



Do Household Characteristics Matter in Schooling Decisions in Urban Kenya?

What is the Issue?

Household characteristics are an important determinant of schooling decisions. Characteristics such as income and levels of parental education greatly determine whether a child enrolls in school, stays in school, learns and makes progression to higher levels of education. Household schooling decisions, such as the type of school that a child attends are also influenced by household characteristics. In Africa, studies that have examined the influence of household characteristics on schooling decisions normally differentiate between urban versus rural households. Rural households are often portrayed as disadvantaged, as having lower income, lower levels of education and therefore worse schooling decisions and outcomes compared to urban areas. Recent evidence is however showing a high level of disadvantage among households in poor urban neighborhoods that is influencing schooling decisions in these areas.

Why is the Issue Important?

Children living in informal settlements in urban areas face many schooling challenges emanating from the households, the schools and/or the environment they live in. In or-



A section of pupils from Daniel Comboni Primary in Korogocho slums. Households are more inclined to choose a public primary school if they are not residing in informal settlement, not very poor, headed by a female and have older household heads.

der to institute appropriate interventions and therefore enhance access to quality schooling among children in informal settlements, it is imperative to understand the relationships between household, school and/or environmental characteristics and schooling decisions. Household characteristics are important due to the influence parents/guardians have on children's schooling. An understanding of such relationships will inform the implementation of free primary education policy and other strategies meant to facilitate the provision of public education to all, including those living in informal settlements.

The policy relevance is based on the premise that if household characteristics are significantly associated with schooling decisions, then it would be

necessary to institute interventions that target households' schooling decision-making process with a view to ensuring that the decisions made promote access to free and quality education to children in informal settlements.

How did the Issue get that Way?

The UN Habitat describes informal settlements as places with numerous economic, social, as well as infrastructural problems. People living in informal settlements lack proper housing, water and sanitation, are exposed to serious health risks, and have limited access to the formal job market. The urban informal settlements that we focus on in this policy

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brief are characterized by poverty and poor/non-existent infrastructure. These settlements are largely served by poor quality, low-cost private, community and informal schools managed by individual entrepreneurs, communities and non-governmental organizations.

The Government of Kenya implemented a free primary education policy in 2003. This saw an increase in gross enrolment ratio (GER) from 88% in 2002 to 103% in 2003, and a rise in net enrolment ratio (NER) from 76% to 80%. In Nairobi, the GER rose from 34% to 42%, while NER reached 38% from 27% within the same period. Free primary education was expected to benefit the poor and vulnerable populations by removing barriers to access such as school fees and other related charges. The program however had differential impacts for households in informal and formal settlements in Nairobi. It is this challenge that this policy brief aims to present by assessing how household characteristics affect schooling decisions in urban Kenya in the context of the implementation of the free primary education policy.

Findings

From the analysis, households are disposed towards choosing enrolment of their children in primary school if they are richer, residing away from urban informal settlements, are headed by a female, smaller, live nearer a primary school, and the household head has more education. Child individual attributes also influence the decision to enroll. As would be expected, orphans are less likely to be enrolled compared to non-or-

phans, however the type of orphan does not matter – an indication that children are treated in the same way with regard to schooling whether they have lost one or both parents. From the data, the age of the child is an important consideration in enrolment; older children are more likely to be in school than younger ones. However, the issue of late school entrants, particularly among children from households in informal settlements, needs to be investigated further to establish the household and environmental dynamics.

The analysis also shows how different household and individual attributes motivate decision on the

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type of school. Households are more inclined to choosing a public primary school if they are not residing in informal settlements, not in the lower wealth quintiles, are headed by a female, and have older household heads. The households are more likely to choose a public school as the child becomes older – perhaps to take advantage of the fact that public schools are usually used as national examination centers. These factors are reinforced by the flexibility of

non-public schools, low social capital and networks, and the perceived differences in the quality of education provided by different schools.

Policy Implications

The study has provided evidence to show which types of households are likely to benefit from public provision of free primary education. It appears that the households who use informal non-public primary schools have distinguishable characteristics, strongly attracting them to these schools. The study indicates that it is better-off households that are benefiting from free primary education since they are more likely to have children in public schools whereas the poor send children to private schools where education is not subsidized by the free primary education policy. The evidence in this paper can inform demand-driven policies aimed at increasing the utilization or uptake of free primary education services as the paper isolated distinctive characteristics that can be used to identify target households. The existence of systematic patterns on who enrolls in school and the type of school attended by children from various households provide important clues on what happens when there is free primary education and constrained supply under publicly provided education. It demonstrates that even if the intention of the government is to publicly provide education, equity cannot be attained if demand for education exceeds supply. It appears that, in urban informal settlements, not all of the poorest of the poor are benefiting from the government's free primary education policy.