

## **Baseline Survey of Kenya's Universal Primary Education: A Case of Butere/Mumias District.**

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### **Abstract**

The implementation of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Kenya in the year 2003 led to a drastic increase in pupil enrollment in the public primary schools in the country from 5.9 million in December 2002 to 7.2 million children in January 2003 (Ayodo, Michuki & Wanzia, 2005). This upsurge has had positive implications and challenges for the education system and society at large. A survey carried out in 20 public primary schools in Butere/Mumias district in Western Kenya using observation checklists, interviews (structured and unstructured) and questionnaires revealed that more children are attending school than in the past, although they were overcrowded, learning and physical facilities overstretched and teachers few. There was also a general increase in cases of indiscipline among the pupils. It is recommended that there be an expansion of the physical facilities such as classrooms to cater for increased pupil numbers, improved provision of learning equipment, employment of more teachers, and establishment of school feeding programs as an incentive for needy children. These will help improve the quality of education and enhance retention and completion rates among the pupils.

### **Background**

Education is viewed as key to development and a tool for lifting millions of the world's poor out of poverty. Findings show that as the educational level of a population increases, so do its chances of living a healthy, positive life. A survey of 106 developing countries showed strong positive correlations between adult literacy rates and life expectancy (UNESCO, 1995) while, in Africa, an increase of one percentage point in the national literacy rate was associated with a two-year rise in life expectancy. Formal Education acts as a powerful determinant of economic productivity, even when just a modest level of schooling is attained. Individuals who have completed primary school, for example, tend to have higher earnings, and lower fertility, as well as better health and nutrition status than their less-schooled fellow citizens. They save more of their incomes, adopt new technologies more readily, and participate more often in civic affairs (UNESCO, 1995). Therefore, the poverty and low life expectancy in developing nations is a cycle enhanced by lack of education.

The idea that education is a human right was articulated at the international conference on education convened by the UNESCO in Geneva at its 39<sup>th</sup> session in October 1984. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulates, "Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory". All member states were therefore expected to fulfill the primary requirement for education in accordance with the United Nations Convention on Educational Commitments.

Attempts to promote universal primary education in Uganda through The Third Five Year Plan (1972-1976) and the Education Policy Review Commission of 1977 had both failed due to negative political climate and poor economic growth. Between 1980 and 1985, education accounted for an average of only 15.6% of recurrent government expenditure (Kirungi, 2005).

When the National Resistance Movement (NRM) took over power in 1986, it constituted a series of commissions to investigate the situation in all areas of government including education.

The Education Policy Review Commission headed by Professor Senteza Kajubi recommended the universalization of primary education, not later than the year 2000. In 1997, the government of Uganda declared a policy of Universal Primary Education (UPE), which entitles up to four children per family (two had to be girls) to receive free education in government and government-aided primary schools. Between 1986 and 1990, government spending on education rose to 17.8%, and further to 30% the decade that followed. This decision removed a key obstacle for families and also sent a signal on the importance of education. Enrollment gaps between the rich and the poor, and between boys and girls were successfully narrowed (Ministry of Education and Sports-Uganda, 1999).

In Bangkok, the Education for All: Goal 2 aimed at ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult conditions, and minorities have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education. All children had to have the opportunity to fulfill their right to quality basic education, whatever level of education is considered basic. In Pakistan, Morocco, Niger and Cameroon, the World Food Program-UNESCO introduced Take-home Ration Programs to enhance school enrollment especially among the girls. A study by the WFP on school feeding had found that economic factors and cultural traditions were a key impediment to education. Girls were less likely to attend school since their labour was heavily relied on at home. The Take-home ration program led to increased enrolment of girls in schools by at least 50%. Parents of participating girls also developed interest in education of their girls resulting in higher retention rates of girls in schools once they got enrolled (UNESCO, 1995). If these countries were able to put in place programs to encourage children to attend school, Kenya too needed to do the same.

A Participatory Poverty Assessment study undertaken in Kenya's eight districts (Kitui, Busia, Nyamira, Kwale, Bomet, Kisumu, Mandera, and Kakamega) in 1995 indicated disturbing trends of poverty which had high implications for, among other things, education and vice versa. Increasing poverty and escalating school costs resulted in quadrupling of school dropouts in most areas surveyed. Between 50% and 68% of children in all but Nyamira district, reported that someone, often more than one child, in their family had been forced to drop out of school in the last two years before the study because of inability to meet school expenses, fees and uniforms (Narayan, et al. 1995). Against this backdrop, the idea of UPE in Kenya was long overdue if the cycle of illiteracy and poverty had to be successfully broken.

### **Universal Primary Education in Kenya**

The concept of UPE in Kenya is not new. It has existed since 1969 and, over time, a number of factors have pointed to the need to embrace at least basic education for all. Kenya's increasing population resulted in need for a corresponding expansion of the education sector. The high population was associated with an enhanced poverty index, which ensured that many children were out of school and engaged in child labour or prostitution. The government had to address this state of affairs. Then there was also the convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989, Articles 28 and 29 re-affirmed the global declaration that education is a human right, which must be made accessible to all children. The Children's Act (2001) stipulates that every child has a right to basic education regardless of his/her socio-economic status. The National Development Plan (2000-2008), The Millennium Development Goal, and the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) government manifesto all fronted for education for all.

When the NARC government came to power at the end of 2002, the introduction of UPE was considered urgent. This was undertaken in January 2003 as part of the government's commitment to the achievement of universal primary education by 2015. The verdict of many

stakeholders was that the program was noble and timely. They argued that it would help develop the country right from the grassroots. Expectations were high and indeed the response of learners was immense. Consequently, the government spent 18 billion Kenya shillings to kick-start the program. However, the abrupt implementation of the noble idea had both positive implications as well as challenges for the education system and the socio-economic life of the people at large. These challenges constitute the major interest of this paper.

### **Study objectives**

The general objective of this study was to assess (normative) the UPE program in Kenya, almost three years after its inception and assess its performance. The specific objectives of this study were to assess:

- Program achievements;
- Extent of interactive learning;
- Existence and adequacy of teaching /learning materials;
- Counseling services in schools;
- Quality assurance/ inspection and the
- Management of school funds by heads of schools.

### **Focus area of study**

The study was carried out in 20 public primary schools in Butere/Mumias district of Western Kenya. The district has five divisions and eight zones. There are 256 public primary schools with a total of 147,423 pupils and 2,846 teachers. The enrolment of pupils rose from 102,000 in December 2002, to 134,969 in 2003, and then to 144,165 in 2004. By January this year, the numbers had increased to 147,423. This is an area that contends with issues of child labour, hawking, and cane cutting among school dropouts.

### **Methodology and Aample Design**

The largely descriptive study was undertaken by use of discussions and in-depth interviews with teachers and pupils, classroom observations, and reference to school records. 20 public primary schools were randomly selected from among the rural based ones for purposes of homogeneity of sample. The head teacher and at least four teachers (chosen at random) from each of the sampled schools were interviewed. A few were also asked to respond to oral questions during the study. Observations were carried out in lower primary. This was based on the assumption that the effects of UPE could be better reflected there than in the upper classes.

### **Study findings**

There were several achievements attributed to UPE in Butere/Mumias district as enumerated below:

- There has been a general improvement in enrolment as many children took advantage of the UPE to access education. This means that the gap between the rich and the poor in enrolment is successfully being overcome (see Table below).
- There are nearly as many girls as boys in school, therefore improved gender equity in enrolment as shown in the table below.

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
2003	68,628	66,341	134,969
2004	73,207	70,958	144,165
2005	75,342	72,081	147,423

**Total enrolment for boys and girls (source: District Report-2005).**

- Improved school retention rates as children were no longer sent home for fees.
- Financial burden on parents has been reduced and what was used on fees is now channeled to other income earning activities.
- With subsequent funding from the government, schools were able to procure the most needed items, especially books, which support learning, even though this was considered inadequate.

### Challenges

Whereas Free Primary Education was successfully launched in all parts of the country almost three years ago, there are still many challenges occasioned by lack of adequate planning before its implementation. This demands for intervention by the government with the support of development partners and other players. Challenges experienced in Butere/Mumias schools include the following:

- Poor buildings which are incomplete or collapsing. In some cases, halls and churches have been converted into classrooms. These are not conducive for learning. In extreme cases, two classes were found to share one classroom or lessons conducted outdoors. The Public Relations Officer in the Ministry of Education said that "the role of government is only to provide teachers and instructional material... communities are to make sure classrooms are available (Mulama, 2005). This has not been easy in Butere/Mumias. There are difficulties raising extra funds for school projects.
- Lack of instructional materials and books. Books provided to the schools are few in relation to the numbers of learners. Generally rote learning is used due to the overwhelming pupil numbers.
- Inadequate physical facilities such as desks and chairs. Consequently, learners sit on the floor and stones during lessons. Besides, sanitary facilities such as toilets are few and overstretched.
- The teacher/ pupil ratio of 1:60 was large and had the potential of watering down the quality of education since the teachers are overloaded. Some schools operate with fewer teachers than the number of classes meaning that some classes, especially the lower ones, go unattended during certain periods. The cut back on teacher employment was worsened by high attrition rates due to deaths, resignations, and retirements. Overloaded teachers were also reported to be indifferent. In a specific case, a teacher was alleged to have advised pupils to have their work marked by their parents. Lack of close monitoring and the withdrawal of the cane led to indiscipline, which negatively affected the learning process.
- Expanded roles for head teachers created management problems. Cases of mismanagement of funds were reported in schools where school committees comprised semi/illiterate

- members. In other cases, schools operated on unapproved budgets, poor prioritization, poor bookkeeping, and lack of adherence to procurement procedures.
- Other requirements such as school uniform continue to stand in the way of Education For All (EFA) in this district where poverty is a big issue. Thus, not all children of school-going age are in school.

### **Lessons learnt**

Based on the study, the following lessons were learnt:

- There was need for widespread consultations with all stakeholders, especially those directly in the education sector before implementation of the UPE. This would help put in place appropriate measures to reduce eminent challenges. This is because in addressing one educational need, other needs were bound to be created.
- School committees ought to be enlightened in matters of proper management and efficient use of funds.
- Employment of more education officers is necessary for quality assurance.
- There is need for a policy guide on how to match the expanded basic schooling with initiatives concerning secondary education to avoid a situation of even more children dropping out after primary school.

### **Conclusion**

Accessibility to Free Primary Education has been realized to a great extent in Kenya as a whole, about 1.7 million children who had previously been excluded from the education system are now enrolled in schools. If the emerging challenges were successfully dealt with, then school enrolment would be higher than what it is currently. In Butere/Mumias district, the enrolment between December 2002 and February 2005 shot up by over 45,000. However, many children of school going age are still out of school, and strategies have to be found to deal with the challenges in order to realize the goal of Education for All (EFA) by the year 2015.

### **Recommendations**

- The government should consider providing key physical facilities especially the classrooms, desks and chairs so as to avoid situations where children sit on floors and stones. Further, schools should build more latrines to serve the increased numbers in enrolment. Uncomfortable learning conditions frustrate especially girls who easily give up and leave school.
- Teachers to be sensitized to be alert, aware and innovative in the use of locally available material in the school and its surroundings for visual aids. Learners can be enlisted to make a variety of learning aids under the guidance of their teachers.
- The Ministry of Education should consider employment of more teachers to ease the workload of those already on the ground. Butere/Mumias District currently has a shortfall of 1,006 primary school teachers.
- School budgetary allocations should be revised upwards to enhance inspection and quality service delivery in Butere/Mumias District.
- All effort be undertaken to retain the enrolled children in schools by providing incentives such as food in schools. Some children keep away from school due to hunger perpetuated by poverty.

- The government put in place a policy specifying the age limit for learners joining Standard One to avoid cases of very old people learning together with the young, which in itself is distracting. Adult education institutions should be revived.
- Committees that handle school finances should comprise enlightened people to avoid mismanagement.
- There is still need for further research and close monitoring to identify barriers that slow down the interventions towards providing Education For All (EFA).

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