



ASPIRATIONS FOR and free

Writers and critics of the systems of education in Africa during the colonial period very often underestimate the quality and quantity of the educational work that was actually achieved in that era. One often gets the impression that under the colonial regime education was completely neglected. It is, of course, true that the colonial powers could conceivably have done much more than they did in education during the long period they governed the African territories.

It is equally true that, during most of the 19th century and early part of the 20th century, initiative in educational work in the British, French, and Belgian territories was almost exclusively taken by the Christian missionary bodies. We know that at a conference held in Cambridge in 1910, mission groups strongly urged colonial governments to take a more active and responsible part in the development of education in their African territories. It was indeed because of such criticisms that the Phelps-Stokes Commission was appointed in the early 1920's. The first report of this famous Commission was published in 1922. It confirmed earlier criticisms by missionaries and government officers regarding the inadequacy of the curricula, organization, and administration of African schools.

Credit should, however, be given to the colonial governments in London, Paris, and Brussels for taking at least *theoretical* action

on the important recommendations of the Commission report. Cowan, O'Connell, and Scanlon, in their *Education and Nation-Building in Africa, 1965*, have given an excellent review of the educational policy statements and directives of the British, French, and Belgian governments between 1925 and 1950. A study of these policy statements reveals that the colonial powers had educational insights which are not significantly different from the insights that have so far been expressed by political and educational leaders in the newly independent nations of Africa.

One example of an attempt by a colonial power to adapt a Western type of education to the mentality, aptitudes, and traditions of the colonial peoples is contained in the policy memorandum, *Education Policy in British Tropical Africa, 1925*, published by the Advisory Committee on Native Education in the British Tropical African Dependencies. In one section the memorandum says:

Education should be adapted to the mentality, aptitudes, occupations, and traditions of the various peoples, conserving as far as possible all sound and healthy elements in the fabric of their social life; adapting them where necessary to changed circumstances and progressive ideas, as an agent of natural growth and evolution.¹

¹ Advisory Committee on Native Education in the British Tropical African Dependencies. *Education Policy in British Tropical Africa, 1925*. pp. 3-8.

Education in the "new" nations of Africa

ENOKA H. RUKARE *

Needs and Actions

It is still true, however, that most of these aspirations, which were developed by educational advisers in Paris, London, and Brussels, never went beyond the desks of the colonial administrators in the African territories. There was thus an unfortunate gap between what was intended or planned and what was actually implemented. Yet is this gap not also identifiable in the educational policies of the free and independent African nations? If political and educational leaders in Africa today are to avoid the inevitable condemnation of future generations, serious attempts must be made to bridge the gap between their declared educational aspirations and needs on one side and the practical actions taken on these aspirations on the other.

If education is to be an effective ladder for political, social, and economic advancement, professional educationists, political leaders, and social science scholars in Africa (and outside Africa?) must learn to accept in a practical way the challenge and responsibility of coordinating their effort and know-how. There are too few personnel in each professional camp for the African elite to assume the "mind-your-business" attitude. It is here that the spirit of what has been described as African socialism may begin to bear tangible fruits.

One of the clearest inventories of African educational needs was spelled out at a

Unesco-convened Conference of African States on the Development of Education in Africa at Addis Ababa in May 1961. Richard Greenough, who was an active observer at the Conference, has described these needs as follows:

Basically, spread across the full spectrum of education from the Primary School through higher and university education levels and embracing adult education, as well as all the auxiliary and related services essential to effective programmes of education, they can be broken down under five main headings: overall needs; material needs such as buildings, textbooks, equipment; need for teachers; need for changes and reforms in methods of teaching and school curricula; need for the development of African culture. Woven inseparably through all these are two other paramount needs—financing and planning.²

The participants at the Addis Ababa Conference did not merely draw up an inventory of educational needs: they went further and devised an educational development plan for the whole continent. This plan was later revised and clarified at the Paris and the Tananarive conferences. In the main the 20-year plan set as targets the attainment of universal primary education throughout

² Richard Greenough. *Africa Calls*, 1961. pp. 15-16.

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Both "manual" and "mental" activities are emphasized. Photographs courtesy of the author

Africa by 1980; the enrollment at secondary school level of 30 percent of the children leaving primary schools; and the admission of some 20 percent of those completing secondary education to higher and university education, mostly in African institutions.

At the Abidjan Conference in 1964, the Addis Ababa plan was further reviewed. It was then agreed that an additional target should be to eradicate illiteracy. It was also recommended that for reasons of efficiency special emphasis should be given to *national* educational planning—of course within the continental targets in the Addis Ababa master plan. Another refinement of the Abidjan Conference was the general endorsement of the principle of Africanization.

These needs and aspirations seem to present two distinct types of challenges. First, there is the *quantitative* aspect of educational development, and second, there is the *qualitative* aspect of educational development. It is the contention of this writer that the general tendency of both the colonial governments and the independent African governments so far has been to devote very great attention to the quantitative aspect of educational development almost to the neglect of its qualitative elements. Faced with the gloomy situation in which over 80 percent of the more than 170 million Africans could neither read nor write; in which less than 50 percent of the school-age children had any opportunity of stepping inside a school; in which, of those who were enrolled, less than half completed their primary education; in

which only three out of every hundred school-age children ever saw the inside of a secondary school; and in which less than two out of every thousand children had a chance of some sort of higher education, it is quite understandable for the newly independent African nations to have focused attention on the quantitative aspect of educational development.

It is, however, equally important that the qualitative aspect of education in the independent African nations be given serious attention. This is because the inherited systems of education were in many respects based on assumptions which are no longer relevant to the people of the new states. President Nyerere has, for example, identified four such assumptions in the system of education Tanzania inherited from its former colonial masters. These are:

1. That education is designed to meet the interests and needs of the very few who are intellectually stronger than their fellows, a practice that induces feelings of superiority for the elite and inferiority among the majority;
2. That it tends to divorce its participants from the society, so that the school here has practically nothing to do with the society within which it is set;
3. That the "system encourages school pupils in the idea that all knowledge which is worthwhile is acquired from books" or only from people who have been to schools; and
4. That the system has led to the acquisition of attitudes which regard "manual" work as being inferior to "mental" work and hence to the view that manual work is below the status of the "educated" person.

"Community" Experience

African leaders ought to follow the lead President Nyerere has given, as expressed in his booklet *Education for Self-Reliance, 1967*, and reexamine the social and economic relevance of the curricula and modes of thought that have been inherited from the colonial systems of education. Such a review of the relevance of existing curricula should lead to a redefinition of the aims of education. In

this process of redefining educational goals, one would have to clarify the type of society he wishes to develop and possibly to know more about the psychology of the African child.

Yet given the good will of all parties concerned, the exercise of improving the quality of African education should present no insurmountable problems. Many of us who claim to be educationists might, however, have to shed many of our professional hang-ups. It might also be necessary to adopt non-conventional methods in our educational reorganization. One of the problems I have encountered, in attempts to introduce aspects of African culture in Ugandan Teacher Training Colleges, has been the scarcity of men and women with the necessary experience.

Very few of the members of the college faculties were prepared to accept responsibility for teaching African art, African music, African dance, African history, or African ways of worshiping God or gods. There were plenty of people within easy reach of these institutions who were fully competent to introduce these important aspects of our culture, but none of them had the "paper" qualification demanded by official regulations to allow them to offer their services even on a part-time basis!

Another professional hang-up that African educationists may have to contend with is the "inherited" belief that the "illiterate" African has nothing of value to offer. The colonial educationists, being ignorant of the "native" languages, could hardly be ex-

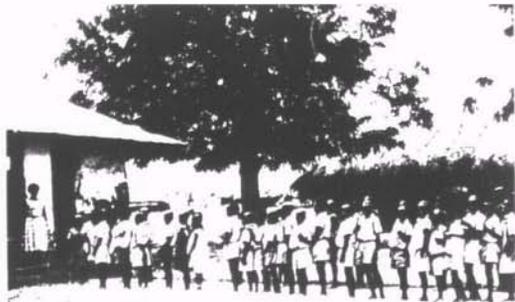


Many classes meet in informal settings.

pected to know better. We do know, however, that many of these so-called "illiterate" people actually represent mines of African wisdom. I know an old woman in South Uganda who knows the names and classes of nearly every plant and grass in the region and who is believed to be the private family medicine adviser to a number of the African medical doctors at the neighboring government hospitals. There are many other experts in other fields.

It is thus true that those who have had most of what Western education could give are least prepared to offer practical guidance in the revolution to Africanize education for the African child—and those who are best qualified to interpret African culture are not given the platform in our schools. One way of resolving this unfortunate situation is by modifying current red tape to enable educational institutions to make full use of "community" experience. Another important way of tapping such "community" experience is in widespread and systematic recording of such human resources. The assistance of international educational organizations and/or other agencies would be greatly welcomed in such a program.

In conclusion, it must be emphasized that the cry to revolutionize education does not imply that the African educationist has to adopt everything that is contained in the surviving African culture(s). Our turning to the cultures of our precolonial past, to the tribal and kinship social and economic sanc-



Modern education relates to the total society.

tions that helped to maintain law and order, and to our "primitive" conception(s) of the physical and spiritual world(s) is not an end in itself. It is but a necessary means in the

process of rediscovering our identity. It is a means in the process of making our educational aspirations more realistic and qualitatively meaningful. □

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