

Education in Kenya: The Hidden Costs of a “Free” System

A comment by BlackAndWhite

To many children in Kenya, education is treated as a luxury, even though it is a basic need and a fundamental right. For families who cannot afford even a daily meal, school becomes a distant dream.

In developed countries, people often speak of “free education.” But in truth, nothing is free. Citizens pay high taxes, and governments channel those funds responsibly into schools. That is why in places like Germany, education is accessible. Families work hard, and their contributions are returned to them in the form of opportunity.

In developing countries, the reality is starkly different. Corruption and poor leadership mean that taxes rarely reach the right departments. Parents are left to carry the burden alone.

The harsh slogan becomes: no money, no food, no education, no treatment.

Students are regularly sent home from school, alone, with all life-threatening risk on the road – even the youngest ones - because their school fees have not yet been paid in full.

In Kenya, the government claims there is free education. But this is only a fantasy. If education were truly free, why would well-wishers from abroad send millions of shillings to support needy children? Why would organizations like **BlackAndWhite** have to step in to rescue children from dropping out?

The truth is that hidden costs block the path to learning:

- If you don’t pay **school fees**, you cannot attend classes.
- If you don’t pay for **school trips**, you are excluded.
- If you don’t pay for the **school bus levy** even though the bus was purchased ten years ago, you are sent home.
- If you don’t pay for a **school ID**, you are denied admission.
- Families are forced to pay **caution money**, which is non-refundable even after four years of high school.
- If you don’t pay for a **uniform**, you cannot attend school.
- If you don’t pay for **remedial lessons**, you will be sent home.

- If you have **fee arrears**, you will never receive your **national examination certificate**, even if the arrears are artificial and caused by technical or administrative failure of the system
- Without that certificate, you cannot be admitted into **middle college or university** until all fee balances are cleared.

These hidden costs vary from school to school, but they all carry the same cruel message: without money, a child's right to education is denied.

For vulnerable families, these costs are insurmountable. For children, they mean humiliation, exclusion, and shattered dreams. For donors, they represent an urgent call to action.

Your support can bridge this gap. By covering the hidden costs, you are not just paying for books or bus fees, you are restoring dignity, protecting dreams, and ensuring that children in Kenya can walk confidently into classrooms where they belong.

Education is not free when poverty is the price, hidden costs deny children their right to learn.