

Policy Brief

No. 49 June 2015



Collaborating Organizations: National Council for Population and Development, Ministry of Education and African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP).

Investing in Education and Skills Development

Kenya has one of the most youthful populations in the world with about 43 percent of its population under the age of 15. The youth population is growing fast and the country is experiencing a youth bulge; an excess especially in young population aged 15-24.

These young people are an important resource for economic growth and present a window of opportunity to earn the demographic dividend. The demographic dividend is the accelerated economic growth that may result from a rapid decline in a country's fertility and the subsequent change in the population age structure¹. Kenya is in a position of benefiting from a demographic dividend, but this will not happen automatically. Immediate and sustained investment must be made in health, education and economic policies reform.

Education Is a Key Driver of Economic Growth

Education is a key driver of economic development and investing in education and skills development in Kenya would lead to accelerated national economic growth. Providing young people with quality education prepares and equips them with skills to enter the labor force, and helps them realize better and more productive lives. Reduction in fertility, mortality rates and general improvement of quality of life are dependent on education. Increase in education for women and girls contribute to greater empowerment, postponement of age of marriage and reduction in family sizes.

The Government of Kenya has invested in the improvement of both the access and quality of education in order to achieve education-related Millennium Development Goals and Vision 2030. However, there are bottlenecks that make the realization of desired levels of access, participation and quality of education a challenge.

This policy brief looks at how Kenya can make strategic measures by investing in education and skills development so that the young people can be drivers of development over the next two decades. It identifies the key issues facing the education sector and suggests potential policy and programme solutions that will ensure a better-educated and skilled workforce that contribute to the country's economic growth.

Key Issues in the Education Sector

Access and Participation in Education Levels

Low Participation in Pre-primary and Post-primary Education Levels

Kenya has made tremendous efforts in achieving universal primary education and expanding access to basic education across the country through the free primary education (FPE) introduced by the government in 2003.

The Gross Enrollment Rate (the number of children newly admitted to the first year of school, regardless of age as a percentage of children who are entitled to admission) has remained above 100 percent since 2009, while the Net Enrollment Rate (NER) increased from 92.9 percent in 2009 to 95.9 percent in 2013². The growth in primary school enrollments has, however, not been matched by a similar growth at the pre-primary, secondary and tertiary education levels. Although at the pre-primary level, the GER increased from 60.6 percent in 2009 to 69 percent in 2013 and the NER increased from 49 percent to 53.5 percent in the review period, participation at pre-primary level remains far below the set Education For All (EFA) target of 80 percent³.

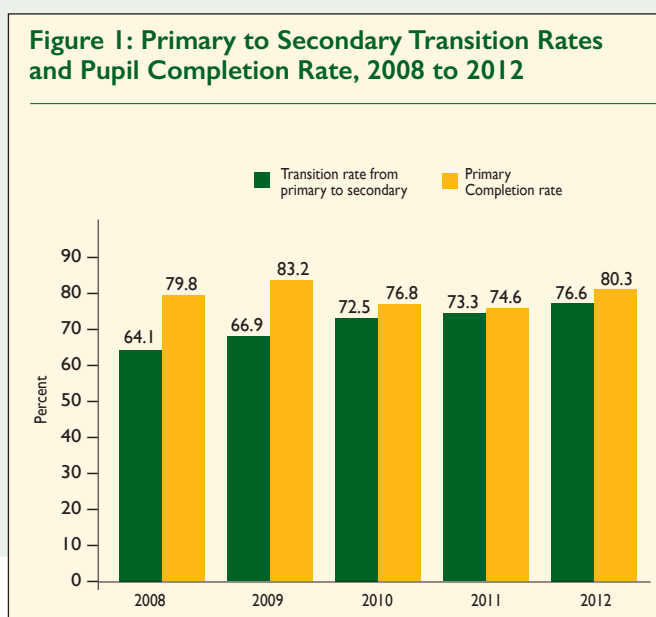
At Secondary level GER is also still low, though it has been on an upward trend since 2009. The GER increased from 45.3 percent in 2009 to 56.2 percent in 2013 and the NER for secondary schools increased from 35.8 percent to stand at 39.5 percent in 2013. There is need to increase access and enrollments to pre-primary and post-primary since the pre-primary programmes (ECD) provide the cognitive foundation needed for the children to be better learners in school. Furthermore, ensuring that half of the population attains some secondary education could more than double annual economic growth rates⁴.

Notwithstanding, enrolment in higher institutions of learning and tertiary institutions has been on the rise but is still very low as shown in Table I, with girls being more disadvantaged at the higher levels. It is at these higher levels that the youth can acquire the critical skills to spur economic development. The country cannot exploit the full potential of a future large labour force relative to dependents if the workers do not have the requisite high level skills to develop the economy.

Low Primary School Completion Rate and Low Transition Rate from Primary to Secondary

The primary completion rate as shown in Figure 1 increased from 79.8 percent in 2008 to 83.2 percent in 2009. In 2010, the pupil completion rate dropped to 76.8 percent, further dropping to 74.6 percent in 2011, before rising to 80.3 percent in 2012. The transition rate from primary to secondary school has been increasing over the years, from 64.1 percent in 2008 to 76.6 percent in 2012 (Figure 2). But this is against the country target of 85 percent (GoK, 2013)⁵.

Cultural barriers to education such as child marriages, female genital mutilation (FGM), cultural norms and gender roles which favour boys over girls remain prevalent in some communities and have direct negative consequences for the education and socio-economic status of girls and young women⁶. These factors have continued to contribute to poor transition rates from primary to secondary. Secondary school fees are also a major financial hindrance to secondary school access.



Source: Ministry of Education EMIS and Government of Kenya Economic Survey (various).

Table I: Student Enrolment by Type of Educational, Training Institution and Sex, 2010-2013

Type of Educational Institution	2010		2011		2012		2013	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Enrolment in Universities ¹ '000	107.7	69.9	117.7	80.6	135.4	105.1	193.2	131.4
Enrolment in other Institutions ² '000	56.4	54.7	68.5	65.3	92.5	66.0	106.1	79.0

¹ Includes students in National Universities and Private accredited Universities and unaccredited universities.

² Includes students in Teacher Training Colleges, Polytechnics, Technical Training Institute and Institutions of science & Technology.

Source: KNBS Kenya Facts and Figures 2014.

Quality of Education and Training

Quality education and training at all levels prepares young people with requisite skills to effectively and fully participate in the labor market. However, provision of quality education and training remains a challenge and disparities for example in quality between public and private schools which is related to disparity in performance is of major concern⁷. The difference in performance reflects differences in facilities, teachers and other resources.

Quality Education means the following are in place

- Modern teaching and learning Infrastructure
- Optimum Teacher to Student ratio
- Improved Capacities; Teachers/Trainers have relevant pedagogical skills
- A curriculum that imparts skills for sustainable livelihoods and for work, citizenship, sustainability and tailored for all categories of learners
- Effective management system of learning institutions

Mismatch between Curricula and Labour Market Needs

The education system does not prepare young people effectively with the relevant marketable skills that match the job market as most of them are deficient in employment skills⁸. The skills acquired by the college and university graduates often do not meet the expectation of employers, showing a disconnect between the skills offered in learning institutions and those demanded by employers⁹.

Challenges in Technical, Vocational, Educational and Training (TVET) and Middle Level Colleges

Vocational training can help young people acquire marketable skills that can enable them obtain employment. The government has put in place measures for expansion and modernization of TVET and middle level colleges over the last ten years. These institutions are the main providers of hands on skills training required for participation in the labour market hence the vehicle for social, economic and technological transformation¹⁰. Several challenges exist including poor perception towards TVET leading to underutilization, low female participation in TVET especially in Science, Engineering and Technology (SET)

courses, poor infrastructure and equipment especially in the youth polytechnics and high costs of technical courses prohibit participation in TVET¹¹. Unlike university TVET does not have an elaborate student financing mechanism.

Gender inequalities in Primary and Secondary Education

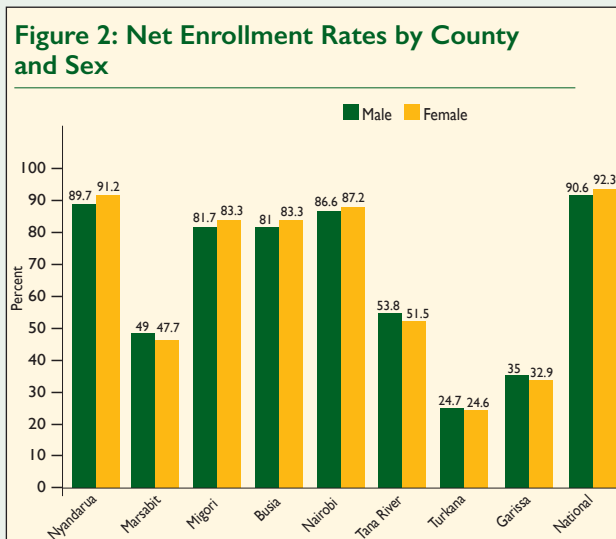
Improvements in gender equality in education has multiple benefits to human development through reduced maternal and infant mortality, improved nutrition, reduced fertility and improved access to productive resources among others.

Kenya has achieved improvement in gender parity in primary education and secondary levels. The ratio of girls to boys in primary was 0.98 in 2013 while the ratio of girls to boys in secondary increased from 0.86 in 2011 to 0.89 in 2013. The ratio of females to males at the tertiary level increased to 0.81 in 2013 from 0.63 in 2000¹².

Cultural barriers to education such as child marriage, teenage pregnancy, FGM and poor sanitation are among the major challenges to higher participation for girls.

Regional Disparities in Primary and Secondary Education

There are regional disparities with best performing schools in terms of NER in non-ASAL regions. Figure 2 shows that participation rates are low across counties in arid and semi-arid lands, and those with high poverty levels. Garissa and Turkana have especially low NERs of 34 percent and 25 percent, respectively, against a national average of 91.4 percent in 2010 and 95.7 percent in 2012¹³.



Source: KNBS, Economic Survey 2014.

NCPD is a semi-autonomous government agency that formulates and promotes population policy and coordinates related activities for sustainable development in Kenya.

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What is needed for change

In order to enhance access and participation the following options are proposed:

1. Ensuring and expanding access for girls: Early (child) marriages, FGM are some of the cultural barriers to girl's education. Existing laws should be strictly enforced to compel parents to educate both boys and girls.

Relevant policies should be implemented to keep girls in school.

These include: scholarship programme for needy girls, establishment of and expansion of rescue centers for girls subjected to FGM which can be achieved if government and private sector pulled resources; enhance sanitary towel policy in schools and re-admission policy for teenage mothers.

2. The National and County Governments should allocate adequate budgetary resources to subsidize the education of poor. A special fund targeting the needy and vulnerable can be established at the county level to address gender inequalities in education. In addition transparency in allocation of bursaries should be enhanced so that the targeted group benefits.

3. Improvement and expansion of facilities

- Provision of pre-primary education is the responsibility of county governments and priority interventions should be given to providing and improving basic facilities and equipment, provision of learning materials and human resources.
- To increase transition to secondary school education there should be expansion of secondary school infrastructure including the number of schools and classes.
- The government should improve the existing mobile schools (for nomads) with logistics and learning materials and equipment. In addition the government should also expand non-formal schools at the secondary level and improve their quality to attract students in marginal areas.
- To improve quality especially in rural schools that lack electricity, books, enough trained teachers, pupils can access quality education materials and free lessons on line if connected via solar panels and wireless broadband.

4. Information and Communication

- To reduce teenage pregnancy and early sexual initiation there is need to empower girls with information by promoting Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in schools. Through CSE young girls receive information that enable them make informed decisions about their sexuality and reproductive health. Evidence has shown that CSE that is culturally and age-appropriate, gender-sensitive and life skills-based can provide young people with the knowledge, skills and efficacy to make informed decisions about their sexuality and lifestyle¹⁷.

5. Empower youth with relevant skills and connect them to livelihood and employment opportunities

- Re-establish mid-level colleges to prepare workers with necessary technical skills in addition to those of university-educated workers.
- Establish strong linkages between TVET and industry to address relevance of training. This may include, dual training conducted in two places of learning – companies and vocational schools in order to provide qualifications and competences required in the changing world of work.

Conclusion

Education is a tool for personal development, economic growth and social transformation. To galvanize education, the government needs to improve access to education and learning, increase quality by strengthening the education and training sector to respond to the emerging challenges in a bid to realize its national development goals. These improvements will demand necessary funding. The Ministry of Education should also develop a clear mechanism for monitoring school and county education performance in relation to national targets. This will inform the overall education planning, monitoring and evaluation process at national and county levels and help establish priority areas for investment in education.



This brief is part of a series of 4 briefs (No. 49) that were developed on the four demographic dividend pillars: Education, Health, Economic and Fertility. Publication of this was made possible by the Government of Kenya with support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The contents are the responsibility of the National Council for Population and Development (NCPD) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the UNFPA.



African Institute for
Development Policy

The African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP), is an African-led, regional non-profit policy think tank, that seeks to make research evidence matter in African-driven development. AFIDEP's mission is to translate and enable utilization of evidence in policymaking, primarily in the fields of population change and sustainable development, and health systems strengthening in Africa.

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