



# DEPRIVED CHILDREN AND EDUCATION

Kenya



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# Executive Summary

Kenya has a primary school net enrolment ratio of 76% and 77% for boys and girls respectively [UNICEF 2006]. After a decline in enrolment in the 1990s, as a consequence of structural adjustment programmes (SAP) and the “cost sharing” for public services, enrolment is on the increase again. When a coalition of opposition parties took power in December 2002, they introduced Free Primary Education (FPE) with the beginning of the school year 2003. But the introduction of FPE was fraught with huge difficulties and challenges; while its policy as such was welcomed from all sides, the actual implementation has drawn severe criticism. The school management was expected to implement FPE at short notice and without any further guidelines and direct support. At the beginning of and during the school year 2003, the number of primary school students rose substantially, especially in poor rural areas where school fees had previously formed a significant obstacle. While in 2002, 5.9 million children were enrolled in primary school [UNESCO 2005a], that number rose to 7.2 million during 2003 and reached 7.6 million in 2005.

The field research took place during the first three months of 2007 in the western province of Nyanza and in the southern coastal region. In Nyanza, interviews and observations were carried out in Homa Bay district and were concentrated on two (clusters of) villages and their respective primary schools, Ndiru and Omako Koth. According to governmental statistics, poverty in Homa Bay stands at 74.4% and health is a serious problem. Malaria still remains the major cause of child morbidity and mortality, and HIV and AIDS prevalence is one of the highest in Kenya. The economy is based on small-scale farming and trade. The locations in Kinango, Kwale district on the south coast, are characterised by subsistence farming and small-scale animal husbandry. Recurrent droughts in this area have led to a sharp decline in farming income and food security. Many households depend on revenues brought in by family members working outside the villages, mainly in the coastal city Mombasa.

## Views on quality

The views on quality of education were divided. Increasing access and simultaneously maintaining quality is an immense challenge for any country, given the limited budgets for the education sector and the fact that investments in quality will only show their returns in the mid- and long run. Kenya is no exception. The rapid expansion has put a strain on infrastructure and other resources.

A majority of parents were critical of the quality of education that their children received. The quality was measured by parents in terms of curriculum and its perceived relevance, the motivation of the teachers, acquired skills (literacy, numeracy), language skills and examination results. But also by the student-teacher ratio, the instruction time the students receive and the regularity with which teachers attend school.

Overcrowding due to a large influx of students constituted a severe problem at one of the schools and was pointed out by teachers, students and their parents alike. The lack of attention given to the individual student, and the impossibility to assist weaker students and to check and correct

assignments, were named as the biggest problems. Most respondents in this area agreed that the quality of education has decreased since the introduction of FPE and the resulting influx of students. At the same time, however, the abolition of school fees has been welcomed as a just measure, because it enabled also the poor to send their children to school. In order to improve the quality again most stakeholders proposed the construction of more classrooms and the employment of more teachers.

Overcrowding was a less pressing problem at other locations; but again, a lack of individual attention and instruction time was seen as a serious problem. In theory, the students in grades I-IV are supposed to have seven lessons per day, and the grades V-VII even eight lessons per day. Regular classroom hours are from 8.20 am to 12.40 pm, and then again from 2.00 pm to 3.10 pm for the upper grades. In practice, however, the students in 3 out of 4 research locations received far fewer hours of instruction. Amidst all the complaints about shortage of teachers and overcrowding, scheduled classes are often not taught. But it is not just physical absence of the teachers that impedes the delivery of education. Teachers frequently report to school in the morning, take roll call in their first class, and then retreat to the teachers' room. The students are sometimes given assignments, but not always. The students are not allowed to leave the classroom during these periods and are supposed to study by themselves. Often they are not given instructions, but just told to remain well-behaved. Both parents and students reported this as a major problem. Students are frustrated by the imbalance between the discipline demanded by the teachers and the teachers' own behaviour. The inability to address and solve this issue was the main complaint. Many students also expressed the wish that the practice of (corporal) punishment would be dropped and that teachers would take their complaints and concerns more seriously. But still, students generally appreciate going to school.

## **Relevance and benefits**

The perceived relevance and benefits of education are related to the quality as well as the highest level of education that a child is likely to achieve. In the perception of parents and students themselves, the most important set of skills taught at primary school level is the ability to read and write, which is seen as a basic prerogative and necessary to secure even the most basic job (outside the village). Another frequently named benefit is that of "finding one's way around" - having had some exposure to the aspects of life outside the village, having gained language skills and being able to communicate with people.

But when the quality is low, parents become disillusioned with the potential benefits for their children. Having children in grade V or VI who are not able to write and read Kiswahili sufficiently to deal with a letter, let alone having attained some basic English skills, has left some parents wondering what benefits education can have, if any. Several parents voiced their concern that children are wasting their time at school, not learning useful skills and often idling in the classroom. Since these children haven't learned to work in the fields, it is stated, they might become frustrated youth in the future, susceptible to bad habits and influences.

One of the major shortcomings in the eyes of parents and students alike is the lack of practical skills with which the students are equipped. All subjects are academic, and the practical subjects were scrapped during the last curriculum reform. These included agriculture and crafts. Many families

expressed the view that these subjects could provide skills to those who cannot continue onto secondary education or proceed to polytechnics. The majority of students do not advance beyond primary school and the education offered does not encourage self-reliance and entrepreneurship, nor does it help to improve life in the villages.

Without emphasis on practical, marketable skills, primary school only prepares for secondary education. As secondary schools increasingly appear out of reach, the motivation to actually finish primary school is likely to lessen. The overwhelming majority of primary school students expressed the wish to continue to secondary school. According to national statistics, 47% of primary school graduates proceed to secondary school, but in the research locations the rate was often significantly lower. From Omako Koth, less than 25% of the students proceed to secondary school.

There are two major obstacles regarding secondary school. The first and most important obstacle is financial. While primary education is more or less free, the costs of secondary education are so high that they are unaffordable for the majority of families.

## **Prospects**

While intrinsic gains from education are also occasionally mentioned, primary school is mainly viewed as a stepping stone to future employment opportunities, i.e. formal employment, a “white-collar job” away from the village. Such expectations stem from the (recent) past when education was more exclusive and when the attainment of a grade VIII certificate was a virtual guarantee to formal employment. The emerging paradox is that employment opportunities are in sharp decline, whilst education is evermore important, even for the most basic jobs, and that without any education the future prospects are extremely limited. Population pressure, disease and inefficient farming methods have led to low farming income. The farming plots are small, yields are low and funds to invest are out of reach for the majority of farmers; families see formal education - and subsequent employment opportunities - as an important path or even the only path that can lead to a better future. “Formal employment” is the way forward; a future in agriculture is not seen as an attractive option, but rather as a last resort.

## **Compulsory education**

Primary education has become free and compulsory; nevertheless, not all children are in school. This was said, during interviews, to be connected to two issues: firstly, some parents do not appreciate the value of education and secondly, children are busy fulfilling their traditional tasks at home, such as herding animals. The government has subsequently set up a control mechanism that appears to work reasonably well in rural areas. Enrolment is monitored and controlled through the chiefs’ offices. A chief and his assistants or sub-chiefs are the government representatives and they see to the implementation of governmental policies. By appointing politically loyal village elders or chairmen, who each are responsible for 30-40 households, the local authorities have managed to set up a tight system of control. Cases of non-school-going children are reported by the village elders to the sub-chief or chief. This system is evidently quite successful in rural settings with a tight social control.

National statistics clearly show that enrolment is the lowest in urban areas [Republic of Kenya 2004]. Migration towards urban centres has led to the creation of large informal settlements in

which infrastructure and social control is lacking. At the same time, alternatives and opportunities for non-school-going children are much more readily available in urban areas than in the countryside.

## Obstacles

Despite free and compulsory primary education and the fact that the majority of school-age children in the research locations were actually enrolled in school, there are still several obstacles preventing children from enrolment or regular attendance. While the introduction of FPE freed parents from the burden of school fees, there are still costs that persist: school uniforms, examination fees and contributions to the school's maintenance and infrastructure.

Extreme poverty can make these costs a high burden to families, and cash income is scarce in rural farming communities and fluctuates greatly throughout the year. In some locations, HIV/AIDS and other diseases already take a high toll on families, both financially as well as in terms of the responsibilities shouldered by children from families that have been affected by disease. Children in those cases have to stay at home to care for sick parents, or take over some of their tasks. Especially in single-parent households and households headed by grandparents, contributions by children can be significant. The consequences for children from families affected by HIV/AIDS can be dire, especially in cases where the scale of the problem puts a serious strain on the traditional coping mechanism, and where relatives have to absorb a large number of orphans. In the first two research locations in western Kenya, 30-40% of the households were taking care of children other than, and in addition to, their own biological children. Indeed, most orphans have members of the (extended) family around and can count on some basic support. When nobody in the community is willing or able to take an orphan in, the child may have to leave the village and seek survival elsewhere. In the slum area and market place of Homa Bay town, for example, children were encountered who had to fend for themselves after having left their villages.

Unfortunately, recent and reliable data on enrolment ratios are hard to obtain. In the climate of compulsory education, which appears to be well enforced at the village level, the willingness of parents and even other community members to discuss the issue of non-enrolment was very low. Those children not enrolled, and those who have dropped out of school tend to leave their villages in search of work, either in the closest market places (Kinango, Kwale), or in Mombasa. From the research sites in Homa Bay, those students who had dropped out left to Homa bay town or Kisumu, although in the case of pregnant girls, some were re-enrolled after giving birth. Dropout occurs mainly in the higher grades, from grade IV onwards or with over-aged students. The majority of dropouts were older than 15 years old.

Where children were found at their homes in the villages, they were mostly enrolled but not attending, due to "sickness", "helping at home" or being sent home by teachers. Teachers estimate that children miss an average of 1-2 days per week. Especially on market days the school attendance is low. The age of those children ranges from nursery school students to young adolescents. Children themselves see this as problematic: they miss out on classes and get punished by teachers for their absences. Children who stay at home frequently have poor exam results and their motivation declines accordingly.

While “pre-FPE” dropouts mostly cited lack of funds as the reason for dropout, “post-FPE” dropouts and their parents named poor quality as a major reason. Children who were enrolled at a relatively higher age found it difficult to adjust to the school environment and judged their prospects, also with regard to the quality of education, more critically. Additionally, there was a high incidence of early pregnancies in the case of older girls. Early pregnancies were more common in the Homa Bay area than around Kwale. The dropout rate was especially high among over-aged students who had enrolled in school with the introduction of FPE, but who were several years older than their class mates. This becomes mainly an issue of youth-unemployment in rural areas, and many who drop out subsequently move away. A child idling at home was an extremely rare occurrence.

## Child work

None of the research locations offered commercial employment opportunities to children, and work done by children was to a large part limited to the child’s own household. The work load of a child was not a major cause for non-enrolment, but it did have an influence on regular attendance and performance. The time of the research in Kwale did not coincide with the most labour-intensive period in the villages. Families were awaiting the annual rains to prepare their fields, but work had not commenced yet. The daily tasks assigned to children mainly included fetching water, collecting firewood, tending to goats and cattle, cleaning and sweeping, food preparation, looking after younger siblings and guarding the house during the absence of parents. These tasks did not stand in the way of enrolment as such, but did lead to irregular attendance. On market days especially, the attendance rate was lower, as children either go to the market to accompany their mothers, to perform small jobs, or they are needed at home while the parents are out.

Girls are more affected than boys, as they take on a higher proportion of the workload. Students in all research locations commented on their contributions at home, with female students describing a higher work load. More girls than boys complained about the fact that their tasks interfere with their schooling and that they are given little time to study or to prepare for examinations.

Traditionally, certain tasks are mainly carried out by children, such as herding cows and goats [Kielland & Tovo 2006], and some of these tasks have proved to be incompatible with schooling. The introduction of FPE coupled with compulsory education therefore had a lasting impact on the division of work within the household. Many tasks previously assigned to children are now being carried out by adults within the family, by hired labour (in cases where families can afford it), or are done by children outside their regular school hours. According to many respondents, this reorganisation of the workload within the household did pose challenges for families in the initial phase. Adults had to take over some of the tasks formerly assigned to children, something that was previously unheard of; grown-up women and elderly men can now be seen tending to the goats and herding cattle. But children continue to help; children have to take livestock out for watering or grazing when they return from school and on weekends. Some children are kept at home once or twice per week for these tasks, especially those whose parents have other duties away from the homestead, for example going to the market. But, by and large, traditional labour patterns underwent a drastic change once it became clear that education was made compulsory and/or was internalised as a norm.

As there are no employment opportunities in the villages, neither for adults nor for children, those seeking employment tend to migrate. The children or youths, who migrate, are likely to be at least 15 years old. For younger children, employment opportunities are very slim, especially since the Kenyan government increased its control on child labour in urban areas. In Homa Bay district, children and youths seeking employment go to Homa Bay town as the nearest option, but still with few opportunities. Kisumu by contrast, Kenya's third-largest city, was named as a popular destination for job seekers. In Kwale district, villagers always referred to Mombasa, as "the town" where chances for employment are highest. Unfortunately, no reliable data could be obtained regarding the scope of child labour and child labour migration. The practice of sending children to Mombasa, in order to work as domestics, is still existent, but in decline. In recent years, existing legislation and controls have been sharpened and parents complain that it is getting too difficult and risky to place their children in employment.

Remarkably, children in some research locations spent a considerable amount of time working around the school compound. In general, education is supposed to be beneficial for the child, and the school a place where the development of the child is central, but in many incidences it was observed that schoolchildren are required to work during or after school hours. The Kenyan practice of involving school children in work for the school was also reported by Mull [Mull 2005]. Teachers and administrators frequently justify this practice as necessary to operate the school despite its limited funds. Tasks assigned at school include: maintaining school grounds and classrooms, working in the school garden, digging irrigation or drainage trenches, fetching firewood and water, and working in the fields of the teachers. While the practice is widespread, the scope and severity differs. Work activities are sometimes part of the curriculum, or are carried out for the benefit of the school. In other cases, extra work is assigned to the children by the teachers. This includes cooking for teachers, working in the teachers' fields, and bringing water and firewood in excess of what would be necessary for the normal operation of the school. These activities were mostly limited to a maximum of 1-2 hours per day. In some cases, however, these activities were extended to three or four hours per day, involving all students from grade III onwards. At one school, students as young as eight years old were observed having to carry water and firewood to school, for the personal use of teachers. Students of higher grades (5 and up) were even "hired out" for farm work by the teachers. Both students and parents complained about this workload, which is an addition to the workload the children are given at home in order to assist their families.

## Improvements

The questionable quality of education, the lack of motivation and/or absence of teachers, the poor cognitive skills acquired by the pupils as well as cases of corruption, call for a functioning system of control and accountability. In order to improve both quality and efficiency of the education system, both school management committees (SMC) and parent teacher associations (PTA) have been established. The rationale behind setting up SMCs was to provide mechanisms for effective management of school resources. The SMCs consist of parents and a representative of the school administration, normally the headmaster. The committee is supposed to be (re-)elected every year, and their primary role is to prepare plans and budgets for the school as well as to approve expenditure. The headmaster is responsible for the implementation of the decisions taken and accounts for the utilisation of the funds. The SMC is also responsible for resource mobilisation.

In practice, the actual leverage of these committees is very limited. In none of the four research locations did the SMC succeed in bringing issues of the quality of education on the agenda. Even the most pressing problems, such as teachers' absences and the workload assigned to children by the teachers, could not be addressed. The headmaster and the teachers of each respective school tend to emphasise the difficulties in engaging community members in any activities and often question the sincerity and depth of interest in educational matters. A very frequently heard comment is that there is "no real interest in education". While teachers accuse parents of being ignorant and unmotivated when it comes to the education of their children, parents feel that they are not taken seriously and that their involvement in educational matters is only sought when contributions are needed. These contributions can be of financial nature, in kind or a contribution in the form of a work assignment. For example, parents are required to provide construction material to maintain or build infrastructure, dig latrines, bring water and firewood to the school and assist in the running of the school feeding programme.

The PTAs does indeed appear to function more as an instrument for the school management to tap additional resources than as a means of involving the community in the running of the school.

## Conclusion

Non-enrolment does not constitute a major problem in Kenya. Even though perspectives are bleak, most people recognise that education is crucial for the future of a child; expectations are tied to (formal) employment and a life away from the traditional village economy. At the same time, the enforcement of compulsory education pressures those parents who do not necessarily see the benefits of education.

The introduction of free and compulsory primary education has helped to establish a social norm whereby children are expected to go to school. A helpful factor was the fact that Kenya in the past had a good record of primary school attendance and the present trend is drawing on the performances reached in the 1990s, before the liberal policies introduced a cost-sharing arrangement, which led to a temporal decline in enrolment.

The fact that enrolment in urban centres, where labour opportunities are abundant and social control is more relaxed, is much lower than in most rural areas also points to the reality that both social control, as well as the lack of economic opportunities helps to keep rural children in school.

The major obstacle and challenge to achieving universal education is the quality of education. Irregularities such as internal corruption, non-delivery of services such as frequent absence of teachers, or excessive extra-curricular workload for students have been found to different degrees, and together, they form serious obstacles to obtaining an education. These irregularities take place within an established net of power relations, institutional and personal arrangements, and it is very difficult to address or even identify some of these problems. The PTA has proven powerless in the attempt to control these issues.



Kenyan pupils line up to have their homework checked

# Introduction

International treaties have recognised free and compulsory elementary education as a human right for more than half a century now, and especially during the last decade the drive for universal (primary) education has gained momentum. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), agreed upon in 2000, set 2015 as the year in which universal primary education (MDG-2) and gender equality (MDG-3) are to be achieved. Despite such efforts and their echoes in national policies, many children are still out of school. The mid-term results for MDG-2 suggest that big strides have been made in terms of universal enrolment, but also give reasons for concern.

The overall statistics are merely averages and tend to hide what happens to the most vulnerable and most excluded children. Various forms of deprivation continue to put tens of millions of children in a difficult situation without access to education. The estimates of these children not attending school vary from 100 to 200 million. Successes in extending primary education have been unmistakable, but actual school attendance in most regions is still dramatically low, despite high gross enrolment figures (and fairly lower net enrolment figures).

*Table 1: Out-of-School Children (millions)*

	1998	2002	% Girls
Sub-Sahara Africa	45	40	55
Arab States	8	7	58
Eastern Asia	8	15	58
South & West Asia	36	30	59
Latin America	4	2	45
North America & Europe	2	2	53
Central & Eastern Europe	3	3	55

*Source: UNESCO [2005b:48]*

Table 1 shows that the number of out-of-school children has generally decreased since 1998; unfortunately, the progress is slow and too many children have not yet found their way into the education system.

The current policy focus on education is not only based on the adherence to the “child’s right to develop its personality, talents, physical and mental abilities to its fullest potential” (CRC article 29). Education is also generally considered a key factor in reducing poverty and child labour and in promoting democracy, peace, tolerance and development [UNICEF 2002]. Both approaches largely draw their attention away from the perspectives of parents and children themselves. Efforts have been directed instead towards sensitising uneducated masses of their “right to education” and the “importance of education”. Yet not much is known about how exactly uneducated people perceive education as a tool (or impediment) for their own family’s subsistence or advancement. What future

expectations and aspirations do parents have for their children, or children for themselves? How does (basic) education feature in these ideas? And does the quality of the education on offer influence such ideas? What are the perceived obstacles preventing access to education, and which changes should be made to remove these obstacles?

Repeatedly, there has been a summing up of relevant factors that form major barriers for achieving basic education for all. Sarkar [2004:12] has classified these factors into four groups:

- *Accessibility* - the physical and social distance to school, discrimination, the burden of household chores, and the burden faced by children combining work and schooling
- *Affordability* - direct, indirect, and opportunity costs
- *Quality* - the lack of infrastructure, facilities, materials, and support systems for children, inadequate conditions of work for teachers, low status of teachers, lack of adequate training, aids and materials for teachers, and the lack of sensitivity of education authorities and teachers to the needs of children at risk
- *Relevance* - curriculum detached from local needs, values and the aspirations of children at risk, curriculum inadequate to prepare students for gainful skilled employment

Quality issues have become a central theme in the education debate over the last few years. Increasingly, it is being acknowledged that quality must be seen in the light of how societies define the purpose of education [UNESCO 2004] and that quality can influence parents' choices to invest in education [Plan Netherlands 2006]. However, not much is known about the (lack of) intrinsic, social, cultural or economic benefits different parents and children may see in the education that is on offer to them, or in which way they feel school-attendance may influence their children's prospects. By collecting village case studies from seven developing countries, this study aimed to provide insights into local ideas about future expectations and aspirations of parents and children, and how (basic) education features in these ideas.

In periods of three to four months during 2006 and 2007, research was conducted in different areas of three South-Asian countries (Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan) and four Sub-Saharan-African countries (Ethiopia, Kenya, Burkina Faso and Ghana). These countries were selected on the basis of their enrolment and attendance data.

Figures for the selected regions for 2000-2005 show that in Sub-Saharan Africa only 61%, and in South Asia 74% [UNICEF 2006:105] of children of primary school age are enrolled. In certain countries within those regions figures are significantly lower. The selected countries, with the exception of Kenya, used to have adult literacy rates that were substantially below the average of developing countries, but have made substantial progress over the last decades. The exception is Kenya, where the youth literacy rates in 2004 were actually lower than in 1990. Table 2 shows that where the countries in Asia have done reasonably well (in Nepal, for example, female literacy increased from 27% in 1990 to 60% in 2004), the African countries have had mixed results. Burkina Faso still had, in the early years of this century, male and female youth literacy rates of only 25.5% and 14.0% respectively.

Table 2: Literacy in Selected Countries

	Adult & Youth Literacy				Share of Females in Illiteracy		Youth (15-24) Literacy Rate				Not enrolled (millions)
	1990		2002-4		1990	2002-4	1990		2002-4		2002-4
	M	F	M	F			M	F	M	F	
<b>Bangladesh</b>	44.3	23.7	50.3	31.4	56	57	50.7	33.2	84.2	67.7	2.9
<b>Nepal</b>	47.4	14.0	62.7	34.9	63	65	67.0	27.3	80.6	60.1	0.9
<b>Pakistan</b>	49.3	20.1	61.7	35.2	62	63	62.5	30.6	74.8	53.9	8.1
<b>Burkina</b>			18.5	8.1					25.5	14.0	1.4
<b>Ethiopia</b>	37.6	19.8	49.2	33.8	57	57	51.5	34.1	63.0	51.8	5.7
<b>Ghana</b>	70.1	47.2	62.9	45.7	65	60	88.2	75.4			1.3
<b>Kenya</b>	80.9	60.8	77.7	70.2	68	58	92.9	86.7	79.8	80.0	2.0
<b>Developing countries</b>	75.9	57.9	83.2	69.5	63	64	85.8	75.8	85.0	88.7	

Aggregated from UNESCO [2005b]

Access to the research areas was facilitated by local staff of Plan International and other NGOs, but they were not necessarily regions in which these NGOs worked. The long stay in each area, a minimum of three weeks, allowed the researcher to build up a relationship of trust and to distinguish official statements from reality.

This study was initiated to deepen the understanding of household and village level perception of education in rural areas, and to get an insight into the factors determining the continuation of non-enrolment and non-attendance despite the efforts made by governments and NGOs to facilitate education for everyone, including the poorest segments of society. A central, underlying theme is the perception of education in terms of relevance and quality by parents and children, and the way these perceptions influence decision-making with regard to school enrolment and attendance. The main question addressed is:

How does the perception, on household and village level, of relevance and quality of education, in interaction with other economic and cultural factors, lead to non-enrolment, non-attendance and/or drop-out?

The research was qualitative in nature and the results cannot haphazardly be applied to any country at large. However, the research areas were selected in such a way that they covered the poorest families in the poorest areas where school-enrolment is low.

The research involved close contact with the various stakeholders, particularly with the parents and the children. Much attention was given to their perceptions, and thus to how their circumstances, ideas and experiences may explain non-enrolment, non-attendance and drop-out, or enrolment and attendance in the face of adversity. Such insights are needed in order to design education policies that respond well to the ideas and circumstances on a grass-roots level.

## Country selection

Kenya was chosen as one of the research settings for this project, even though it presents comparably high enrolment numbers, especially when compared to other Sub-Saharan African countries. Enrolment rates in the 1980s declined under the pressure of structural adjustment programmes and the resulting “cost sharing” for public services in the 1990s. However, enrolment has been on the increase again since the end of the 1990s, particularly due to the introduction of free primary education in 2003. Although there have always been large disparities within the country, both with regard to access and quality of services, education has featured prominently on each administration’s agenda. Both past and recent policies offer an interesting insight into factors that influence enrolment and retention of children in primary schools. The introduction of free primary education has brought along new challenges, as there is a high pressure on the existing infrastructure and other resources.

While expanding access to education is an important goal to strive for, maintaining quality or even improving quality is equally important. A 2007 World Bank Report on the Millennium Development Goals notes that “Evidence is emerging that in many countries rapid progress in improving schooling enrolment and completion is not translating into better cognitive skills.” Increasing access and quality at the same time, or even maintaining quality in a phase of expansion can be an immense challenge given the limited budgets and the fact that investments in quality will only show their return in the mid and long run. Despite progress being made, Kenya’s education sector still faces severe challenges, especially in remote rural areas, urban slums and other areas where poverty prevails.

## Methodology

The research was qualitative in nature and thus anthropological methods were employed; the data collection took place at four specifically selected sites, selected due to their rural setting, relative remoteness, and access to a primary school. Firstly, two regions were selected, in coordination with Plan Kenya: Homa Bay and Kwale. Then, with help from Plan’s field offices, two villages in each region were chosen, based on their relatively low enrolment and attendance numbers; the selected sites were both Plan project sites and non- (or prospective) Plan project sites.

All villages had a primary school within an easy walking distance, according to local norms; this averaged 0-2 kilometres, although in one location children had to walk 5 kilometres. None of the villages had an extensive range of infrastructure and facilities such as public transport, telephone and other means of (mass-) communication. In fact, none of the research villages were connected to the electricity grid.

The practical demarcation of one research location or “village”, proved to be difficult. In Kenya, “village” does not always correspond to a visible cluster of houses and homesteads, nor does it necessarily correspond to a unit in the self-understanding of the inhabitants. Houses and homesteads are often situated on their own respective plot of land that borders on the land of the neighbouring homestead. This means that a village can be spread out according to the size of the farm plots. Mostly, a village is homogenous with regard to clan alliance, but this is not always the case; a village is defined by an administrative border rather than an actual identity as a village. The traditional title of a chief or clan elder is now being used to describe an appointed headman or

chairman of the respective location and sub-location, which are the smallest administrative units. The chief and the sub-chief are representatives of the government on this administrative level and are political appointments rather than (traditional) representatives of the community. A similar notion can be extended to the position of village elder or village chairman. They form the link between the community and the chief's office and are also appointed according to their political allegiance.

For the purpose of the research, a village was defined within these administrative borders, and a primary school was chosen as a geographical centre, which sometimes, but not always, corresponded with an approximate centre of the village. In some cases, the site of the school actually constitutes a place equally accessible from different villages. In this case, a village was chosen due to its relative representative nature in socio-economic terms.

The field research and data collection was carried out during 2-3 weeks in each location, together with an assistant who also acted as an interpreter. Interviews were mainly held in Luo (Homa Bay) and Kiswahili (Kwale), and translated into English.

Existing sociological and statistical data, obtained from local organisations, institutions and administrations, formed the quantitative basis for the research. Qualitative data was obtained through anthropological methods, such as:

- Interviewing key persons, (children and their parents, teachers); structured interviews aimed at general information, and in-depth interviews with selected informants.
- Case studies of a selected and limited number of children and the household in which they live.
- Focus group discussions on key issues.
- General observations at the schools, on community and household level.

The time span spent in each location proved to be of crucial importance. During the first days at each research location, elaborate attempts were made by different stakeholders to steer and control the proceedings of data collection. In general, these were well-meaning initiatives to aid the researcher, to make the data collection efficient, to help to speak to the "right" people and to ensure that respondents in the villages were supportive of the research activities. Within the local power structure, however, these initiatives were sometimes also attempts to manipulate the proceedings and to avoid criticism from being voiced. During the research, we came across cases where funds were misappropriated, or where teachers or other officials used their position to extract extra benefits. In such situations, those involved had a natural interest to evade exposure and embarrassment. While it has not been the explicit purpose of the research to uncover these practices, their occurrence sheds light on the functioning of the education system and the challenges faced when trying to improve it. By spending a minimum of two weeks in each location and being logistically independent, it was possible to obtain a balanced picture through contact with a broad cross-section of the village population. During the course of each research period, respondents would become increasingly open with their views and opinions. In general people have a clear picture of the official and "correct" view on education, i.e. the message that the government spreads with its campaigns. This official view is also tinted by the perception that local stakeholders have about the answers that a foreign researcher and/or representative of an international NGO might wish to hear.

In each location, there was a perceptible increase of truthfulness over time. It was also possible to verify claims through direct observations, for example those concerning enrolment and attendance rates, classroom time and the performance of teachers.

The ability to move freely (by means of a motorcycle kindly provided by Plan field offices), and the aid of an assistant fluent in the local language, ensured that the research could be carried out independently, and without too many restraints set by local power relations.

## **Outline of the report**

Chapter one will introduce the research methods and the fieldwork settings. The second chapter will mainly address issues of educational quality, as seen through the eyes of the main stakeholders: the students, their families, other community members and the teachers. In the third chapter, the relevance and benefits of education will be discussed, including the gap between primary and secondary education and the prospects on the employment market. Chapter 4 will discuss marginalised groups, the implications of child work and labour, and other obstacles to getting an education.

# Chapter 1

## Background

Kenya became independent from British colonial rule in 1963. Jomo Kenyatta was the first president of the new state, and led the country until his death in 1978. In a constitutional succession, Daniel arap Moi took the power, which he managed to retain until 2002. Between 1969 and 1982, Kenya was a one-party state, but from the early 1990s onwards, as a result of both internal and external pressure, the political landscape became more open and liberal. The ruling KANU retained power during two elections in 1992 and 1997, amidst violence and accusations of fraud during both of these elections. In December 2002, the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) came to power. The next national elections are scheduled for the end of 2007.

Kenya is divided into 8 provinces, the Coast, Central, Eastern, Nyanza, Nairobi, North Eastern, Rift Valley, and Western Province. The climate ranges from the arid and semi-arid areas on the northern border with Ethiopia to the tropical and humid coastal area. There are two main rainy seasons, from October to November and from April to June. Kenya has been hit by several severe droughts over the last decade, and even areas where the rainfall pattern had been consistent for many decades have been affected.

Official languages are Kiswahili and English, but there are also numerous indigenous languages spoken throughout the country. The main ethnic groups are Kikuyu (22%), Luhya (14%), Luo (13%), Kalenjin (12%), Kamba (11%), Kisii (6%), Meru (6%), others (15%). Non-African inhabitants make up a mere 1% of the population.

The economy is dominated by agricultural production. Main crops include tea and coffee, maize, sugarcane, wheat, fruit and vegetables. But the unreliability of rainfall patterns has serious consequences for agricultural production, which is mostly rain-fed, and with changing or irregular rain patterns, income for farming communities cannot always be secured. Between 75-80% of the population lives in rural areas, and subsistence farming prevails over commercial agriculture. Tourism constitutes a major industry in Kenya, but concentrates on game parks, nature reserves and coastal resorts.

The country has a population of 36 million, out of which 60% are under the age of 30. More than 50% of the population is below the age of 15, which means that there is a high dependency rate and a high pressure on social services such as health care and primary education.

The low economic growth and the rising inequality in income distribution have led to a rise of poverty levels over the last two decades: while the percentage of the population living in absolute poverty was estimated at 44.7% in 1992, it rose to 52% in 1997 and reached an estimate of 56% (17 million people) living below the poverty line [Kenya Ministry of Planning and National Development & UNDP 2006].

While Kenya is regarded as politically stable, corruption continues to be a major problem. Even though the new government took immediate measures to curb corruption and to re-establish support of donors and investors, new corruption scandals have rocked the current government again and continue to hamper economic development.

## 1.1 Education in Kenya

Formal education was first introduced in Kenya by missionaries, mainly with the purpose to introduce literacy in order to spread Christianity. The first schools were established in the 1840s in the coastal region and were only slowly expanded into the interior with the construction of the Uganda railway at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By 1910, a total of 35 mission schools were operational. From the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, education was segregated; the first school for European children opened in 1902. A school for the children of Asian workers was opened in 1910. The “Frazer Report of 1909”<sup>1</sup>, a British government sponsored study on education in East Africa, came to the conclusion that separate educational systems for Europeans, Asians and Africans should be handled and maintained. With an additional system for Arab students, education was thus divided into four streams.

As many other newly independent countries, Kenya faced immense challenges in restructuring the education sector in the early 1960s. People had to be trained to serve in mid- and upper level government posts, as well as in the commercial and industrial sectors.

From 1967 onwards, the Kenyan government stepped up support of the education sector by paying teachers and support staff a salary, as well as partly funding tuition and boarding expenses at some schools, colleges and universities. Parents had to bear the remaining costs, such as boarding fees at non-government-supported schools, uniforms and stationary. In 1974, a presidential decree declared free primary education up to grade 4, resulting in a doubling of the number of school-going children from 900,000 to 1.8 million. Enrolment at primary level reached 94.7% in 1988.

But in 1990, Kenya bowed to pressure from the World Bank and the IMF to reduce public spending under the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP). Funding of the education sector was reduced through the following measures: downsizing of the teaching force, decentralising the recruitment and managing services to curb corruption and shift expenditure from teachers’ salaries and allowances to textbooks and other teaching materials. Especially “cost-sharing” proved to put a high burden on parents and other guardians of school going children, being therefore the most controversial measure. As a consequence, the enrolment rates declined at all levels of education, down to 76.7% for primary education in 1997. And together with decreasing enrolment, the learning environment deteriorated and facilities degenerated due to the lack of funds available for maintenance. In 2002, the Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA) collected data with regard to enrolment and drop-out rates, and came to the conclusion that 64.7% of children were leaving school due to the lack of school fees, 9.2% left because of “lack of interest”, 6.7% were taken out of school by their parents and 5.3% had to leave because of the death of one or both of the parents [Manda et al. 2003].

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.africa.upenn.edu/NEH/keeducation.htm>

During the election campaign in 2002, the coalition of opposition parties the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) promised free access to primary education if they were to be voted into power. When NARC took over in December 2002, the party held its campaign promise and introduced Free Primary Education (FPE) with the beginning the school year 2003.

But the introduction of Free Primary Education was fraught with huge difficulties and challenges. While the policy of FPE as such was welcomed from all sides, the actual implementation has drawn severe criticism. After the political announcement of the policy, school heads were expected to implement FPE without any further guidelines and direct support. The short time span between the announcement and the start of the new school year (a matter of weeks) would have made thorough planning difficult in either case, and the schools were initially left to deal with the challenges by themselves.

At the beginning of and during the school year 2003, the number of primary school students rose substantially, especially in poor rural areas where school fees had formed a significant obstacle for students. While in 2002, 5.9 million children were enrolled in primary school [UNESCO 2005b], that number was raised to 7.2 million during 2003 and reached 7.6 million in 2005. According to the Free Primary Education Assessment [UNESCO 2004]: “New enrolment was primarily those who had never been in school before and/or those who had dropped out due to lack of fees.” The influx of new students was mainly felt in grades 1 to 3. Some students were transferred from private academies to public schools; others were transferred from poor-performing to well-performing public schools. Overall, the study also pointed out that the intake of newly-enrolled girls was higher than that of boys.

The levels of enrolment at the beginning of the school year 2003 were overwhelming and often exceeding capacity. In a reaction to the immense problems with implementation, the Ministry of Education, the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE), together with representatives of the private sector, civil society and faith-based groups set out to work on guidelines for implementation and to create a taskforce.

Currently enrolment ratios are as follows: 52% for pre-primary schools, 112% GER and 79% NER for primary schools, and 42% for secondary schools [UNESCO 2005a]. The regional disparities are great. The latest statistics from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST) from 2003 show NER as low as 28% for the northern Turkana region and 8.3% for Garissa in the North Eastern region [Kenya Ministry of Education Science and Technology 2003]. These areas are sparsely populated with a predominantly pastoralist population. While the national average NER was set at 77.7% by MOEST in 2003, the rates for the urban centres are considerably lower: 55.7% for Nairobi, 50.3% for Mombasa, and only 36.4% for the third-largest city Kisumu.

Not only did primary education become free, it also became compulsory. Although there had been a big surge in enrolment with the introduction of FPE, not all children were reached. This is said to have been related to two factors: firstly, some parents did not appreciate the value of education and secondly, children were busy fulfilling their traditional tasks at home, such as herding animals. The government subsequently set up a control mechanism which appears to work reasonably well in rural areas. Enrolment is monitored and controlled through the chiefs’ office. A chief and his assistants or sub-chiefs are the government representatives on location and sub-location level, and

they see to the implementation of governmental policies. By appointing politically loyal village elders or chairmen, who are each responsible for 30-40 households, the local authorities have set up a tight system of control. Cases of non-school-going children are reported by the village elders to the sub-chief or the chief. This system appears to work reasonable well in rural settings with a tight social control. National statistics, however, clearly show that enrolment is the lowest in urban areas, due to several factors. Migration towards urban centres has led to the creation of large informal settlements where infrastructure is lacking and social control is missing. The large numbers of migrants cannot be absorbed in existing services. At the same time, alternatives and opportunities for non-school going children are much more readily available in urban areas than in the countryside.

## 1.2 Education structure

Currently, the education system consists of early primary (or pre-school), primary, secondary and tertiary education. Pre-school takes 1-2 years, the full cycle of primary consists of 8 years, secondary school is made up of 4 years, and tertiary education, depending on the course, 4-6 years. The 8-4-4 system was introduced in 1984, replacing the old 7-4-2-3 system. Even though pre-school is not compulsory, it is viewed as an important requirement for admittance into grade 1. On a national scale, only around 35% of children admitted into grade 1 have previously visited a pre-school [UNESCO 2005a]. The common age for primary school students is 6-13 years old. At the end of the 8-year primary cycle, students are obliged to sit examinations for the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE), which determines whether a student can proceed to secondary school or vocational training. The KCPE results also determine (in case they pass), which secondary school they can proceed to. There are local, provincial and national schools, and each school is allowed to set its own benchmark for admission. The best and most popular schools are the “national schools” which have the highest academic standard and are said to enhance a student’s chances to eventually proceed to tertiary education. At the end of the secondary cycle, the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) decides on the next steps to be taken.

A school year is divided into 3 parts, and starts at the beginning of January. After 3 months, the first examinations are taken, and the month of April is officially vacation time. The second part of the school year commences in May and runs through the end of July. After the summer break, the last part of the school year runs from September to half November, which is when the final examinations are taken.

Free Primary Education means that there are no school fees, neither direct nor indirect. Instruction materials, exercise books and textbooks are provided for the students. As part of the FPE grants provided by the MOEST, and for a large part funded by the World Bank, schools buy instructional material including textbooks. This relieves parents of the previous burden to buy textbooks. Officially, there is a target of Pupil Textbook Ratio (PTR) of 1:3 in lower primary and 1:2 in upper primary school. The responsibility of choosing and purchasing textbooks rests with the headmaster of each respective school, and there are several sets to choose from. Funds for teaching materials and other costs (for example the maintenance of infrastructure) are allocated to each school according to the number of students and are managed by the school management committees (SMCs). The only costs for the parents are school uniforms, examination fees and contributions in kind.

Transition rates from primary schools to secondary schools are a serious concern. While primary education is now free of charge, the costs for secondary education are high and are increasing rather than declining. According to a publication by the Ministry of Education Science and Technology [2004], only 47% of those who complete primary education actually proceed to secondary schools. Officially, the fees for secondary schools are also regulated by the government: 10,500 KES per year for district schools, 22,900 for provincial schools and 28,500 KES for national schools. In practice, the fees to be paid by parents are often higher, exceeding 30,000 KES. For a large proportion of rural communities, these costs are extremely hard to meet. One initiative to address this situation is to offer bursary funds to students. Parts of these bursaries are channelled through the Constituency Development Fund (CDF). CDF is a government development programme “aimed at poverty reduction through community involvement in programme identification and implementation”. This programme started in 2003 under the CDF Act, which provides 2.5% of the government’s ordinary spending, to fund development activities at district and community level. Besides providing bursaries to needy students, CDF funds can be utilised to improve educational facilities, health facilities, infrastructure, provision of water and electricity, etcetera. One of the shortcomings of the CDF system is poor accessibility; many poor families are not even aware of the available funds and bursaries. Unfortunately, much of the funds are siphoned off by corrupt officials. In theory, there are strict criteria for CDF bursaries, as well as a priority list; priority goes to total orphans, then partial orphans, children born out of wedlock and finally children from poor families. There is also a special consideration for girls. Other bursaries are provided by NGOs, which especially support orphans and children from poor families with bursaries for secondary education.

In January 2007, there were rumours and media reports on a possible introduction of free secondary school. While this would be welcomed by large numbers of poor parents unable to meet the high costs for secondary schools, critics were quick to point out that the government would be hard pressed to foot the bill. A newspaper report in the Daily Nation<sup>2</sup> published a figure of 20 billion KES needed for implementation, while the government is already spending 9 billion per year on free primary education. As the implementation of FPE still proves to be challenging, both in terms of funding and logistics, an introduction of free secondary education would appear to be rushed. Taking the fact that 2007 is an election year, the debate around free secondary education is dismissed by some as merely a hunt for votes.

This current research focused on education in rural settings, areas in which (in most countries) both access and quality prove to be more problematic than in urban areas. Access is still a serious concern, especially in the sparsely populated northern regions of Kenya, and the quality of schools in remote areas often lags behind those in urban areas. In contrast to other countries, however, enrolment in rural areas in Kenya is often substantially higher than enrolment in urban centres. The two largest cities in Kenya, the capital Nairobi and the coastal city Mombasa, have very low enrolment rates when compared to the national average, 55.7% and 50.3% NER respectively [Kenya Ministry of Education Science and Technology 2003]. The third-largest city, Kisumu, accomplished a

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<sup>2</sup> Daily Nation, January 22, 2007; <http://www.nationmedia.com/dailynation/nmgindex.asp>

mere 36.4% in 2003. Only the north-eastern province, which is very sparsely populated, shows even lower enrolment, which is the result of poor access and a mobile pastoralist population.

The importance of education and the challenges faced, also in terms of quality, was reflected in a recent national literacy survey [Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2007]. The study, which sampled 18,000 households across the country, found 7.8 million adults or 38.5% of Kenya's population to be illiterate; and of this group, respectively 36.6% and 5.5% had attended primary and secondary school. The literacy rate for 15-19 year olds is recorded at 69.1%, while literacy among the 45-49 year-olds was determined at 51%. The fact that a substantial proportion of people classified as being illiterate have been to school, points to the important fact that enrolment rates and attendance do not necessarily lead to the attainment of usable skills in the future.

## 1.3 Research locations

### 1.3.1 Homa Bay District

Homa Bay District is located in southwest Kenya, on the shore of Lake Victoria. It is one of the 12 Districts that make up Nyanza Province. The district is subdivided into five divisions; each of the five divisions is split into locations, which are in turn made up of sub-locations. Homa Bay town lies directly on the lakeshore and serves as the administrative and commercial centre of the district. The district can be divided into a lakeshore lowland area (1150-1220 MASL) and the upland plateau (1220-1560 MASL). The annual rainfall ranges between 700 and 1800 mm, with a long rainy season starting in late February, and short rains between August and November.

The general infrastructure and communication networks are limited. The main road connecting Homa Bay to towns in the east is a series of potholes, making journeys cumbersome, and many secondary roads become impassable during the rainy seasons.

Electricity is unreliable even in Homa Bay Town, especially when it rains, and the majority of the villages are not connected to the electricity grid. In general, the district has sufficient surface and ground water. Besides the lake and 4 rivers that carry water throughout the year, several rivers are only seasonal. Therefore, wells, boreholes and rainwater catchment areas play an important role. Lake Victoria, the second largest lake in the world, has a large potential both for income through fishing as well as transport. But while Homa Bay town lies on the lakeshore, fishing is very limited, due to both severe water pollution and an explosive growth of water hyacinth<sup>3</sup>, which blocks off the routes for fishing boats. The previously existing ferry service between Homa Bay and Kisumu had to be stopped due to the hyacinth as well. More profitable fishing settlements are situated further along the lakeshore and on islands within the lake. Even with the potential for fishing, poor marketing opportunities limit the use of this resource: prices for fish are low, there are no cold

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<sup>3</sup> The water hyacinth appeared on the lake in the mid 1980s and, having no natural predators, spread quickly. At its height, it covered an area of 17,230 hectares, paralysing shipping and any other commercial activities on the lake. With support of the World Bank, millions of dollars were spent to weed out the plant, and the situation appears to be under control in most areas. But due to the geographical feature of the Bay area, thick carpets of hyacinth are pushed up against the shore.

storage facilities in Homa Bay, the EU has set a ban on Kenyan fish due to pollution of the water and the fish caught for sale on the national market gets a low price due to exploitation by middle men.

(Subsistence) agriculture is the prevailing mode of income in the research area; the average farm holding is 2 hectares and soils are very fertile. Main cash crops in the area are maize, beans, groundnuts and pineapples, but again, marketing and distribution are a problem. A pineapple processing plant in Homa Bay was closed due to the unreliable electrical supply and financial difficulties. Both cotton and sisal industries have collapsed due to high costs and low prices. Marketing and export of some of the other major crops such as pineapples, groundnuts and papaya are limited as there are no processing facilities. Because of poor electrical services many industries are either impossible or too expensive. The commonly named “Jua Kali” sector refers to the informal sector: self-employment, odd jobs and small-scale business such as bicycle repair shops and bicycle taxis (*boda-bodas*). “Jua Kali” literally means “hot sun”, and thus refers to types of work that are performed outside and usually involve manual work.

Poverty stands at 74.4% and the district camps with serious health issues [Kenya Ministry of Planning and National Development 2006b]. Malaria still remains the major cause of child morbidity and mortality in Homa Bay District, and there is a steady increase in malaria infection. In 2005, malaria was determined to account for about 42% of the morbidity cases reported at the District Hospital. Poverty levels in the district have made it hard for the people to afford adequate medicines [Kenya Ministry of Planning and National Development 2005]. Some of the challenges encountered in malaria control are parasite resistance. The district health status shows an infant mortality rate of 102/1000, with malaria being the main cause of morbidity and mortality. Life expectancy is 52 years (female) and 48 years (male). The district has 1 hospital, 10 health centres, 22 dispensaries and 5 nursing homes [PRSP Secretariat 2001]. The HIV and AIDS prevalence is, at 32%, one of the highest in Kenya, with huge social and economical consequences. According to the District Development Office in Homa Bay, 25% of all children are orphaned, having lost one or both parents. As a result, many households consist of children and old people, both groups with low productivity. Young adults are most affected by this situation of dependency. Women are also more affected than men. The transmission of HIV is exacerbated by cultural practices and the taboo of openly discussing and addressing the issue. Polygamy is the norm in Luo culture; a man has at least 2 wives or more. To have a second or third wife is a sign of wealth and prosperity. The status of women is generally low. A woman cannot own property herself, and is economically dependent on her family and husband. If she is still of child-bearing age, she is expected to bear at least one child to her new husband. A widow is traditionally obliged to be re-married. The so-called wife-inheritance states that a widow does not inherit the property she shared with her husband, and she is thus “given” to one of her brother-in-laws. If she is not claimed by a family member, she may be required to find another husband within the community. If a woman objects to being “inherited”, she can be chased away from the community and her deceased husbands’ property remains with his relatives.

Luo culture also knows a variety of other cultural practices that can prove problematic in economical terms. Cultural taboos include the practice of *golo pur* or *golo kodhi*, which entails the family elder initiating the planting of a new crop before anyone else. In cases of sickness or absence, this can mean that the necessary planting is critically delayed. There are numerous tasks that can only be carried out by a specific member of the household, and in case of absence, sickness or death, the remaining family members can find themselves unable to fulfil their

traditional and daily tasks. Traditional obligations form a major drain on already scarce household resources. Funerals, for example, play an immensely important role in Luo culture, and the family of the deceased is expected to host a large funeral ceremony and cater to numerous guests. Households often go into debt in order to provide food and shelter for relatives attending the funeral.

The predominant religion is Christianity, spread over different churches, mainly catholic, while the Christian sect Legion Maria has also many followers in the area.

Demographically, the population is young, and there are more females than males. Males are more likely to migrate to urban centres in search of employment. According to the 1999 Census, 52% are younger than 18<sup>4</sup>.

### **1.3.2 Education in Homa Bay**

As of 1999, the district had 606 educational institutions, out of which 247 were pre-primary schools, 318 primary schools, 30 secondary schools, 9 youth polytechnics and 1 medical training centre/ITTC. Unfortunately, up-to-date enrolment rates for Homa Bay district were impossible to obtain. While the education office can provide enrolment numbers in absolute terms, there is no information on those children not enrolled in school, and the most recent census data originates from 1999.

Two communities/schools were chosen in Homa Bay: Ndiru and Omako Koth. While Ndiru is one of the largest schools in the area, with 720 students, Omako Koth is one of the smallest schools with less than 100 students.

#### **1.3.2.1 Ndiru**

Ndiru is situated 1 km off the main road, 22 km out of Homa Bay, with approximately 300 households. The nearest market is at Rodi, at the intersection with the main road. But even with the proximity to the main road, the households are not connected to the electricity network. As in many other parts of the district, subsistence farming is the dominant mode of livelihood. Families own an average of 3 acres of farmland, ranging from 1 to 10 acres.

Ndiru primary school is one of the larger primary schools in the area. The school has 11 teachers employed by the government and 2 additional teachers employed by the community. The school consists of grades 1-8, and the catchment area covers 3 villages and consists of a total of 300 households. The school was set up in 1968 by the local community as other existing primary schools were too far for children to walk. Initially, it was set up as an ECD centre (Early Childhood Development), and then expanded into a primary school up to grade 4. It was run by local volunteers until 1978, which is when the government took control of the school. The school had around 200 students at that time and it was becoming too big to be run by the community alone. The school appeared to have had a very good and committed headmaster in the 1980s, leading to a sound quality of education and a strong community involvement. The school built up a strong reputation for delivering results and continued to grow.

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<sup>4</sup> The 1999 Census is the most recent data available; [www.cbs.go.ke](http://www.cbs.go.ke)

But currently, the school must deal with a huge student population. With the start of FPE, the student population grew but the facilities did not expand at the same pace. The classrooms are in varying states of disrepair. Some of the oldest classrooms have collapsed and are no longer in use, whilst others are deteriorating but are still being used, only because of a lack of alternatives. They are so-called “semi-permanent” structures<sup>5</sup> with mud walls and corrugated iron roofs. Only 4 of the classrooms are permanent structures and were constructed with the help of an NGO. Water drainage is problematic around the school compound and when heavy rains fall, four of the provisional classrooms become partly flooded, and the children sit with their feet in the mud.

Out of the 13 teachers at the school, 3 live next to the compound, in huts provided for them. Others live in Rodi or Homa Bay and commute every day. They come by bicycle, by *matatu* (minibus, shared taxi) or on foot. Due to the location close to the main road, the distance as such is not a problem, but the costs of transport are a burden for the teachers, as the salary of a primary school teacher is as low as 3500 KES.

Ndiru school was chosen as a site for a (re-) launch of a school feeding programme in this area, sponsored by the government. The programme is designed to stimulate both attendance and retention of students as well as the local economy by purchasing the food from the community. The government buys the food from the farmers, but the community has to effectively organise all other necessities, such as employing the cooks (4-5), constructing the kitchen and supplying the stoves and the pots. Furthermore, the community is expected to provide the firewood and the water. The intention is to link the feeding programme to an agricultural programme, which hopes for a rise in productivity, by training farmers in improved farming techniques.

*Table 3: Distribution of students at Ndiru primary school*

Grade	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total
Male	42	63	55	48	45	45	36	20	354
Female	77	64	42	47	52	34	33	17	366
Total	119	127	97	95	97	79	69	37	720

### 1.3.2.2 Omako Koth

The second research location was situated at Omako Koth. Omako Koth is difficult to reach by any means. Although situated only 6 kilometres from Homa Bay, the school and the surrounding villages are not connected to the main road. The terrain is rough, and when it rains it is only passable on foot. As in Ndiru, there is no electricity, and there are no shops within the village. In order to buy necessities, villagers have to walk to Homa Bay, or other villages which are also several kilometres away. A new census of the area had just been completed, but not yet published, at the time of the research. According to the assistant chief who took part in the census, the sub-location consists of 128 homesteads, 451 households and 3128 individuals, out of which approximately 700 are children

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<sup>5</sup> The commonly used classification for infrastructure are temporary (mud-walled, thatched roof), semi-permanent (mud-walled, corrugated iron roof) and permanent (brick walls, corrugated iron roof)

aged between 6 and 15 (school-going age). The literacy rate stands at around 50%. The majority of the households are headed by one parent only, and poverty levels are high. The households have six dependents on average. Only 150 persons out of the total population are formally employed and receive a regular payslip. Plots are large enough, in theory, to support the population (an average of 4 acres), but a lack of farming equipment and working animals limit the yields from the land.

The school's catchment area is divided by a riverbed that is easily traversable during the dry seasons, but which forms a serious barrier during the wet season. The school at Omako Koth is relatively new. It was built in 2000, and initially only offered grade 1. After that, each year one class was added as the original students proceeded through the grades. Currently, the highest grade is grade 7. There are several other schools in the same area, with as little as 2 km between them. One of the particularities of this area is the fact that several different (sub-) clans live here. According to the official version, as related by the headmaster and the chief of the sub-location, the school was built in order to limit the distance that children have to walk, especially during the wet season. A not often openly admitted, but still frequently (and privately) cited reason to open this school had been the desire to have one school per clan, irrespective of the number of students. Apart from being an educational institution for children, a school also forms the (administrative) centre of the village, and community programmes and projects are often run and initiated through the school administration. This means that there are also other motivations and benefits connected to the location of a primary school. Since parents are required to contribute to the maintenance of the school, by providing building materials and contributing to the payment of additionally hired teachers, and since alliances are usually limited to one's own clan, the desire to have one school per clan can override other factors.

The infrastructure of the school in Omako Koth is very poor. A row of semi-permanent classrooms was initially set up with support of the community. The mud walls are now crumbling and the whole structure appears to be leaning at a dangerous angle. The floors are dusty and there is not nearly enough furniture to seat the students; most students in the lower grades have to sit on bricks or on the ground. Three new classrooms were supposed to be constructed with the help of the CDF, but they are only partially finished. The headmaster said that the funds were not sufficient to finalise construction, while several members of the community claim that the headmaster has misappropriated part of the funds for his own personal profit.

The headmaster of the school states that there are around 200 students enrolled in the 7 grades, but enquiries with the students themselves and a repeated headcount over the course of two weeks established that a mere 112 students were enrolled. The difference between the "officially" reported number of students and actual enrolment might be explained by the fact that a school needs to have a minimum number of students per class to be approved by the government and that the financial allocation to the school is also based on the number of students.

The school has 5 teachers who are employed by the government and one additional teacher who is employed by the community, the so-called PTA (Parent Teacher Association) teacher.

Besides three primary schools in this sub-location, there is one mixed secondary school, and one polytechnic, offering courses in mechanics, masonry, carpentry and metal work. Enrolment rates were impossible to obtain, but it became clear that the overwhelming majority of the children are enrolled, even if they do not attend school daily.

### 1.3.3 Kwale District

Kwale District is located in the South-Eastern corner of Kenya; it borders the Indian Ocean to the East and Tanzania to the South. The district has 6 Divisions, 37 Locations, and 86 Sub-Locations. Kwale District has a resident population of 566,887 persons, consists of 6 administrative divisions and 3 political constituencies. The poverty index is 63%, with an estimated 657,139 persons living below the poverty line [Kenya Ministry of Planning and National Development 2006a]. The population is made up of people from the Akamba and Duruma tribes. The district has some natural resources (titanium, limestone, iron ore, zinc, calcium, lead). The coastal belt attracts tourism; the main tourist centre is Diani beach, while Shimba Hills National Park also attracts a lot of attention from travellers. But the benefits of tourism only reach a few isolated centres and the nature of the tourism (mainly all-inclusive package tourism) makes only a small impact on the local economy. 50 km inland from the 5-star tourist resorts, the benefits are completely absent.

Agriculture is the main economic activity in the district, while livestock and fishing also play important roles. Around 90% of the arable land is used for small scale crop production, mainly maize, cassava and beans. Cash crops include coconuts, cashew nuts, bixa and cotton. Also grown are mangoes, oranges, citrus and papaya. The distribution of rainfall is very unequal across the district and some areas have been hit by repeated periods of drought, especially over the course of the last 8 years. Long spells of unreliable rainfall have altered the mode of livelihood for many families. During the years of drought, farmers cut down trees in and around their villages to produce charcoal for sale. While this has been the sole source of income for many families, it has left a lasting environmental impact on the area and potentially perpetuates the prevailing droughts. Nowadays, the only reliable crop is maize, which is far more resistant to dry spells when compared to other crops. According to local authorities, the area has undergone severe changes, and many people have migrated towards the Tanzanian border, where the rainfall is more reliant and the soils are good. Another very important source of income is livestock, mainly cattle. But the combination of droughts and diseases has led to a sharp decline of the cattle population.

There is no industry in the area, and apart from agriculture, only the “Jua Kali” sector provides limited employment opportunities. People seeking employment usually have to move to Mombasa. Mombasa is the second largest city in Kenya with a population of approximately 650,000, and is about 60 km from Kwale town.

Both research sites in this district were situated in the Kinango division. Kinango division is the third largest, and is divided into 6 locations and 16 sub-locations, with a total population of 82,368 (data obtained from the Districts Commissioner’s Office). Kinango is set to become a separate district and Kinango town will become the administrative seat. Kinango division suffers from a very dry and hot climate, since the lush and green Shimba Hills act as a barrier for rain clouds. Kinango town serves as a main market for the surrounding villages and holds a major market every Thursday. There used to be a cattle/livestock market at the same time, but Rift Valley Fever<sup>6</sup> has led to the temporary closure of the livestock market. The ban on livestock trading has had negative consequences for

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<sup>6</sup> The Rift Valley Fever is transmitted both by the consumption of infected animals (red meat) and more rarely through mosquito bites. The disease leads to bouts of high fever and often ends fatally as there is no adequate medication.

many families as livestock is often the only asset a family has. There are no banking facilities and loans are not available. The villages around Kinango are considered poor even by local standards, and have been hit hard by the recurrent droughts. A combination of prolonged periods of drought and disease has led to a decrease in livestock to 20-25% of its level a decade ago.

### 1.3.4 Education in Kwale District

Kwale District has 274 primary schools and 36 secondary schools. Kwale District had a net enrolment ratio of 68.5% in 2002, which was an increase from 53.9% in 1999 [Kenya Ministry of Education Science and Technology 2003]. While there was no marked gender difference in Kwale District in initial enrolment, at least not at the lower end of primary school level, gender does play an increasing role in the higher grades.

Due to extended periods of drought and the resulting food insecurity, a number of schools in the district take part in a school feeding programme. The food consists of maize, wheat and beans. Lunch is provided to all children, grades 1-8 as well as nursery school children, who receive an additional mid-morning snack in the form of porridge. The classification of “regular school” means that a school participates in the school feeding programme on a regular and structural basis, while the “expanded schools” are added when circumstances threaten the food security in that particular area.

*Table 4: Implementation of the School Feeding Programme in Kinango Division, Kwale District*

Division	Zone	Regular School	Expanded School	Total
Kinango	Kinango	-	10	10
	Ndavaya	11	8	19
	Gandini	9	8	17

Kwale district has experienced an increase in enrolment of 36.7% in absolute numbers between 2002 and 2006. The yearly education report by the District Education Office in 2006 attributed this increase to the following factors:

- The introduction of FPE which enabled even the poorest households
- The regular and expanded School Feeding Programme
- The “Lets go to School Campaign”, a joint initiative by the Government of Kenya and UNICEF
- Support from other development partners
- FPE grants

Actual enrolment rates were again difficult to obtain, and can only be estimated by comparing the latest enrolment numbers with the data of the last census. Since FPE in 2003, enrolment has seen an increase of 36.7% [Kenya Ministry of Planning and National Development 2006a].

*Table 5: Enrolment in Kwale District since the introduction of Free Primary Education*

Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Boys	48,854	65,012	72,149	75,171	76,475
Girls	38,864	51,475	59,271	63,566	66,673
Total	87,718	116,487	131,420	138,737	143,148

The two selected research sites in Kinango division were Banga and Gwadu. Both schools receive support by NGOs (Verkaart Foundation and Plan International).

#### **1.3.4.1 Banga**

Banga school was founded in 1974 and provides classes for grades 1-8. The school has been supported by the Dutch Verkaart Foundation since 2002. In 1999, the school had 304 students, by 2003 that number had risen to 416. At the beginning of 2007 the school had a total of 480 students (263 male and 217 female).

*Table 6: Distribution of pupils at the Banga School, 2007*

Grade	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Male	15	27	61	48	40	25	31	16
Female	8	25	50	43	28	22	26	15
Total	23	52	111	91	68	47	57	31

The school has 11 classrooms, including those for the nursery school. There are 11 teachers employed, plus an additional nursery school teacher. The school has taken part in the school feeding programme, run by the government, since the school year 2002/2003. The government provides the food (with the support of the WFP and USAID), while the community is responsible for provisions such as firewood for cooking, the cooks etc. The school is situated 12 kilometres from Kinango town, alongside a dirt track. There is no public transport in the area, apart from two trucks that pass twice daily and pick up passengers for a small fee. The school is not situated within one village, but is situated between three villages that are all 3 to 5 kilometres from the school. There is a nursery class at the school, but some of the villages have their own nursery schools, as the distance is too big to cover for small children. The area is sparsely populated and each village unit is comprised of 30 - 40 households. People have farm plots ranging in size from 2 to 20 acres, with the main crop being maize and beans. Due to extended periods of drought, many families depend on family members working in "town", usually in Mombasa. According to the Banga village elder, depending solely on farm income has become too insecure.

#### **1.3.4.2 Gwadu**

Gwadu is situated 5 km from Kinango town. The density of primary schools is actually quite high in this area: there are 4 primary schools within a radius of 3 kilometres. The Gwadu primary school was founded in 1989 and consisted then of an improvised temporary structure. The school initially had only a few classes, but by 1999 it had expanded up to grade 8. The school continued to grow

and with the assistance of the community and both national and international NGOs the school now has 8 fully permanent classrooms, a nursery classroom and pit latrines. The school currently has 465 students and 11 teachers, plus 3 nursery school teachers. The distribution of the pupils is shown in Table 7. Grades 1 and 4 are split into two streams. The ECD has a total of 67 children, ranging in age from 3 to 7 years (see Table 8).

*Table 7: Distribution of pupils at the Gwadu School, 2007*

Grade	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total
Male	41	30	39	40	29	21	26	26	252
Female	36	31	34	35	20	19	23	15	213
Total	77	61	73	75	49	40	49	41	465

*Table 8: Distribution of children in the Early Childhood Development Centre, 2007 (ECD)*

Age	3	4	5	6	7	Total
Boys	5	9	5	7	4	30
Girls	5	11	10	8	3	37
Total	10	20	15	15	7	67

The enrolment at Gwadu has been steadily increasing over the past years. While the school had a total number of 275 students in the year 2000, that number had risen to 444 in 2006, and 465 in 2007. With the introduction of FPE in 2003, the number of grade 1 students jumped from 62 in 2002 to 131 in 2003. Out of those 131, however, only 78 proceeded to grade 2 in the following year, and only 59 to grade 3 in 2005, indicating a high repetition and drop-out rate. While the number of the students has risen, the performance has been in decline. The results of the KCPE exams show that performance has been in steady decline since 1996.

The school has a budget of 449 KES per student per year, and this includes textbooks, exercise books, chalk, registers, pencils and other teaching materials. Like Banga primary school, Gwadu primary school also takes part in the school feeding programme, and all children are provided with a school lunch and an additional half-morning breakfast for nursery school children.

## Chapter 2

### The Perception of Quality

Kenya has managed to increase access to primary education in many parts of the country, although problems remain in the sparsely populated arid and semiarid zones as well as in fast growing urban areas. With the introduction of FPE, access to education was made possible for many children to whom the financial barriers had previously proven to be too high. But the rapid expansion has come at a price as the rise in the student population was not matched by a qualified teaching force and satisfactory infrastructure, which has in turn resulted in pressure on the quality of education.

According to a UNESCO assessment study of FPE [UNESCO 2005a], the views on the impact of growth on the quality of education are divided. On the positive side, quality is said to have improved as pupils can spend more time at school and do not need to worry about collecting school fees, and thus there is more continuity in learning. On the other hand, however, the rising number of students and the scarcity of resources is perceived as a serious strain on the delivery of quality education. The quality of education is measured by parents in terms of the curriculum content and its perceived relevance, the motivation of the teachers, acquired skills (literacy, numeracy), language skills and examination results. But quality is also measured in terms of more basic indicators: the student-teacher ratio, the instruction time and the regularity with which teachers attend school. Infrastructure also plays a large role for parents when determining quality of education: “A good school has nice buildings, toys, a cement floor, while a bad school has poor infrastructure, a poor building, or children have to sit outside.”

#### 2.1 Overcrowding

With the introduction of FPE, all children became entitled to enrolment in a primary school and schools were no longer allowed to turn anybody away. Enrolment increased dramatically, but those schools in densely populated areas and those with a good reputation experienced the highest increase. The large increase in enrolment at some schools led to severe overcrowding in classrooms, less time for teachers to spend per pupil, lower motivation of the teachers as they became overloaded with work and a resulting decrease in quality of education.

The school at Ndriu experienced an increase from 600 to nearly 800 students since the introduction of FPE, but construction of new classrooms and the recruitment of additional teachers did not follow suit, and now the Ndiru primary school is stretched to capacity. Some of the lower grades had to be split, but still there are an insufficient number of classrooms. Other grades have about 100 students crammed into one classroom. Nearly everybody concerned, the teachers, parents and students themselves see the overcrowding as a serious problem which hampers the quality. Teachers complain about the workload that they cannot handle; marking homework becomes almost impossible, individual students cannot be followed up on and the discipline in class is difficult to be upheld. With lessons of only 35 minutes long, teachers feel incapable of giving individual attention

to students. A teacher from Ndiru noted that, “the quality really suffers with the big class sizes; there is a lot less individual attention for each child and therefore the classes should be divided.” One of her colleagues added:

The problem is the class size, it is impossible to support the weak students, and 35 minutes is far too short to give attention to all the students. You concentrate on the quick learners, checking on the ones who first finish written assignments. Moving from one class to the next, there is no time to catch up. We encourage that the students are helped at home, but usually nobody has done homework. The parents are too busy and the children are supposed to help at home as well. The parents say ‘that is the teachers’ job, not ours’. Another problem is the lack of classrooms. There is poor planning on behalf of the government. They build according to political motivation: rich areas get the infrastructure while poor areas do not get anything, and so teachers move to richer areas where they get more pay. The government policy is ‘just to let it happen’. They say: ‘you implement it, it is a policy, and the rest is your problem.

The problem of overcrowding is recognised by teachers, parents, and students alike. Samson, a community worker in Ndiru, said:

Ndiru primary is totally overcrowded. Nearly all children from the village here go to Ndiru school and it is impossible to teach well in a class with over 70 student; some students are slower than others. In subjects such as maths and Kiswahili, the teacher might spend the whole time marking the exercise books, and that’s it.

A 54-year-old villager from Ndiru recalled what it was like when he himself went to school: “There were around 10 students in class, and we would be taught until everybody understood. Then the classes started to grow, first to 20 students, then to 30 students. FPE was a good idea, but now we have quantity instead of quality.” According to the village elder in Ndiru:

There are too many pupils and too few teachers at the school. They cannot check the homework, and children no longer perform at school. Teachers also give subjects they were not trained to teach. The government employs those teachers, so they should be qualified to do the job! Before they introduced FPE, the quality here at the school was good and there were enough teachers and fewer students. Now with as many as 120 pupils in one class, the teachers are overwhelmed. Children have to repeat classes, and the classes get bigger and bigger. The quality is very poor now. The problem can be solved by employing sufficient staff, and the classes need to be divided. The government spent all this money to provide books and material, and they think that is enough.

Parents and other guardians complain about the fact that teachers fail to mark homework, or even refrain from setting homework altogether. The interest in the proceedings at school among parents is quite high at Ndiru, where the majority of the parents have enjoyed at least some basic education themselves and the school has been in operation for a long time.

There have been some negative changes around here lately. The performance of students has dropped as the numbers increased, the discipline has gone down greatly and the students are noisy, not taking their work seriously. We need more teachers. There are far too many students in class; especially the younger students can't really see much of what is going on. I used to punish to punish my daughter because I thought she wasn't paying working well until I realised that it is not her fault.

A father of 4 remarked:

Overcrowding and understaffing kills the interest of both children and teachers. The weaker children are not learning. With Free Primary Education, funding is no problem, the resources are there, but the ministry is not employing sufficient teachers. The children are not being taught the whole syllabus: the books are there, there are classrooms, but somebody needs to put the knowledge in the children's heads and that is the problem.

A mother of 5 children, even though very critical of the decline in quality, also stressed the fairness of FPE:

Before FPE, there were few students, and the teacher could tend to all of them, but now, they don't even give homework. But of course there are still advantages, because there is no payment anymore. In the end, FPE is better, but they should employ more teachers. At least everybody gets to have a chance; at least everybody can learn something. Now also those who are disadvantaged can go.

Those parents who have an option to send their children to other schools choose quality. A woman who has 4 children of school-going-age considers herself lucky to have options, as her husband works as a tailor in Nairobi and is able to send money home to her. The 0.5 acre she works on provides for some of the basic needs. She explained:

There are too many children in class here, and they are not taught well. I realised that my son was not doing well in grade 4 and I sent him to my home area to finish his education. He goes there to another school, and stays with his grandmother. He says that there are only 40 students in his class, and now he is doing much better. The children here in grade 2, I look at their homework and see that they are not marked, it is only those children early in the line who get their homework checked, there is no time for the others. When their homework is not marked, I correct it myself. Another child of mine goes to a private school, in grade 1 which costs 700 KES per month. This is for the tuition only, books and everything costs extra.

Another problem caused by the large student numbers is the lack of textbooks. A teacher from Ndiru primary related the challenges: "Yesterday, the school received 210,000 KES, but that is for buying pens, exercise books, textbooks and other teaching materials. Officially, according to FPE policy, there is one textbook (per subject) per 3 pupils for grades 1-5, and 1 book for 2 pupils for the grades 6-8. At the beginning of the year the students of grades 1-4 received 8 exercise books

and grades 5-8 received 10 exercise books. Children are assigned responsibility for their books, but of the 80 lost books in the past year, none have been replaced. The announcement of the food programme last year brought many more students, thus further increasing the strain on materials. Students are careless, they leave books lying around, and most students don't have bags. Parents also don't understand that the students need to take the books to school everyday and that they have to be taken care of."

The Ndiru students themselves clearly dislike the overcrowded classes. They complained about the inability to ask questions, the fact that the teacher only pays attention to the quick learners, leaving those with difficulties behind, about how assignments are not marked on time or not marked at all, the lack of discipline in class, and of course the lack of textbooks. But despite their complaints about overcrowding, many students at Ndiru feel that their teachers do their best, and that those students serious about learning get a fair chance.

## 2.2 Teacher performance

Overcrowding and a very high workload obviously do have an impact on the performance of teachers, and some of the teachers at Ndiru primary spoke about becoming demoralised in the face of a workload that they cannot handle. In contrast, in the other research locations, overcrowding was not a major issue, but the performance of the teachers was still under critical scrutiny of the community. In these other locations, the main concern was the lack of motivation of the teachers and the limited amount of instruction time.

According to the UNESCO, indicators for good learning and effective schools include the interaction between learners and teachers, which is tied to the training, motivation and remuneration of the teachers; the classroom time for the students, an agreed benchmark for effective learning being 850-1000 hours per year; sufficient emphasis on core subjects and skills; the pedagogy used in the classroom and the language of instruction [UNESCO 2004].

Officially, the lower grades of primary school in Kenya are taught a total of 9 subjects (English, Mathematics, Kiswahili, Social Studies, Science, Christian Religious Education (CRE), Creative Arts, Mother Tongue and Physical Education). Each lesson is 30 minutes and the students in grades 1-4 are supposed to have 7 lessons per day. The upper classes 5-8 have lessons of 35 minutes each, with 8 lessons per day. Regular classroom hours are from 8.20 am to 12.40 pm, and then again from 2.00 pm to 3.10 pm for the upper grades. This is the theory, but in practice the students in 3 out of 4 research locations received far fewer hours of instruction. Amidst all the complaints about shortage of teachers and overcrowding, the scheduled classes are often not taught, to the great dismay of both students and parents. When asked about this, the teaching staff of the school blamed the lack of sufficient infrastructure, i.e. classrooms. Indeed, all schools that were visited in the research areas did have some restraints in infrastructure, mostly related to number and the state of the classrooms. The school in Ndiru, for example, had a lack of classrooms, and children were therefore also taught outside. The classrooms for grades 3 and 4 did not have any sidewalls and the mud floor became flooded after rains. Nevertheless, most classes were taught, and lack of instructional time or the absence of teachers did not constitute a major problem, although there were random incidences of absence.

At Omako Koth, although the infrastructure was very poor, with mainly temporary structures in a dilapidated state, the major problem for the students was constituted by the absence of teachers. The school is located several kilometres away from the road and many teachers simply failed to show up in the mornings. Those who came to school often did so late or left again early, and students missed a substantial part of their scheduled instruction time on most days.

The visited schools in Kwale district also camped with serious problems regarding teachers' absences. At both schools, teachers complained about pressure on the existing infrastructure and the fact that there were insufficient classrooms, even though both schools did have a classroom for each grade. Indeed, in all research sites except Ndiru, the absence of teachers in the classrooms was indicated as a major problem. Teachers often come from outside the village, which means that the teachers have to commute on a daily basis. Given the poor level of public transport, and the low salaries, making private transportation prohibitively expensive, mere attendance is a challenge. A school located near a major road is more easily reached by teachers, but also by inspectors.

Some schools have teacher's accommodation next to the school compound, but the accommodation tends to be basic and serves primarily the young and unmarried teachers. Also, according to education officers, the remoter the school, the more difficult it is to find teachers to fill the teaching posts in the first place, and thus also to fill a gap left by a teacher removed from his or her post.

As perceived by the community, the headmaster is responsible for the overall performance, quality and results at his school and responsible for the individual performance and discipline of the teachers. If the headmaster himself sets a bad example by not coming to school regularly, parents often remarked that "it cannot then be expected from the teachers to do so". There appears to be very little individual responsibility ascribed to the teachers. As a consequence, if the headmaster himself does not take his duty too seriously, most of the teachers are likely to follow suit. The fact that the headmaster has a variety of duties besides teaching, and that some of these duties take place outside the school environment does not help to improve the situation.

A group of parents related how things have changed over the course of time:

The old headmaster really used to push everybody and the teachers worked very hard. Now the teachers are too relaxed. The former headmaster did not allow the teachers to idle in school. During the last meeting with the parents, they wanted to chase the new headmaster away. Most of grade 8 failed their exams last year; the quality really went down with this headmaster. During the meeting the parents demanded that the headmaster should be stricter on teachers who are idling. The teachers spend too much time in the staff room and leave the students to themselves.

Banga primary school in Kwale had a very good reputation in the past; 10 years ago, Banga primary was among the best schools in Kwale district. Two village elders related what happened:

Another headmaster came and it went all downhill from there. They replaced him last year, but the new one is not much better. Students in grade 8 cannot even express themselves in English at all. It is all a matter of poor leadership from the headmaster; he needs to be stricter to supervise the staff, to see to attendance. He himself has to

set an example, but is often absent himself. It came to an extreme that many students were transferred to other schools. The parents had demanded the removal of the old headmaster and now they are keeping an eye on the new one. Some of the teachers were also transferred. But there are still many problems with the teachers, some don't show up for work, others leave early, or they simply don't do their work when they are there.

In Banga primary the situation became so undesirable that the pupils staged a strike, demonstrating the poor teacher performances. The criticism was shared by most villagers:

The performance is not good, only 4 or 5 children made it to secondary school last year. The main problem is the performance of the teachers. Most of them come from Kinango, only two live around here. They have to travel and come to school late, find the children playing and then release them again at noon. The problem of the laxity of the teachers starts with the headmaster. He also comes from far and sets a bad example because he comes and does not follow up on the other teachers. The children don't get at school what they are supposed to get. They walk all the way to school, and then they sit around there all day, and play. Some of those in grade 7 cannot even write a letter. They hardly know any English. The teachers don't work without supervision. The teachers can relax in the staff room because they know that they will get their salary at the end of the month anyway.

A young man from Banga, who had dropped out in grade 7 explained that laxity and absence of teachers led him to give up on school. He also explained why this issue is so difficult to address:

Normally there are government offices which should check and control the teachers. When the situation at our school became worse and worse, we, the students of my class reported the teachers to the education office. Then the inspectors came, found the teachers absent and 'berated' them. This really back-lashed on the students, and we were punished and sent home to bring our parents. When the teachers know that an inspector will come, they will start even at 7 am!

It is not just physical absence of the teacher from the school compound that impedes the delivery of quality education. Another problem is that teachers frequently report to school in the morning, take roll call in their first class, and then retreat to the teachers' room. The students are sometimes given assignments, but not always. The students are never allowed to leave the classroom during these periods and are supposed to study by themselves. But often, they are not given instructions, but just told to behave. Two young men from Banga, (one completed grade 8 in 2004, the other dropped out in grade 4) related their school-going experiences:

The main problem with the quality is the teachers. They are not so much into teaching, they come late or they just come for the sake of it so that they can say: 'I was there'. Before, the education office would send inspectors regularly, and the teachers took their work seriously; now the inspectors never come. Transferral of teachers doesn't solve the problems because the new ones will do the same thing. Some teachers stay

away from school for one week at a time. Also the training they receive is not up to standard, they just get their certificates. And they don't want to become teachers because of an interest in the profession. They went to the training college because they had the right marks, the money and the bribes. They are interested to have a paid job, but they are not interested in working.

Obviously, when teachers do not teach their assigned classes, there are negative consequences for the students. Nevertheless, despite many parents' low opinion of the quality of the education, the majority still think that their children are better off going to school than staying at home.

## 2.3 Teaching methods & language

The research focused on the perception of quality as seen by the beneficiaries of education, most importantly the students themselves and their parents rather than on teaching techniques as such. But the practices in the classroom as related by the students and observed during the research shed a light on challenges, difficulties and shortcomings. Rote learning is the predominant mode used in the classroom. In the case of classes with up to 100 students, individual teaching is indeed difficult, but rote learning is also part of the general teaching culture, where the reproduction of knowledge, obedience and respect for authority is valued above critical thinking. During lessons, hardly any time is allocated to open questions and discussions. The teacher reads out passages from a textbook, and students are expected to fill in the answers to the questions printed in the books. Weaker students are especially disadvantaged by this. There is no mechanism in place to individually engage each student and to make sure that a student actually understands the content of the lesson. As the success of education is primarily measured in terms of examination results and thus in the reproduction of textbook knowledge, the lack of emphasis on critical thinking and creativity is not readily recognised. When engaging students in discussions on issues that were covered by their curriculum, most students appeared to be at a loss. When asked about how one determines the quality of a school, the overwhelming majority of parents cited the outcome of the previous KCPE exams as a reference.

The frequent absence of teachers during scheduled classes gave us the opportunity to engage classes in discussions on a variety of topics, including both those that had and had not been covered in class. We often used these moments to hold focus group discussions, or to test the students' knowledge in an informal way. During our visit with the Gwadu primary grade 5 pupils we discovered that they were officially on schedule with their curriculum, had been told by their teacher to do independent study in her absence, but were generally unable to reproduce even the smallest paragraph from one of their books. Their comprehension of and verbal use of the English language was very low. When we read some stories written by grade 7 and 8 students, it became apparent they had mostly copied sentences from story books and rearranged them. Although they understood the general meaning of the sentences, they were often unable to explain the meaning of particular words, and were unable to rephrase the sentences in their own words.

The instruction language for lower primary grades is the local majority language. In the area around Homa Bay it is *Luo*, while the dominant language around Kwale is *Kiswahili*. In the latter case, the situation is slightly more complex as the native language spoken in most households is *Duruma*. *Kiswahili*, however, is widely spoken and children usually become acquainted with *Kiswahili* while

still in nursery school. The transition to English as the language of instruction is supposed to be made in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, but from the first grade onwards all textbooks are already in English.

Parents are divided over the issue of which language is supposed to be spoken at school. In the western part of the country, where Luo is the predominant language, the vast majority prefers English over Kiswahili as language of instruction. English is seen by most as the language of the learned and the language that has to be mastered in order to stand a chance to make a career. Therefore, parents attach a certain importance to learning English. But students with a limited talent for languages and difficulties in learning English experience a double disadvantage; not only do they get poor marks for English, but they are also severely disadvantaged in other subjects, as English is the language of instruction.

We discovered a marked difference between students who went to a village primary school and those who went to school in a town. Exposure to English is far greater in towns, and students also seem to be far more assertive in towns than in villages. This difference becomes noticeable in secondary schools, where graduates of village primary schools experience more difficulties in following the classes, in passing assignments and with communicating in class. According to the headmaster of a secondary school in Kinango, children from remote village schools are seriously disadvantaged when they start secondary school, and only those with an aptitude for language manage to cope. A mother from Banga, who used to live in Mombasa for several years, pointed out the difference:

At schools in Mombasa children speak English when they reach grade 3, because the teachers there insist that English is spoken all the time. Kiswahili the mother tongue in Mombasa, and is spoken at home. Here in the village it is Duruma, then Kiswahili and only then English. The children here don't have any chance to practice it; they only start to practise English from grade 4 onwards.

Other villagers around Banga agreed: "In town, even small children can understand and speak English, here they cannot. English language skills indicate to us the level of quality."

A mother of 8 children from Omako Koth emphasised:

The quality here is so poor, if somebody has been to school here and is then sent to school in town, they will be forced to go to a lower grade than here. So I really wonder what they are doing here at school. Take English, for example; the children here hardly understand anything. In the village schools, the children are taught in Luo, and the teachers don't really care enough to do their best. A teacher teaches at a village school, but will send his children somewhere else to study, because he knows that other schools (town schools) are better.

While exposure to a language plays an important role, the teaching culture and the role of children in the rural society are also influential aspects. Children are expected to respect and obey elders and persons of authority. Asking questions and speaking out is not encouraged at home and even if a teacher encourages assertiveness, the children might not respond. A second grade teacher at Gwadu primary school explained:

Mostly the teachers are blamed for the poor performance of students. But is it also the students themselves; the children are shy around here so they will be unable to talk at school. When they are small, they have to switch from Duruma to Kiswahili, which is difficult at first. When we ask them questions, they are too afraid to answer, and they are too afraid to ask questions if they don't understand something.

The majority of schools offer extra tuition to students; some for all grades, but most commonly for grades 7 and 8 when the final exams are approaching. These tuition sessions can be divided into regular sessions, which take place before or after the regular classroom time, and tuition periods that take place during school vacations. In general, tuition is given for an extra fee, to be paid to the respective teacher. The fee ranges from 20-40 KES per student per week. The problem is that during tuition, the focus is not on rehearsing with weaker students or on the topics that were addressed during the regular classes, but simply pressing on with the regular curriculum. This puts those students whose parents cannot afford tuition, or who need to help at home, at a serious disadvantage. A 17 year old student going to grade 7 at Ndiru explained:

We have regular classes to 4pm, and after that we do the exercises and go for tuition. Sometimes students sneak away when they have work to do. Tuition is an obligation, and we are supposed to stay until 6.30. We have to pay for the tuition, and the teachers really enforce the fee to be paid, otherwise students are sent back home. Around 10 out of 37 students of my class do not come to the tuition in the morning and evenings. During tuition, the teachers continue with the syllabus, it is not something additional or repetitions.

The whole system of tuition is therefore controversial; teachers stress that the curriculum is so overloaded and the planning so tight that they need the tuition time to stand a chance to get through the required workload during the school year. Some parents, but especially education department officials, maintain that the tuition classes are for a large part a strategy of the teachers to earn an extra income. There are in that respect not strictly necessary, or wouldn't be if the teachers would follow the regular curriculum.

## 2.4 Choice of school

Many parents are quality conscious and try to ensure that their children attend a school at which they receive a good standard of education. Parents can sometimes opt between different government schools or choose for a private "academy" if they have the means to pay for it. But transferral is not free of charge. A mother of 7 children from Banga talked about the choice of school for her children:

I looked at their marks: last year, one of them had 190 out of 500 points, and was still 5<sup>th</sup> best student in class! But in order to transfer children to another school, you first have to register them there. You have to pay upfront for the usual community distribution, which can add up to 500 - 1000 KES.

Her younger children have been transferred to another school. “Kitu school only has a semi-permanent building (mud-walls), and sometimes the students are taught outside. But the quality of teaching is better there. The teachers do their work; my daughter is in grade 2 there and she can already speak some words in English, and that makes me happy”.

Around the valley where the Omako Koth school is situated, some parents choose to send their children to a school in, for example, Langoromo, or others that are close by. “The teachers’ efforts and motivation are very important for the performance of the students. At Langoromo, the Parent Teacher Association has employed an additional 3 teachers.” One of the reasons for choosing one school or the other is also the question of administrative boundaries. Residents are invited for *harambees* (fundraising) for Omako Koth school; it is impossible to refuse, as it is also a matter of clan obligations. In the area around Omako Koth, every clan wants to have its own school. In the words of community members, “it is a matter of jealousy. Parents even prefer to send their children to the school of their own clan if the quality is better somewhere else. The parents’ contribution is an important factor here.” Every school needs to have a minimum number of students in order to operate and to receive recognition and funds from the government. A villager from Omako Koth explained: “There is a lot of competition between the clans. Within the same clan, people do things together, but they want to suppress people from other clans.” The clan initiates to set up a school and then the school is registered by the government. The government then appoints and pays for the teachers. But the structure/infrastructure of the school must be set up by the community. The government sets the criteria: sufficient land/space, which needs to be registered. Then a management committee is set up and a school can start with a minimum of 10 students. Financial contribution to one’s own clan school is an obligation, whether children are registered there or not. A mother from the village explained: “I have to contribute to the school at Omako Koth, but my children here go to Manera, which is a better school. I prefer my children to go there but this means that I have to pay at both schools.”

The focus of the research is the public system, but with the introduction of FPE and the resulting surge in enrolment, the pressure on the governmental schools has led to an increasing number of private “academies” being opened. Parents who are not satisfied with the quality of the public schools, whether regarding the infrastructure, the sizes of the classes, or, most importantly the examination results, may opt for private academies. These of course mainly cater to children of families which are slightly better-off.

Rodi town, for example, which is located in close vicinity to Ndiru primary school along the main road to Homa Bay, has a total of 4 private academies, and Rodi township academy is the newest addition. The school has 350 students, spread over 8 grades and a nursery class. The children at the academy are mainly from those families who have moved here, such as government employees, NGO staff and business people. The school follows the British system, the government curriculum is taught, but in a flexible way, and classes are taught for full days, regardless the grade. The teaching is far more intensive than at the governmental schools. Classes start at 7am, then there is a lunch break between 12.30 and 14.00, and after that classes commence until 5 pm. The maximum of students in one class is 30. There are exams every 2 weeks for grades 7 and 8; all other grades are tested once per month. Remedial lessons, if necessary, are free of charge. The school even has a computer for grade 8 pupils. The fees are paid annually; 3600 KES for nursery class, 5000 KES for grades 1-3, 6000 KES for grades 4-6 and 7000 KES for grades 7 and 8. The manager of the academy

justified the costs: “FPE is not really free either, there are costs for books and other materials as well as building fees, and it is of poor quality. Here we deliver good education.” But she also admitted that the school caters for a large part to the children of the relatively wealthy and that it remains out of reach for the majority of the local population.

Private schools are an attractive option for those parents who can find the financial means. A widowed mother from Ndiru sent her eldest daughter to the academy at Rodi, for which she managed to get financial support from an NGO and from relatives to cover the costs:

She had done the grade 8 KSPE exams in a public school but achieved only very poor results, she could have gone nowhere with that. Now she is redoing them at the academy. At the academy, there is no idleness, they have weekly tests and are kept busy all the time. I had looked around for a better school for her; I compared the results of the exams and then chose the best one. Now the girl sits in a class with 35 fellow students.

## 2.5 Children’s perspectives

Naturally, children will sometimes set different standards when measuring the quality of their learning experience; and the way in which children view the school-going experience can substantially shape their motivation to attend regularly. Groups of students were interviewed at all schools; their ages ranging from 8 to 19 years old. When asked about their initial motivation to come to school, most students stated that they were sent to school by parents, and sometimes older siblings.

At Banga and Gwadu, children expressed their enjoyment with attending school. Besides the school-going experiences as such, children appreciate time spent with peers and the relative leisure compared with multiple tasks at home. When at home, children are expected to help with various tasks in and around the house; this is especially true for girls, who have a higher domestic workload. As such, time spent at school is experienced positively. But students also have complaints, including the following:

- During lessons, the teachers sit in the staffroom, chatting. Mostly, students are not even given assignments at these times. Some students study by themselves, but most just play around. In other instances, teachers come very late, but expect their students to be on time. Students also reported instances where they actually went to the staffroom to demand their teachers to teach, and were subsequently punished.
- The lack of textbooks is another issue that can bring about problems. Books are assigned to individual students, who are then responsible for them. They are supposed to share them with other students; officially there is 1 book to 2 or 3 students, but this is rarely achieved. Those students responsible for a particular book have to pay for it in case it is lost, so they often refuse to share it with others.
- Additional material given to the school, such as footballs and volleyball are kept locked up by the teachers and are only used for competitions.

While the majority of children initially said that they like attending school, they also admit to a certain level of fear, caused by punishments received from teachers. Even though teachers deny that caning takes place, students testify that it is still very common, and it was also witnessed on

several occasions. When asked for the reasons for punishment by caning, the following answers were the most frequently given:

- Coming too late to school
- Having missed a day
- Failed to do homework
- Incorrect answers/assignments
- Failing to bring items such as firewood to school
- Failing to show up for work assignments, some of which have nothing to do with school

Winnie, aged 11 and in Ndiru primary 3, said that, “the teachers are harsh and they punish us a lot. We are caned for coming too late, even for making minor mistakes. Also, if we don’t write our assignments well, we get punished in class.” Students from Gwadu complained about unfair treatment by the teachers, such as: ridiculing girls if they make mistakes, collective punishment of groups of students, and being punished for the mistakes of a brother or sister. Students at Omako Koth feared their teachers more than those at the other schools. There was one particular teacher they especially feared because of his harshness. While caning at other schools mostly appeared to be “symbolic”, designed to humiliate rather than hurt, this particular teacher hits students with the intention of hurting them.

While school related factors are very important for the performance of children at school, the home environment also plays an important role. As already seen above, many parents are concerned about the quality of education, and those who are able try to assist and keep up to date on the learning progress of their children. Other children are less fortunate, and even though they are enrolled in school they face immense challenges to attend regularly, concentrate at school or complete assignments.

8-year-old Emily, for example, is enrolled in Omako Koth primary 4. Emily had 5 siblings, of which 4 died, her sister very recently: “There was a spell cast over my sister, she grew thin and died, she was 4”. Emily lives with the family of her paternal uncle, who has 8 children. She used to live with her mother next door to her uncle, but now her mother is in the Homa Bay hospital, and doesn’t know when she will return. Her father lives with his second wife in Mbita, 30 km away, where he works as a fisherman. He never visits. Sometimes Emily sleeps at her mothers’ house, but she goes to her uncle’s to eat. Last time she was asked to pay a fee at school, in this case it was 10 KES, her grandma paid it for her. They were asked to bring money for the new teacher at the school, who had been transferred from Dunga school. Emily had once been the best in class, but it is no longer going so well. “At Omako Koth, we get punished when we don’t bring firewood and water to the school. They need that for cooking for the teachers. The work is divided: grade 3 has to bring the water, grade 4 the firewood. The students of grade 4 also do the cooking; the food itself is provided by the teacher”. Emily’s feet and fingers are covered with jiggers<sup>7</sup>. She explained that due to her mother’s absence, no one had laid down fresh mud at their home, and so the jiggers started to

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<sup>7</sup> Jiggers are the immature stage of a harvest mite. To mature they must have a blood meal. They will attach themselves to the body, usually around body creases, where they inject saliva into the wound. They may feed for several days before they drop off and continue their development. The breaking down of the body tissue surrounding this bite causes infections and severe itching.

accumulate. After school, she has lunch, does the dishes and then goes to look after 12 cattle, together with 2 other children. She also takes the cattle out on weekends. During the week, she has to stay home to look after the calves when the cows are milked, this happens twice a week. The teachers punish her for failing to attend without ever asking her the reason why. At her uncle's house, 9 children need to eat; they eat *ugali* and *fingerlets*, but only very few pieces with lots of soup. Emily gets up very early, then goes to the river twice to collect water before she can go to school.

Eric is 15 years old and just recently returned to Omako Koth primary. He says that some things have changed for him: "Right now studying is more difficult than before, and my friends who were with me in my class before are now ahead of me." He had previously left school to work and support his family after his father had fallen ill and died. Now he lives with his mother and his father's other wife. While he was out of school he tended to cattle belonging to other villagers, which earned him 700-800 KES per month. He also did some other farm work. He could support the whole family and "even had money to buy clothes and sandals". Now that he is back in school his mother is working. They grow vegetables in the garden, and during the rainy season, there is enough food; but during dry spells, the diet is insufficient.

I wanted to go back to school because I saw my friends going there every day. My mother didn't want me to go back there, but I could convince her. Now I am looking for work in the afternoon, after school. But following the classes is difficult, and the teachers don't understand when I have to stay home sometimes to help my mother or make some money.



Grade 3 classroom in Omako Koth

## Chapter 3

### Perception of Relevance and Prospects

Despite serious concerns about the quality of education which children receive in primary schools, the majority of parents interviewed deem the formal education of their children as important. Before the introduction of FPE, school fees were said to be the major obstacle to school enrolment. With this direct financial obstacle removed, access to education has been improved to include all children, at least in theory. There are still children who are not reached, and not *all* parents are fully convinced of the importance of education, especially in the light of poor quality and limited employment opportunities. At the same time, efforts by the government to enforce compulsory enrolment have proved to work reasonably well, at least in the researched areas. In those rural settings, a system of control, which involves the chief's office and a network of village chairmen, ensures a tight social control over governmental policies. The efficiency in which this system appears to function in some areas often leads to the enrolment of children whose parents are not fully convinced of the relevance and benefits of education. While dropout of older children is accepted, younger children are generally sent to school.

In general, the expectations tied to enrolment stem from the (recent) past when education was more exclusive and when the attainment of a Primary Grade 8 certificate, and even more so a Secondary Form 4 certificate, was a virtual guarantee to formal employment. Now there appears to be a paradox with regard to expectations: many families realise that employment opportunities are in sharp decline, but that education is ever more important, even for the most basic jobs, and that without any education the prospects are extremely poor.

Around Homa Bay, population pressure, disease and inefficient farming methods have led to low farming income. The problems around Kwale district are more related to the weather pattern, which is increasingly unpredictable and makes farming unfeasible for many families. In these contexts, families see formal education - and subsequent employment opportunities - as an important path, or even the only path, that can lead to a better future. At times, however, the poor quality of the education and the resulting lack of useful skills that the students acquire, leads to serious doubts whether education can produce the desired results.

#### 3.1 The relative importance of education

Various policy documents for the Kenyan education sector state the aim of providing Kenyan children with relevant life skills through primary and secondary education, in order "...to fit into and contribute towards the well being of society, and to fit in the world of work. These two goals address the competencies, which the learner should acquire. ... The learner should get adequate knowledge and skills to be able to earn a living. The other focuses on the learner being able to fit into a 'social' world" [UNESCO 2004:4]. Two aspects are thus mentioned, the economic returns and the general and intrinsic value of education. From interviews with parents, students, teachers and

other stakeholders, a picture emerged of the perceived importance of education that is overwhelmingly focused on employment opportunities. While intrinsic values of education are also mentioned, primary school is mainly viewed as a stepping stone to a future of employment away from the village. Meanwhile, many families also see how the number of unemployed youths is starting to rise sharply. The problem of a mismatched supply and demand, of a type and quality of education that does not match the realities of the labour market, has been observed by Kielland & Tovo [2006:141]:

[I]t has been argued that the quality of schooling and the relevance of the curriculum are often so questionable that children's time could be invested more fruitfully elsewhere. In many African schools the curriculum seems to be focused on educating children for unemployment, in the sense that the skills that are taught are mostly useful in the formal sector, which employs only a fraction of the labour force. Besides, the more education one receives, the harder it is to accept life as a subsistence farmer.

Indeed, in each of the research settings, respondents pointed to the fact that primary education alone does not equip their children with many marketable skills, blaming this partly on the curriculum that is taught at primary school level. In an effort to streamline and reform the curriculum, a variety of subjects have been dropped altogether, while other subjects have been merged. The old curriculum was said to be overloaded with subjects that were of no benefit to the students. But it was mainly the practical subjects that were dropped and as a consequence, the curriculum became even more academically focused. Despite the fact that a large part of the Kenyan economy is rural, the education system is orientated towards the modern urban economy. Combined with the lack of jobs in the countryside, expectations of a financial return on primary education are unlikely to be met.

A young man from Banga related his opinion of the curriculum:

I struggled through to grade 8 to get my certificate, being poor in math and English, but the certificate didn't really help me much practically. Yes, maybe to be able to read and write was worth the effort; that was the most important thing. But subjects such as arts, crafts and agriculture were removed from the curriculum, and those were my favourites. Those subjects were useful and the students could discover their talents in time. It was something one could make a living from, I don't know why they dropped those subjects, people could have gotten jobs out of them.

This view was echoed by several parents in all research villages. A former school teacher, and grandmother of 4 school-going children, criticised:

Not all children are academically bright, and they will get afraid to go to school when they cannot cope. Now that they dropped the practical subjects, it is bad for these children. When will they learn these things? Young people don't know anymore how to work at home, they want to leave and work somewhere else. The young girls don't know how to iron, look after cattle, milk cows. The only thing they focus on is passing

the exams; that seems to be the whole purpose of going to school. But education should make a child fit to do any work, and not learn to say 'that I cannot do, I do not want to do this anymore'. Why did they remove the practical subject from the curriculum? The practical subjects are the ones that will help them to develop in the future.

A widow from Omako Koth expressed a similar view: "The former syllabus was much better because it equipped people with practical skills to make an income. Now, even those who have completed form 4 do not have anything when they come back to the village." 3 of her children finished secondary school, and they all work in Nairobi: "Around here, there is nothing for them. With what they learn, they have to go to the city." A retired school teacher also lamented the lack of a practical focus in the curriculum:

What I don't understand is why they don't teach handicrafts anymore, there are no opportunities to learn it. You can't even get baskets and other things around here. There is only one woman around here who makes blankets. You have to develop an interest early in order to move on from there, and that interest must be initiated when the children are young.

According to another woman, "with many of the practical subjects now removed, the main benefits of primary education are that it teaches one how to read and write, and basic maths."

Besides literacy, maths, and some basic knowledge of the world outside the village, social skills learned at school are also valued. "Being able to find one's way around", "knowing how to interact with other people", and "becoming more knowledgeable about taking care of oneself", are all examples of valued skills. The village elder of Ndiru explained: "At least an educated person knows how to handle himself better, even if they don't get a job."

Benefits of education can be found in many ways, as a father from Gwadu explained:

What motivates me, children learn to read and they will find their way around. Currently, it is preferable to go to class 8, the syllabus changes all the time, if someone left at grade 5, it may not have been sufficient, but up to grade 8 brings a child a good foundation. If somebody has been to school up to grade 8, they will be able to handle some jobs, for example *Jua Kali*, they can handle these jobs. Even for agriculture there can be some benefits. School can help with better techniques, to deal with insecticides. Agriculture is also taught at school.

The importance of educating girls compared to boys has reached a balance, at least at primary school level. Before the introduction of FPE, sending a child to school was a matter of allocating scarce resources and boys were mostly favoured. While there is still a disparity in the upper grades of primary school and in secondary schools, there is no gender discrimination in initial enrolment any more. During a focus group discussion in Omako Koth, a mother explained that "many children did not go to school before FPE. Here from this household, only 3 children went to school. Back then, if one had to choose, the boys would go, because the girls could get married later. But also the girls should get a chance to go to school." But when a choice has to be made about secondary

school enrolment, boys still get priority in many cases: “Boys are more important to be educated: if they are educated, they can help their parents. It is better to educate someone who stays at home (in the village), than somebody who moves away (the girl after marriage)”. Another villager disagreed:

It is different for girls nowadays; they can help and assist the parents in many ways. Before, the girls were promised and arranged for marriage, and wealth was given to the parents while she grew up. That money would be spent along the way and nothing would be left when she grew up. Girls are more reliable than boys, they help more at home and they also have more sense of responsibility.

A mother of 8, from Omako Koth, compared the past and the present situation of girls:

I tried to finish school myself. Before, people liked to educated boys rather than girls. They believed that girls marry anyway, and that they do not need to be educated. I went up to grade 6, and then my father told me that I had to look after the house. My father had 5 wives and said that if a woman gets too much education it will lead to no good. There was no argument possible about this with my father. But with time, these things are changing. Before, marriage was very lucrative when you had children. People would come and bring cows, ‘making a reservation’ for a daughter. That time, there was plenty of open space for cows. The price for a bride could be up to 20 cows, now it is one, or the bride even comes for free. At that time, men didn’t like educated girls because they would cause disturbance. A girl who went to school would want to rule the house, so leaving her ignorant made her more easily controllable by her husband. But nowadays, if a girl does not go to school, it makes it more difficult to find a husband, the men don’t like uneducated woman any more.

But the poor quality of education leads several parents to question the use of sending their children to school. A mother of 3 school going children from Banga complained:

I don’t think that there is anything important for the children to learn at the school there; even 6<sup>th</sup> graders cannot do a simple greeting in English. What is the point of sending children there? It is a waste of time, but now it is compulsory. Education does not help them, actually they lose on both sides. They don’t learn anything at school and they don’t get used to work on the *shamba*<sup>8</sup> or taking care of the animals. Then they get frustrated and might turn into criminals and thugs because they need money but have not learned to work for it. Many youths drop out before they finish, mostly in grade 5 or 6, and then go to Mombasa to look for work, as maids, as gardeners, mainly for Indian families.

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<sup>8</sup> Shamba is the Kiswahili word for farm

One of her neighbours, a father of 6, of whom the two oldest boys dropped out in grade 6 and 7, said:

I was not educated because of the costs involved, but I wanted my children to learn something. But they don't learn much there. It should be the governments' responsibility to ensure that the teachers are teaching. My younger brother in grade 5 can't even write anything in Kiswahili, not to mention English! The government forces the parents to send their children to school, but they cannot ensure that the teachers are actually teaching? Children should better stay home to help in the fields, there is no need to eat and then go to school just to play around. I would prefer my child to work in the *shamba*. They (the government people) always promote the benefits of education, but we never see the benefits. They say that when children are educated, they will get jobs and help to develop the area and so on. But they don't deliver the kind of education needed for that. My brother recently brought a letter from school, but he couldn't even read it!

Nevertheless, the majority of respondents considered education important, because a future in farming is seen as either not viable or not desirable. A father from Banga explained:

I want my children to be educated and then go and find employment in town (Mombasa), to work in a shop for example. I don't want them to be uneducated like myself. Here when it rains, you can rely on farm produce, but with the water shortage, it becomes a problem. The rain will fill the wells for 2-3 years, and if it does not rain then there will be a problem. Moving somewhere else is not so easy, as in areas where the climate is good, land is scarce. That is why the young people move to town, to support their families.

Another villager added: "The land here is divided among the sons and the grandchildren. Those who have some money can buy some additional land. Educating children now will give them some choice in the future. Farming can be a sideline, they can become a teacher or a judge or something else, and then they will have some resources to till the land or to pay somebody else to do it."

A woman heading a large household in Gwadu was sure of the importance of education: "It can help to develop the country; it brings a modern standard of life. Practically, it is important to know how to read signs when you go to other places. It makes it safer to be outside the village. You can also get a good job." Her neighbour told how she had been married off before she even had breasts so that her father could pocket the dowry in the form of cattle. She regrets that she never went to school, and now has no option but to stay on the farm: "My husband is too old to take care of us, and I don't even have beds for the children. Nowadays, dowry is less important, girls even go to Mombasa to work. It is acceptable now, especially when they bring money home, and there is not much pressure anymore to get married. Due to education, there are more options."

The problem is that the benefits of education are often not visible and that those who successfully gain an economic return on their education are the exception rather than the rule. A focus on the possible economic benefits of education frequently has an adverse effect, as it can turn people against formal education when these benefits don't materialise.

### 3.2 Transition from primary to secondary schools

I believe that the children will get better jobs in the future. With grade 8, there is at least the chance for some casual work, some children leave and go to Nairobi. But with grade 8 only, there is only casual work, but not more. And you don't really need the certificate for that. Therefore there is so much dropout. Only after secondary school they can become policemen, academics and so on. One only needs to go through primary school up to grade 8 when there is hope to proceed further to secondary afterwards. (Father of 6 children, Banga)

Often, the relevance and benefits of primary education are viewed in the light of the chances to proceed to a secondary school. Without emphasis on practical, marketable skills, primary school is designed to lay an academic foundation for secondary education. When secondary schools are beyond reach, due to financial or other reasons, the motivation to finish primary school is likely to lessen. According to national statistics, 47% of primary school graduates proceed to secondary school, but the rate encountered in the research locations was often significantly lower. From Omako Koth, less than 25% of the students proceed to secondary school.

There are two major obstacles to secondary school. The first and most important obstacle is of a financial nature. While primary education is more or less free, the costs of secondary education are so high that they are prohibitive for the majority of families. The fee for each term can easily amount to 12,000 to 20,000 KES. Most secondary schools are situated in small towns, and so students from the villages are forced to board. This means that everything has to be provided for by the families: the tuition fee, uniforms, books, clothing and even mattresses, sheets and cooking gear. For students from Omako Koth, for example, the nearest secondary school at Lal is a day school and costs 14,500 annually; the nearest boarding school at Magare charges 26,000 per year. It is common for schools to allow payments to be made in instalments during the year, depending on the season and the flow of income from farming. But the last instalment has to be made before the last exams of that year; without payment of the full fee, the pupil may not sit the exam.

A teacher from Gwadu primary related how the secondary school enrolment works in practice around Kinango: "It is necessary to initially enrol a student in form 1, and pay at least 2000 to 3000 KES at the beginning of the term. Most secondary schools accept later payment, but the payment has to be completed before the end of the term, i.e. the exams."

But even when the payment can be staggered, the fee is often much too high and unattainable for most. A father of 6, from Omako Koth, explained:

After grade 8, it will not be possible to send any of the children to secondary school; I have no money. Taking a loan is not an option because I could not pay it back, and the secondary school takes 4 years. Selling animals can be an option but even a very good cow only brings 12.000 KES; but the even cheapest secondary school costs around 20.000 KES per year.

Only families with a member with a (well) paid job, or those with assets they can sell, such as cows, can afford these fees. Secondary school bursaries are available in theory, but they are very scarce and the majority of respondents were either not aware of the existence of bursaries or did not know

how to apply. Even those who knew about the bursaries had expected their applications to be denied anyway, and thus did not even take appropriate action in the first place. The bursaries provided by NGOs were very popular because parents trusted that the required costs would be actually met, instead of just part of it, as is the case with government programmes. The NGO bursary programmes are along the lines of the traditional system of “sponsorship”, in which a wealthy family member or friend of the family takes over the responsibility for the wellbeing of a child - including the education - and thus covers all costs, not just direct fees.

When a government bursary is awarded, the selection procedure is not always transparent and in each research location examples were related of how some of the few available bursaries had been awarded to children of the wealthy and well-connected families. A young woman from Gwadu in Kwale told how her application had been successful, but when the money was transferred, a civil servant pocketed the money and never sent it on to the school. She was unable to hold anybody responsible as the person in question has some power in the area and nobody wanted to confront him.

Another respondent from Ndriu lamented:

There is no way that a family having 50 KES per day can pay 20,000 KES for school. Now, the school uniform might be the only decent clothes that a child has. Once young people are put ‘on hold’ after they finish primary school, in order to wait for funds to materialise, they might never get a chance. It often happens that a girl has to stay home for some time because the parents don’t have money. They say ‘wait until there is some money’, but she may meet one of the boys hanging around the village and get pregnant, and then she cannot continue.

Most parents claim that it is a lack of financial ability that prevents their children from continuing on to secondary school. However, some also recognise a certain lack of motivation that is to blame. In other words, the fees may indeed be too high for most families to pay, but a lack of strategic financial planning makes the situation even worse. A man from Banga village put it this way: “Most people here don’t value education. It’s like this; I myself do not know how to ride a bicycle, so I would not buy one either, or invest in one. Education is the same, those who don’t know enough about it don’t value it very much”.

Traditional and social obligations can also drain a household’s resources. A father from Banga explained why he had to take his oldest son out of secondary school: “My own mother passed away, and funerals are very expensive. I had to spend all his savings on the funeral; people come from far, and we need to provide everything for them. That drained my resources, and my son now works as a carpenter and works on the family plot. I couldn’t keep paying the school fees for him.”

A father from Ndiru described how he struggles to get by:

I want my son to finish secondary school, get further training and eventually get a job. We have 3 acres of farmland with yellow and white maize. I work the land by myself and the children only help after school. Three of the children are now approaching grade 8, but none of them will be able to continue with schooling, because there is no money for them. And the girls may decide to get married. It is not possible to take a

loan for further education. There is a CP programme where young goats are given to families but it is not easy. You have to form a group, there is a monthly membership fee and 6 people from one group are given a goat. The goats have to be paid for up front. There is another project with high breed cattle, to produce milk and sell it in Homa Bay. The problem is that the risk is high, because the cows are very expensive. They cost 20,000 KES apiece and get sick easily. The milk is sold for 12 KES per litre. You also need a borehole, because they drink a lot of water. There is not much profit at the end of the day, not enough to get my children through secondary school anyway.

When primary school students observe their siblings or peers unable to proceed with their education after primary school, some lose their own motivation to continue. Graduates of primary schools often just stay at home, and their education becomes seemingly of little benefit.

The oldest daughter of a household in Omako Koth finished grade 8 the previous year; she is 15 years old and is now sitting at home because the family lacks the money to send her to a secondary school. Her brother is in grade 8 in Homa Bay, staying with a relative. He did not do well at school before, and was transferred when he was in grade 5. Now he is doing well. His mother says that he was discouraged by seeing his sister sitting at home after having completed grade 8, not getting anywhere. The daughter would like to proceed with her education, but there is no money. She says that maybe a tailoring course could be an option, but that will cost 700 KES per month, an amount which is also not available. The son in Homa Bay has told his parents that he would like to continue to secondary school, or at least proceed to a mechanics course. That means for the family that they would have to plan a budget for 2 children's education. They do own land, but the last harvest was not good because it first didn't rain enough, and then it rained too much. The price of maize is very low as well, so selling some would not really help. They have only the farm, no other assets or income. Only very occasionally can they get some money by helping others and working on other farms.

The second obstacle to secondary school enrolment lies in the poor level of performance at many village schools. The final examinations at the end of grade 8 are national exams, which are synchronised throughout the country. The minimum pass mark for secondary school is 250 out of 400 points. In general, students are appointed to a secondary school according to their KCEP results (Kenya Certificate of Primary Education). Those with the highest marks can go to one of the prestigious national schools. However, in each grade 8 there are boys and girls who are repeating the year for the simple reason that their parents cannot afford the secondary school fees. They are kept in school in the hope that the families will be able to raise the money for the next year, or that a bursary will come their way. This is especially true for families with many children; where one child may be able to proceed, the others are "put on hold". Often it is one of the sons who is given priority in these cases, while the girls will either repeat grade 8 or stay at home. "After grade 8, my oldest girl should be sent to secondary school, but it is not sure yet if the money will be sufficient. Maybe we can sell some farm products or an animal. I do not think that there will be a chance to get a bursary, as the priority for bursaries goes to total orphans."

During the time of the research, there were rumours and regular media reports about a possible introduction of free secondary education. Naturally, the idea is popular with the general public, but the feasibility is questionable. A community development worker from Ndiru is sure that, "the

introduction of FPE had much to do with politics and elections. The whole discussion around free secondary education is only politics as well. With free secondary education, there would be even less jobs left. There should be more focus on agricultural work. Even after a few months working in the fields, people can earn some money, people have their own land around here.”

A woman who has taken care of her grandchildren since her son and his wife died, stressed the importance of having different options:

The interest of the child might be different individually, depending on their own talents. There is no way to know what children want; they have to find their own way. There is also no discussion on these things. Children are only asked after grade 8, and then the talent will show, guided by the best subjects. You cannot advise a child on something it is not good at. It is better only to take the bright child to secondary school. Someone who is not bright in class will perform better in a vocational school. If there is money, even the girls can continue to secondary school. In the current world, it is really needed that a girl goes to school. In the past, girls were left behind; they need to catch up now. Girls should go to school; they carry the burden at the home. A girl who went up to college will send her children up to college too, a woman cannot leave her children, but a man does. Children should be educated to help themselves, and to help others!

The so-called polytechnics or vocational training schools are an alternative to secondary education. Frequently named as “second best” options, those who cannot proceed to secondary school due to financial restraints often express a wish to proceed to one of the polytechnics in the area. These polytechnics or vocational schools offer 2 year-courses such as tailoring, masonry, carpentry and motor vehicle mechanics. The quality of these institutions is varying, but one of their shortcomings is that the training is not very practical and job market orientated either. Technical training requires an adequate infrastructure, which is wanting in many places. The Kinango polytechnic, for example offers the usual range of courses, but the students gain very limited experience that could help them on the job market. Teaching aids are limited; the class of mechanics, for example, has two engines for demonstration and one motorcycle to practise on. The girls in the tailoring class have to buy their own fabric to practise on. Finding jobs and business skills are not part of the curriculum, which means that many youths find it very difficult to gain employment or start their own business.

### **3.3 Education and employment opportunities**

According to Kenya’s MDG report, 500.000 job seekers enter the market annually, but only 80.000 formal sector jobs have been created in the previous 6 years, leading to rapidly rising unemployment rates [Kenya Ministry of Planning and National Development & UNDP 2006]. The lack of employment opportunities on all levels of education is a serious concern. A study conducted in Homa Bay district, regarding poverty reduction strategies, found that, “unemployment is a major factor contributing to poverty. The majority complained that after spending all their resources in educating their children, they are left with nothing to depend on and the educated children still continue to be a burden to them” [PRSP Secretariat 2001]. The report follows with, “the youth,

including the educated are very unproductive and have negative attitudes towards farming and therefore resort to idleness,” and that, “...most men ignore farm work.” This report points out two related problems: firstly the fact that education often does not lead to the desired job and therefore income, and secondly that the expectations that have been raised by an education make it very difficult for educated youth to remain in villages and “resort” to farming. A number of respondents pointed out this adverse effect of education. Instead of leading to a positive economic return, education then leads to undesired results, high unemployment, the refusal to perform manual labour and the potential for social conflict.

The vast majority of respondents, parents and students alike, mentioned “getting a good job” as the desired outcome of education. A “good job” invariably means a white collar job. The exact nature of this work was generally not further specified by respondents, but they always seemed to link it to a good salary and a secure future. Other desired professions are doctors, nurses, engineers and pilots.

In Ndiru, a group of young men had formed, all of whom had been seeking employment, but had failed. They all completed grade 8 and many even finished secondary form 4. After failing to secure a job, they set up a project group, which initially received some NGO support. The youth group has been in place since 2002 and coordinates jobs in tailoring, horticulture and activities related to “maram”<sup>9</sup>. Each member pays 20 KES per week, and there are 24 members. One of their members, 25-year-old John explained:

There are not many employment opportunities. In this village, most students stop their education after grade 8 because there is no money for the school fee for secondary school. There are only few options then. One option is the project here (stones), or to go back to farming. There is also some small scale sisal business which is usually done individually; middle men then buy the fibres.

The youth self help group also sponsors some youths to continue with their education, or to take courses such as tailoring. One of the young men in the group completed grade 12, went to college and then spent one year trying to find a job in Nairobi. After that he gave up and came back to the village. “Even after finishing a polytechnic, it might be impossible to find a job.”

A father of 5, from Omako Koth, explained that, “in former times, having completed form 4 meant that one was ensured a job, nowadays, it is the same as before grade 8. It is like inflation.” This “inflation” was also noted by other respondents: “The education that is offered now will not help the poor. Even somebody who went to college or university can be without a job. But even so, it is always better to send children to school; there is always some hope for the future ... for any job now, they want an educated person, even the *matatu*<sup>10</sup> touts and the shoe shiners nowadays are educated.”

A mother of 7 children, with 4 of school-going age, from Banga village, explained:

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<sup>9</sup> “Maram” is a very hard African red clay, used to pave roads, and for other construction purposes.

<sup>10</sup> A “Matatu” is comparable to a minivan used as a taxi

There are fewer jobs these days than before. Before, even those who just finished grade 8 could get jobs as teachers, now only secondary graduates have a chance. Around here, there is only farming and burning charcoal, making sisal, cutting grass for thatching other people's roofs and casual farm labour. There is a lot of disappointment because many don't see any direct benefits, but it will not discourage people from going to school, it is good to go to school anyway, to learn how to communicate, to learn English. The good thing is to learn how to read and write, and sometimes jobs do come up once in a while. Also for voting, reading and writing is important; you have to know how to vote and whom to vote for. Still, if the benefits of education are not seen, some might indeed decide to drop out.

A father in Gwadu (with two sons, both of whom finished grade 8 and now work in a Mombasa; one in a cannery, the other in an Indian shop) explained his view:

Now, the job market is flooded because everybody is educated. Before, an educated person could count on a governmental job, but now it gets very hard. But education is essential, the technology is changing and the standard of living is rising, especially in the cities, people need higher education. Without education, young people will not have a chance in the future.

Even though employment prospects might be bleak, education at least offers a chance; and as the traditional ways of life are threatened, options are limited. In many areas of Kwale, for example, the combination of drought and then excessive rains has made it nearly impossible to rely on farm income alone. Many families have at least one member working in Mombasa, and the adult men all try to find some casual labour in or around the village. Mombasa is about 60km away from Kinango, and is generally referred to as "the town". Villagers looking for work are forced to move there, because small market towns such as Kinango and Kwale offer only very limited opportunities.

According to a village elder in Banga:

People either find work through somebody that they know in town, or they just move out and try to find something by themselves. Women go and find work as maids, the men seek employment as drivers, porters or in shops. Employment opportunities in Mombasa are there, but it may take some time. Most people who leave here in search of work stay with people they know until they find employment. Otherwise it would be very difficult to survive in town as everything costs money there. The minimum requirement to find work in Mombasa is to have at least finished grade 8, to be able to read and write and to be able to make calculations. Only for maids this is different, they can also be dropouts.

Several respondents addressed the potential downside of education in the light of limited future prospects. Unemployment among the youth is rampant, and frustrated expectations can lead to social conflict: "Unemployed youths become easily frustrated and get themselves into problems, drug abuse and other things. This is also a bad influence for those in school, leading to bad habits in them too. If young people cannot proceed with their education, it encourages thuggery and theft in

the villages, it is a security issue.” Besides leading to “bad habits” and social conflict, education is also seen to spoil young people for the harsh life in the villages. An elderly man and his two wives see a clear disadvantage:

The problem is that young people in the village lose their interest in farming, because there is a lack of finances, equipment and cows. Farming well and efficiently is impossible. Also the attitude has changed. Before, youths could be made to work hard, even walk far, without complaining. Now if you want to send them somewhere on foot, they will ask for money for transport instead. Everything got more expensive as well. If you don't have your own cows, you will have to spend up to 3000 KES to hire them. When we were young, the richer people had more cows, and they would lend them out to others, in return for tending to their cattle or ploughing their fields. But then, the rich wanted to marry many women, and they gave the cattle as bride prices or sold them. They squandered all the wealth. They also sold their cattle to educate their children. Initially, there would be only 2 educated persons in this village, and 2 in the next. The problem is that the educated people don't bring any benefits to the community; they look down on the villagers. Young people are reluctant to stay here, to farm, to find jobs here or to go into fishing. If they make money somewhere else, it is just enough to scrape by and there is nothing left to support the families back home.

Another problem related to education is the change in behaviour it can bring forth, which is seen to be especially problematic in the case of girls. While parents retain control if the children attend close-by primary schools, attendance of secondary (boarding) schools means a loss of control.

Of course there is a change in culture: the young people adopt foreign ways when they go to town. It brings problems, they lose respect for the elders, they dress differently and they wear short and tight clothing. Girls change more than boys, in terms of clothing and discipline. Some young people never come back once they've gone to town; others send money and come back for visits. The issue of change in culture and behaviour is a big problem. Sometimes they are influenced in a way that the bond between the children and the parents is broken. Provocative dressing leads to embarrassment, people will talk badly and the family loses the respect in the village.

A young man from Banga who finished grade 8 retold his experiences:

Before, the young people would look after the families' livestock and people didn't think that education was so important. Then the diseases came and much of the cattle disappeared. Education is more sustainable, it can bring you further. But then there are not many jobs around. When people finished grade 8 or even secondary form 4 and then look for work but don't find any, it becomes very de-motivating for others. There are three main problems for the young generation: no money for secondary school, no jobs and the need to find something to do! Most of my former classmates now work in Mombasa, mainly in *Jua Kali* jobs, in hotels, pushing carts or working as porters, and street hawking. Some don't find any work and come back here. Those who come back are the ones who do not know anybody in town, having to find food and shelter

themselves. Another problem is that your family will always expect money, even if you did not find work, and they will be upset if you don't bring any money home. Even if you stay away for two weeks only, they think you must have earned money, and if you don't have they will accuse you of having wasted it on women. In the end I think that life in the village is better than in town. If you get a salary of 1500 KES, it all goes on rent and other things you need to buy; in town life is too expensive. The decrease in livestock has led to a change in lifestyle. People used to have livestock as a reserve in hard times, now when there is a problem, they have nothing left to sell. Cows were also used as a guarantee for a loan, which becomes ever harder also. Now most people want to send their children to school because they see that their life is changing. Some still try to cling to their old ways, to the way of life when cattle were plenty. Around Masomalome, there are only 2 or 3 families who do not send their children to school.

A 19-year-old boy from Banga, without an education, moved to Mombasa to work, and found a job in a retail shop through a contact he knew:

Connections matter more than education. Many people are educated but don't have work. I have the same job now for 2 years. In the beginning it was difficult because I cannot read and write. Fortunately I had practised Kiswahili with other school children in the village before I went to Mombasa. I really miss reading and writing skills in town. There are places for adult education, but they start at 500 KES per month.

The benefits of primary education on its own are seen to be very limited. The most important knowledge that students acquire (as seen by the parents) is basic literacy, basic numeracy, and the ability to find one's way outside the village. One of the major shortcomings in the eyes of many is the lack of practical skills with which the students are equipped. All subjects are academic, and the practical subjects were scrapped with the last curriculum reform. These included agriculture, crafts, and so forth. Many families expressed the view that these subjects could provide skills to those who cannot continue to secondary education. As the majority of students do not proceed beyond primary school, youths are ill-equipped for their futures. The education offered does not encourage self-reliance and entrepreneurship, nor does it help to improve life in the villages. At the same time, attainment of at least standard 8 is often seen as the absolute minimum requirement for personal advancement, although it is also widely recognised (especially in Kwale) that personal connections can be at least as important when it comes to securing a basic job.

The "better" jobs, i.e. white collar jobs, can only be attained by those with a secondary education. Almost everybody expresses the desire to continue to secondary school. Caretakers usually do not define the exact nature of future occupation for their children, but describe it in terms of "formal employment". A "career" in agriculture is not seen as a viable option, rather as a last resort. Education is clearly linked to a career and a future outside the village, and there is the expectation that returns will flow back into the villages. Farming would thereafter become a secondary and/or supplementary income. In terms of employment, people see a certain "inflation" of primary education: an increasing level of education is needed to offer a chance of a formal job.

A major factor here is the quality of education being offered in the village primary schools. Where the quality is low, parents become disillusioned with the potential benefits for their children, and in

some cases even experience an adverse effect. Having children in grade 5 or 6 who are not able to read and write Kiswahili sufficiently to deal with a letter, not to mention some basic English skills, has left some parents wondering which benefits education has, if any. Several parents voiced their concern that children are wasting their time at school, are not learning useful skills and often idle in the classroom. In such cases, parents recognise the negative fact that these children are also missing out on learning essential skills by working in the fields. They worry that the children will become frustrated with their prospects and susceptible to bad influences.

In each of the settings, only a few families could recount a “success-story” either within the extended family or in the neighbourhood. While there were divided opinions on the issue, a majority of parents and youths felt that some of the practical curriculum subjects that fell victim to the last reforms should have been retained. Basic business skills, crafts and home science provided previous school leavers with some practical and meaningful skills. The new curriculum regrettably focuses on academic subjects.

# Chapter 4

## Obstacles to Education

Despite the fact that the majority of school-age children in the research locations were actually enrolled in school, there are still several obstacles preventing children from enrolment or regular attendance. While the introduction of FPE freed parents from the burden of school fees, there are still costs which have to be covered: parents have to buy school uniforms, pay examination fees and contribute to the school's maintenance and infrastructure. Extreme poverty can make these costs a high burden to families, and cash income is scarce in rural farming communities and fluctuates greatly throughout the year.

In some locations, HIV/AIDS and other diseases take a high toll on families, and responsibilities for care are often shouldered by children. Children may have to stay at home to care for sick parents, or take over some of their tasks. Especially in single-parent households and households headed by grandparents, contributions by children can be significant. This can lead to irregular attendance and dropout. However, dropout also occurs due to the poor quality of the education, limited prospects, early pregnancies and so forth.

### 4.1 Poverty and disease

There is a wealth of studies on the impact of HIV/AIDS on the lives of children. In 1998, Kenya had an infection rate of 14%, with marked regional differences. One of the two research areas features one of the highest rates in the country. According to UNICEF, between 30% and 35% of teenage girls in the western province of Nyanza were infected with HIV in 2001 [UNICEF 2001]. Without a doubt, the disease leaves a deep impact on all aspects of life, including the educational opportunities of children. Within the scope of this research, however, it was decided not to isolate the problems of children from HIV affected families from those who face other challenges, because the high malaria incidence rate in the region in fact leads to even more cases of mortality, and similar consequences for children.

In the first two research locations in western Kenya, 30-40% of the households were taking care of children other than their biological children, in addition to their own. Thus, most orphans who still have members of the (extended) family can count on some basic support. The problem intensifies when nobody in the community is willing or able to take an orphan in. As those children do not have any means to survive in the village, they may have to leave the village and seek survival elsewhere. When the parents die, adolescent children are sometimes chased away from the village so that others can take over the property. The most desperate cases are found in market places and towns rather than in the villages.

It appeared that as long as children can remain in their villages of origin and are being looked after by relatives, they receive basic protection, even if they live in dire poverty. For those who must

leave their villages, the situation becomes more difficult. The slum area in Homa Bay, for example, is an area where children and youths seek shelter, living in small sheds and trying to scrape together a living on the streets. While in the villages it was nearly impossible to find children out of school during school hours, Homa Bay town presented another picture. Children were found begging or working in and around the market all day long.

A 14 year old girl, for example, came to Homa Bay town with her older brother, aged 17. They were chased away from their home village after their parents died and they were left to fend for themselves. They live in a tiny tin shed without windows and ventilation, with barely enough space to sleep. Both had to drop out of school and find some casual work in order to survive. Nearby, in the same slum area, neighbours had alerted a small local charity group about the fate of two young boys, approximately 7 and 9 years old. They were living with their grandmother; the parents had died. The grandmother was unable to take care of them and the children had become malnourished and sick. They fed at a nearby house where a widow cooks meals for a group of orphans, with supplies provided by a catholic charity. The children did not go to school and were fending for themselves most of the time. These are just two examples of a growing challenge. The scope of poverty and the impact of disease in the district have led to an increasing number of broken families as well as an increasing number of orphans. The few charities are overwhelmed and often widows and orphaned children find themselves at the mercy of private initiatives.

In the villages, the traditional structures still ensure that the vast majority of children are looked after, even though it is very difficult. An elderly man from Omako Koth summed up the challenge: “Our own children die, and we are left to care for our grandchildren. I am old now and it becomes too difficult to work the farm”. He is in his seventies and had lost 3 sons and 2 daughters. Now he struggles to take care of 6 grandchildren. “I had thought that my children would take care of me when I am too old to go out to the field every day, but now they are gone and I have the responsibility for my grandchildren.” Households headed by grandparents were a common sight in the Homa Bay district and the challenges are severe; the additional costs to keep all children in school can be overwhelming. A grandfather in Omako Koth explained:

The problem is that school as such is free, but there are other costs as well, such as the school uniform. Other children have to stay home to help. If a child does not have a proper uniform, the teachers usually don't send the children straight back home but they will give a deadline. For uniforms and shoes and other little things, the cost of sending a child to school is around 1200 KES per year.

But these additional costs, although relatively small, are also a burden for households that have not been hit by disease. A father from Banga said, “because there are no jobs in the area, people even have difficulties to buy a school uniform. So they have to go to the forest, and cut down trees to burn charcoal, which is bad for the whole area.”

A mother in Ndiru related how one of her daughters was sent home from school: “One of the girls was in grade 2 and she was chased away because she didn't have a good uniform, her uniform was too old and tattered. She will stay home for the time being, because at the moment we don't have money to buy another uniform, so she will have to wait.”

Besides the costs for a school uniform, a small examination fee also has to be paid, usually about 30 KES. Then there are the community contributions for school maintenance and other projects set up by the school management committee (see next chapter). While Free Primary Education abolished school fees from grade 1 to 8, nursery school still has to be paid for. And as the completion of nursery school is a requirement for admittance into grade 1, parents have to find a way to pay the fee. The fees are set by the school and can range between 40 to 100 KES per month per child. The fee is supposed to cover the salary of the nursery teachers, who are not employed by the government. In Gwadu, the majority of the parents find it difficult to cover that fee. Instead of paying 100 KES in cash, they bring chicken, woven mats, or they work in the nursery teachers' *shamba*. One of the two nursery school teachers explained:

The parents around here are poor, so they can't pay. Since we live around here, the parents come and offer us their help at home, instead of paying the fee. The payment is supposed to be made between the end of the month and the 10<sup>th</sup> of the next month. If the fee is not paid by then, the children can be sent home. Last month, we had 1000 KES each, but if everybody would pay, we would earn 3500 KES per month. On average we get 1500 per month, never the full amount. Especially orphaned children run into problems, and they are often enrolled late for nursery school. The oldest child here is 8 years old, and she has been here for one month. She lives with her aunt, and the village chairman brought her here, because she was always helping at home. Most of the smaller children you'll see at the homes here have been sent home because the parents didn't pay the fee. Some other children have to stay home because they are left in charge of the homestead when the parents work in the *shamba* or go to the market.

A women's group from Ndiru explained that, "there is a lot of dropout, especially among the total orphans who cannot meet the basic needs. A single family has many children and there is no proper income. The children have to go to school in shifts and that reduces their performance. Some children always have to stay home to help. Then that leads to a lack of motivation and they drop out".

There is FPE, but in practice, there is still cost and labor sharing. It is hard but we have to do it. When they built something, we have to pay or the children will be sent back home from school. The last contribution was 200 KES per head last November, for building a new classroom. Many families could not pay, so the teachers sent the children home repeatedly. If they still don't pay, sometimes the teachers leave it to that. And sometimes a child - especially the girls - is too shy to return to school if they have been sent home often, and they decide not to return to school.

Where poverty may prevent attendance due to an inability to pay fees, poverty can also stand in the way of performing well at school. Insufficient nutrition and a high domestic workload contribute to a challenging environment for learning. As none of the research villages were connected to the electricity grid, studying in the evenings is impossible. Most houses have 1 or 2 rooms only, which are shared by the whole family for living, sleeping, cooking and eating. Cooking on open fireplaces

inside the house is common and the fireplace is built below the storage place for maize, as it is said that this will conserve the maize and drive out insects. Chickens and kid goats also share the living space. In this environment, doing homework and studying for exams can be challenging. A teacher from Ndiru primary school observed: "I don't give my students homework, because I know that for many of them studying at home is impossible. They cannot concentrate, nobody helps them and after dark there is not enough light anyway." Girls seem to be slightly more disadvantaged than boys, as they are often assigned more household chores than boys. As soon as girls return from school, there are tasks awaiting them, while boys are more readily excused if they say that they have to study.

Extra incentives such as school feeding programmes can serve as a motivational factor for parents to enrol and retain their children in school. Around Kwale, for example, subsequent droughts and very poor harvest yields have led to food distributions by national and international NGOs. In this context, the lunch provided for primary school pupils, and the additional breakfast for nursery school children, help to prevent dropout. A father of 5 explained why the school lunch is so important:

There are many advantages with the school feeding programme. The poverty levels around here have increased, and children do not always get sufficient food. There is less rain, and fewer yields from the fields. Without ploughing animals there is not much yield from the fields, the soil is very heavy. Before, we had many cows around here, some didn't survive the drought, and others were sold to pay for the education of children. There are no grazing grounds for cows anymore, because of overpopulation and shorter rainy seasons. The cattle are sold for education fees, but educated people do not bring returns the way that ploughing animals do. Before, we planted groundnuts and sweet potatoes, now we can only grow rice.

In the light of the poor quality of education, extra incentives can make a difference and tip the balance. According to the CBO chairman in Gwadu, "children here are in school because of the food programme and not because of the education. Without the food, there would be mass dropout within one month! Without the food here, the children would be looking for casual jobs". Both parents and teachers acknowledged that the school feeding programme around Kinango serves as an important motivational factor to keep children in school. A community development worker in Kinango observed that the school lunch is in many cases the most nutritious meal a child receives during the day. Observations at Banga and Gwadu village confirmed that many households are struggling to provide sufficient food for all members of the family. Children were regularly observed to save part of their school lunch to take home to their younger siblings.

## 4.2 Child work

Child labour and education are often seen as two sides of the same coin. In order to eliminate child labour, free and compulsory education is often identified as the vehicle to reach that goal. With the introduction of free and compulsory education, and more importantly, the enforcement at a local level, child labour becomes less acceptable.

Traditionally, all children are expected to help with various tasks in the household and on the families' farm, to a varying degree. This does not have to be in conflict with school attendance, but can pose a practical challenge. However, child work and child labour is not confined to household chores. While the legislation regarding child labour is clear and also strictly observed in most areas, children still leave school in order to seek employment. According to UNICEF, 27% of Kenyan children, from 6 to 15 years old, are working children. Poverty and HIV/AIDS are named as major reasons for this, combined with inadequate legislation, poor enforcement of existing laws, and the breakdown of families [UNICEF 2001].

National reports present different statistics; according to the ILO definition of child labour (25-41 hours of work per week), 17% of children aged between 5 and 17 are engaged in child labour. Only 1% of children were identified as being involved with the worst forms of child labour, and 3% worked for pay [Mull 2005]. The main sectors where children are found to be working include subsistence agriculture, commercial agriculture and domestic work.

A UCW report from 2005 analyses the workload of children and the influences on their education [Guarcello et al. 2005]. The report finds that household chores are the most important form of work performed by the sampled children, with teachers indicating that 38% of children perform household chores as main work activity, 27% are involved in subsistence agriculture, 18% in commercial agriculture and 4% in domestic services in other people's homes. Girls tend to work more in their own household than boys do, and boys spend more time in agriculture and other economic activities. The report goes on to show that weekly working hours are moderate, with 75% of children working less than 14 hours per week, and only 16% more than 22 hours. Household chores appear to put the highest burden on children, followed by domestic services and formal employment. Agriculture ranks very low, with only 5% of children spending more than 22 hours per week on these tasks.

The vast majority of the interviewed children in all 4 research locations stated that they routinely assist with household chores. This ranges between cleaning the house and washing dishes and clothes, preparing meals, accompanying parents to the market, and collecting water and firewood. Other chores named, but to a lesser extent, were tending cows and goats as well as working in the fields (digging, weeding, harvesting). Herding and working in the fields is mostly a boy's domain, or occasionally older girls. None of the research locations offers commercial employment opportunities for children, and work done by children is to a large part limited to the child's own household. The time of the research, however, did not fall together with the most labour-intensive period in the villages. Families were awaiting the annual "long" rains, in order to prepare their fields, and work in the *shambas* was still limited. Other daily tasks assigned to children mainly include looking after younger siblings and guarding the house during the absence of parents. In general, these tasks do not stand in the way of enrolment as such, but do affect regular attendance. Especially on market days there is a noticeably lower attendance rate, as children either go to the market to accompany their mothers or they are needed at home while the parents are out. Girls are more affected than boys, as they take on a higher proportion of the workload. This also affects performance, as girls are given less time to study and to prepare for examinations.

Tasks within the household are traditionally assigned by gender, age and within a certain social hierarchy. The tasks carried out by children are generally those with little or no prestige, and children have little choice but to accept them. As Kielland & Tovo [2006:17] observed: "Children's

chores are primarily defined on the basis of their low social status.” Tasks demanding responsibility, such as operating machinery, no matter how basic (such as pulling the plough by oxen), is traditionally a man’s domain. Women are responsible for the domestic area, the provision of water and firewood, and as observed in the research areas, for harvesting. Children are given increasing responsibilities according to their age. In many rural societies, the time-consuming and tiring, but not difficult, task of herding animals is often left to children. Due to the nature of this task, regular school attendance is difficult. The duration of herding depends on the availability of water and fodder and can vary greatly throughout the year.

In Kenya, the introduction of Free Primary Education coupled with *compulsory* education had a lasting impact on the division of work within the household. As school enrolment and attendance is often closely monitored in the villages, many households had to rearrange the division of work. Many tasks previously assigned to children are now carried out by adults within the family, by hired labour (in cases where families can afford it), or done by children outside their regular school hours. The reorganisation of the workload within the household posed a challenge for families, especially in the early stages. According to several respondents, there was initial opposition: “Even when primary education became free, there were families who didn’t want to send their children to school, which had to do with the animal herding the children were doing. The adults suddenly had to take over the children’s tasks, which wasn’t easy in the beginning”. A group of woman from Banga village talked about the division of work and the conflict of attending school and helping at home:

The workload has always been an important factor when deciding if the children can go to school. Often, the issue has not been the money for the school fees, but the high workload at home. With FPE came the pressure to send children to school. There has always been a lack of will, especially in the case of girls many parents did not want to send their children. Now, the work at home is still being done, but organised differently. Now even the women take out the cattle.

Herding was always done by children, mainly the girls until they were of age to be married off. With the start of FPE and compulsory education, there was a lot of resistance. Then the chief’s office sent people around to ensure that children were being send to school. The chiefs called meetings with the village elders: they were to look out for children out of school. The parents were warned that schooling was compulsory now. Then the village elders moved from door to door. Initially, the workload was difficult to handle, it was too much. And there was no consideration for “hardship”, families with one parent, or sick family members.

The women continued to explain how the tasks of the children were taken over by adults, something that had previously been unheard of. Now grown woman and elderly men can be seen tending to the goats and herding cattle. However, children still have to help outside their school hours. Children whose parents own livestock demand that they take them out for water or grazing when they return from school and on weekends. Some children are also kept at home once or twice per week for these tasks, especially those whose parents have other duties away from the homestead, like going to the market.

Children working full time tend to leave the villages altogether. As there are no employment opportunities in the villages, neither for adults nor for children, those seeking employment tend to migrate. In Homa Bay district, children and youths seeking employment go to Homa Bay town as the nearest option, but there are still few opportunities. Kisumu by contrast, Kenya's third-largest city is a popular destination for job seekers. In Kwale district, villagers always referred to Mombasa, "the town", as the place with the best chances for employment. Unfortunately, no reliable data could be obtained regarding the scope of child labour and child labour migration directly. Interviews in the research villages indicated, for example, that the practice of sending children to Mombasa in order to work as domestics is still existent, but in decline. Over the recent years, the existing legislation and controls have been sharpened and parents complain that it is getting too difficult and risky to place their children in employment. Some parents have brought their children back or the employers have sent them back home.

A 15-year-old girl from a household with 8 children, for example, had worked as a maid in Mombasa for one year, before she came back in 2004, after tougher child labour laws were implemented. She herself would have preferred to remain in Mombasa, in the job which she said she enjoyed very much. Before, not having been enrolled in school in her village, she used to spend her days helping her mother and looking after her younger siblings. When she had gone to Mombasa to work, she said that her life had improved:

I had to help them in the household, but it wasn't much work, not more than here at home anyway. The food was good there, and sometimes the family took me into town. I don't know what they paid me, my father took the money. Life was much better there than here in the village. My father came after one year and said that I would have to come back here.

She explained that she didn't want to leave Mombasa, but that her father insisted she return. The government had started to check papers and ID cards and employers would be punished if caught employing children of school-going age. Her mother also thought that sending her back to the village was to her disadvantage: "In town, she had a better life; there are more opportunities for her than here in the village. She could have kept working as a maid." The new laws and stricter enforcement on child labour were also commented on by other families in the village, and some parents saw it as a disadvantage for their children. The majority, however, argued that now that children can go to school free of charge, they should get a chance to do so, and only move out to work when they are older.

A group of woman from Ndiru argued that continuing school, or dropping out, is often a matter of choices and options:

The gap to secondary school is very big. If you are from a less fortunate family, children get frustrated and drop out. I know of a boy who dropped out and is just idling. The workload at home is never an issue to drop out. It is always the adult who can handle the work. It is not that the students drop out because they cannot go further; they just drop out because of lack of interest. Around Kisumu, there are a lot of dropouts because there are many work opportunities. Children here drop out when there is work on other people's plots.

### 4.3 Work at school

It is generally agreed that school and education should be beneficial and in the best interest of the child's development. Unfortunately, during the research it was frequently observed that pupils were asked to perform chores during school hours. The Kenyan practice of involving school children in work for the school was also reported by Mull [2005]. Teachers and administrators frequently justify this practice as being necessary to operate the school with limited funds. Tasks assigned at school include the following: maintaining school grounds and classrooms, working in the school garden, digging irrigation or drainage trenches, fetching firewood and water, and working in the fields of the teachers. According to Mull [2005], 93% of primary schools have school activities involving work, and 100% of secondary schools. These activities include working on the school farm (42%), and cleaning and cutting weeds or grass (74%). 57% of the work is assigned as "punishment for students". While the practice is widespread, the scope and severity differs.

Work activities are sometimes part of the curriculum, or are carried out for the benefit of the school. In other cases, extra work is assigned to the children by the teachers. This includes cooking for teachers, working in the teachers' fields, and bringing water and firewood in excess of what would be necessary for the normal operation of the school.

At Ndiru primary school, working activities were limited to a short time span and mainly to activities that benefit the school as a whole. Students, however, still complained about the practice, such as a group of female students from Ndiru, (grade 8, and aged 14-16):

I dislike digging at school; the teachers have their own plots of land and the teachers pick a class and make them work the land, up to 3 times a week, for half an hour. Many teachers do that. And we already have to help at home in the fields as well. During the dry season, we have to fetch water for the teacher; we do that during "game time". But they have the right to send us; we have to go when they send us.

The girls related how they get up at 6am in order to prepare breakfast and clean the house before going to school, and how difficult it sometimes is to finish their tasks at home and get to school on time. The extra work load at school is much more burdensome for students in other places. The situation is especially serious at Omako Koth primary. Children are made to work excessively, not only in the school compound, but also on the fields of the teachers. There were even complaints about teachers hiring out groups of students to other farmers, and then pocketing the money. Teachers denied that this was taking place, but the evidence given by students and parents was overwhelming and matched observations. While the work assigned to students takes away from their instruction time, it also conflicts with their responsibilities at home. Parents complained that the teachers keep their children until long after the regular hours and that it becomes impossible to handle the household chores. A mother of 4 school-going children said:

I have complained many times. Yesterday, the children came back home again very late, and they need to help at home as well. The teachers keep them there to work; yesterday they removed soil and carried it up to a building site. They do these things often when they have "game time", but I have also seen them weeding the fields at 10

in the morning. The government and the inspectors are not aware of that. The chiefs know about it, but they don't report it.

The following remarks came from parents in Omako Koth:

All parents here complain about the way that the teachers keep the children around to work. Children are supposed to be relieved by 4pm, but they often return only at 7pm!

If the teacher has a relative who needs some work to be done, they send the children. It can be any work: carrying bricks, weeding, harvesting.

The school building is not permanent, so students have to help keep up the structure. They have to smear the walls and bring poles to school. But when they are released late, they still have to bring firewood to school the next day. When are they supposed to gather that?

Children are overworked at the school. The teachers make them work there so hard that they cannot help anymore at home. They never come home before 6pm. If I ask for permission to keep a child home when I have to go to the market, it is impossible. I am alone at home. They want the children at school to work and not to learn. Much of the work that the children do at the school is unnecessary. The teachers get paid, but they still make the students work for them. If they don't work, they get severely punished.

Everybody wants to make money, and some teachers use the students. You will find that children are hired out to work somewhere in the fields, and the teachers take the money for it. The children cannot refuse, the whole class is sent.

#### **4.4 Dropout and attendance**

Finding children younger than 14 or 15 who had dropped out of school was a serious challenge in all research locations; most dropouts are 15 years or older. While dropout at primary school level used to occur due to a lack of funds, the introduction of FPE has relieved parents of that burden. But as seen above, extreme poverty may still present an obstacle, despite FPE. Factors mentioned in the previous chapters, such as poor quality, lack of relevance and perspective as well as household responsibilities of children can lead to irregular attendance and dropout. Often, the irregular attendance precedes the eventual dropout.

The respondents were somewhat divided when identifying the main reasons for dropout, but three major topics emerged: poverty, lack of interest, and lack of prospects. There also appeared to be a difference between dropout of girls and of boys. A teacher from Ndriu observed: "Dropout is due to poverty and the lack of money to buy a uniform. For boys, if they see that they can make some

money riding a *boda-boda*<sup>11</sup>, they just decide to drop out. For girls, the main reason is pregnancy, often between the ages of 14 and 16.” Early pregnancy was named as a problem in all research locations; with girls starting to drop out from grade 5 onwards.

Teachers tend to hold parents responsible for irregular attendance and dropout. According to the deputy headmaster at Gwadu, attendance rates average around 90% on any given day: “Those not attending stay home due to sickness, because the parents keep them home to help, and because of ignorance. Parents don’t push their children, if they don’t feel like going or pretend to feel sick, they will not send them to school.”

A teacher at Ndiru primary school said:

Parents do little to encourage and help their children and they also think that the time which a child spends at school is enough. The lower grades just come in the morning anyway, in the afternoon they help at home. Even the older ones stay at home in the afternoons when the parents go to the market. Attendance is sometimes a big problem. Older students skip school for small business; younger ones are kept at home to help out. From each class, around 10 students skip class. On market days, even fewer students come; sometimes as many as 10-20 students don’t come. If they skip for a longer time, the teacher will enquire with classmates. The parents always give the same excuses, or the children are tending to a sick family member. Other children just hide and the parents don’t even know that the children skip school.

Attendance was also noted as a problem in Gwadu:

I never find a class full, there are always several students missing. Absence of students is a major problem. Children are being sent on errands during school hours. Some children miss 1 or 2 days every week, most often the Thursdays which is a market day. Even though the feeding programme helps to retain the children at school, the conditions here can be very harsh. There are few educated people here and so there are no role models for the students. Nobody at home can advise them and nobody supports their homework.

According to the headmaster and the chief’s office, an estimated 50 children around Omako Koth have left the village. They are said to have moved into town to work for other people, because they were orphaned, or came from very poor families. A villager in Omako Koth explained:

The children who are not going to school are very hard to find. They don’t stay around the house. They are either out in the fields, or they leave the villages altogether. When young girls get pregnant, they also tend to leave the village, out of embarrassment.

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<sup>11</sup> Boda-boda are bicycle taxis, the preferred mode of transport in small towns of Western Kenya. The bicycles have a reinforced and lengthened baggage rack and can be hired to transport passengers or goods.

Males drop out because of their own reasons, mainly when they already have another option. It is hard to find people idling around here.

The situation is similar in other villages, as comments made by teachers in Ndiru show:

Girls drop out of school and move somewhere else to help in households. Then the girls get married and never come back. Even though it is very uncommon to put children into employment nowadays, it still happens but it is mainly the older girls who get employed, there has been a change of attitude. It is more often the boys around grade 5 dropping out. It is better to at least learn up to grade 8 and then decide what to do. Dropouts easily turn into thugs; the girls get married and move away.

At Ndiru primary school there are more girls in the lower primary grades; in grades 1-4 girls actually outnumber boys. From grades 5 to 8, the situation changes and there are more boys than girls at school. According to teachers, this has to do with adolescence and the related problems. Children are enrolled when they are 6 or 7 years old, and when girls reach puberty at the age of 12-14, they start to drop out of school. "It is both the children themselves dropping out by themselves and also the parents who do not or cannot control them. Many parents let their children drop out, some make them drop out," a villager commented.

A teacher from Ndiru expressed the belief that the *attitude* towards education plays an important role in attendance:

The high wastage is due to a negative attitude towards education. There is a lack of motivation as most cannot continue to secondary schools. There are bursaries, but many parents are not aware of them and there are too few. The younger students have a better discipline, but the older ones need to be pushed all the time. Gender performance is divided: in the lower grades, the girls do better, in the higher grades, the boys perform better. Maybe that is also a problem of the workload of the girls, girls work a lot at home, while the boys only have to look after the animals. Girls get suppressed and they get more quiet when they get older, small girls are more active. Girls are always told that they are not that good, and that their place is at home. The women carry water, firewood, they go to the *shamba*, they do everything. Boys are encouraged to talk, girls are told to be quiet. Then it is the same here in school: they are too shy to speak out. Life at home is so difficult, a girl might think that marriage brings a way out, rather than keep studying and remaining with the family.

The problem of early pregnancies was mentioned in all research locations. Girls generally drop out between grades 5 and 8 if they become pregnant. Some, however, do manage to return, even when they are mocked at school. A father from Banga related his own experiences:

Children mainly play around at school, and girls get pregnant. Once a girl gets impregnated there, nobody will want to send an adolescent daughter anymore. Once pregnant, a girl can better stay at home. My daughter got pregnant and got a child. I didn't want to send her back to school, but others here in the village convinced me otherwise. She then went to a secondary boarding school in Mombasa and got pregnant

again while she was in form 2. She had an abortion and nearly died. She never went back to school. Her first child is with my wife here in the village, and my daughter is now working in Mombasa. I don't know what she does; maybe she works as a maid. In my time, there wasn't such immorality at school. Most parents fear for their daughters. The teachers don't care, they tell the students "you do what you want; I'll get my pay at the end of the month."

Orphans are also more likely to drop out of school. Just down the road from the school at Omako Koth, a household had taken in the children of their relatives. The second youngest, 11 years old, had repeated both grades 1 and 2, because he had attended school only irregularly because he looked after his sick parents. His older sisters both dropped out of school, in grades 5 and 6 respectively. Both are married now and moved away. One got pregnant and dropped out, the other decided to leave. The young boy now attends grade 3, but he is not doing well.

Poor quality and especially the poor performance of teachers can also lead to frustration and dropout. When children perform poorly at school, the parents and the children themselves may decide that continuing through to class 8 might be a waste of time. A father from Banga linked dropout to quality and relevance:

Instead of sitting around and playing at school, one might decide to stay at home and play. Not many here complete primary school, most look for employment and others just stay home. My own son dropped out in the first term of grade 7, because his teacher was so lax that he thought he was wasting his time there. There is no relative benefit or difference if one only has grade 7 or completed grade 8. Only those who go on to secondary schools are in a better position; they can find work in town, join the military etc. Those with only primary education live the same life as the others here in the village, there is not much difference: it depends rather on creativity and hard work. The only things that really make a difference are reading and writing skills; apart from that, somebody who dropped out early might do much better in life.

Late enrolment is also a contributing factor to dropout. Many pupils enrolled with FPE were overaged, and according to teachers, the problems for them are a combination of difficulties in adjustment and social pressures: "For them, it has been difficult and many drop out. Older youths get teased at school. Girls with big breasts get laughed at; also boys with the body of a grown man get ridiculed sometimes." Students confirmed that the teasing of older students is quite common and that it can easily demoralise students, especially girls.

The school at Gwadu, for example, experienced a surge in enrolment with the introduction of FPE in 2003; the numbers in grade 1 doubled. But in subsequent years the numbers in the higher grades did not show a significant increase, pointing to a high rate of dropout. A teacher explained: "Many overaged students were enrolled in grade 1 that year. But a lot of the older students found it too difficult to adapt and dropped out within the first two years". There is quite a variation in age in some classes; in grade 8, for example, the age of the students ranges between 13 and 18 years. "Once a student reaches grade 8, they are motivated because they have nearly made it, the lower grades 5-7 give more problems, higher dropout."

An especially disadvantaged group of children are handicapped children. Even though there are several schools for these children, places are scarce and many families fail to see the use in educating a handicapped child. Mentally handicapped children seem to be even more disadvantaged than the physically handicapped. All the children with a mental handicap encountered in the research villages were referred to as “those with epilepsy”, and were not sent to school. A mother of 7, who supports the education of all her children and has already transferred some of her children to a better functioning school, keeps one of her children at home: “She is epileptic and we had to take her out of school. She used to go but would wander off and get lost, so we had to keep her home. The school is 6 kilometres away, and it is one hour walk for the children.” In other cases, handicapped children are hidden away; either said to “not belong to the family”, “be only visiting”, or “have recently been sick”. A handicap, even more than disease, is often seen as a curse on the family, and something that is not openly talked about.



Pupils bringing in the teachers' maize harvest



Nursery school pupils, Gwadu

## Chapter 5

### Community Involvement

Questionable quality of education, lack of motivation and/or absence of teachers, poor performance of students, as well as cases of corruption, all call for a functioning system of control and accountability. In order to strengthen both quality and efficiency of the education system, school management committees (SMC) and parent teacher associations (PTA) have been established. The rationale behind setting up SMCs was to provide mechanisms for effective management of school resources. The SMC is supposed to enhance the administration of the school, to provide a platform on which the school and the community can pool their resources, to improve accountability, and to strengthen community involvement and “ownership” in educational matters [Kenya Ministry of Education Science and Technology 2005]. Each committee is made up of the school headmaster, who serves as the secretary, a treasurer, a chairman and representatives or contact persons for each grade. The total number of committee members ranges from 12-14. The committee is supposed to be (re-)elected every year. If it functions well, members should serve several years so they can build up experience. If they do not fulfil their tasks well, they should be replaced. Their primary role is to prepare plans and budgets for the school as well as approve expenditure. The headmaster is responsible for the implementation of the decisions taken and accounts for the allocation of funds. The SMC is also responsible for resource mobilisation and serves as a link between the school and the community. In the latter role, the SMC can function as an information or mediation forum.

For the school year 2007, the government allocated 1020 KES per child. According to the Kwale district education officer, 600 KES is allocated for instructional materials, while the remaining 420 KES is used for maintenance, travel expenses and support-staff wages. While teachers’ salaries are paid directly by the ministry, funds for textbooks and other teaching materials, maintenance of the infrastructure, salary for the guard, and so forth, are allocated to schools according to the number of pupils.

Problems pertaining to financial accountability and with regard to quality education thus fall within the responsibility of the SMC. In practice, however, the actual leverage of these committees is very limited. In none of the four research locations did the SMC succeed in getting issues such as quality on the agenda. Even the most pressing problems such as teachers’ absences and the workload assigned to students by the teachers could not be addressed with lasting results. There are several reasons for this, and there are distinct opinions from the community on the one side, and the school and other educational authorities on the other. The headmaster and the teachers of each school tend to emphasise the difficulties in engaging community members in any activities and often question their sincerity and depth of interest in educational matters. A very frequently heard comment was that there is “no real interest in education”. Teachers accuse parents of being ignorant and unmotivated when it comes to the education of their children. Parents, on the other

side, feel that they are not taken seriously and that their involvement in educational matters is only sought when contributions are needed. These contributions can be of financial nature, in kind or a contribution in the form of a work assignment. The findings correspond with those found by Mull [2005:12]: “[T]eachers often criticized the school management committees as working against the teachers and ineffective as members are frequently illiterate. The most common criticism by parents is that the schools are always asking for more money and passing unnecessary costs on to parents.”

At none of the research locations did the SMCs or PTAs function to the satisfaction of the majority of the community. In fact, only a few committee members themselves expressed their content about the functioning of these groups.

Both a SMC and a PTA are in place in Ndiru, but neither of the two seems to function very well. According to one of the teachers, there is a friction between the headmaster and the teachers. The community puts pressure on the school as the quality is declining and people suspect that there is a misappropriation of funds. While the previous headmaster had been very popular, the current headmaster is controversial and isn't trusted by the community. The teachers are not entirely satisfied with the way the school and the funds are being managed either. One of the teachers explained that, “the teachers are locked out from decisions and knowledge on how money is being spent. The SMC acts as signatory to government allocated funds, but all is decided by the headmaster alone.” The SMC only meets at irregular intervals and, according to the parents, their issues are never addressed. The PTA at Ndiru is not functional at all and meets only once per year. According to a Ndiru community worker, “the PTA is supposed to discuss the progress of their children and actually all parents are expected to come, but we never get more than 150 people at the most. And then there is not much opportunity to actually discuss anything and it is basically the headmaster passing on some information.” At the same time, powerless as it is, the PTA is said to be more neutral than the SMC, and more critical of the situation at school.

Practical and motivational challenges for community involvement can be illustrated with the following example. Ndiru school was chosen as a site for a re-launch of a school feeding programme sponsored by the government. The programme is supposed to stimulate both attendance and retention of students as well as the local economy by purchasing the food from the community. The government buys the food from the farmer but the community has to effectively provide all other things, such as the employment of the cooks, construction of the kitchen and the stoves, and the pots necessary for cooking. Furthermore, the community provides the firewood and the water. The intention is to link the feeding programme to an agricultural programme, and make sure that everybody from the community is actively involved. In the whole province of Nyanza, only Homa Bay has been selected as a site. In order to finance the programme, the government announced the provision of 2 million KES for a whole school year, which should be sufficient to purchase all the necessary maize and beans. This was officially announced during a public meeting that was attended by ca. 130 people from the community. During this meeting, a surprising number of security personnel were present. Apparently, the parents had threatened to not let the headmaster into the school compound that day, because there was the widespread belief that he was squandering the school's money. The headmaster was only able to attend thanks to the security measures. Two weeks later, the funds were to be officially handed over and the details laid out. During these two weeks, the vast majority of the parents with school going children were not aware

of the fact that the community was expected to make a substantial contribution in the form of construction, materials and the cooks' remuneration. When the handover ceremony took place, the initial amount had somehow shrunk from 2 million to 500.000 KES, an amount sufficient only to cover the costs for a maximum of 3-4 months. Nobody dared to ask where the remaining 1.5 million had gone, and those who had attended both meetings said that, "this is the way these things happen..." During follow up interviews, parents expressed both resentment and frustration and several people pointed out that in a climate of corruption, the willingness to contribute to a community cause is very limited.

One of the government officials at the meeting had a very clear message for the community, regarding their rights and responsibilities:

The parents' role is NOT to watch how the headmaster spends money. Instead, parents have to ensure that their children study at home. They never follow anything up; they leave everything to the teachers! The poor quality of education should actually be blamed on the parents and not on the government. Mistakes should not be automatically blamed on the teachers, but things have to be looked into first.

This criticism did not go down well with the parents, who find that they are always asked to contribute but not to "interfere".

In the case of Omako Koth, the tight grip of the headmaster on all school matters, together with a weak treasurer and chairman, leaves little space for active and constructive participation of other committee or community members. There are serious grievances about the functioning of the school: "The teaching is not good, the teachers don't care, they come late and leave early, children just play around"; and parents say that the headmaster does not implement any of the rules, and that the school inspector has come only once in 7 years. But "the committee has to address the issue, before the parents can do anything about it." The headmaster is said to be harsh and not easy to get along with. "People are afraid of him. If he doesn't work here, he would have a job somewhere else. He doesn't need to fear any consequences, and this is not a popular post, because the school is remote."

As it is only the headmaster who can call a new meeting and an election for new committee members, his refusal to cooperate effectively halts all initiatives taken by parents and other community members. Parents in general don't feel that they can rely on the SMC to safeguard the students and parents best interest. PTAs meet only rarely, and then the meetings take on a type of public address rather than a forum or discussion. "If you are not a member of the committee, there is absolutely no direct contact with the school. And it is far too hard to complain about anything because many members of the committee may be related to the teachers."

The committee always supports the teachers and not the community. When the committee comes together, they pretend to be on the community's side, but they keep with the teachers' opinion when it gets serious. The committee is supposed to be elected yearly, but it has been in place for 7 years now, and the headmaster refuses to call in a meeting for a new election.

Another community member lamented:

The committee should address the workload of the students but they can only do that when they are strong. The chairman of the committee doesn't even know how to write his name. And the headmaster is also the secretary, and he is the one who is supposed to call meetings. At each meeting we have had, we have demanded that a new committee is to be elected, but the headmaster has never responded to that. For example, the problem with the CDF money for the additional classrooms could not be dealt with by the chairman, he is ignorant. The headmaster doesn't call for a meeting because he knows that he will be in trouble. The only solution for the parents is to involve the education office in Homa Bay. But even then, an inspector will probably be on the side of the headmaster. The only chance is to raise publicity, and then the parents have to unite and physically remove the headmaster from school. The headmaster is supposed to set an example and to set the rules, but if he only comes to school 2 times per week, the other teachers will do the same!

When meetings are set, the school sends word to the parents through the students. This is normally done with very short notice, which is extremely annoying for parents, as they are expected to drop all their daily duties. One day at Omako Koth all students were sent home at 11am to notify the parents to come. A mother explained:

My daughter first refused and was caned for that. It is said to be compulsory for all parents to attend those meetings and they don't say beforehand what the meeting is going to be about. They don't take us seriously; they make us come there without knowing what is going on. In the end, they usually want something from us. And they usually berate those present on behalf of the whole community for things that don't go well. That's why many people don't like going.

Parents' control in these matters is weak. The level of illiteracy among parents, gives them little power and leverage to deal with quality issues at school. While it prevents parents from fully understanding what their children are supposed to learn, it also strengthens the relative power of the teachers and the headmaster. Parents complained about the fact that they are only called to the school when they have to make a contribution, either financially, in kind or in the form of work to be carried out. They are never consulted or invited to discuss matters of quality of education or performance of their children. They are also not confident about their entitlement to do so.

The relationship between the parents and the school (headmaster, teaching staff) appears to be marked by mistrust and a lack of mutual understanding. In Gwadu, for example, a corruption case, which involved the SMC chairman and the headmaster, was brought forward by parents, but was arrogantly and aggressively pushed aside by the headmaster. The fact that the issue was brought forward shows the concern of the community, but the way it was dealt with did not encourage trust and cooperation.

At Banga, a father of 6 had similar complaints:

The headmaster doesn't like people to investigate matters and to follow up on things. If the committee gets too close, he will call for a re-election to get new members, he doesn't want people to know too much. He is also the one who deals with the money

allocation of the school funds, and he does not like the accounts to be checked, so he will try to get rid of people who know too much. He disbands the committee and calls for a new election.

The students don't expect any help from the committee either. A group of girls from grade 7 in Gwadu explained that they only have an average of 4 lessons per day, and that the headmaster is sometimes absent for 3 weeks at a time: "We cannot complain to the SMC about it. The SMC has no time for students, only for their meetings."

A member of the SMC at Banga presented a more optimistic picture:

I am in charge of class 7, and also for the collection of money for the cooks. It is 10 KES per month per child. The SMC runs 3 projects, tree planting, maintenance of the water tanks, and sees that the teachers are teaching accordingly to the guidelines. I ask the students about the teachers' performance; on Friday mornings I go to the school and they can talk to me. But there are never any complaints.



Family compound in Gwadu



Grade 5 in Omalo Koth

# Conclusion

Increasing access to education and simultaneously maintaining its quality is an immense challenge for any country, given the limited budgets for the education sector and the fact that investments in quality will only show their returns in the mid- and long run. Kenya is no exception and the rapid expansion has put a strain on infrastructure and other resources. The introduction of free primary education (FPE) has brought relief for many families but has also put a severe strain on the quality of education.

A majority of parents were critical of the quality of education that their children received. The quality was measured by parents in terms of curriculum and its perceived relevance, the motivation of the teachers, acquired skills (literacy, numeracy), language skills and examination results. They also consider the student-teacher ratio, the instruction time the students receive and the regularity with which teachers attend school. Overcrowding due to a large influx of students constituted a severe problem at one of the schools and was pointed out by teachers, students and their parents alike. The lack of attention given to the individual student, the impossibility to assist weaker students and to check and correct assignments, were named as the biggest problems. Most respondents in this area agreed that the quality of education has decreased since the introduction of FPE and the resulting influx of students. At the same time, however, the abolition of school fees was welcomed as a just measure, because it enabled also the poor to send their children to school. In order to improve the quality again most stakeholders proposed the construction of more classrooms and the employment of more teachers.

Overcrowding was a less pressing problem at other locations; but again, a shortage of teachers, a lack of individual attention and instruction time was seen as serious problems. Classes were reported, and observed, to frequently not take place as planned. It is, however, not just a physical absence of the teachers that impedes the delivery of education. Teachers frequently report to school in the morning, take roll call in their first class, and then retreat to the teachers' room. The students are sometimes given assignments, but not always. The students are not allowed to leave the classroom during these periods and are supposed to study by themselves. Often they are not given instructions, but just told to behave themselves. Both parents and students reported this as a major problem. Students are frustrated by the discipline demanded by the teachers and the teachers' own behaviour. The inability to address and solve this issue was the main complaint. Many students also expressed the wish that the practice of (corporal) punishment would be dropped and that teachers would take their complaints and concerns more seriously.

The perceived relevance and benefits of education are related to the quality as well as the highest level of education that a child is likely to achieve. In the perception of parents and students themselves, the most important set of skills taught at primary school level is the ability to read and write, which is seen as a basic right and necessary to secure even the most basic job (outside the village). Another frequently named benefit is that of "finding one's way around" - having had some

exposure to the aspects of life outside the village, having gained language skills and being able to communicate with other people.

But when the quality is low, parents become disillusioned with the potential benefits for their children. Having children in grade 5 or 6 who are not able to read and write Kiswahili sufficiently to deal with a letter, let alone having attained some basic English skills, has left some parents wondering what benefits education can have, if any. Several parents voiced their concern that children are wasting their time at school, not learning useful skills and often idling in the classroom. Since these children haven't learned to work in the fields, it is stated, they might become frustrated youths in the future, susceptible to bad influences.

One of the major shortcomings in the eyes of parents and students alike is the lack of practical skills with which the students are equipped. All subjects are academic, and the practical subjects were scrapped during the last curriculum reform. These included agriculture and crafts. Many families expressed the view that these subjects could provide skills to those who cannot continue onto secondary education or proceed to polytechnics. The majority of students do not advance beyond primary school and the education offered does not encourage self-reliance and entrepreneurship, nor does it help to improve life in the villages.

Without emphasis on practical, marketable skills, primary school is in actual fact a preparatory step towards secondary education. As secondary schools are increasingly out of reach (restricted by financial and geographical factors), the motivation to finish primary school is likely to decrease. The overwhelming majority of primary school students did, however, express the wish to continue to secondary school; and according to national statistics, 47% of primary school graduates are able to proceed to secondary school. But in the research locations the rate was significantly lower; from Omako Koth, less than 25% of the students proceed to secondary school.

There are two major obstacles regarding secondary school. The first and most important obstacle is financial. While primary education is more or less free, the costs of secondary education are so high that they are unaffordable for the majority of families.

While the intrinsic gains of education were occasionally mentioned, primary school is mainly viewed as a stepping stone to secondary school and then future employment, i.e. formal employment, a "white-collar job" away from the village. Such expectations stem from the (recent) past when education was more exclusive and when the attainment of a grade 8 certificate was a virtual guarantee to formal employment. The emerging paradox is that employment opportunities are in sharp decline, whilst education is evermore important, even for the most basic jobs. Population pressure, disease and inefficient farming methods have led to low farming incomes. The farming plots are small, yields are low and funds to invest are unavailable for the majority of farmers; families see formal education - and subsequent employment opportunities - as an important path or even the only path that can lead to a better future. "Formal employment" is the way forward; a future in agriculture is not seen as an attractive option, but rather as a last resort.

Primary education is free and compulsory; nevertheless, not all children are in school. This was said, during interviews, to be related to two issues: firstly, some parents do not appreciate the value of education and secondly, children are busy fulfilling their traditional tasks at home, such as herding animals. The government has, as a result, set up a control mechanism that appears to be working reasonably well in rural areas. Enrolment is monitored and controlled through the chiefs'

offices. A chief and his assistants or sub-chiefs are the government representatives and they see to the implementation of governmental policies. By appointing politically loyal village elders or chairmen, who each are responsible for 30-40 households, the local authorities have managed to set up a tight system of control. Cases of non-school-going children are reported by the village elders to the sub-chief or chief. This system appears to work reasonable well in rural settings with a tight social control. However, it is less successful in more populated areas, and national statistics clearly show that enrolment is the lowest in urban centres [Kenya Ministry of Education Science and Technology 2003]. Migration towards urban centres has led to the creation of large informal settlements in which infrastructure and social control is lacking. At the same time, alternatives and opportunities for non-school-going children are much more readily available in urban areas than in the countryside.

Despite free and compulsory primary education and the fact that the majority of school-age children in the research locations are actually enrolled in school, there are still several obstacles preventing children from enrolment or regular attendance. While the introduction of FPE freed parents from the burden of school fees, there are still costs that persist: school uniforms, examination fees and contributions to the school's maintenance and infrastructure.

Extreme poverty can make these costs a high burden to families, and cash income is scarce in rural farming communities and fluctuates greatly throughout the year. In some locations, HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases take a high toll on families, both financially as well as in terms of the responsibilities shouldered by children from families that have been affected by disease.

Unfortunately, recent and reliable data on enrolment ratios are hard to obtain. In the climate of compulsory education, which appears to be well enforced at the village level, the willingness of parents and even other community members to discuss the issue of non-enrolment was poor. Those children not enrolled, and those who have dropped out, tend to leave their villages in search of work, either in the closest market places (Kinango, Kwale), or in Mombasa. From the research sites in Homa Bay, those students who had dropped out left to Homa bay town or Kisumu, although in the case of pregnant girls, some were re-enrolled after giving birth. Dropout occurs mainly in the higher grades, from grade 4 onwards or with overaged students. The majority of dropouts were older than 15 years old.

Children found out-of-school were mostly enrolled, but not attending due to "sickness", "helping at home" or having been sent home by teachers. Teachers estimate that children miss an average of 1-2 days per week. Especially on market days the school attendance is low, and absent pupils include children from all classes and ages. Children themselves see this as problematic: they miss out on classes and get punished by teachers for their absences. Children who stay at home frequently have poor exam results and their motivation declines accordingly.

While "pre-FPE" dropouts mostly cited lack of funds as the reason, "post-FPE" dropouts and their parents named poor quality as a major reason. Children who were initially enrolled at a relatively higher age found it difficult to adjust to the school environment and judged their prospects, also with regard to the quality of education, more critically. In addition, there was a high incidence of early pregnancies in the case of older girls. Early pregnancies were more common in the Homa Bay area than around Kwale.

None of the research locations offered commercial employment opportunities to children, and work done by children was to a large part limited to the child's own household. The workload of a child was not a major cause for non-enrolment, but it did have an influence on regular attendance and performance. The time of the research in Kwale did not coincide with the most labour-intensive period in the villages. Families were awaiting the annual rains to prepare their fields, but work had not commenced yet. The daily tasks assigned to children mainly included fetching water, collecting firewood, tending to goats and cattle, cleaning and sweeping, food preparation, looking after younger siblings and guarding the house during the absence of parents. These tasks did not stand in the way of enrolment as such, but did lead to irregular attendance. On market days especially, the attendance rate was lower, as children either go to the market to accompany their mothers, to perform small jobs, or they are needed at home while the parents are out.

Girls are more affected than boys, as they take on a higher proportion of the workload. Students in all research locations commented on their contributions at home, with female students describing a higher workload. More girls than boys complained about the fact that their tasks interfere with their schooling and that they are given little time to study or to prepare for examinations.

Traditionally, certain tasks are mainly carried out by children, such as herding cows and goats and some of these tasks have proved to be incompatible with schooling. The introduction of FPE coupled with compulsory education therefore had a lasting impact on the division of work within the household. Many tasks previously assigned to children are now being carried out by adults within the family, by hired labour (in cases where families can afford it), or are done by children outside their regular school hours. According to many respondents, this reorganisation of the workload within the household posed challenges for families in the initial phase. Adults had to take over some of the tasks formerly assigned to children, something that was previously unheard of; grown-up women and elderly men can now be seen tending to the goats and herding cattle. But children continue to help; children have to take livestock out for watering or grazing when they return from school and on weekends. Some children are kept at home once or twice per week for these tasks, especially those whose parents have other duties away from the homestead, for example going to the market. By and large, traditional labour patterns underwent a drastic change once education was made compulsory, and, in some cases had become the norm.

Remarkably, children in some research locations spent a considerable amount of time working around the school compound. In general, education and school is meant to be beneficial to the development of the child, but in many incidences it was observed that school children are required to work during school hours. While the practice is widespread, the scope and severity differs. Work activities are sometimes part of the curriculum, or are carried out for the benefit of the school. In other cases, extra work is assigned to the children by the teachers. This includes cooking for teachers, working in the teachers' fields, and bringing water and firewood in excess of what would be necessary for the normal operation of the school.

The questionable quality of education, the lack of motivation and/or absence of teachers, the poor cognitive skills acquired by the pupils as well as cases of corruption, call for a functioning system of control and accountability. In order to improve both quality and efficiency of the education system, both school management committees (SMC) and parent teacher associations (PTA) have been established. In practice, however, the actual leverage of these committees is very limited. In none of the four research locations did the SMC succeed in bringing issues of the quality of education on

the agenda. Even the most pressing problems, such as teachers' absences and the workload assigned to children by the teachers, could not be addressed. The headmaster and the teachers of each school tend to emphasise the difficulties in engaging community members in any activities and often question the sincerity and depth of interest in educational matters. A very frequently heard comment is that there is "no real interest in education". While teachers accuse parents of being ignorant and unmotivated when it comes to the education of their children, parents feel that they are not taken seriously and that their involvement in educational matters is only sought when contributions are needed. These contributions can be of financial nature, in kind or a contribution in the form of a work assignment. For example, parents are required to provide construction materials to maintain or build infrastructures, dig latrines, bring water and firewood to the school and assist in the running of the school feeding programme. The PTAs do indeed appear to function more as an instrument for the school management to tap additional resources than as a means of involving the community in the running of the school.

Non-enrolment does not constitute a major problem in Kenya. Even though prospects are bleak, most people recognise that education is crucial for the future of a child; expectations are tied to (formal) employment and a life away from the traditional village economy. At the same time, the enforcement of compulsory education pressures those parents who do not necessarily see the benefits of education.

The fact that enrolment in urban centres, where labour opportunities are abundant and social control is more relaxed, is much lower than in most rural areas also points to the reality that both social control, as well as the lack of economic opportunities helps to keep rural children in school.

The major obstacle and challenge to achieving universal education is the quality of education. Irregularities such as internal corruption, non-delivery of services such as frequent absence of teachers, or excessive extra-curricular workload for students have been found to different degrees, and together, they form serious obstacles to obtaining an education. These irregularities take place within an established net of power relations, institutional and personal arrangements, and it is very difficult to address or even identify some of these problems. Unfortunately, the PTAs have so far proven powerless in the attempt to control these issues.



Teenage dropouts, Gwadu

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