

**Research title:**

**Influence of the abolition of fees on transition to secondary school: Evidence from rural Kenya.**

**Research statement:**

This research will look at the transition from primary to secondary education in rural Kenya. In particular it examines the influence of the abolition of fees announced in February 2008 on the possibilities for access to secondary school for primary school leavers. The paper will build on data that has been collected preceding the abolition of secondary school fees, and so allow a comparison immediately before and after the policy announcement. The first round of data collection focused on those children who successfully completed primary education and qualified to enter secondary school, but failed to enrol before the abolition of fees. The follow-up round of data collection will re-interview these children and their households to find out whether they have been able to enter school following the abolition of fees and, if not, why not. I will also return to the secondary schools visited to explore the impact of the fee abolition on their enrolment, as well as how funding of the schools has changed as a result of the loss of fee income.

Analysis of the data before the fee abolition reveals that secondary school fees are a major factor in preventing access to secondary education. By analysing household income and expenditure, as well as school fee structures, the findings show that low income of households and high costs of schooling are indeed the obstacles for gaining access to secondary school. Interviews with school teachers and parents also endorsed this finding. However, given the recent context of Kenya where the government abolished all the secondary school fees (except lunch fees for day scholars and boarding fees for boarding scholars), the study predicts that those children who were excluded from secondary education in 2007 may now have a chance to enrol in school. If that is not the case, it is interesting to explore the reasons why they are still excluded.

As the CREATE framework illustrates, transition to secondary school is a crucial process for the successful implementation of universal primary education, which can also lead to an overall increase in enrolment in secondary school (Lewin, 2007a, 2007b). This paper will present insights into this (focusing on Zone 4 in the CREATE framework), providing an analysis in the context of Kenya where free primary education has now been extended to the secondary level.

**Research Background:**

Expanding access to secondary education for primary school completers in Kenya is a serious challenge, particularly, after the introduction of universal free primary education (UPE) in 2003. Given the fierce competition for scarce secondary school places, evidence shows that in 2004 and 2005 only half the pupils who took the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) gained access to secondary schooling (UNESCO, 2006). One of the reasons is a shortage of secondary schools to meet the demand from primary school leavers. The insufficient supply of secondary school has been intensified by the ever increasing demand for secondary schooling, due to the following causes: the growing school-age population, the government's commitment to UPE with its

consequences for secondary education, and the influence of globalisation and the labour market. For this reason, primary school leavers face a significant challenge in gaining access to secondary education.

Despite the severe shortage of secondary school places, the Government of Kenya officially launched the free secondary education programme in February 2008, which will add a further tension to the imbalanced demand and supply for secondary education. According to the President, the rationale for the introduction of the new policy emerged from the following two reasons:

- Pupils who complete 8 years of primary schooling are too young to engage in productive activities and contribute meaningfully to national development
- Pupils from poor families who fail to join secondary schools because of school fees often revert back to illiteracy, thus reversing 8 years of investment in their primary education (speech by President Kibaki, State House, 2008).

It is important to note that during his speech, the president emphasises that “the main objective of providing free secondary education is to ensure that children from poor households acquire a quality education that enables them to access opportunities for self-advancement and become productive members of society” (*ibid*, 2008). As a consequence of the free secondary education programme, the government is expecting a rapid increase in demand by the end of this year. However, it is not yet apparent how this demand is being met by an increase in secondary school places. The study will provide a critical analysis of the policy, and its implications for the transition from primary to secondary school in practice.

## **Research Design**

### *Selection of areas*

This research will be conducted in semi-arid rural Kenya where over 70 per cent of the population are categorised as living in absolute poverty (SID, 2004). The area has a relatively good number of secondary schools, so it allows to examine whether there are primary school leavers who are not enrolled in secondary school despite the availability of school places.

### *Period of fieldwork*

Field research will take approximately three months from May to July in 2008. As this period is the dry season, it is appropriate to conduct field research. It is also an ideal time to visit secondary schools as they are usually settled down by the ginning of the second term and principals are more relaxed during this term than the following term where a national certificate of secondary examination takes place. For this reason, I will visit during the second term, which allows me to have a time to talk to principals and teachers.

### *Selection of respondents*

This research will re-interview the 103 households and 99 children who were initially identified through the earlier study conducted in 2007 (before the fee abolition). All 24 secondary schools and 10 youth polytechnics in the division will be re-visited for

additional information on changes in enrolment, class size and sources and amount of income/expenditure. Interviews will be conducted with parents and children. If children are enrolled in secondary school following the abolition of fees, such children and parents will be interviewed to explore their experience on gaining access to secondary education under the new programme. In some cases, children might have initially enrolled but dropped out before the end of the year. The reasons for this will be investigated. Alternatively, if children are still excluded from gaining access to secondary education, the study will explore the reasons for this in more depth.

### *Methods*

This research will employ a mixed method of quantitative and qualitative data collection as was employed in the earlier study. Quantitative research will be conducted to examine the degree of impact of the free secondary education programme on the households and children as well as schools, by adding new information on each. This will be complemented by qualitative semi-structured interviews, including a mix of those who have now been able to enrol in secondary school, those who have enrolled but dropped out, and those who have still not entered.

### **Analysis:**

The study will analyse factors that differentiate the groups who have entered secondary school and those who have not, by comparing data from the household questionnaires collected in 2007 and 2008.

### **Output:**

The output of this research will be a thematic paper on the influence of the abolition of fees on the transition from primary to secondary education by presenting evidence from rural Kenya. It will critically assess the process through which the policy has been implemented, with analysis of the implications for enrolment and resources in secondary schools. It will highlight strengths and weaknesses of the introduction of the free secondary education programme. The findings from the study will provide new insights into understandings of transitions between primary and secondary school, which is relevance to many other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa where the abolition of secondary school fees is also under consideration.

The paper will be written in conjunction with my supervisor. A draft of the paper will be prepared by the end of October, and the final paper will be ready by the end of 2008.

*Reference*

- Lewin, K.M. (2007a) *Improving Access, Equity and Transition in Education: Creating a Research Agenda*, CREATE Passways to Access: Research Monograph No1, University of Sussex.
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- Society for International Development (SID) (2004), *Pulling Apart: Facts and Figures on inequality in Kenya*, Nairobi, SID.
- State House (2008) *Free Secondary Education Programme officially launched*. Retrieved on 13 February, 2008, from: <http://statehousekenya.go.ke/>
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2006) *Access to secondary school remains a real challenge*, EFA News: A newsletter of UNESCO Nairobi Office, Nairobi, UNESCO.