

Effectiveness of Constituency Bursary Committees in Promoting Access and Retention in Secondary Education: A Case of Nairobi and Machakos Counties

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Abstract

The Kenyan government transferred the management of the secondary education bursary fund from Head teachers and School's Boards of Governors to the newly created Constituency Bursary Committees (CBCs) in the 2003/2004 financial year in line with its policy of decentralization. It is a tenet of decentralization that it leads to enhanced efficiency, effectiveness, transparency, accountability and local participation in service delivery. However, some educational stakeholders have criticized the new system of disbursing bursaries as inefficient and ineffective and have numerously called on the government to re-examine it. It is against this background that this study was conceived and executed with a view to: capturing the perceptions of stakeholders with regard to the new secondary education bursary disbursement procedure, determining the effectiveness and equitability of the CBCs in bursary disbursement, and mapping the challenges facing the CBCs. This study adopted an exploratory approach using a descriptive survey design. The study locations were Nairobi County and Machakos County. The target population included members of the CBC, Secondary schools Head teachers, BoG chairpersons, PTA chair persons, elected Councillors, Parents, Students, Religious leaders, KNUT officials and DEOs. Data was collected through questionnaires and interview schedules. The study established that the CBCs were rated lowly by the stakeholders. In a five point likert scale (1 low, 5 high), the CBCs scooped very low scores on a number of key variables namely: efficiency (2.48), transparency (2.36), accountability (2.34), representation of local community (2.40), competence (2.19), and fairness (2.50). The study established that the majority of the stakeholders, especially Parents, BoG members, PTA members, Head teachers and KNUT Officials, would prefer that the Secondary Education Bursary Scheme be managed at the school level. The study further established that the decentralized bursary scheme was inefficient with regard to timeliness in making bursary awards for it took more than two months for 50% of the applicants to get their bursary. It also emerged that the bursary had a limited reach as only 21.9% of the applicants in the 13 constituencies received bursaries over a three year period. Indeed, some constituencies had a reach averaging around 10% over the three year period meaning many of the applicants were unsuccessful. According to the head teachers, some 4302 very needy students were locked out of the bursary and some 65 students dropped out of school due to lack of school fees. The study also tested some five hypotheses using ANOVA and established that the bursary was equitable with regard to gender (p-value 0.474), type of school attended (p-value 0.068), type of family set up (pvalue 0.000), family income (p-value 0.000), and region of residence-urban or rural (p-value 0.013). The CBCs faced a number of challenges e.g., political interference by MPs, limited funds against a high number of bursary applicants, delayed release of funds by the MoE, and lack of capacity. In order to improve the effectiveness of the CBCs, the recommends that: MPs should cease being the patrons of the CBCs so as to curb their influence, government should increase bursary allocation in order to benefit more students, government should stick to a schedule for releasing the bursary as this would enable CBCs to plan, and that teachers should be more involved in the screening bursary applicants at school level.

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