

*Review*

# Government funding on access to secondary education in Kenya: Challenges and prospects

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One of the major challenges facing secondary education sub-sector in Kenya over the years is low transition rate from primary to secondary level of education. This has contributed to low enrolment at secondary schools with a wide gap existing between primary and secondary enrolment. With the introduction of Free Primary Education in 2003, the gap would have widened further if efforts were not made to enhance access to secondary education. Low enrolment had been occasioned by introduction of the cost sharing policy in 1988. The government of Kenya, through sessional paper No.1 of 2005, made a commitment to increase transition from primary to secondary school from 49 to 70% by the year 2010. This would be made possible by the government supplementing parents' efforts in meeting education costs at secondary level. The government supported the poor and needy students through bursaries. Further, tuition free secondary education policy was implemented in 2008 with the government's commitment to pay tuition fees for all students enrolled at secondary level. The government has also made efforts to enhance access by providing bursary funds to the needy to meet other educational needs charged above tuition fees through the constituencies. With the government efforts, transition rate to secondary level of education has since increased from 59.6% in 2007 to 70% in 2010. The cost of education in Kenya has continued to escalate over the years due to rising cost of living. Many people from the low income group are finding it difficult to sustain their children in secondary school hence lowering gains made in transition. This paper utilizes secondary data to critically analyze financing of secondary education in Kenya. In particular, the paper discusses the impact of the tuition free secondary education and bursary schemes on enrolment in secondary schools in Kenya. It also analyses the strengths and weaknesses of these programmes in enhancing access to secondary education.

**Key words:** Free secondary education, constituency bursary fund, enrolment, transition, drop-out.

## INTRODUCTION

Education is critical in determining the socio-economic development in a country as it is the most important factor in social, cultural, political and economic development of any nation. It is the basis for training human capital to serve in various economic sectors of the country (Psacharopoulos and Woodhal, 1985). The Kenyan government recognizes education as a human

right, the means to developing human resources for development and socio-cultural transformation (GOK, 2010). In spite of the recognition of education as a right, enrolment rates in secondary schools in Kenya declined from 30% in 1990 to 27% in 1994 with the most declines being realized in arid and semi-arid lands. The enrolment in schools fell by 9% between 1998 and 1999 (Gogo et

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**Table 1.** Allocation of the free day secondary education per vote head per child.

S/No.	Vote Head	Amount (Ksh)
1	Tuition	3600
2	Repairs, Maintenance and Improvement	400
3	Local Travel and Transport	400
4	Administrative Costs	500
5	Electricity, Water and Conservancy	500
6	Activity	600
7	Personal Emolument	3965
8	Medical	300
	Total	10265

Source: Ministry of Education, 2008 Circular.

al., 2010). Based on 1999 census report, a total of 2.8 million boys and girls aged between 14 to 17 years who should have been in secondary school were not enrolled. This declining trend prompted the government of Kenya to strategize ways of enhancing access, equity and provision of quality education.

Several strategies were hatched to realize the above goals. Orodho and Njeru (2003) for instance observed that the government recommended increasing of bursary allocation and introduction of the fee waiver systems as some of the ways of enhancing access and participation in secondary education. However, despite the introduction of free day secondary education and bursary allocation, access and participation at secondary level have remained proportionately low relative to primary level participation in Kenya. For instance, in 2004, enrolment at Early Childhood Education level, primary and secondary levels stood at 1,627,721 (16.4%), 7,394,763 (74.3%) and 926,149 (9.3%) respectively (MOE, 2005). In 2009, the enrolment was approximately 2.2 million (16%) at Early Childhood Education, 9.4 million (70%) primary and 1.8 million (13%) secondary (2009 Census Report).

Analysis of the 2009 census data reveals that approximately 6.7 million children of school going age were out of school. Of these, 2.1 million (58%) were of pre-primary age, 1.9 million (23%) primary and 2.7 million (76%) secondary school age (GOK, 2009). With the foregoing background, it is important to critically evaluate the extent to which the enhanced financing of secondary education has led to improved participation of secondary school going age in education. Specifically, this paper discusses the extent to which the financing programmes have had an impact on access, equity and provision of quality education.

## **FINANCING THE FREE DAY SECONDARY EDUCATION**

The Free Day Secondary education policy was

implemented in 2008 (Oyaro, 2008), to enhance transition from primary to secondary schools, to accommodate the enrolment gains made at primary level through the Free Primary Education (Republic of Kenya, 2008). This programme, often referred to as free tuition secondary education, costs the government Kshs. 10,265.00 (US Dollars 120.8) per child per year. The breakdown of the cost is displayed in Table 1.

The funds are disbursed directly to school accounts in three tranches in December, April and August at 50, 20 and 30%, respectively.

The fund is horizontally equitably distributed to all students enrolled in schools irrespective of socio-economic backgrounds. This kind of distribution is limiting and it does not in reality guarantee equity in that the rich and the poor or children from marginalized areas are given equal allocation yet they are unable to top up the difference to cater for all school fees requirement. Since the above amount is not adequate to cover the entire cost of education and families and households are required to top up, the rich have a higher chance of survival by topping up fees for their children while the poor and marginalized drop out of school. This in itself therefore is a recipe for promoting inter-generational inequality. Free secondary education has led to mushrooming of many day schools to accommodate the upsurge in enrolment in secondary schools. Most of the upcoming day schools are either sponsored through the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) and or communities and parents. In most cases parents pay more as they are required to support government effort in infrastructure development in the schools hence; they still have a burden to shoulder in the financing of education at secondary school level. The old, well established schools have relatively higher levels of efficiency than the upcoming day secondary schools and district schools because they have much of the required infrastructure. Due to the inadequacy of infrastructure, equipment and facilities in the upcoming schools, provision of quality of education is compromised. When the quality of education offered in such school is quite low, parents may not see the value to sacrifice the

**Table 2.** Distribution of boarding fees per vote head.

Vote Head	Day schools	Boarding schools	Parents' fee	Total
	G.O.K Subsidy	G.O.K Subsidy		
Tuition	3600	3600	0	3600
B.E.S.	0	0	13034	13034
R.M.I.	400	400	400	800
L.T&T	400	400	500	900
E.W.C.	500	500	350	850
Administrative costs	500	500	1500	2000
Activity	600	600	0	600
P.E.	3965	3965	2743	6708
Medical	300	300	100	400
<b>Total</b>	<b>10265</b>	<b>10265</b>	<b>18635</b>	<b>28892</b>

Source: Ministry of Education, 2008 Circular.

little income they have to maintain their children in school. Indeed, this could be one of the reasons for low enrolment in subsequent forms despite high transition rates from primary to secondary education. To ensure the benefits of subsidized education are realized, there is therefore need to ensure the completion rate is looked into at secondary school level. The first bunch of the beneficiaries of free primary education will complete secondary education in the year 2014. It is the onus of the education authorities and stakeholders to evaluate the success of the programme by establishing the completion rate.

A task force appointed in 2008 to look into financing of secondary education reached a conclusion that boarding schools charge a maximum of ksh 18,627 per student per year for boarding expenses (GOK, 2008). This is not standard because many schools do not adhere to the recommended fees guidelines. For example, some schools charge development project funds, teacher motivation fees, remedial teaching up keep, and school tours among other levies decided on by parents through the parents' annual general meeting. Boarding schools also charge boarding fees that reflect the cost of living of their respective areas, provided they don't exceed the maximum amount recommended. This adds onto the cost of financing secondary education and in reality it is not affordable by the poor. The recommended fees to be charged to parents and household are outlined in Table 2. From Table 2, the fees charged to households are higher than the subsidy given by the government. This means that the children of the poor, though they may be qualified to and are admitted to these schools, they may not afford hence, they will be forced to attend the local day schools which in most cases do not have adequate facilities. This in most cases compromises the provision of quality of education.

Apart from these costs, parents are supposed to meet other expenses such as uniform, development levy, personal effects, and lunch for day school students

among other expenses (Kaberia and Ndiku, 2011). Whereas, the cost of living has gone up to warrant charges above the government recommendation, the parents and households remain pressed financially to afford the extra levies and or they do it with strain. This has raised the cost of schooling beyond the reach of an ordinary Kenyan from the low income bracket. An average County school in Kenya charges an average of Ksh 35,000 per child per year (less government subsidy). On receiving admission letters to secondary school for their children, some parents from the low income bracket get excited and even sell their property (including land) to get their children enrolled in such schools. They later on are unable to sustain keeping their children in such schools when they find themselves without property to sell. These results to dropouts and a total waste to the parent the state and to a great extent the learner considering the initial costs invested.

### The Constituency Bursary Fund (CBF)

Other funds for schools are channeled through the Constituency Bursary Fund. This fund is meant to supplement the effort of FSE and parents to meet the financing gap of needy students. The fund was initially operated through the MOE and operationalized by the BOG at school level as the Secondary Education Bursary Fund (SEBF). SEBF was introduced during the 1993/94 financial year with initial allocation of Kshs 25 million. The fund was increased in subsequent financial years as follows:

2000/01: Kshs 536 million  
 2002/3: Kshs 548 million  
 2004/5: Kshs 770 million  
 2007/8: Ksh 800 million

Currently the fund is administered at constituency level

under the management of the constituency bursary fund committee. The Ministry of Education gives direction on the application procedure, evaluation criteria and allocation ceilings. The minimum allocation as per kind of secondary school (category) is as follows:

Day Secondary: Ksh 5,000/=  
Boarding Secondary: Ksh 10,000/=  
National Schools: Ksh 15,000/=

The Constituency Bursary Fund committee may vary the amount to award per student depending on the available amount and the number of needy students. For instance, the allocation per student in Lurambi constituency in Kakamega county has been Ksh 8,000/= for students attending boarding schools. According to IPAR (2008), an estimated 43% of applicants benefited from the bursary fund in all constituencies. As the practice is, many constituencies have no guarantee for continuous funding equally this funding is hardly adequate in that a majority of the students received the minimum Ksh 5,000/= as compared to 0.4% who received Ksh 8,000/= per year in the year 2008 in almost all constituencies. The bursary allocation is therefore still insufficient compared to the rising demands for educational requirements and it is marred with a lot of irregularities ranging from delays in disbursement by the government to biased allocation by the constituency bursary committees. Indeed political interference has compromised equity considerations in award of bursaries. While the poor who are not able to afford the extra charges in school are denied the fund, some rich, politically connected individuals are awarded the bursaries or they influence award to some of their relatives. This has led to low enrolment as well as high drop out at secondary level among the economically poor groups mostly the rural poor and the urban poor mostly living in slums.

### **CHALLENGES FACED BY THE GOVERNMENT IN ENHANCING ENROLMENT THROUGH SUPPLEMENTARY FUNDING**

With declining trends in secondary Gross Enrollment Rate as witnessed in the 1980's and 1990's, the government was concerned that further decline would undermine efforts towards EFA targets (Republic of Kenya, 2005). The sessional paper No. 1 of 2005 outlined strategies of enhancing access hence enrolment. One such strategy was to increase provision of bursaries and devise better methods of targeting and disbursing funds to the needy (GOK, 2005). The same governance, through political greed has propagated misappropriation of funds and failed to reach the larger targeted population that is out of school.

Another strategy was to work in partnership with parents, communities, private sector among other

stakeholders in providing secondary education. The implementation of free secondary education saw many parents withdraw from paying additional levies to supplement the FSE due to misconception. This comprised internal efficiency in quality of education and encouraged drop-outs.

High levels of corruption in government departments as well as some school administration have led funds meant for free education being misappropriated at the expense of enhancing internal efficiency.

In the year 2011, the British government, which is one of the major donors in the Kenya Education Sector Support Programme (KESSP) hired independent consultants who worked with the Ministry of Education to audit the programme. The audit was completed December, 2011 but the findings were revealed much later (13th June, 2011) by the then finance minister. The findings revealed that Ksh 4.6 Billion could not be accounted for, prompting the British Government to cut down its aid to education by 300 million in the next financial year and opting to channel their aid through Non- Governmental organizations until the MOE adopted prudent financial management systems (Muindi and Wafula, 2011). Lack of confidence by donor agencies in the financial management of government departments has had great budgetary implications leading to delays and shortfalls in disbursement of funds for education programmes.

Financing of education in Kenya is a partnership of the government of Kenya and donor agencies. Sometimes due to bureaucracies in the processing of the funds, delays are experienced causing panic and outcry among the school stakeholders (Wafula, 2012). The magnitude of this delay has been at its climax in second term 2012, with the permanent secretary in the Ministry of Education writing to the treasury seeking urgent allocation of fund to save the twin learning programmes (Siringi, 2012). While confirming release of the delayed funds, the minister for education stated that the funds could not be disbursed to schools immediately due to the constitutional requirement under article 221, which requires that budget making process undergoes wider consultation (Anami, 2012).

Since schools may find it difficult to maintain children in school without funds they send them away to collect the supplementary fees which sometimes results to drop-out hence wasting the investment made through FSE. Socio-cultural factors such as truancy, pregnancies early marriages, drug abuse among others are quite common at secondary level. This has also resulted to drop-out hence low enrolment.

In laying strategies to enhance access and equity, the government was banking on community partnership which greatly led to establishment of Harambee secondary schools in the 1970's, but whether that will work today given the different labour market circumstances is not clear (Oketch and Rolleston, 2007). Indeed, the government expenditure on education is comparatively

high to other ministries and banking on donor support without sustainable economic growth may undermine the viability of the programme.

The parliamentary house committee on education in a special report pointed out that the free secondary school programme had faced many challenges including lack of schools to match the growth in enrolment arising from the big number of graduates from primary schools, shortage of teaching materials and large number of school drop-outs (Siringi, 2012). The upsurge in enrolment has resulted to underfunding. The acting permanent secretary, Ministry Of Education noted that at secondary level, a short fall of ksh 1.5 billion arose from inadequate budget allocation in the 2009/2010 financial year which was carried forward to the last financial year. Underfunding of the free primary and free day secondary education is currently in the tune of ksh15 billion (Siringi, 2012).

### **PARENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS FREE FUNDING**

It should be noted that the free education promise by the NARC government seemed a dream to many and was indeed applauded when it became a reality. Many parents enrolled their children in school with faith that the programme would be free indeed, with minimal parental financial obligation. As times get tougher with rising cost of living, the charges levied as parents' fees exceed the governments' free subsidy. Indeed parents have not felt the financial relief particularly in relation to free day secondary education since this programme came into force in 2008, in the aftermath of the post election violence whose destruction led to high inflation. One wonders if the cost of secondary education would be affordable by the majority if the government had not introduced this noble program. Parents from the low income bracket have been unable to sustain their children in school due to the additional levies they are required to pay. There are incidences where parents are required to buy reams of duplicating paper, printing paper, A4 exercise books and other tuition materials to cater for students' personal tuition programs. This raises doubts by parents as to whether the government is indeed offering tuition free secondary education.

The most recent delays in disbursement of the free education funds both at primary and secondary levels has further raised negative feelings of parents as the school managements send students home frequently to make parents clear outstanding parents' fees balances to enable running of school programs. Indeed, parents and other stake holders were in support of the planned teachers' strike in a bid to pressurize the government to release the free education funds. While the government has cleared the allocation for the free primary education, the allocation for the free day secondary education for second term has not been cleared, raising fears over the

sustainability of this program (Anami, 2012).

### **GAINS OF FREE DAY SECONDARY EDUCATION**

Government funding programmes have made considerable contribution to transition from primary to secondary school. It is impressive that the rate has steadily increased from 45.8% in 2003 to 59.9% in 2008 and over 70% in 2010 (Republic of Kenya, 2009), and 72% to date as announced by the minister of education during the release of 2010 KCPE results. The greatest increment has been realized between 2008 and 2010 with the introduction of free secondary tuition in 2008, and increase in bursary allocations. The introduction of tuition free secondary education saw an increase by 15% which raised enrolment from 1,180,267 in 2007 to 1,382,211 in 2008 (Republic of Kenya, 2009). According to 2009 census report, enrolment of secondary level was approximately 1.8 million.

### **CONCLUSION**

The rise in enrolment following the free education initiatives is an indication of the urge for the young generation to get educated and the willingness of the older generation to invest in education. The government should enhance transparency and accountability in government departments to win back donor confidence in financing education. The Kenya budget to education is comparatively large yet seems to be inadequate requiring consolidated support for sustainability. The gains made in enrolment due to government supplementation of education costs need to be applauded. However, further efforts should be made to ensure that those who enroll do not drop out by cushioning parents from the low income bracket. There is need to address the issue of infrastructure as the rising numbers seem to out match existing facilities. Overcrowding, if not well managed, could greatly compromise quality.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

There is need for the government to exploit options of targeting financial assistance to benefit the needy and vulnerable groups more on the basis of household incomes. One effort would be to enhance transparency in allocation of bursaries so that the targeted group benefits. Free tuition secondary education would also be more beneficial to the needy if the concept of vertical equity would be impressed.

Access to secondary level would also be enhanced by addressing geographical disparities. For instance in Kakamega county where many boys drop out of school after grade 8 to join the body boda business, and many

girls join the house help business, more incentives would be given to divert their interest towards education.

The government should exploit the possibility of expanding non-formal schools at the secondary level and improve their quality since they may be more successful in attracting students in marginal areas as well as non formal settlements. They should also be cost effective to the overburdened parents from the low income bracket.

The government should formulate policies that can regulate charging other levies such as motivation fees which drain the poor parents to benefit teachers already on the payroll. The government should formulate ways of universalizing parental charges on education by school managers to help the poor parents from being exploited. Threatening school managers with stern warnings over overcharging fees beyond the government recommendation without action has not yielded any fruits. Indeed, more and more ways are being formulated by school authorities to milk the poor parents of their hard earned, inadequate monies.

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