

## Education and Child Labour in Kenya

### Introduction

The government's overall goal for primary education is to achieve Universal Primary Education by the year 2005 and Education for All by the year 2015. Promoting enrolment in primary schools by offering free primary education is expected to lead to achievement of this goal. The Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation 2003-2007 identifies the achievement of a 100 percent net primary school enrolment and reduction of the disparity in access to education as some of the key interventions in the education sector. However, retaining children in school remains a challenge. High drop out and low completion rates are contributing to increase in child labour.

Enhancing access to education is one of the most effective instruments for eliminating child labour and rehabilitating ex-child workers. Children with no access to education have few alternatives but to enter the labour market, where they are often forced to work in dangerous and exploitative conditions. Although primary school enrolment in Kenya has increased in absolute numbers, the number of children dropping out of school has not reduced significantly. Several factors account for children dropping out of school, the most common being high direct and indirect costs of education, low quality education, low primary to secondary school transition rates, and the effects of HIV/AIDS pandemic.

A household's decision to send children to the labour market is partly determined by the perceived benefits of education, cost of education, quality of education, household's income, and labour market opportunities for children relative to adults. Increase in the expected returns from attending school are likely to increase school enrolment while increase in school fees and in the opportunity cost of attending school are likely to reduce enrolment. Therefore, there is a trade-off between child schooling and child labour. Households

that send children to work during school time do so at the expense of schooling and vice versa. Therefore, it would be hard to eradicate child labour alone without a focus on schooling. Similarly, universal primary education is unachievable without a dual policy of eliminating child labour.

This policy brief is based on a study on *Education and child labour in Kenya*. The study investigates the child labour-schooling trade-off owing to the fact that those children who are not in school end up in child labour. The study was motivated by the realisation that to promote schooling, there is need to understand what drives children from school to labour. The study also looks at the effect of quality of schooling, and also the role of adult and child market wages on child labour and child schooling. To determine the key causes of child labour, the study estimated a child labour hours supply equation using household cross-sectional data from the 1998/1999 Integrated Labour Force Survey.

The Government of Kenya has since realised that even after implementing the free primary education policy, children from street families were not ready to go back to school. Consequently, the Government started street family rehabilitation programmes, which involved placing children in rehabilitation centres and thereafter in public schools and vocational training institutions. One of the lessons the government learnt is that lack of employment opportunities for the parents due to insufficient skills limits their income and therefore support for their children in school.

### Main Findings

#### *Schooling as an alternative to work*

The most compelling potential alternative to full time work for children is education. Children engage in full time work either because they have no access to schools within a convenient distance, or the schools are of such

low quality that parents do not see the advantage of enrolling their children in them. Access to education can be promoted by increasing the number of schools and classes, by promoting enrolment in schools through incentives, and by sensitising parents on the importance of schooling for their children.

### **Opportunity cost of schooling**

The cost of education alone cannot explain the existence of child labour without taking into account the role of opportunity costs of schooling and perceived returns to education. The introduction of free education is not enough to keep children out of work and therefore in school. Some children work to raise money for food and uniform, meaning that free schooling may not reduce some types of labour, such as paid work done over the weekends. There is also evidence on the connection between employment of adults, child schooling and child labour. Employment of children may indeed secure employment for the adults; when children work at home, adult members are released to seek work outside the home. Therefore, greater success can be realized in the free primary education programme if more jobs are created for the adult members. This would ensure that households have available finance for food, school uniform, and for contributing to expansion of school facilities and other items not financed through the free primary education programme.

### **Education costs and child labour**

There is a positive relationship between schooling costs and child labour. With about 56 percent of the Kenyan population living below the poverty line, poor households are unable to enrol their children in school due to both direct and indirect costs of schooling. Child labour becomes the only option for the children who are out of school. Under the free primary education programme, the government finances teachers' salaries

and provides basic learning/teaching materials such as textbooks, exercise books, pencils, chalk and dusters. This means that parents and local communities continue to meet other educational expenses such as building and renovation costs, school uniform, transport and food. When these costs are very high, both the family and the society may neglect the provision of education, with the only alternative for children being entry to the labour market. Financial constraints are the main causes of children not enrolling in schools. Therefore, the goal of a 100 percent net enrolment rate in primary schools may not be achieved unless the government facilitates the implementation of school feeding programmes, especially in hunger-stricken, ASAL and hardship areas, or create an environment for parents to have alternative income-generating programmes.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

There is evidence of interdependencies and a trade-off between schooling and child labour. The fight against child labour cannot therefore be de-linked from interventions that raise enrolment and greater participation for children in school. Also, full participation for children in school need to take into account those children involved in labour, or who work part-time. Similarly, universal primary education is unachievable without a dual policy of eliminating child labour or determinants that account for it while raising enrolments for children. Therefore, policies to address schooling should also focus on elimination of child labour and poverty. The government should in addition to free primary education consider promotion of adult literacy; enhancement of the sustainability of school feeding programme; promotion of early childhood care education and development; promotion of technical, industrial, vocational, and entrepreneurship programmes; rehabilitation of street children; and creation of more alternatives for adults through employment and income-generating activities.

---

#### **About KIPPRA Policy Briefs**

*KIPPRA policy briefs are aimed at a wide dissemination of the Institute's policy research findings. The findings are expected to stimulate discussion and also build capacity in the public policy making process in Kenya.*

**This work was carried out with the aid of a grant from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Ottawa, Canada through a KIPPRA/IDRC Kenya Economic and Political Transition Project for Economic Recovery.**

**The aim of the project is to enable KIPPRA embark on activities that will help the Kenya government in formulation of transition policies in three broad areas: Jumpstarting economic growth, fiscal reforms, and financing free primary education.**

**For more information contact: Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis, PO Box 56445, Tel: 2719933/4, Nairobi; email: admin@kippra.or.ke; website: <http://www.kippra.org>**