

# FACTORS AFFECTING TRANSITION RATES FROM PRIMARY TO SECONDARY SCHOOLS: THE CASE OF KENYA

**Kikechi R. Werunga, Geoffrey Musera**

Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (MMUST), Kenya

E-mail: werungawerunga@yahoo.com, gmusera34@yahoo.com

**Oliver Sindabi**

Moi University, Kenya

E-mail: osindabi@yahoo.com

## Abstract

*Kenya envisages being a developed nation by 2030. This calls for increased transition rates from primary to secondary school in all districts to meet its anticipated middle and high level manpower requirements. However, transition rates from primary to secondary school in some districts remain low despite the government effort to offer tuition free secondary education. This has been attributed to a number of factors among them cultural, environmental, school-based or socio-economic factors. This is a cause of concern if the government has to meet Vision 2030 as well as MDGs by 2015. This paper reports on factors affecting transition rates from primary to secondary school in Taita Taveta district, Kenya. A sample of 144 respondents consisting of 88 parents and 56 primary school head teachers in the district were used. The main tools of data collection were a questionnaire and interview schedule. Data analysis involved the use of percentages and a Chi-square. The results indicate that an average of 40% of pupils fail to transit to secondary schools every year in the district and the most affected are girls. The main reasons for non transition are lack of funds to pay school levies, early marriages, long distance to school and lack of interest in schooling. There is thus need for the government to introduce incentives such as additional allocations to the poor, include secondary education as basic education, empower the locals through poverty eradication strategies and review the curriculum to make it more responsive to students' interests.*

**Key words:** cultural factors, environmental factors, school-based factors, socio-economic factors, transition rate.

## Introduction

The flow of students from one level of education to another known as 'transition' is an integral part of education development. This is thought to be a good indicator of balanced or unbalanced development of education between two levels. However, it has been reported that a large proportion of primary graduates fail to proceed to secondary school level all over the world (Ebel, 1979). This has been attributed to a number of reasons. For instance (Kariuki, 1976) argues that school based factors such as school rules, attitudes, the curriculum, teachers, physical facilities, and management practices does affect students transition rates. In addition, socio-economic and cultural factors such as parent's education level, parent's occupation, family size, birth order, gender, occupational aspirations, parental involvement or students own attitudes towards education also have an effect on transition rates (Kariuki, 1976).

The low transition rates has been a concern in many countries as secondary education all

over the world is emphasised because of its important role in empowering individuals socially and economically. It has been reported that many pupils at primary level consider education as a means of occupational mobility. Thus many pupils at this level hope to continue with education beyond primary level by being selected to secondary level to achieve this aspiration (Otaala, 1972; Akinkunle; 1977; Koff, 1967). However, the world is faced with the problem of transition rates from primary to secondary with a larger proportion of pupils failing to join level one in secondary education.

With the adoption of free primary education in Kenya, participation in primary education is expanding rapidly. However, access to secondary and tertiary education remains limited for most young people in sub-Saharan Africa. For example in the school year ending in 2005, the median transition rate from primary to secondary was 62% (UNESCO, 2009). There are also marked disparities in transition rates in terms of gender and among countries. According to UNESCO (2009) the transition rates for boys (66%) was 9 points higher than their girls' counterparts (57%). Very low transition rates, below 50%, were also reported in several countries, including Burundi (34%), Botswana (75%) and Cameroon (33%). However, the report indicates rising enrolment in secondary education in the region, with over 12 million more students in 2006, up from 20.6 million in 1999. Despite this significant trend, the average secondary NER in sub-Saharan Africa was 25% in 2006. This implies that nearly 78 million of the region's secondary school-age children were not enrolled in secondary school (UNESCO, 2009). The question of who should and who should not receive secondary education thus cannot be wished off (Aisie, 1968).

Thus the issue of transition rates continues to dog the world despite efforts to offer free or subsidised secondary education. The transition rates can only be analysed fully through the analysis of pupils graduating from the last year of a particular level of education (primary) as compared to the proportion of the same cohort that enters the first year of the next level of education (secondary). Avakov (1980) observes that even with the great expansion of the number of school places in secondary level only a small percentage of primary school leavers are admitted to secondary school. In Kenya for example the government policy is to expand secondary education in order to increase its access to all Kenyans. This is hinged on the government commitment to achieve Universal Primary Education (UPE) as demonstrated by its efforts to Free Primary Education (FPE) in 2003, the global Education For All (EFA) by 2015 and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) by 2020. A crucial aspect of these goals is increasing access to secondary and tertiary education especially for the financially poor. According to the RoK (2002) the goal is to achieve and sustain universal primary education (U.P.E.) by 2005 and to raise the transition rates from (primary to secondary) from the currently 70% to 100% by 2015.

Despite the governments' efforts to raise the transition rates from primary to secondary schools, a large proportion (30%) of the primary level graduates do not proceed to the secondary level due to some cultural, environmental, school-based or socio-economic factors. In Taita Taveta district the situation is wanting and only a small percentage of pupils proceed to secondary school level. It is on this basis that there is need to establish the factors responsible for such low transition rates in districts such as Taita Taveta. This study reports on the factors responsible for low transition rates in this district.

### *Statement of the Problem*

Low transition rates of pupils from primary to secondary schools in Kenya over the years have been associated with lack of form one places in secondary schools. However, in Taita Taveta district there is under enrolment in most of the secondary schools. This implies

that facilities continue to remain idle due to lack of pupils. The problem is exacerbated with low transition rate from primary to secondary. According to RoK (2010), in 2010, 39.1 % of pupils in the district failed to transit to secondary school despite the availability of secondary school spaces. This is 9.1% higher than the 30% national mean of pupils not joining form one. This suggests that other than lack of form one places there are other critical factors that contribute to the problem of low transition rates. This study explores these factors.

### *Purpose and Objectives of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors affecting transition rates from primary to secondary schools in Taita Taveta district, Kenya. The specific objectives were to:

1. To establish the proportion/ratio of students transiting from primary to secondary between 2006 to 2010.
2. To establish the main factors associated with low transition rates in the district.
3. To establish the relationship between parents level of education and enrolment in secondary school
4. To establish the main socio-economic activities engaged by students who fail to join form one in the district

### **Methodology of Research**

This study was a descriptive survey designed to investigate the current situation with regard to factors affecting transition rates from primary to secondary schools. The design was found appropriate as it enabled the researcher to obtain head teachers' and parents' opinions on factors affecting transition rates from primary to secondary schools in Taita-Taveta district within a short time. The study comprised 88 parents of the 2009 class eight pupils who failed to join form one in 2010 and 56 head teachers of the sampled schools. The 226 primary schools in the district were stratified as private, public, boys, girls or mixed. Simple random sampling was used to select a total 56 primary schools. Purposive sampling was used to select 56 head teachers of the sampled schools. Snowball sampling was used to select a total of 88 parents' whose children were in class eight in 2009 in the selected primary schools but their children failed to join form one in 2010. A questionnaire for the primary heads and a structured interview scheduled for the parents were used to collect data. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data as per the objectives.

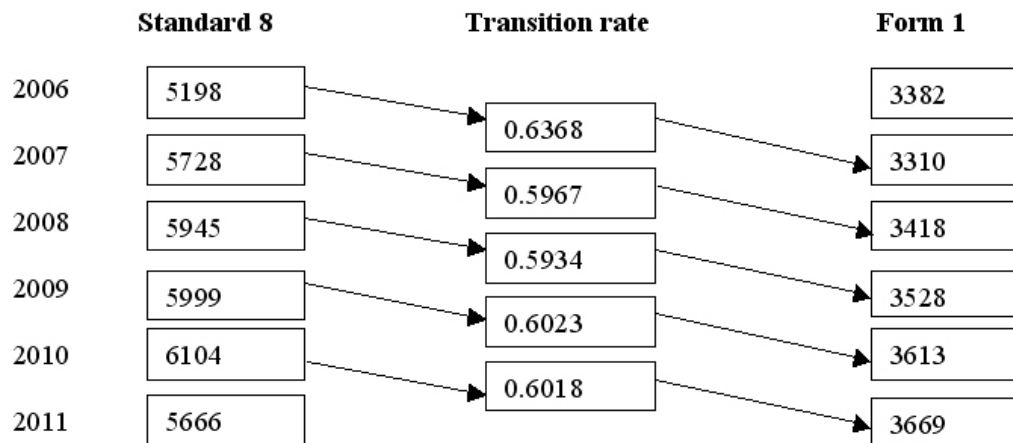
### **Results of Research**

This section reports the findings of the study on factors affecting transition rates from primary to secondary schools in Kenya with a focus on Taita-Taveta district. Data on enrolment in primary and those who transited to secondary school was obtained from the Head teachers of the primary schools. Transition rates are examined by gender. Factors associated with low transition rates in the district are also identified and examined. The relationship between parents' education level and transition rates is also established. The study also reports on activities engaged by pupils who fail to transit to secondary school. The findings are presented in the order of the objectives of the study

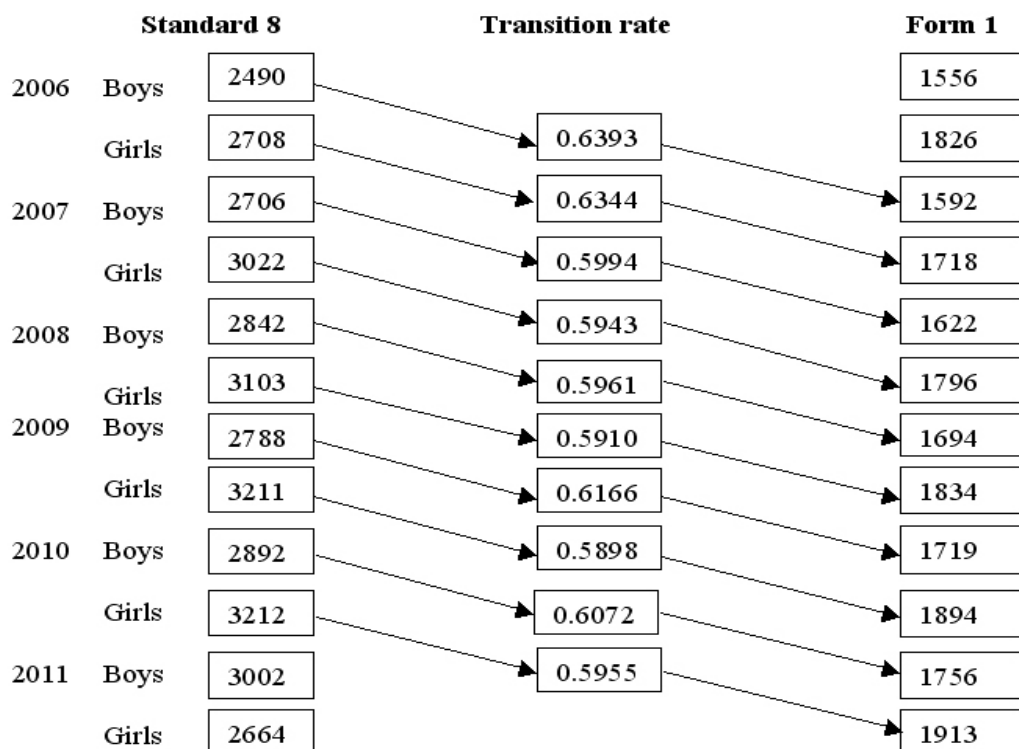
#### *Transition Rates from Primary to Secondary School between 2006 - 2010*

The study sought to establish the proportion/ratio of students transiting from primary to secondary between 2006- 2010. To do this the primary head teachers were asked to indicate the

number of students enrolled in class eight in a particular year. Information was also sought on the number of students who joined form one in the preceeding year by gender. The data is used to calculate transition rates by dividing the number of students enrolled in form one in a given year divided by the enrollment in class eight the previous year. The results are summarized in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: Transition rates from 2006 to 2010.**



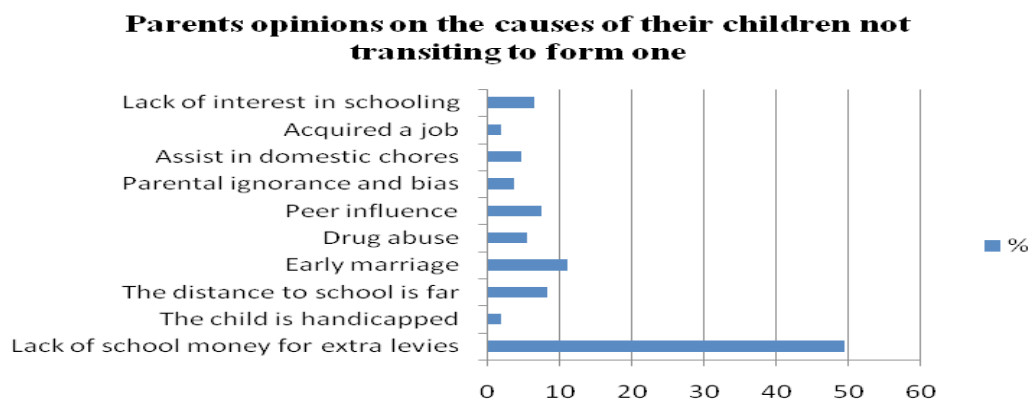
**Figure 2: Transition rates by gender from 2006 to 2010.**

The results in figure 1 do indicate that the average transition rate in the district is 0.6062. It further indicates that an average of 40% of pupils failed to join form one during the period

under study. This high percentage is a waste of resources given that these children are beneficiaries of FPE and the government willingness to pay their tuition at secondary level. The results reveal that there are other factors other than tuition fee that impact on transition rates in the district. Figure 2 indicates that boys have high chances of joining form one in any given year than the girls. Figure 2 also reveals gender differences in transition rates among boys and girls. The average transition rate for girls was found to be 0.6010 which is lower by 0.0107 points to that of boys 0.6117. Thus on average fewer girls (60.10.8%) transited to secondary school than boys (61.17%). This is despite the fact that the enrolment of girls in class eight (57.3%) was higher than boys (42.7%) for the period under study. This is a strong indication that girls require extra support to enroll in secondary schools than the boys in the district. Other studies have also shown gender differences in transition rates among boys and girls (UNESCO, 2009).

#### *The Main Factors Associated with Low Transition Rates from Primary to Secondary*

The study was also interested to establish factors associated with low transition rates from primary to secondary school in the district. To achieve these parents whose children were in class eight in 2009 and failed to join form one in 2010 were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 10 the factors associated with low transition from primary to secondary schools in the district with 1 implying highly responsible and 10 least responsible. The results are summarized in Figure 3.



**Figure 3: Parents' rating on the causes of low transition rates.**

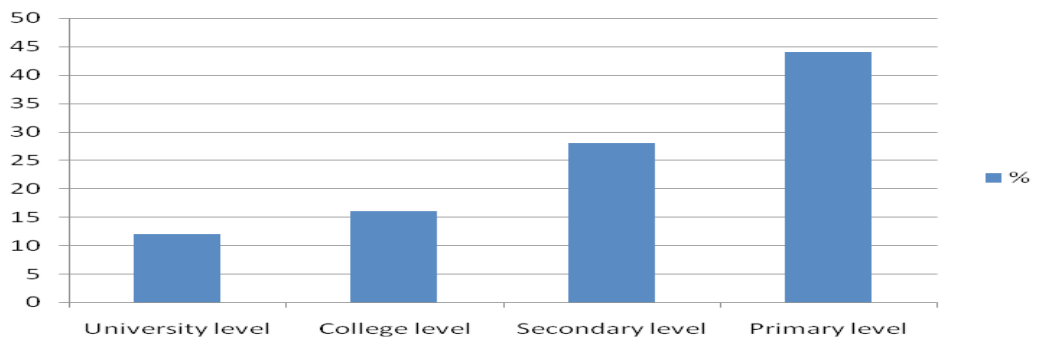
The results in figure 3 reveal that monetary factor is the greatest contributor to low transition rates from primary to secondary school in the district. The factor was rated by almost half (49.5%) of the parents as the main cause of failure of their pupils to join forms one. This may be associated to high poverty levels in the district. According to constituency rating on poverty index the district was rated among the poorest in the country (GoK, 2010). This indicates the need for the government to enhance poverty eradication strategies in order to address the problem of low transition from primary to secondary in the district. The problem of early marriage seems also to dog the district despite the enactment of the children's Act in 2001. This has been a major problem also associated with poverty where parents marry off their daughters to gain wealth. The factor is the second rated contributor (11.6%) to low transition rates. Other studies (UNICEF, 2001) have also cited earlier marriages as a major contributor to low transition rates in school. UNICEF (2001) argues that where poverty is severe, a young girl may be regarded as an economic burden where one less daughter is one less mouth to feed.

Other factors that were also rated highly included long distance to school (8.2%), peer influence (7.8%) and lack of interest in schooling (6.3%). Surprisingly these factors remain a

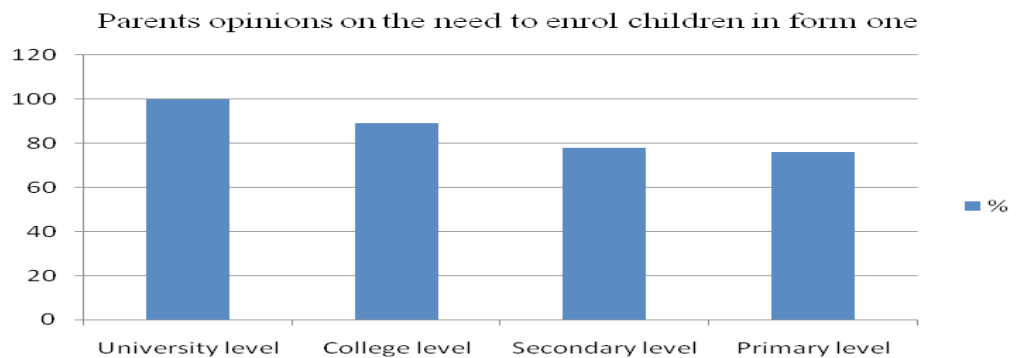
hindrance to young pupils in accessing secondary education despite the government efforts to expand secondary school places and revision of the curriculum. The results indicate the need for the government to evenly distribute schools in the district to address the problem of distance. Kenya still faces the problem of planning secondary schools as a result of political influence rather than professional planning. Many schools have been established as a result of political influence to woo voters. There is need for the government also to review the curriculum in order to influence stakeholders to see the need to take their children to secondary school.

*The Relationship between Parents Level of Education and Enrolment in Secondary School*

This study was also interested in establishing whether there existed a relationship between parents' education level and enrolment of pupils in secondary schools in the district. To achieve these, parents were asked to indicate the highest education level attained and their opinions regarding the need to enroll their pupil in form one. The results are summarized as follows.



**Figure 4: Parents education level.**



**Figure 5: Parents opinions on the need to enroll children in form one.**

From the findings in figure 4 it can be observed that the majority of the parents interviewed had primary education as their highest level of education (44.8%) followed by secondary and college level at 27.9% and 16.0% respectively, with university level of education being the lowest at 12.2%. As much as education level has been reported to have an effect in performance it is also shown to have an effect on transition. In this study this variable does indicate to have a strong effect on transition rates. From figure 5 it is clear that parents with higher level of education perceive secondary education for their children as valuable more than those with

lower education level (100% for university, 89% for college, 78% secondary and 76% for primary graduates). This finding therefore confirms the assertion that parental educational level influences child's transition from lower stage of education (i.e. primary) to higher stage of education (i.e. secondary). The aspirations they have for their children are high especially when they are educated. Graetz (1995: 25) observes that parents' level of education (socio economic status) may neutralize, strengthen or mediate their children's educational outcomes. Parents with high educational attainment may have a low income and a low-status occupation, for example, but nevertheless transmit high educational aspirations to their children.

Further analysis was done to establish if there is a significant difference in the opinion of parents and their education level. A Chi - square was used. The results are tabulated in Table 1.

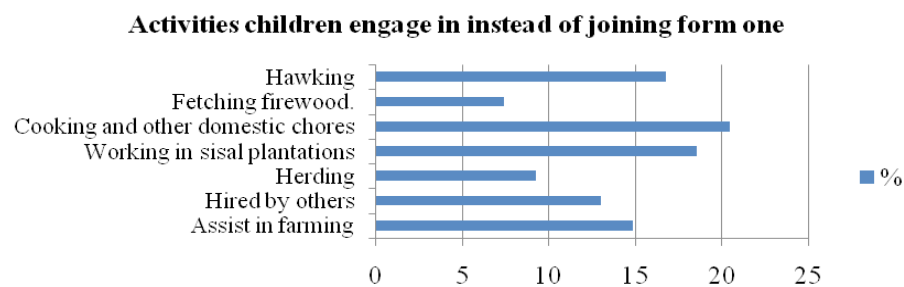
**Table 1. Chi-square test on the relationship between parent's level of education and their opinion on value of sending children to secondary school.**

Computed value	405
Degrees of freedom (df)	3
Critical value at 0.05 level of significance	14.07

The results of the chi-square test in Table 1 show that the computed value (405) is greater than the critical value (14.07) at 0.05 levels of significance. This implies that there is a significant relationship between the parents' level of education and willingness to enrolment to secondary school. Thus a parent's level of education highly influences whether a child will transit to form one or not.

*The Main Socio-economic Activities Engaged by Students who Fail to Join Form One*

Various studies have indicated opportunity cost as a major hindrance to enrolment at primary and secondary school level. This study was interested in establishing the main socio-economic activities engaged by pupils who fail to join form one in Taita-Taveta district. Parents whose children were in class eight in 2009 and failed to join form one in 2010 were asked to rate a given set of socio-economic activities on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 as the most desired activity and 10 the least desired activity their children were likely to engage in. The results are summarized in Figure 6.



**Figure 6: Socio-economic activities engaged by children who fail to join form one.**



From the figure 6 it can be seen that male related duties such as herding of cows comprise only 9.2% while female duties such as cooking and other domestic chores as well as assisting in farms comprise 20.9% and 14.8% respectively, these are higher and thus could explain the reason why fewer girls transit to secondary school from primary school despite of them being more than boys in class eight. Economically children also play a crucial role in that they are used by parents for hawking goods (16.6%), working in sisal plantations (18.1%) and being hired by others as house help (13.4%). This has assisted the family to cushion themselves against the current inflation in the country.

Emerson and Souza, (2007) note that through hands on experience or on job training, these children acquire skills they might need later in life. This applies to housework as house help, which for girls often is considered a good preparation for marriage. From this, to some parents, it can be observed that learning by doing delivers more returns than formal education; the future benefits can be substantial as well. The same reasoning goes for hawking, assisting in farming and working in commercial sisal plantations, which in addition may provide a monetary income in the present. In Kenya, presently sending children to school has a relatively high cost. Parents have to pay for transport, meals, uniforms and books. But the most important though are the opportunity costs in the sense of income foregone and activities at home not performed.

## Discussion

In the year 2010, it was found, on average, that fewer girls (44.8%) were enrolled in form one than boys (55.2%) as compared to the actual enrolment in class eight in 2009 where girls were more than boys. An important observation here is that in most of the primary schools visited, girls (57.3%) were more than boys (42.7%) in class eight but according to the records by the primary head teachers more boys transited to form one than girls. During interviews with parents it was also discovered that there was a commonly held view that girls were academically less capable than boys. This attitude has a negative effect on girls' participation in secondary education. This negative attitude can be attributed to most traditional socio-cultural beliefs regarding gender roles and abilities. Thus the low transition rates for girls than boys in the district could highly be associated to gender stereotyping where parents prefer to educate a boy at the expense of a girl.

According to the World Bank (2005), financing secondary education has been a big challenge to both the governments and households in Africa. TRANSE Group (2005) observes that household burden in financing secondary education is high. It further notes that in Kenya, whereas households meet only 20% of primary and 8% of university education costs, the government shoulder 60% of secondary education costs. Thus, cost is a key barrier to transitioning to secondary school for the poor, who form the majority in sub-Saharan Africa. This is consistent with the findings of the study where parents' rated lack of funds for extra school levies (transport, extra tuition, meals and school uniforms among others) as the main reason for not enrolling their children in secondary schools were high, while only 14.8% and 6.3% indicated that the extra levies were moderate and low respectively. The parents (49.5%) also sighted lack of money for the extra levies as the main cause of them not sending their children to secondary school. This has been a problem before and after the introduction of free secondary tuition where the government has continued to fail to address the problem of school levies secondary schools charge.

Parents' education level was found to have a strong effect on transition rate from primary to secondary school. A 100% of those with university degrees and 89% of those with college diploma perceived secondary education for their children as valuable as compared to 78% and 76% of those with secondary and primary education respectively. Studies by Eccles, Adler and



Kuczala (1992) did also show that parental expectancies have a strong influence on adolescent choices regarding enrollment in high schools and career choices outside of high school as well as influence on educational aspirations and school enrolment.

A good number of parents found that the opportunity cost of education was too high and hence engaged their daughters in income generating activities such as cooking and other domestic chores (20.4%) as well as being hired by others as house help (13.0%). Other money-making activities children engage in included farming (24.6%), Selling in market centres (21.0%), hawking (14%) and hawking (14.0%). This to parents contributed more towards raising the family's standard of living as compared to schooling of the girls. According to the World Bank (2008) study in Eritrea, girls are given various household chores as compared to boys, which often prevent them from accessing and participating in secondary education. A project of buying donkeys to help girls save on their energy and time for secondary school studies was then started in Eritrea.

## Conclusions

This study on factors affecting transition rates from primary to secondary school in Taita–Taveta District was prompted by the fact that despite there being facilities in secondary schools in the district, the number of pupils who enroll in form one was not matching with the available chances. The number of girls in primary eight was higher than boys yet fewer girls than boys transitioned to form one girls. The enrolment of pupils in form one as far as gender is concerned reflects the girl/boy ratio to be 1:1.3 while the percentage of girls enrolled in class eight is 54%. The actual population boy/girl ratio at class eight is 1:1.2. This shows that even at the time of admitting pupils to form one there was inequality as boys were favoured to girls and a good percentage of girls did not transition to secondary school at all.

It can also be concluded that some parents prefer their children to work in farms, gemstone mines and sisal plantations instead of transitioning to form one. This is because they felt that working in farms, gemstone mines and sisal plantations was more rewarding than schooling. The researchers found out that most parents in the district have large families and are also subsistence farmers, thus, what is produced in the farms is largely used for consumption in the household with no surplus remaining to help finance the education of their children. The expenditure on educating the children is thus a big strain to the household incomes. Children form an important 'stock' to the household in terms of labour and income they produce towards the household needs. By engaging in money making activities and providing household labour, the direct costs spent on children in education normally involves difficult choices on the parents hence for peasant farmers, there are high opportunity costs to be borne in terms of the labour not done and the income not earned envisaged against the high direct educational costs whose returns are not immediate as compared to the needs of the household.

Most secondary schools did not offer an alternative to those willing but could not effectively demand education such that there were large numbers of pupils out of school. Simply because their parents could not meet the costs of maintaining them in school due to lack of finances. At the same time, lack of finance was the major problem facing the secondary schools due to low economic endowment of the surrounding community who in the real sense are supposed to maintain these local schools.

## Recommendations

There is need to urgently address the problem of low transition of pupils from primary to secondary as a result of poverty. This can be achieved by either giving incentives to parents in terms of food stipends to parents to lower the level of opportunity cost of sending a child to

secondary school. Long term strategy would be to initiate poverty eradication strategies that will empower the locals financially.

There is need to address the problem of gender difference in the transition of pupils from primary to secondary. This can be achieved by organizing stakeholders' sensitization meetings by the ministry and other interested parties to educate the locals on the need to give equal chances for both boys and girls to continue with secondary education. There is also need to fully enforce the law on those parents who marry off their children at a tender age in the district.

There is need for concerted efforts by the government, the local community and other stakeholders such as NGOs, local councils and business people to enhance efforts to assist the needy to acquire secondary education through bursaries and scholarships in the district

The government should as a matter of fact as per the constitution include secondary education as basic education by making it free and compulsory

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*Advised by Laima Railienė, University of Siauliai, Lithuania*

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<b>Ronald Werunga Kikechi</b>	PhD Student, Educational Planning and Management, Department of Educational Planning and Management, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Kenya. Master of Education in Educational Planning and Economics, Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya. E-mail: werungawerunga@yahoo.com
<b>Musera Geoffrey</b>	PhD Student, Economics of Education and Management, Department of Educational Planning and Management, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Kenya. Master of Philosophy in Economics of Education, Moi University, Eldoret, Kenya. E-mail: gmusera34@yahoo.com
<b>Oliver Sindabi</b>	Department of Student Affairs, Moi University, Kitale Campus Master of Arts in Education, Moi University, Eldoret, P.O. Box 3378-30200, Kitale, Kenya. E-mail: osindabi@yahoo.com