

Final Draft

Committee IV  
Crises in Education in the 1980's:  
A survey of Educational Values  
and Systems.

CRISES IN EDUCATION IN THE  
1980'S: THE AFRICAN SCENE

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Discussion Paper  
on  
John Oxenham's

EDUCATIONAL VALUES AND HOPES  
FOR UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION  
IN AFRICA

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Dr. John Oxenham's paper looks at the predicament of education in Africa principally at two levels: the teleological level and the operational level.

At the teleo-philosophical level, the author sees the formal educational process as an unfortunate historical event introduced in the continent by colonial powers in open disregard of what indigenous socializational processes existed. The event, according to the sentiment of the paper, was a wrong kind, upholding wrong values and hence bent on producing wrong products of a necessarily defective quality.

At the level of practical operation, Oxenham observes an education industry in the majority of African countries today suffering from a number of setbacks despite the undisputable priority given to it compared to government budgetary allocations to other sectors in the national economy. "While a dozen or so states have indeed achieved virtually universal primary education, the majority of African states have not.... Even if they are biased towards optimism, they show nevertheless that large deficits still remain."

From both these two points of view, the author succeeds in portraying the general nature of the multifaceted problem of the education process in modern

Africa as it reflects itself in the persistent dilemma between "total education for life" and "certification for occupational slots", failure to achieve quality against a background of promises of mass benevolence, as well as other intervening factors such as a very high population growth rate, a static or decelerating rate of economic growth, a correspondingly depressed material base to support or reinforce established infrastructural facilities, and, consequently, a bewildered feeling of disenchantment and alienation particularly among the growing youthful population who neither get full education nor settle down to apply themselves to the world of work and production.

Nonetheless, Oxenham could be quizzed about his first level of analysis. While it is true that modern (or, western-type) education in Africa is a transplanted import of the nineteenth-century colonialist (and missionary), there is no concrete evidence that without this historical interlude the pre-existing traditional socializational patterns and methods would have remained the same to the present day (unless one assumes a changeless, static society). In fact, whether modern education systems in today's African nation-states should still be termed colonial systems is a subject of qualified particularistic reference to individual

countries, depending on the extent of adoption of values. The argument here is that while it is undeniably true that most African education systems today were heavily influenced (and to a large extent negatively affected) by the old colonial administrations, they are by now (in the twentieth century) legitimately an African fact, with responsibility for proper management or mismanagement entirely in African hands. Whether their fabric can be drawn back to the old simple indigenous patterns and framework of an old small-scale community is a subject of conjecture.

As the author rightly points out, the extended family, the community elders and the talented local craftsmen were key educative institutions in old African society. Is it conceivable, however, that the same institutions could squarely and adequately handle the task today in a situation where the "small-scale community" has long grown into a "large-scale nation" which is no longer living in isolation but within an inextricable web of international relations? Nay, we must admit that school - or formal education - in Africa is an African fact to stay and, like other Western formal educational systems, to continue to shoulder the heavier and more complex educative tasks that have with time grown well beyond the competence

level of the family (even the extended family), the village elder and the community craftsman.

But this does not absolve to-day's school in Africa (as elsewhere in the Western world) of the systemic inefficiency, disorientation, insensitivity or else malfunctioning as has correctly been pointed out by Dr. Oxenham, along with the thinking of other critics such as John Holt (on the "underachieving school"), Paulo Freire (on "teacher authoritarianism"), Paul Goodman (on "compulsory miseducation" attendant on compulsory attendance and ritualistic drilling), Ivan Illich (on the divisive nature of formal schooling and certification) and Ronald Dore (on the unfortunate "diploma disease" attendant on hankering for mere credentials).

While, in my view, it may be unwise and indeed impracticable to deschool society, it is nevertheless the task of the present generation to re-orientate and rehabilitate the school (all formal educational institutions!) back to the proper track, that is, to the tune of the philosophy, objectives and expectations of proper (quality) and full education. Any certificates, when they have to be given, must properly be a testimonial representing what the graduand actually

acquired and mastered by way of knowledge scope and skills and not merely hollow and deceptive credentials for a job on the competitive labour market.

This view then leads us to a discussion of the nature and extent of the crisis besetting Africa in connection with the ideal and practice of "universal basic education". What we discover about this is probably the basis of the pessimism and fears that were expressed and overheard at the ECA in Addis Ababa (in 1982): that by the year 2000 Africa might not merely be in a ditch beside the highway but dismally in an abyss of entanglement and hopelessness. It may have been a far-stretched pessimism, but it is nonetheless legitimate. Why? Only four factors will be summarized here, the first three of which Dr. Oxenham has touched upon in his present paper and elsewhere (Oxenham 1984: 1 - 7) but will here be illustrated with specific African country cases, the fourth factor deserving our attention as well.

1. The wanting quality of basic education. In spite of the increased rates of school enrolment and literacy over the last two decades, universal basic education has not yet been achieved (World Bank, 1980: 7-11; Fredriksen, 1981: 1 - 15). Yet even in Third World

countries where advances towards universal primary education have been made (e.g. in Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Kenya and Tanzania), the quality of education still leaves much to be desired. This could and must be rightly assessed in terms of the kind and quantity of teachers supplied, classroom sessions, teaching-learning materials and equipment available and the variety and quality of skills gained in school for life after and outside school.

The same observation could be made of the adult population. Thus, even though the quantitative side of education is impressive in terms of numbers registered, the qualitative side of permanence of literacy, functionality and application of knowledge and skills gained, and adequacy of skills themselves and a demonstrable generation and continuity of creative and innovative abilities is yet to be evidenced. It is reckoned by the World Bank (1980: 21) that about 250 million children and 600 million adults in developing countries have had little or no exposure to any formal learning. This in fact means that a third of primary-school-age children are not yet in school, and that a third of the adult population are still illiterate.

2. The disproportionate relationship between a fast-growing primary school-level enrolment and a slow post-primary institutional expansion and/or slow post-primary occupational training possibilities. With the expanding UPE programme, fuelled by growing social demand for educational opportunities, enrolment at the base of the educational structure is growing at a much faster rate than the number of post-primary institutions (e.g. secondary regular schools, trade schools, occupational training centres) to absorb the increasing number of primary school leavers. Tables 1 and 2, showing the expansion trend in Tanzania and Kenya over the last two decades, are just two cases among many of disproportionate educational expansion in many developing countries. The inevitable effects have been, and may well continue to be, frustration of child and parent aspirations, popular disaffection, young school leaver migration into urban regions, continuous rural denudation, urban joblessness against rural unproductivity, and consequent urban youth delinquency and crime (see Ishumi, 1984). In some cases such as in Tanzania (see Table 1), the situation is likely to be much graver in the nearest future as expansion at secondary



Table 1: Primary and Secondary School enrolment trend in Tanzania, 1961 - 1984.

LEVEL	1961	1964	1969	1974	1976	1981	1982	1983	1984
Primary Std. 1	121,386	140,340	171,500	208,300	542,977	576,347	687,481	*	*
Primary Std. 7	11,732	20,348	60,545	119,350	156,114	212,446	419,331	454,604	653,509
Secondary Form 1	4,196	5,302	7,149	8,165	8,620	8,907	8,843	9,285	**
<b>Residual (unplaced)</b>	7,536 (64%)	15,046 (74%)	53,396 (88%)	111,185 (93%)	147,494 (94%)	203,539 (96%)	410,488 (97.9%)	445,319 (97.9%)	

Sources: Ministry of National Education, Dar es Salaam and Malekela (1983).

\* Figures for 1983 and 1984 for Standard (Grade) 1 unobtainable

\*\* Placements for the 1984 primary school output not yet made.

Table 2: Primary and Secondary School enrolment trend in Kenya  
1973 - 1977

LEVEL	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977
Primary Std. 1	379,370	956,844	668,166	571,872	603,259
Primary Std. 7	194,875	214,272	227,439	243,214	237,140
Secondary Form 1	n.a.	64,706	73,690	94,834	106,413
Residual (unplaced)	n.c.	149,566 (70%)	153,749 (68%)	148,380 (61%)	130,727 (55%)

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, Nairobi,  
Kenya.

n.a. = statistics not available

n.c. = figure not calculable.

and other post-primary levels is almost stunted and the unplaced numbers are approaching absolute.

3. Internal educational inefficiency. This is reflected in several things: inoptimal teacher-pupil ratios, in many cases with too many children to a teacher as is to be seen in many UPE classes in Tanzania and Nigeria, and in a few other cases with too few children to a teacher as has traditionally been in many schools in Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and Namibia; inadequate or else hasty preparation of teachers who hardly acquire or else quickly lose expected qualities of professionalism and morale; an imbalanced, often over-crowded curriculum; extreme modes of school administration and classroom management; and an inadequate supply of institutional equipment and teaching-learning support materials.

4. Deficient planning. In most developing countries, educational planning exercises have unfortunately been limited to quantitative expansion (increasing of school places) and mere theoretical setting of goals and targets. Rarely has the exercise grappled with questions of quality control, effectivity and productivity of the education offered, and of possibilities of step-wise expansion of educational opportunities

that correspond with areas and levels of effective skill application, employability and occupational stability. While this problem has in part been a result of pervading ideological pressure and highly centralized political decision making (which has often influenced and sometimes dictated even the details of public policy), it has also been a reflection of a gross deficiency and poverty in professional planning expertise. Many planners (in the "planning units") of ministries of education are planners more by title than by training and professional and technical know-how.

Dr. Oxenham's paper expresses compassion and hope for the future. So do I and all others seriously concerned with not only the repair work but also an innovative, progressive take-off in African countries and all others in the Third World. I personally feel that the hope we now demonstrate can only be sustained by positive and immediate responses on the part of the individual national power structures and decision-makers in flexibly looking for and testing alternatives to our current hurdles and bottlenecks.

Such alternatives include a decentralized (as opposed to a centralized, imposed) control of educational institutions in the quest for relevant curricula; instigation and encouragement of local community initiative and involvement in defining and grounding post-primary educational-cum-production institutions and centres that are appropriate to needed forms and levels of productive skills; and concerted action among policy-makers, planners and implementers (including educators themselves) in pragmatic innovations and renovations as well as in open programme evaluation in the whole field of educational provision for the constantly changing socio-economic and cultural conditions.

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