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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Decentralization of Education Services: Implication on Access, Equity, and Quality. A Kenyan Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Most African countries have put in place policies that ensure delivery and achievement of the time lines for the provision of Education for A (EFA). Decentralization of education services is one of the many reforms put in place by many Governments for effective service delivery to its citizens. This paper thus outlines the implications of Decentralization of Education services on Access, Equity and Quality. The authors highlight the concept of Decentralization and the rationale of Decentralization of Education services. Policies and practices of decentralization of education services with specific reference to Kenya have been surveyed citing their positive effect on Access and Quality. These policies and practices include empowering Boards of Governors, Teacher recruitment, School Inspection Programs, empowerment of School Management Committees, Teacher Management programs, Provision of Teaching and Learning Material programs, Administration and Planning, Funding through Constituency Bursary Fund and Local Authority Transfer Fund. In conclusion the authors outline the potential benefits of decentralization as increased accountability to the citizens resulting in improved efficiency in the use of school resources as well as a better match between services provided and preferences of citizens.

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INTRODUCTION

Decentralization of Education Services

Background

Many African countries have had to implement policies that assure the financing, delivery and fulfillment of the conditions for the provision for Education for A(EFA). As part of educational and public sector reforms, many countries are decentralizing educational services to regional, local or school levels (Gaynor 1998). Mbeki (1999) contends that, the utilization of the policy of decentralization aims at a renewal of the educational thrust on the continent to enable Africa to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Though many African countries recognize the fact that sustainable development can be attained only when a functional system of education exists, the framework and policy direction for achieving this is a main area of concern. There are also issues such as the growing financial resource requirements for basic education programs in the states as well as the need to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of basic education delivery and democratization of education.

Policies and Practices that promote Access, Equity and Quality

The context under which decentralization has manifested itself in African education policy is largely tied to issues of education access, quality, school retention and completion rates, provision of infrastructure such as school facilities among others (Uwakwe et al 2008). With specific reference to Kenya, this paper explores policies and practices of decentralization of education services to enhance access and equity as discussed in the ensuing sub-topics;

Teacher Recruitment

The policy of recruitment of teachers derives its authority from the TSC Act (Cap 212, Laws of Kenya) and the TSC Code of Regulations for teachers. The Act mandates the TSC to recruit teachers, among other functions as well as harmonizing their terms and conditions of service (TSC 2006). Prior to this, teachers were employed by various organizations with diverse terms and conditions of service. However, as the number of teachers tremendously expanded, it became evident that a centralized system is not effective. Parents became increasingly aware of the rights of their children. Furthermore, communities, due to their involvement in cost-sharing in the provision of education services demanded a greater say in the way their schools are run and how teachers perform. Since its inception, TSC used the supply-driven method of recruiting teachers which resulted in uneven distribution of teachers. This policy changed in 1997, following the Government freeze on employment of civil servants including teachers, due to budgetary constraints. Since the year 2001, TSC has only been allowed to recruit teachers to replace those who leave service through natural attrition. Thus, TSC adopted a demand driven policy in the recruitment of teachers.

The decentralization process necessitated the redefining of the roles of the TSC agents. It also called for the involvement of the stakeholders at various local levels and also gave more responsibilities to the District Education Boards (DEBs) and Boards of Governors (BOGs). The Government of Kenya has thus been recruiting teachers at the school and district level for secondary and primary schools respectively. The policy is guided by the following principles; ensure fairness and equity in the recruitment of teachers, be sensitive to gender and disadvantaged groups and consider merit.

Empowering Board of Governors

The management of public secondary schools in Kenya is vested in the Board of Governors appointed by the Minister of Education in accordance with Section 10 of the Education Act Cap 211 (1980)

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(Kipsoi and Sang 2008). The delegation of managerial duties to Board of Governors stemmed from the realization that the centralization of functions within the Ministry of Education was leading to inefficiency and unnecessary bureaucratic delays in the execution of duties by the field officers.

The empowerment of Board of Governors was backed by several commissions which include; the National Committee on Educational objectives (Gathathi 1976). This committee endorsed that secondary schools be run by Boards of Governors and recommended a higher degree of delegation in order to enhance effective management of schools. The presidential Working Party of Education and Manpower Training for the next Decade and beyond viewed the establishment of the Board of Governors by the Government as a noble intention to decentralize the day to day management of educational institutions to the Boards and Heads of schools (Kamunge 1988). In 1996, the former Teachers Service Commission Secretary announced a plan to give powers to school boards to employ teachers. Besides improving efficiency, this process empowered parents and communities to participate in the recruitment and supervision of teachers (Aduda 2001).

School Inspection Programs

Majority of countries worldwide have come up with strategies of monitoring the quality and standards of their education system. In most cases, the monitoring process involves supervision by Inspection. Stalker and McGlynn (1995) cited one of the reasons for inspection as reporting on the effectiveness of education in schools and other educational institutions and to recommend action for improvement as well as evaluating arrangements for assuring quality in schools. In Kenya, inspection of schools is a function that has over the years been entrusted to the Ministry of Education in accordance with the provisions of the Education Act, Chapter 211, and Section 18 of the Laws of Kenya. The Act empowers the Minister of Education to promote the education of the people of Kenya and power to appoint school inspectors with authority

Supervision by inspection has long been and still is a major device employed by the Ministry of Education to monitor education quality in the country. The Kenyan philosophy of education embraces "the inculcation of a high quality instruction". According to Kamuyu (2001) one of the major reasons for inspection is to have an overview of the quality of education in Kenya, based on agreed all-round performance indicators of the performance of an educational institution and to report back to the educational institutions to enable them plan improvement strategies. Education inspectors (or school inspectors) are officials of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology charged with the responsibility of identifying and providing feedback on strengths and weaknesses in educational institutions. This enables institutions to improve the quality of education provided. In a bid to improve school inspection, the Kenyan Government deploys school inspectors at the National, Provincial, District and Zonal levels.

School Management Committees-(SMCs)

The Kenyan Government devolved funds to the local level in order to speed up service delivery and increase community participation in decision making. According to Right to Education Project (2008), this has been achieved through training communities to monitor education policy and budget implementation and establishing good governance structures in schools. Lobbying authorities led to change in the Education Act, to outline the role and function of School Management Committees on school and financial management. Wambua and Cheruto (2010) contend that, Community involvement is considered to be central to the success of decentralized procurement policies, which form part of the community empowerment process. Thus Head teachers should ensure that their School Management Communities are actively involved in defining

the school's annual spending priorities and procurement plans. The Government of Kenya in collaboration with development partners and other stakeholders has prepared Kenya Education Support Program (KESSP) investment with a view to consolidating the gains accruing from the implementation of FPE, address the main sector issues and to support the Government in strengthening management and delivery of educational services in order to improve access, quality, equity and relevance of education and training. This helps the government to stay on track towards meeting the objectives of Economic Recovery strategy, Education For All, and Millennium Development Goals. To successfully implement KESSP it is essential that there is a clear link between Oversight Management Committees such as School Management Committees, Parents Teachers Associations, Boards of Governors and District Education Boards (MOEST 2005).

Through KESSP program primary schools have come up with five year development plans describing individual schools' priority areas of investment. Each plan is developed and agreed by the School Management Committees (SMC's) and the Parents Teachers Associations (PTA's) before being submitted to higher authorities. Some of the items included in the plan are improvement of existing permanent classrooms, toilets, storage facilities, fences, water supply infrastructure, furniture and cooking facilities. The program also aims at mobilizing communities, parents and other stakeholders to provide support in improving and maintaining existing infrastructure. Community contributions, either in financial resources (depending on economic level) or in kind will be required to support government and other partners' contributions.

Teacher Management

In Kenya, attempts have been made to decentralize many of the managerial responsibilities in the education system to various levels of local Government and even to the schools themselves. Teacher resource is one of the most important inputs into the education system and therefore, efficient management and utilization of teachers is critical to the quality of learning outcomes. According to MOEST (2005) the Teachers Service Commission was established through an Act of Parliament in 1967 and mandated to; register, recruit, transfer, promote, remunerate and discipline teachers. The commission discharges its mandate through agents in a partially decentralized system at the district and local levels. To bring service closer to the users, the commission has created units at the District and Educational Municipality level. These units are manned by district staffing and human resource officers including other support staff.

To address challenges facing teacher management, the Teachers Service Commission has come up with a policy framework in which the following policies will be implemented; delegation of teacher management to primary school Management Committees, Board of Governors and District Education Boards which will carry out tasks like recruitment and supervision. Another policy aims at ensuring equitable distribution, efficient and cost effective utilization of teachers. It also aims at undertaking consultation and provides advice on current and future teacher training programs as well as undertaking regular review of staffing norms.

School Construction Programs

According to Abagi (1997) the downturn in primary education development that Kenya has faced from 1985 to date may partly be attributed to policies that the Government introduced later that led to greater centralization and control of the education sector by the central Government. Part of these policies were the centralization of primary school management through District Education Boards (DEBs). To fill the vacuum left by the central government, the Ministry of Education adopted a policy of partnership, which allowed the participation of various partners in the establishment, financing

and management of Early Childhood Development Educational Centers (ECDE) throughout the country. As a policy requirement, all primary schools in Kenya are supposed to have a unit for ECDE. Such units are financed by local communities, in terms of the construction of facilities and payment of teachers. Other organizations that have been instrumental in the provision of ECED include the parents associations, local authorities, religious organizations, welfare organizations, private firms and private individuals.

There are a number of projects that either wholly or partly support primary school construction such as Basic Education Project which is a collaboration between the Government and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) which aimed at constructing 215 classrooms in North Eastern Province. In addition, the Local Authority Trust Fund (LATF) and the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) provide funding to a wide range of community based projects including construction. All these initiatives are coordinated by the District Education Boards (DEBs).

The new primary school construction program main objective was to improve access by constructing new primary schools in areas where there is overcrowding in existing schools or where there are no primary schools (MOEST, 2005). The Districts and Municipalities to benefit from the program were to be selected centrally though the need and location of schools was to be done at the District level. Functioning SMCs and PTAs and approved development plans were required prior to construction of new schools.

Provision of Teaching and Learning Materials

To ensure quality teaching and learning, materials including textbooks are available to all primary school children in Kenya. Government grants are sent directly to special school bank account and managed by a school committee composed of the Head teacher, teachers and parents. The funds are used to procure books and materials, selected by the committee from approved lists with accredited suppliers. The management of the grants by school-level committees has increased capacity in the areas of tendering, procurement and accounting and has reduced elements of collusion between the publishing industry and education officials often found in textbook procurement and distribution systems. Details of the funds provided and expenditures are posted in a public place so that students, parents and other members of the community can monitor spending (Anti-Corruption Resource Centre-U4,2002)

To address key issues relating to access, equity, quality and relevance, the government abolished cost sharing as a deliberate policy to promote Universal Primary Education (UPE). Through the Free Primary Education, capital grants towards provision of instructional materials and support services were instituted. The Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MOEST) in an effort to address the challenge of overstretched facilities in primary schools works in partnership with communities, parents, other ministries, development partners and other stakeholders for the improvement of school learning environments and accessibility. In particular the MOEST assists schools and communities to construct and renovate physical facilities and equipment in public learning institutions.

Administration and Planning

According to Prinborgue (2002), the difference between planning and administration is seen in how they apply in a school system. Since Planning tends to organize the provision of education, it includes the institution (school, college) as a component in an overall system. The very creation of a school, its mission, and how this is accomplished all depend on planning. Administration on the other hand, is legally prescribed for the school's administration as it is for those who at the National, Regional or local level are responsible for leadership, supervision, control and regulation. Planning is a primary

act in the sense of being preliminary to administration. The former prepares the provision required for intervening within school system. The latter then administers the personnel, the premises, the students, teaching activities, certificates etc. In highly decentralized developed countries, the general trend is towards increasing state involvement to assure coherence and guarantee the level of education. In strongly centralized ones, the trend is towards a transfer of responsibilities to regional and local levels of planning (administration) in as a concern for greater efficiency (capacity of adaptation and innovation) and better management.

The planning and control of education as part of the general planning of National development requires a concentration of power in the hands of the Government sufficient to secure orderly growth and to overcome sectional obstacles to growth. However, a concentration of power does not of course imply dictatorship, since the schools cannot be run without the co-operation of a great many people, and such co-operation can only be obtained on terms that imply a measure of decentralized responsibility (Carter, 1966)

In Kenya, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology has adopted a Sector Wide Approach to Program Planning (SWAP) (MOEST 2005). A SWAP is a process of engaging all stakeholders in order to attain National ownership, alignment of objectives, harmonization of procedures, approaches and a coherent financing arrangement. In addition, a SWAP process involves broad stakeholder consultations in designing a coherent and rationalized sector program at micro and macro levels and the establishment of strong co-ordination mechanisms among donors and between donors and the Government.

Through the SWAP process, the Government and development partners have developed KESSP. KESSP comprises twenty three investment programs focusing on the sector as a whole. KESSP fits within the broader framework of National Policy Framework as set out in the Economic Recovery Strategy (ERS) and Sessional Paper 1 of 2005 on a Policy Framework for Education, Training and Research. KESSP is based on the rationale of the overall policy goal of achieving Education For All (EFA) and Government's commitment to the attainment of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The broad objective is to give every Kenyan the right to quality education and training no matter his/her socio-economic status. This will be achieved through the provision of an all inclusive quality education that is accessible and relevant to all Kenyans.

Funding

The choices made concerning education finance are extremely important as they determine both the degree of effective local Governments as well as the implications for efficiency and equity (Education Encyclopedia 2011). In 1993/1994, The Kenya Government established the Secondary School Education Bursary Fund (SSEBF) to cushion new schools from impacts of poverty, unstable economy and the effects of HIV/AIDS by increasing access, retention and completion rate in secondary schools. The bursaries were administered by the Ministry of Education Science and Technology through secondary school Heads and Education Officers (TISA, 2011) However, in 2003, the Government changed the system by establishing Constituency Bursary Committees to administer the fund. The allocation to each constituency is based on the Secondary School Enrollment, Constituency Poverty Index, overall National secondary school enrollment and the countrywide poverty situation.

In order for a Constituency to qualify for an allocation of the bursary funds, it is mandatory that it forms a Constituency Bursary committee which is comprised of Area Education Officer (AEO) who is secretary to the Committee, area Member of Parliament, Kenya National Union of Teacher (KNUT) representative, three members of religious organizations, one chairperson of Board of Governors, two

chairpersons of the two Parents Teacher Associations (PTA) of two area secondary schools, one representation from an education based Non-Government Organisation (NGO) or Community Based Organization (CBO). The committee is free to co-opt two other members if necessary. The Local Authorities Transfer Fund (LATF) came into effect in June 1999 under the Local Authorities Transfer Fund Act No. 8 of 1998. It established a Central Government to Local Authorities (LAs) budget transfer mechanism to assist LAs supplement financing of their services, improve service delivery, improve financial management and accountability and to eliminate all outstanding debts by June 2010 (KHRC and SPAN 2010). Syagga and Associates (2007) noted that, though the fund is presumed to provide supplementary funding to the local authorities, it has become a significant source of funding for the majority of local authorities. Most secondary schools in Kenya have benefited from LATF funding through their respective local authorities. According to KESSP 2005, MOEST introduced the school improvement grants program. The objective of this component was to improve access, retention and learning outcomes in primary education for both boys and girls through the provision of grants to schools in the poorest areas of the country.

Conclusion

From policies and practices discussed in this paper it can summarily be noted that decentralization provides a solution to many obstacles facing the education sector through eliminating Government bureaucracy, increasing efficiency and accountability, and improving the quality and relevance of education. It also enhances transparency, public involvement, coordination, monitoring and evaluation of the education system. However with the promulgation of the new Constitution with resultant devolution of education services to the county level, major changes are being realized in the decentralization of education services. In line with new Education reforms Oduor, (2012), contends that the teachers service Commission has stripped District Education Officers of their powers to manage teachers' affairs. As required by the new Constitution the task of managing teachers' issues now rests with 47 county Directors.

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