

Reorienting Education to Achieve Vision 2030: challenges and barriers

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Abstract

Education is the single most important factor essential for economic growth, technological advancement, social-cultural sophistication, healthy living and successful political governance. Nelson Mandela affirms this and states that education is the most powerful weapon, which you can use to change the world. Education is more than speaking a foreign language. It encompasses the development of skills and competencies essential to navigate through life, efficiently and effectively perform productive tasks necessary for maintenance and enhancement of life. It therefore has to be looked at elliptically and not just as a process where children or individuals go through a school system. It has to be viewed from the end product also; the graduates who will emerge from this system and the consequent society created. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) processes emphasize the need for stimulating a holistic, integrated and interdisciplinary approach to developing the knowledge and skills needed for a sustainable future as well as changes in values, behaviour, and lifestyles. This requires us to reorient education systems, policies and practices in order to empower everyone, young and old, to make decisions and act in culturally appropriate and locally relevant ways to address the problems that threaten our common future. This paper discusses current challenges, presents government proposals for reform and recommends a way forward toward achieving an enabling education sector that supports sustainable development by the year 2030, thus making Kenya a high income nation. The method used was exploratory study and the authors utilized document analysis as a method of data collection by reviewing

existing relevant documents from the ministry of education such as ministry of education reports; commissions and committees' reports; and policy papers. The study also collected primary data using group discussions and individual key informants from key ministry institutions. Data was analyzed using qualitative techniques and presented using description. There is therefore need to critically look into our education system so as to introduce efficiencies and ensure it effectively produces graduates well equipped for modern day life experiences.

Keywords: *Development, Education, Reorienting, Vision*

Reorienting Education to Achieve Vision 2030: challenges and barriers

Education plays a pivotal role in contributing to the human resource development and to the nation's general economic development in today's globalizing context. Education is viewed as 'adding value' to investment on human capital; this has seen changing labor market requirements shift to the phenomena of 'lifelong learning'. Like many other countries in Africa, Kenya has since independence in 1963, invested heavily in education as a means to social and economic development for her citizenry. An educated citizenry is vital to implementing informed and sustainable development. In fact, a national sustainability plan can be enhanced or limited by the level of education attained by the nation's citizens. Development options, especially "greener" development options, expand as education increases.

Education is also central to improving quality of life. Education raises the economic status of families; it improves life conditions, lowers infant mortality rates, and improves the educational attainment of the next generation, thereby raising the next generation's chances for economic and social well-being. ESD (Education for sustainable development) carries with it the inherent idea of implementing programs that are locally relevant and culturally appropriate. Education is an essential tool for achieving sustainability. People around the world recognize that current economic development trends are not sustainable and that public awareness, education, and training are key to moving society toward sustainability.

The relationship between education and sustainable development is complex. Generally, research shows that basic education is key to a nation's ability to develop and achieve sustainability targets. Research has shown that education can improve agricultural productivity, enhance the status of women, reduce population growth rates, enhance environmental protection, and generally raise the standard of living. Education is the single most important factor essential for economic growth, technological advancement, social-cultural sophistication, healthy living, and successful political governance. Nelson Mandela affirms this and states that education is the most powerful weapon, which you can use to change the world (van der Rheede, 2009). Education is more than speaking a foreign language. It encompasses the development of skills and competencies essential to navigate through life and efficiently and effectively perform productive tasks necessary for maintenance and enhancement of life. It therefore has to be looked at holistically and not just as a process where children or individuals go through a school system. It has to be viewed from the end product also; the graduates who will emerge from this system, and the consequent society created.

According to the World Bank (2005), education must impact on national economic development and poverty reduction. The proclaimed development of the western world may be seen as commensurate to the superior literacy levels of the citizenry. Advanced literacy enables critical judgment and entrepreneurship which are critical for the choices an individual makes in every sphere of life.

Individuals are therefore able to study and criticize information available to them, including decisions made by their leaders which impact on their society. They are consequently able to make investment and career choices which propel their socioeconomic development.

The Kenyan government sees provision of education and training to all Kenyans as fundamental to the success of overall development strategy (Government of Kenya, 2005). Not endowed with rich mineral resources which aid development in many nations, and faced with a fast rate of globalization and internal social upheavals, Kenya's only hope lies in re-assessing and refocusing her education system to invest more in her wealth of human resources (Kenya, MOEST, 2004). Furthermore, education is paramount for bridging the knowledge gaps between privileged and under-

privileged communities, social inclusion, environmental sustainability, agricultural production, healthy living, industrial development, and economic empowerment.

In the last 50 years, we celebrate the fact that we have managed to lay a good and solid foundation not only for the expansion of education and training opportunities, but also for the growth and sustainability of the education system. But here is where our celebration ends. As we celebrate 50 years of independence, the education sector is facing major challenges and gaps. Available evidence from the Ministry of Education, researchers and practitioners indicates that our education system faces the “whole system” challenges. These challenges include: the fact that there are almost two million school-age children who are currently out of school and are not able to access quality basic education for all; which is their constitutional right, **the quality** of basic and even higher education is very low compared to other countries with the same or lower GDP per capita as Kenya, and the available teaching-learning resources (books) are not enough and promote poor learning. In the last 10 years, about 200,000 young Kenyans have been pushed out of the education system and terminated their learning at primary school level. Our education system lacks about 100,000 teachers to effectively and efficiently manage our schools and the teaching-learning processes such that for instance, the teacher-pupil ratio at primary is about 1:80 instead of the required 1:40. In developing countries like Kenya, many public schools have limited infrastructure (e.g. classrooms and water/sanitation facilities), and if they exist they are dilapidated and not conducive for effective teaching-learning process. In 2014, pupils still learn under trees or sit on stones in some counties in Kenya. Most teachers are demotivated and remain in the classrooms just because there is no better alternative. Their salaries and working conditions are low compared to others in other forms of employment. There are millions of hungry and angry school-going children in ASAL regions and urban slums that need health, shelter and education support. What fails our education system is not lack of finances and qualified human resources but, our continued failure to invest available resources strategically and where they are needed most. Kenya’s education sector has failed to compete internationally because of the following four factors:

Firstly, despite several policy commissions and task forces being put in place, the education policy reforms in Kenya have largely remained politically driven. In 2002, it was Free Primary Education - a political campaign for NARC and now it is the introduction of laptops for pupils joining Standard One in 2015 for Jubilee leaders. We have systematically failed to apply research-based policy formulation, changes and implementation in the sector. Secondly, we have failed to set up a comprehensive and robust Education Management Information System (EMIS) from national to school level to provide comprehensive real time data that could be used for decision making and planning. No wonder we tend to be ad hoc or go by the political wave and not really practical need based on technical policy analysis and needs assessment. Thirdly, we have failed to conduct comprehensive impact studies on the education interventions in which we have invested a lot of public and donor resources. For example, the impact of FPE and the MoE bursary programs. Findings of such studies could have informed the much-talked-about laptop program. Fourthly, we have failed to put teachers at the core of education growth and improvement of education standards across sub-sectors. Education is still regarded as semi-professional and attracts people with low grades compared to other professions. Besides, teachers' salaries and allowances are comparatively low compared to those -in engineering, medical and judicial sectors

Kenya's poor quality of education and high wastage rates are worse or comparable to less endowed countries in Africa such as Cape Verde, Rwanda, Mali, Senegal and Malawi. East Asian countries like Singapore, Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Indonesia have often been cited as successful cases of human capital development and fast economic development. In the **70s**, social infrastructure including schools, in these countries were in the same stage as those in Kenya. However, because of political will and good policy choices these countries have been able to accomplish 100 per cent coverage in primary and secondary education. Besides, they have a tertiary (higher) education sector that is large and competitive as those in developed countries. If we are to build on the achievements we have made in the last five years, we should avoid implementing education programs without proper evidence of policy analysis. This is the surest way of avoiding wastage of resources.

Kenya's Vision 2030 is the nation's new development blueprint for 2008 to 2030 which aims at making Kenya a newly industrializing, "middle income country providing high quality life for all its citizens by the year 2030" (UNESCO, 2007). The plan is to be implemented in successive five-year terms with the first plan covering 2008-2012. The education goals of the 2030 Vision are to provide globally competitive quality education and training and research for development. This is to be achieved through reducing literacy by increasing access to education, improving the transition rate from primary to secondary schools, and raising the quality and relevance of education. Other goals are the integration of special needs education into learning and training institutions, and increasing the adult literacy rate to 80%. The government also aims at increasing the enrollment in schools to 95% as well as the transition rates to technical colleges and higher education to 8%. In addition, the rate of students joining universities should expand from 4.6% to 20% within this period, while simultaneously boosting emphasis on science and technology courses. The government has specified the implementation strategies which include integrating early childhood into primary education, reforming secondary curricular, updating teacher education, and strengthening partnerships with the private sector. In addition, the government has goals to improve special needs programs and adult training program, and to revise the higher education curriculum. Specific educational development projects for 2012 are to increase the number of secondary schools by building 560 new secondary schools, to establish a teachers' recruitment program so as to employ 28,000 more teachers, to establish a computer supply program that will equip students with modern ICT skills, to build at least one boarding primary school in each constituency in the pastoral districts for nomadic populations, and to roll out the education voucher system program in five districts.

Vision 2030 also aims to capitalize on knowledge in science, technology and innovation (STI) in order to function more efficiently, improve social welfare, and promote democratic governance. STI is to be applied in all the sectors, and the education and training curricular in the country will thus be modified to ensure that the creation, adoption, adaptation and usage of knowledge becomes part of formal instruction. A new incentive structure will also be developed to support the use of STI in specialised research centres and universities.

The vision places great emphasis on the link between education and the labour market; the need to create entrepreneurial skills and competences; and the need to strengthen partnerships with the private sector. This has considerable importance for the structure and focus of the education system and curriculum. It also has considerable relevance to teacher education. Consequently this has been given consideration toward changing the structure of education; the introduction of technical talent; general academic curriculum pathways; the centrality of ICT to teaching and learning and its application on the day to day life. Vision 2030 also recognize the need for a literate citizenry and sets targets for enhancing adult literacy from the current 61.5% to 80% by 2012. Student net enrollment is envisaged to increase to 95% whereas transition rates from secondary to technical institutions is expected to rise from 3% -8%.

Experience, training, and education are the three main mechanisms for acquiring human capital, with education being primary for most individuals whereas education facilitates, and the acquisition of new skills and knowledge increase productivity. This increase in productivity frees up resources to create new technologies, new businesses, and new wealth, eventually resulting in increased economic growth.

Reorienting education

The term “reorienting education” has become a powerful descriptor that helps administrators and educators at every level (i.e., nursery school through university) to understand the changes required for ESD. An appropriately reoriented basic education includes more principles, skills, perspectives, and values related to sustainability than are currently included in most education systems. Hence, it is not only a question of quantity of education, but also one of appropriateness and relevance. ESD encompasses a vision that integrates environment, economy, and society. Reorienting education also requires teaching and learning knowledge, skills, perspectives, and values that will guide and motivate people to pursue sustainable livelihoods, to participate in a democratic society, and to live in a sustainable manner. Experience, training, and education are the three main mechanisms for acquiring human capital, with education being primary for most individuals. Education facilitates the acquisition of new skills and knowledge that increase productivity. This increase in productivity frees up resources to create new technologies, new

businesses, and new wealth, eventually resulting in increased economic growth.

Ways to Reorient Education in Kenya

Change in the curriculum

As has already been seen, the 8-4-4 curriculum brought in over 13 subjects to be covered by the students. With it came increased costs of textbooks, raw materials, equipment and facilities needed to facilitate the vocational aspects of the studies. There was increased workload for the teacher and student and the demand for more school hours. Many children could not handle these, and therefore dropped out. The need for suitably qualified teachers increased in tandem with the increasing population. There is therefore need to critically look into our education system so as to introduce efficiencies and ensure it effectively produces graduates well equipped for modern day life experiences. Stop-gap measures over the years have proved inadequate as standards have remained low. A serious re-look at the curriculum is a must if this nation is to meet its objectives for vision 2030.

Constitutional reforms alone cannot bring about the needed change and development. They must be coupled by a complete change in societal attitudes, which can only be best achieved through quality education. A good education would ultimately equip individuals with requisite information literacy competencies thereby improving job performance, social lifestyles and political participation. The rest of the world is refocusing its education in this line through information and communication technologies (Semenov, 2005).

Purpose of education

In Kenya, career guidance and life-skills have for a long time not been part of the education system. Many children therefore go through school without a clear concept of where they aim to go but wait for the examinations results to decide on their professional destiny. Those who pass their exam and can afford to pay the fees, remain in school because it is smooth sailing while those who seem not to do well academically opt out because they find no value in the school system. Guidance and counseling, including career guidance as has been identified of late must be entrenched into the school system right from early elementary

education stages (Kweyu, 2009). Mentorship should be inculcated in all schools both rural and urban. While many children in the urban areas are more informed and grow up with career choices in their minds, their rural counterparts grow up not knowing much about the world. It must be emphasized that the purpose of education must not be that one “secures a good job” but ,to enable one enjoy an improved standard and quality life. A good job is not the end; it is a means to an end. Human beings, like well manufactured sophisticated equipment and machines, must position themselves toward achieving efficiency and effectiveness as opposed to production and activity.

Instead of training to be an employee, the education system should be such that individuals train with a focus on being job creators and employers – business owners, large-scale farmers, and farmers of special products that have high returns, manufacturers, innovators, creators and technology wizards. The catalyst that is lacking must be found to sharpen and enhance the skills of graduates. While it is good to encourage people to learn in school, it may be more appropriate to teach people that education is wider than just a job (Warah, 2010).

School life

The system should also change from being examination-oriented to being school-life based (Mongolia, 2007; Bwana, 2009). The entire school life would be documented: academics, sports, the arts, and personality, hygiene and people skills. Right from class one, all aspects of a child’s life should be trained, examined and documented and an average or mean score regarded as their performance. Aptitude tests should be introduced where the child’s perception is measured. This would enable better self understanding. A child would know in which areas she/he is strong in and those in which she/he is weak in. Consequently, they can either focus more energy in refining what they are good at so as to be the best in the area, or they can also pay extra attention to the areas of weakness and improve on them. This way, the idea where private schools and academies drill children into passing exams and not being wholly educated would cease. Education should be about producing a complete, well-rounded whole person, not just passing exams. It should also inculcate personal skills and skills that will be useful in the job and business world (Kigotho, 2009)

University education

Universities and university education are essential for development (Mutisya, 2010). Reforms in the higher education sector are urgently needed focusing on quality training and quality of education while increasing enrollment for improved national development. (Daily Nation, 2010).

TIVET (Technical, Industrial, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training)

TIVET has always been the plan B of our education system. It is where we dump all those who did not make it to the next level. As a nation, we have assumed that technical, industrial and vocational training is a substandard level of education for the less clever in the classroom. While this may be so, we must recognize that sustainable development needs a few good brains and many willing hands. Other nations such as Japan and China did not grow because of degrees and doctorates. They scrapped their selves out of heat, sweat, and pain into developed status. It is the electrician who keeps the bulb working not the engineer who designed it.

Whereas the TIVET enrollment has steadily grown in the last number of years, it is worrying to see that the vast number of school dropouts do not enroll in these institutions. As a country we fail every year to attract them to these institutions because society sees no value for them. Let us take a step back. For every degree holder, we need 6 technical personnel. If this was the case, new developments would be springing up daily and technological advancement rate would practically double. But lack of technical skills in our society is worrying. Soon we will be a nation of degree holders with theoretical knowledge and no practical skill.

The government and society, both have a role to play. The society should demystify the theory of blue collar jobs worth. The youth should see practical application of knowledge as more beneficial than theoretical application.

ICT (Information Communication Technology)

ICT development is a core concept in the jubilee manifesto. Digitization of government and private activities is heavily reliant on application of ICT. In the Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2005 Chapter VII, the Ministry's policy

clearly articulates intentions to integrate information and communication technology (ICT) into education. As the nation goes digital, education is not to be left behind. It is to be fast tracked. The Vision 2030 identifies Science, Technology and Innovation (ST&I) as a foundation for the social, economic and political pillars for overall socio-economic development. The Vision recognizes the role of Science and Technology in development as new knowledge is expected to boost wealth creation, social welfare and international competitiveness. ICT should be the main driver in this regard.

The implementation of the National ICT Strategy for Education and Training through multi-stakeholder participation in 2006, laid the foundation for developing the necessary capacity for a skilled human resource required to achieve Kenya's Vision 2030. This was also in line with the 2010 Constitution. ICT has one major advantage. It stretches the confines of a class room to include the home and the recreation area. ICT will therefore extend boundaries of the classroom to beyond the fixed time and space of school, help adapt instruction to the differences between the students, provide for feedback in real time, and provide the chance of learning in the classroom and at home.

Recommendations

- (a) Train and staff ST&I sector adequately
- (b) Review curriculum to meet skill demands that are constantly changing.
- (c) Strengthen technical capacities
- (d) Identify priority areas.
- (e) Intensify innovation
- (f) Enhance awareness through various media forms
- (g) Have quality Teachers, quality schools and quality school managers.

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