Searching for Development Education in Africa: Select Perspectives on Somalia, South Africa and Nigeria

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The important and constructive role of education in the development of postcolonial Sub-Saharan Africa is a taken-for-granted issue with different countries and communities generally expecting better livelihood possibilities through public and available educational programs. Due to recurring and continuing political and economic pressures, educational programs have been, at best, limited in advancing reliable platforms of social development for many countries in the sub-continent. This essay focuses on the three countries of Somalia, South Africa, and Nigeria, and delineates some weaknesses in education and development. The analyses presented here are intended to instigate minimally the refinement of some components of the current debate on African education and development. The paper highlights the most conspicuous problems in each case, and finally calls for the re-examining of development education in these and related contexts.

Africa, Development Education, Somalia, South Africa, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The positive relationship between education and development, i.e., education leading to relative notions and components of social advancement and institutional efficiency, especially in the less industrialized zones of our world, has been highlighted by both academic researchers and political leaders (Mandela, 1994; Pillay, 1994; Tilak, 1994; Fagerlind and Saha, 1985, Thompson, 1981; Nyerere, 1968). In the recent and especially post-colonial histories of Somalia, South Africa, and Nigeria, education, as the engine of development, might have not responded to people’s needs and expectations (Abdi, 1998; Nwagwu, 1997; Harber 1998; Saunders 1996; Soudien, 1994; Mzamane, 1990; Kallaway, 1999, 1984).

Primarily responding to pertinent conceptual and contextual exigencies, development education would, in the analysis undertaken in this paper, generally connote or speak about instructional and learning systems that deliberately seek and eventually lead to personal and community advancement through the maximum harnessing of available human and natural resources. As such, an important aim of this article is to delineate, at this crucial juncture of an Africa that is continually of “scant strategic interest to the West” (Magyar in Smither, 2001, p. 664), the state as well as the possibilities of an expansively reliable development education in three African countries. Somalia, South Africa, and Nigeria are different in their population sizes, regional locations, colonial histories, development possibilities, and current nation-state structures.

Somalia, with about seven million inhabitants, lies in East Africa and gained its independence from British and Italian colonialists in 1960. It has been under civilian rule until 1969 when the military seized power, and has been stateless since early 1991 when the still continuing civil war rendered all civic institutions, including educational programs and
structures, out of service and unusable. South Africa, on the other hand, has been under Dutch, British, and Afrikaner domination for over three-and-half centuries, and gained its independence in 1994. It is now under a political democracy, but the ravages of cruel colonization and apartheid are sustaining a cluster of previously de jure and now de facto constituted powerful schemes of inequities in socio-economic possibilities among the country’s so-called ‘racial groups’. South Africa’s population of about 40.5 million people is more than five times that of Somalia. In the case of Nigeria, the country gained its independence from Britain in 1960, and besides being the most populous country in the continent (about 125 million inhabitants), it should also have been, primarily because of a huge oil wealth and a relatively educated populace, a potential case of African educational and social development. But that has not been the case, at least until the writing of this paper. Even with the ending of the country’s successive military dictatorships and the election of the globally respected General Olusegun Obasanjo as Nigeria’s ‘civilian’ president, the current crises in Nigerian education continue, and will probably continue in the foreseeable future.

In discussing the three countries in the context of development education, I am not undertaking a direct comparative analysis of the three case studies. Rather, I am presenting select observations on the thematically related problems of education and development in the three contexts. A legitimate skepticism that might arise, especially for Africanists, in this situation could, for example, be the relevance of discussing de-developing Somalia with no organized and official economic and political institutions, and South Africa which is seen by many as a rising star that is democratic, economically powerful and politically stable, in the same analytical forum. While I understand and welcome that and similar concerns, my own take in the case is that South Africa, despite its potential, has a number of both subjectively and objectively based educational and, therefore, development problems (Ash, 1997; Herman, 1995; Kallaway, 1999; Soudien, 1999 & 1994; Stromquist, 1999) that it could share a number of discursive and observational platforms with optimally underdeveloped Somalia. Just to give an important observational snapshot of the South African situation, one must see the painful continuities of the educational legacies of apartheid in the so-called ‘farm schools’ where, as Christie and Gakanagis (1989) previously pointed out, education for African children was at the mercy of white farmers. The importance of farm schools in South Africa was that in the late 1980s, 1 in 5 of black children was studying in schools located in white-owned farms, with these farmers closing schools at will (Wilson and Ramphelae, 1989). In the current post-apartheid configurations of the situation and a testimony to how little things have changed in certain areas of the education terrain, Kallaway (1999, pp. 9-10) gives us these recent observations:

In a situation where the majority of parents live in houses that belong to their employers, where they are employed by those same farmers, where the farm schools are located on land belonging to the employers, and where the farmers even provide the transport to enable the children to go to school in many cases, there is little chance of pressure, despite all the post-apartheid and “racial democracy” pronouncements, being able to be brought on those farmers to increase their .funding to the schools if they are not of a mind to do so. The principals of the farm schools. ..have to face the fact that they are dependent on the farmers for all the resources they need to run the school. In all but a very few cases, the farmers have showed a marked lack of interest in the welfare of the schools and a resistance to spending more on the farm schools (emphases added).

In terms of Nigeria, the country has been and should still be an educational powerhouse with, for example, more universities (35) than any other country in Sub-Saharan Africa (hereafter SSA), that cater to tens of thousands of students (Nwagwu, 1997). That has apparently resulted in the formation of an already large number, in African terms, of Nigerians with advanced degrees both inside and outside Nigeria. But all of that apparently
did not respond to the development needs of the country’s populace. With these introductory and explanatory notes in place, I will now selectively look at the educational and development situations of the three countries.

**SOMALIA: THE TOTAL ABSENCE OF DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION**

If there is a present and clear case of underdevelopment and de-development partially due to lack of formal systems of learning, Somalia would be a very good example. For the past 11 years, Somalia has been without a state and without any national systems of formal schooling. With the destruction of national institutions during the 1991 civil war, tragically complemented by the de facto division of the country into autonomous, regionally based ‘chiefdoms’ (Samatar, 1991), Somalia’s primary and secondary schools, specialized technical centres and the national university have all been decommissioned by the major protagonists in the conflict (Abdi, 1998). In describing the bleak educational and development actualities that Somalia’s children are subjected to, in current Somalia, Abdi (1998, p. 336) writes:

> With no organized systems of learning in place now, millions of Somalia’s children, young adults and adults are all at the mercy of whatever informal education “bestows” upon them. Informal education, seen in this context at what is randomly learned from the general societal situations, may sometimes, and depending on the situation, enhance social development. In Somalia’s case, though, the country’s situation in the last seven years or so would lead us to believe that informal education is not only destructive at the moment, it also seems to be legitimizing a host of negative consequences, and in the process, it is self-perpetuating.

With Somalia now residing in this developmentally deprived space, any discussion about development education must be preceded by the physical rehabilitation of the country’s basic education system. These must be constituted along with the rebuilding of the country’s whole economic, political and other social infrastructure. While the need for a situational turn-up in the education front is greatly needed in Somalia, the fact that the country’s regions are still socio-politically detached from one another, does not help either the formulation or the implementation of any nationally based development education programs. Despite that difficulty, though, new thinking as well as new possibilities must not only be explored, but are actually being discussed and designed by grassroots organisations in many parts of the country. In almost all of Somalia, there have been certain attempts, some successful and some not so successful, in re-establishing new learning possibilities for Somalia’s children and adult learners.

Despite the situational importance of these scattered and sometimes isolated efforts, it is clear that without full-fledged educational programs that could effectively and comprehensively re-tool Somalia’s schools and specialised learning centres, the country’s development prospects will, at best, be limited. Currently, for example, UNICEF (2000) estimates that about 15 per cent of the country’s school-age children are in quasi-formal structures of learning, a number that Somali observers in the field dispute as highly overestimated. While my aim here is not to minimise local efforts including the opening of a number of private schools that are charging ‘a manageable fee’, it should still be clear that when primary school enrolment in most SSA countries is, at least, over 50 per cent, the possibility of 15 or so per cent of Somalia’s school-age children in hugely under resourced classrooms with sometimes unpaid, unsupervised and uncertified teachers does not at all bode well for the much needed reconstitution of the country’s educational and development sectors.

Especially in the case of Somalia also, the social by-products of lack of education are hugely problematic. In many instances, when there is a vacuum of educational and learning opportunities, the space may be immediately filled by the Horn of Africa’s new merchants of
death (or factional warlords) who, because they are more likely financially more solvent than others, would recruit many young men into their so-called ‘armies’ that are, in the first place, responsible for the destruction that has befallen upon the Somali people in the past 10 or so years. Here, the paradox, especially from the educational and development forum, should be clear and undoubtedly, humanistically disturbing and even frightening. When tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of potential young learners who would have constructively contributed so much to their societies are now being trained to decommission anything that hinders their “through the barrel of the gun” existence which is, by the way, now internationally known through the slogan, *haddaan qorigayga dhiibo, yaa qada isiina* (if I give up my gun, who will feed me today), the destructive nature of this (their) current informal education and the distance it pushes back any viable development prospects for the country should be, analytically and, of course, practically, conspicuous. Hence, the urgent need to reconstitute some educational possibilities that are expansively located, and that could minimally re-direct current trajectories of social development and institutional aptness for methodically de-developing Somalia.

**SOUTH AFRICA: THE CHALLENGE OF EDUCATIONAL REBUILDING AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

The most important component in analysing integrated development education in post-apartheid South Africa represents for me the learning difficulties as well as the endemic culture of ‘non-learning’ that black students have brought with them into the new system of integrated education. With the implementation of educational integration in 1992 (Lemmer, 1993), one ministry of national education has been created and important allocations have been made, through the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP), for the socio-economic uplifting of the previously disenfranchised segments of the population (African National Congress, hereafter ANC 1994). But a fundamental and developmentally pressing question has yet to be answered: are current allocations enough, and what is the current educational situation of the previously segregated, and still underdeveloped black majority in the post-apartheid period? As is argued below, the different components of any answer to this important question would be hardly encouraging. Hence, the post-apartheid reality that despite the political triumph over apartheid, “in general...there is a feeling of disappointment at the apparent slowness of change and development [especially] in the field of education in this new era of multiracial and multi-party democracy” (Hartshorne, 1999, p. 105).

To get a generalised glimpse of the severity of educational problems under discussion here, let us consider some numbers: In 1990, the retention rate up to matriculation for black students was 33 per cent. And even if 10 per cent of African pupils entering school achieved matriculation, the numbers who achieved matriculation exemption (i.e., admission into universities) was as small as one in 1,000 (Kahn, cited in Lewin, 1995, p. 202). More discouragingly, 19.3 per cent (about eight million people) of those over 20 years of age had no schooling (South African Institute of Race Relations, hereafter SAIRR, *Fast Facts* No.11, 1998, p.10). With these highly disadvantaged millions overwhelmingly from the ranks of the African population, the urgency of the case for development education in the post-apartheid situation should be quite clear.

The quality as well as the possibilities of education in a given society usually correspond to the realisation of available, livelihood choices that one can attain. In the case of South Africa, the mis-education of Africans and their subsequent economic marginalisation and overall underdevelopment are, in essence, conspicuous in present life possibilities. In this regard, let me look at what may be arguably the most important indicator of economic
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development, i.e., the availability of jobs or lack of them. The rate of unemployment, one of South Africa's most serious problems was 39 per cent in the first half of 1996 (SAIRR, Fast Facts No.6, 1996, p. 3). Of the unemployed, and clearly a disturbing sign in this post-apartheid period, 47 per cent were African women, 29 per cent were African men, four per cent were white men and eight per cent were white women. When the so-called four 'racial' groups in South Africa are comparatively surveyed in the unemployment terrain, the numbers are again painfully dismal for Africans. "Africans at 38 per cent have nearly twice the unemployment rate of Coloureds at 21 per cent; more than three times the rate for Indians at 11 per cent; and nearly ten times the rate of whites at 4 per cent" (ANC, Mayibuye, February 1996, p. 11). Worse, a study by SAIRR shows "unemployment increasing by nearly two percentage points" in the coming years with a projected unemployment rate of 43 per cent by the year 2006 (SAIRR, Fast Facts No.1, 1999, p. 1).

Moreover, the problems of lack of money for the required educational expenditure are complicated in that even if the government could have attempted some bold steps towards that direction, it should be discouraged by the fear of losing what is selectively called "credibility with international financial markets." As such, with South Africa now in the thick of the neo-liberal economic paradigm (O'Meara, 1997), the sacredness of fiscal responsibility is ever too important and must be promoted as a national policy. It is in the spirit of this neo-liberal worldview that the RDP has now been replaced by a new program called Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR). And despite the presence of the term 'redistribution' and the political ingenuity of its policy implications (i.e., redistributing resources that have been in the hands of few), GEAR is economically focused on reducing national budget allocations for housing, health and education (Stromquist, 1999). In justifying GEAR in a South African environment that urgently begs so much resources for development, the ANC government is quite conspicuous in its adherence to the expectations of the global capitalist economy even if the political language is still developmentally friendly. Stromquist (1999, p. 15) elaborates on this last point:

South Africa's Deputy President Thabo Mbeki (now President) seeks to reduce the difference between RDP and GEAR stating that while RDP is the blueprint for better quality, GEAR is the vehicle to attain it. [But] a Key strategist of the ANC expressed in a private meeting that GEAR was unavoidable as the means to establish international confidence in the macroeconomic environment, as private investments are essential to growth. But macroeconomic stability and investment incentives to entrepreneurs have not yet led to jobs.

It is, of course, possible, indeed selectively pragmatic, that fiscal responsibility and/or national monetary policy would have a directional similarity with the exigencies of the inter-continental macroeconomic environment. But reducing expenditure on essential areas of social development such as education will only make the situation worse for South Africa's unschooled millions. If literacy rate for black South Africans is 30 per cent in contrast to 97 per cent for whites (Stromquist, 1999), one could only guess to what extent so many people are still peripheral to the post-apartheid political and economic enterprise. As such, South Africa will be facing, at least for the foreseeable future, a sizable block of educational problems that were mostly transported from the apartheid era, and that have not yet been solved, and may not be solved with current allocations and economic policy directives.

The about 20 per cent of the South African budget that is now allocated for education is not nearly enough to deal with the acute problems in the country's learning systems. That, of course, does not mean the government can get more money for education. In fact, as Murray (1993) has pointed out, to create a racial parity in educational provisions, current outlays must be more than doubled, i.e., close to 50 per cent of the national budget must be spent on education. The possibility of that happening is, ipso facto, far fetched, but the need is still there. And if a gradual move towards anywhere near an acceptable level of education for the
Oppressed majority is to be attained, the national economy must cooperate. That is to say that high levels of gross domestic product (GDP) growth (at least 6% or higher) would be required. Unfortunately, recent South African GDP growth rates are, to say the least, dismal. In 1997, GDP growth was 1.3 per cent, and 3rd quarter growth for 1998 was -0.4 per cent in comparison with the same period in 1997 (SAIRR, Fast Facts No.2, 1999, p.7).

Perhaps cognizant of the immensity of educational and, therefore, current and future development problems in the post-apartheid space, and, of course, fully aware of the lack of enough government resources to ameliorate the situation, Mandela called upon white South Africans to renew their patriotism by giving something back to the less redeemed African population. Mandela called this the opening of “a new page on civic morality” (Government of South Africa, hereafter GSA, Rainbow, 4(12) 1998, p. 1). Also pragmatically reflecting upon this same issue, Mbeki, the current President was seemingly less patient with the development situation since the fall of apartheid. Mbeki, in effect, derides, “the level of inequality in the country by warning about the mounting black anger unless expectations were met” (GSA, Rainbow, 4(13), 1998, p. 1). These statements from the highest levels of South Africa political office, must pose serious observational and analytical concerns. In other words, problems of education, problems of development and, therefore, the continuing marginalization of millions who are still searching for any rewards from their struggle against colonialism and apartheid are immense, enduring and must be attended to, le plus tôt possible.

NIGERIA: THE RISE AND DECLINE OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Nigeria has been and still is, as is said above, an educational powerhouse in Sub-Saharan Africa, but the qualitative crisis in Nigerian education has also been going on for a while now. Besides primary and secondary education, where Nigeria’s educational strength lies in the African context is, perhaps higher education. The establishment of the first generation of Nigerian universities (Ife, Ahmadu Bello, University College of Ibadan later becoming Ibadan University, University of Lagos, University of Benin) took place in the early 1960s. The second generation (Calabar, Jos, Maiduguri, Sokoto, Kano, Ilorin, Port Harcourt) came into existence in the mid 1970s, while the third generation of Nigerian Institutions of higher education, generally known as federal universities of science and technology were established in early 1980s (Enaohwo, 1985).

The subsequent stages of creating these universities are apparently responsive to Nigeria’s needs for trained personnel that could effectively deal not only with administrative tasks but also with complex and high level technological demands. The establishment of so many universities in such a short time in Nigeria was basically instigated by the exponential rise in primary and secondary school enrolments in the 1960s and into the 1990s. Generally, though, the state of Nigerian education in crisis has been hastened by a multitude of situations that may have served as so-called ‘push-and-pull’ causes for one another. As early as the late 1970s, it was clear that the quantitative increase in Nigerian education was not to be complemented by a qualitative rise as funds for higher education were, for example, cut in the 1978/79 state expenditure. In addition, the worldwide oil glut around that time, and the resulting shortage of petroleum sales which accounted for 80 per cent of Nigeria’s income from exports, was seen as another important culprit for the decreased spending (Enaohwo, 1985). Nwagwu (1997) also identifies the 1980 oil glut and the accompanying critical shortages of funds as having led to decreased provisions to education at all levels. These were, of course, to be complemented by the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) in to the African development terrain in the early 1980s when a reduction of public expenditure, especially on educational and other social programs, was important.
The general trend of educational expenditure decline in the African context was not limited to Nigeria. As Hayward (1991) points out, the now enduring financial crisis in SSA education started in early 1980s when between 1980-1983, spending on education fell from nearly $10 billion to $8.9 billion. In the Nigerian case, for example, in the 1984-85 fiscal year, “Obafemi Awolowo University saw its recurrent funding fall to 58 per cent of its 1980-1981.” (Hayward, 1991, p. 37) It is hard to imagine, especially from both operational and qualitative implications, how a university with such drastic cuts in its yearly operations could survive; the point is that it has survived, but practically with very limited capacity in programs, research and teaching. Among the enduring economic problems that resulted from this income/export decline, which were unfortunately complemented by government corruption including outright theft and unabated grand embezzlement of public funds (see Soyinka, 1996), was a six per cent decline in GDP between 1980-1990 (Nwagwu, 1997). These realities have led to more reduction of government subvention to educational institutions where, despite “the increasing enrolment in universities, government expenditure per student fell from N3085 (N=Naira, the Nigerian currency) in the 1980-1981 academic year to N3057 in 1984-85” (Nwagwu, 1997, p. 90). This was complemented by lack of paying teachers’ salaries that were in arrears for months, all collateral worsened by other educational woes such as “poor funding, inadequate facilities, admissions and certificate racketeering, examinations malpractice, and general indiscipline” (Nwagwu, 1997).

The issue of salaries especially at the university level, where professors are either not paid on time or what they are paid is not nearly enough to cover basic expenses, exacerbated by lack of academic freedom and the absence of funding for research all represent some of the major causes of why so many of Nigeria’s best and brightest students have left their homeland for greener and, sometimes, not so greener pastures elsewhere. One of the major problems for reformulating educational programs in SSA and, therefore, the lack of viably situated development education is because so many of Africa’s educated cadre are leaving the continent, more or less for the same reasons that Nigerians are departing. According to Brittain (1994, p. 22), the combined forces of economic collapse and institutional corruption have forced “over 100,000 African professionals and intellectuals to flee their continent in search of better opportunities, thus bleeding their countries of the talent, education, and energy that would offer a chance of reversing the trend of de-development.” And this is an Africa that needs, perhaps more than anything else, new educational reconceptualizations and reformulations well into the new century.

Many of the thousands who left Africa and who, partially based on recent political and economic upheavals, should now number hundreds of thousands would be Nigerians. This estimate is based on the high proportion of Nigerians vis-à-vis other Africans with advanced degrees who are either employed, in many cases unemployed, or underemployed in Europe and North America. More conspicuously, it is not unusual to find Nigerian academics teaching or conducting research in almost all American universities and colleges. Qualitatively representative, for example, though not necessarily of important quantitative significance, of the Nigerian Diaspora in the United States institutions of higher education are the cases of the well-known writers Chinua Achebe, author of the classic Things Fall Apart (1958) who is at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, and the Nobel Laureate in literature Wole Soyinka who is at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. Nigerian academics are also scattered in other countries of the world, and lately in Southern Africa with the highest concentration in newly-independent South Africa. It was, for example, a surprise to Vice-Chancellor Makhubo (1996) of the University of Swaziland, how so many senior professors from Nigeria with an international reputation and with a distinguished record of teaching and publications that were coming to her university, were
willing to work as junior lecturers, especially when they could not be hired at a higher level. This is the essence of the brain drain problem that, while it is affecting all of Africa, is apparently more central to the educational problems Nigeria is facing. Overall, therefore, the Nigeria educational situation, is, from a multitude of corners, as Cordelia Nwagwu (1997, p. 94) instructs us, in urgent need of repair and re-direction:

There is a crisis of confidence in the ability of the [Nigerian] education system to tackle the many serious problems confronting it. Nigeria is at a crossroads where she must develop the courage [nationally and institutionally] to fight problems which range from home to school and through society to government. The first major step is a recognition that the environment that has generated and supported the Nigerian education crisis must be changed if an operational climate that will ensure effective teaching and learning is to be achieved.

CONCLUSION

With development education, problems of general social development and other concomitant national and continental depressants sustaining themselves in one of SSA’s poorest countries (Somalia), Africa’s, theoretically speaking, most promising nation-state (South Africa), and the continent’s most populous country with a huge potential of human and natural resources (Nigeria), there must be serious considerations of the quality as well as the direction of SSA education at the beginning of this potentially promising new millennium. While development education in the three countries is symptomatic of the current overall livelihood difficulties in SSA, the remedies, based on the observations we have encountered in this paper, would vary. In Somalia’s case, the physical rehabilitation of the education system as well as almost all educational institutions is urgent; in South Africa, new re-alignments in educational expenditure and social development through bold and proactive re-distributive policies and programs are needed; and in Nigeria, new prerogatives in educational efficiency and accountability must be undertaken. When some measure of these possibilities is achieved, the results would definitely contribute to a better tomorrow for the peoples of the countries under discussion, and beyond that, undoubtedly to the wider and still developmentally bleak SSA landscape.

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