The Dynamics of Education Policy Implementation: Insights from USAID's Experience in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the intricacies of implementing education policies in Kenya, specifically examining the contributions and obstacles faced by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). This study evaluates the efficacy of USAID's initiatives in the education sector of Kenya, examining the intricacies of cooperation between governmental entities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and civil society groups. The study utilizes a quantitative research methodology and gathers data through a survey delivered to 120 respondents, who were selected to represent government, NGO, and civil society groups. The data is analyzed using descriptive statistics. The study highlights significant barriers such as insufficient government backing and restricted resources, while also emphasizing fruitful partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society. The research findings emphasize the crucial role of USAID in improving access to education and emphasize the need for more research to address gaps in policy relevance and implementation effectiveness. This paper provides useful insights into the discussion on international development and education reform, presenting proposals for enhancing policy implementation frameworks in Kenya and similar settings.

Introduction

Implementing education policy is crucial in establishing the foundation for human growth and its subsequent impact on economic development. Research indicates that only a few nations have achieved above-average economic growth without considering the presence of robust educational foundations (UNESCO 2013). Several countries have been unable to get above-average outcomes due to

their inadequate investment in high-quality and sustainable education for all (Ramnarain, 2014). Implementing education policy is crucial in cultivating people who make informed decisions, particularly about democratic processes, health, and the overall well-being of families and populations (Burns et al., 2014).

Reforming global education systems has been characterized by slow progression, highlighting the complexity and challenges of implementing effective educational policies. For instance, it took nearly 14 years of experimentation in the Czech Republic to evaluate the most effective programs and methods for implementing education system reforms, even after new policies were officially implemented (OECD, 2016). Similarly, Borman et al. (2014) found that educational changes in the United States during the 1990s achieved their highest level of effectiveness 8 to 14 years after implementation. These examples underscore the long-term nature of education policy implementation and the need for sustained effort and evaluation.

To expedite progress in economic growth, development, and governance, it is imperative to integrate technology and innovation in the education sector alongside legislative reforms (Fullan, et al., 2014). Policy analysis evaluations in developed nations, such as the United States, consistently demonstrate that measuring outcomes based on long-term goals rather than the policy implementation process in the education sector is the most effective approach (Devarajan et al., 2013). However, in numerous countries, policymakers in the education sector frequently neglect the implementation process while prioritizing policy formulation. This explains the failure of many education policies, prompting intervention from organizations like USAID.

The disconnect between policy formulation and implementation is a significant concern in education. Education scholars express dissatisfaction with the tendency of professionals to prioritize policy implementation without adequately developing effective measures to ensure policy success (Badat & Sayed, 2014). A clear distinction exists between policies and the practice of teaching and learning in education (Cerna, 2013), with policies often formulated without considering their practical execution. This gap between policy and practice highlights the need for a more integrated approach to education policy development and implementation.

USAID has long been engaged in integrating policy formation and execution, particularly concerning the connection between policies and actual education provision. The organization has spearheaded innovative systems and initiatives prioritizing community engagement, is grounded in research, and aims to achieve gender parity in education. Fisne et al. (2016) described comprehensive and pragmatic procedures globally. Given the evolving nature of education in terms of social and demographic factors, it is imperative for education to be adaptable to respond to these changes effectively.

The experiences of various African countries provide valuable insights into the challenges and successes of education policy implementation. In Tanzania, for example, USAID designed an education strategy well-suited to the country's needs and had realistic, practical implementation. The program focused on attaining self-

sufficiency for the populace, emphasizing agriculture and incorporating Kiswahili, a language widely spoken by learners. This approach demonstrates the importance of tailoring education policies to local contexts and needs.

In Ghana, the government implemented two primary programs, "The New Deal" and the Authenticity Campaign, to ensure that most citizens received education and developed self-sufficiency (Coburn et al., 2016). The positive outcomes of these programs became apparent two decades following Ghana's independence, highlighting the long-term nature of education policy impacts.

However, challenges in education policy implementation persist, particularly in developing countries. In Kenya, studies have revealed implementation challenges in education policies. Mulinya & Orodho (2015) found that implementing free primary education in Kakamega South District did not prioritize policy or resource allocation, leading to overcrowded classrooms and unsatisfactory performance in KCPE examinations. Similarly, Mutegi et al. (2017) identified inequitable distribution among secondary schools following the introduction of free secondary education, resulting in gender disparities in enrolment.

These examples underscore the complexity of education policy implementation and the need for comprehensive, context-specific approaches. While significant progress has been made in addressing gender inequality in education access in many developing countries, implementing education policies remains a challenge in several nations, resulting in low education standards in African countries like Kenya (Gabriel, et al, 2016).

Despite the involvement of donor partners such as USAID and UN organizations like UNAID and UNICEF, the persistent challenges in education policy implementation highlight the need for further research and evaluation. A thorough evaluation of policies is strongly advised to determine whether failures result from inadequate execution or ill-suited policies (Cosner et al., 2016). Such studies would aim to evaluate the extent of stakeholders' engagement in the implementation process and identify effective strategies for improving education policy outcomes.

Implementing education policy is a critical study area with far-reaching implications for individual and societal development. The challenges and complexities in translating policy into practice underscore the need for continued research, evaluation, and adaptation of approaches. By understanding the factors that contribute to successful policy implementation and addressing the barriers that hinder progress, we can work towards more effective and equitable education systems that truly serve the needs of learners and communities.

Hence, This study evaluates the extent of USAID stakeholders' engagement in implementing education policy in Kenya, building on prior discussions. This study aims to investigate the extent to which USAID has engaged stakeholders in implementing education policy in Kenya.

Literature Review

Educational stakeholders acknowledged the significance of education in promoting progress when they made commitments to enhance access to education in poor nations. The commitment to provide education access for all people, regardless of gender or social background, has received support from the Millennium Goals (World Bank, 2015). The Monterrey Consensus of 2002 and the Doha Declaration in 2008 suggested the establishment of a fund and greater collaboration to support the financing of education policies and their execution.

Technology integration has been strongly advocated for in implementing the global education agenda (Verger, 2014). According to research conducted in the US education system, one of the first countries to adopt technology in educational policy implementation, technology generally improved the success rate of most policies (Khan et al., 2014). This elucidates why the United States was among the first nations to attain self-sufficiency shortly after gaining independence. The World Bank (2018) successfully implemented a merger of education policies and technology, which proved to be a profitable venture.

In Kenya, Kaberia et al. (2011) found that despite the benefits of free primary education, there were some policy difficulties. Initially, the government assumed the responsibility of supporting primary and secondary education, thereby relieving parents of the financial burden. Due to the government's substantial expenditures, it could not fully finance free education, resulting in several obstacles. Typically, pupils in many schools had to share desks and books, while many kids were crowded into a single classroom. Teachers were overwhelmed by many students, given that these same teachers were not actively engaged in executing the free education policy. Furthermore, teachers lacked proper training in effective teaching methodologies and strategies to manage larger class sizes effectively.

Implementation of the Education Policy.

According to a 2019 article by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), the primary factors influencing education policies in Kenya were the country's distinctive requirements and the demands of its education system. For example, the primary goal of education programs in Kenya was to attain self-sufficiency and foster economic growth and development. The education policies were established with careful consideration of their sustainability and future effectiveness, taking into account several intended outcomes. To fulfill the requirements mentioned earlier, the process of creating and executing policies in the education sector was recognized as a complex and multi-faceted task. Many specialists, stakeholders, and government organizations were required to participate. The stakeholders contributed their expertise and experience from their different professions, which influenced the development and implementation of the final policies (Brookings Institution, 2016).

The system dynamics entailed collaborations among many stakeholders, including local actors that utilized the knowledge of local personnel and considered the diverse evidence gathered in Kenya (Kaberia et al., 2011). This facilitated

programming customization to align with Kenya's specific requirements, prospects, and existing resources. As a result, Kenya implemented evidence-based educational interventions that were applied in both elementary and secondary school. It was recognized that the effectiveness of these interventions may vary depending on the specific political and social circumstances of each environment (Pettipas & Walker, 2016).

The primary obstacle encountered was the adaptation of research recommendations to align with the tangible requirements of the school system (Salem & Hiba, 2018). To establish benchmarks, this entailed adopting policies and recommendations from partner countries like the United States and Britain, which shared comparable goals and objectives (Sonia et al., 2016). These policies were subjected to several trials at both the national and regional levels to assess their efficacy. Consequently, the benefits and disadvantages that arose were not limited to a national scale but were observed throughout the country (Denham, 2007).

Gaining a comprehensive understanding of the factors that impact access to and participation in education at a community level facilitated the customization of local policies and solutions in Kenya. In several regions, including Narok and Kajiado Counties, the primary factor contributing to low school enrollment was gender bias. Local communities in these areas showed a preference for educating males rather than females. An effective solution to this problem would involve implementing incentive-based policies, such as providing free education for girls. In some regions, the primary challenges are political instability, such as in West Pokot, impoverished backgrounds, and drought conditions. Each of these difficulties necessitates a distinct strategy or set of policies to be implemented (GIZ, 2014). These challenges required establishing public schools, religious schools, private schools, schools supported by non-governmental organizations, and special schools.

The theory of Structural Functionalism

Talcott Parsons is widely identified with the philosophy of structural functionalism. The theory was established in 1937. According to the theory, society is perceived as a complex entity in which every part must effectively interact with other aspects to promote solidarity and ensure the stability of the society. According to the theory, society has developed over time due to the interaction and interdependence of its key components, including norms, practices, traditions, and institutions, resulting in a stable and enduring society. According to the functionalist idea, education establishes a system of rules and regulations in which knowledgeable individuals provide instructions, and those who lack knowledge are expected to comply with these instructions. This is the case because not all members of society can assume leadership roles. If everyone were to become a leader, it would result in significant uncertainty and a breakdown of law and order within the society. The reference is from Hörisch and Schaltegger's work published in 2014. Education is crucial in categorizing people based on their talents and abilities. In a stable and cohesive community, everyone is allocated tasks that align with their strengths and abilities, ensuring optimal performance (Archer, 2018). Consequently, the society

experienced sustainable growth and development as every community member actively contributed.

Utilizing the structural functionalism theory in policy implementation reveals that the responsibility of implementing policies does not rest only on one institution. According to the notion, all aspects must be interconnected to attain rigidity and sustainability. Therefore, to implement policies effectively, it is imperative for USAID, the government, parents, and civil society groups to collaborate (Dafouz, & Smit, 2014). Through the synergy of their collaborative efforts in policy implementation, they enhance one another's strengths and compensate for their flaws, resulting in highly sustainable and stable policies. Based on the aforementioned considerations, proponents of structural functionalism have identified education as a catalyst for numerous advantages concerning a society's institutions, norms, culture, and social behaviors. This theory was crucial in elucidating how a lack of coordination among parties responsible for implementing education policies had delayed attaining the education policy's objective, which was to establish sustainable livelihoods in Kenya (Chitty, 2014).

In summary, the literature study emphasizes the need to prioritize the government's and diverse stakeholders' involvement while also emphasizing its significance. In most countries, the responsibility for formulating and implementing policies rests not solely with the government. Instead, the government must collaborate with various stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the general public, funders, education financiers, and others. According to Mulinya & Orodho (2015), the free primary education policy in Kenya was largely unsuccessful due to the government's failure to engage other stakeholders, such as teachers and other education funders. The Kenyan government opted for independent action, resulting in resource management difficulties.

Effective policies in the education sector are developed and implemented by first benchmarking with nations that have achieved superior results. It is necessary to assess and improve the adopted policies periodically to address the evolving educational requirements of a nation. According to a study by Kaberia & Ndiku (2011), the lack of benchmarking by the Kenyan government with other countries that had successfully implemented free education was a significant obstacle to implementing free education in Kenya. The government hastily introduced the program without performing a pilot study or adopting it in stages.

Research Methods

This study was conducted in the United Nations Headquarters-Gigiri complex located in Nairobi. The study also involved respondents collaborating with policy implementation partners, such as the government, civil society organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Their comments were intended to complement the material provided by the USAID personnel.

The study employed a mixed-method approach, using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Data was gathered through the utilization of standardized

questionnaires and focus group talks. Given the hectic schedules of most USAID personnel, a solitary focus group was conducted at their Gigiri office for two hours. The focus group was only attended by 15 USAID personnel who were present at the time of the event. The researcher distributed the questionnaires for completion and retrieved them within one week following the submission of responses.

This study utilized a population comprising a limited sample of United States Agency for International Development personnel and other organizations involved in the education sector. The study encompassed a total of 120 participants.

A quantitative methodology was employed to analyze the research variables. The qualitative analysis was performed using statistical methods, including calculating percentages and ratios. Based on these percentages and ratios, conclusions and determinations were reached. The researcher conducted a qualitative analysis to gather fundamental information. This information was gained via notes taken during the focus group discussion and transcripts from the collected questionnaires. Quantitative analysis extends its investigation to examine the theories within the study's theoretical framework and ascertain their validity or invalidity.

Results and Discussion

Demographic characteristics of the respondents

120 questionnaires were distributed to respondents as part of the original research. However, only 80 respondents responded to the questions. The 65% response rate indicates that we have a satisfactory quantity of responses to represent the population accurately.

Regarding the gender of the respondents, there was a more significant proportion of male respondents, accounting for 56 individuals, while just 24 respondents were female. Most participants, specifically 60 out of 80 respondents, were 18-45 years old. This age group is considered prime as individuals tend to contribute their highest level of effort in the job before experiencing a decline in productivity due to aging.

Regarding the respondents' educational background, the data indicates that most of them, specifically 64 individuals, have completed higher education programs, as evidenced by their diplomas, degrees, and postgraduate credentials. Out of all the respondents, only 16 possessed basic elementary and secondary school qualifications. This data indicates that USAID and its partners hire individuals with a formal education. In addition, a more significant number of program officers (40) responded to the questionnaire compared to grants officers (27) and project directors (13). This can be attributed to grant officers and project directors being occupied with their work and having limited availability.

Role of USAID in Kenya Education Policy Implementation

The study's primary objective was to ascertain USAID's involvement in implementing education policy in Kenya. To provide a more comprehensive response, we analyzed and interpreted the feedback received from the participants.

Figure 1 demonstrates that most respondents, specifically 78%, observed increased education access while USAID was active. Nevertheless, the percentage of school access was only 22% in cases when USAID was not present or not active. This is corroborated by the research conducted by Kaberia & Ndiku (2011), who discovered that policies are more likely to be unsuccessful if the government does not involve all essential parties, such as USAID, in their implementation. Consequently, this leads to limited access to education. This data is consistent with the second objective, which aims to determine why USAID plays a significant role in implementing educational policy in Kenya. USAID's involvement significantly increases the likelihood of policy success due to the organization's extensive skills and understanding.
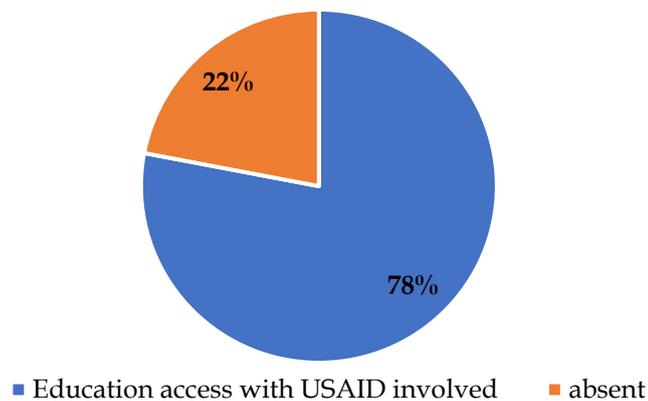

■ Education access with USAID involved   ■ absent

Figure 1. Levels of Education Access when USAID is Involved
in Policy Implementation
(Source: Researcher's primary data, 2023)

Regarding the participation of the Kenyan government, civil society groups, and NGOs in implementing education policies with USAID. Table 1 below indicates that most respondents believed NGOs had a higher level of involvement with USAID, with a percentage of 55%, followed by civil society groups at 25%. The data also indicates that the Government of Kenya had limited involvement in implementing policies with USAID, as only 20% of respondents reported cooperation between the two entities.

Table 1. Levels of Involvement and Cooperation between USAID and Key Stakeholders/Partners

Partner/Stakeholder	Level of Involvement in Percentage
The Government of Kenya	20%
NGOs	55%
Civil Societies	25%

Source: Researcher's primary data (2023)

According to Mulinya & Orodho (2015), providing free education in Kenya encountered significant obstacles, mostly due to resource constraints. The government's lack of full cooperation with stakeholders was a major contributing factor, as only 20% of respondents perceived the government to cooperate with USAID. This is supported by the structural functionalist theory, which posits that when institutions such as the government and USAID do not collaborate effectively, the outcomes achieved will lack dependability and long-term viability in society. The Kenyan Government encountered challenges in maintaining the long-term viability of free primary and secondary education.
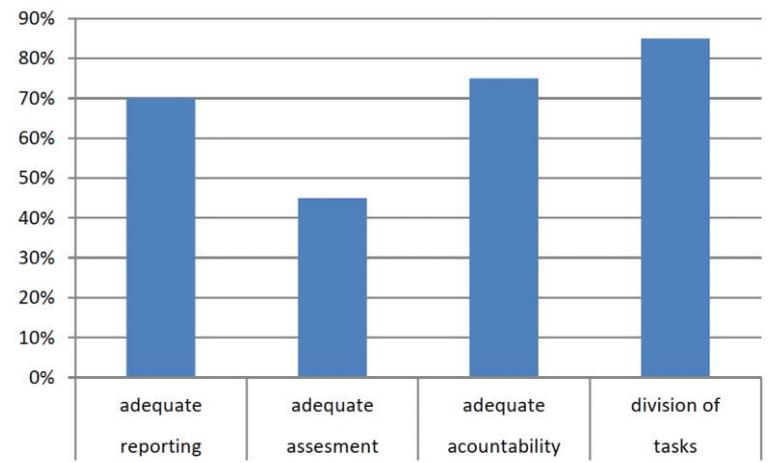

Figure 2. Advantages of Involving USAID in Policy Implementation in Kenya's Education Sector
(Source: Researcher's primary data, 2023)

Figure 2 presents that when USAID was involved in the policy implementation process, 70% believed there was sufficient reporting, while 75% believed there was adequate accountability. Regarding the division and allocation of work, 80% of individuals observed that tasks were effectively assigned during the implementation of policies. Does the fact that just 45% of respondents reported

adequate assessment when USAID was involved explain why most education programs implemented are not sustainable in the long run?

Mutegi et al. (2017) observed that implementing free secondary education resulted in gender imbalance in public secondary schools. This inequality arose due to the lack of assessment undertaken by the government of Kenya and partners such as USAID after the program's implementation. As a result, certain learners have been deprived of their entitlement and freedom to access education, which contradicts the principles of liberalism.
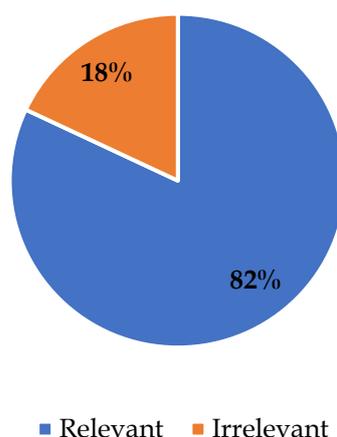

■ Relevant   ■ Irrelevant

Figure 3. Relevance of USAID Policy Implementations to
the Kenyan Education Sector
(Source: Researcher's primary data, 2023)

Based on Figure 3, almost 82% of the participants considered USAID's education policies highly pertinent to the Kenyan education sector and preferred USAID to maintain these policies. In contrast, a mere 18% of individuals in Kenya considered the USAID policy irrelevant. The key determinants responsible for the perceived lack of significance in implementing USAID policies in Kenya were not identified. Nevertheless, this presents a chance for future research to investigate this discrepancy. Considering the concept of citizen participation, most respondents expressed support for implementing education policies led by USAID. The organization actively engages citizens and all interested parties, including religious organizations, civil society, and the government, in implementing these policies.

Based on a comprehensive analysis of the aforementioned studies, can we reasonably assert that USAID has effectively contributed to improving education policy implementation in Kenya? Most respondents believe that USAID programs have significantly improved various aspects of the Kenyan education sector besides addressing policy execution. What were the problems encountered by USAID throughout the implementation of its education programs in Kenya?
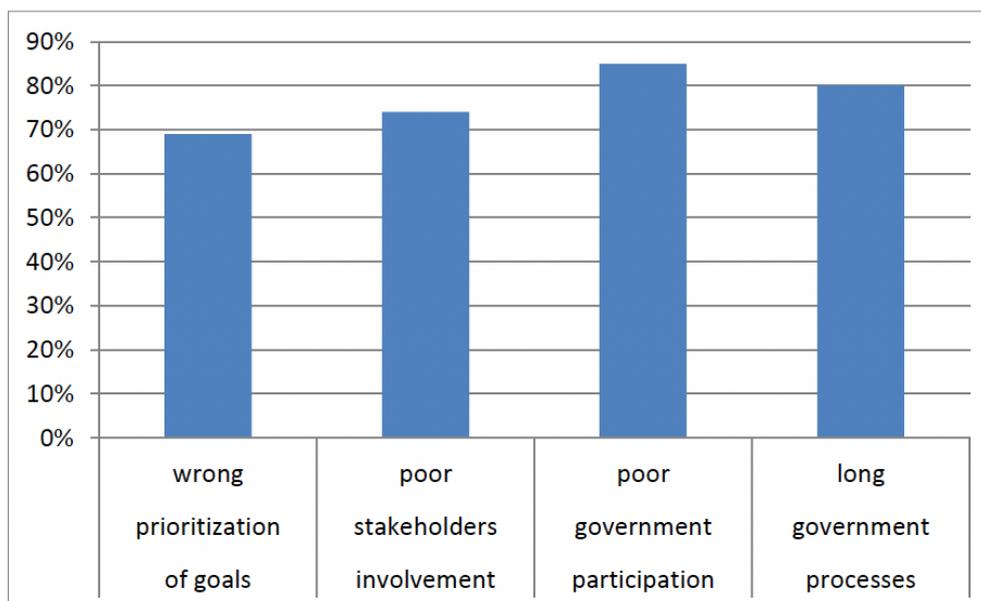
Figure 4. Major Challenges Faced by USAID in Implementation of Policies in Kenyan Education Sector
(Source: Researcher's primary data, 2023)

Figure 4 illustrates that the primary obstacle encountered by USAID in the execution of policies in the Kenyan education sector was the government. The government was unwilling to participate in policy implementation programs led by USAID. Consequently, obtaining government consent was laborious, resulting in a prolonged policy implementation. One of the difficulties encountered was the lack of sufficient cooperation from some stakeholders, a significant obstacle for USAID in implementing education programs in Kenya. Some of the education goals and strategies established in Kenya were inappropriate and did not benefit the education system. This is an uncommon occurrence. The obstacles encountered by USAID in implementing education programs in Kenya closely resemble the challenges encountered in Britain. This study is closely related to the one conducted by Chitty (2014) in the education sector throughout Britain.

Conclusion

This study evaluates how USAID engaged stakeholders in implementing education policies in Kenya. Based on the research findings, USAID has prioritized including stakeholders due to each major stakeholder's unique expertise and information. USAID has engaged the government in implementing education programs, as many of the initiatives implemented by USAID appear to complement or coincide with existing government policies. The collaboration between the government and USAID is deficient because the government perceives USAID as a competitor. USAID mainly collaborates with other non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including UNICEF and UNAID, because of their shared

educational goals and objectives, particularly in ensuring universal access to education in Kenya. USAID collaborates with civil society as they advocate for equity in the Kenyan education system, which aligns with USAID's goal of ensuring equitable education for everyone (Odukaya et al., 2018).

The degree of USAID policy execution in the Kenyan education system can be measured as slightly below the mean. Although USAID has made significant efforts in the Kenyan education system, it has largely failed to achieve its primary objective, primarily due to problems encountered while executing its responsibilities. A significant obstacle is the absence of coordination and cooperation between USAID and the national government. Before engaging in any education policy implementation process or educational activity, USAID is required to obtain government approval. The government approval process was arduous and time-consuming, resulting in delays and cases where USAID activities were not authorized. Because of the lack of transparency in Kenyan Government operations, there were instances where they refused to approve USAID. This was because the government perceived that the organization was making a more significant impact in the Kenyan education sector than they were.

Inadequate money contributed to USAID's failure to fulfill its policy implementation goals in Kenya. USAID was engaged in numerous development endeavors, albeit its financial resources were limited. Consequently, the organization's involvement was limited to Kenya's most pressing educational policy projects. USAID primarily prioritized the underprivileged population in Kenya, particularly in rural and arid regions, to narrow the educational disparity between the affluent and the impoverished. USAID primarily prioritized policy implementation in slum settlements, including Kibera, Mukuru, and Kawangware, located in Kenya's capital.

The study's primary findings indicate that USAID demonstrated a strong commitment to adopting a sustainable education policy in Kenya, involving all relevant stakeholders, despite encountering opposition from the government. The organization is crucial in implementing education programs because its workers have extensive expertise and experience. In Kenya, learners have greatly benefited from USAID's involvement in the education sector. USAID has filled the gaps left by the government, which hastily adopted most of its programs. USAID had significant obstacles in implementing its policy goal, mostly due to insufficient resources and a lack of cooperation from the Kenyan government. The following proposals were suggested for consideration to enhance service delivery by USAID.

An essential proposal that greatly contributed to USAID's achievement of its policy implementation goals and objectives in Kenya is enhanced collaboration between USAID and the stakeholders. Facilitating enhanced collaboration among NGOs, civil society, and USAID is rather straightforward. However, the primary obstacle lies in enhancing cooperation between USAID and the Kenyan government. In response to this issue, a sequence of collaborative discussions occurred between the Kenyan government and USAID. During the discussion, the government explicitly outlined the specific areas in which USAID should be active

in policy implementation and those in which USAID should refrain from involvement. This guaranteed that each institution had a distinct and explicit mandate regarding its duties, tasks, and activities to prevent conflicts of interest between the Government of Kenya (GOK) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

With the resolution of the conflict of interests, the relationship between USAID and the government was strengthened, making it easier for USAID to obtain legal authorization from the government to conduct its educational initiatives. As a result, USAID expedited policy implementation in Kenya by reducing the time required for clearance, ensuring that most policies were implemented within the designated timeframe. Using this approach, USAID successfully implemented numerous policies under tight timeframes, potentially increasing the number of policies adopted within a year. This had numerous benefits for the Kenyan education sector.

To address the assessment problem, many of the policies put into place are not appropriately evaluated because of redundant responsibilities or the staff's unwillingness. It was decreed and officially recorded that all educational initiatives introduced in Kenya must undergo assessment after a specific timeframe. No additional policies can be implemented if the existing policies are not evaluated. This was effective since no institution, whether the government or USAID, desired their plans to stagnate or halt due to failing to achieve the legally established assessment standards.

Financial resources are limited globally, including in Kenya. USAID should address the problem of insufficient money by prioritizing the most crucial policy implementations. Simultaneously, USAID should exert significant effort to attract additional financial partners to support its execution of educational policies in Kenya. This principle should not only be limited to USAID, but the government and other stakeholders should also adopt it. Having sufficient financial resources greatly facilitates implementing policies, making them more efficient and successful. Individuals discovered to have misused or stolen 48 units of currency intended to execute policies were held responsible by facing legal consequences.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the focus on USAID's involvement in Kenya's education sector may limit the generalizability of findings to other sectors or countries. Second, the research appears to be predominantly from USAID's viewpoint, potentially overlooking the perspectives of other key stakeholders, particularly the Kenyan government. Lastly, the apparent lack of substantial quantitative data to support the conclusions suggests a reliance on qualitative assessments, which may limit the robustness of the findings.

Several avenues for future research are recommended to address these limitations and further advance understanding in this field. These include conducting comparative analyses of USAID's engagement in education sectors across multiple African countries, evaluating the long-term impacts of USAID's

education policies in Kenya, and investigating the perspectives of various stakeholders. Additionally, examining governance structures and decision-making processes within USAID and the Kenyan government, analyzing resource allocation strategies, and studying the policy transfer process from USAID to local contexts could provide valuable insights for improving international development efforts in critical public administration settings.

Acknowledgment

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