

Primary education in Kenya

Abstract:

The study provides a critical analysis of primary education in Kenya using time series data for the period between 1989 and 2002. The main issues of concern include access and participation, internal efficiency and equity. The research basically adopted a desk-study orientation with secondary data providing the bulk of the information. This was obtained from existing literature, including policy documents, Government publications, MoEST Statistics and local and international professional reports. Primary data was obtained by conducting key informant interviews using guided interview, observation and discussion schedules and a questionnaire. The major respondents included key education stakeholders, parents and teachers from a sample of schools drawn from Nairobi province and Kajiado district. The major challenges facing primary school education in Kenya include unsatisfactory levels of access and participation, regional disparities, declining quality and relevance, rising educational costs, poverty incidence, and declining government financing (prior to FPE), internal inefficiencies and school wastage. Over-age enrollments, increasing dropout rates, high repetition rates, low completion rates, declining transition rates from primary education level to higher education levels, and declining survival rates denote internal inefficiencies and primary school wastage that characterized trends in access to primary education between 1989 and 2002. Rising educational costs, poverty incidence and declining government financing are to a large extent, associated with the cost sharing policy introduced in 1988 that has had negative effects on primary education in terms of enrollments, quality and financing. Most of the resources are spent on recurrent expenditure items dominated by teachers' remunerations, while development allocation constitutes less 5 per cent (in 2001 the proportion was 2 per cent). Other challenges evident during the review period include lack of clear policy guidelines on cost sharing, inadequate mechanisms in the identification of needy students within the school system, inefficiencies in resource mobilization, utilization and accountability, poor management of some learning institutions, over reliance of donor funding in development projects/programmes, unsustainability of programmes/projects, child labor, and increasing numbers of destitute/street children. FPE initiative aims at addressing the challenges relating to access. However, close monitoring and evaluation are important in ensuring programme sustainability. During the period under study, the shortcomings were basically associated with limited educational capacity in densely populated regions, dilapidated physical infrastructure, rising costs and reduction in real Government expenditure on education, cost-sharing strategy and its implications, socio-economic backgrounds of pupils and high incidence of poverty, poor health and nutrition, HIV / AIDS and its implications for education demand and supply, lack of coherent and consistent policy guidelines, and incapacity to adequately provide and use reliable data and research findings in planning for education. However, it is important to note that with the introduction of Free Primary Education starting from the year 2003, many of the challenges associated with the high cost of primary education are being addressed. The data contained in the report indicate that approximately 630,820 (9.1 percent) pupils of primary school going age (6-13 years) were not in school by 2001. Remarkable achievements had however been achieved in early 2003 with the country recording a gross enrolment rate of 103 percent. Completion and transition rates averaged below 50 percent during the period under review, indicating significant wastage rates at primary school cycle. The figures portray gender parity at national level but significant regional disparities. The study

recommends elimination of barriers to access and participation, through construction of more primary and secondary schools, concerted effort and collaboration between the Government, private sector and other stakeholders to ease overcrowding; immediate review of the cost-sharing strategy and institutionalization of policies aimed at sustaining FPE programme; improved and sustainable political commitment towards major initiatives such as provision of textbooks, school feeding, and improved prioritization and targeting in the implementation of the bursary and school grants programmes. Although the study attempts to discuss the general reasons for the current status of Kenya's primary education system, this is limited to analysis at provincial level. As such, it provides limited information on the magnitude of the impact of individual factors on major outcome indicators and quality. This calls for further research in order to establish the differential impact of all factors by district and gender. Special studies could be designed for Provinces with distinct variations in participation rates. Other emerging issues and research gaps include establishment of real unit cost of education at various levels of education and at micro (household) and macro (national or public) levels; private education in Kenya; comparative analysis of physical infrastructure in public and private schools, and in rural and urban primary schools; and the impact of HIV / AIDS on primary school education at micro (household), meso (school) and macro (national) levels.