

THE CHALLENGE OF INCREASING ACCESS AND IMPROVING QUALITY: AN ANALYSIS OF UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION INTERVENTIONS IN KENYA AND TANZANIA SINCE THE 1970s

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Abstract – This article shows how interventions to provide Universal Primary Education (UPE) from the 1970s into the twenty-first century affected efforts to improve the quality of primary education in Kenya and Tanzania. While the interventions have made significant differences in the lives of many communities by increasing access to education of children who would have been denied schooling, quality indicators (including attrition and completion rates and examination scores) have stagnated at best or declined. Efforts to ensure and maintain quality in primary education in the two countries are reported to face serious challenges, including mainly inadequate funding to ensure the provision of essential teaching and learning materials, appropriate infrastructure as well as a sufficient number of competent teachers.

Résumé – COMMENT AMÉLIORER LA QUALITÉ DE L'ÉDUCATION PRIMAIRE UNIVERSELLE AU KENYA ET EN TANZANIE ET Y FACILITER L'ACCÈS : ANALYSE DES ACTIONS ENTREPRISES DANS CE DOMAINE DEPUIS LES ANNÉES 70 - Cet article montre comment les interventions visant la scolarisation primaire universelle au Kenya et en Tanzanie depuis les années 1970 ont affecté la qualité de l'enseignement primaire dans ces deux pays. Les diverses interventions ont permis à des enfants, qui autrement n'auraient pas eu droit à l'éducation, d'avoir accès à l'école. En revanche, les indicateurs de qualité, notamment les taux d'abandon, d'achèvement et de réussite aux examens nationaux, ont stagné voire regressé. Cela est attribuable au fait que les efforts pour assurer et maintenir la qualité de l'éducation primaire dans ces deux pays fait face à de sérieux défis, en l'occurrence, un financement inapproprié ne permettant pas de fournir les matériels basiques d'enseignement et d'apprentissage, une infrastructure appropriée et un nombre suffisant d'enseignants compétents.

Zusammenfassung – HERAUSFORDERUNGEN BEI DER ZUGANGSSTEIGERUNG UND QUALITÄTSVERBESSERUNG: EINE ANALYSE DER MASSNAHMEN ZUR UNIVERSALEN GRUNDSCHULBILDUNG IN KENIA UND TANSANIA SEIT DEN 1970er JAHREN – Dieser Artikel zeigt, in welcher Weise die Maßnahmen zur Bereitstellung universaler Grundschulbildung (UPE), die seit den 1970er Jahren bis ins 21. Jahrhundert in Kenia und Tansania vorgenommen wurden, die Bemühungen zur Qualitätsverbesserung der Grundschulbildung beeinflussten. Während diese Maßnahmen im Leben vieler Gemeinden zu beträchtlichen Veränderungen führten aufgrund des verbesserten Bildungszugangs für Kinder, denen eine Beschulung sonst verwehrt geblieben wäre, kam es gleichzeitig zu einer Stagnation oder sogar Absenkung von Qualitätsmerkmalen wie Abschluss- und Abbruchraten und Examensleistungen. Es wird berichtet, dass die Bemühungen zur Qualitätssicherung und –aufrechterhaltung der Grundschulbildung in beiden Ländern auf ernsthafte Herausforderungen treffen.

Diese bestehen vor allem in der unzureichenden Finanzierung und Bereitstellung von Basislehr- und Lernmaterialien, einer angemessenen Infrastruktur sowie der Anstellung einer ausreichenden Menge kompetenter Lehrer.

Resumen – EL RETO MEJORAR EL ACCESO Y LA CALIDAD: UN ANÁLISIS DE LAS INVERTENCIONES EN LA EDUCACIÓN PRIMARIA UNIVERSAL EN KENIA Y TANZANIA DESDE LA DÉCADA DEL 70 - Este artículo muestra cómo las intervenciones realizadas para proveer una Educación Primaria Universal desde la década del setenta del siglo pasado hasta el siglo veintiuno han afectado los esfuerzos realizados para mejorar la calidad de la educación primaria en Kenia y Tanzania. Mientras que las intervenciones causaron diferencias significantes en las vidas de muchas comunidades, al incrementar el acceso a la educación para niños que habrían estado privados del derecho de aprender, los indicadores muestran que la calidad (incluyendo tasas de abandono y completación y puntajes en los exámenes) se ha estancado en el mejor de los casos o ha decaído. Hay que constatar que los esfuerzos tendientes a asegurar y mantener la calidad en la educación primaria de ambos países deben enfrentar serios desafíos, tales como una financiación inadecuada para la provisión de materiales básicos de enseñanza y aprendizaje, de una infraestructura adecuada y de un número suficiente de docentes competentes.

Резюме – ПРЕПЯТСТВИЯ ДЛЯ ОБЛЕГЧЕНИЯ ДОСТУПА И УЛУЧШЕНИЯ КАЧЕСТВА: АНАЛИЗ МЕР ОБЕСПЕЧЕНИЯ УНИВЕРСАЛЬНОГО НАЧАЛЬНОГО ШКОЛЬНОГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ В КЕНИИ И ТАНЗАНИИ С 1970-Х ГОДОВ – Данная статья показывает, каким образом мероприятия для обеспечения начального школьного образования, проведенных в Кении и Танзании с 1970-х годов до 21 века, влияют на усилия, направленные на улучшение качества начального школьного образования. В то время, как результатом этих мероприятий стали заметные изменения в жизни многих общин в силу того, что образование стало более доступным для детей, которые в другое время не могли его получить, они одновременно привели к застою и даже снижению таких признаков качества образования, как количество учащихся, заканчивающих учебные заведения, учащихся, прерывающих обучение, а также к ухудшению результатов экзаменов. В статье идет речь о том, что усилия, направленные на улучшение качества и поддержание начального школьного образования, в обеих странах наталкиваются на серьезные препятствия. Причины их появления кроются, прежде всего, в недостаточном финансировании и нехватке учебного материала для учителей и учащихся, в отсутствии необходимой инфраструктуры и недостаточном количестве компетентных учителей.

From broadening access to the quality imperative

In general terms, access to education focuses on the number and location of schools, the number of grades offered and the opportunities for students to progress from one level of education to another (Geissinger 1997). However, it needs to be stressed that broadening access to schools is not just a matter of increasing the number of school places. School participation is an interaction of what is often referred to as supply, demand and the learning process. Supply refers to the availability and quality of school facilities, materials and teachers, while demand, is often determined by cultural, family and individual characteristics, stemming from parental decisions based on the

opportunity cost of schooling. The learning process, describes what children experience once they are in school. On this basis, ample evidence shows that educational supply, demand and learning are not consistent across all sub-groups of the school population. Certain groups of children are disadvantaged in virtually all societies in access to education in terms of enrolment, retention and educational attainment (World Bank 1989).

Recognising disparities in educational access within communities, planners in many countries have embarked on various strategies for expanding access and increasing school participation. Widening access to education has been a major policy goal in most developing countries for the past several decades. This has reflected a broad recognition that education is essential to economic and social development. There is overwhelming evidence that education improves health and productivity and the poorest people are said to benefit most. When schools open their doors to the wider society, the benefits multiply and indeed, failing to invest adequately in educating larger sections of the society can reduce the potential benefits of education for the elite. This failure contributes to a high cost in lost opportunities to productivity, to increase income and improve the quality of life (Hill and King 1993).

Apart from the socio-economic returns of education, the need to increase access, and place all the world's children in school was firmly entrenched as a major international concern at the end of the 1940s by the United Nations. The human right to education was established by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. Article 26 of the declaration propounds the right to education as follows: *"Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory..."*. There are more recent international instruments which call for increased access to education for all the children and among the key ones are the International Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 and the Dakar Framework for Action adopted in 2000. Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children is one important commitments made in this framework. A strong emphasis on girls' education is one of its overriding features. It is hoped that by 2015, all children, including girls as well as children in difficult circumstances and from ethnic minorities will have access to completely free and compulsory primary education of good quality (UNESCO 2000).

Quality is a term which has become increasingly popular in the discourse about education, especially in the less industrialized countries, although there is little consensus on what it means and on a universal valid way of measuring it (Lowe and Istance 1989; Smith 1997). There are scholars who have described the quality of education in terms of the extent to which, and the manner in which, aims and functions of education are achieved or realized. Aims are the anticipated effects of learning and functions refer to what schools are expected to accomplish (Vedder 1994). The notion of quality is therefore relative. It changes over time and differs geographically due to variation of aims,

functions and the means to realize them. In this regard, the quality of education is linked to people and how they perceive education (Rissom 1992).

Some institutions which fund education hold specific perceptions as to what constitutes quality education. The World Bank for instance tends to equate quality with efficiency in attaining desired school outputs. It utilises school achievement (cognitive achievement of pupils or efficiency of output compared to inputs) to measure quality (Psacharopoulos 1981; Heynemann and Loxley 1983). In the World Bank's study on *Education in Sub-Saharan Africa* (World Bank 1988), it is noted that when an attempt is made to measure output as a direct indicator of quality, the most common approach is to concentrate on the scores of cognitive achievement. It is emphasized that such an approach makes sense to the extent that enhancing cognitive achievement is prominent among educational goals and contributes centrally to a student's ultimate productivity. Citing results of tests carried out by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), it was concluded that the quality of education in Sub-Saharan Africa is well below world standards. One explanation for this low quality was that expenditure per student, a highly aggregated proxy for educational inputs, was very low by world standards. Per student expenditure in African education was not only low but was declining. The combination of essentially constant budgets since 1980 and rapidly expanding enrolments had made the financing of education's recurrent costs ever more difficult (World Bank 1988). The World Bank's position on the strong relationship between students' cognitive achievement and the provision of key inputs features highly in its sponsored study by Lockheed and Verspoor, *Improving Primary Education in Developing Countries*, in which it is stressed that 'the achieving of the correct mix of inputs will bring about the desired outputs' (Lockheed and Verspoor 1991). The Bank's focus on quality through cognitive achievement has faced serious criticism as the goals of schooling encompass more than just academic achievement and there are issues which deal with human betterment which tend to be ignored (Hawes and Stephens 1990; Smith 1993).

From the broad debate on quality education some key common strands seem to emerge which are important in its definition and ways of assessing it. These include; inputs, outputs and process. Inputs include materials such as textbooks, desks, blackboards as well as teachers and students. The quality of these inputs is often measured quantitatively or through characteristics such as the qualification of teachers, textbook relevance and students' intellectual and nutritional status. Outputs include proxies of achievement (promotion and completion rates) and measures of actual achievement, such as the kinds and quantity of facts and skills learned. Process includes the proper organization of lessons, the correct use of texts and homework, the encouragement of child-centred learning and the absolute amount of time spent on a task (Hawes and Stephens 1990; Shaeffer 1992; Heneveld 1994; Stephens 1997; Abagi and Odipo 1997).

This article discusses how interventions to provide universal primary education from the 1970s into the twenty-first century affected efforts to improve the quality of primary education in Kenya and Tanzania. The discussion is guided by the input–output–process conception of quality outlined above.

Universal primary education (UPE) interventions of the 1970s in Kenya and Tanzania

In the early and mid-sixties when most African countries achieved independence, planners were guided by the human capital and modernization theories which assumed that education was the most profitable form of investment not only to the society but also to the individual. Education was believed to contribute to economic growth, by improving the quality of the labour force through giving qualified workers the skills and knowledge demanded by the modern sector of the economy, and therefore making these workers more productive. Education was also believed to contribute to better standards of health and child care and reduced fertility rates, among other things. This perception stemmed from the understanding that the lack of high and middle-level human resource development was a major bottleneck to economic growth. Human resource planning was therefore a partial solution to this problem. The report of the Conference of the African States on the Development of Education in Africa – which met in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) in May, 1961, under the joint sponsorship of UNESCO and the Economic Commission for Africa to provide a roadmap for the development of education – placed greater emphasis on the expansion of secondary and tertiary education. But in addition, steps toward achieving universal primary education by 1980 were planned (UN Commission for Africa and UNESCO 1961).

Although the independent governments in Kenya and Tanzania chose to emphasize the rapid expansion of secondary and tertiary education in line with the Addis Ababa Conference, they also adopted a policy of providing facilities for a slow and steady increase in primary school enrolment. Between 1960 and 1970, for example, primary school enrolments increased by 50 percent in Tanzania and 40 percent in Kenya (Ishumi 1994). From the early 1970s onward, the two countries initiated policies towards achieving universal primary education (UPE).

The case of Kenya

In Kenya, the official policy to slow the growth of primary education and allow a rapid growth of secondary and tertiary education underwent a major shift in 1971. A presidential decree abolished tuition fees for all the districts which had unfavourable geographical conditions. The populations in these districts were said to be generally poor, and the payment of school fees tended to prevent a large proportion of children from attending school. The

presidential decree was in line with the declared policy of the then ruling party, the Kenya African National Union (KANU), a policy announced in its 1963 manifesto entitled, *What a KANU Government Offers You* and re-echoed in the general elections of 1969 (Sifuna 1990). The manifesto committed the party to offering a minimum of seven years of free primary education.

At the time of this intervention, the medium of instruction was officially expected to be the mother tongue or Kiswahili in localities with multi-ethnic languages in the first three grades, followed by English from standard four to seven. However, due to pressure from parents, English became a medium of instruction from nursery schools and has remained so to the present day in many parts of the country.

The second presidential decree of December 12, 1973 was said to have taken the country much closer to achieving 'universal primary education'. The decree provided free education for children in standards one to four in all the districts of the country and provided a uniform fee structure of 60 Kenya shillings per annum for pupils in standards five to seven. A subsequent decree in 1978 abolished school fees in primary education. Following the 1973 pronouncement, enrolment in standard one classes rose by a million over and above the estimated 400,000. The total enrolment increased from 1.8 million in 1973 to nearly 2.8 million in 1974.

With increased enrolments, many schools were unable to cope with the high influx of pupils. It was common to find classes being conducted in the open, under trees or in church buildings to supplement the available space. Many schools introduced double sessions/shifts in the morning and afternoon to cope with the upsurge, while others introduced several streams. The afternoon sessions were particularly uncomfortable for many areas because of the heat and rain in most parts of the country (Amutabi 2003).

In 1969, the Ministry of Education had established the Kenya Equipment Scheme to facilitate the provision of teaching and learning materials. The scheme provided 20 Kenya shillings per child at the primary school level for the purchase of learning materials. Following the 1973 free-primary-school pronouncement, the supply of equipment and teaching materials underwent a very serious strain. Since the distribution of supplies had been centralized, it was difficult to dispatch the necessary materials to most primary schools. Consequently, many schools went without equipment and materials for most of 1974 and even in subsequent years. Through the diversion of funds due to pressure on the Ministry of Education, the equipment scheme started to decline and eventually was abolished.

With regard to the primary school teaching force, at the time of the 1973 pronouncement the country was already short of properly trained teachers. The number of teachers stood then at 56,000, out of whom 12,600 were professionally unqualified. By 1975 the number of unqualified teachers stood at around 40,000 out of a teaching force of 90,000. In 1974, an additional 2,500 teachers were needed for the new classes. This shortage continued to

increase, contributing to a high pupil–teacher ratio. Some schools recorded astronomical ratios as high as 150:1 (Bogonko 1992).

On the whole the primary education sector was inefficient during the 1970s, with very high attrition rates, reaching an average of 40 percent in 1978. Completion rates have remained steady but low since the 1980s, remaining consistently below the 50 percent mark. The completion rates for children enrolled in standard one in 1987, 1988 and 1989, for example, were 43.9, 42.6 and 44.3 percent respectively.

In the late 1980s, the government started implementing the World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) in an effort to reduce the growth rate of the education recurrent budget to sustainable levels through shifting the cost to the beneficiaries by introducing cost-sharing policies. This policy called upon parents and the school communities to finance capital development and recurrent expenditure of primary and secondary education. The government's main responsibility remained the payment of teachers' salaries (Government of Kenya and UNICEF 1992). The cost-sharing policy not only had the effect of impairing the quality of primary education, but also led to the decline in gross enrolment rate, from 95 in 1989 to 78 percent in 1995. According to the Kenya National Examination Council, although the number of candidates for the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) examination has kept rising, overall performance in key subjects like English, Kiswahili, Mathematics, Sciences and Social Studies for the years 1990–1995, for example, hardly hit the 50 percent score (Abagi 1999).

The case of Tanzania

In Tanzania, universal primary education had its origin in *Education for Self-Reliance*, which was articulated in the context of the ideology of socialism and self-reliance as enunciated in the *Arusha Declaration* of 1967 and focused on the following demands, among others:

- The demand that Tanzania's educational policy be directed to the needs of the majority of the students;
- The demand that schools identify themselves with the community and the country's struggles; and
- The demand that correct attitudes of socialism and self-reliance be inculcated in the students (Katunzi 1991).

Education for Self-Reliance emphasized the need for the curriculum to focus on the needs of the majority who did not have access to secondary education. Thus, in addition to subjects like Mathematics, Science, English, Geography, History, Agriculture was made part of the primary school curriculum, especially in rural schools. Cultural activities which included poetry, drama, music, art and crafts, sports and games, among others, became important activities in primary classrooms and in adult literacy, with Kiswahili as the medium of instruction. It is important to note here that it was not

until independence in 1961 that Kiswahili assumed the official functions of English, and in 1968, it was declared “the language of all primary education”. The declaration enhanced its status in education and contributed immensely to its development. The decision led to the decline in the status of English and its mastery among students. Hence, there was a loss of linguistic continuity between primary and the beginning of secondary education. The few pupils joining secondary schools had to grapple with English as an alien medium of instruction (Mulokozi 1991).

The shift to attain universal primary education in Tanzania was however, targeted in the Musoma Declaration of 1974, which also focused on the eradication of adult illiteracy. The declaration perceived education as a basic human right. While the government recognized the importance of quality education, top priority was now placed on access. The government therefore advanced the target year for attaining universal literacy and numeracy from 1989, as articulated in the Second Five Year Development Plan, to 1977. The government’s measures to achieve this goal included the following:

- Directive to attain universal primary education by 1977;
- Free and compulsory basic education to enable children of poor families to enroll and attend school;
- Enactment of the *Education Act No. 25 of 1978* to provide for compulsory enrolment and attendance of all school age children;
- Training teachers through crash programmes to run schools which had mushroomed following the re-settlement of people in villages during 1973/74; and
- Removal of standards four and seven examinations and the adoption of the seven years primary education cycle to ensure full participation by all citizens irrespective of their social and economic status (Temu 1999).

The quantitative achievements of universalisation of basic education were quite impressive. The overall number of pupils rose from 1,228,886 in 1974 to 3,553,144 in 1983. The gross enrolment ratio (GER) increased from 48.6 percent in 1974 to 98 percent in 1991, while net enrolment increased to 71.6 percent in the same period. The number of primary school teachers increased from 28,783 in 1975 to 106,436 in 1998.

Just as in Kenya, the quantitative increase in enrolments was achieved at the expense of quality. With the increase in pupil enrolment, the already difficult situation regarding facilities was exacerbated. Classrooms were too few in about 60 percent of the rural schools, leading to very large classes of around 180 pupils per class, and 52 percent of the schools lacked toilets. Pupil–teacher ratios were also high, with some districts recording ratios of 72:1 against the national ratio of 40:1. Some of the districts were in need of 40 percent of new teachers. Of the existing teaching force, over 50 percent were unqualified. With regard to the textbook/pupil ratio, it ranged from 1:10 to 1:13 in different districts against the recommended

official one of 1:3 (Temu 1999). In terms of student performance, Carr-Hill in 1984 estimated that 20 percent of school leavers had completed school without permanent acquisition of knowledge and skills in reading, writing and numeracy (Carr-Hill 1984).

Like Kenya, Tanzania also implemented the World Bank's macro-economic policies. This began in the mid-1980s and featured the introduction of cost-sharing strategies in education. The implementation of such strategies dealt a serious blow to the principle of equity and education for all. It had an immediate impact on enrolments with the GER dropping from 98 percent in 1980 to 71 percent in 1990, as the net enrolment ratio plummeted to 56 percent from 68 in 1980. The policy also adversely impacted on the capacity of parents and communities to build schools and provide teaching and learning materials (Mbilinyi 2003). As a result, achievement in the standard 4 and standard 7 Primary School Leaving Examinations (PLSE) which had nonetheless, been retained as a means of maintaining the quality of education was generally low, especially for girls. An analysis of the 1995 PLSE showed that even among the best performing regions like Dar es Salaam, Mara and Iringa, failures, namely, those who were unable to attain 41 percent of the total scores, constituted 60.7, 66.5 and 72.5 percent respectively. Failures in the poorest performing regions of Mtwara, Kagera and Shinyanga constituted 88.5, 87.1 and 89.6 percent respectively. Overall, 82 percent of the standard 7 leavers failed their examinations in 1995, and analyses of other years do not seem to show much difference (Temu 1995).

UPE interventions in the two countries since the year 2000

Although the new launching of UPE in the East Africa region after 2000 received strong acclaim by many stakeholders, it was unfortunate that the experiences from the earlier attempts did not seem to inform the new efforts at implementing the plan in both Kenya and Tanzania, even though the latter went through a lengthy phase of planning and developing the UPE programme prior to its takeoff. In Kenya, political expediency seemed to have superseded the need for a sound analysis and assessment of needs, leading to inadequate preparation, consultation, planning, budgeting and a smooth implementation of the programme. The UPE formed a central plank of the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) for the December, 2002, general election campaign. Accordingly, Kenya launched its UPE programme in January 2003. The ensuing commotion as primary schools opened under the UPE arrangements was exacerbated by a shortage of personnel at the district and provincial levels (Oxfam and ANCEFA n.d.).

In Tanzania by the late 1990s, the government—having recognized the declining trend in access and quality of education—produced the *Basic Education Master Plan* for the period 1998–2002. The production of this

plan occurred in tandem with the formulation of the Education Sector Development Programme (ESDP) process that began in 1998 and was being undertaken within the framework of the Sector Wide Approach. The ESDP led to the development of the Primary Education Development Plan (PEDP) whose underlying principles were access, equity and quality for all the children. A key policy decision on access and equity was to abolish school fees and all other mandatory contributions so that no child would be denied schooling. PEDP and UPE were formally launched in July 2001 and funds released from the debt relief were to be used to construct classrooms and teachers' houses besides meeting costs of UPE provision. By 2003 16,000 classrooms had been built and more were later on constructed, an effort that went a long way toward improving school facilities throughout the country. To improve quality, more teaching and learning resources were to be made available at the school level while more teachers were to be trained and recruited.

Despite the shortcomings in analysis, planning and implementation, UPE programmes made a significant difference in the lives of many communities in the two countries. In Kenya, enrolments increased from 5.9 in 2002 to 7.2 million in 2004 with a GER of 99 percent, while in Tanzania they grew by 25 percent from 4.4 in 2000 to 6.4 million in 2003, with a GER up to 108 percent (from 71 in 1990). There has also been an improvement in the infrastructure, especially in Tanzania, where 72.7 percent of the classroom quality requirement has been achieved. In terms of instructional materials, the textbook ratio has changed from 1:15 to 1:3 in the core subjects in Kenya. In Tanzania, the establishment of school libraries through the CARE International supported project, *Tusome Vitabu Project (TVP)* in some regions has improved the quantity and quality of reading materials for primary school children. In the two countries more teachers have been recruited through in-service teacher training programmes.

But key challenges in maintaining quality education still remain. In both Kenya and Tanzania, teaching and learning have definitely been compromised by large classes and a shortage of teachers. Some studies (UNESCO 2005; Abagi and Sifuna 2006) have found teachers handling large classes of 60–80 or even 100 pupils per class. In such classes pupils hardly get the attention they deserve and hence not many learn much. The lack of a 'school age admission policy as shown in the available policy documents' also results in many over-age pupils being admitted, most of whom find it difficult to cope with the learning process and, at times, they have a negative influence on other pupils. Staff shortages have forced teachers to work without break right from morning to afternoon; and with large classes and increased workloads, they end up giving very few assignments. With regard to the teaching and learning materials, although the supply of such materials has considerably improved as a result of the implementation of UPE programmes in the two countries, there are still fewer materials compared to the number of pupils. They have to share books in the ratio of 1:3 and in some subjects in

the ratio of 1:5 or even higher, which makes it difficult for the pupils to do their homework and other assignments on time. There is also the problem of inadequacy of physical facilities, especially with respect to classrooms in Kenya. Congestion and overcrowding in the lower grades is quite common. It is also not uncommon to find that the number of pupils has increased, but the number of chairs and desks has remained the same. Overstretched facilities and congested classrooms create a very unfavourable learning environment which seriously undermines the quality of education (UNESCO 2005; Abagi and Sifuna 2006).

As a result while the priority accorded to UPE is quite significant, the primary education subsector still experiences under-funding problems. The capitation grants are often inadequate to ensure that all schools are properly equipped with all the essential teaching and learning materials. The need to upgrade the school infrastructure, to provide sufficient teaching and learning materials, to hire more teachers and pay them adequately, and to build sufficient education management capacities among government officers put a considerable strain on the available resources.

Conclusion

Widening access to increase participation in basic education has been the goal of many developing countries. This has been motivated by a broad recognition that education is essential to economic and social development, as well as by international conventions on the provision of education as a basic human right. In this article the interventions by the governments of Kenya and Tanzania to provide universal primary education have been shown to have undoubtedly made significant differences in the lives of many communities in the two countries by increasing access to primary education of children who normally would not have attended school. The interventions, however, face serious challenges in maintaining quality in primary education. The challenges include, among others, inadequate funding to ensure the provision of essential teaching and learning materials, infrastructure as well as hiring more competent teachers.

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