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IMPROVING ACCESS TO EDUCATION

**A Review of Published and Unpublished
Research from Eastern, Central and Southern
Africa**

By

Professor George S. Eshiwani

**Bureau of Educational Research
Kenyatta University
Box 43844
NAIROBI, KENYA.**

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IMPROVING ACCESS TO EDUCATION

A Review of Research from Eastern,
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This paper reviews 32 studies on improving access to education in Eastern, Central and Southern Africa.

Evidence from the studies reviewed and other sources show that the enrolment targets set at the historic Addis Ababa Conference on Education in 1961 are far from being achieved by many countries in Africa. The prevailing birth rates and financial constraints imply that it is not possible for most of these countries to provide primary school places for all their children during the foreseeable future. The number of primary-age children who are likely to be out of school in the next decade could be phenomenal if no rehabilitation of the situation is planned.

In those countries where enrolments are high a different sort of problem may be experienced. There may be disparities due to: sex, socio-economic status, urban-rural differentiation, and geographic differentiation.

Common assumptions are that the problem of equality of access to primary schooling is almost entirely a question of an inadequate supply of schools; that an effective demand

for formal schooling exists almost everywhere, and that if the resources and political will can be found to provide an adequate number of primary schools all children will attend. The obstacles on the supply side are formidable.¹

"Efforts to expand and equalize education opportunities face many constraints. The most obvious and frequent one is lack of resources - not only financial, but also physical and human. Next, geographic and demographic conditions - vast distance, low-density population, harsh environment, and poor communications - make the construction of schools, the supply of books and equipment, and the provision of qualified teachers a difficult and costly task. Another group of constraints arises out of the cultural and sociopolitical characteristics of a country. Enrolment, for example, may not be expanded for fear of threatening vested interests, and education of the female population may be restricted by cultural factors. Finally, many countries lack the analytic and managerial capacity to perceive and implement alternative, more efficient methods of expanding and equalizing education opportunities."

It has also become apparent over the past that there are obstacles on the demand side as well. According to the

1. The World Bank Education Sector Policy Paper, 3rd ed., Washington D.C. 1980, p. 24-25.

World Bank², "It is unrealistic to assume that if an educational service is offered, the intended beneficiaries will automatically accept it. For social or economic reasons, some groups may be apathetic toward the education being provided, or not consider it worth the opportunity costs involved." As Foster has noted, "A set of social and economic preconditions must exist before a demand for education is established among local populations, which leads in time to a more rapid rate of diffusion of schooling."³

The second issue that was considered in this review was equality of survival. A large proportion of children who enter school in grade one do not reach grade five. These high rates of non-survival are a result of combined effects of high repetition rates and drop-out rates.

It is generally true that in any given level of the educational system poor children are less likely to survive educationally than are well-to-do children; that children born in rural areas are less likely to survive educationally than urban children; that repetition and dropout rates are higher among girls than boys. However, the evidence regarding the relationship between any particular aspect of a child's personal or family circumstances and the probability of

² Ibid

³ Foster, Phillip: "Education and Social Differentiation in LDCs." Comparative Education Review, 21, 1977. p.217.

achieving a given level of education is so scanty and contradictory that general conclusions cannot be easily drawn. The patterns vary dramatically from country to country, in ways that are not easily accounted for.

The third and final issue that was considered was the output of educational systems in Africa. This output was defined as learning. The focus was on the question: Do children who have had the same number of years of schooling (thus with equal access and survival) learn the same things and at the same level? Although evidence from Europe and North America seems to indicate that differences in levels of achievement are systematically associated with differing social origins of the children and gender, there was no single study among those we reviewed to support this conclusion for the African region.

Other research gaps were in the area of policy related to access to education; the way resource allocation affects access to education; and the attitudes of parents and pupils toward education.

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A Review of Published and Unpublished Research
in Eastern, Central and Southern Africa

By
G.S. ESHIWANI

INTRODUCTION

The decade following independence in most African countries (1960-1970) was characterised by an exponential expansion of educational systems in these countries. School enrolments especially at the primary level more than doubled. More children went to school more than they ever had done before. It was predicted by educational planners that universal primary education (UPE) would be attained in most countries on the continent by 1980. This goal unfortunately seems to be very far away from being achieved. In some African countries, it is now estimated that absolute enrolments have actually plummeted.

There are perhaps two factors that have led to the decline in the enrolments in some countries and stagnation in others. The first concerns the explosive population growth and the second concerns the current economic problems experienced in Africa that have necessitated significant cutbacks in public spending.

The rapid population growth has created serious

problems for education in Africa. In order for the growth of educational places to keep pace with the growth of school-age children, more schools, teachers, books and other resources are required each year. The demand for education far exceeds the supply. This by itself implies that thousands of children are likely to be kept out of school due to lack of construction of new classrooms to cope with the rising population.

The current economic situation in Africa has resulted into the reduction of recurrent costs necessary to support the massive expansion of educational systems in African region. Besides this, children who might have attended school in better economic times are kept out or pulled out of school because they are needed to work at home, or because their parents can not afford to pay the required fees, official as well as 'hidden' fees (building fund, school uniform, etc..).

Decline or stagnation in school enrolments will certainly accelerate inequalities in African education access. Differences in access will continue to be felt between: rural-urban children, male-females, children from different socio-economic classes, and between children from different geographical regions.

Definitions

A distinction must also be made between access to education and participation, because the distribution of enrolments may be related to the numerous factors that influence private demand as well as to the access to education in different regions or geographical areas. That is to say, government policy in some countries may be concerned with reducing inequalities of access and thus may opt for building schools in remote areas or for reducing fees to remove financial barriers for those who cannot afford to enrol. In other countries, the overriding concern may be to reduce inequalities of participation, and thus incentives may be provided for those who do not choose to enrol. In this case, the policy chosen to promote equity will be wider than one that is simply concerned with removing barriers, because it seeks to increase participation by changing some of the factors that govern private demand. Such an approach to equity is likely to involve greater costs than the former. Whether a government adopts a wider or more restrictive approach to questions of equity will depend partly on the available resources. When enrolment rates are low (less than 30 percent), governments are likely to be primarily concerned with increasing access to the system by having more schools enrol more students. As enrolment rates grow to more than 70 to 80 percent, the main concern becomes to maximize internal efficiency and ensure

equality in the distribution of resources.

It is also useful to make a distinction between equality and equity. As Bronfenbrenner has suggested, equity refers to social justice or fairness. It involves a subjective ethical or moral judgement. Equality deals with the actual patterns in which something, say education, is distributed among members of a particular group. In this connection one is concerned with question: "At what points in the process, to what degree, and how are children of which social groups screened out or kept in the education system?" In answering this question three facets of equality can be usefully distinguished:

1. Equality of access - the probabilities of children from different social groupings getting into the school system.
2. Equality of survival - the probabilities of children from various social groupings staying in the school system to some defined level, usually the end of a complete cycle (primary, secondary, higher).
3. Equality of output - the probabilities that children from various social groupings will learn the same things to the same level at a defined point in the school system.

Each of these facets represents a mechanism by which children are sorted and screened by the school, and all three occur at each level of cycle of the system. That is, a child may or may not enter primary schooling, may or may not survive

to the end of the primary cycle, may or may not learn as much as other students do by the end of primary school; having completed primary school, a child may or may not enter secondary schooling, may or may not survive to the end of secondary schooling, and so on. In some systems the access question is not simply whether a student enters the cycle, but the type of institution to which the student is given access. We should also keep in mind that the same factors will not necessarily affect the destiny of children at all the sorting points. Since children confronting a later sorting point are the survivors of earlier sortings, we can assume factors that are critical at the earliest points may lose their significance at later points (having already had their effect), with new factors coming into play as the lengthy process moves along.

THE OBJECTIVE OF THE REVIEW

The main objective of the Access research review was to identify the factors, and the clusters of factors, that shape patterns by which some groups have access to schooling and others are excluded. Often these patterns are invisible to policy makers and planners who assume that, if the intention of policy and planning is to include everyone, then this will occur. A major thrust of the research in this area was, therefore, to make visible implicit patterns of access and exclusion.

- a. Most countries have a policy of inclusiveness in providing education to their citizens because they see education both as a benefit of development that should be distributed among their citizens as a matter of equity (normative position), and as a resource for future development that must be increased if development is to be realized (strategic planning position).
- b. When certain groups of people are excluded from education in systematic (albeit unintentional) ways, a basic resource for development is underutilized and economic and social productivity suffer.

- c. Identification of implicit and explicit patterns by which groups are excluded from basic education is necessary for the formation of policies and programs that overcome these patterns and increase the educational resource for development.

Groups which are excluded from schooling fall into two principle groups:

1. Those for which the exclusion is deeply rooted historically or traditionally. In these cases, the patterns of exclusion frequently are "invisible" to policy makers. Examples of such groups are females or lower class/caste groups.
2. Those for which the exclusion results from a new event or situation with which the educational system has not, in some sense, "caught-up." Examples of such groups are urban squatters and refugees.

One can imagine that policy options to address these two categories will be quite different, and that the kind of documentation and information that would be helpful in formulating policy will also differ between the two kinds of groups.

Nonetheless, the points where policy interventions may be assumed to have an impact on groups in both categories

include:

1. At the point of entry into schools.
2. At critical points where retention and promotion to new levels in schools occur.

In this connection the review was concerned with the questions:

1. Who goes to school?
2. Who stays in school?
3. Who goes into and stays in what sort of schools?

In a wider context the review attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What are the explicit governmental laws and regulations, outside the school environment, that affect access to entry to school? That effect who continues in and completes school? Who enters and continues in which schools?
2. What are the arrangements and requirements within schools and school systems that affect access to entry to school? Who continues in and completes school? Who enters and continues in which schools?
3. Given the fact that most laws and regulations are intended to be explicitly inclusive, how

do these play out in a given social/political context to exclude/include certain groups in the schooling system?

4. How do policy and planning decisions about the allocation of financial resources to the construction, and supply of schools and for teacher training affect access to entry/continuation/promotion in schools? How do these decisions affect patterns by which certain groups have access to certain types of schools while others are excluded?
5. How can resources be differently allocated to improve access for previously excluded groups? What are the trade-offs in resource allocations among different groups and their access to schooling?
6. How do identifiable groups of students differ with regard to their perceptions regarding the value/relevance of education? What affect do these perceptions have on access to schooling for different groups?
7. How do families assess the importance or relevance of educations for their children? How do they assess this differently for

- different children (by gender, birth-order, etc...) thus affecting their access to schooling?
8. How do communities identify and shape the relevance of educationa for their young people? Toward what goals are communities most commonly found to direct education, and to perceive its relevance? How does this result in differential access to schooling for children/youth?
 9. How do nations identify the purposes and relevance of education for their youth? Do they perceive the relevance differently for different groups? How do these perceptions affect access to schools and completion of schooling?
 10. What are the relationships between the perceptions of students, families, communities and nations as to the relevance or usefulness of schooling? How does their congruence or disharmony affect who enters and continues in school? Are there predictable cross-over points in perceptions between different layers such as by students and communities, for example?

At a very basic level answering these questions involved looking at school selection (at various levels), at wastage (drop-outs and push-outs), at the repeater phenomenon, and the relationship between society and formal education.

THE STUDIES

Most of the studies included in this Review are unpublished dissertations, project reports and research papers mainly conducted under the auspices of various East, Central and Southern African Universities. The starting point of all the studies under discussion is that schooling is a desirable societal goal, and that it is ultimately related to a nation's socio-economic development.

The various studies/papers may be classified into three main categories according to the level of analysis. The first category, consisting mainly of post-graduate project reports and dissertations, are content with identifying socio-economic obstacles to school entrance and survival, and offering solutions based on these findings. The second group of studies go deeper, relating educational inequality (access and opportunities) to the structure of the society. Finally, the third category takes an historical approach, tracing regional and structural inequalities in education to colonialism and capitalist penetration early this century.

Majority of the studies/papers reviewed belong to the first category (Mbunda, 1983 ; Kirui 1982; Michieka 1983; Gitau 1985). Concerned with the identification of the socio-economic factors responsible for drop-outs and repetitions in primary schools, they tend to utilise standard sociological techniques such as questionnaires and interviews (of pupils and administrators) for purposes of data collection. Not surprisingly, the findings are non-spectacular and a bit too obvious, causes for dropping-out of school being identified with pregnancies and early marriages, negative peer influences, negative parental and community influences, pupils' involvement in extra-school activities (helping parents with housework, herding cattle, minding business) poverty and socio-cultural values.

The studies in this category display a lack of any definite theoretical orientation, and tend to be superficial in analysis. While the reasons cited for unequal access to primary and post-primary schooling may be true at a certain level, the causes identified are not related to any broader theories such as those of educational attainment, social change, or social stratification. If, for example, girls drop-out of school due to pre-marital pregnancy, what societal factors contribute to the phenomenon of school-girl pregnancies? It is not enough to assume that it is the girls' libidinous

impulses which lead to such a situation. It is not fair either to recommend expulsion of the pregnant school-girl for getting herself into the family way, as one researcher has done (Mbunda 1983). That would be to blame the victim for the crime.

Similarly, to blame the "ignorance" of parents and the community for their lack of interest in their children's schooling, is once again to confuse issues. Such explanations rather reveal the ethnocentric tendencies of the researchers themselves. Though mention is made of the children's involvement with household duties, the economic values of these "duties" are not discussed. The question is not asked: Why do parents consider household tasks (including fetching water for girls and herding for boys) more important? What is the rationale behind such attitudes? Is it that parents cannot differentiate between what is good or bad for their children and themselves?

Nigerian anthropologist, J. Ogbu (1978) at the end of a classic study covering six cultures, concluded that in order to equalise educational opportunities, the definition of access has to include access to post-school rewards, or rewards in the employment market (this definition coincides with Schiefelbein and Farrells' "outcome" category referred to earlier). For already educationally disadvantaged ethnic

groups and minorities, schooling does not hold out the promise of immediate economic rewards. Employment prospects for the few who manage to complete the first cycle or even the second cycle of schooling is almost non-existent. Under such circumstances, the action of parents who insist on getting economic aid (both in the subsistence and monetary sectors) from their offsprings in preference to formal schooling with its uncertain benefits, can be said to be rational.

Majority of the studies in this category focus on particular geographical areas or ethnic groups. In contrast, most of these relating school failures (in terms of both admissions and survival) to the structure of either the education system and/or society tend to be more national in scope. These studies, adopting a comparative framework, have found for example, that the rural rather than urban oriented schools suffer from more drop-outs, and that boys rather than girls tend to survive more in the schooling system (An exception to this is Botswana, where research has shown insignificant drop-out from primary & the greater participation of girls at the primary level than boys). In an interesting analysis of access to primary schooling in Lesotho, A.S. Hartwell draws attention to the problem of "push-outs" where a child leaves school simply because there is no space for him/her in the higher levels, or because the school does not

have an attached secondary school, or because there are no such schools within walking distance.

Hartwell's paper is also interesting from the methodological point of view. It outlined a methodology for relating primary education to specific localities using the census enumeration area as a basic unit. The preliminary analysis of the paper shows the potential usefulness of relating basic social services to census enumeration areas as a fundamental planning and research tool.

Similarly, though Wafula (1984) does not utilise the push-out concept, he too highlights the role of availability of places in Std. One classes in the selection and admission processes in primary school. High competition for the few chances available make the problem facing Headteachers in evolving definite admission criteria more complicated, observes Gitau.

In a paper on pre-school education and educational opportunities in Kenya, O.N. Gakuru maintains that the pattern of development of primary education may be understood fully only within the context of the existing structure of primary education and the underlying socio-economic differentiation in the society. He observes that the lack of government intervention and competition for the few standard one places in the primary schools that reflects the income inequality in society. Based on data obtained from a

stratified random sample of Nairobi nursery schools, Gakuru concludes that nursery education in Nairobi has unequal outcomes both in the type of primary school entered and in the socio-educational development of the children. These outcomes, states the author, are only reflection of the inequality among the social groups that these nursery schools serve.

The relationship between regional differences and academic achievement is highlighted in several papers. Eshiwani, for instance, in a survey of undergraduate students in Kenya finds that certain provinces are over-represented in the University system (e.g. Central Province) as against others such as the Coast, North-Eastern and Rift Valley. Similarly, Kinyanjui (1972) again basing his observations on an exploratory survey of relevant documents, found that:

1. the educational benefits are being distributed in favour of the economically and politically powerful districts and provinces in the country (again he cites the existing disparity between the Central Province and the Coast).
2. the quality of education at primary level determines the opportunities available at secondary level, and the quality of education at the secondary level strongly influences whether a pupil goes on to further education, training or employment or ends up unemployed.

Mwaniki's doctoral dissertation (1973) examines some

deeper into the problem under scrutiny, and are more critical of Government policies aiming at solutions based on superficial analysis of the situation. Quite a number of the researchers in the first category, for instance, suggest the abolition of school fees as a first step towards providing equal access to schooling for all. But Nkinyangi (1980) in his paper on public policy and school failure in Kenya points out that these policies, however well-intentioned, may have exactly the opposite effects at the regional and individual levels. He presents evidence to show that during the 1970's, the government policies acted both as cause and result of much educational failure with possible implications for increased regional disparities and social differentiation. He alleges that the abolition of school fees was just a cosmetic measure, intended as a perfunctory gesture towards the less privileged social classes in society. This was a political move, rendered impotent by the fact that at the time of the so-called abolition of school fees no fiscal counter-measures were taken to find ways and means of replacing the cost revenue. The announcement of free primary schooling prompted a mushrooming of primary schooling, but the issue of access was not solved. On the contrary, many pupils had to discontinue schooling as a result of "hidden" costs such as building funds, bedding, buying of text books, etc...

of the issues we have raised in the preceding paragraphs. He discusses the provision of educational opportunity in post-independent Kenya, analysing the relationship between schooling and the processes of social stratification by looking at differential access into various levels and types. He concludes that the differential access to schools in Kenya seems to be based on the parental socio-economic circumstances in favour of pupils from relatively high socio-economic backgrounds. The most important determining factor is gross family income when associated with awareness of the importance of formal schooling.

Thus, socio-economic background of parents and of geographical regions appear to be crucial in the distribution of resources and access to schooling. As W.T.S. Gould (1978) points out in his analysis of secondary school admission policies in Eastern Africa, poorer areas of the countries concerned allege discrimination in the distribution of influence and allocation of expenditure by the central authorities in favour of rich areas. It is further alleged that attempts to reduce regional disparities in economic and social provisions are not sufficiently rigorous.

The studies quoted above relating to schooling opportunities and survival in the school system to the socio-economic structure of the wider society are more analytical in their approach. These studies/papers attempt to probe

Nkinyangi's data, based on documental research, indicate that in the period before 1974, only the relatively richer agricultural cultural districts of Central Province, Eastern and the Rift Valley were registering the full-age cohorts. After 1974, enrolment in all districts more than doubled. However, the relatively "backward" Arid and Semi-arid districts remain in the periphery educationally speaking. Participation is low, and the data show little annual variations in terms of educational access. Government efforts to improve educational access and school retention in these areas appear to be based on haphazard policy decisions and implementation. Planners and policy-makers enthusiasm often oscillates from one untested proposition to another, observes the researcher.

Nkinyangi points out that pupils from other agricultural districts migrate to boarding schools meant for pupils from arid and semi-arid areas, thus defeating the purpose for which they had been built.

Taking all the above factors into consideration, Nkinyangi questions the optimism about free primary education in Kenya since 1974. The real impact of this move was to raise schooling costs in terms of most peoples ability to afford them. It also served to widen the educational gaps between regions and ethnic groups within particular regions.

The present policy, concludes Nkinyangi, puts regions which have concentrations of moneyed-classes against those which do not.

The discussion also shows that the compensatory policies enacted to assist children from pastoral and other under-privileged parts of the country failed to meet their objectives adequately because costs in government sponsored institutions make these institutions positively closed to the manority of children indigenous to those areas.

Mwaniki (discussed earlier) points out that formal schooling and related cosmetic measures alone cannot solve the problem of access to education in educationally backward areas. He suggests that non-formal education has a big role to play in educational development, particularly in increasing secular awareness as well as literacy, especially for the adult population.

The intellectual orientation of those in the third category identified earlier, seem to be tilted towards the Dependency school of thought in the social sciences. Such studies attempt to relate colonialism and capitalist penetration to structural inequalities and regional disparities in education in the East African region. Kinyanjui's (1979) paper for example, tries to demonstrate the relationship between the development of capitalism in Kenya and the unequal development of education between racial communities, regions

and social classes. It begins with the hypothesis that the structure and organization of the educational system broadly corresponds to the socio-economic system of contemporary Kenya. He traces educational inequality to the nature of capitalist development during both colonial and post-colonial periods in the country. He concludes with the observation that though the extent of inequality prevalent may be debatable, their existence is definitely unquestionable.

Similarly, Court and Kinyanjui (1980) draw attention to the role of colonial (and missionary) education and economy in the development of education in various regions in Kenya and Tanzania. However, in this paper, the authors go further than describing the dimensions of regional disparity within the two countries, and compares the responses of the two Governments to equalizing educational opportunities. The authors point out that while it is easy to account for the inherited (colonial) pattern of regional disparities, it is less easy to explain the causes of their persistence in Africa and assessing the possibilities of reducing them. The writers observe that the regional policies, though in different ways, are pressing against the limits of the old structure and pushing both towards fundamental change with important planning implications. In Kenya, the limit is signified by the guidelines to the National Committee on Educational Objectives and Policies that its recommendations for reform

must come under a financial ceiling determined by the rate of economic growth. In Tanzania, it is the intensifying momentum of decentralization and villagization which is producing the demand for new types of planning. They conclude with the remark that the similarities and ironies as well as the differences in Kenya and Tanzania and the contextual constraints which they imply provide a useful guide to the issues which positive planning for educational equality will have to confront.

Nkinyangi (1980) in his doctoral dissertation on "Socio-Economic Determinants of Repetition and Early School Withdrawal at the Primary School Level and Their Implications for Educational Planning in Kenya" also examines the role of history in the creation of regional disparities in education and socio-economic development. He argues that such a situation had come about as a result of different patterns of colonial penetration. He found the incidence and magnitude of repetition and drop-out to fall squarely along the lines of past and present disparities in educational and socio-economic development. The regions which had been incorporated into the capitalist mode of production were found to have relatively higher repetition rates and lower drop-out rates than those regions which had been relatively less incorporated. Further, both repetition and drop-outs were found to be the problems of the lower socio-economic status child.

While the two studies quoted earlier depended largely on secondary sources and personal references, Nkinyangi's study combined document analysis with field data collected from four of Kenya's provinces. Special attention was paid to reflect rural and urban areas. The total sample included 3,000 pupils drawn from a total of 14 schools.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This review was undertaken with the purpose of identifying implications of research on access to schooling and the provision of educational opportunities for all. The rationale for improving access are two: (a) formal education is seen as a basic human right; and (b) schooling is seen as a resource to enhance socio-economic development of a nation. However, certain groups tend to get excluded from formal education intentionally or not. The reasons for this exclusion may be historical or socio-cultural. By the same token, other groups get a relatively higher share of the educational package. This review attempted to identify those groups traditionally and historically disadvantaged, such as females, ethnic and regional groups, as well as low income groups. Based on the available literature, the review tried to relate the demographic composition of schools to regional and structural inequalities in society in sub-Saharan Africa. These inequalities can best be understood if viewed within an historical framework, taking into account the impact of colonial and post-colonial capitalist penetration in a largely non-monetary African economy.

Several patterns in the type of research undertaken can be discerned. Though the least advantaged groups in terms of access to schooling were identified, few of the studies conducted focussed on indepth examination of any such group.

Access of girls to schooling, for example, has been largely ignored (exceptions are Eshiwani 1983; Krystal 1980; and Coyne 1979). The Coast and North-Eastern Provinces in Kenya have been under-represented and groups like nomads have hardly merited any attention. Such neglect of groups that should constitute a significant portion of research energies may in part be traced to the personal bias and training inadequacies of the researchers. Part of the reason may lie in financial constraints. However, whatever the cause, future research should pay attention to these previously neglected areas. Researchers should avoid the simple enumeration of unrelated obstacles to schooling access and survival. They should try to develop a framework for analysis and integrate the findings. For research to have any meaningful impact on improving access to schooling, recommendations should be based on deep understanding of the social-cultural context of the target groups. Recommended changes based on lack of adequate understanding of this context can at best only be cosmetic and at worst can lead to some very disastrous consequences.

Research so far conducted tend to indicate that the economically advantaged groups both at the regional and individual levels have access to the best schools at the primary level and survive in them the longest. In extreme cases, certain disadvantaged groups do not even enter the school system, and when they do, withdrawal occurs even before the completion of the first cycle of formal education.

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