Universalizing Access to Primary Education in Kenya: Myths and Realities

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Abstract

Kenya is among the African countries that have made notable advances in the quest for Universal Primary Education (UPE). Major landmarks in this regard include free primary education, increased enrolments, and an attempt to democratize education governance through decentralized management. However, the road towards full attainment of UPE has also been marked by increasingly complex internal inefficiencies in the form of increased dropout rates, congested classrooms, shortage of teachers and basic facilities, and a policy framework that favours centralism over inclusivity. Equity concerns, with regard to gender, region, ethnicity, and socio-economic background also abound. Furthermore, overemphasis on primary education may have locked out other sectors of education from their due policy and fiscal attention. Such shortcomings compromise the ideal of UPE, namely the provision of an education that is equitable and meaningful to all—including underserved populations.

Introduction

The quest for universal access to education has been a legitimate priority for many African governments in the postcolonial period. This has been a result of several concerns, the most notable being economic development. In this regard, education for human resource development has been a big priority (Bray, 1986). In addition to training Africans to take over from the departing colonialists, African governments have been keen to catch up with the more developed countries of the world. As is evident in several policy documents, in Kenya, the three post-independence governments have prioritized and developed Universal Primary Education (UPE) as a means of attaining the global target for Education for All (EFA) (Abagi, 1999). Tangible achievements have been made in this regard. One of these landmark achievements has been the provision of free primary education and subsequent increases to enrolments, especially after 2003 (Sifuna & Sawamura, 2008). However, beyond the euphoria over the alleged success of the free primary education initiative and the increased enrolments, there has been little policy attention to issues of equitable access, relevance, quality, and outcomes of primary school education. In this paper, I examine some of the attempts to universalize primary school education in Kenya, investigating the successes, pitfalls, and challenges inherent in this quest. Ultimately, the question is whether the various UPE initiatives in Kenya have been genuine efforts to democratize access to basic education for the majority of Kenyans or whether such efforts have merely been political grand standing

The methodology involved a broad theoretical conceptualization of UPE as a global undertaking and an interpretive policy analysis of the various initiatives and aspects of UPE in Kenya. This undertaking entailed a review of research literature on UPE in Kenya, as well as a review of documents—both government and international agencies' policy papers, as well as newspaper articles—relating to UPE in Kenya. The first part of the paper examines the rationales and theoretical assumptions that undergird UPE. The second part of the paper discusses some key aspects of UPE in Kenya in light of broader local, regional, and global educational, historical, and political developments.

Rationale and Theoretical Foundations for UPE

The notion of universalizing primary education is rooted in the perceived centrality of education to promote (a) individual rights, (b) gender equity, and (c) economic development. The promotion of individual rights as a rationale for UPE mainly draws on article 26 (1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which stipulates that everyone has the right to education (United Nations, 1948). Following on this theme, the World Conference on Education for All at Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 committed the world community to ensuring that "every person—child, youth and adult—shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs" (Inter-Agency Commission, 1990, article 1).

Another rationale for the global quest for UPE is gender equity. In this regard, the Dakar Framework for Action of 2000, while reaffirming the broad vision of the 1990 Jomtien conference, resolved to ensure "that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality" (UNESCO, 2000, p. 8). The world community reiterated this commitment at the Millennium Summit, setting the target to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015 (United Nations, 2000).

There are two major reasons why equity is a major concern in the provision of education services. First, because education is a social good in and of itself, it is important that it is equally available to all (Bray, 1986). Second, educating women in particular not only ensures their equal participation in the socioeconomic and political spheres of life, but also reduces child mortality, fertility, and the incidence of malnutrition (Abu-Ghaida & Klasen, 2004). Moreover, as Lynch (2001) pointed out, the paid labour market uses educational credentials to select and stratify human labour. Thus, achieving equality in the distribution of education is essential for equalizing opportunities in the labour market.

Finally, UPE is conceptualized within a framework of economic development. The World Bank, among the vanguard international agencies that support UPE in developing countries, referred to education as an "investment" in many of its official publications, such as its *Education Sector Policy Paper* (World Bank, 1980). In particular, the bank's position draws on work by Psacharopoulos (1981) and Blaug (1979) on the higher returns to investment in primary education. Moreover, the economic rationale for UPE, rests on the notion that education is one of the most powerful instruments known for reducing poverty and for inciting sustained economic growth (Bruns, Mingat, & Rakotomalala, 2003). Many developing countries, including Kenya, cite the three rationales discussed above as the basis for their UPE programs (Bray, 1986).

The Quest to Universalize Primary Education in Kenya

Upon attaining political independence in 1963, Kenya embarked on an ambitious educational program aimed at universalizing access to education. According to Jomo Kenyatta, the first president of Kenya, the young nation faced three major threats: ignorance, poverty, and disease. The Kenyatta government touted UPE as a viable weapon for combating these perceived enemies. This commitment was amplified in the reports of various education commissions, notably the Ominde commission of 1964 and the Gachathi commission report of 1976, as well as in various national development plans (Bogonko, 1992).

The quest for UPE in Kenya has included commitment to various international protocols including the 1990 (Jomtien) and 2000 (Dakar) declarations on education for all and, more recently, the Millennium Development Goals' (MDG) commitment to achieve UPE by the year 2015 (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology [MoEST], 2004). This quest has also included the implementation of landmark reforms including free primary education initiatives, school feeding programs, and the total overhaul of the education system.

The Kenyatta government (1963-1978), the first post-independence government in Kenya, set the pace by declaring in the ruling party's manifestos of 1963 and 1969 that the government was committed to providing seven years of free primary education. In 1971, a presidential decree abolished tuition fees for the districts with unfavourable geographical conditions, mainly in the North-Eastern Province, and parts of the Rift Valley and Coast provinces (Sifuna, 1990). In 1973, the president issued another decree abolishing fees for all primary school children in classes one to four throughout the country. Later decrees abolished all fees in the rest of the primary school classes.

The Moi government (1978-1992) picked up the baton and continued with the free primary education policy. Moreover, in 1979 president Moi declared that all the primary school children in the country would be provided with free milk once a week. The idea was both to entice children to attend school and to provide some sustenance for children from poor families. In 1984, the president initiated a major reform by decreeing that the country would change from the 7-4-2-3 system of education, consisting of seven years of primary school, four of secondary, two of higher secondary and three of university, to the 8-4-4 system consisting of eight years of primary school, four years of secondary, and four years of university. The argument was that the former system was too academic, elitist, and theoretical, and that the new system would be more practically oriented. Consequently, the new system, which started in January 1985, placed more emphasis on vocational subjects in the final years of primary education and throughout secondary school (Sifuna, 1990).

The National Alliance Rainbow Coalition (NARC) government, which came into power in 2002 on a platform of establishing a more democratic political system, also pledged to provide free primary education. Indeed, the president declared free primary education in January 2003. The commitment by the NARC government to continue free primary education saw 1.5 million additional children enrolling in primary schools between January 2003 and June 2004 (MoEST, 2004). This time, however, the government was prepared and set aside some money to support the project. Nonetheless, as I shall discuss in the following sections, problems relating to teacher shortage and inadequate facilities have continued to hinder the initiative. Moreover, problems stemming from poverty such as families' inability to provide necessities such as uniforms, have kept many children away from school.

Success Stories

Increased Enrolments

The various measures taken to implement UPE in Kenya have attained some positive results, especially with regard to increased participation, albeit in the short run, When President Kenyatta announced free primary education in 1971, the enrolment in standard one (first grade) rose from 397,000 in 1971 to 959,000 in 1972 (Bradshaw & Fuller, 1996). The implementation of the free school milk program in 1979 also saw a surge in primary school enrolments. Indeed, primary school enrolment rose from 890,000 to 4.3 million between 1963 and 1983 (Bradshaw & Fuller, 1996).

The implementation of free primary education by the NARC government in 2003 has been lauded as a success story in Africa. In its 2005 Country Report, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) said that with a national primary enrolment rate near 80%, Kenya was making significantly better progress in education than many of its East African neighbours. Following the NARC government's initiative, the number of primary school pupils all over Kenya increased by 18% from 6.06 million pupils in 2002 to 7.16 million pupils in 2003. This was a remarkable increase as rates of annual increase before the free primary education initiative had been less than 1% (Government of Kenya [GoK], 2004). Enrolment continued to rise phenomenally from 5.9 million in 2002 to 8 million in 2007. In a speech delivered at the 34th UNESCO General Conference in 2007, Kenya's Minister for Education indicated that the gross enrolment rate was 112.4% and the net enrolment rate stood at 86.5% (Saitoti, 2007). The large gap between gross and net enrolment may be explained by enrolment of tens of thousands of over-age children, including street children, or those who dropped out of school to work and rejoined school when fees were abolished (Vos et al., 2004).

The United Nations praised the move by the government to provide free primary education as having put the country "on track" to reach the Millennium Development Goals' enrolment and gender parity objectives, at least in primary education. Equally impressive has been Kenya's success in reducing dropout rates from 4.9% in 1999 to just 2% in 2003 (Fleshman, 2005).

In the remote rural areas, especially those inhabited by pastoralist nomadic communities, the free education initiative has been especially welcome. Even though these regions still lag behind in terms of overall rates of enrolment, it is noteworthy that children, and especially girls, have benefited from the initiative. In places like Lokichoggio and Lodwar, the enrolment of girls has increased by nearly 400%. In Lodwar, for example, the enrolment of girls rose from 227 in 1997 to 1056 in 2005 (UNICEF, 2005).

Decentralized Management

Another major success, especially following the 2003 free primary education initiative, was the involvement of various stakeholders in the provision and management of education. This multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approach was envisioned in the Master Plan for Education and Training (GoK, 1998). According to the master plan, the quest for UPE would entail increasing efficiency and effectiveness through the decentralization of educational management and financing authority to local authorities and school committees. While the decentralization of educational management may not have been a resounding success, there has been some shift of power from central government to grassroots stakeholders. School management committees in primary schools, for example, now have more powers over the expenditure of the funds provided under the free primary education program (MoEST, 2003). Moreover, the government has also delegated the hiring of primary school teachers to District Education Boards (Teachers Service Commission [TSC], 2006).

However, it may be too early to celebrate the success of decentralized management of education in Kenya, as the process is still in its infancy and there has been little evaluative research on this topic. Management of education and other public services in Kenya has traditionally been very centralistic, with the government playing a very important role. It would be ambitious, therefore, to imagine that such a governance tradition could be transformed overnight. In their study on the implementation of free primary education in Kenya, Sifuna and Sawamura (2008) found that the communication between government and schools was still predominantly top-down and that Ministry of Education officials had little regard for the concerns of teachers regarding the quality of education.

Do these aforementioned and other successes qualify Kenya as an exemplary case in the quest for UPE, as has been touted in certain government and international agencies circles? Or is it, as Mukudi (2004) and Sifuna (2005) posited, just an illusion? Concerns regarding educational quality, equity, and outcomes make the achievement of true UPE in Kenya by 2015 yet a distant dream, as discussed below.

Challenges to Universalization of Education

Poverty

Poverty is one of the leading challenges facing the implementation and eventual realization of UPE. Over 50 % of the population in Kenya lives below the poverty line. According to the UNDP 2007/2008 Human Development Report, Kenya has a Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.521 and is ranked 148th out of the 177 countries with data. In Turkana, the poorest region in Kenya, 94% of the people live in poverty (Oxfam, 2008). Consequently, school enrolment is very low. The enrolment is even lower for the children of nomadic pastoralist families. Oxfam reported that while the national enrolment rate in 2008 was about 95%, for Turkana it was only 43% and less than 20% among the nomadic pastoralist communities.

Poverty is also rampant among communities in the semi-arid parts of the country, particularly in the lower Eastern province, Coast Province, and parts of the Rift Valley province, where families struggle to make a living from subsistence farming or from livestock herding. The combination of harsh climatic conditions and poverty has locked out over 60% of the eligible children in these areas from accessing schooling (UNICEF, 2005). Indeed, for many of the children and their families, a more pressing question is whether they will get at least one meal per day (UNICEF, 2005). Moreover, schools in these areas are far apart, poorly equipped, and poorly staffed, thus exacerbating an already bad situation.

Child Labour

An offshoot of the poverty problem is child labour. According to the *1998/99 Child Labour Survey*, Kenya had 1.3 million children classified as child labourers (GoK, 1999). It is not only among the pastoralist nomadic communities that poverty is responsible for keeping children away from school. In more affluent regions, family poverty, and sometimes the lure of easy money, has led to girls leaving school to work as domestic help, and boys going to work as “beach boys” at the coast or as coffee or tea pickers in tea and coffee plantations (GoK, 1999). Estimates suggest that 1.7 million children are still outside the education system (Fleshman, 2005). However, I am inclined to agree with Abagi and Olweya (1999) that the number of children outside the school system is unknown

owing to the lack of systematic census and monitoring mechanisms necessary to establish accurately the actual numbers of children who have been denied access to schooling.

All this portends that access to education is still limited for children from poor families and poor regions. In the majority of cases, moreover, girls suffer more than boys when it comes to accessing schooling. In Turkana, for example, where more than 60% of the children do not attend school, only about 3000 children advance to secondary school and less than 1000 of these are girls (UNICEF, 2005). Alwy and Schech (2004) have analyzed national surveys in post-independence Kenya to show that ethnicity also has a role to play in determining access to education. This is not difficult to envision given the nature of Kenyan politics where political proximity to the ruling elite ensures a disproportionate share of the national largesse, including the availability of educational opportunities and even scholarships (Barkan & Chege, 1989). Thus, the provision of free primary education without first tackling the root causes of poverty and interrogating the systemic issues that undergird regional, ethnic, and gender inequalities will not achieve much in the way of universalizing educational access.

Decrees

As outlined earlier in this paper, many of the policy pronouncements regarding UPE in Kenya were made through presidential decrees. These included the various pronouncements regarding free primary education, the free school milk program, and the shift to the 8-4-4 system of education in 1985 (Sifuna, 1990). What was especially problematic about these presidential decrees was that they were made without prior consultation with the relevant policy making bodies in government. The implementation was therefore a nightmare for the government bureaucrats and school administrators. Thousands of children otherwise locked out of school suddenly turned up to be enrolled. The sudden flood of new students placed a great deal of strain on facilities and teachers. Following the declaration of free primary education by President Kenyatta in the 1970s, for example, the government was not able to fund the construction of the extra classrooms needed for the increased enrolment. Therefore, school committees eventually reintroduced fees, disguised as building levies in order to construct classrooms and to provide other facilities (Bedi, Kimalu, Manda, & Nafula, 2004). These fees were higher than the fees previously charged. Many students could not afford the levies and had to drop out once again (Muthwii, 2004).

When President Moi moved to reform the entire education system through the introduction of the allegedly more practical 8-4-4 system of education in 1985, he plagued the nation with what Sifuna (1990) has called the darkest moment in Kenya's education history. The announcement came unexpectedly and caught educational authorities and school administrators unaware. The schools were not equipped to switch over to a new curriculum, there were no workshops for the vocational subjects, no trained teachers to teach the subjects, and no money to construct and equip the workshops and home-science classrooms. Consequently, parents and school committees had to shoulder the entire financial burden. Moreover, the new curriculum meant that students would spend an extra year in primary schools. These added cost and time implications in the context of a poorly performing economy in the 1980s and 90s and thus reduced employment opportunities, which may have led students and their families to question the expected gains from primary school education resulting in declining enrolments from the mid 1980s to the mid 1990s (Bedi et al., 2004).

Teacher Shortage

Poor staffing and provisioning have also adversely affected the attainment of UPE in Kenya. Many schools are grossly understaffed. There have been conflicting estimates of the extent of the teacher shortage with the government claiming that the number of teachers needed is 45, 000 while the Kenya National Union of Teachers puts the estimate at 60,000 (Kimani, 2008). UNICEF estimates a required 31,000 teachers (UNICEF, 2005). Despite the obvious evidence of inadequate personnel audit mechanisms, the undisputed point is that there is a huge teacher shortage for primary schools. The teacher shortage is even more severe in remote rural schools. The 2006 *Economic Survey* reported that the teacher-student ratio in Kenya rose from 1:40 in 2003 to 1:44 by 2005 (GoK, 2006). The situation is grimmer for schools in the arid and semi-arid areas, as well as those in the slums of urban areas, where the ratio could be as high as 1:100 (UNICEF, 2005). Teaching and learning resources are also in short supply in most schools. The UNICEF (2005) report, while decrying the dismally low rates of participation in northern Kenya, also painted a grim picture of the lack of educational resources:

> Dangerously overcrowded facilities compound the problem. At a boarding school in nearby Lodwar, lucky students sleep four to a single bed, while the less fortunate spread blankets outside. At Lokichoggio Girls' Primary School, there is one book for every three students. Latrines are overflowing, and the closest water supply is a kilometer away. (para.5 &13)

Under such circumstances, school authorities have to make hard choices between spending the little money they have on teaching and learning facilities or on hiring teachers. Oft times, head teachers have resorted to diverting funds for supplies and construction to hiring more teachers (Fleshman, 2005). The irony, however, is that while schools struggle with teacher shortages, the country has a large pool of unemployed teachers. It is estimated that over 40,000 qualified teachers are unemployed (Anami, 2010). Since 1998, the government has imposed a freeze on the hiring of teachers. This has been partly a response to fiscal pressures following the increase of teachers' salaries in 1997, as well as part of the wider Public Sector Reform Program (PSRP) initiated in the early 1990's under the Structural Adjustment Program (Mutahaba & Kiragu, 2002).

Relevance

For the majority of children in Kenya, as in other African countries (Ki-Zerbo, 1990), primary school education is terminal. As such, primary education should equip them with adequate life and career skills to lead meaningful lives after school. In reality, however, the education offered in primary schools predominantly aims at preparing the students for secondary school (Sifuna & Sawamura, 2008). Consequently, many children terminate their formal schooling with very little in the way of gainful life skills.

The government has, to its credit, attempted to introduce vocational subjects and to make the primary school curriculum more practically oriented with the introduction of subjects such as woodwork, metalwork, tailoring, agriculture, and business studies. Indeed, part of the reason why the government extended the of primary education cycle to eight years with the introduction of the 8-4-4 system in 1985 was to help children acquire practical knowledge and skills for employment during the eight years of schooling. Unfortunately, such vocational subjects have ended up not being taught due to lack of qualified teachers and lack of properly equipped workshops (Sifuna, 1986). Furthermore, many Kenyans hold negative views of vocational education rooted in the education offered to Africans by the colonialists and missionaries (Sifuna, 1990). The missionaries and colonialists offered vocational education to Africans as part of the wider scheme to keep Africans acquiescent. Moreover, the connotation was that Africans were not smart enough to undertake academic training. Only a select few were chosen for academic training, which enabled them to assume positions of power in the colonial administration to help the colonialists to govern (Sifuna, 1990). Unfortunately, this elitist view of education has taken root and schools, parents, and students are reluctant to invest time and resources in vocational subjects in primary schools even when it would be the most prudent course of action (Olembo & Waudo, 1999). Olembo and Waudo (1999) further noted that this apathy is exacerbated by the realization that many children who complete primary school do not go on to secondary school, nor are they assured of attaining gainful employment. The value of education in relation to employment prospects is therefore being seriously challenged. Indeed, some people have been using the Swahili translation for free education, *elimu ya bure*, which literally translates to "useless education", in jest to deride the quality of the free primary education.

The shortcomings that dot the primary school education landscape raise important questions regarding the quality and relevance of primary education in Kenya. Indeed, there have been concerns that the government has placed too much emphasis on quantitative expansion at the expense of quality, to the extent that "it even appeared that they were pushing over-aged children into school to achieve their goal" (Sifuna & Sawamura, 2008, p. 110).

Narrow View

The final issue that I will address is whether the focus on UPE may have disadvantaged other education sectors and other sectors of the economy. Kenya's progress in primary education has already come at a stiff price. The free school milk program initiated in 1979, for example, was a financial and logistical nightmare for policy makers in the country since the president had decreed a policy without prior consultation and preparation. President Moi's thinking was that the free milk would entice children to attend school. It did, but at a huge cost (Bradshaw & Fuller, 1996). Indeed, the free milk program has been linked to the eventual collapse of the Kenya School Equipment Scheme (KSES), a unit established by the Ministry of Education in 1969 to supply books and other stationery—

pens, pencils, chalk—to schools all over the country. Owing to financial cuts and the extra burden placed on it to distribute milk to primary schools throughout the country, the KSES collapsed (Amutabi, 2003).

In 2003, government spending on primary education jumped by over 360% and overall spending on education and training reached an estimated U.S. $420 million—well over the usual 30% of all government recurrent expenditure. Spending on primary education doubled again in 2004 forcing the government and its development partners to struggle to keep pace with the expanded demand for teachers, books and classrooms (MoEST, 2004). A review of the government *Economic Surveys* shows that public investment in primary schooling increased more than tenfold between 2002 and 2007 (GoK, 2007). Even though the Minister of Education views this massive expenditure as a sign of the government's commitment to achieving the Millennium Development Goals, it may as well be that prioritizing UPE has taken away from the provision of other services such as post-secondary education and health services (Mukudi, 2004).

Even before the advent of free primary education and especially during the 1990s, the World Bank-fronted reforms that called for the privileging of market forces had an adverse effect on educational provision in Kenya. Tertiary education, especially university education, has suffered the brunt of these reforms with substantial cuts in government funding and offloading of the bulk of the cost to students and their families (Ndiragu & Bosire, 2004). The government's financial commitments due to its commitment to free primary education have only worsened a bad situation. Other sectors that have suffered neglect include adult informal education, and vocational technical education (Department of Adult Education, 2003).

This narrow view, which has been the bane of policy making in education in many African countries (Assie-Lumumba, 2008), is indicative of failure to appreciate the inter-dependence between the various levels of education from pre-primary to tertiary education. Moreover, as King and Palmer (2009) noted, the problems bedeviling the education system regarding access, quality, relevance, and outcomes are rather complex and will not be solved by focusing on only one sector but rather through sustained institutional and systemic reform:

> The sheer myriad or critical mass of networked elements that eventually produce change in the physical sphere provide a searing critique that we can apply to those proponents of school reform who are looking to isolate a single critical factor that 'makes a difference', or to those who hope that a single crash programme can deliver universal primary education, or those who believe that the pursuit of just two MDGs can secure a nation's future. In the face of those who argue that one big push by an artificial target date can secure education for all, it is invaluable to reflect on the massive and sustained interventions at every possible level that may be required before the desired change or reform emerges and sustains itself autocatalytically. (p. 115)

Conclusion

The quest for UPE in Kenya has been a considerable success with regard to increased enrolments. Measures such as the free primary education and free school milk programs have had some impact in terms of popularizing primary school attendance. The euphoric response to the introduction of free primary education in 1972 and in 2003 and the introduction of the free school milk program in 1979 witnessed massive enrolments in primary education. However, such increased enrolments were short-lived. Whereas the government and international agencies have praised Kenya's achievements in UPE, particularly with regard to increased enrolments, questions abound regarding the sustainability of the high enrolments. It could be that such high enrolments were merely momentary flashes in response to the free education and milk.

The proposal to introduce vocational education with the 8-4-4 system in 1985 was laudable. However, this ambitious initiative was not matched by financial and logistical commitment. More importantly, no attempt was made to change the pervasive perception among students, their families, the public, and even teachers, that schooling should ideally lead to white-collar jobs and not manual work.

Moreover, important concerns remain regarding equity of access and quality. While it is laudable that enrolment has increased overall, such generalizations gloss over continued inequalities in access to primary education with respect to region, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and gender. Furthermore, emphasizing quantitative expansion of

schooling without putting in place policies and measures to ensure quality render the alleged success of the UPE project a fallacy. Ultimately, it is questionable whether it is feasible or even logical for the country to place such an emphasis on primary education and even to continue offering free primary education at the expense of other levels of education. Such a project smacks more of political grand standing than a genuine effort to universalize education.

A more feasible undertaking, in my opinion, would be to engage in a holistic conceptualization of education for all, and an unpacking of the barriers—institutional, systemic, fiscal, and otherwise—that inhibit the quest for meaningful education for all Kenyans. Such a broad perspective would necessarily imply attempts to institute sustainable initiatives and measures, and a shift from emphasis on UPE to a broader based quest for universal basic education. Such a framework would foreground formal as well as non-formal education initiatives for children as well as adults. Moreover, efforts should be made to link primary education to poverty alleviation and employment, particularly informal sector employment. Ultimately, the quest to universalize basic education should be an inclusive undertaking that prioritizes sustainable initiatives that are of immediate benefit to students and their families, rather than grandiose plans that only serve political expediency.

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