

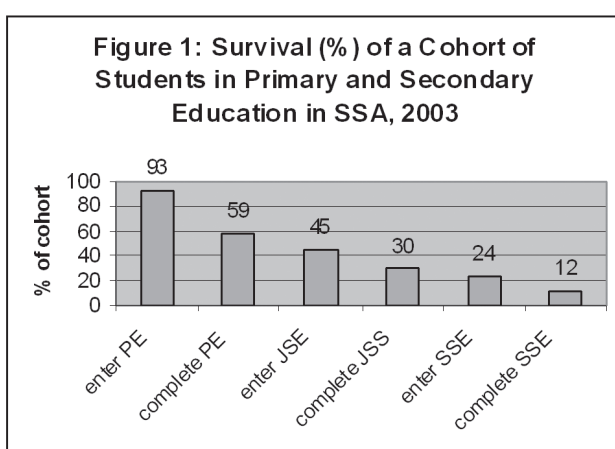
Inventory of Interventions to enhance Transition from Primary to Secondary School for Children Living in Poor Urban Settings

Introduction

While much current effort by many countries in sub-Saharan Africa is geared towards realizing universal primary education (UPE), not much is being done to expand access to secondary education, especially by the poor who form the majority in this region. As such, secondary education remains a dream to many children in sub-Saharan Africa.

Only a handful of children make it to secondary school in sub-Saharan Africa

The current secondary education system in these countries is skewed in favor of the small minority of better-off members of society. The biggest hindrance to secondary education in the region is cost, which locks out many children from poor families. As a result, only 12% of 'age cohorts complete full secondary education in the sub-Saharan Africa region (see figure).



Source: Pole de Dakar in SEIA, 2007.

Why is secondary education critical for sub-Saharan Africa?

Unlike in the 1980s when primary education was seen to be critical in facilitating developing, today secondary education is seen as being more critical for economic development and poverty reduction in sub-Saharan Africa. Indeed, according to the World Bank access to quality secondary education is now considered the most important strategy for creating economic opportunities and social development for individuals and nations alike. Secondary education has several benefits which, if realized, will create the foundation for development and prosperity in sub-Saharan Africa.

What Viable Interventions that can see more Children in Africa attain Secondary School Education?

The biggest challenge lies in transforming the secondary education system in African countries to ensure that it benefits the poor, who form the majority in these countries. For the poor to fully participate in secondary schooling, they require not only the initiation of supply-side policies such as free primary education, but also demand-side interventions – which remove barriers on the side of the household that may hinder poor and disadvantaged children from attending school. Such barriers include the need for children to work to support their families. Demand-side interventions have been implemented in relatively similar underdeveloped regions of Latin America and some Asian countries, and could be modified to suit the situation in sub-Saharan African.

PROGRESSA in Mexico

Implemented in Mexico in 1997, PROGRESSA was a targeted pro-poor program that provided financial aid to 2.6 million families (40% of all rural families in Mexico) conditional on children attending school. Implemented on a large scale, the aim was to enable children from poor families to complete basic education by providing resources to their families. The program offset the opportunity costs of sending children to school. Evaluations of the impact of PROGRESSA have revealed that the program:

- Increased schooling on average of about 0.4 grades for poor children
- Reduced the amount of time girls and boys spent on domestic and farm work
- Resulted in better grade progression
- Reduced school dropout rates, especially during the transition from primary to secondary school
- Encouraged school dropouts to re-enroll
- Increased the number of children transitioning to secondary school
- Reduced grade repetition
- Encouraged early entry into school

Subsidy to promote girls' secondary education: the female stipend program in Bangladesh

This program was introduced in 1994 to subsidize girls' education in rural Bangladesh with the aim of improving the participation of girls from rural areas in secondary education. A nationwide stipend program was targeted to girls in grades 6 through 10 in 460 rural districts. While the tuition fees were paid directly to the schools, other allowances were sent to bank accounts opened for the girls to cover costs for text books, transportation, examination fees, and other miscellaneous expenses. Evaluations of the program's impact reveal that it:

- Greatly increased gender parity in secondary education – girls enrolment increased at 13% per year following the program (the increase in boys' enrolment for the same period was 2.5% per year);
- Greatly increased girls' educational attainment;
- Increased girls transition to secondary school.

Vouchers for private schooling in Colombia

This program, known as PACES, used a lottery allocation approach to distribute vouchers which partially covered the cost of private secondary schools for students who maintained satisfactory academic progress. The program was implemented by the government of Colombia in 1991 with the aim of expanding access to private secondary education, which was seen to be of high quality compared to public secondary education. The program was targeted at the poorest of the poor, offering vouchers to children from neighborhoods of the two lowest socio-economic strata, who were attending public schools.

Evaluations of the impact of the program revealed that it:

- Enhanced school completion – more lottery winners completed more schooling than losers;
- Reduced grade repetition by 5-6%.

However, it:

- Did not achieve as much as anticipated as the participating schools were of low quality with teachers accused of moonlighting;
- Did not increase enrollment;

Way Forward Africa will find implementation of such interventions challenging given the widespread inequalities that already exist between rural and urban and, within urban, between poor slum dwellers and the well-off suburban areas. Experimentation is, however, necessary since ultimately, demand-side interventions will be needed to ensure that the very poor get secondary education. The evaluations suggest these interventions are beneficial in addressing the issue of inequality, but they will need to be adjusted for the African context and targeted in ways that maximizes the benefits in sub-Saharan Africa. A starting point is an acceptance by policymakers in sub-Saharan Africa as happened in Latin America that interventions have to be targeted at the poorest of the poor. Experimentation with mechanisms that have elements of PROGRESSA, the stipend for girls or vouchers, is timely as the focus shifts to expanding access to secondary education to meet the development needs of sub-Saharan Africa.

For details and references, please read the full paper: "Inventory of interventions to enhance transition from primary to secondary school for children in the slums" by Moses Oketch, PhD, Institute of Education University of London, UK. This paper is available from APHRC. This brief was written by Rose N. Oronje.