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The Challenges of Education and Development in Post-Colonial Kenya

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Abstract

Explorations of socio-cultural realities of many African countries in the post-colonial era reveal a very complex yet saddening reality. Poor infrastructure, large numbers of the local populations living below poverty lines, and continued civil and ethnic strife are some of the most prevalent identifiable markers of post-colonial Africa. This paper addresses the legacy of colonialism as manifested in the educational system of Kenya in the post-colonial era. I argue that although Kenya is an independent country, it is overly dependent on the West for its cultural and intellectual nourishment. I critically analyse the role of education in shaping a national sense of identity and as an agent for development. I show that the education system offered in Kenya needs a total overhaul in order to tap the best of its brains by recreating a new cultural orientation. Therefore, this paper examines, with examples from Kenya, the condition of post-coloniality as it relates to education and development, two concepts that are closely related in both national and individual discourses. I argue that through colonialism and post-colonialism, Kenyans have absorbed imperialist values that consequently condition them to think of 'development' as the process of shedding any traces of their unique traditions and cultural practices. This has led to a situation where majority of Kenyans have become schizophrenic members of a nation-state that tries to nurture citizens who strive to be Western and yet remain Kenyan. I also argue that even after three decades of political independence, Kenya's education system has not been able to tailor its content and pedagogy to the socio-economic and cultural realities of its people. Instead it continues to uphold an education system that is centered around schooling rather than learning and which consequently produces a people who are incapable of fitting into their own social environments. I often revert to the first person to articulate my own embeddedness in that which I am critiquing.

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Résumé

L'étude des réalités socioculturelles d'un grand nombre de pays africains révèle une réalité très complexe et plutôt triste. L'Afrique post coloniale est caractérisée par de pauvres infrastructures, par le fait qu'une grande partie de ses populations locales vive en-dessous du seuil de pauvreté, mais également par les interminables conflits ethniques et civils. Cet article se penche sur l'héritage du colonialisme, tel qu'il se manifeste au niveau du système éducatif Kenyan, dans la période post coloniale. J'explique que, même si le Kenya est un pays indépendant, il dépend excessivement de l'Occident, sur le plan culturel et intellectuel. J'analyse de manière critique le rôle de l'éducation en tant que facteur de développement jouant un certain rôle dans la formation d'un sentiment d'appartenance nationale. J'explique que le système éducatif Kenyan doit être réorganisé, afin de produire de bons éléments, en mettant en place une nouvelle orientation culturelle. Cette contribution examine ainsi la situation post coloniale, dans le domaine de l'éducation et du développement, deux concepts intimement liés, au niveau des discours nationaux et individuels. Je soutiens qu'à travers le colonialisme et le post colonialisme, les Kenyans ont intégré des valeurs impérialistes, qui les conditionnent à concevoir le « développement » comme un processus nécessitant la destruction de leurs traditions uniques et de leurs pratiques culturelles. Cela a créé une situation où la majorité des Kenyans sont devenus des membres schizophréniques d'un Etat-nation, favorisant les citoyens qui s'évertuent à devenir des occidentaux, tout en restant Kenyans. Après trois décennies d'indépendance politique, le système éducatif Kenyan n'est toujours pas parvenu à adapter son contenu et sa pédagogie aux réalités socioéconomiques et culturelles de sas population. Au lieu de cela, ce pays continue de faire valoir un système éducatif centré autour de l'instruction au lieu de l'apprentissage, et qui, par conséquent, produit des individus incapables de s'adapter à leur propre environnement social. J'emploie souvent la première personne du singulier, pour décrire mon ancrage dans ce système même que je critique.

Introduction

Much writing on post-coloniality has rightly addressed the need to look beyond the Western concepts and models of domination shrouded in meta-discourses that tend to divide world communities into neat categories such as 'primitive', 'developed', 'underdeveloped', 'oriental', etc. Writers such as James Clifford critique the ethnographic authority of anthropologists in representing other cultures by showing that the 'native informants' can speak for themselves without the mediation of the anthropologists and their 'scientific discipline'(Clifford 1988). Edward Said also draws attention to the construction of the 'orient' through a process of 'orientalism' where the West produces systematic images and discourses of the 'other' for purposes of cultural and economic domina-

tion. Such a process is so powerful that whatever the non-Western peoples say about themselves is negated and discounted all together (Said 1978). From such writings, scholars are drawn to other facets of domination and cultural representation. In doing so, accounts of how dominated and colonised peoples struggle against and resist the powers of colonialism enter the academy. This resistance has in the past manifested itself in movements of decolonisation, self-determination, and national independence. However, it would be unfortunate to romanticise this resistance especially because even after political independence, many former colonies are still under Western domination, both economically and culturally. As a former colony of Britain, Kenya continues to show strong strands of economic and cultural dependency on Europe and America - so much so that most of Kenya's political and economic policies are defined in reference to those in Europe and America. This is attributable in part to colonial structures inherited by the post-colonial state that ensured that economic and political structures established by the colonial system remained primarily to serve the interests of the colonizing Europe. Thus the first school to be established in Kenya in 1846 was run by the Church Missionary Society in Rabai, Mombasa with the purpose of promoting 'evangelism, but as education developed it became an instrument to produce skilled labour for the settlers' farms and clerical staff for the colonial administration'.[1] When Kenyans took over political power following independence, no structural changes were made to the existing colonial education system, except for some attempts to Kenyanise it by having local people trained to take over as teachers and leaders in the schools. Even the reports written to review the system all tended to emphasise structure rather than content.

This paper critically analyses this condition of post-coloniality and how it relates to education and development, in ways that highlight dependency rather than independence. I argue that although colonialism ended in 1963, Kenyans absorbed imperialist values that continue to condition the way they see themselves, especially through the discourse of 'development'. They see development as a process of self-denial that constructs an imagined self devoid of the assumed cultural baggage of its own traditional social and cultural practices. This has led to a situation where the majority of Kenyans have become schizophrenic members of a nation-state that tries to nurture citizens who strive to be Western and yet remain Kenyan at the same time. Kenya's education system has not been able to tailor its content and pedagogy to the socio-economic and cultural realities of its people capable of developing local solutions for local prob-

lems. Instead it continues to uphold an education system that is centered around schooling rather than learning, consequently producing a people who consistently look to Europe for models of development, and are hence incapable of producing knowledge that matches their own social and physical environments. How does one, for instance, explain a curriculum for a school in a pastoral community where one of the courses being taught and examined nationally is agriculture? In such a community where rainfall averages less than 5 inches a year, no crop can thrive yet the curriculum does not teach about animal production but a sedentary agricultural lifestyle incompatible with the pastoral way of life.

Consequently, many social environments have not been developed to meet the demands of the values learnt in school. The result is a people whose degrees and diplomas alienate them from the very societies that education should train them to be part of. Many receive an education devoid of the central ingredients that are crucial in making them active participants in their own socio-cultural existence. Thus while it is desirable to think of this post-colonial period in Kenya as one denoting a process of self-government and cultural determination, one cannot but notice the glaring reality of European and American cultural and economic domination that continues to shape all facets of Kenya's social categories including education.

Post-colonial education and the discourse of development in Kenya

There is a considerable amount of critical literature regarding the current education system in Kenya especially in curriculum design. But most of such literature tends to propose the tweaking of the existing curriculum in order to make it much more relevant to the Kenyan condition.[2] None of these studies seeks to incorporate indigenous knowledge systems in the current curriculum so as to make learning in schools more compatible with existing systems of knowing. This is partly attributable to the fact that both in the colonial and post-colonial periods, Kenya's formal education systems have been linked closely to the concept of development, which has never been conceived of in local terms. Indeed, education and development have often been seen as essential working partners in the modernisation of the so-called developing countries. It is often assumed that when people are 'undeveloped' and 'backward' they are lacking in many 'modern' qualities, one of them being education. Thus, part of the remedy for their predicament is for them to be 'educated'. There are different concepts and ways of explaining what 'education' means but there

seems to be a consensus that to be 'educated' is to be 'modern' and to be 'modern' is to be 'developed'. Many Kenyan school children articulate these issues in their everyday discourses in school, at home, and with their peers. Politicians and the other elites are the pacesetters in this process, always keen on imitating and reproducing graduates and schools modeled after their immediate past colonial masters. Thus the national public schools receive little if any attention while those private schools offering curricula modeled after the British, American, or Canadian educational systems are bursting in their seams with high student enrolments and excellent learning facilities. Everybody is thus trying to get some 'good' education so as to get a job and be part of the process of 'developing' his/her country. But even after receiving this education there are other hurdles to jump. Here is a case to ponder:

> Jack Oloo Kimani (not real name but true case) received his Bachelor of Science degree in chemical engineering from one of Kenya's public universities in 1999 but by late 2001 he was yet to find a job. Upon graduation, Jack started off looking for a job that would match his training in chemical engineering but with no success. He changed to concentrating on finding any job. When he had just finished college his colleagues in the arts had started working as sales representatives for upcoming companies in Nairobi earning what they initially considered high school salaries but they had few, if any, alternatives. Who would have thought that all those years of college would end up like this?
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> Jack moved back to 'his' rural home where his retired parents live. He resorted to this step after life in the city living with his uncle turned sour. His uncle clearly indicated that Jack had to contribute to the household budget if he hoped to continue living there. Jack had never stayed in their rural home for more than a week because his parents lived in the city all his life. He was thus finding it hard to adjust to the social and geographical environment in his 'new home'. His age-mates who dropped out at primary school have families and are finding means of livelihood tending their small gardens in the village. They even have permanent houses and their kids are going to the local primary school. Jack was unable to walk into the local shopping centre where he was bound to meet some of his peers who have previously offered to buy him a drink. He refused not because he did not drink but because with a university degree he felt he was above them and should have been the one offering them drinks. Finally he went back to a two-year technical college to earn a diploma as a motor vehicle mechanic with an eye to opening his own repair shop in the city.

Jack is a post-colonial product that traverses facets of Kenya's social and cultural systems. He is a product of a system of education that is in itself a form of governmentality (in Michel Foucault's sense) where individuals absorb dominant ideologies that construct imaginary pictures of prosperity that are shaped by foreign lifestyles. Jack is thus aspiring for something better than what his native community may be able to offer him, yet he does not quite manage to find the desired fit. Ironically a 'developing' society or country such as Kenya does need the services of a chemical engineer but the socio-economic structures that would enable the country to absorb this kind of talent are lacking. Kenya's education and economic systems have never been developed to cater for these needs. They are, however, modeled after Western models that have little, if any, relevance for the country's cultural, economic, political, and other realities. School children are continually enculturated to believe that Western education is what they need in order to make it in life; that urban centres are spaces where a good education is rewarded. A degree is thus validated in social discourse as a means of social advancement. It is, therefore, frustrating for graduates such as Jack to find themselves with a degree but no job.

This problem is further attributable to the content of a Western-oriented education that avoids teaching school children about local culture and its importance in their daily lives, and instead teaches them to hate their cultures and consequently to hate themselves. I, for instance, had to wait until I was in graduate school in North America to start thinking seriously about the relevance of my own cultural heritage. I did not know the history behind Kaaga, Meru – the place I was born – until after my undergraduate studies when I read books and papers about the Meru by foreign scholars such as Jeffrey A. Fadiman.[3] Most of my schooling had been geared towards making Western culture the central point of understanding my world. I learned more about the Mississippi and Rhine rivers than I did about Athi and Tana that have immediate relevance to development in Kenya. Granted there were no written works on local communities to be included in the curriculum, no collective efforts were made to address that anomaly or even problemitise it. Collective efforts made towards cultural enrichment were those aimed at collecting artifacts and other material items to be put in national museums as their contexts were quickly being eroded by westernisation. Thus instead of addressing the need to embody local knowledge and sensibilities in the education system they were seen as being trampled on by Western values. When we left home for school we were entering a new socio-cultural space where

anything we had grown up with was constantly challenged and demonised in favour of western values and perspectives. Thus many of our nursery rhymes were set to teach us about 'London's burning', and 'London bridge is falling down'. Even as we tried to learn English it was apparent through the texts that to be 'modern' is to have large cities with skyscrapers and numerous cars like those seen in the West. Our own cultures and traditions were constructed as backward and a hindrance to 'development'.

Since all education is value based, I was constantly taking in Western values that gradually replaced the cultural values I had learned at home from my parents and neighbours before joining formal school. Writing on the process of adopting the British curriculum to the Kenyan education system, George Eshiwani states that 'Place names and currencies were localized and complex language structures simplified... however, the overall structure of the adapted curricula remained intact' (Eshiwani 1993:157). School is a place where children learn to regard their local cultural practices as backward and inferior, always clamoring to be Western. When I was a child of school-going age we were never taught to understand ourselves first and then appreciate other cultures; we were taught that our cultural practices were backward and we had to do everything possible to dissociate ourselves from them. Children in my generation and before were products of a system that was not relevant to our cultural orientation. Whenever school learning tended to match the learning received at home it was almost always geared towards reproducing clear social and cultural boundaries. For instance, home science classes involved teaching girls about child care, cleaning the house, and sewing. Thus these classes were always seen as meant for girls and this was further supported by the fact that they were taught by female teachers. In the mid 1980s during my undergraduate training at Kenyatta University, I remenber there being five men in the home science department, who were subject to endless jokes about their injured masculinity because of taking 'women's classes'. Yet it was never lost to sight that the majority of nationally renowned chefs were men.

Besides school, the media act as another channel through which colonial values are insidiously inculcated. Popular musicians compose songs that urge Kenyans to hurry up and catch up with the developed world, that education is the key to development. I once watched a primary school programme on local Kenyan television where two schools debated on whether it was right for a woman to be a housewife.[4] One student compared being a housewife to staying in caves and wearing skins, a very backward thing to do, according to this student. This student is of course

a perfect product of a school system that is fueled by an exogenously driven and internalised sense of inadequacy in the Kenyan cultures, and is bent on annihilating any local creativity, agency, or value systems. While challenging the idea of women staying at home, the only unthinkable analogy she could articulate to show her opposition to such a lifestyle is a 'primitive' life often used in formal education to elaborate human social change and development. Such views are born of a system that was developed in part by the form of education Christian Missionaries were mandated to establish in Africa. It was a mission to demonise all traditional African practices and sell Western ones through Christianity, education, and colonialism. This legacy has lingered for many years after independence and many Kenyan children are quick to identify with Western values rather than their own.[5] Hence this student was not taught to see that the lifestyle she calls 'backward' is also a lifestyle like any other; a lifestyle where one can fend for oneself and family. She epitomises what many of us have become: a people who are quick to embrace an empty sense of modernity that deprives them of the basic ability to be who we are. We do not question this 'modern' worldview and its values but rather take it up in its entirety. It is only when things seem to go wrong when there is a desire to reflect upon the decadence of modernity.[6]

This is what Masei Ole Moita and Ben Gardner challenge in their preamble to a report on the Osotua Education Program in Endulen Maasai village in northern Tanzania:

> Throughout the world, much of indigenous/traditional/local knowledge is seen as backward or outdated and no longer relevant for today's society. Thus the current [Tanzanian] education system is focused on teaching a new way of learning with its own values, norms, and language with which to interpret the world. Unfortunately, this language or interpretive framework has not been very successful in helping individuals from indigenous groups meet the needs of their communities and often alienates 'educated' people from the rest of the society. We believe that it is important to broaden the concept of education to include all systems of knowledge, with a recognition of the value of indigenous or local knowledge within the education process (Peterson 1999:6).

Indeed, not much has been done to challenge current conceptualisations of 'modernity' and the ways in which such concepts as 'education' and 'development' that are constantly used in our social and national policies are constructed. Some of our leaders have made some strides in defending indigenous knowledge but have themselves fallen into the trap of

ossifying that knowledge as if it were fixed and bounded. Thus I cannot but agree with Ole Moita and Gardner in their observation that:

> Indigenous knowledge is often seen as something that needs to be preserved and documented before it vanishes. This philosophy treats societies as fixed in time and unable to adapt to new conditions. This thinking is often at the heart of development efforts that are meant to 'bring people into the modern world' by delivering them development and in turn changing their way of life. Alternatively, we see indigenous knowledge not as a relic to be documented and saved, but as a process that reaffirms different ways of living and interpreting the world, that ultimately leads to more appropriate models of change (Peterson 1999:6).

While it is appealing to see a modern education system incorporate indigenous knowledge, it is doubtful that such a step would be taken nationally. The national curriculum seeks to build a homogeneous society of Kenyans under a nation-state with a shared sense of identity and common future mediated through the concept of 'development'. Yet the curriculum that seeks to produce such a citizenry is received and taught to people with different potentials, experiences, and resources. Thus while it would be beneficial to have a standard curriculum for all public schools it is impossible to have the same or similar end results. With so many children eligible for school enrolment missing out on both secondary and college education, the efficacy of a national educational system is all the more open to scrutiny and critique. One such critique is to seek to understand whether education in Kenya as it is visualised in the national curriculum is a tool for development.

Education for development or in development?

In a recent survey by a daily newspaper in Kenya, it was estimated that 30 percent of the government's budgetary expenditure goes into education.[7] Indeed, a lot of time and resources have been channeled into education despite the realisation by many that the system needs a serious review.[8] Kenyans are told daily that education is the key to development, although it is not quite clear what kind of education will unlock that mystical door to development nor is there a definition of what that key is and who defines the development we crave. Hence one is left to wonder why with such a high level of education and a great many educated people in the country Kenya is still not developed. The most plausible explanation is that the kind of education Kenyans receive does not equip them with the necessary tools that would enhance development. This means that such an education is not relevant to the country's development needs or that

education is not a necessary ingredient for development. One may also question the local perception of development: what is it and how relevant is it to Kenya's socio-economic and cultural realities? In what way and areas do Kenyans perceive themselves developing?

In its regular usage, the term development describes a process through which the potentialities of an object or organism are released, until it reaches its natural, complete, full-fledged form (Esteva 1992:8). Thus to be developed, a human being has to be able to go through a process that enables one to reach a mature form that enhances the attainment of the full human potential. This involves one's ability to use one's environment successfully to reach that potential, including meeting one's most basic needs of shelter, food, clothing, and reproduction. In the nineteenth century, however, the work by scientists such as Charles Darwin, changed development as a concept from denoting the transformation that moves toward the appropriate form, to denoting movement towards an ever more perfect form. It is during this period when evolution and development began to be used as interchangeable terms by scientists (Esteva 1992:8). This is the time when human communities were seen to be going through an inevitable process of evolution from low to high. When translated to development, this notion of evolution intimated that there were some communities that were 'developed' while others were 'undeveloped'. Indeed, the West became the model for the 'developed' while the rest of the world was either 'developing', 'underdeveloped', or 'undeveloped'. It is this differentiation that brought forth colonialism which then cemented this apparent differentiation in levels of development, propelled it, and also tried to remedy it. Thus in 1932, for instance, the British government developed what it called the Law of Development and Welfare of the Colonies that sought to guarantee the natives minimum levels of nutrition, health, and education (Arndt 1981). This kind of law was based on two assumptions: first, that the natives' nutrition, health, and education were lacking or undeveloped, and second, that the colonial government had the mandate to change that condition. One would wonder what value such a law would have for a hunting and gathering community such as the Okiek in Mt. Elgon area who had never experienced famine or hunger until their land was annexed by settlers and other agriculturalists. If development is self sufficiency then many communities in Kenya had developed since they were able to meet their daily needs without upsetting their balance with their environment. Of course one cannot overlook the advent of colonisation and the world systems that ensued which soon placed East African countries in a global framework of dependence and

exploitation. With such a structure development was bound to be redefined and those redefining it became the trend setters.

It is 1949 and the concepts of 'developed' and 'undeveloped' are crystallised. In his inauguration address US President Harry Truman declares the Southern Hemisphere to be underdeveloped (Sachs 1992:2). This declaration was not made in innocence but in order to provide a comforting vision of the world order where the US would naturally rank first (Sachs 1992). Consequently, when the word 'development' entered the global vocabulary, it was loaded with Eurocentric connotations that put the world in a hierarchy in which the West ranked higher than the rest.

The West was considered to exemplify a 'developed' people to be emulated. Indeed, the West through colonialism, Christianity, and imperialism, became the dominant cultural node whose values were to be imitated and embraced. Colonial governments thus sought to 'assist' other countries to achieve that same state of development. The colonialists conquered and decimated local political systems and injected their own. Missionaries captured the souls and value systems of the colonised and made them Western or approximations thereto; and the social scientists provided in-depth accounts of how they worked or why they did not work so as to make colonisation and evangelising easier. Once colonialism and missionary work had made their breakthroughs, it was possible to let the colonies have political independence since they were already destined for economic and cultural dependence.

Our newly-crowned political leaders sought to move our countries to greater heights in order to be 'developed'. They successfully slipped into the shoes of departed colonial leaders; inherited their economic, judicial, political, and administrative systems, and encouraged their nationals to do everything possible to 'develop' their communities based on the colonial models. The colonial governments together with their counterparts in America and Eurasia, were convinced of the need to assist the new nations to develop. This led to myriad non-governmental organistions, loans and grants, and all kinds of 'assistance' packages that were focused on the undeveloped – and especially Africa. What were the results of such interventions? Let us see what Claude Ake, a renowned African social scientist, said in Abuja, Nigeria in 1995:

> Most of Africa is not developing. Three decades of effort have yielded largely stagnation, regression, or worse. The tragic consequences of this are increasingly clear: a rising tide of poverty, decaying public utilities and collapsing infrastructure, social tensions and political turmoil, and now premonitions of inevitable drift into conflict and violence (1995:2).

It is clear that despite many years of attempts to develop Africa, the livelihood of Africa's population has become worse economically, culturally, and politically. Why? My first intuition is to see it as a result of development prescribed by the West based on a Western diagnosis that does not reflect Africa's realities. Africa does not have the cultural framework necessary for adopting Western development concepts and processes. Until Africa develops a frame of economic, cultural and political institutions or systems that incorporate its own cultural framework, it will consistently remain a sorry shadow of the West. The first step along this road to recovery is a review of the processes of self-reflection and how its youth are trained and equipped for the future. All this falls under the rubric of education. Much of Africa's education can be described as a process of Westernisation, developing a people who are keener on aping the West than learning from their own heritage and histories. Let us now turn to the case of education and its relevance to Africa's development with a focus on Kenya.

Education, schooling, and development

A casual glance at Kenya's education reveals that the school system is one that is more about 'schooling' than 'education', with very little positive influence on 'development'. A clear understanding of the limitations of such a system begins with definitions of these three concepts of schooling, education, and development as used in this paper. Schooling as a concept is used here to refer to the intended process of perpetuating and maintaining a society's existing power relations and the institutional structures that support those arrangements (Shujaa 1994:15). Education is the process through which values, aesthetics, spiritual beliefs, and all the parts of a people's unique cultural orientation are transmitted from generation to the next (See Nyerere 1968; Shujaa 1994). Development as a concept is taken to refer to a process through which a community, by using its knowledge and other resources, is able to confront and maintain its world and environment for its own existence.

How then can we integrate these seemingly related concepts into a cohesive framework that would be useful for us and our communities? One way is to realise that education and school are indeed compatible and that if positively blended they can make a sound contribution to a community's, or country's positive development. Indeed, they can be used positively to serve both the interests of diverse communities as well as those of a nation-state. Thus our school and education systems should be able to do the following:

(i) Foster the development of adequate skills in literacy, numeracy, the humanities, and technologies that are necessary to negotiate economic self-sufficiency in the country;

(ii) Instill citizenship skills based on a realistic and thorough understanding of the political system, and support such citizenship skills by promoting questioning and critical thinking skills and teaching democratic values;

(iii) Provide historical overviews of the nation, the continent, and the world which accurately represent the contributions of all ethnic groups to the storehouse of human knowledge (Shujaa 1994:15).

If all our school and education systems were based upon such principles, our citizens would have full and equal participation in their respective communities, the nation, and the world at large. This kind of system would decentralise the basis of disseminating knowledge and the power of knowing in order to instill in our learners the fact that they and their own cultures did and do contribute to our being and existence. That way no culture would claim supremacy over the other and consequently no culture would negate the importance of its own existence in order to embrace another that is construed as better or 'modern'. This would be proper education and each culture would equally contribute to both local and national development.

Indeed, it is quite refreshing that this kind of thinking has started taking root in Africa through the concept of the African renaissance where some of our leaders and intellectuals are going back to their local cultural practices to seek answers to current problems.[9] It should be noted that some of these cultural practices were once sneered at in the quest to embrace Western ones. Thus traditional methods of healing, ways of resolving conflicts, and farming strategies devoid of harmful inputs are once again being considered in order to make sense of current social, economic, and political problems. This should also be seen as a cue for invigorating our education system that would enable our children to cultivate skills that would give them an all-round sense of self and of their daily contexts of livelihood. Until we do that, our education will remain just a process of schooling that dissociates our students from their own communities and hence making them dysfunctional members.

It is no wonder, therefore, that some university students in Kenya recently conceded that they were not in a hurry to finish school as there were no jobs out there for them after graduating. This is because we have developed a culture that teaches our students that education is a means to

an end, a passport to a job. Thus rote learning and mechanical studying to pass examinations has replaced the all-necessary ethic of studying to develop a deep understanding and mastery of one's life and environment. True education should give its practitioners life sustaining understandings that lead them to self-reliance. What we currently have is too much schooling and very little education (Shujaa 1994).

On education and relevance to community needs

In the five years (1998–2003) that I visited different parts of Kenya on educational trips for American undergraduate students I constantly confronted cases of education for development or relevance and in each area there were local sensibilities about the value of formal education. I once heard a primary school student from Kisima in Samburu District tell her father that she spent the day learning Swahili, English, and Agriculture. English is the official language, Swahili the national language, and Agriculture the backbone of Kenya's economy; thus all are very crucial for a young person being trained to be a useful citizen. However, a perusal of the content of the agriculture course reveals a bias towards a farming culture. How then will this pastoral girl gain from learning agriculture that does not allow her to understand her mode of life? If anything, this education will cause her to look down upon her own community's lifestyle. It is Julius Nyerere who stressed the need for education to be relevant to the community involved when he said:

> The educational system in different kinds of societies in the world have been, and are, very different in organization and in content. They are different because the societies providing the education are different, and because education whether it be formal or informal, has a purpose. That purpose is to transmit from one generation to the next the accumulated wisdom and knowledge of the society, and to prepare the young people for their future membership of the society and their active participation in its maintenance or development (1968:44).

There are two crucial issues raised by Nyerere here. First, that education should transmit a society's accumulated wisdom and knowledge to its children, and second, that education is a preparation for their future membership in their society. This is not possible in our countries today because we are torn between providing education to create national citizens and teaching an inappropriate curriculum designed by a few who have had Western formal training that tends to alienate students from their own communities. Inevitably, this system disregards the views and needs of local communities in its efforts to develop national citizens who are bi-

ased towards a lifestyle that is not necessarily relevant to their local living conditions. Students of such a system must be transformed in order to fully use their acquired education for practical living. There is nothing wrong with having an education that projects a national outlook, one that aspires to harmonise the population into a community of shared values. The problem is rather that the products of this schizophrenic system receive an education that encompasses little, if any, of the valuable tenets of cultural practices from the many communities that form the country's population. Hence it provides a weak foundation for building a national identity. This problem is clearly reflected in the calibre of graduates coming out of our educational institutions. With the increase in the numbers of Kenyans who have school certificates, diplomas and degrees, and the decrease in employment opportunities, the country is faced with the great challenge of dealing with a large population of a people who are ill-equipped to deal with a world that calls for life skills, not just academic credentials. Kenya's attempt to install a curriculum that builds self reliance came through the hastily introduced 8-4-4 system of education. While its relevance to Kenya may be clear, its content through the national syllabi and its relevance to specific communities it questionable. One is quick to want to know which employment sectors will absorb the graduates from this education system with such an alarming percentage of unemployment in the country.

Conclusion

This paper addresses the relevance of Kenya's education to the cultural and socio-economic realities of its citizens today. Although many Kenyans encounter school at different points in their lives, there is a tendency to enroll in formal school at the ages of six and seven. Prior to that many have learnt through watching, listening to, and imitating their care givers, be they parents, house helps, aunts, uncles, grand parents, or any other people with whom they associate in their daily activities as they grow up. During this time they are forming cultural orientations that are very crucial in their overall existence as humans. These orientations will introduce them to cognition, affection, and the road to understanding themselves, their environment, and how they relate to it and to others around them. Their traditional orientations help in placing them within a local and historical context where their peoples' experiences and ways of solving problems are inculcated in them through day to day activities, taboos, songs, riddles, stories, etc. As Shujaa (1994:15) says, '(a)ll societies must provide a means for their members to learn, develop, and maintain through-

out their life cycles adequate motivation for participation in socially valued and controlled patterns of action'. Although Shujaa makes these remarks in reference to the education of African-Americans in a White-dominated society, its ramifications apply to much of the education offered in Africa. Thus, although the nation-state in Kenya, for instance, did not aggressively structure the content and structure of education to reflect and support existing power relations created by colonialism, it did nothing to change them soon after independence. Indeed, the elite replaced the colonial administrators and fitted well in their shoes. Instead of transforming the country's education to reflect the local cultural realities, the government and the ruling elite continue to support an education system that was created to serve the colonial structure – hence imbuing Kenyans with cultural orientations that compel them to constantly strive to catch up with the West. Unfortunately they have never been able to catch up and there is no such chance that they will ever do it. This is because the meanings, policies, and practices surrounding education and development tend to be informed by the colonial thought and legacy that continues to disregard the contributions of local populations. Without a well defined education curriculum that empowers local actors, Kenya's education system will end up as what Mudimbe calls 'the domination of physical space, reformation of the native's minds (particularly in terms of knowledge systems and culture) and the incorporation of local economic histories into a Western perspective'(cited in Banerjee 2003).

Notes

1. www.kenyaweb.com/education/overview.htm February 2, 2004.
2. See numerous research reports by researchers affiliated with the Bureau of Education Research at Kenyatta University, work by Federation of African Women Educators (FAWE), and reports from Kenya Institute of Policy Analysis and Research (IPAR) based in Nairobi.
3. His book *When We Began There Were Witches: An Oral History of Mount Kenya*, (University of California Press, 1994) explores the history of pre-colonial and colonial Meru society.
4. There are weekly programmes on Kenya's premier public television, KBC, that hold debates in either English or Kiswahili between rival schools on various topics.
5. An example of such values is the annual beauty contests held throughout the country and culminating in finals held in Nairobi. The standard of beauty is purely Western, with being thin, tall, and having straight hair being the quintessential markers. However, when it comes to beauty contests for Miss Tourism, the emphasis is on the attire, mostly dominated by Maasai adornment.

6. The prevalence of illegal drugs in all levels of the education system in Kenya in the late 1990s to date has led many parents and educators to review the role of traditional lifestyles in dealing with the problem. See report on drug abuse reported in the *Daily Nation* of October 27, 2003.
7. www.education.go.ke January 30, 2004.
8. A commission headed by Dr. Davy Koech of Kenya Medical Research Institute was constituted to collect and collate views from Kenyans of all walks of life regarding the current system of education and made its recommendations to the government of Kenya. The report stated in part that the current system of education needs to be revamped to allow more flexibility in subjects offered and chosen by students and reduce its emphasis on rote learning. The government through the Minister of Education has directed that the number of examinable subjects in primary school be reduced to five from the usual eight.
9. One notable player in the African continent is South Africa's President Thabo Mbeki and his crusade for African systems of dealing with African problems especially the HIV/Aids problem.

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