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School enrollment among urban non-slum, slum and rural children in Kenya: Is the urban advantage eroding?

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Abstract

For long now, the urban child has been considered to be more likely than his/her rural counterpart in being able to realize the dream of fully participating in school. This observation has mainly been attributed to what is commonly known as the "urban advantage". This "urban advantage" is associated with increased access to facilities such as schools in urban areas. Recent work documenting population health in urban and rural areas has however begun to suggest that some sections of the urban population do not benefit from the "urban advantage". For example, a child in the slums of Nairobi is more likely to suffer from diarrhea than a child in rural Kenya. In addition, a child from the richest household in the slums is more likely to suffer from diarrhea than a child from the poorest family in rural Kenya. This paper explores patterns of school enrollment comparing urban slum, urban non-slum and rural children. The paper uses data from the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS) for 1993, 1998 and 2003. A contrast with school enrollment in Nairobi slums is done using the KDHS-type Nairobi Cross Sectional Slum Survey for 2000. Data from focus group discussions collected in the slums of Nairobi provide the context for discussion. The results suggest that school enrollment is higher in urban non-slum than in urban slum areas, and is higher in slums than in rural areas at younger ages. However, this is only true up to age 9 for females and 11 for males, from which school enrollment for slum children declines and the rate of decline is faster than among their rural counterparts. The corresponding ages at which the enrollment among the rural children begins to visibly decline are 13 years for males and 14 years for females. Factors contributing to these results point to the poor quality of primary schools in slums, limited access to secondary school for slum children, increased vulnerability to coercion into sexual activity and other ills that hinder school participation, disabling environment at home and increased child labor.

Keywords: Slum; Informal settlement; Urban; Nairobi; Kenya; Education; Schooling; Quality; Africa

1. Introduction

A child in an urban setting has been considered to have better educational outcomes than a child in a rural setting. This is also true for health and other social indicators (National Research Council, 2003). This has mainly been attributed to what has been coined as "urban advantage" where urban areas are served with more facilities such as schools. Therefore, children in urban areas are expected to have more access to these facilities. Recent work on population health suggests that some sections of the urban population do not benefit from the "urban

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advantage'' (APHRC, 2002). The work of African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC), for e.g., suggests that a child in Nairobi slums is more likely to die than a child in rural Kenya. One of the other findings is that a child from the richest household in the slums of Nairobi is more likely to have a bout of diarrhea than a child in the poorest household in rural Kenya. Similarly the probability of dying before age five is higher in the Nairobi slums (151 per 1000 births) than in rural Kenya (113 per 1000 births). More recent work of a panel on urban population dynamics in its publication Cities Transformed recount how this urban advantage has dwindled, and especially so in developing countries (National Research Council, 2003).

What is more of a concern is the high rate of urbanization in Africa that has been associated with economic decline, unlike in other continents. For example, while the urban population grew by 4.7% between 1970 and 1995, the gross domestic product dropped by 0.7 (World Bank, 2000). Yet the United Nations projections suggest that a higher proportion of people in Africa will live in urban areas by 2030 (United Nations Population Fund, 1996). Whether the timing will be 2030 or later, governments will find it difficult to provide social services to the sheer increase in the urban population size when their economies are declining. The consequence of urban poverty is that more and more urban dwellers will live in slums or informal settlements (UN-Habitat, 2003). Currently over 60% of Nairobi residents live in slums that constitute only 5% of the residential area. With this expected increase in population size, it is important particularly for those concerned with improving and expanding educational provision in the developing world, to understand the patterns of school enrollment within the urban (slum and non-slum) and rural areas. This paper therefore sets to explore school enrollment comparing urban non-slum, urban slum and rural children.

2. Urbanization and school enrollment

To set the context, it is important to recognize that the majority of employment opportunities have traditionally been in urban areas. In recent years, the supply of educated labor has been increasing rapidly in many African countries, including Kenya. Yet this increase in the supply of educated labor has occurred at a time when the economies are shrinking. Such increase in labor within declining economies means that the economic returns to schooling are depressed, keeping all other factors constant. It is however possible that increased demand may absorb the increasing labor supply. For example, the accumulation of physical capital can raise the relative demand for better-educated labor if skilled labor is complementary to capital (Fallon and Layard, 1975). Taiwan is instructive of this relationship. Over a period of rapid increase in the supply of workers with secondary and tertiary schooling, other factors—perhaps having to do with technological change and capital accumulation—conspired to enhance the rates of return to schooling (Lee and Mason, 2001). In sub-Saharan Africa, however, and in particular Kenya increase in the supply of the educated labor has not been accompanied by economic expansion (Appleton et al., 1999). Urban levels of consumption per capita have fallen steadily, declining by one-quarter from 1978 to 1995. Over this period, the return to secondary schooling deteriorated, falling by nearly two-thirds. The wage gains for primary schooling relative to having no schooling also declined. At the tertiary level, however, the rates of return to schooling remained constant or increased. Although declines in the quality of secondary schooling may have undermined the rate of return, Appleton et al. (1999) are skeptical that school quality can be the main explanation. In their view, the high rates of return enjoyed by early Kenyan cohorts were probably due to their ability to secure employment in well-protected niches in urban economy. Bredie and Beeharry (1998) also suggest that for earlier cohorts, those who finished school, especially secondary school were almost guaranteed employment in the civil service. They suggest that this expectation was often the driving force behind household demand for education (Bredie and Beeharry, 1998). The expected returns to schooling would probably be lower among slum households due to high unemployment, which would in turn affect their demand for education.

Other conditions in urban slums equally provide the context for household demand for education and therefore school enrollment. Again, due to the inability of local economies, slum dwellers live in poor conditions characterized by high population density, poor housing and lack of public amenities such as schools and health facilities—largely due to their illegal nature. The schools that serve the slum communities are mainly non-formal. These schools are characterized by shortage of staff, congested