

Unfinished Business in the Provision of Universal Primary Education: The Kenyan Scenario

Gideon Motuka¹ & John Aluko Orodho²

¹ Doctorate Student in the Department of Educational Management, Policy and Curriculum Studies, School of Education, Kenyatta University, Kenya

² Associate Professor of Research and Statistics in the Department of Educational Management, Policy and Curriculum Studies, School of Education, Kenyatta University, Kenya

Abstract: The purpose of this study was to examine the extent to which Kenya had progressed towards attainment of Universal Primary Education (UPE) global policy by the end of the 2015 deadline. A historical research design was utilized in the study. Secondary data from the review of literature supplemented with primary data from the field were generated and analyzed. It was established that while Kenya had made commendable progress towards attainment of UPE policy by 2015, there was still an unfinished business of resolving some challenges related to inadequate qualified teachers, accelerated enrolment against low physical infrastructure contributing to low quality of education and regional disparities in access, equity and quality of educational provision. The study concluded that despite the great strides that had been made in Kenya towards attainment of UPE, the policy had not been fully achieved by 2015. To fill the gap, it is recommended that the complementary UPE policy of "Learning for ALL by the year 2020" for all world countries in general and Kenya in particular should be carefully implemented for the envisaged educational results to be achieved (182 words).

Keywords: Universal Primary Education, unfinished business, primary education, Kenya.

I. Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

The foundation and development of modern formal education systems worldwide were conducted as state enterprises but financed mainly by the community or families for a long time. The universalization of primary education in accordance with the idea of education as a human right was delayed until 1948 (Yonemura, 2007). Thus, long before 1990 countries of world funded education of their people differently and had different priorities towards their education systems until 5th to 9th March, 1990 when 155 countries of the world held a conference in Jomtien, Thailand, organized by the United Nations (UN) to address education as a basic human right, as in the 1948 UN charter.

This well attended Jomtien Conference came out with a blue print document entitled, 'World Declaration and Education for All (EFA)' and Framework of Action to meet basic learning needs of the poor (Edho, 2009). From 1990 to 2000 the policy "Education for All" never got implemented effectively and efficiently among world countries (United Nations, 2013). The Jomtien Conference was a failure because a decade later the number of children outside school had grown to 125 million (Amartya, 1999). This led to the adoption of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) whose second item was the Universal Primary Education (UPE).

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of which Universal Primary Education (UPE) is part, was a global framework adopted at the Dakar conference in Senegal in the year 2000 and signed by 189 world leaders who met in that Millennium Summit. Indeed, the Millennium Development Goal item two of UPE is a response to the world conference of "Education for All" (EFA) held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 (Edho, 2009). The Millennium Development Goals (MGDs) were initially called International Development Goals (IDGs). It was in the year 2001 that the International Development Goals (IDGs) got renamed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) when the United Nations (UN) drafted the millennium declaration and the final negotiations between the United Nations (UN), Development Assistance Committee (DAC), World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) to amend International Development Goals (IDGs) into the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a global policy in which leaders of 189 countries of the world set for themselves eight Millennium Development Goals to be achieved by them by the year 2015.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) item two adapted by these world missions in the year 2000 proposed that by 2015 children of educable age should have free, affordable and accessible education. In other words, countries of the world committed themselves to achieve Universal Primary Education (UPE) by the year 2015 (Ejeh, 2009). For each the 8 MDGs of which UPE is item two, the world leaders established yardsticks for measuring its results for all world countries, both developed and developing ones. Various

agencies such as World Bank UNESCO, among others and developed countries were to provide funds to the poor or developing countries for the implementation of the MDGs in general and UPE in particular.

According to United Nations (2013), a panel of eminent persons was constituted to take a postmortem of achievements made as the 2015 MDG deadlines was approaching. The Panel came together with a sense of optimism and a deep respect for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The panelists observed that 13 years since the millennium had seen the fastest reduction in poverty in human history: there are half a billion fewer people living below an international poverty line of \$1.25 a day. Child death rates had fallen by more than 30%, with about three million children's lives saved each year compared to 2000. Deaths from malaria had also fallen by one quarter. This unprecedented progress has been driven by a combination of economic growth, better policies, and the global commitment to the MDGs, which set out an inspirational rallying cry for the whole world.

Given this remarkable success globally, the panel of eminent persons were of the opinion that it would be a mistake to simply tear up the MDGs and start from scratch. As world leaders agreed at Rio in 2012, new goals and targets need to be grounded in respect for universal human rights, and finish the job that the MDGs started. Central to this is *eradicating extreme poverty* from the face of the earth by 2030. This is something that leaders had promised time and again throughout history (United Nations, 2013).

So the Panel asked some simple questions: starting with the current MDGs, what to keep, what to amend, and what to add. In trying to answer these questions, they listened to the views of women and men, young people, parliamentarians, civil society organizations, indigenous people and local communities, migrants, experts, business, trade unions and governments. Most important, they listened directly to the voices of hundreds of thousands of people from all over the world, in face-to-face meetings as well as through surveys, community interviews, and polling over mobile phones and the internet (United Nations, 2013).

The United Nations (2013) also considered the massive changes in the world since the year 2000 and the changes that are likely to unfold by 2030. They acknowledged the fact that there are a billion more people today, with world population at seven billion, and another billion expected by 2030.

Over two decades have elapsed since the international community adopted the six Education for All (EFA) goals at the World Forum held in Dakar, Senegal in April 2000 (Republic of Kenya/UNESCO, 2012). This broad Vision of education and the holistic approach to sector development was fully embraced by Kenya as a critical vehicle for realizing Vision 2030, the road map for development (Odhiambo, 2010; Gikondi et al, 2010; Republic of Kenya/UNESCO, 2012).

The Constitution of Kenya 2010 unequivocally promises all Kenyans unprecedented opportunity to capitalize on the progress made thus far in order to exploit the full potential of education for each and every child, youth and adult in the nation (Republic of Kenya, 2010, 2012). In addition, the Basic Education Act 2013 reiterates the fact that basic education which has been made free and compulsory in Kenya should be operationalized through the legal framework enshrined in the Act (Republic of Kenya, 2012). Both the Constitution 2010 and Basic Education Act 2013 guarantees and provides legal mechanisms of ensuring that every Kenyan citizen gets access to basic education and other economic and social rights that hinge upon the citizen's access to, and performance in, education, as much as on the application of knowledge, attitude and skills gained through the educational experience (Republic of Kenya, 2010, Republic of Kenya/UNESCO, 2012; UNESCO, 2012; World Bank, 2012; Republic of Kenya, 2013). It is against this background that this paper was motivated to examine the progress that had been made by the Government of Kenya in an attempt to attain UPE goals before the expiry period of 2015.

Purpose and Objectives of the study

The purpose of this paper is to examine the unfinished business of UPE policy in Kenya. The main objective of the study was to examine the strategies put in place and the achievements made thus far towards attainment of UPE in Kenya by the deadline of 2015.

II. Research Methodology

The paper was based on historical research design utilizing secondary data from desk review of literature supplemented with primary data from various existing studies on UPE from selected areas. In attempt to answer the research concerns, the paper explored a variety of issues concerning the UPE implementation process. The statistical data derived from the two sources were analyzed to determine the UPE enrolment and participation rates using the common indicators of gross and net enrolment ratios. The data were further analyzed to provide information to access to primary education and whether UPE has been achieved or not. The paper also has explored achievements made thus far and challenges enabling effective implementing of UPE policy and offered recommendations on the way forward.

III. Findings and Discussion

3.1 Postmortem of progress made to achieve EFA in Kenya

Given the expiry of deadline of 2015 for meeting the internationally agreed goals and commitments related to education as stipulated by Education for All (EFA), governments that are signatory to these commitments were expected by their citizens to take stock of their progress as part of accountability concerns regarding their promises (United Nations, 2013). In response to these concerns, the first ever EFA assessment undertaken jointly by the Government of Kenya and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in May 2010 revealed mixed results regarding Kenya's attainment of the internationally agreed commitments and targets. On the positive side, it was established that strong political will and commitments, coupled with substantial and sustained allocation of the state budget to education sector, have translated into the development and implementation of major policies and programmatic interventions enabling the country to record progressive expansion of the sector (Republic of Kenya/UNESCO, 2012; Orodho, 2014; Orodho, Waweru, Ndichu & Thinguri, 2013; Sava & Orodho, 2014).

The major reforms and innovations in the education sector include the implementation of Free Primary Education (FPE) and Free Day Secondary Education (FDSE), which have accelerated enrollment of students in both primary and secondary schools in the country (Republic of Kenya, 2012). There is little doubt that these innovations have led to the improvement of access, retention, equity, quality, relevance, and overall efficiency of the education sector at national level (Oketch & Ngware, 2012; Odhiambo, 2010; Republic of Kenya/UNESCO, 2012). Hopefully, at the national level, it can be concluded that Kenya was on track, and the achievement of EFA were within reach (Orodho, 2014; Republic of Kenya/UNESCO, 2012).

On the other hand, the report also painted a negative picture as it lamented that there were still exist numerous challenges to be overcome in order to attain quality education for all children, youth and adults (Orodho, Waweru, Getange & Miriti, 2013; Republic of Kenya/UNESCO, 2012). These include significant geographical disparities in access and achievement amongst the marginalized groups that constitute those living in informal urban settlements and ASAL regions; and absence of clear definition of life skills and lifelong learning, among others (Republic of Kenya/UNESCO, 2012). The negative finding touching on the geographic disparities in access and achievement among marginalized communities prompted this study. In the present study, therefore, we investigated the state of educational access and quality with a view to soliciting plausible reasons to explain the strategies being applied to cope with the current state.

3.2 Performance of Kenya in UPE

The second objective was to examine the progress made by the Government of Kenya through the Ministry of Education to achieve Universal Primary Education (UPE). Kenya being one of the nations that signed the MDGs of which item two was provision of Universal Primary Education (UPE) promised to achieve this goal in 2015 it was deemed prudent to assess her performance. We need not reiterate the fact that by endorsement of UPE, Kenya like other world nations put in place concerted efforts to expand her education system so as to improve access to primary school education (Orodho, 2014).

Table 1 carries data on primary school enrollment by class and sex between 2009 and 2013. The data carried in the table indicates that there has been a steady increase in pupils' enrollment by sex over the period under review. The table also indicates that at the national level, Kenya had almost gender parity, although the males still slightly outnumbered their female counterparts

Table 1 : Primary School Enrolment by Class and Sex, 2009 – 2013

Class	2009		2010		2011		2012		2013*	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Standard 1	696.7	684.4	736.7	731.8	754.5	749.4	770.3	772.5	790.3	778.2
Standard 2	663.9	625.2	679.9	656.1	691.1	688.8	725.0	727.5	760.7	715.8
Standard 3	625.8	613.0	643.3	607.5	665.1	647.0	664.0	661.7	686.2	657.3
Standard 4	620.6	608.6	633.0	608.8	674.1	648.4	625.7	628.1	653.4	626.3
Standard 5	569.8	565.6	582.8	584.8	620.7	622.9	654.5	629.4	651.2	644.8
Standard 6	535.3	492.6	558.0	562.1	594.3	588.7	602.6	598.4	618.0	622.9
Standard 7	480.8	467.7	531.3	523.4	565.8	557.4	560.2	546.5	561.4	571.2
Standard 8	384.9	351.6	386.8	354.7	411.9	377.7	424.3	404.6	427.9	417.0
TOTAL	4,577.7	4,408.7	4,751.9	4,629.3	4,977.7	4,880.2	5,026.5	4,968.7	5,149.1	5,033.4
GRAND TOTAL..	8,986.4		9,381.2		9,857.9		9,995.2		10,182.6	

Source : Teachers Service Commission

The bar graph depicted in Figure 1 shows percent attainment of primary school education in the year 2014 which is the eve of 2015. It can be deduced that about 29% men had either not attained education or had incomplete the primary education whereas 33% women either had no primary education or had incomplete primary school education.

A critical examination of the data carried in Figure 1 reveals that more women compared to men in the age bracket of 15-49 years with no formal education in Kenya. It was also revealed that an equal number of males and females within the same age bracket had incomplete primary education level of education.

Age 15-49

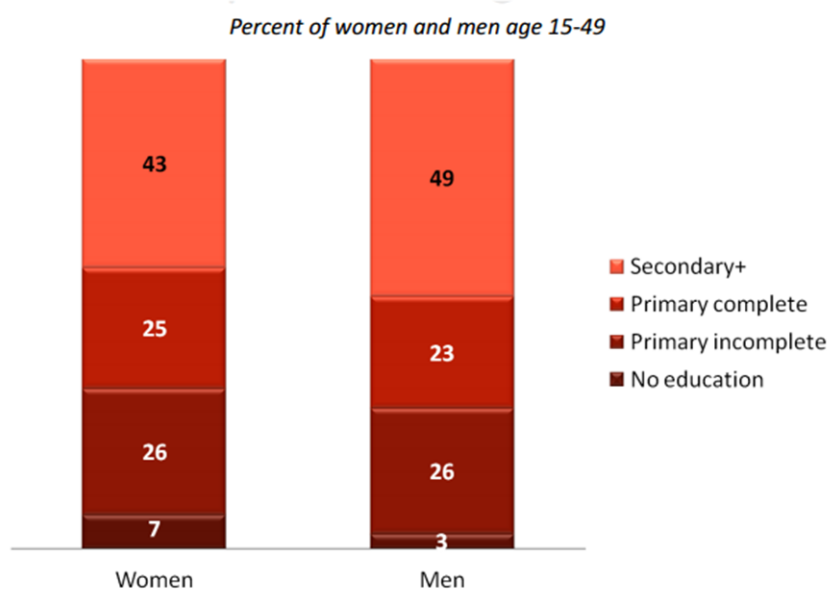


Figure 1: Educational Attainment by gender for the 15-49 age cohort in Kenya as of 2014

The Figure 1 also indicates that more males than females had completed secondary school or above. The overall picture paints a positive progression profile for males compared to their female counterparts. The results in Figure 1 confirms that in an effort to implement Universal Primary Education (UPE) the Ministry of Education in Kenya designed and developed the KESSP based on Sector-Wide Approach to Planning (SWAP). This was developed through a consultative process as the only programme for the sector through which education stakeholders would channel their support to education. The first phase of KESSP that was designed to run from 2005 to 2010 mainly focused on access, equity, quality and relevance of education and strengthening the KESSP sector.

Table 2 shows the progress made in enrolment of Primary schools in classes one to eight, boys and girls respectively in thousands in five years towards the year 2015. It depicts a steady increase gradually. UPE has led to a steady increase of pupil enrollment since 2003 in Kenya. For instance, there was steady increase of pupil enrolment of 5.9 million to 9.4 million between the year 2005 and 2010 as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Primary Gross Enrolment Rate in Kenya 2000-2010.

Year	Boys	Girls	Total	GER/Boys	GER/Girls	GER/Total
2000	3680176	2933156	6613332	111.3	88.0	99.6
2001	3,002476	2,939134	5941610	90.8	88.1	89.4
2002	3073929	2988813	6062742	92.9	89.6	91.2
2003	30674398	3485124	7159522	111.1	104.5	107.8
2004	3821837	3575209	7397046	112.0	103.9	108.0
2005	3912399	3690112	7602511	111.2	104.0	107.6
2006	3896378	3735535	7632112	106.4	101.1	103.8
2007	4258616	4071532	8330148	111.8	106.0	108.9
2008	4440770	4284282	8725052	112.2	107.3	109.8
2009	4643435	4433983	9077518	112.8	107.2	110.0
2010	4751943	4629268	9381211	108.8	109.9	108.8

Source: Ministry of Education. EMIS data (Republic of Kenya, 2013).

From the data contained in Table 2, it can be deduced that there was an increase in Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) from 99.6% in 2000 to 109.8% in 2010. This indicates that either underage pupils or overage pupils got enrolled or both. The given trend also confirms that the Government of Kenya made good progress and even surpassed the targets set out just before the deadline of 2015.

The increase of pupil enrolment due to increase of PTR in turn has led to increase in secondary enrolment due to introduction of Free Day Secondary Education in the year 2008 (Orodho, 2014).

UPE led to the adoption of the Free Primary Education (FPE) policy by the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) Government in 2003 in the education sector in Kenya whereby the Government of Kenya eliminated all school fees paid by pupils so that the Government could cater for it fully. Majority of Kenyan children before the advent of Free Primary Education (FPE) were not able to access primary education due to the escalating cost of education hence perceived FPE as a Panacea to their problems regarding education (Orodho, 2014).

UPE has led to several agencies and organizations to come out strongly in aid of basic education worldwide, especially poor countries, Kenya inclusive. For instance, United Nations agencies like UNDP, UNESCO and UNICEF among others have provided educational funds for the construction of school infrastructure, training and hiring of teachers besides providing study materials like textbooks.

UPE with its target of 2015 deadline, motivated countries of world Kenya inclusive, to a health competition making primary education accessible to more of its citizens. Both the public and private schools have been expanded to provide education to both school age going children and adult illiterates. Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE) centres have also been expanded to prepare pre-school children for primary school education. Consequently, literacy and numeracy skills have been accessible to many more citizens than before the advent of Universal Primary Education in Kenya.

With the advent of Free Primary Education policy put in place to drive Kenya to achieve the UPE target by 2015, Kenya has almost achieved the UPE target but with gender and regional disparities. According to (Orodho, 2014) Kenya is progressing well with UPE though there is a show of both regional and gender differences with Net Enrollment Rates (NERs) for females being lower than those for males in some geographical areas - indicating that more males are attending schools especially in the ASAL counties and urban slums.

The Free Primary Education (FPE) put in place by the National Alliance Rainbow Coalition (NARC) government in Kenya of 2003 was an effort in the country to attain the MDGs item two of UPE (Odhiambo, 2012). Indeed following the implementation of FPE policy in 2003 the enrolment ratio in Kenya grew by a further 22.3 percent. This rapid expansion in enrolment exacerbated problems of teaching and learning facilities, increased classroom congestion as well as raised teacher-pupil ratios (Orodho, 2014). To sustain the FPE the Kenyan government raised its education budget in the years 2003-2004 by 17.4% besides being strongly supported by donor funding. The cost of providing FPE is beyond the scope of ordinary education budget leading to a weak economic performance and yet donor finance has been often temporary (Muthwii, 2004).

According to Orodho (2014) Kenya as a nation was making good progress towards the achievement of UPE and had almost achieved it though with regional and gender imbalances. There is more enrolment of males than females in some geographical areas whereas in disadvantaged regions located in ASAL counties and urban slums, general enrollment is generally low. The deadline for achieving UPE is the year 2015. Has Kenya achieved UPE?

In an effort to enhance UPE in Kenya, quality of education has been compromised given that some children complete primary education cycle without literacy skills. This happens due to a limited number of teachers hired by the government to handle large classes such that a teacher is unable to attend to individual children. Though there are enough trained teachers for the primary cycle in Kenya, the government does not have enough funds to hire them. Therefore it is possible that pupils in public primary schools access primary education but of poor quality.

The increment in pupil enrolment in public primary schools in Kenya, in the advent of UPE, has also led to inadequate schools and classrooms today. It is not a wonder to find some children in some sub-counties such as Mandera County being taught under trees while seated on stones (Orodho, 2014). Indeed inadequate teaching and learning materials like textbooks, stationery and desks are a big challenge in public primary schools in Kenya. This has made the rich families to enroll their children in private primary schools where better education is provided at a fee (Ndayambaje & Orodho, 2014). Most private primary schools in Kenya have better and enough educational facilities and qualified teachers given that parents pay fees well for their children in these schools as opposed to public primary schools in which parents pay barely nothing for their children's education.

Poor parents whose children are in public schools have been encouraged by leaders to leave the burden of financing for their children's education to the government of Kenya. The government officials are ever complaining of budgetary problems as a reason for not hiring more teachers for public schools in Kenya. The

same government has found itself faced with lots of frequent strikes from its hired teachers that constantly demand salary increment due to inflation in Kenya's economy (Adan & Orodho, 2015).

3.3 Factors Hindering Children Access and Attendance

The commendable progress made in terms of achieving UPE at the national level notwithstanding, the same data portrays disturbing trend when unpacked at regional and or county levels. The data carried elsewhere indicates that there are gender and regional differences in access, retention and performance in national examinations in Kenya.

First, Location was found to contribute to a child's lack of access and attendance to primary education. Indeed in certain areas of Northern Kenya, it is more difficult for children to get to school. (Postiglione, 2007). In the remote locations insufficient school funds contribute to low attendance rates by creating undesirable and unsafe learning environment. There is evidence to prove that the distance to and from school contributes a child's attendance or lack thereof. In study done investigating the relation between distance and school attendance in Mali about half the villages reported that the school was too far away causing students not to enroll (Birdcall, 2006). Likewise a study done examining the correlation between location and school attendance in Argentina found that urban residence was positively correlated with school attendance (Arubayi, 2005; De Vos, 2006)

Secondly, the study established gender disparities in favour of boys in some North Eastern counties and an emerging gender disparity in favour of the girl- child in some counties such as Kiambu County, Embu County and Vihiga Counties (Orodho, 2014; Adan & Orodho, 2015). Gender contributes to child's lack of access and attendance to education in some communities in Kenya. Indeed gender inequality in education has been an issue for a long time such that there is currently a gender discrepancy in education. Thus in Kenya like most countries of the world the proportion of boys enrolling in both primary and secondary is higher than girls (Arubayi, 2005). This is also consistent with trends in countries such as India, Nepal, Togo, Turkey and Yemen (Down, 2001). It is generally believed that girls are often discouraged from attending primary schools in developing countries due to religious and cultural reasons. Consequently, some 78% girls drop out of school compared to 48% boys (Douglas 2003). A child's gender continues to contribute to access and attendance today.

Third, poverty at household level was also singled out to be negatively affecting strides to attain UPE. It was noted that cost in terms of school fees can be very expensive for poor household hence contribute to a child's lack of attendance to primary school. Children from such poor households worldwide prefer to in the field at homes. For example an estimate of 121 million children of primary school age worldwide are kept out of school to work at fields at home (UNICEF; 2015).

Fourth, language of communication in class and in outdoor activities is another factor that affect the enrolment of children in schools in many developing countries such as Kenya. This is true of children asked to enroll in a primary school where the medium of instruction is not his or her home language but of the government or another dominant society. According to Mehrotra (1988) in situations where parents are illiterate, if the medium of instruction in school is a language not spoken at home, problems of learning occur and chances of dropout increase correspondingly. Mehrotra's study shows that students learn to read more quickly when taught in their mother tongue. Thus children who have learnt to read in their mother tongue learn to read in a second language more quickly than do those who are first taught to read in the second language. In terms of academic skills students taught to read in their mother tongue acquire such skills more quickly. (Mehrotra, 1988)

Fifth, the health of the learner is another factor that affect access and attendance of children to school worldwide. Indeed, in areas where access, attendance and quality of education have seen improvement there has also been slow spread of HIV/AIDS hence an increase in healthiness of the community in general.

Sixth, hunger and famine in poor households in northern Kenya children's access and attendance to schools. The UN organ, the World Food Programme, says that there are approximately 300 million chronically hungry children in the world. One hundred million of them do not attend school. Therefore one successful method of ensuring that children attend school on a regular basis is through school feeding programmes commonly founded by World Food Programme and the World Bank. Such school meals have led to improved concentration and good academic performance of children in school.(www.worldbank.org/education)

Finally, the other challenges facing children's access and attendance to Universal Primary Education in Kenya include:

- a. The problem of physical facilities to cater for children with special needs.
- b. Poor net and gross enrolment in pastoralist areas
- c. Fairly high dropout rate before completion of primary cycle of education
- d. Low transition rate affects Kenya at national level. For instance roughly 700 000 pupils that complete primary school education less than 400 000 can get access to secondary school education in both private and public schools

- e. Low literacy levels in some parts of the country where children complete primary school education being unable to write even their names
- f. The Kenya Government froze recruitment of teachers for sometimes accompanied by pupil enrolment increase due to the launch of free primary Education leading to a challenge to pupil-teacher ratio in the schools.
- g. Pupil – textbook ratio remains high while absorption of school and college leavers into the labour market remains low
- h. Government discrimination against private primary schools in secondary school admission and in payment of KCPE examination fee
- i. Teachers frequent strikes over poor remuneration
- j. Cultural challenges that discriminate girls' education hence demand their early marriage for bride price.
- k. National disasters like floods in areas like Budalang'i and Kano plains and drought like in Northern Kenya.
- l. Conflicts/Land Clashes/ Al-Shabaab menace/ Post – election Violence

Disparities in access, quality of education enjoyed by learners and in learning outcomes in world population and groups exist due to large part to social economic and cultural facts. Consequently, marginalized individuals and groups often receive a poorer quality of education that results in low levels of learning achievements worldwide.

IV. Conclusion and Recommendations

Despite great strides made in Kenya in achieving UPE, the policy has not fully been achieved by 2015. Consequently, United Nations has come up with UPE Complementary policy of “Learning for ALL by the year 2020” which need to be carefully implemented if the envisaged results are to be achieved.

From the findings and discussions thus far, the following recommendations were advanced.

1. Open schools need to be established instead of conventional schools to cater for more learners.
2. Creation of collaborative learning materials that can reach learners in form of printed media.
3. Making use of computers by children whereby e-learning materials of quality can be used in teaching them.
4. Construction of more classrooms by the national governments to enhance UPE.
5. National government of Kenya should increase transition from primary to secondary and technical institutions to encourage pupil enrolment at primary school level.
6. The national government need to increase Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) and Net Enrolment (NER).
7. National Government should integrate all special needs education into primary schools.
8. The national government should increase adult literacy at primary level so as to ensure adequate access by all.
9. National Government should recruit adequate academically and qualified teachers.
10. National Government should remunerate teachers well and regularly to avoid the frequent teachers' strikes that waste a lot of teaching time.

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