



POLICY RELEVANCE SUMMARY



Social Capital and Education: The Case of Western Kenya

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Policy Relevance-- Summary

This research hypothesized a causal link between social capital and education outcomes, specifically performance in the school leaving examination, the Kenya Certificate of Primary Examination (KCPE), in a region of Western Province in Kenya. The study used qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze the link based on data collected through structured in-depth interviews and observation coupled with descriptive statistical data. For the qualitative section of the study school heads and community leaders provided an array of information and observations which were then coded to determine patterns relating to the research question.

Basic Finding: Leadership is a crucial variable in success of schools. It is an important factor that determines how communities, parents and community leaders, relate to schools, and how they perceive the wider education project within their communities. Sometimes it was difficult to determine which came first. Did forward looking communities with engaged local leaders attract good school heads who augmented the

education process or was it the other way round? In some school communities in Marachi, school heads clearly provided leadership in two respects. They set goals for schools and the communities and then worked assiduously to ensure that the goals set were met. In others, the impetus came from the community and school heads were pressed to deliver what the community had defined. In a few instances where there was a perfect fit between the aspirations of the community as expressed by their leaders and school heads, the resultant atmosphere positively impacted performance in the KCPE

There are various ways of measuring school or community success or improvement. For instance, one school that had a consistently poor performance record showed significant improvement after a new young head teacher arrived. He secured the support of a very able local community leader who has a passion for community improvement. The two are slowly turning what was arguably the worst performing school in the locality into an averagely performing school

In yet another community, a forward looking and resourceful head teacher clashed with into obstinate community leaders who viewed her as threat because she instituted a tight school management approach. Despite the school's good performance in the KCPE, some community leaders actively campaigned for her ouster. They succeeded.

The study categorized school communities of interest into three groups: those with harmonious community leaders/ school head relations and therefore with better prospects to tap into social capital; those where relations were clearly bad, and those with lukewarm relations.

A second hypothesis relates to the impact of individual stocks of social capital on performance on the KCPE. Evidence points to a strong link between performance and

status and income levels of families. For instance, students whose parents were leaders or were employed appeared to do well not just in the examination but in life in general. This is an instance of social capital being deployed to help offspring. These parents have network which they can tap into.

On going quantitative analysis of data suggests that the postulated causal link between performance on the KCPE and social capital or other social and economic variables is not that clear or straightforward. Several factors could account for this finding, the main ones being the sample size and measurement of social capital. The study is based on interviews with nearly 600 parents of students at 14 randomly selected schools. At any rate, it can be tentatively concluded that quantitative analysis will support the hypothesis.

Policy Implications: Quality of school and community leadership is not the most frequently highlighted a factor in the debates about improving school performance in developing countries. Other inputs are usually considered more important. This study indicates that as important as the rest of the inputs—textbooks, teacher pay, teacher quality and experience etc --, are, quality leadership and the extent of community social capital and focus, both which pivot around leadership, are perhaps just as central. In Kenya, the underlying reality is one of an acute scarcity of resources, a disproportionate share of which go to the education sector. A streamlined process of identifying and training school heads and community leaders could result in better educational outcomes and better use of resources.

Opportunities/Incentives: Kenya already has an infrastructure that could be used to better train head teachers not only in school management but in community outreach as well. The department of community development, which runs community outreach programs but rarely in conjunction with the department of education which manages schools, could be deployed to play a greater role in school and communities. Twining the two departments operationally at the local level could improve school management and enhance focused community support to schools. Coordination of government departments and activities at the local levels is performed by the administrative arm of the state—the provincial administration. Given the department’s reputation as an arm twister and compeller, it is unlikely to elicit the needed type of community support to schools. It has to be bottom up approach which is guided by expertise acquired by school heads and community leaders.

Constraints: Multifaceted holistic development programs are not without critics. There is a danger that they might simply add another layer of bureaucracy to an existing one without much guarantee of success. Departmental turf wars are likely to hinder an approach that calls for blurring of departmental functions. Re-orientating school heads to view their roles as going beyond leadership of school, and imparting community leaders with requisite skills to enable them to play active and constrictive roles in their communities and schools may be viewed as prohibitively expensive.

Conclusion: What is indisputably clear from examples of successful education school systems around the world is that community and individual social capital is crucial to

success of schools. The remaining inputs in the education process are multiplied or diminished depending on the stock and deployment of social capital in a community.