



Development
Progress

Case Study Summary

Education

BEYOND BASIC The growth of post-primary education in Kenya

Susan Nicolai, Annalisa Prizzon, with Sébastien Hine



School children in Kibera. Photo: © Brad Ruggles

- School life expectancy rose from 8.4 years in 2000 to 11 years in 2009 and the secondary gross enrolment ratio (GER) grew substantially, from 40% in the early 2000s to 60% in 2009.
- In 2008 Kenya's government implemented the Free Day Secondary Education programme which made access to secondary education more affordable. By 2012, the transition rate from primary to secondary education stood at 75%, up from just 46.4% in 2002.
- Despite a low tertiary gross enrolment ratio of 4%, the number of students enrolling in public universities more than doubled increasing from 97,000 in 2007/08 to 201,000 in 2012/13.
- Public spending on education rose by 31% in real terms between 2003/04 and 2008/09 and, in the aftermath of the 2008/09 global financial crisis, primary and secondary education budgets have been ring-fenced.

This and other Development Progress materials are available at developmentprogress.org

Development Progress is an ODI project that aims to measure, understand and communicate where and how progress has been made in development.

ODI is the UK's leading independent think tank on international development and humanitarian issues. Further ODI materials are available at odi.org.uk

Why explore post-primary education in Kenya?

Enabling access to relevant and high-quality post-primary schooling and training is increasingly a national and international priority. While considerable progress toward Universal Primary Education (UPE) has been achieved, in comparison, post-primary education has been a neglected area in the Millennium Development Goals debate until quite recently.

Kenya represents an important example of how progress can be made at higher levels of education, an area that remains a challenge for many low-income countries. Over the last decade, school life expectancy in Kenya has increased by nearly 30% and enrolment rates at secondary level have risen, as has access to tertiary education (albeit marginally).

Identifying the factors that have contributed to these significant gains can help other countries understand some of the areas driving progress in expanding education access beyond basic levels. Kenya provides a compelling example for discussing the implications of what government commitment and strong leadership can achieve in fostering this level of education – and where they sometimes fail.

What progress has been achieved?

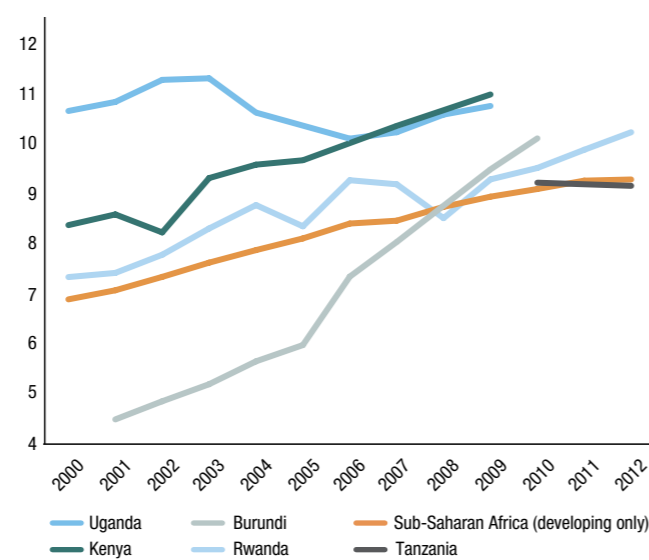
The Kenyan education system has seen major evolution over the past decades. There were only 50 secondary schools when the country became independent in the early 1960s, and it was not until 1970 that the first national university was established. While much growth occurred in the sector during these years, in the 1990s Kenya experienced falling enrolment rates in the midst of fiscal retrenchment and the introduction of cost-sharing policies between government and households. From this somewhat bleak starting point, Kenya has emerged as a leader in improved school life expectancy in sub-Saharan Africa and over the last ten years has caught up with other regional leaders such as Uganda (see Figure 1).

‘There has been a deliberate focus on access, which is now compulsory in the constitution. Students in day primary and secondary schools hardly pay anything’ - Head teacher

The increase in the number of years the average child will spend in school is thanks, in part, to the rapid expansion of primary education enrolment over the last decade. The net enrolment rate (NER) in 2002 was 62%, just below the average for SSA at the time. However by 2009 the NER had risen to 82% in Kenya, above the

1. World Bank EdStats Query, The World Bank.

Figure 1: School life expectancy in years 2000-2012, Kenya, SSA average and East African Community countries, primary to tertiary



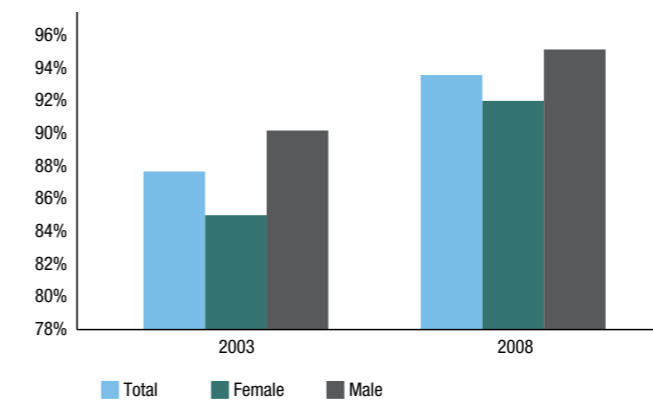
Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2014)

SSA average of 76%.¹ Moreover, an increasing number of students are successfully moving from primary into secondary education; the transition rate rose from 59.6% in 2006 to 72.5% in 2010 (KNBS, 2011), and up to 74% in 2012 according to the MoE (2012). Demographic and Health Surveys suggest even higher figures with an increase from 88% in 2003 to 93% in 2008 (see Figure 2 overleaf).

‘The situation of girls in Kenya has improved a lot over the years. Free primary and free secondary was a big change. More girls are excelling, finding their way’ - NGO representative

The secondary gross enrolment ratio (GER) grew from 40% in early 2000s to 60% in 2009, while the SSA average remains around 40%. While secondary NER is not widely available for other SSA countries, the NER for Kenya increased from 34.7% in 2002 to 50% in 2009 (UNESCO Institute of Statistics data). In absolute numbers, enrolment in secondary education increased from 1.2 million in 2007 to 1.7 million in 2010 (KNBS, 2011). Starting from a low gender parity index (0.450) in 1970 for secondary education, gender parity in enrolment rates (i.e. close to 1) had already been achieved by the mid-1990s, and has been more or less maintained since.

Figure 2: Primary to secondary transition rates



Source: World Bank EdStats Query, DHS data

Access to higher education in Kenya has also expanded, although only marginally. The GER at tertiary level rose from 1% in the early 2000s to 4% in 2010, leaving Kenya behind the regional SSA average of 7%. However, the number of students enrolling in higher education rose from 112,229 in 2006/07 to 180,978 in 2010/11, a more than 60% increase in four years.

‘Strong political will and the determination of the Kenyan people have been key drivers of education progress’ - Government Official

What are the factors driving change?

Today more youth in Kenya are able to pursue secondary and higher levels of education than ever before. This is the result of a combination of factors that cluster around four main and interlinked drivers: (1) mounting user demand for opportunities beyond basic education; (2) political prioritisation and government policy as a game-changer; (3) increased public funding to education; and (4) growth in community, faith-based and private-sector provision.

1. Calls for increasingly higher levels of education

In Kenya, demand-side factors have been key drivers behind the expansion of post-primary education. Increased demand can be seen as a key element behind each of the other three factors identified: government prioritisation, sustained public funding, and expanding non-state provision.

A demographic factor that has played a role in this has been the decline in fertility rates. Smaller household size means that parents can, in principle, allocate greater financial resources for human capital development for each child. Greater incentives to pursue further education have also emerged, there has been a rise in the level of qualification levels required in the job search, and high youth unemployment has reduced opportunity costs for further years of education. Further, as will be discussed below, there have been efforts to reform the education sector over the last decade aimed at lowering financial barriers and increasing affordability across all levels of public education.

2. Government policy as a game-changer

One of the most striking drivers of education progress across the entirety of the system has been the role of political decisions, particularly in the form of election promises and high-level policy pronouncements. Education reforms implemented in Kenya over the last 15 years have aimed at expanding access by reducing financial barriers (primary and secondary education) and by lowering entry requirements (tertiary education).

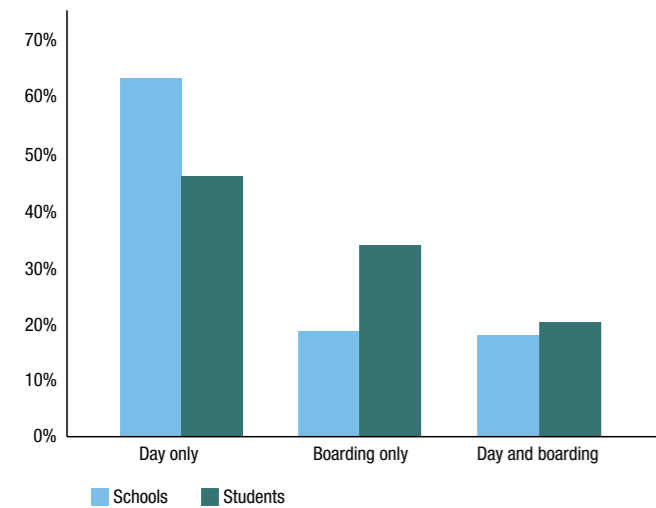
First, in 2003, the new government led by Mwai Kibaki introduced free primary education (FPE), with an extra 1.1 million students arriving at school on the first

Table 1: Burden sharing between government and household – (%) of total expenditure

Level	Public schools	
	Government	Household
Early childhood	5	95
Primary	80	20
Secondary	40	60
Technical Industrial	25	75

Source: Adapted from MoEST (2005)

Figure 3: Secondary school types in Kenya, 2007



Source: Kenya Open Data, 'Kenya secondary schools 2007'

day (Cifuentes, 2012). Second, pressure from additional primary school leavers was part of the motivation behind Free Day Secondary Education (FDSE) in early 2008. Third, enrolment in higher education also expanded as the result of the introduction of a parallel track of private-non-subsidised education in public universities known as Module II in 1998 (Colclough and Webb, 2010). The scheme has allowed public universities to expand enrolment while generating their own funds to supplement diminishing state support (Otieno, 2010).

A new constitution in 2010 that declares education as a right and the adoption of the Education and University Bills in 2012 have shown continued political commitment to the sector and set the stage for further progress.

3. Financial resources accompanying political commitment

The priority status given to education has been translated into budget outlays: the sector has always received the highest allocation of public spending among other sectors (Ngware et al., 2007; GoK, 2010), generally above 20%

of total government expenditure. Reforms in primary and secondary education and the shift in burden sharing from households to government budget required further expansion of public expenditure on the education sector. Public spending on education rose by 31% in real terms between 2003/04 and 2008/09.

Aid to education in Kenya has remained modest relative to the government's education expenditure and has mainly concentrated on primary education. In 2005 the country embarked upon the Kenya Sector Support Programme (KESSP), put in place following the introduction of FPE, as a means for donors to coordinate and strengthen their support to the education sector. Donor contributions have been relatively minor at approximately 5% of its total resources.

In more recent years, in the aftermath of the 2008/09 global financial and economic crises, primary and secondary education budgets have been ring-fenced, as has support to poor students at university level. To address infrastructure capacity constraints, a larger share of public spending on the education sector has gone on development expenditure (i.e. capital expenditure). Constituency Development Funds (CDFs) have also played a pivotal role in supporting infrastructure development as well as in funding students from low-income households, especially at secondary level.

4. Expanding provision from communities, faith-based and private-sector education

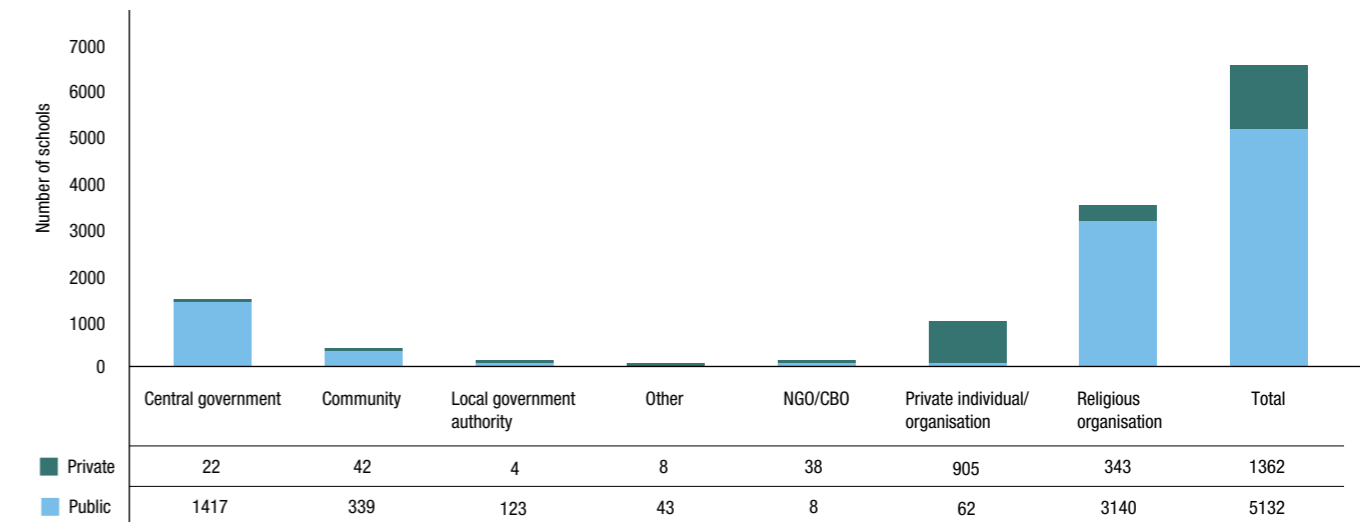
The role of non-state actors has been significant in driving education opportunities at the post-primary level. This stems partly from a history of community and faith-based involvement in development dating to before independence. During this time, partly due to British colonial policies, a self-help movement called *Harambee* – Swahili for 'all pull together' – along with church groups established and supported independent schools throughout the country (Onsomu, et al., 2004).

While non-state actors may have been the driving force behind establishing a large number of secondary schools, particularly in the post-independence period, they have often since been integrated into the government system. *Harambee*, faith-based, and even private secondary schools have been absorbed into the state system as district

Box 1: Kenya's tiered system of secondary schools and role of exams

Kenya's secondary schools are organised in several tiers: 78 prestigious *national schools* (up from a total of only 18 in 2012); 1000 *provincial/county schools*; and more than 7000 *district schools*. While most of the district schools are day schools, national and provincial/county schools are boarding schools. Admission both to secondary education and to tertiary education are governed by the results of the national examination system, the Kenyan Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE). Results in KCPE examination determine access to secondary education and school placement follows a sequence based on results: national schools first, then provincial/county schools, and finally district schools. This sequence reflects the perceived quality of the three different tiers (see UNESCO, 2010 and Oketch and Somerset, 2010). Admission to university and faculties is also administered on a highly competitive basis on the basis of the results of the Kenyan Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examination, with results influenced by the type of secondary school attended.

Figure 4: Sponsors of secondary schools in Kenya in 2007



Source: Kenya Open Data, 'Kenya secondary schools 2007'

schools, with government salaried teachers and budgets.

At the tertiary level, the private university system has also expanded provision. According to informants at the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology (MoHEST), the number of private universities has more than doubled in the last decade from 13 in 2003 to 29 in 2012, with enrolment more than quadrupling in these institutions.

What are the challenges?

1. Entrenched inequality across the system

Equitable access remains a key challenge for the education system. Although progress has been made in increasing access for all groups, inequalities still exist between groups and appear to have been growing in recent years. This means gains made through FPE and FDSE have been most beneficial to already advantaged groups, while disadvantaged groups have made smaller gains.

At the secondary level, the most recent comparable gross attendance ratios (2008/09) range from as high as 93% in Nairobi to only 21% in the North Eastern province, and from 75% to 19% for the richest and poorest quintiles respectively (KNBS and ICF Macro, 2010). Further, intersecting inequalities show that only 13% of girls in the poorest quintile were attending secondary school in 2008/09 compared to 87% of boys in the richest quintile (KNBS and ICF Macro, 2010). Government guidelines for boarding costs and other fees not included in the Free Day

Secondary School capitation grant are capped at roughly annual KES 29,000, but this is still nearly three times the current capitation grant. These costs make attending boarding schools unaffordable for students coming from the poorest and most vulnerable backgrounds.

2. Concerns over education quality

Quality at all levels of Kenya's education system is a major challenge, and is intricately linked to both equity and labour market issues. The percentage of students achieving the basics of learning to read in primary school has been falling and inequalities widening. This may mean that a greater number of children who are less prepared for school are enrolled, which points to the need for stronger early childhood education.

While there is little data available on learning outcomes at secondary level, the results of the KCSE show that around three quarters of students do not achieve the minimum grade for entry into university (C+), meaning only a quarter of those completing secondary education can consider continuing into higher education. At both the primary and secondary levels teacher absenteeism is a concern. According to World Bank data on service delivery at the primary level, over 42% of teachers are absent from the classroom, and the figures are worse for public schools (47%) and schools in rural areas (47%) compared to private schools (31%) and schools in urban areas (34%) (Martin and Pimhidzai, 2013).

'There are huge regional disparities, for instance with low enrolment in the north-east' - Government Official

3. Extensive youth unemployment

Much more needs to be done to strengthen school-to-work transitions. Unemployment hits youth hardest and puts Kenya at risk of squandering its 'demographic dividend' of a particularly large working-age population over the coming decades: 80% of Kenya's 2.3 million unemployed are between the ages of 15 and 30 (UNDP, 2013). According to most accounts, the quality of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is weak, with observers pointing to a weak curriculum and a lack of meaningful work experience and supervision for students (Nyere, 2009).

4. Financial constraints and sustainability

Despite the rise in school infrastructure spending fuelled by CDFs, the expansion in demand for secondary education has not yet been fully matched with increased service

provision. For instance, more than 100,000 primary school leavers who scored more than 250 in the 2013 KCPE exam session could not be accommodated in secondary school in early 2013 due to space issues. Moreover, addressing the shortage of teachers requires a combination of supply expansion and efficiency measures. Managing teachers' performance is key as their salaries are estimated at approximately 59% of total education spending in 2008/09 – though this share has been decreasing over time (GoK, 2010: 59). Moreover, pupil-teacher ratios in Kenya at secondary level are one of the lowest in SSA and there would be scope for improving efficiency in service provision. Demographic pressure from new cohorts together with the policy target of universal provision of basic education (which includes secondary education) and a 10% gross enrolment ratio in tertiary education will put the national budget under stress.



Photo: © Ntugi Group

Lessons learned

As primary school enrolment continues to grow worldwide, Kenya's story of expansion of secondary and tertiary education reflects a trajectory many other developing countries will be experiencing in the coming years. While the Kenyan education system faces challenges, some of the steps it has made in developing post-primary education may serve as illustration for other countries needing to expand and improve secondary and tertiary opportunities. A number of lessons can be drawn:

- **When political commitments lead to dramatic reforms, this can send shockwaves through an education system which continue to be felt years later.** While the net effect of implementing FPE and FDSE on the education system was positive, it could have benefited from more comprehensive planning in implementation. Providing free primary, and later secondary, education had the desired effect of increasing enrolment and reducing household burdens from education, but the sudden increase in numbers led to an overburdened system, at least initially, and may have diverted attention away from issues of quality and equity.
- **As with primary education, lowering the household financial burden is a key aspect of increasing access at secondary level.** As the cost of secondary and tertiary education outweighs primary education, Kenya's government scaled up education spending by 31% in real terms between 2003/04 and 2008/09.
- **Community-based action in education, through increasing demand as well as supporting provision, has been an essential part of Kenya's gains in post-primary**

education. Historically, a large number of secondary schools were established as *Harambee* schools at the behest of community and church leaders. The downside to this model is that where communities are not strongly calling for secondary education, such as in the arid and semi-arid regions, it is more difficult for the state to fully take on provision successfully.

- **Greater attention to high-quality, relevant education is needed, along with active links to the labour market, if there is hope of strengthening school-to-work transitions.** While completing secondary or tertiary education seems to be a growing necessity in Kenya's job market, increased access at post-primary levels does not necessarily lead to better transitions. Kenya's mixed picture for TVET could potentially be transformed with greater links to labour and industry leadership, a focus on changing attitudes and perceptions towards youth polytechnics, and subsidising students.
- **Increasing post-primary access is not enough to reduce entrenched inequalities, particularly in a stratified secondary school system.** The challenge ahead is to achieve greater (pro-poor) access to post-primary education across all income groups and regions. Access to education varies greatly between regions, inequality on the basis of ethnicity and income is significant, and an urban/rural divide remains. Scaling-up access to post-primary opportunities – and potentially achieving universal secondary education – requires these inequalities to be addressed by removing further barriers to school attendance.

This summary is an abridged version of a research report and one of a series of Development Progress case studies being released at developmentprogress.org

Development Progress is a four-year research project which aims to better understand, measure and communicate progress in development. Building on an initial phase of research across 24 case studies, this second phase continues to examine progress across countries and within sectors, to provide evidence for what's worked and why over the past two decades.

This publication is based on research funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The findings and conclusions contained within are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Overseas Development Institute

203 Blackfriars Road
London SE1 8NJ

The Institute is limited by guarantee
Registered in England and Wales
Registration no. 661818
Charity no. 228248

Contact us

developmentprogress.org
developmentprogress@odi.org.uk
T: +44 (0)20 7922 0300

Sign up for our e-newsletter

developmentprogress.org/sign-our-newsletter

Follow us on Twitter

twitter.com/dev_progress

Disclaimer

The views presented in this paper are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of ODI.

© Overseas Development Institute 2014.
Readers are encouraged to quote or reproduce material for non-commercial use. For online use, please link to the original resource on the Development Progress website. As copyright holder, ODI requests due acknowledgement and a copy of the publication.

References

- Cifuentes, M. (2012) 'Two sides of a public-policy innovation: The Kenya education reform', *Halduskultuur – Administrative Culture* 13(1): 67-84.
- Colclough, C. and Webb, A. (2010) 'The impact of aid on education policy in Kenya'. RECOUP Working Paper Series, No. 36: Cambridge: University of Cambridge (http://recoup.educ.cam.ac.uk/publications/WP36-Kenya_aid_paper.pdf).
- GoK (2010) *Public expenditure review, policy for prosperity, Minister of State for Planning, National Development and Vision 2030*, Nairobi.
- Kenya Open Data. 'Kenya secondary schools 2007' (<https://kenya.socrata.com/Education/Kenya-Secondary-Schools-2007/i6vz-a543>).
- KNBS (2011) *Economic survey 2011*. Nairobi.
- KNBS and ICF Macro (2010) *Kenya demographic and health survey 2008-09*, Calverton, Maryland: KNBS and ICF Macro.
- Martin, G.H. and Pimhidzai, O. (2013) *Service delivery indicators: Education and health: Kenya*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- MoE (2012) 'Kshs.6.4 Billion for education released' Nairobi (www.education.go.ke/News.aspx?nid=558).
- MoEST (2005) *2005 Public expenditure review and medium term expenditure framework 2005/06—2007/08: Delivering the economic recovery strategy priorities*. Nairobi: MoEST.
- Ngware, M.W., Onsumo, E. N., Muthaka, D.I. (2007) 'Financing secondary education in Kenya: Cost reduction and financing options', *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 15(24).
- Nyere, J. (2009) *Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Sector Mapping in Kenya: Zero Draft*. Dutch Schokland TVET programme Edukans Foundation.
- Oketch, M. and Somerset, A. (2010) *Free primary education and after in Kenya: Enrolment impact, quality effects, and the transition to secondary school. CREATE Pathways to Access Research Monograph No. 37*. University of Sussex.
- Onsomu, E., Mungai, J.N., Oulai, D., Sankale, J. and Mujidi, J. (2004) 'Community schools in Kenya: Case study on community participation in funding and managing schools.' Paris: UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (www.unesco.org/iiep/PDF/pubs/Kenya_B185.pdf).
- Otieno, W. (2010) 'Kenya' in Pillay, P. (2010) *Higher education financing in East and Southern Africa*. Cape Town: Centre for Higher Education Transformation.
- UNDP (2013) *Kenya's youth unemployment challenge*. Discussion Paper. New York: UNDP.
- UNESCO (2010) *World Data on Education VII Ed. 2010/11*. Paris: UNESCO. Available at http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Kenya.pdf