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ENROLMENT GAINS FROM THE ELIMINATION OF PRIMARY SCHOOL USER FEES IN BURUNDI

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Following two decades of conflict and after a process of reconciliation that lasted several years, the newly elected President of Burundi declared in 2005 that primary education in public schools would be provided for free. The policy became effective starting with the 2005-06 school year. This chapter uses the 2006 QUIBB survey to analyze the impact of free primary education in Burundi on enrolment. After a brief description of Burundi's education system and of some of the efforts implemented at the time by the government to improve education outcomes, we analyze the impact of free primary education on enrolment among various categories of household using purposeful questions in the household survey that aimed to measure the household response to the elimination of user fees. The free primary school policy helped increase enrolment dramatically, especially for the poor, but the quality of schooling still needs to be improved and barriers to schooling also remain, especially now at the secondary level.

1. Introduction

In 1993, civil war broke out in Burundi between the Hutu majority and the Tutsi minority, plunging the country into a vicious circle of armed combats, chronic poverty, social fractures, and food insecurity. Close to two decades of conflict were to follow, costing the lives of over 300,000 people and forcing 1.2 million people (16% of the population) to flee their homes. The combined effect of the severe recession caused by the war as well as the lack of national consensus and the politico-economic embargo in force from 1996 to 1999 was a period of unprecedented impoverishment. By 2005, real per capita Gross Domestic Product had dropped to US\$105, a level similar to that of the mid-1960s (Baghdadli et al., 2008; Nganou et al., 2008). Human development indicators in education and health also worsened significantly.

After several years of negotiations, a transitional government of reconciliation came to power in 2005. A new constitution was approved by national referendum and municipal, legislative and presidential elections were held. In August 2005, Pierre Nkurunziza, leader of a former rebel party, was elected President. In September, he proclaimed that primary education in public schools was to be provided for free. A poverty reduction strategy (Republic of Burundi, 2006) was soon approved with support from donors. The objective of this paper is to assess to what extent the turnaround of 2005, and especially the elimination of user fees in primary public schools, led to an increase in school enrolment, as well as who contributed from this increase.

It has long been recognized that the direct costs of schooling as well as the opportunity costs associated with schooling represent barriers for the poor to send their children to school (see for example Deininger, 2003 and Ravallion and Wodon, 2000). This is especially the case in sub-Saharan Africa, and this reality has led a large number of African governments to eliminate user fees, among others in Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia, although with

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mixed results depending on the country under consideration (see among others Avenstrup, 2006, Oketch and Rolleston, 2007a and 2007b, Nielsen, 2009, Nishimura et al. 2008, Sifuna, 2007, and World Bank and UNICEF, 2009 for reviews of these experiences²).

This paper uses household survey data to analyze the impact of free primary education in Burundi on the enrolment of children in schools. After a brief description in Section 2 of the education system and some of the efforts implemented by the government to improve education outcomes, especially in primary schools, we analyze in Section 3 the impact of free primary education on enrolment using data from a 2006 nationally representative household survey which included several questions to measure the household response to the elimination of user fees. Section 4 is devoted to some of the remaining barriers to schooling. A brief conclusion follows.

2. Administrative data on enrolment and government efforts

Burundi's education system has a traditional structure similar to that in place in other countries in francophone Africa, with four distinct levels: nursery (4 to 6-year-olds), primary (7 to 12-year-olds), secondary (13 to 18-year-olds) and higher education. Secondary education can itself be divided into three main branches: general secondary education consisting of two cycles; technical/professional education provided by educational establishments; and primary teacher training schools. With regard to higher education, until 1999 there was only one university– the *Université de Burundi* – administrated by the state, although more recently a number of private institutions have also entered the market. Progress through the hierarchy of the education system is controlled at three levels: the national competitive examination at the end of primary school, the examination at the end of the first cycle of secondary school and the state examination at the end of the second cycle of secondary school. In this paper, we focus on primary education, and especially on the impact of the elimination of user fees on primary enrolment.

Around 2003-2005, as the democratic process took hold and the conflict effectively ended, the needs of the education sector where large (Obura, 2008). Many facilities had been destroyed or damaged by the conflict and access to education had been limited for an entire generation of young people. Some of those who had been most affected included children from displaced families who were now starting to return to the country, as well as orphans and former child soldiers. Thanks in part to the elimination of user fees, remarkable progress was then achieved in primary education in just a few years (Republic of Burundi, 2006, 2008, 2009).

As shown in **Table 1**, the gross primary enrolment rate jumped from 81.6% in 2004-2005 to 101.3% in 2005-2006, and continued to increase thereafter to reach 130.4% in 2008-2009. The gender parity index in primary education also increased from 0.86 in 2005-2006 to 0.95 in 2008-2009, suggesting faster gains in enrolment for girls than for boys. In terms of the numbers of children enrolled, the elimination of user fees contributed to an increase in enrolment in primary school to 1.3 million students in 2005-06, versus one million in 2004-05 (see **Figure 1**), but large urban-rural and regional disparities in enrolment still persist.

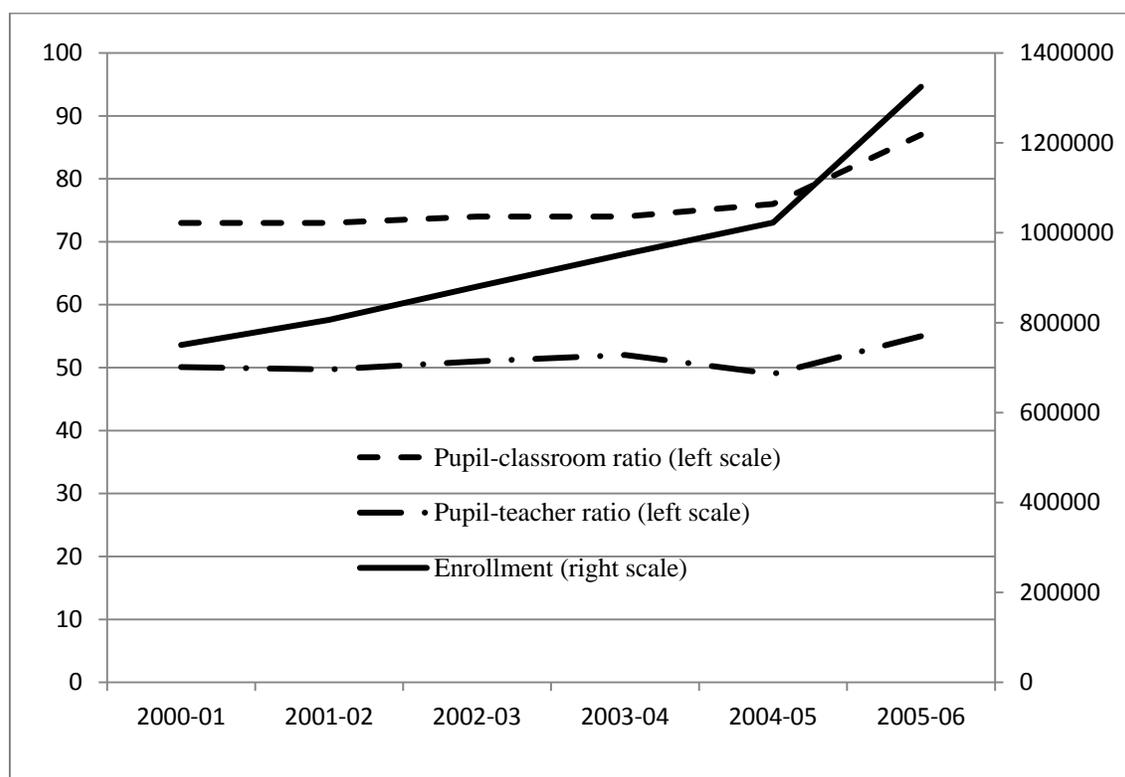
² The impact of those reforms has varied from one country to another. For example in Uganda free primary education was introduced in 1997 and contributed to a very large increase in the gross primary school enrolment rate. In Tanzania, the positive repercussions of free education, introduced in 2001, have been slower to appear due, among other things, to a lack of school infrastructures. In Kenya also, free primary education introduced in 2003 appears to have resulted in a limited increase in the net enrolment rate at least in the first few years after the reform.

Table 1. Change in gross primary school enrolment rates by province, 2003-2009

Province	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009
Bubanza	70.5	71.2	86.6	95.2	108.9	117.2
Bujumbura Mairie	101.8	124.3	141.9	119.8	112.9	102.3
Bujumbura Rural	92.3	86.9	95.6	116.6	127.3	131.2
Bururi	112.5	108.3	122.2	140.9	141.3	162.1
Cankuzo	75.8	74.9	97.5	79.8	130.3	137.0
Cibitoke	77.2	74.6	91.9	101.7	122.6	129.5
Gitega	93.8	88.9	106.6	112.0	134.9	138.1
Karusi	78.9	83.2	100.1	104.5	129.7	135.2
Kayanza	68.7	75.2	102.8	97.2	127.0	134.6
Kirundo	70.3	63.9	88.8	86.7	103.4	110.1
Makamba	78.7	82.6	101.2	114.3	135.2	152.1
Muramvya	96.2	96.3	115.4	125.3	151.9	153.7
Muyinga	57.8	56.4	74.7	85.7	96.0	105.5
Mwaro	111.1	106.8	122.0	128.7	150.6	153.8
Ngozi	58.3	57.1	86.4	91.5	117.7	122.1
Rutana	85.3	90.9	117.8	96.3	123.3	133.4
Ruyigi	63.5	80.1	105.8	101.4	117.6	127.2
Total	81.0	81.6	101.3	105.2	123.5	130.4

Source: Ministry of National Education

Figure 1. Primary school enrolment, pupil-teacher ratio and pupil-classroom ratio



Source: Statistical Yearbook of Burundi

The appraisal of the education system carried out within the framework of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (Republic of Burundi, 2006) just after the elimination of user fees in public primary schools highlighted several priorities. First, the physical capacity of the system to welcome the influx of the students was limited. This is clear in Figure 1 in terms of the increase in the pupil-teacher and pupil-classroom ratios in 2005-06, as compared to the previous year. Thus it became a priority to increase the numbers of classrooms and teachers, and this took a bit of time. In the 2007–2008 academic year for example, 1,894 new classrooms were built and 2,780 new primary school teachers were hired. Additional efforts highlighted in subsequent progress reports on the implementation of the PRSP include education materials such as textbooks that were made available to a larger number of children, continuing education programs that were implemented for teachers, school principals, and inspectors, and improved conditions for teachers through initiatives such as a teacher housing fund created in 2008. Inputs such as cement and sheet metal were distributed to communities for the building of new school facilities, especially at the secondary level where an overwhelming majority of schools are run by communities instead of the government. Religious groups and NGOs were also key partners in the expansion of the secondary school network.

The substantial efforts implemented by the government to increase access to education are visible through the budget as well. According to a World Bank (2006) education country status report, public spending allocated to education doubled in nominal terms from FBu 20.9 billion in 2001 to FBu 44.9 billion in 2006 (at that time, one US\$ was worth about FBu 1,000). As a proportion of total budgetary allocations, spending for education increased by five percentage points over the same period. Since then, funding for education has continued to increase in absolute terms, although less so as a percentage of total budgetary expenditures. For example, while the budget for education increased only by 2% in 2007, the increase for 2008 was at 28%, and more than half of the budget for education is allocated to primary education in 2006 and 2007, and remained relatively high at 48% in 2008 despite the fact that funding for secondary schooling increased by nearly a third in that year.

3. Impact of the elimination of user fees on enrolment

It is clear that enrolment in primary education increased substantially in 2005-2006, but administrative data does not tell us who benefited from this increase. In principle, analyzing the distributional impact of a public policy requires the availability of data for the periods before and after the introduction of the policy. Panel data are particularly useful. Yet in Burundi, household surveys are scarce even in cross-sectional settings, not to speak of panel data. Fortunately the questions asked in the nationally representative 2006 QUIBB (*Questionnaire des Indicateurs de Base du Bien-être*) survey provide us with a good idea of the impact of free primary education on the enrolment of children for various types of household because the households were asked several questions about the enrolment of their children in school before and after the reform.

More precisely, the following questions were asked in the QUIBB survey: “(1) In August 2005, the President of the Republic decided to abandon school tuition fees in public primary schools. Are you aware of this? (Yes/No); (2) If the President hadn’t decided to introduce free tuition, do you think that your child (children) who is (are) now at primary school would have stayed at home? (Yes/No); (3) If yes, could you tell me the names of these children who might not have gone to school?; (4) Before this school year, did one of your children not enrol at primary school because you didn’t have enough money to pay the tuition fees? (Yes/No); (5) Are some of these children, who stayed at home because of the tuition fees, enrolled this year? (Yes/No); and finally, (6) If yes, could you tell me the names of these children?”

According to the survey data (see **Table 2**) 97% of households were aware of the decision to introduce free primary education, which in itself is already remarkable in a country as poor as Burundi. If school had not been free, 41.4% of the poorest households (first quintile calculated according to household consumption per adult equivalent) think that some of their children who are currently enrolled in primary school would have stayed at home. The proportion falls to only 13.1% for the richest households. Among the poorest households, 36.1% claim that at least two of their children were at risk of not going to school. Before the 2005-2006 school year, 32.1% of households in the poorest quintile had experienced a situation where one of their children did not go to school due a lack of money to pay enrolment fees, while 37.7% of the poorest households where children had stayed at home in 2005 due to the tuition fees enrolled some of their children in school in 2006 (the questions aimed at identifying the children who benefited from this suggest that one child per household was enrolled in 61.3% of the poorest households and two children in 28.4% of these households). The proportion is much smaller for the most affluent households.

Table 2. Impact of free primary education on school enrolment, 2006

	Number of observations	Urban	Rural	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5
In August 2005, the President of the Republic decided to abandon school tuition fees in public primary schools. Are you aware of this?								
Yes	6,728	97.8%	96.4%	96.8%	98.0%	96.3%	96.4%	96.1%
No	237	2.2%	3.6%	3.2%	2.0%	3.7%	3.6%	3.9%
If the President hadn't decided to introduce free tuition, do you think that your child (children) who is (are) now at primary school would have stayed at home?								
Yes	1,360	16.2%	27.4%	41.4%	35.7%	26.9%	20.6%	13.1%
No	3,853	83.8%	72.6%	58.6%	64.3%	73.1%	79.4%	86.9%
Before this school year, did one of your children not enrol at primary school because you didn't have enough money to pay the tuition fees?								
Yes	960	12.1%	20.3%	32.1%	22.9%	20.4%	16.3%	9.6%
No	4,002	87.9%	79.7%	67.9%	77.1%	79.6%	83.7%	90.4%
Are some of these children who stayed at home because of the tuition fees enrolled this year?								
Yes	511	31.3%	31.2%	37.7%	36.6%	27.7%	30.2%	21.1%
No	1,124	68.7%	68.8%	62.3%	63.4%	72.3%	69.8%	78.9%

Source: Authors, using data from the 2006 QUIBB survey

The data presented in Table 2 suggest that free primary education had a major impact on the enrolment of children in schools, especially in the poorest quintiles. **Table 3** provides a more detailed profile of the children having benefited from the free education policy insofar as they enrolled in school following the introduction of free education. The questionnaire enables us to identify exactly who these children are. Hence, in Table 3, three groups of children can be distinguished: children who already attended school before the reform, children who have enrolled in school since the reform and children who are still not enrolled in school.

The following results can be observed. 31.8% of children aged 6 to 11 enrolled in school after the introduction of free education. Although not indicated in Table 3, it is possible to demonstrate that among these newly enrolled children aged 6 to 11, 28.2% were from the poorest quintile, 26.0% from the second quintile, 19.8% from the third, 16.6% from the fourth and 9.4% from the richest quintile. Thus this confirms that the policy benefitted the poorest disproportionately, as could have been expected.

The profile of the newly enrolled children provided in Table 3 also shows that the impact of free education was stronger for (1) relatively young children (6 to 11-year-olds and 12 to 15-year-

olds as compared to older children aged 15 to 18), which is quite normal as the elimination of user fees concerned primary schools only; (2) children who do not work, although it should be noted that the decision whether or not to work depends in part on the decision whether or not to enroll in school; (3) rural children compared to urban children; (4) children belonging to poorer households, as already discussed; (5) children belonging to households where at least one member of the family is handicapped, which is another indicator of vulnerability; (6) children from households where the household head had a low level of education; and (7) households where the head worked in agriculture (as opposed to industry or services). However, there is relatively little difference in impact according to whether the child was displaced due to the war, the sex of the head of household or his/her marital status, the sex of the child, whether or not the child is an orphan, and the distance of the child from the different services identified in the survey. The main result is therefore not surprising: free education was a rather pro-poor measure.

Table 3. Profile of children by school enrolment status, 2006

	Number of observations	Children enrolled before the reform (%)	Children enrolled since the reform (%)	Children not enrolled since the reform (%)
Characteristics of the child				
6-11 year-old	4,314	64.1	31.8	4.1
12-15 year-old	3,837	56.9	25.9	17.2
16-18 year-old	2,211	35.4	13.9	50.7
Boy	4,343	56.8	26.1	17.0
Girl	4,372	55.0	24.2	20.9
Eldest child	2,523	52.8	21.0	26.2
Orphan	2,792	48.7	25.8	25.5
Works	645	11.0	9.1	79.8
Characteristics of the household				
Urban	1,372	70.8	16.6	12.6
Rural	8,990	52.9	27.2	19.9
Poorest (Q1)	2,240	43.5	33.7	22.9
Second quintile (Q2)	2,220	49.0	31.3	19.7
Third quintile (Q3)	2,072	55.6	25.5	18.9
Fourth quintile (Q4)	2,013	62.2	22.1	15.7
Richest (Q5)	1,817	69.5	13.8	16.7
Displaced war refugees	7,279	52.2	28.3	19.5
Households with female head	2,054	49.3	28.3	22.4
Households where head is not married	2,673	49.3	27.6	23.1
Households with at least one handicapped member	1,229	48.1	31.7	20.2
Level of education of head of household				
No education				
Primary school	3,404	60.2	24.5	15.3
Koranic school	2,786	49.4	27.6	23.0
Secondary school	623	74.2	11.6	14.3
Higher education				
Employment of head of household				
Agriculture	2,190	43.2	34.5	22.3
Industry	359	59.6	22.6	17.8
Commerce	874	63.3	23.2	13.5
Services	805	76.9	11.8	11.3
Distance to services (ref.: <15 minutes)				
Between 15 and 30 minutes from public transport	4,452	55.6	25.2	19.2
More than 30 minutes from public transport	2,723	52.7	27.4	19.9
Between 15 and 30 minutes from primary school	5,754	55.4	25.4	19.2
More than 30 minutes from primary school	4,036	53.6	26.7	19.7
Between 15 and 30 minutes from secondary school	4,829	56.5	24.4	19.1
More than 30 minutes secondary school	2,726	50.7	29.9	19.5

Source: Authors, using data from the 2006 QUIBB survey

4. Remaining obstacles to schooling

Although free primary education has helped to increase the rate of enrolment of children in schools, especially among poorer households, this does not mean that all children in age of going to primary school are enrolled or that the cost of education is no longer a barrier for some households, especially after the primary level. **Table 4** presents data from the 2006 QUIBB survey concerning the main reasons cited by parents for not enrolling some of their children in school. The statistics are presented for two age groups (6 to 11-year-olds and 12 to 18-year-olds) and for the older children a distinction is made between boys and girls (for the younger children, there are few differences between boys and girls in the reasons for not being enrolled).

Table 4. Main reasons for not going to school, 2006 (%)

	Urban	Rural	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5
Children aged 6 to 11							
Too young	73.1	56.4	53.0	50.9	58.1	67.7	70.7
School too expensive	1.5	12.5	13.9	15.8	11.0	7.7	4.1
Work	4.1	5.9	7.2	7.0	3.8	4.1	4.5
Illness	5.4	6.4	5.5	5.7	9.6	5.4	6.2
Too old	0.7	4.1	5.3	3.5	4.3	2.1	2.3
Pointless	1.6	1.5	1.5	2.8	0.6	1.1	0.0
School too far away	0.0	0.9	0.6	0.7	1.9	0.9	0.7
Failed exam	0.0	1.0	0.5	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.2
Finished school	2.6	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.6
Other	11.0	11.0	12.0	12.0	8.9	9.7	9.8
Girls aged 12 to 18							
Pointless	22.6	22.0	21.7	18.7	19.7	26.9	27.5
School too expensive	19.6	20.6	21.3	21.4	23.3	16.0	17.5
Too old	13.9	14.0	14.1	14.7	16.1	11.3	12.3
Finished school	8.3	9.1	11.7	6.7	8.0	7.1	11.0
Work	8.1	10.6	8.9	11.6	10.8	14.2	7.1
Failed exam	5.1	6.2	5.2	5.2	5.4	8.9	8.8
School too far away	4.6	2.6	2.6	2.3	1.7	4.2	3.1
Too young	1.6	1.5	1.0	1.0	1.3	3.5	1.9
Enceinte	5.9	0.3	0.4	0.0	0.6	0.3	2.4
Illness	0.0	0.7	0.3	0.9	1.2	0.9	0.4
Other	10.5	12.4	12.9	17.6	12.1	6.8	7.9
Boys aged 12 to 18							
Too old	18.8	21.2	23.2	24.2	18.7	15.8	18.1
School too expensive	18.5	19.4	21.0	16.5	22.1	18.9	16.9
Work	19.9	15.7	19.2	11.0	14.4	18.1	16.3
Failed exam	11.4	8.9	8.2	7.0	12.2	11.3	8.2
Illness	6.8	5.6	3.2	6.5	5.3	7.9	9.3
Finished school	6.2	5.6	3.1	7.8	4.2	9.3	5.6
Pointless	6.7	5.2	2.5	7.3	5.8	5.2	8.5
Too young	1.4	2.3	2.2	0.9	2.6	1.5	6.4
School too far away	0.0	0.9	0.4	2.9	0.0	0.0	0.0
Other	10.3	15.3	17.1	15.9	14.7	12.0	10.9

Source: Authors, using data from the 2006 QUIBB survey

At the primary level, the main reason for not enrolling a child in school relates to the fact that the child is too young. Cost does not seem to be a barrier any more, and the other potential reasons for not being enrolled tend to be limited as well. Thus, as discussed previously, the elimination of school fees (rather than the opening or construction of new schools since opportunities to do so were limited in the first year after the announcement of the reform) helped reduce dramatically the barriers to schooling at the primary level, although efforts could still be undertaken to convince parents to send their child as soon as warranted to school.

The situation is very different at the secondary level, as proxied by the data for children aged 12 to 18 (some of these children are still in primary school due to repetition or late entry, but these are a minority among the group as a whole). For girls, the main reason for not being enrolled in school is that this is “pointless”, meaning probably that the learning that takes place in the classroom or the prospects from having a better life through secondary schooling are limited. The proportion of parents not sending their children to school due to the perception that this is pointless is significantly smaller for boys, but still not negligible, at 8.5% of the sample. For boys, a more important reason for not sending the child to school is that he may be too old (even though the child is of secondary schooling age), and this affects 18.1% of the boys not enrolled (12.3% for the girls). In addition, for 11.0% of girls and 5.6% of boys not enrolled, the fact that children are considered by their parents as having finished school (which in all likelihood means that the child has completed primary school) is mentioned as the reason for not being enrolled.

Apart from age and ineffective learning or learning that is not useful according to parental perceptions, the main reason for not being enrolled at the secondary level is cost. First, the fact that schools are too expensive is mentioned for 17.5% of the girls, and 16.9% of the boys not enrolled, but in addition the need to work which captures the opportunity cost of schooling is also mentioned as a key reason for not enrolling, for 7.1% of girls and a much larger 16.3% of boys. Still another important reason for not being enrolled is the failure in examinations, which probably refers to the national competitive examination at the end of primary school necessary to transition from primary to secondary school. This affects 8.8% of girls and 8.2% of boys. By contrast, other reasons such as the distance to schools, the fact of being pregnant for girls, or an illness are cited only by a minority of parents as key reasons for not enrolling their children.

The perceptions by parents, including on the usefulness of schooling, make sense given the limited learning that takes place at both the primary and secondary school levels. This poor performance is related to a wide range of issues, many of which have been identified in the country’s Poverty Reduction Strategy and the progress reports to-date on its implementation (Republic of Burundi, 2006, 2008, 2009), as well as in the education status report completed by the World Bank (2006). Some of the issues relate to the practice of double shifts, whereby students attend school for only a half day (generating only a total of 600 hours/year of teaching at the primary level). Materials available for children also remain limited, with a 2007 Public Expenditure Tracking Survey suggesting that only 2% of all public primary schools have a library or a pharmacy, half have a teacher’s office, one in ten has a cafeteria, less than 5% have electricity, and only a third has access to drinking water. The Public Expenditure Tracking Survey also revealed that teacher absenteeism remained high at about 25%. As for the student-teacher ratio, it remains above 50 despite the addition of new teachers in recent years, and the student-classroom ratio is even higher at 84 nationally. These conditions indeed contribute to limited learning as well as high repetition and drop-out rates in primary schools.

5. Conclusion

Remarkable progress has been made in terms of the primary school enrolment rate in Burundi since the decision was taken in September 2005 to make public primary education free. This decision was a key step in getting children back to school after two decades of conflict. This does not mean however that the education system in Burundi no longer needs to improve. The rates of secondary school enrolment remain very low and, in the years to come, it will be important to observe if the progress made at primary level continues at secondary level. Major differences still exist between the enrolment rates of poor children and rich children and between boys and girls. The increase in the number of children enrolled in school has also probably yielded a negative effect on the quality of teaching, as the number of children per class

is now especially high despite efforts by the government to hire teachers and build classrooms. As the country is preparing its second poverty reduction strategy, in addition to administrative data and the analysis presented here, it is now essential to collect more detailed data concerning both achievement and attainment, with a view to identifying the actions to be implemented in order to ensure the continued improvement in the performance of the education system in Burundi.

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