

# Learning, Marginalization, and Improving the Quality of Education in Low-income Countries

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Second volume in the series  
*Learning at the Bottom of the Pyramid*



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Daniel A. Wagner, Nathan M. Castillo and Suzanne Grant Lewis, *Learning, Marginalization, and Improving the Quality of Education in Low-income Countries*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0256>

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ISBN Paperback: 9781800642003

ISBN Hardback: 9781800642010

ISBN Digital (PDF): 9781800642027

ISBN Digital ebook (epub): 9781800642034

ISBN Digital ebook (mobi): 9781800642041

ISBN Digital ebook (XML): 9781800642058

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0256

Cover design by Anna Gatti.

# 17. Kenya

## Education in Marginalized Communities

*Joyce Kinyanjui*

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### Introduction

The Kenyan Constitution (Articles 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, and 59) states that all children have a right to free and compulsory basic education, including children with disabilities. Despite these constitutional provisions, education marginalization in Kenya persists. UNESCO (2010) defines education marginalization as a form of acute and persistent disadvantage rooted in underlying social inequalities. In order to know where education marginalization is most likely to occur, one needs to first identify marginalized communities in Kenya.

Under Article 260, the Constitution states that a “marginalized community” is: (a) A community that, because of its relatively small population or for any other reason, has been unable to fully participate in the integrated social and economic life of Kenya as a whole; (b) A traditional community that, out of a need or desire to preserve its unique culture and identity from assimilation, has remained outside the integrated social and economic life of Kenya as a whole; (c) An indigenous community that has retained and maintained a traditional lifestyle and livelihood based on a hunter or gatherer economy; or (d) Pastoral persons and communities, whether they are—(i) Nomadic; or (ii) A settled community that, because of its relative geographic isolation, has experienced only marginal participation in the integrated social and economic life of Kenya as a whole.

The entirety of Northern Kenya—including upper parts of the eastern region (Moyale, Marsabit, Isiolo), northern and southern parts

of the Rift Valley region (Turkana, West Pokot, Samburu, Kajiado, Narok, Transmara), and the northern part of the coastal region (Tana-River)—is occupied by nomadic pastoralists. Fishing nomads are found in parts of Homabay County (around Lake Victoria) and northern parts of the Rift Valley region (around Lake Turkana and Lake Baringo). Hunters and gatherers are mostly found in northern parts of the coastal region (Lamu district) and parts of the Rift Valley region (Marakwet, Baringo, and Narok districts) (MoEST, 2014). The government recognizes the fact that the educational needs of nomadic communities are generally complex and underserved. It is therefore not surprising that 11 counties—West Pokot, Turkana, Garissa, Isiolo, Kwale, Narok, Marsabit, Mandera, Tana River, Samburu, and Wajir—account for 733,765 (57 percent) of 1,292,675 out-of-school children in the country.

This chapter analyzes the social, cultural, political, and economic factors driving educational marginalization in the above 11 counties in Kenya. The paper also proposes how the government can ensure the right to quality basic education for children from marginalized communities. Gross Enrollment Rate (GER) will mainly be used to capture the percentage of pupils accessing education. Various recommendations are made in the conclusion that derive from the present findings.

## Methodology

The main purpose of this chapter is to identify children and communities who are experiencing education marginalization in Kenya. The researcher used secondary data that were collected through a desk-review of government documents and policies, particularly the Ministry of Education and other line ministries both at national and sub-national levels, the National Gender and Equality Commission, and the National Council for Nomadic Education in Kenya. In addition to official government documents, official international documents—especially from UNICEF and UNESCO—were reviewed.

To generate a comprehensive review on education marginalization in Kenya, the researcher utilized a systematic approach with two key steps, namely:

1. Identification of potential documents for review. These were identified through discussions with colleagues and online

searches using Google Scholar. Snowballing of bibliographies as a way to search for relevant literature was successfully applied to identify additional documents. Government data from the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics and the Ministries of Education and Health were used extensively.

2. Examination of relevance and credibility of the data and documents. This was done by verifying data through multiple sources and the materials referenced.

Once documents were selected, quantitative data were collated, summarized, aggregated, and organized into tables. Qualitative data were synthesized and formed part of the report. Additional grey literature, especially from newspapers and local studies by UNICEF, was also reviewed. One disadvantage of using this methodology is the fact that, in many cases, government data are a couple of years behind, and therefore somewhat outdated.

## Education marginalization in Kenya

### Access

Since Kenya introduced free primary schooling in 2003, and free secondary education in 2008, the education sector continues to expand at all levels. With regards to primary education, the introduction of Free Primary Education (FPE) in 2003 enabled 1.3 million poor children to benefit from primary education for the first time through the abolishment of fees and levies for tuition (MoEST, 2014; see also Manyasa & Karogo, this volume). The Gross Enrollment Rate in primary education jumped from 86.8 percent in 2002 to 104 percent in 2018, while the GER for secondary schools increased from 35.7 percent in 2008 to 70.3 percent in 2018. The net enrollment rates are the highest ever—77.2 percent for Early Childhood Development and Care (ECDE), 92.4 percent for primary schools, and 53.2 percent for secondary schools. The Pupil Completion Rate (PCR) was 84.2 percent in 2017, and there was a Primary-to-Secondary Transition Rate (PSTR) of 83.3 percent (KNBS, 2019). Despite this expansion, education marginalization continues.

In order to understand education marginalization, one needs to analyze education data. In 2014, a total of 1,292,675 (580,921 boys and

711,754 girls) children aged 6–13 years were not enrolled, either because they never attended school or dropped out (MoEST, 2014). This number was the ninth highest of any country in the world (UNESCO, 2015). The following 11 out of 47 counties accounted for almost 57 percent of all out-of-school children in the country: West Pokot, Turkana, Garissa, Isiolo, Kwale, Narok, Marsabit, Mandera, Tana River, Samburu, and Wajir (MoEST, 2014). Education access and retention have since increased in these 11 counties, but they remain at the bottom of the pyramid with regards to education attainment.

The 2019 national census established that there are 17,834,572 school-aged children in Kenya (KNBS, 2019). In 2018, more than 850,000 children aged between 6 and 17 years were out of school, with Mandera accounting for 15 percent (12,000) of all children out of school. Turkana accounts for 10 percent, Garissa 8.9 percent, and Wajir 6.7 percent, indicating that these counties are truly at the bottom of the pyramid (Mghenyi, 2018). The most comprehensive and accurate data on education in Kenya is found in the Basic Education Statistical Booklet of 2014 (MoEST, 2014)<sup>1</sup>.

The national Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE) centers' Gross Enrollment Rate (GER) stood at 73.6 percent in 2014. Compared to the national averages, only Garissa (69.4 percent), Marsabit (51.5 percent), Wajir (25.6 percent), and Mandera (20.70 percent) have GER lower than the national average of 73.6 percent (MoEST, 2014). The reason for high ECDE GERs is that, in most centers, children attending ECDE receive free meals.

At the primary level, the numbers begin to decrease. Figure 1, below, presents the Primary Enrollment Rates per county. Only West Pokot (109.4 percent) and Kwale (107.5 percent) had a higher primary GER than the national average of 103.5 percent (MoEST, 2014). The bottom six counties with regards to primary enrollment were Turkana (77.40 percent), Tana River (77.20 percent), Samburu (73.70 percent), Garissa (71.40 percent), Wajir (35.20 percent), and lastly Mandera (29.20 percent).

The secondary GER decreases further when one compares it to the national average. Figure 2 below shows the Secondary Enrollment Rate for counties in Kenya.

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1 This paper has referred extensively to the BESB 2014 booklet, as the information contained in it is regarded as official government data.

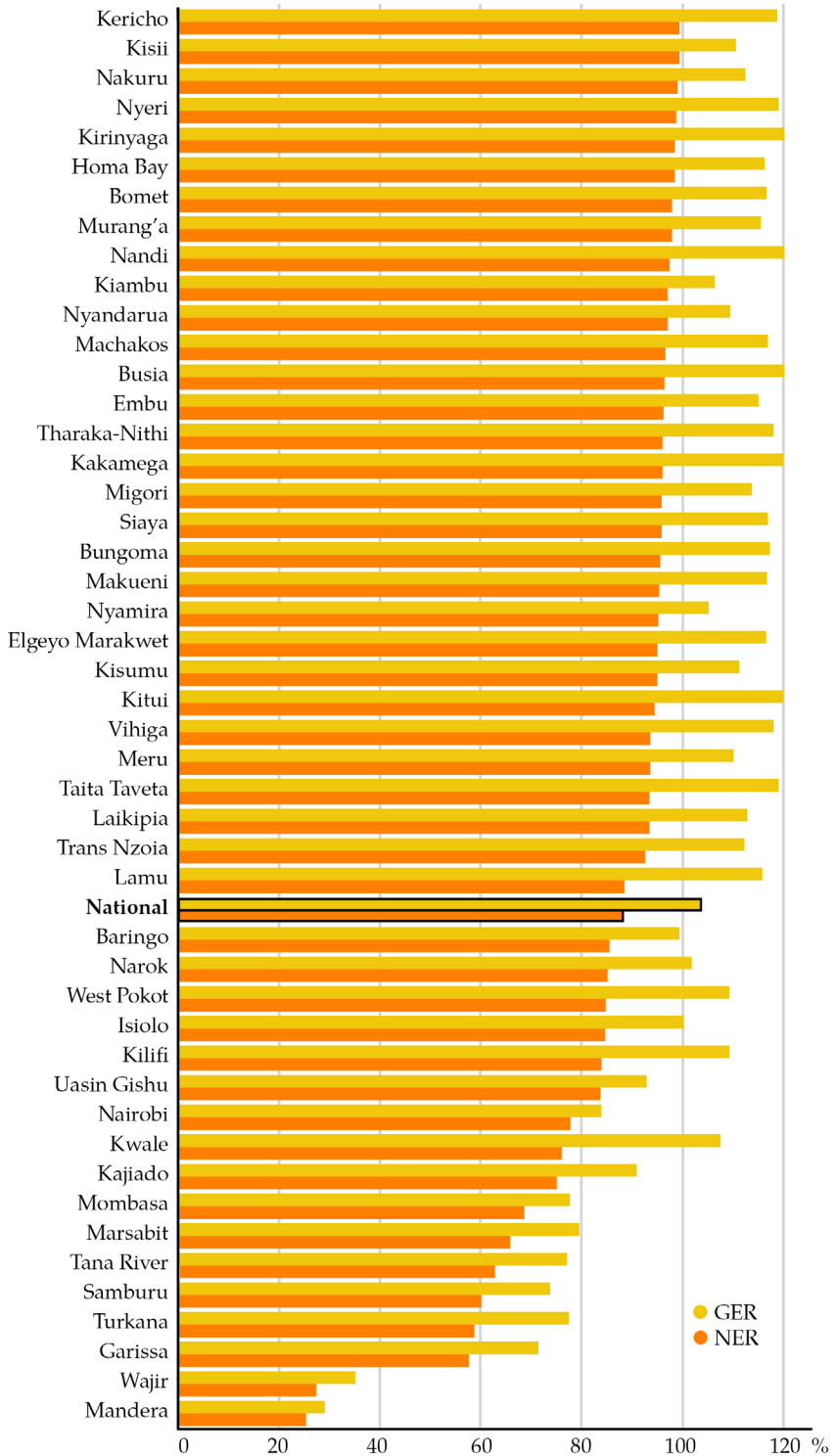


Fig. 1. Primary Gross and Net Enrollment Rates for counties in Kenya (MoEST, 2014). Source: the author.

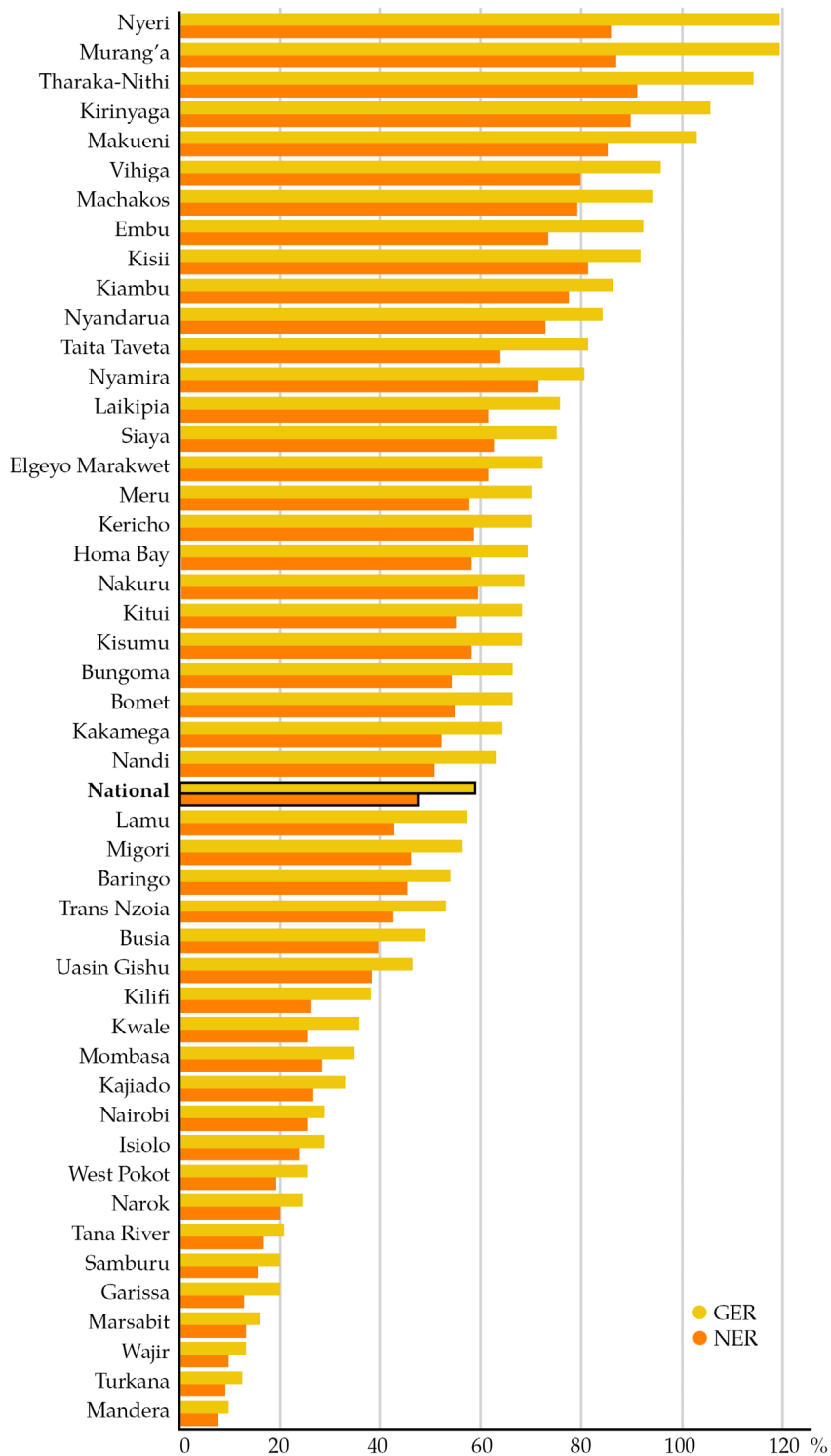


Fig. 2. Secondary Gross and Net Enrollment Rates for marginalized counties (MoEST, 2014). Source: the author.



At the secondary level, 10 out of the 11 counties under study had the worst secondary GER in the country. Mandera had the lowest secondary Gross Enrollment Rate of 9.40 percent, followed by Turkana at 12.10 percent. The national GER was 58.7 percent. Secondary enrollment in these counties is low when one compares the rates to those of counties like Nyeri with a GER of 132 percent, Muranga with a GER of 128 percent, and Tharaka Nithi with a GER of 114 percent.

### Retention

Enrollment, however, does not tell the whole story. Equally important is retention. This is true for marginalized counties whose ECDE GER was higher than the national average of 73.6 percent. Such counties include West Pokot (98.9 percent), Turkana (97.6 percent), Isiolo (107.7 percent), Kwale (83.7 percent), and Samburu (113.0 percent), where the Gross Enrollment Rate at ECDE level was higher than the national average of 73.6 percent. West Pokot had a primary GER of 100.4 percent, which was higher than the national average of 103.5 percent. However, several counties had high access rates, but low retention levels. In 2014, the national retention rate was 88.2 percent. Turkana had the lowest retention rate at primary level (31.4 percent), followed by Garissa at 40.2 percent, and Narok at 61.4 percent. Out of the 11 marginalized counties, Kwale had the highest retention rate at 77.2 percent (MoEST, 2014).

With regards to primary education, the Mandera, Wajir, Marsabit, Samburu, and Tana River counties, in that order, have the worst education indicators with regards to access and retention. Mandera has a primary access rate of 39.3 percent and a retention rate of 13.6 percent, making it the most marginalized county with regards to education (MoEST, 2014).

### Factors contributing to education marginalization

Marginalization in education is linked to factors such as poverty, politics, gender, ethnicity, disability, location, refugee status, and so on. This section looks at how some of these barriers are contributing to education marginalization in the 11 counties identified in the previous section.

## Poverty

There is a high correlation between poverty and education marginalization. 36.1 percent of all Kenyans live below the poverty line (KNBS, 2018). All the counties that experience high rates of education marginalization have higher poverty rates than the national averages except for Narok,<sup>2</sup> which has a poverty rate of 22.6 percent. The following (Figure 3) presents the poverty levels and GER of marginalized counties in Kenya.

Turkana County has the highest poverty incidence in Kenya, with 79.4 percent of the residents living below the poverty line. The Mandera and Samburu counties are second and third at 77.6 percent and 75.8 percent respectively.

With regards to extreme poverty,<sup>3</sup> 8.6 percent—or 3.9 million people—lived in conditions of abject poverty and were unable to afford the minimum required food-consumption basket (KNBS, 2018). The incidence of extreme poverty at the county level ranges from a low of 0.2 percent in Nyeri to a high of 52.7 percent in Turkana. Likewise, the Samburu (42.2 percent), Mandera (38.9 percent), Busia (26.8 percent), West Pokot (26.3 percent), and Marsabit (23.8 percent) counties recorded a higher extreme poverty incidence. More than one-third (37.5 percent) of the total population living in conditions of extreme poverty reside in these six counties. Turkana County recorded the highest incidence of 66.1 percent (KNBS, 2018).

Poverty contributes to education marginalization in many ways. Children from poor homes in these 11 counties are unlikely to be enrolled in school due to the costs associated with schooling. Education at primary and secondary levels is free in Kenya, but there are still associated costs, such as school uniforms. Perhaps the greatest cost parents incur are levies in the form of examination fees, contributions to the salaries of teachers employed by Boards of Management, and building and other

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2 Narok County is host to the Massai Mara, the eighth wonder of the world. This has led to increased direct and indirect employment, enhanced standard of living, more investments, infrastructural development, and new business linkages and opportunities. However, for the indigenous Masaai living in rural Narok, these benefits are not always in reach, hence contributing to education marginalization.

3 Households and individuals whose monthly adult equivalent total food and non-food consumption expenditure per person is less than KES 1,954 in rural and peri-urban areas, and less than KES 2,551 in core-urban areas (KNBS, 2018).

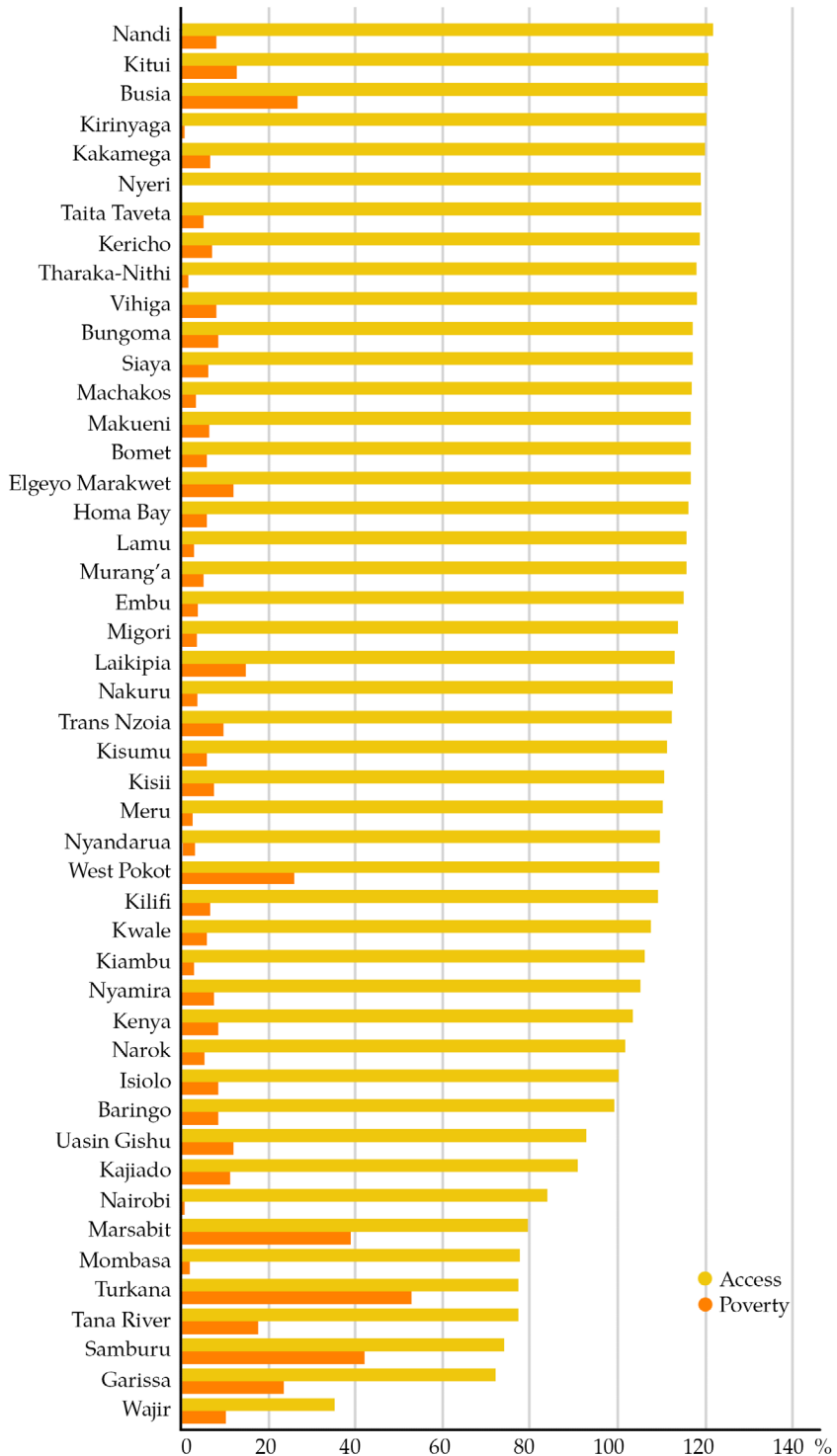


Fig. 3. GER and poverty levels in education marginalized counties (KNBS, 2015; 2018).

levies that are agreed upon by schools. In addition, the majority of communities living in the 11 counties practice pastoralism. Pastoralism is labor-intensive and children are sometimes withdrawn from school to take care of the family animals. In some cases, the families migrate to very remote areas in search of water and pasture where there are no schools.

### Sociocultural barriers

Education marginalization cannot be entirely attributed to poverty. Complex sociocultural challenges affect education opportunities, especially for girls. These challenges include: negative cultural practices like female genital mutilation (FGM); early and forced marriages; tasks associated with family care and housework; and early pregnancies. In addition, the socializing processes are designed and rigorously applied to instill a feeling of superiority in boys, while girls are groomed to accept subjugation and inferiority with apathy (KNBS, 2015). Girls grow up with feelings of being inferior and suffer from low self-esteem. These two outcomes contribute to girls dropping out of school. Parents also prefer to send their sons to school over their daughters. Subsequently, boys are more likely to complete primary education than girls.

In counties experiencing education marginalization, the number of boys completing primary-level education is more than that of girls. Figure 4 shows the primary-level completion rate in the marginalized counties.

In order to calculate the Gender Parity Index, absolute numbers were used. In Garissa, the Gender Parity Index (GPI) is 2.02, in Mandera, 2.0, while in Wajir it is 1.94, all in favor of boys. The national GPI primary completion rate is about 0.99.

### Gender, teen pregnancy, and early marriages

In 2020, the government of Kenya launched a national campaign against teenage pregnancies, through the National Council for Population and Development (NCPD, 2020). The campaign is focused on galvanizing communities to end teen pregnancies through awareness and advocacy, citing their negative impact on socioeconomic growth.

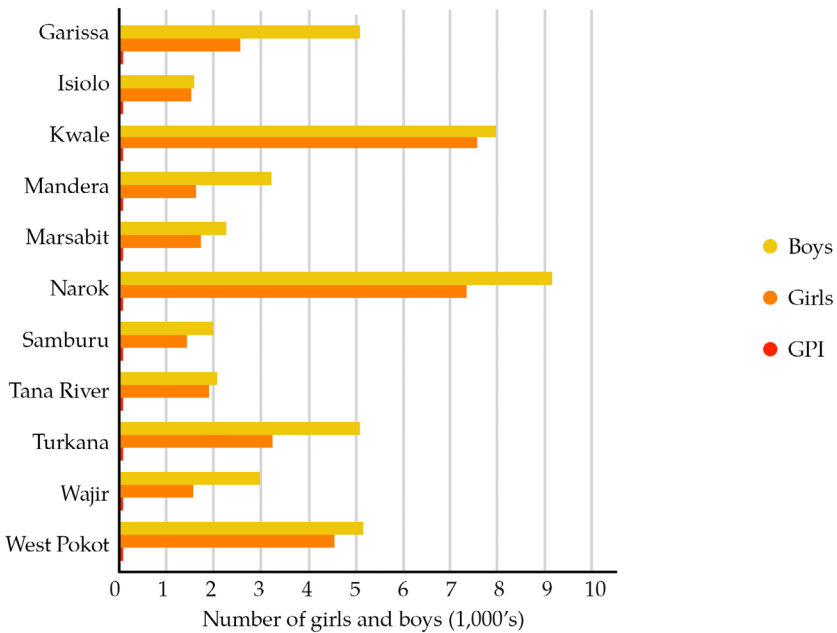


Fig. 4. Primary-level completion rate by gender.

Data from the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (2014) show that one in every five girls between 15–19 years is either pregnant or already a mother. As a result, over 13,000 teenage girls drop out of school annually because of pregnancy (KNBS, 2015). As of 2019, based on the latest statistics from the Global Childhood Report (Save the Children, 2019), Kenya has a teen-pregnancy rate of 82 births per 1000.

Recent media reports show that 449 girls are failing to sit for their final examinations, while others complete examinations in maternity wards. This is a detriment to these girls' educations, health, and opportunities. The case of Narok County is especially profound, with 40 percent of teenagers being pregnant, compared to Garissa, Wajir, and Lamu at 10 percent (Mghenyi, 2018).

The 11 counties are all characterized by high fertility rates. Wajir and Garissa are the two counties with the highest Total Fertility Rates<sup>4</sup> in Kenya, at 7.8 and 7.2 respectively, against a national average of 3.9. Their GERs are 35.2 percent and 109.2 percent. Kirinyaga has the lowest

<sup>4</sup> Fertility rate is defined in this paper as the average number of children born to women during their reproductive years.

Total Fertility Rate, at 2.3, and subsequently has the highest GER of 120.2 percent. High fertility rates contribute to increased poverty, as this strains the budgets of poor families. Other effects of high fertility rates include high infant mortality, malnourished children, and lack of education for children, especially girls, which in turn leads to intergenerational transmission of poverty.

Fertility rates decrease as women's education and wealth increase. Table 1 below shows that the total fertility rate decreases from 6.5 among women with no education to 4.8 among women with some education, and further to 3.0 among women with a secondary or higher education. Fertility is also closely associated with wealth, with women in the lowest quintile (6.4) having more children than those in the highest quintile (2.8) (KNBS, 2015). Wajir, Mandera, and Garissa are located in the northeastern part of the country. This region has the highest total fertility rate, at 6.4.

Table 1. Correlation between poverty and total fertility rate.

Background characteristic	Total fertility rate
Urban	3.1
Rural	4.5
Region	
Coast	4.3
Northeastern	6.4
Eastern	3.4
Central	2.8
Rift Valley	4.5
Western	4.7
Nyanza	4.3
Nairobi	2.7
Education	
No education	6.5
Primary incomplete	4.8
Primary complete	4.2
Secondary+	3
Wealth quintile	
Lowest	6.4

Background characteristic	Total fertility rate
Second	4.7
Middle	3.8
Fourth	3.1
Highest	2.8
Total	3.9

In Narok, 33 percent of women aged 15–19 years have had a live birth, while 7.4 percent are expecting their first child. West Pokot (22.8 percent), Tana River (20.4 percent), Samburu (19.7 percent), Isiolo (18 percent), and Turkana (17.6 percent) have higher percentages of girls aged 15–19 having a live birth, compared to the national average of 14.7 percent.

Sociocultural issues, such as female genital mutilation and early marriage, contribute to education marginalization. The government established the Anti-Female-Genital-Mutilation Board, a semi-autonomous government agency in December 2013, following the enactment of the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act 2011. It is within the Ministry of Public Service, Youth, and Gender Affairs. The fight against FGM has gained momentum recently, with the president promising to end the practice by 2022. Although the timeline may be unrealistic, religious and community leaders are joining the crusade against it.

### HIV and AIDs

Kenya is one of the four HIV “high burden” countries in Africa—about 1.5 million people were living with a HIV infection at the end of 2015. Women in Kenya are more vulnerable to HIV infections than Kenyan men, with the national HIV prevalence at 7.0 percent for women and 4.7 percent for men, as per the 2015 HIV Estimate report (Kenya Ministry of Health, 2017). Young people aged 15–24 years constituted 51 percent of all new adult HIV infections in 2016 (Kenya Ministry of Health, 2016).

With regards to children below 14 years old living with HIV and AIDs, Turkana was ranked 21 out of 47 counties, with almost 2,000 children with HIV and AIDs. Narok was number 23, Kwale number

26, and Kilifi number 12 (KNBS, 2015). It is worth noting that the HIV and AIDs pandemic is affecting the entire country, and not just the 11 marginalized counties that are the focus of this chapter. The epidemic has also negatively affected the country's economy by lowering per-capita output by 4.1 percent. Kenya has an estimated 71,034 new HIV infections among adults and about 6,613 new infections among children annually.

### Location, agriculture, and education of nomads

The Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALs) of Kenya make up 89 percent of the country, encompassing 29 counties and a population of about 16 million people. The ASAL regions are characterized by low and irregular rainfall of less than 500mm per year, high temperatures of over 35° Celsius, and a sparse population whose main economic activity is pastoralism. The 11 counties under study are all located within the ASALs. For decades, these areas were marginalized and seen as unproductive due to persistent drought and famine. Investment in infrastructure was minimal as a result. Insecurity occasioned by cattle rustling and violent incidents due to terrorist attacks by Al-Shabaab have often led to humanitarian situations. Except for Marsabit and Isiolo, the other nine counties located in the northeastern part of Kenya borders with Somalia, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Northern Uganda, which for many years have also suffered from insecurity.

Kenya is currently experiencing the worst locust invasion in 70 years. Currently, there are 17 counties invaded by locusts. So far, approximately 70,000 hectares of land have already been infested (FAO, 2020). Of the 11 counties under study, Mandera, Wajir, Marsabit, Garissa, Isiolo, Samburu, Turkana, Narok, and West Pokot have had such invasions. Only Tana River and Kwale have not had invasions, but it is predicted that by June 2020, 75 percent of the country will be covered by locusts. In conjunction with the fragile economy and the outbreak of COVID-19, this will lead to major loss of livelihoods. It is expected that many more children may not access education due to increased poverty.

Providing quality education to nomadic communities will enhance their socioeconomic growth. With this in mind, the government has established the National Council for Nomadic Education in Kenya



(NACONEK) whose mandate is to steer and coordinate efforts towards quality education for all in nomadic communities. Among the issues the Council is addressing are poor school infrastructure, shortage of teachers, low-quality education, and low access to primary and secondary education.

The mobility of nomadic communities, the hardships associated with the ASALs, and the few teachers with a nomadic background make recruitment, deployment, and retention of teachers difficult. Since the current teacher management policies, including delocalization,<sup>5</sup> have not adequately addressed staffing problems, there is a need to review the whole spectrum of teacher training, recruitment, and deployment.

### Refugee education crisis

As of March 2020, there were 494,585 refugees and asylum seekers in Kenya, 51 percent male and 49 percent female. Of these, 53.6 percent are children aged 0–17 years, 43.7 percent are aged between 18–59, and only 2.7 percent are aged beyond 60. The refugee-hosting communities of Kakuma, Kalobeyi, and Dadaab are located in some of the most marginalized and food insecure counties in Kenya. Out of the total refugees and asylum seekers, 84 percent of the refugees and asylum seekers live in rural camps, while 16 percent live in urban areas, mainly Nairobi.

Among the refugee population in Kenya, over half are children of school age (4–18 years) (UNHCR, 2020). The majority of refugee children are enrolled in pre-primary, primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions located in Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps and the Kalobeyi settlement established in 2016. Despite significant gains in enrollment at all levels, almost half of school-age children and refugees are still out of school. The gap in enrollment widens with progression through the levels. Only 30 percent of eligible refugees have access to secondary education. In Kenya, 16% have access to technical and vocational education and training, and only 1% of qualified learners acquire places to study in public and private universities across Kenya and abroad each year (UNHCR, 2020).

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5 The delocalization policy was introduced by the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) to make teachers work outside their home counties.

According to UNICEF (2018), reasons for low education attainment among refugees include extreme poverty, overcrowded classrooms, inadequate numbers of schools, long distances to schools, poor-quality education, drug abuse, lack of role models—especially for girls—and lack of interest in education due to feelings of hopelessness, occasioned by the fact that there are very few opportunities for meaningful employment.

The refugee scenario is very similar to that of other marginalized communities, as they have large numbers of out-of-school children. However, in Kakuma, refugee children have better education levels than the children from Turkana host communities, when one considers mean years of schooling.<sup>6</sup> Congolese refugees have 8.2 mean years of schooling, South Sudanese refugees have 6.6 years, and Somalis have 5.7 years, compared to 2.7 years for the Turkana. In Garissa, Somali refugees have lower education levels, with an average of 8 years of schooling, compared to Kenyan Somalis with an average of 10.1 years of schooling. Kenyan Somalis have better education levels than Somali refugees because they are able to travel to Nairobi where there are more education opportunities (Betts, Omata, & Sterck, 2018).

The education sector in Dadaab refugee camps consists of pre-schools, primary schools, secondary schools, adult literacy centers, special education schools, accelerated learning centers, vocational training providers, and scholarships for tertiary education. One of the important tertiary education projects is the Borderless Higher Education for Refugees (BHER) project, a multi-partner initiative that delivers university education to refugee and local community populations in Dadaab, Kenya. The project is run by a consortium of four universities (York University, University of British Columbia, Kenyatta University, and Moi University) and is implemented by Windle International Kenya. The BHER project aims to enhance the life chances of vulnerable refugee and local communities, and build educational and teaching capacity *in situ*. Its ultimate goal is to afford refugees a greater likelihood of successful and productive repatriation to their home country when possible, and raise the quality of education in host/home countries so

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6 Mean years of schooling: this is the number of completed years of formal education at primary level or higher, not counting years spent repeating individual grades.

as to build more peaceful, equitable, and socially inclusive societies (UNICEF, 2019).

Perhaps the greatest challenge is the inadequate number of learning institutions. For example, within the Dadaab refugee camp, there are only 22 ECDE Centers, 34 primary schools, 12 secondary schools, and 9 education institutions offering Alternative Basic Education (ABE). With regards to Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVETs), there are 15 registered TVETs in Garissa County, 13 of which are private and two of which are public (UNICEF, 2019). At the Turkana refugee camp, there are 21 primary schools, with 12 schools having an Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP), and five secondary schools and three education institutions offering ABE. At the Kalobeyei settlement, there are five primary schools, two secondary schools and one education institution offering ABE. With regards to TVETs, there are 11 TVET institutions, four of which are private and seven of which are public.

The Kenyan Constitution (2010) and the Basic Education Act (2013) stipulate that access to education is the right of every child in Kenya, including non-citizens. In October 2017, Kenya recognized the need for greater responsibility-sharing to protect and assist refugees and support host states by adopting the Comprehensive National Education Sector Plan 2019: Refugee Response Framework (CRRF)<sup>7</sup>, and in December 2017, signing the Djibouti Declaration.<sup>8</sup> Education, training, and skill development for all refugees and host communities is an important component of the CRRF approach, which places emphasis on the inclusion of displaced populations in national systems. When refugees gain access to education and labor markets, they can build their skills and become self-reliant, contributing to local economies. The Djibouti Declaration also commits IGAD member states and development

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7 On September 19th 2016, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a set of commitments to improve the manner in which we respond to large movements of refugees and migrants. These commitments, endorsed by 193 member states, are known as the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants. The New York Declaration calls upon UNHCR to develop and initiate the application of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF). The objectives are to: ease pressure on host countries; enhance refugee self-reliance; expand access to third-country solutions, and support conditions in countries of origin for safe and dignified return.

8 Details about the Djibouti declaration can be found at: <https://igad.int/attachments/article/1725/Djibouti%20Declaration%20on%20Refugee%20Education.pdf>.

partners to take collective responsibility to ensure that every refugee, returnee, and member of host communities has access to quality education in a safe learning environment, without discrimination.

In November 2017, President Uhuru Kenyatta rejected a bill that gave refugees living in camps the right to work and use land for business and farming. Without freedom of movement, refugees will remain unable to access education, especially tertiary education, economic opportunities, or employment.

### COVID-19 pandemic

The first case of COVID-19 in Kenya was confirmed on March 13<sup>th</sup> 2020. One of the first measures taken was the presidential directive to shut down all learning institutions from March 15<sup>th</sup> 2020, which affected all schools, colleges, and universities, or about 17.5 million learners.

The government introduced online learning for students in ECDE, primary, and secondary schools. However, very few learners are accessing these digital materials. A recent study by Usawa Agenda (2020) and Uwezo (2020) established that, on average, only 22 out of 100 children are accessing digital learning. The higher the grade the learner is in, the higher the probability of their accessing digital learning. The majority of learners not accessing digital learning are from marginalized counties. The implication is that they will continue lagging behind in terms of learning outcomes. Figure 5 presents findings on the status of digital learning during COVID-19 school closures. Although closure of schools has affected most learners, those from marginalized communities have experienced greater education marginalization (see Figure 5).

### Conclusion

Education is at the center of Kenya's future human and economic development (Kenya Ministry of Education, 2016). It is therefore critical that all children have access to education and quality learning. Where this is not happening, there is the risk of a continued cycle of poverty. The ideals of the country as envisioned in Vision 2030, of having Kenya become a newly industrialized country, may not happen. We have seen that there are many interconnected and continuing causes of

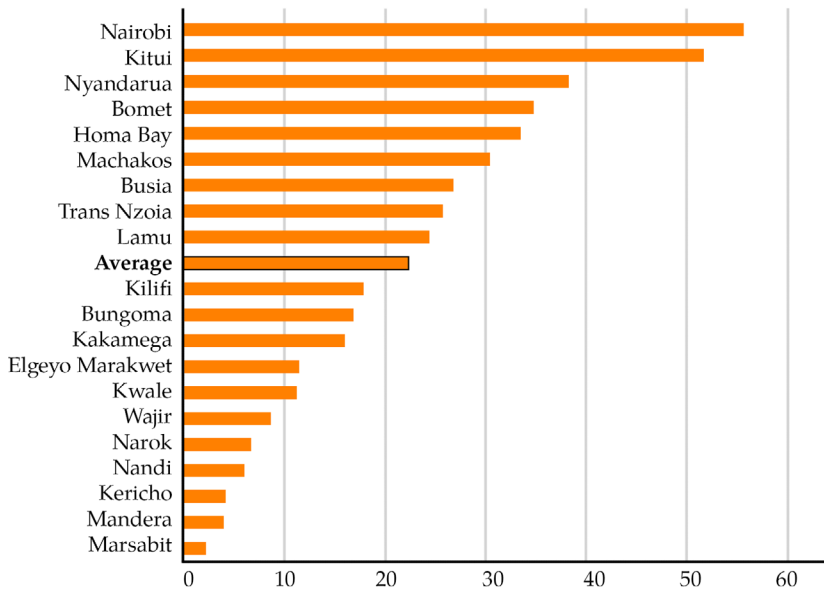


Fig. 5. Access to digital learning materials during the COVID-19 pandemic.  
Source: Uwezo (2020).

marginalization in Kenya, such as geographical location, gender, health, and the current pandemic. And while these factors affect all children in Kenya, we have seen that there is increased impact on the 11 marginalized counties in this review. As such, it is possible—and, indeed, crucial—to find ways of improving the lives of those at the bottom of the pyramid, including the following recommendations.

## Recommendations

1. **Ensure implementation of Vision 2030**, especially components that deal with increased investments in ASAL regions for increased economic growth.
2. **Strengthen institutions like NGEC**, which support gender equality in Kenya.
3. **Strengthen NACONEK** to manage and administer quality education that is sensitive to the needs of pastoralists. One way of doing this is by facilitating the integration of emerging

technologies, distance education, and other alternative interventions in nomadic areas.

4. **Incorporate the nomadic pastoral production system into the national curriculum.** One of the objectives of education in Kenya is to foster nationalism and patriotism, and promote national unity. One way of doing this is by ensuring that the nomadic pastoral production system and lifestyle is incorporated/reflected in the approved national education curriculum.
5. **Strengthen and expand education institutions at all levels for increased access and transition to higher levels of learning.** The government can address this challenge by expanding the number of low-cost boarding schools in nomadic communities and increasing the number of feeder schools (ECDE and Standard I-III) to enhance proximity to school and also to serve as a catchment for boarding schools.
6. **Expand school feeding programs to all children in nomadic communities** to increase access and retention. Most of the homes in marginalized counties are food-insecure. Children are sometimes forced to participate in child labor in order to look for food.
7. **The government to sign the Refugee Bill, 2019.** The new Bill will revise the encampment policy to allow for a high level of freedom of movement. Refugees can then access education and economic opportunities beyond their camps.
8. **Review, adopt, and implement the curricula for Non-Formal Education (NFE) for increased access and completion.**
9. **Implement the Borderless Higher Education for Refugees (BHER) project** in Kakuma Refugee Camp and Kalobeyei Settlement to ensure equal access to tertiary education for all refugees living in Kenya.

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