

## **Education for Democracy and Human Rights in African Schools: The Kenyan Experience**

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**Abstract:** The increasing clamour for democracy and good governance in Africa risked being futile if a politically literate citizenry remains insignificant and is not proactively dominant in the workings of the state. A democratic culture anchored on the respect and protection of human rights need to be imbibed in wider cross sections of the citizenry. Among the structures in the society that can be used to achieve this objective, the educational systems can be effective in inculcating and fostering a culture of awareness of rights and responsibilities among the populace. But the organizational mode of current formal education systems in Africa, basically Western and trapped in its colonial historic origins in particular, have been lacking in promoting tolerance and democratic values. Rather, the authoritarian school structures have encouraged unquestioning acquiescence to authority. This paper argues that African educators should use the school curriculum to promote democracy and human rights. It stresses changes in the systems and the need to align efforts with a view to ensuring that democratic values would pervade the entire society beginning with organizations and institutions at the grassroots level.

**Résumé :** Plus de démocratie et de gouvernance réclamée à grands cris en Afrique risquent d'être vaines si une citoyenneté politiquement avertie reste insignifiante et notoirement passive dans le fonctionnement de l'État. Des citoyens de tous bords ont besoin de se pénétrer d'une culture démocratique profondément ancrée dans le respect et la défense des droits de la personne humaine. Au nombre des structures dans la société pouvant permettre la réalisation de cet objectif, il y a les systèmes éducatifs, efficaces dans l'inculcation et la promotion d'une culture de prise de connaissance des droits et obligations au niveau du peuple. Cependant, le mode d'organisation des systèmes éducatifs qui existent actuellement en Afrique, foncièrement occidentaux et pris au piège de leurs origines historiques coloniales en particulier, a failli dans sa mission de promotion de la tolérance et des valeurs démocratiques. Pire, les structures scolaires autoritaires ont encouragé une soumission à l'autorité. Le présent article défend l'idée selon laquelle les éducateurs africains se doivent de mettre à

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contribution les programmes scolaires pour la promotion de la démocratie et des droits de la personne humaine. Il s'attarde sur les mutations au niveau des systèmes et sur la nécessité de déployer des efforts pour la pénétration des valeurs démocratiques dans l'ensemble de la société, à commencer par les organisations et institutions de base.

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## **Introduction**

The increasing clamour for democracy and good governance in Africa in the last one decade or so stemmed from two broad roots. Firstly, violations of basic individual freedom and rights and authoritarianism, have remained familiar traits of majority of the governments in Africa. The strain of this style of governance has prompted a call for greater responsiveness of political leadership, respect for human rights, accountability and a two-way channel of information between the people and their leadership. There has been a call for adequacy of the legal system, laws and the independence of the judiciary, which serves to protect the ordinary citizen and the society against the oppression of the government, particularly a corrupt and unpopular government (Obasanjo 1994). These related issues of governance could only be guaranteed under a pluralistic political framework. The existence of choice in selecting those who will lead them, and the corollary existence of the chance to periodically review and renew or terminate the mandate given to the political leadership should normally provide the basis for a good government.

The second and perhaps more profound reason for the clamour for democracy in Africa, has had to do with the inability of most African governments to better the lot of the citizenry. Having arrived at political independence with the hope and promise of an increasingly better existence, the populace has been extremely disillusioned as the following quotation vividly illustrates.

When will this independence pass away so that we enjoy the peace and the life we loved so much when we were young? We used to grind our corn when and in a manner we wanted. We could make our

own soap and salt. We were introduced to the white man's products. But you do not even get them in the market now (Hagan 1991:254).

Many rural people in Africa share the sentiments of the old lady quoted above. They are quick to confess that they were better in the pre-independence or colonial period. During the liberation struggle they had been promised that things would certainly be better on attaining political independence. Many now regret the turn of events. The glorious future of milk and honey promised at the time of independence has turned in many instances into a future of woes and uncertainties (Hagan 1991).

The continuing clamour for democracy should therefore be seen in the context of perceived redemption. There is the general feeling that the previous framework, having had the chance of performing and having failed to perform adequately, should give way to democracy with the people themselves, and not just the elite determining how they should be governed (Obasanjo 1994).

In this paper, we briefly discuss the concepts of democracy and human rights education, the limitations of schools to promoting such education and what needs to be done for schools and the wider society to champion democracy and human rights education in Africa.

### **Democratic and Human Rights Education**

It is not the purpose of this paper to focus on the various meanings of democracy. A narrow political conception of 'democracy' would include the following features: (1) the accountability of rulers through regularised multi-party, free and competitive elections; (2) political institutions and policies which reflect societal values as established and changed via formal electoral and legislative mechanisms; (3) the freedom to associate and organise politically; and (4) the rule of law (Clark 1994).

For democracy to flourish, there must be a politically literate and active citizenry, who take a direct, personal responsibility in the workings of society including government. These are people

who have a working knowledge of the aim and purpose of government—how it is constituted, maintained and renewed; how government policy is formulated and implemented; the nature and scope of government institutions, process and procedures and how they operate. Political literacy goes hand in hand with political action. Knowledge of political processes and institutions that is not translated into action regularly is useless and dangerous. Therefore, democracy is sustained by people who care to find out, investigate and explore problems and issues in society and who are willing to come up with a plan of action for their resolution (Kobia 1991).

Such democratic behaviour is not genetically conditioned, inborn or inherited faculty. It is acquired or learned. This practice of democracy must therefore be taught to its practitioners. It belongs to the cultural patrimony of a people; where culture means what a person learns from, and in relation to his/her material and social environment. It refers to acquired knowledge: about what is good, bad, useful, useless, what to do, when, and how. This culture or education is what fashions values, attitudes, beliefs, and habits of individuals and social groups. It is at the root of behaviour and conduct in society. It is through it that individuals and groups learn to recognise, accept and respect established social institutions and practices. For democracy to exist, survive and prosper, it requires that the people are imbued with democratic ethos. In other words, education and culture constitute fundamental foundations of democracy (Gitonga 1987).

With growing clamour for democracy and human rights in Africa, democratic ethos cannot be left to the whims of socio-economic change. There should be a conscious attempt through the education system to create new citizens. In this process of political change, the importance of the attitudes of children need to be stressed. As Anderson (1966) wrote, children develop new conceptions of what kind of person they are. They adopt new rules for conduct and acquire loyalties to new ideas and groups. More specifically, the import of the school as a vital agent for bringing about democratic change has never been lost to the political elite. Some African governments have in the

past used formal education as an essential instrument for promoting national harmony, it has now to be used to enhance democratic ideals.

Human rights is inextricably related to democracy. Torney-Purta (1988) defines human rights as those entitlements which are basic to being human and are not connected to the accident of being born in a certain country or with the skin of a particular colour. She points out that there is a basic core of universally agreed concept of human rights as well as a collection of documents in which they are expressed. The concept of human rights itself can be divided into several forms as well. Basic rights deal with the dignity and worth of the person; civil and political rights with the right to participate in self-government; and social, economic and cultural rights with such matters as the right to work, to maintain one's culture and language and receive adequate education (Taylor 1993).

Although different societies define rights in terms of their own historical experiences, their value systems, and the economic and political realities of the current era, it has, however, been acknowledged that Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations 1989:7) meets the criteria for being considered part of the customary law of nations, and that, as such, it is binding on all states, regardless of whether or not they had a voice in its adoption (Tarrow 1992).

Democratic and human rights education as applied in this paper is a conscious effort, both through specific content as well as process, to develop in students an awareness of their rights and responsibilities, to sensitise them to the rights of others, and to encourage responsible action to secure the rights of all (Tarrow 1992). It is important that the youth in Africa are prepared for life in a democratic and pluralistic society. This becomes even more imperative as many of the African societies are plagued by intolerance and violence. Democratic and human rights education is well suited to develop respect for the dignity of the individual and the rights of others, to promote tolerance and acceptance of difference and to strengthen respect for fundamental freedoms. As such democratic and human rights education is a

key element of the education process in the sense that it contributes to the full development of the human personality, building personal capacities and developing the attitudes, skills and knowledge which individuals and groups need to live in harmony in pluralistic societies. The significance of such teaching for society is underlined by the fact that democratic and human rights education can reach through the classroom out into the community in ways highly beneficial to both (Taylor 1993).

### **School Organizations as an Obstacle to Democratic and Human Rights Education**

Despite much lip-service to the idea of education for democracy and human rights, the organizational mode put forward by Western education is essentially authoritarian in nature (Harber 1989). A tenation study of civic education concluded, for example, 'that perhaps a hierarchical organization such as the school is not the right setting for inculcating democratic values' (Oppenheim 1975:21). What characterises Western education, however, is not simply its authoritarianism, but that this takes the form of bureaucracy, the dominant mode of organization in modern industrial society. Parsons (1960:2), for example, has noted that 'one of the most salient structural characteristics is the predominance in it of relatively large-scale organizations with specialised functions which is loosely referred to as "bureaucracies"'. .

More specifically Dreeban (1968) argues that it is the school which provides the child with his or her first experience of the norms of bureaucratic behaviour associated with modern work place. He suggests that the school contributes to the learning norms of universalism as children become members of categories such as years, classes, and houses and that individuals do not warrant special treatment in the application of rules. They also learn to make the distinction between the person and the social role occupied (e.g. gender, race, religion, etc.) and become used to the notion of roles based on the division of labour according to function. Secondary

schooling also involves an increasing amount of contact based on specificity to the task in hand (e.g. a short period with a teacher of a particular subject) rather than the more diffuse personal relationships of family and friends.

Arguing along similar lines, Shipman (1972) suggested that schools have been organised to teach the impersonal contractual values and relationships that typify the transition from an agricultural to industrial society. Thus the values that are enforced in the school are those which are needed for the efficient functioning of bureaucratic organizations and the maintenance of social order—obedience, abiding by the rules, loyalty, respect for authority, punctuality, regular attendance, quietness, orderly work in large groups, working to a strict timetable, tolerance of monotony, the ability to change readily from one situation to the next and the ignoring of personal needs when these are irrelevant to the task at hand. If school organization in the West does have this essentially bureaucratic nature, then to what extent have the African schools, based often on colonial models, adopted its key features?

Colonial rule in Africa has been criticised by Dudley (1973:38) for not promoting the tolerant and participant political values required in a parliamentary democracy. Instead, through their authoritarian school structures, schools encouraged unquestioning acquiescence to authority. As it has been argued many times, the colonial state in Africa did not only need an 'educated native' but 'a loyal educated native'. This was to be achieved through education based on religious teaching. As the Official Scheme of Development of African Education emphasized:

If we are to avoid the disastrous consequences which elsewhere have followed the forcible divorce of religion and education, it is clear that although the right of conscience will remain inviolate, religious instruction and observance must, within the competence of established and accredited religious bodies, continue to be available for children of all parents who desire it.

The principle just enunciated is as valid in its future application to non mission as to mission schools (Mamdani 1976:160).

This policy was a result of the memorandum of British missionaries working in East Africa to their government. It emphasized that there was an overwhelming weight of competent testimony that if education was not to be disruptive of morality and the social order, it must have been on a religious basis (Oliver 1965:268). The British government therefore embraced missionary education because of its political and ideological usefulness since it imparted skills such as reading, writing and arithmetic as well as values which included loyalty to the existing order and disciplined self-sacrifice in the interest of that order. Lord Lugard was clear in his appreciation of this in a discussion of the education of the sons of Fulani chiefs in Nigeria.

I hope that they would thus be taught not merely to read and write, but to acquire an English Public Schoolboy's ideas of honour, loyalty and above all responsibility. It is by such means that I hope the next generation of Fulani rulers may become really efficient, reliable and honest cooperation with the British in the administration of the Protectorate (Low and Pratt 1960).

With regard to discipline, military type of discipline was considered a necessary aspect of training Africans:

To the African in his primitive state, military or semi-military discipline makes a strong appeal. No better example can be found than the discipline of the military and police forces of the colony which has been adopted in government schools...

...At Machakos Government School a serving military discipline is combined with a large measure of self government by the prefects of the school, with whom authority in all minor matters is now completely vested, subject merely to the general superintendence of the staff (Education Department 1926:16).

The emphasis in most African educational institutions on blind obedience to school authority as constituted through prefects, teachers, and the headteachers had a colonial base. This created



unidirectional flow of orders and communication and provided no corresponding channels for the students to communicate with the authority.

Mamdani (1976:162) appropriately describes colonial education which was inherited at independence as follows:

This was not education, but training; not liberation, but enslavement. Its purpose was not to educate a person to understand the objective limits to the advancement of individual and collective welfare, but to train a person to accept even administer the limits in an 'efficient, reliable and honest way'. Such training could most effectively be imparted in a controlled environment... a boarding school. The boarding school was a total environment, much like a jail or an insane asylum. Its purpose was to turn out a particular breed of man, 'loyal' Afro-Saxons—the collaborating class'.

Emphasis on loyalty as the basic tenet of colonial education reinforced the bureaucratic model of the Western school introduced in the colonies. The common pattern of schools in independent African countries was strict and puritanical in the moral code. Oversimplified religious instruction had suggested that it was sinful to question authority, for it sprang from an infallible source—the Church for the Catholics and the Bible for the Evangelical Protestants. Unfortunately, this doctrinaire attitude had spilled over into the classroom, creating authoritarian pupil-teacher relations, an old-fashioned hierarchical, British house/prefects system and too often a reliance on learning by rote (Cliffe 1971:63). These school norms were hardly designed to prepare children for a free and democratic society. The new African leadership hardly questioned the colonial educational ethos. They were anxious to retain and enhance the bureaucratic hierarchical school structure as a way of inculcating among the pupils the sense of punctuality, honesty, obedience, hard work and respect for authority.

One aspect of the inherited school organization that has been criticised heavily as contravening democratic values is the existence of the prefect system. One writer has suggested that:

The way in which prefects are appointed establishes the style in which they perform their duties. If a prefect is appointed by the headmaster he will naturally look immediately to the head as his source of authority... consequently he will tend to be regarded as a 'rather remote and authoritarian figure' (Ungoed-Thomas 1972:84).

Most schools in English-speaking African countries have some form of prefect system. The basic role of the prefects normally is to act as general agents of social control—checking lateness, reporting misbehaviour to teachers, organising the tidiness of the school compound and generally acting as messengers of the staff. Each class also usually has its own monitors responsible for making sure the classroom is tidy, that pupils are not noisy when the teacher is not present, collecting books and other assignments. Prefects usually have their authority reinforced by some sort of formalisation—usually their names are listed on the head teacher's notice board and often they are distinguished by a difference in their uniform (Harber 1989).

Prewitt (1971:19) noted the discrepancy between the egalitarian-democratic values taught in programmes of civic education in East Africa and the existence of a prefect system based on satisfying the authorities rather than the student constituency. School heads often used to the bureaucratic nature of the school structure, however, seem to perceive nothing undemocratic in the selection of prefects, since they argue that such selection is based on merit. Moreover, the pupils themselves seem to see such a system as fair and sensible. In a study in Nigeria in which students were asked if they thought it was a good thing to have prefects and monitors, they expressed overwhelming approval (Harber 1989:83).

Some educators have proposed the setting-up of school councils as a way of introducing student participation in the governance of schools. Entwistle (1971:59), however, argued that there is a wide variety in the way school councils can be organised. On the one hand they may be safety valves where the headteacher or representatives of the staff listen to the grumbles of the pupils and explain problems away. On the other hand, the council may be run in a way that

provides genuine feedback on legitimate pupil grievances in order to administer the school more efficiently. At the other extreme, there are the nearly autonomous pupil councils of some progressive schools. King (1973:141) argued that, where they existed in Britain, school councils tended towards the first two types rather than the last one, being more of the nature of channels of communication than of democratic decision-making. He found that in practice few were even an introduction to methods of democracy, as there was not much evidence that elections had taken place and usually the head could veto decisions by councils. This was no suggestion that school councils were necessarily a waste of time, but that in the overall contents of the formal school, their function is likely to tend towards the bureaucratic rather than the democratic practice (Harber 1989:83).

In a study in Northern Nigeria, secondary school students were asked whether or not it was a good idea to have a school council. None of the schools studied had a school council. There was a strong approval of the idea. A majority of the students saw it either as a forum where complaints could be voiced and grievances settled or as a means by which pupils would have a better idea of what was going on in the school. In essence, the pupils liked the idea of a school council because channels of communication in the school were unsatisfactory (Harber 1989:85). No mention was made of a school council as a way of familiarising pupils with election procedures nor as a way of being involved in democratic decision-making about school policy. Considering the way in which a school council is likely to operate, these students were said to have a limited realistic view of its benefits. Their experience of school had highlighted what is often one of the major constraints of bureaucratic operations—that of communication. School had made the pupils aware of its bureaucratic shortcomings, however, by itself it was unlikely to produce fervent demands for more democratic participation. To put it differently, schools by their bureaucratic nature and operation are not likely to instil democratic ideals in the students.

Another important aspect of concern is one of education and rights of the student. As it has already been argued in this section, the school as a bureaucratic organization proceeds on the basis of written rules. The duty of the students to obey the rules is constantly stressed. Student rights are very much a minor concern, if indeed they are of any concern at all in most schools. It has been argued that organizationally most schools tend towards a model of authoritarian bureaucracy with decision being made by a few people at the top of the hierarchy and then executed down the chain of command. Post-primary schools in many of the English-speaking countries are very authoritarian. Physical punishment, carried out by teachers and senior students is administered freely. Lessons are very much teacher-centred with little student participation. The overall result is an experience that encourages dependence and passivity rather than independence and self-discipline.

This authoritarian nature of schooling in African education systems is not likely to make it a source of awareness of citizen rights. Such an awareness is detested lest it contributes to increasing student unrest in schools. Hence, in this sense, political socialisation reinforces the duty of a citizen to the state, though alongside the traditional sense of duty to elders and parents in the various African cultures, which now develops a sense of duty to more impersonal objects—rules, procedures and institutions.

The second level of influence is the official curriculum which lays emphasis on the role of the school in promoting national consciousness and loyalty through the manipulation of national symbols such as the flag, the loyalty pledge and the national anthem. There is also a strong emphasis on national unity and other duties of the citizen in textbooks (Harber 1982). The combined effect of these patterns of socialisation is that educated Africans—predominantly from the school system—define their citizenship in relation to their duties but not to their social rights. This analysis has been supported overwhelmingly by a good number of studies. In East Africa, Koff and Van Der Muhll (1971:78) found that pupils regarded the most

important purpose of schooling as the creation of good citizens and obedience to authority (whether parents and teachers in the case of primary or law in the case of secondary students) was the most frequently mentioned attribute of the best citizen. This attribute is basically a passive orientation. In Northern Nigeria, students heavily stressed duties over and above rights in terms of what constituted a good Nigerian citizen (Harber 1989:94).

On the overall, it would seem that schooling tends to contribute to the rather one-sided emphasis on duty in the African students' view of national citizenship. This may be desirable for purposes of trying to encourage abstract ideas of national loyalty. But if democracy is the eventual aim and if it is the case that those with more education are more likely to participate in politics, then more emphasis on rights would be desirable among the educated Africans. A greater concern with political rights is however not a likely outcome of the present school socialisation (Milbraith 1965:122).

### **Democratising Decision-making and Human Rights Education in Schools**

The need for democratic and human rights education does not only stem from continued clamour for democratic governance in many of the African countries, but also from the educational crisis precipitated by the bureaucratic mode of governance that has manifested itself in school strikes which have been rampant in most of the countries. In the mid-seventies for example, the Nigerian Government became quite concerned about what was described as indiscipline among pupils. The Federal Government showed the extent of its concern when it decided to post soldiers to all post-primary institutions from January 1978. These were to assist the principals and staff with disciplinary problems in the school and provide an example of military discipline for pupils to emulate. General Obasanjo, then the military Head of State, gave an example of what was to be expected when he personally caned a pupil while touring a school because of the pupil's shabby appearance and the disrespectful way in which he

answered a question. In Mali, security forces wounded ten students when they opened fire during secondary school riots protesting at the dissolution of the student union (Harber 1989). Security forces brutally against striking secondary students are abundant in many of the African countries.

Many of the school strikes are not the underlying cause but rather the spark which reflects deeper feelings of malaise and frustration. The essence of the problem is communication. As a conference of principals of post-primary institutions in Nigeria noted, poor communications between heads and students leads to misunderstandings and generates suspicion and indiscipline (Harber 1989). Time and time again things go wrong—allowances do not turn up, classes are left untaught, food is in short supply, examinations are not administered on time, shortage of teachers, corruption and many other factors. The system on which students depend and which is so important to their future frequently seems to be failing them. No explanation is forthcoming because there is no regular system of communication and no expectation that the school head and staff should explain what happened. Complaints are met with high-handed authoritarianism and resentment grows till in the end a small incident sparks off violence, which can include very serious attacks on staff, property and buildings.

It is apparent that a major factor in the existence of strikes and riots in many African secondary schools is the problem of lack of communication between layers of the school hierarchy. This cannot simply be attributed to senseless bloody-minded students and staff, however. The lack of effective communication comes with an attempt to operate a bureaucratic organization in a setting where congruent norms of behaviour are not sufficiently developed. Attempts to improve communication, such as bulletins, assemblies, suggestion boxes, school magazines and even school councils (King 1973:141) are quite welcome, since they are designed to make the bureaucratic machinery run more efficiently. They should not, however, be confused with inculcating democratic norms or pupil participation in

school decision-making and in human rights education. The key question, therefore, is what needs to be done?

First, there is a need to reform the decision-making structure and social environment of the schools. The emphasis in many educational institutions on blind obedience to school authority as constituted through prefects, teachers and headteachers which as we have already observed is a continuation of the colonial tradition, needs to be changed because it creates a unidirectional flow of orders and communication and provides no corresponding channels for the students to communicate with their teachers and the school head.

The education system in many countries operates on the premise that the best way to educate its youth is to reduce them to the level of docility. The authoritarian structure of schools, naturally inculcates fear in students and rewards blind obedience to authority. Consequently, any attempts by students to have a say in the running of schools is viewed with great disapproval and in some cases punishment. In Kenya as in many English-speaking countries, school heads and boards of governors of secondary schools are vested with arbitrary powers to suspend and expel students without being given opportunity to be heard (Republic of Kenya 1972). In such a situation, the students are not likely to question teacher's authority as it might mean being deprived of secondary education. As opportunities for secondary education are limited, not many parents will encourage their children to defy or question school authority. There are times, however, when students feel they cannot tolerate the humiliation and oppressive nature of their school authority. When this point is reached, the students will revolt regardless of the consequences of the action. The violent reaction of students in such a situation is the result of the authoritarian conditions they have to deal with (Kinyanjui 1975:23).

In this regard and on the basis of many countries educational objectives that education systems should produce informed and critical citizens who can participate fully and meaningfully in their society (Republic of Kenya 1965), it then follows that students should

be active participants in the institutions which socialise them for their future roles. To accomplish this objective, an overhaul of the power structure within secondary schools is therefore needed. This may sound threatening to school heads and teachers' authority in schools, but in reality it may establish a more favourable atmosphere for learning, and thereby enhance teachers' effectiveness. Reforms of this kind entail an establishment of lines of communication between teachers and pupils, exposing students to what are perceived as their rights and responsibilities, and a shift from the situation where students are passive recipients of knowledge to active participation in the learning-teaching process. In addition, it may entail accepting that it is not a crime for students to organise themselves and elect leaders who articulate their grievances and views within the institutional settings. The perception that secondary school pupils are immature is invalid in view of the fact that some of these students are around eighteen years, which is a voting age. A major constraint in the realisation of these reforms is not the age of the students but the political will and attitudes both students and the school authorities to change.

With regard to the administration of discipline, the present regulations governing suspension and expulsion from secondary schools do not give students an opportunity to be heard or appeal against unfair decisions. The whole question of punishment within the Kenyan schools, for example, is against students and has legal backing (Republic of Kenya 1972). This is against all tenets of natural justice. The attitude displayed by the Kenya Government, more particularly the Ministry of Education and the press towards student strikes is a clear case of condemnation without being given the opportunity to be heard. A change of this attitude on the part of the educational administrators is badly needed. An amendment to the school discipline regulations of 1972 is required. The amended regulations should give students an opportunity to be heard before any punishment is meted out. Mechanisms should also be provided to give students a fair hearing and an appeal in cases of injustice. The present



structure gives school heads power to prosecute and be judges at the time in all matters involving student protest.

The involvement of parents in maintaining school discipline also needs a fresh examination. In Kenya, whenever students go on strike and a decision is made that they ought to be punished, parents are summoned to be informed of the nature of the punishment. In all cases they are required to guarantee good conduct of their children in addition to a fine, if school property was destroyed during the protest. Apart from this, there is the normal parent participation in school affairs in the form of financial contributions through school levies or *harambee* (self-help) fund-raising occasions. To democratise the decision-making process, in the schools, parents' role should be broadened beyond raising of funds. Parents-Teachers Associations (PTAs) should be involved in the management of schools and in the general education of their children instead of largely operating as forums for raising funds for the schools. As a matter of fact, even the fund-raising process is not at all democratic since PTA meetings are often convened to endorse decisions already taken by the school head and a clique of influential PTA members. PTAs should be concerned with day-to-day affairs of their schools as well as with the general education policy. They should work in conjunction with the Ministry of Education to find solutions to educational problems.

The relationship between the staff and students is an important area of school management. In this regard, the position of the school head is crucial. The style of leadership of the school head determines whether the students and staff will have respect and confidence in the management. In the absence of this respect, the legitimacy of the head's power and authority is undermined. This in turn affects the morale of the staff and discipline in the school. The ability of the school head to listen to students grievances and points of view, and his or her willingness to communicate the management's views and decisions are critical in the smooth running of the school (Nkinyangi 1981). Unfortunately, such qualities may be lacking among many

heads in Kenya who often attain their positions through political patronage.

In terms of the curriculum and the syllabus, democratic ideals and human rights have centred on disciplines such as law and political philosophy, which are not subjects of the primary and secondary school curricula. The systematic introduction of democratic and human rights education has therefore to take the form of separate programmes or specific subjects or as part of many subjects by integrating elements of it into the teaching subjects such as civics, literature, religious education or more specifically the social studies. In most African countries, the approach has been towards integration, but in subjects like civics and history, they have tended to be descriptive in a more conservative manner by avoiding or playing down potentially controversial topics (Scott 1983:273). In Kenya, for example, while the secondary schools syllabus in history for the Kenya National Examination Council aims at helping the candidate to understand political developments up to the present day, work critically and express an opinion in terms of content, it is strong on resistance to colonialism and the growth of nationalism, but avoids controversy on certain post-independence developments. Overt and conscious political education, while it has not appeared in the curriculum as such, has taken place via history and civics, but in a 'safe', quiet and passive manner aimed at political conformity rather than at critical inquiry. The introduction of multiparty political system in Kenya in 1992 has hardly changed the mode and style of teaching.

Political socialisation in Kenya, therefore, largely takes the form of a conservative approach, which attempts to use political education to support, reinforce and legitimise the existing system of government and its policies. It tends to emphasize factual knowledge of the system and devalues discussion of controversial issues or the possibility of alternatives or reforms. This uncritical conservative approach is reflected in the syllabuses of history and government in primary and secondary schools, which were developed for the 8-4-4 education system. Although the content is now more potentially political,

controversial and open to discussion such as the problems facing modern Africa, the Kenyan political system, African socialism, democracy, nationalism, international relations and others. The syllabuses seem to view this content as received factual knowledge rather than as there being alternative viewpoint and contradictory arguments and values (Kenya Institute of Education 1985).

In textbooks, the benevolent images of authority are transmitted to pupils. Thus, the tendency is for children to idealise authority roles and to see them as heroes. Yet, if corruption and nepotism, which have become rampant within these heroes have to be understood and combated, then at some point their existence must be recognized and realistically discussed in the Kenyan schools. As it has been aptly put, 'apart from civics lessons in primary schools which give the skeletal description of the government hierarchy—the ruling party, parliament, the speaker, minister and MPs—there is no serious political education offered in Kenyan schools' (Harber 1989). This is reinforced by raising of the flag on parade and the loyalty pledge on the first or last day of the school week. At secondary school in particular the President's portrait hangs in every classroom and school offices, constantly reminding the students as to who wields power and authority in the country.

If Kenya really wishes to move towards a more democratic, open and a participatory form of society, then the ethers of free discussion will have to be an important consideration for Kenyan educators. This will have to be a democratic or liberal education in inculcating societal values. Such an approach stresses the ability of the individual to make up his or her own mind after consideration and discussion of relevant evidence, fairness, toleration of the values of others, the freedom to make political choices, a critical stance towards political information, individual rights and responsibilities and others.

The learning content of democratic and human rights education has to be organised and sequenced across the successive levels within the concerns of particular disciplines; that is, to be matched according to the developing maturity of the pupils and what they are able to

grasp. The NCKK (n.d.) suggest that beginning in the home, through pre-school, primary and secondary, children can be introduced to fundamental ideas embodied in the concept of democracy and human rights. For instance, that an individual deserves consideration, kindness and sufficient material goods to live as well as the notion of freedom and sharing with others inside and outside the family. Shafer (1992:165) emphasizes that as children begin to understand the value of working as responsible members of the group, they can be introduced to underlying concepts of democracy and human rights as respect for the importance of individual opinions and views of others, freedom of expression and dialogue about any strange and threatening aspects. As they move to higher schools, serving wider and more diverse communities, the notion of respect for other human beings tolerance and acceptance of differences can be emphasized.

With regard to delivery of information or teaching about democracy and human rights, a focus would be on helping pupils to become acquainted with and understand basic documents on the concepts of democracy and human rights. Above that, there should be participatory teaching and learning which leads to the acquisition of skills and values basic to democracy and human rights. Pupils will need to be given real experience of democracy and human rights situations so as to create a personal appreciation of their importance. This will in particular require activity-based methods such as group work, problem-solving exercises, drama, role play and simulation (Taylor 1993). The use of the pupil's own questions and interests are important as a starting point. Cooperative learning methods have been shown to promote interpersonal and intergroup relationships. Almost everything which happens in the classroom and in the school is relevant to education for democracy and human rights. An appropriate climate in a school is an essential complement to effective learning about human rights and democracy, which are best learned in a democratic setting where participation is encouraged where views can be expressed openly and discussed, where there is freedom of expression for pupils and teachers, and where there is fairness and justice.

Democratic and human rights education cannot be provided as part of the school curriculum without attention to the pre-service and in-service training of teachers. Besides training in the content of democratic and human rights and activity-based, cooperative and group work methods, teachers will also need to be committed to the ethos and values of democracy and human rights and aim at changing society towards more complete fulfilment of democratic and human rights goals (Sebaly 1987:208). Rendel (1992:160), however, points out the difficulty confronting teachers in the teaching of democracy and human rights; namely, its political, moral and philosophical dimensions. She believes that some training in philosophy and knowledge of philosophical arguments about human rights are necessary, to enable teachers deal with the difficult and controversial issues about democracy and human rights. To know the arguments and the counter arguments would according to Rendel give most teachers greater confidence in handling issues that are likely to stir emotions, consciences, and beliefs.

What is being proposed here is that schools initiate activities for education for democracy and human rights through basic instruction in which civic education marks an elementary 'political literacy'. Such instruction should not be regarded as a straightforward classroom subject among others. The aim is not to teach precepts as rigid rules, which could slide towards indoctrination, but to make the school a model of democratic practice so that children, can understand the basic of practical problems, what their rights and duties are, and freedom of other people. Learning democracy in school should be reinforced by practices that have already been tried out, including drawing up charters for the school community, setting up pupils parliaments, role-playing simulating the functioning of democratic institutions, school newspapers and other activities. As education for citizenship and democracy is *par excellence* an education that is not to the space and time of formal education, it is also important for families and other members of the community to be directly involved (Delors *et al.* 1996).

It is however reckoned that civic education is a complex matter covering acceptance of values, acquiring knowledge and learning how to take part in public life. It cannot, therefore, be considered ideologically neutral since the pupils' conscience is necessarily challenged by it. To safeguard independence of conscience, education in general, from childhood throughout life, must also build up a critical sense that makes free thought and independent action. When pupils become citizens, education is likely to be their constant guide along a difficult path, where they will have to reconcile the exercise of individual rights based on public freedoms with the fulfilment of duties and responsibilities towards others and to their communities. Therefore, there should be synergetic relationship between education and the practice of participatory democracy, in that, not only should everyone be trained to exercise their rights and fulfil their duties, but use should be made of lifelong education in order to build an active civil society which occupying the middle ground between scattered individuals and distant political authority, would enable each person to shoulder his or her share of responsibility in the community with a view to achieving true solidarity. In this regard, the education of each citizen should continue throughout his or her life and become part of the basic framework of civil society and practical democracy. It would even become indistinguishable from democracy when everyone plays a part in constructing a responsible and mutually supportive society that upholds the fundamental rights of all (Delors *et al.* 1996).

### **Implications for the Wider Society**

Despite the democratic character of many African traditions, the culture of democracy failed to thrive during the colonial period as those traditions were thwarted by colonial rule. Thus at independence, the outgoing colonial authorities handed power to emerging political elites who did not only institute repressive regimes, but made politics the exclusive preserve of a few individuals leaving the vast majority of citizens as passive onlookers and apolitical. The lack of interest in political issues was nurtured by the patronising attitude of leaders who calculate that they could succeed in keeping the masses from political

participation by providing them with basic needs. The patronising attitude became the cause and consequence of non-participation.

The democratisation of schools is aimed at fostering a democratic culture in the wider society. This would imply people sharing certain values and attitudes about the just management of society and the equitable distribution of resources, services and opportunities. Democratic values would pervade the entire society if they were rooted in grassroots organization and institutions (Kobia 1993). The weight of civil society is key to the quest for democratization. The totality of groups, clubs, societies and institutions that meet as social, cultural, religious, or economic entity have as their objective to advance the interests of members. In the process, they are accountable to their members and value freedom to organize democratically. Such practices should be encouraged and nurtured since they are key to the democratic transition. The organizations and associations in many countries have acted as checks and balances against abuse of power by political actors (Joinet 1991). This is essential to development as well as to the growth of democracy.

The much cherished sustainable development rarely occurs in an atmosphere of intolerance, and it is now generally recognised that development and human rights are inextricably intertwined. To insist on economic development at the expense of fundamental freedoms and human rights is to force people into a false dichotomy. The choice can never be either economic development or human rights. There is a package of human rights that cannot be divorced from development and these include such economic and social rights as: the right to food; the right to education; the right to health care and the right to work (Boysyut 1990). This is in addition to conventional civil rights which it is argued, their respect does not require any major financial effort on the part of any government concerned and large financial assistance from developed countries. The common denominator between civil and political rights on the one hand, and economic and social rights on the other, however, is the right to participate. The right to participate calls for the free and meaningful association of peoples

to pursue their agreed goals, which may be civil, political, economic and social without any form of interference. Participation by people in matters that affect them directly is *sine qua non* of development (Kobia 1993).

Such is the socio-economic and political environment in which democratised schools could exist to enhance the democratic and human rights process in the African context. Education will not be satisfied with bringing individuals together by getting them to accept common democratic values that are not reflected in the wider society. It must answer the question for what purpose: As a way of envisioning a society liberated from repressive and corrupt rule?

### **Conclusion**

The increased clamour for democracy and human rights in the governance of African countries suggests that schools which are inextricably linked to the society should start inculcating such values. Schools, by bringing a large proportion of the youth under their roof, are better placed to be starting points for promoting democracy and human rights values in society. Increased provision of education, in itself is not enough for political change to move in a democratic direction. Literacy and the skills necessary for the operation of complex bureaucratic enterprises do not themselves ensure democracy and human rights.

This paper has explored some problems and ways of enhancing democratic and human rights education. African educators should openly recognize the need for this type of education in schools and find a form of political education that is congruent with the wider system of political democracy and human rights that is being clamoured for in Africa. It also emphasized that democratising educational practice should go hand-in-hand with fostering a democratic culture in the society. Democracy in the wider society would entail people sharing certain values and attitude about the just management of society and the equitable distribution of resources,



services and opportunities. Organization and institutions at the grassroots level foster democratic values in the entire society better.

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