Looking Backwards and Forwards: Gainers and Losers in Tanzania's Primary Education System

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Abstract
This paper takes a historical view to examine the primary education system on Tanzania Mainland with a view to highlighting the gainers from and losers in this system. The paper will first provide a contextual analysis of Tanzania's primary education system. In this process, the paper examines the key foundational principles that have shaped the education system in Tanzania from the colonial to the post-colonial period and it highlights the educational policies aimed at encouraging children's engagement with primary schooling. The paper further examines what seems to have worked or not worked in ensuring access to quality education by all. In the second part of the presentation, the paper examines the losers and gainers from the current primary education system. Finally, the paper makes a projection of the way forward before the concluding remarks are presented.

Introduction

Education is recognised as the foundation of economic development in any society: it facilitates the acquisition of the skills and attitudes necessary to facilitate innovation and, hence, raise national productivity; it offers individuals the opportunity to access a better life; it is a means of overcoming household poverty and raising the standard of living; and it is also the basis for improving public health and facilitating the use of new technologies (Omari, 1999; Watkins, 2000; Wedgwood, 2007; Rose &Dyer, 2008). Arguably, education is the most powerful catalyst for poverty reduction; conversely, educational deprivation is equally a powerful cause of poverty (Omari, 1999; Watkins, 2000; Avenstrup, 2006; Rose et al. 2008). The existing literature maintains that the effect of investing in education outweighs economic investment (Watkins, 2000; Galabawa, 2005). Indeed, the various anticipated benefits of investing in primary education for the community and individuals suggest the need for a good education system. This system of education is expected to promote quality education. In this connection, a sound, equitable primary education system is fundamental for a nation that wants to be economically, politically and socially independent. Tanzania is no different in this regard. A good education system is one that is well-planned to ensure that pupils from various socio-economic backgrounds can access education, learn, and acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes for becoming economically, politically and socially productive.

Various ways of financing education such as total government financing and provision have been identified. However, it is worth noting here that the provision of free primary education

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by the government alone is insufficient to ensure quality and access to school for children from different social and geographical groups. Notably, the parents play a determining role in whether or not their children enrol in school, attend regularly, are committed to school and complete a given cycle of education (Lloyd & Blanc, 1996; Willms, 2003). Hence, the need to involve parents in encouraging their children's engagement is fundamental. However, evidence from Tanzania confirms that the government's commitment to parental involvement is poorly defined in the educational policies (Galabawa & Agu, 2001; Omari, 2002). It has been noted that there is no clear policy regarding this matter and, hence, very little parental involvement in children's education. The situation is worse in public primary schools, where parents are less involved in their children's educational matters (Kironde, 2001; Omari & Mosha, 2008). In this paper, the author argues that the failure to involve parents in public primary schools might increase the number of "losers" in Tanzania's education system.

The education system in Tanzania
This part of the paper examines Tanzania's primary education system in different phases: pre-independence, post-colonial and the liberalisation of education era, when market forces were allowed to drive education. It also examines poverty alleviation strategies with a view to exploring the extent to which the system provides access to children from different social, geographical and economic backgrounds.

The pre-independence education system in Tanzania
Prior to independence, schools were owned by missionaries and voluntary agencies. Historically, the African education system was generally aimed at imparting skills and providing knowledge to enable them to become productive servants of the state (Mbunda, 1978). Hence, education was aimed at getting a few Africans to assist the colonial government. The three aims of education were: (1) to train individuals to serve in the colonial state as clerks and junior officials; (2) to train individuals for the propagation of religion; and (3) to inculcate the values of the colonial master, including subservience (Mbunda, 1978, p. 67).

In this phase, education was not considered a necessity in terms of the majority of Tanzanians; it was segregated and the policies had no tendency of encouraging children's engagement with school. Hence, very few children were enrolled and, of these, very few survived a given cycle of education. For example, a 1960 World Bank study (cited in Maliyamkono & Mason, 2006, p.398) revealed that only 45 percent of school-age children were enrolled in Standard I, but only 33 percent reached Standard IV and just 3.5 percent reached Standard 12. The education system was pyramidal in shape, whereby the number of children enrolled decreased as they progressed up the levels.

There were separate schools for various racial groups. Inequalities were evident in terms of the educational opportunities and government expenditure among the various racial groups. Whereas all European and Asian children were enrolled in school, only 40 percent of African

school-age children were enrolled (Mbunda, 1978). Further evidence suggests that, within African schools, there were inequalities in terms of gender, as only a few girls were enrolled in school. Likewise, there was inequality in terms of region, as most of the schools were constructed in Kilimanjaro, Kagera and Mbeya. Indeed, schools were constructed in regions that were climatically and geographically conducive for the missionaries. Since education targeted a few people and was characterised by inequality and segregation, most African children from poor rural areas failed to benefit from such schooling. Moreover, most of those who were enrolled attended bush schools, with no qualified teachers, and the education they received had little relevance in terms of the skills and knowledge needed in the Tanzanian context (Mbunda, 1978).

Post-Independence (Immediate Post-Independence 1961-66)
The post-independence period was mainly characterised by policies aimed at re-addressing the discriminatory and irresponsible legacy of the colonial education system. One of these responses was the adoption of the Racial Integration Act in 1962, which aimed at ensuring there was equity by abolishing racial discrimination in the provision of education. In this phase, the government strove to increase the manpower to fill the colonial positions. Hence, this phase was generally characterised by an expansion in the number of secondary schools. At the level of primary education, the local authorities were encouraged to build more middle schools and Standard VIII was phased out (Mbunda, 1978).

Basically, the main feature of this phase was de-racialisation and the nationalisation of education. This education system encouraged more children to engage with school as compared with the colonial period. The data show that the number of children attending primary school rose from 486,470 in 1961 to 740,991 in 1967 (an increase of 34%). Also, the number of primary schools rose by 16 percent i.e., from 3,238 in 1961 to 3,865 in 1967 (Mbunda, 1978). Similarly, the percentage of girls in primary schools rose from 35 percent in 1961 to 38.7 percent in 1966. However, the increase in the number of children enrolled in primary school was not matched by an increase in the number of students attending secondary school. Most Standard VII leavers were not absorbed by the secondary education system. For example, statistics show that 29,367 and 41,083 pupils completed Standard VII in 1965 and 1966, respectively. Among these only 458 (1.6%) and 712 (5.7%) pupils were selected to join secondary schools (URT, 1982). Even then, they acquired knowledge that was less applicable in their home villages. As a result, most of them migrated to the urban areas (Mbunda, 1978).

Education for Self-Reliance (1967 to mid-1980s)
In 1967, the Tanzanian government adopted the Arusha Declaration, which called for the renovation of the country's economy. The main agenda was to build a self- reliant nation, based on the principles of Ujamaa (African socialism) and self-reliance (*Kujitegemea*). The Arusha Declaration aimed at guiding Tanzania in the war against its three national arch-enemies: poverty, ignorance and disease. In this phase, education was considered the primary

springboard for achieving the goal of a better life based on egalitarian principles. The introduction of Education for Self-Reliance (ESR) aimed at extending educational access to all, irrespective of their socio-economic or geographical background. ESR also sought to integrate work and school learning and enable graduates to use their acquired skills to become self-reliant and confident and to cherish local knowledge and indigenous science (Lwaitama, 2004). The policy emphasised the need for curriculum reform to integrate theory with the acquisition of practical life skills.

In 1974, the government adopted the Musoma Resolution, which set the goal of achieving Universal Primary Education (UPE) by 1987. The UPE policy, whose implementation started in earnest in 1977, required every child aged 7-13 to be enrolled in school. This initiative was further reinforced by the 1978 Government Enrolment Act, which insisted on compulsory enrolment and regular school attendance. In practice, the 1977 UPE policy succeeded in promoting the schooling of children from different socio-economic and geographical backgrounds. As a result of these concerted efforts, more children were enrolled in school. Subsequently, the total primary school population rose from 1,228,886 in 1974 to 3,553,144 in 1983, an increase of 189 percent (Sumra, 2000, p.93). Unfortunately, these achievements were short-lived and were eroded by the economic and financial crisis that hit the country from the late 1970s onwards. The government lost its ability to finance various public social services, including education. For example, the dramatic increase in enrolment was undercut by a critical shortage of teachers, textbooks, classrooms and other resources. In fact, although statistics indicate that the number of children enrolled in primary school during the UPE thrust increased, some of the children aged between seven and 13 were never enrolled. In 1979, for example, the gross enrolment ratio (GER) was 93 percent, suggesting that seven percent of school-age children were not in school (Maliyamkono & Mason, 2006).

These weaknesses in ESR and its extended UPE policies attracted criticism from education practitioners, who said that these were responsible for the declining quality of education in Tanzania. Arguably, UPE resulted in the complete neglect of quality issues. In fact, the policies resulted in two opposite tendencies: whereas nearly all school-age Tanzanian children were enrolled in school, the percentage of pupils who dropped out increased greatly. It has been noted that 26 out of every 100 pupils dropped out before completing Standard VII (Sumra, 2000). The majority of these dropouts were from poor households.

Liberalisation Policies (Mid 1980s-mid 1990s)

Following the 1970s economic and financial crises, the government in the mid-1980s was forced to shift from socialist to liberalisation policies. In consequence, public expenditure on the provision of social services was reduced and the fiscal responsibility for social services was passed from the central government to the beneficiaries. Fees for all social services, including education, under the veil of cost-sharing, were introduced in 1993. This shift in policy negatively affected social service provision. In primary education, *inter alia*, children's tendency

to disengage from school increased. Mbilinyi (1999, p.24) listed the following consequences of the cost-sharing measures in primary education:

1) Children were either removed from school or not enrolled at all;
2) Children were sent home for not paying their school fees; hence, skipping school became common;
3) Poor families were forced to reduce their spending on health and nutrition to finance education;
4) Instead of teaching, the teachers' time was spent on collecting and managing fees;
5) The relationship and trust between parents and schools/local education authorities worsened, thus affecting their partnership potential;
6) Equity goals were undermined as the poor were increasingly unable to afford education.

The statistics show that cost-sharing measures resulted in a dramatic drop in enrolment and an increase in the dropout rate. Out of every 100 primary school-age children, only 56 were enrolled, with only 38 completing primary school, and only six proceeding to secondary school (Kuleana, 1999). Furthermore, the GER, which had increased from 33 percent in 1970 to 94 percent in 1981, had dropped to 62 percent by 1998. Also, the Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) dropped from the peak of 68 percent in 1991 to 46 percent in 1998 (Sumra, 2000: 94). Inevitably, the disengagement from school was higher among children from poor households than their well-to-do counterparts.

In addition, following the cost-sharing measures, the country was characterised by structural differentiation between rural and urban as well as between the rich and poor (Omari, 1999; Malekela & Ndeki, 2001). It has been noted that children in urban areas and those belonging to the middle class elite had a greater chance of being enrolled, attending schools with well-equipped classrooms and sufficient teaching and learning resources, being properly fed, wearing clean, neat school uniforms, possessing sufficient basic equipment and completing their primary education (Omari, 1999). These disparities in terms of school buildings and other learning facilities are attributable to the variation in the financial ability and commitment of the councils and members of the community to supplement government funding (Galabawa, 2000). The differentiation in terms of the children's engagement with school and their physical preparation was due to variations in the socio-economic backgrounds of the children's parents.

Poverty Alleviation Strategies (Late 1990s-2025)
Following the problems experienced during the cost-sharing period and the need to meet the United Nations (UN)'s Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of achieving UPE by 2025, the Tanzania Government, in collaboration with the donor community and international financial institutions, drew up the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) in 2000. The strategy was adopted to acknowledge that, *inter alia*, primary education is instrumental in strengthening human capabilities and reducing poverty. To achieve this goal, the government introduced the Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP) in 2002, through which the primary education sector underwent major education and financial reforms that resulted in the rejuvenation of primary education. The government abolished all fees and direct financial

contributions to primary schools. Such PEDP measures have contributed significantly to increasing children's engagement with school, especially those from poor backgrounds. It was noted that the GER reached 105.3 percent and 106.3 percent in 2003 and 2004, respectively, while the NER reached 88.5 percent and 90.5 percent in the same years (URT, 2005). The PEDP opened the door to education for more children, especially those from disadvantaged households. In 2005, the government further launched the National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (NSGRP) with the same aim of empowering people to fight against poverty, ignorance and disease. In relation to education, the strategy sought to achieve UPE as a means of empowering children, thereby promoting national development and individual well-being. In this phase, the statistics confirmed an increase in children's engagement with school, as in 2007, the GER was 97.3 percent and the NER was 114 percent (URT, 2007).

These efforts notwithstanding, these figures and evidence from elsewhere suggests that during this phase some school-age children were not enrolled in school, others were enrolled but attended school irregularly and others dropped out of school before they completed the seven years of primary education (URT, 2005; Maliyamkono et al., 2006; URT, 2007; Oketch & Rolleston, 2007). Indeed, an analysis of the poverty alleviation strategy shows that, despite the government's attempts to finance primary education and waive all primary school fees and school contributions, many children continued to disengage from school (URT, 2007). The factors behind this setback include the financial status of families, as well as cultural, human and social capital (Teachman, 1987; Dachi, 2000; Cooper et al, 2007; Bakker, Denessen & Brus-Laeven, 2007; Garcial-Reid, 2007; Lindberg, 2004). Hence, the unavailability of these resources among families could explain why children continued to disengage from school, regardless of the government's capitation and development grants. This paper, therefore, identifies and discusses the losers and gainers from the current education system in Tanzania.

Gainers from Tanzania's primary education system
This section discusses the gainers from Tanzania's education system in the poverty alleviation phase. From the above review, the gainers can be categorised into five groups: (1) Children from well-off families; (2) Children who live in urban and semi-urban areas; (3) Children from literate families; (4) Children from families with positive values and attitudes and an interest in education; (5) Children from families who are aware of their educational responsibilities; and (6) Children who are monitored and protected.

Children from well-off families
Children from these families are sure of being provided with food, school uniforms, exercise books and other school equipment. They are also more likely to be enrolled in good schools, including English-medium schools, to receive tuition, and to be motivated and encouraged by their families to work hard at school, hence passing the Standard VII examinations and proceeding to higher levels of education.

Children who live in urban and semi-urban areas

Children who live in urban and semi-urban areas are more likely to attend schools with facilities such as classrooms, textbooks, desks and teachers. Hence, assuming that everything remains constant, the children in these areas are more likely to be enrolled, attend school regularly, learn and successfully complete Standard VII.

Children from literate families

Families who are literate are more likely to provide academic support and instil in their children a positive commitment to school. In fact, it has been established that children whose parents completed Standard VII are more likely to attend school regularly and are less likely to drop out than their counterparts whose parents never did so (Komba, 2010).

Children from families with positive attitudes and values and an interest in education

Children from these families are more likely to receive parental support for their educational activities at home and at school. Families with positive attitudes and values and an interest in their children's education are more likely to enrol their children in school and willingly participate in various education-related activities. They can provide their children with basic school needs, instil in their children a positive schooling culture by conversing with them, monitor their children's progress and out-of-school activities and insist on regular school attendance, taking any necessary remedial steps to help them (Komba, 2010). Positive parental attitudes and values and an interest in their children's education act as a buffer against the negative impact of a lack of schooling. In fact, families who value education are more likely to sacrifice their immediate and ultimate needs to support their children's education and it is also more likely that the children will also value their parents' sacrifices (Furstenberg, 2005). This means that the parents' sacrifices are translated into their children's obligation to work hard and, hence, succeed at school. Such parents' positive attitudes, values and interest are more important in supporting children's educational activities than their material circumstances, as they carry more weight than parental income (Graham, 1991).

Children from families who are aware of their educational responsibilities

Children from families, who are aware of their educational responsibilities, are more likely to benefit from attending school regularly. Parents are responsible for discussing with their children what they have learnt at school, urging regular school attendance, motivating them to work hard at school and communicating with them about their schoolwork. Although parents are responsible for instilling in their children a positive commitment to school, most parents from disadvantaged households fail to do so for a variety of reasons (Komba, 2010). As a result, their children are more likely to disengage from school.

Children who are monitored and protected
In Tanzania, children's education is affected by a number of factors outside the home. These factors are commonly referred to as neighbourhood dangers (Garcial-Reid, 2007). They include poor peer groups, income-earning activities, clubs and bars where children can pay to watch video shows and the men or women who lure girls and boys into engaging in premature sexual activity. Hence, children who attend school in areas where community members and parents collaborate with one another to monitor and protect children from such dangers are more likely to attend and finish their primary education.

"Losers" in the primary education system
The losers in the current primary education system are also discussed under five sub-sections: (1) Children from illiterate communities; (2) Children from communities in which illiterate individuals flourish in life; (3) Children from poor households; (4) Children with illiterate parents; (4) Children from families with negative attitudes, low values and a lack of interest in education matters; and (5) children from communities with counter school cultural practices.

Children from illiterate communities
These are children who live in communities in which the majority of members have never attended school, where the people who have a better life are those who have never attended school and those from families who completed Standard VII and yet remained poor in the villages (Komba, 2010). Children and families from these communities rarely connect a bright future with education. Consequently, the parents encourage their children to drop out to engage in short-term activities which they believe render a better return than education. Likewise, some families are unwilling to spread their thin resources on their children's education, preferring to encourage their children to undertake quick-earning activities, killing their children's desire for an education in the process (Komba, 2010). On the whole, the imprecise economic returns from investing in children's education may make poor families reluctant to spend money on it (Lloyd et al, 1996).

A study by Komba (2010) established that the success enjoyed by illiterate individuals in life tended to affect children's valuing of education and pupils' commitment to school, in addition to discouraging families from enrolling their children in school since they mistakenly believe that success is guaranteed even without a formal education. The situation is compounded by the lack of ideal educated role models in such communities, which tends to make the families fail to appreciate the benefits of education, hence engendering negative attitudes towards the education of their children.

Children from poor households
Generally, poverty interferes with the family's ability to support and be involved in their children's education, a tendency which affects children's commitment to school. The lack of sustainable income is detrimental to children's commitment to school in the following ways:

Firstly, poverty interferes with the parents' ability to enrol their children in school because they cannot afford it or they fail to support their children's education once enrolled. In Tanzania, poor families also tend to have larger families, hence compromising their ability to afford to educate their children. In fact, many of these poor families enrol their children simply to avoid government sanctions. As a result, many children are enrolled but without ever being encouraged to attend school.

Secondly, poverty forces many parents to focus on the immediate family needs and may even encourage their children to miss school to pursue financial gain, by letting them engage in various activities that supplement the family income to help meet basic needs. Hence, some children drop out in order fully to participate in those activities. Arguably, for the poor, schooling is a 'hit-and-miss' affair (Sachs, 2005) as attending school may depend on how strongly they are needed to perform household activities and other productive ventures. In areas where artisanal gold mining takes place, the common slogan is "gold first, agriculture next and education last". In these areas, getting gold constitutes an end itself, and everything in life rolled up into one.

Thirdly, the families heavily involved in various activities to obtain food tend to leave home early in the morning and return late in the evening with little time to check whether their children had attended school, or even done their homework (Komba, 2010). Single parent families, large families and aged leaders of households also face difficulties in following up on the progress of their children in school. In other words poverty is a threat to parental involvement in the school welfare of their children (Cooper et al, 2007). The lack of parental participation in educational activities at home may create the impression that education was unimportant, which may therefore affect children's attitudes, values and commitment to education.

Fourthly, family poverty tends to limit their ability to make financial contributions to the school and find time to volunteer to help out or attend school meetings. Without parental contributions, whether monetary or in kind, many of the schools in Tanzania end up with poorly-furnished, dilapidated classrooms, where some pupils squat on the floor or ground, an environment that rarely motivates children to work hard in school. Inevitably, the deteriorating quality of primary education contributes to declining enrolment and pupils' tendency to drop out (Mulaa, 2008).

Fifthly, poverty interferes with the family's ability to provide a comfortable, safe and protective home environment. The children from poor households live in poor houses. In fact, it is normal for a two-bed-roomed house to house more than 10 people. Some sleep on poor beds made of ropes and mats. In these households, the children are never provided with educational-related equipment at home (tables, chairs or books). Hence, the home environment is neither safe nor

secure. The home environment is arguably a part of the family's material resources that reflect the parental commitment to investing in their children's education and general well-being (Dufur, 2001). Arguably, the general cleanliness and safety of the home environment influences children's educational development, and enhances positive schooling outcomes in addition to reducing the children's behavioural problems. Furthermore, the home environment is where children's daily experiences occur and the availability of educational-related materials facilitates their intellectual stimulation. As such, a poor home environment coupled with the lack of educational-related materials means that the children enrol in school when they are poorly prepared to remain and succeed there. Not surprisingly their commitment also suffers in the process.

Sixthly, poverty limits the family's ability to provide their children with basic school equipment, let alone ensure that they are physically prepared to participate in the learning process. As a result, such children attend school with insufficient exercise-books and pens, without school uniforms or in torn, dirty ones, bare-foot or wearing slippers and, in most cases, without breakfast and stay at school for eight hours without lunch. This lack of basic school equipment contributes to the irregular attendance of some pupils and the inclination to drop out since such poverty-stricken pupils are required to work to purchase their school equipment. Female pupils might be tempted to engage in sexual activities to get some of the basic necessities and ultimately drop out of school due to pregnancy.

Finally, poverty tends to make many families and children undervalue education. Despite the introduction of community-based secondary schools aimed at taking education to the grassroots at ward level, many parents still find secondary education expensive as they are unable to bear the costs (Komba, 2010). In fact, most parents from poor households are unsure as to whether they would be able to afford to send their children to secondary school, although they knew that primary education alone would never liberate their children from poverty. Such perceptions might affect the family's values, priorities and ultimately their willingness to invest in their children's primary education, which might interfere with their children's commitment to school. It should also be noted that the provision of free education by the government does not necessarily guarantee that children from poor households will engage positively with school. Thus, the parents have to see the benefits of education for them and for their children to free their children from full engagement in household chores and income-generating activities to allow them to primarily concentrate on schooling (Lloyd et al, 1996).

Children with illiterate parents
Generally, the lack of schooling on the part of parents limits their ability to participate in their children's home learning, so much so that some believe that educational provision is the sole responsibility of the teachers and that all learning ends at school. Furthermore, parents' lack of schooling can make the majority of teachers uncomfortable involving them in their children's education-related matters. As a result, the children are never given homework; instead most schools direct their efforts at involving parents in school construction. Evidently, there is a lack

of trust between teachers and parents on the role of the latter in children's education. This lack of mutual trust affects the level of parental support for their children's education (Pong, 1998). In fact, parents can effectively support their children's education when they believe that the teachers trust that they are central to it, and when they believe that their role in helping to educate their children is crucial.

In short, parents' lack of schooling might eventually turn their children into "losers" in the education system, despite the bright prospects on offer even for those from poor backgrounds. Sadly, such parents probably do not see the need for schooling, hence denying their children the inalienable right to education. In fact, some illiterate parents do not see why they should send their children to school, let alone support or encourage them to attend school regularly when they eventually enrol them there. Thus when their children dislike school, it is easy to trace the source of such an attitude.

Negative attitudes, low value and lack of interest
Another group of "losers" in the Tanzania primary education system constitutes those children whose parents have never valued education and who are generally uninterested in their children's education. These parents never participate in any educational-related activities either at home or school. The parents' negative attitudes, low value they place on education and their lack of interest in it might limit their positive support for their children's education, and in turn undermine their children's commitment to school in three ways.

Firstly, such parents are probably unwilling to send their children to school, and when they do, they will never encourage them to remain in school, let alone support them in terms of providing basic school necessities. Such families may opt not to enrol their children in school or to take them out of school at some stage. In fact, despite government measures and sanctions to ensure compulsory enrolment and attendance, studies confirm that families with negative attitudes towards education use various ways to cheat the system by hiding their children to avoid enrolling them in school or removing them from school for one reason or another. Such parents can take their children out of school without requesting an official transfer. Some families conspire during the school enrolment census by declaring that, although there were children living in their homes, they would be returning to their own families, and so there was no point in enrolling them. Some families register their children and then move to other, more distant villages when time for school comes to avoid putting them in school (Komba, 2010). Thus, parents' negative attitudes contribute to pupils' non-enrolment, truancy, lack of commitment to school and to them dropping out of school.

Secondly, some parents spend the few resources at their disposal on luxuries, such as alcohol or taking several wives, and direct their efforts at other activities, forgetting about their children's education, which is also one of their responsibilities. Some of these parents rarely inspect their

children's exercise-books, discuss their schooling, receive and read their reports, let alone encourage or take action regarding their progress, as indicated in the children's school reports. Such conduct and attitudes tend to interfere with the children's schooling and can take a toll on their commitment to education.

Children attending schools which lack a social network among the parents

Studies show that in most public schools, families never co-operate with each other or with the teachers concerning their children's education (Komba, 2010). The common tendency is for each family to work alone. This lack of collaboration signals a lack of trust and networks in the community (Coleman, 1988, 1991). Preventing families from obtaining information from teachers and other members of the community on the importance of children's education and how to participate in enhancing children's engagement with school can be detrimental to the children's educational prospects (Mozumder & Halim, 2006). Arguably, the network among parents serves as a tool for empowering families who have never been to school, who do not value education, and who have a negative attitude towards their children's education (Mozumder et al, 2006).

Furthermore, lack of collaboration is also a disadvantage to children who live with families who are not well-informed about the benefits of education and/or are poor. Financially, this implies that, once a family is unable to support its children's education, there is no way it can expect support from neighbours or other members of the community. Similarly, if a family is ignorant of the benefits of education or has developed a negative attitude towards education due to poverty, it cannot expect to receive support, information or advice from other members of the community. Hence, children from these families may end up neither supported nor encouraged to attend school, which may limit their commitment to school.

Children from families and communities with counter-school cultural practices

Children's education is further affected by counter-school cultural practices. Among others, these practices include girls' socialisation into adult roles. In fact, some traditions forbid fathers from having any contact with their daughters who have reached puberty. There are also some traditions that prohibit children's formal schooling.

Some culturally based girls' socialisation events cause them to miss school to attend some rites of passage ceremonies, including initiations into puberty. There is also evidence that some of these ceremonies contribute to teenage pregnancies, resulting in these girls being expelled from school (Komba, 2010). At these initiation ceremonies, the children are taught sexual skills, often above what is appropriate for their age. As a result, curious girls are motivated to put into practice what they had learnt, often with some relative abandon that makes them vulnerable to early pregnancies, let alone sexually-transmitted diseases. Once pregnant, the girls often see

their dreams of acquiring formal education go up in smoke. Their families often spend their meagre resources on conducting these ceremonies instead of on the education of their girls, which many poor families are often unwilling to do.

Some ethnic groups even forbid fathers from talking to or spending time with their daughters who have reached puberty (Komba, 2010). In fact, when the girls reach puberty, they move into huts outside the main family home. The freedom the girls get allows them to behave as they wish, as there is no father or mother-figure to monitor their nocturnal activities. Once pregnant, these girls also lose the prospect they had of receiving a formal education. Until recently, in some communities, the traditions and customs have made girls the "losers" in the Tanzanian education system.

There is also evidence to the effect that, among the Maasai, there is a tradition which deliberately prohibits children's schooling. Maasai girls and the oldest son of the family are usually not allowed to attend school. Traditionally, the oldest son is expected to inherit the family's wealth (cattle). According to this ethnic group, sending the oldest son to school will lead to him ignoring their traditions and customs. The families believe that, upon completing school, boys will never return home to tend to the family's cattle. Girls, on the other hand, can be enrolled in school up to a certain point as they are not expected to attend secondary school. In fact, some girls are enrolled in school when they were already engaged to be married, which limits their chances of completing primary school, let alone going to secondary school.

Looking ahead

To ensure universal access to education, the government needs to take several measures in a concerted manner. Firstly, it needs to implement strategies that will help improve the income of poor families, who constitute the majority, to empower them to support their children's schooling. Without a sustainable income, many poor households fail to effectively participate in the educational activities of their children. In a situation of abject poverty, how can families divert their efforts from struggling to meet the immediate family needs (food) to investing in a long-term enterprise (education)? There is no doubt that these families need help to raise their income to sustainable levels. Even when education is free from the government's point of view, parents are still expected to bear some of the educational costs.

Secondly, the school authorities should honour the government's promise to provide free primary education by removing all financial contributions payable to the schools. Although many primary education circulars state that education is free, in reality, parents are required to make various contributions, which is counter-productive because poor households are unable to meet these additional costs and so children are not able to attend school.

Thirdly, there is a need to educate families on the private and social returns of investing in education in order to motivate them. The mass media such as radio programmes that reach

even remote areas could be used to explain the benefits of education for the children, their families and society as a whole. This strategy of educating and motivating parents may also serve as a sustainable way of encouraging pupils' engagement with school. Fostering children's enrolment and regular school attendance by chastising their parents (by fining them or taking them to court) and punishing the children (by whipping them) constitute temporary methods that in the long run prove ineffective. Indeed, despite these punitive actions, a number of pupils are still disengaging from school and families have found ways of outwitting the system.

Fourthly, there is a need to educate children on the benefits of education for society, themselves and their families. This could be achieved by adding a topic on education in subjects such as general studies.

Fifthly, there is a need to initiate and adopt legislation, policies and circulars on education that explicitly state that parents' involvement in their children's educational activities is compulsory in addition to delineating the their educational responsibilities. The schools should be provided with official documents outlining the family's responsibilities in relation to the welfare of their school-going children.

Sixthly, there is a need to strengthen the home/school partnership by encouraging families to participate in various educational activities. Empirical evidence shows that a poor linkage between the school and families is one of the key reasons for children's disengagement from school.

Seventhly, there is a need to cultivate the trust between families and networks and to sensitise them on the fact that, according to African social values, child-rearing is a communal responsibility. Collaboration among community members will help protect children from various factors that might interfere with their schooling. Indeed, co-operation among families will enable them to work together in encouraging pupils' engagement with school in addition to shielding them from practices harmful to their schooling.

Eighthly, there is a need to provide districts, schools and children with differential grants. In this regard, there is a need to establish criteria for measuring the educational needs of each child, school and district. Doing so would facilitate the formulation of formulae for distributing grants that would take into account variations in need, thereby providing more grants for schools and districts with greater need.

Finally, there is a need to engage parents in socialising and instilling in their children a sense of commitment to education. On the whole, parents should be encouraged to acknowledge that they have a role to play in this matter.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to identify the gainers and "losers" in Mainland Tanzania's primary education system. This distinction was realised by considering the variations in families' financial, social, human and cultural capital as causal factors. Many years of government provision of free education have simply reinforced the value of parents contributing to the promotion of the education of their children. In other words,, strengthening families' resources and making them aware of their responsibilities in relation to the education of their children would reduce the number of children who fall in the undistinguished category of "losers", so that children in Tanzania can universally be acknowledged as gainers in the country's education system. As "losers" in Tanzania's primary education system tend to be those children from families whose financial, human, social and cultural capital limit them in terms of supporting their children's education, deliberate efforts should be directed at facilitating the education of these disadvantaged children using a two-pronged approach: enabling their families and improving the learning environment by providing basic facilities, such as teachers, classrooms, textbooks or other teaching and learning facilities, to motivate them and improve their commitment and retention in the education system.

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