

# EDUCATION AND CULTURE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF EAST AFRICA

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**Africa is rich in terms of its young human and other natural resources like oil, gas, gold, uranium, diamond, forests and fertile soils. The continent is currently putting together developmental strategies that include: regional economic communities, infrastructure that include Information, Communication, Technology (ICT), roads, bridges, electrical grids, telecommunication, strengthening health and education capacities, security etc. However, for the purpose of this article the authors have concentrated on the East African region and on two components culture and education the double bind for development.**

## CONCEPTUALIZING EDUCATION, CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT

Education and Culture are inseparable twins and they both contribute to general development. The aim of education is to develop the mind, the attitude of reason, that spirit of democracy that makes us responsible citizens.

Culture paves way for education while education flavours the cultural values in life. Education rooted in culture serves as the engine of development and extracts the best values tested over time in the face of adversities.

Cultures keep adjusting to the times without losing much of the original. Emphasizing

culture means giving members of a community an active role in directing their own destinies. It is also evident that cultural resources of a community can be converted into an economic wealth by promoting the unique identity, tradition, cultural products and services.

**Education** is defined as the act or process of importing or acquiring general knowledge, developing the powers of reasoning and judgment and generally of preparing oneself or others intellectually for skills, profession. Education is judged to be a social or public affair as the learner is initiated into social life through education<sup>1</sup>.

Education always occurs within a given historical and social cultural context, it

acquires thereby contextual meaning<sup>2</sup>. Education can be defined as socialization.

**Culture** is a multifaceted phenomenon. In anthropology and sociology, culture denotes indifferently all manifestations of social life which are not merely concerned with the reproduction and sustenance of human beings. Thus customs, habits of association, religious observances, even specific beliefs, may be accepted as part of a culture<sup>3</sup>.

Culture is therefore a system of knowledge by which people design their own actions and interpret the behaviour of others. It is not static but rather keeps on evolving. Culture is transmitted through language, material objects, ritual,

institutions and art from one generation to the next. In this respect, culture represents a collective mode of life spanning a particular period, a repertoire of beliefs, styles, values and symbols. According to E. Durkheim (1858-1917), a French sociologist and philosopher, the task is to understand how culture works in its social context and its impact upon other elements of the society and the whole social system<sup>4</sup>.

In our particular instance, how do culture "functions" influence development in East Africa?

**Development** is the specific state of growth, advancement, progress in socio-economic and political spheres. In the words of Armatya Sen, winner of the 1998 Nobel Prize in economics, development entails a set of freedoms, political transparency in relations to people, opportunity, and access to credit, protection from abject poverty, income supplement and unemployment relief.

The three concepts above in contemporary Africa are complex triple bind. The pre-colonial societies of the East African region used to preserve and develop African customary education, which helped them to adopt and explain their own future, understand the institutions, laws, language and values inherited from the past for development.

## **EDUCATION CHANGES IN THE LATE COLONIAL AND POST-COLONIAL PERIOD**

These periods are characterized by: a massive expansion at all levels; a

provision of technical and professional instruction and Africanization of the curricula and professions.

Africans were opposed to colonial education from the start. However, that opposition was not formalized and sustained until the formation of the African welfare cum-political associations in the early 1920s. Africans resorted to open politics to rectify the situation. In this endeavour, they made education one of the rallying points against colonialism.

In any case education was an aspect of politics, and the missionaries provided very little literary education. Hence, all the African political associations in one way or another took education as one of their major concerns.

Education at this point in time was understood in the context of social change, as it became the agency for effective communication with and mobilization of the masses. Education too brought economic development and cultural struggle. Following independence, African countries saw the need to link higher education with African freedom movement that included:

- The aspiration to replace European decision makers by indigenous recruits;
- The stress on ensuring supply of high level man power pre-requisite for economic development;
- Embracing intellectual and cultural renaissance that provides trained man power, research, culture and intellectual life of a community<sup>5</sup>.

One of the major focuses of East Africa governments' policy and development planning after independence was education.

Education lay at the heart of the independent governments' attempts to foster social change and promote development. Education is a purposeful activity. It implies aims, goals, and ideals.

J. Iliffe, a Professor of African history at Cambridge University, writing on colonial change in Africa points out that alongside economic development, education provided the chief dynamic of colonial change, not only as a reservoir of skills but as a source of social differentiation and political conflict. He notes that compared with wealth, education was easier both to obtain and to transmit to the next generation, so that it became Africa's big generator of both mobility and stratification<sup>6</sup>.

In pre-colonial Africa indigenous education enabled ethnic groups to pass down the social, political and economic systems to the younger generations. According to S. Bokongo, a Professor of Education at the University of Kenyatta, this education was "moral, progressive, gradual and practical"<sup>7</sup>. The advent of external interaction through the Arab traders and European missionaries exposed the continent to formal non-indigenous education. This in essence means that Africans had their system of education contrary to the European missionary thought that Africans were primitive and had no education and was upon them to civilize them through religion and formal education.

Colonial education was minimal in nature and included the sons of chiefs, notables, civil servants, employees of trading

companies and infantry. The education stressed on primary education, few secondary schools and regional university colleges<sup>8</sup>.

The aftermath of the First World War witnessed a number of Colonial government measures in regard to education given to Africans. It was to that end that in 1918 the East African Protectorate Education Commission came up with recommendations on the structure of education to be adapted.

University education was to take a longer road than the other levels. The Colonial Office approved that Makerere be modeled in 1938 as an independent higher college with its own governing body. And in 1949 Makerere was renamed the University College of East Africa in 1949. A college council was set up with representatives from Kenya, Tanganyika, Uganda and Zanzibar.

The 1960s was a turning point not only in the political landscape of the East African countries but was the beginning of a journey in quest of institutional and intellectual self governance. The University of East Africa was born in 1963 and had Nairobi, Dar es Salaam and Makerere University Colleges as its constituents. However, by 1970 each University college had developed its own courses and the University Development Committee (UDC) mandated to oversee all the three colleges had little power.

In 1968 a Working Party on Higher Education recommended the promotion of each college of the federal university to full university status in 1970.

Accordingly Makerere, Nairobi and Dar es Salaam were set up by Acts of Parliament.

In many ways the development of autonomous universities was a blessing to the people of East Africa. First and foremost, more places for higher education in various fields were now available locally in each country; second, the number of students going overseas for university education under government sponsorship was progressively reduced thereby saving the countries' foreign currency. Furthermore, each country could shape and control the ideological and cultural orientations of a large number of would-be future decision-makers of their nations. With this went the designing of the curriculum for higher education.

Scholars have been in agreement with Plato, the Greek Philosopher, who argued in his work *The Republican* that education and childhood experiences are the arenas and methods of instilling citizenship values, stating that educational systems affects political life<sup>9</sup>.

The nations' educational curriculum is harnessed to the tasks of nation building and in independent Africa meant nationalization of schools, restructuring curriculum and mobilization of the elites to national building. The school system would disseminate national building policies and plans by the political and civil servants.

Education was also to serve as an instrument of modernization and national development. Teacher directed political socialization and indoctrination are the characteristics

of educational systems, as political and leadership consolidation takes place in institutions of higher learning<sup>10</sup>. This was demonstrated by the late president, Milton Obote of Uganda who continuously linked national development, democracy and individual development to education<sup>11</sup>. The higher national budget in education expenditure, creation of more national schools and shift from missionary based administrators to civilian administrators are indications on how governments are reflection of national values and culture. However, the biggest challenge has been how to match or harness the values of traditional ethnic life and ideas from the rest of the world.

In Tanzania education was focused to instill values appropriate to African Socialism thus suppressing individualism in favour of cooperative values. The National Curriculum and teachers was core in the implantation. The cooperative ideology was difficult to internalize as competition for scarce resources remained the dominant experience of every school child all over Africa<sup>12</sup>.

The sense of nationhood identity transcended ethnic or racial loyalties in most institutions of higher learning. For example in boarding schools students of different classes, ethnicity and race share common dining, dorm, play grounds, class-rooms, instructional languages and teachers<sup>13</sup>.

Education systems are careers of political learning and individuals acquire a "political self" in them. Countries understand the importance of education as a tool to disseminate their policies for

education imparts social values to the youth. In East African Universities students are deeply involved in politics but not against political authorities. They looked at higher institutions of learning as a political institution and trainer of high level manpower.

When the East Africa states attained independence the struggle remained on decolonization, indigenization, enhancement and utilization of university education. Education had to address itself to the needs of the state. Emphases was put on the role of the university in training of high level manpower for national development, promoting the intellectual and cultural growth of their countries and carrying out research.

The education system has the potential to effect social change. Emergent Africa could not allow the role of the University to remain at the abstract level. Thus, African political leaders and academicians have largely argued for universities to apply their energies directly to the practical solutions to social, economic and political problems of their nations. African universities had to actively participate in the idea - cultural regeneration, social transformation, economic modernization and training and in training and upgrading the most important means of production, human resource. E.Ayandele, the late Nigerian Professor of History, aptly put: "In the belief that education is the sesame to economic transformation and modernization, African governments adopted, with faith and hope, the credo, 'Seek ye the

kingdom of knowledge and all things shall be added unto you"<sup>14</sup>.

Educational institutions have a great role in national life. They have a crucial role to play in the life, welfare and strength of a nation. The universities for example, are the homes to ideas and idealism. This identity assigns them the role of being the vehicles of development in the form of research and innovation as well as being the watchdog of societal moral fabric. Education in the region has been expected to be one of the avenues to poverty reduction. According to the Inter-Agency Commission on the World Conference on Education (1990), "quality basic education for all" is an important part of the overall strategy for poverty reduction. Improvement on education can have a profound impact on the life of the citizens.

As the Kenyan Professor of History B.Ogot observes, "Education curbs population growth; education forges attitudes of tolerance and comprehension... [and] education today is knowledge intensive"<sup>15</sup>. In this regard, the institutions of higher learning, for instance, have continuously attempted at constructing an infrastructure in the development of human resource in order to free the region from economic, scientific and cultural development maladies.

Over the last few decades there has been greater interest in studying into the concept of development, including not only indicators like economic growth or production, but also incorporating factors currently considered essential for full development a non-linear

development and conceived as a complex process involving different fields and characteristics.

## **CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT**

The Tanzanian case illustrates that culture is based on ecological systems, structure, socio-historical processes and within different environments interacted creating layers of cultural identities. Africans and Arabs interacted and created Swahili culture though with diverse identities<sup>16</sup>. Tanzania aimed at harmonization of development and culture through the "Ujamaa" concept as culture was perceived as a tool for development.

In the Republic of Rwanda, National Unity and Reconciliation Commission identified cultural values in national development as follows: 1) the social co-existence in Unity, peace mutual respect and complementarily of respect of human rights of every citizen; 2) good governance patriotism, national security and integrity; 3) devotion to work, thoroughness and zeal; 4) maintaining the principal of gender and complementarily roles of both genders. The four pillars contribute to sustainable development in Rwanda<sup>17</sup>.

In Uganda culture remains central to development. Community labour, communal responsibilities and accountability, traditional forms of conflict resolution, informal education, value of honesty and industriousness facilitate development. Cultural tourism to the Kingdoms of Uganda, Bunyoro and Teso, craft and art contribute to Uganda's

revenue incomes towards development.

As an independent nation, Kenya had to develop a national culture as a means of promoting national unity. The Kenyan National development plans are based on government/ministerial policy papers, Vision 2030, the Constitution and the *Harambee* philosophy<sup>18</sup>. *Harambee* has been applied in all sectors of development, education, health etc. The bottom up approach to development is a method in which individuals at community and grassroots level participate actively in initiation, planning and implementation of local development projects. In the *Harambee* spirit, participation is guided by the principle of collective good rather than individual gain.

As A. Mazrui, the late Kenyan Professor of Political Sciences asserted: "A national cultural policy was essential in providing an orientation context within nation-building

efforts are operated" in the case of Kenya<sup>19</sup>. This importance is entrenched in the Constitution of Kenya. Chapter 2, Article 11 of the Constitution "recognizes culture as the foundation of the nation and as the cumulative civilization of the Kenyan people and nation"<sup>20</sup>.

According to the Millennium Development Goals, culture promotes economic goals. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development 2010 emphasized development creative business such as cultural heritage, music, arts, architecture and marketing. These areas, the conference noted created jobs, increased exports, contributed to social inclusion, diversity and development. Cultural collaboration does not demand big money and investments - "software" - ideas, experience, imagination, dreams and creative power. Culture ensures unity during a crisis, it inspires change, stability,

debate, influences identity and as politics it's hard and soft.

## CONCLUSION

According to UNESCO, placing culture at the heart of development policy constitutes an essential investment in the world's future and a precondition to successful globalization process that take into account the principles of cultural diversity<sup>21</sup>.

Education plays a major role in nation building, especially by producing professional elites in the various fields. It suffices to note that, what kind of development the region envisages is dependent on the question of regional identity, which in essence, is a cultural question. Education and culture have become agents for national development and regional integration.

<sup>1</sup> Peters R. Ethics and Education. London, 1966.

<sup>2</sup> Njoroge R.J. and Bennaars G.A. Philosophy and Education in Africa. Nairobi: Transafrica Press, 1986.

<sup>3</sup> Scruton R. A dictionary of political thought. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Macmillan Publishers, 1996.

<sup>4</sup> Durkheim E. The Division of Labour in Society. Glencoe: Free Press, 1960.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>6</sup> Iliffe J. Africans: The History of a Continent. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

<sup>7</sup> Bogonko S.N. A History of Modern Education in Kenya, 1895-1991. London: Evans Bothers Kenya Limited, 1992. P. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Mazonde I.N. Culture and Education in the development of Africa. Gaborone: Isaac Ncube Mazonde, 2001.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in - Prewitt K. Introduction // Prewitt K., ed. Education and Political Values: An East African Case Study. Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1971.

<sup>10</sup> Prewitt K. and Oculi O. Political Socialization and Political Education in the New Nations // Prewitt K., ed. Education and Political Values...

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ayandele E.A. Africa: The Challenge of Higher Education. DAEDALUS, Spring, 1982. P. 165.

<sup>15</sup> Ogot B.A. Building on the Indigenous: Selected Essays 1981-1998. Kisumu: Anyange Press Ltd., 1999. P. 174.

<sup>16</sup> Nyerere J.K. Freedom and Development (Uhuru na Maendeleo). A selection from writings and speeches, 1968-1973. Oxford University Press, Dar es Salaam, 1973.

<sup>17</sup> www.rwandapedia.ru/.../worksace%254A%252Fspa ceastore%

<sup>18</sup> The *Harambee* philosophy meant to maximize the utilization of local resources such as labour funds and materials.

<sup>19</sup> Mazrui A.M. Cultural (Re) Construction and Nation-Building in Kenya: 1963-1970 // Ogot B.A. and Ochieng W.R. Kenya: The Making of a Nation: A Hundred Years of Kenya's History, 1895-1995. Maseno: Institute of Research and Post-graduate Studies. Maseno University, 2000. P. 118.

<sup>20</sup> Republic of Kenya. Kenya Constitution 2010 - www.kenyaembassy.com/pdf/The constitution of kenya.pdf

<sup>21</sup> Culture and Development - <http://www.unesco.org/news/en/culture/themes/culture-and-development...>