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The potential role of open and distance learning in provision of basic education to vulnerable groups in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

The majority of Kenyans have some education. However, despite the impressive general increase of students' enrolment, courtesy of government's free primary and subsidized secondary schooling initiatives, a significant number of vulnerable persons in Kenya continue to have no or limited access to basic education. Barriers to their participation are partly due to inappropriate and inflexible nature of the formal school model itself. The objective of this paper was to assess the potential role of Open and Distance Learning in the provision of basic education to vulnerable persons in Kenya. Purposive sampling method was used to select the study area. Only secondary data sources were utilized. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Results of the study indicate that, nationally 85% of the women and 92% of men are literate and that more boys than girls attend basic education. Further analysis indicated that although learning institutions increased from 2009 to 2010, 31.34% of learners in pre-primary, 28.36% in primary and 40.30% in secondary are out of school. Further results revealed that 3.9% of the total population are disabled with no basic education or semi-literate. It is concluded that Open and Distance Learning is a cost effective approach to reach all Kenyans with basic education. It is recommended that the Government and other educational stakeholders invest in distance learning infrastructure and design Open and Distance Learning programs that are responsive to emerging educational needs, especially for the vulnerable persons.

Keywords: Basic Education, Distance Learning, Infrastructure, Open Learning, Potential, Vulnerable Groups.

INTRODUCTION

The majority of Kenyans have some education (R.o.K, 2011). Among the most educated people reside in city centers such as Nairobi which hosts most of the highly educated Kenyans. The province of North Eastern however, has the highest number of uneducated persons, which is 78%, of women and 41% of men. Nationally, 85% of women and 92% of men are literate (R.o.K, 2011).

In the Kenyan context, Basic Education refers to all

learning starting from kindergarten through secondary school levels. This education is expected to reach people within the bracket of four to eighteen years. The people in this age bracket are 20,740,751 (53.7 %) of the total population of Kenya, by the latest census of 2009 (R.O.K, 2010), see Table 1 for actual population distribution by age and percentage.

Importantly, whereas basic education may thus be meant for the above noted groups of people, a few individuals above the stated ages do enroll for it. An example at hand is that of the late Mzee Maruge of Eldoret town in the Rift Valley Province of Kenya, who enrolled in class one at the advanced age of eighty four years. Unfortunately he died before he completed the primary school cycle. In Kenya, there are various groups

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Table 1. Distribution of Kenya's Population by Age and Percentage.

Years	Millions	Percentage
00 – 24	24.5	63.5
25 – 44	9.2	23.8
45 – 64	3.5	9.2
65 – 74	0.7	1.9
75 and Above	0.6	1.6

Source: R.o.K (2010).

Table 2. Some Vulnerable Groups of People in Kenya

S/N	Category
1	Marginalized
2	Adolescents
3	Unemployed
4	HIV & AIDS Victims
5	Disabled
6	Poor
7	Uneducated
8	Prisoners
9	Children
10	Women

Source: Integrated by Authors from the Literature

of people within the population who may be categorized as vulnerable. Such people have been influenced by nature, poverty, disease and/or locality, among others. Table 2 consists of some categories of vulnerable groups of people in Kenya. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) concept refers to flexible, learner-friendly approaches employed in the delivery of contents in the process of acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes in order to equip those concerned. From the development point of view, Kenya has embraced education as a pillar for human development towards the realization of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Vision 2030. This is because education imparts knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for individual and nation building. Thus, basic education system starts from pre-primary to primary and secondary. This system is structured to integrate the needs of young people and adults so as to provide the relevant learning and life skills. The objective of this paper therefore was to assess the potential role of Open and Distance Learning in the provision of basic education to vulnerable persons in Kenya.

METHODOLOGY

The Study area

The study analyzed data that covered the entire country

(Kenya). Purposive sampling method was used to select the study area

Data source and analytical approach

Only secondary data sources were utilized. The data were obtained from governments' publications such as Economic Surveys, Statistical Abstracts, publications from the Ministry of Education, Population census reports, and publications from private institutions and individuals. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Abridged analysis of basic education in Kenya

It is important to note that Kenya's population growth rate is high. Currently, the country's annual population growth rate is about one million people (R.o.K, 2010). This phenomenon presents a challenge to Kenya's sustainable socio-economic development, (see table 3) for population distribution between 1969 and 2009. Accordingly, the Ministry of Education's (read Basic Education) expenditure increases by year to match increase in enrollment. For instance, the recurrent

Table 3. Kenya's Population Distribution by Decade and Growth rate (1969-2009).

Decade	Population	Period	Growth
1969	10,942,705	1969-1979	3.4
1979	15,327,061	1979-1989	3.4
1989	21,448,047	1989-1999	2.9
1999	28,686,607	1999-2009	3.0
2009	38,10,097		

Source: R.o.K (2010).

Table 4. Pupil Enrollment in Early Childhood Development Centers.

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Enrollment					
Girls	866,445	876,163	885,320	967,544	1,100,890
Boys	805,891	814,930	834,925	946,678	1,092,181
Total	1,672,336	1,691,093	1,720,245	1,914,222	2,193,071

Source: Compiled from Republic of Kenya (2011)

Table 5. Pupil Enrollment in Primary Schools by Gender and Year

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Enrollment					
Girls	3,78600	4,032800	4,201300	4,322000	4,629300
Boys	3,95700	4,223800	4,362500	4,509400	4,751900
Total	7,74300	8,256600	8,563800	8,831400	9,381200

Source: Republic of Kenya (2011)

Table 6. Secondary School Enrollment by Gender and Year

Year Form	2006		2007		2008		2009		2010	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
1	161,588	137,873	170,650	143,045	207,212	180,461	232,854	202,045	266,707	232,226
2	132,015	119,077	173,165	149,840	196,500	163,164	190,987	212,467	232,145	211,799
3	120,978	115,443	157,572	134,793	181,775	155,798	182,764	156,785	216,786	181,823
4	131,491	111,615	137,304	113,899	161,026	136,275	182,764	154,546	199,333	160,682
	1,030,080		1,180,268		1,382,211		1,515,212		1,701,501	

Source: Compiled from Republic of Kenya (2011)

expenditure increased by 16.0 percent from ksh 115,600.3 million in 2009/10 to ksh 134,111.4 million in 2010/2011 (R.o.K, 2011).

The results of the 2009 census show an increase in basic education attendance at 40% in 2009 compared to 35% in 1999 and 37% in 1989, (see tables 4, 5 and 6 for analyses showing increase in enrollment).

Apparently, more boys than girls in Kenya attend basic education. To better accommodate the learners, increase in the respective learning institutions has been concurrently realized. For instance, whereas there were 71,881 basic education institutions in 2009, in the year 2010, the number increased to 83,318, representing 15.91% increase (R.o.R, 2011), see table 7 for the breakdown.

In spite of increased enrollment and given that the government provides Free Primary Education (FPE) since 2003 and Subsidized Secondary Education (SSE) since 2008, many young Kenyans are out of basic education schooling (Ogenga, 2010). This problem starts at the pre-unit school level where it is noted that enrollment is low (Kojwang, 2005). Precisely, 2.1 million children which is 31.34 percent of the total number are not enrolled (Table 8). In primary schooling too, not all children are enrolled. This is partly attributed to poverty (Ndiku, 2007; Siringi and Macharia, 2007). Accordingly, 1.9 million youngsters which translate to 28.36 percent of the total number of learners expected at school are not enrolled (Table 8). The situation is worse at the secondary school level (R.o.K, 2004). About 2.7 million young adults

Table 7. Increase in number of Basic Education Institutions from 2009 to 2010

Category	Increment		Percentage 26.87%
	From	To	
Pre-primary	38,247	48,523	
Primary	26,663	27,487	3.09%
Secondary	6,971	7,308	4.83%
Total	71,881	,318	15.91%

Source: Republic of Kenya (2011).

Table 8. Number of Learners Out of School in Basic Education

Category	Number of Learners Out of School (Millions)	Percentage
Pre-primary	2.1	31.34
Primary	1.9	28.36
Secondary	2.7	40.30
Total	6.7	100.00

Source: R.O.K (2010).

are not at school. This is about 40.30 percent of the number expected (Table 8).

Coupled with the incidence of poverty (Achoka, et al., 2007; Chege and Sifuna, 2006), at between 31 and 65 percent countrywide, Kenya encounters formidable challenges which erode her effort to meet Education For All (EFA) targets. In spite of her economic growth, the number of people living below the poverty line in Kenya has been rising steadily from 44.7 percent in 1992 to 52 percent in 1997 and to 56 percent in 2002. As noted above, given that about 82 percent of the poor live in rural areas (R.o.K, 2005), it is difficult for them to afford the cost of basic education. Ironically, education is the main exit from poverty (Ogenga and Achoka , 2008; Maiyo, et al., 2007). According to these scenarios, several questions emerge, for example, how are the vulnerable persons in Kenya surviving? Can they contribute effectively to the socio-economic development of the country? Or, can they usefully and comfortably fit in our current Hi-Tech global village without enough knowledge, skills and attitudes?

Worse still, vulnerable Kenyans stand a high risk of contracting the dreaded illnesses such as HIV/AIDS due to lack of education. For example, most of the disabled Kenyans either do not go to school or do not complete basic education cycle because of their special needs. Moreover, HIV/AIDS infections are high among Kenyan women especially those who are: illiterate, widows, divorcees and separated. The majority of these widows are found in Nyanza province which has 14 percent prevalence, double the level of the next highest provinces of Nairobi and Western at 7 percent each (Achoka et al., 2007).

Among the young persons who are divorced, sep-

arated, or widowed, a higher HIV prevalence at 22 percent is observed compared to six percent prevalence among the youth in general. Most importantly, HIV infection is reported even among young persons who have not had sexual intercourse in their lives. By implication, there is some level of infection by non-sexual means of transmission, for example unsafe injections or other blood borne means. More importantly, it is noted that HIV prevalence is high among young people without education (R.o.K, 2010). To overcome this, acquisition of adequate education is imperative. So far conventional formal education has failed to reach all persons in Kenya. Alternative approaches of delivery of basic education should be sought and used to reach the entire citizenry.

Outlines of Some Vulnerable Kenyans

Although vulnerable groups of Kenyans are many (see, for example data in table 2), for our considerations in this article, focus is directed on the disabled and the illiterates. Table 9 consists of data on the noted persons.

In a nutshell, the number of Kenyans with disability is 1.5 million, which is 3.9 percent of the total population (R.o.K, 2010). These Kenyans are among the vulnerable persons. Most of them either have no basic education or are semi-illiterate. In particular, cultural and social stigma keep the disabled away from the public. This is because, disability in most, if not in all communities in Kenya is perceived as ill omen. Moreover, 3.2 million Kenyans are illiterate (R.o.K, 2011). Among them are 2.9 million women and 0.3million men representing 15 and 2 percent of the total population respectively. Most importantly, the majority (82%) of these persons reside in the rural

Table 9. Some Vulnerable Kenyans by Category and Percentage.

S/N	Category	Population in Millions	Percentage
1	Disabled	1.5	31.90
2	Illiterates		
	Women	2.9	61.70
	Men	0.3	6.40
	Total	4.7	100.00

Source: Integrated from R.o.K(2010) and R.o.K (2011)

Table 10. Categories of Disabilities in Kenya by Gender and Percentage

Category	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
Visual	153,783	177,811	331,594	0.86
Hearing	89,840	97,978	187,818	0.49
Speech	86,783	75,020	161,803	0.42
Physical/Self Care	198,071	215,627	413,698	1.08
Mental	75,139	60,954	136,093	0.35
Other	44,073	55,233	99,306	0.26
None	18,402,226	18,679,550	37,081,776	96.54
Total	19,049,915	19,362,173	38,412,088	100.00

Source: R.o.K(2010) and R.o.K (2011)

regions of Kenya (RoK, 2005).

Potential Role of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in Provision of Basic Education to Vulnerable Kenyans

Basic Education is the route to the full development of a people as human beings with social, spiritual, intellectual, and cultural aspirations as well as with economic interests. In these respects, basic education plays a key role in achieving not only personal but also international targets as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In developing nations such as Kenya, it is concurrently realized that traditional or conventional educational systems no longer suffice to bring an education to all persons. Hence, the need for unique approaches in order to create a knowledge – based society (Khan and Gul, 2006), cannot be overemphasized. Be that as it may, Open and Distance Learning has emerged handy as an alternative approach in increasing education opportunities to reach the unreached, marginalized, and excluded groups of citizens. This is because Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has the potentiality to bring education to all kinds of persons, their individual and or special needs notwithstanding. Its flexibility makes it a convenient and all inclusive approach to learning. Hence, the recipients of basic education through ODL may include: school – age children, the youth and even adults that are unable to attend conventional schools, persons who are geographically dispersed, urban and rural folks

alike among others. As a developing nation, Kenya can find ODL most suitable, cost-effective approach to disseminate basic education as an entitlement to the entire populace. It is partly in recognition of the plight of especially developing countries like Kenya, that UNESCO backs ODL initiatives to enhance the priority to ensure that the right to Education For All is realized (UNESCO 2002), and persons that are deprived of basic education benefit. Thus, in the recent past decades, there has been a noticeable growth in ODL the world over (Fozdar and Kumar, 2006; Cavanaugh, 2005); Kenya should not play the exception role. Infact, for Kenya, ODL should not only be used as an alternative to formal schooling system but also as a way to further continuing education for the masses who find themselves among the vulnerable.

Moreover, Kenya has many vulnerable persons (Achoka, et al., 2007). Among them are the disabled, illiterate and those who are out of school. Their vulnerability is worsened by challenges such as poverty and lack of education. Since education in Kenya is provided largely through formal schooling, alternative delivery initiatives are likely to alleviate the situation. For that matter, ODL is the best alternative to ensure that vulnerable citizens get basic education.

According to UNESCO (2002), ODL concept reflects the fact that all or most teaching is conducted by someone removed in time and space with the learner. The benefits are numerous for instance, covers educational approaches that reach learners in places that are convenient, provides learning resources, can be accessed by many people at once, it is flexible; it is cost-

effective, increases opportunity to ensure Education For All (EFA), increases chances for individual learning and overcomes geographical distance as well as cultural and social barriers.

It should be noted that attainment of global targets such as Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Universal Primary Education (UPE), and elimination of gender disparities in primary and secondary schools preferably by 2005 and at all levels by 2015 are dependent not only on mass enrollment drives as is the practice in Kenya, but also on targeting and reaching those vulnerable persons within the society. ODL approaches provide ideal strategies to reach all people countrywide. Infact, as hope to achieve the MDGs by 2015 fades away, there has been increased policy interest in ODL (Kratli and Dyer, 2006; UNESCO, 2002), to facilitate acquisition of basic education by as many people as possible, if not all (Carr-Hill and Peart, 2005), the world over. Furthermore, the disabled, illiterate, and out of school Kenyans have their right to basic education, which should free them from ignorance of not knowing themselves and the world around them. This is because basic education has the potential to enable vulnerable persons to acquire necessary skills and knowledge to address issues such as renewable energy generation, management of water and farming, sustainable agriculture, healthy living, financial management, investments, and other issues they wish to pursue in development processes. In Kenya's dispensation of the new constitution, ODL shall enhance participants' learning in significant aspects such as law and citizens' rights, governance, conflict resolution in families, groups and communities, the rights of others, health and well-being issues to avoid diseases and to keep healthy.

Besides the long time approaches such as correspondence by postal mail, radio and daily news prints, emergence of new approaches have been realized to the benefit of the learner. They include: e-mails, World Wide Web, school based courses, evening programmes and modular learning. However, these efforts have not yet captured all concerned. This is because so far ODL approaches used are to a large extent exclusive to the few who are able to access education. The critical question then to ponder is, where and how can ODL be best mounted to reach all citizens? ODL can be mounted anywhere there are citizens. Such places may include: church/mosque centers; market centers; local administrative centers; village centers; formal school centers; and, homes. Besides the old methods of learning through ODL, other new ones may include: village barazas, local development groupings like "chama" (read specific people with similar intentions) for those concerned, public discussions and lecture forums, video/cinema and other audio visual recordings, print materials, voicemail, e-mail and fax.. ODL therefore, can be used to disseminate knowledge, skills, and attitudes to large numbers of people at different convenient learning

places including residences. Better still, the learners can access education at times that are convenient to them. For instance, learners can be able to study at the same time stay with their families, raise their own families and, keep their respective current employment for earning a living. Such ODL initiatives are most likely than not, to enhance Kenya's ambition to match international competitiveness of becoming knowledge – based society.

Accordingly, the vulnerable people of Kenya, for example, the physically challenged can access basic education more easily today than yesteryears. In this way, vulnerable persons would reduce severity of their vulnerability. Even the poor people would have a chance through ODL to access basic education based on their financial ability. Illiterate Kenyans too, can access basic education at their convenience without fear or stigmatization. In these ways, ODL can empower all Kenyans to better participate in national socio-economic development for today and tomorrow.

CONCLUSIONS

As Kenya focuses on fulfillment of Vision 2030 as well as implementing her new constitution, basic education becomes her indispensable tool for action. Although basic education enrolments have increased since 1969 and most Kenyans (85 per cent of women and 92 per cent of men) have some education, the normal, conventional methods, have failed to reach all Kenyans. Consequently, there are Kenyans who are illiterate, or out of school, or with too little an education.

Open and Distance Learning (ODL), has the potential to reach every Kenyan regardless of gender, location, culture, perception, age and time among other factors that are prohibitive within the conventional learning approaches. As such, ODL makes it possible to reach vulnerable persons within the society, in Kenya and it is also a cost-effective approach for acquisition of education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Suggested below are some of the approaches that could be used to enhance provision of basic education to especially vulnerable Kenyans:

- (1) There is need for the government and other education stakeholders to invest in Open and Distance Learning infrastructure.
- (2) Through the Ministry of Education, the government should design and develop ODL programmes for the geographically inaccessible citizens.
- (3) There is need for the government, to evaluate ODL programmes and ensure that they are responsive to emerging educational needs, especially those of vulnerable persons.

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