

Policies on Free Primary and Secondary Education in East Africa: Retrospect and Prospect

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Abstract

This chapter reviews the evolution of education policies in the East African region in a historical context. The focus is on the formulation of policies for access to primary and secondary education in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania since their independence in the 1960s. We ask the following questions: What led to those policies and how were they funded? What was the role, if any, of the international community? What were the politics and underpinning philosophy surrounding the formulation of those policies and have the policies changed over time, and if so why? In recent years, several countries in sub-Saharan Africa have (re) introduced the Free Primary Education (FPE) policy in line with both Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) international agendas. Three East African countries? Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania? Are among them. All three countries are often held up as success stories in the implementation of FPE policies and in all of them, implementation of FPE policies is already leading to new policies for access to secondary education. But the idea of a universal primary education system is not new to these countries. Efforts have been made to expand access to education ever since they gained their independence from British colonial rule in the early part of the 1960s. Yet, still, there are those with no access, those who are excluded after initial entry, those at risk of dropout, and a majority excluded from any form of secondary education. The three countries have common characteristics and historical backgrounds. For example, few of their population had access to education at all levels in the past, and hence, each faced similar educational and literacy challenges at the time of their political independence in the 1960s. Kenya declared a campaign for Universal Primary Education (UPE) free of charge as a long-term objective in 1963. Tanzania followed in 1967, and Uganda, although lukewarm in its desire to expand primary education, nonetheless experienced improved access from the time of independence in 1962 until the late 1970s when internal political conflict and war caused serious.....

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