

# Strategies and approaches to ensure equitable access to quality education in economic crises<sup>1</sup>

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## Question

*What strategies and activities have worked to ensure equitable access to quality education when a country is in economic crisis?*

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<sup>1</sup> This is the second of two reports on education and economic crises. The first examined strategies and approaches to motivate teachers in the sudden shock of economic crises (James 2018).

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*The K4D helpdesk service provides brief summaries of current research, evidence, and lessons learned. Helpdesk reports are not rigorous or systematic reviews; they are intended to provide an introduction to the most important evidence related to a research question. They draw on a rapid desk-based review of published literature and consultation with subject specialists.*

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# 1. Summary

This helpdesk review has drawn primarily on evidence from systematic reviews and synthesis studies focused on (i) the impact of economic crises on education systems, and (ii) the effectiveness of strategies and approaches that aim to improve educational participation. It has focused on policy responses at the primary and secondary levels of education, and where possible has drawn on examples from effective responses in the context of large-scale economic crisis. Where evidence was not available from contexts of economic crisis, studies from resource-constrained low- and middle- income countries (LMICs) were considered.

There is a comparatively large (and growing) literature on the relative effectiveness of different strategies and approaches aimed at ensuring equitable access to quality education in LMICs in general. There is a much more limited literature discussing the impact of economic crises on education systems, and documenting examples of where strategies and approaches have been implemented and/or been effective in these contexts.

Concerns for equity in education are central to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), emphasising the need to address issues of exclusion and marginalisation in relation to access, participation and learning (UNESCO 2017). There are a number of barriers to the achievement of equitable access to quality education, related to the policy environment, the quality of schools and teachers, and household and student-level factors related to geography and social norms.

Economic crises pose particular challenges to the achievement of goals around equitable access to quality education. Falling household incomes can affect the 'demand' for schooling, increasing the cost of schooling, particularly for the poorest. Meanwhile, constrained government budgets can lead to reduced investments in schools and teachers, and associated declines in education quality (World Bank 2009). Evidence on the effect of economic crisis on educational outcomes or school quality is limited, likely related to the fact that the collection of data are often halted during crisis events (Shafiq 2010). Nonetheless, policy responses need to prioritise the maintenance of education investments where the returns are largest, whilst also protecting the most marginalised groups (World Bank 2009).

This review discusses five strategies and approaches to ensure equitable access to quality education, which have been identified as appropriate responses in literature on the impact of economic crisis on education (Lundberg and Wuermli 2012; Shafiq 2010; World Bank 2009). These are: (1) cash transfers; (2) scholarship programmes and fee waivers; (3) school feeding; (4) decentralisation and school grants; and (5) information-related activities. For all except 'information-related activities', there are examples of the effective implementation of that policy in contexts of economic crisis. Their effectiveness can be summarised as follows:

- **Cash transfers** have a strong track-record of effectiveness in LMIC contexts, targeting demand-side financing issues (Snilstveit et al. 2016). When conditional on some sort of educational participation, they have been shown to be effective at improving both enrolment and attendance at school (Baird et al. 2013; Kremer et al. 2013; Snilstveit et al. 2016). When targeted at the poorest or most marginalised, they can specifically address equity concerns, but this approach relies on the availability of relevant data on which to base targeting. There are examples of such policies being implemented (and effective) in the wake of crisis or shocks, such as Mexico's PROGRESA, and Nicaragua's 'Red de Proteccion Social' programme. However, in crisis contexts cash transfer

programmes might be hard to deliver, particularly where administrative capacity is low and programmes have complexities around effective targeting (Lundberg and Wuermli 2012).

- **Scholarship programmes and fee waivers** can work to reduce the cost of education in times of crisis (Lundberg and Wuermli 2012). Scholarships can be targeted to poorer students or marginalised groups (e.g. girls). Evidence from scholarship programmes that target the poor suggest positive effects for equity of access in terms of enrolment and retention (Bolton 2014), whilst evidence from merit-based scholarships shows more limited impacts on school participation (Snilstveit 2016). Meanwhile, in relation to fee waivers, the evidence from LMIC contexts is 'unclear', with only small effects evident on access-related indicators (Snilstveit 2016). There are examples of scholarship programmes being effective at safeguarding equity of access in the context of Indonesia's economic crisis, via the Jaring Pegamanan Sosial (JPS) scholarship programme (Cameron 2009). Meanwhile, evidence from Kenya also suggests that merit-based scholarships for girls can improve equity of access for this group (Damon et al. 2016). Whilst there are examples of fee waiver programmes from times of economic crisis, evidence of effectiveness is limited.
- **School feeding** initiatives can incentivise children's attendance at school through reducing the burden on households of providing food in times of crisis (Lundberg and Wuermli 2012). Evidence from across LMIC contexts suggests that these interventions are most effective in contexts where malnutrition is prevalent and where local participation and ownership of the programme is prioritised (Snilstveit et al. 2016). One example from the context of economic shocks (resulting from 2007-08 global food price shocks) – the Guyana Hinterland Community-based School Feeding Programme (Ismail et al. 2012) – has some of the most positive effects on access and other educational and nutritional indicators of all school feeding initiatives reviewed by Snilstveit et al. (2016).
- **Decentralisation and school grants** can be an important way of safeguarding school budgets in times of economic crisis, particularly if targeted to areas hardest hit by the crisis, or to schools serving vulnerable or marginalised communities (World Bank 2009). However, evidence of effectiveness in relation to equity of access is relatively limited (Joynes and James 2018) and such reforms often interact with levels of local capacity such that they are less effective in disadvantaged communities (Carr-Hill et al. 2016). Two examples of this policy from contexts of economic crisis are Indonesia's Scholarship and Grants programme, and Zimbabwe's School Improvement Grant. Whilst there is very limited evidence of the effectiveness of Zimbabwe's policy (Smith et al. 2018), Indonesia's policy was associated with grants going to disadvantaged schools, but evidence of effectiveness for equity of access was more mixed (Bolton 2012; Deffous et al. 2011; Hartano and Ehrmann 2001).
- **Information-related initiatives** are put forward by Shafiq (2010) as a potentially important response for safeguarding access in the wake of economic crisis. However, few examples of the effective implementation of this policy in times of economic crisis were identified. In relation to the general evidence from LMICs, Snilstveit et al. (2016) note that these initiatives usually provide students and/ or parents with information about the returns to education, but that there are few examples of such studies being rigorously evaluated, and it is hard to draw strong conclusions about their effectiveness.

## 2. Equitable access to quality education and the impact of economic crisis

### 2.1 Equitable access to quality education

Equity is a key consideration for education policy in LMICs. UNESCO (2017: 13) highlight that it is 'about ensuring that there is a concern with fairness, such that the education of all learners is seen as having equal importance' (UNESCO 2017: 13). International legislation guarantees the right of all children to education, and 'States therefore have an obligation to respect, protect and fulfil the right of *all learners* to education (UNESCO 2014 cited in UNESCO 2017: 12).

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) calls for countries to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education, and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' (UNESCO 2017: 12).

Despite this global consensus, many students continue to be out of school, particularly girls and those from the poorest backgrounds (UNESCO 2017: 12).

The Education 2030 Framework for Action aims to advance progress towards SDG4 (UNESCO 2017: 12). The Framework emphasises

the need to address all forms of exclusion and marginalization. It specifically calls for addressing inequalities related to access, participation, and learning processes and outcomes, paying particular attention to gender equality. This includes efforts to enable education systems to serve all learners, with a particular focus on those who have traditionally been excluded from educational opportunities. Excluded learners include those from the poorest households, ethnic and linguistic minorities, indigenous people, and persons with special needs and disabilities (UNESCO 2017: 12).

There are a number of barriers to the achievement of equitable access to quality education. These relate to both the policy environment, the quality of schools and teachers, and household- and student-level factors such as social norms around gender. Effective monitoring of access to education is essential for effective policy targeting (UNESCO 2017), for example disaggregating access and participation data for students at different levels of the system (primary, secondary etc.), from different geographies (rural, urban), from different social, economic and ethnic backgrounds, and between boys and girls.

Implementing effective strategies and approaches to ensure that 'every learner matters and matters equally' is challenging (UNESCO 2017: 12). These strategies and approaches might target issues of access, retention or learning, and take account of a number of different factors, including teacher skills and attitudes, infrastructure, pedagogical strategies and the curriculum, and are supported by legislation, institutions and resources (UNESCO 2017: 13).

### 2.2 The impact of economic crises

Economic crises can have diverse effects on education systems. In the context of declining government and household income, these effects can be felt in relation to both the supply and demand for education, with potentially detrimental implications in both the short- and long-term (World Bank 2009). On the supply-side, increasingly constrained government budgets can lead to reduced investments in schools and teachers and declines in education quality (World Bank, 2009: 1). Meanwhile on the demand-side, falling household incomes can work to increase the

cost of schooling, particularly for the poorest and most marginalised, with important implications for enrolment, attendance, retention and learning, and often pushing students out of the private sector into overcrowded public schools (World Bank 2009: 5).

The effect of crisis on educational enrolments and participation is context dependent, with negative effects in some settings, constant school enrolment rates in other contexts, and improvements in educational outcomes evident in others (Shafiq 2010: 7-8). Lundberg and Wuermli (2012: 251) state that

in theory, during negative financial shocks poorer households are driven to reduce expenditures on education or to increase household income by sending their child to work. Wealthier households may respond to the decreased opportunity cost of the child's time to increase enrolment and attendance. Which effect dominates will depend on the depth of the shock as well as on the household's resources.

There is a very limited evidence base on the effect of economic crisis on educational outcomes or on school quality, related in large part to the fact that 'data collection initiatives are typically postponed or curtailed during crises' (Shafiq 2010: 6). In the wake of an economic crisis, not all households are affected in the same way (World Bank 2009: 6). Indeed, crisis may impact different levels of schooling differently, as well as having different implications on households according to socioeconomic status, parental level of education and employment status, and by student characteristics such as age and gender (Shafiq 2010: 6-7).

For example, in Indonesia in the 1998-99 crisis years, 'urban households were more severely affected than rural households in terms of unemployment, earnings, and school enrolment, because the crisis entailed a devaluation that boosted incomes in rural areas relative to incomes in urban areas' (World Bank 2009: 6). Children from poorer households were more likely to drop out, whilst younger students experienced higher falls in school enrolment (Thomas et al. 2004 cited in Shafiq 2010: 7; Thomas et al. 2004: 53). Meanwhile, in Cameroon's crisis years of the 1980s and 1990s girls were much more likely than boys to drop out of both primary and secondary school, particularly those in rural areas or from poorer households (Eloundou-Enyegue and Davanzo 2003 cited in Shafiq 2010: 7).

Governments need to prioritise policy responses in the wake of economic crisis, considering '(1) sustaining the level of investments where the returns are greatest, and (2) protecting the most vulnerable and disadvantaged parts of the population' (World Bank 2009: 2). Drawing on evidence from past economic crisis, the World Bank (2009: 11) suggests that key to appropriate policy responses is an effective identification of the populations that will be 'hardest hit by the crisis and most likely to cut back on investments in human capital', and the subsequent formulation of policy responses which effectively target these groups. This might rely on effective monitoring of the education sector, including an examination of the differential impacts on various population subgroups and the equity-related impacts of the crisis (World Bank 2009: 11).

### 3. Strategies and activities to ensure equitable access to quality education in economic crises

Strategies and activities to ensure equitable access to quality education in economic crises can include programmes that target both the demand- and supply-side of education. On the demand-side, programmes such as conditional cash transfers, student scholarships and school feeding initiatives can help to ‘cushion the worst effects of the crisis’ (World Bank 2009: vii). Meanwhile, on the supply-side, ‘interventions such as block grants to schools in the most vulnerable areas, on-time payment of teacher salaries, and incentives for teachers<sup>2</sup> to be present in their classrooms help ensure that students stay in school and learn’ (World Bank 2009: vii).

Also writing in relation to policies and programmes that can help to mitigate the effects of economic crisis, Lundberg and Wuermli (2012: 252) note that

assuming that poverty is the main constraint to children’s education, a government can attempt to reduce the cost of education, as well as the cost of children’s time, to prevent school dropout and encourage education and learning despite an economic crisis. These goals can be achieved through cash transfer programs (universal or targeted, conditional or unconditional), scholarships or fee waivers, or subsidized school materials. Policy makers can also try to increase the perceived returns to education by enhancing quality and links to employment.

This section will review evidence of effectiveness of a selection of both demand- and supply-side interventions that have been shown to be effective in contexts of economic crisis. On the demand-side, the review will consider: (i) cash transfers; (ii) scholarship programmes and fee waivers; and (iii) school feeding. On the supply-side, the review will consider the evidence around: (i) decentralisation and school grants; and (ii) information-related activities. In each instance, a general discussion of the effectiveness of that strategy is presented (drawing primarily on relevant systematic reviews and synthesis papers), followed by case study example(s), with a focus on contexts of economic crisis.

It should be noted that what follows is not a comprehensive list of all the possible strategies and approaches that could be taken to ensure equitable access to quality education, and which may have applications in settings experiencing economic crises. Such an approach was beyond the parameters or resourcing of this report. Instead, this section is focused exclusively on the evidence around those strategies and approaches which were detailed in synthesis papers focused on the impact of economic crisis on education systems (Lundberg and Wuermli 2012; World Bank 2009).

For a broader perspective, there are a number of recent synthesis papers that consider the relative effectiveness of different strategies and approaches beyond contexts of economic crisis (for example including targeting the reduction of distance to school via school building, targeting improvements to education quality via teacher incentives, or deworming initiatives), including in

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<sup>2</sup> Strategies and approaches that target teacher motivation in economic crises were considered in James (2018), but the evidence base was found to be extremely limited.

relation to the goal of equitable access to quality education (Damon et al. 2016; Kremer et al. 2013; Snilstveit et al. 2016).

### 3.1 Cash transfers

Demand-side financing programmes such as cash transfer programmes or scholarships can be an important response in the wake of a crisis (World Bank 2009: 12). Indeed, '[conditional cash transfer (CCT)] programmes in several countries have been shown to be an effective way to encourage poor households to invest in their children's education. When incomes fall and such transfers are in even greater demand, CCT programmes can help keep children in school' (World Bank 2009: 3), with potentially important effects for equitable access to quality education.

Cash transfers are a type of 'social safety net programme', providing funding to students and/ or household members (often women) (Snilstveit et al. 2016: 20). They work to reduce or remove financial barriers to educational access (Snilstveit et al. 2016: 20), effectively helping to 'smooth consumption and sustain investments in children's development' and cushion the impact of a shock on household incomes (Lundberg and Wuermler 2012: 244). In education-focussed cash transfers, the aim is typically improvements in student enrolment, attendance and retention (Snilstveit et al. 2016: 20). Cash transfers might be either conditional or unconditional, with the former disbursing funds in response to certain behaviour, such as school attendance (Snilstveit et al. 2016: 20). Schooling CCTs alter both income and the relative price of schooling (Baird et al. 2013: 10).

CCTs are some of the most well-evaluated policy responses targeting demand for schooling in LMIC contexts, often demonstrating strong and positive effects (Damon et al. 2016: 37). In a systematic review of the evidence on the effectiveness of cash transfer programmes for educational outcomes in developing countries (i.e. not limited to contexts of economic crisis), Baird et al. (2013: 7-8) found that

both CCTs and UCTs<sup>3</sup> improve the odds of being enrolled in and attending school compared to no cash transfer programme. The effect [on] sizes for enrolment and attendance are always larger for CCT programmes compared to UCT programmes but the difference is not significant... While interventions with no conditions or some conditions that are not monitored have some effect on enrolment rates (18-25 percent improvement in odds of being enrolled in school), programmes that are explicitly conditional, monitor compliance and penalize non-compliance have substantively larger effects (60 percent improvement in odds of enrolment). Unlike enrolment and attendance, the effectiveness of cash transfer programmes on improving test scores is small at best.

Similarly, Snilstveit et al. (2016: 20) synthesise the findings of 50 studies on the effectiveness of cash transfers in education, evaluating 38 unique programmes, of which half are found in Latin America and the Caribbean. The reviewed programmes tended to involve a conditional element, whilst the intensity varied between programmes (Snilstveit et al. 2016: 20). They found that cash transfers improve participation, including enrolment, attendance, completion and drop out in

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<sup>3</sup> Unconditional Cash Transfers (UCTs)

school in most contexts, whilst evidence of positive effects for learning outcomes are more limited and variation was found between programmes (Snistveit et al. 2016: 21).

However, it should be noted that 'conditional cash transfers have other characteristics that make them less attractive as a crisis response tool. If administrative capacity is low, it may not be possible to scale up rapidly enough to meet demand, to manage the complexities of administered targeting schemes quickly, or to scale the programs back once the crisis has abated' (Lundberg and Wuermli 2012: 255).

Two examples of CCT programmes which have been effective in ensuring and/ or improving school participation for marginalised groups in the context of sudden shocks or economic crisis are the PROGRESA programme in Mexico, and the Red de Proteccion Social programme in Nicaragua (both cited in Lundberg and Wuermli 2012: 254).

### ***Mexico: PROGRESA***

Mexico's PROGRESA programme was a CCT programme aimed at maintaining educational participation in rural areas in times when household heads became unemployed (de Janvry et al. 2006 cited in Shafiq 2010: 9). It is the precursor to the ongoing Oportunidades CCT programme, and has been extensively evaluated since its inception in 1997. The programme emerged out of a need to protect children's school enrolment amongst households experiencing shocks following the Tequila Crisis of the mid-1990s (de Janvry et al. 2006 cited in Lundberg and Wuermli 2012: 254). Behrman et al. (2000) conducted the original impact evaluation of the first iteration of the programme, with a focus on student learning outcomes. Insights from this paper are included in this report, whilst instructive lessons from the later iterations of the programme (which have also been rigorously evaluated in a number of different papers) can be found in Baird et al. (2013) and Snistveit et al. (2016). The programme was a 'multifaceted programme aimed at improving education, nutrition, and health outcomes of families, as well as alleviated immediate poverty, with initial focus on poorer households in rural Mexico' (Behrman 2000: 2). In relation to the education objectives, the programme offered 'educational grants to facilitate and encourage the educational aspirations of children and young people by fostering their enrolment and regular school attendance and promoting parents' appreciation of the advantages of their children's education' (Behrman 2000: 3). These 'grants' were transfer payments made to eligible families that were conditional on children's attendance at school in specified grades (Behrman et al. 2000: 4). Behrman et al. (2000: vi) found significant increases in the enrolment rate for those students receiving the programme, with larger positive effects for female students in the 12-14 age range. In summarising the effects of the 1998 intervention, Kremer et al. (2013: 297) state that the programme 'increased girls' transition rate from elementary to junior secondary school by 14.8 percentage points and boys' by 6.5 percentage points.'

### ***Nicaragua: Red de Proteccion Social***

Similarly, the Nicaraguan 'Red de Proteccion Social' programme was 'effective at increasing school enrolment in coffee-growing areas that were hit by the fall in coffee prices in the late 1990s' (Maluccio 2005 cited in Lundberg and Wuermli 2012: 254). The programme started in 2000 and made monthly transfers of approximately 18 percent of pre-programme expenditures, paid to a designated female and 'with a strong social marketing message that the money was intended to be used for human capital investments' (Barham et al. 2013: 6). There was an additional educational component to the programme in which households with children between



ages 7-13 who had not yet finished grade four could receive a 'school attendance transfer' twice a month, contingent on enrolment and regular school attendance (Barham et al. 2013: 6). Households also received an annual cash transfer for school supplies, conditional on enrolment, including a small 'supply-side transfer' to provide 'schools with funds for school materials, and to incentivize teachers' (Barham et al. 2013: 6). Barham et al. (2013: 2) followed-up with the programme in 2010, and found that the positive effects of the programme on student learning were sustained, even after households stopped receiving transfers, suggestive of potentially long-term impacts of CCTs.

## 3.2 Scholarship programmes and fee waivers

A key approach to safeguarding access to quality education in times of crisis is to reduce the costs to households of educating their children (Lundberg and Wuermli 2012: 255). One way of doing this is to subsidise household expenditure through scholarship programmes, or fee waivers, either of which can be targeted to particularly disadvantaged groups.

### Scholarship programmes

In a review of strategies and approaches to safeguard education in contexts of economic crisis, the World Bank (2009: 13) note that 'student fellowships could be a less expensive alternative than large investments in school infrastructure. Especially if targeted to poorer students, student fellowships have been shown to increase net enrolment in lower-income neighbourhoods without overcrowding public schools by using existing capacity in private schools'. In systems with a diversity of education providers, scholarship programmes might help to reduce the probability of large shifts out of the private sector and into the public sector, and the associated negative impacts on school supply (World Bank 2009: 13).

Bolton (2014: 1) produced a helpdesk report on the impact and effectiveness of scholarship programmes for disadvantaged children and girls, noting that most programmes improve enrolments but have a less clear impact on learning. Bolton (2014: 1) notes that

programmes that aimed to get girls into schools were successful in that aim. Scholarship programmes that target the poor generally have the aim of improving equality in enrolments and retention. They do not directly address learning. Merit-based scholarship programmes, however, are more likely to see improvements in learning but less likely to reach the most disadvantaged.

Bolton (2014) provides several case studies from Ghana, Kenya, Bangladesh, Nepal, Mexico, Brazil and Indonesia.

Snilstveit et al. (2016: 19) synthesise the findings of 10 programmes providing merit-based scholarships implemented in LMIC contexts (i.e. not limited to economic crisis settings, and focused only on merit-based scholarships), usually involving the payment of cash to students. They found promising impacts on student learning outcomes, whilst the evidence on effectiveness for school participation was more limited.

## **Fee waivers**

The removal of fees for educational services or the provision of fee waivers is a related response and has been a popular initiative in the wake of the Education for All movement (Snilstveit et al. 2016: 22). In their synthesis of literature concerning the effectiveness of education interventions, Snilstveit et al. (2016: 22) identify 10 programmes that either removed or reduced school fees. However, they found that the overall effect of these programmes for participation in school was 'unclear', with only small effects evident on enrolment, attendance, drop out, completion and attainment. Furthermore, Snilstveit et al. (2016:22) note that this policy approach may lead to short-term reductions in school quality, linked to the immediate reduction in school resources.

### ***Indonesia: Jaring Pegamanan Sosial (JPS) scholarship programme***

This policy aimed to safeguard and improve school enrolment levels during Indonesia's crisis period in the late 1990s (Shafiq 2010: 9), with a particular focus on ensuring access for the most marginalised. The programme sought to ensure that the large dropout rates that had followed Indonesia's crisis in the 1980s, did not occur again (Cameron 2002 cited in Shafiq 2010: 9). Alongside the scholarship programme, students were not dismissed from school if they failed to pay fees, and requirements around the wearing of uniforms were also relaxed (Filmer et al. 2001 in Shafiq 2010: 9).

JPS began in the 1998/99 academic year, funded by development banks and donors and disbursing scholarships to primary, lower-secondary, and upper-secondary level schools and reaching between 1.2 and 1.6 million students (Shafiq 2010: 9). School committees, made up of school staff and community members had responsibility for the selection of student recipients, whilst they aimed to specifically target the most marginalised students, particularly girls, single parent households, large households and the poorest households (Shafiq 2010: 9; Sparrow, 2007). Effectiveness evidence suggests that the committees responsible for allocating scholarships largely followed the official allocation criteria (Cameron 2002; Filmer et al. 2001 cited in Shafiq 2010: 9). Evaluative evidence suggests that 'a secondary school student receiving a scholarship had a 24 percent lower likelihood of dropping out than a similar child who did not receive the scholarship' (Cameron 2002 cited in Shafiq 2010: 9).

'Cameron (2009) [found] that the scholarship programme was effective at reducing dropouts at the lower secondary school level, where historically students were most prone to leave school. Sparrow (2007) [found] that the programme increased enrolment especially for primary school-aged children from poor rural households and helped the households' smooth consumption during the crisis' (cited in Lundberg and Wuermli 2012: 255). Cameron (2009: 308) suggests that the programme can be seen as a model to be followed by other countries facing economic crisis.

### ***Kenya: Merit-based scholarships for girls***

Damon et al. (2016: 37) provide a useful summary of evidence from two studies (Kremer et al. 2009 and Friedman et al. 2011) evaluating the impact of a merit-based scholarship programme targeting rural Kenyan girls in grade 6. Whilst this programme was not implemented in the context of economic crisis, the equity focus (i.e. in targeting girls), makes it a relevant programme to consider.

The programme involved telling students at the start of the school year that 'those who scored in the top 15 percent on end-of-year exams would be given approximately \$6.40 for each of the

next two years (grades 7 and 8), which was enough to cover school fees. In addition, they were informed that their parents would be given an amount of money equal to \$12.80 for each of the next two years' (Damon et al. 2016: 37-38). Kremer et al. (2009 cited in Damon et al. 2016: 38) found that the intervention increased participation (daily attendance) by 3.2 percent. Meanwhile, Friedman et al. (2011 cited in Damon et al. 2016: 38) 'examined the educational outcomes of the same girls 4-5 years after the original program started', finding significantly positive effects on enrolment in secondary school and current enrolment in any school.

### ***Indonesia: school fee abolition***

One example of fee abolition in the wake of economic crisis comes from Indonesia in the late 1990s, where the government abolished school entrance fees, alongside a series of other policy responses also considered in this review (scholarships, grants, a media campaign) (Filmer et al. 2001: 43). Filmer et al. (2001:49) examined the extent to which schools had eliminated student fees (both mandatory and 'voluntary contributions', and those paid at entrance and on a monthly basis) in response to the crisis. They found that 'the proportion of schools charging entrance fees did decline during the crisis years at both the primary and junior secondary levels' (Filmer et al. 2001: 49), whilst monthly fees increased at no greater rate than inflation (Filmer et al. 2001: 50). However, the effectiveness of this policy response for equity of access to schooling was not explicitly discussed.

## **3.3 School feeding**

School feeding programmes can serve as an important safety net in times of crisis, helping to both keep students in school and to improve their ability to focus on learning tasks (World Bank 2009: 3). In times of crisis, school feeding programmes can work to incentivise children's attendance at school, through reducing the burden on households of providing food (Lundberg and Wuermler 2012: 255). As with the previous interventions, they can be tailored to target particularly marginalised groups or locations, to address equity concerns.

In their synthesis study of effective educational interventions, Snilstveit et al. (2016: 16) identify 15 rigorous evaluations of school feeding programmes, finding evidence of positive effects on both participation and learning levels. However, their review of the evidence suggested that unless malnutrition is prevalent, the effects of school feeding may be more limited, and ensuring local participation and ownership was important for success (Snilstveit et al. 2016: 16). Tull and Plunkett (2018) also recently reviewed the evidence of the effectiveness of school feeding initiatives in humanitarian contexts in a K4D helpdesk query, with potentially instructive suggestions for contexts of economic crisis. This section is therefore limited to one example from a context experiencing the effects of an economic shock.

### ***Guyana: The Hinterland Community-based School Feeding Programme***

This school feeding programme targeted both children's nutrition and educational outcomes, and was evaluated by Ismail et al. (2012). The programme had much more positive effects on enrolment and learning than other school feeding programmes reviewed by Snilstveit et al. (2015). The programme is of particular interest to this helpdesk query, because it was implemented during the global food price shocks of 2007-08, which increased food insecurity for poor families (Snilstveit et al. 2015: 95). The programme began in 2007 with the aim of 'building more community participation in schools and improving children's human development

outcomes, such as student enrolment and attendance, nutritional status and learning outcomes' (Ismail et al, 2012: vii). The evaluation of the programme found that 'while school attendance fell among the comparison group, it increased among the children in the [school feeding] programme' (Snilstveit et al. 2015: 95). Benefits were seen for those students receiving the intervention, in relation to both enrolment and attendance, whilst positive outcomes were also noted in relation to nutritional status, classroom behaviour and participation, and performance on standardised tests (Ismail et al. 2012: 1-2). Considering why the results of this programme were much more positive than the other studies reviewed in their systematic review, Snilstveit et al. (2015: 95) note that the programme was meeting a 'clearly defined need' and 'represented an important income transfer to poor families.'

### **3.4 Decentralisation and school grants**

A recent K4D helpdesk report (Joynes and James 2018) reviewed the evidence of effectiveness of school grant policies in relation to (i) equitable access to quality education, and (ii) student learning outcomes and the reader is directed to that helpdesk report for a detailed discussion of relevant evidence. This section of this helpdesk report therefore focuses on the evidence of effectiveness of school grant policies for ensuring equitable access to quality education in contexts of economic crisis.

There is relatively limited evidence of the effectiveness of school grant policies for improving equitable access to quality education (including outside contexts of economic crisis) (Joynes and James 2018). Instead, most evaluations of such policies focus on impacts on student learning outcomes or other dimensions of educational quality. In their systematic review on decentralisation policies in LMIC contexts, Carr-Hill et al. (2016:84) found that such reforms are often less effective in disadvantaged communities, particularly where levels of education or social status are low, such that these type of reforms are less likely to be effective in these contexts. There is also some evidence that devolving decision-making over financial resources to the level of the school may have negative consequences for equity of access, for example as a result of elite capture of education at local level, disharmony between ethnic groups, and the further limitation of educational opportunity for marginalised ethnic groups (Carr-Hill et al. 2016: 85).

In the context of economic crisis, schools often see reductions in their allocation of funding for non-wage expenditure. Where this persists over a long time, it may encourage school management to raise additional funds from the community (for example via tuition fees), with potentially negative effects on enrolment levels, particularly in schools serving poor communities (World Bank 2009: 14). In these contexts, additional financial grants to schools in areas hardest hit by crisis, may be a useful policy response (World Bank 2009: 14), helping to maintain the quality of schooling (Shafiq 2010: 10), and potentially being 'critical to the survival of schools that are likely to see a significant decline in non-salary allocations' (World Bank 2009: 3).

Joynes and James (2018: 11-12) detail two case study examples of school grant policies implemented in contexts of economic crisis, and focused specifically on issues of equitable access: Indonesia's 1999 Scholarship and Grants Programme, and Zimbabwe's School Improvement Grant. These case studies are reproduced below.

### ***Indonesia: Scholarship and Grants Programme (SGP) (1999)***

Following the economic crisis in the late 1990s, Indonesia introduced a scholarship and block grant programme to help mitigate the effects of the economic crisis (SMERU 2003 cited in Bolton 2012: 16-17; Deffous et al. 2011; Shafiq, 2010). The scholarship programme has been discussed earlier in this paper. The school grants programme was implemented in two phases which targeted both access and quality, with the first phase designed to maintain enrolment and quality, and the second phase aimed explicitly at poverty alleviation, through targeting the neediest schools in the poorest districts (Deffous et al. 2011: 8). The grants were provided to both rural and urban schools, and recipient schools were asked to 'waive primary levels fees' to prevent falls in attendance and quality (World Bank, 2009: 14). Grants were most likely to be allocated to religiously-oriented primary schools in Indonesia's rural areas, because it was these schools who had the least privileged children (Shafiq 2010: 10). Evidence of effectiveness is mixed. A rapid assessment of the programme by the World Bank in 1999 found that on the whole, block grants had not been very effective, but that they were more successful in remote areas (Bolton, 2012: 17). Hartano and Ehrmann (2001: 31) writing shortly after this, found that a large number of schools benefited from the programme, with some able to cover as much as 40 percent of non-salary expenditure, enabling them not to raise school fees. Shafiq (2010: 10, citing Frankenberg et al. 1999) states that a result of the policy was that teacher attendance and performance did not decline, whilst school principals were positive about the policy. Meanwhile, Deffous et al. (2011: 21) draw on interview data to suggest that whilst the anticipated increase in dropout from schools did not occur, the impact on equity is less evident. Bolton (2012: 17) summarises that some of the key issues influencing the successful implementation of the programme included mechanisms to effectively identify and target eligible recipients; the level of funding; the use and disbursement of funding (including the level of transparency); and the effectiveness of school committees in monitoring and supervision.

### ***Zimbabwe: School Improvement Grant (SIG)***

As part of an evaluation of UNICEF support to the Education sector in Zimbabwe, Smith et al. (2018) present a case study of Zimbabwe's SIG. Zimbabwe's education system faces a number of challenges to equitable access to quality education, including in relation to large rural-urban and wealth-related differences in access and poor attendance of children with disabilities (Smith et al. 2018: 16). Where 'the usual argument for SIGs is that funds are spent better at school level with local knowledge determining priorities... in Zimbabwe SIG provides an opportunity to increase the volume of expenditure on improving the environment for learners as opposed to ensuring greater efficiency' (Smith et al. 2018: 89). In the context of economic crisis, significant expenditure cut backs for schools, and the collapse of non-grant funding sources in recent years, the SIG has a particularly important role to play, especially for the poorest schools (Smith et al. 2018: 90). The SIG originally aimed to provide funding for all non-salary costs incurred by schools, with the ultimate aim of facilitating the abolition of school fees and improving enrolment rates, particularly for disadvantaged groups (Smith et al. 2018: 84). Originally, a differential scale was used to allocate grants to school, to enable the targeting of the poorest schools (Smith et al. 2018: 85). Grants could also be used to subsidise fee waivers for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVCs). However, changes to grant allocation criteria in 2016 have limited the potential effectiveness of this targeting. An additional school income-level criterion was introduced, such that the number of schools receiving grants fell significantly (Smith et al. 2018: 87). Secondly, fee waivers for OVCs were removed (Smith et al. 2018: 88-89). The authors note that 'at its height

(in 2015) SIG data makes the claim that over a million OVCs were being supported with access to education through the grant. This total will have dropped significantly since the criteria have changed' (Smith et al. 2018: 92-93). However, these 2016 changes have also created opportunities for schools to use grants to expand income generating opportunities and support school feeding, with potentially positive effects for equity of access to quality education (Smith et al. 2018: 89). Limited evidence of the effectiveness of the grant for equitable access to quality education is available. The evaluation notes that grants seemed to have made an 'important contribution to improving the environment of learners' (Smith et al. 2018: 97), for example through purchasing teaching and learning materials, or through using SIG for income generating activities. However, the evaluation was not able to determine the full contribution of the SIG.

### **3.5 Information-related initiatives**

Policies and programmes focused on providing information to parents and students, including concerning the 'potential future benefits of education, in terms of income, employment and social status' have received attention in the literature on what works to improve access and learning in education (Snilstveit et al. 2016: 23). In the context of economic crisis, media campaigns directed at both society at-large, and at individual households, can help to protect educational outcomes, with such campaigns helping to 'reaffirm the many private and social benefits of educational attainment' (Shafiq 2010: 9).

In their systematic review of the effectiveness of education interventions for educational outcomes in LMIC contexts, Snilstveit et al. (2016: 23) identified four studies examining the impact of information-related initiatives on school participation. All four of these reviewed studies provided participants (either students or parents or both) with information about the returns to education, i.e. potential earnings after leaving school (Snilstveit et al. 2015: 115). Improvements in school participation were found in Chile, China, the Dominican Republic and Madagascar (Snilstveit et al. 2016: 23). However, Snilstveit et al. (2015: 119) were unable to draw strong conclusions about the effectiveness of this type of intervention, owing to the small number of studies and different outcome measures. They note that 'the observed effects are mostly small and in a few cases negative', with the exception of one study in Madagascar which provided information about the returns to education to both children and parents. None of these initiatives were introduced in the context of economic crisis, whilst in response to the 1999 economic crisis, the Indonesian government accompanied their grants and scholarship programmes (discussed earlier) with a media campaign.

#### ***Indonesia: 'Stay in School' campaign***

In the late 1990s, Indonesia launched the 'Stay in School' media campaign, alongside the scholarships and grant programme discussed earlier (Filmer et al. 2001: 35). Anecdotal evidence suggests that the campaign 'helped maintain educational outcomes' (Cameron 2002 in Shafiq 2010: 10).

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