

## AN ASSESSMENT OF STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IN PROMOTING ACCESS TO PRIMARY EDUCATION IN KOPSIRO WARD

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the extent of stakeholder engagement in promoting access to primary education in Kopsiro Ward, Mt. Elgon, Kenya. Despite Kenya's implementation of free primary education in 2003, rural and marginalized communities continue to face significant barriers to educational access. This research investigates how various stakeholders including parents, teachers, community leaders, and government officials engage in decision-making processes to enhance primary education accessibility. Using a descriptive survey design with a sample of 138 stakeholders from a target population of 580, the study employed questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis for data collection. Multiple regression analysis revealed that stakeholder engagement variables explain substantial variance in primary education access outcomes, with an R-squared value of 0.742 and overall model significance at  $p < 0.001$ . Parent-Teacher Association participation emerged as the strongest predictor with a standardized beta coefficient of 0.385 and significance at  $p < 0.01$ , while community leader engagement showed a beta coefficient of 0.298 with  $p < 0.05$ . Government official involvement yielded a beta coefficient of 0.241 with  $p < 0.05$ , demonstrating meaningful contribution to education access improvement. The analysis identified significant barriers including limited awareness among community members with a negative beta coefficient of -0.312 at  $p < 0.01$ , and cultural constraints showing a beta coefficient of -0.278 at  $p < 0.05$ . The findings contribute to the broader discourse on achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 and provide evidence-based recommendations for improving engagement mechanisms to ensure inclusive, equitable quality education for all children in rural contexts.

**Keywords:** stakeholder engagement, primary education access, rural education, Kenya, educational equity

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Access to quality primary education remains a fundamental human right and a cornerstone of sustainable development. However, despite significant global progress, approximately 258 million children and youth were out of school globally in 2018, with rural and marginalized communities disproportionately affected (UNESCO, 2019). In Kenya, while the introduction of free primary education in 2003 led to substantial enrollment increases, challenges persist, particularly in rural areas like Kopsiro Ward in Bungoma County.

Stakeholder engagement has emerged as a critical mechanism for addressing educational barriers and promoting inclusive access to primary education. Effective stakeholder

engagement enables governments and educational institutions to better understand the unique challenges faced by different communities and develop responsive policies (Akkari & Malekalungu, 2019). The Stakeholder Theory, developed by Freeman (1984), provides the theoretical foundation for understanding how various actors—including parents, teachers, community leaders, and government officials—can collaborate to address educational challenges.

This study addresses a significant knowledge gap by examining stakeholder engagement practices at the ward level, where local dynamics and community-specific challenges require tailored interventions. Kopsiro Ward, a rural area in western Kenya, represents a critical case study for understanding how stakeholder engagement can be optimized to enhance primary education access in marginalized communities.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

International research demonstrates that effective stakeholder engagement is crucial for successful educational outcomes. The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) has provided evidence from countries like Mozambique and Somalia, showing how stakeholder involvement in educational planning and implementation significantly improves access and quality (GPE, 2021). Similarly, regional initiatives in East Africa have emphasized the importance of community participation in addressing educational disparities (UNICEF, 2018).

In the Kenyan context, the government has established various mechanisms for stakeholder participation, including School Management Committees (SMCs) and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), which provide platforms for community involvement in school governance (Muriithi & Insley, 2018). The Basic Education Act (2013) and the National Education Sector Strategic Plan (2018-2022) further emphasize the importance of stakeholder engagement in educational decision-making processes.

However, existing research reveals significant gaps in understanding how these mechanisms function at the local level, particularly in rural areas. Studies indicate that while formal structures exist, their effectiveness in facilitating meaningful stakeholder participation varies considerably across different contexts (Yego & Kyalo, 2021). Furthermore, cultural barriers, limited awareness of rights and mechanisms, and inadequate communication channels often impede effective stakeholder engagement in rural communities.

## **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Research Design and Study Area**

This study employed a descriptive survey design to obtain detailed information from a representative sample of stakeholders in Kopsiro Ward, Mt. Elgon Sub County, Bungoma County, Kenya. The descriptive survey design was particularly suited to investigating stakeholders' redress mechanisms in enhancing access to primary education, allowing for systematic examination of stakeholder engagement practices, policy involvement, sensitization programs, and mediation approaches.

Kopsiro Ward was selected as the study area due to its unique challenges, including recurrent land conflicts that have led to school closures, destruction of educational facilities, and teacher transfers, resulting in high dropout rates. The ward is located on the southeastern slopes of Mt. Elgon and is predominantly occupied by Sabaot, Iteso, and Bukusu communities, with rich agricultural activities for both commercial and subsistence purposes.

### 3.2 Target Population and Sampling

The study targeted a comprehensive population of 580 stakeholders directly or indirectly involved in primary education within Kopsiro Ward. This included 120 school personnel (head teachers and classroom teachers), 350 parents and guardians, 45 community leaders (chiefs, elders, and village administrators), 25 government officials from the Ministry of Education, and 40 NGO representatives involved in education advocacy or support programs.

Using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination table, a sample of 138 respondents (23.8% from the target population of 580) was selected through stratified and purposive sampling techniques. Stratified sampling ensured proportional representation across different stakeholder categories, while purposive sampling was employed to select key informants with relevant expertise in primary education access issues. The sample distribution included 30 school personnel (21.7%), 85 parents/guardians (61.6%), 10 community leaders (7.2%), 9 government officials (6.5%), and 4 NGO representatives (2.9%).

### 3.3 Data Collection Methods

Data collection employed multiple instruments to ensure comprehensive coverage of research objectives:

**3.3.1 Questionnaires:** Two sets of structured and semi-structured questionnaires were developed based on literature review and research objectives, utilizing a four-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree). These were administered to head teachers, classroom teachers, parents/guardians, local community leaders, Ministry of Education officials, and NGO representatives.

**3.3.2 Interview Schedules:** Face-to-face interviews were conducted with County Children Officers, Sub County Officers and NGO representatives to obtain data not captured through questionnaires. This method provided direct quotations about experiences, opinions, and knowledge, along with background information.

**3.3.3 Document Analysis:** Various documents were examined including pupils' class attendance registers, progress records, teachers' annual return records, school strategic plans, correspondence, and official reports to facilitate comprehensive information collection on stakeholder engagement mechanisms.

### 3.4 Validity and Reliability

Content validity was ensured through review by two university supervisors and educational research experts, with instruments pilot-tested using 10 respondents from neighboring Cheptais Ward. Internal consistency was tested using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, yielding an alpha

value of 0.78, indicating high reliability. A Pearson product moment correlation coefficient of 0.6 was used as the cut-off value for acceptance.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

Quantitative data from questionnaires were coded and analyzed using SPSS software, employing descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, and means. Results were presented through tables, bar graphs, and pie charts, with inferential statistics in the form of regression analysis. Qualitative data from interviews and open-ended responses were analyzed thematically, with emerging themes identified, categorized, and linked to research objectives.

### **3.6 Ethical Considerations**

The study adhered to strict ethical principles, obtaining necessary permits from the Ministry of Education, university research ethics committee, and County Education Office. Participants provided informed consent after being fully briefed about the study's purpose and procedures. Confidentiality was maintained throughout, with no identifying information included in data collection instruments or final reports. All research activities were conducted respectfully without disrupting normal educational or community functions.

## **4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 Regression Analysis of Stakeholder Engagement and Primary Education Access**

The regression analysis conducted to examine the relationship between stakeholder engagement and access to primary education in Kopsiro Ward revealed statistically significant findings. The multiple regression model examining the extent of stakeholder engagement as a predictor of primary education access yielded an R-squared value of 0.742, indicating that stakeholder engagement variables explain a substantial portion of the variance in primary education access outcomes. The model's F-statistic was significant at  $p < 0.001$ , demonstrating the overall validity of the regression equation and confirming that stakeholder engagement significantly predicts access to primary education in the study area.

The regression coefficients for individual stakeholder engagement variables provided detailed insights into their relative contributions to education access. Parent-Teacher Association participation emerged as the strongest predictor with a standardized beta coefficient of 0.385 and significance level of  $p < 0.01$ , indicating that increased PTA involvement substantially enhances primary education access. Community leader engagement showed a standardized beta coefficient of 0.298 with  $p < 0.05$ , demonstrating moderate but significant influence on education access outcomes. Government official involvement in stakeholder processes yielded a beta coefficient of 0.241 with  $p < 0.05$ , suggesting meaningful contribution to education access improvement.

### **4.2 Analysis of Stakeholder Engagement Mechanisms**

The regression analysis revealed that formal institutional mechanisms, while present across most schools in Kopsiro Ward, varied considerably in their effectiveness as predictors of education access. School Management Committees demonstrated a beta coefficient of 0.189

with marginal significance at  $p = 0.06$ , suggesting that while these formal structures contribute to education access, their impact may be mediated by other factors such as community awareness and active participation levels. The analysis indicated that the mere existence of formal structures does not guarantee improved education access without accompanying community engagement and awareness initiatives.

Community-based engagement approaches showed stronger predictive power in the regression model, with traditional community forums yielding a beta coefficient of 0.267 at  $p < 0.05$  significance level. This finding suggests that informal but culturally embedded engagement mechanisms may be more effective in promoting education access than formal structures alone. Religious gatherings and traditional meetings emerged as significant predictors with combined beta values indicating substantial influence on education outcomes, highlighting the importance of leveraging existing social structures for educational engagement.

Government-led stakeholder initiatives demonstrated mixed results in the regression analysis. While county-level stakeholder consultations showed positive correlation with education access outcomes, the beta coefficient of 0.156 indicated moderate predictive power. Ward-level government engagement proved more influential with a beta coefficient of 0.223 and significance at  $p < 0.05$ , suggesting that localized government involvement in stakeholder processes more effectively translates to improved education access than broader county-level initiatives.

### 4.3 Barriers to Effective Stakeholder Engagement

The regression analysis identified several variables that negatively influence the relationship between stakeholder engagement and education access. Limited awareness among community members about their roles in educational governance emerged as a significant negative predictor with a beta coefficient of -0.312 at  $p < 0.01$ , indicating that knowledge gaps substantially diminish the effectiveness of engagement efforts. This finding underscores the critical importance of awareness-building initiatives as prerequisites for meaningful stakeholder participation.

Cultural and social barriers demonstrated significant negative impact on stakeholder engagement effectiveness, with traditional gender role constraints showing a beta coefficient of -0.278 at  $p < 0.05$ . The analysis revealed that communities with stronger traditional hierarchies experienced reduced effectiveness of stakeholder engagement initiatives, particularly regarding women's participation in educational decision-making processes. Social stratification variables also negatively predicted engagement effectiveness, with marginalized community status yielding a beta coefficient of -0.201 at  $p < 0.05$ .

Communication-related barriers emerged as significant negative predictors in the regression model. Language barriers between stakeholders and educational officials showed a beta coefficient of -0.234 with  $p < 0.05$ , while inadequate communication channels yielded a beta coefficient of -0.189 at  $p = 0.07$ . These findings highlight the critical role of effective communication systems in facilitating meaningful stakeholder engagement and subsequent education access improvements.

### 4.4 Impact Assessment through Regression Analysis

The comprehensive regression analysis demonstrated that effective stakeholder engagement significantly predicts primary education access outcomes across multiple dimensions. Enrollment rates showed strong positive correlation with stakeholder engagement variables, with the combined engagement index yielding a beta coefficient of 0.421 at  $p < 0.001$ . Retention rates demonstrated similar patterns, with active stakeholder participation predicting lower dropout rates, particularly among vulnerable populations including girls and children from economically disadvantaged families.

The regression model examining learning outcomes as dependent variables revealed that stakeholder engagement contributes to academic achievement beyond mere access indicators. Schools with higher stakeholder engagement scores demonstrated improved standardized test performance, with the engagement index predicting academic outcomes at  $\beta = 0.356$  and  $p < 0.01$ . This finding suggests that stakeholder involvement enhances not only access to education but also the quality of educational experiences and outcomes for students.

Resource mobilization emerged as a significant mediating variable in the regression analysis, with stakeholder engagement predicting increased community and external resource acquisition for schools. The analysis showed that schools with active stakeholder engagement secured additional resources at rates significantly higher than those with limited engagement, with stakeholder involvement predicting resource acquisition at  $\beta = 0.398$  and  $p < 0.001$ . This finding indicates that effective stakeholder engagement creates virtuous cycles where community involvement leads to improved resources, which in turn enhance education access and quality.

Community ownership of educational outcomes demonstrated strong correlation with stakeholder engagement variables in the regression analysis. The sense of community responsibility for children's education, measured through survey instruments, showed positive correlation with engagement levels at  $r = 0.487$  and  $p < 0.001$ . Schools in communities with higher ownership indicators demonstrated better maintenance of facilities, higher teacher retention rates, and more sustained improvement in education access indicators, suggesting that stakeholder engagement fosters long-term sustainability of educational improvements.

## 5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, this study recommends several strategies to enhance stakeholder engagement in Kopsiro Ward:

- a) **Strengthen Awareness and Capacity Building:** Implement comprehensive community education programs to increase awareness of educational rights, stakeholder roles, and available engagement mechanisms. These programs should be culturally appropriate and delivered in local languages.
- b) **Enhance Inclusive Participation:** Develop strategies to increase participation by marginalized groups, including women, youth, and minority communities. This may include scheduling meetings at convenient times, providing childcare, and creating safe spaces for diverse voices.
- c) **Improve Communication Systems:** Establish regular, multi-channel communication systems that utilize both traditional and modern communication methods to ensure information reaches all community members effectively.

- d) **Integrate Traditional and Formal Mechanisms:** Create bridges between traditional community forums and formal educational governance structures to harness the strengths of both approaches.

## 5.1 Global and Regional Context of Stakeholder Engagement

### 5.1.1 Global Perspectives on Policy Engagement

Globally, stakeholder engagement in primary education has evolved significantly since UNESCO's Education for All initiative launched in 2000. Research by Bray and Kwo (2018) emphasizes that effective access to primary education requires addressing not only enrollment but also quality, relevance, and equity issues through comprehensive stakeholder involvement. International experiences demonstrate that successful educational reforms depend on meaningful participation of diverse stakeholders including parents, community leaders, teachers, and civil society organizations.

The African context presents unique challenges and opportunities for stakeholder engagement in primary education. According to the African Union Commission (2019), while enrollment rates have increased across the continent, persistent issues such as inadequate infrastructure, teacher shortages, and socio-economic disparities continue to hinder access. The Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) 2016-2025 emphasizes the critical role of stakeholder engagement in addressing these challenges through policy reforms, community involvement, and innovative interventions.

### 5.1.2 Regional Dynamics in East Africa

Within East Africa, stakeholder engagement practices vary significantly based on cultural contexts, governance structures, and resource availability. Research by Ndaruhutse et al. (2020) highlights the importance of community involvement and localized interventions in enhancing access to primary education. Community schools and alternative education programs have emerged as viable strategies in regions with limited formal schooling opportunities, demonstrating the effectiveness of context-specific approaches that prioritize local stakeholder input.

Studies by Osei-Hwedie and Koomson (2019) reveal that at the local level, access to primary education is significantly influenced by cultural norms, parental attitudes, and local governance structures. Community-led initiatives, including parent-teacher associations and school feeding programs, play crucial roles in addressing barriers to education at the grassroots level. These findings underscore the importance of understanding local dynamics when designing stakeholder engagement strategies.

### 5.1.3 Stakeholder Engagement Mechanisms in Practice

Active participation in Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings represents a fundamental aspect of stakeholder engagement globally. Studies demonstrate that when parents engage actively in these meetings, they become more informed about their children's progress and school needs (Gupta et al., 2019). This involvement typically leads to improved student

outcomes, as parents are more likely to support their children's learning at home and advocate for necessary resources at the school level.

Community awareness programs serve as another critical mechanism for stakeholder engagement. These programs aim to raise awareness about the importance of education, address cultural barriers, and encourage enrollment, particularly among marginalized communities (Rodriguez et al., 2021). By involving community members in educational discussions, these programs foster ownership and collective responsibility for children's schooling, leading to higher retention rates and improved educational outcomes.

Collaboration with local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) has emerged as a prevalent practice in enhancing stakeholder engagement globally. NGOs often work closely with communities and schools to fill resource and service gaps, providing textbooks, scholarships, and teacher training (Adegbile et al., 2021). These partnerships leverage NGO expertise and resources to complement government efforts, particularly in areas with limited infrastructure and funding.

#### **5.1.4 Context-Specific Approaches**

The effectiveness of stakeholder engagement practices varies significantly across different regional contexts. In conflict-affected areas of Africa, involvement in conflict resolution workshops has emerged as a critical strategy for maintaining educational access. By addressing underlying social and political tensions, these workshops create safer learning environments and facilitate school reopening, thus increasing access to education for affected populations (Makokha & Odhiambo, 2021).

In rapidly urbanizing areas of Asia, community contribution to school infrastructure development represents a prevalent form of stakeholder engagement. Population growth and urbanization have increased demand for school facilities, prompting collaborative efforts to build or renovate schools (Khan et al., 2022). These initiatives address physical barriers to education while promoting community cohesion and pride in local schools.

#### **5.1.5 Local Implementation in Bungoma County**

In Bungoma County, stakeholder engagement practices reflect the priorities and dynamics of local communities. Research by Simiyu and Juma (2022) highlights the need for targeted interventions addressing school infrastructure, teacher shortages, and cultural barriers. Active participation in PTA meetings represents a longstanding tradition reflecting the commitment of parents and educators to collaborate in improving educational outcomes.

Community awareness programs in Bungoma County often intersect with broader development goals, mobilizing support for initiatives aimed at increasing enrollment and retention rates (Wafula et al., 2022). These programs empower community members to advocate for educational resources and policies that effectively address local needs. Collaboration with local NGOs provides diverse support ranging from scholarships and school supplies to policy advocacy and community empowerment (Simiyu et al., 2020).

Within Kopsiro Ward specifically, stakeholder engagement practices are shaped by unique community dynamics and educational priorities. Active participation in PTA meetings is encouraged as a means to foster collaboration between parents, teachers, and school administrators. Through these meetings, stakeholders can identify and address specific challenges facing schools and students, including infrastructure needs, teacher shortages, and curriculum gaps.

The evidence from global, regional, and local contexts demonstrates that effective stakeholder engagement requires culturally appropriate, context-specific approaches that recognize the diverse needs and capabilities of different communities. Success depends on building trust, ensuring inclusive participation, and creating sustainable mechanisms for ongoing collaboration among all educational stakeholders.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

This study demonstrates that while stakeholder engagement mechanisms exist in Kopsiro Ward, significant opportunities remain for enhancement. Effective stakeholder engagement is not merely about establishing formal structures but ensuring meaningful participation by all community members in educational decision-making processes. The findings underscore the critical role of inclusive, culturally appropriate engagement strategies in promoting equitable access to primary education.

The research contributes to the growing body of evidence supporting community-driven approaches to educational development and provides practical insights for policymakers, educators, and development practitioners working in similar rural contexts. As Kenya and other developing nations continue working toward achieving SDG 4, the lessons from Kopsiro Ward highlight the importance of authentic stakeholder engagement in creating education systems that truly serve all children.

Future research should explore the long-term sustainability of enhanced stakeholder engagement mechanisms and their impact on educational outcomes across different cultural and economic contexts. Additionally, investigating the role of technology in facilitating stakeholder engagement in rural areas represents a promising avenue for further inquiry.

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