Safety Awareness in Learning Institutions in Kenya: A Recipe for Sustainable Development

Ongek Margaret
School of Education, University of Kabianga, Kenya
Email - ongekmargaret@yahoo.com

Abstract: *The Bill of Rights and the Constitution of Kenya (2010) both recognize safety as an inalienable social human right that is indispensible in the preservation of dignity and facilitation of development of one's personality. In recent times however, safety has seemingly become elusive in many learning institutions in Kenya given the frequent and shocking media reports on violent episodes that have rocked   schools and colleges across the country. These violent occurrences range from arson, rape, bullying, destruction of property, shootings and even deaths. As a matter of fact, the prevalence and magnitude of these violent incidences have caused worry and concern among education stakeholders and the general public. This has led to intense calls to relevant authorities to urgently institute safety measures and awareness programmes in learning institutions throughout the country as a way to guarantee safety to the populace in these institutions. This is because unsafe environments stifle development by reducing peoples' ability to concentrate on meaningful and productive activities including teaching and learning processes that go on in learning institutions in the country. This paper therefore sets out to explore the diversity of violent occurrences that characterize learning institutions in Kenya in a bid to offer sustainable solutions that would perhaps prove useful and inevitably partially constitute the safety management package for learning institutions in the country.*

Key Words: *Safety Awareness, Learning Institutions, Recipe, Sustainable Development.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

In support of the Bill of Rights and the Constitution of Kenya (2010) on security and safety of the citizenry, the Kenya Vision 2030, which is the country's development blueprint for the period 2008-2030 emphasizes that one of its core objectives is to help transform Kenya into a newly industrializing country providing high quality of life to all citizens in a clean and secure environment by the year 2030. Indeed, this declaration implies a most favorable situation that any country not just Kenya per se would desire for its citizens. However, with regard to learning institutions in Kenya, prevalence of unsafe conditions due to violent occurrences has created a worrying trend in the recent past. The most common violent episodes witnessed in learning institutions have been in the form of school fires, riots, school raids and bullying among others. These are very unpleasant experiences that not only traumatize victims but are definitely ruinous in both the short and long term. Chapter Four of the Constitution (Constitution of Kenya, 2010) stipulates the fundamental freedoms and rights of citizens which clearly spell out that every person has the right to freedom and security which includes the right not to be; subjected to any form of violence from public or private sources; subjected to torture in any manner whether physical or psychological; subjected to corporal punishment; or; treated or punished in a cruel, inhuman or degrading manner. It is further indicative in the constitution that threats to life, safety and security of people within learning institutions should not be condoned as this instills fear, destruction, destabilization and sometimes even loss of life. With regard to some of the repercussions of   violent occurrences in learning institutions Kreiner (2000:16) submits that staff:

> '…may be distracted from their teaching if they fear
> for their safety. Some have even given up their teaching
> because they were afraid of violence in their schools.'

On matters safety, it is the expectation of all and sundry that learning institutions ensure their members are safe while at school. When someone fears, such a one would be unable to engage in any meaningful endeavors. As a matter of emphasis, fear tends to reduce a person's ability to focus on school affairs (Kreiner, 2000). In the same vein, Blandford (1998:32) assrerts that: 'Teachers and pupils (read learners) should feel safe and secure in the school environment'. It is in light of the preceding, that this paper finds   anchorage on the premise that human life is sacrosanct and any threats to it, real or imagined should be thwarted by all means. For this reason, the subsequent sections of this paper are dedicated first to examining in a general way, the various categories of forces that breed unsafe and insecure conditions in learning institutions. The second section discusses those human triggered episodes that make schools unsafe. Furthermore in this section, illustrations from both the global and national (Kenya) arena are provided for purposes of understanding not only the scale but also the intensity of unsafe and insecure scenarios in learning institutions. The last section presents a bird's eye view of the degree of safety readiness and awareness in

learning institutions in Kenya, followed suggestions of certain possible solutions check the scenario of unsafe conditions and unpreparedness currently witnessed in learning institutions across the country.

2. AN OVERVIEW OF FORCES THAT TRIGGER UNSAFE AND INSECURE CONDITIONS IN LEARNING INSTITUTIONS:

According to United Nations Development Programme (UNDP,n.d.) ,unsafe conditions that prevail where people dwell are triggered by two broad factors namely; nature and man (male and female). Those adversities that are triggered by nature and may create unsafe conditions when they occur in the vicinity of learning institutions include storms, landslides, earthquakes and even floods. Skinner (2009) refers to them as environmental hazards, and that they originate in the lithosphere, atmosphere or hydrosphere. In instances where these natural catastrophes have occurred on a higher scale, their   effects have equally been largely devastating sometimes even leaving a trail of tragic experiences. Conversely, those factors that are directly instigated by human hand include school riots, arson, strikes, burglary, bullying, terrorism, conflicts and violent protestations just to mention but a few. They are called social hazards while those that are more industrial in orientation such as explosions, accidents and contamination fall in the class of technological hazards according to Skinner (2009). While it is informative to orientate the preceding factors into natural vis-à-vis human categories, it is worth noting that regardless of category in question, their repercussions are usually devastating and risk oriented. Such occurrences as observed above may result in injuries, loss of life, devastation of property, disruption of both the economic and social fibre of society as well cause environmental degradation. The second classification is that of external and internal factors. Simply put, external factors are those whose origin is outside learning institutions with target located inside such institutions. Fine examples here are terrorist instigated activities that are planned outside learning institutions while targeted at particular sites within learning institutions. Their origin is external to the school environment while aiming at causing havoc within school premises. Internally originated factors are usually resident within school settings and more often than not caused by learners even other school staffs. This latter group of factors is most evident in Kenya and the rest of the world over. The populace that may be caught-up in the event that these broad categories of factors occur in their environment, may be said to be vulnerable and therefore at risk. Here, risk implies the probability of encountering harmful consequences or even loss like loss of life or and property resulting from an unpleasant occurrence. The extent of risk depends on the degree of vulnerability of persons caught-up in a particular unpleasant episode. If the potentially vulnerable person(s) has the capacity to cope with or even limit the losses or even adapt by minimizing the conditions that may aggravate the risk, then the impact of disastrous encounters might be checked thereby reducing the magnitude of casualties. The bottom-line however is that regardless of the cause of unsafe conditions in an environment, (such as a school setting) UNDP (n.d.) report cautions that:

'…losses from disasters undermine development objectives. Loss of lives and destruction of infrastructure, livelihoods and property…aggravate financial crisis, social conflict, disease and environmental degradation hence impede programmes directly related to the achievement of MDG's… to improve quality of life in areas of …education…'

The preceding account could not be more relevant to the Kenyan context where in recent times learning institutions have been frequented with indefinite closures following violent occurrences thus causing disruption of education programmes and by extension impeding achievement of national development goals.

3. A GLOBAL ACCOUNT OF ANTECEDENTS OF VIOLENT EPISODES IN LEARNING INSTITUTIONS:

Prevalence of unsafe conditions in learning institutions is indeed a global phenomenon stretching from North America, Europe, and Australia to Africa. While unsafe conditions may be epitomized by myriad disruptive encounters, the most common ones include bullying and arson on one hand, and assault and shootings on the other. While the former sets of episodes are common in the African continent, especially in learning institutions in Kenya, the latter set is more prevalent in the advanced countries. Perhaps the variations in form and frequency of these disruptive behaviours have got to do with the level of technology in a given part of the world as well as the extent of exposure to instruments of disruption. For purposes of focused discussion in this paper, a snapshot is made of school shootings on a global scale due to the fact that it is most frequent form of violence in learning institutions in developed countries with very scant attestations from other parts of the world. Subsequently, incidences of bullying and arson are then examined being the most common occurrences in many learning institutions across Africa especially in Kenya. As indicated earlier, school violence that is dominated by shootings is largely evident in the developed world. According Wikipedia (n.d.) school shooting refers to a form of mass shooting that involves a gun attack on an educational institution such as a school or even a university. A study of Table 1 and Two reveals that while there were widespread school shootings in United States of America (USA), Canada and Europe it however remains clear that many of the shootings became intense in the twenty first century probably pointing to the advancement in technology coupled with increased exposure of school –age children to guns. From Table 2, it is evident that in less than a span of twenty years from 2002 to 2014 there were more school deaths (66 in number),due to shootings compared to 56

deaths registered between 1913 to 1999 the latter covering nearly fifty years. It is equally vital to note from Table Two the intensity of shootings between 2002 and 2009. These seven years seemed the most turbulent in the history of school shootings as they occurred consecutively in learning institutions all over Europe. Data concerning South America and Mexico reveal that in these locations it seems school shootings rarely occur. In Mexico for example Table 3 shows that between the year 2011 and 2014 only three deaths were attributed to school shootings. Table 4 reveals the date and number of school shootings in Asia and Oceania. It can be observed from the table that these two locations are not prone to school shootings both in rate and intensity as from 1975 to date. In Oceania for example, from the year 1923 to 2012 only five (5) deaths can be attributed to school shooting compared to for example 17 school deaths in South America registered between 2004 and 2011. Table 5 shows a very minimal number of schools and colleges in Africa that have experienced shootings at school. This data could be a clear pointer to the fact that there could be other forms of school violence in the offing other than gun shooting. As indicated earlier in this paper, it is probable that learners in Africa do not resort to shooting at school due to their ill exposure to guns. They (learners) tend to engage in other forms of violence such as arson or even riots with such abandon.

PLACE	DATE	YEAR	DEATH TOLL
1.UNITED STATES **Name of School**			
Enoch Brown school shooting	July 26	1764	**-**
University of Texas massacre	**-**	1966	**-**
Columbine High School massacre	-	1999	-
Santana High School shooting	-	2001	-
Redlake Senior High school	-	2005	-
Virginia Technical shooting	-	2007	-
Northern Illinois University	-	2008	-
Umpuqua Community College	-	2015	-
2.CANADA **Name of School**	-		-
Markdale shooting	August 25	1884	1
Altona shooting	October 10	1902	2
Ross Sheppard shooting	March 16	1959	1
Centennial shooting	May 28	1975	3
St. Pius X High shooting	October 27	1975	2
SturgeonCreek School shooting	October	1978	1
Weston Institute	No date	1989	0
Ecole Polytechnic massacre	December 6	1989	15
Cocordia University massacre	August 24	1992	4
W.r.Myers High shooting	April 28	1999	1
Bramaiea school	December 10	2004	1
Dawson College shooting	September 13	2006	2
C.W. Jefferys Collegiate shooting	May 23	2007	1
Bendale Business and Technical Institute shooting	September 16	2008	0
Central Technical shooting	September 30	2010	0
Les Racines de vie Montessori	April 5	2013	2
York University shooting	March 6	2014	0
La loche shootings	January 22	2016	4

Table 1: List of incidents of shootings in learning institutions in the United States and Canada.
This Table is adapted and customized from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

PLACE	DATE	YEAR	DEATH TOLL
3.EUROPE **Name of School**			
Bremen School shooting	June 20	1913	**5**
Wilno School massacre	May 6	1925	**5**
Zadra School shooting	October	1972	2
Kungalv School shooting	March 4	1961	1
Cologne School massacre	June 11	1964	11

Eppstein School shooting	June 3	1983	6
Raumanmeri school shooting	June 24	1989	2
Aarhus University shooting	April 5	1994	3
Dunblane massacre	March 13	1996	18
Roc de Leijgraaf	December 7	1999	0
Erfurt massacre	April 26	2002	17
Coburg massacre	July 3	2003	1
Terra College	January 2004	2004	1
Rotz school shooting	March 7	2005	0
Geschwister Scholl School attack	November 20	2006	1
Jokela School shooting	November 7	2007	9
Kauhajoki school shooting	September 23	2008	11
Winnenden School shooting	March 11	2009	16
OAED Vocational College shooting	April 10	2009	1
Kanebogen Elementary School shooting	April 28	2009	0
University of Pees shooting	November 26	2009	1
Toulouse School shooting	March 19	2012	5
2014 Moscow school shooting	February 3	2014	2
2014 Viljandi school shooting	October 27	2014	1

Table 2: List of incidents of shootings in learning institutions in Europe.
This Table is adapted and customized from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

PLACE	DATE	YEAR	DEATH TOLL
4.MEXICO **Name of School**			
Ciudad Juarez School shooting	August 24	2011	**1**
Ciudad Juarez School shooting	January 12	2012	**1**
Atizapan School shooting	May 6	2014	1
5. SOUTH AMERICA **Name of School**			
Carmen de Patagones School shooting	September 28	2004	4
Realengo massacre	April 7	2011	13

Table 3: List of incidents of shootings in learning institutions in Mexico and South America
This Table is adapted and customized from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

PLACE	DATE	YEAR	DEATH TOLL
5.ASIA **Name of School**			
Ma'a lot massacre	May 15	1974	**25**
Sanaa massacre	March 30th	1997	**8**
University of the Philippines shooting	Febraury 19	1999	1
Longzhou County Middle school shooting	October 19	1999	1
Number 34 Middle School shooting	September 26	2002	2
Pk Phanangschool shooting	June 6	2003	2
Niutoushan Primary School shooting	October 5	2005	0
Beirut Arab University shooting	January 25	2007	4
Euro International School shooting	December 12	2007	1
Mercaz HaRav shooting	March 6	2008	9
Azerbaijan State Oil Academy shooting	April 30	2009	13
Xuwen School shooting	October 27	2011	1
Peshawar School attack	December 16	2014	145
6. OCEANIA **Name of School**			
Waikino SchoolHouse shooting	October 19	1923	2
Orara High School shooting	June 19	1991	0

La Trobe University shooting	August 3	1999	1
Monash University shooting	October 21	2002	2
Tomaree High School shooting	April 3	2003	0
Modbury High School shooting	May 7	2012	0

Table 4: List of incidents of shootings in learning institutions in Asia and Oceania.
This Table is adapted and customized from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

PLACE	DATE	YEAR	DEATH TOLL
7.AFRICA **Name of School**			
Maidiguru School shooting	June 18	2013	9
Yobe State School shooting	June 6	2013	42
Garissa University College attack	April 3	2015	147

Table 5: List of incidents of shootings in learning institutions in Africa .
This Table is adapted and customized from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Overall, it is indicative from the data presented in Tables 1 to 5 that school shootings are more widespread and frequent   in   learning institutions in Europe and North America. These two locations alone based on data contained in Table 1 upto Table 5 account for 25% of world's total school shootings from 1920's to date.

4. THE KENYAN CASE:

In recent times, learning institutions in Kenya have witnessed frequent and more intense incidences of violent episodes .both internally instigated or otherwise. Away from the gun wielding learner in the developed world awaiting to aim at his/her target(potential victim), the learner bent on destruction in a typical Kenyan school today would engage in arson , rape, bullying or simply become riotous with an aim to cause damage to property, inflict pain on others or even upon self. Some of the shocking violent occurrences sparked off by students, most of them in secondary schools were in 1991, 1999,2001 and 2006 to sample but a few. In 1991 male students in a mixed high school invaded a girls' dormitory and went on rampage destroying property and engaging in rape with abandon. This episode led to the death of 19 girls aged about 15. Another violent scenario occurred in 1999 when a group of male students locked up four prefects in a cubicle at night and doused them in petrol –they all died. In 2008, 68 students burned to death while scores were injured when two school boys ignited a dormitory fire. In the year 2016, a wave of unrest swept across institutions of learning in Kenya especially secondary schools and even some universities to the effect that well over ninety institutions were affected leading to indefinite closure of some of these institutions (Daily Nation ,Monday July 25,2016 p.6) In many Kenyan school a culture of molestation especially of newly incoming students seems to have been institutionalized such that victims resorted to adapt to their newly found 'prisons' as they bore the wrath of older students.   In Saturday Nation,(March 4, 2017, p.6) concerning entrenched culture of bullying in schools sentiments echoed thus; ' The student suffered severe injuries in his private parts forcing him to be hospitalized for days'

School bullying is one of the most humiliating experiences learners undergo while in school. The effects of bullying upon a victim become so entrenched leading to gross destabilization of persons. Wikipedia (n.d.) sums it up that students who undergo bullying tend to develop behavioural problems, depression loss of self control , poorer social skills and a drop in performance at school. The preceding accounts are usually very dreadful and many a school staff, administrator or even students would yearn to a solution to these unpleasant encounters. Kreiner (2000:12) describes such a fear infested scenario as follows '…violence had taken their lives and instilled such a sense of fear and loss that it will take time for survivors, family and friends to heal' In order to restore esteem, dignity and harmony in learning institutions in the country, the onus is upon relevant authorities to guarantee school populace safety and security during their stay in these places as staff, workers administrators or even as learners.

Following the scenarios described above where sometimes learners, staff or generally workers in learning institutions may find themselves victims of what could have been avoided or even put in place mitigating measures when already trapped in an unpleasant situation the question that begs answer is what propels can be made to ease occurrence of risky and many times avoidable situations in our learning institutions? As if in response Makuta, Gatebe, Mbaru & Gitu (2016) in their study on fire safety awareness and practice in Thika West District in Kenya emphasize the need to step up fire awareness in schools followed by adequate implementation of fire management strategies In the same vein, Ronoh and Kyalo (2009); and Ntheya (2011) reiterate that learners need to be equipped with knowledge for safety needs .The fact that most violent situations in schools can be averted has been emphasized by Begun (2001),cited in Ronoh and Kyalo (2009).

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

To all and sundry, presence of violence or even mere imagination of occurrence of the same in learning institutions is unpleasant as it is unacceptable. This is because besides impeding the realization of national development goals, the mere lack of safety is in itself a dehumanizing experience. It is on this premise that this paper calls for institutionalization of safety awareness programmes in learning institutions in Kenya in the hope that when   people are educated on how to act in the face of unsafe situations then not only would lives and property be salvaged but that individuals would find fulfilment in their endeavors not the benefit of self alone but of entire populations.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS:

Based on findings of empirical studies cited above as well as research literature contained in the paper, the following recommendations are made.

- The Ministry of Education ought to enforce safety programmes in schools. The ideal way to achieve this is through formation of safety committees and sub-committees that would function as channels of communication to various segments of school population.
- Periodic drills on fire, road and personal safety should be integrated into the school programme. Through such empowerment people can adequately respond to any eventuality.
- Seminars and workshops on safety should be in the offing for education stakeholders=this group provides a strong support base for schools.
- Quality Assurance and Standards personnel from the Ministry of Education to conduct evaluation of safety programmes to ascertain their relevance and functionality.

REFERENCES:

1. Blandford S. : Managing Discipline in Schools. London: Routledge. (1998).
2. Gisesa, N: 'Culture of Torture finds its way Back to Schools' *Saturday Nation.* Nation Printers. .(2017,March 4).
3. Juma, J. (n.d.). Violence in Kenyan Schools Spreading. Retrieved from http;//www.reliefweb.int/rwh.nsf/db900sid/TBUO-7KLBER?Ope.
4. *Kreiner*, A. : Everything You Need to Know about School Violence. NewYork: The Rosen Publishing Group Inc. (2000).
5. Makuta, P., Gatebe, E. G., & Gitu L.M.(2016).Assessment of Fire Safety Awareness and Practices in Public Secondary Schools : A Case Study of Thika West District, Kenya. In *Journal of Agriculture Science and Technology,* Vol. 17, No 1 (2016).
6. Nthenya, S. D. : Situation Analysis of School Safety and School Administration Participation in Public Secondary Schools: Kenya. In International Joyrnal of Current Research Vol.3. Issue,6, pp.278-283. (2011).
7. Ouma, W: 'Knut Wants New Team to Investigate Unrest' *Daily Nation* .Nation Printers . . (2016, July 25).
8. Rono ,P. K. & Kyalo W. B: Safety Awareness and Preparedness in Secondary Schools in Kenya: A Case of Turkana District. Educational Research and ReviewVol. 4(8), pp.379-584. (August 2009).
9. Available at htt://www.academicjournals.org/ERR
10. Skinner, M. : Hazards. Tunbridge Wells, Kent: Gray Publishers. (2009).
11. The United Nations Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction by UNDP/BCPR&UN/ISDR Africa. In Partnership with Umuto Africa (Pty) Ltd: Cape.
12. Wikipedia –Free Encyclopaedia.