



Ministry of Education



**Zizi Afrique
Foundation**



**CHILDREN'S
INVESTMENT FUND
FOUNDATION**

Achieving Equity, Transition and Retention for All at the Secondary Level

Briefing Paper



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A. Introduction

Education is a human right with wider benefits of reducing inequalities in outcomes such as health, poverty, and gender and for decision-making. To this end, many African countries have made progress in realising universal basic education. From a historical analysis, secondary school enrolment in Kenya increased rapidly in the 1960s and 1970s as a result of rising primary school enrolment and policy interventions (Oketch & Rolleston, 2007). Similarly, other developing African economies such as Uganda adopted free primary education which enhanced access to equitable and quality education, led in a reduction of the rate of child marriages and pregnancies, and consequently improved transition from primary to secondary school (Brudevold-Newman, 2021). While the rise in enrolment in these developing economies was mostly a response to increasing demand for further education and the global focus on Education for All (EFA), there have been misses in achieving set targets for universal education by 2020 besides concerns around the quality of education (Fredriksen, 2023).

In response, recent efforts from governments, development partners, and education stakeholders have led to policy shifts from just accessing education to approaches that will ensure improved quality education thus ensuring globally competitive human capital development, achievement of national goals and the country's economic growth. These efforts align with Sustainable Development Goal number 4 of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all in line with Kenya Vision 2030 goal of ensuring all children acquire quality education and training to be globally competitive in the world of work.

Kenya thus has put in place several interventions to increase education access, retention, and completion. The 2003 Free Primary Education (FPE) policy increased access and completion at the primary school level. For instance between 2002 and 2003, enrolment in primary schools increased by 10% from 5.9 million to 7.2 million respectively (MoEST, 2003; Oketch & Somerset, 2010). While the Free-Day Secondary Education (FSDE) policy increased prospects for transitioning to secondary school by removing the cost barriers to secondary education. According to the 2020 Education Statistical Booklet published by the Ministry of Education (MoE), 87.1 percent of learners who completed primary school in 2019 transitioned to secondary school in 2021 (MoE, 2020a). While this is a low statistic considering that the Kenyan government enacted guidelines in 2019 aimed at realizing a 100 per cent per cent transition to secondary school it is an improvement from the pre FSDE, when transitions rates were below 80%.

The 100 per cent per cent transition guidelines called for a multisectoral approach in mobilizing all children to transition to secondary school. This moved the responsibility beyond the Ministry of Education to include the Ministries of Interior, communities, and local agencies. However, despite the progress, differences exist between contexts, with some counties realizing nearly 100 per cent transition while others have been lagging behind due to various social, cultural, and economic factors. For instance, counties in the North and Coast of Kenya have consistently been ranked at the bottom, with transition rates below the national average as compared to those in Central Kenya (MoE, 2020a).

In 2020, Zizi Afrique partnered with the Ministry of Education to document the levers of 100 per cent transition in Kenya and design a community accountability intervention through the Policy Learning for Universal Secondary (PLUS) education project. PLUS, a two-year initiative, aims to test the potential for driving change by focusing on policy enforcement and accountability, rather than plugging gaps. It aims to achieve this through two objectives: i) generating evidence on the drivers and barriers to implementing Kenya's existing 100 per cent transition policy and community accountability; ii) co-creating with the Ministry of Education and stakeholders and testing a community accountability intervention that tests identified successful drivers of 100 per cent transition.

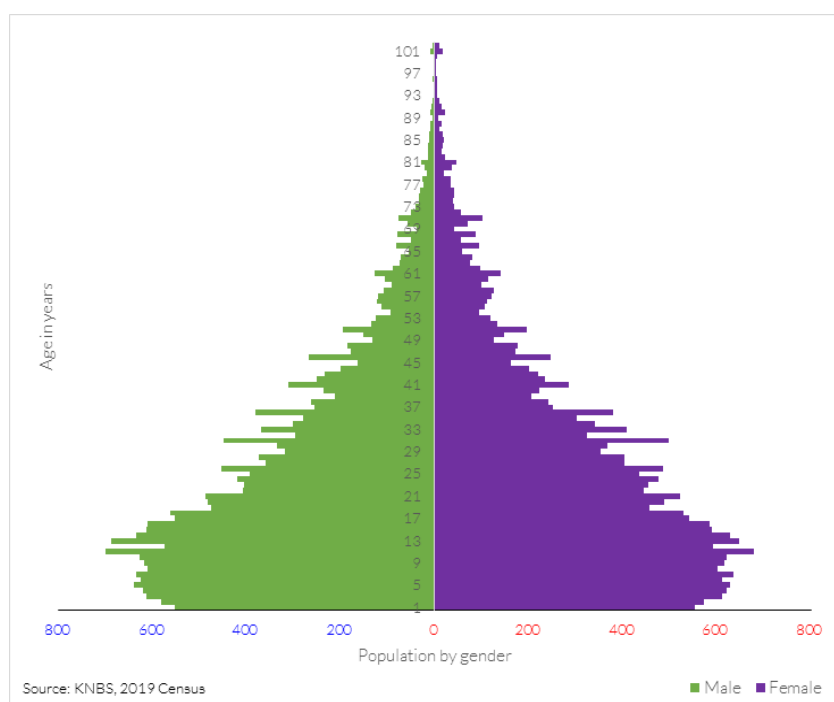
This briefing paper focuses on the first objective and reviews existing evidence of the barriers and facilitators to 100 per cent transition from primary to secondary education and existing initiatives aimed at increasing intervention beyond the policies and guidelines. It presents key results from the collaboration between Zizi Afrique and MoE. It also examines these in a holistic approach highlighting the need to invest in the development of human capital and employ targeted interventions to populations likely to be left behind.



B. Reaping from the demographic dividend

Kenya has a largely youthful population with almost 64 per cent of the citizens aged between five and 35 years (33.5 per cent and 30.5 per cent of the population are aged five to 17 and 18 to 35 years respectively) accordingly to the 2019 national census (KNBS, 2019). Scholars have identified the youthful population as an opportunity for economic development and transformation thus the need to invest in developing its human capital (Cardona et al., 2020). In Kenya, secondary education, is a key pathway to tertiary education hence its importance cannot be underscored.

Figure 1: Kenya population distribution, KNBS 2019



C. Key Education Policies on Transition and Retention in secondary schools

Policy and Date	Reference
Basic Education Act, NO. 14 of 2013; and 2015 revisions. http://ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/94495/117651/F-1505056566/KEN94495.pdf	Section 28, 29 30: (29) Right of a child to free and compulsory education. It places this mandate with the Cabinet Secretary for Education. Section 28 promises tuition-free education in all public schools; while section 30 is specific in regard to the level by stating compulsory to focus on both primary and secondary education
Policy Framework for Nomadic Education in Kenya of 2010. https://www.education.go.ke/sites/default/files/2022-05/Policy-Framework-for-Nomadic-Education-in-Kenya-compressed.pdf	Section 39 (c) mandates the Cabinet Secretary of Education to ensure that children belonging to marginalised, vulnerable; or disadvantaged groups are not discriminated against or prevented from pursuing and completing their basic education.
Education and Training Sector Gender Policy of 2015. https://www.education.go.ke/sites/default/files/2022-05/EDUCATION-and-TRAINING-Sector-Gender-Policy-2015-FINAL-PRINTED-VERSION1.pdf	Article 27(3-8), stipulates equality, rights, and freedom from discrimination in every sector, including education. One of the aims of gender policy is to reduce gender inequalities in access, participation, and achievement at all levels of education, which is crucial in improving transitions from primary to secondary schools and retention rates
Free Day Secondary Education Policy (FDSE) in 2008 (revised in 2015) and 100 per cent guidelines for secondary school transition. https://demo.education.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Guidelines-for-Implementation-of-FDSE-2021-2.pdf	Following the World Declaration on EFA at Jomtien in 1990 and the Dakar declaration in 2000, the Kenyan Ministry of Education adopted Free Primary School in 2003 and consequently, FDSE to increase enrolment, retention, and transition from primary to secondary education. FSDE currently caters for full tuition in a day public secondary school of KSH. 22,244 and operationalized through circulars to schools on the maximum school charges.

D. Gender inequalities in secondary school access

Girls are at higher risk of dropping out and/or missing school due to a myriad of reasons. Based on a report on vulnerable and marginalized groups conducted by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Global Partnership for Education, and the World Bank, child marriages, child pregnancies and female genital mutilation, were identified among the top reasons affecting children in marginalized communities from accessing education (MoE, 2017). Evidence from that report aligns with the data on school dropout gathered from secondary school principals by the Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) in a recent baseline study on learning achievements at secondary schools.

Findings from this KNEC report revealed that even after enrolling in secondary schools, pregnancy and child marriage are among the four major reasons learners dropped out of school before completing secondary education. Specifically, pregnancy and child marriages contribute to 33.9 per cent, and 17.5 per cent of girls dropping out respectively. Given that the indicator of absenteeism is considered an antecedent of dropout, it is worth noting that at least 75 per cent of the teachers who responded to the KNEC study on secondary learning achievement reported child pregnancy as the main reason for absenteeism. Studies on relationship between absenteeism note that when school absenteeism worsens by becoming frequent, regular, and predictable due to various factors, it can easily mutate to dropout, which is a permanent state of absenteeism (Gubbels, van der Put, & Assink, 2019).

While population distribution across age cohorts, as shown in Figure 1, reveals that there is near gender parity, gender disparities in education still exist within contexts and are more pronounced in marginalized counties as illustrated in Figure 2. The disparity worsens as learners progress through secondary school (form 4 GPI consistently below that of form one)

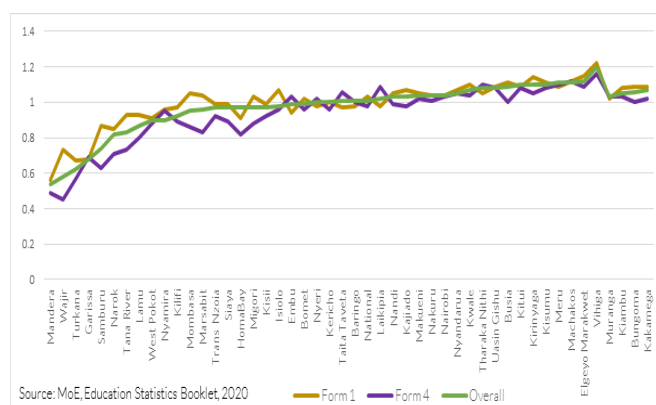


Figure 2: Gender parity index in secondary schools in Kenya (2020)

E. Transition to secondary school and data gaps

suggesting the likelihood of low retention among girls than boys. It is however important to note that some counties, especially those in the Central region have more girls in secondary schools than boys as indicated by a gender parity index of above 1. Surprisingly, it appears that the gender disparity in enrolment at secondary school is worse for male students in marginalized counties. Since the enactment of FPE and subsequently FSDE, primary school completion and transition rates to secondary school have steadily increased. While anecdotal evidence points to a nearly 100 per cent transition to secondary school, recent statistics from the 2023 Kenya Economic Survey point to lower rates. That is, in 2021 primary school completion and transition rates were reported to be 85.8 per cent and 78.5 per cent respectively. This, however, is not surprising because of incomplete data reported by the National Education Management Information System (NEMIS), with some students who already transitioned to secondary school not existing in the system more so those opting for non-public secondary schools.

In collaboration with the Ministry of Education, the PLUS project tracked learners in four sub-counties – Kahuro in Muranga, Dagoretti in Nairobi, Cheptais in Bungoma and Sololo in Marsabit - to estimate the true transition rates. In total, the study followed 6409 learners who sat for KCPE in 2022 in 96 primary schools to establish their transition status in 2023. The data was then compared with NEMIS system for verification and validation.

As shown in Figure 3, the active tracking showed higher transition rates as compared with average rates captured in NEMIS across respective sub-counties. The analysis also showed emerging gender disparities with slightly more girls than boys transitioning to secondary in three out of the four sub-counties: Dagoretti, Kahuro and Sololo. Engagement with stakeholders highlighted drug use and involvement in income-generating activities as the main factors contributing to these disparities, with boys being more affected.

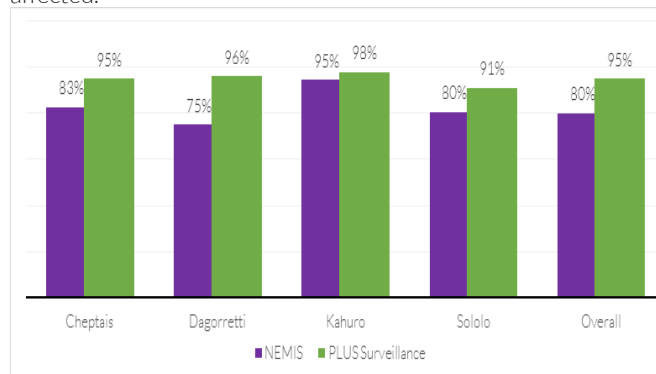


Figure 3: 2023 transition rates comparing NEMIS and tracking data.

F. Data gaps in secondary school retention/completion

While data on secondary school retention and completion remains scarce and inconclusive, tracking the cohort of learners joining secondary school (form one) and the subsequent number of candidates who sit for exit examinations as reported in the annual Kenya Economic Surveys reveals wastage within the system and a need for immediate policy-driven interventions. For instance, as shown in Table 1, in 2017, about 91 per cent of learners who had joined form one in 2014 sat for their KCSE examination. The completion rate marginally increased to 93 per cent in 2020. From our analysis, slightly more boys than girls complete secondary school. However, the difference is not statistically significant. While this is impressive, the national averages mask apparent differences at the sub-national levels, particularly for marginalized and vulnerable populations, thus the need for data at the lower level of education administration to inform policy and practice and targeted interventions.

Table 1: Secondary school completion rate by gender

	Form 1 enrolment in 000's			Form 4 KCSE entry in 000's			Completion Rate		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
2014	342.4	331	673.4	250.2	216.5	466.7			
2015	380.4	352.2	732.6	230.3	507.4	737.7			
2016	382.8	375.1	757.9	296.6	266.3	562.9			
2017	405.5	396.1	801.6	314.878	295.623	610.501	91.96	89.31	90.66
2018	414.6	411.4	826	334.777	319.01	653.787	88.01	90.58	89.24
2019	423.2	438.2	861.4	353.861	339.909	693.77	92.44	90.62	91.54
2020	487.1	494.4	981.5	378.323	364.93	743.253	93.30	92.13	92.72
2021	450.1	462.9	913	419.257	403.244	822.501	101.12	98.02	99.58
2022	452.3	473.3	925.6	441.467	435.207	876.674	104.32	99.32	101.77

Source: Own analysis with data extracted from the Kenya Economic Surveys 2007 to 2023



The analysis also reveals inconstancies of data, with secondary school completion rates surpassing 100% in 2021 and 2022. Discussions with stakeholders including the MoE indicate incompleteness of NEMIS data, registration of students in private secondary schools with KNEC, even when some miss on the NEMIS system among other reasons.

G. Barriers to secondary school transition and retention

Transitioning to secondary school is happening amidst challenges that households have to navigate. The PLUS study identified these barriers and categorized them as social-economic, cultural, individual, and policy and political, with specific issues highlighted in Table 2 and Figure 4.

Figure 4: Barriers to secondary school transition

Levers of transition	Manifestation
Social economic	Household poverty, hunger, household responsibilities, decision making
Cultural	Child marriage, pastoralism, and migrations
Individual	Performance, behaviour, child pregnancy and interest in schooling
Policy and political environment	Existing policies, implementation, and enforcement of the policies, education financing and political will.

Table 2: Commonly cited reasons for not transitioning to secondary school ranked by stakeholders

Barrier	Stakeholder		
	Village Elder	School	HH
School fees and related costs	1	2	1
Drug/substance abuse	2	3	2
Peer pressure/influence	4	5	3
Poor performance	6	4	4
Child lack of interest in schooling	7	8	5
Child Marriage	3	1	6
Child pregnancy/ mother	5	6	7
Parents has no interest in schooling	8	7	8

Direct school costs: Lack of affordability of direct fees continues to be a significant social-economic barrier to education and opportunities for learning in Kenya owing to the high prevalence of poverty and disparities in wealth index among households across the country. Moreover, fees are charged according to the category of schools, while capitation remains fixed per child at Kes. 22,244 - further disadvantaging children from marginalized populations who enrol in national and extra county schools (Brudevold-Newman, 2021)

Table 3: Fees across school categories

School Category	Government	Parental contribution	Total
Category A: All National and Extra County schools are located in Nairobi, Mombasa, Nakuru, Kisumu, Nyeri, Thika and Eldoret towns only	22,244	53,544	75,798
Category B: Other Extra County schools and all county schools and boarding sub-county schools are located in other areas apart from Nairobi, Mombasa, Nakuru, Kisumu, Nyeri, Thika and Eldoret towns.	22,244	40,535	62,779
Category C: All day sub-county schools	22,244	10,000*	32,244

Source: (Republic of Kenya, 2023); * Maximum allowable charges for school meals by sub-county day schools.

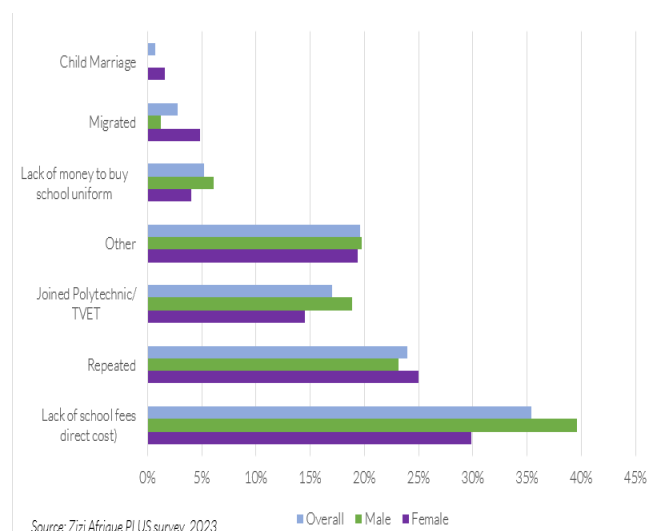
Source: (Republic of Kenya, 2023); * Maximum allowable charges for school meals by sub-county day schools.

Indirect costs of education: Both boarding fees, which include the cost of meals and school uniforms are major hindrances, particularly for learners from low social-economic status. It is worth noting that while the FSDE allowed the elimination of tuition and learning-related costs, it does not cater for boarding and school meals. These costs have implications on the transition rate. Data derived from a recent study conducted by Zizi Afrique as shown in Figure 5 revealed that 35 per cent of children who had not transitioned to secondary by March 2023 cited the lack of school fees as the main reason for not transiting; this was also echoed by those who transitioned albeit late.

This data aligns with evidence reported by Usawa Agenda that showed, that nationally, sub-county schools, which are generally more affordable, had the lowest number of students who did not enrol due to lack of school fees (Usawa, 2022). Considering government capitation across the school categories is constant, this explains why while only 33.3 per cent cited schooling costs as the major reason for not enrolling in sub-county schools,

the percentage is relatively higher in other school categories with 57.5, 51.6 and 43.3 per cent indicating school fees as the main hindrance to enrolment in national, extra-county and county schools respectively.

Figure 5: Reasons for not joining Form 1 in 2023



Lack of school meals and appropriate school uniforms creates structural barriers that have an impact on access to education and learning outcomes. Food and clothing are the basic human needs, yet evidence suggests the provision of both increases school participation (Evans & Ngatia, 2020). About 1.6 million learners in Kenya, mainly those in ASAL receive school meals, leaving 8.4 million without. School feeding for the majority of learners in secondary school remains the responsibility of households. In addition to giving parents from low SES and marginalized contexts an incentive to enrol their children in school, especially girls, providing meals at school encourages attendance, and participation in learning activities, and motivates the learner to finish the school day; these are strong indicators of learning outcomes (Destaw et al., 2022; Wang, Shinde, Young, & Fawzi, 2021). Various studies conducted in Africa suggest a positive correlation between school feeding programs, transition rates and learning outcomes as the meals boost learners' concentration, cognitive ability, and learning capabilities. The effects are even larger in contexts where enrolment is low and households are experiencing high food insecurity (Republic of Kenya, 2023; Wang et al., 2021).

School uniforms are compulsory in public schools in Kenya, and it's the responsibility of parents to purchase them because the costs are not covered by the government. Uniforms could create structural barriers that have implications on access and transition from primary to secondary school as girls uniforms are more expensive than boys' (Mutegi, 2018). Parents spend more on school uniforms at transition points since uniform varies from one school to the other and by level. Students transitioning to boarding schools need more sets of uniforms than those in day schools besides other requirements for boarding (Mutegi, 2018), 2018). The Presidential Working Party on Education Reforms challenged the current models that trust schools to guide parents on where to procure uniforms, as this drives up the cost of the uniform and the system is subject to abuse (Republic of Kenya, 2023). Inflated uniform costs could discourage access to education considering households from low SES are already struggling with other basic needs.

Individual-related barriers: The existing transition from primary to secondary school happens among other transitions in life including from childhood into adolescence and teenage. These stages are characterized by a lot of experimentation, which predisposes learners to risks of not transitioning to secondary school. For instance, through the PLUS survey, respondents identified peer pressure, drug abuse and lack of interest in schooling as some of the key barriers to transition and retention.

While these barriers were shared across the sub-counties, drug abuse and peer pressure were commonly reported in Kahuro (Muranga) and Dagoretti (Nairobi), while teenage pregnancy was prevalent in Cheptais (Bungoma). Moreover, poor performance, which is interrelated to peer influence and drug abuse further constrain them from transitioning to secondary level. Identifying strategies for mitigating consequential effects that are caused by being out-of-school such as drug abuse, crime and prostitution presents a double dividend to the country as it will also reduce cases of teen pregnancies, contraction of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections, imprisonment, premature death among other vices life challenges.

Cultural barriers: These include but are not limited to child marriages and lack of interest in schooling by parents due to social-cultural bias majorly driven by gender norms and practices. Cultural practices that encourage child marriage and childbearing push girls out of school and contribute to gender inequality in access to education and pose significant barriers to society's social-economic transformation. Cultural biases in some communities in Kenya, and other developing economies make parents choose to educate boys rather than girls especially when faced with financial constraints. This is driven by the belief that investing in boys' education is more economically advantageous than that of girls (Nudzor, 2015). In the Zizi Afrique survey, child marriages featured prominently as a potential barrier across all the sub-counties, and it was highly ranked in Kahuro (87 per cent) and Sololo (80 per cent). However, during tracking transition, only 2 per cent of females who had not transitioned were a result of child marriage.

These findings highlight major concerns about cultural practices and intergenerational effects these might have on women's empowerment given prior studies and data gathered by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) in 2022 through the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS). The two surveys reveal that without completing secondary school education and above, girls' odds of getting pregnant became higher (Kangwana et al., 2022; KNBS & ICF, 2022).

Teenage and adolescent pregnancy: Absenteeism, high drop-out rates, and poor transition from primary to secondary level are closely associated with teenage pregnancy, and demanding tasks of motherhood. Based on the 2022 KDHS, the prevalence of teenage pregnancy was 2022 15 per cent declining from 18 per cent in 2014. Moreover, 40 per cent of the girls aged 15-19 years who have not acquired any formal education have ever been pregnant, while only 5 per cent of adolescent pregnancy was reported among those with secondary education and above (KNBS & ICF, 2022).

Additionally, the burden of childbearing and child motherhood has a severe impact on young girls' health, education, well-being, livelihood, and prospects for employment (UNICEF, 2021). In Kenya, it is estimated that almost 25 per cent of girls give birth by age 18, a challenge that makes a majority of these girls drop out of basic education and continue experiencing multiple negative effects (Austrian et al., 2021). While teenage pregnancy was cited as a barrier to transition by households, village elders and school heads, it was not ranked among the top three and was only a main concern by village and school heads in Sololo. Despite the favourable school re-entry policies and legal frameworks protecting them, teenage girls' experiences with pregnancy and parenthood therefore may have both immediate and long-term impacts on access to education and their learning outcomes (MoE, 2020b; Nayriro, 2018). These effects vary depending on the socioeconomic situations of these girls and require multifaceted and strategic interventions to ensure equitable access to education, training, and long-life learning opportunities.



H. Inequalities in the quality of secondary school education

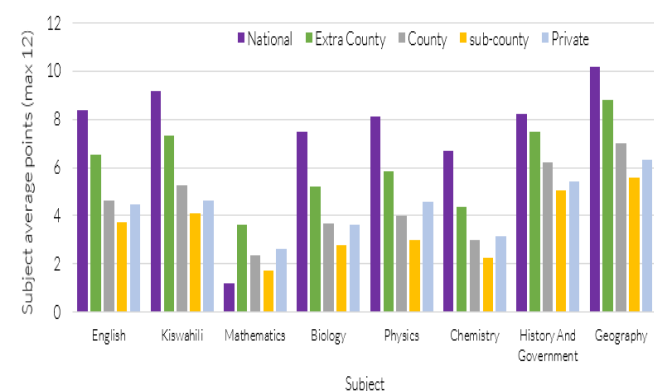
There are apparent inequalities in secondary education manifested in terms of quality of school leadership and staffing, performance in the exit examinations and infrastructure. Particularly, national, and extra-county schools are better equipped and resourced, offer more subjects, and are characterized by school leaders with more experience compared to county and sub-county schools (Usawa, 2022). For instance, about 55% of heads in national schools have at least 12 years of experience compared to 22% in sub-counties and 26% in county schools. Moreover, 88% of national schools had a library as compared to 21.3% of the sub-county secondary schools. Well-resourced schools have flexibility in their investments and decision-making which is integral to improving the quality of education, the learning environment, and the experiences of learners. 88% of national schools had a library as compared to 21.3% of the sub-county secondary schools.

Well-resourced schools have flexibility in their investments and decision-making which is integral to improving the quality of education, the learning environment, and the experiences of learners. Admission to the current formation of secondary school is based on performance in the KCPE – with those in the highest quadrant admitted to national and extra-county schools that are well-resourced. More than two-thirds of students in secondary schools are enrolled in sub-county schools, with the majority of them being day schools, yet these are the same schools that lack basic inputs. The skewed inequalities in leadership, staffing and infrastructure development coupled with the marginalization of children enrolled in county and sub-county schools, perpetuates inequalities, and create a systematic reproduction of 'hustlers'.

The inequality indicators are associated with learning outcomes at secondary schools. For instance:

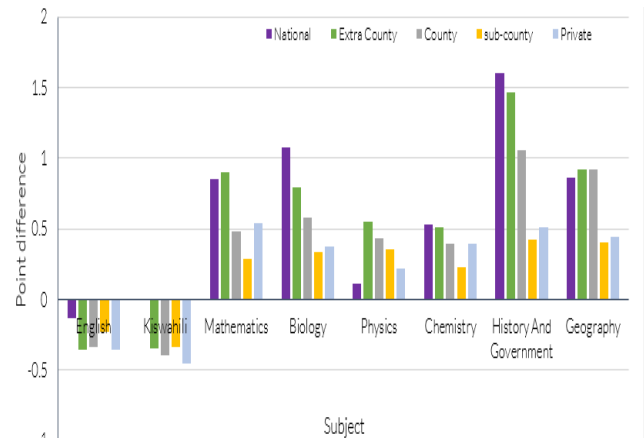
- i) *Performance across all subjects is high in National schools as compared to the sub-county schools (Figure 6). Sub-county schools, which admit more than 60% of learners consistently underperform the national and extra-county schools raising pertinent inequality issues in the quality of education besides the sorting during transition.*
- ii) *There is a strong association between KCPE and KCSE scores, with students who perform well in KCPE also likely to perform well in KCSE (Usawa, 2022).*
- iii) *Schools with a higher proportion of TSC teachers significantly performed better by an average of 7.5 points in the KCSE score (out of 84). National and county schools for instance had about 80 and 70 per cent of staff from TSC, while sub-county had the lowest distribution of TSC teaching staff (Usawa, 2022) and unlikely not to meet the curriculum establishment.*
- iv) *Attending a school where the school leader has at least five years of experience is associated with a 14.2-point increase in KCSE scores.*
- v) *Attending a school with a library, boarding facilities and lower teacher absenteeism is associated with better learning outcomes.*

Figure 6: 2022 KCSE performance by core subject and school category



Girls' performance and competencies are worse compared to boys in key subjects that are essential in competitive career pathways. For instance, based on analysis of available 2022 KCSE data, other than languages, boys outperformed girls in all other subjects (including STEM, arts, and humanities) and this was consistent across the school categories (Figure 7). The findings of this analysis are consistent with the 2020 Baseline Report on Monitoring Learner Achievement at form two in secondary schools conducted in 30 target counties by the KNEC, which showed that on average, boys performed better than girls across in STEM-related subjects such as mathematics, biology, chemistry, and physics. From the analysis of 2022 KCSE results, more boys than girls qualified for university education. That is about 18% per cent of girls in comparison with 22% per cent of the boys attained at least a C+, the minimum entry grade for university admission.

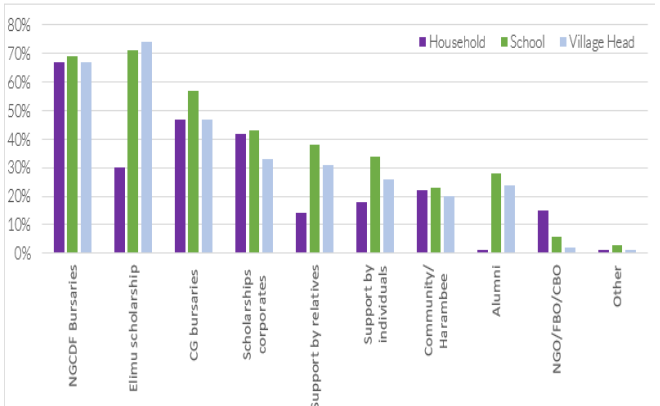
Figure 7: Gender differences in 2022 KCSE performance (base=male)



I.Enablers of transition and retention

The existing policy and legal frameworks are the key enablers of secondary school transition and retention. They not only provide the framework for enforcement and basis of education as a basic right but also the commitment by the government to ensure children of school-going age enjoy this right. To this end, the 2010 constitution of Kenya operationalized by the 2013 Basic Education Act and its subsequent revisions and sessional paper 1 of 2019 on reforming education for sustainable development commit to ensuring every child enjoys the right to basic education. Through the frameworks, the government has put in place various interventions as earlier alluded to including the FSDE and 100 per cent transition guidelines, as well as devolved funds to cater for children experiencing adverse financial constraints through the National Constituency Development Fund.

Figure 8: Enablers of secondary school transition and retention as perceived by the study community.



In addition, the government continues to provide scholarships to needy but bright students. While the FSDE is universal, other available financial support/opportunities only benefit few students, mainly those who are bright and from needy backgrounds. Moreover, provision of bursaries and scholarships, particularly at the sub-county and lower levels is sometimes skewed and politicized and may not necessarily benefit those who are in need. The existing financial support and other initiatives resonated with the community understudy as shown in Figure 8. Scholarships and support from corporations, relatives and county government bursaries emerged as possible enablers.

ALUMNI movements, that have greater opportunities for development if fully harnessed were perceived to play a marginal role in facilitating the transition. Though there were some variations in the perception of these enablers, they did not significantly differ between sub-counties.

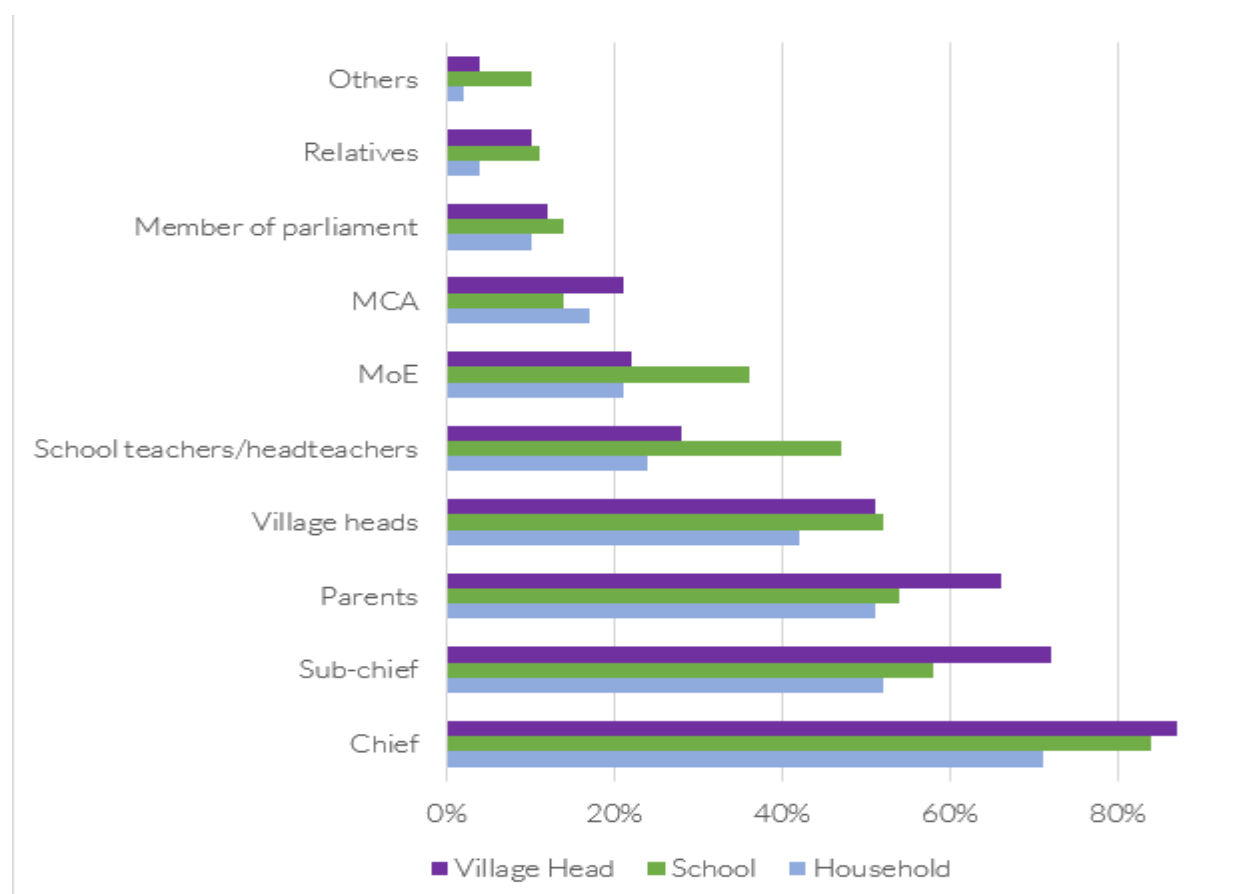
The perception of what exists in the system to support transition was in resonance with the actual support and facilitation observed while tracking transition (Table 4). For instance, over 90 per cent of the learners who transitioned to secondary schools were supported by their households. The support included paying school fees and purchasing uniforms. Support from NCDF and other government funds was limited. However, subsequent interactions with the local leadership highlighted efforts to extend support to all children, specifically in Kahuro through the NCDF, with a deliberate target to children enrolled in in day schools.

Table 4: Enablers (%) of transition across the four sub-counties

What facilitated the transition to secondary school	Cheptais	Dagoretti	Kahuro	Sololo	Overall
Supported by parents	91.4	92.8	85.4	89.2	91.3
Supported by relatives	3.4	14.3	7.1	3.6	10.2
Supported by non-related individuals	0.6	8.0	0.8	1.9	5.0
Supported by siblings	1.9	5.4	1.0	8.6	4.3
County government bursaries	2.4	3.4	8.3	5.6	3.9
NGCDF bursaries	0.1	2.0	6.1	5.0	2.3
Support by NGO/FBO/CBOs	0.4	2.1	1.1	0.8	1.5
Scholarships by government (E.g., Elimu scholarship)	0.8	1.4	0.3	0.6	1.1
Scholarships by corporates	0.3	0.7	0.8	0.0	0.6

The PLUS survey also examined enablers in terms of stakeholders who bear the main responsibility for enforcing the 100 per cent transition policy. Figure 9 shows that there was a consensus that grassroots officials under the Ministry of Interior – specifically the village heads, chiefs and their assistants were the key persons to drive and facilitate 100 per cent transition rate. The MoE and local leaders were perceived not to wield so much power in enforcing transition, but rather as individuals who raise awareness among the public.

Figure 9: Stakeholders involved in enforcing 100 per cent transition.



J. Policy recommendations

Identifying strategies that increase access to quality basic education for everyone is integral to a society's sustainable human development and competitiveness in the dynamic market economy. Acquiring secondary school education, in particular, is associated with reduced poverty rates and improved economic welfare as it plays a key role in providing the youth with essential skills for employment opportunities and creates a foundation to further acquire human capital that will enable them to pursue higher education and to improve their skills leading to higher labour market productivity (Jindal-Snape, Hannah, Cantali, Barlow, & MacGillivray, 2020; Ngware, Onsomu, & Muthaka, 2007; Rolleston, 2011)

To achieve equity and inclusion, deliberate efforts must be made to remove barriers to enrolment, retention, and completion of basic education. This calls for differentiated policy interventions targeting marginalized groups to ensure all children, adolescents, and youth attain quality secondary education thus allowing transition into post-secondary institutions and the labour market. This briefing paper presented key findings from the PLUS initiative complemented by existing evidence including government initiatives that have explored issues of equity, retention, and transition from primary to secondary education while making the following policy recommendations.

1. Improve the National Education Management Information system to ensure accurate data on enrolment, retention, and transition across the country to effectively develop intervention strategies and allow systematic scholarship allocation:

Given the NEMIS is an essential tool in decision-making for allocating FPE and FDSE, it needs to be improved to capture essential data from students, particularly those from marginalized contexts. This will allow systematic tracking of all students and characterising them based on key inequality and vulnerability measures such as SES, disability, and gender among others—factors that are crucial when designing interventions. This will also ensure all students are tracked and accounted for during their entire education system, as well as targeting differentiated support. Data captured at basic education level will also be essential to ensure equitable post-secondary financing and will provide crucial vulnerability data for use in the Mean Testing Instrument as outlined in the proposed New Funding Model being adopted in allocating scholarships, loans, and bursaries at tertiary level of education.

2. In collaboration with development partners and the private sector, the government to identify cost-effective interventions that enhance equity and retention in marginalized counties and among underprivileged population groups:

These approaches could involve developing interventions that have been successful in the country and other developing countries, and piloting potential strategies and interventions to identify policies that could work in addressing the key barriers such as boarding, school meals and uniform. Adopting a context-centred approach from a social-justice, equity-led frameworks, and neoliberal economic practices in the implementation of policies such as school uniforms is however essential to ensure that poor students are not disadvantaged due to lack of affordability (Sabic-El-Rayess, Mansur, Batkhuyag, & Otgonlkhagva, 2019). Implementors should also leverage the strong political goodwill given there is strong evidence that school meal programs have multisector benefits to local agriculture economy and value chain and are associated with improved performance and attendance (Wall et al., 2022), key antecedents for grades transition and retention rates, especially in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC).

3. Harmonization of government financial support in regards to scholarships and bursaries – and define criteria for targeted reach:

Scholarships, bursaries and other forms of conditional cash transfer programs are associated with short-term effects such as school attendance and learning outcomes for poor households by reducing drop-out rates, and a need for school-aged children to engage in labour activities to raise school fees and other indirect costs of education (Filmer & Schady, 2014). There is a need to develop an approach of consolidating scholarships from private entities such as Equity Bank Wings to Fly, KCB Foundation, non-governmental organizations and those offered through the MoE such as Elimu Scholarship Program as well as bursaries allocated by the National Government Constituencies Development Fund (NG-CDF). This harmonization is essential for efficiency and equity in disbursement thus lessening financial burden, especially among disadvantaged households who usually struggle to pay for the direct and indirect fees. To ensure equity and fairness in the allocation of funds, the MoE should develop guidelines and a platform that should be adopted so that the scholarships and bursaries provide essential support to students based on the level of financial need, performance, and learning achievement thus consequently promoting retention and transition in education.

4. Developing guidelines to ensure uniforms prices are regulated, subsidizing materials for producing the uniforms and allowing schools to procure the same competitively. Learners from low SES struggle to purchase expensive compulsory uniforms. Since the uniforms are locally made, the government through MoE should provide incentives that will reduce the costs of uniforms such as subsidizing materials including tax incentives and developing partnerships with local TVET institutions to manufacture affordable uniforms and enhance competitive procurement by schools. Moreover, learning from existing evidence in Kenya on efforts by the private sector to provide school uniforms that resulted in 37 per cent drop in absenteeism (Evans & Ngatia, 2020) besides from other contexts outside Kenya could help explore more cost-effective models that can be implemented to reduce uniform costs burdens from household. These approaches will ensure existing school uniform policy does not exacerbate the income inequalities that continue keeping poor household learners from schooling.

5. Identify differentiated strategies that will allow expansion of school meal programs. The MoE should collaborate with development partners, and implementers of school feeding programs such as Food for Education to develop policies, regulations, and strategies for identifying institutions and learners that need school meals and tracking how the intervention is impacting attendance, retention, and learning outcomes. For example, Kahuro constituency has partnered with schools and the private sector to roll out a comprehensive and cost-effective schooling feeding model. Learning from these initiatives and scaling to more contexts can provide robust evidence on the most cost-effective strategy for school feeding for all learners irrespective of their level. It is also imperative to examine school feeding programs from other nations, especially those that emphasize improving equitable access to school meals through the expansion and strengthening of universal school meal policies. This could be followed by developing vulnerability score criteria to allow implementation of a formula-based support for students from highly needy families and adopt a school model that will allow students who might have otherwise not afforded stipulated school meal costs benefit from the intervention.

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