



**CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PROGRAMMES AND  
ACTIVITIES DEVELOPED TO IMPROVE EDUCATIONAL ACCESS, QUALITY AND  
EQUITY IN KENYA**

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**Abstract**

*The declarations of the 1990 Jomtien World Conference on Education and the 2000 Dakar World Education Forum both emphasized that to achieve Education for All (EFA) by 2015, in addition to increased **access** to education, all countries would require to improve the **quality and equity** of education so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all. Ministries of education worldwide fully agree with this interpretation of the EFA mission, Kenya included. However, many educational planners in developing countries have raised two related questions: firstly, when resources are scarce, can greater improvements in the performance of a population of students be made by focusing these resources on a limited section of the population? Secondly, would it be better to spread these resources thinly across the whole student population? The issues leave planners in a dilemma, and suggest that there might be an inherent **trade-off** situation that operates in education systems between the average level of student learning outcomes and their equitable distribution.*

**Key Words:** Access, Education, Effectiveness, Equity, Quality

## **Introduction**

Education is widely seen as one of the most promising paths for individuals to realize better, more productive lives and as one of the primary drivers of national economic development. Education is a fundamental human right and an essential tool for improving the quality of life and making informed choices and achieving development. A rights perspective implies a commitment to equitable access to quality education, and these three values, (equity, access and quality) are inherently inter-related. Since education often determines life opportunities, equalizing access goes a long way towards creating a more equal nation in the future. Educating children and empowering young people to use their skills and energies constructively is a vehicle to ending poverty and its debilitating effects on society (Uwezo, 2010). Many of the calculations to establish affordability focus on access, and do not provide adequately for the costs of improving quality, or for the added costs of reaching the hard to reach.

## **The concepts of Access, Quality and Equity in Education**

Access to education is determined by a number of factors such as cost, proximity to educational facility and availability of appropriate physical amenities such school laboratories and adequate instructional material. Although literacy levels have increased globally, approximately 800 million people in the world lack basic literacy skills, with women accounting for about two thirds. Illiteracy today reflects past deficits in access to education (UNDP, 2005). UNDP projects that it will be difficult to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) target of universal primary education target by 2015. Based on current trends, there will be 47 million children out of school in 2015, 19 million of them in Sub-Saharan Africa. UNDP further notes that 46 countries are already retrogressing and will not meet the target until after 2040. These countries account for 23 million of the 110 million children currently out of school in the developing countries (UNDP, 2005; Commission for Africa, 2005). Over 40 million primary school age children are out of school.

## **The Dynamics of Quality in Education**

Educational decision-makers all over the world have become more concerned with improving not only the “quantity”, but also the “quality” of educational provision (UNESCO, 2005). The concept of quality of education is a very complex one and has been approached differently by different educational researchers and educationists. The question of the quality of education and its main determinants remains controversial amongst scholars, policy makers and practitioners. UNICEF (2000) defines quality of education in terms of six characteristics: “learners who are healthy and ready to learn; environments that are safe and adequately resourced; content reflected in relevant curricula for acquiring basic skills; processes that use child-centered learning; outcomes that encompass knowledge; skills and attitudes and link to national educational goals and civic participation”. UNESCO (2005) expands the definition of quality to include a special emphasis on gender perspective and a demand for education to reflect upon its relevance to the world outside of school and social dimensions. The different definitions highlight the different elements of the basic input-process-output model. This model emphasizes

the importance of both cognitive and affective results measured by the extent to which pupils achieve knowledge, skills and behaviors specified by a national curriculum. Despite the elusive nature of the concept of quality, it is noted that common to all education systems is the objective of improving the cognitive achievement of pupils.

### **Equity in Education**

Equity in education has been a concern of almost all countries, whether developed, transitional, or in the process of developing. Equity refers to the practices of fairness and justice in the distribution of opportunities, benefits and responsibilities (UNESCO, 2005). It also refers to treating all individuals equally, on the basis of their situations and needs, and without reference to their gender, (GOK, 2007). Equity in education is more than an issue of fairness and distributive justice. The proponents of the government's role in providing education assert that a shared public commitment in achieving greater equity is the only reason for government (public) schools to exist.

### **Kenyan context**

The overall goal of education sector in Kenya is to achieve EFA and MDGs by 2015 through provision of quality education and training. The citizens and the government of Kenya have invested heavily in improving both the access and quality of education, in an effort to realize the promise of education as well as to achieve the education-related Millennium Development Goals and Vision 2030, (MOE, 2008). In Kenyan educational landscape, inequalities in relation to access to quality education are apparent. Earning disparities create inequalities in the ability to access quality education at all levels of education- primary, secondary, TIVET and university institutions, with regional and gender disparities, middle and upper income bracket earners more likely take their children to lesser affordable but more competitive private and provincial schools (Keriga, 2009).

The overall literacy rate for Kenya is 76.8%, with literacy rates among males amounting to 82.5% and those of females reaching only 71.2% (GOK, 2008). The enrolment of women in the public universities has increased over time from 36.7 % in 2004 to 40.13% in 2008. The disparities differ from region to region with the lowest recorded in North Eastern Province with a GER of 29.3% for girls in primary school compared to Western Province with the highest GER of 112.2%. North Eastern Province is mainly inhabited by pastoral communities, who live a nomadic way of life, making it difficult for children to attend school consistently. Some of the reasons for the disparities are attributed to high poverty levels, insecurity, persistent droughts and cultural/religious beliefs that control social behavior, limited opportunities in terms of schools and classrooms e.g. in some urban informal settlements there is no public primary school and this means the children there cannot access FPE.

**Critical Analysis of the effectiveness of Programmes developed by the government and other development partners to Improve Educational Access, Quality and Equity.**

Since Independence, the Government with other development partners has sought to address the challenges facing the education sector through a range of policy initiatives, often with mixed results. The key programmes and interventions undertaken by the government of Kenya to address issues of access, equity, relevance qualities cut across all the sub-sectors and include:

1. Free primary education programme(FPE)
2. Implementation of Affordable Day Secondary schools programme and Establishment of day streams in boarding, and bursaries.
3. Support to Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE);
4. Grants to support Non Formal Schools;
5. School feeding programme, health/nutrition and de-worming programmes;
6. Grants for special needs education,
7. Promotion and integrating of ICT into the secondary school curricula.
8. Alternative approaches such as Open and distance Learning (ODL), provision of low cost boarding schools and Mobile schools in ASALs
9. Grants to support and cushion schools in the Arid and Semi-Arid Lands, pockets of poverty and vulnerable categories such as orphans, girl child, displaced children and the disabled.
10. Establishment of Centres of Excellence;
11. Bursaries to teacher training college students;
12. Recruiting more trained teachers ;
13. improving textbook-to-pupil ratios;
14. Supplying sanitary towels to girls
15. Establishment of guidance and counseling to deal with drug abuse and violence.

Some of these programmes and their effectiveness have been discussed as follows:

#### **Free Primary Education (FPE)**

The first notable increase in enrolments took place in 1974 when the then government introduced FPE via the abolition of the school fees for standards one to four (Republic of Kenya, 1974). This led to a massive surge in primary enrolments, showing an over 51 percent increase from 1.8 million in 1973 to 2.7 million in 1974 (Republic of Kenya, 1975). However, under this free primary education, parents were still responsible for meeting the costs of school construction, hence undermining the gains of the FPE policy. The second massive surge was in 1979 when the then government enacted a policy of no building levies and other school funds to improve children's nutrition and thus their capacity to learn, the government also started distributing free milk to all primary schools Each child received two glasses of milk per week (Republic of Kenya, 1979a, 1980a). These policies led to another sharp increase in standard one enrolment, from 599,057 in 1978 to 977,368 in 1979; an increase of 63%. In total, primary enrolments increased from 2,994,991 in 1978 to 3,698,246 in 1979, an increase of 23% .In 2003,

Kenya introduced the Free Primary Education (FPE) policy with a view to meeting the goal of Universal Primary Education (UPE) (Onsomu, Muthaka, Ngware, Kosimbei, 2006).

While the Free Primary Education (FPE) program has increased access to primary education especially among poorer households, ancillary costs of primary education (such as school uniforms) continue to hinder the educational attainment of many children. In addition, the provision of quality education remains a challenge. This was highlighted by a recent study by Uwezo (2010), which found disappointing levels of learning among primary school children. MOE (2008) reveals a persistent high dropout rate among the lower primary grades despite free schooling. Overcrowded classes, high pupil to teacher ratios, poor teacher education, crumbling buildings and inadequate overstretched learning facilities has undermined the quality of education. Facilities and projects that were originally supported by parents and communities have also been abandoned; parents and community member feel they do not have to contribute financially to the running of school facilities now that FPE has been introduced; these challenges have a bearing on the access, equity and quality of education for learners and the community as a whole. Strategies to improve includes setting guidelines and defining on the age of entry to primary school, hiring more manpower and increased funding to buy textbooks to improve text-book pupil ratios, prioritize teaching-reading and making literacy core accountability for education systems to improve learning achievement.

#### **Introduction of Affordable Day Secondary Schools Education (ADSE) and increased number of streams in a school to accommodate more students**

To cope with the pressure arising from the increased primary school graduates, the MOE advised all public secondary schools to expand their capacities to a minimum of three streams and a maximum of six streams. Further, the government implemented the subsidized Affordable Day Secondary school programme in 2008. This set of programmes to some extent addresses some of the structural drivers of inequality and access. In addition, the recent creation of schools that are centers of excellence in every constituency, will in the long term contribute towards reducing regional inequality, improving quality and access (Ministry of Finance, 2009). Further, bursary programme targeted at needy students living under difficult conditions and Most Vulnerable Children (MVCs) groups such as orphans, the girl child and children from poor families, slum areas, pockets of poverty in high potential areas, and Arid and Semi-Arid Lands(ASAL) districts to improve access, ensures retention and reduces secondary school disparities and inequalities. The bursary fund is managed by a Constituency Bursary Management Committee (CBMC) in consultation with the Ministry of Education (MOE) in accordance with the set guidelines.

For effective intervention, any attempt to expand access MOE must take into account the existing disparities within the society, such as social stratification, failure to which such expansion will be a tool for propagating social-economic inequalities. Recognize and invest in good-quality community-based monitoring, planning and accountability approaches. Address

opportunity costs for education and sensitize communities and households on the private and social benefits of education to reduce cultural factors negatively influencing access to quality education.

### **Support given to Early Childhood (ECDE) Programme**

The ministry acknowledges that access to Early Childhood Education lays a strong foundation to future learning and development of children in their early years and has a positive effect on enrolment and retention. The aim of the ECDE programme is to provide holistic integrated services that create a strong foundation for meeting the child's cognitive, psychosocial, moral, spiritual, emotional and psychomotor needs. The program aims at expanding access, equity and quality of ECDE services for children aged 4 to 5 years, especially those living in ASAL areas, urban slums and pockets of poverty in Kenya by 2010.

However, access to early childhood education remains low (MOE, 2008). This has been attributed to limited teaching and learning materials, inadequate ECDE centres; limited community participation; lack of a clear policy on transition from pre-primary to primary school; inadequate nutrition and health services; lack of enough trained teachers; low and irregular salaries for ECDE teachers and lack of clear entry age guidelines (MOE, 2005).

Strategies to improve access, equity and quality includes intensifying capacity building and resource mobilization with a view to empowering stakeholders to manage their ECDE facilities efficiently, setting quality standards and publicize the same among all service providers; developing and implementing appropriate ECDE programmes for children with special needs, including the vulnerable and disadvantaged. Start early to ensure early learning opportunities and experiences for children, and increase investment in training and support for early childcare providers, preschool teachers, parents and caregivers, prioritizing the most vulnerable and poorest children.

### **School Feeding, Health and Nutrition Programme**

Children who are sick cannot attend school or learn sufficiently. Children can be treated for worms, micro-nutrient deficiencies and malaria in schools in a cost-effective way as mass de-worming in schools is the most cost-effective way to increase school participation – biannual treatment reduces absenteeism by 25%. In 2009, 3.6 million children were de-wormed through a partnership between the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Public Health and Sanitation, and the Kenya Medical Research Institute in partnership with World Food Programme (WFP). De-worming and treatment of jigger's infestations among children has been shown to significantly increase school attendance (Miguel and Kremer, 2004). In a comparison of alternative ways to promote access to education, de-worming was found to be one of the most cost effective approaches of all those rigorously tested. Large-scale de-worming programs, for example, have been shown to be extremely cost-effective at increasing schooling and could go a long way in boosting participation, especially among the poor. Another intervention is provision of sanitary towels for girls. Currently the Ministry of Education is distributing sanitary pads free to schools

but faces challenges in meeting the demand. Girls' schooling is positively affected through the provision of sanitary, private and secure latrines, since poor sanitation facilities can cause girls to drop out of school or stay at home during menstruation.

School feeding programme is also another intervention meant to improve access equity and quality of education. The long-term objective of the programme is to promote basic education of socio-economically disadvantaged and nutritionally vulnerable children, especially girls in pre-primary and primary schools in targeted ASAL districts and slums in Nairobi.

Although the School Feeding and Health Programme (SFP) has enabled the Sector realize some of its set targets, there still exist challenges of expanding the scope of the programme to reach more needy cases in pockets of poverty and other needy areas, and sustainability of the SFP. Also, lack of de-worming programme guidelines and implementation framework undermines its effectiveness. Strategies for sustainability include encouraging partnership participation through community involvement, government investment in agricultural sector to ensure adequate food supplies. Also, establish strategies, frameworks and funding for sustainability of programmes meant for children viewed as 'hardest to reach' so that they can access good-quality education.

### **Capitation for Special needs education and the policy of inclusive Education**

Special education is important for human capital development as it prepares those who would otherwise be dependents to be self reliant. The population of people with disability in Kenya is estimated at 10% of the total population of whom about 25% of these are children of school-going age (MOE, 2008). Out of 750,000, an estimated 90,000 have been identified and assessed. However, only 14,614 are enrolled in 10 educational programmes for children with disabilities; while an equivalent number are integrated in regular schools (Ibid). This implies that over 90% of handicapped children are either at home or in regular schools with little or no specialized assistance.

Grants are given to facilitate procurement of the necessary teaching/learning materials and equipment to provide a conducive learning environment for children with special needs. Although programmes are noble and improving access and equity to education, these only cater for children with special needs in areas of hearing, visual, mental and physical challenges leaving out those with specific learning difficulties, gifted and talented children. Lack of clear guidelines on the implementation of an all inclusive education policy and teacher preparedness to teach learners in an inclusive classroom setting makes it almost impossible to teach. There are no mechanisms of identifying highly intelligent children at an appropriate age so as to give them special training as is the case in other countries where skills are nurtured from early stages of life. Lack of reliable data on children with special needs and inadequate tools and skills for

identification and assessment of identifying highly intelligent children at an appropriate age to give them special training as is done in developed countries where skills are nurtured from early stages of life. The teachers are not adequately prepared to handle children with special needs (Mwanje, Akoten, Riechi, Barasa, Oyugi, Omolo, Junge, Kimbwarata, Mukasa, 2008). Further, delivery of education and training services in the special needs sub sector is constrained by high cost of relevant equipment and inadequate teachers and assessors. Another constraint is the negative attitude of the community towards special needs children and many facilities not being responsive to the needs of learners at all levels of education and training. All these issues lead to poor implementation, rendering the interventions ineffective in improving access, quality and equity in education, (MOE, 2008). To make it more effective, ensure inclusion is part of basic education sector planning by mainstreaming it in the national educational curriculum. Also, invest in national education policies that reflect inclusivity with a particular prioritization of teaching children in their own language and optimizing girl's education.

#### **Promotion and integrating of ICT into school curricula at all levels.**

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills play a key role in promoting economic development of a country. The Government appreciates and recognizes that, an ICT literate workforce is the foundation on which Kenya can acquire the status of a knowledge economy. Education and training sector has a major role to play in the implementation of the new ICT policy promulgated in 2006. If appropriately used, ICT can bring many benefits to the classroom and the education and training process, including opportunity to reach more learners, greater opportunity for teacher-to-teacher, and student-to-student communication and collaboration, hence, improving access, quality and equity in education provision.

#### **Expansion of Higher Education and loans by HELB to needy students**

The MOE have upgraded some middle colleges e.g. Kenya polytechnic and Mombasa polytechnic to full university status, and constituent University colleges have been created to enhance access and equity to university education. Further, the Higher education loans board offers scholarships and loan schemes to needy students to enhance equity and access to university education. Despite such efforts, university education in Kenya is characterized by gender, regional, ethnic, and social disparities and inequalities. Gender and poor communities are under-represented in strategic and competitive degree programmes such as sciences, medicine, engineering and law. Other challenges include low loan recovery resulting from unemployment; unrealistic unit cost of higher education; impact of HIV/AIDS pandemic and low corporate/private sector participation in funding higher education. Further, there is lack of systematic and comprehensive studies on equity in provision of higher education. High student numbers do not match the available physical facilities such as lecture halls and halls of residence. Overcrowding is also seen in other facilities such as libraries and dining halls. Quality of learning in the institutions of higher learning has also been blamed on large number of admissions, lower and more flexible admission criteria and the liberalization of academic



institutions which is seen to promote the concept of 'education for sale' (Sifuna, 2007). Other factors that affect quality of output in institutions of higher learning include poor remuneration of academic staff, lack of financial support from the government for research and development. Due to lack of systematic and comprehensive studies on equity in provision of higher, inadequate comprehensive data base renders monitoring of government interventions difficult to assess their effectiveness.

### **Grants to Schools in Arid and Semi Arid Lands**

The four areas of concern are tailoring the provision of education to respond to the needs of children from pastoralist communities in ASAL areas (boarding and mobile schools); increasing the provision of financial support for education to poor children; addressing socio-cultural impediments to the pursuit of an education; and integrating special needs children within the mainstream education system.

Although the measures are appropriate, effectiveness to improve access, quality and equity is hampered by socio-cultural factors and weak implementation of the programmes targeting the hard to reach children as well as inadequate funding. Misappropriation of public funds has sometimes rendered the implementation of the projects ineffective or even making them stall completely. Therefore, there is need for continuous monitoring and evaluation, accountability and consistency of purpose. Further, schools should explore setting up scholarship funds for the bright and needy students as a motivating strategy. In addition, they can attract scholarships from the government NGOs and companies among others. Companies could do this through their corporate social responsibility as a way of marketing themselves

### **Affirmative Action**

Generally, the national education system has been characterized by gender disparities at the national level and across regions. Affirmative Action policies includes Re-entry of girls to schools after delivery to continue with education, lowering the entry points for girls into the university, lower entry grades for pupils from ASAL areas, provision of alternative schooling approaches among others. As part of an Affirmative Action, secondary schools in Mandera, Wajir, Ijara, Garissa, Moyale, Marsabit and Isiolo have been given an enhanced allocation so that the minimum amount per school in these districts is Kshs. 100,000 regardless of student enrolment. Government's commitment to the education of girls and women is shown by its active participation in key international forums; being a signatory to nearly all conventions relating to gender equality, and commitment to achieve goals of EFA, especially by introducing free primary education; and establishment of Centers of Excellence in various parts of the country. There is also Gender mainstreaming to ensure equity and equality in SNE. UNICEF's key contribution to quality education is the child-friendly school includes the gender specifics that promotes safe and healthy learning environment so that education is provided in safe places for girls and boy (UNICEF Education strategy 2006-2015).

However, there is lack of systematic follow up and laxity in implementation of recommendations of commissions/Boards/Committees. In addition, there is inadequate capacity and resources for implementation and lack of political will to take unpopular but necessary decision. This can be improved by establishment of implementation framework, monitoring and evaluation of the projects for accountability, consistency and Cost Benefit Analysis. The Ministry of education should empower those with knowhow on project management for effective implementation.

### **Adult Continuing Education and Grants to Non Formal Schools**

The Government recognizes that all Kenyan children have a right to quality education. Adult education on the other hand provides basic education and training opportunities to adults and out of school youth aged 15 years and above who have either missed formal education in their childhood or dropped out before attaining sustainable levels. To achieve this, the Sector has for the last four years been providing grants to NFSs for teaching and learning materials and improvement of infrastructure. Despite the introduction of Free Primary Education in 2005, there are an estimated 1.7 million children and youth who have not yet got access to education through formal schools (MOE, 2008). This problem is particularly severe in informal urban settlements and remote rural areas and concerns vulnerable groups such as child workers, orphans, nomadic children, and street youth and the “hard-to-reach” groups in urban slums.

Due to the diversity in Non-Formal Education (NFE) provision, there is no regular, accurate enrolment account, and this hampers proper planning for effective implementation. There is also the problem of limited funds as reflected in the 2004/05 financial year, only Kshs.5.9 million was allocated to fund the 166 NFSs that had met the funding criteria (Ibid). These funds are not adequate; hence, the effectiveness of the intervention to improve access, quality and equity has not been realized. This is mostly due to the low status of adult education, lack of teachers, poor provision of requisite services, lack of own facilities and resources. Cumulatively, these have led to little enthusiasm among learners in enrolling for adult education classes. Adult education teachers are also poorly remunerated; they lack essential teaching skills and are mostly volunteers or in many cases, retired teachers or ordinary level (Form Four) school leavers without any form of teacher training. Also, there is lack of linkages between formal and non-formal education. There is also weak monitoring and evaluation mechanisms of projects leading to poor or uncontrolled progress in implementation (MOE, 2008). There exist weak implementation structures of the programmes targeting the hard-to-reach children and other marginalized groups as well as inadequate funding for the same. The NFE sub sector lacks a broad partnership framework encompassing community based NGOs, Faith Based Organizations (FBOs), multi/bilateral agencies and key ministries to enhance efforts to reach participation for out-of-school children and youth. Given the scarcity of NFE institutions particularly in the northern and eastern parts of the country, it is not surprising to find very low enrolments and pupil/teacher ratios (less than 10 pupils per teacher).

## Conclusions

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, focusing on 'Education for All' is out dated. The question of what product education is offering to the learner for the labour market is crucial. The issues of access, equity, and quality in education continue to emerge as important factors in creating systems that will promote academic achievement opportunities during to learners in diverse environments. Kenya needs pragmatic curriculum reforms that can encourage creative and effective innovations in learning and teaching, new methods of assessment capable of capturing valued learning outcomes, and selection of content and thinking skills that are more rather than less relevant for entrants to diverse labour markets, and relevant to a much broader range of learners.

It is time education looked at where the society is today and where it wants to be tomorrow in its endeavour in to implement new strategies improving educational attainment. In order to achieve Education for All and gender equality in education by 2015, among other milestones, targeted measures need to be taken and resources prioritized for the poorest of the poor and most marginalized communities, including orphans and vulnerable children, those in rural areas, pastoralists, ethnic minorities, children with disabilities, and those affected by natural disasters and conflict. Enhancement of access and equity entails provision of infrastructure to deepen the gains of FPE and address the concomitant infrastructure needs with the higher enrolment in the new policy on Free Secondary Education. Access and participation in education should be matched with adequate quality educational inputs such as continuous in-service teacher training, provision of relevant teaching/learning resources, construction of physical infrastructure and improvement of the school environment. Education policies should be redesigned or reviewed in order to empower and encourage children to exercise their right to education. All stakeholders including parents, teachers, households and private entrepreneurs have a stake in the provision of quality education, therefore, participation of the main stakeholders (employers/consumers and education/training providers) in national education and training policy formulation and management is essential.

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