

Kajiado County Braves Prolonged Drought to Increase School Enrollment and Retention

Every Kenyan child has a right to free and compulsory basic education according to article 53(1) (b) of the constitution of Kenya. The state is required to take measures including affirmative action program to ensure access to relevant education and training as per article 55 (a) of the 2010 constitution. However, despite basic education being enshrined in the supreme law of the land as a right to all children and a responsibility of the government, various challenges hinder the realization of such a constitutional right. Kajiado county suffers a great deal of such challenges ranged from systematic, social, economic and cultural practices which have been a barrier in the realization of a dream of ensuring all school going children enroll and remain in school.

In realization of such challenges the Ministry of Education together with UNICEF and Centre for Behavior Change and Communication (CBCC) through the media platform DigiRedio; a platform with over 50 community radio stations across the country, came up with the 'Come Twende Shule' campaign to address the challenge. Kajiado county is among the 16 counties targeted by the campaign. The program through on-air discussion aimed at increasing community knowledge on the need to support OOSC and support the enrollment and retention of children in school.

Kajiado county is one of the counties in Arid and semi-arid areas that faced the effect of the prolonged drought between 2020 and 2022. The National Drought Management Authority termed the drought as the worst in 40 years and Kajiado Central subcounty whose predominant source of livelihoods is pastoralism, was the most affected of the five sub counties of Kajiado county. As a result, many children of the school going age dropped out to look for alternative means of survival. According to a research by Care Kenya in Kajiado central the drought impacted school retention as pupils were forced to assist their parents in search for food and pasture with 99 percent of dropouts between September and November 2022 being as result of the drought.

One of the aims of the 'Come Twende Shule' campaign is finding solutions to the challenges resulting to school dropouts and poor retention. The

community and duty bearers had to look for ways to deal with the challenge in Kajiado central constituency, most hit by drought and with the highest school dropout rate. The national government's school feeding program was initiated to increase school retention and enrollment.



Pupils of Saina Primary School in Kajiado County that benefited from the school feeding program.

Saina primary school in Kajiado Central sub-county is a school that benefits from a joint community effort to retain and enroll more school age children through school feeding program. Mrs. Rose Naito the head teacher of the school, says that the school feeding program has resulted into 100% retention since January 2023 when the program started.

According to her, the program improved the school's performance in the 2023 KCPE examination, 97 pupils having sat for the national examination a rise from 60 in the previous year. "Since the inception of the school feeding program, the enrollment in our school has increased from 600 pupils to 980 in the year 2024," Mrs. Naito said.

attributed the school feeding program success to the 'Come Twende Shule' campaign which rallied the parents and various stakeholders to action for a viable solution.

Mercy Nthenya, a grade six pupil at Saina primary, is a beneficiary of the school feeding program. She recalls how prior to the introduction of the school feeding program, she would miss school to help her mother make beads for sale so as to get food because her father frequently moved in search for pasture for their cattle. She however credits the program for her consistency in attending school in the last one year. Her sentiments are similar to those by Victor Lemaiyan, a grade 6 pupil aged 15 who is also a beneficiary of the program. "I had dropped out of school to help my father look for pasture for our livestock but Mrs. Naito and chief Mpai helped me get back to school in February 2023," Victor said, proving how the community was hit by the drought. Victor, like Mercy says that the school feeding program helps him to always attend school each day.

According to Jeremiah Ole Ncharo, the County Executive Committee Member for education in Kajiado county, school feeding program played a big role in school enrollment and retention. Ole Ncharo explains how the program aided in high retention in schools. The county education minister emphasized the role of partnerships as a result of efforts by CBCC through DigiRedio in the 'Come Twende Shule' campaign in coming up with school feeding program in various schools in the county. He affirmed that the county government as a partner is determined to make sure that the program is successful and progressive.

Mr. Josephat Mpai, the senior assistant Chief in Kajiado township location during this interview said that his office in collaboration with various stakeholders play a vital role to ensure transition, enrollment and retention. He further said that he was part of the 'Come Twende Shule' campaign which ensured that all school going children get enrolled testifying the huge role played by DigiRedio in enlightening the community to finding a solution for the high number of dropouts because of drought. The impact of the 'Come Twende Shule' campaign is also massive to the community and the parents. Jared Ole Nkaru, a parent, explains how the school feeding program is not only a relief but also a blessing to the community. He, like most parents with pupils at Saina primary school go on with their daily duties during the day as their children have their lunch taken care of. To him, the drought would have shattered the dream of many children, espe-

cially boys, thanks to the school feeding program which is a game changer.

According to Out of School research conducted by UNICEF in 2020, almost 1.13 million of primary school age (6-13 years old) were out of school. Poverty and nomadic lifestyles contributed to the high number of out of school children by 10% and 7% respectively which are top the list in Kajiado county. Despite these challenges in the county, collective efforts by the relevant stakeholders can always come up with a lasting solution. The program at Saina primary school has proved that it is possible to have more pupils enrolled and retained in schools thanks to the impactful 'Come Twende Shule' campaign in Kajiado county by Centre for Behavior Change and Communication (CBCC) through the DigiRedio Platform.



Saina junior secondary school gate. The school is a beneficiary of the feeding program as a result of community effort.

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