

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF COUNTY GOVERNMENTS' ROLE IN FINANCING EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION PROGRAMMES: THE CASE OF NAROK COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

This paper intends to critically analyze the role of the county governments' role in financing pre-schools in the counties with a special reference to Narok County. The world bank ECDE project (1997-2003) strengthened the ECDE program through the construction of conference facilities of NACECE, the staffing, equipping and capacity building of DICECE, expansion of training opportunities for pre-school teachers and university students and strengthening community involvement and engagement. Through the Kenya Education Sector Support Program-KESSP(2005-2010), ECDE has benefited through the community support grant and the ECDE capitation grant that have played a strong pillar in strengthening ECDE. The role of financing education has always been a partnership between the governments, parents and communities. This has been the case even before the cost sharing policy (Kamunge,1988) came into force. The government continued to pay the salaries of teachers and education administrators and also fund some limited school facilities in line with the cost sharing policy. The parents' role was that of paying for private tuition, textbooks, materials and examinations. The community's role is to provide land for building the schools, put up physical facilities and ensure maintenance of the same. With the promulgation of the new constitution in Kenya in 2010, early childhood development and education was devolved from the central government to the county government as stipulated in the fourth schedule on the distribution of functions in the constitution. It is therefore necessary that a review of the role of county governments in financing ECDE centers be critically analyzed. This is with a view of examining the strategies put in place by the counties to support ECDE centers in Kenya. This paper reviews the Narok County government's plan to finance ECDE Centers.

Keywords: Capitation grants, pre-schools, promulgation , devolution, constitution

INTRODUCTION

Education for all global monitoring report (GMR) 2013/14 states that there is increasing participation in early childhood care and education globally. This is still limited and unequal between various regions of the world in most of the developing countries, ECDE programs are through private initiatives or charity-supported and they mainly concentrate in urban areas. Many countries are yet to assume responsibility for pre-primary education and prioritize ECDE in their education strategies, laws and investments. The GMR 2013/2014 postulates further that ECDE is the foundation set in the first thousand days of a child's life from conception to the second birthday – this being a very critical age in a child's future and well-being.

Families should have access to adequate health care coupled with support to make the right choices for the mother and the baby.

ECDE in Kenya has been described in various forms. The early Childhood development service standard guidelines for Kenya defines an ECD child as a human being from conception to eight years. Every child shall have a right to life, survival and development. The basic education Act No. 14 of 2013 refers to this level of education as Pre-primary and defines it as the education offered to a child of four to five years before joining class one in a primary school. The sessional paper No. 1 of 2005 on policy framework for education, training and research defines ECDE as the education that covers early core for 0-3 old children and pre-primary for 4-5 years olds. The sessional paper No. 14 of 2012 refers to the holistic development of children in the range of 0-5 years of age in 2006, through the National Early Childhood Development Policy Framework provided a compensation guidelines on management of ECDE in Kenya at the same time underscoring the importance of ECDE as one of the most importance levels for accelerating the attainment of the ECDE (EFA) goal. It emphasizes that all children must be nurtured in safe and caring environment that allow them to become healthy, alert, secure and able to learn. The policy stresses on the provision of good quality early childhood care and education both at family and community level.

There were many strategies put in place to ensure that the provision of ECDE in Kenya is implemented. In order to address the challenges facing the ECDE sub sector which were identified by the EFA EDA report, various strategies were developed by the MOEST through sessional paper No. 1 of 2005 and sessional paper No. 1 of 2005 and sessional paper No. 14 (2012) for ECDE. The strategies included creating funding modalities for pre-primary to include start-up grants, capitation grants, instructional materials, school meals (feeding), maintenance and the development of infrastructure, enhancing community support grants to support pre-primary teachers' remuneration in the transition period was also a strategy under KESSP. With the promulgation of the Kenyan constitution in 2010, the ECDE was devolved to the County governments.

It is in view of this that the paper attempts to review the role of the county governments in financing early childhood and development centers with a special reference to Narok County.

DISCUSSION

ECDE Enrolment and Projections 2010-2015

Enrolment at the ECDE level is projected to increase from 1.9 million pupils in 2010 to approximately 2 million in 2012 and to 2.5 million by 2015. This translates to mean that there will be serious financial implications for both the central and county governments.

A total of 35,155 public ECDE classrooms were recorded in 2007. Based on the Public ECDE enrolment projection of 3 million pupils by 2015, the pupil teacher ratio will be 25:1 and pupil class ration of 30:1. A total of 61,343 teachers and 73,721 public ECDE classrooms will be required by 2015. It is also important to note that public ECDE centers are currently financed by local communities and in some cases local authorities. It is important that the government intervenes to improve the quality of the infrastructure. This is because learning in some ECDE centers takes place in church compounds, social halls and private homes.

Financing ECDE

According to the fourth schedule on the distribution of functions in the constitution; County governments shall be responsible for managing ECDE among other areas of education. It is stated that the national government would retain responsibilities for policy, standards and curriculum development, even where implementation is with county governments.

ECDE has not been part of mainstream services with ECDE provision left to various organizations and individuals in a totally uncoordinated way. Major stakeholders in the sector included individual private investors, faith based organizations NGO's and private providers, ministries of education, home affairs, local authorities, gender, culture and social services as well as authorities and communities.

The importance of ECDE to child development and subsequent good performance in education beyond that level is well established. Amongst benefits identified are the following:-

- a) Early identification and subsequent realization of the child's potential
- b) The development and growth of the brain of the child is fastest at ECDE age bracket.
- c) Children are able to learn and acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes rapidly at that stage and
- d) It is relatively easier to mould the character of a child at the ECDE stage.

Funding Early Childhood Education in Kenya

The Kenya constitution of 2010 devolves the management of ECDE to the counties as per schedule 4. The capacity of the counties to effectively manage the sub-sector is still in doubt as many counties have not implemented this. Article 53 (1b) of the new constitution provides for free and compulsory basic education to all children. Children in ECDE Centers are entitled to equal opportunities, benefits and services as those enjoyed by children in primary and secondary schools level. The affirmative action will be employed to make sure that there is access and equity. There is an allocation of responsibility of planning, development and implementation of ECDE to county governments as postulated in the fourth schedule of the Kenya constitution, 2010.

The responsibility of policy, standards and curriculum development was retained by the national government. This translates to mean that the responsibility for financing pre-primary education shall be borne by both the central and county governments. The child's best interest is of paramount importance in every matter concerning children should bear this in mind. The constitution of Kenya has a framework of obligations and responsibilities of various stakeholders especially in education and health. The constitution of Kenya (2010) places major emphasis on devolution and decentralization of services. The county authorities are required to put in places mechanisms to ensure that children receive comprehensive childcare services at all levels including the sub-county, wards or facility level. Child care services and pre-primary is placed under the mandate of the county. Since the same information has not been reflected in the national ECD policy framework, it needs to be reviewed comprehensively. According to the basic Education Act (2013), establishment of a county ECDE committee to oversee the operations, implementation, management and the supervision of the county education board, should be instrumental in ECDE matters.

ECDE in Narok County

Despite the devolution of ECDE to county government as per schedule 4 of the Kenya constitution, the emerging concern is the capacity of the counties to effectively manage the sub-sector. This is a challenging task which for a long time had not been given due attention. This calls for a massive investment into the sector so as to mainstream it into basic education. Due to the multiplicity of the service providers, Narok County has to grapple with the challenge of unreliable data in terms of enrolments, number of schools and the number of teachers. ECDE is large in terms of the population of the school going children. The expenditure for the ministry of Education, Science and Technology is expected to grow by

17.2 per cent from Ksh. 260.1 billion in 2012/13 Ksh.304.9billion in 2013/14. The total recurrent expenditure was expected to increase by 11.2 per cent to Ksh. 259.1 billion in 2013/14 from Ksh. 233.1 billion in 2012/13. There was a significant drop on recurrent budget for pre-primary education mainly due to transfer of pre-primary education function to the county governments. The development expenditure was expected to grow by 41.9 per cent from Ksh. 27.0 billion in 2012/13 to Ksh. 38.3 billion in 2013/14 out of this, Ksh 24.30 will be allocated to ECDE which is a decrease from the money that had been allocated in 2012/13 at Ksh. 1,676.2 due to ECDE being devolved to the county level. In view of the statistics highlighted above, it is imperative that programmes for ECDE need to be given first priority whatsoever. Narok County still grapples with retrogressive practices that hinder service delivery in ECDE. The County government has a role of funding the programmes in order to save children from early marriages and female genital mutilation which is still rampant in the county.

CONCLUSION

1. The future of ECDE under the devolved government may be enhanced more through having more concerted efforts to ensure equitable access to services by marginalized communities.
2. There is through proper financing and coordination between the county government, non-governmental organizations and community based organizations.
3. It seems that it will go a long way in enhancing holistic service delivery for ECDE centers. The ECDE programs have a great future if there is an establishment of county parents' education programmes to support development of children under 3 years of age.
4. The government of Kenya through devolution of power has mandated that ECDE programs be under the county governments. This has seen tremendous improvement especially in infrastructure and physical facilities in areas where ECDE was pushed to the periphery. The Narok County government should build partnerships with parents, sponsors, private sector and other stakeholders to promote the development of ECDE. The ECDE programmes have experienced low funding from the government in past years resulting in reduced access, equity and quality. With the inception of the new constitution, ECDE is now the county's program. This means that ECDE programs can now be fully funded by the counties comfortably.
5. Despite the many challenges facing Narok County, the ECDE programme has been cost effective and has essential inbuilt mechanisms for sustainability, quality assurance and monitoring and evaluation. This achievement notwithstanding, there are areas that need strengthening especially funding the ECDE centers. The challenge that needs greater focus and attention is the involvement of men in ECD activities in the County.
6. The devolved funds through the county are a viable pool or resources at gross roots levels to support the ECDE programmes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The capacities of the counties on the management of ECDE need to be built if the standards of education are to improve. The following are the recommendations:

1. An agreement should be reached between the TSC and the county governments on the hiring of ECDE teachers as provided for under article 187 of the Kenyan constitution. This allows for the sharing of functions between the two levels of government.
2. Sustainable ways of getting funds for supporting ECDE either through taxing free moving goods and services or collaboration with development partners should be explored by the national and county governments.
3. An efficient education management information system (EMIS) need to be developed by the education sector both at the National and County level to provide an accurate and up to date data on all aspects of ECDE.
4. ECDE centers should be attached to each primary school in the event that it is not possible, an elaborate school transport system should be put in place.

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