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Actualising Strategies for Improving Access, Equity and Retention in Educating the Hard to Reach; A Case of Turkana County

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Abstract
The equity consideration in the provision of Basic education is perhaps one single factor that many countries have come to regard as critical in planning for their childrens’ education. The hard to reach are mainly nomadic pastoralist communities whose environment is harsh and lifestyles are too conservative to be responsive to education. The government of the republic of Kenya and many partners which include governmental and non governmental organizations have for many years implemented innovative education programmes in Turkana county as it has been done in many other Arid and Semi Arid counties as well as in urban slums in order to increase participation in basic education. These interventions which include Mobile Schools, Low Cost Boarding Schools, The School Meals Programme and School Enrolment Drives among others have however, achieved a marginal impact as they are not sustainable and are too inadequate to achieve improvement in child education in the long run (Bartenge 2016). Gross and net enrolment rates are still low. The dropout rates are high while retention rates are low. This paper noted that despite the many costly interventions mounted in the county, their impact is not as significant as desired. Apart from the programmes being inadequate and unsustainable, they are often implemented with little or no regard to community input and involvement. The budgets for operations are often higher than for deliverables in terms of educational outputs. The paper therefore recommends that the organizations sponsoring these interventions as well as the ministry of education ought to reconsider their strategy. Interventions should be community driven and stakeholder input be factored in to increase ownership. Budget lines for outputs to be increased and sustainability Mechanisms be built into the planning cycles of the programmes. Coordination strategies for various partners be improved to avoid duplication of interventions.

1.0 Introduction
Treaties and Laws worldwide clearly recognize that education is a fundamental human right (UNESCO 2014) Furthermore, Education imparts knowledge and skills that enable people to realize their full potential and hence catalyses the achievement of other development goals (UNESCO 2014).

It is further argued that Education reduces poverty and boosts jobs and growth (ibid). Despite this emphasis on the importance of Education it is noteworthy that attaining equity in many parts of the world is still dogged by many challenges. UNESCO (2012) while reporting on education for all (EFA) Global Monitoring observed that progress in reducing numbers of children out of school had stalled, yet the potential for achieving Universal Primary Education (UPE) depends on the speed with which countries succeed in reducing overall numbers of children out of school (UNESCO 2012).

Education for all (EFA) Goal 2 sought to ensure by 2015 all children, particularly girls children in
difficult circumstances as well as those belonging to ethnic minorities have access to and complete free and compulsory Education of good quality. However, two years beyond the 2015 timeline this target has not yet been achieved in Kenya and other developing Countries. This is more so in the hard to reach parts of these countries.

1.1.1 The Situation In Kenya
In Kenya particularly, despite the government opening doors to Universal Primary Education (UPE) 2003 – a delayed promise of education for all (EFA) goals in 1990, the situation has not changed much (MOE-KO-OPEC, 2012). Through this initiative which was supported by various legislations, the children’s Act Cap 586 Laws of Kenya, and others, the flooding of school going and Elder persons to Primary School did not “break the walls of inequity” that had earlier prevented many children from attending school despite the lowered cost.

It was estimated that over 2 million children aged 6-13 years were out of school by 2015, the EFA timeline year.

This figure is mainly concentrated in specific pockets of the Arid, semi-Arid, urban Slums and other hard to reach Counties and Sub counties of Kenya. (ILO/IPEC 2012). Uwezo 2012 pointed out that 40% of children aged 6-16 years are out of school in specific counties of West Pokot, Turkana and Samburu. These counties have common features – ARID land with scarcity of water, pastoralist and nomadic lifestyles and conservative cultures, that pose as a serious challenge to progressive attitudes that embrace education.

1.1.2 The Status of Education in Turkana County
Turkana is the largest but poorest County in Kenya. It occupies the North Western part of the County boardering three counties – Uganda, Sudan and Ethiopia. This place is one of the places affected by the age long concept of marginalization in the country every aspect of it therefore lagged behind including education(Lotir 2016).

Turkana county has a child rich population, where 0-14 year olds constitute 46% of the total population (Transparency International Kenya 2014). It is noteworthy that this population bracket, 4-14 years is the age during which children are expected to be enrolled in Primary School (Official Primary School going age) yet the net enrollment rate for the Primary Sub Sector in Turkana was 58.8% by 2014 (GOK 2014). This implies that at least 41.2% of children who are supposed to be in school 04-14 years are out of school.

The arid county has 332 public primary schools whose enrolment stood at 130,380 by 2014 (CEB 2014). Owing to the sparse population and nomadic pastoralist nature of the inhabitants, schools are under enrolled and the distances between them are vast. It is not uncommon to travel for up to 30 kilometres from one school to another. Save the children International (2016) observes that the nomadic lifestyle of the Turkana community, high literacy levels among adults, chronic poverty, recurrent droughts and lack of awareness of the value of education among parents all serve to disrupt children’s education and compound the vulnerabilities of households. The figures in the tables below serve to paint a clearer picture of the situation in Turkana.

Table 1: Enrolment by Category- ECDE and Day Primary (Public and Private)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Enrolment Public 2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>Private 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECDE (All Ages)</td>
<td>44,348</td>
<td>38,626</td>
<td>82,974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary: Below 6 years</td>
<td>13,216</td>
<td>9,583</td>
<td>22,799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary: 6-13 years</td>
<td>38,024</td>
<td>32,152</td>
<td>70,176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary: Over 13 years</td>
<td>13,982</td>
<td>11,426</td>
<td>25,408</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Anyang (2020)
Table 2 Enrolment by Category: Low Cost Boarding and Mobile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Enrolment by Category</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2013</td>
<td></td>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOYS</td>
<td>GIRLS</td>
<td></td>
<td>BOYS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GIRLS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>GIRLS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>TOTAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Cost Boarding</td>
<td>19,531</td>
<td>16,290</td>
<td>35,821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile Schools</td>
<td>5,082</td>
<td>4,439</td>
<td>9,521</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 ECDE And Primary Gross And Net Enrolment Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrolment by Gender</th>
<th>Gross Enrolment Rate (GER)</th>
<th>Net Enrolment Rate NER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>TOT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECDE</td>
<td>60018</td>
<td>51638</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>126032</td>
<td>95136</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From table 1 above it is evident that transition from grade to grade, retention and completion rates are extremely low. The high drop out rate is evident that in 2014 for instance, enrolment in standard one was over five times higher than standard eight of the same year. The retention rate is very low while the drop out rate is very high. Cases of overage learners in primary school are evidently high. These statistics testify to the observation by the Ministry of Education through the National Education Sector Plan (NESP) 2015 that a myriad of challenges face the sector in Turkana:-

i. The mobile nature of the community makes the provision of formal learning difficult, as families tend to migrate in search of pasture when drought strikes their current settlements. These movements disadvantage school going children.

ii. There are persistent security issues in the County especially at the Boarders with Pokots, Karamojong, Toposa and Donyiro as well as with the Merile. Raids, skirmishes and attacks from and with neighbours often force schools to close virtually disrupting the school programmes as well as forcing teachers to be constantly in a state of worry and panic.

iii. Low Cost Boarding Schools which is one of the innovations to address the issue of the nomadic nature of families do not have a meaningful impact. The schools do not have adequate boarding facilities hence the boarding is inadequate and is below expected standard of quality.

iv. Children in Turkana have to travel long distances in order to access Education owing to large distances between schools.

v. Transparency International (2015) noted that governance structures in schools in Turkana are weak hence undermining transparency and accountability as well as prudent management of resources expended by the many partners that the County has attracted.

vi. Though there are many partners that support education in the county, little impact has been achieved owing to weak co-ordination of the players. Each partner enters Solo to the field and introduces interventions that are pre-determined by their head office with little regard to the needs of the Education Sector. This inhibits full implementation of interventions which most of the time do not achieve the desired impact. Furthermore the operations budgets of the Agencies often are greater than the actual support that reaches the target.

vii. Turkana culture is largely conservative and hence does not freely accommodate school Education. Many families still regard children going to school as ‘wasted’ and hence given to the government. Families would rather have their children take care of family livestock than go to school. The healthiest brightest looking children are ‘retained’ to perpetuate valuable culture. This scenario is a serious setback to expanding access strengthening retention and achieving completion rates, which is a pathway to achieving EFA.
viii. High levels of poverty impact very negatively on schooling and attainment of Education for all. Most families are unable to afford even the most basic of their needs. The inability to provide the children’s basic needs impacts negatively on children Education.

ix. Pastoralism and Fishing do contribute to sizeable number of children staying away from school to engage in fishing and herding of their family livestock. Other challenges include very unfavourable ratios such as Primary pupil teacher ratio which is 77.3, the highest in the County, against the national average of 30.4, while the Average class size is 77 pupils per class compared to the National average of 34. The Pupil toilet ratio is 99 against the national average of 21 (GOK 2012)

x. The barriers discussed above have however been addressed by the government and other partners with a limited degree of success.

2.0. Notable Players in Education in Turkana

(i) Government of Kenya
(ii) Catholic Diocese of Lodwar
(iii) United Nations High Commission for Refugee (UNHCR)
(iv) United Nations Children’s Fund (UNCEF)
(v) Windle Trust International
(vi) International Labour Organization (ILO)
(vii) County Government of Turkana
(viii) World Food Programme (WFP)
(ix) Save The Children International
(x) World Vision
(xi) Oxfam

Table 4 Educational Interventions Offered by Key Organizations in Turkana County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serial No</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Intervention offered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Government of Kenya</td>
<td>Funding, Provide Teachers, Supervision of curriculum implementation, Policy formulation, Support for the school meals programme, Infrastructure development,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Catholic Diocese of Lodwar</td>
<td>Provide support teachers, School meals programme, Spiritual direction in schools, Infrastructure development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>United Nations High Commission for Refugee (UNHCR)</td>
<td>Manages education in the refugee camp Pays for teachers Puts up infrastructure Supplies students with provisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund (UNCEF)</td>
<td>Provides girls with sanitary packs, Pays stipend to teachers of mobile schools, Funds enrolment related programs Supports re-entry of girls that may have dropped out of school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Windle Trust International</td>
<td>Engage teachers to alleviate the shortage Support mentorship programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>International Labour Organization (ILO)</td>
<td>Implements anti child labour programmes Advocacy for protection of children against child labour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>County Government of Turkana</td>
<td>Financing infrastructure for ECDE centres. Employment of care givers for ECDE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>World Food Programme (WFP)</td>
<td>Provide food to all public schools to attract enrolment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ngugi (2016) observes that valued needs of learners remain unmet inspite of global efforts to increase enrolments for several decades now. This observation is true of the efforts that government and non governmental organizations have put into place trying to improve access to education, retention, completion, quality and equity in ASAL counties of Kenya in general, and Turkana in particular. Despite heavy expenditure in Education related interventions in Turkana by the players listed above, the state of Education in the County still remains below average compared to the rest of Kenya. A number of noteworthy interventions have been supported by the various players, cited above among others.

2.1.0 The School Meals Programme
The World Food Organization(WFO) has since 1980 in partnership with the National Government of Kenya as well as Catholic Diocese of Lodwar provided food to all Primary School Children in form of a hot midday meal. This programme serves as an incentive to attract children to school and possibly retain them. The world food programme was initially procuring food and transporting it to schools. A new model, the Home Grown School Meals Programme has since a few years ago been rolled out. Schools are given cash to purchase food. This fosters ownership of the programme. School meals no doubt protect vulnerable children from hunger and offer a regular source of nutrients essential for children’s mental and physical development.(WFP 2017). Additionally a school meal provides a strong incentive to families to send their children to school as early as possible and keep them there. It helps increase school enrolment and attendance and decrease drop out. However, it is noteworthy that even with the school meals, as children mature, there is a tendency to drop out and engage in family chores, largely pastoralism and to perpetuate cultural values. To a significant number of children, the school meal is not a means to get Education to finish but a means to a different end – grow strong enough to be able to take care of livestock as well as engage in raiding in order to increase the herds. Another support incentive therefore is required to eliminate the dropping out and improve retention and completion.

2.2 Mobile Schools
The mobile schools concept was an innovation that actualized the attempt to provide viable quality Education to nomadic pastoralists by local communities, non profit making organizations Faith Based Organizations and the government. Aimed at increasing access to education through the provision of culturally and religiously appropriate basic Education to children who would have missed out on Basic Education, Ole Koissaba (2013) suggests that the concept of mobile school in Turkana in particular be given a fresh look by possibly giving a serious restructuring by for instance setting teacher training benchmarks and investing heavily on supervision and standardization of curriculum delivery. Furthermore, Enrolments in Mobile Schools have been declining in the recent years (Ngugi 2016). The withdrawal of food by the WFP has impacted on the enrolment in these schools considerably.

With the handicaps created by the challenges cited above that face mobile schools in Turkana, this paper suggests that the concept of mobile school in Turkana in particular be given a fresh look by possibly giving a serious restructuring by for instance setting teacher training benchmarks and investing heavily on supervision and standardization of curriculum delivery and structuring assessment. These measures could be arrived at by improving advancement to regular school. Partners in Education who have substantially invested in the mobile school in Turkana should refocus and lay fresh emphasy on...
measurable outcomes and impact by demanding for deliverables such as improved literacy rates, higher transition rates and visibly higher advancement levels.

2.3 Low Cost Boarding Schools
Low Cost Boarding Schools (LCBs) is one of the innovations which is an alternative way of ensuring access retention, equity and completion to Basic Education in ASAL Counties of Kenya. Totally Integrated Quality Education and training (TIQEF) (1999) advanced LCBs as the best way for achieving access and Equity in Kenya. It suggests that we increase low cost boarding schools in arid regions to enable children of Pastoralists communities who are basically nomads to be held and retained in school, even as their parents migrate in search of pasture and water. Furthermore LCBs are intended to provide children with a secure conducive learning environment away from home which most of time is characterized by trauma, and family conflicts, cattle rustling and the dangers of early marriages (Mukhula 2014). Low Cost Boarding schools ideally do also give the child more study time, as well as mitigating challenges that children face in Arid and nomadic environments. By 2014, over 37000(28%) primary school children enrolled in Turkana County Primary Schools were in Low Cost Boarding Schools (GOK2014). The schools are funded by the government using a capitation rate of Ksh. 4000 per child per year. Partners such as United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) have substantially supported these schools by providing Boarding equipment such as beds mattresses and Wash facilities.

The Low Cost Boarding Schools (LCB) have arguably impacted positively in improving access and retention in Turkana, it is however noteworthy that their impact has not been optimized in view of the shaky enrolment, retention and completion rates. The schools are still dogged by a number of challenges including overcrowding, poor sanitation and lack of teachers houses. In some schools the author of this paper who worked in the County as County Director of Education witnessed some of the children spend the night outside the dorm on the dormitory courtyard due to inadequate space.

Teachers live in ‘Manyattas’ as they play custodians of the children. This scenario calls for improvement of the Boarding facilities as well as provision of teachers’ accommodation for it to have a meaningful capacity to enroll accommodate and retain children.

2.3 School Enrolment Drives
One of the latest innovations geared towards increasing enrolment in Turkana is the United nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) sponsored County Enrolment Drive(CED). The drives entail an organized outreach to communities, homes and households looking for schools age children who are not in school with a view of persuading them their parents and guardians to return them to school. The strategy involves a dialogue at the sub-localational level between Education officials, chiefs, their assistants and village Elders on one hand and parents and guardians on the other hand. Officers would be facilitated with allowances and transport to reach out to communities. The strategy further involved parents giving their view of what keeps children out of school and what could be done to have them back to school.

The drives are noted to have borne some fruits in form of more children enrolling in school. These include average boys and girls that may either have dropped out of school or may not have been enrolled at all. It is however instructive to note that many of he children who retun to school as a result of the drives, more often than not drop out before completing.it is advised hat a retention strategy for these learners be crafted in order to fully actualize the benefits of the strategy.

3.0 Conclusion
Despite the heavy investment and expenditures by various partners in educational interventions, the state of education in Turkana remains bellow average compared to the rest of Kenya. The school meals programme require an additional support programme to ensure retention in school, of children attracted to be enrolled as a result of the school meals programme, as a good number of children dropm out of school to take care of family livestock as soon as they grow old or strong enough to do so. The concept of Mobile schoolbe re-addressed and restructured in order to mitigate the challenges facing it currently such as lack of qualified teachers and weak supervision mechanisms. Investment be made in...
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supervisory structures for mobile schools in order for mobile schools to deliver the anticipated outcomes. The low cost boarding school which evidently has been the lifeline of education in Turkana and other ASAL counties be rethought out focusing on expansion of the boarding facilities and provision of accommodation for teachers in order to strengthen the supervision of instructional programmes in the boarding schools. County Enrolment Drives (CED) which in the past achieved good returns in form of more children enrolling in school, as more often than not children enrolling out of the drives end dropping out before completing. It is further recommended that a coordination mechanism that brings all partners together to avoid duplication of programs and interventions hence achieving minimal impact.

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