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Access to basic education in Kenya: inherent concerns

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Accepted 24 September 2007

Basic education being the minimum education that every Kenyan must have for progressive existence in society is a crucial factor. That is why Kenya subscribes to the international protocol that established Education for All (EFA) in Jomtien, Thailand 1990 and the world education forum in Dakar, Senegal, 2000. Since then, the Kenya Government in her Education Sector Strategic Plan and Sessional paper No. 1 of 2005 has articulated how to attain goals for education. For instance early childhood education which tries to ensure development of the whole personality of the child's physical, mental, and socio-emotional attributes faces challenges such as lack of access to early childhood education mostly caused by poverty, regional and gender disparities, policy framework, and HIV/AIDS among others. At primary school level where children stay longest in the schooling years and they develop more motor skill, further cognitive skills along with higher socialization than the early childhood education level, has children failing to access education due to poverty, gender imbalances, regional imbalances among other concerns. Secondary education which creates a human resource base higher than the primary education along with training youth for further education and the world of work registers restriction to many children due to concerns of poverty, gender imbalances, insecurity regional disparity among others. This article articulates in detail the above concerns discussing their manifestations in Kenya. Conclusions are drawn and recommendations made on how to improve access to basic education in Kenya. Among the recommendations are: To make basic education free and compulsory, improve provision of health services, intensify fight against demeaning cultures, give special attention to children with disabilities, avail employment opportunities to the youth, assure security to all in conflict prone zones and tighten bursary disbursement procedures.

Key words: Basic education, access.

INTRODUCTION

The universal declaration on human rights in 1948 by the United Nations Organization embraces education as a basic human right. Kenya subscribes and is a signatory to this declaration as well as to the international protocol that established Education for All (EFA) agenda in Jomtien, Thailand, 1990 and the World Education Forum (WEF) in Dakar, Senegal, 2000. Accordingly, Kenya's Educational Sector Strategic Plan and Implementation Matrices: 2003-2007, shows her commitment to: a) Eliminate poverty as a hindrance to educational development.

b) Promote human rights through provision of education.
c) Attain sustainable development by the provision of quality basic education for all. Thus, like other developing nations in the world to-day, Kenya is making strenuous efforts to achieve education access for all. Kenya realizes that in order to cope with the wave of transformation and development that is sweeping across the nations; she must sacrifice and invest more in the educational development of her people.

For this matter, the National Conference on Education (NCE) held in November 2003, brought together educational stakeholders to chat way forward for better developments in this sector. This came as a realization that over the years, the country had made tremendous strides in the development of this sector and the need for review

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Table 1. Number of pre-primary schools and enrolments

| Year | 1992 | 1994 | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|-------------|---------|---------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Pre-schools | 18,327 | 19,083 | 21,261 | 23,344 | 23,977 | 25,429 | 26,294 | 27,573 | 28,300 |
| Enrolment | 858,593 | 951,997 | 1,033,367 | 1,064,053 | 1,076,606 | 1,063,883 | 1,096,629 | 1,163,523 | 1,175,225 |

Source: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology 2002).

could not be overlooked. For example, the number of students enrolled at the basic education levels had substantially expanded since independence in 1963. Moreover, although ECD education was not mentioned in the Education Act of 1968 (Revised, 1980), concerns in this sector were many (Chege et al., 2006; UNESCO, 2003). Furthermore, ECD needed to be made accessible to as many children as possible. By the year 2003, Kenya, South Africa, and Zimbabwe were the only African Countries with comparatively high ECD enrolments ranging between 30 and 50% but below the world's desired average of 70% (UNESCO, 2006).

In this paper we discussed some of the inherent concerns vis-à-vis access to basic education in Kenya. Conclusions and suggestions for way forward are provided at the end of the discussions.

Access to early childhood development education in Kenya: concerns

Following the Dakar Declaration in the year 2000 that education is for all people, the Kenya government took a more serious approach to ensure accessibility of at least basic education that encompasses Early Childhood Development (ECD), Primary, and Secondary levels to all. The urgency of this matter was emphatic given that about a half of the county's population is composed of young people. 20% of these people are under the age of five years (Republic of Kenya, 2004). Statistically this fraction is a large portion of potential human resource that needs careful planning and development.

In Kenya, the ECD sub-sector constitutes: household, community, and state efforts to provide an integrated development for children from birth to the age of entry into primary school (Republic of Kenya, 2006). Integrated development includes the nature of the whole personality of the child, growth of the child's physical, mental, and socio-emotional attributes (Republic of Kenya, 2003). Some scholars have noted that the provision of security, adequate nutrition, and promotion of good health are recognized as constituting the foundation of proper growth of children (Odebero et al., 2007). Moreover, that, a child's fastest growth in physical, mental, and socio-emotional traits takes place during the age of 0-5 years (Republic of Kenya, 2006). This is when the child is most vulnerable to environmental influences. Therefore, ECD plays a crucial role in laying foundation for further education and training of individuals in society. It forms the most important springboard for the total development

of an individual and society. Imperatively therefore, ECD should be provided to all children.

By 2002, available statistics show that there were 28, 300 pre-schools in Kenya compared to 18, 327 in 1992. This represented a 68.9% increase in the number of ECD centers. Consequently, enrolment rose by 37.7% from 858, 953 in 1992 to 1,175,225 in 2002 as indicated in Table 1.

In 2003, enrolment increased by 2.5% to 1,204,606. The impact of Free Primary Education (FPE) on pre-school enrolment is yet to be conclusively evaluated. Nevertheless, the average number of children enrolled in each pre-school range between 42 and 52% (Chege and Sifuna, 2006). This is below expectation. It means that many children in Kenya do not have access to ECD. It is herein thought that some parents out of poverty and other factors may not enroll their children in pre-primary schools. Instead, they will opt to wait and register them in primary schools where education is free and compulsory (Republic of Kenya, 2004). Nonetheless, such children would have missed their ECD education, which, as earlier noted, plays a critical role in one's total development.

In this section, attempts are made to discuss four of the many perturbing concerns in the ECD education sub-sector in Kenya. These are: poverty, regional and gender disparities, policy framework, and, HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Poverty concern

In the year 1992, about 44% of Kenya's total population lived under poverty line. In 1997, 52% of the population was under going the same situation. In 2002, about 56% of the population lived in this same sorry economic condition. Although the situation seems to have improved, the national picture is still gloomy because about a half of Kenya's 34million people lives below poverty line (Otieno, 2007). According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Report of 2006, four out of eight provinces recorded an increase in poverty levels while Kenyans living in abject poverty deepened. These people suffer remoteness, poor road network, lack of production technology as well as storage capacities, and fluid cash among others. These people are subsequently incapable of acquisition of proper dietary needs, medical care, and clean habitats (Achoka et al., 2005). Children who are born to such parents are pre-disposed to disadvantaged access to ECD right from conception to primary school age; they suffer improper growth due to financial impoverishment of their parents.

Table 2. Percentage distribution of pre-primary school enrolment, 2002

| Province/Nation | % Boys | % Girls |
|-----------------|-------------|-------------|
| Central | 51.0 | 49.0 |
| Coast | 51.6 | 48.4 |
| Eastern | 50.9 | 49.1 |
| North Eastern | 56.8 | 43.2 |
| Nyanza | 49.8 | 50.2 |
| Rift Valley | 51.3 | 48.7 |
| Western | 49.8 | 50.2 |
| Nairobi | 48.7 | 51.3 |
| Kenya | 50.8 | 49.2 |

Source: Chege and Sifuna (2006:35).

For instance, only 40% of eligible pre-school children are nationally registered. Some districts record as little as less than 20% of pre-school age children (Siringi, 2007). The major obstacle to optimal registration is financial constraints of poor parents. For instance, the biggest increase in poverty levels in Kenya is in North Eastern Province. Here the poverty index is 50.5%. From the national global picture, by the year 2003, only 20% of the eligible children were registered (Republic Kenya, 2003).

Even government's financial support in this sub-sector of education is negligible. Parents and supporters must pay the bulk of the required amounts of monies. For example, the estimated cost for the government and other stakeholders to meet EFA goals in ECD sub-sector is Kenya shillings four billion, six hundred and nineteen million, six hundred and fifty thousand two hundred and thirty only (Kshs. 4,619,615,230.00) (cumulated estimates from all districts' EFA plans). The Kenya government contributes a pastry about 1% only. As such, parents pay much money that most poor parents cannot afford to pay. Concisely, either children from these poor homes miss the whole of ECD education or if they were enrolled, they drop out of school. Whichever paradigm the trend assumes, Kenya incurs losses necessitated by poverty. Unless ECD is made free and compulsory in Kenya, children from poor homes will continue to be disadvantaged.

Regional and gender disparity factors

The land of Kenya is largely varied geographically. Some parts like those of Northern Kenya are Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALs). Other parts like those of Central and Western Provinces are wetlands. Most families that live in the ASALs encounter difficulties that counteract government efforts to achieve education for all Kenyans. Their life styles are not conducive to learning as they often move from one location to the other in search of wetlands

and water for themselves and their livestock. As they move on, they take their children along with them. It is difficult to have children from these regions attend ECD education as required.

Another related concern is children who are born to parents that are forced to become exiles subsequent to land/tribal clashes in Kenya like is the case in Mt. Elgon region of Rift Valley Province (RVP) this year, 2007. Besides the RVP, another province that has been adversely affected by perennial land/tribal clashes is Coast. It should be noted that RVP is the largest province in Kenya. It runs from north to south Kenya. Many families not only inhabit the province but also depend on it for their livelihoods. The Coast province is Kenya's "international market place" which like the RVP hosts many people. Disturbances in these provinces therefore destabilize many Kenyans. The most affected lot are children whose parents are either send away from their homes and/or are killed. They remain unsupported for any useful education.

In addition, cattle-rustling menace in some parts of North-Western Kenya leads to many deaths. Children are not spared the agony. Those who survive suffer poverty and neglect. Consequently, affected parents of land/tribal clashes and/or cattle rustling together with their children hibernate in market places, local chiefs' camps, religious centers, or roam on the streets begging for security and maintenance. These parents are not able to finance their children's ECD education. The psychological trauma the children suffer is likely to hurt them the rest of their lives. Many of these children have been forced into becoming street beggars; that is a great concern, which the NARC government is striving to resolve since it came to power, 2003. By then, 20% of Kenya's population belonged to age group 0-5 years (Republic of Kenya, 2003). Yet, enrolment into the ECD was as low as 20% of the relevant age group (Republic of Kenya, 2006).

Coupled with the above challenges is the issue of culture in some communities. Government efforts to provide equal educational opportunities for boys and girls are frustrated by some parents' choice to pay more attention to boys who are regarded a more formidable asset to the family than the girls. Consequently, more boys than girls enroll for ECD creating gender disparity in spite of the fact that statistically Kenya's female to male population ratios are 51 to 49%. Table 2 shows a sample of percentage distribution of pre-primary school enrolment disparity by gender in the year, 2002.

Accordingly, as earlier noted, enrolment for ECD in Kenya is far below expected average of 70% (UNESCO, 2006) all efforts to improve the situation notwithstanding (Republic of Kenya, 2004; 2003). The North Eastern Province exhibits the highest gender gap of 13.6 percentage points with the proportion of boys being 56.8% as against 43.2% for girls. Coast province was second in percentage mismatch between girl and boy enrolment with a disparity of 3.2 percentage points in favour of boys. It is worth

Table 3. Pre-school Gross Enrolment Rates by Gender and Province, 2002.

| Gender | Coast | Central | Eastern | Nairobi | r/valley | Western | Nyanza | N/eastern | Kenya |
|--------|-------|---------|---------|---------|----------|---------|--------|-----------|-------|
| Boys | 42.7 | 47.4 | 42.3 | 36.7 | 45.7 | 36.5 | 40.4 | 13.6 | 41.4 |
| Girls | 40.2 | 47.4 | 42.1 | 39.9 | 43.3 | 38.1 | 40.8 | 9.8 | 40.9 |
| TOTAL | 41.4 | 47.4 | 42.2 | 38.3 | 44.5 | 37.3 | 40.6 | 11.8 | 41.1 |

Source: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (2002).

noting that Nyanza, Western and Nairobi provinces had higher proportions of girls' enrolment than that of boys. However, this case is in only three out of eight provinces of Kenya.

The analysis of the Gross Enrollment Rates (GER) by province in 2002 show that the North East Province has the lowest, 11.8%, with 13.6% for boys and 9.8% for girls, followed by Western province with a GER of 37.3%. Central province recorded the highest GER, 47.4%, with boys and girls. See [Table 3](#) for actual descriptive statistics.

Most importantly, one of the most persistent hindrances to higher accessibility rates in ECD education is parents' inability to afford levied fees. The most affected children are those whose parents live in rural and urban-slum households. The biggest increase in poverty levels according to the UNDP Report of 2007 is North Eastern Province, whose human poverty index rose from 43 to 50.5% between 2004 and 2006 respectively. No wonder, her GRE is comparatively very low. Importantly, a record of over 50% of GER loss in ECD school age children is a great concern in national development for future generations.

Policy framework concern

Another concern in the provision of ECD is the lack of adequate policy framework (Republic of Kenya, 2006). As a result, centers of learning have tended to adhere to different curriculum whose outcomes are not uniform or measurable. This concern creates mismatch for children's entry behavior to primary schools. The most adversely affected are children of the poor rural parents; yet they are the majority in Kenya.

Moreover, the management of ECD has been too long left to the abilities of individuals and affiliated societies. It scares an educator to realize that ECD in some parts of Kenya is processed in tiny rooms called "academies" whose managers are not trained teachers and/or care takers. The learning environment in most of such centers is not conducive. For instance, such centers are patched either behind shops, or in some 'bandas' or shanty-like buildings, or religious centers with too much other activities going on so as not to allow proper learning to take place. Alternatively, some centers are situated far away from homes of the learners who must then walk long distances only to arrive when they are too tired to access meaningful education.

In any case, it is difficult under such learning conditions to detect children with special needs. This is because most of their teachers are not trained and/or they are more interested in enrolment than in paying special attention to children with special needs. It is at this level that one's future is enhanced or destroyed and this is a major concern.

HIV/AIDS Concern

The HIV/AIDS pandemic has not spared Kenyan children. Most of those who are born to infected parent(s) die at the tender age of less than five years. The current situation analysis for Kenyan children in terms of their health status indicates that 20% of the Kenyan population is less than six years of age. 30% of the under fives are stunted in growth and 6% are wasted (Central Bureau of Statistics) (Republic of Kenya, 2002).

As a result, infant mortality rate in Kenya has increased from about 60 per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 74 in 1998, 77 in 2003 and 78 in 2006 (Barasa, 2007). Under five years mortality ranges from 114-199 per every 1,000 live births. Nyanza Province has the highest mortality rate of children less than 5 years of age. Incidentally, the same province has the highest rate of HIV/AIDS prevalence rate nationally. In Kenya, it is feared that HIV/AIDS could increase infant and child mortality up to 75% unless drastic measures to control the pandemic are engaged (Republic of Kenya, 2006) and this is how severe the HIV/AIDS pandemic concern and threat to ECD is in Kenya.

For the above and other related concerns of ECD in Kenya to cease, the government and all progressive Kenyans must appreciate that ECD is the backbone of all learning and development of persons. Importantly, ECD starts not at birth but conception. Be it as it may, ECD will be better accessed when controlled by the Ministry of Education, thanks to the recent ministerial launch of ECD policy in January, 2007 (Siringi, 2007).

Access to primary education in Kenya: concerns

The primary education cycle in Kenya lasts eight calendar years. This is the longest time spent at one level of learning in Kenya's education system. It is also a long period of one's life span spent on learning at one level. It is here that while children are in the lower primary school between age 6 and 8 years they need support in acqui-

Table 4. Primary School Gross Enrolment Rates (%) by Gender, 2003.

| | 1990 | 1991 | 1992 | 1993 | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 |
|--------------|-------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| TOTAL | 101.8 | 91.4 | 91.2 | 87.8 | 88.5 | 86.8 | 86.4 | 87.7 | 88.8 | 86.9 | 87.6 | 92.7 | 92.6 | 103.7 |
| Male | 104.0 | 93.4 | 92.0 | 88.9 | 89.1 | 87.4 | 87.3 | 88.7 | 89.4 | 88.2 | 88.1 | 93.3 | 93.8 | 105.8 |
| Female | 99.6 | 89.5 | 90.0 | 86.7 | 87.8 | 85.5 | 85.5 | 86.6 | 88.2 | 85.6 | 87.1 | 92.0 | 91.3 | 103.7 |

Source: Ministry of Education Science and Technology, Statistics Section.(2004). These Gross enrolment rates (%) in primary schools by gender clearly show discrepancies between boys and girls. Thus, from 1990 to 2003, girl-child enrolment at the primary school level in Kenya lagged behind that of the boy-child.

iring additional motor, language and thinking skills. They also begin to develop self-control, persistence, and independence as they stay longer hours in a larger learning community called primary school. The children enroll in primary schools at age six years and leave when they are adolescents; primary schooling occupies an important period in a person's growth and development. It should be accessible to all children.

With her commitment to Education for All (EFA) agreement, the Kenya government instituted Free Primary Education (FPE) in the year 2003. One of the aims of this undertaking is to achieve and sustain Universal Primary Education (UPE) by 2005. Another aim is to raise transition rates from primary to secondary from 40% in 2003 to 70% in 2008 (Republic of Kenya, 2002). Like the ECD sub-sector of education, this sector encounters a Myriad of concerns. Only three of these concerns are addressed herein. These are: poverty, regional and gender, and HIV /AIDS concerns.

Poverty concern

As noted earlier, many of Kenyans are poor (Republic of Kenya, 2003). These people have little or no hope of bringing up a child to the age of where they can benefit from free primary education. The Government's efforts to deal with this challenge are best exemplified in her policy papers on, Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) of 2001- 2004 and Economic Recovery for Wealth and Empowerment Paper (ERWEP) of 2003 - 2007 to mention but only two. Although the NARC government initiated Free Primary Education (FPE) for all, this policy has not ensured total enrolment for all primary school age-group children. In Northern Eastern Province, for example, where the highest index of poverty is recorded nationally, only one out of three children attends primary school (Otieno, 2007). The major challenge for many Kenyans therefore has been many parents' and guardians' inability to augment government's financial provision with personal inputs as stipulated in the policy of cost-sharing (Republic of Kenya, 1988). By this policy, the government provides for teachers and to a limited extent, equipment. Parents, guardians and sponsors among others provide for facilities, uniform, feeding, medical care and other non-statutory fees. Upon many parents' failure to provide financial requirements, their children

drop out of school despite the fact that this sector of education is "free".

Regional and gender concerns

In some regions, primary schools are sparsely located. Young children have difficulties accessing such schools. Thanks to the local transportation system, the famed "boda-boda" mania. However, this system is as expensive for many parents as tracking is to the children. In either way, this concern contributes positively to primary school drop out rates particularly in some rural regions.

Moreover, people who live in the ASALs have peculiar needs related to nomadic life style. Establishment of low-cost boarding schools has failed to alleviate the concern of low enrolment as either expansion and/or sustainability emerge as added concerns.

Participation of the girl-child continues to be a challenge in some communities in Kenya. In particular, the cultural practice of early marriage for young girls haunts many families as their young girls are withdrawn from school and married to comparatively old men. This practice becomes double tragic when the girls must be quickly married to counteract perennial poverty in their homes. Of course, the NARC government is impressively hawk-eyed against this practice. However, how does a government totally eradicate a people's culture? This could take centuries. For now, this practice together with others such as preferring to educate boys other than girls, remain some of the major concerns Kenya encounters in making primary schooling accessible to both gender, see a sample of enrolment rates presented in Tables 4-6.

Apparently, most disparities occurred in Nairobi and North Eastern provinces. Enrolment in Coast, Nairobi, and North Eastern provinces were below the mark of 100%. Gross enrolment in the later province was pathetic, 23%. In spite of the fact that 51% of the Kenyan population is female, girl-child access to primary school was less than that of the boy-child in most provinces except for central and Western.

Unfortunately, from 1990 to 2000, Kenya's primary school completion rates were below average. Throughout the period, girls' completion rates trailed those of the boys. This issue is most pronounced in the arid and semi-arid districts and pockets of poverty-stricken portions in the

Table 5. Gross Enrolment Rates (%) in Primary Schools by Gender, 1990-2003.

| | Coast | Central | Eastern | Nairobi | Rift Valley | Western | Nyanza | North Eastern | Kenya |
|--------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| Boys | 88.9 | 106.2 | 113.7 | 92.7 | 103.8 | 121.9 | 120.7 | 29.3 | 105.8 |
| Girls | 77.3 | 106.1 | 112.9 | 57.4 | 100.8 | 121.3 | 116.9 | 15.7 | 103.7 |
| TOTAL | 83.6 | 105.6 | 113.3 | 74.5 | 102.3 | 121.6 | 118.8 | 23.0 | 103.7 |

Source: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Statistics Section (2004)

Table 6. Primary school completion rates by gender.

| | 1990 | 1991 | 1992 | 1993 | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|-------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Boys | 45.7 | 46.4 | 44.7 | 44.5 | 44.6 | 43.0 | 45.1 | 46.3 | 46.4 | 47.7 | 48.3 | 52.4 | 60.3 |
| Girls | 40.5 | 41.6 | 48.2 | 42.2 | 43.0 | 42.1 | 43.5 | 45.8 | 48.1 | 47.8 | 49.5 | 52.5 | 53.2 |
| Total | 43.2 | 44.1 | 46.4 | 43.4 | 43.9 | 42.6 | 44.3 | 46.1 | 47.2 | 47.7 | 48.9 | 52.5 | 56.9 |

Source: Ministry of Education Science and Technology, Statistics Section.

urban centers. Kenya therefore has a burden to improve the low access rates for especially the girl-child. This is an uphill task.

HIV/AIDS concern

HIV/AIDS pandemic is another concern in provision of primary school education in Kenya. The pandemic affects the education system, which is the pillar of development and economic growth both at the societal and individual levels. Unfortunately, the pandemic has been reported in every district in Kenya. Sad to note, the pandemic affects the demand for schooling, enrolment rates, participation and completion necessitated by high rate of absenteeism from classes by pupils and by teachers (Achoka, 2006) leading to high dropout rate.

By 2003, Kenya had over 2 million people living with HIV/AIDS. Over 600,000 among them were children. About 40-70% of patients in major public hospitals suffer from HIV/AIDS related illnesses. It is estimated that by the year 2010, nearly 3 million Kenyans will be suffering from HIV/AIDS (Republic of Kenya, 2003).

Moreover, in 2006, the highest crime in Kenya was rape of the girl-child. It was erroneously believed that sex with a virgin cured the deadly HIV/AIDS! Many girl-children perished. Accordingly, this trend defeats the whole purpose of education and erodes gains in basic education, which contribute towards attainment of EFA (ibid).

Moreover, disabled children have been systematically sidelined in the awareness campaign as well as resource allocation making them more vulnerable to the disease as well as to school dropout (ibid). The overall picture of HIV/AIDS on access to primary education in Kenya is its negative impact on the potential clientele through, for example: the rapid growth in the number of orphans; increase in the number of street children; and the massive strain, which the orphan hood problem places on the extended family and the public welfare services.

Access to secondary education: concerns

Secondary education in Kenya caters for primary school leavers in the 15-18 years age group. This is an important sector in national and individual development for two major reasons. One, at the end of its four-year learning period, one may be selected for university, or middle level colleges or professional training such as primary teaching, medical nursing, vocational and technical careers. Two, secondary education plays an important role in creating the country's human resource base at a level higher than primary education. Access to secondary education in Kenya is therefore critical.

Although secondary education has expanded considerably since independence, 1963, access to this sector of learning remains restricted. For instance, only 47% of pupils who complete primary level education are selected for entry in the secondary level (Republic of Kenya, 2003). This percentage represents only 27% of the eligible age group. The restricted transition rates of less than 50% are due to many challenges of concern. This scenario militates against government's determination to achieve EFA goals for the Kenyan citizenry.

Among the challenges encountered include, inability to absorb all primary school graduates into secondary schools (Low transition rates between primary and secondary schools), high dropout rates especially in the last two years of secondary education, HIV/AIDS scourge due to loss of parents and guardians, insecurity, cultural practices, and geographical disparities in some parts of Kenya.

Considered in this section of the article is the critical concern of perennial retention, drop out, and completion rates at the secondary school level in spite of low primary-secondary school transition rates in Kenya. The period under consideration is between 1995 and 2005 indicating retention (%), dropout (%) and completion (%) rates for the last five cohorts. Table 7 shows the rates

Table 7. Secondary School Retention, Dropout and Completion Rates for the 1995-1998 Cohort.

| | BOYS | | | GIRLS | | |
|----------------|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | 1995 / 96 (F1 – F2) | 1996/97 (F2 – F3) | 1997/98 (F3 – F4) | 1995/96 (F1 – F2) | 1996/97 (F2 – F3) | 1997/99 (F3 – F4) |
| Retention (%) | 97.06 | 95.55 | 92.47 | 97.36 | 95.15 | 87.42 |
| Dropout (%) | | *10 (14.25) | | *20 (16.93) | | |
| Completion (%) | | *90 (85.75) | | *80 (83.07) | | |

Source: Computed from Statistical Abstracts, Economic Surveys, and National Development Plans. Key: * = Figures Rounded to the Nearest 10th Actual Calculations Bracketed.

Table 8. Secondary School Retention, Dropout and Completion Rates for the 1996-1999, Cohort.

| | BOYS | | | GIRLS | | |
|----------------|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | 1996 / 97 (F1 – F2) | 1997/98 (F2 – F3) | 1998/99 (F3 – F4) | 1996/97 (F1 – F2) | 1997/98 (F2 – F3) | 1998/99 (F3 – F4) |
| Retention (%) | 98.09 | 94.51 | 86.33 | 147.42 | 89.66 | 85.78 |
| Dropout (%) | | *20 (19.97) | | *20 (23.44) | | |
| Completion (%) | | *80 (80.03) | | *80 (77.74) | | |

Source: Computed from Literature. Key: * = Figures Rounded to the Nearest 10th Actual Calculations Bracketed

Table 9. Secondary School Retention, Dropout and Completion Rates for the 1997-2000 Cohort

| | BOYS | | | GIRLS | | |
|----------------|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | 1997 / 98 (F1 – F2) | 1998/99 (F2 – F3) | 1999/00 (F3 – F4) | 1997/98 (F1 – F2) | 1998/99 (F2 – F3) | 1999/00 (F3 – F4) |
| Retention (%) | 99.57 | 92.07 | 88.29 | 99.09 | 9.85 | 156.97 |
| Dropout (%) | | *10 (9.82) | | *50 (51.11) | | |
| Completion (%) | | *90 (89.94) | | *70 (72.75) | | |

Source: Computed from Literature. Key: * = Figures Rounded to the Nearest 10th Actual Calculations Bracketed.

between 1995 and 1999.

In this cohort, the highest retention rate, 97.06% for boys and 97.36% for girls were between Forms 1 and 2. The lowest retention value, 92.47% for boys and 87.42% for girls was realized between Form 3 and Form 4. Dropout rates for boys, 10% was lower than that for girls, 20%. Completion rate for boys, 90% was higher than that of girls, 80%. Table 8 contains similar statistics for the 1996 to 1999 secondary school cohort.

Retention rate for this cohort was higher in Form 1 and Form 2, 98.09% for boys and 147.42% for girls compared to previous cohort, 97.06% for boys and 97.36% for girls in the same forms. Lower retention rates were recorded in this cohort for Forms 2 - 3, 94.51% and Forms 3-4, 86.33% for boys while for girls in Forms 2 - 3, 89.66 and Forms 3 - 4, 85.78% compared to 95.55% in Forms 2 - 3 and 92.47% in Forms 3 - 4 for boys while statistics for the girls in same forms were 95.15 and 87.42% respectively in the previous cohort.

The drop out value of 20% for boys in this cohort was

higher than for boys 10%, in the previous cohort. For girls, the rate remained constant at 20%. Completion rate, 80%, was lower for boys in this cohort than in the previous cohort, 10%. There was no change in the drop out value for girls in both cohorts.

Contained in Table 9 are data for the retention, drop out, and completion rates (%) for the cohort of 1997 to 2000.

In this cohort, the highest retention value, 99.57% for boys was recorded between Form 1 and Form 2. The highest rate, 156.97% for the girls was between Forms 3 and 4. This overwhelmingly high rate could be due to repetition by candidates in these classes. The lowest retention rate for boys, 88.29% was between Form 3 and Form 4. For girls it was 49.85% between Forms 2 and 3. Drop-out values were, 10% for boys while that for the girls was 50%. The cohort's completion rates were 90% for boys and 70% for girls.

The highest retention value, 127.88%, occurred between Forms 2 and 3 for the boys while for the girls,

Table 10. Secondary School Retention, Dropout and Completion Rates for the 1999-2002 Cohort.

| | BOYS | | | GIRLS | | |
|----------------|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | 1999 / 00 (F1 – F2) | 2000/01 (F2 – F3) | 2001/02 (F3 – F4) | 1999/2000 (F1 – F2) | 2000/01 (F2 – F3) | 2001/02 (F3 – F4) |
| Retention (%) | 107.64 | 98.80 | 96.23 | 104.15 | 99.63 | 90.07 |
| Dropout (%) | | *10 (5.50) | | *10 (10.69) | | |
| Completion (%) | | *100 (102.13) | | *90 (93.46) | | |

Source: Computed from Literature. **Key:** * = Figures Rounded to the Nearest 10th Actual Calculations Bracketed.

Table 11. Dropout/Completion Rates for five Cohorts by Gender

| | 1995/1998 | | 1996/1999 | | 1997/2000 | | 1998/2001 | | 1999/2002 | |
|---|-----------|----|-----------|----|-----------|----|-----------|----|-----------|----|
| | B | G | B | G | B | G | B | G | B | G |
| D | 10 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 10 | 50 | 30 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| C | 90 | 80 | 80 | 80 | 90 | 70 | 100 | 90 | 100 | 90 |

Source: Summaries from Data above. Key: D = Dropout rate. C = Completion rate.

101.82%, was realized between Forms 1 and 2. Dropout rate for the boys is higher, 30% compared to that of girls, 10%. Completion values were high: 100% for boys and 90% for girls. It should be noted that although the completion rate for the boys was 100% this statistic is misleading because the dropout value in the same cohort was 30%. It could be that, the high dropout and completion rates are attributed to repeaters in Forms 3 and 4. Table 10 contains data for our consideration in the years 1999 to 2002.

The highest retention rate for the boys, 107.64% and for the girls, 104.15% was realized in Forms 1 and 2. The lowest retention rate for the cohort occurred between Forms 3 and 4; boys, 96.23% and girls, 90.07%. Dropout rate for both girls and boys was 10%, while completion value was 100% for the boys and 90% for the girls. Again, the repeater variable could have taken place. Table 11 shows a summary of dropout and completion rates for the above cohorts.

Thus, secondary school education, which is the last step of the basic education segment, suffers dropout rates ranging from 10 to 50%. The highest dropout value for the girls was 50% in the 1997-2000 cohorts while for the boys was 30% in the 1992 to 1998 to 2001. These rates are very high. They represent youngsters who: 1. Have no access to complete secondary education. 2. Are youth aged between 15 - 18 years. 3. Are not able to positively contribute to their individual, community and national development of the 21st century. 4. Have bleak future in the global village of Hi-Tech.

Moreover, as a nation, Kenya incurs a loss whenever there is a dropout in any educational sector. The dropout signifies unfulfilled aim, goal and objective for the individual, community, and nation. For example, any dropout at this level marks the country's loss of potential man-

power for industrialization in the year 2020 (Republic of Kenya, 1988). In addition, Kenya also incurs shortfall in her aim to provide EFA by the year 2015 which is also the year for realization of Millennium Development Goals (Achoka et. al., 2005).

Accumulated effects of lack of access to secondary education by many youths may be reflected in various ways such as: (a) Increased crime (b) Impoverished persons (c) Drug addicts (d) Semi-literates (e) Unskilled persons (f) Low life expectancy rate. These and other impacts of low or lack of access to secondary education in Kenya point to the urgent need to alleviate the situation.

Conclusions

Whereas education is the backbone of all growth and development of individuals and nations, its achievement continues to elude and haunt Kenya's efforts. Right from the ECD to secondary education, several hindrances challenge Kenya's desire to educate her youth people who are tomorrow's asset in development.

The most persistent negative forces in the fight to achieve basic education for most Kenyans include:

Poverty: With about 50% of Kenyans living below the poverty level in an environment where education is among the most expensive social service (Achoka, 2003). Apparently most people cannot access it.

Health: Besides education, medication for the sick is another expensive social service in Kenya. For a people who are financially constrained, it is difficult to access both education and health. This concern is crucial in this HIV/AIDS pandemic era. It denies many Kenyans access to basic education as victims fall sick and/or are orphaned and/or drop out of school to take care of their sick

loved ones.

Culture: As long as some Kenyan communities remain loyal to their cultural practices and other related crimes like Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and early marriages for girls, access to complete basic education for affected group of citizens remains a dream.

Insecurity: Increase in crime such as cattle rustling, land/tribal clashes and rape destabilizes communities and denies the young people opportunities to access basic education.

Dropout Rates: This concern is closely related to concerns such as: culture, poverty, and HIV/AIDS pandemic. Young girls in some communities drop out to be married off. Young boys and girls are forced to dropout due to lack of fees both statutory and non-statutory. The Aids scourge has academically maimed many youth either directly or indirectly. These and other factors singly or together deny many young people access to complete basic education in Kenya.

Way forward: suggestions

It must be acknowledged that the Government of Kenya has made huge strides towards achievement of basic education for Kenyans. In particular, since the present government, NARC took over, 2003, improvement in access is evident through such undertakings as provision of "Free" Primary Education, streamlining of the ECD Education Policy, and Provision of bursaries and grants for poor children at the secondary education level.

Nonetheless, to achieve optimal access to basic education, more effort is required. Suggested below are some of the approaches that could be used to alleviate concerns in this sector of education in Kenya.

Improve provision of health. Government's move to provide free treatment for ECD goers in public health facilities is a welcome idea. Should this service be extended to other constituents of basic education, improvement in retention and completion rates would be recorded. But this undertaking also means that hospitals should be located within reach of the people. They should also be well equipped – a very expensive venture; but who says education is cheap?

Intensify fight against demeaning cultures. In this twenty-first century all efforts should be made to eliminate non-progressive cultures that force people out of schools. Such are cultures like early marriage for girls and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in some communities in Kenya. People who insist on practicing these cultures should be punished by law.

Special attention. In particular, girls and youth with disabilities should be given special attention to enable them complete basic education. Thus, in families where girls and disabled cannot access basic education due to poverty or culture, the state would ensure reverse of the situation.

Increase attention to youth employment. The government kitty to assist youth get economically stable through soft loans is just but the beginning. What is suggested here is that the radius of reception be widened through a mechanism that is not seen to be segregative. Let young people in both urban and rural areas be encouraged to participate in this programme. Moreover, the programme should be made a national policy not a political maneuver. Achievement of complete basic education should eventually be a requirement to participate in the programme.

Tighten disbursement of bursaries and grants for basic education. This idea would buffet learners from poor homes against dropping out from school. The government initiated this noble idea except that in many places it is seen to be misused. Sometimes non-deserving friends and relatives benefit from the fund at the expense of the poor and disadvantaged. Streamlining of this system is necessary.

Enhance security. Security should be tightened in all war prone zones. Most of these zones are in Rift Valley province where people fight over land, cattle, and tribe. The most disadvantaged people are youth who are not only displaced but also drop out of school to fend for themselves. This situation is redeemable.

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