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THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF ATTAINING UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA:

THE POLITICS OF UPE MPLEMENTATION

PAUL BENNELL

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1. **Introduction**

This is the second article of a two-article review which examines how key aspects of the dominant political economy in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) are influencing the implementation of the policy of Universal Primary Education (UPE). The main proposition of this review is that the lack of progress to date in attaining UPE in SSA can only be properly understood by focusing on the wider impact on primary education attainment levels of the combined social, political and economic forces and processes/structures that characterise a new political economy which has been emerging during the last three decades in the majority of countries in SSA. The main conclusion arising from this analysis is that, given the prevailing situation in many countries, it is unlikely that UPE in SSA can be attained in the foreseeable future.

The first article analyses three key sets of mainly socio-economic factors which are powerfully influencing the extent to which the goal of universal primary education in SSA is likely to be attained. These are new social class relations which are emerging as a result of the adoption of neo-liberal, capitalist development strategies, new forms of educational competition and distancing (in particular the growth of higher education and private schooling provision) and intensifying competition for formal sector jobs. This provides the essential contextual background for this second article which explores the politics of UPE and, in particular, the levels of commitment of economic and political elites to the attainment of UPE.

It is important to emphasise from the outset that the theoretical framework/ argument presented in these two articles is heavily based on broad observations of key aspects of the evolving political economy of education and economy and society as a whole in SSA[[1]](#footnote-1). Consequently, the set of underlying propositions which collectively underpin this theoretical framework should be treated as tentative and are primarily intended to encourage further theoretical elaboration and detailed empirical research at the country level[[2]](#footnote-2).

Another important caveat is that since the discussion covers broad trends in the political economy of primary education reform across sub-Saharan Africa as a whole, broad generalisations are unavoidable. Again, these can only be adequately substantiated by detailed theoretical and empirical research across a range of disciplines.

*1.1 The core argument*

*The genesis of UPE:* From the early-mid 1990s onwards, a particular set of political and economic incentives and opportunities among major stakeholders/vested interests led to the introduction of national UPE strategies in the majority of countries in SSA. Two of the most important ‘drivers of change’ for this ambitious education policy reform (which was linked to the new, global Education For All targets)[[3]](#footnote-3) were the rural and urban poor and the international (development assistance partner) ‘donor’ community[[4]](#footnote-4). With the World Bank taking the lead, bilateral and multilateral donor agencies became powerful product champions for expanded primary education provision which, it was argued, is a basic human right as well a prerequisite for sustained poverty reduction, improved governance and economic growth[[5]](#footnote-5). National political and economic elites were also generally supportive of the overall UPE goals[[6]](#footnote-6) although, as will be discussed below, this was not necessarily consistent with their immediate educational and/or economic interests.

Democratisation and post-conflict reconstruction in many countries increased the level of political pressure to improve service delivery especially in rural areas where most of the poor reside. After decades of economic crisis, governments also urgently sought major increases in donor funding which were generally forthcoming for UPE (but not other areas of education provision).

*What has changed?* The changing socio-economic situation in many countries in SSA during the last two decades (which was discussed in the first article) has affected, in a variety of ways, the initial ‘political settlement’ that led to the adoption and mass implementation of UPE with the result that the overall level of political will to sustain this educational reform programme has declined, in some countries quite appreciably. This includes a large section of the rural poor themselves who have not benefited as expected from UPE (either educationally and, most important of all, economically) as well as relatively better-off, more aspirational sections of the poor who have benefited from UPE (by mainly being able to enrol their children in secondary school) but who do not need additional support for primary education. Donor interest and support for UPE is also waning. Economic elites, in particular, the new/reconstituted middle class, have grown much stronger and have other educational priorities which has meant that they are less committed to the provision of government-funded primary education.

Government reliance on its rural support base has, if anything increased still further as political opposition from urban populations has intensified. However, expanding access to primary education and improvement in quality and learning outcomes is no longer central to retaining this support. This is increasingly being secured through expanded provision of other basic services which provide more direct, tangible benefits often at lower cost (rural infrastructure, health). At the same time, governments have taken steps to try to placate urban opposition which has negatively impacted on UPE. International aid donors to the education sector have become less important financially and thus politically but are still influential. Donors themselves are increasingly more interested in providing support to more directly productive areas which are also increasingly preferred by governments in SSA.

*1.2 Article organisation*

The discussion is organised as follows. Section 2 briefly reviews the literature on the political economy of education in SSA. Section 3 describes the theoretical framework. Section 4 discusses the key features of the emerging political economy which supported the initial implementation of UPE, which in most countries was during the mid-late1990s. Sections 5 and 6 adopt the same analytical approach to assess how political economy factors have affected the implementation of UPE in the medium-longer term. Key conclusions are presented in Section7.

1. **Literature review**

As Bruns et al. point out ‘academic researchers have largely neglected the politics of education reform’ (2019 p. 36). This is particularly the case in SSA which has been ‘under-studied (ibid). Similarly, as recently as 2014, a comprehensive and robust ‘systematic’ review of the political economy of education in developing countries by Kingdon et al. concluded that ‘the literature on the political economy of education is under-developed in geographical scope, robustness of methods utilised and theoretical richness… Large parts of the world, especially most countries in Africa and South-east Asia, remain virtually untouched by research on the ways in which political-economy forces affect their education sector decisions, processes and outcomes’ (2014:46).

Virtually all of the articles reviewed by Kingdon et al. rely on traditional political economy analysis with a relatively narrow focus on the ‘policy domain’ and, in particular, the motivations and behaviours of key educational stakeholders (bureaucrats, teachers, etc.). As a result, very little attention is given to how national ‘political settlements’, both directly and indirectly, affect education policy and practice including UPE implementation.

Only 17 out of a total of 64 articles included in the review focus on countries in SSA[[7]](#footnote-7). All but one of these deal with specific, fairly narrowly defined political economy topics most notably school accountability, community participation, and donor priorities. Only one adopts a political settlements analysis in order to assess comparative levels of political will with regard to education provision as a whole in Ghana and Taiwan (see Kosack, 2009).

A systematic review of ‘the political economy of education systems in conflict affected contexts’ by Novelli et al., which was also published in 2014, identified 15 studies on African countries out of a total of 55[[8]](#footnote-8). Again, none of these focused on the political economy of UPE implementation in part because UPE had only been recently embarked upon in the majority of conflict-affected countries in SSA covered by the review (in particular DRC, Sierra Leone, South Sudan). Some such as Somalia and Dafur were still very much in the midst of on-going conflict.

Research on the political economy of primary education in SSA since 2014 has been very limited. Noticeably, all four of the major studies that have been undertaken concentrate on the political economy of improving the quality rather than the quantity of primary/basic education provision – at the national level in Rwanda (Williams, 2017) and the sub-national level in Ghana (Ampraktum et al., 2018), South Africa (Levy et al., 2018) and Uganda (Kjoer et al., 2018). To date, therefore, no research has ever been undertaken on the overall political economy of national UPE strategies in any country in SSA.

1. **Theoretical framework: the political settlement approach**

This review is based on the political settlements approach (PSA). Broadly speaking, the concept of political settlement refers to ‘the balance or distribution of power between contending social groups and social classes on which any state is based’ (Di John and Putzel, 2009. p.4). PSA comprises two main levels, namely the broad configuration of ’domains of power’ at the national and sub-national levels and the ‘policy domain’ which primarily focuses on policy formulation and implementation at the sectoral level, in this case education (see Hickey and Hossain, 2019).

* 1. *Domains of power*

The analysis of ‘domains of power’ is mainly centred on investigating the interests and incentive structures of the ruling political elite in each country. A basic proposition of PSA is that the degree to which governing political elites commit to implementing specific reforms is very strongly influenced by the extent to which this helps them stay in power. This, in turn, leads on to two key related questions namely, which groups (‘political constituencies’) are seeking these reforms and, under what circumstances, will governments need the support of these political constituencies in order to stay in power thereby ensuring their long term political survival.[[9]](#footnote-9) Each political settlement is, therefore, a balance of short-term and long-term calculations by the ruling political elite that are shaped by the ‘capacity of different groups to make demands’ (domains of power) and the way in which these demands are resolved into political settlements characterised by varying degrees of compromise and stability over time[[10]](#footnote-10).

As will be discussed below, this theoretical approach is particularly helpful in analysing the broader, social, economic and political processes at the national and sub-national level which lead to major policy initiatives such as UPE and how, in turn, changes in these processes affect overall implementation. It very much complements, therefore, the mainly socio-economic analysis of UPE reform in the first article.

Institutional economics, in particular, the concepts of principal-agent relations and opportunistic behaviour has also been influential in shaping what is generally referred to as the ‘good governance’ research agenda particularly at the micro level in relation to provision of public services. In the African context, this has focused in particular on the functioning of the ‘clientelist-patrimonial’ state and the resulting rent-seeking networks at all levels of society. A key concept is ‘elite capture’ of institutions at national and sub-national levels.

As elsewhere, two main types of political settlements are delineated in SSA. More dominant and, therefore, more secure regimes (such as in Ethiopia and Rwanda)[[11]](#footnote-11) are able to adopt longer-term development strategies with a relatively strong commitment to rule-based behaviour. By contrast, the political settlement in the large majority of countries in SSA is still characterised by more insecure regimes with ‘weakly dominant’ political elites and where, therefore, the political settlement is predominantly ‘competitive clientelist’ in nature. It is in these situations, where it is argued that the commitment to major policy objectives/reforms is generally more fragile and difficult to sustain. According to Cammack, ‘the political settlement of competitive clientelism has meant that the elite benefit individually’ and have ‘established a social contract with the population that mostly maintains just enough services to sustain social conciliation’ (Cammack, 2017: 663).

The PSA approach highlights the extent to which in countries with predominantly competitive clientelist political settlements public service provision is generally undermined by rent-seeking activity at all levels from the apex of the state down to direct provision at the community level. Key processes and relationships are deeply politicised which adversely affects most decisions involving the procurement and utilisation/ deployment of resources at the local level. The main research focus has been on local ‘accountability’ which has meant that most attention has been focused on the micro political economy issues of service delivery at the grass roots.

 *3.2 Policy domain*

The national political settlement is the dominant context in which the policy domain functions with regard to major sectors. Key factors that shape the policy domain are organisational structure, governance arrangements, the role of ideas, information and communication and policy legacies, along with the interactions of the main stakeholders/social actors.

As discussed earlier, the main emphasis of the limited amount of research on the political economy of education in SSA that has been conducted to date is on the behaviours of key ‘stakeholders’ in the education sector and especially those who are directly involved in policy implementation. These include the education ministry itself along with other key ministries (finance, local government, public service) local governments, parents, teachers and their trade unions, the private sector as a whole, non-state education providers (both not-for-profit and for profit), donors, and education NGOs of various kinds. The main focus is, therefore, on identifying the actions and underlying motives of these key ‘stakeholder groups’ (particularly those who are ‘drivers of change’) which, in the dominant context of the overall political settlement at the national level, strongly influence the degree to which specific policy reforms are successfully implemented (see Leftwich, 2006).

*3.3 PSA shortcomings*

‘In recent years, few concepts have captured conflict and development specialists’ imagination as profoundly as the idea of a ‘political settlement’ (Effective States Programme, 2020). Broadly speaking, PSA does provide a robust and comprehensive conceptual framework for the analysis of both the overall politics of education in a country as well as educational policy formulation and implementation. However, ‘despite its current popularity, there is no single definition of a political settlement that commands widespread support with different groups and individuals using it in diverse and sometimes contradictory ways. There is a need, therefore, to refine the definition and devise rigorous guidelines for measuring political settlements’ (ibid, p.1).

Another important shortcoming of PSA is that too much attention tends to be placed on the politics of the government and bureaucracy with political elites being the primary focus[[12]](#footnote-12). For example, Hickey and Hossain argue that most developing countries ‘lack a domestic capitalist class of any size or significance’ which means that ‘they can only accumulate wealth through their relationships with political elites’(2019:26). However, as was discussed in the first article, the last three decades have witnessed the development of a much stronger national industrial/business class, a much greater presence of foreign corporate capital in key economic sectors, and the emergence of a new/reconstituted ‘middle class’ which is increasingly powerful both economically and politically in their own right (see Author, 2020b). In short, by over-privileging the political sphere and the role of the state itself, PSA tends to be overly (politically) instrumentalist and deterministic.

1. **UPE and the new political settlement**

The renewed focus on UPE was a key pillar of a new type of political settlement which emerged in many countries in SSA during the mid-late 1990S and early 2000s. How, then, did the adoption of UPE help political elites maintain and strengthen their political power and survival? PSA identifies two main types of political and related economic incentives for primary education reform; (i) how does UPE help to secure support for the political elite? And (ii) what are the wider economic benefits of UPE and, in particular, its role in creating a skilled labour force? (Kosack, 2009).

*4.1 Overview*

Generally speaking, UPE was widely supported right across society during the initial stages of its implementation. In many ways, the goal of UPE fed into widely held expectations (bordering on euphoria in some countries) about the future economic and social prospects in countries which had suffered decades of economic and political turmoil. In short, UPE was seen as an integral part of this new beginning.

The short-term political benefits generated by very sizeable and rapid increases in primary school enrolments were important in helping to consolidate new democratically-driven political settlements. The direct economic impact of UPE was also very significant. In particular, the construction of new schools was a significant boost to local economies and the mass recruitment of teachers was often the largest contributor to job creation especially in post-conflict countries.

More problematically, though, the large injection of resources to support UPE implementation expanded opportunities for political patronage and rent-seeking at both national and local levels. As Corrales points out ‘clientelism, patronage and corruption are three of the most intense political forces that push states to expand education’ (2005, p.18). Bruns et al. go even further when they argue that ‘compared to other large public services, education has a special vulnerability to clientelism because procurement is relatively unsophisticated and hiring unqualified political supporters does not have the immediate or visible negative consequences’ (2019, p.33).

Within the education policy domain itself, UPE was rarely perceived as a serious direct threat to the interests of any of the main stakeholders in the education sector. UPE was widely regarded as a straightforward, transparent, and non-divisive policy with a very high reward-to-threat ratio with few, if any, negative unforeseen consequences. As a result, there was little opposition to its rapid implementation.

*4.2 Domains of power: the initial political benefits of UPE*

The introduction of UPE was closely linked with major political reform in many countries in SSA. In particular, the democratisation of the national polity with the introduction (or re-introduction) of national and sub-national elections and multi-party politics created new political conditions which, to a greater or lesser extent, shaped new political settlements.

*Democratisation*

Despite its often quite serious limitations and contradictory outcomes (see below), democratisation with full-blown elections at national and sub-national levels increased the political power of all subordinate, non-elite classes in society especially the urban and, to a lesser extent, the rural poor where the majority of ruling parties in SSA have their political power bases[[13]](#footnote-13). This is particularly the case where democratisation resulted in much higher levels of competition between political parties with periodic changes in the ruling party. To date, national elections have led to the transfer of power from one political party to another in over 15 countries in SSA (including Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Senegal in West Africa and Kenya, Malawi and Zambia in East and Central Africa).

With regard to education, the ‘fruits of independence’ were decidedly meagre in many countries in SSA, and especially in Francophone and Lusophone Africa. The limited opportunities to send children to primary schooling especially in rural areas was a particularly strong grievance among the poor. The advent of multi-party democracy gave the poor a more effective ‘voice’ (at least during election periods) in supporting long overdue primary education reform[[14]](#footnote-14). Consequently, UPE was a key component of national election manifestos in many countries during the 1990s and early-mid 2000s.

There was also a fairly strong consensus among national elites about the economic, political and social merits of UPE[[15]](#footnote-15). Chronically low primary school enrolment rates were an obvious sign of social and economic backwardness in a rapidly globalising world and were a potential source of political and social instability. While the degree of elite ‘buy-in’ to UPE varied considerably between countries, it was a major factor shaping the new political settlement.

*Post-conflict reconstruction: the peace dividend*

The political importance of UPE was particularly strong in post-conflict countries in SSA especially where the acute lack of educational opportunity was a major causal factor leading to conflict, as for example, in Sierra Leone. More generally, it was a core component of the ‘peace dividend’ in countries which had endured protracted liberation struggles and civil wars including Angola, DRC, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, South Sudan, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.

*International aid donors*

International aid donors were a core component of the new political settlement during the 1990s. In many countries in SSA, political elites needed the political and economic support of donorsin order to ensure their political survival. This support was conditional on governments demonstrating strong political commitment to the new development agenda of which UPE was a core component.

Donor influence stemmed from a combination of the role of ideas (the benefits of UPE) and major funding (financial power) coupled with the weak economic and political position of governments and national elites after decades of economic crisis and painful restructuring. It was, therefore, a particularly opportune time for donors to shape national educational strategies. Given that many national elites were also supportive of the UPE agenda (although often with important reservations), there was a considerable convergence of interests and beliefs.

UPE was also linked to new forms of donor assistance with a shift away from discrete projects to sector-wide budget support[[16]](#footnote-16). In some countries, during the 1990s and 2000s, donor budget support of one kind or another[[17]](#footnote-17) amounted to as much as one-half of the total recurrent public sector budget which gave donors a high degree of influence over both policy formulation and implementation. Among the poorest countries, such as Malawi and Mozambique, governments effectively lost control to donors.

Although dressed up in the new discourse of national ownership and government-donor partnership (based on the Paris Declaration principles), the major donors, and particularly the World Bank, were able to ensure a high degree of compliance to their educational priorities. For some time, key bilateral donors were only prepared to support basic education. Donors also pushed governments hard to increase both the overall share of the education budget as well as the share of primary education expenditure within the overall education sector[[18]](#footnote-18). Although political and economic elites were often uncomfortable with the downgrading of other education sub-sectors especially higher education and vocational education and training (VET), they had little oppositional room for manoeuvre.

In some countries, donor budget and project support for primary education effectively financed a large proportion of the additional costs of implementing UPE[[19]](#footnote-19). This not only enabled a rapid increase in enrolments but also the mass recruitment of secondary school leavers as primary school teachers was a major source of employment which was very important, both economically and politically. In five countries[[20]](#footnote-20) for which data is available, teaching accounted for 26-36% of all new jobs during the 2000s. Tracer studies of lower secondary school leavers found that among those who graduated in 1990, by 2001, around one half in Malawi and Tanzania and a staggering 81% in Uganda were employed as teachers (see Al-Samarrai and Bennell, 2003).

*4.2 The anticipated economic benefits of UPE: the new pro-poor development agenda*

Poverty reduction emerged as the preeminent development goal in the mid-late 1990s[[21]](#footnote-21). The expected benefits of primary education especially literacy and numeracy, lower fertility, gender equality and participation in civil society were seen as being indispensable for sustained poverty reduction. Almost all countries developed ambitious and comprehensive poverty reduction strategy papers with UPE as a key goal.

*4.3 Policy domain*

As noted above, the nature of the education policy domain was particularly propitious for the rapid, initial implementation of UPE. With regard to organisational arrangements, the management of primary education was still directly under the control of the Ministry of Education in almost all countries. Thus, the launching of UPE considerably increased the Ministry’s power both in absolute terms and in relation to other ministries. Interestingly, in post-conflict countries such as Sierra Leone and Uganda, UPE coincided with the reassertion of central government control over primary education which, as result of little or no government funding over many years, had enabled individual parent-teacher associations (PTAs) and other organisations, mostly notably churches, to establish de facto control over primary education at the local level. Re-establishing overall national control over primary education was, therefore, a prerequisite for the adoption and implementation of UPE.

The abolition of school fees coupled with increased access to newly constructed schools were highly popular especially in predominantly poor and more remote rural areas. While more middle class parents expressed growing concerns about the perceived negative impact of UPE on the quality of education, the increasing availability of private schools meant that these concerns did not translate into direct opposition to the UPE policy. In the longer term, though, the absence of strong elite support for UPE has adversely affected its implementation.

In general, both primary school teachers and their trade unions were pleased with the new priority accorded to primary education after years of relative neglect. Teacher trade unions particularly welcomed the increase in their membership as a result of the mass recruitment of teachers.

1. **The evolving politics of UPE implementation: domains of power**

As is discussed in the first article, after rapid increases in enrolments during the first five to ten years of the national rollouts of UPE reforms, not only are the large majority of countries in SSA still a long way off from attaining EFA (with all children successfully completing primary school), but the rate of progress in attaining UPE has slowed down markedly in many countries (see Bennell, 2020a). How then does political settlement analysis help us to understand the underlying the reasons for this? This section focuses on explanations that relate mainly to the macro politics of the domains of power. Three key areas are discussed, namely, UPE as a source of political support, the degree of democratisation, and the politicisation of UPE.

*5.1 UPE as a source of political support*

A key proposition is national political settlements have changed during last 20 years or so in ways that have reduced the commitment (or buy-in) of political elites to ensuring the full implementation of UPE. In particular, this is because continued progress in attaining UPE no longer generates the same high levels of political support from key social classes and other groupings/stakeholders for the political elite as was the case during the initial phases of the implantation of UPE.

Over time, UPE is increasingly likely to become more of a political liability than an asset. Despite its initial promise, many children still do not complete primary school and learning outcomes are poor and, in some countries, declining. While large number of parents have gained from largely free access to primary schooling for their children, this no longer serves as a basis for their continued support (or motivator) for the ruling political elite especially when so many other education and other needs remained unsatisfied[[22]](#footnote-22). Nor has UPE resulted in any significant reduction in the gross inequities in resource allocation to primary education.

*Non-elite groups: the rural and urban poor*

For the reasons discussed in the first article, we argue that the anticipated economic benefits from UPE for the mass of the population in SSA have not materialised. Consequently, the critical assumption that the poor will prioritise primary education may increasingly not be true. Some argue that this is still likely to be the case even if it is possible to improve significantly the overall quality of primary education. For example, Watkins et al. note that, in Malawi, ‘for most parents, the quality of education is irrelevant’ (2019:10). For them, the single metric of success is the performance of their children in primary school leaving examinations. With very low and often falling pass rates in these examinations, many poor parents see little point in ensuring that their children complete primary school.

One of the main consequences of UPE implementation in a growing number of countries is that government primary schools are increasingly becoming the preserve of the poor with generally limited learning outcomes. In particular, the rural poor suffered most from the decline in quality of primary education after the start of UPE because most were unable to find and/or afford alternative provision in the private sector. In short, low quality primary education has itself become a poverty trap.

Faced with this situation, another key proposition is that it is likely that the level of interest among the rural poor in ensuring that their children not only attend but complete primary schooling is falling and what little political voice they have has been directed at requesting new government investment in other areas in particular roads, health, electricity, and water which have more immediate and tangible benefits. If this is indeed the case then, in order to retain the all-important electoral support of the rural populace, governing political elites have, therefore, come under increasing pressure to respond to these changing priorities. Detailed quantitative analysis is obviously needed to substantiate this, but it is noteworthy that in over half of the countries in SSA for which data are available, the share of education in total public expenditure has declined during the last decade.[[23]](#footnote-23)

As was discussed in the first article, key social and economic developments are likely to have affected political incentives/pressures for educational reform. In particular, the rapid growth of secondary and higher education enrolments which mainly comprise students from relatively well-off, non-poor households, has markedly increased the political pressure to focus on the needs of these educational sub-sectors.

 *Elite perceptions and responses*

Initial expectations around UPE were generally quite naïve and unrealistic. The overall economic, social, and political/human rights benefits of primary education were over-sold, especially by the donors. Some of the evidence (in particular rates of return to education) used to support primary education and UPE was flawed (see Bennell, 1996). The key underlying assumption that the mere provision of additional primary schooling would lead to major private and wider social benefits regardless of the underlying economic and socio-political environment proved to be largely false.

National political elites in SSA have had to come to terms with disappointing UPE outcomes. Just how they have done this has varied from country to country but three broad trends are apparent. Firstly, growing concerns have been voiced about the extent to which continuing to focus on the attainment of UPE is consistent with national economic development strategies which are increasingly preoccupied with maximising economic growth and ensuring that the requisite skilled workforce is available to facilitate this. The global financial crisis of 2008-9 highlighted the fragility of sustaining high economic growth rates. Political elites have become even more preoccupied with directly promoting growth-enhancing interventions with less focus on social sectors especially basic education whose contribution to overall growth has been increasingly called into question.

Secondly, elite concerns about the rapid increases in the number of school leavers which, to large extent, have been fuelled by UPE have grown rapidly during the last decade. As a result, ‘youth employment has risen to the top of Africa’s development agenda’ (Sumberg et al. 2019:1). Unemployed educated urban youth pose a particularly serious political threat particularly in those countries (such as Zambia) which have high levels of urbanisation. As noted in the first article, this has not led to a surge in post-school VET and other employment creation activities specifically targeted at youth. Rather, the main impact on UPE implementation has been to make elites more wary about the consequences of too rapid expansion in primary and secondary school enrolments.

And thirdly, there is a growing realisation about the enormous challenge of getting all children to complete primary school with acceptable learning outcomes. Recent systematic reviews of both access and quality improving interventions have concluded that there are only a limited number of effective interventions (see Glewwe and Muralidharan, 2015; Snilsveit et al. 2015). Conditional cash transfers and school feeding are the only unambiguously access interventions but they are too costly for governments in SSA (even with significant donor support) to scale-up nationally[[24]](#footnote-24). What this means that the marginal cost of getting the remaining students out-of-school children to complete primary education is much higher than getting them to enrol in school.

These reviews also conclude that there are no simple, straightforward solutions to improve learning outcomes. The only consistently effective intervention is the introduction of ‘structured pedagogy’ coupled with improving teacher subject competence. However, in the context of deeply engrained teaching practices and low and, in some countries, declining levels of teacher motivation, efforts to change pedagogy are invariably unsuccessful especially over the longer term.

The private sector business community is an increasingly powerful political force but these employers have little or no direct interest in the attainment of free UPE. This is mainly because they already have an adequate supply of educated labour especially given limited job opportunities and sizeable increases in secondary school and higher education graduates (Bennell, 2020).

Reduced levels of donor support coupled with burdensome teacher payroll costs have meant that primary education is no longer a major source of job creation. This in turn has reduced the overall political commitment to UPE both from politicians, school leavers and the educated unemployed.

Finally, the lack of sufficiently strong political commitment to UPE is also indicated by the continued reluctance of governments to enforce compulsory primary education in most of SSA. This would encounter too much popular resistance and a high level of enforcement could seriously undermine political support for the ruling party.

*5.2 The degree of democratisation and political organisation*

The degree of democratisation is likely to be critically important in shaping the national political settlement since it powerfully influences the extent to which political elites (both those in and out of power) need to respond to the political demands of core political constituencies. It is also widely contended that the more democratic a country is, the greater the extent and quality of public service provision. For example, a key finding of the latest triennial Afrobarometer surveys of public opinion in 34 countries in SSA is that ‘more democratic countries are seen as being better able to provide public education…Citizens were more likely to be satisfied with government performance on education if the immediate areas of accountability and transparency at the school level are embedded in a broader political system that encourages these qualities’ (2019:35). However, the available research evidence suggests that the links between the degree of democratisation and the level and quality of public service delivery can be considerably more complex (see Stasavage, 2005a and 2005b). It has been suggested, for example, that strong democratic pressures can be quite effective in realising (quickly attained) increases in primary school enrolments. However, this is not necessarily the case with quality reforms because, regardless of the overall level of democracy in a country, these type of reforms are considerably more difficult to implement not only because they are more intrinsically complex but because they normally face strong resistance from a range of key stakeholders who governments are loathe to antagonise (see Strestha et al, 2019).

And secondly, in the context of weak institutions and the persistence of ‘informal politics’, a key tenet of political settlement theory is that formal democratisation per se is not necessarily of much help to the poor. Citizens have to be organised in order to reap the benefits of democratisation[[25]](#footnote-25). The rural poor, in particular, are atomised in dispersed settlements and are rarely effectively organised. Not only, therefore, do they have limited political voice to ensure the full implementation of UPE but, as will be discussed below, they are increasingly choosing to prioritise other state services other than primary education. The new/reconstituted middle class, on the other hand, who are concentrated in increasingly politically contested urban areas are often in a stronger position to influence political decision making and outcomes. They are more economically powerful and more directly involved in political parties, professional organisations and civil society in general.

*5.2 The politicisation of UPE*

The politics of UPE have also become increasingly complex and contentious which is likely to have adversely impacted on the implementation of UPE. Not surprisingly, given its overall importance as a national education and development goal, UPE has become central to the politics of many countries in SSA. In three key respects, this high level of politicisation of UPE has made the attainment of UPE that much more complicated.

Firstly, it has become more embroiled and thus susceptible to the adverse impacts of clientelism and political competition particularly at the local level. In Ghana, for example, research by Ampratwum. et al shows that in districts where political competition is limited (given the electoral dominance of one political party), this has led to a more programmatic, rules-based approach to the implementation of UPE. By contrast, in districts where the level of competition between the two main political parties is high, the extent of clientelism and patronage in the implementation of UPE has been more pervasively disruptive since the competing parties distribute the available resources for UPE in ways that increase their political support.

Secondly, in some countries (for example, in Uganda), UPE is closely associated with the ruling political party. As a result, political opponents are often suspicious of UPE regarding it as a ‘tool’ used by the ruling party in helping to maintain its core political support, which invariably is concentrated in rural areas. This is particularly the case in capital and other large cities where political opposition is strongest (and growing in many countries) and has contributed, therefore, to the mass exodus to private schools which, in turn, has undermined overall political commitment to UPE[[26]](#footnote-26). In oppositional urban areas, the poor resourcing of primary schools is frequently perceived as being not simply due to an overall shortage of resources but the result of government neglect, inefficiency and corruption.

And thirdly, in some countries, UPE has become embroiled in highly sensitive and destabilising religious-based politics. Nigeria is the prime example, where post 9/11, UPE was a key, very much top-down intervention in the war against Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism in the north of the country (see Davies, 2008, Lelo, 2011, Bhatia and Ghanem, 2017, UNESCO, 2017). Prior to 9/11, the longstanding political settlement in Nigeria enabled the northern Islamic states to maintain their traditional madrassas and not to adopt formal primary education which was not only seen as being Western but was strongly associated with the Christian south of the country. The rupture of this political settlement through the active promotion of UPE across the north of Nigeria was strongly opposed by the Islamic establishment and was a key factor in the emergence of Boko Haram in Bornu state during the early 2000s.

1. ***The policy domain***

The following discussion of the UPE policy domain briefly discusses the eight areas that are likely to have had the greatest impact on UPE implementation; educational decentralisation, policy coherence and clarity, parents, teachers and teacher unions, employer organisations, private education providers and donors.

* 1. *Organisational re-arrangements: Educational decentralisation*

Another key contextual factor is that UPE was introduced in many countries in SSA at the same time as decentralisation reform. Decentralisation was expected to facilitate the implementation of UPE especially by making schools and teachers more accountable. However, as noted above, this very much depends on the nature of political settlements at the local level. More generally, decentralisation has complicated governance arrangements for primary education which is likely to have had important repercussions for the implementation of UPE.

*Ministerial restructructuring*

To, date, almost all of the political economy analysis of education has focused on the impact of education decentralisation at the school and community and, in particular, the extent to which this has improved school accountability. What is striking, however, is that virtually no attention has been given to the implications of educational decentralisation at the national level and, in particular, the change in the overall role and related functions of the ministry of education (MoE). In a number of countries (including Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda) full-scale decentralisation resulted in the transfer of the direct management of primary schools to the Ministry of Local Government (MoLG) with the MoE retaining overall responsibility for the regulation and provision of key support services (planning, curriculum development, inspection, etc.). Primary education provision has, therefore, become politically and bureaucratically segmented with the MoE losing its previously high level of control of what is by far the largest segment of the overall schooling system. However, most MoEs continue to have direct control of secondary education.

MoLGs, on the other hand, have been empowered both nationally and at the district/regional levels with regard to the direct management of and resource allocation to primary education. Each district now has considerable scope to make their own priorities with regard to key services including health, education and rural infrastructure. Consequently, as one senior education official in Uganda put it, ‘it’s like having nearly 200 mini Ministries of Education’.

Simultaneously, in many countries, there has been a centralisation of political control over line ministries with the already powerful Ministry of Finance taking almost total control over all resource allocation[[27]](#footnote-27). With regard to primary education, in many countries, nearly all recurrent funding to schools is now directly channelled to schools themselves mainly in the form of pupil per capitation grants. Teachers’ salaries are also paid directly into their bank accounts thereby reducing the scope for rent-seeking through the payment of salaries to ghost teachers.

The political economy implications for UPE implementation of these major changes with respect to the political/governance structures in the education sector are likely to be far reaching. Firstly, with the loss of direct political and bureaucratic responsibility for primary schools, the commitment to UPE by the MoE has declined with a concomitant increase in focus on secondary education over which it continues to have direct control and where the political pressures for rapid enrolment expansion have become most intense. Also, MoEs usually have seriously insufficient resources to be able to monitor adequately what is going on in districts let alone in individual primary schools. In particular, where school inspectors are still directly accountable to the MoE, they rarely have the resources to visit rural schools regularly. MoEs rely on periodic written reports from inspectors but these are rarely acted upon.

Secondly, although directly responsible for primary schools, the MoLG lacks a strong political presence with regard to primary education in part because it is responsible for multiple areas of service delivery. In conjunction with the loss of direct MoE control, this has further diluted the overall political commitment to UPE implementation which, in some cases, has created a political vacuum or given rise to political tensions between MoEs and MoLGs. At the district level, the capacity to manage effectively an often geographically dispersed network of primary schools is also usually lacking. Thirdly, the lack of effective political and management oversight in a decentralised system has led to considerable variability in the implementation of UPE at the local level. In Nigeria, for example, the Chairmen of Local Government Authorities have considerable scope to vary the level of resources allocated to primary education (see Author, 2007). More generally, decentralisation has exacerbated regional inequalities usually without compensatingfiscal and other transfers. And fourthly, the lack of political and bureaucratic fragmentation in the secondary education sector has led to a relative increase in the political influence of the powerful, generally quite unified elite vested interests who continue to be strongly committed to public secondary education. Similarly, at the local level, new school governance structures (such as Boards of Governors in Kenya) have been given far greater powers over the overall management of secondary schools than is generally the case for primary schools.

* 1. *Policy conceptual clarity*

The initial conceptual clarity of what needs to be done in order to achieve UPE has been lost to some extent as a result of more complex and, at times, contested conceptions about the form and sequencing of UPE implementation. The initial focus was almost exclusively on access but this is increasingly being crowded out by concerns about quality and learning outcomes. Clearly, the two are interlinked. In particular, it is argued that without significant improvements in learning outcomes it will never be possible to achieve full UPE with all children completing the primary education cycle. Nonetheless, in the meantime, large proportions of children and especially girls will either never attend school (especially in West Africa) or never completely finish primary school. In short, the simple access goal of UPE has been diluted by the new focus on quality.

* 1. *Information and communication*

The availability of good quality, real-time information enables informed decision making and promotes transparency and accountability at all levels of the education system from the apex of government right down to the school level. An effective communication strategy is also essential (see Shrestha et al, 2019). During the initial stages of UPE implementation, donors made concerted efforts to ensure that education management systems had the capacity to produce detailed and timely statistics for all key UPE performance parameters. However, as donors have become much less prominent in the implementation of UPE, the overall availability/timeliness and quality of UPE statistics has deteriorated in some countries.

Recent research has highlighted the political nature of information and communication in large public bureaucracies such as education (see Lieberman et al 2014; Sandefur and Glassman, 2015). As UPE has become increasingly problematic, the incentives for Ministries of Education and government as whole to produce timely and accurate statistics are likely to have decreased. Information about private school enrolment and examination performance as well as the spatial distribution of resources across highly dispersed school systems is particularly sensitive.

*6.4 Parents*

As discussed earlier, a key proposition is that parents particularly those in rural areas who constitute the main power base of most ruling parties in SSA continue to be highly influential in shaping the commitment of political elites to implementing UPE. However, as elsewhere, this influence is mainly brought to bear only periodically during national and local elections. Their on-going political involvement, either individually or more significantly as part of formal parent stakeholder groups, has tended to be fairly minimal at other times. The exodus of most middle class children to private schools means that the level of direct, on-going political pressure to achieve UPE has also probably declined in those countries which have the largest private school enrolments.

The rural poor who have the most to gain from UPE implementation have been the least likely to organise themselves into effective education pressure groups at both regional and national levels. Education NGOs only can take on some of the roles of mass political organisations and, with a few exceptions,[[28]](#footnote-28) they too have remained relatively weak across most of SSA. It is also the case that education NGOs have increasingly focused their attention on learning outcomes rather than increasing access. In part, this is because they are heavily reliant on donor funding and are obliged, therefore, to focus on the mounting concerns of their funders about learning outcomes.

*6.5 Teachers and teacher unions*

According to Bruns et al ‘in general, the pivotal stakeholders in education reform are teachers’ unions’ (2019, p.29.). Without teacher buy-in, education reforms such as UPE cannot succeed but, because these reforms often threaten the vested interests of teachers, resistance by well-organised teacher unions is widely regarded as the most serious constraint to the implementation of schooling and other reforms. While this is the case for many countries in Central and South America and South Asia, the almost complete lack of research on teacher unions in SSA, makes it impossible to reach robust conclusions. Certainly, teacher unions are powerful in some countries (for example, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa). But, in many other countries, teacher trade unions are relatively ineffective particularly those that are formally part of ruling party structures.

Publically, most teacher unions in SSA have consistently expressed strong support for UPE as a key national education goal. However, for a number of reasons, the implementation of UPE has adversely affected both the overall power of trade unions and the welfare of their members. Firstly, most governments have prioritised increasing the employment of primary school teachers over improving pay and other conditions of service which remain chronically inadequate in most countries in SSA. In a sense, therefore, UPE contributed to the continued immiseration of teachers with seriously inadequate motivation levels (see Bennell and Akyeampong, 2007). Secondly, the need to recruit very large numbers of teachers almost overnight led to serious declines in the overall quality of teacher trainee intakes which damaged already low levels of professionalism and contributed to declining levels of respect for teachers in society as a whole. Thirdly, from a traditional trade union perspective, the increasing employment of contract teachers in order to make up for teacher shortfalls posed a direct threat to the professional and material status of their members. Fourthly, the rapid growth in primary school teachers contributed to the formation of new, breakaway trade unions in some countries which undermined the overall organisational and political power of the teacher union movement as a whole especially where relationships between teacher unions are openly conflictual. And finally, UPE, both directly and indirectly, has increased the workload of teachers. Directly as a result of much larger classes and, indirectly, as the focus of UPE has shifted to quality-increasing interventions which require teachers to adopt new, usually more demanding learner-centred teaching practices in already very challenging working conditions. Steps to make teachers more accountable have also not been very well received by most teachers and their unions.

*6.6 Employers and business associations*

Another key proposition of PSA is that political elite support for primary education is strongly influenced by the extent to which it contributes to the development of a skilled workforce (see Kosack, 2009). At one level, this can be attributed to the overall recognition by political elites of the historic importance of primary education in the development process. From a more strictly political settlement perspective, political elites may need to respond to the political demands of employers for improved primary education in order to ensure their continued support.

As elsewhere, business associations in SSA appear to have little direct impact, either positive or negative, on the implementation of UPE. An obvious reason for this is that in a number of countries in SSA, business associations have little influence over key policy areas. But, a probably more pervasive reason, is that they have no strong vested interests in increasing either the quantity or quality of primary education because, even with relatively low primary education enrolments, there are already more than enough adequately educated school leavers to fill the very limited number of new job openings in the formal sector. Furthermore, since employers in SSA generally rely on the job training of their workforce, they have little policy interest in the education and training sectors as a whole (Bennell, 2020b).

* 1. *Private education providers*

As discussed in the first article, UPE coupled with the learning crisis in primary schools has fuelled the rapid expansion of private schools especially in major urban areas. Moreover, since private education has been liberalised at much the same time as the rollout of UPE, private education providers have no specific vested interests in opposing UPE.

 6.8 *Donors*

Three propositions are advanced in relation to donor support for UPE. Firstly, donor commitment to UPE has declined during the last decade for many of the same reasons as discussed above with regard to national elites and the poor. Their main focus has switched from increasing access to and completion of primary schooling to improving learning outcomes[[29]](#footnote-29). More generally, the new SDG education goals, especially SDG4,[[30]](#footnote-30) effectively dilute the overall commitment to UPE (which will disproportionately affect the attainment of UPE among the poorest) and, more generally, are poorly conceived and too ambitious for SSA (see Fredriksen, 2020)[[31]](#footnote-31). The 2015 Global Monitoring Report notes that seven out of the 15 largest donors to education have reallocated education aid to post-secondary education at the expense of basic education.

Secondly, the very success of the World Bank in making the case for UPE meant, somewhat ironically, that mainly bilateral donors grant funded the expansion of primary education thus crowding out World Bank (loan) funding[[32]](#footnote-32). The Bank was obliged, therefore, to look for new education loan opportunities with the result that funding for secondary, higher education and skills training increased rapidly from the mid-late 2000s onwards across SSA[[33]](#footnote-33). Making the case for increased funding for these education sub-sectors also intensified among Bank staff (see Arias et al. 2019, Filmer and Fox, 2014, World Bank, 2005, Salmi, 2009).

And thirdly, donor influence on education policy and practice in SSA has also declined as many countries have become less aid dependent as result of relatively long periods of sustained economic growth[[34]](#footnote-34). Overall levels of budget-support both nationally and for the education sector itself are also lower which, for some key donors, has been associated with a reversion to project-based interventions where the scope for donor conditionality is usually less. The emergence of China as a major aid donor is also highly significant especially given the generally low priority given to education and primary education in particular by Chinese aid.

In spite of new donor priorities and lower funding (in relative terms) to the education sector, donors still have considerable influence. In particular, the multi-donor funded Global Partnership for Education (GPE) sets strict conditions for countries to access what has become the largest single external funding window for education. A key condition is that the education budget should be at least 20% of the total government budget which is probably a key reason why the share of the education budget is around this level in most countries.

1. ***Government response***

Governments in SSA have responded in a variety of ways to the enormous challenge of implementing UPE. However, three widespread responses stand out namely educational liberalisation and privatisation, massification of secondary education provision and the shift from UPE focused on access to a preoccupation with increasing quality in primary schools.

*7.1 Education liberalisation and privatisation*

Despite the changes in the overall political settlement and the policy domain in recent decades, there have not been any major shifts in education expenditure away from primary education. What has changed, however, is the emergence of a new enabling environment in favour of private education as a whole and higher education, which serves the interests of the new/reconstituted middle class. With pervasive privatisation of both primary and secondary schooling especially in major urban centres, many governments have effectively relinquished responsibility to the private sector to educate a sizeable share of the population which has considerably eased the budgetary burden of mass education provision[[35]](#footnote-35).

*7.2 Further education massification: from UPE to USE*

Ironically, the initial success of UPE in rapidly expanding primary school enrolments put increasing pressure on the policy itself because political elites very quickly came under mounting pressure to increase rapidly secondary school enrolments. Not only did this lead to increased competition for scarce resources between primary and secondary education but it shifted the attention of political elites away from UPE when there was still so much ‘unfinished business’.

Many governments in SSA have been reluctant to commit urgently needed additional resources to primary education as is evidenced by the decline in the real value of student per capitation grants in many countries. At the same time, however, in rural areas, it is not politically feasible to allow the parental costs of primary schooling to increase substantially. In major urban areas, PTAs raise considerable resources which enable new facilities to be built and additional ‘PTA teachers’ to be employed which leads to a further widening of the rural-urban school performance gap.

*7.3 Reformulating UPE: from access to learning outcomes*

Increasingly (and especially during the last five years) the original conception of UPE with its primary focus on access is being significantly reformulated to focus primarily on quality and learning outcomes. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, most of the poor who were most likely to benefit from UPE have already done so. As noted earlier, the costs of reaching those who remain out-of-school are relatively high. It is widely argued that poor quality of primary education has itself become the major constraint in achieving UPE since its deters still out-of-school children from enrolling and it has a major negative impact in keeping completion rates well below 100% for those children who are in school.

This shift from access to learning outcomes amounts to an altogether new political economy of UPE. Firstly, both governments and donors are paying less attention to what are relatively costly access enhancing interventions. Secondly, the shift to improving quality considerably increases the complexity and reduces the appeal or attractiveness of the UPE reform agenda. Complexity because improving quality and learning outcomes requires multiple policy interventions to improve curricula, pedagogy, and teacher and school accountability. And reduced appeal because quality improving reforms pose a much greater threat to the interests of key stakeholders in particular teachers who are required to implement them in the classroom.

**8. Conclusion**

The core argument of this two-article review is that the lack of progress in attaining UPE in SSA can only be properly understood by focusing on the wider impact on primary education attainment levels of the combined social, political and economic forces and processes that characterise this new political economy. The main conclusion arising from this analysis is that, given the prevailing situation in most countries, it is unlikely that UPE in SSA can be attained in the foreseeable future. In short, UPE is a failing reform and ‘the goal of Education for All is in jeopardy’ (Kosack, 2009:495).

For all the reasons discussed above and in the first article, a core proposition of this review is that the overall political commitment of a growing number of governments in SSA to UPE is waning which raises major concerns about the attainability of UPE. It is essential, therefore, that the international community re-doubles its efforts in order to ensure that UPE is finally achieved by 2030.

*7.1 Future research*

Given the lack of both quantitative and qualitative data, most of the propositions and related conclusions in this review are quite tentative. Considerably more in-depth research is required, therefore, before they can be adequately substantiated. The main research priority is for in-depth national studies which comprehensively and systematically test these propositions. Such studies will not only enable common themes and trends to be identified for SSA as a whole, but will almost certainly highlight the continued diversity of outcomes which is to be expected in a vast geographical region of 50 countries.

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1. Many of these observations are my own based on over forty years of research and consultancy in over 15, mainly Anglophone countries in SSA. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. By their very nature, political propositions are invariably that much difficult to substantiate than more economic-based propositions which are more amenable to quantitative analysis. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. As discussed in the first article, UPE has been an official, internationally endorsed policy for 60 years but only a few countries in SSA made concerted efforts to implement UPE during the 1970s and 1980s. The Jomtien Conference in 1990 marked a major turning point with renewed international and national commitments made to attain UPE by 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The term ‘donor’ is problematic in many respects especially since major multilateral organisations, most notably the World Bank, lend rather than donate. However, for expositional convenience, the common parlance term ‘donors’ is used throughout this article. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The World Bank’s 1991 sector policy report on primary education was an important statement of the benefits of increased investment in primary education. (See Lockheed and Verspoor, 1991). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This support was considerably bolstered by the very sizeable (non-fungible) funding support for UPE by the major aid donors in particular the UK, Netherlands, and the Nordic countries. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ghana 4, Kenya 3, South Africa and Tanzania 2, Nigeria 1 and regional studies 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Strikingly, there is no overlap whatsoever in the studies included in the Kingdon and Novelli reviews which highlights the critical importance of (both explicit and implicit) selection criteria in reviews of this kind. The Novelli review is particularly heavily weighted towards qualitative research on the impact of religion, ethnicity, ‘cultural values’ on education policy formulation and implementation in conflict-affected countries whereas nearly half of the research included in the Kingdon review is quantitative. There are also a few relevant studies that were not included in either review, for example, Chisholm (2005), and Zengele (2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Although quite simple and instrumentalist, this proposition is based on extensive PSA research in both developed and developing countries and provides key insights about the underlying motives of governments in supporting/no longer supporting certain policies and not others. Like all the other propositions in this article, it needs to tested in specific country contexts, [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The term ‘setttlement’ in no way implies that it is has to be recognised or accepted in any way by all or some of the political constituencies that are part of the overall settlement. The political settlement is the outcome or wider political, social and economic forces that shape the overall balance of power. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Eritrea and Uganda also in 1990s but have become more competitively clientelist subsequently. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Given that PSA is conducted by political scientists, this is perhaps not surprising. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The demographic profile of most countries in SSA means that governments are heavily reliant on rural electorates in order to gain and retain power. The main exceptions are South Africa and a few other countries such as Zambia which are relatively highly urbanised. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Mass political mobilisation is the most extreme form of political pressure. However, movements of this kind are uncommon in SSA, unlike, for example, in Central and South America. Nonetheless, the pressure for UPE was particularly intense in countries (such as Mozambique, Zimbabwe) which had achieved independence through liberation struggles which affected large sections of the population, especially in rural areas. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Gauging the level of overall political support is difficult. However, what is clear is that there was little, if any, sustained opposition by political and economic elites in SSA to UPE. As noted earlier, the high level of grant aid from major donors was no doubt an important reason for this acceptance. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Some major donor countries in particular Japan and the United States as well as the World Bank were never supportive of budget support. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. This includes sector wide assistance programmes (SWAPs) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Informally, the World Bank and major donors established a target of 60% of the national education budget to be allocated to primary education. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. This is particularly the case for countries where donor budget support exceeded more than one-third of total government expenditure between the mid-1990s and late 2010s. In Anglophone Africa, this included Ghana and Sierra Leone in West Africa, and Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia in Eastern and Central Africa. Mozambique and Rwanda were also highly aid dependent. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Ghana (36%), Kenya (27%), Senegal (35%), Uganda (33%), Zambia (27%). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. This is not to suggest that the other more geo-political strategic objectives of aid were no longer important in determining the overall size and geographical and sectoral distribution of aid. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. The proposition is based on hygiene motivation theory where once a need has been satisfied it no longer acts as a strong motivational force (Herzberg,). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. For the 24 countries in SSA for which UIS data is available, since 2010, the share of education in total public expenditure has declined in 10 countries, remained the same in six and increased in eight countries. The corresponding figures for the share of primary education in total public education expenditure are seven, one and five. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Automatic promotion has been introduced in some countries in SSA in order to increase completion rates. While repetition rates have fallen in many countries, they still remain high. Grade repetition in the penultimate and final primary school grades is often used as a form of quality control so that only students who are considered to be ready to take terminal exams are allowed to sit them. It is for this reason that repetition rates often spike in the penultimate grades. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. It is interesting to note that in developed countries such as the UK and US, it was the organisation of the poor rather than democracy per se which resulted in governments investing in mass organisation (see Kosack, 2012).

 [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. This is not to suggest that the performance of private schools is uniformly higher than in government schools. The quality of private schools is highly variable and is higher in many government schools (especially secondary schools). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Centralisation of certain functions (particularly control of finance) has been undertaken in order to enable central governments better overall control of the economy and the overall development process (including reducing corruption) while, at the same time, decentralising key functions (especially the delivery of basic services such as health and education) to local governments. In countries such as Nigeria and Uganda, after decades of the economic and political/military turmoil, the political demands for greater decentralisation could not be easily ignored by political elites and in some countries significant decentralisation was incorporated as core elements of new constitutions (as in Kenya and Uganda) [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. For example Haki Elimu in Tanzania, particularly during the 1990s and, more recently, UWEZO in Kenya, Tanzania and Kenya. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. This new preoccupation with learning outcomes is very apparent in the World Bank’s recent high profile review of education in Africa with less than one-quarter of the report devoted to improving access .The top education and training priority in SSA is the ‘building of knowledge capital’ ‘which drives economic growth’ (see Bashir et al. 2018). See also the 2018 World Development Report, Learning to Realise Education’s Promise (World Bank, 2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. SDG4 is ‘to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Certainly, continued, highly selective entry into upper secondary education is inevitable for the foreseeable future. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. The share of primary education in total World Bank funding for the education sector in SSA fell from nearly 80% in the mid-late 1990s to around 40% in the late 2010s (see author, 2020c). [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. For example, the funding share of TVET and skills development increased from less than 5% in the 2000s to nearly 20% in the late 2010s (see Author, 2000c). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. This may well change in the light of the economic slowdown in much of SSA since the mid-2010s and, more immediately, the impact of the COVID epidemic.

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35. Even so, many MoEs are quite defensive about the growth in private school enrolments as well as the overall performance of private schools in public examinations. They frequently dislike and thus oppose independent assessments of learning outcomes which can heighten tensions in their relationships with donors as well NGOs (such as UWEZO in East Africa) who are funded by donors to conduct these assessments. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)