

## **African Education in the Twenty-first Century: The Challenge for Change**

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### **Abstract**

This exploratory paper reviews African development in general and education in particular, and argues that many problems that bedevil Africa today, have their origins in the colonial period. Colonisation, it is noted, was not a developmental process, but a mechanism of exploitation. As a result, colonial education was designed and implemented to serve the needs of the colonial state, which was to produce a low level educated cadre of the labour force to facilitate economic production. It is in this regard that it placed no premium on promoting advanced professions for Africans. African independence, it is further argued, failed to alter the colonial economic structures, with their educational systems continuing along the Western models and paradigms that have little relevance to African development. The African governments' failure to reconstruct their education to respond to their immediate problems has been compounded by their heavy reliance on technical assistance, which by and large has shaped their educational agenda with little or no impact at all on development. In many parts of the continent, it is now apparent that the initial gains made following decolonisation have disappeared, resulting in economic stagnation, and in some cases disintegration through civil strife.

The paper, therefore suggests that as the African continent moves into the twenty first century, African countries should take control of their destiny and pursue the kind of development which is endogenous to their settings. Structured international packages should be resisted in favour of international cooperation that responds to their own designed development strategies. Education should take the lead in the new transformation, with programmes that totally break with the past mechanisms of knowledge and skill acquisition. Such programmes should place emphasis on knowledge, skills and values that are based on the African environment in which the learners will live and work. Education should also spearhead critical thinking and emancipation of the communities from forces of domination and exploitation.

### **Introduction**

The continent of Africa has been in contact with Western civilisation for over a century. First was through the Slave Trade followed by colonisation and then the so-called decolonisation. Like Asia and Latin America, Africa has been on the Western invented track of 'development' on which it has been part of the different jargons, such as 'underdeveloped', 'developing', 'third world', 'less-industrialised' and so forth. In this process, it has also been subjected to the various economic development strategies whose

key objective is to assist the African countries catch up with the developed and industrialised North. The list of such strategies is long, but suffice to name but a few. These have for example included, 'human resource and modernisation theories', 'new economic order', 'sustainable development or everlasting growth', 'decades of development', 'the basic needs approach', 'structural adjustment programmes' and now 'globalisation'. As the continent approached the close of the twentieth-century, African countries had still not achieved the long aspired socio-economic and political self-sufficiency. Massive national resources investments coupled with technical assistance through aid, there was very little to show by way of development. In many parts of the continent, the initial gains made following decolonisation, had disappeared, resulting in economic and social stagnation, and in a good number of cases, disintegration through civil strife. Such a trend undoubtedly reflects some basic underlying issues that have not been adequately addressed. In the discourse of these issues, what is often overlooked are some two key works among others, published at the height of African decolonisation, namely, Franz Fanon's, *Wretched of the Earth*, Rene Dumont's, *False Start in Africa*, (1), that were quite critical of the process of the so-called independence and made some accurate predictions as to what was to become of it.

In education, which is the main focus of this paper, was an object of intense effort and enthusiasm during the decolonisation process because of the belief that it held the key to unlocking the door to Africa's political and economic development, as others viewed it as master determinant of economic growth and probed the relationship between education, political leadership and economic development. In the 1950s, for example, P. C. Lloyd initiated scholarly debates over the kind of modernity, a highly educated African elite would bring to politics and society in the independent Africa, while J. Coleman provided regional experts some theoretical foundations for their studies of the ways in which education and development were interrelated (Boyle, 1999). It was on this basis that there was a rapid growth in certain aspects of education at the time most African countries achieved their independence. Consequently, a reasonable proportion of the populations enjoyed access to primary education and the benefits of functional literacy. The creation of state-wide systems of education in the region, despite the challenge it presented for educators and the burden it represented for state budgets, it stands as one of the principal developmental achievements of African governments in the post-independence era. However, among the major repercussions of the SAPs has been a decline in both public and household resources allocated to education. The World Bank's restrictions on educational expenditure, coupled with the decline in government revenue emanating from the economic crisis, have crippled most African governments' capacity to expand and provide quality education. This is evident in all levels of education systems in terms of declining enrolments and acute shortages of teaching/learning materials (Tenga, 1999).

To understand and perhaps appreciate Africa's current educational challenges and the way forward, it is important to situate them in a broad historical context. In this regard, an exploratory approach is attempted in this paper to analyse colonial education and the pitfalls of decolonisation, some efforts in educational reform, technical assistance and the challenge for change.

## **Colonial Education**

In the mid-nineteenth century, Africa changed phase from the Slave Trade to colonisation by the various European powers. The main reason for the shift was to establish what was commonly known as 'legitimate commerce' for the benefit of these powers. This was vividly captured by the famous French historian, Victor Hugo(2) in the following statement:

...Go forward, the nations! Grasp this land! Take it! From whom? From no one. Take this land from God! God gives the earth to men. God offers Africa to Europe. Take it! Where the kings brought war, bring concord! Take it not for the cannon, but for the plough! Not for the sabre but for commerce! Not for the battle but for industry! Not for conquest but for fraternity! Pour out everything you have in this Africa, and at the same stroke solve your own social questions! Change your proletarians into property owners! Go on, do it! Make roads, make ports, make towns! Grow, cultivate, colonise ...(Rist, 1997).

To convince the French Chamber of Deputies, to embrace colonialism as a policy in 1885, economic benefits were given considerable emphasis. It was argued:

Colonial expansion follows an economic objective: 'colonial policy is the daughter of industrial policy'. The continual growth of production and the accumulation of capital require new outlets, especially as international competition is intense and everyone has to increase their economic area...Colonisation is necessary if France is to keep its place in the concert of nations and avoid the highroad to decay! If it withdraws into itself and refrains from colonisation, other nations will do it instead, but in the name of less noble values and with less talent..(Rist, 1997).

Philanthropic reasons were also advanced to justify colonialism, but to a much lesser degree than the economic importance. The same reasons for colonisation can be read in the writings of the time by other European nations that were participants in the colonial adventure.

On the basis of the commercial motivations for colonisation, it was abundantly clear from the outset, that it was not to be carried out in the interest of the colonised people. Colonialism was designed and operationalised to the exclusive benefit of the metropolitan states. The nature of the colonial economies and their supporting infrastructures attest to that fact. Colonial economies in a large measure, consisted of cash crop production, extraction of forest products and minerals and other commodities that were processed in the metropole capitals, a thing that is being continued to the present. No major industries were established in the colonies and the infrastructure that existed mainly served the key economic centres. These types of economies, did not expand much as to require a lot of labour, and the kind of labour needed was mainly of unskilled nature. In which case there was very little demand for education and training.

Turning to education, available literature shows that most colonial powers were reluctant to offer it purely for the benefit of the colonised people. They were in a great dilemma, whether or not it should be provided, and if provided, what form was it supposed to take? For example at the time of colonisation, in France, a large segment of the French population opposed education for Africans because they thought that the purpose of colonialism was to satisfy the need for new markets for French industrial production and to be the source of cheap labour and cheap raw materials. Proponents of this view argued in favour of limiting schooling for Africans because they felt that, "the more you educate individuals in this situation, the more they hate you" (Clignet, 1970). The general view, however, was that educational programmes

for Africans should be limited and be given to a small elitist group. In Britain, the Education Committee of the Privy Council, in its report in 1867, for example, criticised what it called, ' a bookish type of education' and instead advocated for "a strong vocational orientation" which would lead to a settled and thriving peasantry (Clignet, 1970). What should, however, be emphasised is that in talking about vocational education, the colonial curriculum placed no premium on professions such as engineering, technology and allied subjects. Most often the so-called vocational education, carried a racial overtone, which stressed that Africans should be trained so that they would fulfill tasks appropriate to their presumed intellectual and social inferiority(3).

In short, therefore, colonial education was designed to serve the needs of the colonial state. At no time were the aspirations of the Africans put into consideration. Colonial schools, functioned as part of an ideological state apparatus designed for capital reproduction and accumulation. In this regard, the educated labour in Africa consisted largely of low-level functionaries whose main task was to promote and maintain the status quo. The colonial powers did not only neglect education for their colonised population qualitatively, but quantitatively as well, because their main attitude was based on imperial self-interest. Consequently, the type of education provided was generally patchy, being of a selective nature, concentrating in particular areas and among certain interest groups to the utter neglect of others since it was mainly guided by pragmatic reasons. It created very serious disparities between urban and rural areas as well as geographic and ethnic divisions in practically all the colonial states (Uchendu, 1979).

Despite its fragmentary nature, Western education as Coleman points out was instrumental in the rise of nationalism and subsequent achievement of independence in most African countries:

The introduction of modern educational system in colonial areas had significant political consequences. It was the single most important factor in the rise and spread of nationalist sentiment and activity. From the modern educational system emerged an indigenous elite which demanded the transfer of political power to itself on the basis of the political values of the Western liberal tradition or the ethical imperatives of Christianity, both of which had been learned in the schools...Designed essentially to serve only evangelizing or imperial purposes, Western education became a prime contributor to the emergence of new independent nations (Coleman, 1965).

## **Pitfalls of Independence**

It is no longer a major subject of contention that African independence is widely considered to have been a mere compromise between the colonial powers and the middle-class leadership of the nationalist movements (Fanon, 1962). The former turned over the machinery to the latter, in turn for which the latter implicitly promised to hold in check the radical tendencies of the lower class protest, and to leave basically intact the overall economic links with the former (Bassy, 1999). This, in essence meant the replacement of colonialism with neo-colonialism, which is a process whereby colonial powers still extend their influence and dominance over political and economic matters in Africa. This means that, with the perpetuation of neo-colonialism in Africa, what is commonly described as independence for most African countries in the 1960s, was in effect a mere change of guard. Neo-colonialism eroded the prospect of

genuine independence by strengthening the dependency of African states on their former colonial rulers, to the mutual advantage and benefit of both the foreign powers and the domestic partners. As a result of such ties, African political scientists argue, the African ruling elite, have left unchecked the exploitative relationship that existed during colonialism. This means that African leaders are keen to subject their countries to European exploitation rather than work for the interests of their own people. It is further argued that what African leaders call nation building merely refers to: political and administrative reforms aimed at experimenting with the political traditions of the Europeans; and strengthening of the economic ties with the former colonial masters (Adekele, 1997).

The process by which most African countries in a large measure remain neo-colonial client states requires no emphasis. The ruling elite still oversees economic structures that were set up in the colonial period, with very little or no change at all. What has often been referred to as economic expansion and growth has largely meant increasing cash production and mineral extraction. There has been no meaningful industrialisation, hence little diversification in their export trade, let alone processing their so-called raw materials before export. Their external trade is subject to erratic international prices of demand for primary commodities (Rist, 1997).

The ruling elite having put itself in a position where it cannot effect change to alleviate the poverty of its people and thereby stem discontent, it devises different means of holding on power. These have included the shift from pluralism to centralisation of power in the hands of a single party which was grafted on the personalisation of power in the hands of the party leaders, who in turn became state presidents in a kind of divine right presidential doctrine (Tardoff, 1991). Another strategy has been a scramble for power within the elite class through the illegal seizure of governments by military dictators, who advance dubious schemes aimed at promoting and advancing the interests of their group. Among the commonest strategies, however, has been holding on power through corrupt practices. Corruption, normally takes many forms, which include; falsifying election results in which quite often losers are declared winners, and the embezzlement of public funds by the ruling elite and their associates. It is now admitted that corruption is quite rife in the entire African body politic. As it has been recently observed, it is a matter of regret amounting to national calamities, that according to a recent estimate, the amount of money held by African political leaders in foreign accounts is said to be equivalent to the size of the African external debt (Mafeje, 1999) (4).

The education sector was not different from other sectors in the decolonisation process. In the three decades of the post-colonial era, most African states, either created or significantly expanded the network of public sector schools as an important means of addressing the so-called challenges of modernity and of meeting the requirements of participating in a global system of modern states. Conventional development wisdom in the West at the time admonished them that: 'Education is the key that unlocks the door to modernisation'

(Harbison and Myers, 1964). The logic upon which this wisdom rested was that education would offer Africans training so that they could find work in the newly created modern sector and thereby contribute to their countries' prosperity. Consequently, each African state spent considerable human and financial resources to develop the public education system (Boyle, 1999).

Apart from expanding the educational systems, little or no effort was made to change the ethos and values of colonial education. As it has been pointed out:

...Post-colonial education in Black Africa is essentially a colonial legacy. After the overthrow of colonial regimes, colonial educational systems in Africa were merely replaced by those which, although satisfying the aspirations of many for educational reforms, conformed, to a large extent, to the system in the colonial country. It was the avowed policy of the colonial governments to make education in their dependencies similar to those at home as a means of depersonalising the African and for paternalistic and assimilationist reasons. It was also an attempt to limit the number of intermediate and top-level African cadres...

(Moumouni, 1968).

In that regard, apart from minor structural and organisational changes, very little has changed in the philosophy and curriculum content of African education. Therefore, in principle and practice, education has remained a colonial legacy. Some very meaningful changes were, however, tried with a degree of success, by Guinea under Sekou Toure, Tanzania during the time of Mwalimu Julius K. Nyerere and Mozambique in the time of Samora Machel. In the rest of most of the countries, the colonial education values and ethos have remained intact, and in some cases attempts have even been made to parallel the French or English systems, due to the nostalgia of having diplomas that are comparable in tone and content to those of France or Britain.

Education in Africa is therefore still designed after Western models and paradigms that have little connection to life in Africa. African institutions, particularly universities, still largely teach most subjects whose content is Euro-centric with most of the textbooks imported from Europe and the United States, if they are affordable. Very little is taught about Africa, based on African research (Bassy, 1999). As in the colonial era, education is still perceived as the major determining factor for social mobility because it is only through it that an individual can achieve higher occupational enhancement, high income, higher status and higher prestige. It is seen as the only avenue into the elite status and educational policies are still designed to perpetuate this elitist perception. The African elite are on the whole totally unwilling to effect educational changes that are likely to undermine their self interests. This attitude like the colonial one is derived from the notion that 'peasant children should remain attached to the land' and should therefore only receive brief education that fits them for that purpose (Moumouni, 1968).

### **Some Attempts in Educational Reform**

The failure to restructure the colonial economies, while at the same time expanding their formal education systems, led to one inevitable consequence, namely, the mismatch between economic growth and the education output. Within a matter of years, following the achievement of independence, most Sub-Saharan African countries, started to experience an acute problem of school-leaver unemployment problem, although its magnitude varied from country to country. Although some of the African governments began to perceive the shortcomings of the type of education they inherited, in a majority of cases, they have made the wrong diagnosis, and therefore have generally tended to provide wrong remedies or have tried to deal with symptoms and not the disease. The focus has always been on

education per se and hardly anything on the nature of the economy.

Many of the education commissions established to investigate the problem of the education sector, have therefore always attributed it to the literary content of the colonial curriculum. Hence, these commissions have conceived the development of technical education as a panacea that would usher in the much-longed for divine event leading to an age of economic and technological development. For example, an education paper, for the then government of Eastern Nigeria had the following:

The colonial type of education did not adequately meet the needs of the country...The result is that manual, agricultural and technical education have come to be associated with inferior status and to be accorded low instead of high regard in the scheme of things...We must now evolve a policy, a system of education which will produce men and women who will not be out of place in a technological age...A system which will feed our industries with personnel (Bassy, 1999).

In Kenya, the Ministry of Education in an attempt to provide a rationale for introducing a new education system in 1984, provided among others the following arguments:

The Need for a more Relevant Curriculum: The education system hitherto followed in the country did not cater for the greater number of pupils enrolled. There is the need therefore to provide a practical curriculum that will offer a wide range of employment opportunities.

Technical and Vocational Training: The 8-4-4 system, with its emphasis on technical and vocational education, will ensure that the students graduating at every level, have some scientific and practical knowledge that can be utilised for either self-employment, salaried employment or further training

(Republic of Kenya, 1984)

Educational reform literature in Africa is full of this kind of reasoning. Among the major educational reform approaches to deal with the problem has been to restructure the colonial education system. In Nigeria, for example, the early 1980s, witnessed a restructuring of education system to a 6-3-3-4 system. The objective was to provide a free basic segment of six years of primary education and three years of junior secondary(5). In Kenya among the main objectives for the 8-4-4 education system was to prolong the primary education segment to enable its leavers to be mature enough to enter into the world of labour. There are indeed many examples of educational restructuring in a good number of the African countries.

The major educational reforms, have, however, been on vocationalisation. In the 1970s and 1980s, the numerous educational innovations that were introduced into the educational systems included: the introduction of work experience into primary and secondary school curricula; vocationisation of the secondary school curriculum; introduction of a mandatory period of labour market experience between secondary and higher education; recruitment of dropouts from the educational system into a national youth employment service; and the integration of adults and children into a more flexible system of education (Bassy, 1999).

Some studies carried out on the introduction of these innovations as well as on technical and vocational education, illustrate the fact that things have not drastically changed the structures and perceptions of the inherited colonial education. Western education, fundamentally remains a form of credentialising entry into the elite status. From most of the studies, problems which commonly inhibit vocationisation, however, include: high unit costs; an absence of clarity in aims and objectives; shortage of qualified

teachers to teach vocational subjects; and the low status as viewed by the students and the community (Sifuna, 1992). Some of these problems are, however, by no means peculiar to Africa in particular or less industrialised countries in general. They apply to industrialised countries as well. As Norton Grubb has summarised:

Vocational curricula have always had to battle against not only the resistance of academic curricula, but also the suspicion that they provide a second class education and track to some individuals of lower class or lower caste, racial minorities, and women away from academic education and access to jobs of the highest pay (Grubb, 1985).

## **Technical Assistance**

It is important to state that in formulating their development policies, African governments have heavily relied on technical assistance. The 1960s and 1970s, when most African countries achieved their independence, this coincided with the United Nation's, First and Second Development Decades. The main driving force in technical assistance was the human capital and modernisation theories, which were largely advocated by leading Western economists. The basis of these theories, was an assumption that African countries emerging out of colonialism were poor because they lacked the necessary qualified human resource. On this basis, the new African governments directed considerable resources in the development of secondary and tertiary education.

The consequence of these policy strategies as indicated before, was the mismatch between educational outputs and the sluggish economic growth, leading to the high school leaver unemployment problem. It is no exaggeration to point out that both the educational expansion and innovations mentioned in the previous section were undertaken, more often on the advice and support through technical assistance. For example, it is estimated that in the 1970s alone, the World Bank before shifting its interest in basic education, over 25 percent of its lending had gone to the vocationalisation of the secondary school curriculum and related technical programmes in Third World countries. This particular trend was shared by other donor agencies.

A few examples will suffice to pinpoint the donor hand in educational vocationalisation of the 1970s. Sierra Leone was among the countries that benefited from donor support in its diversification of the secondary school curricula. As a matter of fact, diversification was not a policy emanating from the government, but thrust upon it by the World Bank in line with the First Sierra Leone Government/IDA Education Project. Although the Bank may not have had bad motives for the programme, the funding arrangements constrained the country to embark on vocationalisation, when it was least prepared for it. In 1970, working under constraints, the government issued a White Paper declaring that diversification of the secondary school curriculum had become a major education policy (Wright, 1988).

In Kenya in the early 1970s, the government embarked on ambitious programmes of expanding technical secondary schools and modernising their workshops through technical assistance from the



Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA). These schools had a dual track of academic and vocational education. Industrial education was also introduced in 35 academic secondary schools, and the Canadian Development Agency (CIDA), assisted with the building of a technical teachers college, the Kenya Technical Teachers' College (KTTC), to train teachers for vocational subjects. Through USAID, there were massive expansions at the then Egerton College of Agriculture now Egerton University, and JICA established a College of Agriculture and Technology at Juja, 30km from Nairobi which is now the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT). Although these institutions now serve an important role in human resource development, they, however, illustrate the donor community role in shaping the Kenya government policy in technical education(6).

Since the early 1980s, African countries like other so-called less industrialised countries have been grappling with technical assistance that is tied to the donor directed structural adjustment programmes (SAPs). SAPs are partly the consequence of the crisis in the Northern economies, when the seventies marked a period which ended the post-World War 2 'golden age' of low unemployment and inflation. It will, however, be naive to suggest that African governments, have been dancing to donor initiated policies without any form of objections.

In the early 1970s, under the umbrella of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) bloc of countries, they demanded alternatives to all existing economic and political relations, including new mechanisms of international economic regulation to ensure stable commodity prices and access to First World Markets, the direct redistribution of global wealth from North to South and the transfer of global economic decision-making to the more democratic United Nations' institutions. Their challenge culminated in the famous U.N. General Assembly resolution for a 'New International Economic Order, (NIEO) in 1974. The response of the industrialised countries, was to shift their major activities to organisations that mainly represented their interests like the G7 and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Some countries such as the U.K. and the U.S.A. went as far as withdrawing from U.N. institutions in response (Cox, 1979; Mundy, 1999).

In 1980, the African countries evolved the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) which drew up the Africa's Priority Programme for Recovery, and the U.N. Programme of Action for Recovery and Development. These were aimed at restructuring and transforming African economies towards long term self-reliance and self-sustaining development. The document was adopted by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and subsequently in 1989, by the U.N. General Assembly as the African Alternative Framework by a vote of 137 countries, with only the U.S. voting against it (Odora-Hoppers, 1999)(7).

In another effort to counteract the socio-economic distortions by the World Bank/UNDP report on Africa's Adjustment and Growth in the 1980s which in effect obliged African governments to implement the structural adjustment programmes, they mobilised a response through the U.N. Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) which produced a critique of the report, entitled, African Alternatives to Structural Adjustment Programmes: A Framework for Transformation and Recovery in 1989 (Odora-Hoppers, 1999).

The two African initiatives were ignored by the World Bank and the IMF which continued with 'business as usual', adopting orthodox SAPs with their overriding concern with fiscal and financial

balances and external equilibrium. As Adedeji points out:

...there was a refusal of the donors, particularly the Bretton Woods institutions, to accept and support Africa's perception of their own developmental objectives and strategies. Instead, the institutions proposed their own strategies for a development path, they thought would be good for Africa...Long term developmental objectives were put on hold. In their place were devised SAPs, by the Bretton Woods institutions, which these countries were required to adopt if they were to qualify for external support and, in particular, have access to the desperately needed foreign exchange..(Adedeji, 1995)

Consequence to the rejection of the African initiatives, the World Bank/IMF now virtually define and control the development of most African countries, and education is one of the sectors that has fallen under such control. The World Bank has assumed the duty and responsibility to guide and direct policies, projects and programmes in education. As it has rightly been pointed out ' all the donors, including the Nordic countries, seem to agree to have their policies coordinated and decided by the thinking of the World Bank' (Brock-Utne, 2000). This has meant an end to all possibilities of any external aid to education in Africa, without the acceptance of the World Bank/IMF axis and conditionalities. Previously, some bilateral donor organisations, particularly the Nordic countries, had rescued a number of African countries from tough conditionalities of the Bank and the IMF, like the introduction of school fees, privatising secondary schools or cost-sharing in higher education. These conditions were seen to be not only unfavourable for African development, but also to be against the policies of independent bilateral donor organisations (Tenga, 1999).

With an all encompassing mandate of the Western powers, especially the United States, the World Bank/IMF are now the key players of Africa's educational scene. They are the architects of the different policy documents related to education reform, as well as sponsorships of research, policy evaluation, organisation of conferences, seminars and workshops. There are very few, if any, education sector policy documents that originate from Education Ministries of respective African governments. Such World Bank education sector papers directly influence the education policies of the countries that are recipient of loans from the Bank or any other bilateral donor of the industrialised countries. For example, it is common to find that the Bank or donor agency specifies what the loan or grant should be used for. Consequently, in an effort to benefit from these multilateral and bilateral donor support, most African governments, have had to shift their education policies in order to accommodate the Bank's demands. The Bank on its own, and also in conjunction with other donor agencies with interest in African education, commissions studies as well as sponsoring various research and evaluation projects in the education sector that become key to policy formulations. As a result, sources of data outside the Bank's domain have often been totally ignored. Because of its immense financial resources, the Bank is capable of distributing its policy documents widely, in order to influence decision makers, and the various interest groups in education such as universities and NGOs (Tenga, 1999).

Despite the widely publicised claims of the benefits of the World Bank/IMF initiated SAPs, their repercussions on the allocation of both public and private resources to education are now more than obvious(8). The Bank's restrictions on educational expenditure, coupled with the on-going economic crisis, have crippled African governments' ability to provide education for their people. This is reflected in

falling gross enrolment ratios (GER), and wastage rates in basic education in practically all the African countries. There is an acute shortage of teaching materials and textbooks at all the levels of the education systems, deteriorating physical structures and facilities, declining research capacity in higher education, difficulties in payment of teachers' salaries, students' allowances and others.

## The Challenge for Change

The above general survey has attempted to situate some of the current educational problems facing Africa at the continental level as well as internationally. An overall summation from it is that through various ways and means, Africa has been conditioned to travel some 'development path' that has been designed and mapped out for it by others for over a century now. As the famous, but ignored report, *What Now ?* points out, 'development' as defined and pursued by Western countries is an illusion. (Dag Hammarskjold Foundation, 1975). 'Development' as it was noted, is not simply an economic process, but a complex whole that has to arise endogenously from deep down inside each society. It springs from the culture in question, and cannot be reduced to imitation of developed societies. It was further emphasised that **there is therefore no universal formula for development**. This point has been supported by a wide range of other authoritative sources. For example, Mwalimu Nyerere in some of his most fascinating arguments, noted:

People cannot be developed. They can only develop themselves. For a while, it is possible for an outsider to build a man's house, an outsider cannot give a man pride and self confidence in himself as a human being. Those things a man has to create in himself by his own actions. He develops himself by what he does; he develops himself by making his own decisions, by increasing his understanding of what he is doing and why, by increasing his own knowledge and ability, and by his own full participation- as an equal- in the life of the community he lives in. Thus for example, a man is developing himself when he grows or earns enough to provide decent conditions for himself and his family; he is not being developed if someone gives him these things (Nyerere, 1968).

This point was also given emphasis by M. M'bow at the time he was Director General of UNESCO, as he noted, development can only come from within. He stressed that it must be endogenous, thought out by people themselves, springing from the soil on which they live and attuned to their aspirations, the conditions of their natural environment, the resources at their disposal and particular genius of their culture. He stressed that education should accordingly contribute to the promotion of such endogenous development (Thompson, 1983)(9).

What is strongly emphasised in this kind of developmental thinking, is that development must be geared to satisfying the basic needs of the poorest sections of the population, who should rely mainly upon their own capability and resources. As has been shown in this survey, the present crisis of development in Africa and perhaps in other parts of the less industrialised countries is bound up with structures of exploitation which though originates in the North, are relayed and maintained in Africa by the ruling class that is an accomplice of the privileged layers of the industrialised countries. This appears to be the **cardinal point of the challenge for change**, because, how is it that despite their constant declarations of

good intentions for change, nothing really changes?(10). A new type of thinking should permeate the psyche of the African elite, who as a result of the unfortunate circumstances of acculturation occasioned by many years of colonialism, they do not think in terms of using their power to create human and material resources on their own, but rather always think mostly of sharing or presiding over the sharing of such resources along the predatory colonial models. Little wonder, in contemporary African politics, the slogan 'power shift' or 'it is our turn' is always another way of saying we want a shift of guard, rather than a shift in the paradigm in the way things are perceived and done (Bassy, 1999).

Contrary to the common characterisation by the Western media of Africa as a collapsing continent, it is only so when measured by their distorted model of development. The African people are quite resilient to poverty orchestrated by their ruling elite as agents of exploitation. After many years of false experimentation, groups are beginning to emerge that are determined to break with the dominant systems which have ceased being seen as a model or paradigm to be adopted. The frustration caused by impossible imitation of a false and alienating ideal is discarded, and energies are mobilised and invested in new approaches. They reject the idea of remaining prisoners of development in which everything is measured by the yardstick of percapita income- and maintain that this does not do away with material poverty. Such self confidence liberates their initiatives to embark on socio-economic movements which are not recognised by the media or feature in international declarations, but effectively sustain large communities (Rist, 1997).

It is now reckoned that there are socio-economic movements in the South which have stopped expecting everything to come from the good will of those in power, and no longer believe either in aid or international cooperation. They therefore organise among themselves, inventing new forms of social linkage and new ways of securing their existence (Rist, 1997). It is through such social organisations as well as individuals, that large African populations are able to feed themselves without any reliance on the national governments and international agencies. One of the most puzzling aspects of the African ruling elite is to boast of increased percapita income, GNP and related economic jargons, while large sections of their populations have to rely on imported food or food from relief agencies. The main task of the emerging organisations is to restore the economic authority of the marginalised groups. They no longer place their hopes in international trade or from the state, although the latter often tries to stifle their initiatives by imposing all manner of regulations and control. Such organisations, generally do not revolve around activism, as their commonality is a new and practical way of focusing on themselves. These include such movements as the Swadhyaya in India which has influenced and changed the life style of a large group of people and similar groups have been reported in Latin America and Africa whose expansion is based on sharing successful experiences. In West Africa, for example, there have been movements at the village levels which have been based on sharing common experiences in the improvement and utilisation of village resources, and have not received the usual international publicity (Rist, 1997). Each African country needs focus on these self- reliant groups for replication and expansion.

Economic growth may remain necessary, but not the key priority, until large populations have learned to develop themselves, first and foremost in self sustaining food production. Such growth should, however, be consciously geared to the production of certain essential commodities. Loans may be considered so long

as they provide the capacity to pay them, while the integration of the African countries into the so-called world system ought to depend on the benefits they can derive from it. Instead of simply conforming to the principle of free trade. International agreements on basic products should allow prices to be stabilised in a way favourable to all parties, while the multinationals should agree to transfer their technology to African countries, when these countries ask them to do so (Economist, 2001).

How does education fit in the new socio-economic challenge? A change in attitudes and values about the function of education has to permeate the entire African societies. In many parts of Africa, it is not only the educated elite who are frightened by experimentation and transformation. Rural societies are among those who strongly advocate the existence of the modern school, and the way it has been structured. This is because mistakenly, or otherwise, they perceive it as a means of advancement out of the village for their children, and as a source of security in an unstable environment. Any intention on the part of the educationists to experiment with the present educational set up is, therefore in danger of being met with considerable skepticism and even resistance. However, what seems to augur well for change is that large sections of the populations in most African countries are increasingly getting disillusioned with the present education as many of their offsprings complete it even as high as university, but return to the villages and cities to join many cohorts of the unemployed.

With the changed socio-economic orientations, basic questions will have to be raised about the kind of knowledge and values that need to be transmitted by the education systems. Do globalised curricula meet the needs of re-oriented African communities? In the new framework of the communities, every context must be explored in itself for what knowledge capital and values that exist and how education can be organised and structured for children and the community? One is really not discussing a utopian situation as the following narrative illustrates:

A short workshop held for curriculum developers at the National Institute of Educational Development in Namibia exemplified one approach to identifying and curricularising community knowledge. In the form of a carefully designed and prepared simulation exercise in small groups, a pair of 'curriculum developers' visited a village to interview a 'villager' about what work their children did, within what age brackets, at what times of the year, how they learnt how to do it, how the village knew when they had achieved the level of skills needed, and how the village gave recognition of it. They were also to elicit information about what explicit teaching was given by the village through social and cultural activities of various kinds. The 'villagers' were selected professional staff who had grown up in rural villages, and thus only needed to be themselves and remember their own childhood. The information collected was then systematised and written down as if it were a curriculum, described in terms of competencies to be achieved, a progression of learning experiences to bring the child to that achievement, how their competence would be assessed, how it would be recognised, and at what phase the competence would normally be expected to be achieved: in other words the community curriculum (Avenstrup, 1999).

What is being stressed here is that in the changed education systems, the school should be not be a source of alienation from the immediate environment, but inculcate knowledge, skills and values that should be of immediate utility. Nor is one saying that education provided should be one that continues to encourage attitudes of conformity and the status quo. The school will have to be emancipatory, that is

provide a type of education that challenges oppression, kleptocracy and exploitation of whatever kind. It should awaken the political, economic and civic responsibilities in the youth. In this regard, it should inculcate skills that would enable the youth to consciously and effectively utilise their environment. It should enable individuals to create new ideas as well as new economic opportunities. As it has often been pointed out and stressed, African education should be an instrument for change, preparing people for any necessary adjustment to new and challenging social, political and economic forms (Giroux, 1993).

The subjects of study should not be separate from or alien to, the everyday problems requiring critical thought, but rather they should be the fundamental bases of such problems. Since many subjects have their origins in human conditions and are decidedly about human conditions, they provide insights and understandings about human problems and enable rational discourse about problems that confront society especially their immediate environment. Hence, it should be emphasised that the subjects that make up the educational systems in Africa, must be grounded in research and conditions that prevail in Africa.

Teachers are a very critical component of the changed educational design. Teacher education has to move away from the preparation of docile teachers whose main function is to assist students to parrot irrelevant knowledge for the purpose of passing examinations. Teacher trainers in Africa should therefore begin to develop critical discourses that challenge the ills afflicting societies like kleptomania, exploitation, the white collar syndrome, sexism, and other related vices. Teacher education programmes should reflect and examine the ways in which Western education has been used as an effective instrument of domination, exploitation and inculcating the culture of silence and oppression. The programmes should aim at producing the type of teachers who have the mission to seriously challenge the status quo due to their critical disposition and emancipatory outlook. In this regard, they have to be an all-rounded group that critically analyse the economic, social and political foundations of the current African structures and changes for the future to emancipate the continent from domination and exploitation (Bassy, 1999). This calls for a new kind of pedagogy that recognises the mutual role that both students and teachers contribute in the learning situations.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has attempted an overview of African development in general and education in particular for over a century and raises the basic question as what ought to be done in the twenty-first century? It was first and foremost established that colonialism was not a developmental process but, a very strong mechanism of exploitation. Consequently, colonial education was designed and implemented to serve the needs of the colonial state. African interests and aspirations were never put into consideration, hence schools functioned as part of an ideological state apparatus for capital reproduction and accumulation. The so-called independence failed to alter the colonial state arrangements, with education continuing along the Western models and paradigms that have no relevance to African needs and aspirations. Attempts by most African governments to initiate educational reforms, have always been based on wrong diagnosis, which have perceived the problem to be one of the literary content of colonial education. This

has often led to the vocationalisation of the school curriculum, which has dismally failed to change the ethos and values transmitted by the school systems, let alone its lack of impact on the school-leaver unemployment problem.

The African governments' failure to reconstruct their educational systems to respond to their immediate problems, has been compounded by their heavy reliance on technical assistance. Technical assistance has by and large shaped the African countries' educational agenda, which began with education for human resource development at independence to vocationalisation programmes, and to the present pathetic situation in which the donor community under the control of the World Bank /IMF formulate and supervise the implementation of educational policies in Africa.

The paper is of the view that the twenty-first century is an important turning point at which the African countries, should take stock of the present 'development path' designed and mapped out for them by others, and has been followed with disastrous consequences for the continent. They have to take control of their own destiny and follow the kind of development that is endogenous to their settings. They need to be inspired by the initiatives launched within their own countries by local communities and in other less industrialised countries outside the umbrella of international prescriptions and scouting, which meet the needs of the marginalised groups and replicate them for further development. Structured international packages should be resisted in favour of international cooperation that responds to the countries' own designed development strategies. Education which should take the lead in the transformation process, new educational programmes need to be developed that totally make a break with the past mechanisms of knowledge acquisition. Such programmes should place emphasis on knowledge, skills and values that are based on the African environment in which students will live and work. Education should spearhead critical thinking and emancipation of the community from domination and exploitation.

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## Notes

1. Franz Fanon and Rene Dumont are among the few most critical writers of the nature of the decolonisation process in Africa, and seem to have rightly predicted they would not lead to any meaningful change on the continent. Fanon in particular was quite emphatic about the ineptitude and a lack of the development agenda by the African political elite.
2. Victor Hugo is a renown French historian of the nineteenth century whose opinion on issues was very highly respected and regarded by the French elite as well as the public.
3. For more details, it is quite useful to read Lord Frederick Lugard's perceptions of what Britain should do to make the African colonies different from India, especially with regard to the type of education that would not contribute to the

undermining of the empire. This ideas are contained in his book, *The Dual Mandate*, London 1922. Lugard was the architect in the establishment of British colonial rule in East and West Africa.

4. The sudden death of Sani Abacha as the President of Nigeria was helpful to the succeeding Nigerian governments in following up the colossal sums of money he had stashed away in foreign banks, and that characterises a majority of the current crop of African political leaders and their close associates.
5. I am most grateful for the information provided by Dr. Christy N. Omoifo of the University of Benin on the changes and the current system of education in Nigeria.
6. It is of course not being suggested here that the donor agencies had bad motives for the country. These institutions have played a major role and continue to do so in human resource development as the two colleges are now full fledged universities.
7. It is important and most significant to understand that much of the neo-liberal agenda currently drummed by the World Bank and the IMF has its main origin as the U.S. government. It is therefore not surprising that both the U.S. and the Bretton Wood's institutions totally ignored the African initiatives, which actually contradicted the neo-liberal approach.
8. All along the World Bank/IMF have insisted that SAPs are not the cause of the economic crisis in Africa, but the solution to the crisis, despite the lack of any concrete evidence to support its contention. It is such a ridiculous position which is partly contributing to an international back lash to the Bank's policies as reflected in organised demonstrations against its meetings world wide.
9. Japan perhaps offers some unique example of endogenous form of development. During the era it embarked on modernisation, it selectively borrowed aspects of industrialisation that were carefully infused in indigenous skills and material development. No country or agency dictated to Japan what it ought and ought not to do in order to develop as is now the practice with the so-called developing countries.
10. The African elite class in particular is being called upon to genuinely commit itself to change and totally discard the development agenda hitherto imposed on it from outside. It can very easily do so if it shakes off its interests in the current socio-economic and political structure that seems to have a dead end and a likelihood of leading to violent revolutions on the African continent.

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