

Policy Brief

Barriers to improvements in accelerated education programs in Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania



GRAÇA MACHEL TRUST





INTRODUCTION

This policy brief summarizes the findings from three separate baseline assessments conducted in Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania on the state of accelerated education programs in the three countries. The studies were conducted to inform the testing and piloting of scalable intervention approaches for the **Back2School project**, implemented by Graca Machel Trust and other implementing partners in the three countries. The policy brief describes the existing types of accelerated education in each country and then highlights the policy and other systemic barriers that stymie progress towards increasing enrolment, retention, and transition for out-of-school children.

The key policy message is that unacceptably large numbers of children remain out of school. Barriers exist at the household, community, school and policy levels. Existing models of accelerated education programs are inadequately structured and ill-equipped to address these barriers, with the implication that many more children are likely to continue to drop out and will remain out of school for their entire school-going age. This problem is more heightened for adolescents in the 15 to 17 years age bracket.

A useful way to view the problem of out-of-school children is to take a global bird's eye view, as a starting point. The UNESCO Institute of Statistics 2018 report observed that hardly any progress had been made in reducing the number of out-of-school children. Approximately 263 million children and youth were out of school in 2016. Roughly 23% of this population was between 6 and 11 years old (primary school age), 24% was 12 to 14 years old (lower secondary school age), and 53% was 15 to 17 years old (higher secondary school age). These statistics indicate that the largest proportion of children out-of-school were in the 15 to 17 years category. Additionally, the data revealed that gender disparities, while improved in some regions, are still a major concern in others¹.

263 million children and youth were out of school in 2016



children
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(primary school age)
23%



adolescents
12 to 14 years old
(lower secondary school age)
24%



youth
15 to 17 years old
(higher secondary school age)
53%

A more recent modelling study by the UNESCO Institute of Statistics¹¹ estimates that the out-of-school population stood at 244 million in 2021, including 67 million children of primary school age (about 6 to 11 years), and 57 million adolescents of lower secondary school age (about 12 to 14 years). The continuing trend of large numbers of older adolescents (about 15 to 17 years) forming the bulk of out-of-school children is replicated in this study, with 121 million youth of higher secondary school age being out of school. Overall, 9% of primary school-age children, 14% of lower secondary school-age adolescents and 30% of upper secondary school-age youth remain out of school. The study notes further that the decline in the out-of-school rate appears to have slowed down earlier and more visibly among adolescents of lower secondary school age: while the rate fell by nine percentage points in the 2000s, it has only fallen by two percentage points in the 2010s.

Out of school population
244 million in 2021



More worryingly, the study indicates that Sub-Saharan Africa is not only the region with the highest out-of-school population but also the only region where this population is growing. Since 2009, the out-of-school population has increased by 20 million, reaching 98 million in 2021. Out-of-school rates among primary school-age children have been consistently declining, albeit by only 0.3 percentage points per year in the 2010s with the result that one in five children are still not enrolled. The main challenge, however, persists among adolescents and youth whose out-of-school rates have stagnated since 2010 at 33% and 48%, respectively. While gender disparity at the global level has disappeared, there are persistent gaps in both directions in individual regions, especially among upper secondary school age youth. The female out-of-school rate is 4.2 percentage points higher than the male rate in sub-Saharan Africa.



AN OVERVIEW OF EXISTING MODELS IN ETHIOPIA, KENYA AND TANZANIA

ETHIOPIA

Several accelerated education program models exist in Ethiopia. Among these are the **'Second Chance'** and **'Accelerated Learning for Africa'** (ALFA), both of which have evolved from the same model called 'Speed School' and are based on a condensed curriculum equivalent to the primary school grade 1 – 3 materials, which is covered within ten months. The programme has three phases: Phase I is a condensed form of the grade 1 curriculum, Phase 2 is that of grade 2, and Phase 3 is that of grade 3. The condensed curriculum materials were developed with the participation of their Regional Education bureaus. Both programs have 'community development' related components such as Self-Help Groups and the School Capacity Strengthening, aimed at strengthening parents' and link schools' capacities respectively.

The **Accelerated Learning Program (ALP)** is the government-adopted version of the 'Speed School' model that uses condensed curricula, active pedagogy, and holistic training – all adopted from the Second Chance and ALFA programmes. However, it has none of the 'community development' related components of the Speed School models. Moreover, it mostly runs two Phases and hence covers grades 1 and 2 curricula per school year. ALP classes are held only half a day (as opposed to a full day in Second Chance and ALFA classes) – which is not enough time to cover the curriculum content. As a result, ALP students transition to grade 3 upon completion of the programme (instead of transitioning to grade 4 like Second Chance and ALFA graduates). Unlike Second Chance and ALFA, it uses qualified and experienced teachers, called ALP teachers, selected from existing primary school teachers based on previous performance records.

Alternative Basic Education (ABE) was adopted by the Ministry of Education (MoE) as a national strategy in 2004/5 to increase the mostly pastoralist and agro-pastoralist rural children's access to quality education. The curriculum for grades 1-4 is condensed into three levels of one year each. ABE Level III completers transition to grade 5 of formal school. ABE classes mostly run three hours a day, three days a week either in the mornings or afternoons. The long distances to primary schools for grades 5 – 8 lead to high dropout rates. For this reason, the Oromia REB and UNICEF decided to upgrade some selected ABECs to run Levels 5 - 6ⁱⁱⁱ to address the distance barrier. This new ABE level under the pilot phase offers an 18-month curriculum equivalent to the formal school curricula of grades 5 and 6. Completers of this new ABE level will transition to middle school grade 7, provided that they score passing marks at the Regional Primary Education Leaving Certificate Examination.

The absence of water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities pushes many children away, especially girls who have reached puberty. The accelerated programs' learning environment resembles those of the link formal schools, with little difference in the quality and number of facilities available. Moreover, even though some schools have separate toilets for boys and girls, none of the Second Chance, ALFA, or ALP classes have provisions for sanitary materials for older girls. There also exists no reporting mechanisms and follow-up for violence and GBV incidents. Other than ABE, the accelerated education programmes do not seem to sufficiently and meaningfully engage and mobilise local communities (other than the SHG members) in the management and operations of their classes or centres to support effective implementation.

KENYA

Existing models in Kenya are mostly implemented by non-state actors and tend to be project-based with defined lifespans. For instance, ActionAid's **Catch up Programme** (the Education for Life project) was implemented as a partnership involving ActionAid, Volunteer Service Overseas (VSO) and Leonard Cheshire targeting girls between 10 and 19 years who had never been to any school or those who were in school and dropped out. The target was to have 15 pupils per catch-up centre, but they ended up with 40 to 50 pupils per centre. The project came to an end in February 2021, having enrolled at least 1289 girls in 32 Accelerated Education centres in four sub-locations of Magarini Sub-County.

Another project, the **Back-to-School Project**, implemented by the Government of Kenya and UNICEF, identified out-of-school children (OOSC) from the villages and linked them to the nearest public primary school to resume their education. The program was domiciled in 50 public primary schools in 5 sub-counties of Kilifi County. Though the pupil recruitment drive was largely successful, retention has been a challenge. Likewise, the **Wasichana Wetu Wafaulu** by Education Development Trust and Kesho Kenya was launched by Education Development Trust and Kesho Kenya in 2017 but came to an end in February 2022, having enrolled 15,000 OOSC, of whom 12,750 were girls and 2,250 boys across 54 government primary schools and 20 secondary schools. This project similarly faced significant dropouts of both boys and girls, with girls dropping out mainly due to poverty, teenage pregnancies, early marriages, and child labour.



'MODELS IMPLEMENTED BY SOME NON-STATE ACTORS LACK SUSTAINABILITY'.



In Garissa, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) provides opportunities for school-aged children (6 to 18 years old) to complete a full cycle of basic education, coupled with diverse learning pathways across the education continuum for youth (15 to 24 years old). NRC has a stand-alone centre for only out-of-school children that is attached to a mainstream school, easing the transition to nearby mainstream schools.

I-REP Foundation SHEPHARD School, West Pokot currently supports 56 girls at Ortum Girls Boarding Primary School, which also acts as a safe house. There are an additional 19 girls in various high schools and 5 boys benefiting from the education program. The program has also established a centre school that is closer to the villages to enable girls who look after their family's livestock to flexibly balance between attending school and caring for the livestock. The classes are conducted in three shifts comprising of morning, midday, and evening lessons. The evening lessons are majorly attended by the shepherd girls after taking the livestock back to their homesteads.

The greatest weakness of the model as implemented by some non-state actors in Kenya is the lack of sustainability. Moreover, accelerated education programs are not recognised by the government, which presents a problem during registration for examinations, since government officers do not recognize the system. Besides, the absence of a recognised AEP curriculum and teaching materials and collapsing accelerating work of three to four years to fit one year, remain major challenges.



TANZANIA

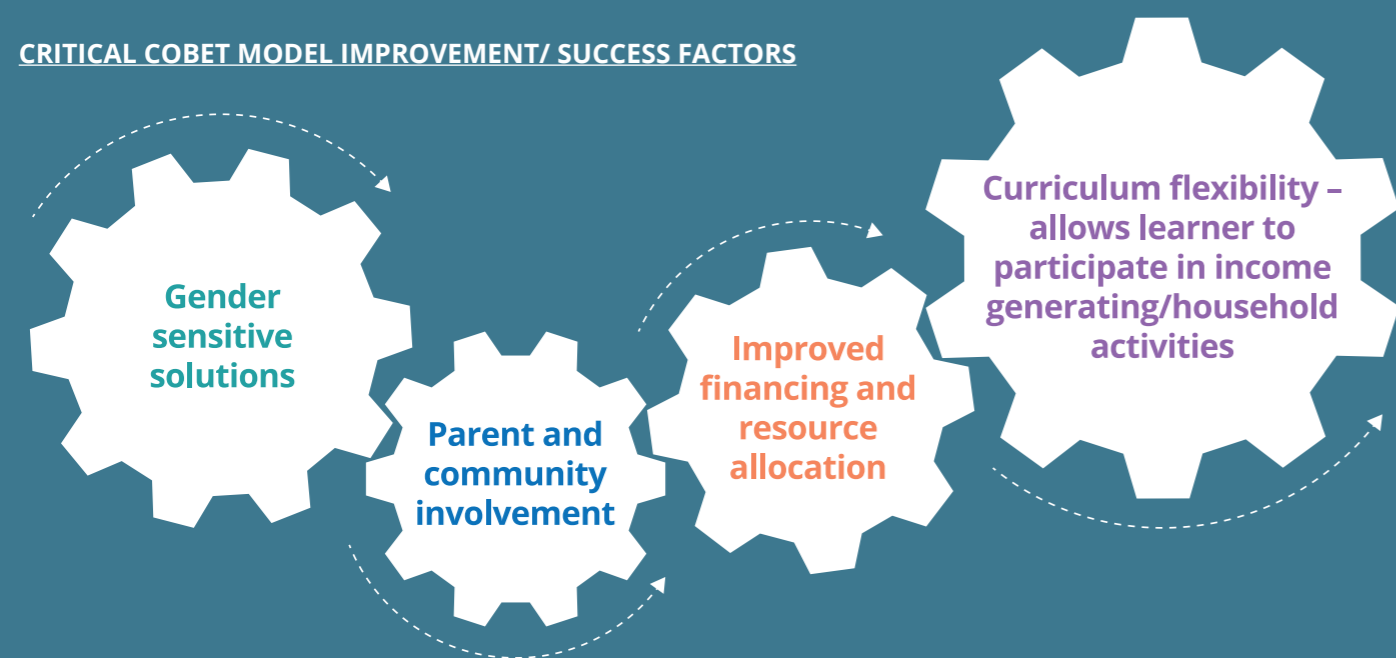
The **Complementary Education for Tanzania (COBET)** model was introduced and piloted in 5 districts in 1999, with the support of UNICEF. After registering initial success, it was scaled up across the entire country. COBET caters for over-age children and youth in primary school who are out of school. The program is designed for two age groups, Cohort One (11-13 years old) and Cohort Two (14-18 years old). This design allows for flexibility in allocating enrolled children into the ideal age group.

The design of the COBET model gives room for learners to participate in generating income for their households, and attend school within any one weekday. The COBET curriculum differs from the formal primary school curriculum because it allows learners to be accelerated by doing formal exams and moving into higher classes. It seeks to give education to OOSC in terms of skills and knowledge over three years and covers a number of modules aimed at preparing learners for national exams.

One of the major constraints for the COBET programme is limited resources. At its commencement, a budget of TZS 50,000 (22 USD) was allocated per month for paying teachers and paraprofessionals, which was later reduced to TZS 20,000 (7 USD) per month. Currently, the government allocates capitation grants based on the number of pupils in the mainstream learning system, with no allocations for COBET pupils. However, head teachers have had to divert money from capitation grants for COBET pupils, which puts financial pressure on public schools running COBET programs. The reality is that even the capitation grant allocated to mainstream schools is grossly inadequate. Statistics for 2019/2020 indicate that all schools in the entire Mara region received on average capitation grants per student of TZS 5,518, which is only 55 % of the planned amount. The policy envisages TZS 10,000 per primary school student^{iv}.

Low budget allocation is compounded by other factors such as low community participation and awareness, stigmatization of COBET learners at community levels, poverty at the household level, early marriages and child labour. The net effect of all these has been the decline in COBET enrolment, which is occurring alongside a spike in the number of OOSC. For example, whereas there were 69,205 OOSC of primary school going age in 2008, in 2020 the number increased to 1,812,727^v. The situation has worsened in many aspects as revealed by the data in 1998 just before the establishment of COBET, which showed the number of OOSC at primary school being 3,069,521^{vi}.

CRITICAL COBET MODEL IMPROVEMENT/ SUCCESS FACTORS



Out-of-school girls face specific and heightened challenges when they join the COBET programme. At the community level and in particular, in the Mara Region, there are cultural expectations for girls to be married at a certain age - thus returning to school is not encouraged for girls. Harassment also happens at the community level. Moreover, other domestic pressures such as supporting and taking care of the family are often a girl's burden.



KEY POLICY MESSAGES

Unacceptably large numbers of children remain out of school, and more children will continue to drop out, adding to the large numbers already out of school. Accurate data on out-of-school children is lacking across the three countries. The administrative data from schools is unlikely to capture children who have never enrolled, and school administrative data are weakly integrated into the national education management information systems. Anecdotal evidence points to increasing numbers, especially among older adolescents (14-17 years), but hardly any studies have confirmed or refuted these positions.

Each of the three governments have policies on universal and compulsory access to free basic education. However, these policy statements have not been backed by adequate budgetary commitments, and weak regulatory environments mean that policy provisions remain aspirational and have had little effect on children in the lower economic quintiles, those living in marginalized areas, or both.

Structural and systemic barriers exert binding constraints to enrolment, retention, transition and completion for children from marginalized households and those from the lowest economic quintiles. Poverty at the household level, retrogressive cultural practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and early and forced child marriages, overcrowding in classrooms, and poor sanitation in learning centres pose major constraints. These constraints are reinforced by gaps and weaknesses in existing policies, and girls are the most affected. For instance, the Kenyan study identified commercial sexual exploitation of children in the Kilifi tourism circuit, FGM and early and forced child marriages in West Pokot as major impediments to girls' enrolment and retention in school. Across the three countries, the long distances to learning centres act as a major disincentive to both boys and girls and is implicated in most incidents of non-enrolment or drop out.

The **absence of scalable, sustainable accelerated education models that suit the resource-constrained implementation contexts** continues to be a challenge. Existing models do not sufficiently address, and are yet to overcome, the implementation barriers faced by schools and governments in reintegrating out-of-school children. The appetite for education is growing among out-of-school children but existing models are ill-equipped to respond in a way that will enable the children to be retained in school. In contexts plagued with economic deprivation, retrogressive cultural practices, weak government oversight and low budgetary allocations, accelerated education models that are community-owned and driven, and that are cost-effective are ideal. Besides, given the diversity of the targeted children's ages, models pegged on pedagogically engaging but flexible curricular would be the most ideal. The Speed School model in Ethiopia has a learner-centred engaging curriculum, but it is highly intensive in terms of resources and its execution and might not be suitable for children who must balance school and other activities such as livelihood pursuits, caregiving or even parenting.

Indications are that existing accelerated programs enable enrolment, retention, and completion. However, as with other accelerated education programs elsewhere, definitive data on learning is often missing. Most data comes from self-reporting for program improvement. Moreover, learners in accelerated education programs do not necessarily undertake the same assessments as mainstream schools and, where they do, these are not usually standardized tests. There is therefore a shortage of comparative data with the formal system within the same country. Long-term longitudinal studies of accelerated program learners have not been undertaken^{vii}.

There are **no alternative pathways for older adolescents who may wish to transition into skills-based vocational training**. Existing models implicitly assume that all children are interested in continuing with their education through the conventional educational pathways. The assessments revealed that older children would want a different, skills-based pathway into vocational training because some of them are already pursuing income generating activities and see little prospects through formal education. The Africa Child Policy Forum (ACPF), one of the partners in the Back2School project, is currently piloting a curriculum with a pathway into vocational training in two regions for 127 children aged between 12 and 17.

Government ownership and oversight are weak. Structurally, accelerated education programs fall under the Ministry in charge of Adult Education in each country. By implication, the Ministry of Education has no oversight role in accelerated education programs, yet most of these programs are either run by or based in public schools under the Ministry of Education. Hardly any budgets are allocated for equipping schools which host accelerated education programs. In Kenya, the government does not employ any teachers for accelerated education unlike Ethiopia and Tanzania. Also, Kenyan policy has no formal provision for entry examination from the accelerated education into the conventional school system. Both Ethiopia and Tanzania make provision for entry exams, which offer a point of equivalence so that accelerated education program graduates can transfer to public schools.

Finally, **teacher skills and competencies are not always up to date with the demands of accelerated education.** Where non-state partners are involved, the teachers recruited may have no prior formal training. The training offered is often short lasting about a month, which is hardly enough time to equip teachers with the requisite competencies for handling learners with diverse learning needs. Even where teachers have prior training, like those employed by government, the training they received in colleges prepared them for handling the conventional school curriculum. Admittedly, efforts have been made to retrain the teachers handling accelerated education programs but these need to be institutionalized into continuing professional development for teachers, preferably with clear career progression plans and certification.



RECOMMENDATIONS



The three governments need to urgently make budgetary provisions for accelerated education programs.

This will enable recruitment and remuneration of teachers, construction of school infrastructure like classrooms and separate toilets for boys and girls and purchase of learning materials. A more long-term strategy would be to move accelerated education to be located structurally within the Ministry of Education, so it can benefit from greater oversight and quality assurance by the ministry.



Review existing accelerated education curricular to align them with existing national realities.

Accelerated education programs draw their content from formal school programs, which are reviewed regularly. However, similar curriculum reviews are not done for accelerated education, which hinders both quality teaching and seamless transition into formal schools or vocational training. There is further need for reviewing the curricular of accelerated education to create education pathways for skills and talents-based training.



Need to foster greater community involvement.

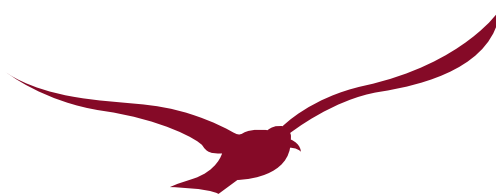
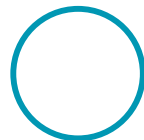
There is need to foster greater community involvement, especially that of parents and caregivers through intensive and regular community sensitization and training. This will ensure community support for accelerated education and for diluting the negative influences of sociocultural practices that impede enrolment and trigger dropout.

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