



Exploring the potential of public-private partnership in provision of basic education to the urban poor in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

The policy of free primary education in Kenya, although highly commendable, has resulted to a baffling phenomenon where parents in urban slums are withdrawing their children from public to private primary schools. This clearly suggests that parents seem to have confidence in private schools than in public schools. The emergence of low fee private schools whose accreditation is in doubt is indeed an interesting phenomenon worth exploring. It is no longer a question of whether private schools exist but rather to what extent private schools supplement the government in providing basic education. While the government bears the sole responsibility of providing education to all children, the findings from three researches discussed in this paper portray a different reality. The number of private schools especially in the slums almost outnumbers government schools despite the fact that public primary schools are free. This trend raises key policy issues regarding the role of the private sector in collaborating with the government in providing quality education to all citizens. Indeed, the emergence of low cost private schools in urban slums presents an unexploited, though potent, opportunity for public-private partnership in the provision of basic education.

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Introduction

Universal access to quality primary education is yet to be achieved in most of the developing countries despite the pledge by governments, non-government organizations and international agencies to provide primary education for all children by the year 2015 (Tooley & Stanfield, 2008). However, this does not imply that no achievements have been accomplished. Many countries have made considerable progress aimed at attaining Universal Primary Education as envisioned by the *World Education for All* conference in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 and later emphasized in *World Education Forum* in Dakar, Senegal in the year 2000. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] Global Report notes that since the Senegal Forum, forty million more children have enrolled in schools (UNESCO, 2012). Meanwhile, three years to the *Education for All* and the *Millennium Development Goals* deadline, at least 22 countries in Africa are not likely to achieve key educational goals implying that millions of children are still not in school (UNESCO, 2012). In fact, even where access has improved, quality provision of basic education is still a challenge.

To comply with the *Education for All* initiative, the Kenyan Government scrapped all user charges in public primary schools in January 2003 (Sifuna, 2005). This policy was not the first but it is the most successful compared to previous two attempts (Oketch & Ngware, 2010). Subsequently, enrolment in public primary schools rose from 6,314,726 to 7,614,326 pupils within a duration of one year starting from January 2003 to December 2003. This was a 22.3% increase. Despite the success, it was reported that more than three million children were not yet enrolled (Sifuna, 2005). The policy, although highly commendable, has resulted to a baffling phenomenon where parents are withdrawing their children from public schools and

transferring them to private schools. This clearly indicates that parents seem to have more confidence in private schools than with public schools (Nishimura & Yamano, 2012).

Researchers are puzzled by this phenomenon. The emergence of low fee private schools in the poorest areas of Kenya that charge modest fees but whose accreditation is in doubt is indeed an interesting phenomenon worth exploring (Oketch, Mutisya, Ngware, & Ezech, 2010). Furthermore, the debate has gone further as it is no longer a question of whether private schools exist but rather the extent to which private schools supplement the government in providing education (Tooley, 2008). While the government bears the sole responsibility of offering free basic education to all children as enshrined in the Constitution of Kenya, findings from three researches discussed in this paper portray a gloomy reality. The number of private schools especially in urban slums almost outnumbers government schools. This trend raises key policy issues regarding the role of the private sector in collaborating with the government in providing quality education to all citizens.

Theoretical framework and outline

This paper is informed by human capital principles which advance that education is vital for any sustainable economic development (Keeley, 2007; Sianesi & Reenen, 2000; Maritim, 2009). This claim is evident by the documented high rates of return to education (Colclough, Kingdon, & Patrinos, 2009). Kenya is a relatively highly populated low-income country in the East African region struggling with widespread poverty that creates chaos in the social, political and economic arena (World Bank, 2011). To cope with the huge socio-economic disparity, Kenya needs to improve its human capital base in areas of education, innovation, technology and industry (World Bank, 2008). This paper is divided into three sections. The first section

discusses three researches on Free Primary Education in Kenya published in the years 2008, 2010 and in 2012. Tooley, Dixon, and Stanfield (2008) begin the debate by arguing that Free Primary Education (FPE) has not had an effect in terms of enrolment at Kibera slums in Kenya. Oketch, Mutisya, Ngware and Ezech (2010) rightly argue that since the introduction of FPE, there has emerged very many low fee private schools in the slums that cater to the educational needs of the poor. Nishimura and Yamano (2012) conclude the discussion by exploring the determinants of school choice by parents. In summary, the three articles agree that in spite of the FPE policy in Kenya, the majority of poor families are sending their children to low fee private school. The second part of this paper engages in the emerging debate on the role of private sector in education provision by proposing public-private collaboration through a voucher system. This paper concludes that if the private sector can deliver quality basic education, and even probably deliver better than the government, there is an opportunity for public-private partnership. The final section proposes suggestions and recommendations.

The impact of Free Primary Education (FPE) in Kenya

At a time when the Kenyan Government claims great success in the FPE initiative, Tooley et al. (2008) research raises doubts about the assertion. They argue that FPE policy may have actually precipitated a decline in primary school enrolment in Kibera. Their research was conducted ten months after the introduction of FPE in 2003. It was based in and around "unplanned informal settlement" of Kibera in Nairobi commonly known as Kibera slum. The study was set to explore two main objectives. First, the study investigated whether or not private schools existed in Kibera, and, if so, to catalogue their nature and extent. Secondly, the study assessed the impact of FPE in Kibera since its introduction in 2003. The researchers found that indeed, many private schools existed and thrived in Kibera. They discovered that there were in total, 76 private schools with a population of about 12,132 pupils. Accordingly, the rolling up of FPE had a significant effect on private unregistered schools in Kibera Slums whose population declined by roughly 11,171 pupils. In government primary schools in the area, the enrollment rose by 3, 296 pupils. Enrolment in primary schools in Kibera Slums therefore reduced by 7,875 pupils since FPE was introduced in the year 2003. The net increase/decrease in enrolment in private and public primary schools in Kibera Slums ten months since the inception of FPE in the year 2003 is summarized in table 1.

Table 1: Net increase/decrease in enrolment in Kibera Slums since introduction of Free Primary Education in the Year 2003

Category of School	Increase/Decrease in Enrolment
Net decrease in private schools	-11,171
Net increase in public schools	+3,296
Total	-7,875

Source: Tolley et al. (2008)

Their research suggests that there are 7,875 fewer students from Kibera enrolled in primary schools, both public and private, than before FPE was introduced in 2003. While acknowledging the relevance of the findings and the conclusion of the researchers, some issues need further examination because they were based on the reported decline in school enrolment by school managers, which relied on memory, and so may be incorrect. The doubts are evident considering that managers of private schools alleged that twenty five private schools had stopped operations because they were financially unsustainable with the diminishing enrolment. Furthermore, it is

clear that the managers who were deriving their livelihood from these schools were definitely unhappy with FPE since it unceremoniously deprived them of employment. Likewise, the managers would most likely hold back some critical information considering that they were unregistered and therefore, they did not remit taxes as expected of all businesses in Kenya.

Regarding the declining number of pupils in primary schools, there are key considerations that the research ought to have explored further such as the claim that "the figure assumes that all children who have left private schools could only have gone to the five government schools bordering Kibera" (Tolley et al. 2008, pp. 458-59). The study failed to investigate the fact that children who had enrolled in private schools prior to FPE may have transferred to other schools either in Nairobi or in the rural areas. Without exploring this probability, it would be unjustified to claim that FPE had resulted to a decline in enrolment. At the end of the paper however, they admit that children may have moved elsewhere through natural movement of families in and out of the slum areas but "with no way of quantifying this movement" (Tolley et al. 2008, pp. 459).

According to their findings, private institutions are preferred because of their quality and financial flexibility. Parents cited the "crowded classrooms, lack of commitment by teachers, and shift systems" as reasons why they label public schools as of low quality (Tolley et al. 2008, pp. 460). It is the opinion of this paper that the majority of parents opt for private schools especially those affiliated to religious and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) because of other attached benefits such as free lunch and stationery. Finally, while concurring with the argument for the financial flexibility of the private sector, this paper observes that the circumstance for that flexibility is not as explicit as Tooley et al. (2008) portray. The failure to recognize that the majority of schools in Kibera slums are religious and NGOs affiliated leads to this quirky conclusion. Moreover, most charitable organizations do not charge user fees and the admission criteria are merit and need based.

Poor households and enrolment in non-state primary schools in urban Kenya

In spite of the existing policy of FPE initiative, pupils from poor households still enroll in private schools. By using data collected in the year 2005 by the African Research and Health Resource Centre [APHRC] in two slums of Korogocho and Viwandani and two non-slum settlements of Jericho and Harambee, Oketch et al. (2010) seek to explain why the poorest households still prefer using low fee private schools and why the wealthiest household quantiles prefer using private schools. The research concludes that excess demand drives poorer parents to low quality private schools, while differentiated demand pushes non-slum parents to choose private schooling for their children over free public schools (Oketch et al. 2010, pp. 24). They advance that, in the slums, public spending on education is low and so parents will find alternative ways of educating their children when their preferred route to free primary schooling is unavailable to them. On the contrary, wealthy parents in the non-slum area will bypass the FPE because they have preference for the fee-charging high quality private sector (Oketch et al. 2010, pp. 24).

Four issues emerge from their findings. First, almost twice as many children in the slums use private schools than from the non-slum areas. In real terms, 81.5 percent of non-slum dwellers attend public schools compared to 60.8 percent of the slum dwellers. Secondly, private school usage appears to be highest among the poorest families. Forty three percent of the poorest

quantile of families in the slums send their children to private schools compared to only five percent of the poorest quantile of families in the non-slums. Lastly, there are differences in private school usage between the two slums. From Viwandani study site, pupils “have significantly higher odds (OR=1.94) of being enrolled in public schools than pupils from Korogocho; while among the non-slum, pupils from Jericho are one and half times likely to enroll in a public school compared to those from Harambee” (Oketch et al. 2010, pp. 28-30).

In order to explain their findings from the four study sites, the authors borrow the excess demand versus the differentiated demand theory by James (1993). The overall conclusion of this research is that it is excess demand which drives poorer parents to low quality private schools, but it is differentiated demand which is driving non-slum parents to choose private schooling for their children over free public schools. Poor parents, unlike the wealthier parents, chose private schools because their preferred route to FPE is unavailable to them. Furthermore, poor families would have preferred to enter the free public system but they fail to get admission for their children because the schools are overcrowded. However, the non-slum wealthy quantile are looking for something better for their children that is different from what is available in the public system; to this group of parents/guardians, public schools and private schools are imperfect substitutes (Oketch et al. 2010, pp. 24-31).

Such a conclusion, though seemingly appealing and practical, lacks an evidential threshold to sustain its credibility. Oketch et al. (2010, pp. 25) argument that parents in the non-slum settlements are sending their children to private schools for quality reasons, whereas in the slum settlements, parents are sending their children to informal/private schools because of low quantity of schools in these settlements is unsubstantiated. The implication is that poor parents’ choices are forced choices opted because of the inadequacy of state provision, and have nothing to do with quality considerations, whereas wealthy parents, in contrast, make proper unconstrained choices, based on their perception of the quality of education provision available to them. How do the authors arrive at this very strong conclusion about the differing educational quality appreciations of the rich and the poor? It is not through interviewing or observing parents and ascertaining these differences in demand. The evidence used is precisely adduced from the fact that parents in the slums are poor. However, even if parents in the slums are poor as the authors allude (which may be true), it does not imply that they are not aware of the quality dimension of their children’s education. In fact, some parents in the slums send their children to private schools precisely because of quality even when public schools are nearer.

To argue their case, Oketch et al. (2010) note three points. First, there is a difference in the use of private school by the most and the least wealthy quantiles of families in the slums. There is high public school utilization by the least poor slum residents whereas the poor residents are more likely to use private schools. Their argument that, “it cannot be the case” that the poorest should prefer the so-called private schools when the less poor in the slums prefer the state schools (Oketch et al. 2010, pp. 31) need to be investigated. Why cannot that be the case? It seems that the authors have not answered this question satisfactorily. Experience would show that poorer parents have higher aspirations and expectations for their children’s education than wealthier parents. Poor parents are aware that they do not have any other resources set aside to empower their children except education. Quality education can redeem them from the cycle of poverty. As a result, parents from poor backgrounds are

willing to spend the little money at their disposal for the education of their children even if it means paying an extra fee and taking their children into what they perceive as quality education in low fee private schools for the poor.

Secondly, there is an interesting contrast about the way the different quantiles in the slums and non-slums use private and public education where in the non-slums, it is the wealthier quantiles that are more likely to send their children to private schools (Oketch et al., 2010, pp. 31). In the non-slum areas, parents send children to private schools because of differentiated demand. In the slums, the poorest quantile send children to private schools because of excess demand. How does this further the argument of excess versus differentiated demand? The authors do not explain how they had reached this conclusion. Their conclusion can be explained by the reason expounded above in that poor parents have greater expectation for their children and are willing to provide the ‘best’ education possible for their children. Therefore, their action is propelled by differentiated demand. For the wealthier parents, it is possible that their preference for private schools is because of differentiated demand as they would be worried about their children mixing with children from poor families in public schools.

Thirdly, the private schools in the slums are of very poor quality. However, are these schools of such poor quality that the poorest parents could not possibly choose them above public provision unless forced to do so in some way? Furthermore, how have the authors shown that the schools are indeed of poor quality? They have not given any evidence to support their claim. It would be credible if the authors have given a comparison in terms of performance of private and public schools in the slums. Without such a comparison, their claim is deficient of evidence. From this inadequate evidence, they claim that the reality of a fee paying private education sector that charges low fees and sets out to meet the needs of the poor is an indication of the inadequacies of state education (Oketch et al. 2010, pp.23). While this could be true indeed, it carries too much presumption because just as the wealthier people view private education to be of high quality, the same can be argued for the poor and it only depends on who evaluates the quality of the private provision.

Determinants of school choice in Kenya

By using data from panel survey conducted in the years 2004 and 2007, and sampling 718 rural households with 895 and 817 children aged 6-15 years respectively, Nishimura and Yamano (2012) examined the dynamics of schooling behavior, not in the slums like the two preceding articles, but in the rural areas of Western and Central Kenya. The overall conclusion of their research was that the probability of attending private schools increases as both the number of private schools and the average pupil–teacher ratio of public schools increase in the community. The latter finding may suggest that children, and of course parents, tend to avoid overcrowded public schools in the rural areas of Central and Western (Nishimura & Yamano, 2012, pp. 268)

Their research proposes a strong hypothesis that many parents aspire to send their children to high-quality private schools even if they cost more than public schools. As a result, the average pupil–teacher ratio of public primary schools in a community has a positive impact on; (a) the probability of children attending private schools and (b) the probability of children who attend public primary schools transferring to different schools (Nishimura & Yamano, 2012, pp. 268). Their study discovered an interesting relationship; first, the quality of

public education is measured by the pupil-teacher ratio; secondly, the wealth of households determines the school a child attends, and finally, there is a gender imbalance as boys have a high probability of studying in private schools than girls.

Despite the interesting findings, it is worth noting that this research uses a skewed sample population. Although they justify using Central and Western parts of Kenya because the regions have been at the center of the *Harambee* (pulling together or self-help) movement during the colonial period (Nishimura & Yamano, 2012, pp. 268), their justification is not strongly connected to the matter that they were investigating. Central and Western regions are relatively well endowed economically as compared to the other parts of Kenya. Furthermore, the land in the two areas is very productive for agricultural purposes and this increases the likelihood of a family having some disposable income. In addition, the areas have the best private institutions both at primary and at secondary level. Besides, quite a number of the national schools are located in these two areas and therefore it is incongruous that they decided to compare the two regions yet they do not have acute problem of access compared to some other parts of the country.

However, their topic is very interesting because while the Government of Kenya is upbeat about increasing access to primary education, the issues of quality and equity in the education system has not received adequate emphasis (Nishimura & Yamano, 2012, pp. 268). Their research notes that whereas the abolition of fees is internationally recognized as the panacea for achieving the objectives of EFA and the MDGs, it is not a mere access to school that is important but the cognitive skills that a child acquires. These two aspects – access and cognitive skills – are key determinants for sending a child to public or private school. It is therefore incumbent that the education for all movement be accompanied by an emphasis on quality and equity (Nishimura and Yamano, 2012).

Considering the debate on the intricacies of quantity and quality, one would have expected a deeper analysis of why parents view a class of 43 pupils as a threat to the quality of education while a class of 23 pupils is an ingredient to quality education. This observation is in contrast with other parts of the country where it is reported that some classes have a pupil teacher ratio of 1:70 reinforcing the argument put earlier in this paper that the sample population is not representative of the reality in Kenyan primary schools. Is it surprising that the children from wealthy households have a higher probability of attending private schools than children from poor households? It is the position of this paper that no researcher should be surprised by this kind of finding considering that the private establishments are seen as effective in Kenya even when some public schools are performing better. Oketch et al. (2010) have explained this trend in detail in reference to the theory of differentiated demand.

The conclusion that girls have a 3.6% point lower probability of attending private schools than boys is of great interest (Nishimura & Yamano 2012, pp. 272). This trend clearly indicates that in spite of the progress made in addressing gender inequality, the issue is still problematic in Central and Western Kenya. However, the authors did not report why the trend is still prevalent and subsequently propose practical measures for rectifying the anomaly. Instead, they argue that parents of girls may hold a narrow view with regard to the returns to their daughters' education, while the parents of boys may hold a wider view on returns to their sons' education. This is a supposition, as there is no evidence provided to support the claim in their study.

It is interesting to note that parents consider pupil-teacher ratio as the main criterion that determines the quality of education. It is a disservice to the rest of the country to argue that a class size of 43 pupils is overcrowded and thus affects the quality of teaching. The argument that the average pupil-teacher ratio of public schools has a positive impact on the probability of attending a private school ought to have been supported by facts (Nishimura & Yamano, 2012, pp. 272). This paper argues that the issue of parents complaining of overcrowding in schools is not justified and it is only because there is excess supply of educational opportunities in the two regions. Consequently, Nishimura and Yamano (2012) would have concluded it is differentiated demand that drives parents in Central and Western Kenya to send their children to private schools and not excess demand as in other parts of the country. The fundamental issue that emerges from their research is that there is unequal distribution of educational opportunities in the country as observed by Oketch et al. (2010) and Tooley et al. (2008).

Public-Private Provision: An opportunity for collaboration

The three articles, although approaching the FPE initiative from different perspectives, raise fundamental questions worth exploring. Why do parents send their children to private schools when there are fee-free state schools? In agreement with the findings of the researches discussed earlier, Oxfam Education Report suggests that lack of sufficient facilities in state schools is to blame for many poor households turning to private provision. The report asserts that there are instances in which private schools offer cheaper and better-quality alternatives to state provision (Watkins, 2000, pp. 207 in Tooley, 2008). It is evident that state schools have failed to live by the pledge of providing accessible and quality education to all. Given that poor parents in urban slums are taking their children *en masse* out of the state system into private education due to poor accountability and inefficiency, an obvious possibility is worth investigation (Tooley, 2008). Indeed, if private education is serving the same purpose, then the aforementioned observation of emerging private schools to cater for the high demand of education and quality issues in publicly funded education is a blessing in disguise. Harnessing their ability can supplement the already stretched public schools in Kenya.

However, while such a policy is effective within a stipulated legal framework, it is important to acknowledge that private sector must be encouraged and not squeezed out (Tooley, 2008, pp. 4). This paper opines that the private sector can provide a powerful impetus for reform and delivery of basic education while recognizing the need for caution and making it clear that mass privatization of education has to be approached with restraint. Subsequently, the government has to realize that the private sector is no longer an inferior competitor but rather a partner in providing quality education. Viewed from this perspective, the private sector and non-state actors have a critical role to play in providing quality education to the Kenyan populace as evidenced by the degree to which low-fee private schools are currently mushrooming in Kibera. Thus, the debate is not whether private schools exist, rather it is whether supporting private schools with public funds will help or hinder the development of education systems. This is because whenever public provision fails or is inadequate, those who can afford opt out and transfer to the high-quality private sector. That option is not available to the vast majority of poor households in Kenya.

This paper argues that the government has a responsibility to introduce a policy framework in which all parents have a choice of enrolling their children in either public or private

schools. In fact, this is highly possible if the government manages to curb financial mismanagement from the central ministries down to the classrooms bearing in mind that public education sector providers in Kenya are for the most part notoriously unaccountable to parents (Sifuna, 2005). Although this paper advocates for strengthening and incorporating private education providers, care must be taken to avoid oppression by the materialistic entrepreneurs who are driven by profit rather than service. Recognizing that poor parents may fall prey to these amateurs, it is the position of this paper that right political structures of accountability and efficiency are imperative. Therefore, this paper does not advocate a thoughtless marketization and privatization of basic education. Instead, it encourages the state and the private sector to collaborate as partners in realizing EFA and MDGs objectives. One practical way to achieve this objective is to encourage voucher schemes to provide the poorest households access to quality schools. Already, the three articles have revealed that an overwhelming majority of poor parents would prefer to send their children to private schools, if they had funds, based on their awareness that private schools were accountable to them. Would it not be appropriate to devise a system such as a voucher system that would cater for the needs of poor parents?

Advocates of voucher schemes argue that they are advantageous for they promote the benefits of variety, choice, consumer responsiveness, and competition induced efficiency to the schools (James, 1984, pp.65). Furthermore, school vouchers are a solution towards poor quality education in state schools. This position was confirmed by a research that was done in Chile by McEwan and Carnoy (2000, pp. 213) who noted that private run schools with voucher system will deliver education more effectively and at lower cost than public schools. Although they attributed the success of voucher system to the fact that most of the private schools in Chile in those years were religious-based and therefore nonprofit institutions, they acknowledged that the benefits of voucher system outweigh its disadvantages (McEwan & Carnoy, 2000: 227). Their conclusion was supported by Torche (2005, pp. 316), who argued that there is an increase in the advantages that are associated with private-voucher schools, as well as in the benefits of attending private-paid schools.

While acknowledging the benefits of voucher system to the Kenyan education system, a research from Chile and other developing countries have raised mixed signals. The vouchers are criticized because the supply of private schools places might be inelastic and the quality uncertain (James 1984, pp. 605). James (1984) argues that privatization might lead to a deterioration of the public school system and increased social segmentation with the wealthy elite supplementing the government subsidies and securing a superior education for their own children. According to McEwan and Carnoy (2000, ppp. 227-28) there are inconsistencies in that privately managed vouchers schools produce significantly higher achievement than public schools for pupils with similar socioeconomic backgrounds. Even so, non-religious voucher schools are more cost-efficient than publicly run schools. They argue that in the case of Chile, Catholic voucher schools are able to achieve higher test scores for similar students but only by spending more (McEwan & Carnoy, 2000, ppp. 227-28).

A research done in the USA by Lewin and Belfield (2003) in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program and Cleveland Opportunity Scholarship Program revealed that the evidential base for voucher system is far from complete. While voucher system increases choice considerably, competition and choice

are associated with small improvements in academic achievement. Therefore, there is evidence that universal market approaches have a tendency towards inequalities, although if the poor are safeguarded the results may produce the opposite impact. Subsequently, Lewin and Belfield (2003, pp.183) concluded that the effect of educational privatization depends on a variety of factors including government commitment towards the process.

Conclusion and recommendations

The three articles reviewed in this paper construct strong evidence that the introduction of FPE in Kenya has not been as successful as it was intended. It is evident that Kenya will not achieve the MDGs in totality by 2015. Tolley et al. (2008) kicked off the debate by arguing that FPE has not had an effect in terms of enrolment at Kibera slums in Kenya. Oketch et al. (2010) rightly argues that since the introduction of FPE, there has emerged so many low fee private schools in the slums to cater for the educational needs of the poor. Nishimura and Yamano (2012) conclude the discussion by exploring the determinants of school choice by parents. This paper recommends two considerations. First, considering that education is both a private and a public good, the government, the individual and other stakeholders have a role to play in financing education. While acknowledging that proper administration and curbing of corruption in the education sector can provide enough resources to fund education, it is also realized that there are other competing and urgent needs such as health that also require significant budget allocations. In such circumstances, the EFA target is best achieved by a partnership between governments, families and private sector in both the provision and funding of education (Bray, 2004, pp. 22). This is in line with the recommendation of Article 7 of the World Conference on Education for All Declaration (WCEFA, 1990, pp. 7) which emphasized that:

“National, regional and local educational authorities have a unique obligation to provide basic education for all, but they cannot be expected to supply every human, financial or organizational requirement for this task. New and revitalized partnerships at all levels will be necessary . . . including partnerships between government and non-governmental organizations, the private sector, local communities, religious groups, and families”.

Secondly, this paper proposes a voucher system to enable poor households access education in private schools. The voucher system is advantageous for it creates variety, accountability, and competition in schools. Although voucher system is criticized for its inelasticity and the uncertainty of quality (James 1984, pp.605), this paper argues that the benefits of such a system outweigh its disadvantages especially when there are effective safeguards for the poor.

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