

The Effect of User Charges on Access to Basic Education in Kenya

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Abstract—In Kenya, the right to free basic education was enshrined by law in 2003 and expanded to include secondary schools under the new constitution. The Basic Education Act allows schools to impose other levies with the approval of the Cabinet Secretary in consultation with the County Education Board provided that no child is denied education because of failure to pay such charges. However, this has not been the case. In practice, there are a large number of different “fees” that households have to pay for publicly provided primary and secondary education, including tuition fees, compulsory uniforms, Parent Teacher Association (PTA) dues, and various special fees such as exam fees, and the like which have kept school age going children out of school. These fees are especially difficult for marginalized children such as females, orphans, and the financially underprivileged. For as long as many children of school going age still remain out of school, the achievement of vision 2030 remains a mirage since education and training of all Kenyans is an important ingredient under the social pillar in the realization of this vision. It is therefore recommended that, the government should meet the full costs of boarding in secondary schools in order to redress the imbalance between low and high social economic status families, provide adequate teaching and learning resources in public primary, and review the current capitation grant at both sub-sectors.

Keywords—User charges, access, basic education, marginalized and capitation grant.

I. INTRODUCTION

Kenya has targeted Universal Primary Education (UPE) since independence and therefore development of education has been a long standing objective of the government. Attainment of UPE is an international development goal which all countries should realize. The World Conference on Education for All (EFA) held in 1990 emphasized the importance of basic education and introduced a new concept of “basic learning needs” for people (Sawamura &

Sifuna, 2008). The Dakar Framework of Action of 2000 set the above goal with the statement of ensuring that, all children, particularly girls and children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities have access to free and compulsory education of good quality. The importance of basic education and its role in poverty alleviation is also underscored in The Dakar Framework of Action.

According to Maiyo, Amunga and Ashioya (2009), President Thabo Mbeki, while opening the conference on African Renaissance in the 21st century reiterated the need for education thus:

If the next century is going to be characterized as a truly African century, for social and economic progress of African people, the century of durable and sustained development in Africa, then the success of this project is dependent on the success of our education systems. For nowhere in the world has sustained development been achieved without universal and sound primary education, without an effective higher education and research sector, without equality of educational opportunity (p.1).

In Kenya, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST) has as its vision, “Quality Education for Development.” Specific targets set towards meeting the Ministry’s key priority include: Achieving UPE by 2005 and EFA by 2015, achieving a transition rate of 70% from primary to secondary school by 2010, enhanced equity, access and quality in primary and secondary education supported through capacity building of 45, 000 education managers by 2005 among others. The right to free basic education was enshrined by law in 2003 and expanded to include secondary schools under a new constitution. According to the Bill of Rights, basic education is a fundamental human right. This implies that citizens can hold the state accountable for ensuring that every child aged 4 to 17 years is in school and receiving quality education (MOEST, 2014).

According to the Basic Education Act, schools are allowed to impose other levies with the approval of the Cabinet Secretary in consultation with the County Education Board provided that no child shall be denied education because of failure to pay such charges. However, this has not been the case.

The Act also states that, "No person shall while admitting a child to a public school or a basic education institution collect any admission fee." It shall be the duty of the Cabinet Secretary to ensure compulsory admission, attendance and completion of basic education by every pupil.

II. USER FEES

General discussion of user fees is often explicitly or implicitly about tuition fees. In practice, however, there are a large number of different "fees" that households have to pay for publicly provided primary education, including tuition fees, textbook fees or costs and/or rental payments, compulsory uniforms, Parent Teacher Association (PTA) dues, and various special fees such as exam fees, community contributions to district education boards, and the like (Kattan & Burnett, 2004). Other costs incurred include: transport costs in sending children to school. Poorer households also often incur indirect economic costs by sending to school children who would otherwise contribute to the household economy, by working for income, working in farming or through such tasks as collecting water and firewood or looking after younger children.

User fees in the form of tuition payments, compulsory uniforms and other payments, have in Kenya, played a big role in keeping the poorest children out of school and making it hard for them to stay in school for the completion of basic education that is essential to achieving and maintaining functional literacy. The problem is that user fees are often not reported in official school surveys or financial returns from education systems (Kattan, 2006).

III. PRIMARY SCHOOL EDUCATION

The World Conference on Education for All sparked a paradigm shift in the education sector in many African countries. In Kenya, earlier, The Kenya African National Union's (KANU) Education Manifesto of 1963 had stipulated the need to embrace free and compulsory basic education (Eshiwani, 1993). A more pragmatic step aimed at realizing this was taken in 1971 when the government abolished tuition fees for children from Arid and Semi Arid areas (ASALS). Later, tuition fee free education for class

one to four was decreed in Kenya in 1974 and by 1978, parents were not paying fees.

However, as tuition fees was phased out, development fees and other levies crept in through the back door leading to high dropout rates in primary schools. It was at the height of this massive dropout problem that the government embarked on FPE (Maiyo, Amunga & Ashioya, 2009). The Free Primary Education (FPE) was introduced in 2003 and it has been critical in attaining EFA as the key objective of realizing the UPE goal. The overall long term goal of FPE is to build human capacity through investment in children at an early age. FPE is also the government's way of linking education and economic development. In addition, FPE offers a great chance of equalizing opportunities.

Under the FPE programme, each school receives Ksh. 1,020/= (US\$14) per child enrolled per school year. The school monies are meant to be disbursed in April, July and December (MOEST, 2003). Schools are supposed to run two accounts: Account 1 is SIMBA account which caters for text books, pens, exercise books and chalk among other things and it receives Ksh 650/= (US\$ 10) per child enrolled per year. Account 2 is the General Purpose Account (GPA) which is meant for wages of support staff, repairs, maintenance, phone bills, electricity, postage, garbage collection and general expenses. It receives Ksh. 370/= (US\$ 4) per child enrolled per year. Later, it was realized that the government grant of Ksh. 1,020/= was inadequate and the shortfall of 5, 280/= had to be met by the parents (Elimu Yetu Coalition, 2004).

To charge any extra levies, the school heads and committees are supposed to obtain approval Cabinet Secretary in consultation with the County Education Board. The fund is managed by the School Management Committee. While the government's role is to mobilize resources, recruit teachers pay their salaries, meet tuition costs, develop the curriculum and provide instructional materials, parents were expected to provide the basic needs, buy school uniform and other scholastic materials. They were also expected to refurbish schools and use existing facilities such as community and religious buildings. This aspect of the policy complicated the FPE provision. Parents who could not afford uniform had children send away from school. The parents were also meant to pay for the refurbishing of schools and this meant the free education was not free after all. Late disbursement of funds is a problem that has dogged the FPE programme since its inception forcing head teachers to send pupils away for money to cater for schools needs.

Thus, although Primary School tuition fees was abolished, several factors continue to impede access to education in Kenya. Many parents still cannot afford to pay for school uniforms, textbooks, transport, meals and supplies, without which students cannot attend school (Glennister and Kremer, 2011). These fees are especially difficult for marginalized children such as females, orphans, and the financially underprivileged (Benoit, 2013). The cost of uniforms ranges from KSh500 to KSh1,000. Poor parents and those in slum settings are most affected. Many parents in Kibera, Kenya said that, schools required their children to have two uniforms to attend government schools, a cost which many parents could not afford (Tooley, Dixon & Stanfield, 2006). Another parent in Kibera was told to pay KSh11,000 for a building maintenance fund (Benoit, 2013).

According to the Education for All Global Monitoring Report Fact Sheet (2012), One million children are still out of school in Kenya making Kenya the ninth highest of any country in the world. The poor, and girls most of all, have far less chance of making it to school. In 2008, in Nairobi, almost all children from rich households had been to school, whether boy or girl. But 55% of poor girls living in the North-East had never been to school, with 43% of poor boys in the region in the same situation. This shows how overall figures that show massive increase in access and near gender parity are deceptive because they mask the stark realities of severe disparities.

Again, the frequently quoted increase in access and participation rates and the near gender parity in most regions notwithstanding, the question of quality which is a key concern of the Millennium Development Goals has not been realized (Amunga, Amadalo, & Maiyo, 2010). With the introduction of FPE, enrollment increased from 40 pupils to 70 pupils per class (Kipkoech & Kyalo, 2010). Teaching and learning facilities were overstretched, and teachers' morale hit rock bottom since there was no incentive for handling the swollen classes. This compromised the quality of education in public primary schools. Since the introduction of FPE, public primary schools have constantly been out performed by private schools.

The row over the continued imposition of fees, and concerns over plummeting standards, make many observers wonder if the money has been wisely spent. Donors and governments have thus been keen on the quantitative expansion of schooling at the expense of the qualitative aspect. They have created a dysfunctional public-education system where the children who are attending school are not learning actually learning! According to the Education for

All Global Monitoring Report Fact Sheet (2012), primary education is not of sufficient quality to ensure that all children can learn the basics. Among young men aged 15-29 years who had left school after six years of schooling, 6% were illiterate and 26% were semi-literate. The figures are even worse for young women, with 9% illiterate and 30% semi-literate after being in school for six years. The proportion of semi-literate or illiterate women after six years of schooling has worsened in recent years: in 2003, 24% were in this situation, compared with 39% in 2008.

IV. SECONDARY SCHOOL EDUCATION

Secondary school makes an important contribution to democratic citizenship and social cohesion. According to the World Bank (2005), provision of good quality secondary education is a critical tool in generating the opportunities and benefits of social and economic development. Secondary education is also a basic requirement for the continuation to higher education. In the formal education system, secondary school education is strategic in that, it connects primary schooling, tertiary education and the labour market. It is thus a transition level that connects those in education from low to higher echelons of education.

In Kenya, as the country moved towards achieving universal primary schooling, demand started shifting to secondary education. One of the challenges of gaining access to secondary education was affordability because it was a fee paying sector. Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2005 had clearly underscored the cost of secondary school as the main reason for low enrolment, and low transition rates (MOEST, 2005). Therefore, children from low income households whose parents could not meet the costs were unlikely to participate in secondary education. The introduction of Free Day Secondary Education (FDSE) in 2008, also referred to as Subsidized Secondary Education was meant relieve the poor and the marginalized groups, and enable them access education. The government's concern was that, if secondary education sector remained fee paying, the majority of those who successfully accessed, participated in primary education and completed the cycle would be unable to pursue secondary education. In most cases, most children who 'poured' into primary school upon the introduction of FPE were from poor households. Denying them secondary education would limit their only chance of escaping from the vicious circle of poverty. Another concern was that, children from poor households who failed to access secondary education due to lack of fees

would revert back to illiteracy thus reversing the eight years of the government's investment in their primary education.

Financing of secondary education has also been motivated by the fact that, in recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the fact that, primary education is important for individual welfare; it is nevertheless an insufficient condition for national economic growth and poverty reduction. Primary school leavers are usually too young to become economically independent and socially engaged in various activities. For children from poor households who can't raise fees for secondary school, completion of primary schooling may mean an end to formal education and entrance into the world of work. However, because of their limited skills and knowledge and their tender age, most primary school leavers are unable to participate in the world of work. By extending the minimum level of basic education to secondary education, it was hoped that, children would complete basic education when they were ready to join the labour market. This notwithstanding, the introduction of FDSE was a government strategy of meeting the promise of achieving the transition rate of 70% from primary school to secondary school by the year 2008.

Previously, there was a MOEST bursary scheme put in place to cushion against adverse effects of cost-sharing in education. However, its operation was handicapped by inadequate guidelines with regard to the amount of money to be allocated per student, poor selection of genuinely needy students, inadequate awareness creation about the existence of the scheme, limited funds, poor coordination and delays in the disbursement of funds. There was also lack of Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms by MOEST. This resulted in lack of transparency and accountability, nepotism, and various aspects of mismanagement of the bursary scheme. The Constituency Development Fund (CDF) has been dogged by the same problems.

Despite subsidizing education and availing funds through CDF, high achieving students are often unable to attend schools of choice due to lack of school fees and distances that require residency hence need for boarding. Good schools are often a long distance from home. In order to attend school, many children wake up long before sunrise, returning home late in the evening. In addition, schools in Kenya all have different fee structures. They also vary in the quality of education and overall school environment. Therefore, affordable secondary education remains elusive years after the Government introduced subsidized learning. The reality is that fees has been rising every year contrary to the agreed upon harmonized fee structure. The Kenya National Association of Parents (KNAP) harmonized the

fee structure with the government four years ago but many secondary school heads have ignored the agreement overcharging indirect charges such as KES 20,000 for lunch, booster charges amounting to almost KES 30,000 and bus maintenance fee (Time News, 2014). Such charges raised fees in schools beyond parents reach hence locking out Kenyan children from pursuing education. Because basic education is a fundamental human right and citizens can hold the state accountable for not ensuring that every child aged 4 to 17 years is in school and receiving quality education (MOEST, 2014), early in the year (2014), parents attempted to sue the Minister of Education for an infringement on children's rights.

The fear was that, because the majority of parents struggle to get fees for their children, the schools' unlawful move to increase fees would lock out many children especially the 2013 KCPE candidates from joining schools of their choice. Currently, it has been realized that fee charges especially for national schools ranged from KES 70,000 to Ksh. 100, 000 and this has locked out the majority of bright children from poor families. According to Miruka, Akinyi and Mangoa (2009), five students from Nyanza Province who were admitted to national school could not report because of lack of school fees. Access to public secondary schools and universities by the poor has remained elusive despite government efforts to ensure equity in provision of education (Martim, 2008).

It is now apparent that students in many public national and provincial schools have not benefited from subsidized education. Many schools charge more than what the Government recommends for a year for just one term. The introduction of the subsidy came with a recommendation from the Education ministry that public day schools should be free and boarding ones to charge a maximum of Sh18, 627 a year. This replaced an earlier guideline that had largely been ignored by schools for years, which recommended that national schools charge Sh26,900, provincial and district boarding (Sh22,500) and day (Sh19,000) annually. A survey by The Standard revealed that national and top provincial schools charge fees as high as Sh73,600 for two terms, including the subsidy. A number of bright students who secured Form One admission to elite national schools in 2014 were opting to join low-ranked county and district schools because their parents could not raise annual fees running to as much as Sh130,000.

The Kenya National Association of Parents (KNAP) said the national schools had increased fees by about 100 per cent in the recent past in breach of Education ministry regulations (Otuki, 2014). The withdrawal from elite

schools over high fees and requirements of expensive sport items, besides personal effects, underlines the class divide in secondary school education. This beats the logic of the quota admission system where learners from public primary schools — who are presumed to be from poor backgrounds — got 75 per cent of the 17,000 slots in the 105 national secondary schools, but they were opting out and would be replaced by the those for high socio-economic status. According to the Free Secondary Education policy, the government was expected to meet the tuition fees of KShs 10,265 per student, while the parents were required to meet other requirements like lunch, transport and boarding fees for those in boarding schools, besides development projects. This was in line with the government commitment to ensure that regional special needs and gender disparities were addressed (Ohba, 2009). These efforts were a positive move towards the realization of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All.

Parents have constantly faulted schools for introducing unnecessary levies while head teachers blame the high cost of living and delays by the Government to disburse funds. When first term 2014 was coming to an end the Government has sent a paltry Sh2,050 of Sh10,265 per student for old students and nothing for Form Ones. This trend has recurred in subsequent years. Another challenge for the schools is that they receive funds at unpredictable times and in a “trickle down” approach that is often insufficient. Many heads of schools have complained due to the delays in disbursing the funds that each public school should receive, suppliers are not being paid for their services. The Kenya Union of Post Primary Teachers Nyanza secretary Kepher Oguwi said principals are justified to increase fees following delays in disbursement of funds (Ayodo and Too, 2010). Again, it has been indicated that, the sum of 10,265KSh per pupil amounts to only 30 percent of the actual funds required to attend a public school therefore, thousands of secondary school youth walk the roadways during the day, sent home for lack of school fees.

Other schools have all types of levies that have pushed up the cost of secondary education ranging from payment for plastic chairs, motivation, desks and beds. There are also levies for the purchase of school buses, development etc. Many of the levies are re-introduced using Education ministry rules, which provide that schools can raise fees with the approval of the Board of Management and County Education Boards. School heads have indicated that they hold PTA meetings where parents suggest the need to increase fees towards quality and efficiency.

According to the Global Monitoring Report for Kenya (2012), while the abolition of secondary school fees reduced the costs for households, indirect costs are still twelve to twenty times as much as the monthly income of parents in rural areas, leaving secondary school out of reach for the poorest households. Only a minority of children from poor rural households or urban slums make it to secondary school. The increased investment would be more equitably distributed if it were geared towards remote rural areas, slum settlements and pastoralist communities (Kattan, 2006).

V. CONCLUSION

Despite advancements in accessing primary education, access to secondary education has remained quite low in comparison for students from low socio-economic status. Many children of secondary school age still remain out of school. Achievement of vision 2030 is made near impossible since education and training of all Kenyans is an important ingredient under the social pillar in the realization of this vision.

Recommendations and way forward

1. To enable children from low poor households proceed to National and Top County schools, the government should meet the full costs of boarding in order to redress the imbalance between low and high social economic status families.
2. Completion of primary school is no guarantee that children have acquired basic skills. There should be provision of adequate teaching and learning resources in public primary schools so that learners can compete favourably with those from private schools.
3. Access to education has been achieved at the expense of quality. The government must rethink its piece-meal hiring of teachers which has failed to meet the shortfall leading to high pupil-teacher ratio.
4. The current capitation grant of primary and secondary schools should be reviewed in the light of changing economic times.
5. The umbrella funding policy should be reviewed at secondary school level. The government should look at the possibility of funding only students in boarding schools who are from low socio-economic status. This could free more funds for full funding of such students while those from high socio-economic status meet their own costs of education.
6. Schools should come up with Income generating activities and use the proceeds to subsidize costs of

education. Proceeds from the IGA should be directed towards boarding costs in order to reduce the financial burden for students from poor families.

7. Schools should prudently manage financial resources to avoid wastage and misappropriation.
8. Funds drives should be held. In addition, schools should have special kitties to support students from poor families who are likely to drop out due to user fees.
9. CDF should allocate sufficient funds for academic functions.

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