are perceived not to be persons per se but becoming (not yet adults). For girls and women to be treated in similar ways as those in which children are treated is to make a statement; they (women) are not persons yet, they are persons in the making and apparently, they always remain as such. And for all the females, even if elderly, they are buried after 3 days following their death, a day less than those spent with the bodies of the men before marriage. Their burial rites are also less elaborate compared to those of men. Clearly, despite both men and women being spiritual beings, and despite this spirituality being a fundamental attribute of personhood, the way the Abakhayo people perceive and treat women indicates their conviction that although women are persons, but are lesser persons.

Other attributes of personhood identified by the informants in the study include; possession of knowledge (or capability for knowledge) and wisdom, having some rights and possession of some wealth (including children). While these attributes may not be reflective of St. Thomas idea of personhood, some are. For instance, possession of knowledge and wisdom is closely related to rationality which is one of the attributes proposed by Aquinas. To the Abakhayo, a person is one with knowledge or wisdom and this can be tapped in matters of settling disputes, enacting laws and giving wise counsel. However, in practice, all these activities which are manifestations of these attributes are associated with men rather than women. For instance, women in the Abakhayo way of life seldom make any laws, do not settle community disputes and are rarely approached to provide any counsel let alone wise counsel. This is to say that in the Abakhayo way of life, women are lesser persons as compared to men.

The issue of rights, though not an idea by St. Thomas, is a universally agreed-upon one. Human persons have been argued to have some rights to which they are fundamentally entitled. This idea was observed in the dialogues with the various informants – that a person is one with rights. And indeed, there are certain identifiable human rights among the Abakhayo to which a person is entitled. One of them is the right to own property such as land. However, in the Abakhayo lifestyle, a woman both in their homeland and in the land where they are married do not enjoy this right at all. While in their homes where they were born, it is expected that the girls will get married away and co-own property with her husband and not where she was born. But while at the same home as a married woman, she is perceived as a stranger or an alien who has no right to own property in the land where she is. Even in the event of the death of her husband, a woman cannot inherit the late husband's land but can only hold it in trust for the sons until such a time when they are grown up to the age of owning land and they take it up. In other words their (women's) rights such as the right to own property such as land limited). Therefore, even in their own Abakhayo definition, women are lesser persons as compared to their male counterparts.

Women do not have the opportunity to even own wealth (including children). Children belong to the man and the woman only gives birth and cares for them using resources provided by the man. For this reason, children are identified by the names of the man's lineage and not the woman's. When the children grow up to the time of paying bride price, it's the man who pays bride price for the sons and as well receives bride price from the daughters' suitors and not the woman. In cases the father of the children getting married is dead, this payment and receiving may be done by the brother of the woman's late husband. Simply put, the woman in this case is a lesser person than the man.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

This chapter was devoted to examining the concept of personhood among the Abakhayo people and as well, the concept of personhood of the woman among the Abakhayo people of Western Kenya. The views reported and discussed in this chapter were collected from elders, head teachers, teachers, girls both in school and out of school and some community leaders from the Abakhayo community.

From the discussions held in this chapter, it was noted that the Abakhayo people have an identifiable concept of personhood characterized by some identifiable attributes. It is also notable that the attributes of personhood that operate within the Abakhayo people are not very different from those identified by St. Thomas Aquinas. These include a person having been created by God in a unique way and given power to dominate over other creatures and having the capacity to think hence capable of knowledge and wisdom. Again, the fact that a person is one who is responsible or takes responsibility for his actions and choices was evident in the dialogues with the informants from the Abakhayo community. Finally, the issue of human rights as an attribute of a person was also noted. Bu despite the identification of all these attributes by the respondents, and having listened to the way life is conducted in the community through rites, ceremonies, food and nutrition, governance and so on, it was concluded that although the community looks at people (both men and women) as persons, the ways in which life sustaining processes are sustained in the community portray women as lesser persons as compared to their male counterparts. The next chapter looks at the Abakhayo conception of personhood and girls' education.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **THE ABAKHAYO CONCEPTION OF PERSONHOOD AND GIRLS' EDUCATION**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

The previous chapter has illuminated the concept of personhood from the Abakhayo worldview. In so doing, it was noted that while the Abakhayo people have an identifiable set of attributes for a personhood, those attributes appear to be skewed towards the male gender. In this regard, while both men and women would be considered persons as per the identified attributes, in practice, men are considered to be more of persons than women who are considered as lesser persons. This chapter set out to execute two main tasks, thus: to interrogate the extent to which this understanding affects girls' access to education and to work towards a kind of person-centered model of the girl child access to education that considerably responds to the lived experience of the girls concerning education as revealed by Abakhayo community.

#### **5.1 The Abakhayo Conception of Personhood and the Education of the Girl - child**

The two central questions addressed in this section are; first, how do the Abakhayo people perceive the personhood of the girls; and second; how does this conception affect the access and participation of the girl-child in education? This particular section begins by addressing the first question where it demonstrates how the Abakhayo people conceive of the personhood of the girls.

Much of the discourse on the ontological status of women and girls has displayed a common tendency to emphasize the community rather than the individual person, and more so, emphasizing the male gender over the female one. Done in this way, the metaphysical reality of the person comes second to the reality of the community with the possibility of having the significance of the individual (women and girls) diminished as that of the community is made more prominent. And in the situation of the Abakhayo people, it is the significance, or simply, the personhood of the women and girls that runs a risk of getting diminished and on the extreme, vanquished. This perhaps, and in part, explains the reason why, the female gender category of person in general, and the girl child in particular in the African social thought remains theoretically, philosophically and methodologically problematic. While this has been decried as a source of complexity and even confusion in the search for an understanding of the nature of the personhood of women and girls, this section seeks to approach this task through a careful analysis of the lived experiences of women and girls from the Abakhayo community. It is from this careful analysis that it will be clear how the Abakhayo people conceive of the personhood of the girls in their community.

Following from the dialogues held with the elders, head teachers, teachers and the girls within the Abakhayo community, it was evident that girls are regarded as property in the community. As such, once they attain the age of bearing children, they ought to be married off to start a family. By getting married, the parents expect to get some bride-wealth from them.

“Girls are counted as property in the community and once they hit the age of having children, they should be married off to start a family (Appendix A2).

In yet another interview from village elders, formal education was understood as something that empowers others to create wealth, education to the community. It was also a source of pride. It raises the feelings and expectations of the individual and the family. Equally, girls go to school just as their male counterparts. In fact, in most schools, girls were alleged to outnumber boys. According to these elders, girls do better than boys in primary school but later, they begin to engage in sexual affairs and drop out. In other instances, in times of economic hardship, some parents opt to pull out girls out of school especially when responsibilities become pressing. This reality of poverty was also noted in the views of the participants thus;

Poverty is a big setback and so boys would go to school as preferred children. If girls go to school, they would benefit the in-laws with the knowledge (Appendix A2).

From the foregoing views as reported in the interviews, it can be seen, on the one hand, an affirmation of St. Thomas conception of a person (not as socially differentiated, say; in gender terms hence girls having potentials as their male counterparts – as persons) while on the other hand we see the negative socio-cultural and economic character of the Abakhayo community's conception of person. This is a conception that is dichotomized along gender lines yet again allocating the girls an inferior ontological status. This conception tends to inform many other practices including the distribution of the educational opportunities in ways that disadvantage the girls. This ends up maintaining their (girls) status quo as intended by the Abakhayo as lesser persons.

The preference to take boys to school over girls is so typical that even the few girls who have been given the opportunity to pursue education, which of course is their

right, have done so through rather difficult circumstances. This can be seen from the experience of one female head teacher who shared in an interview, thus:

“In my family, we are seven, three boys and four girls. I am the third-born. My father took us to school at least up to the secondary school level. While in school girls were more than boys as is the case today. After I graduated from class 8, I joined the high school (boarding for girls) and did my school certificate and obtained a B-. But this is where my problems began. I was not selected to join the university and I had two brothers behind me. It took me seven years at home waiting to be taken to college. This only happened after all the two brothers graduated from college” (appendix B1).

It is evident that girls having been conceived of as those who are less of persons, at least from the perspective of the Abakhayo people, are the kind of persons to whom not all the attributes of personhood would apply. In this regard, it would appear that although a girl is a human being created by God as the elders acknowledged, and although a person is *isolo ili namakesi* (an animal with intelligence), the intelligence is required in cases where one is addressing issues that are rather complex and which require some critical thinking. However, given that such issues are the responsibility of the men in the Abakhayo society, it is the men who badly need the development of this intelligence, possibly through education and not really the girls. It would therefore appear that, according to the logic of the Abakhayo people, the chores assigned to women are those that do not require much thinking or application of intellect for that matter. They (girls) therefore do not require much education and if they do, then an elementary one is just sufficient. While this kind of thinking appears to be narrow, it appears to have influenced and guided the provision of educational opportunities among the Abakhayo children. This is how the Abakhayo conception of the person of the girl has undermined, and perhaps, continues to undermine the education of the girl-child.

It is also worthy of noting that the lack of approval of education for the girl-child in the Abakhayo community, which in the arguments sustained in this study, stems from the understanding that women are lesser persons continues to affect girls and women even when they are educated and become a resource to the community but have not gone through the path charted by the cultural contours of a woman's life, that is, they should get married and bear children. In an interview with one head teacher who happened to have children but is not married, it was noted that despite having that level of knowledge and supporting many other younger girls in their education hence improving society, she was still disrespected by the community and even the children she was teaching in school. This was captured in the following excerpt:

“The community considers me useful because I help their children. I am so concerned with girls at school and I do my best to make sure they have useful knowledge especially as they begin their teenage years. I am in primary school so the girls I am working with are young girls who need lots of training in hygiene etc. However, members of the community show disrespect in some ways; since I finished college and began teaching, I have never gotten married. Not that I do not want to get married but most men find me an overgrown woman who is beyond marriage. Since I got pregnant and now got 2 children, members of the community consider me a prostitute, it was even worse when I bought a plot of land and build a house where I stay with my children. I did this because my father would not give me land to build. The cultural practice would not allow it. He always asks me why I am not married to the father of my two children. Sometimes this is also reflected in school discipline, even among the staff. They simply cannot understand why I am not married” (appendix B1).

The kind of experience this female head teacher is going through is one that many other girls would want to avoid. In particular, young girls can draw a lesson from this experience that it is more socially acceptable to get married than to pursue education, after all, this head teacher appears to have pursued education but still compromised her personhood even more. The tone of the head teacher almost implies that in her neighborhoods and community at large, that girl who abandoned school and went for marriage is now more respected than her (head teacher). That she has pursued

education but the education has not helped her reclaim her personhood at all. She has pursued education at the expense of her personhood, at least the little that the community ascribes to women and girls. This certainly devalues the worth of education of the girls which in turn negatively affects their (girls) access and participation in education.

Interestingly, some community members believe that education has no value to girls. This is because, according to them, girls spend a lot of time in school and when they come out they do nothing, despite having wasted years in school. These, according to these community members, are years the girls would have spent giving birth to children. This is a predetermination of the importance of the girls' education (or lack of it as is the case in the Abakhayo context) is evidently not supportive of girl child education Among the Abakhayo people. Accordingly, there are many members of the community who have not adequately invested in girls' education and as well, do not expect much in terms of outcomes. For many of such parents, investing in girls' education does not bring about the expected outcomes. However, while it is common to evaluate the worth of any process, in this case, education, using its outcomes, it is evident that the notion of outcomes as used by the community members here is so narrow as it is confined to cognitive abilities alone without any reference to non-cognitive abilities. It is no wonder that it is therefore commonly concluded, and narrowly so, that education wastes time for girls. In general, therefore, some parents claim to have spent so many resources expecting returns that are not visible.

In some instances within the interviews held with community members, education is viewed, metaphorically, as light. But in their interpretation of this metaphor, they

limit this light to the illumination of the mind and not anything else. In their interpretation, they rightly observe that education adds knowledge to that which a person is born with and hence, they send both boys and girls to school. However, they fail to consider two things; first; the circumstances under which the girls study and second; the multifarious nature of the outcomes of education. To those who hold this view, the outcomes should necessarily be good grades that help a child to transit to the next level; mainly university or college where they will study and eventually land a well-paying job. But girls narrated a host of barriers that make it difficult for them to navigate their way to such a high academic success as compared to the situation of boys yet the treatment given to both girls and boys tends to be differentiated not in a manner that achieves equity but one that condemns the educational path of the girls to one that will not lead them to achieve their educational objectives.

**Interviewer:** What were you doing during the seven years?

**Informant:** I was involved in many jobs around my home area and in towns where my older sister was working.

**Interviewer:** Did you get married?

**Informant:** No. I did not even get pregnant. I was so upset with the way things were happening. I got admitted twice to nursing college and TTC but my father could not pay for me. The reason is simple; I was not a boy. When you eventually joined TTC did your father pay for you? Yes, he did partly. First, he was not interested in my going to college. He paid more attention to my younger brothers and my sister was the one who took me to college after 7 years of waiting. Then my father picked interest and supported part of the fees” (appendix B1).

The sentiments of this informant, present evidence of the fact that there is a tendency to prioritize the path of the boys’ education clear of all the barriers before they can think about the girl if they ever will. This appears to stem from the view of the girls not being fully persons and hence not so much in need of knowledge (education) which is one of the attributes of full personhood. This perception therefore certainly jeopardizes the commitment to education of the girls.

Interviews held with the elders of the community advanced the idea that women (and girls) were not natives in the cultural community where they were born but aliens who will soon get married off to another family even outside the Abakhayo community. By being aliens, they are persons but lesser persons compared to the boys. In this regard, they do not need to have the attributes of personhood in full measures the way boys do. From the earlier discussions, such attributes include possession of knowledge and intellect (through the process of education). In a way, the girls are perceived as those who do not need education and if they do, then they do not need much of it. Just a little knowledge (education), say to primary level was sufficient. Interestingly, even in the current situation where there appears to be enhanced awareness on girl-child education that has seen more girls pursuing education, there were some views that tended to discourage more education for girls based on some apparent unintended outcomes. In this regard, some community members observed that in a situation like today where girls go to school to the level of boys, they would reject boys and remain unmarried but have children with different men, educated girls would stay longer in their homes of birth thereby giving birth at home, educated girls take benefits to the home of the in-laws and that they would despise traditional rules and refuse to get married.

And another belief is that when we educate the girl she will get married to anyone else and take the richness to another place so they saw that they were doing nothing when they educated girls, so the Abakhavo took their money they had to educate boy child and they thought that when they educate boys they will retain their richness instead of educating girls because they will go away with their money (appendix A1).

Whereas this thinking would appear retrogressive and even superstitious, it has, for quite some time, guided the provision of education in many of the Abakhayo households. Other obstacles to girl child education identified by the respondents during the interviews included the idea that; girls are too delicate, they get pregnant

and disappoint parents, poverty kills the hope of educating a girl and these factors work singly or in combinations in undermining the education of girls in Abakhayo community.

Whatever justifications there are against investing in girls' education were further reinforced by elders in a focus group discussion who brought in the aspect of polygamy, which is common practice among the Abakhayo, as a barrier to girls education. In this view, women married in a polygamous family will discourage girls in the family not to bother with education and get married and even cite examples of (uneducated) women who are perceived as leading a good life having abandoned education to get married as second or third wives, thus:

''there could be very many reasons maybe we cannot name all of them but one as you heard from others they are polygamists isn't and it is true that the core wives don't love one another they love their husbands so they play a big role on detriment of these girls to continue like, you will find others question those girls why they should continue learning instead get married is it, that perspectives exist you see you get married and why should you struggle reading and they give funny examples, you see that girl didn't get education but she have a good husband so polygamy plays a big role in destruction of girls to be educated (FGD with Elders, Appendix A3)

It would therefore appear that women in the Abakhayo context, particularly those not educated, have accepted the reality of their circumstances as the norm and are willing to advise the younger women to perpetuate it. This is rather unfortunate since it means that they appear deficient of any power to change anything and liberate themselves from such in dignifying circumstances that maintain their culturally given ontological status to that of being lesser persons.

While the foregoing discussions give a clear hint that one would expect more boys in school compared to their female counterparts, on the contrary, however, interviews with the head teacher revealed that the situation at that moment was different. To the

head teachers, in the normal primary school situation in Bukhayo, girls were slightly more than boys at enrolment. This was attributed to a higher mortality rate for boys compared to that of the girls. Apparently, more boys seem to die in infancy compared to girls. To explain this further, it was noted in that interview held with the head teacher that when unmarried girls become pregnant and give birth to boys, they try to find ways of doing away with the child because of the clan factor. According to tradition, a boy-child must own land which he inherits from his father. When a girl becomes pregnant and she is not sure that the father of the unborn child will accept paternity and the associated responsibilities when the child is born, they feel awful since they are carrying a child who lacks the entitlements of a male child as per the community. This gives them a feeling that the child they are carrying will be perceived as less of a person even though putting on the body of a man – something that is unbearable for a male child in the community. Should the pregnant girl keep the pregnancy, the situation will become worse especially if she happens to get married (within the same cultural boundaries). A boy is hardly accepted in marriage compared to the girl-child. In this case, girls who become pregnant are likely to opt for procuring an abortion as the surest way of avoiding the odds associated with this situation.

In a way, the whole range of difficulty that troubles such a pregnant girl certainly centers on the ontological position ascribed to the males as those with attributes of personhood and which should be guarded at all costs. Everything must be done to ensure that the boy or man has all they need to have as a person or never to exist if they are going to appear less of that. Girls are therefore dehumanized to the extent that having been ascribed with the ontological status of lesser persons, they end up acting

like real lesser persons, sometimes, to ensure the personhood of the boys. While in many cases they are made to, there are times when they even voluntarily give up their educational opportunities in favour of the boys. If education is one of the attributes of personhood, then this becomes a case of girls giving up the opportunity to enhance their personhood through the pursuit of education to the boys. This mentality works against the state of access and participation of girls in education.

But again, following the educational journey and trends of boys and girls, the head teacher's narrative indicates a change of states of affairs as they (boys and girls) progress in their studies. From the interview with the head teacher, at the point of completion of class 8 (which was the level at which one sat for their Primary Leaving Examinations – KCPE), there are more boys remaining in school compared to the girls who have dropped out for various reasons including; early pregnancies, uncontrolled effects of adolescence on girls, menstruation period affects girls while others just opt to leave school, some girls are orphaned or from single mothers hence lack the relevant support in their education processes, most girls living with grandmothers hence lack appropriate and adequate parental care. And generally speaking, there was an apparent tendency among the Abakhayo people to prefer a boy to a girl even in terms of care.

It is therefore notable at this point that even though the girl-child has a good start at the education journey, she meets so many barriers along the way and which, from the interview, are not taken so seriously. Even when the girl child begins to experience certain challenges that put her on the path to dropping out of school, the community does not seem to have any known mechanisms of countering them and shielding the

girl from their adverse effects. In fact, the general perception of the members of the community towards girls' education is one factor that appears to accommodate these barriers. Not much effort from the community appears to be directed towards addressing these barriers. It would therefore appear that for as long as the boy child's interests are taken care of, because he is the 'Mundu' (person), all is well. The girl and her identity does not seem to warrant much concern, after all, she is not a "Mundu" (person), at least from the conception of personhood as presented from the Abakhayo people's point of view.

In some other focused group discussions with head teachers, there were some views that appeared to contradict the foregoing situation. Accordingly, in some areas within the Abakhayo community, school statistics indicated that in terms of enrolment right from primary schools, there was higher enrolment of girls enrolled compared to that of the boys.

Now the current trend is that after class 8 some boys drop out to take up jobs like bodaboda for economic purposes to support their poor families. About 80-90% of girls complete their primary school. There is a small percentage of 10% that drop out. This dropout percentage is much less than that of the boys. The reasons for this 10% dropout include, early pregnancy, hard economic situations at home – poverty, peer group influence and early marriages (appendix A2).

From the views presented in the excerpt above, it is possible to identify at least two issues that are associated with the concept of personhood. The first one is the issue of girls dropping out for reasons that include poverty. When a household is experiencing hard economic times, the girls would be expected to cede their right to education in favour of the boys. This is considered normal in the Abakhayo context, after all, girls do not need much education (knowledge) as they are not fully Mundu (person). Again, even when their education journey is full of barriers, not much effort is in place to address them. The second issue is that of an emerging trend where boys are

dropping out of school at a higher rate as compared to the girls. These boys drop out of school to go look for jobs so that they can support their families. They therefore end up in the transport sector where they get hired by motorcycle owners to ride those motorcycles transporting people and goods to various destinations for a pay and bring the money back to the owner of the motorcycle every evening and earn some commission from the day's proceeds. This is partly an issue of personhood in such a way that the Abakhayo people's conception of a person associates a person with taking responsibility. Boys are persons in the making and as such, they are obliged to be heads of families which involves providing for those families. Not being able to provide for one's compromises a man's personhood. Therefore, in a situation of increased unemployment even for those who have gone to school, coupled with the need to preserve their status as persons, boys drop out of school to begin looking for ways in which they can play out their responsibility by providing for their families partly as a way of preserving their personhood. In the final analysis therefore, it is notable that the Abakhayo conception of personhood is one that makes it acceptable for boys to abandon school to pursue other activities that affirm their personhood as well as one that makes it unnecessary for girls to perceive it as a fundamental right hence not committed to pursuing it. It is a conception that fails to highlight the fundamental importance of education particularly for the girls.

Another one of the attributes of a person as pointed out in the preceding sections is the possession of rights. A person is one with some entitlements (rights) which if and when withdrawn or compromised, then the person's humanity is equally compromised. Boys, in the Abakhayo worldview, are persons (in the making) and hence have some entitlements or rights. These include the right to own property, the

right to participate in various forums and even the right to education. However, while the Abakhayo people have this notion of rights as part of the attributes of a person, they do not seem to have women and girls as those that enjoy these rights and if they do, then women and girls only enjoy these rights to a very limited extent. And as far as education. But on the contrary, it appears that the few Abakhayo women who have gone to school know that education is a right and can make you claim your rights and earn you more status akin to that of the male gender who are considered as fully persons. This can be noted from the views of one of the respondents who is a female teacher thus:

**Interviewer:** Do you think going to school was important?

**Respondent:** Sure. Without it, I would be a homemaker without any rights in the community. Today, even if they think that I do not deserve respect, they do that in low tones. It is not pronounced for nobody can tell you directly. Because they know, I have a job” (appendix B1).

Apparently, the notion that education is a good thing and can help one reclaim their rights including the right to education appears to be slowly percolating into the girls’ consciousness as some of those interviewed and particularly those that had children indicated that they would wish to go back to school or better still, pursue any other vocational courses. It is notable that they preferred going back to school to getting married at their age. Nonetheless, they raised concern over the hostile environment that exists in the school when they would be readmitted that include discouragement from some community members and harassment by their fellow learners especially boys who see them as women who are supposedly married rather than school learners.

This is captured in the following excerpt:

Secondary schools are very welcoming for those who have enrolled but primary schools are cruel to girls who become pregnant and want to return to school. Some boys have a bad attitude towards girls who are pregnant or have a child. They say they (re-enrolling girls) are now outdated. They ask them to go get married to old men (appendix B1).

There is an apparent window of hope that can be utilized in getting to improve the access and participation of girls to school as well as sustaining them throughout the various transition stages given that the girls who even get pregnant and get children are still willing to go back to school. What this means is that the earlier mentality the girls had as those who do not need education but meant for marriage is slowly changing in a manner that works towards the direction of the girls reclaiming their ontological status as persons like their male counterparts.

What, perhaps, needs to be addressed are the cultural principles of the Abakhayo people in the light of the existing policies on educational access and pursuit as detailed in the various policies both national and international. There is an apparent need to review the cultural basis of the Abakhayo conceptualization of personhood with a view of highlighting its aspects that work against the education of the girls. Further there is an apparent need to challenge the ways in which the Abakhayo conception of personhood denies the girls the status of full personhood by highlighting the ways in which such a conception is not only limiting but also detrimental to the wholesome growth and development of the community at large.

## **5.2 A Conceptual Model of the Girl Child as a Person in the Community**

The foregoing sections have presented the conceptualization of the personhood of the woman and that of the girl-child. Earlier in the literature reviewed, the study examined some discussions on the conceptualization of the African woman and her ontology, theoretical-philosophical gaps, which have continued to diminish the ontological possibility and concreteness of the female gender category of person in general and the girl child in particular. In other words, the notion of person is not lacking in most African societies and so is for the Abakhayo community. One notable trend in most of these conceptual models is that of having the personhood of the

female gender category being lumped up and subsumed within the community thereby giving a communitarian model of understanding the personhood of women and that of the girls. These models are community centred and in some cases, male centred. In this way, women in general and girls in this particular case have their need for things like education provided for since they are lesser persons.

An examination of the Abakhayo community's conception of person and particularly that of the women and girls has been found to be rather limiting in many aspects to the extent that women are not considered as fully persons. This has been further entrenched into their consciousness through practices and values that have been in place for a long time making it normal to appreciate the stereotypes created there from, even by the women themselves as implied in Anyango (2014). All these have led to the denial of the girl child an opportunity to pursue education as a human right. This paints such a retrogressive state of affairs, and certainly calls for a shift in a conceptual model of personhood, to one that is sensitive to the need to conceive of women and girls as persons like their male counterparts hence a more progressive model.

In seeking to propose a person-centred model of a girl child, this section seeks to promote a concept of personhood of the women and girls and which recognizes the dignity and worth of the women and girls. It is a model that places the dignity and worth of the girls in the collective and patriarchal power of society. As has been noted, when children are born, they are not yet persons but with time, as they grow through the stages, they acquire more of the attributes of personhood and systematically become persons. This is different from the Abakhayo model that appears pre-determinative of personhood where there are attributes of personhood but in the processes of human development, culture and socialization, the men and boys

tend to be given more opportunities to develop those attributes hence getting exposed to higher chances of becoming persons than those attributes than women and girls. In fact, in certain instances, as already seen in certain declarative statements in the data collected, personhood appears to be exclusively a male attribute.

This kind of model appears to be supported by Menkiti (2004) and Mbiti (1995) to the extent that a person acquires the status of person progressively through successful negotiations of the challenges one faces at each stage. However, the point of divergence between these two is seen where the Abakhayo one tends to tilt the development of these traits towards the direction of the men. Therefore, while both Mbiti and Menkiti's ontological view personhood as that which involves progression the Abakhayo's conception appears to identify this progression with the male gender category in its cultural practices and socialization patterns. In this regard, since male persons progressively act more in the course of human life in the community, their personhood is more regarded prominently than that of their female counterparts. This view must be reviewed with a view to recognizing personhood of both men and women hence boys and girls primarily as that of human beings before anything else. All the other attributes must be predicated on the premise that a person is first of all a human being before it becomes anything else. In this way, the girl-child will have been captured and recognized in the conceptualization of personhood as opposed to the current conceptualization that tends to exclude women and girls.

In proposing a person centered model of a girl child is to say that existential personhood calls upon Abakhayo community to recognize the dignity and worth of the individual. This places the dignity and worth of the individual above the collective power of the community. In creating a conceptual model of a girl as a person, it involves considering aspects that define her identity, her experience and her

development in the community. When considering her identity, it means that the community must be made aware that being a girl is influenced by biological factors and not the aspect of personhood. She is first a person and while in the community, the biological and cultural factors influence her life to live and act a girl different from boy. The community leaning on her biological differences denies her right to feel confidence and thus her self-esteem lowered.

Secondly, to perceive a girl as worth builds her abilities. This can be shaped from the family to peer groups and to the community. If the communal celebrations and rituals turn the attention to the worth and abilities of the girl, self-esteem would be realized in girls and this would steam up confidence. This means that in cooperating cultural aspects such as language, religion, music, proverbs, storytelling shapes the world view of the girl child and contributes immensely on building the cultural identity of the girl child, thus would form a great model of a girl child in the Abakhayo community.

The development stages of a girl are not different from that of a boy. To emulate Plato's tripartite theory (Plato), that one is born with spirit (soul), reason and appetites but the reason and appetite are dormant until the school going age. At school, the child develops reason that later becomes important in controlling the appetites, these aspects are common to both boys and girls in the community.

Abakhayo is no exception. If that is true, then the cognitive development of the girl to reason and solve problems is influenced by education and life experiences that both girls and boys experience in the community. In developing the model of a girl in the community, it must be recognized that formation of social skills and relationships has nothing to do with the gender. A girl child can develop and influence both her family

and community in the same manner a boy would do. If this is true, her social development must be accorded equal rights and protection.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the concept of personhood as applied to the women and girls according to the Abakhayo people and how this has affected the provision of education to the girls in particular. The chapter has found out that while there is a clearly identifiable conception of personhood among the Abakhayo people with clearly identifiable attributes, these attributes tend to highlight or recognize men and boys more than it does to the women and girls with the result that girls' personhood is neither fully developed nor acknowledged. This makes the girls be conceived of as lesser persons. As lesser persons, they do not enjoy certain entitlements or rights which, unfortunately, involve the right to education. It is in this sense that the conception of personhood among the Abakhayo undermines girls' education.

This being the case, the chapter also sought to work towards a kind of person-centered model of the girl child's access to education that considerably responds to the lived experience of the girls concerning education as revealed by the Abakhayo community. In this regard, it was, therefore, argued that there is a need to, first, conceive of personhood from an individual person' perspective rather than a communitarian perspective that tends to subsume the personhood of the girls within the larger community. Second, the conceptual model of personhood by the Abakhayo people must necessarily begin by acknowledging that personhood begins with being a human person first before other attributes are brought to bear on the conception.

## CHAPTER SIX

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 6.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the summary, conclusions and recommendations of this study. The summary is based on the study objectives while the conclusions are drawn from the research questions. At the end of the chapter, there are two sets of recommendations: one, those drawn from the study findings and two, those that are geared towards further research.

#### 6.1 Summary

This study was guided by four research questions. The first objective sought to explain the concept of personhood in the light of the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas. On this objective, the study found out that according to St Thomas, a person focuses on the human being as a unique, irreplaceable and incommunicable member of a human species. That personhood is an identity of a person that cannot be shared or cannot be universal but he shares in common as a member of the human species (Wojtyla 1993). In this context, you can talk of there being many human beings, but there is only one person. In this sense a person can only be defined but cannot be shared. For instance, if you see a flower, you will call it a flower because it belongs to the family or the species of flowers but it remains a distinct flower that you do not know its scientific name. Therefore, the Thomistic ontology understands a person as one who can fulfill his life as an individual among others in the community. It implies that each has the capacity for self realization and that the community can propel a person to self-realization because a person acts in the environment where similar species act. Whether male or female, it matters not, all have similar rights and capacities to act in life.

The second objective sought to elucidate the Abakhayo people's understanding of the concept of personhood. To the Abakhayo, a person is one with knowledge and this is reflected in matters of settling disputes, law enactments and wise counsels in the community. However, in practice these attributes are associated with men and not women. Women do not enact laws, neither are they allowed to offer wise counsels. They are also not allowed to settle disputes and this gives them a rank of lower person in comparison to men. Secondly, although it is widely acceptable that a person is one with entitlements in the community, women do not enjoy this right. They do not own property and even the children they give birth to, belong to the husband. In the event the husband dies; the woman holds the property in trust waiting for the son to take over when he is of age. This is also reflected in the fact that women do not pay dowry, it's the man who does and in this respect women are not regarded as persons in the context of Aquinas, rather the community decides their destiny. They cannot make themselves in the community, the community makes and decides, what they should do and what they are.

The third objective sought to assess the extent to which the understanding of the Abakhayo concept of person impacts on the girl child's access to education as a human right. Families that have both boys and girls, education preference is given to boys. Many a time, girls are encouraged to get married and in the event that dowry is paid, it would be used to keep the brother in school. Where the girls are in school, two things seem apparent that determines their continued stay at school. First, in the situation of poverty and the family is unable to keep children in school if the girl dropped out of school as a result of poverty, she would be encouraged to get married while the family will struggle to keep boys in school. When a household is experiencing hard economic times, the girls would be expected to cede their right to

education in favour of the boys. This is considered normal in the Abakhayo context, after all, girls do not need much education (knowledge) as they are not fully Mundu (person). Again, even when their education journey is full of barriers, not much effort is in place to address them. The second issue is that of an emerging trend where boys are dropping out of school at a higher rate as compared to the girls. These boys drop out of school to go look for jobs so that they can support their families. They therefore end up in the transport sector where they get hired by motorcycle owners to ride those motorcycles transporting people and goods to various destinations for a pay and bring the money back to the owner of the motorcycle every evening and earn some commission from the day's proceeds. This is partly an issue of personhood in such a way that the Abakhayo people's conception of a person associates a person with taking responsibility. Boys are persons in the making and as such, they are obliged to be heads of families which involves providing for those families. When they express the need to return to school, they are quickly accepted back in school. The Bakhayo people believe that this is important in securing boys' futures, while to the girl, marriage secures their future.

The fourth objective sought to propose a person - centered model of the girl child's access to education as a human right among the Abakhayo people. The Abakhayo's conception of person and particularly that of women is limited in many aspects because women are not considered fully persons. Through generations of practices this has entrenched into the consciousness of the community as a value and this has led to denial of girl child opportunity to pursue education as a human right. The research proposes a person centred model of a girl child that seeks to promote a concept of personhood which recognizes the dignity and worth of women in the community. Aquinas' understanding recognizes this aspect that the concept equalizes

all persons and gives a chance to each to make him/herself in the community. This is void of favourism. When personhood is seen as a declaration in favour of boys, then it becomes exclusively a male attribute as it appears among the Abakhayo. However, the model proposed is supported by Menkiti (2004) where an understanding of the concept of “person” requires one to progressively succeed through negotiations and challenges that face one in each stage, This allows a the “person” to make the self without the favourism from the cultural community. This view recognizes the personhood of both men and women hence boys and girls primarily are seen as human beings before anything else. All the other attributes must be predicated on the premise that a person is first of all a human being before it becomes anything else. In this way, the girl-child will have been captured and recognized in the conceptualization of personhood as opposed to the current conceptualization that tends to exclude female children.

## **6.2 Conclusions**

This study sought to answer four questions. (i) The first question was “How can the concept of personhood in the light of the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas be explained?” The study noted that the concept of personhood according to St. Thomas Aquinas is based on his metaphysical system, Aquinas expounded upon the notion of personhood, which he derived from his understanding of metaphysical principles such as essence, existence, and intellect.

First, Aquinas explained essence as referring to the nature of a thing, while existence refers to its actual being. According to Aquinas, existence is not inherent in the essence of things but is rather received from an external source, which he identified as God. In humans, essence refers to our nature as rational animals, while existence is the actuality of our being in the world.

Secondly, Aquinas emphasized the role of intellect in defining personhood. He argued that humans possess intellect, which distinguishes them from non-rational beings.

Thirdly, Aquinas viewed human beings as a composite of body and soul, where the soul is the form of the body. This union of body and soul constitutes a substantial unity that defines the person. While the body provides the material aspect of human existence, it is the soul, particularly the rational soul, which animates the body and imparts personhood.

Fourthly, Aquinas believed that each person possesses inherent dignity by virtue of their rational nature and their capacity for moral agency. Therefore, Aquinas's understanding of personhood in his metaphysics is deeply rooted in the distinction between essence and existence, the role of intellect and rationality, and the inherent dignity and purpose of human life. Personhood, according to Aquinas, encompasses both the material and spiritual aspects of human existence and does not draw a line between male and female. Both enjoy the characteristics of personhood and have equal capacity to make him/herself in a given environment.

The second question was: “How can the Abakhayo people’s understanding of the concept of personhood of a woman be elucidated?” That according to the Abakhayo a person is one who possesses knowledge that can enact laws and offer guidance. This is clearly one who has the intellect to act in the environment. Abakhayo people predicate all this to male function where women, though possessing intellect, do not share in. Females are considered lesser persons given the fact that they cannot act in enacting laws of the community, nor are they allowed to participate in offering needed guidance.

The third question was, “To what extent has the understanding of the Abakhayo concept of person impacted the girl child's access to education as a human right?” This understanding has given advantage to boys and not girls. In the situation of poverty, girls are given out for marriage so that the dowry given can be used to educate boys. This can be interpreted as girls being offered for sale to gain income that can educate boys. When a similar situation happens to the boy, he is allowed to go seek for activities that can generate income and when he makes an income, he can be allowed back to school. This understanding has impacted girls’ education negatively and does not recognize equal chance to girls as human beings.

The fourth question was, “To what person centered model of the girl child's access to education as a human right among the Abakhayo people does you propose?” The limited perception of girls as less person among the Abakhayo people has lessened the ability of women to participate in education as equals in the community. The research proposes a person centred model of the girl child that seeks to promote a concept of personhood which recognizes the dignity and worth of women among the Abakhayo people. The denial of the girl child's opportunity to pursue education as a human right paints a retrogressive state of affairs and thus a shift to a conceptual model of personhood that is sensitive to the needs of women as a person. This is in agreement with the Aquinas understanding of the concept of person. This is the need to conceive personhood from an individual person’s perspective as opposed to one that is communitarian. If the community defines personhood, then the aspect of favourism sneaks in, a fact that disadvantages girls in this context.

### **6.3 Recommendations**

The study came up with two sets of recommendations; one that is based on the findings of the study and the other that identifies other areas for further study and research.

#### **6.3.1 Recommendations based on the findings of the study**

The study was an effort in understanding the concept of a person. There is a need to make this concept practical in terms of inculcating values of inter-human relations and secondly, the socio-cultural interactions. The curriculum developers can be encouraged to develop one that is designed to encourage health inter human relations. Secondly, there is a need for stricter implementation of laws relating to human relations especially in regard to the right to education of the girl child.

#### **6.3.2 Recommendations based on further research**

The study recommends that a similar study be carried out to other communities where the girl child is neglected or where a female person is looked upon as of one of lower rank. Secondly, there is a need to unravel the interplay between personhood and ethics. Those distinctions between persons and mere biological human beings are made given different grounds on which they exist.

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## APPENDIX ONE

### RESEARCH DIALOGUE GUIDELINES

#### **OBJECTIVES:**

This study will be carried to achieve the following specific objectives:

- i. Explain the concept of personhood in the light of the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas.
- ii. Elucidate the Abakhayo people's understanding of the concept of personhood of a woman.
- iii. Assess the extent to which the understanding of the Abakhayo concept of person has impacted on the girl child access to education as a human right
- iv. Propose a person - centered model of the girl child access to education as a human right among the Abakhayo people.

#### **Guided dialogue with the elders (Ethnographic approach)**

1. Who do you think is a person according to you? How would you define a person to be?
2. Who is a person (Omundu) according to the Abakhayo? How do the Abakhayo define a person?
3. What is the role of a person in the community? What are the basic characteristics/properties that the definition of the term person must include?
4. Is a woman considered a person among the Abakhayo?
5. What is the role of a woman in the community? Is a woman a person according to the Abakhayo conception of the word?
6. How does the community treat women? Does the Abakhayo community/culture treat women as persons?
7. Are women involved in any decision making in the Abakhayo community/culture?
8. If so which particular decisions are put a side for women?
- 8.1 If not, what reasons does the community give?
9. Are women allowed to access resources? If so what resources are they allowed to access?
10. Is a woman entitled to any inheritance? What happens when the husband dies?
11. Are girls allowed to attend school? Are girls given opportunities to pursue schooling to the highest possible level that one can reach? Or are there levels of education that are considered sufficient for girls? Given a boy and girl in a strained economic situation, whom would you take to school? What reasons do you give for your answer?
12. What is the meaning of education to you?

13. If you slaughtered a chicken at home would you consider girls eating it?
14. If so what part of chicken would you share with girls and what reasons would you have?

**Dialogue with school administration (head teachers, principals / deputies)**

1. Who is a person?
2. Are girls considered as persons in the community?
3. What is the ration of girls joining schools compared to boys?
4. What is the explanation for the difference?
5. How many girls complete school compared to the number enrolled?
6. What reasons do you give for your answer?
7. Are girls given equal opportunity at enrolment? Please give some reasons for the explanation
8. What are the real statistics of boy/girl enrolment (both at enrollment and at finish)?  
Interrogate more on access, participation, performance, completion, transition, placement at college and types of courses pursued by girls at college, and the type of jobs they get.

**Dialogue with girls (15-20years old and those in some profession)**

1. Who is a person according to you?
2. Do you consider yourselves as persons?
3. Do you consider going to school as good?
4. What do you understand what formal education means?
5. Do you think it's your right to attend school?
6. What challenges do you face at school?
7. How supportive are your parents in your academic pursuits?
8. Does the community consider a good thing for a girl to be in school?
9. Do boys in your class think that you should be in school?
10. How about teachers, are they supportive?  
Interrogate more on access, participation, performance, completion, transition, placement at college and types of courses pursued by girls at college, and the type of jobs they get.

Group 1: School drop outs aged between 15 to 20 years

Group 2: School girls in their last year of schooling (both primary and high school)

Group 3: individual girls with college education (mostly in some profession)

## APPENDIX A1

### ETHNOGRAPHIC DIALOGUES ONE

**Dialogue with IDUNU WAOGARA, a Mukhayo elder from Mabunge village aged 70 years old.**

**Idunu went to school up to std 7 and he speaks both English and Kiswahili.**

#### **Who is person?**

In our discussion, we referred Person to be equivalent to Mundu in Kikhayo.

Idunu referred person to the households, that is father and mother, but when you visit a household and find mother present, when you ask for mundu becomes the male household.

He also said that mundu refers to the corpse (dead body). When a person dies, the dead drops the name that was known and simply becomes mundu

Among the children, mundu is the older male child and the rest are simply children.

And lastly, he says, that any child born from a woman regardless of sex is mundu. This is so when you are trying to find out whether the woman has been productive in the community or not. So one could ask, has she ever given birth to mundu. Even dead fetus is referred to mundu as long as it was buried in the homestead

#### **What is the role of the person?**

- a) All married persons are in-charge of the family and grows to become an elder.
- b) Once he brings up children to maturity, his role becomes to pay dowry for his sons and receive dowry for the daughters that is is Kikhayo: *Akhwera khandi akhwerwa*
- c) The term Omwami which refers to a leader who is endowed with wealth, can only be a male person. This is a characteristic of a person who is rich.
- d) Person is one who has a home that he has built himself. He becomes the owner of the home
- e) Woman can also be referred to as a person but at a lower degree. In the absence of the husband, she cannot pay or receive dowry of her children. She must use brothers or cousins of the husband. This is done so in respect of the person of the home who is the husband.

#### **Role of a woman**

- a) Entertain the husband
- b) Cook for the family
- c) To collect firewood
- d) To fetch water
- e) Clean the house
- f) Look after the children
- g) Store keeper that is built by person
- h) Advice of young adolescent girls

#### **Treatment of women**

- a) Woman is the manager caretaker of the house

- b) She milks cows and when a goat or a cow is slaughtered, she is allowed to eat the upper part of the animals, that is from ribs to the neck
- c) As for the chicken, girls are allowed to eat until the age of marriage. When she gets married, she abandons eating chicken and only cooks for the husband. As a girl, she is only allowed to eat chicken wings for she will fly away.
- d) Gizzard in chicken is the part in the stomach that represents the homestead and girls are not allowed to eat that part. Only the person of the home and his absence, the elder son can eat it.
- e) Woman is treated as a servant in the homestead. If she does not bear children, her clan has to replace her by another young girl capable of bearing children. If dies childless, she is taken to the grave through backdoor.

#### **Decision making**

- a) Girls and women in general are not allowed in elders meeting
- b) Traditional leaker (lutsekhe) was only for male persons. A woman could probably be used as water refile

#### **Resources and inheritance**

- a) Girls owns nothing in the family and the mother too can only till the land but cannot own it.
- b) As long as the children existed, if the husband died, the woman would till the land waiting to leave it to the son. In the absence of the son, the land would be taken by a brother of the husband or even a cousin in the absence of the brother.
- c) The woman would also be inherited when the husband dies. Elderly woman would be inherited by the grandson. The inheritance was not necessarily for sex, but just a ritual that needs to pass.
- d) A situation where a couple dies at the same time, like in the accident, a woman is buried first. Then the burial of the husband would come as the last event.

#### **Girls and school**

Girls are counted as property in the community and once they hit the age of having children, they should be married off to start a family. School is not a must, but child bearing is a must.

Poverty is a big setback and so boys would go to school as preferred children.

If girls go to school, they would benefit the in-laws with the knowledge.

#### **What is education?**

Education enlighten one from where he did not know to give more light

## APPENDIX A2

### ETHNOGRAPHIC DIALOGUE TWO

#### **Dialogues with EA AND EB BOTH AGED 65 YEARS OLD.**

**They both went to school to secondary school level and are retired school teachers**

#### **Who is a person?**

Person is anyone born a live and found in a homestead.

Person is the man responsible of a homestead. If there are issues at home the person is responsible.

They view man to be more of person than woman which means woman is lesser person.

Given that the woman does not belong to the clan, she gets adopted to the clan and in case of death she gets buried in the custom of the husband. Young girls dyeing at home they are buried like any child of the clan, but if the girls were of the age marriage and she was not, she would be buried like an alien, outside the compound on the fence. Females will be buried after 3 days while men after 4 days.

Omundu or person is the male individual who is the owner of the homestead. The woman individual is only adopted there and has lesser rights and responsibilities

#### **Role of the person**

- a) Provider of the family
- b) He is entrusted to looking for the resources
- c) The person is responsible for acquiring the shamba on which the homestead is put up
- d) Provides security to the homestead
- e) Gives direction to the homestead by making crucial decisions in the family

#### **Characteristics**

- a) Caring
- b) Confident
- c) Capable of giving advice
- d) Have leadership qualities

#### **Females**

- a) This is a person of lesser value compared to man. This partly so because she does not belong to the clan and so she cannot be consulted.
- b) In the absence of the husband, a brother of the husband is consulted. Like is any child has issues with marriage, she cannot discuss the issues. They will want a person to discuss, and the person in this case if the brother of the husband.

#### **Woman role in the community**

- a) She is a helper
- b) Helps the person to expand the lineage by giving birth to children who would belong to the man
- c) She is a worker in the homestead

#### **Decision making**

- a) Women are not involved in decision making
- b) She can only offer her opinion privately when man consults her

- c) She is not allowed to attend community public meeting unless if she is a witness

### **Specific responsibilities**

- a) She is a guide to female children in the household
- b) Cooking for the family
- c) Working in the family garden
- d) Keep chicken and milk cows

### **Community roles**

- a) In the community funerals, women are expected to be cooks
- b) Look for firewood, water, serve guests, etc.
- c) Guide newly married girls

### **Resources**

- a) Women would be allowed to keep chicken
- b) Allowed to milk but cows belonged to the man

### **Inheritance**

- a) Girls and women are not allowed to inherit anything; all the children belong to the man thus community in situation where the man dies. In a situation where the husband dies, the woman still remains as the property of the clan.
- b) Land as property belongs to the man and in the situation of death its transferred to the sons and incase he never had sons, it would belong to the husband's brother or the clan

### **What happens to the girl?**

- a) Are expected to get married and leave homestead
- b) Girls are only attached to the brother (boy child) where brothers are not, cousins would play the role
- c) For schooling, girls would be allowed to attend school. For boys they are allowed to attend school and pursue higher education, whether with low grades or not
- d) Girls are not allowed to stay long in school for they will squander their chances of having children
- e) Boys have a chance to remain in the homestead while girls would leave. And for this reason, boys married and extended the lineage of the father while girls extend the lineage of the in-laws.

### **Boys roles**

- a) Boys remains in the homestead
- b) Marry and expand the ideas of the father
- c) Expand the family lineage
- d) Boys empower the family

### **Girls and education**

- a) Empower the in-laws
- b) The expand the lineage of the in-laws
- c) They leave homestead and becomes foreign
- d) They drop out of school early due to early marriages, peer group sexual pressure and early pregnancies.
- e) Girls fear not to be married if they delay and grow older in school and also most men who are ready to marry do not prefer older girls, they prefer younger girls

- f) They also don't prefer girls who have gone to college. They are stubborn and demanding

### **Meaning of Education**

- a) Formal education empowered to create wealth
- b) to the community it's also a source of pride
- c) It raises the feeling and expectations of the individual and the family
- d) Girls go to school equally as boys and in most school girls are more. According to these elders, girls do better than boys in primary school but engage in sexual affairs and drop out.
- e) Some parents want girls out of school when responsibilities become pressing. That is the reality of poverty.
- f) However, some community members' belief that education has no value to girls for the spent a lot of time in school and when they come out they do nothing, yet they have wasted years they would give birth to children. So education it wastes time for girls.
- g) Some parents claim to have spent so much resources expecting returns that are not visible

### **Food sharing**

- a) That when sharing food at home, boys would be separated to eat with the father and they would be given more food compared to what is given to the girls who would eat with the mother or the grandmother
- b) Only young girls and adolescent girls are allowed to eat chicken when slaughtered at home. Once married, a girl would be stopped by the orders of the community to stop eating chicken. The reason for this was that chicken is a small bird that cannot feed a big family. And since the girl is expected to have boys then it would be reserved for the husband and the boys. She needs to prepare herself psychologically to give up the practice.
- c) If a cow or goat is slaughtered, girls would eat kidneys and for the chicken, they would be served with wings.

### **Child labour**

Newly married girls, when they get their first child, the community has the practice of offering her family a younger girl regardless whether she goes to school or not for the purpose of looking or helping the sister or cousin with the child and house chores. The practice of the family sending a young girl to take care of the child is child labour, but at the same time denies the girl from attending school

### **Interview three**

**Bukheri wa Paulo 72 years old elder. He attended school up class four**

### **Who is a person**

Person (Mundu) is one who seem to have some vision or one with the vision of the family, however, both male and female are person. Since the woman is not a vision holder, she becomes a little lesser in terms of definition.

Responsibilities/roles of a woman

- a) Woman is the custodian of the house
- b) She is the home supervisor who takes care of the things that belong to the family

- c) She is also the store keeper or looks after milk but what is kept in the store is brought by man
- d) Milking is also her role in the family

### **Property**

- a) A woman cannot own land as a form of property. When the husband dies, she becomes the custodian or the holder of land on behalf of the sons.

### **Inheritance**

She is inherited after the death of the husband and that person to inherit her has to come from the clan of the husband. But she is free to choose the one she wants and even drop the one who inherits her to another choice of her.

### **Education**

Education is viewed as light. It illuminates the mind. Education adds knowledge to one you are born with. Both boys and girls are allowed to go to school

### **Girls and the community**

In the family, girls would be treated differently when eating. They would be denied eating things like chicken and where chicken is slaughtered and there is no man, the gizzard would be thrown away. As the girls ate chicken, they would be denied chicken as a condition that they should now get married or they are ready for marriage. Girls ate mostly legs of the chicken, neck, breast and head. The rest males ate. If married and a women eat chicken, it would be taken as a sign of disrespect to the husband.

## APPENDIX A3

### ETHNOGRAPHIC DIALOGUE THREE

#### SCHEDULED DIALOGUE WITH A FOCUSED GROUP

Respondent	Age	Profession
Participant 1 _AM	72 years	Retired teacher
Participant 2 _JM	68 years	Former politician - councilor
Participant 3 _DW	76 years	Community organizer Bukhayo association
Participant 4 _WT	79 years	Retired sub-chief
Participant 5 _MD	70 years	Retired teacher
Participant 6 _NJ	70 years	Retired teacher
Participant 7 -CO	59 years	Head teacher-primary

#### **Who is a person (mundu)?**

All agreed is person is something that has value. It's a God's creation that is different from an animal. They made a difference between an animal and a human being. However, person is unique because is an animal with intelligence (*isolo ili nende makesi*). Intellect is what makes a person feel when one is lost. Person is one who can talk and reason, person is a developed human person. Behavior has something to do with person. Person is the husband woman is his helper.

Traditional tax was never charges to a home without a man. For a home to qualify t pay tax, there must be a man, in a situation the man id deceased, the family too never paid tax.

#### **Role of person**

Person provided security, protection, food, shelter and clothing to date.

He was also charged with responsibility of giving direction on the issues at home.

He was responsible for property sharing and solving disputes in the family.

#### **Property**

Person was responsible for all the property

In his absence the clan members would take charge. The family here connotes family members, male and females plus the cousins of the father's side

#### **Male person**

This was considered the pillar of the household. And any adult male who was unmarried had no value in the community thus not considered as person

For inheritance, brothers and cousins on the side of the father would take charge of the property in case the man did not sire a boy.

#### **Role of a woman in the family**

Give birth to children

Take care of the property

Look after the children by cooking for the family

Advice girls giving what they expect when they get married

To ensure that her son gets a cook (wife) through talking to aunties, grandmother, sister, mother etc

She also was responsible for talking to other people in the community to understand their opinion regarding the husband and she would release secrets to the husband. That is whatever she would get being talked about the husband, she would tell her husband. That is how husbands or persons knew what opinion community people had towards them.

**Other roles include**

To entertain the people, they would sing, dance and ululate

After the death of the husband, the woman would be allowed to choose her inheritor. That is the person to take charge of the position of the husband and the process would be candidates would be identified and the one chosen to go to her house. She would cook for them put the food under the feet of the man she wants, that would be her choice.

**Was there a situation where a woman would be send away to her parents?**

Yes – a) where she was childless b) if she was responsible for the death of her husband c) none-cooperative woman to the clan or community.

Any other time when woman made decision

- a) When choosing the inheritor
- b) Making sure that dowry paid from her daughters went for the marriage of her sons in the absence of the husband
- c) Man inheritor would assist by his presence.

Other roles after husband dies

- a) It depends on her age by the time husband dies. If over sixty, she would become an organizer in the family/community
- b) If young she must be inherited

**Are girls allowed to go to school?**

Yes

Primary level was sufficient because girls boarding were few so girls never got the chance to proceed

In a situation like today where girls go to school to the level of boys they would

- a) Reject boys and remain unmarried but have children with different men
- b) To educate girls they would give birth at home
- c) Educated girls take benefits to the in-laws
- d) They would despise traditional rules and refuse to get married.

**Obstacles to taking girls to school**

- a) Girls are too delegate, they get pregnant and disappoint parents
- b) Poverty kills the hope of educating a girl
- c) Polygamy plays a role in detriment of education girls
- d) Clannism too was too strong for education of girls

Belief that girls should not eat wings of a chicken so as they would not fly away from their marriage is one of detrimental cultural believe.

## APPENDIX B1

### DIALOGUE WITH SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR

Dialogue with the school administration

Respondent	Age	Profession
Participant 1 _CO	58 years	Head teacher
Participant 2 _MN	48 years	Head teacher

This interview began by an understanding who a person is in the community.

The answer was academic rather than cultural.

They began by saying that person is anything that has life, with mind and responsibility. That a living thing that has more aspects than the animal. That person means responsibilities. This definition sounds more academic.

When I asked whether girls are persons too, the answer was in the affirmation Yes, because they have mind of their own that are beyond animals. The question whether to take a girl to school or not should not arise, girls must be taken to school. But why do we have less girls as we progress with school levels?

They attributed this to poverty. Most families are poor and are unable to meet demands of girl child in school. In a situation where you have a boy and girl at primary level most families seem to prefer boys to continue. And the explanation seems to be cultural. They see boys to be easier to take care and even when they get married, they can still proceed with school.

But personally, (to the group) given the scenario, they prefer to take the girl first because the girl is delegate. If left for some time, she would get wasted first like becoming pregnant, etc. Looking at delegate aspect of the girl priority should be given to her rather than the boy.

The heads of schools seem to have a different direction as opposed to the traditions

#### **Enrolment**

In terms of enrolment right from primary schools, you get more numbers of girls enrolled. And now the current trend is that after std 8 some boys drop out to take up jobs like boda boda for economic purposes to support their poor families.

What is the completion rate at primary?

About 80-90% of girls complete their primary school. There is a small percentage of 10% that drop. This drop percentage is much less than the boys.

What is the reason for this 10% drop?

- a) Early pregnancy
- b) Hard economic situations at home – poverty
- c) Peer group influence
- d) Early marriages

#### **Performance**

Boys seem to perform better in mixed secondary schools and reasons are

- a) Boy-girl relationships drop hard on girls than on boys. They become more confused and drop out of school and some drop because they are pregnant

- b) Sanitary towel problem. Girls don't afford the sanitary and sometime asks their buy friends to provide. Just recently, some NGOs are now coming to school to supply the commodity to schools for girl child. Sometimes also County governments supply the towels
- c) Guiding and canceling departments at time makes some mistakes. They embarrass girls. For instance, the teachers check students bags and when they find sanitary towels they begin to talk about that so and so has matured. This aspect stresses the girl child in school.

#### **Performance after form 4**

If a girl does not qualify to join university she easily gives up. They give up for various reasons

- a) Environment becomes harsh to them pushing them to the direction of the family
- b) After form four parents give up on them and they are left on their own. As a result, they struggle through life to survive on their own. When support stops after the exam it put pressure on girls
- c) Most begin small jobs and businesses like mpesa, saloon and etc

#### **Current Head teacher (primary school)**

**CO**

In your understanding explain who a person is

A person is God's animal created to look after other creations. Particularly when it refers a person in the homestead, it implies person in charge of the homestead.

Female person is meant to be married and take care of the husband and children.

When it comes to school matters, most parents get excited taking a boy to school as compared to girls

Are girls considered persons?

In the light of the explanation above, girls would be persons yes because they are creations of God but of slightly lesser degree compared to boys. The boy is the point of defense while girls are meant to go away and get married.

Ideally, one would get excited taking a boy to school as compared to girls and this also applies to mothers. Mothers would be happy taking a son to school and less excited when she is a girl.

What is the ratio of girls to boys?

In the normal primary school situation in Bukhayo, girls are slightly more than boys at enrolment. The reason for this is that:

- a) Mortality rate for boys is higher. More boys seem to die at infancy compared to girls
- b) Unmarried girls when they get pregnant and give birth to boys they kill the child because of the clan factor. They do not know what to do with boys when the father does not recognize them. What inheritance would they give the boy when they do not even have or entitled to one.
- c) If she kept the boy child and eventually got married, the boy is hardly accepted in marriage, but girls seem to be accepted easily.

At completion of std 8 what are the ratios?

By the time the children graduate at std 8, boys are more and the reasons are:

- a) Early pregnancies
- b) Adolescence has more impact on girls than boys
- c) Menstruation period affects girls and some opt to leave school
- d) Some girls are orphaned or from single mothers
- e) Most girls living with grandmother are not directed appropriately. They lack proper parental guidance
- f) Natural among the Abaakhayo, given between a boy and a girl, they would take care of the boy.

What courses are they likely to take?

- a) Girls are oriented towards art subjects as opposed to science
- b) Majority go for teaching jobs, business, social work, tailoring, etc few will take nursing related jobs

Jobs that girls are engaged in:

- a) Teachers are the majority, a few nurses, secretariat, community work, and volunteers in schools
- b) A few lawyers, agricultural related and vet. medicines

Majority regardless of the courses they take, they get married. Some lose the use of their education and become house wives. Due to lack of employment, some do not get opportunities to do what they trained for.

Are girls given equal opportunity at enrolment?

Yes they are given but due to poor parenting, poverty levels, early pregnancies; early marriages push them out of school.

In the recent days, day schools are contributing greatly. The schools are obstacles to girls' education for boys seen to take advantage of girls and end up not going to school.

Reproductive health education is taught at std 6. Sometimes, the government supplies the sanitary towels but the supply is not constant. When girls begin the menstrual without proper sanitary towels even teachers who look after them find it messy and chaotic and thus ask the girls to remain at home with their mother.

Community find it hard to get involved in individual child cases. The idea of human rights and family attachment, community members cannot correct the girls' child who does not belong to their household. Parenting is entirely on the hands of the parents rather than community.

## Appendix IV: Letter of Research Authorization from Kenyatta University



KENYATTA UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE SCHOOL

E-mail: [dean-graduate@ku.ac.ke](mailto:dean-graduate@ku.ac.ke)

Website: [www.ku.ac.ke](http://www.ku.ac.ke)

P.O. Box 43844, 00100  
NAIROBI, KENYA  
Tel. 810901 Ext. 57530

Internal Memo

FROM: Dean, Graduate School

DATE: 28<sup>th</sup> February, 2022

TO: Mr. Daniel Wabwire  
C/o Department of Educational Foundations  
Kenyatta University

REF: E83/37945/17

SUBJECT: APPROVAL OF RESEARCH PROPOSAL

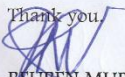
We acknowledge the receipt of your revised Research Proposal entitled "A critique of Abakhayo Conception of the Girl Child's Right to Education in the Light of Thomistic Concept of Person, Busia County" as per recommendations raised by the Graduate School Board of 19<sup>th</sup> January, 2022.

You may now proceed with your Data collection, subject to clearance with the National Universities Commission.

As you embark on your data collection, please note that you will be required to submit to Graduate School completed supervision Tracking and Progress Report Forms. The Forms are available at the University's Website under Graduate School webpage downloads.

By copy of this letter, the Registrar (Academic) is hereby requested to grant you substantive registration for your Ph.D. studies.

Thank you

  
RUBEN MURIUKI  
FOR DEAN, GRADUATE SCHOOL

c.c. Registrar (Academic) Att. Mr. Richard Chweya  
Chairman, Department of Educational Foundations

Supervisor

1. Dr. Francis Ndichu  
C/o Dept of Educational Foundations  
Kenyatta University
2. Dr. Francis Likoye  
C/o Department of Educational Foundations  
Kenyatta University

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*Committed to Creativity, Excellence & Self-Reliance*

## Appendix V: Research Authorization, NACOSTI

Ref No: **273134**

**RESEARCH LICENSE**

Date of Issue: **10/May/2022**



**This is to Certify that Mr. Daniel Wabwire of Kenyatta University, has been licensed to conduct research in Busia on the topic: A critique of Abakhayo Conception of the girl child Right to education in the light of Thomistic Concept of person, Busia County for the period ending : 10/May/2023.**


License No: **NACOSTI/P/22/17382**

Applicant Identification Number: **273134**

*Wabwire*  
Director General

**NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION**

Verification QR Code



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**Appendix VI: Map of Study Location – Busia County**

