# Access and Participation in Secondary School Education in Kenya

## Emerging Issues and Policy Implications

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## Abstract

While education is considered a basic right and need, its provision, particularly that of secondary education, has been experiencing several bottlenecks. Despite the high expenditure on education by the Kenyan government as part of its contribution to the cost-sharing strategy, the implementation of the policy (cost-sharing) in the education sector is beleaguered by multifarious and intertwined problems, notably: lack of clarity of the policy itself, mode of implementation, role of the key actors/ stakeholders; and the future direction as evidenced by the various policy documents. Besides, there are critical shortcomings and challenges facing the education sector, among them being the declining access and participation rates. To this end, a pertinent policy question is: how can the government of Kenya satisfy the increasing demand for the limited number of secondary school places in order to enhance access to, and participation in secondary school education against the background of the apparent negative effects of cost-sharing?

The objectives of this study included documentation of patterns of students' enrolment by province and gender; the status of the teaching force; the availability and adequacy of physical resources; optimal utilization of the specified teaching period; and students' performance in key subjects. Besides, the study investigated the critical factors causing regional inequalities in students' access to, and participation in secondary school education in Kenya.

The study was exploratory and used a descriptive survey design. Four provinces were randomly sampled and one district purposively selected from each province on the criteria of lowest or highest secondary school gross enrolment rate, gender disparity in access to, and participation in education, and regional disparities in agro-ecological potential. Three target populations considered were: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoES&T) staff at the headquarters, province, district and divisional levels, school-based education staff and opinion leaders.

Unstructured and guided interview schedules, and focus group discussion guidelines were used in data collection. The data was edited and analysed using SPSS.

**The study results indicate that:**

1. Not only has there been a considerable decline in the gross enrolment rate (GER), but also wide and severe regional and gender disparities in access to, and participation in secondary school education have been noted. The hardest hit regions are the arid and semi-arid lands (ASAL) and the medium to low agricultural potential areas.

2. The development of human and physical resources varied from one region to the other. Female teachers were mostly deployed in urban areas, whereas male teachers were deployed in other regions of the country, especially in the ASAL and low agricultural potential areas. The availability and adequacy of physical facilities varied within schools by province, with schools in urban and medium to high agricultural areas being more favoured.

3. The general access and performance of students in key subjects, particularly languages and science subjects has been dismal and on the decline.

4. The critical factors responsible for the low access to, and participation in secondary school education varied across the regions and included:
   - The cost-sharing system, which has resulted in high cost of secondary school education in terms of fees and other related costs;
   - The high rates of poverty at the household level, which have made poor households either not to enrol their children in secondary schools, or fail to sustain an interrupted participation of those who are enrolled due to inability to meet various cost requirements. This has resulted in inadequate provision of learning facilities to the enrolled, poor quality education, and high dropout rates among the poor.
   - Some retrogressive socio-economic and cultural traditions, and religious values and practices, have adversely affected students' access and participation in secondary school education, especially in ASAL regions. Some of these militate against the education of the girl-child.

**Policy Options**

1. Given the increasing poverty levels, the escalating cost of education, and the declining GoK investment in education, policy makers should look into more innovative and viable strategies for enhancing access to, and participation in secondary school education. As a matter of policy, the GoK, through the MoES&T should:

- Create an enabling environment for private investors' participation in secondary school education;
- Introduce a special secondary school levy on certain luxurious commodities such as beer, cigarettes and perfumes in order to subsidize the MoES&T's budgetary allocations to secondary school education;
- Increase the MoES&T bursary from the current Kshs. 500 million to Kshs. 1.5 billion;
- Allow and provide professional guidance to introduction of fee waiver systems as well as income-generating activities to subsidise poor students' fees short-falls.

2. Address some of the socio-cultural and religious factors that militate against access to, and participation in secondary school education. Suggested strategies include:

- Sensitising communities, particularly those in the ASAL and pockets of low to medium agricultural potential areas on the negative effects of these practices.
- Enact and enforce a law compelling parents to equally educate both boys and girls, and make it punishable for any person or institution using or promoting child-labour.

3. Effectively address insecurity issues in some parts of the country through:

- Establishing more boarding schools, particularly in the ASAL and low agricultural potential areas, which are more prone to banditry attacks.
- Put in place strict control measures to reduce and eliminate incidences of insecurity especially in ASAL and urban areas.
- Offer meaningful incentives to teachers and other education officers willing to work in ASAL and low agricultural potential regions.

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