Introduction

Namibia is a large and sparsely populated country, with a population density of 2.8 people per square kilometre. Namibia’s total population was estimated to be 2,324,388 in 2016. Slightly over half of the population (52 per cent) live in rural areas and many people live in deeply remote areas.

Building on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Namibian Constitution gives all children the right to a basic education of good quality. To ensure that all children attend and remain in school, the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (MoEAC) developed a policy on inclusive education, and to that end, has been overseeing the rollout of universal primary education since 2013 and of universal secondary education since 2016.

Getting to and from school safely and easily can be a key barrier for children to exercise their right to basic education. Many are unable to attend school because of the long distances. Children living in remote areas, where families are typically from poor socio-economic backgrounds and cannot fund daily transportation to school, face the biggest barrier to accessing and staying in school. The Out-of-School Children Survey Report of 2015 indicated that 8 per cent of enrolled learners in Namibia dropped out of school because of the long distance to school. This is particularly the case with younger learners who have to walk for more than five kilometres to and from school daily (Education Management Information System Statistics, 2016). The situation is obviously worse for children with disabilities.

The effects of travelling long distances to get to and from school include fatigue, lack of concentration in class and exposure to all the dangers that come with being in an unsafe environment. These in turn lead to high drop-out and repetition rates, or total non-attendance. In fact, figures show that enrolment in the remotest schools is 3.2 times lower than enrolment in urban or less remote schools. This suggests that physical distance between homes and schools, among other factors, negatively impacts school attendance.
The need for home-to-school transport

In addition, out of a total number of 1,702 schools in 2015 in Namibia, there are 324 schools whose highest-grade offering is Grade 4 or even lower. This means that to go to Grade 5, relatively young children have to move to a new school, which is usually further away. So relatively young learners (between the ages of 10 and 13) either have to travel longer distances to schools or live in a hostel to continue their education. The hostel environment, with limited parental and psychosocial support, is not conducive to healthy social and emotional development of young children. Part of the negative psychosocial impact is the loss of connection to family life. Children with disabilities and other special needs are particularly vulnerable in this environment.

This brief is based on a study conducted to determine the need for and estimate the costs of a free national home-to-school transport programme for Namibia.

About this brief

This brief explores the viability of providing home-to-school transport, by looking at:
- the number of learners in need of home-to-school transport
- the distances between home and school
- the costs involved
- gives an overview of the methodology used to attain the results
- offers some recommendations.

The number of learners in Namibia in need of funded transport has been found to be considerable.

The calculation was based on the number of learners living in school hostels.

A serious consequence of learners being in hostels is the loss of family life and connection with the community.

The number of primary school children in hostels in some regions is worryingly high.

It has been calculated that free home-to-school transport would be both cheaper for the government and preferable for parents and learners, especially very young learners, than boarding in hostels.
The need for home-to-school transport

Learners in need of home-to-school transport

In this analysis, the number of learners in hostels is a proxy for transport need and therefore has a direct effect on the cost of home-to-school transport. The number of learners in hostels varies per region, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Number of learners in hostels


With the exception of Zambezi and Oshana regions, which do not have any hostels for primary school children, many primary age learners in Namibia are housed in boarding facilities. However, all regions in Namibia have boarding facilities for secondary school learners. This could be attributed to the fact that some schools in some regions do not offer Grades 10 and 11 classes. This means that learners are forced to go to schools further afield for their final years and stay in boarding facilities.

The fact that there are so many primary school learners in hostels in Omaheke, Kunene, Otjozondjupa, Hardap and //Karas regions gives cause for concern, as these children miss out on the benefits of family life.

Distance between home and school

Figure 2 shows the average distances (in kilometres) between home and school. The figure shows that the average distance between home and the nearest primary school is highest in //Karas region (49 kilometres) and lowest in Ohangwena, Omusati and Oshana regions (between 9 and 10 kilometres). For secondary schools, the regions with longest distances between home and school are Omaheke, //Karas, Kunene, Hardap and Otjozondjupa, ranging between 49 and 62 kilometres. The regions with the shortest distances are Oshana, Zambezi, Omusati, Ohangwena and Khomas regions, ranging between 9 and 12 kilometres.

Figure 2: Average distance in kilometres between home and school for hostel boarders

The need for home-to-school transport

Cost of home-to-school transport

The annual total national cost of home-to-school transport is the sum of the annual total cost of home-to-school transport for all the 14 regions. This was estimated to be about N$135 million (as shown in Figure 3), of which 0.2 per cent is for primary and 0.9 per cent for secondary home-to-school transport costs. The cost of annual total home-to-school transport for learners in primary school was estimated to be about N$27 million, which is about 20 per cent of the annual total cost of home-to-school transport, compared to N$107.9 million (or 80 per cent) for secondary learners.

The cost difference between primary and secondary home-to-school transport is driven by the number of learners in need of transport and the distance between home and school. On a national level, the number of secondary learners in need of transport is 4.3 times that of primary learners. Further, the average distance between home and a secondary school is 1.5 times the average distance between home and a primary school.

It is evident from Figure 3 that the total cost of home-to-school transport is only 25 per cent of hostel operating costs. It should be noted, however, that the hostel cost is only for catering and does not include costs of construction, renovation and maintenance, as data on these costs were not available for the period under review. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the cost of home-to-school transport would be much less, compared to the total costs of hostels.

As there are some areas where internal efficiencies10 can be attained within the basic education system and the cost of home-to-school transport is only 1.1 per cent of the total basic education budget, it would be possible to free up funds for free home-to-school transport. The analysis shows that funds cover the cost of home-to-school transport for primary children. This would be particularly beneficial for pre-primary and primary learners, who are most at risk.

Figure 3: Total annual cost of home-to-school transport versus annual hostel operating total costs for 2017
Source: UNICEF – based on data from MoEAC and various sources11

In terms of the regional analysis, Omaheke has the highest proportion of annual total home-to-school transport cost, at 16.7 per cent, compared to the Khomas region, which has the lowest proportion at 0.9 per cent. There are two reasons for this variation. The first is that Omaheke has the highest proportion of needy12 primary learners at 32.7 per cent, compared to Khomas, at 1.8 per cent. The second reason is that the average distance between home and a secondary school in Omaheke is the biggest at 62 kilometres compared to Khomas, at 25 kilometres. In addition, Omaheke has the fourth largest number of vulnerable secondary school learners at 1,973 (or 7.5 per cent of all secondary vulnerable learners) compared to 280 or 1.1 per cent in Khomas. Therefore, the difference in the cost of home-to-school transport observed among regions in the analysis is mainly driven by the number of children who need transport and the distance between home and school.
The study calculated:

- the number of learners in need of free home-to-school transport
- distances between home and school
- the cost of transport per kilometre
- the cost of home-to-school transport.

Although the Namibia Household Income and Expenditure Survey (NHIES) collects data on transport, the data is not disaggregated by sector and therefore is not available for the basic education sector. The ideal methodology for establishing the cost of home-to-school transport is the National Education Accounts (NEA) framework. This would enable an analysis of the costs of this sub-sector: both those currently being paid by the ministry and the costs to households. The cost of home-to-school transport was estimated on the following basis:

**Learners in need of free home-to-school transport**

The data on hostel boarders, which were sourced from the hostels division in the MoEAC, were used to calculate the number of learners in need of free home-to-school transport. The analysis followed the ministry’s policy of not allowing learners whose homes are within a five-kilometre radius of school to live in hostels. Learners in this range were therefore not included in the dataset used for analysis.

**Distance between home and school**

The distance between home and school per region was assumed to be the average distance from the nearest primary or secondary school in that region, as detailed in the NHIES report of 2009/10. This assumption was made due to the lack of data on the distance between the homes of learners and schools. Given the assumption, the average distance from the nearest primary or secondary school was helpful in calculating the cost of transport per kilometre between home and school. The NHIES reports the distances by education level (primary and secondary school) and by region. The data analysis aligned with NHIES reporting in the determination of distances between home and school.

**Cost of transport per kilometre**

To calculate the cost of transport per kilometre, the cost of transport between the departure point and the destination point was divided by the distance between the corresponding points. The cost of transport between the departure point and the destination point is based on the Namibia Bus and Taxi Association (NABTA) transport price list of 2014 (the most current list available). For calculating the average transport cost per kilometre across all locations, the cost of transport per kilometre between the departure and destination points was averaged. This average transport cost per kilometre was used to compute the cost of home-to-school transport.

**Cost of home-to-school transport**

The cost-of-home-to-school transport was derived by multiplying the average transport cost per kilometre by the average distance between home and school and the number of boarders per region. This provided the cost of one trip between home and school per region. To get the total annual home-to-school transport cost per region, the cost of one trip for all learners per region was multiplied by two (to get the cost of a return trip) and 196 school days, as per the 2017 government school calendar. The sum of the annual cost of school transport for all 14 regions gives the annual total cost of home-to-school transport for the entire country.
Recommendations

Provide free home-to-school transport:
The MoEAC should investigate the possibility of providing free home-to-school transport to all vulnerable children in remote areas. This includes those with disabilities, beginning with pre-primary and primary school learners who are most at risk. This investigation should include identifying areas where internal spending efficiencies can be attained to free up funds for free home-to-school transport for vulnerable learners. One possibility could be to take pre-primary and primary learners out of hostels and use these funds for providing them with home-to-school transport.

Improve the safety and quality of routes to schools:
The MoEAC should liaise with relevant authorities to ensure the provision of paved roads, which will improve access to schools and the safety of learners. In future, schools in remote areas should be built near to paved roads to make them more accessible.

Endnotes
9 The number of learners with special needs and those in private hostels were not considered for the analysis because they were not classified into primary or secondary school hostels and no distance data was available for special schools.
10 See the policy briefs on efficiencies in education spending and addressing teacher payroll and other placement challenges.
11 Data sources included MoEAC, MoWVT, NSA and www.distancesfrom.com
12 In terms of school transport as proxied by the number of learners in hostels.
13 For information on the NEA framework, please consult the policy brief on fiscal tracking.
14 For consistency, the 2017 school calendar was used because the analysis used the 2017 hostel statistics.