

## EMPOWER A GIRL, EDUCATE A BOY

BY CRAIG AND MARC KIELBURGER



With the opening of Ngulot, a new all-boys secondary school, boys will soon be celebrating their academic achievements. Photo source: Ken Galloway.

Hundreds looked on as proud young men, decked out in crisp uniforms, led their parents onto the campus that will help unlock their future.

This January, the Kisaruni group of girls' schools in Kenya's Maasai Mara unveiled its first all-boys high school. After the opening ceremony, village elders christened it with a name. They chose *Ngulot*, Swahili for "strength." They want their sons to be as strong as their daughters.

Ngulot High School's first lesson: When empowering women, we must include men. Leading up to International Women's Day on March 8, it's a vital message.

Sadly, women still march in the streets for the same fundamental rights men take for granted. In developing communities especially, huge gaps remain in areas like women's education, health and economic opportunity. Closing those gaps means creating resources, like all-girls' schools and female entrepreneurship programs. But equality is more than an economic problem; it involves changing minds.

In Canada, many men now march alongside women as allies, an act that helps shift social dynamics and recognizes gender equity as a human rights issue that

affects everyone. This mindset shift is also crucial in developing communities.

"We must also empower men [...] to challenge prevailing norms and change their behaviours," [writes Maria Correia, World Bank Manager for Social Development](#).

Overlooking men can actually worsen inequality, according to a 2013 [World Bank study](#) that examined two decades of research on gender equity programs.

Before the boys' school, local community leaders like Willy Cheres were concerned about that very problem. Donors had lined up to fund two Kisaruni schools for girls, but there was little support to build a school for boys—until Mitch Kurylowicz, a 12-year old from Ottawa, began raising funds in 2011 to address the gap.

"Our girls were rising up, but our boys were being left behind," says Cheres.

In the six years since its opening, Kisaruni has created new opportunities for girls, who now dream about becoming doctors and engineers. With men's traditional roles—hunting, tending cattle—dependent on a land threatened by climate change, boys too must be able to dream bigger. Otherwise, a generation of men will grow to resent female empowerment. Ngulot will create new opportunities.

The new school will also offer education about culture-specific gender norms.

Kurylowicz, now 18, says classes at Ngulot will include presentations from local mothers about their daily routines—fetching water, cooking, collecting firewood—and how these tasks contribute to their families and the community. Boys will be encouraged to take part in these chores, breaking down the social construct of "women's work."

This isn't just boys taking home economics. Valuing unpaid household work, and sharing those jobs between genders, is critical to gender equity, according to the [UN Secretary General's High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment](#).

If we're going to win the long-term battle for women's empowerment, we must ensure that girls and boys learn a new paradigm together, so that future teachers, leaders, presidents, farmers, and parents all support women's rights.