Role of Education in Conflict and Fragility in Africa

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1.0 Introduction:

According to Francine Mestrum, education justice is within the domain of social justice, although concepts such as social protection, social security, poverty reduction, social safety nets, social assistance, and social development have been used to define social policies and create some conceptual confusion. Nevertheless social thinking in the postwar (20th Century) period was based on ideas of economic and social development for the South and welfare states for the North. In both cases, there was a strong belief in mutual benefits of economic and social development (Francine, 2014). The ‘conceptual confusion’ has persisted and it is a reflection of a persistent phenomenon of social injustice in spite of concerted effort by policy to address social development. The perceived lack of social justice is at the core of salient and open conflict which emanate from the threatened sense of social protection which can only be guaranteed by emoluments from gainful employment, job-security, access to land for shelter and agriculture and other natural resources and guarantee of the rule of law and human dignity. This is however greatly hampered by information asymmetry.

Government manipulation of the goods market through taxation and subsidies is more conventionally successful, than applying the same measures to gainful employment, access to land and wealth creating information. The non-pricing policies which are usually based on census data which is periodically collected take longer to effect adjustment for the later and could render the African government weary given the desperate need for revenue generation. Usually, in economic theory, “production implies that valuable input is allocated to the bringing forth of a valuable output”, but with knowledge there is no physical output, and knowledge is most of the time not sold on the market. Malchup (1962) thus looked at complementary data to capture the internal market for knowledge. He conducted work on occupational classes of the census, differentiating classes of white-collar workers who were ‘knowledge-producing’ workers from those that were not, and computing the national income of these occupations and thereby arriving at his famous estimate of the knowledge economy worth $136.4 million.
which was 29% of GNP in 1958 (Benoit, 2008). Malchup thus become the father of the hyped knowledge economy concept and rubric.

The attraction of foreign direct investment (FDI) to Africa as a way for creating employment still suffers from inadequate policies, deficient infra-structure, insecurity and stiff competition from other more conducive FDI destinations (Yuqing, 2004). The situation is even worsened by the shortage of skilled man power to run the social services and the manufacturing plants for the prospective industries. This would mean relocating skilled labor from other countries at a higher cost of transportation, accommodation and allowances. The above factors constrain job-creation and incomes to the population. Unemployment is worsened by the high fertility rate and a low life expectancy. These factors combine for a disproportionately youthful unemployed population, with a ‘low-skilled’ education and yet energetic to engage in political activism and various unlawful activities to release bottled anger for perceived social injustice.

The desire to attract FDI is often accompanied with the government eschewed land policies in favour of foreign investors who are offered prime land at low cost with insensitive displacement of local communities without adequate compensation. The situation is even worsened by collusion of state operatives using various means including state institutions for coercion, information asymmetry and corruption to cause land evictions without compensation and resettlement of the afflicted people. These factors can only promote conflict and fragility of the state in Africa.

The social cohesion and stability of communities as brought about by the rule of law and good governance for the stability of the state and promotion of political institutions that promote social justice requires not only human rights activism and access to information but also the knowledge to decode, interpret and put information to gainful use and social justice. Information asymmetry caused by low quality skills education and at times total lack of it, combined with bureaucratic obstruction of information to government programmes and projects, in addition to lack of commensurate compensation disable communities to relocate from government project areas and to invest in alternative prime locations. In the process, armies of people are forced into destitution. This affects public attitude with regard to faith in
the state’s ability to administer justice leading to strikes which in return attract excessive use of force by the state to foster compliance. This promotes resentment and clandestine acts of violence targeting state institutions and installations geared at weakening the state to increase political space for the wronged and the underprivileged.

Information asymmetry also create imbalance in access to opportunities and timely response to planning for relocation and empowerment of individuals to invest in alternative income activities. This creates artificial income inequalities and social privileges based on information asymmetry perpetuated by lack of education, state cronyism and finance capital patronage. There therefore develops a renter class which accumulates finance capital power and assets by mere juxtaposition between the state and finance capital and eventually creating a union of the renter class, the state and finance capital perpetuating a monolithic dictatorship. This political rottenness is a recipe for state fragility in Africa and therefore the urgent need to structure the education system to help foster the social democratic process for stronger and viable social information systems that ameliorate information asymmetry.

Schooling has not delivered fully on its promise as the driver of economic success. Expanding school attainment, at the center of most development strategies, has not guaranteed better economic conditions. What’s been missing is attention to the quality of education—ensuring that students actually learn. There is strong evidence that the cognitive skills of the population, rather than mere school enrollment, are powerfully related to individual earnings, to the distribution of income, and to economic growth. And the magnitude of the challenge is clear—international comparisons reveal even larger deficits in cognitive skills than in school enrollment and attainment in developing countries. Building on several decades of thought about human capital—and centuries of attention to education in the more advanced countries—it is natural to believe that a productive development strategy would be to raise the schooling levels of the population. Ignoring quality differences significantly distorts the picture of how educational and economic outcomes are related. The distortion misses important differences between education and skills and individual earnings. It misses an important underlying factor that determines the interpersonal distribution of incomes within societies.
And it very significantly misses the important element of education in economic growth. There is credible evidence that educational quality has a strong causal impact on individual earnings and economic growth. There is growing evidence that changing the incentives in schools has an impact. Accountability systems based upon tests of student cognitive achievement can change the incentives for both school personnel and for students. By focusing attention on the true policy goal – instead of imperfect proxies based on inputs to schools – performance can be improved. These systems align rewards with outcomes. Moreover, increased local decision making or local autonomy, coupled with accountability, can facilitate these improvements (Eric and Ludger, 2007).

2.0 Knowledge Centralization and Liberalization:

The Copernicus era of the delusion of theology and the state evolved progressive social forces which liberated philosophy and liberalized knowledge for scientific progress and application to social empowerment and economic development. This saw the transfer of knowledge and power from the conservative theological philosophically led state to a free philosophy and enterprising ideology of capitalism that gave rise to Democracy and the Industrial Revolution. It therefore became clear that knowledge is power, and the death sentence in the criminalization of industrial and military espionage as a threat to national security is the more direct expression of the importance of information for industrial and military prowess.

The subjectivism of the ‘scientific method’ as an instrument for controlling the knowledge process and commodity production for private profit and control of state power becomes a real manifestation of intellectual centralism, military centralism, economic centralism, political centralism, proxy wars and arms race which have sucked in China as the new imperial rising power. The Chinese model based on intensified competition leveraged by the abundant cheap skilled labour and home market for the production off cheap commodities for export to developed countries and dumping to the African markets can only be a recipe for further conflicts and fragility of the African state. China is into open negotiations and collusion with African leaders for commodity markets and cheap economic resources on the one hand, while other imperial powers and home based monopolies are redirecting the ‘scientific method’ to
consolidate their economic status-quo through ‘superior’ technologies for commodity production and military prowess. The massive acquisition of land based on new commodity production technology strategies with a penchant for renewable biomass and non-renewable resources shall have a resurgence of land evictions of the African masses which is destined to raise their destitution increasing further the conflicts and the fragility of the African state.

The hope for Africa to develop her natural resources and people cannot therefore be sought after based on the philanthropy of the Chinese state as hyped by African leaders and China ideologues. This is especially so given that we have not seen the Chinese involvement in the transfer of educational and technological skills to support Africa’s industrial and infrastructural technological base. The bureaucratization of the circulation of commodities by state enterprises in Russia and in China reintroduced and asserted the legitimate control of the surplus by the state bureaucracy and cronies and a new financial oligarchy with capitalist ambitions of imperial states.

African elites have been apt at blaming the imperial powers for the plight of the continent, though it is also important for them to recognize their role in empowering their communities through quality education. There must be forgone luxury and self-sacrifice to address quality education needs of our education system if Africa is to enjoy from the Africa patriotism. This calls for voluntarism especially in the rural schools which moreover constitute the roots of most African educated elites well aware that most African governments with their partners do not have enough resources for the requisite financial resources translating into quality education.

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The challenge to the educated elite is to unite and work alongside state institutions and friends to liberalize quality education, quality knowledge, quality information for quality skills for community empowerment and development.

It is commonly presumed that formal schooling is one of several important contributors to the skills of an individual and to human capital. It is not the only factor. Parents, individual abilities and friends undoubtedly contribute. Schools nonetheless have a special place, not only because education and ‘skill creation’ are among their prime explicit objectives, but also because they are the factor most directly affected by public policies. It is well established that the distribution of personal incomes in society is strongly related to the amount of education people have had. Generally speaking more schooling means higher lifetime incomes. These outcomes emerge over the long term. It is not people’s income while in school that is affected, nor their income in their first job, but their income over the course of their working life. Thus, any noticeable effects of the current quality of schooling on the distribution of skills and income will become apparent some years in the future, when those now in school become a significant part of the labour force (EFA, 2005).

3.0 Education Quality, Income and State Stability:

The golden opportunity that ever befell Sub-Saharan Africa is the support by the donor community for its universal education. The problem seems to be over expectation of donor support based on overestimation of the donor financial capacity and therefore the need for an extra wit to address the gap. Many African countries have been helped by the donor community to implement universal primary (Jean et al, 2013) and secondary education, although support for higher education is still peripheral. The aspect of access to primary education has been addressed to a large extent although the issue of quality and student retention through the stages leaves a lot to be desired.

The following higher education conceptual framework by David shows that higher education leads to productivity, entrepreneurship growth, increased specialization and job creation in the private sector which stimulate economic growth. In addition higher education stimulates public
expenditure in research and development, attraction of foreign direct investment, good governance, safety and social development which stimulates economic growth. Economic growth gives rise to sustainable income growth which leads to poverty reduction. These factors combine to raise tax revenue through income and increase in private, public and investment spending, in addition to increased investment in the education sector, repeating the education induced growth cycle (David Bloom et al, 2006). We should however add that it is the quality not the quantity of the education which is crucial for domestic and international competitiveness both for employment and job-creation. The quality of education shall very much depend on the quality of teaching especially of the mathematics subject at all levels and the love for the subject needs to be cultivated early to lay the foundation for other subjects. This is a critical observation given that mathematics is generic in most of the subjects.

Higher Education Conceptual Framework (David Bloom et al, 2006)

According to Holdren and Lander, the competitive economy for the future is projected to be driven by increased skills in science and engineering (Holdren and Lander, 2010). The US Specialist in Science and Technology Policy, Frank Gottron (2013) in the Science and Technology Issues, June 20, 2013 to the 113th Congress raises the importance of STEM as follows. Under the heading; “Workforce and Education”, he highlighted that “Scientists and engineers are widely believed to be essential to U.S. technological leadership, innovation, manufacturing, and services, and thus vital to U.S. economic strength, national defense, and other societal needs.
The report by Holdren and Lander, Co-Chair President of the United States Council of Advisors on Science and Technology of September, 2010 states; “The success of the United States in the 21st century – its wealth and welfare – will depend on the ideas and skills of its population. These have always been the Nation’s most important assets. As the world becomes increasingly technological, the value of these national assets will be determined in no small measure by the effectiveness of STEM education in the United States (Holdren and Lander, 2010).

The African countries shall have to imbibe good teaching methods to emulate the developed nation standards. According to Sue Z. Beers, the President and Consultant, Tools for Learning, on the 21st Century Skills: Preparing Students for Their Future;

The 21st century dawned as the beginning of the Digital Age – a time of unprecedented growth in technology and its subsequent information explosion. Never before have the tools for information access and management made such an impact on the way we live, work, shop and play. New technologies and tools multiply daily and the new technologies of today are outdated almost as soon as they reach the market. Numerous studies and reports have emerged over the past decade that seek to identify the life, career, and learning skills that define the skills needed for success in the 21st century world. Some key design principles include;

- Connecting the content knowledge to real-world applications and problem situations that enable students to see how what they are learning connects with their lives and the world around them. The work that is asked of students must be authentic work that is relevant and that mirrors real life.
- Emphasizing deep understanding of the learning by focusing on projects and problems that require students to use the content knowledge in new ways and to extend their understanding through collaboration with others.
- Helping students understand and monitor the thinking processes they are using by including metacognitive activities that ask students to reflect on their use of thinking structures and the effectiveness of the thinking strategies they employed.
• Using technology to help students access, analyze, organize and share what they are learning and allow students to independently locate appropriate tools for the task.
• Providing opportunities for students to become “creators as well as consumers of published information” by providing opportunities for creating and verifying their own entries in collaborative sites and evaluating contributions of others.
• Engaging students in solving complex problems that require higher order thinking and application of content and that result in new perspectives and solutions to problems.
• Providing opportunities for students to work collaboratively as they gather information, solve problems, share ideas, and generate new ideas.
• Developing life and career skills by creating opportunities for students to become self-directed learners who take responsibility for their own learning and who learn how to work effectively with others.
• Helping students make connections between subjects, concepts and ideas and with others, including those outside of the classroom.

Sue Z. Beers adds, to prepare students for their future lives and careers, they need to wrestle with real-life problems that are engaging and relevant. STEM projects require students to be active learners who learn important concepts through creative and innovative projects. Their involvement in the problem-solving process builds a culture of inquiry, in which asking and answering their own questions becomes the centerpiece of the learning process. As problem solvers, students use high levels of thinking as they apply content knowledge in innovative ways.

Though it is not explicitly brought out by Sue Z. Beers, the teaching should be motivational, inspirational, and addressed to the environmental life learning experiences and capable of mentoring a holistic student with ability to adapt to employment needs and income generating activities. The education should therefore not be purely scholarly and generally informative, but an investment for income generation and destined to fit the individual into a rewarding life experience. This may be difficult to subject to conventional demand and supply rules, but there is need to bench-mark accountability of educators for quality education. Education should not
be a pass-time so that time and money spent as investment be recouped with a return. The bench-marks need to be set and updated to monitor and evaluate the output. Tracer studies to determine the quality of the training shall have to be conducted and made more transparent for the demand side. In addition, the quality of the training of the teachers, remuneration and reward, and accountability for quality teaching shall have to be addressed from the supply side.

The following recommendations (Dani, 2014) based on the mathematics and science conceptual problem of teachers in Uganda need also to be addressed for equally poor mathematics and science academic performing countries of Africa:

- The demystification of science and mathematics for holistic abilities of all teachers to teach life-skills
- The need to carry out research and to develop locally relevant educational materials and books
- The teachers’ need for refresher and short-courses in science, mathematics and the holistic approach
- The urgent need to retrain and train teachers for a holistic understanding of science and mathematics

The minimum facilities standards for quality education delivery shall also have to be determined for the various stages and fields. These factors need a holistic interplay of the stakeholders to focus education systems to the 21st Century skills for quality and income generation. The focus on equal quality education opportunities will reduce disparities in incomes and bargaining power and thereby raise faith in state institutions, reduce conflict and strengthen democratic governance and the rule of law. The ability to articulate one’s interest and to pursue one’s career dreams with a guaranteed human-rights environment fostered by a co-owned legal framework under a democratic system should strengthen citizenship and state stability. The attainment of this goal requires equal quality education opportunity.


