



Advancing Learning Outcomes and Leadership Skills among Children in Nairobi’s Informal Settlements through Community Participation

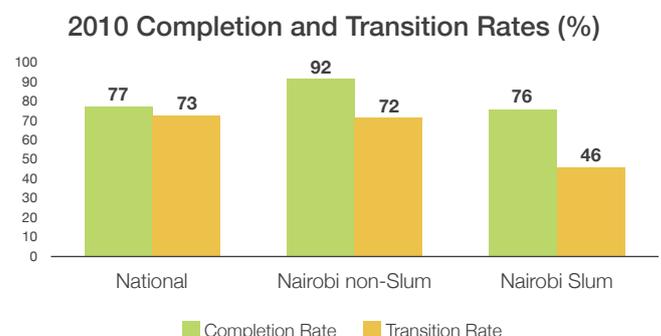
Introduction

Education provides numerous benefits that are important for improving the lives of the poor who live in disadvantaged settings (UNESCO, 2011; World Bank, 2003). For populations living in low-resourced environments such as urban slums, education remains the single most important factor for reduction of household poverty (UNESCO, 2011). At the national level, an educated workforce is a high-yielding investment as it contributes to a productive citizenry that is better able to compete and co-operate in a global economy, consequently enabling greater socio-economic development (World Bank, 2003). More precisely, each additional year of schooling raises average annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth by 0.37% (UNESCO, 2011).

Provision of inclusive and quality education as well as promotion of lifelong learning has been prioritized in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Kenya has made significant progress in increasing access to primary school education; however, secondary school participation remains low, with a gross enrolment ratio (GER) of 58% in 2014 (Republic of Kenya, 2015). Secondary school participation is limited due to a number of factors such as low learning outcomes, cost barriers and poor performance in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) examination. For instance, in 2010, only 77% of the 2003 grade 1 cohort completed primary school with a subsequent transition

to secondary school of 73% as shown in Figure 1. However, in Nairobi, pupils who live in non-slum areas had both higher primary school completion and transition to secondary school rates (92% and 72%, respectively) compared to their counterparts who live in slums (76% and 46%, respectively) (Admassu, 2013). A considerable proportion (27%) of primary school pupils still do not transit to secondary school, despite the introduction of free day secondary education in 2008 to alleviate the cost barriers associated with accessing secondary education.

Figure 1: Primary School Completion and Transition rates by place of residence.



Family involvement in children’s learning remains a significant predictor for their success in the adolescent

years (Spera, 2006). This is reinforced by the realization that schools on their own cannot equip students with the tools they need to succeed in an ever-changing global environment, without the support of parents and families (Katamei & Omwono, 2015). Extant research acknowledges that parents play a vital role in the success of their children's schooling (Fan & Chen, 2001; Katamei & Omwono, 2015; Spera, 2006). Research evidence suggests that parental involvement consists of the following activities: communicating with teachers and other school personnel; assisting children with academic related activities at home; offering to volunteer time in school to help with school activities; attending events in school; participating in parent-teacher association meetings and conferences (Hill & Taylor, 2004).

Other than academic success, increased parental involvement in children's learning has positive impacts on their non-academic performance in school (Fan & Chen, 2001; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999), and this is a fact for both primary and secondary schools (Feinstein & Symons, 1999). Eventually this leads to better academic achievement, greater cognitive competence, enhanced problem solving skills, improved

attendance and enjoyment of school, as well as reduced behavioural problems in school among children (Melhuish et al., 2001).

Unfortunately, parental involvement in children's education tends to decline from middle school to secondary school, as a result of adolescents' desire for autonomy, and variations in school structure and organization. Reduced involvement by parents is especially common in the slum context, where parents are not always supportive of their children (Abuya, Onsomu, & Moore, 2012). Parental involvement is an important issue as research has shown that it has direct and positive effects on learning achievements and more so among children from urban informal settlements (Bellon, Ngware, & Admassu, 2017). In addition, parental and family involvement in children's education is an indicator for a host of adolescent outcomes (Okigbo, Kabiru, Mumah, Mojola, & Beguy, 2015; Spera, 2006). With the foregoing in mind, we seek to answer the following questions: In what ways can we improve children's learning and social outcomes, and transition to the next level of schooling? How can we encourage meaningful parental involvement in their children's education?

Changing young lives through the A LOT Change project

The A LOT Change project is designed to address the challenges of low transition to secondary school and the attainment of positive educational outcomes for girls and boys in urban informal settlements. The study is implementing the following intervention activities which have previously been proven to work in this setting: after-school support in literacy and numeracy; mentorship in life skills; subsidies at the end of the primary school cycle (December 2018); parental exposure to guidance and counselling; and, exposure of girls and boys to opportunities to enhance leadership skills. The A LOT Change project is being implemented among 800 girls and boys in Nairobi's informal settlements of Korogocho and Viwandani by Miss Koch, Kenya and Utena Youth Organization, respectively. The impact evaluation is being conducted by the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC).

The impact evaluation adopts a quasi-experimental study design. The intervention package from the pilot phase (Phase 1) is being implemented in the study sites. The additional component of leadership and role modelling was randomly allocated to the Viwandani study site. The study involves three data collection points. The first is a baseline survey to collect background characteristics of the individuals, assess their numeracy and literacy skills as well as

their knowledge and involvement in leadership and their aspirations. Similar data will be collected during the midline and end-term surveys in order to assess whether the intervention has any impact. The details of the intervention components are provided in the baseline report.

The objectives of the impact evaluation are:

- i Establish whether the proposed intervention has a differential effect on learning outcomes and transition to secondary school between boys and girls in Korogocho and Viwandani;
- ii Examine whether mentoring in life skills impacts differently among girls and boys in terms of positive behavior, aspirations, interest in schooling and self-confidence;
- iii Establish the impact of leadership skills training on various outcomes (learning outcomes, role modelling, and taking up leadership) among boys and girls in the study communities;
- iv Establish whether the parental sensitization component of the intervention increases parents' and community leaders' support towards children's education in Korogocho and Viwandani.

How will the intervention bring about change?

Our theory of change suggests that for informal settlements to be transformed into empowered communities, a multi-faceted intervention is required. We will provide the girls and boys with after-school

support on numeracy and literacy, mentorship in life skills and leadership training. We will also provide parental counselling and financial support to subsidize transition costs. In the short-term, we expect that

the intervention will result in: improved numeracy and literacy scores; increased self-confidence and positive behavior; higher interest in schooling and aspirations; greater knowledge of leadership skills and uptake of leadership positions; higher rates of retention in primary school and transition to secondary school; and, increased parental support and participation in their children's education. This approach is informed by evidence provided in several pieces of literature. For instance, previous research (Scales and Leffert, 1999; National Research Council and Institute of Medicine,

2002) reported that participation of young people in youth development programs led to positive outcomes such as increased self-esteem, better development of leadership skills, fewer psychosocial problems, decreased involvement in risky behaviors, increased academic achievement and increased safety. Further, relationships that are emotionally supportive with adults providing support on schoolwork have been found to contribute to the healthy development of young people (Gambone, Klem & Connell, 2002).

Key Findings

The key findings of this study are presented in the following section:

i Characteristics of Respondents

Overall, an average of 65% of the households were male-headed, with 62% in Korogocho and 69% in Viwandani. The household heads had low levels of education, with approximately 55% of them attaining only primary level of education. In Viwandani, 45% of the household heads had attained at least secondary school education compared with 28% in Korogocho. One in every four pupils had lost at least one parent. This proportion rose to almost one in every three in Korogocho. Among the orphaned children, 81%, 8%, and 11% were paternal, maternal, and double orphans, respectively. Korogocho accounted for all double orphans and two-thirds of the paternal orphans.

ii Achievement in Numeracy and Literacy

Overall, pupils in Korogocho significantly outperformed those in Viwandani on the numeracy test but the performance of the pupils in the two slums was almost equal on the literacy test. Boys performed significantly better than girls on the numeracy test. However, the sex differences on the literacy test were minimal. Younger pupils in grade six outperformed their older classmates in the same grade in the literacy test. Pupils who performed well in literacy by and large also performed well in numeracy.

iii Outcomes on Life Skills

Pupils in both sites have high educational aspirations and future goals, as well as high confidence levels. However, peer-to-peer encouragement and discussion on key issues affecting the pupils are fairly low across both sites. Moreover, there were significant differences by site on educational aspirations and future goals, and self-confidence levels among pupils. For instance, there were higher educational aspirations and striving for future goals, and higher self-confidence levels in Korogocho compared to Viwandani. Nearly half (46%) of the pupils reported that they were comfortable discussing sexuality and puberty issues with their parents, compared to 26% and less than 10% who reported they could discuss the issues with teachers and peers, respectively.

Girls were comfortable discussing sexuality and puberty issues with their parents at 56%, compared to boys at 35%. A greater proportion of boys (29%) than girls (22%) was comfortable discussing puberty and sexuality with teachers. Boys also reported being more comfortable to discuss puberty and sexuality with their peers and siblings compared to girls.

iv Leadership

Boys had significantly higher ratings than girls on the Social Self-Efficacy (the ability to relate to and communicate effectively with others) and Social Competencies (the capacity for empathy which is defined as the ability to be sensitive to the feelings and experiences of others) sub-scales. Overall, there was high endorsement of the 'never' rating when pupils were asked if they 'trusted people who were not their friends.' The high ratings on the Self-Regulatory Efficacy sub-scale, which measures the ability to resist negative peer pressures, suggest that it was easy for pupils to do so. However, the proportion of pupils who reported that it was very easy for them to resist peer pressure was greater in Korogocho than in Viwandani. On the other hand, more pupils in Viwandani reported availability of support within their communities.

v Narratives on the Perceptions of the Community, Parents, and Pupils

The community elders saw their role as being the face of government in their respective communities. They felt that it was important for them to explain education-related policies to their communities as well as ensure its implementation. The community leaders' also engaged with parents to understand the challenges affecting their children in school and encouraged them to be active participants in their children's education. In the eyes of community members, there was a clear link between crime and adolescence (especially 14-18 years). At this age, adolescents are most vulnerable to negative influences around them such as drug abuse and destructive peer influences that can serve as an impetus to crime.

Parental monitoring and the follow-up of children in order to establish whether they attended school and completed work assigned by teachers was more prominent in the narratives of parents in Korogocho.

Parents also reported that effective communication and interaction with teachers was one of the ways to ensure that children receive a good education. These interactions ensured that discipline is maintained in school and at home. The qualitative narratives showed

Conclusion

- i The extant literature suggests that children from households with higher education levels do better in school. However, our findings demonstrated that, although a higher proportion (45%) of household heads in Viwandani compared to Korogocho (28%) had completed secondary education, their children did not perform better on the literacy and numeracy tests. It may be that children from households with higher education levels do not receive the necessary support from their parents who may be away at work for long periods of time.
- ii The finding that younger pupils in grade six outperformed their older classmates in the same grade in the literacy test may be related to grade repetition. Children who are the wrong age for grade may have been forced to repeat a class, and are therefore likely to perform worse than non-repeaters.

that a majority of the children in the study sites aspired for leadership positions that they could relate to in their informal settlement context; for example, working in the security industry to resolve insecurity issues within their communities.

- iii The leadership component is a new element being tested through the A LOT Change project and it will be important to understand how it works within the communities involved. Gender and site differences point to the importance of developing programs which take these differences into account.
- iv The recognition by parents of their role in their children's education is a good entry point as support at this level will ensure success and sustainability of interventions to improve educational outcomes for children.
- v Education intervention programs targeted at adolescents living in Nairobi's informal settlements should consider the input of parents and community leaders to ensure their success and sustainability.

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