

POLICY BRIEF

Realizing the dream of education for all in Kenya



Key messages

School feeding program has resulted in increased enrollment for private schools but reduced enrolment for public schools

Implementation of free primary education has increased enrollment and completion but reduced transitions rates

COVID-19 reduced school attendance, more so for public schools in rural areas and for elderly households



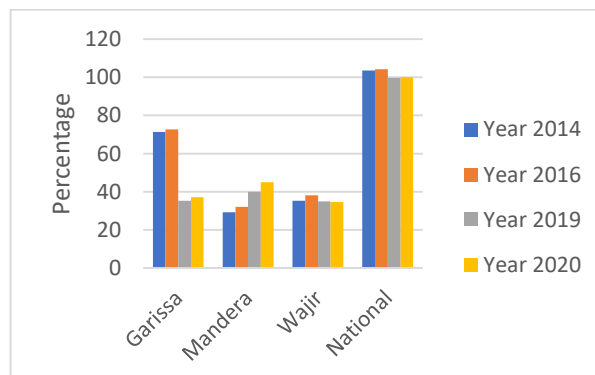
Source: <https://borgenproject.org/tag/free-primary-education-fpe/>

Introduction

Human capital development is key to ending extreme poverty and creating more inclusive societies. In July 2023, African leaders from 43 countries endorsed the Dar Es Salaam Human Capital Declaration, which constitutes concrete commitments to prioritize investments in people, with specific targets in health, education, and jobs. Kenya was one of the countries that committed to prioritizing investment in human capital development.

The right to education is enshrined in the constitution of Kenya, Articles 43 and 53 and in the 2013 Basic Education Act. Kenya is however yet to attain basic education for all. Primary Net Enrollment Ratio (NER) was estimated at 79.3 in 2020(1), indicating that approximately 20 per cent of children within the primary school age going were not accessing school. Enrollment in ASAL counties was 8 percentage points lower and stood at 71.8 per cent. At the secondary school level, the NER was 54.1 per cent, implying that about 46 per cent of children aged 14-17 were not accessing secondary education in 2020. The average for the ASAL

regions was lower. For instance secondary school net enrolment rate was only 9.8 for Mandera, 11.3 percent for Garissa and 13 percent for Wajir



What is the government doing?

In 2003, the government of Kenya implemented free primary education which was followed by implementation of free day secondary school in 2008. The Kenyan government also invests billions of shillings in School Feeding Programme (SFP) to encourage school enrollment, attendance, and completion, and to reduce regional and social disparities in education attainment. School feeding programme began in 1979 with a government led school milk program commonly called the “Nyayo Milk.” Subsequently, various school feeding programmes (SFPs) have been implemented by the national and county governments in conjunction with the World Food Programme (WFP), and other Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Negative shocks can negatively affect human capital accumulation effort. In 2020, the world experienced the COVID-19 pandemic. Such shocks threaten household welfare and the ability to send children to school as well. The COVID-19 pandemic which hit the world in 2020 affected the way children experienced education and, by extension, the learning capability. Closures of educational institutions hampered the provision of essential learning services to children.

What have been the impacts of these policies and shocks to education outcome?

1. School feeding programs

School feeding program has had positive effect on school enrolment for private primary schools (4). For public primary schools, however, school feeding program has had negative effects on enrollment.

For ASAL areas, school feeding program has contributed to increased enrollment both for pre-primary and primary schools. For secondary schools, government assistance in form of bursaries increased enrolment



Source: WFP

2. Free primary education

Free Primary Education has increased enrollment and completion rates made possible through substantial investments in physical infrastructure, teacher recruitment, and funding for educational resources such as school levies and books. Implementation of free primary education increased net enrolment and completion rate by 11% (5). Free primary education is however associated with reduced transition rates from primary to secondary. Implementation of free primary education was associated with 6% reduction in transition rates from primary to secondary.

3. COVID-19

Covid-19 pandemic disrupted normal school attendance in Kenya. The disruption was especially among children attending public schools and especially those in rural areas (6). Children from households with elderly heads were also disproportionately affected. Response strategies such as school closures, cessation of movements

and lockdowns worsened the problem of school attendance especially for public schools and especially those in rural areas due to limited access to learning technologies and internet

Policy recommendations

The national and county governments should allocate sufficient budgetary resources to subsidize education especially for the poor, vulnerable and marginalized populations.

- Free primary education has been effective in promoting primary school enrollment and completion. The government should continue implementing FPE
- School feeding programs should be targeted to poor households especially those living in Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALs) and in informal urban settlements to help bridge the education access gap

To promote transition from primary to secondary:

- More funds should be allocated to Free Secondary Education beyond the Free Day Secondary Education
- The government should also invest in secondary school infrastructure (including mobile schools) to absorb the large number of pupils now transiting from primary schools especially in marginalized areas

To improve quality of learning in the rural areas, the government should continue rolling out rural electrification programs and investing in rural ICT technologies that can come in handy in events there is disruption to normal learning

References

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