School attendance and the perceived value of formal education: Evidence from Tanzania

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Introduction: Benefits of formal education range from increased personal wellbeing to socially important outcomes such as lower population growth and improved maternal and child health, and donor organizations have invested significant amounts of money to reduce barriers to education. However, there are still many children who do not attend school, and countries in sub-Saharan Africa—particularly in rural communities—have not attained rates of primary school attendance as high as other parts of the developing world.

In many of these communities, formal labor markets are thin or non-existent requiring students to migrate to urban areas to take advantage of the financial benefits of increased education, and reducing opportunities for parents to learn about benefits of education through experience or social networks. This poster introduces data on household leaders’ perceptions of the positive or negative effects of education into a model of schooling choice.

Methods:
• Interviews were conducted with pastoralists from 196 study households (HH) in 21 rural villages bordering Ruaha National Park (Fig 1) to collect household level data on school choices, rankings of the value of education, HH income, and decision making.
• We estimated models of schooling choice and number of students, and examined the relationship between HH characteristics and perceptions of the benefits of education.

Results:
• We find evidence that characteristics of households are associated with perceptions of the value of education;
• In models of binomial schooling choices and number of students currently educated, ratings of the instrumental value of education significantly explain education choices:
  • In the binomial model, HHs rating education as important for its own sake are more likely to educate children than HHs not rating it as important;
  • In the binomial model, HHs rating education as important for herding were less likely to educate students
  • In both models, the ability to work outside of the home (earn salary) positively relates to education choices.
• Parents’ education, female income, and Maasai tribe HHs all increase the likelihood and number of children educated.

Conclusions:
• Studying education choices in a remote, rural setting without well-developed labor markets necessitates explicitly examining perceptions of the value of education.
• We find that labor market opportunities are an important consideration in education decisions—both for whether a household educates students and in explaining the number of students educated.
• Valuing education itself is an important factor in explaining household education choices, and households valuing education for its contribution to herding ability are less likely to invest in education.
• Female income increases the likelihood of schooling and number of students, corroborating previous findings on the importance of female income;
• Self-reported measures of gendered decision-making within the household indicates that education decisions made solely by the male household head result in a lower probability that children are educated, and fewer students educated overall;
• Future research will examine gender-specific motivations and decisions among these populations in rural Tanzania.

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