



Policy Brief:
**Expanding Inclusion of
Learning Opportunities
for All -Kenya**

Policy Dialogues Series

Introduction

Kenya has made significant strides towards realising the right to education for every child and continues to take measures towards continuous improvement. The introduction of free primary education in 2003, free day secondary education in 2008 and 100% transition from primary to secondary school have successfully increased access to education.¹ Building on this, the Ministry of Education (MOE) embarked on education reforms through the introduction of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in 2017 and progress towards reviewing the teacher training curriculum. However, significant gaps remain in the achievement of equity and inclusion in education in Kenya, particularly for girls, learners with special needs, learners from low-income households, and other marginalised groups. For instance, as of 2019, 19.6% of the rural population had never been to school compared to 8.8% of the urban population. Similarly, 16.6% of girls dropped out of school compared to 14.7% of boys.² These gaps were brought into sharp focus by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures taken by the government to mitigate the spread of the virus, such as school closures and the introduction of remote learning through the Kenya Basic Education COVID-19 Emergency Response Plan. Evidence demonstrated that only 22% of learners were able to access digital learning with a child in a private school being twice more likely to access digital learning than a child in a public school. Likewise, 20% of parents were not aware that their child could continue learning remotely, with the lack of awareness being more prevalent in marginalised counties such as Mandera where only 18% of parents were aware of the digital learning interventions.³ This indicates a correlation to wealth and geographical inequality.

It is against this background that The People's Action for Learning (PAL) Network,

with support from the INCLUDE Platform, organised six policy dialogues between September 2020 and June 2021, each lasting an hour and a half, with over 380 key stakeholders within the education sector, including representatives from the Ministry of Education (MOE), Kenya Institute for Curriculum Development (KICD), Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC), Kenya Institute of Special Education (KISE), Teachers Service Commission (TSC), schools, parents associations, legislators, civil society, faith based organisations (FBOs), academia, media and development partners. The participants interrogated the extent to which the education reforms and the measures taken to ensure continuity of learning during the school closures addressed educational challenges of exclusion and inequality in terms of geography, gender, access and quality.

¹ Ministry of Education, Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2019 on A Policy Framework for Reforming Education and Training for Sustainable Development in Kenya: Towards Realizing Quality, Relevant and Inclusive Education and Training for Sustainable Development (2019) p 4.

² Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census: Volume IV – Distribution of Population by Socio-Economic Characteristics (2019) p 14.

³ Usawa Agenda (Uwezo Kenya), Are Our Children Learning? The Status of Remote-learning among School-going Children in Kenya during the Covid-19 Crisis (2020).

Structure of the policy dialogues

The six policy dialogues focused on the following themes:

1. Expanding inclusion of learning opportunities, hosted by PAL Network and KICD on 24 September 2020
2. Expanding inclusion for learners with special needs, hosted by PAL Network and the Directorate of Special Needs Education on 13 October 2020
3. Expanding inclusion for learners from marginalised communities, hosted by PAL Network, the National Council for Nomadic Education in Kenya (NACONEK), MOE and KICD on 4 December 2020
4. Regularising home-schooling and community-based learning (CBL), hosted by PAL Network and the Directorate of Policy, Partnerships, and East African Community Affairs on 11 December 2020
5. Ensuring continuity of education for all children following the reopening of schools, hosted by PAL Network on 18 February 2021
6. Ensuring equity and inclusion in the deboarding debate hosted by PAL Network on 1 July 2021.

During each policy dialogue, representatives from the host institutions provided opening remarks after which the panel members shared brief highlights on the issue in focus, leaving time for a dialogue between the speakers and the participants who had the opportunity to raise questions and comments.

To provide the foundation and framing for the policy dialogues, PAL Network published three key reports:

1. The Stakeholder Mapping Report identifies all the education sector stakeholders in Kenya and provides useful

details on each of them. The report contributes to more effective policy formulation and implementation by providing a centralised, accessible repository that makes it easier to access information on which institutions should be consulted on specific issues, which ones to collaborate with, or hold accountable, for the implementation of particular policies.

2. The Education Policy Scan in response to the Basic Education Curriculum Framework Principles provides a review of education sector policies relevant to the achievement of the six guiding principles which underpin the implementation of the CBC. The policy scan establishes that the MOE has introduced several policies, laws and regulations that facilitate the realisation of the right to education and the roll-out of the CBC. It also identifies the policy gaps that remain, where policies are outdated, not fully implemented or entirely non-existent, as a means to facilitate dialogue amongst policy makers and other stakeholders to fill these gaps.
3. The Competency Based Curriculum Indicators of Success draws from the three main anticipated outcomes of the curriculum reform efforts in Kenya to present indicators or measures for the impact of CBC on learners and the country. While these indicators are not exhaustive, they are instrumental on moving forward the dialogue on collaboratively establishing an official set of indicators to determine the success of the curriculum reforms.



Objectives of the policy dialogues

The policy dialogues aimed to:

1. Build and sustain a network of researchers, policy makers, practitioners and other non-state actors to deliberate on emerging evidence on the impact of CBC on education quality and attainment for marginalised children to inform the formulation and implementation of programs.
2. Assemble and repackage evidence-based policy options that suggest different ways of addressing inclusion that benefits vulnerable people.
3. Review key policies on education in Kenya with a view of identifying gaps that hinder equity, inclusion and improved learning outcomes.

The following recommendations were drawn from the dialogues.

1. Expanding Inclusion of Learning Opportunities

The first policy dialogue held on 24 September 2020 was co-hosted by PAL Network and KICD to assess the out-of-classroom learning initiative introduced by KICD which sought to ensure continuity of learning after the government-mandated indefinite school closures in response to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya. This initiative involved running classes on television, radio and online. Despite this commendable effort to minimise the disruption to school-based learning, several learners were excluded due to lack of access to digital technology, including smart phones, televisions, radios, laptops, assistive devices, internet access and electricity.

While most of the recommendations raised during this session were specific to the season where schools were closed and learners were relying on tech-based and community-based learning, some recommendations remain relevant today.

Recommendations

Prioritise marginalised populations

Participants reiterated the importance of prioritising marginalised populations in the conceptualisation and implementation of policy, rather than coming to consider their needs as an afterthought.

Policy dissemination and implementation

The MOE has already enacted several relevant policies that address significant themes to ensure equity and inclusion in education, for instance the Sector Policy for Learners and Trainees with Disabilities adopted in 2018. It is imperative for the MOE, supported by all other stakeholders, to ensure greater awareness of these policies, align projects and interventions with these policies and ensure that the policies are implemented fully in order to realise their transformative potential.

2. Expanding Inclusion of Learning Opportunities

On 13 October 2020, PAL Network in collaboration with the Directorate of Special Needs Education within the MOE hosted the second instalment of the policy dialogues. This dialogue was inspired by the fact that in Kenya almost 2 million learners have special needs due to disabilities. This population is not receiving the attention they require to ensure they are able to fully enjoy their right to education, especially following the school closures and digital learning initiatives precipitated by COVID-19. In response to this situation, participants made the following recommendations.

Recommendations

Increase teacher capacity and improve teacher-pupil ratio

It is important to build capacity for all teachers in universal designs for learning (UDL), and their competence in the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to facilitate continued digital learning in school and to be better prepared in the event there is ever a need to defer to remote learning again.

Connected to this is the need to increase the number of teachers with the skills required to teach learners with diverse special needs and to manage inclusive classes incorporating learners with special needs, thus improving the teacher-pupil ratio for learners with disabilities. Experts demonstrated that the recommended ratios are often lower in these instances, for example for deaf-blind children the ratio is 1:1. This is an indispensable step as the country moves towards truly inclusive education.

Enhance capacities of schools to cater to learners with special needs

Aligned with the above, the MOE needs to prioritise measures towards ensuring that more schools provide reasonable accommodation to enable inclusion for learners with special needs. This will require structural changes and the provision of assistive devices to each learner. The pandemic period demonstrated the importance of ensuring that assistive devices are provided to the learner rather than to the school to make it possible for the learners to access and utilise the device even at home. This will overcome the barrier of learners being unable to keep up with their studies when they are at home for an extended period of time as was the case with the pandemic and may be relevant

as the conversation on deboarding develops, as will be highlighted below. Auxiliary staff were identified as a crucial element of the support structure for learners with special needs, for instance in supporting the learners to carry out their activities of daily living (ADLs). Therefore, the MOE should consider recruiting additional auxiliary staff.

Educational Assessment and Resource Centres (EARC) were also highlighted as providing important support for learners with disabilities. However, the EARC centres are facing a myriad of challenges including insufficient capacity, resources, and reach, which inhibits their potential impact. To further strengthen education for learners with special needs, the MOE should consider strengthening the capacity of EARCs.

Schools as safety nets

During the school closures, some learners with disabilities returned to contexts where they are abused or abandoned. For learners with special needs, schools are often more than just institutions of learning but also provide a safety net or safe haven for the well-being of these children. Policies, guidelines and other interventions should be designed with this in mind to ensure that all measures taken facilitate the continued safe operation of these institutions and welfare of these children, even when learning has been disrupted.

Provision for neurodiverse learners

Acknowledging that there are varied forms of disabilities, experts observed that learners with physical disabilities often received more attention and accommodation from policies because their needs are more visible. It is important for policy makers and implementers to do more to incorporate the needs of neurodiverse learners who require different forms of reasonable accommodation

Increase and rationalise resources

The recommendations above are resource intensive and will only be possible if the MOE coordinates with Treasury and other partners to increase the resources allocated to special needs education.

3. Expanding Inclusion of Children in Marginalised Areas

The third policy dialogue was hosted by PAL Network, the National Council for Nomadic Education in Kenya (NACONEK), MOE and KICD on 4 December 2020 to address the needs of learners in marginalised areas including arid and semi-arid (ASAL) areas, urban informal settlements and pockets of poverty across the country. In addition to emphasising that the children should be at the centre of policy formulation and implementation, experts recommended the following:

Recommendations

Incorporate the duksi and madrasa education into the formal education system

Incorporating the traditional religious education systems into the formal education system will encourage greater participation and retention of learners, especially in arid and semi-arid regions of Kenya where there has been a tension between the two systems of schooling, resulting in low participation in the formal education system. This will require the MOE to enact policies and guidelines to streamline the process for this integration and ensure quality standards are maintained.

Strengthen the low-cost boarding school initiative

While the introduction of low-cost boarding schools is a commendable initiative to improve retention of learners from pastoralist communities, currently, the capitation allocation per child is insufficient, rendering the initiative unsustainable. To strengthen this initiative, the MOE should consider increasing the capitation for learners from marginalised communities.

Strengthen NACONEK

NACONEK has done a laudable job and is in a position to improve learning for children in marginalised areas, but its impact is limited by limited capacity. To increase the progress for learners in marginalised areas the MOE should improve the capacity of NACONEK to fulfil its mandate.

4. Expanding Inclusion through Community-Based Learning (CBL) and Home-schooling

On 11 December 2020, the Directorate of Policy, Partnerships, and East African Community Affairs within the MOE hosted the fourth policy dialogue on CBL and home-schooling in Kenya. The policy scan by PAL Network revealed that while the policy landscape for education was quite comprehensive, several policies necessary for the full implementation of the seven pillars of the CBC were either not implemented, out of date or non-existent. The absence of policies for CBL and for home-schooling came into sharp focus following school closures in response to the pandemic last year. The need for these two policies was highlighted as parents were forced to turn to home-schooling and the government attempted to introduce community-based learning as interim measures to ensure children were able to continue with some learning.

Recommendations

Prioritise development of policies for home-schooling and CBL

To regularise the policy framework, the MOE and relevant stakeholders need to accelerate the formulation and enactment of policies to guide the delivery of CBL and home-schooling to guarantee that these approaches remain robust and of good quality, do not exacerbate inequality and are rationally connected to ongoing education reforms, including the roll out of the CBC and National Education Management Information System (NEMIS), and other relevant policy frameworks, such as the ICT policy.

Role of parents

In the formulation of these policies, experts highlighted the importance of clarifying the role of parents, particularly in light of the parental empowerment and engagement pillar of the CBC. To support this, the MOE should collaborate with other stakeholders generating evidence on promising approaches to guide the policy provisions relating to parents.

Context and sustainability

Considerations around context and sustainability should also be incorporated into the policies as best practice has revealed that allowing contextual variations at the community level to respond to the different contextual needs facilitates greater sustainability.

Build more evidence

In as much as these policies are now being developed, evidence has been gathered regarding these instructional approaches and it will be important to continue to support the generation of more research and

evidence on the most promising approaches to take and for the policies to be guided by these findings. Towards this end, we encourage the MOE and other policy makers to leverage partnerships with stakeholders already involved in the delivery of these learning approaches and undertaking research on these interventions.

5. Ensuring Continuity of Learning for All Children

Following the full reopening of schools in January 2021, the fifth policy dialogue was held on 18 February 2021 hosted by PAL Network to discuss the challenges and provide recommendations for ensuring that all children are able to return to school after schools were closed for almost a year. The session focused on the young girls who were not able to return to school due to early pregnancy and the boys who also did not return to school after undergoing their rites of passage.

Recommendations

Capacity building for schools and teachers

Researchers observed that schools were largely unprepared to receive learners who are mothers-to-be or new mothers, and as a result these learners were subjected to discrimination and bullying. To remedy this gap going forward, participants recommended increased effort in the dissemination and implementation of the National Guidelines for School Re-Entry in Early Learning and Basic Education, 2020. In general, there is a need for increased capacity building for teachers and head teachers to ensure they have the knowledge and skills to facilitate the smooth continuation of learning for the young mothers, including instances where they are also children with special needs.

A recurring concern was the health of the young mothers who returned to school, particularly with respect to nutrition, clinic visits and counselling, considering also the impact this has on their learning. It is, therefore, imperative for the MOE to coordinate schools and partners to take measures to uphold the health and wellbeing of the young mothers. This could be in the form of availing alternative meal options, establishing procedures for providing medical approval and assistance (for instance in the event of an emergency) in collaboration with the local community.

It is also recommended that the MOE permit reasonable modifications to school requirements to accommodate the pregnant girls, such as adjustments to school uniform to ensure they are comfortable and permitting parents to visit the young mother to provide necessary support.

Coordinate with other departments and initiatives to address socio-cultural factors

Participants also flagged the importance of balancing between supporting the girls and preventing stigma on one hand, and on the other hand discouraging risky sexual behaviour among adolescents. Towards this end, the MOE and other stakeholders are advised to utilise well structured, long term, mentorship programs, with the involvement of teachers and parents, that address the issues of peer love, appropriate interaction with media and technology, relevant sex education, among other things.

It is also important to collaborate with other departments, such as the health department, and the local community to address the socio-cultural factors that contribute to the prevalence of early pregnancies for girls and dropping out of school for boys after initiation. These include practices like female genital mutilation (FGM) and early marriage,

rites of passage for boys and the belief that the children are now adults capable of taking care of themselves and starting their own families. These initiatives should be careful to avoid criminalising the boys but help them understand their role in preventing teen pregnancies and prepare them to also be involved in the care and responsibility for the new-born.

6. Equity and Inclusion in the Deboarding Debate

The sixth policy dialogue hosted by PAL Network on 1 July 2021 addressed the question of deboarding schools in Kenya. Instances of unrest in boarding schools have arisen almost every year and has precipitated popular conversation around the need to consider eliminating or scaling down the prevalence of boarding schools in the Kenyan education system. A taskforce established by the MOE in February 2021 recently echoed these sentiments by recommending a shift towards deboarding secondary schools, retaining them only where absolutely necessary, such as in ASAL areas or those for learners with severe disabilities. This policy dialogue concluded that a comprehensive deboarding policy would have to be formulated and implemented, and highlighted recommendations for the following considerations which are key for increasing access, equity and inclusion to quality education.

Recommendations

Increase availability of quality day schools and rationalise distribution of resources

Transition away from boarding schools must be gradual and cannot be effectively done without the government increasing the number of public schools and classrooms

that offer quality education. The MOE in collaboration with Treasury, private sector and civil society will need to establish a plan to scale up quality public day secondary schools for all learners across the country. In doing so, the MOE will need to avoid replicating or exacerbating existing regional inequalities in education by ensuring an equitable distribution of the day schools and the resources required for them to deliver quality education, including infrastructure, and human resources, and adequate provision for learners with special needs. This will, for instance, require marginalised areas and populations to have priority in the allocation of resources.

Expedite formulation of the transport policy

With day schooling learners will be required to commute to their schools daily. This may present a challenge for learners with special needs and in instances where the schools are still far away from the learners' homes. In order to prevent this bottleneck to the rollout of deboarding, the MOE and relevant stakeholders should expedite the formulation and implementation of the policy to guide school transportation that will be economically and physically accessible for all learners.

Parental engagement

In as much as there is a popular push for deboarding, the 2020 school closures demonstrated that learners are at greater risk of abuse and exposure to risky behaviour when they are at home. It will, therefore, be vital for the MOE, civil society, FBOs and all relevant stakeholders to support efforts towards greater parental empowerment and engagement with their children through mentorship, support, and other interventions. Parents should also be equipped to play their significant role of ensuring accountability and maintaining

quality in the public schools in their area. These interventions will require targeted engagement with parents and parents' associations to enhance their capacity to effectively support their children and their local schools. The MOE, national parents' association and other stakeholders should coordinate efforts to address this need.

Conclusion

In conclusion, policy makers, implementers and other participants lauded the utility of these dialogues bringing together a range of stakeholders to share evidence and perspectives which contribute to the development of relevant, sustainable approaches to policy formulation, implementation and interventions. The recommendations highlighted align with and will spur on overarching education reform initiatives such as CBC, 100% transition and equity and inclusion in education.

