



Factsheet: Education in Kenya

Kenya is in East Africa and lies on the Equator. It is a popular tourist destination due to its outstanding scenery and wildlife. It has a population of around 45 million and average life expectancy is 62 years. Kenya's GDP is \$60.9 billion and annual GDP growth is around 5%.¹ GNI per capita (average income per person) is \$1,209² but there is high inequality with 58% of the population living on less than \$2 per day.³ Kenya is ranked 147th out of 186 countries in the Human Development Index (HDI) and has recently been classified as a lower middle income country.⁴

Education in Kenya

In recent years, Kenya has made good progress in getting more children into school. The government of Kenya gives education a relatively high priority, allocating 24% of its total budget to fund it.⁵ Compared with other sub-Saharan African countries, a relatively small proportion (around 4%) of the education budget is funded by aid.⁶ Net enrolment in primary education is over 80%⁷ but some pupils are forced to drop out: 63% of boys and 68% of girls complete primary school.⁸ More than a million Kenyan children are still out of school.⁹ Although Kenya's education statistics look relatively good, the education system struggles to reach the most marginalised children and young people: the rural poor, particularly girls, are much less likely to make it to school than their urban, and richer, counterparts.

In 2008, the Kenyan government introduced its Free Day Secondary Education (FDSE) Policy. This led to an increase in secondary school enrolment rates, although they are still fairly low: 33.1% in 2012, up from 20.5% in 2005. The number of children transitioning from primary to secondary school rose from 57.3% to 73.3% during the same period. Although, in theory, secondary school is now free in Kenya the reality is that the government pays a subsidy to public secondary schools only, and most schools still charge fees. Public schools tend to be over-crowded and poorly resourced and therefore offer a lower quality of education. If they have enough money to do so, most Kenyan parents will send their children to the better resourced, less populated, private schools. Furthermore, the indirect costs of schooling (uniforms, books, travel etc) still mean that, even with subsidised fees, secondary schooling is beyond the reach of many families. These indirect costs are still twelve to twenty times as

¹ World Bank Development Indicators, 2014

² ibid

³ World Bank/Ameena project

⁴ Human Development Index 2014

⁵ UNESCO, 2012

⁶ Education for All Global Monitoring Report: Factsheet: Education in Kenya, 2012

⁷ Male 82%, female 83% (UNICEF's 'State of the World's Children 2015' statistical tables)

⁸ UNESCO, 2012

⁹ Education for All Global Monitoring Report: Factsheet: Education in Kenya, 2012

much as the monthly income of parents in rural areas.¹⁰ There is also a gender gap between boys and girls at secondary schools: the gender parity index worsened from 0.89 in 2005 to 0.86 in 2010.¹¹ Youth from disadvantaged backgrounds are least likely to complete secondary school and therefore have the opportunity to gain skills for decent work, and the ability to work their way out of poverty: 32% of young women and 27% of young men in rural areas have less than a lower secondary education.¹²

Kenya has 33 universities, of which 26 are private and 7 state funded. Only around 4% of Kenyans progress onto tertiary education - this level of education is generally only possible for those from the richest parts of Kenyan society. Only half of those who enrol in tertiary education actually graduate.¹³ The average higher education course costs around \$1,400 per year¹⁴ – with a GNI per capita of \$1,209 and 58% of the population living on less than \$2 per day this is far beyond the reach of most families. Many pupils are also unable to progress to university as they do not get the required grades in their secondary school exams (KCSE): three quarters of candidates do not get the minimum grades needed for admission to university or other middle level colleges.¹⁵ Having said this, as more children are completing secondary school there is more demand for university places and there are limited resources for universities to expand to cope with this increased demand. There is also a considerable backlog of applications to Kenya’s universities as demand outstrips supply of university places. The government offers significant subsidies to both public and private universities to the highest performing students at KCSE. However, there is a mismatch between the skills offered by universities and the demands of the labour market meaning that many graduates are not ‘job ready’ and therefore struggle to find employment.



Taita Taveta County

Rafiki Thabo’s work in Kenya is concentrated in Taita Taveta County. Taita Taveta is about 200 km northwest of Mombasa and 360 km southeast of Nairobi. The capital is Mwatate and other main towns include Voi, Wundanyi and Taveta. The population of the county is 284,657 and it covers 17,083.9 square km. 66% of Taita Taveta’s population live on < \$2 per day, compared to 58% nationally, and rely on subsistence agriculture for their livelihood.

There are more boys than girls in primary schools in Taita Taveta but this trend is reversed in secondary schools, which have 52% girls and 48% boys. The greatest cause of drop outs (50%) at secondary school level is lack of school fees. 60% of Taita Taveta’s population have completed primary education and 21% have completed secondary level education or above.¹⁶

¹⁰ ibid

¹¹ National Education Sector Plan, Ministry of Education, 2015

¹² ibid

¹³ Trends in Tertiary Education: Sub-Saharan Africa, UNESCO, 2010

¹⁴ Based on fees paid by Rafiki Thabo Foundation in 2015

¹⁵ National Education Sector Plan, Ministry of Education, 2015

¹⁶ Exploring Kenya’s Inequality: Pulling Apart or Pooling Together? Taita Taveta County. KNBS, SID, 2013

Secondary education standards in Taita Taveta have declined in recent years and a task force was established in 2013 to investigate the reasons, and remedies, for this decline.¹⁷

Key challenges facing the Kenyan education sector

Like the education sectors in most sub-Saharan African countries, the Kenyan education sector faces lots of challenges. Public schools and universities are under-resourced as budgets are limited, classrooms are full, and there are not enough teachers. Kenya's success in increasing the number of children attending public secondary schools has led to a worsening in quality as the government has been unable to increase the number of teachers at the same rate as the number of children attending school so the pupil:teacher ratio has worsened. In 1999, the ratio stood at 1:32 but it rose to 1:47 between 1999 and 2010. This is compared to an average of 1:43 across sub-Saharan Africa and 1:24 worldwide.¹⁸ The increase in enrolment has also resulted in lower availability of textbooks for students to use in school.¹⁹

The Ministry of Education acknowledges that such challenges have an impact on the sector's relevance, equity and quality. In particular, they highlight challenges in teacher development, inefficient school management, weak linkages between the education system and the labour market, low progression from secondary to tertiary education, and inadequate access to education for children with special needs.

The future of the education sector

The government of Kenya is taking positive steps to address the challenges listed above. The main policy document guiding the development of the sector is the [National Education Sector Plan](#) (2013-2018). This document takes into account wider Kenyan policy frameworks, including Vision 2030, its Medium Term Plan 2013-2017, the Jubilee Manifesto (2012) and the Public Financial Management Act (2012). Other initiatives include a draft policy on gender and education, a draft policy on Open and Distance Learning (ODM), and the establishment of a task force to review all laws on education and training. The Ministry of Education's over-riding objective is 'to ensure equitable access, attendance, retention, attainment and achievement in education, science, research and technology by ensuring affordability of education services.'²⁰ It is encouraging that the government recognises and wants to address the key challenges facing the sector.

The global community has also recently endorsed the Global Goals, including Goal 4 on Quality Education. This aims to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' by 2030. It will be interesting to watch progress towards this goal in Kenya.



¹⁷ The Task Force Report on Causes and Remedies to the Declining Standards of Secondary Education in Taita Taveta County, December 2013

¹⁸ Education for All Global Monitoring Report: Factsheet: Education in Kenya, 2012

¹⁹ Education for All Global Monitoring Report, 2012

²⁰ National Education Sector Plan (2013-2018), Ministry of Education