THE ROLE OF EDUCATION TOWARDS SOCIAL EQUITY IN KENYA: WITH REFERENCE TO VULNERABLE GROUPS

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Abstract

The constitutional provision for the right to health (Social Assistance Bill, 2012) in Kenya states that every person has the right to health, accessible and adequate housing, reasonable standards of sanitation, adequate food and safe drinking water, social security and education. This study sought to establish the role that education played in ensuring social equity amongst vulnerable groups, specifically the deaf. Countrywide representative samples of 5 schools were the basis of this study, namely, Kitui Integrated School, Kilimani Integrated, Kanyuambora Integrated, Thika Primary School and Kajiado Integrated School. The study found that there is a shortage of integrated schools in the country. Teachers as well as parents though largely aware of special schools, were not supportive of the education. In addition, Kenya was found not ready for inclusive schools given the shortage of teachers, poor pay, low morale and inadequate facilities and equipment in the already crowded public schools. However, Free Primary Education was found to be an impetus towards true inclusivity for all, especially the deaf. It is hoped that the findings of this study will go a long way in protecting the human rights of vulnerable groups as enshrined in Article 43 of the Social Assistance Bill, 2012 and in helping us attain poverty reduction by 2030. It is recommended that further research be done countrywide to establish key problem areas to be addressed in helping us provide adequate and quality education, health services and supportive legislation for the deaf.

Key Words: Integrated Schools; Inclusive Schools; Vulnerable Groups; Social Equity; Poverty Reduction; Vulnerable Groups.

Introduction

Who is your neighbor? I don’t know your answer to the above question but I am certain that if everyone loved “neighbor” as much as he loved himself; shared with and cared for him, cooperated and worked together with him, we would not be here discussing “social equity and poverty reduction” today. (Rahnena, 1997). On the contrary, there would be adequate social equity; equality; economic growth; expansion of functioning and income for poverty reduction; the result of which would be human development (Mehrotra and Enrique, 2007).
However, this social ideal in Kenya, existed perhaps before the colonial era (1890s) when all natural resources were largely used for communal welfare and according individual and development needs. (Kitchings, 1980).

During the colonial era, 1890 to 1963, Kenyans were introduced to foreign currency and trade, and the individualistic way of life with resulted in the desire to acquire and accumulate personal wealth. Slowly but surely, Kenya began to develop as a capitalist country that had an economic gap between the fortunate and less fortunate. Kitchings (1980) for instance, depicts how changes in land tenure, land use and land accumulation became instrumental in the creation of new social classes. This unequally distributed economy led to a stratified society whose apex was the bourgeoisie that wielded the political power and led the urban life. At the bottom of the stratum were “the wretched of the earth” - Ploritariat (Frantz Fanon, 1968), who largely constituted the poor, marginalized and disabled natives who lived mainly in the rural area. Indeed, this divisive socio-economic situation did not improve even after achieving political independence in 1963.

However, as a member of the United Nations, Kenya recognized education as a basic human right and powerful tool through which human resource could be prepared for national development. Since then, all national policy documents and education reports have reiterated the importance of civic education as a weapon to combat the three social upheavals, namely, ignorance, poverty and disease (African socialist Paper, 1965). It is to this end that today, Kenya spends over two thirds of her national annual budget on civic education. Although the effects of the three social enemies still sting, this paper contends that education remains the basic tool and vehicle for bringing about desirable changes in light of modern technology and the recently voted constitution. Mehrotra and Delamonica (2007) also point out that educational levels of a population, their gender equity, health and nutrition, as well as their social institutions and environment, constitute significant micro-economic variables.

Definition of Terms

Definition of the following related terms should help us better understand our discussion in this paper.

Education: The term “education” is rich in meaning. For the purposes of this paper, we shall take education to mean any formal, informal or non-formal communication or information exchange carried out in the day to day social intercourse, Norton and Dott (2003). Norton et al gives six reasons for communication which are pertinent to our discussion. They include the need to:

1. Promote public awareness (as we are doing in this symposium) of an organization and its capabilities. Obviously, a nation is a macro organization.
2. Mobilize support (towards attainment of a goal such as poverty reduction in Kenya by vision 2030)
3. Publicize a problem or need and its root causes and to encourage discussion in a bid to create greater awareness that something needs to be done about it.
4. Show that there are solutions, or at least it is possible to do something.

5. Encourage action (such as Kenya Institute of Education is doing in this symposium) to show the general public as well as specific stakeholders, that they can do something about it.

6. Generate a sense of pride (and motivation) amongst everyone connected with the organization to continue working as a team to achieve their vision.

**Definition of Terms**

**Social Equity:** The phrase social equity implies social equality, social sharing and leaving together in harmony. Equality demands that equals are treated equally and unequals unequally. Thus social equity is taken here to mean a fair and reasonable way of behaving towards others and treating them as equals for they share humanity; hence the cardinal law, love one another as you love yourself (King Hammurabi, 2000 B.C.). In the same legal spirit, the proposed constitution of Kenya (2010) affirmed that women and men had the right to equal treatment, including the right to equal opportunities in educational, political, economic, cultural and social spheres. Social equity, therefore, disregards all human differences as well conditions in which one lives richly or is improvised; they equally cooperate to combat poverty.

**Poverty Reduction:** The term poverty has various but related meanings which are here summarized as a condition in which someone does not have enough money to buy essential goods to meet their basic needs or pay out debts. Allen and Thomas (2000) assert that poverty means lack of development whereas development implies moving towards getting rid of poverty. In this sense development generally leads to poverty reduction. Because the concept of poverty reduction varies from society to society, a figure of 1 $ per day has been generally accepted as the poverty line in terms of living or purchasing power (The World Bank, 1997). Thus we can define poverty reduction as the process of economically rising above one-dollar life per day, which was clearly guaranteed to all Kenyans by the proposed constitution (2010) that said:

> Every person has a right to the highest attainable standard of health, which includes the health care services, including the reproductive health care; to accessible and adequate housing, and reasonable standard of sanitation; to be free from hunger, and to have adequate food of acceptable quality; to clean and safe water in adequate quantities; to social security; and to education.

This constitutional provision covers the well to do citizens, as well as vulnerable groups, who mainly live in the rural areas and form the bottom 20% of the population (International Finance Corporation, 2000).

**Vulnerable Groups:** The term “vulnerable” means open or exposed to danger, insecurity and hostile conditions such as poverty. They include women, old members of the society, persons with disabilities, children, youth, members of minority or marginalized communities and members of particular ethnic, religious or cultural communities (the proposed constitution of Kenya, 2010). Evidently, vulnerable groups are many and with varied needs. Majority of
them live in the rural areas while few live in urban areas, for instance street children. According to Mwaura (2009, pg 73), these people, particularly persons with disabilities “continue to face multiple discrimination at home, in the community and society at large”. They are faced with low quality and segregated education, chronic unemployment; poor access to public facilities and widespread disdain coupled with paternalistic attitudes and token inclusion. Most vulnerable persons regardless of their age and gender are prevented from making decisions that affect their daily life. They experience oppression and violation of basic human rights on a daily basis. Infanticide of these people is wide spread, not only in Kenya and the south, but also in Western countries. Persons with various forms of disability therefore face a monumental task in asserting and enjoying their fundamental human rights and are twice more likely to live in absolute poverty, (less than 1$ per day), than their able bodied counterparts. Thus their situation in Kenya is still grim despite the enactment of persons with disabilities act (2003) and the ratification of similar international instruments.

**Research Findings**

1. Nzoka (2007) carried out some research on inclusive education among integrated educational units for learners with visual impairment within the country. The schools were Kitui Integrated, Kilimani integrated, Kanyuambora integrated, Thika Primary school and Kajiado integrated and found the following:
   a. The integrated programs studied were started in the 1980’s and 1990’s
   b. The number of teaching staff in each unit ranged between 4-8.
   c. Each unit stood over several inclusive schools, that is, the schools the pupils attended.
   d. 50% of the teaching staff had a diploma in special education from Kenya Institute of Special Education.
   e. 17% had degrees in special education from Kenyatta University.
   f. Except for one unit under studied, pupils in the other units were day scholars.
   g. Pupils were largely admitted to the school through contact teachers in the units.
   h. Services offered were mainly academic and emotional/social.
   i. The degree of inclusion and material provision varied from unit to unit and school to school.
   j. Parents and teachers were aware of special schools and integrated units but tended to be less supportive of education.
   k. Pupils coped well with the school curriculum except for some subjects such as mathematics and biology which needed adaption for learning to occur.
   l. 60% of the interviewees felt Kenya was not ready for inclusive education. Some of the reasons included lack of training on the part of teachers in special education; lack of motivation of teachers; fear of extra workload; lack of comprehensive educational policy implementation by the government at the grass roots; lack of community sensitization on educational inclusion; inadequate provision of teaching learning resources, facilities and equipment.
The presenter subjected the present topic to 24 fourth year students of special education in Kenyatta University with the following questions:

a. How they would define vulnerable groups: 20% defined them as persons with disabilities; 60% defined them as those with diversified problems and needs and 20% defined them as insecure and needy people.

b. What factors were common to all vulnerable groups: 25% stated insecurity; 10% unemployment; 25% poverty; and 20% stated lack of education.

c. Was there social equity and reduction among vulnerable groups in Kenya? 90% said no; 10% said yes.

d. How would they rank the following factors leading to social equity and poverty reduction for poor people: i) social inclusion ii) employment iii) education iv) economic empowerment v) political stability vi) enabling working environment vii) supportive legislation viii) constitutional implementation ix) land ownership x) political opportunities xi) affirmative action xii) protection of human rights.

After computing the responses the items ranged as follows:

Conclusion and Recommendations

Undoubtedly, this symposium was held at a time when Kenya was transforming all her institutions in light of the new and democratic constitution. The vital changes would go a long way in helping her reach vision 2030. This was the desire of all citizens, including those who were vulnerable in one way or another. Social equity and poverty reduction should be part of vision 2030. However, social equity and poverty reduction could not be attained without free education for all. Consequently the government would:

- Carry out the above study among various vulnerable groups in order to meet their educational needs
- Implement the constitution to the letter in a bid to wipe out poverty among vulnerable groups
- Provide economic empowerment and affirmative action as well as supportive legislation to protect the human right of vulnerable groups, especially those with disabilities
- Ensure medical provision for good health of all vulnerable citizens
- Ensure both political stability and political opportunities for social security; and useful exposure to enable vulnerable persons carry out economic activities comfortably.
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