

# Some Are More Equal Than Others: Societal Structure and Educational Development in Post-Colonial Kenya

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This paper is an examination of the Kenyan situation. It is, however, offered in a South Pacific regional journal in the belief that it is worthwhile to reflect on educational experiences and developments in other countries with a history of colonialism, to gain insights into developments in one's own situation. Whilst it is recognised that the histories are of a heterogeneous nature, there may be some useful parallels to be drawn by the reader, particularly in terms of the educational strategies, their rhetoric, and the inter-relationship between education and other aspects of development.

The paper traces the development of secondary education in Kenya, and the process of curriculum development within it. It examines particularly those dimensions that impinge upon the organisation of Harambee schools and the teaching — learning situation in them. The term Harambee is a Kiswahili word meaning 'all pull together'. It was coined by Jomo Kenyatta as a rallying call for Kenyans to 'pull together' for development, and is used in many community fundraising activities.

The paper will also examine the educational opportunities presently offered in different types of secondary institutions in Kenya, and some of the factors that have shaped their development. This will highlight some of the problems associated with adopting an education system that has been developed in a vastly different social context. In particular it should point to inconsistencies between the aims and objectives expressed in the Kenyan *Development plan 1984-88* (Republic of Kenya 1983) and the situation on the ground. The contents of a development plan may represent only a country's minimum aspirations, but the plan still provides a basis from which one can begin to assess the present situation and the proposed strategies for development, and to estimate how effective these strategies will be in bringing about that development. Indeed, it may even be the basis from which to question the very nature and direction of the proposed development.

Harambee schools are ones sponsored by the community without any government assistance.

### **Educational developments in the pre-independence era**

The missionaries, in their efforts to spread Christianity, set up the first school in Kenya in 1847 (Osogo 1971). Initially the missions seemed to concentrate their efforts in other parts of East Africa, and it was only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that an unco-ordinated proliferation of missionary schools was seen in Kenya. On the whole, besides spreading their Christian doctrines and moral teachings, they provided simple technical education.

Government involvement in education began only after 1909. Despite opposition from the settlers, the government proposed a three tier system based upon racial lines, that is to say the independent development of segregated education systems for Europeans, Asians and Africans. Under this proposal, African education was to follow the model of black American education, with a strong technical bias and emphasis on working with the hands. Since this was assumed to be the area of African capability, the intention was to exploit it and gradually to replace the Asians. The first government school for Africans on this model was set up in 1913 in Machakos, Eastern Province.

The substantial differences of opinion between the settlers and government administrators did not diminish. Finally in 1918 a review of the initial proposals was mounted. The review body travelled throughout Kenya seeking opinions. In the event, the views canvassed were dominated by settler opinion: only one African was interviewed.

The result was a new proposal for a four tier system, with a new category for Arabs and Swahilis (Coastal people who had intermarried with the Arabs). This category was to be inserted below the Asian tier and above the African. The model for the education of Africans was also changed, following the South African Bantu education model, under which Africans were educated for the labour market, largely to enter the service of settlers.

The consequent Education Ordinance of 1924 set up, for each of the four racial groups, committees consisting of representatives from missions, the

settlers, the government, and the community (that is, with the exception of the African community). These committees steered educational developments into the 1950s. At the time of the institution of the 1924 Ordinance, education for Europeans and Indians was already available to the upper high school level, whereas Africans were lucky to receive four years of schooling.

In short, by the later stages of colonial rule there had been only limited attempts to educate Africans formally. Secondary education facilities for them were minimal during this period, and no significant plans were made to extend them. In fact, the Beecher Report of 1949 recommended that only 1 per cent of African primary school children should continue to secondary level.

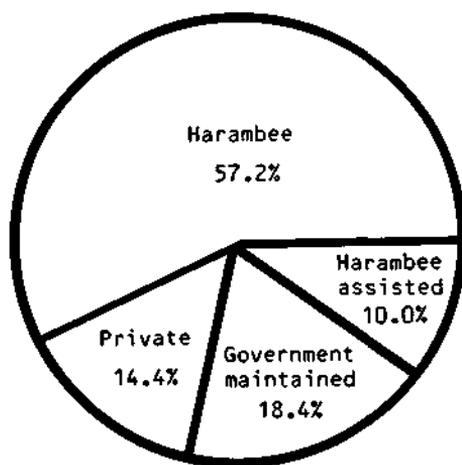
This restricted development of the African education system operated to limit access to secondary schools to a certain group of Africans, namely the chiefly, wealthy and propertied. It was this same group that was later able to take up further educational opportunities as the European and Asian schools opened to Africans. At Independence, it was this sector of the society that was best situated to take greater advantage of the new opportunities. In Kenya, the access to privileged education has been a powerful factor in consolidating the influence of the indigenous ruling class and its supporting groups. In spite of various developments in education at both primary and secondary level, a proliferation of educational institutions, and significant increases in the school population, entry to the older and more well established institutions is still severely restricted to a small select group.

### **The education boom: some causes and effects**

One of the government's main purposes in providing Africans with formal academic education was to enable the gradual Kenyanisation of administrative posts. This manpower planning rationale was responsible for the development of primary and secondary education for Africans, and strengthened the connection between schooling and access to wage paying, modern sector employment. Although the demand was initially placed on the primary education sector, growth in numbers of pupils attending secondary schools climbed quickly: the estimated 27,000 in 1963 (the year of Independence) increased dramatically to 465,000 in 1981 (Republic of Kenya 1983, 37).

The extension of secondary level education through the establishment of more government schools clearly did not meet the tremendous and increasing public demand. Substantial numbers of non-government-sponsored schools were established as the self-help efforts of the people focused upon this sector. The period saw massive expansion in the numbers of secondary institutions over a relatively short time, without proportional financial commitment. Inevitably, there were serious negative effects upon school quality. The graph in Figure 1 shows how limited is government's financial commitment, for example in Machakos District, Eastern Province. Of the secondary schools, 71.6 per cent receive no government assistance, and only 10 per cent of the Harambee schools receive any. A mere 18.4 per cent of Machakos secondary schools are government maintained.

**Figure 1** Funding of secondary schools in Machakos District, Eastern Province, 1982



Government maintained	18.4%
Harambee assisted	10.0%
Unaided (Harambee + private)	71.6%

**Source** Machakos Education Office. Head-count of Secondary Schools 1982

The development of secondary education in Kenya has thus produced a marked stratification of institutions. The hierarchy from top to bottom runs:

- high status/high cost schools (formerly European and Asian schools);
- government schools (more recent and localised);
- Harambee and low cost private schools (not funded by government).<sup>1</sup>

The differences between the institutions from each stratum are evident in terms of buildings, furnishings, books, resources and teachers. Although there are differences in the quality of these between each of the categories, the more marked and serious comparative deficiencies completely separate the third section, the Harambee and private schools, from the upper two. The more recently established Harambee schools, working with very tight budgets, suffer the most. The ex-European and ex-Asian institutions, modelled on the British public schools and charging high fees, have excellent facilities, including several laboratories. Government schools, although not directly comparable, still have the basic necessities as regards buildings and resources, including library and laboratory facilities. Harambee schools generally fall far behind, with partially furnished, poorly lit classrooms, often overcrowded and with insufficient furnishings. Books are a scarce commodity: often the teacher works with only one, out-dated, reference copy. Similarly, other teaching aids such as science equipment and chemicals are absent. By implication, libraries and laboratories are also extremely rare.

Another direct effect of the increase in the number of non-government schools is, inescapably, the employment of untrained teachers. Despite government efforts to increase teacher training, the numbers of untrained teachers doubled between 1964 and 1981 (Republic of Kenya 1983, 37). Besides the tremendous increase in the number of teaching posts, beyond the capacity of the training colleges to meet, other factors also contribute to the shortage. Poor pay and conditions, and the absence of professional identity, all contribute to the failure of education to attract students into teaching. In addition, a substantial proportion of those who are trained do not go into the schools: rather they use the qualification as a stepping stone to alternative, more lucrative, forms of employment. At the same time, the available qualified secondary school teachers are inevitably drawn to the higher status schools and are usually employed in the first two strata of the

secondary institutions. Harambee schools are, as a result, almost exclusively staffed by untrained teachers.

Student ability cannot be discounted as a significant factor in examination performance. But the poor school conditions, low levels of staff training, and consequent low teacher morale, are compounded by the desperately poor examination results (Sifuna 1980, 104). Some schools, for example, maintain a 100 per cent failure rate in science subjects.

This disparity in quality amongst secondary institutions is even more serious when it is remembered that the Harambee and private schools cater for almost twice as many primary school leavers (23%) as do the government maintained schools (12%) (Republic of Kenya 1983, 149). So despite the professed objective of equality of opportunity (Republic of Kenya 1983, 148), a hierarchy of educational institutions is apparent in Kenya today, a hierarchy that clearly reflects the class divisions in society. Consequently it falls to the Harambee and low cost private schools, none of which is government funded, to cater for the lower working class and the peasantry.

### **Harambee schools: the perpetuation of the divide**

Although universal primary education (UPE) is being approached in Kenya, it must be emphasised that the differences in school quality previously described with reference to secondary schools also characterise the range of primary institutions. For example, children attending high cost primary schools in the capital, Nairobi, almost automatically feed into secondary schools of an equivalent standing. Whatever the abilities of the individual student, the conditions within these schools are conducive to the full achievement of his/her potential. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the leavers from poor quality primary schools have little chance of passing the Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) with a high enough score to gain entrance to schools in the first and second categories. This makes the likelihood of transfer between the layers in the system remote, since the destiny of students is determined to a large extent long before they enter secondary school. Selection of students for a specific type of school, although ostensibly through an examination procedure, may be correlated more accurately with their socio-economic background than with their ability or examination performance.

So Harambee schools, rather than opening opportunities, tend to accentuate the initial social differences, and the education system is instrumental in maintaining and reinforcing the divisions in the wider society. Consequently the expansion of the education system has had no real impact on the established structure of the society.

Similarly, regional inequalities have been accentuated. There has developed a practice of raising the status of schools. The 'good' Harambee schools become Harambee Assisted, usually meaning that government pays one teacher's salary. Likewise, 'good' Harambee Assisted schools can become Government Maintained schools. This practice has led to uneven development in the number and range of institutions in the different regions of the country. The promotion of schools to a higher category has tended to take place in areas that are politically favoured, whose schools therefore gain easier access to government assistance. In the early 1970s, for example, over one-third of the Government Ministers came from Central Province. The number and type of secondary schools is a reflection of this. Government statistics for the mid-seventies show Central Province, the fourth most populous province, with by far the highest number of government maintained schools in the country (101 out of a national total of 437). By contrast, the more populous Rift Valley, Nyanza, and Eastern Provinces had 62, 80, and 76 respectively (see Table 1).

**Table 1** Number of secondary schools by category and province, 1977

Province <sup>a</sup>	Government maintained		Government Assisted	Unaided		Total	
	No.	% <sup>b</sup>	No.	No.	% <sup>c</sup>	No.	% <sup>d</sup>
Rift Valley (20%)	62	14.19	-	126	12.09	188	12.65
Nyanza (19%)	80	18.31	-	170	16.31	250	16.82
Eastern (17%)	76	17.39	-	198	19.00	274	18.44
Central (15%)	101	23.11	-	275	26.40	376	25.30
Western (12%)	60	13.73	-	204	19.58	264	17.77
Coast (9%)	28	6.41	3	40	3.84	71	4.78
Nairobi (4%)	26	5.95	4	29	2.78	59	3.97
North Eastern (2%)	4	0.92	-	--	--	4	0.27
National total	437	(100)	7	1,042	100	1,486	100

- Notes**
- a Provinces are ranked according to the approximate proportion of the total population. Percentage figures are rounded from the figures given in Burrows 1975, Table 36, p.25.
  - b Percentage of all government maintained secondary schools, 1977 (n = 437).
  - c Percentage of all unaided secondary schools, 1977 (n = 1,042).
  - d Percentage of national total of secondary schools, 1977 (N = 1,486).

**Source** School numbers taken from Republic of Kenya *Ministry of Education: Annual report 1977: 44-45*. Percentages calculated by the author.

The interaction between politics and education is further exemplified when the 'spirit of Harambee' itself is examined. It is true that there has been a long tradition of self-help and co-operation in Kenya, examples being the reciprocal labour service called *wira* or *ngwatio* amongst the Kikuyu, or the *saga* of the Luo (Kenyatta 1938; Ocholla-Ayayo 1976). This occurred during times of cultivation or harvesting. Groups of friends were invited to assist and were then feasted with food and drink when the work was finished. No exchange of money was involved.

Nowadays Harambee activities are largely for fundraising and hence require financial commitment. Contributions in terms of voluntary labour have been phased out almost completely. This change in accent drastically affects the capability, especially of the rural people with limited monetary resources, to contribute. Furthermore, the heavy toll of these contribu-

tions on families often leaves them unable to benefit from the particular project. For instance, a family may contribute to the building of a school but then be unable to make regular payment of school fees for their children. In certain circumstances government officials enforce contributions, which results in the appropriation of property in lieu of cash.

These factors, together with the increase in Harambee projects around election time, seem to support the view that the whole movement has become a political gambit. It reaps larger benefits for the aspiring politicians than for the people for whose benefit it was supposedly inaugurated. Politicians and local notables pride themselves on the ever increasing donations to particular Harambee projects. The ability to tap these kinds of funds is an unquestionable indication of their own socio-economic status and a reinforcement of the divide between the ruling class and the masses.

Despite the transformation of the motivation behind Harambee, which was intended to epitomise community co-operation, there remains a paradox that derives from the original philanthropy that stimulated self-help. The tendency is to treat the symptom of social inequality rather than its cause. As a result, politicians repeatedly gain support and credibility through involvement in Harambee schemes despite the superficial impact they generally have.

The enormous disparity in the standards of secondary education establishments presents an unjustifiable and intolerable gulf in the opportunities for the different societal strata. If only for the sake of future political stability, however dubious that may be as a motive, measures must be taken to improve the educational opportunities available to the majority of the population. There must be clear evidence of action to fulfil the responsibility of the government to ensure that 'all Kenyans share in the benefits of development' (Republic of Kenya 1983, 38), particularly in the rural areas, which provide the chief focus of many of the proposed development activities.

### **Curriculum development: the plight of the Harambee schools**

The development of the stratified education system, although related to wider social inequalities, has emerged under the control of the educational

administration. An examination of its functioning reveals how these developments occur, and what impact they have on the curriculum in Harambee schools, thus highlighting the more pervasive effects that the structure of society has on the education system and individual schools.

The bodies most directly concerned with curriculum matters are the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE), the Kenya Examination Council, and the Inspectorate, all of which are in Nairobi, although there are also provincial inspectors. These bodies clearly have great influence not only on the nature of the curriculum, but also upon its shape in particular institutions. Hence they directly affect the educational opportunities available to certain individuals or groups.

The education system is centrally administered, although there are, as part of the decentralisation policy, provincial and district offices, whose officers and inspectors have some autonomy. But the real decision making power remains at the centre. Further, it may be argued that decentralisation, even to district level, is still central administration, particularly for remote schools with limited contact with district headquarters. To compound this, the hierarchical bureaucratic structure facilitates only downward communication: a channel in the reverse direction, from an individual or school through area or district offices to the centre, is not readily accessible. This negates the impact of more peripheral institutions or individuals upon decision making.

The maintenance of the status quo and the reproduction of the social structure is clearly demonstrated by developments in the curriculum. Its strong academic bias, established in colonial times, has remained relatively unchanged. For example, the change from the Cambridge Overseas to the East Africa Certificate Examination (EACE) and the Kenya Certificate Examination (KCE), and more recently a structural change to the 8-4-4 system (8 years primary, 4 years secondary and 4 years university) are only nominal. The underlying ideology is unaffected.

The static nature of the curriculum certainly suggests that there are difficulties with the curriculum development process. The unchanging curriculum reflects an unchanging political power base. The close relationship between the curriculum and the societal structure gives added significance to possible changes or developments in the curriculum.

As regards the hierarchy of institutions, all three categories of schools have the same goal, that of producing passes in national examinations. Theoretically, the range of curriculum subjects is wide. The list of examinable subjects is lengthy, with details of each syllabus produced every year by the examination board. However, regulations specified by the Inspectorate (for example, laboratory requirements for the teaching of science) reduce that range considerably, particularly for the poorer schools. Lack of both facilities and suitably qualified teachers narrows the breadth of educational experience for the Harambee school student. For the outstanding students from these schools, some subjects are never viable options in further education, so that their educational opportunities are further diminished. Within this context, the plight of the Harambee schools, at the base of a stratified system and confined to the periphery, contrasts starkly with the other categories of schools.

### **Planning for broad-based curriculum development**

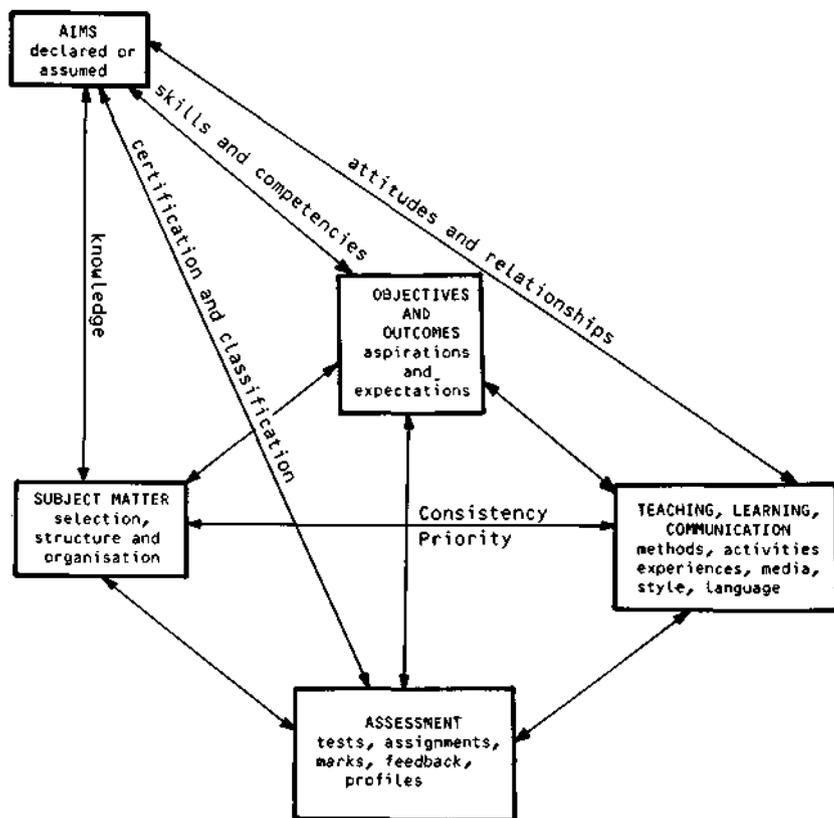
It is clear that curriculum organisation and the processes through which it is developed are key factors that give rise to the situation in Harambee schools. Many aspects of the curriculum in Kenya are centrally prescribed. Its aims and objectives are stated in government publications. The subject matter and the manner of assessment of students are also explicitly laid down through the syllabus and the examination procedure. The subject range in a particular institution is controlled through Inspectorate regulations. The operation of the curriculum is thus very constrained by conditions laid down outside the school.

There is, however, one major element of the curriculum that has no pre-specification, and that is the teaching — learning situation. In the light of the great variation in the teachers' training, experiences and resources, this area is of particular significance. Differences in this aspect of the curriculum are bound to have repercussions, causing differences in the other elements. For instance, teaching methods may affect the subject matter organisation and the ease with which learners grasp the concepts. This is reflected in assessment marks, which in turn force differences in outcomes. In this way, the curriculum aims and objectives may be left unfulfilled.

The curriculum model presented in Figure 2 schematises this

interrelatedness. It specifies five components of the curriculum whose interaction is such that a difference in any one component affects all the others.

**Figure 2** A model of the curriculum, showing five curriculum elements in inter-relationship



Source Eraut 1982, 9.

The absence of any obvious consideration of the teaching and learning element in the Kenya curriculum implies that there are certain assumptions

concerning the general situation. In general, assumptions tend to relate to previous experience, and the Kenyan situation is no exception. The educational decision makers, themselves belonging to the group that feeds into the upper categories of schools, reflect precisely that background and experience—the classroom conditions in high quality schools. Hence a bias implicit in the curriculum reinforces the status quo. The predicament of the Harambee teachers and students remains at best a subordinate consideration. This bias has given rise to centrally imposed curriculum restrictions, rather than provoking any reflection upon components of the curriculum such as its aims and objectives and their relevance, or the problems of their implementation. Harambee schools are thus left struggling on as part of a system that is loaded against them.

It is plain from this analysis that poor results from Harambee schools are the inevitable result of inappropriate curriculum design. Satisfactory implementation of the curriculum is impossible in the current conditions. The design — implementation gap arises from the skewed development of the curriculum because of its domination by central institutions. This dominance from the centre is made worse because there are significant numbers of expatriates in both the high status institutions and the administration, giving rise to the importation of courses whose design has not been formulated in response to factors in the Kenyan context. Modern mathematics exemplifies such alien courses.

To redress the imbalance in the curriculum, further development must both allow and encourage the actual implementers, the teachers, to participate in the design decisions. All teachers must be involved in curriculum development activities and evaluation. Their different perspectives, problems and working conditions will then have a bearing on the curriculum they are expected to implement. This is a radical proposal. But it will be radical proposals that present the best option for more equitable development in Kenya.

#### Note

- 1 Lillis, on whose analysis this summary is based, actually divides the stratified education system into four categories, with a separation between the former European and former Asian schools (1985). Essentially there is no major disagreement with this classification. My emphasis is on the effects of

privileged status, and for this purpose I have amalgamated the two types of privileged institution.

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