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## Tightening Compliance of the Basic Education Act to Ensure Complete and Seamless Transition Across All Levels of Schooling

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The government has focused on enrolment of children of school-going age into the schooling system, culminating in continued significant growth in enrolment rates over the years. Little focus is however directed to retention of these students in the schooling system, leading to a significant number of them dropping out or not transitioning to the next level of education. Therefore, most of the potential labour supply is characterized by those with only up to primary school level of education. The skills largely acquired through the education system and training are crucial in executing development projects under Kenya's Vision 2030.

### Introduction

In year 2000 at the World Education Forum in Dakar, the Government of Kenya committed to achieving *Education for All* by 2015. This was then domesticated through the 2010 Constitution of Kenya which recognizes the right to basic education for all children within the country's borders. The government has carried out various reforms such as enactment of the Basic Education Act and the Children's Act to improve access and provide compulsory basic education to all children. Other efforts include the introduction of Free Primary Education Programme in 2003, Free Day Secondary Education in 2008, development of the policy framework for Alternative Provision of Basic Education and Training (APBET), and the Homegrown School Feeding Programme both in 2009. These interventions, coupled with increased government expenditure in

education to support infrastructure growth, has seen a 66.3% growth in primary school enrolment in the period 2000 to 2016 and a more than 200% growth in secondary school enrolment over the same period.

Despite this marked improvement in enrolment rates, the retention rates of these students in school over their schooling life has fallen. For example, there were 3.49 million primary school level drop outs between 2000 and 2016, while 30% of the cohorts from 2000 - 2007 through to 2009 -2016 who enrolled in class 1 did not make it to complete class 8. A further 38% of KCPE candidates failed to transit to secondary level of education after sitting the primary school national examinations. The transition rates have averaged at approximately 67% from 2004 to 2016 against average completion rate of 79.7%. Failure to follow up and reinstate these students increases

their likelihood of them ending up in the labour market, thus driving up the levels of unskilled labour in the labour market.

### **Challenges of Retention**

Cultural practices such as early marriages, domestic chores, early pregnancy and the perception of maturity associated with circumcision; and socio-economic factors such as poverty, hidden cost of education (school levy, costs of uniforms) and repetition are challenges associated with school drop outs.

Efforts such as the Homegrown School Feeding programme, mobile learning for pastoralist children, and provision of sanitary towels to girls in public schools are geared towards encouraging enrolment and continued schooling for these pupils. However, these measures have not been adequate to address school dropout. Moreover, there have been little effort to establish the reasons for drop out from the schooling system. There have been no effective institutions and structures to monitor year on year progression of the pupils.

Further, while policies such as re-entry for young mothers who get pregnant during schooling have been enforced, progress in terms of numbers is unreported. Measures around handling the stigma after bearing children to encourage them to stay in school are yet to be addressed. Thus, as a country, the issue of drop out is not well enumerated and illuminated to attract the attention of policy makers.

The structure of the educational system is also a contributor to drop out numbers as it requires students to sit for a final national examination after eight (8) years of schooling. Despondent students who have continuously struggled to perform up the primary school academic ladder, on completion of KCPE, perceive further education as more of an option than a necessity. Some students, on completion of

the primary school national examinations, feel they have achieved a milestone enough to mark the end to their educational journey. This mindset has contributed to increased drop out and suppressed primary to secondary school transition rates.

Currently, the role of ensuring that there are no barriers to the right to quality basic education are domiciled at the National Education Board and cascaded to the County Education Boards. These institutions are expected to ensure that all children attend and remain in school to complete basic education requirements and transit to the next level of education especially for marginalized and vulnerable children. The head teachers who are further down the chain are expected to investigate circumstances surrounding children absence from schooling. They provide reports to the county boards and these are escalated to the Cabinet Secretary for Education. Unfortunately, there are no field officers or dedicated teams to follow through drop out cases and reinstate these pupils back to school. Moreover, all these stakeholders have other internally-competing mandates that could be drawing attention away from working to retain these children in school.

The government needs to pay more attention on retention to achieve education for all. This means adopting policies with a wider scope and incorporating pertinent concerns on the number of drop outs and those not transiting to the next level of education.

### **Opportunities to Enhance Retention in Primary Schools**

The government could establish a special dedicated team within the National and County Education Boards to closely monitor retention in primary schools by tracing pupils who do not report back to school and try to understand the circumstances surrounding their failure to advance through the education system. Unlike leaving this mandate open to the education boards

at both county and national levels, these teams will not have competing mandates and will therefore be focused on attaining 100% completion rates in primary school, short only of natural attrition.

Secondly, a legal framework is required to guide the National and County Education Boards in ensuring barriers to basic education are removed, and all children attend and remain to complete basic education. This regulation would stipulate a period upon which County Boards need to act on head-teacher's report on drop outs and provide steps to be taken when such cases are reported. The framework could provide for establishment of a dedicated team to deal with cases of absenteeism. Such a team could be mandated to produce reports on number of drop outs, reasons for dropping out, action taken or to be taken and how to deal with stigma associated with students who enrol back to the system because of early pregnancy. This report could form part of the Board's main Agenda in any sitting.

Thirdly, there is need to develop a data bank on number of recorded drop outs and action taken to revert or ensure all school age going children are in school. The data bank could be domiciled at the county with the County Education Boards. Head teachers would then be tasked with furnishing the responsible persons at the Board for regular updating. This will help illuminate the issue of drop outs leaving the schooling system on an annual basis and therefore bring it to the attention of stakeholders on this issue.

The reporting of such data could also be done on official national records such as the Statistical Abstracts, and Economic Survey, prepared by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. This would help bring to light the issue of a growing potential work force characterized by only primary school education.

Finally, there is need to change the focus of the main basic education examination. The current structure of the educational system requires students to sit for a final national examination after eight years of schooling for them to proceed to the next level of education. Students are then enrolled to secondary school based on their performance. At this stage, further education is perceived as more of an option than a necessity. This puts students under immense pressure, leading to a feeling that they have achieved a milestone enough for them to the end to their educational journey. Mindset re-adjustment by engaging these young people in useful conversation is important to counsel them through this transition which has seen increased drop outs and suppressed primary to secondary school transition rates. Also, the main examination could instead focus on categorizing students based on their areas of interest as reflected in their performance, and allow students to choose the subject they would like to further in their next level of education. In fact, the lower levels of secondary school could be intertwined with primary school to ensure seamless transition.

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