

## POLICY BRIEF



# NURTURING FUTURES

## An Integrated Policy for Adolescent Mothers and Their Children

### Executive Summary

The challenge of school re-entry for adolescent mothers in Kenya presents a critical intersection of education, gender equity, and child welfare. Despite a long-standing re-entry policy, its implementation is inconsistent, leaving both young mothers and their children vulnerable. Research reveals that the primary barriers to a mother's education are the overwhelming burden of childcare, financial hardship, and significant stigma. Conversely, strong family support is the most critical enabler.

This brief proposes the urgent development of integrated guidelines that address not only the mother's re-entry but also the nurturing care needs of her child. By establishing supportive school environments, ensuring access to childcare, and sensitizing communities, we can safeguard the futures of two generations. We urge the Ministry of Education and its partners to champion these recommendations, allowing both adolescent mothers to complete their education and their children to thrive.

### The Problem Statement

In Kenya, adolescent pregnancy remains a significant barrier to girls' education. While a school re-entry policy exists, it often overlooks the critical nurturing care needs of children (aged 0-3) born to these young mothers. This study found that when mothers return to school, their children are at risk; some are not exclusively breastfed, and malnutrition is a common concern, particularly in Samburu. With adolescent pregnancy rates still high, the lack of an integrated support system jeopardizes the educational attainment of the mother and the developmental potential of her child, creating a cycle of vulnerability.



**Malnutrition was reported by healthcare workers to be common among children of adolescent mothers, specifically in Samburu.**

### Context and Background

Kenya's Ministry of Education (MoE) introduced a progressive school re-entry policy in 1994, with comprehensive guidelines following in 2020. However, a significant gap remains between policy and practice. The existing framework fails to address the dual needs of the adolescent mother as both a student and a primary caregiver. Key stakeholders, including the MoE, Ministry of Health, and community organizations, are involved, but their efforts are often uncoordinated. This leaves young mothers dependent almost entirely on family support—which is not always available—forcing many to choose between their education and their child's wellbeing.

The evidence presented in this brief is grounded in the voices and experiences of 155 participants from a wide range of stakeholder groups across the three case study counties of Mombasa, Samburu, and Siaya, as detailed below.

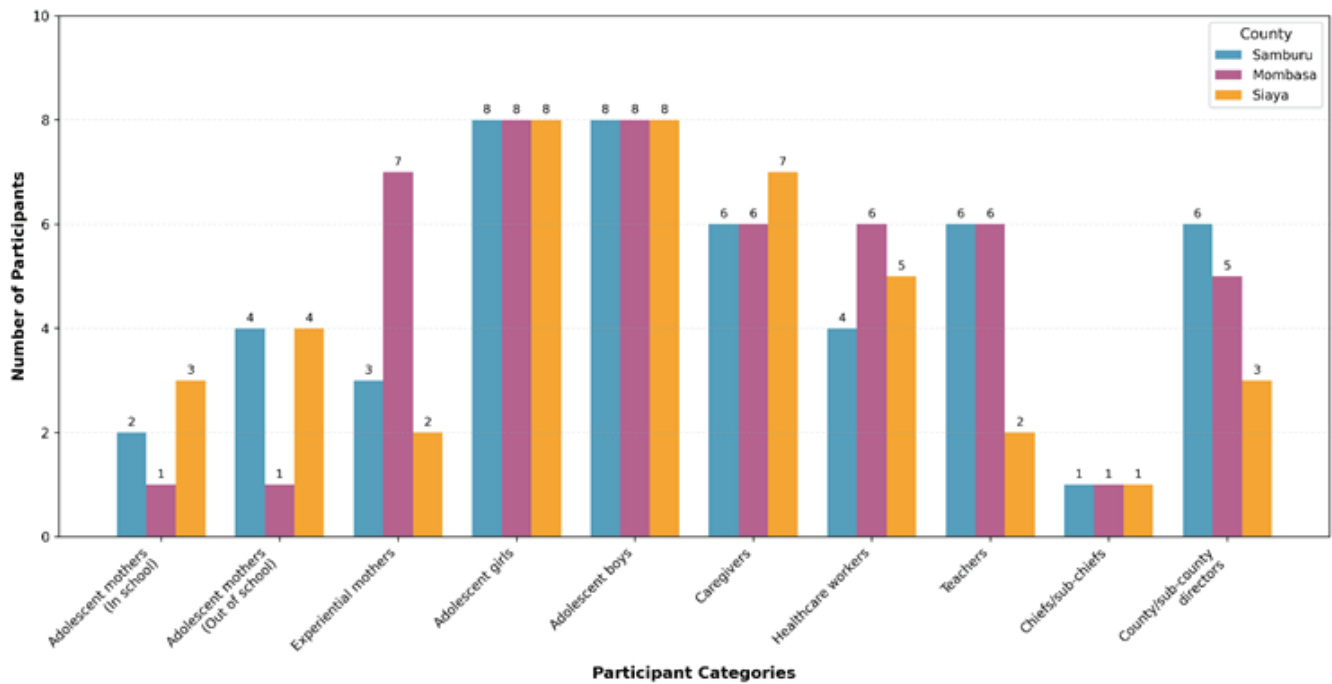


### A Mother's Voice

**"...my biggest challenge was my child because nobody could remain with her... I didn't want to leave my baby alone... he was so small. I also wanted to re-enter school this term... So, I decided I'll just re-enter in January.**

Experiential adolescent mother, IDI  
3.2 & 1.2

**Distribution of Study Participants by Category and County (School Re-entry Study in Kenya)**



### Key Research Findings

The rich qualitative data gathered from these diverse participants revealed five critical findings that must guide Kenya's policy response.

- **Childcare is the #1 Barrier.** The lack of available and affordable childcare is the single biggest obstacle preventing adolescent mothers from returning to school
- **Family Support is the #1 Enabler.** Strong family support that provides financial help, encouragement, and childcare is the most significant factor determining if a young mother re-enters school.
- **Stigma in Schools Persists.** Despite policy, many re-entering mothers face unsupportive school environments from both peers and administrators, who sometimes deny re-admission.
- **The Child's Nurturing Care is Compromised.** When mothers return to school, their child's health and development are at risk. The study found challenges with breastfeeding and nutrition, and a mother's frequent school absenteeism to care for a sick child.
- **Awareness of Re-entry Guidelines is Critically Low.** A significant number of mothers, and even some teachers, are unaware of the official re-entry guidelines, hindering their ability to advocate for their rights.



### Key Research Findings

Based on this evidence, we propose three core, actionable recommendations:

#### I. Develop an Integrated "Mother-Child" Re-entry Guideline.

- **Action:** The Ministry of Education, in partnership with the Ministry of Health and NCCS, must develop specific guidelines that address both the mother's educational needs and the child's nurturing care needs (health, nutrition, responsive care).
- **Actor(s):** Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, County Governments.

#### II. Establish Accessible Childcare Support Systems.

- **Action:** Mandate and support County Governments and schools to establish flexible childcare solutions, such as partnerships with local daycares or subsidized community programs for re-entering mothers.
- **Actor(s):** County Governments, MoE, School Boards of Management.

#### III. Launch a National Sensitization Campaign on the Re-entry Policy.

- **Action:** The MoE should lead a nationwide campaign targeting students, parents, and educators to create stigma-free, supportive school environments and ensure the policy is consistently implemented.
- **Actor(s):** Ministry of Education, Teachers Service Commission (TSC).

## Implementation Considerations

Success requires strong partnerships between national ministries, county governments, and CSOs. The primary barriers are funding for childcare and cultural stigma. These can be overcome by framing the investment as a dual-generation strategy that boosts Kenya's human capital. Piloting childcare models in Mombasa, Samburu, and Siaya can provide a blueprint for scalability. Sustainability will depend on embedding these policies into county budgets and teacher training curriculums



**Investing in a young mother's education is a direct investment in the health, well-being, and potential of the next generation."**



## Conclusion

The gap between Kenya's progressive school re-entry policy and its reality on the ground jeopardizes the futures of thousands. This is a critical moment to act. By focusing interventions on the mother-child dyad—providing integrated childcare and fostering supportive schools—we can create a system that works. Investing in a young mother's education is a direct investment in the health, well-being, and potential of the next generation.



## About Zizi Afrique Foundation

Zizi Afrique Foundation (ZAF), established in 2018 as a nonprofit operating in Kenya and East Africa, envisions a world where all children and youth thrive in education. ZAF's mission centres on consolidating evidence, fostering innovative solutions, and influencing policy and practice to equip children and youth with essential foundational skills. Guided by the challenges of limited learning, ZAF's current strategy comprises three pillars: Research and evidence, policy/advocacy, and innovations for improved practice. ZAF is committed to using evidence like this to partner in building a more supportive and equitable education system for all of Kenya's children.



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## References & Data Sources

The key findings and recommendations presented in this brief are primarily drawn from the qualitative research detailed in the full technical report, which involved 155 participants in Mombasa, Samburu, and Siaya counties.

- **Primary Source:**

Zizi Afrique Foundation (2025). *The Technical Report on School re-entry among Adolescent Mothers in Kenya in the Context of Nurturing Care Framework*. Nairobi, Kenya.

- **Policy Context:**

Ministry of Education, Kenya (2020). *Guidelines for school re-entry in early learning and basic education*. Nairobi, Kenya.

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