

Implications Of Severe Economic Decline & Demographic Pressures On Youth Literacy In Sub-Saharan Africa

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ABSTRACT

Although literacy rates have improved somehow in recent years, there are still large numbers of people that are illiterates in developing countries. This paper examines the impact of severe economic decline and demographic pressures on youth literacy rate in Sub-Saharan Africa. In this study, a cross-sectional data of 39 Sub-Saharan African countries with adequate data information were analyzed. The results from the ANOVA tests indicate that economic decline is statistically significant in explaining youth literacy, while the results from demographic pressures and movement of refugees are inconclusive in explaining youth literacy.

Keywords: severe economic decline, youth literacy, demographic pressures, human capital.

INTRODUCTION

Poverty rates in any nation can be studied by examining the literacy rates, life expectancy and infant mortality rates. Nations with the lowest adult/youth literacy rates usually have low life expectancy and are usually grouped among the poorly developed nations of the world. Youth literacy rate is the share of the population aged 15 to 24 that is literate. According to UNESCO (2007), youth literacy rate is especially higher than adult literacy rate in developing nations because the system of education has expanded over the past decades. Although youth literacy rates are at or above 90 percent in some African nations, low literacy continues to exist in many Sub-Saharan Africa, such as; Mali (youth literacy rate of 24.2 percent), Burkina Faso (youth literacy rate of 33 percent), Niger (youth literacy rate of 36.5 percent), and Senegal (youth literacy rate of 49.1 percent). These low literacy rates may be due to the fact that the educational systems of Sub-Saharan Africa have experienced many natural and human-made disasters. These disasters include increased debt burden, poor governance, and inadequate funding. Literacy improving efforts are constantly disrupted by wars, mounting demographic pressures, movement of refugees, and economic/political disasters. These unfortunate and sobering facts could contribute to the decreasing number of youth literacy rates in many Sub-Saharan African countries.

Education plays a central and critical role in one's ability to respond to constantly changing opportunities that development presents. Basic education serves as a foundation for an improved condition of life. The expected improvements are not only for those who are young but also for adolescents and adults who have been missed by that system (Human Development Report, 2005).

The economic impact of education to any society can be observed from the micro and macro perspectives. Expenditure on education is an investment that leads to the formation of human capital. This formation could be either for the individual or for society at large. In a simplified form, the rate of return to investment in education R can be specified as:

$$R = (Y_1 - Y_0)/N(Y_0 + C_1);$$

Where Y_1 and Y_0 refer to the mean income of workers who are educated and uneducated respectively. N is the number of years of schooling it takes for someone to become literate, and C_1 is the annual cost of keeping someone

in school. Results from studies on the rate of return of investment in education are not far off the yield of more conventional investments. According to Psacharopoulos (1991), the returns to investment in education in advanced countries are roughly the same as those of investment in physical capital, while in developing countries, the returns to education stand at a much higher level. From the macro perspective, investments in education do result in growth in the economy, measured in terms of Gross Domestic Output (GDP).

Apart from the expected impact the economic condition should have on youth literacy, opportunities for schooling are usually less plentiful when the population is constantly on the move. Populations that live a nomadic lifestyle do generally experience a low adult and youth literacy rates. Due to limited resources, basic literacy instruction are usually lacking when a population is constantly migrating from one location to another. The situation gets worst if the migration is caused by war, drought or famine. In some Sub-Saharan African countries – such as Somalia, Liberia, or Ethiopia, war and civil conflict are the major reasons for the migration of people.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Although literacy rates have improved somehow in recent years, there are still large numbers of illiterates in developing countries, representing nearly 25 percent of the world's youth and adults (Maamouri, 2000). According to Meier and Rauch (2005), significant disparities in educational opportunities persist both in enrollment rates, which capture educational flows, and in average years of schooling, which represent the stock of education among the public. This disparity is more pronounced among the rural residents, due to the poor economic condition and the subsequent lack in educational opportunities. In most of Sub-Saharan Africa, the government provides most of the funding for public education. Research has shown that the government plays a more important role in the economies of nations where human development is high than in countries where it is medium or low. In developing countries, especially Sub-Saharan Africa, both government and non-government agencies have responsibility for funding literacy programs. According to UNESCO Report (2002), government funding for education ranged from 55 to 65.9 percent, while parents and communities provided 17.5 to 27.2 percent in 2001. Some larger companies have become involved in literacy programs for their own employees and supplies because the skills acquired can be of great importance in work situations.

Generally, urban centers are favored by government officials in most developing nations especially, in the allocation of government institutions and infrastructures. Such favoritism can involve the allocation of local public services; such as, public libraries, telecommunications, schools and efficient transportation services. Youth literacy rates in Sub-Saharan Africa have remained very low mainly due to unequal access to educational opportunities. The unequal access to educational opportunities is partly due to uneven growth in the economy, and also due to other socio- and geopolitical issues. These developing economies, especially Sub-Saharan Africa, are vulnerable to external shocks that result to severe fluctuations. Also, massive movement of refugees could hinder the ability of government in providing standard educational opportunities for the youth.

Because literacy contributes to the economic and social performances, it is necessary to conduct a study on the roles of the mounting demographic pressures, and the uneven economic development do have on youth literacy rates in Sub-Saharan Africa. As such, this paper examines: a) the impact of severe and massive economic decline on youth literacy; b) the role of massive demographic pressures on youth literacy; and c) if the massive movement of African refugees is contributing negatively to the youth literacy rates in Sub-Saharan Africa.

DATA AND VARIABLES

To address these research questions, the paper uses a cross-sectional data of 39 Sub-Saharan African countries. The data on youth literacy was obtained from the 2005 Human Development Report. Only Sub-Saharan African countries with adequate data information were chosen. The paper uses ANOVA to answer the research questions.

Dependent variables- Youth Literacy (YL) is the percentage of youth 15 to 24 years old that can read and write according to estimates produced by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, July, 2005.

Explanatory Variables: Two Social indicators and one Economic indicator were used in this study. These indicators were selected from twelve indicators of state vulnerability that make up the Failed State Index, which are compiled by the Fund-For-Peace. These indicators comprise of ratings of social, economic and political/military factors that assess the capabilities of core state institutions considered essential for sustaining security and economic development. The ratings for each index are between 0 to 10, with 0 being the lowest intensity (more stable state) while 10 represents the highest intensity (least stable). The two social indicators are – Mounting Demographic Pressures (MDP) and Massive Movement of Refugees (MMR). It is my contention that each will negatively impact youth literacy in Sub-Saharan Africa. The economic indicator used in this study is Severe Economic Decline (SED). Again, I believe that SED will negatively impact youth literacy.

RESULT

ANOVA tests were done to analyze if severe decline in the economy played any role in explaining youth literacy rates among Sub-Saharan African countries. Table 1 showed the ANOVA for the role severe economic decline on youth literacy. To fully understand the role of this variable, we grouped Sub-Saharan African countries into two groups according to the severity of economic decline each experienced in recent years. Given the computed mean score of 7.5, $SED \leq 7.5$ for countries with least decline in their economic performance; while $SED > 7.5$ represented countries with severe economic decline. The ANOVA result shown in table 1 indicates that YL had a mean score of 77.99 percent for countries with $SED \leq 7.5$, while countries with $SED > 7.5$ had a lower mean of 63.63. The two means are statistically different at 5 percent level. The ANOVA for the two social indicator – mounting demographic pressures (MDP) and massive movement of refugees (MMR), were statistically insignificant. Even though in both cases, the means score for countries that are more stable was higher than for least stable countries, the difference were found to be statistically insignificant.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and ANOVA for the Role of Severe Economic Decline on Youth Literacy.

Descriptive

Categories.	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error	Min.	Max.
$SED \leq 7.50$	16	77.99	15.26	3.82	44.40	93.90
$SED > 7.50$	23	63.63	23.12	4.82	19.40	97.80
Total	39	69.52	21.28	3.41	19.40	97.80

ANOVA

	Sum of Squares.	df	Mean Square	F	Signi.
Between Groups	1946.67	1	1946.67	4.74	0.038
Within Groups	15257.28	37	412.36		
Total	17203.95	38			

CONCLUSION

The importance of education for economic development is not a new idea. Researchers have been highlighting the importance of investing on human capital. The rise in earnings of workers in the industrialized countries was due to the growth in human capital, and this continues to be a limiting factor in the advance of developing nations. The investing on human capital that occurred in the industrial world have led to the growth in the economy. The ability of the government to invest on education depends greatly on the condition of the economy.

Lind (1997) observed that the individual empowerment effects associated with literacy is quite strong especially in a male dominated society of Africa. There has been some research conclusion that education transforms people from passive to active citizens. Drawing from South Asia experiences, Saldanaha (2000) observed that basic education has had especially strong connections with the growth of a broadly based civil society and poverty alleviation.

The ANOVA results do indicate that severe economic decline do impact youth literacy rates significantly. Countries with low economic decline experienced a much higher literacy rates than those with higher economic decline. The results also show that demographic pressures and the movement of refugees are statistically insignificant in explaining changes in literacy rates in Sub-Saharan Africa.

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