



# Start Small Education Project - Kenya

Drought Assessment Report

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# 1 Summary and key highlights

Kenya, a generally arid country (80%) of its land mass is arid and semi-arid is facing a severe drought affecting 20 out of 47 counties in the country. The drought affected the community living in Kajiado causing starvation and risk of losing life, malnutrition of children, and suffering for those affected by the drought. Start Small Education project was started in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it aims to ensure adolescents remain in school by giving them psychosocial support in response to the stress, fear, and anxiety caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In one of the counties where the project works, Kajiado County, the drought is having severe effects which are likely to affect the gains made by the project so far. An assessment of the drought situation in the 50 project schools in the areas was done to:

- i. To assess the effects of the drought on school retention
- ii. To assess the effects of the drought on school operations
- iii. To plan the way forward including applying for humanitarian support for the children in schools affected by drought

Below outlined is a summary of the key findings.

- i. Out of 243 children who dropped out from school since school reopened in September, 99% which is 240 children (99 girls; 141 boys) their dropping out was attributed to drought.
- ii. 46% of the schools reported persistent absenteeism, with 3 of the schools recording an average attendance of less than 50% in the 2 weeks preceding the survey which was attributed to the drought situation.
- iii. Close to 84% had less attention and concentration in class in the schools interviewed and the schools attributed this to the hunger in children causing low concentration.
- iv. Close to half of the schools did not get adequate water for daily use and the cost of purchasing water also affected school operations.
- v. In two schools the children were asked to come with water to school, which could be a deterrent to attending school because they needed to look for water first and walk large distances in the morning to school carrying the extra burden of water.

## 2 Introduction

### 2.1 Background information

In Kenya, one of the countries in East Africa, the arid and semi-arid lands constitute 80% of the country's land mass and cover 20 out of 47 counties<sup>1</sup>. The arid and semi-arid regions experience dry conditions in the early months of the year which affects the population which has high levels of poverty and is highly vulnerable to shocks including loss of livestock which is their source of livelihood. The country is currently facing a severe drought, the worst it has been in over 4 decades<sup>2</sup> attributed to four successive failed rains seasons. The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance currently stands at 4.35 million based on the 2022 Long Rains Food and Nutritional Security Assessment Report. The drought has

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<sup>1</sup> Kenya Food Security Steering Group (KFSSG), 2022. The 2022 long rains season assessment report. <https://www.ndma.go.ke/index.php/resource-center/send/86-2022/6602-lra-national-report-2022>

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF, August 2022, Kenya Drought Flash Update No. 04 <https://reliefweb.int/attachments/e88fc970-aa7c-445d-8ee1-05d3b7f09bb8/UNICEF%20Kenya%20Humanitarian%20Situation%20Report%20No.%204%20%28Drought%29%201%20-%2031%20August%202022.pdf>

come at a time when the country is still trying to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic effects which pushed more households to poverty.

The Start Small Education Project is a 30-month project from January 2021 to June 2023 to address the impact of COVID-19 on the Education Sector in Kenya. The overall objective of the project is to ensure adolescent girls and boys reach their full potential by 2023 by limiting the number of adolescents, at risk of dropping out of school. The project is implemented in Mukuru informal settlements, Nairobi County, and rural areas of Kajiado Central sub-County in Kajiado County. The project offers mental health and psychosocial support to adolescents between the ages of 10-19 years to remain in school by dealing with the issues that affect adolescents causing stress, anxiety, and, depression which are both issues from their homes, community, and schools. The project has reached over 50% of adolescents from selected schools with psychosocial support sessions. The project also has a village savings and loan associations (VSLA) component to ensure that the parents of the adolescents save and support the adolescents to continue with their education.

Kajiado, one of the project sites, is mainly a pastoralist community region that keeps livestock for a living, and income generation is from the sale of milk and livestock. Kajiado County's drought situation has been categorized as Alarm-Drought Phase with 10 other Counties in the Country and needs urgent assistance. In Kajiado Central Sub-County where the project implements its activities, milk production was below the long-term average and the distance to the main water source was higher than average according to a Food Security Assessment and it also had severe<sup>3</sup> [OBJ]. The drought situation has caused the pastoralist communities to move in search of pasture. They are struggling to feed and water their cattle and the price of the cattle is also below the long-term average discouraging them from selling. The severe drought is likely to reverse the gains made in limiting the number of adolescents dropping out of school. Considering this, an assessment of the drought situation and the effect on schools was carried out in the 50 schools we work with in Kajiado.

## **2.2 Purpose of the drought assessment**

The drought assessment was carried out with the following aims:

- i. To assess the effects of the drought on school retention
- ii. To assess the effects of the drought on school operations
- iii. To plan a way forward including applying for humanitarian support for the children in schools affected by drought

## **2.3 Data collection and analysis**

The assessment was carried out in the schools where the project is implementing its activities, which are 50 schools in Kajiado Central. Data was collected from teachers, head teachers, and school directors of the 50 schools we are working with. The interview questions were shared on a google form link and the respondents were guided on how to access it. The teachers were given one week to get the information and fill out the tool. The Kajiado Central Sub-County Director of Education was informed of the assessment and gave his approval to continue with the assessment. Data was summarized in percentages and proportions to show the situation.

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<sup>3</sup> National Drought Management Authority, October 2022. National Drought Early Warning Bulletin <https://www.ndma.go.ke/index.php/resource-center/national-drought-bulletin/send/39-drought-updates/6675-national-monthly-drought-update-october-2022>

### **3 Results**

#### **3.1 School dropouts**

All the 50 schools interviewed (100%) were still open and in operation though struggling. Half of the schools reported they have had dropouts in the school since September when the schools opened. There were 243 dropouts of which, 240 (99%), were attributed to the drought situation. In Kajiado Township Primary School, 79 students, and in Olkejuado High School, 50 students had dropped out due to the drought. In some cases, the teachers noted that the students stay at home because of hunger, some children are tasked to go and swing acacia shrubs and collect the seeds to feed the cattle and goats while some moved in search of pasture for their cattle. This was counter-productive to the Start Small Education project efforts to ensure adolescents are retained in school. The study found that of the students who dropped out of school because of the drought, 141 were boys and 99 were girls. The reason there were more boys than girls who dropped out could be attributed to the fact that boys are more involved in taking care of the livestock and when the families move in search of pasture they move with them.

#### **3.2 Attendance**

In 6% (3) of the schools, attendance was below half of the school population while in 40% (20) of the schools, attendance was between 50-80%. There were 26 schools (52%) where attendance was above 80%. From those who had an attendance of less than 80%, the majority (88%) attributed the low attendance to drought and hunger for the children. The teachers indicated that there was a lot of absenteeism and inconsistency in attending classes and were concerned because the persistent absenteeism by pupils was likely to be dropping out. There was also the concern that frequent absenteeism was likely to lead to children falling behind in academic performance and therefore losing interest and motivation to continue with school.

#### **3.3 Attention**

The schools were also asked if they had noted any changes in attention during class work, 82% (41) of the schools assessed indicated that they had noticed a decline in the attention span of students. They noted that the students were less attentive in class while 16% (8) indicated that there was no change noted in students' attentiveness, and 2% (1 private school) noted increased attentiveness. They noted that the children were not concentrating and not active in class, which they attributed to hunger. They reported that most pupils get little or no food in their homes and are sleepy or gazing during lessons. During a meeting to discuss the project activities, the Sub-County Director of Education reported that he had observed the effects of the drought on the learners.

*"Learning is not taking place in schools; the children are hungry and sleeping in class or distracted and they come to school hoping to get food in the school"* Sub-County Education Director.

#### **3.4 Availability of water**

The schools were also asked about the availability and sufficiency of water for their daily use. 46% (23 schools) noted that they were not getting enough water for daily use while 54% reported they are getting water. Boarding schools especially secondary schools reported they needed a lot of water, over 9,000 liters of water daily which was used for cooking, washing, and the student's needs. The schools were also asked where they get their water from, 24 schools reported they get their water from boreholes. For 14 schools, the boreholes were less than a kilometer away while for 6 schools the boreholes were between 1-3 km while 3 schools reported the boreholes are more than 5 kilometers away. The schools benefit from community boreholes which also come with its challenges because they must wait in line for long as the community members who need to get water for their animals also queue. The National Disaster

Management Authority noted that waiting time in water sources had increased to between 30-45 minutes to get water compared to 10 minutes earlier. This would also affect learning because, for schools with large children populations, the learners are sent to collect water. Some 18 schools purchased water from vendors who sell at an average of Kenya Shillings 20(\$0.16) per 20-liter jerrycan which has increased the operating costs of the schools. The high cost of water is also because of the increase in fuel for the areas where they use petroleum-based pumps to get water. The County Government largely depends on open sources like rivers and with the drought and drying up of rivers, there is a shortage of water. 3 schools asked pupils to come with water to school from their homes. This could act as a deterrent to continuing with education because the children end up walking far to collect water and carry an additional burden when going to school in the morning.

### **3.5 Overall drought effects**

The majority of the schools 48% (24) indicated that the drought had a severe effect on the school while 46% (22) schools indicated the drought had a moderate effect on the school generally, only 4 schools (8%) indicated that the effect was mild. The schools noted that many students returned to school and did not pay school fees which puts the schools under a strain to provide food for the students. At the same time, if the students are sent home for school fees, they do not return to school unless the management calls them back, one school indicated they had to send money to the children to facilitate their transport back to school. This is also in addition to the need to purchase water to support the school operations. One school noted that they do not prioritize cleaning their washrooms because the water was scarce, and they feared that this could spread diseases to the students.

Discussions with parents of adolescents who are in VSLAs noted that their source of income is mainly from livestock and milk. They save their income and support education, however now with the drought, they are not getting minimal and in some cases no income from milk. The VSLA groups noted that the attendance in the savings group meeting was less than half (*refer to Figure 2*) and the savings had also decreased. Over 70% of the members are taking loans to purchase food for their families, livestock, and water. They reported that they are prioritizing food for the families and their livestock and water over fees payment for survival. They also noted that unfortunately, the savings was little and not enough for all members who needed to get loans.

## **4 Conclusion**

### **4.1 Conclusion**

Generally, the schools reported that the drought had a severe effect on the school affecting both the school's operation and the students also. The sub-County Education Director noted that the majority of learners are going to school in the hope that the government or well-wishers will provide food through the school feeding programs. The effects of the drought led to children dropping out of school and some institutions, especially private schools, noted that closing would be an option if the situation continues due to the strain to run the schools. The economic situation in the country is also not aiding the situation, there is high inflation and an increase in the cost of fuel which has consequently led to an increase in food prices, the schools are therefore straining to provide water and food due to the high food costs.

The country was just recovering from COVID-19 and general elections which had caused tension and slow business, and now the severed drought is likely to push the strained households deeper into poverty. Support to the schools will ensure motivation for the adolescents to remain in class as more permanent solutions are advocated for to ensure sustainability.

## **4.2 Recommendation**

The following recommendations were drafted from the findings:

- i. Give relief food and water support to schools
- ii. Schools need to be supported with water tanks to store water and linked with initiatives that would train them in water harvesting
- iii. Network with other like-minded organizations and together advocate for the government to reinstate school feeding to ensure retention in the school
- iv. Train parents and community members on income diversification to ensure resilience
- v. Train adolescents in financial literacy and start savings clubs and income-generating activities which will ensure they can also support their education

Annexes

Drought assessment data



*Figure 1: Community Based Trainer in Kajiado watching over the affected cattle*



*Figure 2: VSLA group meeting in Kajiado*