

## INCREASING ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION OF PASTORALIST COMMUNITIES IN PRIMARY EDUCATION IN KENYA

DANIEL N. SIFUNA

**Abstract** – This study shows how the provision of educational facilities in Kenya since the colonial era has been skewed in favour of densely populated agricultural communities. It analyses interventions to redress the resultant imbalances, such as the school-fees waiver, free primary education, the construction of boarding schools, and school feeding programmes. These measures are shown to have had little impact on increasing access and participation of pastoralist communities in primary education; for they have usually been introduced without serious consideration of the prevailing socio-economic conditions. It is proposed here that for their future development, the government needs to articulate clearer policies and involve such communities in planning as well as incorporate elements of their existing traditional education institutions.

**Zusammenfassung** – DER ANSTIEGENDE ZUGANG UND TEILNAHME VON HIRTENGEMEINSCHAFTEN AN GRUNDSCHULBILDUNG IN KENIA – Diese Studie zeigt, wie die Ausstattung mit Bildungseinrichtungen in Kenia seit der Kolonialzeit zugunsten dicht besiedelter landwirtschaftlich geprägter Gemeinschaften verzerrt worden ist. Sie analysiert Interventionen, welche den daraus resultierenden Unausgeglichheiten abhelfen sollten, wie z. B. den Verzicht auf Schulgeld, freie Grundschulbildung, den Aufbau von Internaten und Schulspeisungsprogramme. Es wird gezeigt, dass diese Mittel nur wenig Einfluss darauf hatten, den Zugang und die Teilnahme von Hirtengemeinschaften an Grundschulbildung zu steigern, da sie üblicherweise ohne ernsthafte Berücksichtigung der vorherrschenden sozio-ökonomischen Bedingungen eingeführt worden sind. Es wird hier vorgeschlagen, dass die Regierung für deren weitere Entwicklung klarere politische Ziele artikulieren und sowohl derartige Gemeinschaften in die Planung einbinden als auch Elemente ihrer bestehenden traditionellen Bildungseinrichtungen aufnehmen muss.

**Résumé** – ACCÈS ET PARTICIPATION EN AUGMENTATION DES COMMUNAUTÉS PASTORALISTES DANS L'ÉDUCATION PRIMAIRE AU KENYA – Cette étude montre comment la disposition des aménagements éducatifs au Kenya depuis le début de l'ère coloniale a été faussée en faveur des communautés agricoles à forte densité. Elle fait l'analyse des interventions visant à corriger les déséquilibres qui en résultent, tel que la renonciation aux droits d'inscription, l'éducation primaire gratuite, la construction de pensionnats, et les programmes d'alimentation des écoles. On voit que ces mesures n'ont eu qu'un faible impact sur l'augmentation de l'accès et sur la participation des communautés pastoralistes à l'éducation primaire, dans la mesure où elles ont généralement été introduites sans qu'aient été sérieusement prises en considération les conditions socio-économiques prédominantes. On propose ici que, pour le développement futur de ces mesures, le gouvernement doive articuler des politiques plus claires et inclure de telles communautés dans l'organisation aussi bien qu'incorporer les éléments de leurs institutions traditionnelles d'éducation déjà existantes.

**Resumen** – ACCESO CRECIENTE A LA EDUCACIÓN PRIMARIA Y PARTICIPACIÓN CRECIENTE EN ELLA DE COMUNIDADES PASTORALES EN KENIA—Este estudio muestra cómo desde la era colonial, la provisión de ofertas educativas en Kenia ha ido favoreciendo a las comunidades agrícolas densamente pobladas. Analiza las intervenciones que se han hecho para eliminar los desequilibrios resultantes, tales como la derogación de tasas escolares, la educación primaria libre, la construcción de internados y los programas de alimentación escolar. Estas medidas han mostrado poca eficacia en cuanto al incremento del acceso a la educación primaria y de la participación en ella de las comunidades pastorales, puesto que se han implantado sin tener en cuenta verdaderamente las condiciones socioeconómicas reinantes. Aquí, el autor propone que para el futuro, el gobierno debe presentar políticas más claras e involucrar a estas comunidades en los proyectos e incorporar elementos de sus instituciones educativas tradicionales.

**Резюме** – УВЕЛИЧЕНИЕ ДОСТУПА И УЧАСТИЕ ПАСТОРСКИХ ОБЩИН В НАЧАЛЬНОМ ОБРАЗОВАНИИ В КЕНИИ – Данное исследование показывает, как предоставление образовательных услуг в Кении со времен колониальной эры было обращено в сторону густо населенных сельскохозяйственных общин. В нем анализируются попытки восстановить равновесие таких несоответствий, как отказ от оплаты за школьное обучение, бесплатное начальное образование, строительство школ-интернатов, а также развитие программ школьного питания. Как утверждается, эти меры оказывают незначительное влияние на увеличение доступа и участие пасторских общин в начальном образовании, так как они обычно вводились без серьезного учета доминирующих социально-экономических условий. Здесь предполагается, что для их будущего развития правительству необходимо четко определить политику развития образования и вовлекать такие общины в планирование, а также учитывать их уже существующие традиционные образовательные структуры.

For some decades, development planners, academics and pastoralists in Africa have tried, with diverse motives, to bolster, modernize or fundamentally transform the nomadic pastoralist ways of life. In education in particular, interest has been in improving the educational situation of pastoralist communities as part of a wider concern which seeks to promote rapid socio-economic change in the arid and semi-arid regions (ASAL) of the continent. While pastoralist areas and populations have historically tended to be neglected by development planners and administrators, there has been a growing realization that fundamental improvements in these areas are both desirable and necessary. Previously, the tendency was for the authorities to more or less ignore the special problems which pastoralists posed for education and other forms of social provision and concentrate instead on transforming these nomadic herding communities as a prerequisite to such provision.

The development approach that seemed to neglect the existing social and economic institutions of pastoralist communities were partly based on the work of anthropologists. Although such work was valuable in revealing the internal dynamics of pastoralist societies, it tended to exaggerate the significance of nomadism as compared to other forms of livestock production. The result was that these works were used as proof of the inability of pastoralists to embrace change. For example, the phrase "cattle complex" coined in 1926 by Melvine Herskovits in reference to pastoralists in East Africa was thought by some colonial administrators to designate a terminal maladaptation of the pastoralist communities. In this regard, the refusal of most pastoralists to participate in programmes of socio-economic change was seen as a manifestation of institutional reluctance stemming from an essentially irrational cultural heritage centred on the ownership of livestock based on a "cattle complex". More recent anthropologists, however, have stressed the rationality of systems of livestock production and their links to other forces of socio-economic production. This perception has contributed to the growing view among development specialists that the optimal use of ASAL range resources could involve continuing animal husbandry through extensive pastoralism, rather than radical shifts to new technologies of intensive commercial husbandry or dry-land agriculture (Galaty 1981).

With the increase in initiatives for socio-economic change in pastoralist areas, the responses of pastoralists to such changes, in particular to education, have varied from one group to another due to such factors as different historical experiences, traditional interests, and attachments to clans or sub-groups along with the wider communities in general. It is therefore risky to generalize pastoralist responses to initiatives to effect socio-economic change in a given region or even country. This difficulty is exacerbated by the scarce nature of research on such changes, especially education. While there may be a substantial amount of official material pointing out the problems in promoting education in pastoralist areas and among pastoralist populations, little of it has sought to analyse the problems which normally present themselves or to systematically relate educational provision to other aspects of socio-economic development in these areas. In the Eastern African region, as in other parts of Africa, however, there are numerous examples of diverse pastoralist responses to socio-economic changes since the colonial period. Many pastoralists from the ASAL regions have willingly settled whenever they have been sufficiently motivated to do so. The provision of social amenities such as schools, hospitals, dispensaries, and primary care centers as well as new technologies and modes of transport and communications have substantially contributed to changes in nomadic pastoralism. Examples of such changes include the Sebei, Banyangole, Batoro and Teso of Uganda; the Kipsigs and Nandi of Kenya; and the Maasai group of Wakwavi or Warush of Tanzania. Under the stimulus and opportunities created by colonialism, there were gradual adaptations of the old institutions to new purposes (Goldschmidt 1975; Schneider 1979).

The differences in the responses of pastoralist communities to socio-economic change during the colonial period resulted in the unequal distribution of educational facilities. In some African countries, significant regional and ethnic disparities began to manifest themselves following independence in the 1960s. The provision of educational facilities had been highly skewed in favour of densely populated agricultural communities, where service provision was both relatively simple and efficient. Interestingly, the post-independence policy of rapidly expanding existing education systems has tended to increase rather than reduce these inequalities. Those areas and peoples most favoured by educational services during the colonial era have generally maintained their lead, both quantitatively and qualitatively (Gorham 1980).

With particular reference to Kenya, this study reviews initiatives to provide education to the pastoralist communities since the colonial period, focusing especially on the efforts of the independent government to increase participation by providing free primary education, constructing boarding schools and establishing a school feeding programme. The study attempts to show that the failure to increase school participation by these communities lies more in the modalities of implementing the interventions than in the often perceived attitude by planners of 'resistance to change'.

### **Purpose and approach**

The purpose of this study was to review the development of education in the pastoralist communities and the factors which appear to have influenced that development. Particular attention was paid to interventions by the government of Kenya aimed at tackling the serious disparities in educational provision between these communities and the largely agricultural communities. The free primary education intervention of the early 1970s and the recent similar intervention by the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) government of 2003, the boarding school initiative and the feeding school programme of the late 1970s have been subjected to critical examination. The underlying assumption guiding the study was that the socio-economic conditions of pastoralist communities that did not embrace change during the colonial era call for a fundamentally different approach to formal education provision than what can occur with such provision in non-pastoralist areas.

Educational interventions for pastoralist communities require a proper understanding of the social and economic factors which directly affect these communities. The tendency hitherto has been to view improved education provision largely in terms of providing more and better schools, providing free primary education, constructing boarding schools etc. The history of educational development in these areas, however, does not appear to support such initiatives if they are not based on a proper appreciation of the role of education in the wider society to whose development they are supposed to contribute. Where a particular role is perceived differently by the providers

of the educational services, on one hand, and, on the other, the target populations, serious institutional resistance to education tends to arise. Such resistance is best overcome by a policy which seeks to adjust the goals of educational provision to those of the targeted communities.

The study adopted two main approaches. The first was a review of existing documents, including those related to educational development in Kenya with a particular focus on pastoralist communities, disparities in regional as well in gender participation, and factors contributing to such disparities. These included official policy documents and existing studies on education development. The second approach was field work in which a selected number of ASAL districts were visited to assess the impact of the 2003 initiative to provide free primary education, the status of boarding schools and the school feeding programme. The districts included: Narok and Turkana in the Rift Valley Province; Marsabit and Samburu in Eastern Province; Wajir and Mandera in the Northeastern Province and Tana River in the Coast Province. During the field work focus group discussions were held with members of School Management Committees, while interviews were held with head-teachers of the sampled schools in each district. In the seven districts, 62 primary schools were sampled on the basis of different geographical settings. Interviews were held with head-teachers and education administrators, while 178 senior teachers filled out questionnaires.

### **Educational development**

The land in which most pastoralist communities live and raise their livestock consists of the poor savanna and semi-desert parts of Eastern and Northeastern Provinces and parts of the Rift Valley and Coast Provinces of Kenya. The climate is dry and hot with semi-desert climatic conditions. The vegetation consists of large patches of thick thorn and bush, some regions featuring rocky outcrops strewn with lava boulders. Rainfall is generally low and unpredictable. Occasionally there may be floods, but it is more usual for the wet season to fall out completely, leading to a serious drought in the region. When rain comes, it may take place as heavy showers, only a fraction of which actually provide effective rain. Much of it rapidly flows away, causing immense soil erosion. The lack of rain, or its scanty nature over a period of years, causes severe hardships throughout the ecosystem. These environmental factors dictate one major land use in the area, namely nomadic pastoralism. Indeed, this has been the traditional land use and dates back to the pre-colonial era. The main groups who occupy these regions include the Maasai, Samburu, Somali, Turkana, Gabra, Boran and Rendille.

The early development of schooling in Kenya in the colonial era was inextricably bound with missionary work. As it is generally known, however, missionary work concentrated largely in the predominantly agricultural districts close to or adjacent to white settlements. These occupied the

central band of the country forming the Kenya highlands and the surrounding districts as well as the Western Lake Victoria region of Uganda. There was little or no missionary activity in the wide expanse of lands constituting the nomadic pastoralists. The missionaries generally found it easier to work with the agricultural people than with the nomads. Although the Maasai were among the African communities approached by the Christian missionaries, their contact was generally very limited. More serious, however, were the missionary attempts, similar to government efforts, to engage the Maasai in farming, believed to be the key entry point to the salvation of the community. It was considered not only to be beneficial to the Maasai, but also to undermine their attachment to pastoralism and make them more amenable to change, including becoming more open to formal education and Christianity.

The colonial administration was also eager to provide education to some of the pastoralist communities, although it had restricted outside influence in these areas due to an obsession with law and order which left very little room for undertakings such as educational development. In fact, for much of the colonial period, many of the pastoralist regions were regarded as 'closed districts' which outsiders were not permitted to enter. Hence, missionary activities in these districts were generally limited.

Following independence, there was an enormous expansion of the educational system in the agricultural regions. The demand for education within the urban and agricultural populations was evidenced by the number of schools constructed through community and parents' initiative as compared to government action. Most of these schools were built on *harambee* (community self-help) basis. In the pastoralist areas, the expansion of schools was mainly due to government initiative and action as well religious groups now free to enter these areas. The pastoralist communities' inability to finance the expansion of educational facilities reflected the unstable nature of the pastoralist economy along with the lack of policy to develop the livestock market in these areas. Quarantines on cattle sales and drought often occurred precisely when the government and school authorities demanded more levies from these communities (Ogachi 2002). Low educational participation rates in the pastoralist areas, however, slowly began to be regarded as a serious political problem requiring immediate attention.

The first post-independence Education Commission (Ominde) had envisaged the ultimate achievement of Universal Free Primary Education as a way of overcoming educational inequality for the various marginalized peoples in the country. The commission report urged the government to concentrate on achieving a more equitable distribution of educational opportunities, beginning with lower levels of schooling. It made several recommendations regarding primary education in the ASALs mainly occupied by pastoralist communities. It noted that the main effort of the government should be directed towards raising the level of enrolment in those areas

where the percentage fell seriously short of the national average of 57.7% in 1964. More specifically, the report recommended that the government increase the amount of grants to such areas “while reducing it in favoured districts”. It also expressed the view that education should become an integral part of the overall development of these areas, as was the case elsewhere. It proposed that boarding and mobile primary schools be established for pastoralist communities. It further recommended the preparation of “an economic plan which takes into account the creation of viable settled communities upon which the educational and other social services could be based” (Republic of Kenya 1964).

The problems experienced by both the colonial administration and the independent Kenyan government in providing education to the pastoralist communities were best captured by a Maasai conference participant who worked for the two administrations as an education officer. He was very critical of the approaches used by the two governments to provide education for the pastoralist communities:

The fundamental problem of education with pastoral people, judging from the experience of my own Maasai, is changing their attitude by creating something they believe in. Most pastoral people are not looking for a hand-out; such an attitude is repulsive to them. What they want is something they can really participate in as their own, right from the beginning ... What I am saying is: it's the whole attitude, the whole approach toward pastoral people that's wrong. People begin by assuming that these people will never change. And so they bring in things, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously, that completely antagonize the people and stop them from helping themselves (John Mpaayei, cited in Nkinyangi 1981: 195).

### **Interventions to increase access to and participation in primary education**

The following section focuses on three major interventions to increase access and participation, namely waiving school fees and the politically motivated free primary education programmes of 1973 and 2003; the low-cost boarding schools; and the school feeding programme.

#### *Free primary education*

Among the major interventions to increase access and participation of the disadvantaged groups in primary education in Kenya has been the waiving of school fees and free primary education programmes. In the 1963 elections, the Kenya African National Union (KANU), which became the ruling party, published in its manifesto entitled *What a KANU Government Offers You*. It committed the party to offering a minimum of seven years of free primary education. In the 1969 election manifesto, the party again echoed its

commitment to providing seven years of free primary education. It emphasized that it was the KANU Government's guiding principle to give priority in the educational programmes to areas neglected during the colonial rule so that every Kenyan could share fully in both nation-building and enjoying the fruits of government labour. In more sparsely populated areas, the government pledged to continue its programme of building primary and secondary schools so that every child in those districts which had a low-average enrolment would have the opportunity to attend school (KANU Manifesto 1969). In 1971, a presidential decree abolished tuition fees for the districts having unfavourable geographical conditions, most of them in the ASAL areas, said to make the populations in these areas poor.

A second presidential decree on 12 December 1973 during the celebration of the so-called "Ten Great Years of Independence" claimed to have brought the country close to achieving universal free primary education. The directive provided free education for children in standards I–IV in all districts of the country. It went further and provided a uniform fee structure for those in standards V–VII in the whole country. They all had to pay Kshs. 60 per child per annum. Subsequent directives went further and abolished school fees in primary education.

The government's intervention to provide more educational opportunities through free primary education to the pastoralist communities and other disadvantaged groups did not seem to have had much impact on access and participation. The free primary education programme was beset with many problems right from its inception. First and foremost, there was no proper planning for its implementation, especially with regard to providing the necessary facilities as well as learning and teaching materials for the large numbers of children expected to enroll. To cope with the problem of a high influx of children to school, particularly in high-potential agricultural districts, school committees imposed a 'building fee' per child to construct extra classrooms. There were also other financial impositions, such as an 'activity equipment levy', all intended to offset the school fees being paid before the presidential directive. These varied from one district to another, but in most cases they turned out to be much higher than the school fees being charged prior to the decree. While the payment of some of the levies was compulsory, others were collected on *harambee* (community self-help) basis.

Besides these funds, parents were often required to supplement the school equipment with textbooks, exercise books, and other related teaching and learning materials. These tended to make schooling much more expensive than it had been before government intervention and therefore tended to exclude many disadvantaged groups, especially the pastoralist communities, whose participation the intervention had been meant to facilitate. The government had to acknowledge that "such increasingly compulsory contributions contravened the intention of the Government to provide greater access to primary schooling" (Republic of Kenya 1978). It was also noted that the declaration of free primary education had not helped in filling the gap between those

districts with the highest school attendance and the low ones. It noted that (Republic of Kenya 1978: 8): “Although the abolition of school fees enabled Government to achieve considerable progress towards attaining universal primary education, the policy initiative was, however, less successful in narrowing the gap between the districts with highest and lowest attendance.”

The *Development Plan, 1970–1974* made the following observations with regard to pastoralists and education (Republic of Kenya 1978: 8):

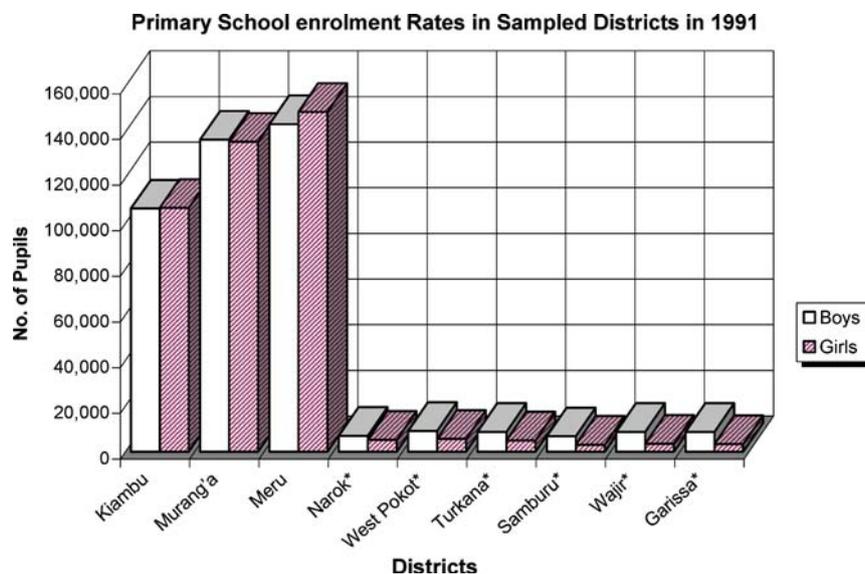
All areas in Kenya, particularly those with widely scattered populations, have not yet participated equally in recent rapid expansion of primary education. Less than 50 percent of the total primary school age population are enrolled in schools in Baringo, Samburu, West Pokot, Turkana, Kajiado, Narok, Wajir, Mandera, Garissa, Isiolo, Marsabit, Tana River and Lamu Districts.

As these districts are among the poorest in the Republic, Government will encourage primary school attendance by providing boarding facilities in each of the mentioned districts. Government will also survey these districts and where necessary and practicable, improve and extend existing facilities.

The participation of pastoralist and other marginalized groups in primary education was exacerbated in the late 1980s by the Kenyan government’s attempt to implement the World Bank’s Structural Adjustment Programme through the Education Sector Adjustment Credit system (EDSAC). Among the things EDSAC recommended was the reduction of the growth rate of the budget to sustainable levels (Government of Kenya and UNICEF 1992). In seeking to reduce the substantial expenditure on education, the government shifted this expenditure to the beneficiaries by introducing cost-sharing policies in 1988. This policy called upon parents and school communities to finance capital development and the costs of primary and secondary education. The government’s main responsibility was payment of teachers’ salaries. The cost-sharing policy considerably escalated the cost of education in the country. It was estimated that on the average parents were spending around Kshs. 2300 per child annually within the rural setting and twice that amount in urban areas (Okore 1981). These figures seemed to suggest that equity in Kenyan primary education system remained remote; they also explained the falling participation rates and disparities in enrolment among the various communities. According to Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), the gross enrolment ratio (GER) in primary education participation reached an all-time high of 95% in 1989. Thereafter, there was a gradual decline in the participation, falling to 79% by 1995 (Abagi 1997; National Council for NGOs 1997). In comparative terms, actual participation by the ASAL districts was low in comparison to high-potential agricultural districts, as shown in Figure 1.

During the 2002 general elections, the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) party promised in its election manifesto to provide free primary education. Following its victory, the Minister for Education, Science and

Figure 1. Primary-school enrolment rates in sampled districts in 1991

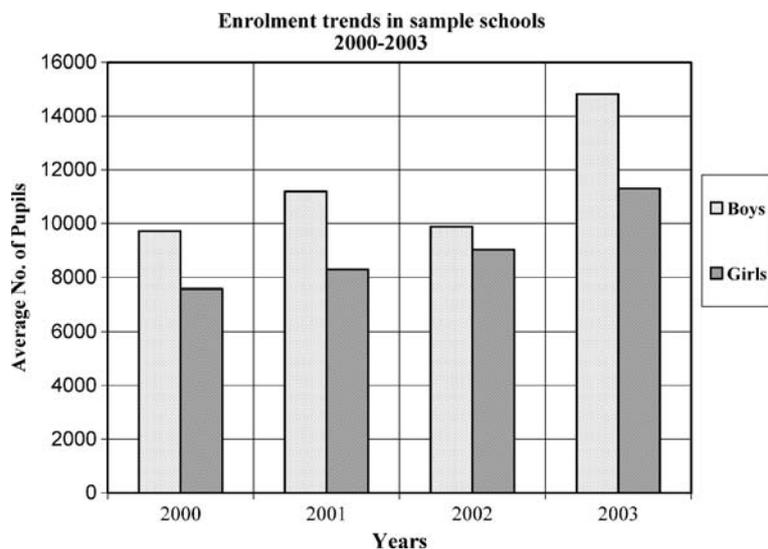


Technology (MoEST) launched Free Primary Education (FPE) to meet this pledge on 6 January 2003. Fees and levies for tuition in primary education were abolished, as the government and development partners aimed to meet the cost of basic teaching and learning materials, wages for critical non-teaching staff and co-curricular activities. The government and development partners were to pay Kshs. 1020 for each primary child in that year. The FPE did not require parents and communities to build new schools, but they were to refurbish and use existing facilities such as community and religious buildings (MoEST 2003).

Before the NARC pronouncement, the number of primary schools in the country had increased steadily from 14,864 in 1990 to 18,901 in 2001/2, representing a 27.2% increase. Enrolment in absolute terms had also up gone from 5,392,319 to 6,314,726, a 17.1% rise over the same period. The percentage of girls' enrolment also increased in the same period to 49.3%, implying that gender parity in enrolment in primary schools at the national level had nearly been achieved. Primary school Net Enrolment Ratios (NERs), however, showed a very disturbing picture in the Northeastern Province, mainly inhabited by pastoralist communities, where boys constituted 16.5% and girls 9.8%, with an average of 13.4% for the province.

Following the NARC intervention in January 2003, it was estimated that the NER rose from around 6,314,726 to 7,614,326 by end of that year, a 22.3% increase nationally. It was also estimated that another three million children were not enrolled in school. Despite the various logistical problems

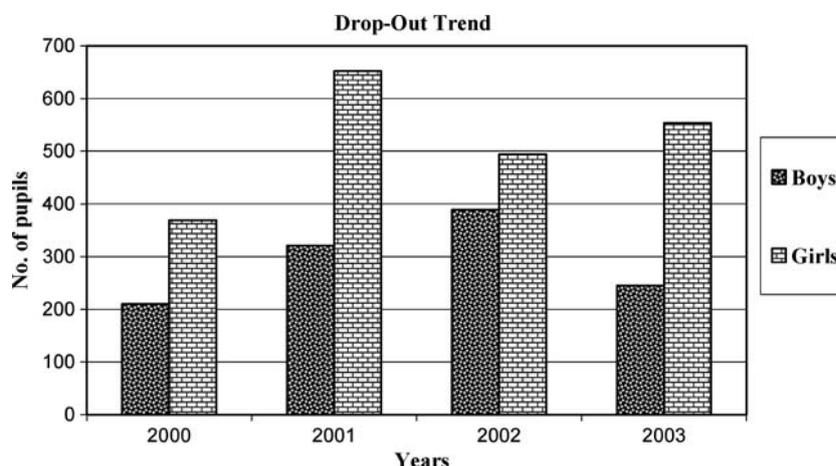
Figure 2. Enrolment trends



hampering successful implementation of the FPE, the policy sounded commendable, as it intended to keep children from poor socio-economic backgrounds, especially girls, from failing to participate in primary education or dropping out of school due to inability to pay fees and other school levies. Overall, the policy intervention could prove definitive in the efforts to achieve UPE and EFA. It was also in line with the objectives of the 1990 Jomtien Conference and the Dakar Conference on Education for All as well as the Millennium Development Goals, which envisage universal access and completion of primary (basic) education by 2015.

Results of a preliminary survey to assess the impact of the NARC free primary education intervention in a number of pastoralist districts through the Net Enrolment Ratios (NERs) between 2000 and 2003 are shown in Figure 2. The implementation of free primary education seems to have had more impact on boys' enrolment than on that of girls. Going through the individual districts, the enrolment increased in Narok 30.2% for boys, for girls a mere 3%. In Marsabit, the shift was 20.1% for boys and 3.6% for girls. In Wajir, the shift was 7.6% for boys, 2.6% for girls. Significant increases were also registered in the districts of Mandera, Turkana, Tana River, and Samburu, in which boys' enrolment increased by over 30%, while that for girls went up around 5%. Overall, free primary education had remarkable impact on the enrolment for all the sampled pastoralist districts, increasing around 28% on average, well above the national average of 22.3%, with boys having a larger share in the increment. This implies that school levies are a major impediment to school access and participation among pastoralist

Figure 3. Dropout trends



communities (Sifuna 2003). With the abolition of levies, more and more pastoralist parents are interested in sending their children to school. Contrary to widely held perceptions, pastoralist communities do not have less interest in schooling for their children than parents in largely agricultural groups.

Enrolment figures alone may not provide sufficient information on access and participation rates of children in the primary education system. Attrition rates which include drop-outs provide a much clearer picture of the situation. Information on attrition rates at the primary school level is quite scanty, as very few schools maintain proper records of their pupils' progression. According to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, the drop-out rate is estimated at around 5.4%, which on the whole appears to be extremely low, considering the low national completion rate, said to be around 45% (Republic of Kenya 2004).

In the selected ASAL districts, as elsewhere in the country, information on drop-out rates is hard to obtain not only from schools but also from District Education Offices. From what was provided in the schools, however, drop-out rates are high for both boys and girls. In fact, they were much higher than the estimated national rates. As Figure 3 shows, however, there were much higher drop-out rates for girls than for boys. For all the years between 2000 and 2003, more girls dropped out of school, with over 650 girls breaking off their formal education in the year 2001 alone. Most interesting is that the provision of free primary education appears to have had little or no effect on girls' drop-outs. Indeed, around 25% of the enrolment dropped out in a single year when free primary education was implemented.

Considering the fact that enrolment figures are relatively low for girls in all the seven selected districts, their participation in primary education

among the pastoralist communities is extremely low, something which requires urgent attention.

On the whole, there was, however, some considerable improvement in drop-out rates as a result of the free primary education programme. In Narok, for example, the drop-out rate declined to around 1%, while in Marsabit it fell to 6.1%. In Wajir it was reduced to 11%, and in Mandera to 9%. In Turkana it was reduced to 10%, while in Tana River it changed to 12% and in Samburu to 9%. Although there has been some reduction in the drop-out rates following the NARC free education programme, these figures are still exceptionally high in comparison with the estimated national drop-out rate of 5.4%, and undoubtedly the gains made through free primary education are being eroded.

The high drop-out rate and the low participation rate among the pastoralist communities can be attributed to several factors. First and foremost is that the participation in primary education for marginalized groups in general and pastoralists in particular is determined by the cost of education. The implementation of free primary education did not necessarily reduce the cost of education. The decision to provide Kshs. 1020 per child per year settled on an arbitrary and low figure not based on the actual minimum cost of primary education. By the 1990s, teaching and learning materials, including school uniforms, were estimated to cost annually around Kshs. 2500 per child. With inflation, this amount more or less doubled by the time free primary education was implemented, so that it was well beyond the ability of parents in high-potential districts to pay, even more so for the pastoralists. Poor parents were left with little alternative but to withdraw their children; and this explains the high drop-out rates in the sampled districts.

In terms of the selected districts, while free primary education has increased participation, it has also created considerable problems. It has particularly exacerbated problems with teaching and learning facilities. A majority of the head-teachers, 95.2%, stated that teaching facilities were totally inadequate, a view shared by 80.5% of teachers. In particular, classrooms were congested as a result of a high influx of new pupils, following the free primary education programme. Both head-teachers and teachers were united (83.1% and 63.3%, respectively) in holding that more classrooms need to be constructed if the quality of education is to be improved. This view was also shared by the school management committees. Congestion in classrooms was said to be a key contributory factor in the withdrawal of children from school.

With regard to the textbook situation, most of the head-teachers and teachers appreciated that the free primary education programme had enabled their schools to obtain badly required teaching and learning materials. It had gone a long way to supplement what schools in these regions had received from non-governmental organisations and donors. The situation, however, is far from adequate, as 59.0% of head-teachers and 54.2% of teachers remarked that they require more textbooks in a good number of the key subjects. The money contributed to the teaching and learning materials was

still far from helping accomplish the recommended textbook/pupil ratio of 1:3 and 1:2 in the lower and upper classes, respectively.

As a result of free primary education, the situation of the teaching force in most of the districts is for the most part very bad. Teachers complained of increased pupil–teacher ratios (PTRs). Although on the basis of the sampled schools the PTR appears to be around 57:1, research teams reported PTRs of 83:1 or even higher in some districts. There was therefore an urgent call for the recruitment of more primary school teachers, since many of the schools are understaffed, and hence existing staff overloaded. This view was held by 82.3% of head-teachers and 77.9% of teachers, as well as the school management committees. It was generally held that the lack of an adequate teaching force does not augur well for the quality of education being delivered at the primary school level (Sifuna 2003).

The implementation of free primary education by the NARC government has been a matter of political expediency rather than a planned education reform. Like other previous interventions, is unlikely to be of much benefit to pastoralist communities. No situation analysis and evaluation of both quality and extent preceded its implementation. All problems relating to adequate funding allocation and infrastructure needs are being dealt with in *ad hoc* manner. Although there are some indications of increased enrolments in the ASAL districts due to the abolition of school levies, overcrowding, lack of teachers, and lack of learning materials have plagued the system and are seriously eroding whatever gains were made. Furthermore, the projected cost of Kshs. 7.8 billion annually far exceeds the current national budget allocation and simply cannot be sustained by the Kenyan economy, which has not been performing well for years. The programme was implemented through a fairly large infusion of donor funding, notably from the World Bank and DFID, among others. This indicates that free primary education appears not to be sustainable without such funding.

#### *Boarding schools*

As indicated in the *Development Plan 1970–1974*, the government decided to provide boarding schools in the arid and semi-arid districts of the country as a way of increasing primary school participation rates there. With support from the World Bank, it established low-cost boarding schools in the pastoralist areas in an effort to avoid disrupting the schooling of children whose parents migrated from one area to another. The boarding school system, however, seems to have worked well only with the schools located in the main urban centres of the ASAL districts. By the time of the *Development Plan 1974–1978*, the government was already expressing disappointment in the programme (Republic of Kenya 1974: 142):

During the 1970–1974 plan period, the Government attempted to encourage education by providing boarding facilities at selected schools in these areas. The

experience to date is that the cost per pupil has been extremely high and the actual response has been disappointing in terms of increased enrolment by people indigenous to those areas. Therefore, the Government will reduce the scope of this particular programme substantially until its effectiveness has been demonstrated. The Government, however, intends to test alternative means of promoting education in these areas. A new programme of Mobile Teaching Units especially designed for areas with these particular problems will be tested on a pilot basis during the plan period.

The government seemed to blame the low participation rates in the boarding schools especially for pupils indigenous to these areas on pastoralist peoples' reluctance to undergo social change. It was asserted that "a substantial proportion of the population in these areas is not yet fully aware of the social and economic benefits that result from education of their people" (Republic of Kenya 1974).

The government's second complaint regarding the low-cost boarding schools was that these installations were actually expensive in relation to the ordinary community-supported primary schools that constituted the bulk of institutions in the country. It was apparent that planners and policy-makers wanted to introduce special facilities for pastoralist children while at the same time hoping to keep the costs down to the level of the regular primary schools (Nkinyangi 1981).

An important contributing factor in the low participation by pastoralist peoples was their inability to pay the relatively exorbitant school fees and to meet other costs in participating in the boarding schools set up for them. In many of them, boarding fees and other incidentals tended to be quite costly. The children were expected to bring their own beds, bedding materials and cutlery. These turned out to be very serious hindrances for their participation. In fact, such problems contributed to high drop-outs in these schools. There were also problems relating to food procurement and transportation. In 1977, for example, all boarding schools in Turkana District had to be closed due to lack of food.

The apparent failure of the government intervention with boarding schools in pastoralist areas has not stopped their expansion. Religious organizations and NGOs continue to support their establishment. For example, in Turkana District, out of 165 primary schools, 42 of them are boarding. There is usually very minimal involvement by the local communities in them from their construction to the provision of teaching and learning materials and food. Boarding schools are popular with pastoralists who have migrated and live near urban centers. Yet those who still practice a nomadic way of life, and who constitute the majority of pastoralists, are eager to have their children under the care of boarding schools while they migrate in search of pasture and water. This has led the government's Arid Lands Resource Management Project to begin experimenting with mobile schools in the ASAL districts.

Restrictions on upper-primary repetition and competitiveness for secondary-school selection have often forced children from the agricultural districts

to transfer to the pastoral districts for their repetition, with the result that they take over places meant for pastoralist children. Indeed, to this end some children from the agricultural communities go as far as changing their names. The aim is first to take advantage of the cheap boarding facilities and second to exploit the preferential selection procedures that were introduced to enroll more pastoral children in secondary schools.

#### *The School Feeding Programme*

Food supplementation has also been perceived as an incentive to increase demand for education in the ASAL districts. Following the severe drought and famine that Kenya suffered in 1979, the government appealed to the World Food Programme (WFP) for food assistance for pre-primary and primary pupils in the ASAL districts as a way of enhancing the learners' nutritional levels as well as their schooling. Food aid was solicited for these districts because the 1979 drought decimated a large proportion of their livestock, the main source of food. Given their lack of opportunities for income generation and diversification apart from livestock production, this loss of animals increased their vulnerability. The WFP responded positively and launched the "School Feeding Programme" (SFP) in 1980 as a way of improving the nutritional levels of pre-school and primary school children and increasing enrolments as well as attendance.

In many of the ASAL districts, the SFP enhances enrolment and retention of pastoralist children especially during severe and prolonged droughts. During the field work in Kajiado and Turkana, it was clear that without the SFP there would be negligible primary school attendance in many of the ASAL districts. In severe droughts, food provided at school is the only meal that children get; it also feeds the communities who migrate to live near schools. However, attendance and enrolments tend to fall sharply when the rainy season sets in, with its improved food situation. Consequently, the School Feeding Programme has had a very negligible impact on school participation and retention in most of the ASAL districts in which enrolments hardly include more than 20% of school-age children (Ngome 2002).

A number of other factors contribute to the pastoralist communities' poor response to schooling. Among them are distances to schools – a major hindrance to participation, especially for girls. In many areas, schools are sparsely located and coupled with high insecurity, which makes many parents apprehensive about allowing their children to go to school. Furthermore, in their socio-cultural setting, many pastoralist communities perceive investment in the education of daughters as being uneconomical, as they are married-off early. Given such relatively deep-seated conservatism, many pastoralist communities generally regard schooling with deep suspicion, as it is said to make their children abandon their cultural practices. This in many cases causes parents to allow only difficult and non-conforming children to attend school.

### Conclusion

On the basis of the diverse environmental settings of the pastoralist communities, a single mode of educational delivery does not seem to adequately meet their needs and demands, as has been shown by this study with reference to the implementation of free primary education, the provision of boarding schools, and the school feeding programme. The Kenyan government is under ever-greater pressure to consider different approaches to educating the pastoralists, and recently set up a unit intended to address issues of nomadic education. Modes of educational provision for these communities should include a mixture of different modes of delivery. These should include fixed schools, most of which are in existence; and mobile schools catering for the nomadic nature of the communities. The latter could employ collapsible classrooms that can be assembled or disassembled within a very short time and carried conveniently by camels and donkeys. A typical mobile unit can consist of three or so classrooms and accommodate 15 to 20 children. There is also a need for feeder/satellite schools facilitating the movement of pupils into fixed schools with more grades, along with subsidised boarding schools and, finally, traditional schools such as Koranic schools. Such traditional schools need to aim at integrating regular pre-school and primary school curriculum with religious instruction. In short, the nomadic education programme should incorporate a multifaceted schooling arrangement suiting the diverse life-practices of the pastoralist communities. Past approaches and interventions of a top-down planning, in which pastoralist communities have been the recipients rather than the planners of their education, should cease to dominate nomadic education policies.

### References

- Abagi, Okwach. 1997. The Impact of Politicised Education Reforms on the Quality of Primary Education: Experience from Kenya. In: *Educational Dilemmas: Debate and Diversity, Volume Four, Quality in Education*, ed. by Keith Watson, Cecilia Modgil and Sohan Modgil, 75–87. London: Cassell.
- Galaty, John G. 1981. Research Priorities and Pastoralist Development: What is to be Done? In: *The Future of Pastoral Peoples*, ed. by John G. Galaty, Dan Aronson and Philip C. Salzman, 13–26. Ottawa: International Development Research Centre.
- Goldschmidt, Walter. 1975. A National Livestock Bank: An Institutional Device for Rationalising the Economy of Tribal Pastoralists. *International Development Review* 17(2): 2–6.
- Gorham, Alex B. 1980. *Education and Social Change in a Pastoral Society: Government Initiatives and Local Responses to Primary School Provision in Maasailand*. Stockholm: Institute of International Education, University of Stockholm.
- Government of Kenya and UNICEF. 1992. *Children and Women in Kenya: A Situation Analysis 1992*. Nairobi: UNICEF Kenya Country Office.

- Kenya African National Union [KANU]. 1969. *Election Manifesto*. Nairobi: KANU.
- Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (Kenya) [MoEST]. 2003. *Free Primary Education: Every Child in School*. Nairobi: MoEST.
- National Council of NGOs. 1997. *Position Paper of the Voluntary on the Government of Kenya, Education and Training Master Plan, 1997–2010*. Nairobi: ActionAid Kenya.
- Ngome, Charles K. 2002. The Impact of the School Feeding Programme on the School Participation Rates of Primary Pupils in Kajiado District, Kenya. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Kenyatta University.
- Nkinyangi, John A. 1981. Education for Nomadic Pastoralists: Development Planning by Trial and Error. In: *The Future of Pastoral Peoples*, ed. by John G. Galaty, Dan Aronson and Philip C. Salzman, 183–196. Ottawa: International Development Research Centre.
- Ogachi, Ibrahim O. 2002. Community Financing of Primary Schooling and its Implications on Quality: Case Studies from Kajiado and Kisii Districts. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Kenyatta University.
- Okore, George M. 1981. A Survey of the Hidden Costs of Standard Eight Education to the Parents of Yala Division, Siaya District. Unpublished M.Ed. thesis, Kenyatta University.
- Republic of Kenya. 1964. *Education Commission Report (Ominde) of 1964*. Nairobi: Government Printer.
- . 1974. *Development Plan 1974–1978*. Nairobi: Government Printer.
- . 2004. *Economic Survey, 2004*. Nairobi: Government Printer.
- and UNICEF. 1978. *Educational Trends*. Nairobi: UNICEF Kenya Country Office.
- Schneider, Harold K. 1979. *Livestock and Equality in East Africa: The Economic Basis for Social Structure*. Bloomington, IA: Indiana University Press.
- Sifuna, Daniel N. 2003. *The Pastoralist Communities and Free Primary Education in Kenya: A Preliminary Survey. A Study presented to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and ActionAid Kenya*. Nairobi: MoEST and ActionAid Kenya.

### The author

**Daniel N. Sifuna** is Professor of History of Education and International Comparative Education at Kenyatta University in Nairobi. His research has principally addressed the Eastern and South African regions. His current research interests include gender and education in Kenya in a historical perspective and obstacles to the provision of basic education as a human right in Kenya.

*Contact address:* P.O. Box 64991, 00620 Mobil Plaza, Nairobi, Kenya.  
E-mail: dnsifuna@wananchi.com.