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Universalizing Primary Education in Kenya: Is It Beneficial and Sustainable?

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Abstract

Kenya has targeted universal primary education since its independence. In achieving such a goal the country introduced free primary education in 2003 and enrolments dramatically increased. However, in terms of quality, the education provided is not satisfactory. This paper examines the challenges in financing the implementation of free primary education and verifies the actual learning conditions at the school level with particular reference to the transition from primary to secondary education. The government tends to focus on the quantitative expansion of education, paying less attention to value, significance and effects of education for individuals. Furthermore, the significance of universalizing primary education is discussed from the viewpoint of people in the rural community. It is important to take interest not only in the "quantitative expansion of education for the nation" but also the "qualitative growth of individuals for the community." Such emphasis may further enhance the benefits of schooling and encourage sustainable educational development.

Introduction

Universal Primary Education (UPE) is an international development goal which all countries are expected to achieve by the year 2015. The World Conference on Education for All (EFA) held in 1990 is the basis of current discussions on UPE. At that conference, the importance of 'basic education' was recognized and a new concept of 'basic learning needs' for people, not limited to schooling, was proposed. Article I of the World Declaration on Education for All adopted at the conference clearly states that "Every person—child, youth and adult—shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs", focusing on value, significance, and effects of education for individuals. The Dakar Framework for Action of 2000 set the goal with the statement "Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality." This was further reflected in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Kenya has been trying to achieve UPE as a national goal since its independence. Reintroduction of free primary education in 2003 dramatically increased the number of children attending school[1]. Economically disadvantaged children were provided a new

educational opportunity. However, what is the actual benefit each child receives? The quality of education is said to be deteriorating further and primary school completion contributes little to becoming employed. Irrespective of labor demand, it does appear to induce a great enthusiasm for secondary education and further education more so than ever before.

Nonetheless, in the course of promoting EFA in the 1990s, the formulating idea which stemmed from questioning the significance of human-centered learning appears to have changed of its own accord. In the process of policy formulation at the national level, UPE which tends to focus more on enrolling large numbers of children gradually took over for EFA. Although the importance of quality of education in the policy is often acknowledged, improvement in nation-wide school enrolment rates tends to become the main emphasis. In other words, rapid quantitative expansion was given priority as opposed to meeting the urgent need of providing quality education.

It might also be pointed out that education has been politicized and free primary education in particular is a critical issue in many countries of sub-Saharan Africa. Such free education is often implemented under conditions of budgetary constraints and many aid agencies are willing to support it. This poses a serious challenge with regard to the ownership of recipient countries. Their self-help efforts, which were frequently debated in the 1990s, are naturally discouraged, but few now express worries about becoming aid-dependent. Other relevant questions include: 1) For whose benefit is UPE? and 2) How well do people understand the actual learning conditions of children at school? Particularly children should not be considered only as the prime beneficiaries, but also the important participants in any educational change.

It is therefore appropriate for more critical analyses to be conducted from the perspectives of children and teachers at the schools, as they are the real actors in achieving UPE. This angle of looking at schools not from the viewpoint of the Ministry of Education officials, but from that of the community people must have significant implications for the international cooperation efforts.

This paper first discusses the challenges in financing the implementation of free primary education as well as issues in maintaining quality education. Secondly, actual learning conditions of primary education at the school level and enthusiasm for secondary education are examined with examples from the Narok District. Finally, the significance of UPE from the viewpoint of people in the rural community is reconsidered to suggest the potential and possibilities of its social benefits. The parents and community may have different expectations for schooling compared to those of educational administrators.

[1] It was in the 1970s that this commitment to universalizing primary education took the form of free primary education for the first time; such free education was partially implemented to cover children in Grades 1 to 4 in 1974 and then extended to Grades 5 to 7 in 1978.

Financing of Free Primary Education

At the national level

In the implementation of free primary education the Kenyan Ministry of Education established a system in which all 18,000 public primary schools can receive capitation grants straight from the Ministry through bank accounts. The annual amount is 1,020 Kenyan shillings (14 US dollars) per pupil, which is earmarked for purchasing educational materials, such as textbooks and notebooks, as well as for the repairing of school facilities and to ensure quality assurance. The total grant amount is determined by the number of pupils enrolled, whereby, large-scale schools enjoy advantages over schools with fewer pupils. Along with abolishing school fees, the government strictly prohibited each school from collecting levies or any money from parents.

In terms of funding, expenditure on education as a percentage of the total government expenditure rose from 16.5 percent in 2000/01 to 20.1 percent in 2003/04 (Oxfam & ANCEFA 2004, p.30). Likewise as a percentage of the GDP, education expenditures rose from 6.1 percent in 2000/01 to 7.1 percent in 2003/04 (Ibid.). This was one of the highest allocations for education in Africa. Education also absorbed between 35-40 percent of the recurrent government budget of which the primary education sub-sector received 51 percent annually (Ibid.). Of the 79.4 billion shillings allocated to education in 2003/4, the government had disbursed about 5.6 billion shillings to all Kenyan primary schools by the end of 2003. By the end of 2004, a total of 16 billion shillings had been released. The government also allocated an additional 300 million shillings for the administration and monitoring of its progress.

In the national budget for fiscal year 2005/06 (360,087 million shillings), expenditure for the Ministry of Education (94,927 million shillings) accounted for 26.4% of the total budget and much of it was provided by donor agencies (Ministry of Education 2006b)[2]. The agencies were therefore becoming the primary funders for the education sector rather than supplementing government efforts. The government is fully aware of the high public expenditure on education and the support it receives from international partners. It is in this regard that serious consideration is being given to the need for the diversification of funding. This can be seen in the following characteristic statement:

> The current heavy investment that is borne, to a large extent, by the government alone calls for a review to ensure collaboration and partnership with other stakeholders. The challenge is therefore to establish partnerships between the government, households and local communities, development partners, private sector providers of educational services,

[2] Donor agencies provided substantial funding for free primary education. Total external support in 2003 amounted to 4.5 billion shillings of which the major donors were the World Bank at 3.5 billion shillings, the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) at 0.47 billion shillings, and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) at 0.48 billion shillings (Oxfam and ANCEFA 2004, p.34).

> including sector employers, religious organizations and civil society, such as NGOs and foundations. ・・・・・・ To bridge the gaps a lot of support will be required from all the stakeholders, especially the development and private sector partners. It is critical to appreciate that without any support from development partners it will be difficult to realize KESSP objectives. (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology 2005c, p.xxxii)

The Kenya Education Sector Support Programme 2005–2010 (KESSP) mentioned above was launched in July 2005, as the master education plan for the country. The objective of KESSP is to put into operation a new policy document, the *Policy Framework for Education, Training, and Research*. The World Bank provided a supplementary 80 million US dollars to support the plan in addition to its funding for the support of free primary education (World Bank 2006). In fact, KESSP comprises 23 investment programs, 18 of which are related to UPE, and also advocates for the provision of educational opportunities to all Kenyans at various levels (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology 2005b). Among the key KESSP goals, the first is to attain UPE by 2015 and the second is to achieve a transition rate of 70%, from primary to secondary school, by 2008 (Ibid., pp.xii-xiii).

It is becoming clear that UPE will not be achieved using the Kenyan government's resources alone. Heavy reliance on support from 'development partners' which emphasize the popular rhetoric of partnerships instead of the traditional donor-recipient relationships will continue. Although donor agencies often mention that Kenya has ownership in policy formulation and implementation, but in practice it is quite difficult to manage and control the education sector development in the situation where the relevant capacity is still weak. In addition, some analyses point out that it is indispensable for parents to bear the burden of tuition fees in some form to attain UPE, considering the financial constrains of the government (Mukudi 2004). This assertion is indeed supported by actual practices conducted at the school level as illustrated below.

At the school level

Under the free primary education policy, each school was directed to keep two accounts to receive the capitation grants from the Ministry of Education. These accounts were to be managed by the School Management Committee (SMC). The first account entitled SIMBA (School Instructional Materials Bank Account) covers direct teaching and learning materials, and the second is a General Purpose Account (GPA) to be spent on various costs including wages for support staff, repairs, maintenance, quality assurance, water and electricity. By means of these two different bank accounts, each school receives grant payments twice a year. The government is supposed to provide 650 shillings (10 US dollars) for SIMBA and 370 shillings for GPA per pupil per year. The breakdown of each account is shown in Table 1.

There are relatively well equipped primary schools in Nairobi for example, which were historically established for Europeans and Asians before Kenya's independence. These schools have facilities such as libraries, swimming pools, halls and school buses, which are

not common in other schools, and used to collect high tuition fees. Children have to wear rather expensive school uniforms and shoes. Consequently, even if categorized as a 'public' primary school, only children of wealthy families can afford to enroll. In such schools free primary education is not really free as they actually charge some levies or fees. This is because it is difficult for such costly primary schools to maintain existing facilities merely using grants from the government.

Table 1. Breakdown of Capitation Grant under Free Primary Education

SIMBA Account I (Total: KSh 650 per pupil per year)
•Textbooks: KSh 360 (approximately 2 books)
•Exercise books: KSh 210 (21 exercise books)
•Supplementary readers & reference materials: KSh 55
•Pencils: KSh 15 (3 pencils)
•Dusters, chalk, register: KSh 5
•Chart and wall maps: KSh 5
GPA Account II (Total: KSh 370 per pupil per year)
•Support staff wages: KSh 112
•Repairs, maintenance & improvement: KSh 127
•Activities: KSh 43
•Quality assurance: KSh 29
(School based evaluation, seminars/workshops for teachers and examination materials)
•Electricity/water: KSh 10
•Local travel/transport: KSh 21
•Postage/ rental box/telephone: KSh 22
•Contingencies: KSh 6

Source: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (2003)

One school in Nairobi continues to collect funds from parents even after the implementation of free education in the amount of ten times that provided by the government. Furthermore, schools in good standing for the primary school leaving examination (Kenya Certificate of Primary Education: KCPE) in Nairobi annually collect 6,000–12,000 shillings per pupil as fees for tuition and supplementary lessons[3]. Most good performing schools in the countryside are boarding schools which require at least 6,000 shilling per year per pupil for boarding fees. Even if tuition fees are free, payments for boarding fees and some other expenses are compulsory. Children from poor families are naturally eliminated from such schools and therefore cannot receive a good quality education. This becomes a critical issue

[3] In comparison, for example, the monthly salary for a newly appointed primary school teacher is approximately 9,000 shillings (120 US dollars).

in terms of equity.

Expenditures for items such as school uniforms are very costly as shown in Table 2. This illustrates the fact that despite 'free' education it is still very expensive for an ordinary parent to send his/her child to a good public primary school. It is estimated that parents have to raise over 10,000 shillings per year per child to meet the cost of uniforms, transportation, lunches, extra tuition, some levies and other expenses. It is partly for this reason that many children are unable to gain access to primary education, despite the government's intervention of abolishing fees.

A key issue therefore is the fact that many schools still collect fees and/or levies skillfully from parents for their survival as seen in Table 3. Most schools whether high, medium or low cost schools charge parents some money to meet the gaps in their budgets. These payments are generally categorized as 'compulsory' or 'optional' payments. However, in fact, even optional payments such as extra/evening/Saturday tuition turn out to be compulsory as all pupils are expected to attend classes which are intended to provide them with extra coaching for examinations. To conceal these payments from the scrutiny of district education officers, they are often made under such labels as 'child support', 'furniture replacement' and so on.

Table 2. Estimated Expenditure on School Items

Item	Price	Remarks
Uniforms	Shirt/Pants/Skirt KSh 520-800; Shoes KSh 1,300-1,780; Sweater KSh 680; Socks KSh 120	Sports clothes for physical education are also required and cost KSh 720.
Textbooks	KSh 290-380 per book	The grant is not sufficient enough to purchase textbooks for all pupils. Good performing schools request each pupil to buy his/her own textbooks and other learning materials.
Exercise books	KSh 30-120 per book	Parents are expected to supply exercise books and other materials.
Stationery	Pencil KSh 3, Eraser KSh 5, Pen KSh 7	Parents are expected to supplement inadequate stationery supplies.
Desk	KSh 400-2,500	In some schools, children are required to get their own desks when they enroll in the first grade. In many cases, this takes the form of a "desk charge."
Transport	KSh 1,200-4,000 per month	This is usually for middle-class parents.

Source: Compiled from interviews at the school level

Table 3. Examples of Primary School Fees and Levies Collected under Free Primary Education

Category	Compulsory Payments	Optional Payments
High-cost schools	・School fees/Child support fund: KSh 2,500-6,000 per child per term ・Furniture replacement: KSh 550 per child per year ・Bus maintenance and repair: KSh 650 per child per year ・Swimming pool maintenance: KSh 350	・Extra/Evening/Saturday tuition: KSh 2,000-4,000 per child per term (N.B. Since all pupils are expected to attend such sessions, the payment of these funds is practically compulsory.)
Medium-cost schools	・School fees/ Child support fund: KSh 300-600 per child per month	・Extra/Evening/Saturday tuition: KSh 100-500 (N. B. The same as above)
Low-cost schools	・School fees/Child support fund: KSh 50-200 per child per term ・Mid-term/Final tests: KSh 20-50 per pupil per term	・Extra/Evening/Saturday tuition: KSh 20-50

Source: Compiled from interviews at the school level

Growing Number of School Children and the Quality of Education

Following the National Alliance Rainbow Coalition (NARC) Government's intervention for free primary education in January 2003, the number of primary school pupils all over Kenya increased by 18% from 6.06 million pupils in 2002 to 7.16 million pupils in 2003 (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2007, p.45). As rates of annual increase before free education had been less than 1% (Central Bureau of Statistics 2004, p.34), it can be said that the increase occurred because of the abolition of school fees. In addition, schools saw a reduction in the number of dropouts and vast strides in the improvement of access. Gross enrolment rates also increased from 92% (95% of boys and 90% of girls) in 2002 to 108% (110% of boys and 105% of girls) in 2003 (World Bank Education Statistics Database: *EdStats*). However, considerable regional disparities in enrolments rates still exist. Although the national average of gross enrolment rates is greater than 100%, in the North Eastern Province, which is an arid or semi-arid area with a large population of pastoral nomads, rates were 32% of boys and 19% of girls in 2003 (Ministry of Education 2006a, p.13). In regions with such low school attendance rates, gender disparity is also significant.

In policy papers such as The Sessional Paper (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology 2005a, p.36), it has been stated that the government is undertaking necessary measures to expand access and to improve quality simultaneously. However, the rapidly growing number of children in school brought about an increase in the number of pupils per teacher or per class. Taking into consideration the inefficient utilization of teachers in the education system before free primary education (Abagi & Odipo 1997), this could have

been improved by intervention.

Large classes often emerged in the lower grades of many schools, but the increase of pupils did not occur uniformly across the district as many parents had already been sending their children to the schools that perform well in KCPE. Actually, in many well-performing public schools in Nairobi, a good number of wealthy parents worried about declining quality and transferred their children to private schools or boarding schools in provincial towns when free education was introduced.

The followings were key challenges free primary education intervention faced:

- Because of acute teacher shortages, teachers were forced to combine classes for a number of grades. Some schools had to introduce double shifts to cater to the increased enrolments. Too few classrooms were available to divide the classes;
- Teachers were less motivated due to increased workloads and the scrapping of extra tuition, which was a major source of their income. This contributed to a decline in the quality of education as it also provided teachers with additional time to complete the syllabus;
- It is rather difficult for teachers to effectively manage large classes. Teacher pupil interaction was minimal, resulting in a disadvantage for slow learners. There were also serious disciplinary problems with overage children;
- Because of free education, some parents came to believe that the government would take full responsibility for education. They became apathetic to all school activities, making effective school management difficult;
- Grants from the government were not distributed in the new school term when schools needed funds, nor was the amount sufficient. The use of funds was uniformly specified, which did not reflect the actual needs of each school.

Although the positive impact of free primary education in providing new learning opportunities for out-of-school children should not be undermined, it seemed as if the Ministry of Education and aid agencies were not particularly concerned about the deteriorating quality of education. Their main concern appears to be with the increased number of children attending school as well as school enrolment rates, which are visible to anyone, as far as we look at the negative impacts from the perspective of schools as shown above. It even appeared that they were pushing over-aged children into school to achieve their goal. At the same time, in top-down communication from the Ministry of Education to schools, government officials, including district education officers, did not try to listen to the voices of teachers concerned about the declining quality of education. Hence the officials of the Ministry of Education did not generally understand nor appreciate the actual conditions under which many schools were operating.

Increased primary school enrolment is most likely to affect the transition to secondary education after 2008, when the first cohort of free education entrants takes their KCPE. This will be a result of automatic promotion which enables children to reach the eighth grade

without repetition and the lack of expansion of secondary school facilities. In 2008, the government also started free secondary education. This new intervention will demand that more priority be given to the quantitative expansion of secondary education than quality improvement in primary education. This provides further support for the assertion that there is more interest in numeric representation in the form of high enrolments as opposed to the provision of quality education.

Connection of Primary to Secondary Education

Examination-oriented primary school life

Primary education is a child's basic right. Thereby, universal access has become an international development goal. Nonetheless, the actual curriculum of primary school has been given only slight attention and little is known about classroom interaction except the typical assumption that teaching is teacher-centered. The actual pursuit of educational goals may differ from 'education' conceptualized as 'basic learning needs' or 'children's rights'. Primary schooling is geared towards preparation for the transition to secondary school, and more specifically, how to get high scores on the KCPE. Consequently, schools influenced by such an examination system automatically resemble preparatory schools for scoring highly on tests. It is reasonable that primary schooling tends to focus on examinations because of the fact that going on to a secondary school of 'good standing' has special importance as a critical determinant of one's future life.

Primary schools are graded according to the results of the KCPE in each district and division. Every education office is busy making league tables. Such examination results are primarily a concern for teachers and head teachers in particular, which inevitably results in an examination-oriented school life. The teaching style of each class is affected greatly by the examination. In higher grades, classes are conducted in order to prepare for the examinations, using questions from past papers, rather than referring to the class syllabi. Schools which perform well on the KCPE offer supplementary classes for Grade 8 pupils. In the early mornings, during lunch breaks, and in the evenings as well as on weekends and holidays, students receive such coaching. Conventional teacher-centered classes are justified, because examinations frequently elicit knowledge recall. Introducing pupil-centered education would likely confuse pupils.

The following essay exemplifies such a stressful life in primary school:

> The Ordeal of a Standard Eight Pupil in Kenya
>
> My greatest fear is when I think of my final examination the K.C.P.E. I fear my result. What kind of happiness or sorrow will I have?
>
> In November I will sit for my examination. I will not have any friend to share any questions with. They will be thinking only about themselves. Even after all the exams, I will still have fear. Oh! God! What shall I get? The December holiday will come. I will be joyful but not deep down. In my heart fear will still be with me. At the end of the month the

> Minister of Education will announce the results. What will I feel? Fear, fear deep down in my heart. After a few days I will go to school to get my result and see my friends. But we must still wait for a letter that we have been selected by a high school. Only the very best get selected as there are not enough government schools. That is another fear I will have.
>
> The New Year will come and still there is no happiness. I will be having fear because my future depends on what happens to me now. Soon I will go back to my old school. When I see the school gate I will see fear coming towards me. I will walk slowly as a tortoise to the headmaster's office. No letter. When I go home, my parents will ask me where is the letter? Nothing but a sad face… When I get my letter, what will I see? Maybe I will not get the school I was expecting. What a fear. What work will I give my parents to find me a better school? My parents will get for me a better (private) school if I have passed my examination. But there is no headmaster who will allow a failure in his school.
>
> That is my greatest fear. (Mwangi 1999, p.55)

Part of the reason why the government extended the duration of primary education from seven years to eight years in the education reform of 1985 was to help children acquire knowledge and skills for employment during eight years of schooling. They were discouraged from proceeding to secondary education. Consequently, the curricula included vocational subjects such as agriculture and business. Nonetheless, many children and parents preferred academic subjects and skill learning has never been accepted in a society that stresses an academic background like Kenya. The current policy to raise the transition rates to secondary education accelerates the so-called *Diploma Disease* (Dore 1976) and may foster the possibility of unemployment among secondary school dropouts and university graduates.

Transition to secondary school

Even when completing primary school with excellent performance, i.e., scoring high on the KCPE, secondary schools are not actually free of charge. School enrolment rates for secondary education are directly related to family income (Central Bureau of Statistics et al. 2004, p.20). That is, only rich families can afford to send their children to secondary school. The Kenyan government seeks to promote free secondary education however the system annually costs 10,265 shillings (140 dollars) per pupil. For its implementation, an amount equivalent to 10% of the total recurrent budgets in the Ministry of Education will be needed[4]. This goal is unattainable without further external assistance and its sustainability is questionable. Even if each school receives government grants regularly, students have to bear costs such as boarding fees and personal expenses[5]. A free secondary education system is far from 'free' even if it manages finances well.

[4] The total number of secondary school students in 2007 was 1,180,267 and the recurrent expenditure of the Ministry of Education was 112,485 million shillings (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2008, p.48 & p.53). Therefore, 1,180,267 multiplied by 10,265 shilling is 12,115 million shillings, or 10.8% of the recurrent expenditure above.

Secondary schools are categorized as National, Provincial, and District, and ranked. Tuition fees for national schools are high (50,000–60,000 shillings per year). Consequently, it is impossible to progress to secondary education without additional funding. Tuition fees for provincial schools (35,000–50,000 shillings per year) are less expensive than those of national schools. However, even if selected to a provincial school, in some cases, a pupil has no choice but to attend a district school because of a lack of school fees. Children well know that educational opportunities are limited without adequate financing and this reality discourages them.

The success story by which education brings people out of poverty can be only slightly appreciated in present-day Kenya. The social environment surrounding primary schools today differs greatly from that of the 1970s. When primary school enrolment rates were low, receiving primary schooling could strongly alter a young person's life. Nowadays, merely completing primary school brings few advantages by virtue of educational background and does not guarantee employment. Current primary schools may have merely transformed into preparatory schools for advancement to secondary school. People observe that even if children improve their living conditions by utilizing knowledge and experience acquired in school, primary school life is useless unless one is then selected to go on to secondary school.

Improvement in transition rates from primary school to secondary school is a crucial issue for the government. The KESSP set the target of an "Achievement and transition rate of 70 percent from primary to secondary school from the current rate of 47 percent, paying special attention to girls' education by 2008" (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology 2005b, p.xiii). In recent government announcements, the "admission" rate to Form I is intentionally interpreted as the "transition" rate. More specifically, as Table 4 shows, the transition rate of 47% percent at the time of the announcement of KESSP is certainly the ratio of enrolment in secondary school for 2004, which has a value of the number of first grade pupils divided by the KCPE candidates in 2003. However, an admission rate, for which the value is more difficult to verify, has come to be used intentionally since then.

Actual transition rates have not improved at all as shown in Table 4. In addition, if the admission rate in 2006 is correct, 26% of those who gained admission declined enrolment. The ratio is higher for girls by 1–3 percentage points. It seems considerably difficult to attain an actual transition rate of 70% in 2008, which is the government's target. This is because transition rates cannot be increased without reducing educational expenses which further results in a reduction in the provision of quality secondary education. On the other hand, the Ministry of Education can technically raise the admission rates with little difficulty.

[5] A district secondary school in Narok used to charge 22,960 shillings per child per year before the introduction of free secondary education. The same school now collects 18,627 shillings. This implies that only 19% of the costs required are covered by the grants.

Table 4. Transition Rates from Primary Education to Secondary Education

	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06
①KCPE candidates (boys : girls)	587,961 (303,907 : 284,054)	657,747 (342,979 : 314,768)	671,550 (352,826 : 318,724)
②Form I students (boys : girls)	273,702 (146,645 : 127,057)	263,853 (139,469 : 124,384)	299,461 (161,588 : 137,873)
③Transition rate (②÷①) (boys : girls)	46.6% (48.3 : 44.7)	40.1% (40.7 : 39.5)	44.6% (45.8 : 43.3)
④Admission rate	------	56.0%	60.0%

Note: It is difficult to verify the admission rate from public documents. The figures above are based on a presentation by the Minister for Planning and National Development (Obwocha 2007).
Source: Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2007)

Case examples in the Narok District

The Narok District is located towards the East of Nairobi, bordering Tanzania. Many inhabitants are Maasai people, who reside mainly on traditional pasturage. The *A* primary school performs well on the KCPE in this division. *B* secondary school, which is adjacent to it, actually, is a district school without sufficient facilities; it has neither libraries nor laboratories. No one wished to go on to this school of the 73 pupils in Grade 8 of *A* primary school. Many secondary schools are boarding schools; few pupils wished to go on to a school near their home. In fact, many pupils wished to go to a school located in an urban area. However, in reality one boy and five girls were from *A* primary school out of 53 boys and 20 girls in the Form 1 of this secondary school in May of 2007.

As for the reasons why they study in *B* secondary school, the following three reasons were given: 1) because of the poor KCPE performance, they were unable to gain admission to provincial schools in urban areas; 2) Although having got admission to better provincial secondary schools through the KCPE, they chose to attend the district school because of the great burden of tuition and boarding fees; and 3) in the case of girls, some parents were unwilling to send their children to a distant school.

When taking the KCPE examination, pupils fill in the names of the secondary school they wish to go to: there are four national schools and four other schools. Acceptance of transition to secondary school is informed by an admission form sent via the primary school. Whether pupils actually go on to the schools for which they are granted admission cannot be grasped precisely on the primary school side. The screening process is rather complicated. No minimum required scores are set by each secondary school, and not all pupils who achieve admission advance to the secondary school. Therefore, in the case of vacancies, a head teacher can enroll pupils not according to the KCPE performance. Here again, the economic strength and social status of parents is the determining factor. For example, a pupil of *A* primary school scoring 150 points on the KCPE (500 point scale, the lowest among candidates of *A* school) entered *B* secondary school. Even when continuing on to secondary school, in the case of *B* secondary school, nine pupils (including four girls) out of 52 pupils (including

17 girls) who enrolled in 2006 left the school within a year. This suggests that the dropout rate of girls is higher than that of boys.

In principle, transition to secondary school is determined according to the KCPE performance. Pupils with high scores can enroll in national or provincial schools. Even if the examination results are poor, there is a possibility to advance to a district secondary school somewhere if they can bear the expenses necessary for enrolment. Conversely, if unable to pay tuition fees or boarding fees, a learning opportunity at secondary school will disappear easily, except for a few bursary recipients. Even when entering and completing secondary school, pupils have no other choice but to return home if they score low marks on the KCSE (Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education), which is another examination for leaving secondary school.

Parents or relatives often bear the burden of tuition fees for secondary education. Consequently, they often expect children to receive regular work to earn cash. However, real employment is very difficult, even after completing a secondary school program. Some young people cannot work in the modern sector, nor can they return to a traditional job, such as agriculture or as a pastoralist. They sometimes subsist on daily employment in urban areas. While children at schools with higher KCPE rankings can enroll at school-age and usually leave school at the age of 14 or 15 years old, some 10% of Grade 8 pupils at *A* primary school are over 18 years old. Although involved in studying and preparing for examinations, most do not proceed to secondary school.

In the case of *B* secondary school, the average KCSE score of the 31 graduates in 2006 was 3.1 points on a rating system of 1 to 12 (1 point is the lowest and 12 points is the highest). It is difficult to go on to further education without at least 5 points. For employment purposes, pupils normally get a year or two of college schooling after secondary education. Among these graduates, the one with the highest score went on to a private university, approximately ten people studied in vocational courses, and the other twenty went back home. Since the KCSE ranking of *B* secondary school is 19th (2006) among 25 schools in the District, realities for schools with a lower ranking must be harsh.

Roles of Primary Schools in the Rural Community

What is the role of primary schooling? Considering the context of basic learning needs, as stated in the Dakar Framework for Action, “It is an education geared to tapping each individual’s talents and potential, and developing learners’ personalities, so that they can improve their lives and transform their societies” (UNESCO 2000, p.8).

For children in rural Kenya, education functions as a tool to exit traditional society. Among parents of Grade 8 pupils in *A* primary school in 2007, 70% had never been to school at all. Nonetheless, they understand the importance of schooling now and are keen in sending their children to school, and children study hard to meet their parents’expectations in some way. All wish to go to university; such aspirations for higher education support the expansion of primary education. Although few children wish to stay in the rural community

and work for them, most children dream of working in the modern sectors of urban cities. Girls, in particular, often have a definite wish to exit traditional society.

Primary education in Kenya, which often focuses on passing examinations, creates a feeling among teachers that learning at primary school is wasteful if one fails to advance to secondary school. Primary school head teachers wish for as many of their pupils to go on to good secondary schools as possible, which results in a high evaluation for their schools and for themselves. That observation corresponds to the reality that acquiring qualifications of higher learning is given priority over educational needs for individuals in this education-conscious society.

Such situations in Kenya are commonly found in other African countries; it does not suggest that such an educational emphasis on examinations is meaningless for children because skills for living are not learned. Even if the quality of education is low, joint work and sharing ideas with their friends are all valuable experiences for everyone. Acquiring sociability is another important benefit of schooling. A good example is that of a girl who left primary school at Grade 6 before completion due to pregnancy and is now working as a community leader.

In a non-full primary school (for example, first to third grades of primary school), only three out of twelve pupils in Grade 3 in 2005 transferred to a neighboring full primary school and other pupils repeated the same grade. Parents do not intend to send their children to a full primary school where upon completion of primary education, students then go on to secondary school. Rather parents expect their neighboring school to look after younger children, as a nursery, rather than as a place to acquire new knowledge and proceed to a full primary school later (Utsumi et al. 2006). In this example, people utilize schools in order to adjust to their lives. In addition to such functions, attending school serves a social function as a safety net to protect children from harmful traditional practices such as early marriage, even if teachers are strict and often absent. School appears to be a place which guarantees life as a child, and where children are set free from domestic labors to spend time with friends.

Although the function of primary schools as a social safety net might not be very important particularly for teachers and education administrators, the role cannot be ignored from the standpoint of parents as well as the children themselves. This alternative role of primary schooling has yet to be fully explored from the perspectives of people in rural communities. Apart from viewing primary schools as places to learn, primary schools are the only governmental organizations found across the country. In the situation where there are no other social welfare facilities, such diversified roles of primary school should be taken into account. What children, parents and communities expect from primary schools may not be the same as what the country's education system tries to deliver.

It might be important that 'successful pupils' become role models for the community, since most primary school dropouts return to the community and spend the remainder of life there. More attention, therefore, must be devoted to how primary schools might better serve the needs of children and parents. They could be a driving force for changing communities

and improving peoples' lives. Actually, some young people are already working in this manner. They can be change agents in the rural community.

Previous attention has focused on the expansion of and access to primary education. Now it might be the time to discuss the qualitative importance of primary education for personal growth and community. It would be better to take more interest not only in the 'quantitative expansion of education for the nation' but also in the development of communities based on the 'qualitative growth of individuals for the community.' Such emphasis may enhance the benefits of schooling and must ensure sustainable educational development. It may also suggest that we need to (re)consider the importance and value of primary schooling in the local contexts, rather than national or global ones. This is a serious challenge for many aid agencies which have been supporting to achieve UPE.

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