

Kenya's Education Sector: How Basic?

Kenyans' accounts of challenges and successes of basic education

1. Introduction

Following the introduction of free primary education in 2003, there was an expansion in enrolment rates in Kenya – from around 60-65% (net enrolment) before the policy change¹ to nearly 90% since 2010². Along with population growth, this has contributed to a sharp increase in the number of children in Kenya's primary schools, from around 6 million in 2000³ to around 10 million now⁴. Despite this expansion in access to school, Uwezo at Twaweza finds that nearly one out of ten children leave primary school without the most basic Standard 2 level literacy and numeracy competencies.⁵

Among other policy reforms, Kenyan government has since 2015 embarked on the process of reforming the curriculum to make Kenya's education more relevant, efficient and

effective in preparing Kenyans for modern-day challenges⁶.

Expanding access to quality education will inevitably bring its own challenges – particularly in ensuring that the numbers of classrooms, desks, reading materials and qualified teachers available keep pace with the growing pupil population. Importantly though, we must prioritize what works in improving learning. The expansion thus triggers our curiosity: will teachers remain as motivated when teaching larger class sizes? Will the curriculum evolve to reflect the country's changing needs? And perhaps most importantly, will children leave school with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in life?

- 1 UNESCO and the World Bank. See <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.PRM.NENR?locations=KE>
- 2 2014 Basic Educational Statistics Booklet (Table 8). Available at <http://bit.ly/2mhQQSg>
- 3 Kenya Facts and Figures 2004. Available at <http://bit.ly/2m2Rml8>
- 4 2014 Basic Educational Statistics Booklet (Table 23). Available at <http://bit.ly/2mhQQSg>
- 5 Uwezo 2015 report, 'Are our children learning?' <http://www.twaweza.org/go/uwezo-kenya-2015-ala>
- 6 KICD 2015. See <https://www.kicd.ac.ke/images/PDF/national-curriculum-policy.pdf>

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Sauti za Wananchi



This brief explores the public's views on these and other important issues in Kenya's education sector. How has the quality of education changed since the introduction of free primary education? How engaged are parents with their children's education? What action should be taken when a school girl becomes pregnant?

Data for this brief comes from Twaweza's flagship program, *Sauti za Wananchi*, which is a nationally-representative, high-frequency mobile phone panel survey. Information on the overall methodology is available at www.twaweza.org/sauti. For this brief data were collected from 1,780 respondents from the Kenyan *Sauti za Wananchi* panel. This was the sixth round of calls to the panel, conducted between 15 August and 6 September 2016.

The key findings are:

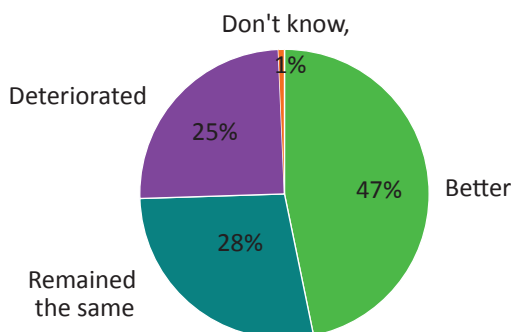
- One in four households has at least one child in a private school
- Eight in ten parents with a child in primary school visit the school at least once per term
- One in two Kenyans thinks the quality of education has improved since the introduction of free primary education, but one in four think that quality has declined.
- Poor student performance is cited by nine out of ten citizens as a serious problem
- Three out of four citizens think students leaving primary school do not have the skills they need for life
- Nine out of ten citizens admit not knowing how much funding is available to schools for free primary education
- Family poverty and peer pressure are the two most cited non-education-related problems facing children in school
- Two out of three citizens feel that there are not enough qualified teachers in public primary schools
- Eight out of ten citizens feel they have a responsibility to contribute to improving the quality of schools
- One in three citizens have a family member who dropped out of school in the last three years due to pregnancy
- Nine out of ten citizens agree with the government policy that allows schoolgirls who get pregnant to re-enter school

2. Ten facts about education in Kenya

Fact 1: Half of Kenyan citizens think the quality of education has improved since the introduction of free primary education

One in two citizens (47%) believe that since primary schools became free to all (in 2003), the quality of education has improved, compared to one in four (25%) who say the quality has declined. A further one in four (28%) say the quality has remained the same.

Figure 1: “Since public primary schools became free for all, would you say the quality of education has become better, remained the same or deteriorated?”

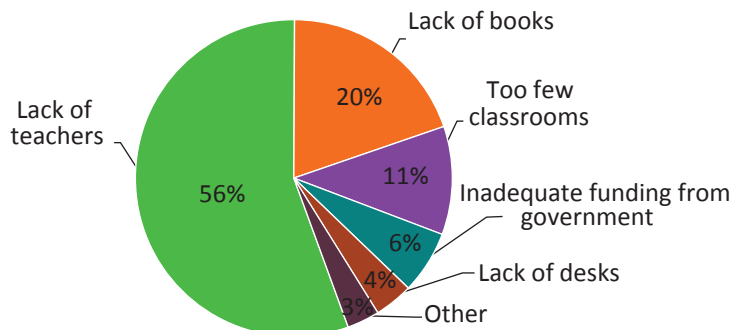


Source of data: Sauti za Wananchi Mobile Phone Survey – (15 August – 6 September 2016)

Base: All respondents, n=1,780

Teacher shortages are cited by a majority of citizens (56%) as the main challenge facing public schools since they became free. Mentioned frequently are additional challenges such as shortages of books (20%) and classrooms (11%).

Figure 2: “What is the main challenge facing public schools since becoming free for all?”



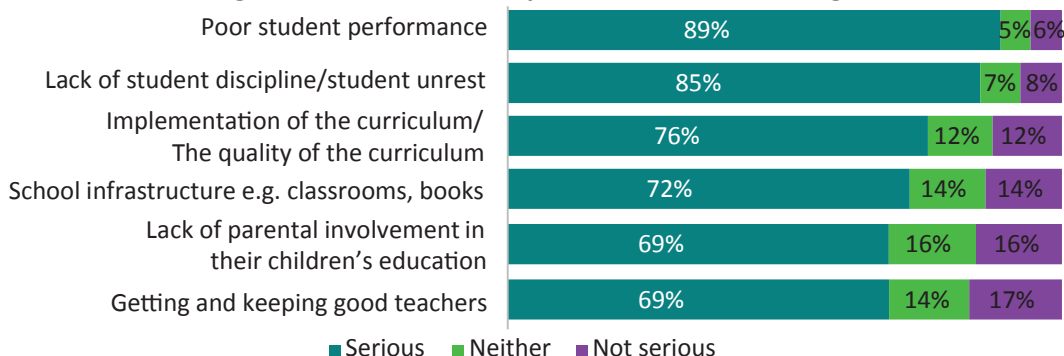
Source of data: Sauti za Wananchi Mobile Phone Survey – (15 August – 6 September 2016)

Base: All respondents, n=1,780

Fact 2: Nine in ten citizens cite poor student performance and a lack of discipline as serious problems

When asked to rate educational challenges nine in ten citizens cite poor student performance (89%) and a lack of discipline (85%) as serious problems. Citizens also recognise school infrastructure (76%) and the quality / implementation of the curriculum (72%) as serious problems. Relatively fewer, but a still substantial share of citizens (69%) see parental involvement and the hiring / retention of good teachers as problems.

Figure 3: “How much of a problem are the following?”



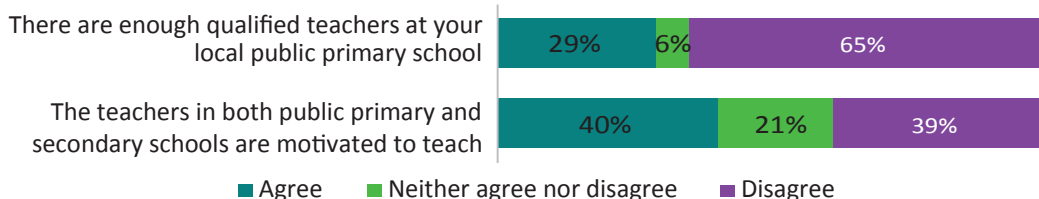
Source of data: Sauti za Wananchi Mobile Phone Survey – (15 August – 6 September 2016)

Base: All respondents, n=1,780

Fact 3: Two in three citizens in Kenya feel that there are not enough qualified teachers in public primary schools

Although citizens are concerned with the number of teachers available (65% disagree that there are enough qualified teachers at their local primary school), Kenyans are divided on whether teachers are motivated to teach (40% think they are, while 39% think they are not).

Figure 4: “Do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about teachers in public schools...”



Source of data: Sauti za Wananchi Mobile Phone Survey – (15 August – 6 September 2016)

Base: All respondents, n=1,780

Fact 4: Three in four citizens think students leaving primary school do not have the basic skills they need.

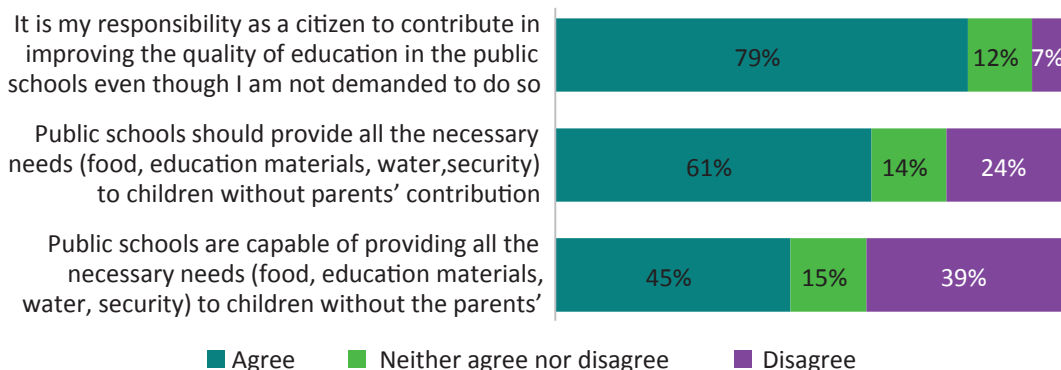
Three in four citizens (72%) disagree with the statement that students leaving primary school have useful skills that will enable them to manage their own lives.

A similar number (75%) feel that students should repeat a grade when they are not doing well in school. This view is at odds with government policy, including the Basic Education Act of 2013, which states that “no pupil admitted in a school shall be held back in any class.”⁷

⁷ Clause 35(2). Available from <http://www.education.go.ke/index.php/downloads/file/96-basic-education-act-no-14-of-2013>

One in three (33%) argue that all children completing primary school should be allowed to join secondary school, whether or not they passed. However, the majority of citizens (51%) disagree with this idea.

Figure 5: “Do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about students in Kenyan schools...”

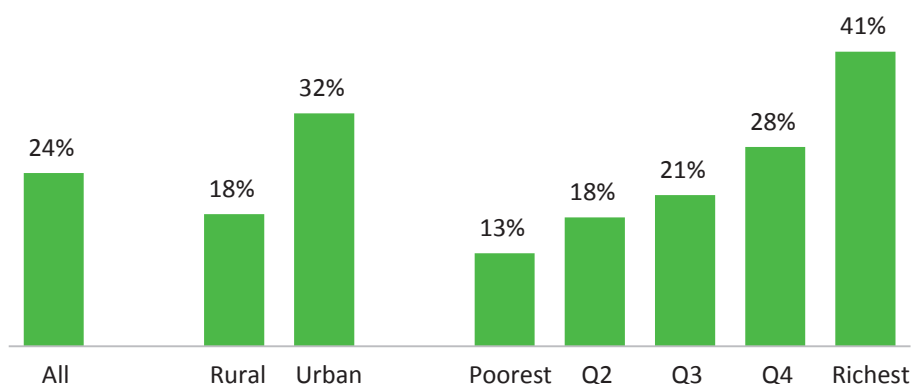


Source of data: Sauti za Wananchi Mobile Phone Survey – (15 August – 6 September 2016)
Base: All respondents, n=1,780

Fact 5: One in four households has at least one child in a private school

One in four (24%) households has at least one child attending a private school (pre-primary, primary or secondary). This figure is higher in urban areas (32%) than rural (18%). It is also higher among wealthier households (41%), though even among the poorest households, one in eight households (13%) has at least one child attending a private school.

Figure 6: % of households with at least one child in a private school (pre-primary, primary or secondary)



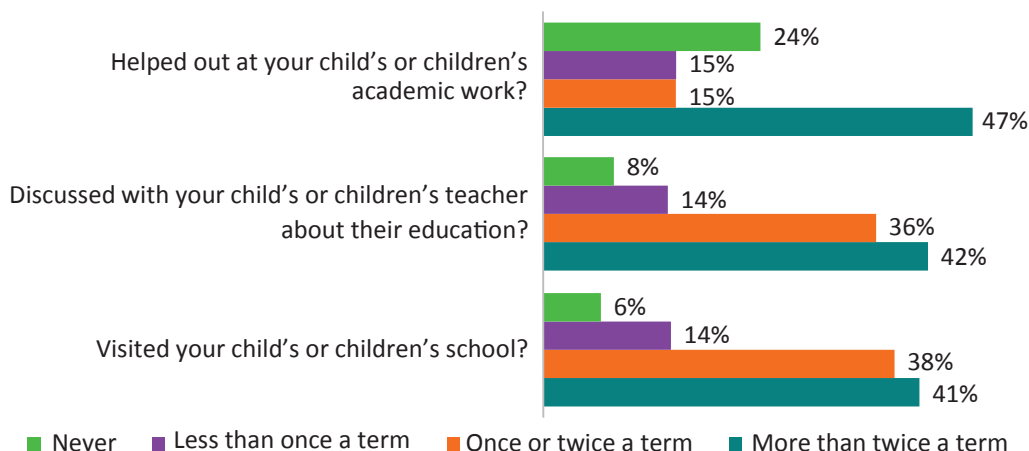
Source of data: Sauti za Wananchi Mobile Phone Survey – (15 August – 6 September 2016)
Base: All respondents, n=1,780

Fact 6: Eight in ten parents visit their children's school at least once per term

Visiting the school and discussing their children's progress with teachers is the most common parental engagement with their children's education. Eight in ten (79%) parents of primary school children visit the school at least once a term. Parents also discuss their child's studies with teachers once or twice a term (36%) or more often than this (42%).

While parents' direct involvement in helping their children with school work plays an important role in the education process, a sizeable share of four in ten parents (39%) never do this or do so less than once each term.

**Figure 7: Parent's involvement in primary school pupil's education:
"How often have you..."**



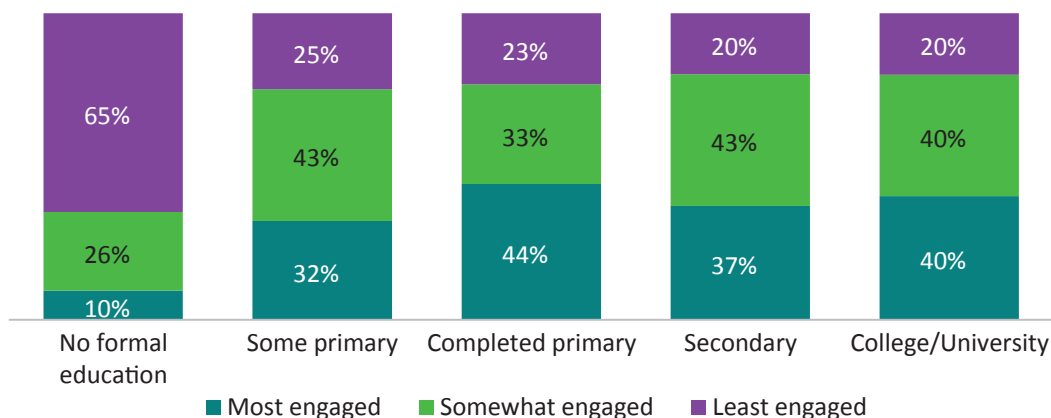
Source of data: Sauti za Wananchi Mobile Phone Survey – (15 August – 6 September 2016)

Base: Respondents who are the parent/guardian of a child attending primary school, $n=1,033$

Parents who have no formal education are the least engaged⁸ in their children's schooling. Just one in ten parents with no formal education fall into the "most engaged" category, compared to 32-44% of parents with some education. However, the level of parents' engagement does not increase among parents with post-secondary levels of education.

⁸ Parental engagement is defined here as helping their child or children with their academic work, discussing with their child's teacher about their studies, and visiting the school.

Figure 8: Level of parental engagement in schooling of primary school pupil(s) in their household, by level of education of parent



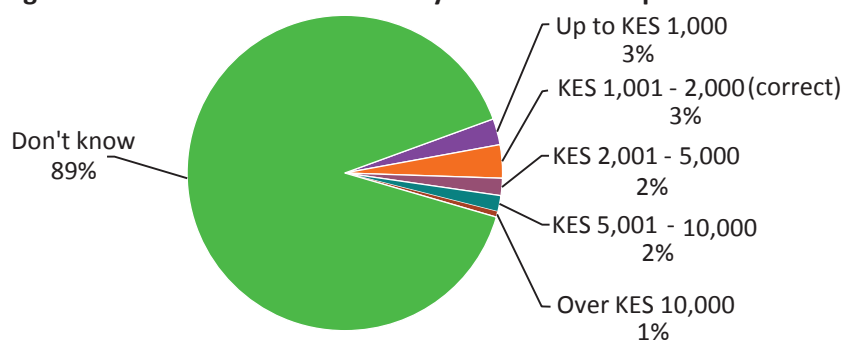
Source of data: Sauti za Wananchi Mobile Phone Survey – (15 August – 6 September 2016)

Base: Respondents who are the parent/guardian of a child attending primary school, n=1,033

Fact 7: Nine in ten citizens admit to not knowing how much funding is available to schools for free primary education

Nine in ten citizens (89%) admit that they do not know how much government funding is available per child for free primary education, and close to one in ten (8%) say they know the answer but gave an incorrect amount. Only one in thirty (3%) come close to the correct figure of KES 1,500 per pupil per year.

Figure 9: “How much is Free Primary Education fund per child in 2016?”



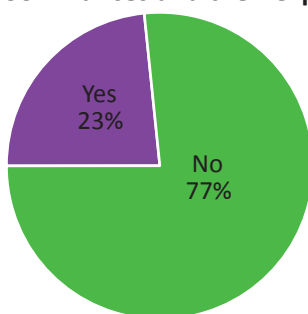
Source of data: Sauti za Wananchi Mobile Phone Survey – (15 August – 6 September 2016)

Base: All respondents, n=1,780

One in four citizens (23%) have ever visited their local primary school to ask about school finances and expenditure. Among those who did, half (51%) reported getting the information from the head-teacher’s office, one in four found the information on a noticeboard either

within (15%) or outside (10%) the school compound. One in five (20%) did not find the information they were seeking.

Figure 10: “Have you ever visited a local public primary school to find out about school finances and their expenditure?”

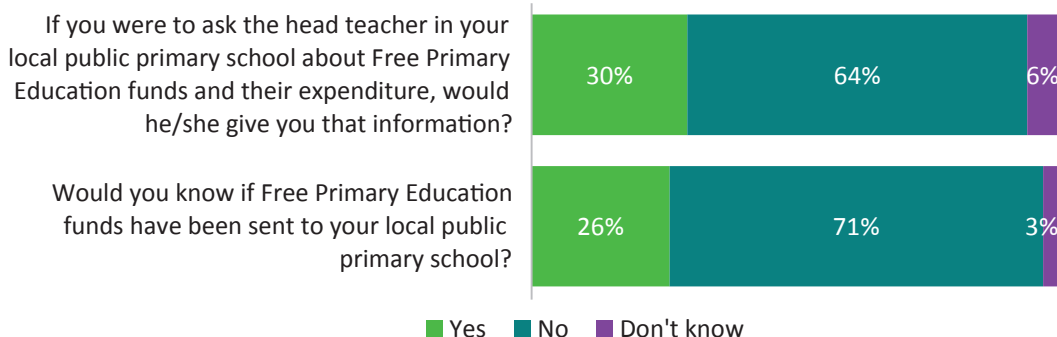


Source of data: Sauti za Wananchi Mobile Phone Survey – (15 August – 6 September 2016)

Base: All respondents, n=1,780

Two in three citizens (64%) do not think the head-teacher of their local primary school would provide them with information on Free Primary Education funds and expenditure, if they asked for it. Seven in ten say they would not know whether or not these funds had been disbursed to their local primary school.

Figure 11: Access to information about primary schools



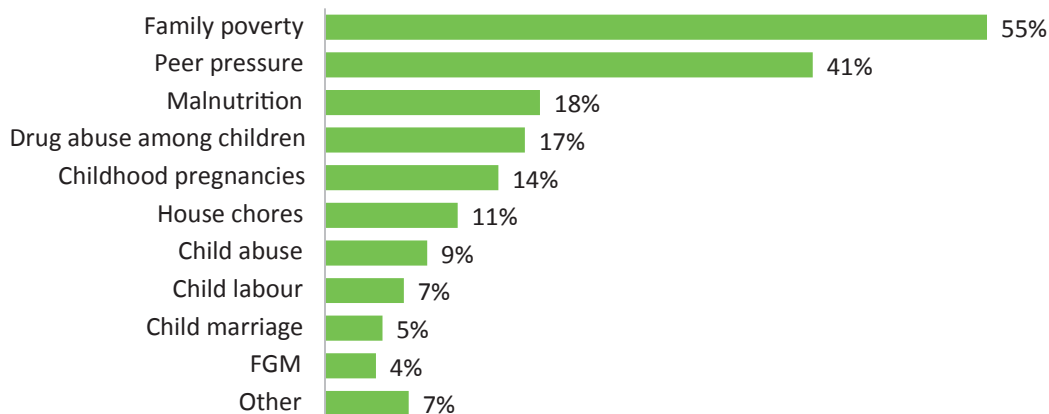
Source of data: Sauti za Wananchi Mobile Phone Survey – (15 August – 6 September 2016)

Base: All respondents, n=1,780

Fact 8: Family poverty and peer pressure are the two most cited non-education-related problems facing children in school

Just over half of Kenyan citizens (55%) named family poverty as among the top three non-education-related problems facing children in school, this was the most commonly cited problem. Four in ten (41%) named peer-pressure, and almost one in five also mentioned malnutrition (18%), drug abuse among children (17%) and childhood pregnancies (14%).

Figure 12: “In general, what are the three main non-education related problems that face children in school?”



Source of data: Sauti za Wananchi Mobile Phone Survey – (15 August – 6 September 2016)

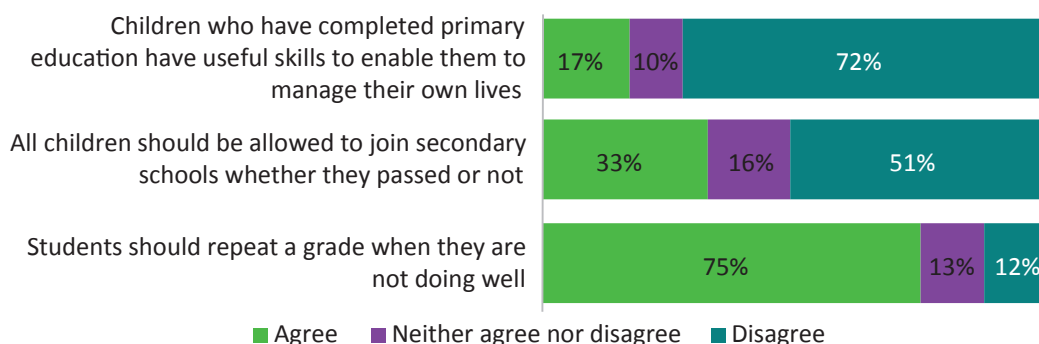
Base: All respondents, n=1,780

Fact 9: Eight in ten citizens feel they have a responsibility to contribute to improving the quality of schools

Eight in ten citizens (79%) feel that they bear some of the responsibility for improving the quality of public schools.

Six in ten (61%) think that public schools should provide everything needed to children (such as food, educational materials, water and security) without parents being required to contribute. However, fewer than half (45%) think public schools are able to provide these essentials and 39% think they cannot fulfil these responsibilities without parental contributions.

Fig 13: “Do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about responsibilities for education...”



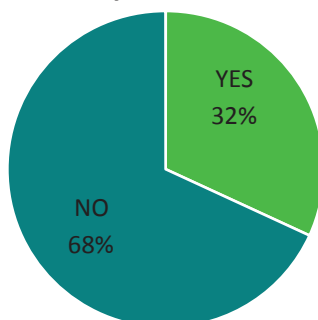
Source of data: Sauti za Wananchi Mobile Phone Survey – (15 August – 6 September 2016)

Base: All respondents, n=1,780

Fact 10: One in three citizens have a family member who dropped out of school in the last three years due to pregnancy

One in three citizens (32%) know of at least one family member who dropped out of school in the past three years as a result of pregnancy.

Figure 14: “In the last 3 years, do you know of any family member who has dropped out of primary or secondary school as a result of pregnancy?”



Source of data: Sauti za Wananchi Mobile Phone Survey – (15 August – 6 September 2016)

Base: All respondents, $n=1,780$

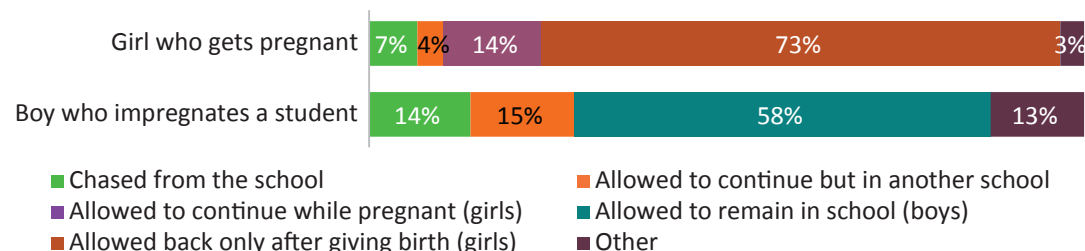
Citizens have differing views on the consequences of pregnancy among students. Many adopt a harsher line towards boys: twice as many citizens think school boys who impregnate school girls should be expelled (14%) compared to those who think the pregnant girls should be expelled (7%), while 15% think the boys should be transferred to another school compared to 4% who think this should happen to the girl.

Three out of four citizens (73%) think girls should return to school after giving birth while one in six (14%) think that girls should be allowed to stay in school during their pregnancy. Six in ten think that a boy who impregnates a fellow pupil should be allowed to remain in school.

This means that a majority of citizens have views that are in line with government’s official re-entry policy which supports the return of girls to school after giving birth. The Basic Education Act further states that children should only be expelled in extreme circumstances⁹.

⁹ Clause 35(2-3). Available from <http://www.education.go.ke/index.php/downloads/file/96-basic-education-act-no-14-of-2013>

Figure 15: “What should be done to a girl who gets pregnant while still in school/a school boy who impregnates another pupil?”



Source of data: Sauti za Wananchi Mobile Phone Survey – (15 August – 6 September 2016)

Base: All respondents, n=1,780

3. Conclusion


This brief presents ten facts on citizens’ views on Kenyan education. On the positive side, about half of Kenyans feel that the quality of education in public primary schools has improved since it became free, compared to a quarter who feel the quality has declined. At the same time parents are aware that schools and the public education system in general face many challenges, ranging from poor performance to student indiscipline.

Despite high levels of understanding that citizens have a role to play in improving education, the survey reveals a level of disconnect between parents and schools. Although the majority of parents visit their children’s schools and have discussions with teachers, relatively few of them help children with their academic work. Overall, levels of engagement with schools among parents are influenced by the parents’ own level of education; those who have completed primary school are the most engaged in their own children’s basic education.

In terms of school financials, the gap is clear: almost all citizens do not know what funds schools are entitled to receive and would not know if these funds arrived at their local school. Large numbers of citizens also think that head teachers would not share information on public funds received and spent. Without this basic accountability relationship between schools and the communities around them, it is impossible for Kenyans to be sure what money is reaching schools and how it is being used and so play their part in holding school managers accountable.

Citizens do recognise that the availability of teachers presents a real challenge; more than half spontaneously mention the shortage of teachers as a problem in the education sector. They also think that student performance is a serious issue in the sector and that primary students do not finish school with the skills to help them manage life. A large proportion of parents have opted to send their children to private school, perhaps as a result of the clear challenges facing the public sector.

Moving forward, four considerations warrant attention. First, citizens appear to express willingness to be more involved in schools. Often this desire is misused to squeeze financial



contributions out of parents but there are many important roles that they can play to support schools. Parents can demand greater accountability when they are more aware of and involved in the financial and administrative aspects of school management. Furthermore, greater attention should be paid to encouraging parents to support their children to learn at home.

Second, we must acknowledge the role played by private schools and integrate them into mainstream planning and support. Government remains responsible for regulating the quality of instruction given to young Kenyans and so the expanding role of the private sector in public service delivery must be carefully managed.

Third, the government must heed the people's concerns about what children are learning. The current process of curriculum reform provides a strong opportunity to seek and incorporate parental inputs.

And finally, these data clearly show that education policy-making requires a careful balancing act between possible technical solutions, parents' expectations and aspirations for their children and the available financial resources. Despite policy to the contrary, a clear 75% of parents think that pupils in primary schools should repeat years when they are not doing well. Instinctively this would seem to provide an answer to the challenges around ensuring children acquire the requisite skills while in school. But if many children are continually repeating years, the cost to government can quickly spiral out of control. Thus there is need to balance the demands and expectations of citizens with a careful consideration of what works to improve learning and the available resources. The voices of citizens, their opinions and experiences, however, must continue to be an important input into any decisions made around public services. There is, more often than not, untapped wisdom among citizens as to what ails our services and how we can deliver on the promise of a better life for all Kenyans.