

## Review Article

# Improving Basic Education in Rural Schools in Tanzania: Lessons from China

### Abstract

Basic education in Tanzania especially in rural schools is faced with diverse challenges that hinder effective teaching and learning. This situation requires immediate interventions from the government to improve basic education in rural schools. The purpose of this study was based on improving basic education in rural schools in Tanzania: lessons from China. This study employed secondary sources to collect data. The government of China used different efforts to improve rural education compared to the previous years. Due to strong investment, most rural schools in China have an improved school environment, well-equipped classrooms, accommodation facilities, and well-constructed teachers' houses. The findings revealed that education in rural schools in Tanzania could be improved by following those efforts employed by China. To succeed in those efforts, the central government of Tanzania should increase financial investment in the education sector through total budgetary allocation to satisfy academic development and simplify the educational plans and policy implementation. As a result, through financial investment, teaching and learning facilities, boarding schools, well-equipped classrooms, accommodation facilities, teachers' houses, and other materials will be accessible in rural schools. On top of that, Tanzania should work with partnerships such as nonprofit organizations (NPOs) to improve basic education in rural and remote areas. Furthermore, the Tanzanian government should initiate special financial management to deal with operational expenditures for the future development of education in rural schools.

**Keywords:** *Improving, Basic education, Rural schools, Tanzania.*

### 1. Introduction

The provision of educational opportunities in 21<sup>st</sup> century especially of basic education, has been an objective of investment across the globe. At the national level, a constitutional commitment to education matters both symbolically and practically. Constitutions delineate a country's fundamental values and commitments as well as its economic and political organization. Since 1961, education has always been seen as the backbone of national development in Tanzania. Through the management of the Education Sector, the Government of Tanzania commits itself to provide quality education. It facilitates the provision of equitable quality education and training at all levels. Apart from that, the government collaborates with educational stakeholders to participate actively in the provision of education (Lusingu, 2013). History shows that at the beginning of the 1990s, the global community recognized the importance of universal education as the booster of economic growth and a foundation of healthy and democratic societies. After adopting these goals, the number of schools has exploded throughout the universe (World Bank, 2008). The Government of Tanzania gives high priority to the provision of quality education to

all Tanzanians. Also, the government follows the fundamental role in bringing about the nation's social, culture and economic development as emphasized in the National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (NSGRP/MKUKUTA), Tanzania Development Vision 2025, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA) goals. Thus, to meet those goals and international commitments, in early 2016, Tanzania embraced a fee-free education policy to gear the access of education in urban and rural areas across the country. Despite those great efforts but Tanzania still have unpromising education in rural schools. Therefore, the provision of education in rural areas is characterized by different challenges.

### **Importance of Basic (Compulsory) Education**

Basic education is an essential key factor in national development because basic education helps to improve individual lives. For example, from a narrow perspective of agricultural improvements in the agriculture sector, basic education improves farmer productivity. From a somewhat broader perspective of rural development, it facilitates off-farm employment and the economic development of rural areas (Moulton, 2001). On the other side, basic education plays a fantastic role in poverty alleviation through different disciplines of learning taught in school, which helps individuals to learn new skills after school completion.

### **The objective of the study**

Improving basic education in rural schools in Tanzania

### **The specific objective of the study**

To investigate the challenges facing basic education in rural schools in Tanzania.

### **Research Question**

What are the challenges facing basic education in rural schools in Tanzania?

### **Methodology**

This study used a qualitative methodology, whereby various secondary sources used to collect data.

## **2. Education Financing in Tanzania**

In Tanzania, most of the financing sources in education come from donors. Donors have a great contribution in fueling educational activities. HakiElimu (2014) reported that 46 percent of the 2014/2015 budget in education development plan was from donors, while 54 percent was from domestic revenue. The 2013/2014 budget had 74 percent coming from donors, but they gave only 15%. The Jomtien conference held in 2011 in Thailand set international benchmarks on education expenditure. The conference came up with the statement that states should spend at least 6% of their GDP or at least 20% of their national budgets on education to achieve quality education for all (UNESCO, 2012) in recent years, The Education and Training Policy of 2014 expanded compulsory basic education in Tanzania to include one year of pre-primary, six years of primary, and four years of junior secondary education. In addition, Tanzania lags behind the average for emerging and developing countries in terms of GDP dedicated to education. Only

3.9 % of the total GDP goes towards the education sector (UNICEF, 2018). Thus, minimal budgeting results in the poor implementation of educational plans, which accelerate educational imbalance between urban and rural.

**Table 1: Budgetary Allocation to the Education Sector from 2015-2018 (Tshs.Mil)**

ITEM	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018
Recurrent expenditure	3,236,090	3,721,743	3,572,049
Development Local	573,532	627,522	809,935
Development Foreign	60,557	296,635	324,377
Development Expenditure	643,089	1,049,210	1,134,313
Total Budget	3,870,178	4,770,953	4,706,362

Source: (URT, 2018)

Table 1 indicates the trends on budgetary allocation to the Education Sector from 2015/16 to 2017/18 have increased by 22% from 2015/16 to 2017/. In 2015/2016 year, the education budget has slightly decreased from 4,770,952,584,000 Tsh in 2016/17 to 4,706,361,982,000 Tsh (a decrease of 1.3%). Meanwhile, the development of budget has been increased while the recurrent budget decreased in comparison to previous years. The budget has increased significantly to meet the demand for education services, especially at the basic education level. However, this has also put significant constraints on the education budget.

**Table 2: Trends of Education's Budget Allocation by Sub – sector**

Sub-Sector	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018
Primary Education	57.4%	58.2%	63.3%	63.2%
Secondary Education	16.5%	16.8%	14.9%	14.4%
Teacher Education	1.8%	1.0%	1.1%	1.4%

Source: (URT, 2018)

Table 2 indicates that the ratio of primary education in the budget increased from 57.4 percent in 2014/2015 to 63.2 percent in 2017/2018. The government has prioritized primary education because of its necessity in human development. On the other side, the amounts allocated to the rest of the sub-sectors have slightly declined since 2014/2018. As a result, there is a large increase in Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR) at the primary and secondary levels. Works of literature have postulated that the largest budget has been spent for allowances and administrative issues instead of constructing classrooms, employing teachers, latrines and procuring textbooks and desks, especially in rural areas.

## 2.1. The Quality of Basic Education in Rural Schools in Tanzania

The provision of education in Tanzania is based on quantity rather than quality compared to other developing countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. A report conducted by (Uwezo, 2011) in Tanzanian local government authorities found that 1 out of every five standard seven pupils could not read a Swahili book. More findings revealed that most students who joined secondary education from rural primary schools had a poor background in Mathematics and English subjects which are important in secondary education. In 2013 another report was conducted again and identified that learners in urban schools perform better rather than learners from rural primary schools.

**Table 3: Percentages of Children Passing all three Subjects Tested by Districts**

District	Mathematics	Kiswahili	English
<b>Temeke</b>	<b>80.4</b>	<b>74.2</b>	<b>45.8</b>
<b>Arusha Urban</b>	<b>78.4</b>	<b>64.8</b>	<b>55.0</b>
<b>Morogoro Urban</b>	<b>77.8</b>	<b>72.3</b>	<b>46.2</b>
Tarime-Rural	43.4	17.9	12.3
Biharamulo-Rural	36.3	27.0	9.2
Serengeti-Rural	44.7	15.4	9.5

*Source: Uwezo 2013*

The findings above indicate that the performance of urban primary schools was better than rural schools. This gap exists because urban primary schools have enough facilities and committed teachers. Apart from that, parents and guardians in urban areas invest many resources for education while rural parents concentrate more on productive activities. Moreover, pupils in urban areas have more opportunities to study well than their counterparts in peripheral communities. On the other hand, learners in urban areas attend tuition classes to capture more relevant concepts from their teachers. They can easily access information from the internet and libraries. The situation is different in rural areas where education has been neglected, educational facilities are scarce, and only a few children can access proper reading materials from relevant sources. This disparity in basic education will be solved if the government decides willingly to invest the available resources for improving the learning environment in rural schools in Tanzania.

### **3. Challenges facing Basic Education in Rural Schools in Tanzania**

Sub-Saharan Africa is one of the regions with the highest rate of poverty and hunger in the world. Different reports indicate that learners living in rural areas of sub-Saharan African countries, including Tanzania, are at great risk of failure and school drop-out as their parents cannot afford to provide their basic needs for them (Shikalepo, 2020). In Tanzania poverty implies a lack of resources for rural dwellers and educational players, which blocks their social interaction and isolates them from professional development programs, resulting in low levels of educational

improvement. Furthermore, the same study conducted by (Nyabanyaba, 2015) postulated that the commendable progress towards opening up access to basic education since the introduction of Free Primary Education (FPE) in 2000, rural learners continue to experience poor access and inequitable provision of education at all. In general, junior secondary education remains highly inaccessible in that country, with almost two-thirds (63.5%) of children of secondary school-going age being out of school. Moreover, the Consolidation of rural schools always results in students having to travel long distances over unimproved roads.

Lusingu (2013) pointed out that poor living conditions are major obstacles in attracting teachers to work in rural schools. Many works of literature report that teachers prefer urban postings because of the living conditions. Urban areas are much better than rural areas. Teachers often express concerns about the quality of accommodations with a better working environment, including classroom facilities and school resources. Pasha (2016) argued that the average pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) at rural primary schools is 60:1 instead of the desired national ratio of 45:1. This situation affects the quality of primary education as pupils cannot get sufficient time to discuss and capture relevant knowledge during the teaching and learning process. In addition, Uchidiuno (2020) pointed that the poor quality of housing in rural areas, working conditions, and unavailability of leisure activities are equally discouraging to teachers to work in rural areas in Tanzania. In addition, one study conducted by Mohamed (2017) revealed differences in the availability of health services in some rural areas in Tanzania. Out of 15 schools visited, six schools (40%) had no hospital except dispensaries characterized by shortages of drugs and physicians. Due to this reason, most of the teachers dislike teaching in rural schools. The government should construct more houses for teachers and other staff to improve education at rural schools.

Malhoit (2005) asserts that rural students, like other students in urban schools, are entitled to attend a school in a safe and conducive building for teaching and learning. Historically rural school facilities have been ignored, neglected, and under-funded because states rely on local communities to pay all or most school repairs and maintenance costs. Also, Lindsjö (2018) confirmed that most rural schools in Tanzania lack chalks, desks, chairs, exercise books, and textbooks. Limited availability of those facilities affects the teaching and learning process. Although these challenges are in rural and urban schools, access to suppliers is easier in urban schools due to infrastructure. On the otherhand, (Chacha & Zhong, 2013) cemented that teachers in rural schools have few teaching aids and a lack of classroom. Few students are provided with desks and chairs of any description, and even chalk can be unavailable.

In contrast, government regulation states that class size is 40 pupils, but they can be up to 200 in the same class. The government of Tanzania has been training teachers to deliver quality education under circumstances that are not possible. Kapinga (2017) observed that a shortage of permanent classrooms, particularly in poor districts, the poor state of existing school infrastructure due to poor investment, poor construction standards, and inadequate maintenance, the limited number of primary schools serving the poor population in isolated rural areas and the huge discrepancies in needs had been major talking points. However, a study conducted by UNESCO (2014) at Namuroto primary school at rural district found out that one school consisted

of 34 students ages 3-5. At the same time, there was one teacher, and the students met under a tree.

Pic 1. Primary school Learners meeting under a tree



Source: UNESCO, 2014,

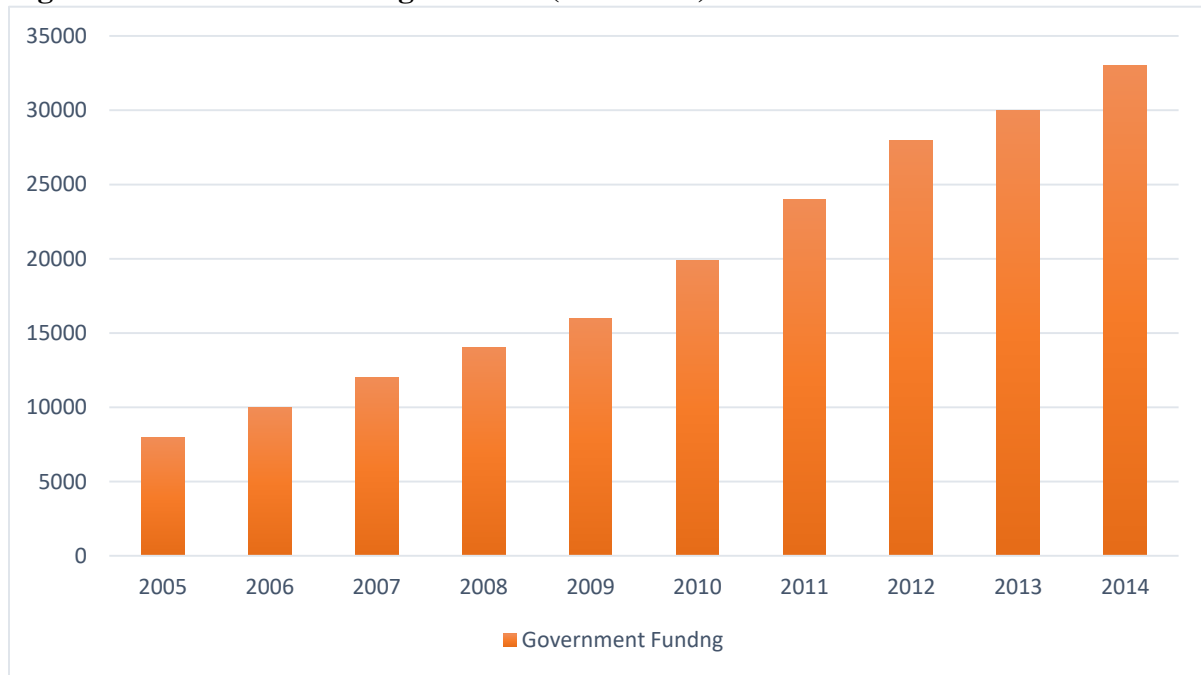
#### **4. Basic (Compulsory) Education in China**

In China, students must complete nine years of basic education, including six years of primary school and three years of middle school. In a few schools, use a five-year cycle for primary school. Primary education starts at age of six for most children, followed by three to four years of junior secondary education. This is a right and obligation for all Chinese children and adolescents who have reached school age (Zhou, 2012). Ultimately, before the 1990s, secondary schools recruited students based on an entrance examination. To emphasize the basic education of junior secondary schools, the government has replaced the entrance examination with a policy of mandatory enrolment based on the area of residence. The gross enrolment ratio for primary education in 2014 was 103% compared with 104% in 2006. For secondary education, the gross enrolment ratio was 94% compared with 64% in 2006, respectively, and the rate of completing compulsory education reached 90.8% (OECD, 2016).

##### **4.1. Education Financing in China**

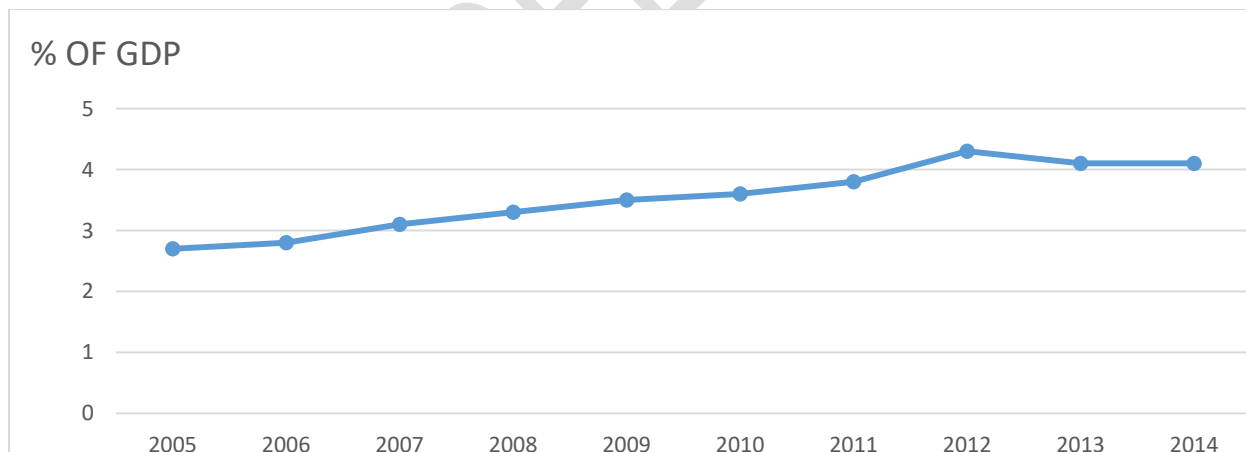
The central government of China is the main source of funds for more than 80.54% in education. China's central treasury and local treasuries contribute to education funding. This arrangement is in line with a policy that encourages diverse resource mobilization. Investment in education in mainland China has continued to increase at a high rate compared to the last years. However, China's investment in education has increased by 19% on average in the last ten years. This trend of increased investment is due to government laws and policies. Meanwhile, one of the targets of educational law in China is to ensure that the percentage of Gross Development Product (GDP) grows following the country's economic development and revenue growth.

**Figure 1: Education Funding in China (2005-2014)in billion CNY**



Source: OECD, 2016

**Figure 2: Percentage of GDP in Education Sector**



Source: OECD, 2016

#### **4.2. Evolution of the educational system and government policies in rural schools in China**

From 1979 to 1984

Two policies characterized this period; the first was "Decisions on the Universal Coverage of the Primary School Education" by the CPC Central Committee in 1980 that pinpointed

universalizing primary education as the predominant task. Second was Notice on Reforms of Education in Rural Areas" by the State Council in 1983.

From 1985 to 1990

The government of China focuses on promoting the nine-year compulsory education in the rural sector through legislation. The major events during this period include the issuance of "Decisions on the Reform of the Educational System" by the CPC Central Committee in 1985 that set the goal of universalizing the nine-year compulsory education

From 1991 to 2000

During this era, further efforts were initiated to strengthen and universalize the nine-year compulsory education in the rural sector. Besides that, the dual goal of *two basics* was put forward; that is, to achieve the universal coverage of the nine-year compulsory education as well as literacy in areas where 85 percent of the population lives by 2000.

From 2001 to date

The main target was the shift of educational funding from farmers' collective funding raised through grassroots organizations to local government funding at the county level. The second target is the shift of the main management body from the township to the county.

#### **4.3. Efforts used to Improve Basic Education in Rural Schools in China**

The government of China is the dominant provider of basic education across the country. In rural areas, public schools constitute 99% of primary schools and 95.9% of middle schools. Apart from establishing and operating public schools, the central government and local government have jointly launched a series of programs, foremost in 2005, the government of China implemented the Two Exemptions and One Subsidy (TEOS) initiative, an effort that seeks to relieve qualified poor rural students from tuition, miscellaneous fees, and other costs, such as textbooks and boarding expenses (Zhou, 2012). Due to that program, rural households' financial burden increased parents' enthusiasm for sending their children to school. In 2014, the Ministry of Education, the National Development and Reform Commission, and the Ministry of Finance jointly launched the Comprehensive Programme for Basic education in rural schools. The central government invested Chinese Yuan (CNY) 50 billion to comprehensively improve teaching conditions and infrastructure in underdeveloped schools (OECD, 2016). The program included the construction of rural schools buildings and sports fields and the purchase of desks, chairs, equipment for science labs, and the construction of dormitories at boarding schools. Also to bridge the gap between urban and rural schools, the central and local governments invested 542.6 billion yuan (US\$81 billion) from 2013 to 2018 in building and renovating school buildings and buying teaching tools. Due to heavy investment, more than 90 percent of primary and secondary rural schools in China now have access to the internet (<https://www.chinadailyhk.com>, 2019). Moreover, (Zhou (2012) cemented that the central government of China has been collaborating with nonprofit sectors to improve the quality of rural education. For instance, the China Youth Development Foundation (CYDF), since its establishment in 1989, has constructed more than 16,355 primary schools, trained over 60,000 rural teachers, and provided financial aid to over 3.49 million students (China Youth Development Foundation. Also, The China Children

and Teenagers' Fund (CCTF), with a mission to promote gender equality, has constructed over 1,000 primary schools and helped over 2 million poor girls go back to school in rural schools.

The Ministry of Education in China and the central government initiated a long-term volunteer teaching program. On top of that, the government provides a large amount of funding for the long-term program and some preferential policies for the college students when they finish their volunteering, ensuring an endless stream of capital and talent (Liu, 2015). The long-term governmental program aims to ensure that volunteers work for one to three years, guarantee a complete teaching process for the rural students (McQuaide, 2021) adds that to improve education in rural schools in China, In September 2003, the government of China introduced a distance education program in rural schools to promote educational resource exchanges between urban centers and rural areas to enhance the quality and effectiveness of education in the whole country. To implement that program, central and local governments committed 12 billion RMB Yuan to the program. Apart from huge investment in the education sector in China, financial management support is imposed on rural primary and secondary schools to ensure that funds are used effectively. A budgeting and disbursement management system has been established in several pilot districts. The system puts educational administration departments in charge of managing schools' finances, allowing for strong management and oversight of finances for the future development of education (OECD, 2016).

### **Lesson learned**

The government of China was able to make such large investments in improving rural education, including incorporating by building classroom and boarding schools because it has dedicated a sizable budget to its public school system. In rural areas, public schools constitute 99% of basic education. However, in 2014, the Ministry of Education, the National Development and Reform Commission, and the Ministry of Finance jointly launched the Comprehensive Programme for Basic education in rural schools. The central government invested Chinese Yuan (CNY) 50 billion to comprehensively improve teaching conditions and infrastructure in underdeveloped areas. Rural schools remain somewhat disconnected compared to their urban counterparts since the rural population is less dense, schools are smaller, and the most remote schools are frequently single-teacher schoolhouses lacking any use of technology. Thus, for the most part, public investment in education has laid the groundwork for complete parity both in the provision of classroom technology and fully informed usage of technology. In case of Tanzania, the same cannot be said. In 2014/2015, the entire budget in education was only 46 percent less than in China. The evidence from different reports indicates that Tanzania lags behind the average for emerging. Developing countries in terms of GDP dedicated towards education whereby only 3.9% of total GDP goes towards education sector. However, universal enrollment has been increased to a large extent; the impact of this chronic underfunding is most strongly felt in rural localities whereby students lack access to learning materials, teacher absenteeism remains high. Therefore, the central government of Tanzania should increase the budgetary allocation to rescue education in rural schools.

The best way to bring quality education is to ensure the central government and the ministry of education engage together with the community that could broaden decision making, policy-

making, and programs conception of what parts of that community could most benefit from access to improved education in rural areas, by opening the door to partnerships with continuing education efforts undertaken within other sectors. China has been working with various partnerships from the communities to promote education in rural areas to solve educational problems in rural schools. The vivid example revealed from China Youth Development Foundation (CYDF) had constructed more than 16,355 primary schools, trained over 60,000 rural teachers, and provided financial aid to over 3.49 million students. Tanzania should work with nonprofit organizations (NPOs) partnerships to improve basic education in rural schools and remote areas.

## 5. Conclusion

The findings of this study postulated that basic education in rural schools in Tanzania, passes through various challenges which affect the teaching and learning process. The study found out that Tanzania should employ those efforts used by the Chinese government to improve basic education in rural schools. These efforts were; heavy financial investment, special programs for teachers to teach in rural schools, imposing financial management, and working with partnerships, such as nonprofit organization (NPOs) and other related sectors. Those efforts succeeded because of financial investment. In recent years China succeeded to a large extent in improving basic education in rural schools due to heavy investment in education. Most rural schools in China have an improved school environment, well-equipped classroom, accommodation facilities, and well-constructed teachers' houses. Therefore, to succeed in those efforts, the central government of Tanzania should increase the total budgetary allocation at rural schools to satisfy school development and simplify the educational plans. Last but not least, Tanzania should work with partnerships such as nonprofit organizations (NPOs) to improve basic education in rural schools and remote areas. Also, the Tanzanian government should initiate special financial management to deal with operational expenditures for the future development of education in rural schools.

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