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**PRESS RELEASE: INEFFECTIVE BURSARY FUND HURTING
SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS, 17TH FEBRUARY 2009**

"in addition to recent failures in the agriculture, and energy sector where the poor are paying dearly; now poor secondary school students are paying the price of an ineffective bursary fund despite provisions for the fund in the National budget"

"Only 42% of applicants for the Secondary Education Bursary Fund (SEBF) receive funding for their secondary fees with more than 84% of the beneficiaries getting the minimum allocation of Kshs. 5,000". This is according to a study, "**Public Expenditure Tracking of Secondary Education Bursary fund in Nairobi Province, Kenya**", conducted by an independent think-tank, Institute of Policy Analysis and Research (IPAR).

The study conducted among secondary schools in Nairobi Province reveals that the SEBF set up by the government in the financial year 1993/94 to enhance access to quality education has limitations both on governance, effectiveness and consistency. As a result, the fund has not achieved its main objective of ensuring access and retention with 58% of applicants not benefiting from the fund.

According to the study, Lang'ata is the only constituency in Nairobi Province where secondary school students have a guarantee of continuous funding for their education, where as in the other constituencies of the province beneficiaries have huge fee balances to clear.

A review of the SEBF documents dated 2004-2007 showed that Nairobi province received a total of Kshs. 118,860,386 from the Ministry of Education for bursary awards. However, only 43% of the applicants for the fund benefited. Though the

government approved maximum fees chargeable by day schools, boarding school and national schools at Kshs. 10,500, Kshs.22, 900, and Kshs. 28,900 respectively, schools do not adhere to these limits with a majority charging more than double these amounts with the approval of the Parents Teachers Association (PTA), making education unaffordable for beneficiaries of the SEBF that funds up to a maximum of Kshs. 15,000 per annum for a student

The study cites *timeliness* as a major weakness in the disbursement of the fund. The budgetary provision for the bursary fund is done for a financial year and this is different from the academic calendar. The disbursement schedule is not synchronized with the school programme with bursaries often being awarded late during the school sessions forcing students to make numerous trips to the education offices to inquire on the status of their funding.

Beneficiaries interviewed unanimously noted with concern that the *application process is cumbersome*. The beneficiaries are particularly unhappy with the requirements of that a section of the application form has to be completed by their primary schools heads, the local chief, or the pastor, who are not easy to access.

Information dissemination is also a challenge. According to the Constituency Bursary Fund Committee(CBFC) secretaries, information is disseminated on public notice boards especially at the educational and chiefs offices, at places of worship, and *barazas*, especially those held by the provincial administration. Beneficiaries noted that the information availed is scanty leaving them confused especially regarding where to return the forms. This is because the beneficiaries' areas of residence and location of schools are not necessarily in the same constituency in Nairobi province.

According the study, there is poor record keeping at the constituency level. In two constituencies, the area members of parliament are said to have taken control of the fund, deciding on who gets the bursaries and at the same time the MP's keep the records of applicants and beneficiaries.

Based on the findings, of the survey, the following recommendations were made:

- The Ministry should issue comprehensive guidelines to the constituencies with regard to the type of information that should be submitted by the CBFCs to the Ministry. A standard returns template should be issued to the CBFCs requiring all constituencies to follow a specific format.
- The bursary awarding evaluation criteria should be revised to emphasise School Principals' assessment of continuing students' need for financial assistance as adequate.
- The Government should create a national data bank for all learners in public schools and training institutions in Kenya for use in assessing applicants of bursary and other such funds and also for ensuring consistent funding for all those who qualify for bursary.

- The Government should establish a framework of monitoring and enhancing collaboration networks with other bursary providers in order to achieve synergies and avoid duplication of efforts.
- To enhance effectiveness of the secondary education bursary fund, the government should finance adequately fewer needy students than to thinly fund many students without any assurance of continuity.
- There should be a mechanism of monitoring the flow of funds from the Treasury through the Ministry of Education to constituencies and finally to schools to ensure timely disbursement of bursary funds to beneficiaries within the phase in which they are received. Being a budgetary provision, bursary funds should be disbursed in one phase preferably in November of each year for allocation in December to beneficiaries before the start of each academic year in January. One-off allocations are preferred to avoid unnecessary anticipation from students and this will minimise costs of fund administration.

The Institute of Policy Analysis and Research (IPAR) is a non-partisan, not-for-profit organization, mandated to conduct social science policy research and training. IPAR shares its policy results, whose objective is the improvement of human welfare, with the Government, its development partners, private sector and civil society.

For more information, interviews with the authors and insights on the study contact Grace Nzou, Publications Editor IPAR on grace@ipar.or.ke or 0721154876 or 0202251179

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