POLICY BRIEF

Socio-Economic Status and Children's Schooling Outcomes in Mozambique

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Abstract

This study investigates the association between socio-economic factors and children's schooling outcomes (school access as proxied by ever enrolled, dropping out and staying in school-current enrolled or still in school) for children in Mozambique using the probit model. The results show that there is not much difference between factors that affect access and those that affect dropping out or staying in school once enrolled. Children from the poorest families, with less educated parents, from the north region, who live far away from a water source and are not the biological children of the household

head were found to be most disadvantaged in all the three schooling outcomes compared to their counterparts with educated parents, from wealthy families and with water at home. The rural–urban divide, availability of electricity and land or livestock at home had no significant correlation with children schooling outcomes. This study therefore argues that policy makers must implement policies that improve the socio-economic backgrounds of children, by dealing with the demand side factors particularly enhancing adult literacy programmes, providing water sources close to households, encouraging pre-primary education centres and improving the general welfare of households where children live. In a nutshell, results showed that demand side factors were strong factors that hinder children's schooling and have to be prioritized in drafting and implementing of education policies.

Introduction and background

Education is generally acknowledged to be the most powerful tool in fighting poverty and enhancing a country's economic development. Investing in human capital through education improves the competitiveness of a nation. Empirical studies have found that education boosts social status, improves agricultural productivity, and speeds up the process of demographic transition (Kravdal, 2002). Bongaarts (2003) and Riyami et al. (2004) found that females' education decreases fertility and mortality through its effect on age at first marriage. The UN MDG 2 sought to ensure that children complete primary education—universal primary education (UPE) (United Nations, 2015). SDG 4 emphasizes the need for "*inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting life-long learning opportunities for all by 2030*" (United Nations, 2015). The Government of Mozambique embarked on extensive reforms in education in 2000, soon after the end of civil war.

Since the end of the civil war, poverty levels have been high across Mozambique (MEF/DNEAP, 2016; Gradin and Tarp, 2019). The country's human development index (HDI) improved by over 120% between 1990 and 2019, from a value of 0.209 to 0.46 (United Nations, 2015). However, the country still falls in the low human development category and was ranked number 180 out of 189 countries and territories in 2017. Inequality remain one of the social ills of the country (MEF/DNEAP, 2016; Gradin and Tarp, 2019; Arndt and Mahrt, 2017). The south continues to be better off than the central and the north.

The gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate in Mozambique was impressive post-2000, averaging about 7.5%, until 2015 when the country plunged into hidden debt crisis (Arndt and Mahrt, 2017). Economic progress, however, did not manage to pull the country out of extreme poverty. The poverty head count ratio was 69.0% in 1996/97; 52.8% in 2002/03; 51.7% in 2008/09 and 46.1% in 2014/15 (MEF/DNEAP, 2016). Studies

have found that people were more likely to remain in the vulnerable or poor category than to move into a better category (Salvucci and Santos, 2020; Salvucci and Tarp, 2021). Child poverty was found to exceed that of neighbouring countries (Mahrt, Rossi and Salvucci, 2020).

The formal sector still only employs about 14% of the total labour force than the rest are in the informal sector. The labour force comprises 43% of the total population and almost half the population is aged between 0 and 14 years. The country also still depends heavily on the agriculture sector which provides 75% of the employment; the service sector provides 21% and the industry sector 4% (MEF/DNEAP, 2016). The most cited reasons for the slow translation of growth to poverty and inequality reduction is the relatively low skilled domestic labour force (MEF/DNEAP, 2016; Gradin and Tarp, 2019; Arndt and Mahrt, 2017). Mozambique has very low human capital, especially in education such that companies relied on imported skilled labour during the boom period (MEF/DNEAP, 2016). In addition, the country experiences frequent from natural disasters like floods, cyclones, drought, and diseases (particularly AIDS and malaria).

The Mozambique schooling system comprises two cycles—lower primary (grades 1–5, known as EP1) and upper primary (grades 6 and 7, which is called EP2). Secondary education also comprises two cycles: grades 8–10 lower secondary, called ES1 and grades 11–12 upper secondary, ES2. Due to the shortage of schools and classrooms, some primary schools operate three shifts a day. After seven years of primary education, the pupils have a choice of enrolling for general secondary education, lower primary teacher training colleges, basic technical or vocational schools.

In colonial times, education was not easily accessible to native Mozambicans, to the extent that in 1975 (the year of independence) 93% of the population was illiterate (UNESCO, 2011). Unfortunately, civil war broke out two years after independence and continued until 1992. The government was thus constrained in making meaningful reforms in the education sector. In 2004 the government embarked on extensive reforms to improve education. National tuition and other fees in primary education were abolished and textbooks were provided for free. Primary school education is completely free in Mozambique whereas secondary schools charge a fee. The government, through the World Bank support in the form of the "Direct Support to Schools" programme also increased funding for non-salary expenses to schools (World Bank, 2003). School construction and large-scale hiring of teachers accompanied the 2004 reforms leading to an increase in the numbers of schools and classes.

Primary school enrolment rate and completion were relatively low and declining for a decade from 1985 to 1995, the period which coincides with the war. Secondary school enrolment was stable at a rate of 7% in this period. The phase post-2004 school reforms were characterized by great improvements in these three educational outcomes. The net enrolment was recorded at 73% in 2005 and 90% in 2015 and fell by

2% to 88% in 2017. The primary completion rate, which was just 16% in 2000 almost tripled and was recorded at 41% in 2005. In 2010 the rate increased by a further 16 percentage points to 57%. However, there was a downward trend thereafter and in 2017 the completion rate was at 46%. The secondary school enrolment rate showed an upward trend since 2005 and recorded an improvement of 22 percentage points between 2005 and 2017. However, the secondary enrolment did not respond as much as the primary did. This might be due to the relatively low primary school completion rate and the inability of some parents to afford to send their children to secondary schools which charge some fees.

The gross secondary enrolment rate stood at just 33% in 2015 while the average in the sub-Saharan African region was 42.5%. This implies that many children do not make it to the seventh grade and, of the few who do, not all of them progress to secondary level. Henceforth, the country will continue to lack an educated and skilled workforce. In a nutshell, this shows that reforms brought about improvement in children's education outcomes; much work, however, remains to be done.

A detailed examination of children's access to school and the associated underlying factors is crucial given the challenges with grade progression and lower primary school completion rates in the country. While much literature exists on the determinants of schooling in the world, literature specific to Mozambique is scarce. Most studies have focused on analysing enrolment status separately. For example, their focus is on whether a child is currently enrolled or not (see Robson, 1993; Handa, 200; Mambo, 2017). This study will contribute by analysing first time enrolment (access to schooling), dropping out and remaining enrolled simultaneously in a bivariate regression model.

The main objective of this study was to investigate the socio-economic factors that drive the process of children's access to school, dropping out and staying in school using the Aids indicator survey data (DHS/AIS, 2015). Specifically, the study sought to examine if the same variables that affects children's first-time access to school (first time enrolment) are the same ones that affect their continued stay in school.

Data source

The study used the 2015 AIS data set. This data set comprises nationally representative household surveys that provide data for a wide range of monitoring and impact evaluation indicators in the areas of population, health, and nutrition. The data were collected between May and September 2015 (DHS/AIS, 2015). This study used the household member record data set (MZPR71FL.DTA) which has some information on every household member. A sample of individuals between 6 and 18 years old was used. The data set has limitations in that it does not include information on when the

child in question enrolled in school or if the child ever repeated any grade. Absent also is information on household monetary income, distance to school and hours spent working for those children who might combine school and work etc., which might have been useful for our study.

Conclusion

The objective of this study was to investigate the relationship between socio-economic factors and children's education outcomes (access to schooling, dropping out and staying or remaining enrolled). The government and donor agencies are working tirelessly to ensure universal enrolment of children and completing primary school studies, in line with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Progress, however, shows that the country is still far from realizing these goals.

This study shows that most variables are correlated with the three children's education outcomes, which implies that almost the same variables that affect access to schooling, dropping out and or remaining in school are practically the same. Children's schooling is affected by the demand or socio-economic factors such as parents' education, distance to water source, household wealth, child age and the region the child comes from. This calls for the government and other interested agencies to also consider these social-demographic factors in child education policies. Thus, more emphasis is needed on improving these factors as much as the school supply side factors are given priority.

The household where the child comes from has to be conducive and enabling for a child to find time for schooling. For example, if the water source is far away from the household, children will be asked to help fetch water. In addition, if the family is very poor, child labour will be demanded in order for the family to be able to put food on the table. In a nutshell, the social-demographic factors show a very high significant correlation with both boys' and girls' education. Hence not only supply-side factors but also the demand-side factors have to be prioritized to ensure children's education.

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