

Promoting Efficient Utilization of Resources in Adult and Continuing Education Centres in Kenya's Arid and Semi-Arid Lands

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Key Highlights

Evaluating the efficiency of the Adult and Continuing Education Centres aligns with the Constitution, the Public Finance Act, and the Public Finance Management Act of 2015, all emphasizing prudent public resource management. Additionally, the effectiveness of the education system harmonizes with the goals of the Kenya Vision 2030, which seeks to enhance public service delivery by advancing administrative frameworks. This policy brief assesses the efficiency of Adult and Continuing Education Centres (ACEs) in arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs) of Kenya and subsequently offer policy recommendations for enhancing the efficiency of ACEs. The key highlights include:

- i) Arid counties have a relatively high efficiency in resource utilization drawn from the Directorate of Adult and Continuing Education (DACE) compared to the other semi-arid categories. Larger ACE Centres tend to operate with higher efficiency levels than their smaller counterparts. The larger ACE schools based on gross enrolment can absorb overhead and administrative costs more effectively, resulting in lower marginal costs and optimal resource utilization.
- ii) Internet access, digital literacy programmes, and electricity are critical determinants of ACE school efficiency. It is important to prioritize investments in digital infrastructure.
- iii) Low publicity, advocacy and awareness creation are attributed to low visibility of the ACE programme on the ground due to sparse distribution of the centres occasioned by inadequate staff and stigma associated with illiteracy.
- iv) Urban ACEs demonstrated higher levels of efficiency. Rural counterparts had lower efficiency majorly attributed to reduced access to resources and amenities.
- v) The key areas of intervention include enhancing access to electricity, expanding Internet coverage and digital literacy programmes, promoting enrolment in ACEs, and promoting economies of scale through consolidation.

Introduction

Education plays an important role in driving social and economic development, making it vital to ensure that investments in this sector yield optimal returns. Quality education is a major determinant of sustainable development, and achieving universal access to education is a key goal for governments worldwide. The literacy rate improved from 61.5 per cent in 2007 to 78 per cent in 2021, which was attributable to improved access to alternative education programmes, including adult education programmes, free primary and day secondary education.

Adult and Continuing Education Centres (ACEs) have been instrumental in providing education opportunities to out-of-school youth and adults in Kenya. As of 2017, there were 1,845 full-time instructors and 3,000 part-time instructors. The programme consists of 6,173 basic

centres and 202 secondary centres. The total number of learners in ACEs totals 306,228, with 102,076 males and 204,152 females (Ministry of Education 2018). Additionally, there are five Multi-Purpose Development Training Institutes (MDTIs) and 217 Community Learning Resource Centres (CLRCs). The Directorate offers Adult and Continuing Education through Basic Adult Literacy Programme (BALP), Post-Literacy Programme (PLP), Continuing Education Programmes (CEP) and Community Education and Empowerment (CEE). The number of ACE centres have experienced a gradual decline from 2018 to 2019 and 2020, reaching 5,340, 5,161 and 4,932 in the respective years (Ministry of Education 2020). This shows a 4.4 per cent decline from 2019 to 2020, which can be attributed to the departure of volunteer instructors from the ACE programme and the completion of projects sponsored by community-based

organizations (CBOs) and faith-based organizations (FBOs) (Ministry of Education, 2020). West Pokot, Nairobi City, and Kitui counties emerged with the highest number of ACEs, while Lamu, Isiolo, Tharaka Nithi, Tana River, and Mombasa had the lowest number of ACEs.

However, the ACEs face various gaps. Among these include shortage of instructors, mismanagement of funds, and inadequate infrastructure. Therefore, improving the efficiency of these centres to maximize the impact of government resources and funds allocated to them is critical. Optimizing the efficiency of Adult and Continuing Education Centres in Kenya is also essential for achieving inclusive and quality education for all (EFA). Therefore, the government through the Ministry of Education and DACE seeks to promote the optimal utilization of resources in ACEs in Kenya by evaluating the efficiency levels of these educational institutions and identify potential sources of inefficiency.

The target audience under ACEs include adults without formal education, those with limited educational attainment, out-of-school youth, individuals seeking professional development, lifelong learners, and special interest groups such as women, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and marginalized communities.

This policy brief focuses on the importance of assessing the efficiency of ACEs in arid and semi-arid regions of Kenya to ensure optimal utilization of allocated resources to the Directorate of Adult and Continuing Education (DACE). The findings from this evaluation could serve as a foundation for making informed decisions regarding investments and programmes aimed at reducing resource wastage within the Directorate and enhance the effectiveness of limited resources allocated, without incurring additional costs in Kenya. This policy brief draws from a comprehensive KIPPRA study (Murunga and Muema, 2023) focused on analyzing the efficiency of Adult and Continuing Education Centres in Arid and Semi-Arid Regions of Kenya.

Efficiency of ACEs in Kenya

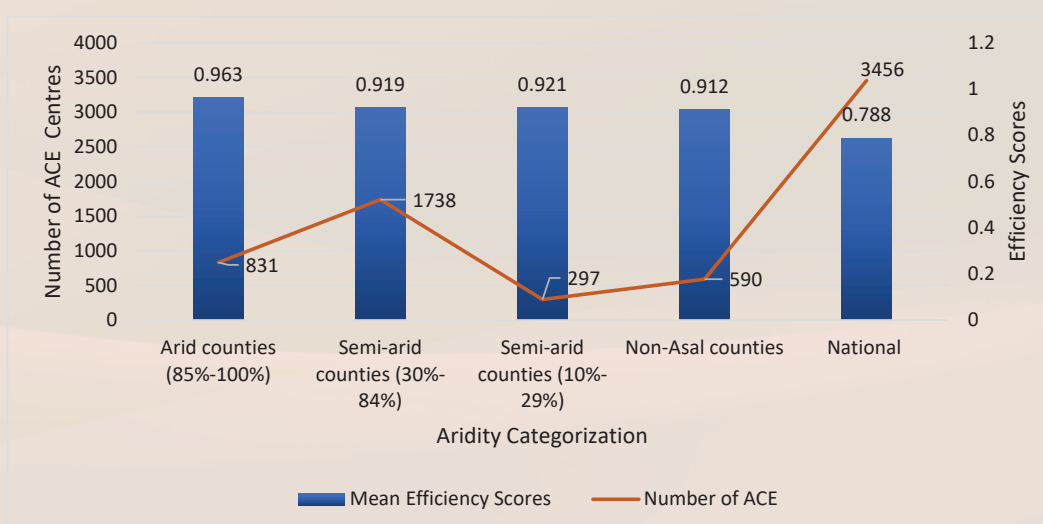
Kenya has made significant investments in its education sector to achieve milestones outlined in the Sustainable Development Goal 4 and the Kenya Vision 2030. However, findings reveal that inefficiencies persist across all categories of ACEs in Kenya, with an average technical efficiency of 78.8 per cent. To this end, there is room for improvement in learning outcomes for ACEs even with the existing level of input resources. The Figure below shows the number of ACEs in Kenya and corresponding mean efficiency scores based on aridity levels.

Arid counties demonstrated the highest average efficiency score (96.3%), hence relatively more efficient in resource utilization drawn from the Directorate compared to the other semi-arid categories, including semi-arid (30-84%), semi-arid (10-29%), non-ASAL with an efficiency score of 91.9, 92.1 and 91.2 per cent, respectively. Larger ACEs tend to operate with higher efficiency levels than their smaller counterparts. The larger ACE schools based on gross enrolment can absorb overhead and administrative costs more effectively, resulting in lower marginal costs and optimal resource utilization.

Urban schools demonstrated higher levels of efficiency attributed to improved access to resources and amenities in urban-based schools that help improve the quality and quantity of education offered and provide amenities that will improve optimal resource utilization. Internet access, digital literacy programmes, and electricity were identified as critical determinants of ACE school efficiency. Policy makers are urged to prioritize investments in digital infrastructure. It is important to enhance access to electricity, expanding Internet coverage and digital literacy programmes, promoting enrolment in ACEs, and promoting economies of scale through consolidation.

The existing framework of Adult and Continuing Education in Kenya reveals both progress and

Figure 1: ACEs numbers and mean efficiency scores based on aridity, 2020



Source: Own compilation

challenges. While the government has committed significant financial resources to this sector, the allocation remains insufficient, representing less than 1 per cent of the total education budget. The problem is compounded by inefficiencies that persist in the operation of ACEs, as evidenced by lower technical efficiency at national and county level. The education sector has over the years been granted the highest proportion of Kenya's national budget, securing a total of Ksh 628.6 billion for the fiscal year 2023-24, corresponding to 27.4 per cent of the projected national spending. However, the Directorate of ACEs remains significantly underfunded (Ministry of Education, 2023), hence assessing optimal utilization of the limited resources by the directorate is critical.

Prevailing Policy Framework under the Directorate

In terms of policy, the Directorate in charge of adult education is actively involved in shaping the landscape of Adult and Continuing Education in Kenya. This includes formulating policies that address aspects such as Adult and Continuing Education Policy, Literacy Assessment and Measurement, and the National Qualification Framework. Notable policy framework guiding the Directorate include the Constitution of Kenya 2010, the Kenya Vision 2030, Basic Education Act (2013), NESP, MTP III, and Sessional Papers. Through these policies, the Directorate seeks to create a conducive environment for learning, skill development, and educational advancement among adults.

Despite substantial investments by the Ministry of Education towards DACE, there are gaps in the current policy framework. These include:

i) Technological integration and ICT accessibility

In an increasingly digital world, the integration of technology in education is critical. The integration of ICT in ACE is yet to be fully implemented among the learners. The Directorate, in partnership with UNESCO, established a computer laboratory at St Peter Clavers ACE in Nairobi County, along with an e-learning centre in June 2011 focusing on ICT accessibility for the visually impaired. Several other centres, including Multi-Purpose Development Training Institutes (MDTIs), have also set up computer labs to provide computer training to youth and adult learners. This initiative aims to equip adults with essential digital skills to harness the benefits of the rapidly advancing digital sector. However, ACEs, particularly in ASALs, face challenges related to limited Internet connectivity and digital literacy programmes (KNBS, 2023), hindering their effectiveness in reaching learners. Barriers to enrolment in ACEs that persist

include stigma associated with illiteracy, which limits the potential benefits of economies of scale.

ii) Inadequate personnel within the Directorate

The scarcity of trained instructors, coupled with an over-reliance on volunteers, has led to limited human resources required to deliver quality education. The Directorate of Quality Assurance and Standards (DQAS) in the Ministry of Education have inadequate human resources, which is worsened by the deployment of its staff to other directorates in the Ministry of Education. Further, the capacity of the staff to develop, assess, and maintain inclusive education standards is weak. For example, a baseline survey found that DQAS officers were not assessing special schools and units, Adult and Continuing Education Centres, among other speciality areas, due to insufficient appropriate knowledge and skills.

MDTIs, critical for enhancing the capacity of both Directorate personnel and communities, are understaffed. The MDTIs have insufficient resources for accommodation, tuition, catering, and transportation, alongside heightened competition from local hospitality establishments. Scarcity of personnel is also evidenced across various tiers of the Directorate, spanning teaching staff, Sub-County officers, and support staff, which amplifies the difficulties faced by these institutes.

iii) Resource allocation by the Ministry of Education

The budget allocation for Adult and Continuing Education is disproportionately low compared to other segments of the education sector. This financial constraint hampers the ability of ACEs to function optimally and limits the scope of services they can offer. The ACE programme has consistently grappled with low budgetary allocations, receiving less than 1 per cent of the total national education budget. This limited funding has resulted in sub-optimal outcomes in the execution, oversight, and assessment of ACE initiatives. Instructors and learners have often resorted to personal funds for purchasing stationery and other educational resources, deterring potential participants. This cost-sharing approach has rendered the programme less appealing compared to Free Primary Education and Free Day Secondary Education initiatives as a result of the scarcity of teaching and learning materials. Community Learning Resource centres are inadequately equipped, hindering their ability to foster a culture of reading within the communities they serve. The table below shows the proportion of ACE funding against total allocation to the Ministry of Education.

Table 1: Proportion of ACE funding against Ministry's total allocation

Financial Year	MoE Budget Allocation (Ksh million)	DACE Budget Allocation (Ksh million)	Percentage of Ministry's Budget
2017/2018	416,000	971.4	0.23%
2018/2019	494,800	1010.7	0.20%
2019/2020	473,400	1133.0	0.24%
2020/2021	505,200	960.9	0.19%
2021/2022	503,900	801.6	0.16%

Source: Ministry of Education

To enhance accessibility, retention, and the overall quality of ACE, the Ministry of Education may prioritize budgetary provision dedicated to the procurement of essential teaching and learning materials, thereby alleviating the financial burden on learners, supported by sustainable financial investment strategies. The Directorate of Adult and Continuing Education Centres is proposed to be transferred to the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) department for adequate resources mobilization and allocation from the Ministry of Education.

iv) Geographical disparities of ACE

When distribution of ACEs across counties are assessed, distribution disparities emerge. Some regions have a higher concentration of centres, while others, particularly in ASALs, face a shortage. This inequality in access to ACE services calls for a more balanced and targeted approach. Urban ACEs exhibit greater technical efficiency compared to their rural counterparts attributed to the higher enrolment and higher concentration of ACEs compared to their rural counterparts. Location-specific policies may be enacted, such as dedicating more resources including infrastructural funds and quality teachers to rural-based ACE centres.

v) Low publicity, advocacy, and awareness creation

The Adult and Continuing Education programme experiences limited awareness mainly due to its low presence on the ground caused by a shortage of staff. The stigma associated with illiteracy is also a major challenge towards effective implementation of ACE programmes. Community Learning Resource centres are inadequately equipped, hindering their ability to foster a culture of reading within the communities they serve. The focus may be directed towards increased visibility, advocacy efforts, and proper resource allocation to these centres.

vi) Limited quality assurance and standards

The absence of a structured curriculum hampers the ability of ACEs to provide standardized and quality basic education. A standardized curriculum for primary and secondary education is essential to ensure that learners acquire relevant and applicable skills that will smoothen their integration into formal education and higher learning education. The persistent misappropriation of allocated funds has hindered the construction of essential infrastructure, such as classrooms and sanitation facilities. This financial mismanagement has resulted in insufficient suitable learning environments for students.

Policy Recommendations

The following policy recommendations will help improve the effectiveness of the already allocated funds to the Directorate of Adult and Continuing Education Centres (DACE) towards ensuring optimal resource utilization by the Directorate:

- i) Increase budgetary allocations to enhance leverage on economies of scale: The government could consider increasing the budget allocation for adult and continuing education to internationally accepted level of 3 per cent of the Ministry of Education's allocation. This increased funding will enable ACEs to expand their programmes, improve infrastructure, and enhance the quality of education provided and reduce the cost of production while maintaining a higher level of output (improved efficiency).
- ii) Collaborate with the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) to devise an alternative curriculum tailored for adult learners. This initiative aims to gradually replace Non-Formal Education (NFE) with a more robust and sustainable framework for continuing education, aligned with the principles of lifelong learning. This will help attract targeted students and thereby increase enrolment and realize economies of scale.
- iii) Enhance monitoring and evaluation: Implementing a monitoring and evaluation framework will allow for continuous assessment of the efficiency and effectiveness of ACE centres. This will enable timely adjustments and improvements in resource allocation and programme delivery.
- iv) Address geographical disparities: A targeted approach to establishing new ACE centres may be adopted, with a specific focus on areas with limited

access to formal education. This will help ensure that education services are equitably distributed across all counties.

- v) Enhance access to electricity: Implement measures to provide reliable and accessible electricity in all ASALs, particularly in areas with lower ACE spending efficiency.
- vi) Expand Internet coverage and digital literacy programmes: Increase efforts to extend Internet coverage and promote digital literacy programmes to enable ACEs to leverage technology for enhanced learning experiences. To bridge the digital divide, initiatives to improve Internet connectivity and digital literacy programmes may be prioritized, especially in ASALs. This will enable ACEs to leverage technology for more effective teaching and learning.
- vii) Promote enrolment in ACEs: Launch awareness campaigns, targeted outreach efforts, and policies that remove barriers to access. Larger ACEs tend to operate more efficiently, potentially leading to better outcomes.
- viii) Promoting economies of scale: Encourage the consolidation of smaller ACEs within the same locality, where feasible, to achieve economies of scale.
- ix) Location-based policies: Develop policies that address the unique challenges faced by rural ACEs, such as improving access to resources and amenities.
- x) Investment in digital infrastructure: Prioritize investments in digital infrastructure, including improving Internet connectivity and providing adequate training in digital skills to both learners and educators.

xi) Implement an induction programme for Quality Assurance and Standards Officers (QASOs) to enhance their understanding of the Adult and Continuing Education (ACE) programme.

xii) Conduct a comprehensive review and development of assessment tools tailored to the specific needs of the ACE programme.

The Directorate has been significantly underfunded over the years, hampering service delivery. Generally, the efficiency in fund utilization is based on strategic financial management. This involves proper budgeting and prioritization of expenditure, and ensuring essential activities receive precedence. Implementing cost control measures, negotiating favourable procurement deals, and tracking performance against key metrics are vital. Regular financial reporting and analysis enable adjustments as required, fostering a culture of transparency and accountability. Risk management and benchmarking against industry standards offer further insights. Leveraging technology, conducting audits, and providing staff with better training all ensures effective financial management. Finally, flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances completes the picture, ensuring resources are optimized for maximum impact.

Revitalizing the ACE sector is therefore crucial for providing quality education to adults and out-of-school youth. By implementing these recommendations, the government could address the longstanding challenges and unlock the full potential of ACEs in Kenya. Efforts to enhance the efficiency and productivity of ACEs in Kenya can be achieved through targeted policy interventions mentioned above. By addressing gaps in the prevailing policy framework, Kenya could maximize the impact of its investments in education and pave way for sustainable socio-economic development.

References

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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.

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