

Survival of Low-Cost Private Schools is crucial for access and quality of education

Policy Brief

July, 2022



Findings Highlights

Geographic distribution and proximity of government schools are not favorable in Nairobi County. This has created a demand for affordable alternative education and consequently mushrooming of Low Cost Private Schools (LCPS) popularly known as Alternative Provision to Basic Education and Training Institutions (APBETs)¹ in Kenya.

Given these market dynamics, some parents opt to enroll their children in LCPS but not necessarily, because they prefer private to capitation grant-funded government schools. Linked to this, our findings from four informal settlements namely Kibera, Korogocho, Mathare, and Viwandani, in Nairobi, indicate that, even with limited financial resources exacerbated by

loss of income due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of households continue to send their children to Low Cost Private Schools. There was a higher preference by households to transfer learners from private schools to more affordable low-fee schools/public schools generally supported by the government capitation funds. However, considering the limited schooling spaces in public schools, high transfer rates in case of future economic shocks could affect the achievement of equitable access for all. Reduced enrollment in LCPS due to transfer to public school could further affect the operations of these schools and consequently affect the quality of education in both types of schools, as private schools have to cope with low enrollment as public schools cope with high student populations against limited infrastructure and human capital.

This policy brief provides evidence from a study conducted in four Nairobi informal settlements

¹ [APBET](#) Institutions are non-formal education institutions offering national curriculum



between August and October 2021 by the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) through the Center for Global Development (CGD) PREPARE partnership. It involved 883 households, 471 schools in operation, and 24 schools that shut down during COVID-19 pandemic. Presented in this brief are indications for policy action.

How is equitable access to quality education essential for the growing urban informal demography?

Migration to cities and towns majorly by young people for education or employment opportunities and better livelihoods has resulted in urbanization, and the proliferation of unplanned and informal settlements, often dubbed as slums (UN-Habitat, 2006). In 2019, the migration to Kenyan cities was 27.5%, a 0.5% increase, (KNBS, 2019) — though lower than the predicted 40% (World Bank, 2016). Projections on Africa urbanization indicate that by 2050, an additional 900 million people will migrate to the cities, making two thirds of the African population to be city dwellers (OECD, 2022). With more than 60% of Nairobi residents estimated to be living in the informal settlements and 63% of primary school learners attending non-government schools, an ever-increasing population residing in urban settings against limited employment opportunities leads to deteriorating standards and quality of living as well as a lack of equitable access to quality education (Ngware et al., 2013). Following a simple random technique to select 883 Households (HHs) from an existing list of 4,060 eligible HHs with at least one school-going aged child and all school heads from operational schools in the area resulting to 96.9 response rate, several factors were identified to influence the demand and choice for the school type.



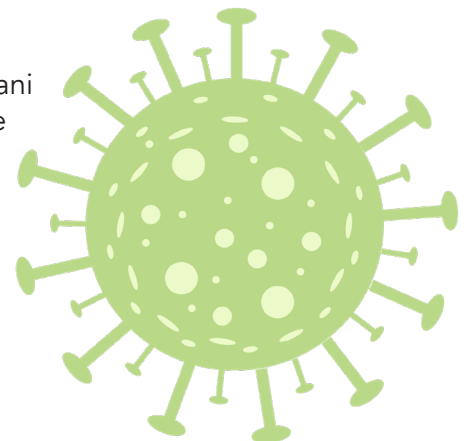
Key Messages

- Low-income households who have to stay in the cities have to eventually explore affordable social amenities including where to enroll their children to schools.
- Policy-driven decisions requiring attention from relevant educational stakeholders are needed to ensure all learners will continue accessing education and measures for mitigating adverse effects of schooling in the ongoing pandemic as well as related future disruptions are identified.

How did COVID-19 affect household income?

While the level of income and employment rate among female-headed households in the urban informal settlements is usually disproportionately low compared with male-headed ones, very low proportions of both male and female remained employed during the peak period of the COVID-19, and only slightly improved at the last quarter of 2021 (Janssens et al., 2021).

At least 69% of the working-age population in Kibera, Mathare and Viwandani lost their jobs. Job loss was highest in Kibera (77.5%), followed by Mathare (70.7%), and Viwandani (68.3%), while it was only 50.5% in Korogocho. In Korogocho slum, almost two-fifths (39.9%) are in self-income generating activities and a further 53.6% are in casual employment, and only 1.2% are in salaried employment. This explains why the loss of employment due to COVID-19 was lowest in Korogocho compared with the other informal settlements.



Key Messages

- Given that the limited employment opportunities in the informal settlements are from informal economic activities, at least 96% of the households' income was negatively affected by COVID-19 containment measures across the four sites.
- Among the coping strategies adopted by households was to transfer learners from private to public schools.

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Learners changed schools from LCPS to public schools



Key Messages

- Private schools that were providing primary and secondary levels of education were the most affected by the school transfers
- The transfer from LCPS to government schools or to other LCPSs was very significant at the primary school level where one in four learners changed schools.
- An estimated 72% of the LCPS schools registered a reduced enrollment rate, which could affect their operations and the quality of education they provide.

Income shocks exacerbated by the effects of COVID-19 especially among the residents of informal settlements working in the informal economy affected school fees affordability and choice of school to enroll their children after schools reopened. Faced with the realities of paying for living expenses and tuition amidst income loss, parents are likely to enroll their children to schools they can afford, rather than deny them rights to education. This is considering that every learner has a right to access basic and compulsory education as enshrined in the Kenyan constitution and basic education act and in conforming to the Education for All act. Some households could not afford to keep their children to the schools they were previously enrolled in prior to the onset of the pandemic. In an attempt to reduce expenses, those learners whose parents could not afford fees charged in the LCPS were transferred to other cheaper LCPS or to government schools that receive capitation grants.



With a quarter of the learners in primary school transferring, policy intervention is essential as this could have long-term effect on learning achievements. The proportion of transfer was highest at the primary school level and lowest at the secondary school level indicating that LCPS offering primary education were affected more by the loss of learners. Since COVID-19 led to loss of income, parents who were affected struggled to afford paying for educational expenses. As a coping strategy, some parents chose to transfer their children from LCPS to government-sponsored public schools. Consequently, at primary and pre-primary levels, more girls than boys changed schools whereas at the secondary school level, transfer rates stood at 12% among boys compared to 9% among girls.

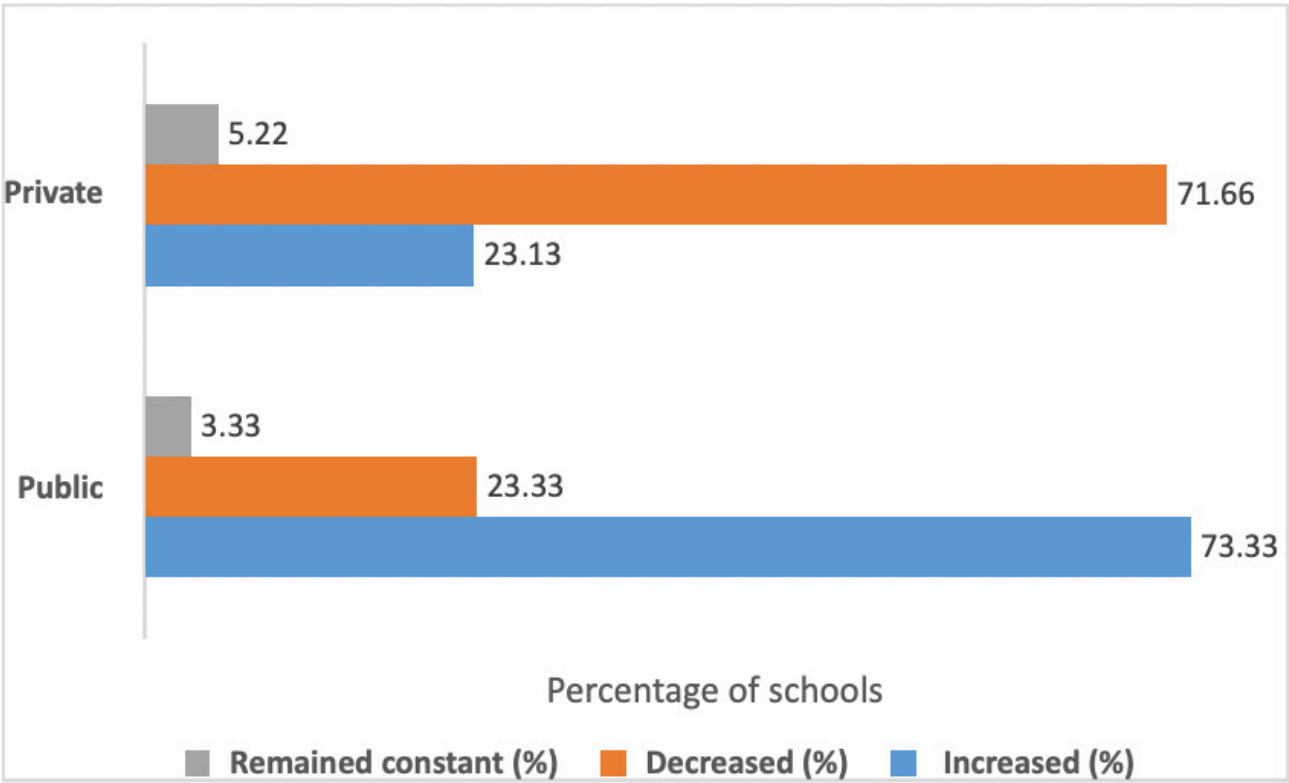


Figure 1: Changes in enrollment after school reopening

A high proportion of dropouts is from the poorest households

Even with the Sustainable Development Goal 4 and the Basic Education Act enshrined in the Constitution of Kenya stipulating that every child has a right to free and compulsory basic quality education (United Nations, 2015; Republic of Kenya, 2013), 1% of children aged 6 to 18 did not return to school. Kibera and Korogocho registered a slightly higher proportion of dropouts, estimated to be more than 1% while less than a percent dropped out in both Mathare and Viwandani.

The gender of the learner did not seem to be significantly associated with the dropout. However, slightly more boys (1.1%) than girls (0.9%) dropped out. Evidence of higher boys’ dropout rate than girls indicates the opportunity cost of schooling (income lost from child labor or lack of engagement in household chores upon school reopening) might have been higher for boys. Learners whose households have very limited financial resources are likely to drop out to engage in economic activities at the expense of attending school in order to support their families. Notably, 47.4% of school dropouts came from the poorest wealth tertile, indicating that affordability of fees and opportunity cost of schooling must have been key drivers.

Quality of education and sustained operations of LCPS at stake



Key Messages

- Low quality of education in LCPS might affect future enrollments.
- A proportion of 28% of the households reported that they would still enroll their child to a school that is far if it is better performing, indicating quality of education is a major factor for school choice, second to affordability.
- The loss of school fees during school closure, coupled with increased default on school fees and a significant reduction in enrollment when schools reopened led to permanent closure of some Low Cost Private Schools.

Quality of education and sustained operations of LCPS at stake

When schools reopened, enrollment data revealed that private schools lost 11% of those previously enrolled in the four informal settlements. This accounts for 6,636 learners of the 60,278 enrolled before the pandemic. On the other hand, only 101 learners of the 20,697 moved from public schools upon full reopening. LCPS therefore lost a high proportion of learners to public institutions. Coupled with other factors that some LCPS might have been struggling with, the economic impact of COVID-19 had adverse effects on the LCPS leading to permanent closure of 24 of these schools. It is worth exploring policy interventions that could mitigate more LCPS from permanently closing. This is especially because it remains unclear the effect the permanent closure has on the ease of access for school spaces, affordability level, distance traveled and most importantly, the quality of education in schools these learners reenroll.



As a coping mechanism of reducing school expenses, 8% of the LCPS hired untrained teachers, whose salaries could be 50% of how qualified trained teachers are generally paid. With evidence from prior studies indicating that learning outcomes are worse for untrained teachers compared with trained ones, replacing qualified trained teachers with untrained ones could further negatively affect the quality of education in LCPS. Identifying strategies to ensure quality in private education is not affected by high transfer of learners from those schools is crucial considering, over years parents from low-economic status have chosen private rather than public education due to perceptions that LCPS provide better quality education than public schools.

Call for action

Low Cost Private Schools play an important role in closing the gap in education supply, especially in these informal settlements. Majority of learners who attend LCPSs do so because there are no government schools within their proximity and not necessarily because they prefer private over government schools or have better quality education (Ngware & Mutisya, 2021). Evidence from education stakeholders indicates some informal settlements or their neighborhoods do not have any public schools and where those government-sponsored public schools are available, slots for admission are limited. This calls for interventions to support parents to send their children to those schools given the high demand for public education against supply of school spaces. We, therefore, recommend that the Government provide capitation grants to LCPSs based on the number of learners from low-income households attending these schools. In the short-run, there is a need for a recovery fund for LCPSs, especially those that were severely hit and could not reopen due to incapacity to meet operational costs.

Further Readings

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Credits

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The opinions expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of APHRC or CGD's official policies.

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