



**Consortium for Research on  
Educational Access,  
Transitions and Equity**

**Does free secondary education enable the poor to gain access?  
A study from rural Kenya**

**Asayo Ohba**

**CREATE PATHWAYS TO ACCESS  
Research Monograph No 21**

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Consortium for Research on  
Educational Access, Transitions & Equity

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## List of Acronyms

ASAL	Arid and Semi-Arid Land
CREATE	Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transition and Equity
DEO	District Education Office
EFA	Education For All
FCUBE	Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
GES	Ghana Education Service
GHCR	Geography, History, and Christian Religion
GNP	Gross National Product
GPI	Gender Parity Index
HIV/AIDS	Human immuno-deficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome
IBE	International Bureau of Education
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPAR	Institute of Policy Analysis and Research
KCPE	Kenya Certificate of Primary Education
KDHS	Kenya Demographic and Health Survey
Ksh	Kenya shilling
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MOE	Ministry of Education
MoEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
NER	Net Enrolment Ratio
PTA	Parent teacher association
PTR	Pupil-Teacher Ratio
SAP	Structural Adjustment Program
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UPE	Universal Free Primary Education
US\$	United States Dollar
USE	Universal Secondary Education

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## **Preface**

This contribution to the Pathways to Access series of research monographs uses empirical evidence to tackle an important set of issues that surround one of CREATE's themes - transitions to secondary school. In 2003 Kenya announced Free Primary Schooling for the third time (depending on the definition) since independence. It has now committed itself to Free Secondary Schooling from 2008. The politics of aspiration coupled with pressures for access arising from the increased flows of primary leavers have generated policy which promises much, but may deliver less. Several factors will have a critical influence on how participation at secondary level grows. First the costs of secondary schooling will have to be reduced if they are to be financed to support universal levels of participation. This implies efficiency gains and greater teacher productivity. Second, universal provision invites curriculum reform and pedagogic innovation to meet the needs of a largely unselected population of secondary school entrants. Third, enough new teachers will have to be trained and deployed in an appropriate time frame. Fourth, costs to households will have to be low enough to be affordable to those in the lower quintiles of household income.

This study provides a useful review of many of the key issues for secondary expansion. It also uses data from field studies in 2007 and 2008 in a semi-arid rural area in the Makueni district of Kenya to explore transition within a particular community. Children transiting from primary to secondary school have been identified and data collected from households and from children.

It shows that after the introduction of Free Secondary Education fees have been reduced substantially but not abolished in public schools. Though participation has increased to at least one student in secondary school in one in three households many remain excluded. Changes in the system of awarding bursaries may actually have made it more difficult for the poorest to obtain financial support. In addition most exclusion of the poorest continues to take place before enrolment at secondary level and for those who reach the point of secondary entrance financial constraints continue to act as a substantial barrier to successful and sustained enrolment.

This paper provides valuable insight into the detail and functioning of free education policy and draws attention to both its strengths and weaknesses. It should be read by those seeking to improve the implementation of policy.

Professor Keith M. Lewin  
Director, CREATE  
University of Sussex.



## Summary

This monograph looks at free secondary education and the way it influences access to education for the poor in rural Kenya. Data collected after the introduction of free secondary education show that government schools continue to levy fees for lunch, school buildings and boarding equipment. Households are also expected to provide non-discretionary items such as school uniforms, sports uniforms, books, stationary etc. The study found that the costs of the first year preparation for day secondary school are about eight times the monthly income for employed parents, 12 to 17 times for self-employed parents and 19 to 20 times for peasant parents engaged in casual work. In the case of boarding schools, the costs of the first year preparation for boarding school are 15 times the monthly income for employed parents, 23 to 33 times for self-employed parents and 38 to 40 times for peasant parents engaged in casual work. The study found that poor households continue to face significant challenges in meeting the costs of 'free secondary education'. Moreover, government bursaries for secondary education are awarded to children enrolled in boarding secondary school only; children whose households cannot raise the initial and ongoing costs required for even low-cost day secondary schools face substantial challenges in accessing secondary education. The paper concludes that government policies aiming to expand access to secondary education for the poor must strive to identify and target socially disadvantaged children who are in need of financial help to access secondary education.

# **Does free secondary education enable the poor to gain access? A study from rural Kenya**

## **1. Introduction**

The focus of this paper is to examine the extent to which ‘free secondary education’ introduced in Kenya at the beginning of 2008 is likely to increase access to education for the poor. A special focus is whether children who previously could not enter secondary school due to school fees have been able to enter school following the abolition of fees and, if not, why not. In pursuing this, the study traced 109 children immediately before and after the policy introduction and explored the extent to which the abolition of school fees enabled some of them to enter secondary school. The paper is written for the Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE) and relates to Zone 4 of CREATE’s conceptual framework (see Lewin, 2007a), which includes children who complete primary education but are denied access to secondary schooling.

As we approach 2015, the year in which the international community pledged to meet the targets of Education For All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), many governments, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), are considering abolishing school fees for secondary education. This is partly due to the domestic and international demand to achieve EFA and the MDGs. Fees charged at secondary school are indeed one of the major obstacles for some children to access secondary education, resulting in low transition rates from primary to secondary education. Thus, many governments in SSA have planned to abolish secondary school fees.

And yet, most governments in the region are under severe budget constraints, especially after the global recession has taken hold. Thus, while the governments are intending to extend free education, they often allow public schools to levy fees for limited items such as school buildings and for non tuition costs—sports fees, school meals, uniforms, textbooks etc. Even though officially most fees are not sanctioned by the government, the fees are often used to make up for lost revenue due to a delay in governmental subsidies. As Universal Free Primary Education (UPE) reaches its peak, and progress towards EFA improves significantly, there is going to be increasing interest in access to post-primary education, particularly in the secondary education sector. Questions are bound to arise as to whether access to secondary education should really be free and what the real cost of such education is. This paper explores these issues in the Kenyan context where the government has recently implemented free secondary education. In particular, the paper explores whether this policy has actually improved access to secondary education for the poor in rural Kenya.

In this paper, secondary education refers to the single secondary stage of post-primary education in Kenya (for some countries in SSA, this could be a combination of junior and senior secondary education). For the purposes of this paper, ‘the poor’ refers to the poorest 40 percent of the population in terms of income distribution.

The structure of this paper is as follows. The next section states the problem of low access to secondary education in SSA and reviews recent changes in extending fee-free schooling to the secondary education sector. The third section looks at access to primary education by household wealth and gender in Kenya and how this affects access to secondary education. The fourth section presents methods of data collection during the first and second visit to Kenya. The fifth section provides findings from rural Kenya on the relationship between free secondary education and access by the poor. The last section draws conclusions.

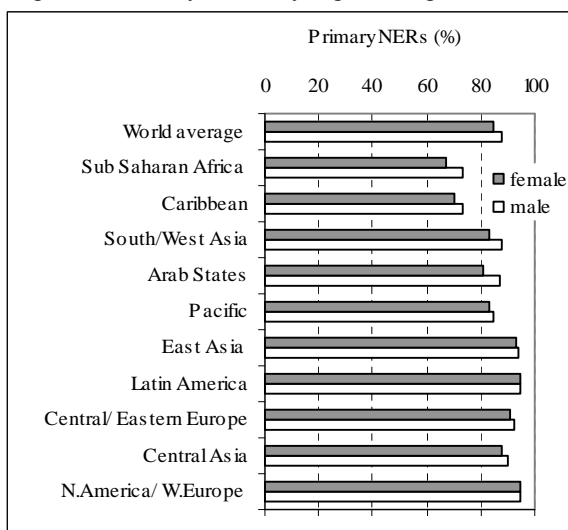
## 2. Expanding Access to Secondary Schooling in SSA

### 2.1 Statement of the problem

Secondary enrolment rates in SSA continue to be the lowest in the world. Of approximately 104 million secondary school-age children in the region, only one in four (25%) were enrolled in secondary school in 2006 (UNESCO, 2008: 330-331). Of those, there were 83 girls only for every 100 boys (*ibid*, 2008). This figure in SSA is a critical challenge as compared with other regions. For instance, net enrolment ratio (NER)<sup>1</sup> in secondary education in the Caribbean is 40 percent with 107 girls for every 100 boys. Secondary NER in South and West Asia is 45 percent with 86 girls for every 100 boys. The world average on secondary NERs shows that slightly more than half (58%) of the secondary school-age children are enrolled in secondary schools in 2006, with 96 girls for every 100 boys (*ibid*, 2008). The gaps in NERs between SSA and the world average are 33 percentage points. Statistics provided by UNESCO (2008) show that children, particularly girls, in SSA have the lowest opportunity to enrol in secondary school at their official age.

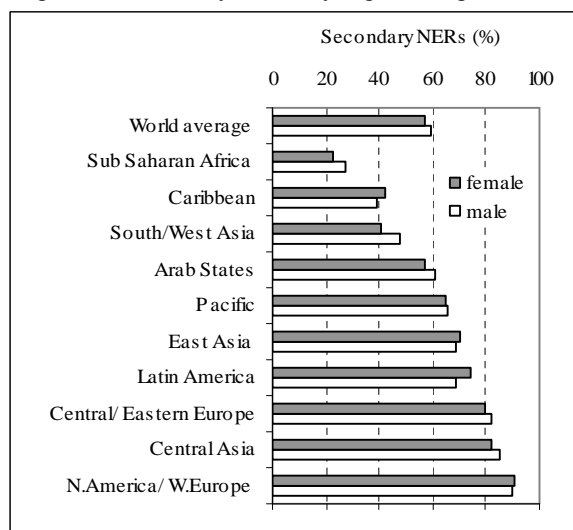
The wide gaps in secondary enrolment rates between SSA and the rest of the world, however, are less pronounced at the primary education level. Although SSA still lies at the bottom of primary NERs in the world, the gaps in primary enrolments with other regions are much smaller than the ones identified at the secondary education level. For instance, there were approximately 122 million primary school-age children in SSA in 2005 (UNESCO, 2008: 306). Of those, 70 percent were in primary school in 2006 with 92 girls for every 100 boys. In the Caribbean, the primary NER is 72 percent with 97 girls for every 100 boys. The gaps in the primary NERs between SSA and the Caribbean are two percentage points only. Indeed, the world average on primary NERs shows that 86 percent of primary school-age children are enrolled in school in 2006 with 97 girls for every 100 boys. The gaps in primary NERs between SSA and the world average are 16 percentage points, half the gaps identified in secondary education (see Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1: Primary NERs by regions & gender, 2006.



Source: UNESCO (2008: 307 and 329).

Figure 2: Secondary NERs by regions & gender, 2006.



<sup>1</sup> NER is defined as enrolment of the official age group for a given level of education who attend school at that level, expressed as a percentage of the population in that age group.

These comparisons raise a critical concern about why SSA is widening the gap with the rest of the world in school enrolments as children move through the education system. Although there are various reasons for this, the following three key stages should be responsible for this account: failing to complete primary education (CREATE Zone 2), failing to transit to secondary education (CREATE Zone 4), and failing to complete secondary education (CREATE Zone 5) (see Lewin, 2007a). Having said that, this paper will concentrate on the Zone 4 of the CREATE conceptual framework.

## **2.2 Challenges of gaining access to secondary education**

One of the greatest challenges of gaining access to secondary education in SSA is affordability. This is because secondary education in the majority of the countries is part of a fee-paying sector. This means that parents are required to meet some operational costs such as tuition and maintenance and may be required to pay for many other things including food, uniforms, learning materials, and special equipment. Consequently, children from poor households whose parents cannot meet the costs are less likely to participate in secondary education. Some estimates suggest that few outside the top two quintiles of household expenditure could afford unsubsidised secondary schooling in SSA at prevailing rates for teacher salaries and other costs (Lewin, 2008).

Distance to school also often hinders some children from gaining access to secondary education. This is particularly so in rural areas where population density is relatively low and households are widely scattered. In such a context, access to secondary education may mostly rest on accessibility of schools. For other children, lack of schools they wish to attend and the poor quality of education become the reason for non-attendance to secondary education. For instance, a child may have an accessible school nearby his or her home; however, the quality of education might not be conducive to his or her learning. Consequently, the child might decide not to attend the school due to lower returns from the schooling. On the other hand, some faith-based schools sometimes exclude non believers. Migrants may be disenfranchised and those without the right documents may be penalised and excluded (Hunt, 2008).

There are several reasons for girls' low access to secondary education. One of them is that girls are given various household chores compared with boys, and that often prevents access to and participation in secondary education. A recent study in Eritrea, for example, shows that girls spend substantial energy and time in fetching water. A project that introduced donkeys to help girls to minimise their energy and time found that it enabled girls to save their energy and time, thus, allowing them to stay in secondary school (World Bank, 2008). Other studies found a negative relationship between girls' schooling and number of younger siblings (see Lloyd & Gage-Brandon, 1992). However, Hunt (2008) points out that there are variations in research in the relationship between household size and girls' access and dropout.

Still other studies suggest factors that have a negative impact on girls' access to secondary education. For instance, a study by Mensch and Lloyd (1998) on gender difference in primary school experiences in Kenya shows that some primary school teachers limit girls' incentives to continue further education and to delay marriage and child bearing<sup>2</sup>. Their study also found

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<sup>2</sup> Their study found that, for examples, the awarding of academic prizes appears to be biased in favour of boys. In high-performing schools, teachers tend to think maths more important for boys than girls. When girls become pregnant in primary school, many teachers think that pregnant schoolgirls should be expelled while only a small proportion of teachers feel that a boy should be made to leave school if he were found to have impregnated a girl.

that boys outperformed girls in the primary leaving examination and that gender gaps in achievement were greater in low-performing schools. In fact, teachers' low expectations towards girls' academic performances can reduce girls' motivations and discourage them from continuing further education (UNESCO, 2008). Gender-stereotyped households and occupational roles presented in textbooks and curriculum also negatively affect girls' aspirations to further education.

Although there are many other reasons for low access to secondary education, there is little doubt that school fees are one of the greatest obstacles for children from poor households to gain access to secondary education.

## **2.3 Abolition of school fees for the poor**

### **2.3.1 Why free secondary education?**

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition that although primary education is important for individual welfare, it is nevertheless an insufficient condition for national economic growth and poverty reduction. The recognition is that primary school leavers are still too young to become economically independent and socially engaged in various activities. For some children, completion of primary education means the end of schooling and the entrance to the world of work. However, because of their limited knowledge and skills from primary education and immature age, primary school leavers are in many cases unable to fully participate in the world of work. By extending the minimum level of basic education from primary to lower secondary education, some governments assume that this will enable some children who complete basic education to directly join the world of work.

The extension of free education to the secondary level has another consideration. Given the massive increase in enrolments after the introduction of free primary education, governments in SSA are concerned that if secondary schools continue to charge fees, the majority of those who successfully enter and complete free primary education will be unable to continue to secondary education. In many cases, these are the children from poor households whose parents are unable to afford the costs of secondary education. The denial of secondary education to children from poor households is likely to limit their chances of escaping poverty. Because of social, political and economic benefits associated with secondary education (see World Bank, 2005), governments in SSA are looking for ways that enable the poor to gain access to secondary education. For these and other reasons, free secondary education is seen as a potential strategy to expanding access to education for the poor.

### **2.3.2 Recent changes in free secondary education in SSA**

Despite their financial crises and deficits, some governments in SSA have recently extended free education from primary to include secondary school. For instance, Rwanda and Uganda abolished lower secondary education fees in 2006 and 2007, respectively, and Kenya abolished secondary school fees in 2008<sup>3</sup>. There seems to be a common underlying rationale for the abolition of secondary school fees. For instance, Rwanda introduced a Nine Year

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<sup>3</sup> The education system in Rwanda is 6 years for primary, 3 years for lower secondary and 3 years for upper secondary. The education system in Uganda is 7 years for primary, 4 years for lower secondary and 2 years for upper secondary. Before 1985, the education system in Kenya was 7 years for primary, 4 years for junior secondary and 2 years for senior secondary. This has been changed to 8 years for primary and 4 years for secondary since 1985.

Basic Education Programme by extending free education from primary to lower secondary education. One of the main reasons for this was because of high fees charged at secondary education. The Government of Rwanda was concerned that high fees and fewer places in secondary education locked out those who completed primary education and qualified for secondary education (Rwanda Ministry of Education, 2008). Uganda too had a similar concern that only one in five children who completed primary school had access to secondary education, and the majority of those were from wealthy households (UNESCO, 2007a). The introduction of Universal Secondary Education (USE) in Uganda aims to shift access patterns from limited elites to the majority of children in the country (Museveni, 2008).

During the launch of free secondary education in 2008, the president of Kenya explained the reason for the Government's introduction of free secondary education as follows:

Primary education alone is not sufficient to provide the quality skilled human resource necessary for our country's sustainable development. Moreover, primary school pupils complete 8 years of schooling when they are still too young to engage in productive activities and contribute meaningfully to nation building. In addition, children from poor families who fail to join secondary schools because of lack of school fees often revert back to illiteracy, thus reversing 8 years of investment in their primary education. It is for these reasons that my Government undertook to implement the Free Secondary Education Programme beginning this year (Kibaki, 2008, para 3).

These countries that have extended free education to the secondary level make it explicit that one of the purposes of the abolition of school fees is to ensure access to secondary education by all children regardless of individual socioeconomic backgrounds. In other words, governments assume that the abolition of secondary school fees will enable the poor to gain access to secondary education. But in reality, to what extent will the abolition of secondary fees enable the poor to gain access to secondary education?

### **2.3.3 The abolition of school fees and influence on access to the poor**

This section reviews the literature that examines the influences of the abolition of school fees on access to the poor. Due to the limited amount of research in free secondary education in SSA, this section draws on literature that discusses free primary in addition to secondary education in the region.

Much evidence concerning the abolition of primary school fees in SSA has shown a massive increase in enrolments as a response to the removal of school fees. For instance, Uganda introduced UPE in 1997 and experienced a 68 percent increase in overall enrolments from 3.4 million to 5.7 million in one year (Avenstrup et al, 2004). Deininger (2003) shows a significant gain in primary enrolments in the country was observed among the rural poor and girls. In 1992, less than 46 percent of children aged 6-12 from the poorest quintile households were enrolled in primary education as against 82 percent of children from the richest quintile. By 1997, about 78 percent of children from the poorest quintile were enrolled in primary school, compared with 89 percent of children from the richest quintile (*ibid*, 2003). Indeed, the gaps in the percentage of enrolments between the poorest and the richest quintile had been reduced by 25 percentage points between 1992 and 1997. A substantial increase in

enrolments was particularly identified among girls from the poorest quintile<sup>4</sup>. Deininger (2003) found that the gender bias in access that had existed before the abolition of school fees had virtually disappeared.

However, increased access to the poor is likely to be at the expense of other basic needs of households. A study of UPE in Malawi shows that despite the abolition of school fees and the non-enforcement of school uniforms, parents were still required to incur expenses for exercise books, pens and clothes. Rose (2002) found that the sum of the costs was actually more than the amount formerly required for fees. Because poor households with many children started sending their children to free primary schools, the allocation of household expenditure on education was eventually increased. Rose (2002) estimates that poorest households spend 13 percent of their household expenditure on education, compared with 7.5 percent of household expenditure spent by the upper quintile households.

Other studies also show that although free education reduces households' direct costs, indirect costs remain as a substantive deterrent for children from poor households to gain access to education. Ghana is one of the countries that have been providing free basic education since 1996. Under the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE)<sup>5</sup>, not only primary but also lower secondary education became free of charge. However, as a result of the abolition of school fees, some schools introduced indirect fees to compensate the lost revenue, which was in some cases an obligation for district authorities (MOE/GES, 2001 cited in Akyeampong, 2009:181). Thus, parents in primary and lower secondary school were still required to pay for operational costs, parent teacher association (PTA), textbooks, uniforms and other costs. It was not until 2006 that all these fees were abolished through the government's capitation grant scheme<sup>6</sup>. In other examples, although Uganda introduced USE parents are still required to pay boarding and medication costs. Similarly, Nigeria provides tuition free secondary education, yet different forms of fees are imposed on parents to cover the cost of running the system (UNESCO-IBE, 2007).

Studies on access and retention in primary and lower secondary education in Ghana show that although the FCUBE made an overall enrolments increase, children from poor households continue to be underrepresented in enrolments (Akyeampong, 2009; Rolleston, 2009). Akyeampong (2009) and Rolleston (2009) made it explicit that not only indirect costs hinder access of the poor but also opportunity costs substantially affect the chances of poor children to enrol in and complete basic education. A study of access patterns in Malawi also concludes that access to education in the country continues to reflect household wealth (Chimombo, 2009). Thus, despite direct fees being abolished, these studies clarify that the abolition of fees has not been enough to ensure access to education for the poor.

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<sup>4</sup> Whereas the enrolment rate for boys from the poorest quintile increased by 29 percentage points between 1992 and 1997, that for girls from the same quintile group rose up by 35 percentage points during the same period.

<sup>5</sup> The FCUBE aims at improving the quality of teaching and learning, enhancing the capacity of school management to be efficient, and increasing access and participation in basic education for all children (Republic of Ghana, 2007). Although access to primary and junior secondary schools have been improved, insufficient school building and qualified teaching staff are some of the major challenges that are faced by the Government.

<sup>6</sup> In the 2004-2005 academic year, a pilot scheme of capitation grants with 40 public basic schools (primary and junior secondary schools) in deprived districts was undertaken by a World Bank Pilot Programmatic Scheme. This was later extended nationwide in the 2005-2006 academic year, whereby every basic school received an amount of €30,000 (US\$3) per pupil enrolled (Karikari-Ababio, 2007).

Although the introduction of a Nine Year Basic Education Programme in Rwanda led the Gross Enrolment Ratios (GERs)<sup>7</sup> from 16.6 percent in 2005 to 18.3 percent in 2006<sup>8</sup>, girls remain underrepresented in the overall enrolments, showing 47.5 percent in 2006, compared to 47.2 percent in 2005 (UNESCO, n.d.). Free secondary education in this instance did not narrow gender disparities in access to secondary education greatly.

These studies indicate that, even after the abolition of school fees, schools continue to levy for fees. Furthermore, opportunity costs remain high for children from poor households, leaving some of them without access to free secondary schooling. Instead of including the poor in secondary education, free secondary education without adequate government financial support might actually reinforce the exclusion of the poor.

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<sup>7</sup> GER is defined as total enrolment at a specific level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population in the official age group corresponding to this level of education.

<sup>8</sup> Disaggregated data on lower and upper secondary education are inaccessible.



### **3. Access to Education in Kenya**

This section first looks at patterns of access to primary and secondary education in Kenya with a special focus on household wealth and gender<sup>9</sup>. Data presented in this section are mainly from the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS) in 2003. After the review of access to primary and secondary education, the section discusses the recent government efforts to expand access to secondary education via government bursaries and the introduction of free secondary education.

#### **3.1 Inequitable access in primary education**

Primary enrolment in Kenya has increased massively since independence in 1963. In particular, there are three policies that initiated increases in primary enrolments. The first notable increase in enrolments took place in 1974 when the then government introduced FPE via the abolition of the school fees for standard 1-4<sup>10</sup> (Republic of Kenya, 1974a). This led to a massive surge in primary enrolments, showing an over 51 percent increase from 1.8 million in 1973 to 2.7 million in 1974 (see Figure 3) (Republic of Kenya, 1975a). However, under this free primary education, parents were still responsible for meeting the costs of school construction. Thus, schools levied fees for development (Muthwii, 2004).

The second massive surge was in 1979 when the then government enacted a policy of no building levies and other school funds<sup>11</sup>. From May 1979, the government also started distributing free milk to all primary schools to improve children's nutrition and thus their capacity to learn. Each child received two glasses of milk per week (Republic of Kenya, 1979a, 1980a). These policies led to another sharp increase in standard 1 enrolments, from 599,057 in 1978 to 977,368 in 1979; an increase of 63 percent (Republic of Kenya, 1981a). In total, primary enrolments increased from 2,994,991 in 1978 to 3,698,246 in 1979, an increase of 23 percent compared with 0.8 percent of the increase in the previous year.

The government decided to re-introduce user fees (cost-sharing) in the late 1980s. The policy was introduced under the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), led by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), to charge user fees in public services. The idea behind this was that user charges would reduce state spending on social services, which would allow the government to continue making payments on their foreign debt (Puiggros, 1997). As a result, the Government of Kenya reintroduced primary school fees in 1988 (Republic of Kenya, 1996b; Bedi et al, 2003). This had a negative impact on primary enrolments in the 1990s<sup>12</sup> (Bedi et al, 2003).

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<sup>9</sup> The official term that refers to grade in Kenya is Standard 1 to 8 for primary education and Form 1 to 4 for secondary education. This paper uses these terms.

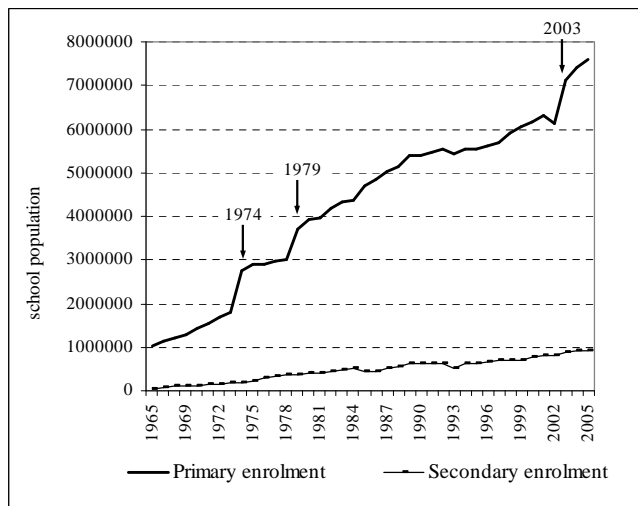
<sup>10</sup> The government subsidised textbooks, exercise books, pens, mathematical sets, etc. for all the children. While the fees for standard 1 to 4 were abolished, those for standard 5 to 7 were fixed at Ksh 60 per term for all public schools (Republic of Kenya, 1974a). The elimination of tuition fees was extended to standard 5 in 1978, standard 6 in 1979 and standard 7 in 1980.

<sup>11</sup> The policy compelled each school to form a parents' association for taking the responsibility of organising community fund-raising (Republic of Kenya, 1979a, 1980a; Somerset, 2007). Thus, funds for constructing and furnishing buildings as well as extracurricular activities were collected from community members.

<sup>12</sup> The GER in primary was 98% in 1987. This declined to 92% in 1990 and to 86% in 1996.

With domestic and international pressures to meet EFA and the MDGs targets, the newly elected President Mwai Kibaki announced UPE in 2003<sup>13</sup>. This led the country to experience its third large increase in primary enrolments, resulting in 1.3 million new primary entrants. Enrolments went up from 5.9 million in formal public schools<sup>14</sup> in 2002 to 7.2 million in 2004 (MoEST, 2004). The majority of new entrants joined standard 1.

Figure 3: The growth of primary and secondary enrolments in Kenya since 1965.



Source: Republic of Kenya (1972a-2006a) Economic Survey.

As Figure 3 shows, although primary enrolments over the past four decades have increased greatly, secondary enrolments have shown only a moderate increase. One of the main reasons for this is a high dropout rate in primary education. Somerset (2007) reveals a persistent high dropout rate among the lower primary grades throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, despite free schooling. A government report highlights that while the dropout rates in primary are greater among boys than girls in lower grades, this is reversed in higher grades where girls drop out more than boys (Republic of Kenya, 2003a). Another government report reveals that in the mid 1990s, barely 47 percent of primary pupils completed their primary education (Republic of Kenya, 1996b). Indeed, numerous government documents underscore the issue of high dropout rates and thus the high wastage rate in primary education (Republic of Kenya, 1994b, 1996b, 2002b).

Though there could be several reasons for the high dropout rate (see Hunt, 2008), one of the main reasons seems to be the various costs associated with primary schooling. Figure 4~9 presents cross-sectional data from the KDHS on age-specific GERs and NERs for primary standard 1, 4 and 8, respectively, by household wealth and gender.

Interestingly, Figures 4 and 5 on primary standard 1 enrolments show different patterns of enrolment. The shape of GER figures in standard 1 presents enormous enrolment rates, showing over 100 percent enrolments across all wealth quintiles except girls for from the poorest households. The high enrolments by boys from the bottom three wealth quintiles are also prominent. As the Government abolished school fees in 2003, this reflects the fact that

<sup>13</sup> The slogan 'free primary education' was used as a manifesto during the 2002 presidential election campaign to gain the popular vote (Oketch & Rolleston, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> Another 300,000 primary school-age children are estimated to be in non-formal education. Some of the non-formal schools cater for children in urban slums with a total of 143 centres/schools receiving a government subsidy under the free primary education programme (Republic of Kenya, 2006a).

many children from poor families had previously been excluded from primary school. However, the NER figures show that fewer children from poor households are enrolled in standard 1. These two figures reveal that children from poor households are more likely to start primary education at a later age than children from better off households. In other words, children from better off households are more likely than children from poor households to enrol in primary school at the official age of entry. The very low NER of children from the poorest households means that household wealth influences access at an early stage. Given the fact that the KDHS was conducted during the second term of 2003, this raises concerns about whether free primary education introduced during the first term of the year will narrow the access gaps.

By standard 4 (Figures 6 and 7), there are some noticeable changes in the patterns of enrolment. A significant change is apparent in NER figures (see Figure 7). Compared to standard 1, the standard 4 NER figures reveal there is a strong relationship between household wealth and grade enrolment. Children from the top two wealth quintiles are more likely than children from the bottom three quintiles to enrol in standard 4 at the official age. Children from the bottom three wealth quintiles are indeed unlikely to enrol at the official age. Although the GER in standard 4 shows high enrolment rates, a comparison with the NER clarifies that the majority of the children enrolled in standard 4 are overage children, and this is particularly pronounced among children from the bottom wealth quintiles. This indicates a relationship between household affordability and the chances of progressing to the next grades in primary education. Because children in overage are at a greater risk of dropping out of school (see Lewin 2009), the patterns of standard 4 enrolment raise a critical issue of age in grade relationships.

Another disturbing result can be seen in standard 8 (see Figures 8 and 9). By this grade, it is apparent that those who survive up to the last grade of primary school are the ones except children from poorest households. This is because enrolment in school of children from poor households depends largely on direct, indirect and opportunity costs (see Akyeamong, 2009), and thus poor households may decide not to enrol their children. Both figures show that children from the poorest households are least likely to succeed in reaching this grade. The GER figures show that the poorest 20 percent of children make up 12 percent of children in this grade (Figure 8). Moreover, when grade attainment is connected with official age, the poorest 20 percent of children make up only four percent of children in this grade (Figure 9). In fact, the NER figures show that the richest 20 percent of children make up more than 40 percent of children in this grade. These figures clarify that as the grades progress, children from poorest households are less likely to remain in school, and gaps in enrolment widen between the poorest and the richest.

One interesting feature is that the NERs in standard 4 and 8 show that more girls than boys are enrolled across the different wealth groups (apart from the poorest households in standard 8). This implies that if girls are able to enrol in primary school at their official age and progress without repetition, they have a better chance of completing primary education. This will have a significant implication for girls' access to secondary schooling.

The comparison of figures reveal that there are access gaps related to household wealth and also that GERs mask relationships between household wealth and grade attainment. Particularly, when the official age of a given grade is concerned, the relationship between household wealth and reaching a certain grade becomes much stronger. This raises concerns about how primary schooling can reach all Kenyan children regardless of household wealth.

Figure 4: Primary school GERs for standard 1.

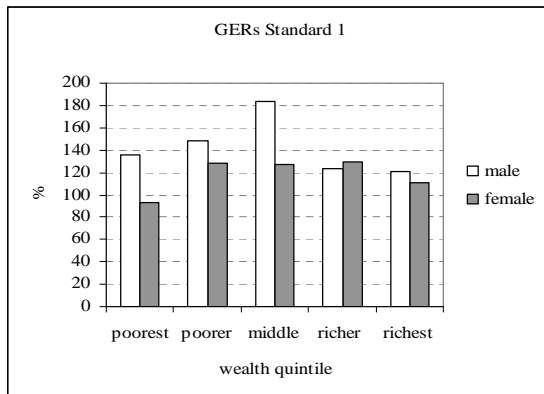


Figure 5: Primary school NERs for standard 1.

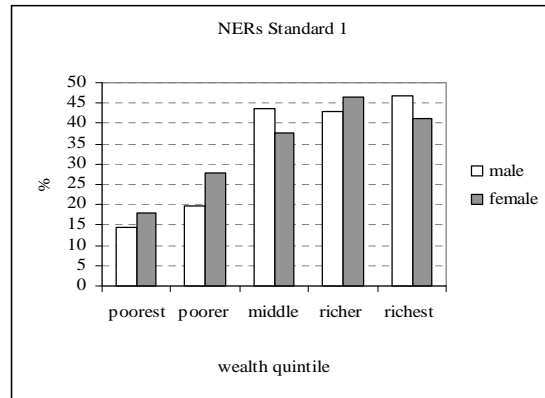


Figure 6: Primary school GERs for standard 4.

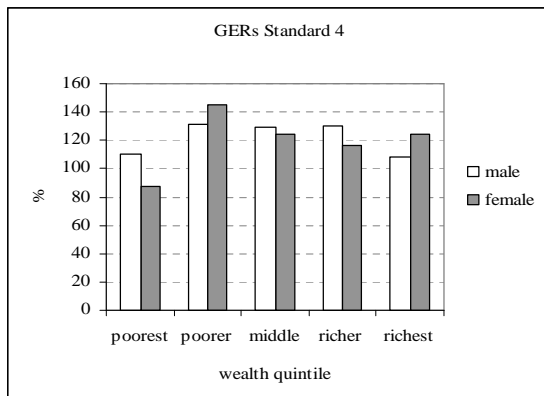


Figure 7: Primary school NERs for standard 4.

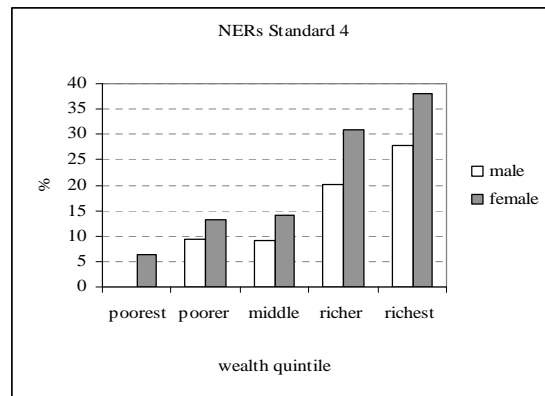


Figure 8: Primary school GERs for standard 8.

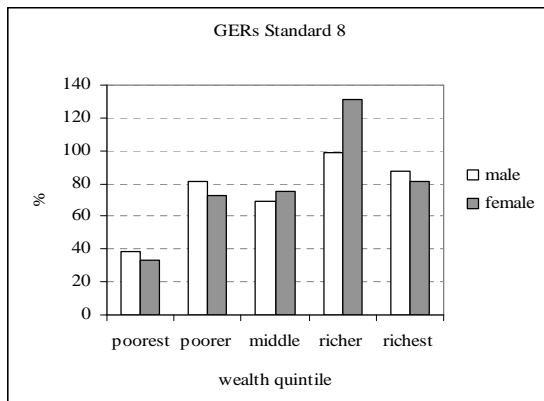
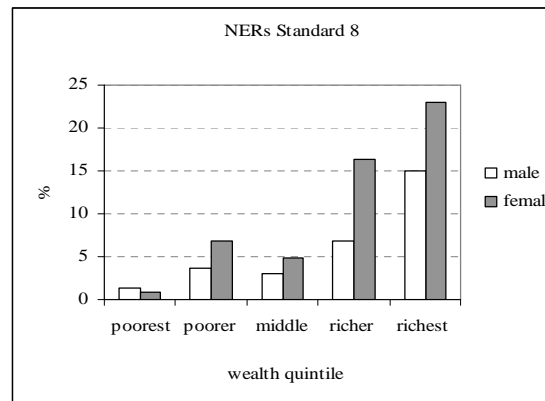


Figure 9: Primary school NERs for standard 8.



Source: Author's computation based on the 2003 KDHS.

### 3.2 Who goes to secondary school?

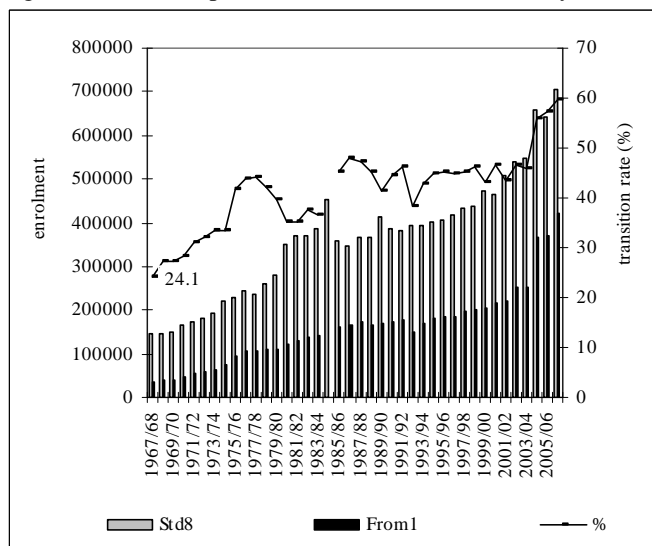
#### 3.2.1 The transition from primary to secondary school

Given that those children who reach the last grade of primary school are more likely to be from better-off households, children from poorer households are less likely to be able to access secondary education. This section looks at access patterns in secondary education using the same data and methodology as in the previous section.

Before looking at the patterns of secondary enrolment, it is important to review historical patterns of the transition from primary to secondary education in Kenya. Figure 10 presents a crude pattern of transitions to secondary school<sup>15</sup>. The transition rate in 1967/68 was 24.1 percent. This means that fewer than one in four children who enrolled in the last grade of primary school in 1967 accessed secondary education in 1968. Since then, while the transition rate fluctuated until recently, the overall transition rate has improved. In 2006/07, it is estimated that the transition rate reached 60 percent. This suggests that six in every 10 children enrolled in the last grade of primary school in 2006 became enrolled in secondary school in 2007.

As Figure 10 shows, there is a strong correlation between the increase in standard 8 enrolments and transition to secondary school. As the enrolment of primary pupils in the last grade increases, so does the number of pupils entering into the first grade of secondary education. This suggests that the increase of enrolments in the secondary sector also depends on the increase in pupils completing the last grade of primary education (Lewin, 2004, 2005).

Figure 10: A crude pattern of transitions to secondary school 1967/68 – 2005/06 in Kenya.



Source: Author's computation based on data obtained from the Ministry of Education and Republic of Kenya (1972a-2006a) Economic Survey. There were no primary graduates in the year of 1984/85, due to the introduction of a new education system in 1985.

Available data on the transition to secondary school by gender show that more boys than girls have enrolled in secondary school in the past decade (see Table 1). The Gender Parity Index (GPI)<sup>16</sup> indicates that there are 89 girls for every 100 boys in form 1 in 2005, and this figure has not significantly changed since 1995. This suggests that there are persistent gender disparities in access to secondary education, despite rapid increases in form 1 enrolments in recent years. There are still concerns about who accesses secondary school in Kenya, despite increases in overall numbers. This will be looked at in the following section.

<sup>15</sup> The transition rate in this figure is based on standard 8 enrolment in a given year and their enrolment in form 1 of secondary education in the following year. This, however, may overestimate the transition rate. This is because children drop out during the last grade of primary school, so a gap exists between the number of children who entered the last grade of primary and those who completed the grade (see UNESCO, 2007b: chap 2).

<sup>16</sup> GPI refers to ratio of female to male values (or male to female) of a given indicator. A GPI above or below 1 indicates a disparity in favour of one sex over the other.

Table 1: GPI in form 1 enrolments in secondary school in Kenya, 1995-2005.

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
GPI (F/M)	0.85	0.87	0.89	0.88	0.89	0.89	0.89	0.89	0.92	0.89	0.89

Source: Republic of Kenya (1997a-2006a) Economic Survey.

### 3.2.2 Secondary school enrolments by household wealth and gender

In 2005, it was estimated that there were 4,169 secondary schools in Kenya, of which 83 percent were public and 17 percent were private. Data from the Ministry of Education show that the number of secondary enrolments in 2005 was approximately 928,000, of whom 8.9 percent were in private secondary schools. This suggests that the majority of secondary school students in Kenya attend government schools.

Using the same KDHS data, Figures 11-12 present cross-sectional data on age-specific GERs and NERs for secondary form 1 by household wealth and gender, respectively. They show a noticeable change from the previous figures on primary GERs and NERs, which demonstrates that access to secondary education in Kenya is limited. Though there are several reasons for low transition rates, insufficient school supply and high costs of fees are two important causes<sup>17</sup> (MoEST, 2004, 2005).

As Figures 11 and 12 show there are clear patterns of access to secondary school related to household wealth. The GERs and NERs in the first year of secondary school show that children from the top wealth quintiles have a better chance of enrolling in secondary school than those from the bottom wealth quintiles. Indeed, the GER figures show that the poorest 20 percent of children make up only seven percent of this grade, a decrease of five percentage points from the last grade of primary. Furthermore, when the grade is linked to the official age, the richest 40 percent of children make up as much as 74 percent of children in the official age group of that grade (Figure 12). These analyses reveal that access to secondary education in Kenya is highly skewed in favour of the rich.

Figure 11: Secondary school GERs for form 1.

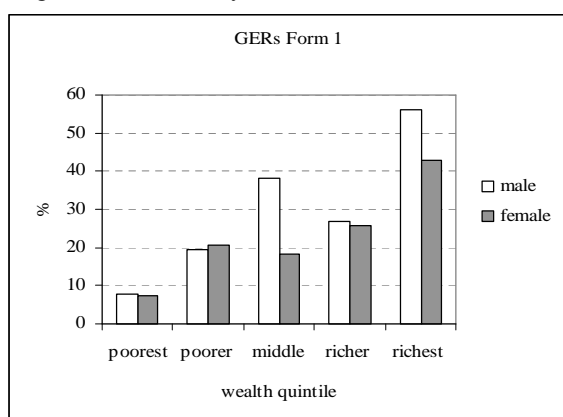
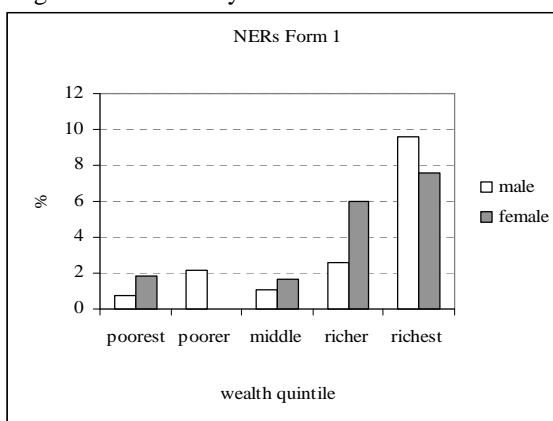


Figure 12: Secondary school NERs for form 1.



Source: Author's computation based on the 2003 KDHS.

In general, the comparison of grade enrolments from the first grade of primary school to the first grade of secondary school shows a clear shift of enrolment patterns, where wealth becomes an increasing factor in access as children move through the grades. As primary and

<sup>17</sup> The Ministry of Education's documents (2004, 2005) point out other reasons such as high level of poverty, extra levies for private tuition, unfriendly school environment, negative effects of HIV/AIDS pandemic and rising repetition rates.

secondary enrolment figures show, the chances of a child getting into secondary school are determined by household wealth. This therefore raises concerns about whether enrolments in secondary school can be helped via bursaries and free secondary education for the poor. The following section reviews the underlying rationale for government bursaries and the introduction of free secondary education.

### **3.3 A government bursary scheme for the poor**

To deal with the inability of poor and vulnerable households to pay secondary school fees, the Government of Kenya created a bursary scheme in 1994. The underlying rationale is that no child who qualifies academically for secondary education should be denied access to secondary education because of the inability to pay school fees. The objective therefore is to provide financial assistance to economically and socially needy students in all public secondary schools<sup>18</sup> (Republic of Kenya, 2002c). In order to achieve a fair and equitable allocation of the bursary, the government set up the following formula when the scheme was established:

- 25% of all bursaries were to be allocated to arid and semi-arid land (ASAL) districts;
- 70% of all bursaries were to be allocated to schools in all districts (including ASAL);
- 5% of the bursaries were to be allocated to the national schools to cater for students who come from disadvantaged areas.

However, the Ministry of Education gradually deviated from the original formula in terms of the proportion of allocations, and gave two percent of the bursary allocation to needy students whose parents are among the staff of the Ministry of Education (Republic of Kenya, 2002c). Moreover, a government report by the controller and auditor found that as much as 14 percent of the bursary allocation was given to needy students of Ministry staff in 2001/02. The report underscores that “[t]he above share out of bursary funds clearly contradicted the original cabinet policy decision on the issuances of Bursaries” (*ibid*, 2002c: 157). Furthermore, the report concludes that “the Ministry has not established [a] proper and reliable system for monitoring the disbursement of bursaries to ensure that the money reaches the intended beneficiaries” (*ibid*, 2002c: 157). Thus, it was not known whether the bursary reached the targeted students. This demonstrates concern for the effective and equitable distribution of the bursary scheme<sup>19</sup>.

Another study by Njeru and Orodho (2003) on the bursary scheme found that although there were students who benefited from bursaries, this had no significant impact on enrolment by the poor. They concluded that because the scheme targeted students already enrolled in secondary school, it missed students who had failed to raise the initial school fees, so the scheme ignored students who had not already been able to gain access, despite their academic eligibility.

These reports raise critical questions about whether government bursaries reach intended beneficiaries and in so doing expand access for those who are excluded, or whether the

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<sup>18</sup> In recent years, bursaries have targeted children enrolled in both public and private schools. The definition of needy students at the time of the bursary establishment is not well known due to limited access to available documents. As I will discuss later, however, the current priority of the bursary is for orphans, in particular.

<sup>19</sup> Currently, each constituency takes the responsibility for bursaries. Although it seems that there have been improvements in the bursary allocation, as I will discuss later, more needs to be done in order to ensure the poor benefit the most.

government reinforces the exclusion of the poor by awarding bursaries to financially able groups whose children are already in secondary school. Since children from the bottom wealth quintiles have fewer chances to enrol in secondary school than children from the top wealth quintiles, it is important that government bursaries reach the poor. This will be further examined in Section 5.2.3.

### **3.4 The introduction of free secondary education**

The Government of Kenya officially launched the Free Secondary Education Programme at the beginning of 2008 because many Kenyan children who completed primary school were not getting access to secondary school, mostly because of school fees. The underlying assumption of the new policy was that all children who were academically qualified for secondary education ought to be able to gain access to it. The President of Kenya emphasised that:

...the main objective of providing free secondary education is to ensure that children from poor households acquire a quality education that enables them to access opportunities for self-advancement and become productive members of society (Speech by President Kibaki, February 2008: para 8).

There seem to be some factors that formed the basis for the introduction of free secondary education in the country. These include: i) Government commitment to the achievement of EFA and the MDGs, with the promise to achieve a 70% transition rate from primary to secondary by 2008; ii) a study by the Government via the Ministry of Education on the possibility of implementing free secondary education; and iii) free secondary education as one of the manifestos of the 2007 Presidential campaign.

Several recent government documents refer to the government's high commitment to meeting the EFA and MDGs targets (Republic of Kenya, 2002b; MoEST, 2004, 2005). In particular, the *Sessional Paper No.1 of 2005* by the then Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MoEST) underscores that costs of secondary education are the main reason for the low transition rate to secondary education. The report (MoEST, 2004) proposes that the government should address transition rates<sup>20</sup>. In response, the Government developed the *Kenya Education Sector Support Programme 2005-2010*, which clearly states their intention to integrate secondary education as part of basic education (MoEST, 2005: 177). This policy framework became the backbone for implementing free secondary education.

It seems that the Government assumed there was adequate physical capacity to accommodate more students in schools; that the government's current budget for secondary education was sustainable; and that the free primary education programme was successful (IPAR, 2007). Hence, the Ministry of Education looked at why low transition rates to secondary school were continued by addressing five thematic areas: i) the unit cost of secondary education; ii) the structure of tuition fees; iii) non-teaching staffing norms and wage guidelines; iv) essential versus luxurious needs in secondary education; and v) tuition fee waivers and their implementation challenges (*ibid*, 2007). As a result of this study the Government concluded free secondary education was viable.

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<sup>20</sup> The *Sessional Paper No.1 of 2005* states the goal of education is to achieve EFA by 2015. In order to monitor and evaluate the progress towards the objectives, the Ministry has set a goal for transition rates from 47 percent at the time to 70 percent by 2008 (MoEST, 2004).



In order to implement the policy, it was essential for the government to receive the support of the Kenyan people. In elections, education has almost always become a strategy for candidates to gain popular votes (Sifuna, 2005; Oketch & Rolleston, 2007). During the election campaign of 2007 most candidates had free secondary education as part of their manifesto (Malenya, 2008). Thus, while implementing free secondary education was the government's intention, the Presidential election in 2007 created the momentum for its introduction.

However, free secondary education would be only sustainable with radical changes in cost structures. The Government of Kenya spends a relatively high proportion of total public expenditure on education as a percentage of Gross National Product (GNP). In 2006, total public expenditure on education was 6.9 percent of GNP (UNESCO, 2008). Despite the relatively high expenditure on education, the GER in secondary education was only 31 percent in 2006 (UNESCO, 2008). Lewin (2007b) suggests that in general to achieve GERs of 110 percent in primary, 100 percent in lower secondary and 50 percent in upper secondary, approximately 8.6 percent of GNP would be required to be spent on education without any cost saving reforms; or 6.3 percent of GNP with cost saving reforms<sup>21</sup>. Lewin further suggests that no country with ratios of secondary to primary unit costs of more than 3:1 succeeds in universalising secondary education. This is a critical challenge in Kenya, given the fact that the ratios of secondary to primary unit costs were roughly 3.4:1 in 2004/2005<sup>22</sup>. This suggests that if Kenya were to achieve universal secondary education, the overall public expenditure on education would have to be increased to 8.4 percent of GNP<sup>23</sup>. Of that, at least three percent of GNP would be required for secondary education with cost saving reforms of no more than 3:1 in the ratios of secondary to primary unit costs. Unless the government radically changes the cost structure, it is unlikely that Kenya will be able to achieve sustainable universal secondary education.

Sections 3.1-3.4 described that as children in Kenya move through the education system, fewer children from poor households continue to be enrolled, and fewer children from poor households transit to secondary school. While the abolition of secondary school fees is likely to increase overall enrolments, the extent of its impact on access to the poor is not known.

### **3.5 Research questions**

Based on the above literature review, this study looks at the extent to which free secondary education introduced in Kenya is likely to enhance access to the poor. Particular questions that are addressed in this paper are:

- How far have school fees been reduced since the introduction of free schooling?
- How much have household contributions to schooling costs been reduced since the introduction of free schooling?
- To what extent have the reductions in household contributions enabled the poor and girls to increase access to secondary schools?

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<sup>21</sup> With cost saving reforms, costs per pupil as a percentage of GNP per capita are calculated as 12% in primary, 20% in lower secondary and 40% in upper secondary education, as compared with without cost saving reforms of 12% in primary, 30% in lower secondary and 60% in upper secondary education.

<sup>22</sup> The unit costs per pupil as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita were approximately 14 percent in primary and 47 percent in secondary education. These are the author's computations based on data from Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2006) and Onsomu et al. (2006).

<sup>23</sup> The calculation is based on public current expenditure on education as a percentage of GNP in 2006.

#### **4. Methods of Data Collection**

This study presents data collected during field study visits to Kenya in 2007 and 2008. Data were collected twice from the same site of a semi-arid rural area in the Makueni district of Kenya. During the first visit in 2007, through primary school records I was able to identify 109 children (69 boys and 40 girls) in 101 households who had successfully completed primary school between 2004 and 2006 but had not enrolled in any post-primary education (secondary school and youth polytechnics) by 2007<sup>24</sup>. The study investigated the reasons for non-attendance in secondary school and collected data for the children and their households through surveys and semi-structured interviews. This revealed that about 51 percent of boys and 55 percent of girls in the study did not enter secondary school due to school fees<sup>25</sup>. The study also covered nearly one in three primary schools (24 primary schools) in the area and all 24 secondary schools and 10 youth polytechnics to look at school characteristics in the area.

During the second visit in 2008, the study traced all the 109 children identified in the first visit in order to examine whether some of the children who wanted to go to secondary school had been able to enter secondary school following the abolition of school fees and, if not, why not. During the second visit, additional information was collected for all the children and their households. I also revisited the schools identified in the first visit<sup>26</sup>. Interviews were conducted with some children, parents, school teachers and officials at the Ministry of Education.

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<sup>24</sup> The study excluded children who were once enrolled in post-primary education institutions but had dropped.

<sup>25</sup> Other reasons for non-attendance in secondary school include interest in youth polytechnics but inability to pay fees for the course and being unqualified for secondary education due to low marks in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education.

<sup>26</sup> The second round of data collection in 2008 covered three additional secondary schools and three youth polytechnics which opened at the beginning of the year. In addition, a total of 42 primary schools were covered.

## **5. Research Findings**

This section consists of two sub-sections. The first sub-section presents findings on the changes to fee structures (by day schools and boarding schools, respectively) before and after the implementation of the free secondary school policy. The sub-section then discusses non-discretionary costs and summarises the overall changes in the household contributions. The second sub-section looks at access to secondary education for the particular children in the study. It examines the extent to which the reduction of the school fees enabled some of them to access secondary education. It also presents changes in the system of government bursaries and the implications for gaining access to education for the poor.

### **5.1 Is 'free secondary education' free? Counting the cost**

#### **5.1.1 Changes in government day secondary school fees**

The Government of Kenya introduced free secondary education by abolishing school fees in 2008<sup>27</sup>. In order to effect the policy, the government promised to subsidise Ksh10,265 (US\$164)<sup>28</sup> per child per year for all the children in government secondary schools<sup>29</sup>. Table 2 presents a comparison of the national guidelines for the day school fees before and after the new policy implementation. The table also presents the average fees charged by the schools in the study. As it shows, before the introduction of free secondary education, parents whose children were attending government day secondary schools were responsible for meeting up to Ksh8,500 (US\$136) of charges in annum. In addition, 'caution money' for new students, 'development fund' charges and 'lunch fees' could be charged to parents<sup>30</sup>. In total, the guidelines suggest the maximum charges be Ksh11,000 (US\$175).

The first round of data collection in 2007 shows that many schools in the study complied with the national guidelines for school fees. As the total shows before the introduction of free schooling, the schools in the study charged on average Ksh7,453 (US\$119), which was below the suggested fees by the government. However, the grand total shows that the schools in the study charged more than the amount suggested by the government. This is because the national guidelines do not indicate how much schools should charge for lunch. On average, the schools in the study charged the lunch fees at Ksh2,426 (US\$39) per child per year, and this was obligatory for all the parents in day secondary schools to pay the fees.

After the introduction of the new policy, the overall fees for day schools were substantially reduced. As Table 2 shows, parents are no longer responsible for payments, apart from

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<sup>27</sup> Secondary education is free but not compulsory.

<sup>28</sup> 1 US\$ = Ksh 62.7 (end of 2007). This figure is based on the World Bank key economic indicators and applied throughout this paper.

<sup>29</sup> Capitation by the government was substantially delayed largely because post-election violence continued during the first term of the academic year, and the new Ministry of Education was only formed in April 2008. It was not uncommon to see public schools running out of money. Most schools had debts to suppliers and could not pay salaries for non-teaching staff.

<sup>30</sup> Caution money is a deposit paid by all students on entry to school. It caters for minor damage, such as breaking a test tube. It will be refunded at the end of the course if no damage is identified. Regarding development fund, not all schools can charge the fees. Only schools that received the approval by the District Education Office (DEO) on school development projects are allowed to levy the fees. With respect to lunch fees, the reason there is no indication given on the amount for lunch fees by the government is because they consider that it should be negotiated between schools and parents.

caution money and development fund charges, which are suggested to be a maximum of Ksh2,500 (US\$40), and lunch fees. According to national guidelines expected fees have reduced by 77 percent from Ksh11,000 to Ksh2,500.

Table 2: A comparison of the average day secondary school fees before and after the introduction of free secondary education in Kenya.

Items for charges	Before		After	
	National guideline	Study schools (N=21)	National guideline	Study schools (N=24)
	Ksh	Ksh	Ksh	Ksh
Tuition	3,600	<b>3,371</b>	0	<b>0</b>
Boarding	-	-	-	-
Repairs	500	<b>429</b>	0	<b>0</b>
Transport	400	<b>357</b>	0	<b>0</b>
Electricity, Water & Conservancy	500	<b>401</b>	0	<b>0</b>
Contingencies	400	<b>326</b>	0	<b>0</b>
Medical	200	<b>169</b>	0	<b>0</b>
Activity	900	<b>738</b>	0	<b>0</b>
Personal Emolument	2,000	<b>1,662</b>	0	<b>0</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,500</b>	<b>7,453</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<i>Additional</i>				
Caution money (new students only)	500	<b>432</b>	500	<b>500</b>
Development projects	2,000	<b>1,670</b>	2,000	<b>1,588</b>
Lunch	-	<b>2,426</b>	-	<b>3,308</b>
<b>The grand total</b>	<b>11,000</b>	<b>11,628</b>	<b>2,500</b>	<b>4,938</b>

Source: 2007/2008 school survey. Documents on the national guidelines were obtained via the Ministry of Education. N shows the number of schools investigated.

\* The charge for contingencies in 2007 was substituted for administrative costs in 2008.

\*\* The fees for caution money and development are the mean of 19 and 15 schools out of 21 in 2007 and 20 and 17 schools out of 24 in 2008, respectively.

The second round of data collection of government day secondary schools in 2008 shows that the average grand total for day schools was reduced by 58 percent from Ksh11,628 (US\$185) before to Ksh4,938 (US\$79) afterwards. Compared to national guidelines, the fees charged in the schools are higher than the guidelines because of lunch fees, which the national guidelines do not include. As can be seen, lunch fees were increased after the introduction of free secondary schooling. Before the introduction of the new policy the average lunch fees were Ksh2,426 (US\$39); this was increased by 36 percent to Ksh3,308 (US\$53) afterwards. One of the secondary school principals explained the reason they increased the lunch fees as follows:

It's because prices of food and commodities are increasing. We might increase further because all prices went up compared with the previous year (*Secondary principal [7]*).

Indeed, the cost of food had increased during that period. The post-election violence brought a sharp increase in costs, as the Rift Valley province, where large-scale violence and the displacement of population took place, is one of the country's key grain supply areas (Kenya Food Security Meeting, 2008).

### 5.1.2 Changes in government boarding secondary school fees

Before the introduction of free secondary education, national guidelines suggested that the maximum charges to parents of children attending provincial and district boarding schools be

Ksh20,900 (US\$333) per year (see Table 3). Together with caution money and development fund money, parents were expected to contribute a maximum of Ksh23,400 (US\$373). The first round of data collection in 2007 shows that the average of the total fees charged was Ksh18,413 (US\$294), and with the caution money and development fund, the total was Ksh21,165 (US\$338) per child per year.

Table 3. A comparison of the average boarding secondary school fees before and after the introduction of free secondary education in Kenya.

	Before		After	
	National guideline	Study schools (N=12)	National guideline	Study schools (N=13)
Items for charges	Ksh	Ksh	Ksh	Ksh
Tuition	3,600	<b>3,450</b>	0	<b>0</b>
Boarding	9,000	<b>7,547</b>	13,034	<b>8,639</b>
Repairs	800	<b>633</b>	400	<b>338</b>
Transport	1,000	<b>858</b>	500	<b>423</b>
Electricity, Water & Conservancy	1,000	<b>925</b>	1,500	<b>1,092</b>
Contingencies	700	<b>621</b>	350	<b>296</b>
Medical	400	<b>433</b>	100	<b>81</b>
Activity	900	<b>871</b>	0	<b>0</b>
Personal Emolument	3,500	<b>3,075</b>	2,743	<b>1,881</b>
<b>Total</b>	20,900	<b>18,413</b>	18,627	<b>12,750</b>
<i>Additional</i>				
Caution money (new students only)	500	<b>440</b>	500	<b>500</b>
Development projects	2,000	<b>1,932</b>	2,000	<b>1,773</b>
<b>The grand total</b>	23,400	<b>21,165</b>	21,127	<b>14,652</b>

*Source: 2007/2008 school survey.*

The fee structure for boarding schools in this paper reflects provincial and district secondary schools.

\* The charge for contingencies in 2007 was substituted for administrative costs in 2008.

\*\* The fees for caution money and development are the mean of 10 and 11 schools out of 12 in 2007 and 9 and 11 schools out of 13 in 2008, respectively.

After the introduction of the free secondary schooling policy, parents with children attending boarding schools are expected to pay a maximum of Ksh18,627 (US\$297) per child (and the government is responsible for Ksh10,265 (US\$164) per child per year). With the caution money and development fund money, parents should pay a maximum of Ksh21,127 (US\$337). This is a reduction of 9.7 percent from before the introduction of free schooling.

On average, data collected from the public boarding secondary schools in 2008 show that the mean total fees charged including caution money and development fund money had been reduced by 31 percent from Ksh21,165 (US\$338) before free secondary education, to Ksh14,652 (US\$234) afterwards. This indicates that on average the boarding schools in the study charged less than the amount suggested by the government.

Comparing differences in costs between day and boarding schools, it is apparent that the fee reduction in the day secondary schools was on average more than that in boarding schools (58 percent against 31 percent). This suggests that government day secondary schools have become more affordable for some children, while costs of boarding secondary schools are still substantial. This leaves many children from poor households without access to boarding schools.

### **5.1.3 Fees for non-discretionary items**

In addition to school fees, households have been responsible for providing non-discretionary costs. Unlike school fees where household contributions were reduced after the free policy, there was no change in non-discretionary items that parents are required to provide. Table 4 presents details on items that are compulsory for each child. For instance, school uniforms are compulsory, and the average cost would be approximately Ksh1,920 (US\$31) if purchased at a rural market. However, the study found that parents in four secondary schools visited were required to purchase uniforms from the school itself at a cost of between Ksh2,890 (US\$46) and Ksh3,870 (US\$62).

Books and stationary are other expensive items, which parents are often unable to afford. While schools are responsible for providing subject textbooks, parents are required to provide other books such as the Bible, dictionaries and some of the learning materials. Since the costs associated with these items are substantial, students often share books or temporarily borrow used ones from fellow-students who have completed secondary school. Games kits, which include standardised uniforms for sports activities, are also compulsory for all students. In addition, boarding students are required to possess items essential for boarding and to meet the travel costs. Although costs for each item vary, it can be estimated that direct costs for non-discretionary items for a day scholar could be Ksh6,743 (US\$108) and for a boarding scholar Ksh8,443 (US\$135).

Together with the school fees, the field study estimates that the costs required by households for the first year preparation are Ksh11,681 (US\$186) per pupil for public day secondary school and Ksh23,095 (US\$368) per pupil for public boarding secondary school!

Figure 13 presents a comparison of the estimated total costs for a first year day and boarding student, respectively, shared between the government and households before and after free schooling<sup>31</sup>. The total direct contribution of households to sending a child to day secondary school was reduced by 19 percentage points from 46 percent before fee-free schooling to 27 percent afterwards; the proportion for boarding school shows a reduction of 16 percentage points from 58 percent to 42 percent. As the ratios of public and private unit expenditure indicate, the government meets as much as 73 percent of the costs for day students and 58 percent of the costs for boarding students after the introduction of the new policy. However with the increase in PTRs, the proportion of the contribution by the government is likely to decline.

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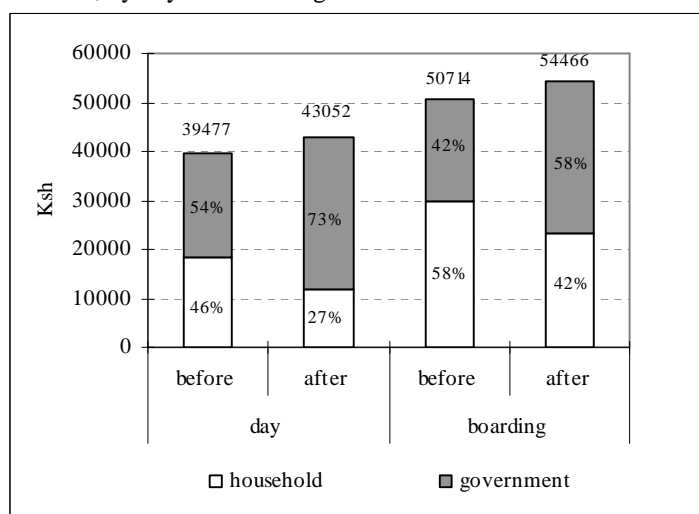
<sup>31</sup> Percentages in the figure are based on the calculation that controlled teacher salaries and pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) are equal. Given the fact that the PTR is likely to increase after the introduction of the new policy, unit costs for day and boarding students may actually decrease. This suggests that the estimated share (%) by households is likely to increase.

Table 4: Costs for non-discretionary items.

Items	Details on each item	Costs (Ksh)
Uniform	Short sleeve	250
	Long sleeve	500
	Trouser/ Skirt	500
	Pullover	500
	Tie	70
	Socks	100
	<b>Total</b>	
Shoes/ Bag	Shoes (black leather)	500
	School bag	200
	<b>Total</b>	
Books/ Stationary	Bible	550
	English dictionary (Oxford)	890
	Kiswahili dictionary	663
	Hymn book	220
	Mathematical table	280
	Geometrical set	230
	Atlas	680
	A spring file	50
<b>Total</b>		<b>3,563</b>
Games kit	T-shirt	240
	Trouser/ Skirt	250
	Rubber shoes	70
	<b>Total</b>	
Boarding requirements	2 bed sheets	300
	2 blankets	500
	A pillow	250
	A basin and bucket	230
	Towel	170
	Slippers	80
	Plate, spoon and mug cup	50
	A padlock	120
<b>Total</b>		<b>1,700</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	Day	6,743
	Boarding	8,443

*Source: 2007 school and field survey.* While the items and details are based on school surveys, prices on each item are confirmed via a field survey in rural markets. The prices indicated here show the minimum costs. Most schools usually require students to obtain two pairs of short and long sleeves and socks. Not all students are likely to purchase all of them. Some of the items are obtainable from siblings, relatives, or friends.

Figure 13: A comparison of public and private unit expenditure in secondary education before and after the fees abolition, by day and boarding.



Source: Computed by author based on 2007/08 school survey and public unit cost by Onsomu et al (2006) Financing of Secondary Education in Kenya: Costs and Options.

As this section has shown, household direct contributions to school fees were substantially reduced, particularly in day schools. The following section looks at whether this enabled some children from poor households to access secondary school.

## 5.2 ‘Free secondary education’ for all? Looking at access of the poor

### 5.2.1 Household wealth and access to free secondary education

Free secondary education has in general increased opportunities for secondary schooling. Secondary enrolments increased from 779,000 in 2002 to 1.2 million in 2007 to over 1.4 million in 2008 (Speech by President Kibabi in February 2008, 2009). This suggests that while the annual average increase in enrolment between 2002 and 2007 was 84,200, in the years between 2007 and 2008 it was roughly 200,000.

According to data collected in 2008 from 42 primary schools, of 1,552 primary school graduates who took a primary leaving examination in 2007, approximately 75 percent of the boys and 70 percent of the girls were enrolled in secondary schools in 2008<sup>32</sup>. Among the 109 children in the study, around 20 percent of boys and eight percent of girls had entered secondary school in 2008. In the study, the proportion of households with a secondary student had increased from slightly more than one in five households before free secondary schooling, to one in three households afterwards. Having said this, approximately 15 percent of boys and 25 percent of girls in the study were still excluded from secondary education due to unmet school fees<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> There are no reliable and comparable data for the previous year in the area. Almost all the primary head teachers echoed that the number of children who went on to secondary school from their primary schools in 2008 was ‘a historically remarkable record’.

<sup>33</sup> Some joined youth polytechnics and others were still unable to pay for youth polytechnic fees. There were also children who were no longer interested in either secondary school or youth polytechnics.



In order to understand how school fees relate to household income, Table 5 presents the average monthly income by parents in the study<sup>34</sup>. As it shows, 36 peasant fathers and 54 peasant mothers who are engaged in casual work are likely to earn Ksh608 (US\$10) and Ksh576 (US\$9) per month in the area, respectively. For those self-employed parents (12 in total), the average monthly income is estimated to be between Ksh700 (US\$11) and Ksh1,000 (US\$16). For parents who are employed as guards, house helps or shop keepers (9 in total), the monthly income is Ksh1,500 (US\$24)<sup>35</sup>.

In section 5.1, it was noted that the average total direct contributions per household to prepare for a child's day secondary schooling was Ksh11,681 (US\$186) and for boarding school was Ksh23,095 (US\$368). This suggests that the costs for the first year of day secondary school are about eight times the monthly income of employed parents, 12 to 17 times the income of self-employed parents and 19 to 20 times the income of peasant parents engaged in casual work. In the case of boarding schools, the costs for the first year of boarding secondary schooling are 15 times the monthly income of employed parents, 23 to 33 times the income of self-employed parents and 38 to 40 times the income of peasant parents engaged in casual work. These comparisons show that the contribution needed by household to send their children to low-cost secondary schools is still substantial, and even more so for boarding schools.

Table 5: Average monthly income by parents in the study according to employment status.

	Father		Mother	
	<i>N</i>	Ksh	<i>N</i>	Ksh
Peasant with casual work	36	608	54	576
Self-employed	6	700- 1000	6	700- 1000
Employed	7	1500	2	1500

Source: 2007 household survey. *N* shows the number of fathers and mothers in each category.

\* There are parents in the study who do not fit into the above categorizations because they are neither casual workers nor (self) employed.

In interviews with children and parents, some of them mentioned the challenges trying to meet these costs. For instance, an orphan boy described how his family tried to pay for his secondary schooling:

I have younger brothers and sisters who are schooling at primary. It's only my mother who buys food and all what we need. It is still difficult for us to pay fees required by secondary school (*Boy [10] aged 18, completed in 2006*).

A mother claimed that the fees were still too high for her to afford:

Although the government introduced free secondary education, it's not that free. People are still paying money, and I cannot afford the amount of money from my casual work (*Mother [6]*).

<sup>34</sup> Although I use parents' income in this paper, my household expenditure analysis with a comparison to national data (2005/06 Kenya Integrated Household Budget Survey) shows that 70 percent of the households in the study belong to the poorest 20 percent of rural population in the country.

<sup>35</sup> Sixty-one percent of households in the study receive remittance. Of those, more than two-thirds of them receive it in cash. The average amount of remittance was Ksh493 (US\$ 7.9) in 1-2 months. However, many parents told me that it was difficult to calculate the amount and frequency.

Another mother explained how her son was denied access to secondary school due to a lack of money:

I went to see a principal in January and was told to go and prepare uniforms for my child. And because I was a new parent for the school, there was money which the principal asked me to pay. Because I didn't have that much of money, I couldn't take my son to secondary school (*Mother [7]*).

A father claimed as follows:

Now you heard that secondary education is free, but it is not that free. For instance, we used to pay Ksh2,000 for a dormitory construction and is now Ksh4,000 per parent. We paid Ksh1,000 for a school building but now is Ksh2,000. For the lunch fees, we used to pay Ksh1,500 and now it is Ksh4,500. And for a school bus, it was previously Ksh1,500 per child but now is Ksh3,000. They normally add like this because they want money...(*Father [5]*).

These interviews with children and parents make it clear that fees charged by secondary schools are still beyond the budget of some poor households. In addition, although the overall fees have been reduced, some schools charge higher amounts for the items they are allowed to levy from parents. Thus, unless the government monitors the charges levied by public secondary schools, 'free secondary education' may not necessarily reach the very people it was intended to reach.

Moreover, it was commonly observed that parents whose children are enrolled in new day secondary schools have to bear some costs for the construction of buildings. One of the mothers in the study whose child now attends a new school explained this as follows:

Fees have been reduced but not that much. What we pay is almost equal to what other parents used to pay, previously. Because the school has not registered through the Ministry, we are paying a lot of money. The school does not have a library and laboratory (*Mother [15]*).

For many poor families their household income has not changed while most of the prices of food and other commodities have soared. Thus, the direct cost of secondary school remains higher than the ability of many to pay. A father pointed out that free secondary education cannot solve the problems of access:

Although the government reduced the amount of secondary school fees, that does not mean my income has increased. The same problem still exists. I have to feed my family and my family depends on my limited income from casual work (*Father [3]*).

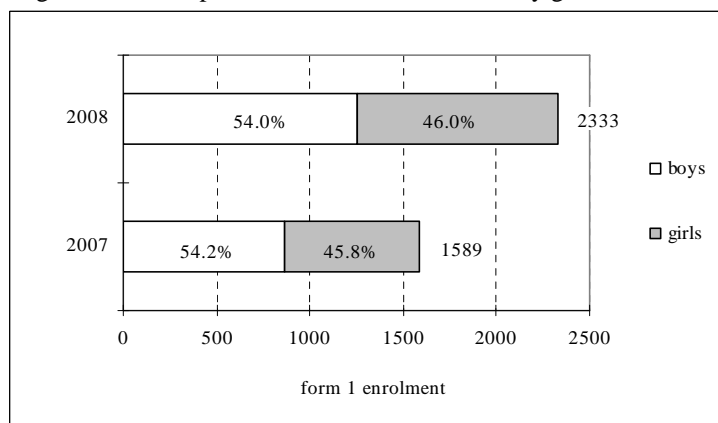
Interviews with parents reveal that even though fees have been subsidised, the amount required by secondary schools is still a significant deterrent for some parents to send their children there. Thus, while lowering fees has enabled some parents to send their children to school, this does not necessarily mean that all children from poor households are enabled to gain access to secondary education. This challenges the assumption by the government that lowering fees makes secondary education accessible to the poor.

## 5.2.2 Gender and access to free secondary education

Although the new policy does not specifically target girls, it is worth examining whether the new policy can close the existing gender gaps in access to secondary education<sup>36</sup>.

One way to identify the gender gaps in access to secondary education is to compare form 1 enrolments before and after the introduction of the free secondary education policy. A comparison of data from the schools in the study shows that there was little improvement in the proportion of girls' enrolment, compared to boys'. There were 1,589 form 1 enrolments in the 24 secondary schools in 2007 and 45.8 percent of these students were girls. After the introduction of the new policy, while overall form 1 enrolments in the 27 secondary schools increased by 47 percent from 1,589 to 2,333, the proportion of girls remained at 46.0 percent (see Figure 14). This comparison shows that although free secondary education led to the overall increase in enrolments, it did little to close the persistent gender gap in access.

Figure 14: A comparison of form 1 enrolments by gender in 2007 and 2008.



Source: 2007/2008 school survey.

The issue of gaps in access to secondary school in favour of boys originates in primary school. As girls' enrolment in primary education is lower than boys and their performance in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) is weaker, girls have fewer chances to gain access to secondary education. Data collected for the 2007 KCPE from 1,552 candidates in 42 primary schools in the area show that 51.4 percent of candidates were boys and 48.6 percent of candidates were girls. This indicates that there were slightly more male candidates than female candidates. Moreover, while 55.5 percent of male candidates scored 250 and above (out of 500 marks), only 46.7 percent of female candidates did. This clearly reveals that girls performed less well than boys.

Several documents refer to girls performing worse than boys. A government document points out that girls outperformed boys in English and Kiswahili between 2000 and 2004 (Republic of Kenya, 2007b). That said, boys outperformed girls in all other subjects in all the provinces over the same period<sup>37</sup> (*ibid*, 2007b). Mensch and Lloyd (1998) show that boys performed better in the KCPE than their female counterparts and that gender gaps in achievement were

<sup>36</sup> This is an important topic because the Government of Kenya aims at meeting the targets of EFA and the MDGs. The MDG Goal 3 engages with the elimination of gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2015.

<sup>37</sup> Other subjects include mathematics, science and agriculture, and GHCR (Geography, History, and Christian Religion). Since 2006, the subjects of the examination have been changed to the following five: English, Kiswahili, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies.

greater in low-performing schools. Girls' lower mean scores in the KCPE are one of the reasons fewer girls enrol in secondary school. This suggests that free secondary education is not likely to narrow the persistent gender gaps in access to secondary education unless the government also addresses gender gaps in performance in primary education.

### **5.2.3 Are government bursaries for the poor?**

It is important to mention a government bursary scheme which existed prior to the introduction of the free secondary education policy. In the first round of data collection in 2007 it was evident that access to the bursary was highly skewed in favour of children already enrolled in secondary school. As the study by Njeru and Orodho (2003) has shown, one criticism of the bursary scheme is that it is for children who could successfully enter secondary school. The field study also found that information about the bursary was unequally disseminated (it was available via the secondary schools), which resulted in bursaries being awarded to those children in school. Eighty-eight percent of the parents in my study responded that they had heard about the bursary via other parents whose children were in secondary school, or from neighbours, or at markets, but over 80 percent of them did not try to obtain one. More than one-third of parents replied that they did not know where to get the bursary or how to apply for it. Parents often encountered difficulties applying via an area chief and were told that the deadline had past. There was no information posted at the local government offices, nor in any public space (schools<sup>38</sup>, church, market etc.).

There were other issues concerning the application process. For instance, although the application form was available in secondary schools, parents whose child was not in school had to photocopy the form. Since electricity is not available in most rural areas, it takes around two to three hours for some parents to reach a market where photocopying is available. The photocopy also costs approximately Ksh24, which was then equivalent to a third of the daily wages for a person engaged in casual work. By contrast, children in secondary schools were well informed about the bursaries by their principals and were often given the form free because schools were able to produce the form.

Another issue concerning the bursary was the process of the selection. In order to select recipients fairly, selection criteria have been developed. This included family status such as orphanhood, special circumstances like disabled children, girls, discipline records in school and academic performance. Each applicant is assessed on the criteria and assigned a score. Orphans are considered among the first recipients of the bursary. Because of the criteria set in the guidelines, children whose parents are alive but from extremely poor families were often excluded from the bursary. A mother in the study who applied for the bursary explained her experience as follows:

I applied for the bursary but since I have my husband, I was told that I could not get the bursary. Now I have nothing I can try (*Mother [3]*).

Although the guidelines showed concern for girls by giving them two more points than the boys, my field study showed that more boys than girls were recipients of the bursary in 2007. From the 24 secondary schools, 53 percent of students were boys and 47 percent were girls.

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<sup>38</sup> The schools that had bursary recipients posted a list of recipients in the school. There was only a single school, however, which openly provided information on the application deadline.

A comparison of this with the recipients of the bursary revealed that 58 percent of recipients were boys and 42 percent were girls<sup>39</sup>. Detailed information on the proportion of orphans receiving the bursary was not available. It is not known whether the reason for more boys than girls receiving bursaries was a result of chance, or of fewer applications by girls, or of gender discrimination.

The application form also requires one referee from either an area chief/sub-chief or religious leader and one approval by a school head. When children do not receive support from these people, they automatically become excluded from the selection process<sup>40</sup>. One secondary school principal explained this problem as follows:

Now the chief and assistant chief in each location deal with it. When you tell them that this child is bright but a needy student, they don't understand it. They don't know about each child (*Principal [1]*).

My study indeed found that the area chief and sub-chief know little about each child and their family status. And yet, it is they who have the power to decide on the recipients. Thus, the first round of data collection found that there were various issues in the government bursaries that needed to be readdressed so that the bursary can reach the very people it targets and, therefore, can be used more effectively.

By the second round of data collection, the government had made a change to the bursary. Whereas the bursary was available for both day and boarding students in public and private secondary schools in 2007, after the introduction of free secondary education in 2008, the government now awards it to boarding students only<sup>41</sup>. In other words, there is no bursary for day students. A senior official at the Ministry of Education explained this as follows:

It's because the new policy is 'Free Day Secondary Education'. It's free for day scholars. The government pays all for them. So, the bursary is for boarding students because their schools are not free (*Education official [6]*).

On the one hand, this sounds reasonable due to the cost of boarding school. Tables 2 and 3 show that after the introduction of free secondary education, the average fees charged for boarding school are three times the average fees of day students. The amount charged at boarding schools is still too high for poor households to afford. Thus, the bursary may help those poor households send their children there.

On the other hand, the new guidelines for the bursaries have prevented the children of some poor families from getting access to secondary school. This is because it is often children from poor families who attend low-cost day secondary schools. The new bursary guidelines target children enrolled in boarding schools only, and few if any of the poorest can afford to gain admission and apply for bursaries. Worse, children whose parents cannot raise the initial fees for day secondary schools have no access to financial support because the bursary has

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<sup>39</sup> Of all the students in the 24 secondary schools, approximately seven percent of them were receiving the bursary in 2007.

<sup>40</sup> In order to receive support by an area chief/sub-chief some children take risks. For instance, there was a case where a secondary school girl was forced to have a sexual relationship with a sub-chief in order to receive a bursary. The news was widely broadcast because the girl became pregnant.

<sup>41</sup> In 2008, bursaries were disbursed only once. Each recipient was given Ksh8,000 (US\$128). Any financially needy students attending public and private boarding secondary schools are basically eligible for the application.

been restricted to boarding schools only. It is apparent that the new policy of free secondary education continues to exclude children whose families cannot meet the initial and ongoing fees required by secondary schools. In most cases, these are the poorest families.

My field study shows that although bursaries for secondary education are provided by the government, their use and distribution among the potential beneficiaries remain questionable. If the purpose of the bursary is to expand access to the poor and provide them with a quality education that enhances individual prosperity and therefore the opportunity to escape poverty, then the target of the recipients of the bursary needs to be the very children whose households are unable to meet the costs of free secondary education.

## **6. Discussion and Conclusions**

This paper looked at the transition from primary to secondary education in Kenya and has examined the relationship between free secondary education and its influence on access to the poor. The findings from this Kenyan study reveal both the benefits and limitations of the free secondary education policy for increasing access to the poor.

An analysis of enrolment in the last grade of primary and the first grade of secondary education using the 2003 KDHS revealed that while the poorest 20 percent of children in the last grade of primary school make up 12 percent of the grade, the presence of this group decreases to seven percent in the first year of secondary school. Furthermore, when the first grade of secondary school is connected to the official age, the richest 40 percent of children make up as much as 74 percent of children in the official age range in the grade. This analysis shows highly skewed access to secondary education in favour of the rich.

Data collected after the introduction of free secondary education show that the average school fees were reduced by 58 percent in day secondary schools and by 31 percent in boarding schools in the study area. However, the study revealed that public secondary schools continued to levy fees for lunch, school buildings and boarding equipment. Parents are also expected to provide school uniforms, sports uniforms, books, stationary etc. Consequently, the study found that the costs for sending a child to the first year of day secondary school are about eight times the monthly income for employed parents, 12 to 17 times for self-employed parents and 19 to 20 times for peasant parents engaged in casual work in the study. In the case of boarding schools, the costs for sending a child to the first year of boarding secondary school are 15 times the monthly income for employed parents, 23 to 33 times for self-employed parents and 38 to 40 times for peasant parents engaged in casual work. Thus, the study found that poor households continued to face a significant challenge in meeting the costs of 'free secondary education'.

The study also revealed that gender gaps in access to secondary education in favour of boys continue in the area of the study despite a rapid increase in form 1 enrolments. Moreover, government bursaries for the poor were highly skewed in favour of children enrolled in secondary school. Because information about the bursary was unfairly disseminated, bursaries were awarded to children who were already successfully enrolled in secondary school. After the introduction of free secondary education, the government has awarded bursaries only to boarding students. Because of this change, poor children whose households cannot raise the initial and ongoing costs required by low-cost day secondary schools face substantial challenges to gain access.

These findings imply that government policies that aim to expand and increase access to secondary education must strive to identify and target those children who are already disadvantaged from accessing secondary education. Unless governments clearly identify those disadvantaged groups to ensure their completion of primary education and transition to secondary education, access to secondary education by the poor will remain limited even with free secondary education policies. These lessons from Kenya in the implementation of free secondary education might well have relevance for other countries in SSA where the extension of free education is under consideration.

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Consortium for Research on  
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## Report summary:

This monograph looks at 'free secondary education' and the way it influences access to education for the poor in rural Kenya. Data collected after the introduction of free secondary education show that government schools continue to levy fees for lunch, school buildings and boarding equipment. Households are also expected to provide non-discretionary items such as school uniforms, sports uniforms, books, stationary etc. The study found that poor households continue to face significant challenges in meeting the costs of free secondary education.

## Author notes:

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