



African Population and Health Research Center



POLICY BRIEF

## The big idea: Busing children from Nairobi's informal settlements to government schools

The spirit of leaving no one behind reminds us of the need to enhance inclusion in education provision. It is for this reason that governments introduce universal primary education – in Kenya, it's popularly known as free primary education. For Nairobi City County, the sub-national government responses include the expansion of or building of new primary schools to deal with the huge school sizes that stand at over 1100 on average. Despite these good efforts, there remains a huge proportion of children from low-income households who do not benefit from such good efforts.



*If schools cannot be constructed within informal settlements due to the challenges associated with the displacement of households, can children be bussed to and from government schools within the city?*



In Nairobi's urban informal settlements, APHRC data show that over 63% of primary school age children attend low-cost private schools (LCPS), which is not a choice. While deciding between attending a government school versus a LCPS, households consider many factors – among them distance, costs, quality of education and livelihood related chores. Of interest to this policy brief is distance, in the context of very few government schools within informal settlements. For instance, Korogocho, an informal

settlement, has two government primary schools against a school-age population of about 10,000.

In the context of urban informal settlement, distance is a real issue because of three main reasons – it influences the perception that the neighboring LCPS are of good quality, children's safety due to overcrowding of buildings and pathways, and parental hustles to put food on the table hence preference for a nearby school with flexible dropping and picking times. This comes in the backdrop of low supply of government primary schools.

The UN-Habitat estimates that 60-70% of Nairobi's 4.397 million (as of 2019) live in informal settlements. In 2020, across Nairobi City County, there were a total of 382,237 learners enrolled in primary schools, and if over 60% cannot access government schools, due to among other things distance, then solutions such as busing need to be explored. Of the 850 available primary schools, only about one in every five (24%) are government schools.



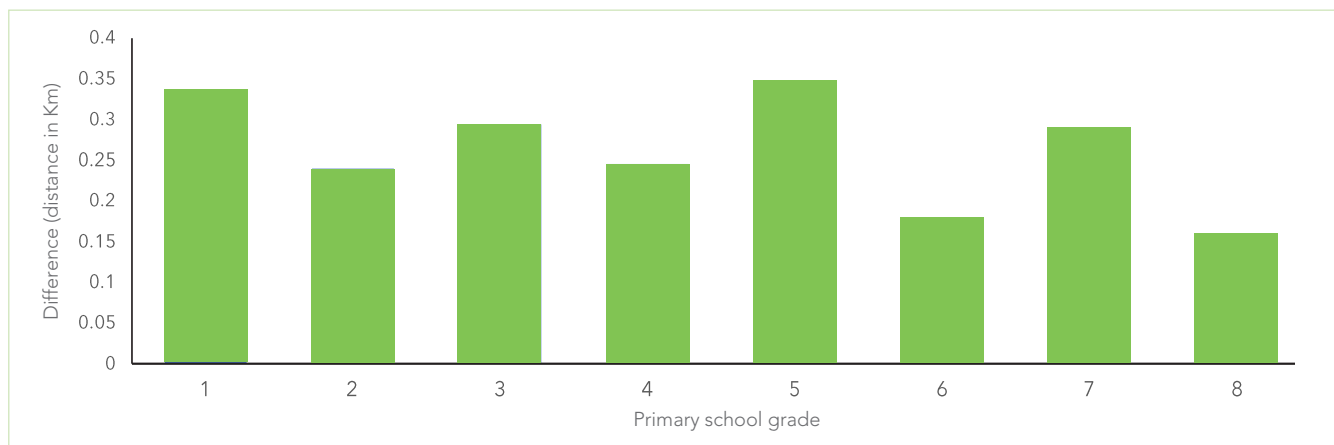
**63%**

*Learners cannot access government schools, due to among other things distance*

Figure 1 shows that government schools are located further away from households in all grades than LCPS. The bars show the extra average distance a child in the indicated grade has to walk to attend a government primary school.



**Figure 1: Differences in average distance walked by grade (government less LCPS)**



APHRC data shows that parents choose LCPS because of the short distance. The mean distance covered is about 0.98km or 1km in an overcrowded environment. Furthermore, factors such as household social-economic status (wealth), the gender and age of the child were mediated by distance to influence a household's decision to use government or LCPS. For instance, parents are more likely to enroll a young girl in an LCPS than sending her to a distance government school. Hence, such a child will miss out on any benefits associated with attending a government school. The nature of parental livelihood e.g., reporting to their daily hustles very early in the morning and returning late hence demand for flexible schooling hours becomes a critical consideration while choosing a school for a young child.



### Call to action

This is therefore to invite the Nairobi City County Assembly Children, Early Childhood Education and Vocational Training Committee to:

- Discuss and champion strategies by the Nairobi City County government to provide bus (busing) transport to children from poor urban neighborhoods so they can access government schools.
- Mobilize support from the Nairobi's government executive, Members of Parliament and Senate to champion the strategies above.

## Conclusion

Access to quality education is critical for all children and especially for those who come from poor backgrounds. The demand for schooling in urban informal settlements will continue to grow due to the high rate of urbanization in Africa, including Kenya. Moreover, parents from urban informal settlements need to enjoy the benefits of FPE, as Kenyan citizens, and busing their children to government schools offers them such an opportunity. The children will access better infrastructure, ICT facilities in government schools, FPE capitation that come with teaching and learning materials, and access to TSC-trained teachers.

Author: Moses Ngware ([mngware@aphrc.org](mailto:mngware@aphrc.org))

## Bibliography

1. Ngware, M.W & Mutisya, M. (2021). Demystifying Privatization of Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Do Poor Households Utilize Private Schooling because of Perceived Quality, Distance to School, or Low Fees? *Comparative Education Review*, 65(1): 124-146, <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/pdf/10.1086/712090>
2. Ngware, M., Abuya, B., Admassu, K. Mutisya, M., Musyoka, P. & Oketch M. (2013). *Quality and Access to Education in Urban Informal Settlement in Kenya*. Nairobi: APHRC.
3. Ngware, M.W., Oketch, M., Mutisya, M. Abuya, B. and Musyoka, P. (2012). *Research Evidence Matters: Contributions of APHRC's Research to Education Policy Analysis in Kenya and Uganda*. Occasional report No. 3. African Population and Health research center, Nairobi.
4. Oketch, M., Ngware, M., Mutisya, M., Admassu, K., Abuya, B., Musyoka, P. (2012). *East Africa Quality in Early Learning (EAQEL): Impact Evaluation Report*. A Research Report of the Impact of a reading to Learn Intervention implemented by the Aga Khan Foundation (EA). African Population and Health research center, Nairobi.