



# The Impact of Community-Based Development Programs on Educational Attainment and Academic Performance in Sub-Saharan Africa

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the effectiveness of Community-Based Development Programs (CBDPs) in addressing educational resource shortfalls and barriers in sub-Saharan Africa. CBDPs empower local communities to make decisions and allocate resources, aiming to improve the quantity and quality of education services. Focusing on sub-Saharan Africa, where challenges like high costs and time commitments hinder schooling, CBDPs aim to reduce these barriers and enhance participation in education programs. By analyzing the impact of CBDPs on educational attainment and academic performance, particularly through initiatives like the Free Primary Education (FPE) intervention and partnerships with local NGOs, this study sheds light on their effectiveness in promoting secondary school retention and learning. The research evaluates various interventions, including small-group instruction, tutoring, technology assistance, and mixed approaches, and explores the pathways through which CBDPs influence educational outcomes. Findings suggest that CBDPs positively impact enrollment rates, transitions to secondary school, and academic performance, especially among vulnerable populations. However, further investigation is needed to understand the nuanced effects on different demographic groups and the long-term sustainability of CBDPs.

Keywords: Development Programs, Sub-Saharan Africa, Education, Free Primary Education, NGO partnerships and Academic Performance

## INTRODUCTION

Community-Based Development programs, which have emerged as a more sustainable alternative to centrally and internationally administered development projects, where the local population takes part in decision-making and has direct responsibility for resource allocation, are attractive in addressing the issue of education resource shortfalls and time and financial barriers [1-3]. The structure and tenets of Community-Based Development programs are expected to be particularly beneficial for the education sector, as following the decentralization of decision-making from its traditional central government format, which has led to significant reductions in education spending and outcomes for countries of varying income levels, the initiatives are able to drum up an influx of resources to meet local demands and preferences [4-6]. This results in improvements in both the quantity and quality of education services [7-9]. In focusing on issues that have been historically identified as preventing children from accessing and completing schooling in sub-Saharan Africa, such as high costs and time commitments from schooling, the initiatives allocate resources to reduce student and family time commitments and financial outlays in accessing schooling [10-12]. They help as transportation and financing costs are reduced, leading to higher participation in school programs. Promoting secondary school retention and learning is an urgent challenge in sub-Saharan Africa. Youth in the region display a high theoretical demand for education, are attaining increasingly higher levels of education, and exhibiting greater overlap with youths from other developing regions of the world [13-17]. Accordingly, an increasing share of public and social resources are being allocated towards education. However, substantial evidence points to low efficiency and high dropout for students pursuing further schooling. These trends increase motivation for education interventions, which have shown promise, particularly when targeting increasing educational resources (e.g., textbooks) and reducing non-financial barriers to education, such as long distances between homes and schools, and high transfer costs associated with schooling [18-21]. However, policies directed towards rural East African communities have not focused on spatial exclusion and the negative effects that it can have on youth educational attainment. Literature on Kenya's 'pro-poor' education policy, Free

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Primary Education, suggests that geographic areas of the country with disproportionately large numbers of households of low socioeconomic status benefited greatly from the policy [22-24]. The change in enrollment rate pre- and post-elimination of school fees was 17 percentage points in rural Western Kenya (where a child would be more likely to encounter a family of low socioeconomic status) and only 5 percentage points in urban Central Rift Valley (where a child would meet few, if any, low-status families) according to RTI International [25-28]. However, since the Kenya Ministry of Education translated these findings into the conclusion that 'pro-poor' meant 'rural' and because they inferred that 'poor' meant 'remote', Nairobi families have been left behind [29-30]. Rural children in East Africa face complex challenges when it comes to accessing basic education. Research conducted by UC Berkeley in 2015 and 2016 revealed that two main reasons exist for why youth in rural East Africa do not attend school. First, social inequalities along race, gender, disability, ethnicity, religion, and poverty lines make children vulnerable to the social exclusion that can result from direct human discrimination and by the meanderings of larger social forces, such as the spatial exclusion that arises from the spatial sorts [25-30]. Second, poor rural residents of East Africa have limited access to quality schools which can lead rural youth feeling unprepared, overwhelmed, and discouraged when it comes time to transition from primary to secondary school, apply for a government loan, or make a choice between a skilled trade diploma and a bachelor's degree.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Identification of Relevant Literature**

A systematic search of academic databases such as PubMed, Google Scholar, Scopus, and Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) was conducted to identify relevant studies published in peer-reviewed journals. Keywords including "Community-Based Development Programs," "Education," "Sub-Saharan Africa," "Academic Performance," and "Educational Attainment" were used to ensure comprehensive coverage of the literature.

### **Selection Criteria**

Studies were included if they: Focused on the impact of Community-Based Development Programs on educational attainment and academic performance in sub-Saharan Africa. Employed qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods approaches to investigate the effectiveness of CBDPs. Were published in English language journals.

### **Exclusion criteria**

Studies not relevant to the topic or conducted outside the geographical scope of sub-Saharan Africa were excluded. Studies lacking empirical data or rigorous methodology were excluded

### **Data Extraction**

Relevant data from selected studies were extracted, including: Author(s), year of publication, study design, methodology, and sample characteristics. Key findings related to the impact of CBDPs on educational outcomes, including enrollment rates, transitions to secondary school, academic performance, and factors influencing program effectiveness.

### **Synthesis and Analysis**

A narrative synthesis approach was employed to systematically review and summarize the findings from selected studies. Themes and patterns emerging from the literature were identified, including the effectiveness of CBDPs, challenges in implementation, and key factors contributing to program success. The narrative provided a comprehensive overview of the current state of research on the topic, highlighting gaps, contradictions, and areas for further investigation.

### **Impact on Educational Attainment and Academic Performance**

This study contributes to the FFE literature by providing valuable results on the impact of the FFE intervention on the age profile and academic performance of children, particularly those enrolled in grades 1 and 1 of primary schools, as well as students that transition from primary schools to secondary schools. A similar study is executed over a longer period of time, i.e., 2014-205 for a larger sample of grade 7 students in Malawi [8-12]. Using a matched difference-in-difference approach, the authors find that students in communities that received the FFE program had higher transitions to secondary school compared to students living in the control group, with the treatment effect concentrated among boys. School disciplines also improved for boys and girls benefiting from the program and those that were treated for a longer period of time (two or three years). This section explores the impact of FFE programs on educational attainment and academic performance in partnership with a local NGO called Raising the Village (RTV) in Mayuge district, Uganda. This program was unique in that it tried to provide comprehensive support to the entire village to improve education, health, and welfare. In 2014, RTV allocated 60 communities to a control group (where no interventions were provided) and 75

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communities to the treatment group (where the full FFE intervention was provided, which included a combination of educational, health, and welfare components) [15-20]. In 2014 and 2015, a study revealed that when compared to the control group, the FFE intervention increased enrollment into secondary schools and had a positive impact on the age profile of children enrolled in primary schools. The findings also reported very positive effects at the high school level. Additionally, FFE appears to have had a positive impact on the age profile of children enrolled in grade 1 of schools. A vast literature evaluates the impact of community production of educational inputs, yet systematic evidence of effective and scalable interventions is limited. The majority of studies focuses on the impact of increasing parental involvement on educational input use and overall outcomes. They evaluate the impact of parental monitoring of children's educational activities and school attendance, and the provision of childcare resources, healthcare, clean water, and information for caregivers regarding child health and center use in community-based centers. Others focus on the relationship between parental educational input decisions and parental characteristics, such as income, wealth, education, health stock, and occupation. Notably, studies also explore different mechanisms to increase parental participation, such as local school management and parent associations. While these studies highlight intervention-induced changes in educational input use, we know much less about how and why these changes improve child outcomes [1-3].

Schools are an optimal site for community-based development programs for several reasons. First, interventions can directly influence educational inputs and the community management of these inputs. For instance, playground clearing, textbook distribution, school meal programs, professional development programs, and locally constructed school infrastructure have all been implemented as community-based development projects, and complex community development programs, notably BRAC's Empowerment and Livelihoods for Adolescents (ELA) program in Uganda, engage directly with educational inputs [5-9]. Moreover, the community-based development model of intervention allows those most invested in and knowledgeable about local schools - parents, teachers, and village leaders - to identify solutions to educational challenges, tailor these solutions to the specific needs of their schools, and manage the resources required for implementation. One way of categorizing the 156 interventions we examine in our review is in terms of whether they belong to one of four categories: small-group instruction, one-on-one tutoring, technology assistance, or a mix of different approaches. Small-group instruction reforms refer to educational models in which students engage academic content under the direction of a teacher. In one-on-one tutoring, a single, more academically advanced individual helps a less advanced student [11-13]. Technology-assisted instructional practices employ ed-technology; for example, the New Jersey High School Proficiency Assessment is a testing system in which students eventually advance to increasingly difficult problem sets. Mixed models is a catchall category for reforms that do not easily fall into one of the others. In the role education interventions such as CBDPs have on educational outcomes, we review 156 evaluations of various school reform programs [16-19]. On average, the most intensive, comprehensive, and well-supported reforms had the largest achievement impacts. Across 95 evaluations of small-group instruction programs, we observe a mean standardized mean difference (d) of 0.39. Only 18 are significantly positive. Among 50 purely organizational programs, the mean standardized mean difference (d) is 0.14, with 33 significant positive producers. A meta-analysis of peer mentoring programs revealed effect sizes and significance levels in between, with a mean d of 0.27 and 14 significant positive producers among 31 evaluations [20-24]. Lastly, being involved at the grassroots level may instill positive behavior towards education in young children. This is supported by an irrigation scheme that was created to take water to the school garden to provide food and school uniforms in six communities. With such activities, affected children believe and successfully replicate through peer education, witnessing first-hand the importance of boiling water, washing hands, and being at school for the whole day [26-30]. Family members and children, in particular, who have been engaged in the intervention processes are likely to take proactive action by adapting educational strategies in support of their children, as the process of grassroots engagement enables them to acquire and develop new skills. For example, when village leadership is directly involved in the selection and implementation of the Village Education Fund (VEF) initiative, the community administrative members are equipped as spearheads, which in turn will boost their children's confidence, esteem, motivation, and behavioral patterns. In parallel, part of the ownership challenges, such as financial contributions, that sons of chiefs and opinion leaders that partake in the Chibombo district nuance maize produce in support of the village We Deserve project, may be more likely to be active in their children's academic activities [1-4]. Secondly, the impacts of these catalytic interventions on education are likely to be helped by the form in which they are implemented. By nature, community-based programs work at the grassroots level, where

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beneficiaries who are affected by the challenges participate in planning, delivery, and ongoing evaluations of interventions. In doing so, power is shared with intended beneficiaries who actively get involved and hence gain knowledge and skills on how to tackle challenges in relation to their strategic objectives and how to sustain such interventions. Being part of this process may help them develop enhanced confidence and encourage them to take proactive action, hence breaking down learned helplessness [5-8]. When provided with resources (money, skills, and materials), needy parents may invest in the education of their children by financing their education, helping them to buy school materials and uniforms, and helping girls postpone marriage. This would also address another barrier, which is female education in Africa. The additional resources would also help to reduce short-term concerns for basic consumption needs and reduce the need for their children to stay at home and undertake domestic work rather than attending school. Poor parents, particularly in developing countries, are unlikely to invest private resources in high school education given that they receive marginal immediate benefits [9-12]. They do not invest in education due to the risk of competing wage-earning opportunities, which disallow investing in long-term endeavors. This may also be due to market incentives and prices, which do not allow them to invest in secondary school education because these are usually high-cost investments. In this sense, community-based development programs may help to break this poverty-education cycle. In order to understand the impact of community-based development programs on educational attainment and academic performance, it is important to know the potential pathways and mechanisms that are likely to shape any effects. Firstly, there are important direct pathways as to how community-based development programs might influence educational outcomes.

### CONCLUSION

Community-Based Development programs represent a promising approach to address educational challenges in sub-Saharan Africa. By empowering local communities and leveraging partnerships with NGOs, these programs have demonstrated positive effects on educational outcomes. However, continued research and investment are needed to sustain these gains and address lingering barriers to education access and equity. Overall, Community-Based Development programs hold significant potential to enhance educational attainment and academic performance, contributing to broader efforts towards sustainable development in the region.

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