

# The National Goals of Education in Kenya: Interrogating the Achievement of National Unity

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## Abstract

Education is critical in promoting political, social and economic development of any country. It is expected to provide an all-round development of its recipients to enable them overcome prevailing challenges and therefore play effective roles in their immediate society. The provision of a meaningful and adequate education is fundamental to Kenya's overall development strategy (MOEST, 2004). The functions the Kenyan education system seeks to attain are embedded in the three aims of education and further translated in the eight national goals of education. These goals explain the ideals this system seeks to attain in terms of the knowledge, skills, and values the country wishes its learners to acquire. The formulation of the eight goals of education is meant to specify more precisely, what qualities are thought most desirable to develop among the Kenyan citizens.

Kenya as a country has made efforts to direct its educational endeavours towards its national goals; however, an examination of products of this system and a critical analysis of the state of the society points to the need for more effort. For instance, since independence, the national goal of national unity has continued to feature prominently among Kenya's national goals of education due to its significance in a state with divergent characteristics. The happenings witnessed in the country especially during the post-election violence of 2007-2008 and the elusive attainment of nationalism and patriotism seem to suggest that this goal is far from being achieved.

This paper interrogates the national goals of education in Kenya with a focus on the goal of fostering national unity. It examines the achievements with regards to this goal and highlights critical issues that prevent its successful attainment. It also attempts to identify gaps which require attention, research and implementation to enable sustainable solutions to one of the society's key needs.

**Key words:** education, goals of education, national unity

## Introduction

Education is a total process by which human abilities and behaviours are developed (Ndaloh et al, 2009). This is done through imparting appropriate knowledge, **skills, and attitudes in the learners to enable their awareness, appreciation and preservation of their cultural heritage and also their creativity in modifying and even shaping this culture for their benefit and that of their society.**

**Education is a purposeful activity (Bishop, 1995). Those who develop or implement curricula have in mind some intent which is captured as aims, goals, and objectives. These aspects describe individual and social**

educational ideals. These ideals are enshrined in a body of values held dear by both the communities and the individuals within the society; education therefore fulfils both an individual and a social function. Educational aims in particular are general statements that provide both shape and direction to the more specific actions designed to achieve some future product or behaviour. Taba (1962) points out the three main functions of education as preservation and transmission of cultural heritage, transforming of culture, and individual development. These general aims of education, also referred to as functions of education, are starting points that suggest an ideal or inspirational vision of the good. They reflect value judgments and value-laden statements which furnish educators with guides for the educational process. Whereas these aims provide guidance as to direction, they do not indicate the actual destination itself. The end point in a means-end-model is noted by goal statements. Goals delimit educational activities so that particular ends or purposes are achieved.

A country formulates its educational goals from its general aims in relation to its social, economic and political context (Nasibi, 2003). Goals of any educational system are to be found in the values and purposes of its people. Omulando (1992) argues that goals address the needs and aspirations of a nation because they specify what qualities or values are thought desirable to develop among the citizens of that country. In Kenya, the national goals have led to the development of general objectives in other educational subsectors such as pre-primary, primary, secondary and university. These subsector objectives give rise to the development of more specific objectives related to the respective subjects, courses or school terms. Teachers at various levels of instruction have the responsibility of translating the educational subsector objectives of their respective teaching levels into instructional objectives; this should be done with aims of education and national goals of education in mind. Figure 1 indicates the hierarchy of aims, goals, and objectives, showing how instructional objectives can be derived from general educational aims and national goals of education; underscoring the significance of the aims and goals in the nature of education in a country determines the end product of education.

### Kenya National Education Goals

Kenya uses aims, goals and objectives in educational planning (Nasibi, 2003). The national goals of education are derived from the general aims of education. General aims being broad and often abstract in their expression are unable to offer particular achievements within specified time limits therefore are used to offer general guidance on educational intention and to guide the formulation of educational goals. Due to their significance in offering specific direction, Kenya has kept reviewing its goals of education to suit her prevailing circumstances. At independence in 1963, Kenya inherited a system of education that had been designed in colonial times to suit the needs of the colonial administration. The new government found it necessary to revise the whole school curriculum and state clearly the national goals of education in an independent state. This important task was first undertaken by the Kenya Education commission in 1964 which became the well-known Ominde Report. It outlined six National Goals of Education which the educational system was expected to fulfil. These goals were later revised and as explained by the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE, 2002), they are as follows:

1. **To foster nationalism, patriotism and promote national unity:** Kenya's people belong to different ethnic groups, races and religions but these differences need not divide them. They must be able to live and interact as Kenyans. It is a paramount duty of education to help the youth acquire this sense of nationhood by removing conflicts and by promoting positive attitudes of mutual respect which enable them to live together in harmony, and foster patriotism in order to make a positive contribution to the life of the nation.
2. **To promote the social, economic, technological and industrial needs for national development:** Education should prepare the youth of the country to play an effective and productive role in the life of the nation.
  - a. **Social needs:** Education in Kenya must prepare children for the changes in attitude and relationships which are necessary for the smooth process of a rapidly developing modern economy. There is bound to be a silent social revolution following in the wake of rapid modernization. Education should assist our youth to adapt to this change.
  - b. **Economic needs:** Education in Kenya should produce citizens with skills, knowledge, expertise and personal qualities that are required to support a growing economy. Kenya is building up a modern and independent economy which is in need of adequate domestic manpower.
  - c. **Technological and industrial needs:** Education in Kenya should provide the learners with the necessary skills and attitudes for industrial development. Kenya recognises the rapid industrial and technological changes taking place especially in the developed world. We can only be part of this development if our education system deliberately

focussed on knowledge, skills and attitudes that will help prepare the youth for these changing global trends.

3. **To promote individual development and self-fulfilment:** Education should provide opportunities for the fullest development of individual talents and personality. It should help its recipients to develop their potential interests and abilities. A vital aspect of individual development is character building.
4. **To promote sound moral and religious values:** Education should provide for the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes that will enhance acquisition of sound moral values and help children to grow up into self-disciplined, self-reliant and integrated citizens.
5. **To promote social equality and responsibility:** Education should promote social equality and foster a sense of social responsibility within an education system which provides equal education opportunities for all. It should give all learners varied and challenging opportunities for collective activities and corporate social services irrespective of gender, ability or geographical environment.
6. **To promote respect for and development of Kenya's rich and varied cultures:** Education should instil in the youth of Kenya an understanding of past and present cultures and their valid place in the contemporary society. The learners should be able to blend the best of traditional values with the changed requirements that must follow rapid development in order to build a stable and modern society.
7. **To promote international consciousness and foster positive attitudes towards other nations:** Kenya is part of the international community. It is part of the complicated and interdependent network of people and nations. Education should therefore lead the youth of the country to accept membership in this international community with all the obligations and responsibilities, rights and benefits that this membership entails.
8. **To promote positive attitudes towards good health and environmental protection:** Education should inculcate in the youth the value for good health in order to avoid indulging in activities that will lead to physical or mental ill health. It should foster positive attitudes towards environmental development and conservation. It should lead the youth to appreciate the need for a healthy environment.

From the above, it can be seen that goals of education seek to answer the question, "What purposes should the educational system seek to attain?" "What qualities of mind, what knowledge, skills, values, do we wish our learners to acquire?" The formulation of the goals of education is meant to specify more precisely, what qualities are thought most desirable to develop among the citizens of the country. This assists those charged with the promotion of education in the country to organize appropriated programmes of study.

As opposed to objectives, national goals of education are a massive objective whose achievement can only be evaluated at the end of school. This means that what is seen in the Kenyan society today is the reflection of the level of achievement of the national goals of education.

### **Interrogating the Achievement of National Unity**

National unity is a philosophical concept which means the voluntary existence of different ethnic communities as one people who constitute one nation bound by a moral, social contract, a constitution, and an internationally defined geographical location. It implies co-operation in building a better world in which pluralism and diversity are accepted with emphasis on what can unite (Bansikiza, 2004). National unity as an educational goal is significant and is ranked highly due to the characteristic nature of the Kenyan society. Kenya is made up of forty-two ethnic communities with each community having even more sub-tribes. These communities are distributed within the country with certain location disparities such as the availability of economic resources, level of various forms of development, religion and race. Education ensures that these differences need not divide them but instead be a source of their strength. It enables the people, though having different characteristics, live and interact peacefully in a patriotic and nationalistic atmosphere. An achievement of all the national goals of education as explained earlier in this article will boost the achievement of this particular goal.

It has earlier been mentioned that what is seen in the Kenyan society today is a reflection of the extent of achievement of the national goals of education. The Kenyan society is grappling with graft of high magnitudes, unemployment is skyrocketing with idle youth especially in urban areas, increasing crime rates, poverty, insecurity, inequality, environmental pollution, ethnic rivalry, nepotism, just to name a few. The post-election violence of 2007-2008 was the epitome of division along ethnic and class lines. With this kind of scenario, it would almost seem obvious that the Kenyan national goals of education have not been fully achieved and as such, the promotion of nationalism, patriotism and national unity so falls short.

However, there are still indicators of achievement of national unity. Below are examples of the indicators of achievement of national unity:

- Forty-two ethnic groups co-exist in majority of urban centres in Kenya.
- Ethnic-related violence occurs periodically. This indicates that there are other forces that come to play, but not necessarily that national unity has not been achieved.
- During peace and reconciliation initiatives, Kenyans in affected areas are always willing to reconcile. This could be taken to indicate that a conscience of national unity has been deeply developed on the Kenyan citizens.

Before casting accusations on any one party for the failure to fully achieve national unity, this article raises certain issues thought pertinent to achievement of national goals of education:

**a) The general understanding of education, and of national goals of education by Kenyans**

To best articulate national unity as an outcome of education, the authors find it prudent to seek an understanding of the term 'education' because the way it is conceived influences the extent to which national educational goals are achieved as stakeholders' roles are determined by this understanding. An analysis of the educational system shows that the system thrives within an influential environment with enhancers and inhibitors, whose 'force' will determine the achievement of national educational goals.

The way education is conceived can result in exclusion of crucial stakeholders and limiting achievement of the national educational goals to the formal education sector, thus exposing the educational system to inability to achieve the goals. This has oft times been the case in Kenya and many expect the evaluation results from formal education to point at efficiency or inefficiency of this form of education, and rarely are the results seen to point at the performance of the informal and non-formal forms, or that of the stakeholders. Education has been taken to be synonymous with attendance at school or some other educational institution such as college or university, a process referred to as schooling. The schooling process in Kenya seems to be failing in its role of offering education to young people for adequate living in the society stressing more on academic achievements and more certification. It fails specifically in its provision of moral and social values leading to a situation of non-education (Bennars, 1990).

The fact that examination is the most common method of determining to what extent the required knowledge, skills, and attitudes have been acquired, gives rise to yet another definition of education. In this definition, education is equated with the passing of examinations. This quite agrees with what Shiundu and Omulando (1992) state, that the prevailing concept in Kenya's education is the tendency to equate education with classroom instruction that leads to mastery of an abstract body of knowledge which can be tested by formal examinations. This kind of conception leaves the influence of the family and community on education of the Kenyan citizenry, and sees the school entrusted with the task of the upbringing of the youth.

Arising from the different conceptions of education, the concept of national goals of education is likely to vary, and an interrogation of the same is important if a clear solution to the Kenyan society's needs is to be realized. Some questions beg for answers, e.g. Is it national goals of schooling, or national goals of education? It has previously been explained that the way the stakeholders of education perceive education will determine the way they perceive their roles. This goes a long way in influencing their understanding of the national goals of education and the keen interest in ensuring the achievement of these goals.

There is lack of research on the conception of education and consequently national goals of education by all stakeholders in education. One would therefore ask the following questions:

- What do the various stakeholders think education is?
- Do all stakeholders in education, who are key in implementing the national goals of education, know and understand the goals?

**b) Practices in the education sector that militate against national unity**

Certain practices in the education sector that militate against national unity include the quota system and teacher recruitment. The quota system was introduced as a mode of admission of learners through an Act of Parliament in 1985 and implemented by the Ministry of Education. This policy advocates that a provincial school admits 85 per cent of the learners from the district within which the school lies, leaving only 15 per cent for learners from outside the district but within the province. Researches carried out on this mode of admission show that majority of secondary school student's benefit from the admission procedure while minority are disadvantaged. The researches, however, reveal that the admission procedure is divisive rather than cohesive since it is district-based,

thus drawing students in the same geographical boundaries and same school. In addition, the procedure denies students opportunities to learn in any provincial school within the Republic of Kenya.

Currently, the recruitment of teachers in secondary schools in Kenya is done by the Board of Governors (BOGs) of the schools. This further enhances remaining in the district of origin, which was not the case when the Teacher Service Commission recruited the teachers and posted them to work in any part of the country.

### **c) Provision of education in Kenya**

Education in Kenya is provided within a context marked by high enrolment rates in primary and secondary levels. The educational system is a part of a political, social, and economic framework. Any change in cultural activities, way of life, resources or means of production, has implications for the curriculum, which must change in order to accommodate novel situations or circumstances (Shiundu & Omulando, 1992). The implication here is needed to invest in in-service training of teachers to update them on current changes. The enrolment rates in Kenya have significant effects on the quality of education. The number of teachers employed do not match these rates, thus quality is compromised. Coombs (1968) points out '*more* education has come to mean *worse* education. The youngsters are not getting as good an education as they used to, as reflected, for example, in the high proportion of poorly qualified teachers, bulging enrolments, leading to severely over-crowded classrooms, and the widespread shortage of textbooks and other teaching materials.

Attagara (1973) argues that in so many developing countries a disproportionate amount of effort and funds are expended to give more children more years of irrelevant and inefficient schooling at the expense of upgrading the teaching staff, the content and method of instruction, teaching materials and educational leadership. Though this may seem like a statement made about 50 years ago, expanding quantity with only a corresponding marginal return of quality is a little bit like adding zeros after the decimal point – the number may look impressive, but it does not add up to very much.

### **d) Development patterns in Kenya**

Development in any country is likely to vary owing to certain factors such as accessibility, geographical location, and socio-economic dispensation. However, any government ought to ensure that there are no unexplained or justified disparities in development. This is because if certain regions seem marginalized, an attitude that may draw the citizens in such regions away from feeling part of the society is likely to develop. It is worth noting that the Kenyan government has made efforts to develop essential infrastructure throughout the country though more effort on this course will further boost national unity and terminate the issue of marginalization.

### **e) Evaluation procedures in the Kenyan education system**

Education involves the acquisition of customs and morals basic to the social units as well as the acquisition of information or knowledge alien to the learner of his social group and makes best use of it. The survival of a discipline depends on its growth - it must increase and improve in content. Similarly, education needs a method of inquiry or methods to use in order to develop new concepts and refine the old ones. Currently, Kenya's education system relies on evaluation of formal education through written examinations. Subjects such as Physical Education and Life Skills are not examined. These subjects are important to a child's development but since they are not examinable, teachers use time allocated to them to teach because parents and the general public expect them to 'shine' academically. Such practice, of course, would not allow opportunities for development of national unity. In addition, focus on academic performance has caused teachers to spare no extra time for other activities that would be significant in the development of national unity. For example, a teacher of Oral Literature may be under a lot of pressure to complete the syllabus and not include many examples of Oral Narratives. The teachers' use of teaching methods are also limited; those that are time consuming yet crucial in development of national unity may be omitted, for instance the use of educational broadcasts.

### **Proposed Interventions**

This paper proposes the following interventions to complement certification on academic grounds:

#### **a) Re-focusing or re-orientation in education**

There is need to move focus from exam-orientation to overall development of the individual. This does not mean that teachers abandon academic work and focus on co-curricular activities, but they should focus on both and realise that both reinforce each other. There is also need for national mobilisation and sensitisation on goal-oriented education - education should be given for its own sake, not solely as a means to gainful employment but as a means to overall development of the learners. Evaluation systems in school should focus seriously on all domains; this will enhance participation in co-curricular activities and inculcation of discipline. This way education will be used to develop the right attributes in the learner, and it is suggested that the move from mixed



to single-gender schools be given attention as it denies the learner the opportunity to interact with members of the opposite sex.

**b) Improving all aspects of the quality of education, and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills**

Quality is at the heart of education, and what takes place in classrooms and other learning environments is fundamentally important to the future well-being of learners (Dakar Framework for Action, 2000). A quality education is one that satisfies basic learning needs, and enriches the lives of learners and their overall experience of living. Evidence over the past decade has shown that efforts to expand enrolment must be accompanied by attempts to enhance educational quality if children are to be attracted to school, stay there, and achieve meaningful learning outcomes. Scarce resources have frequently been used for expanding systems with insufficient attention to quality improvement in areas such as teacher training and materials development. Recent assessments of learning achievement in some countries have shown that a sizeable percentage of children is acquiring only a fraction of the knowledge and skills they are expected to master. What learners are meant to learn has often not been clearly defined, well-taught or accurately assessed. Governments and all other partners must work together to ensure education of quality for all, regardless of gender, wealth, location, language or ethnic origin. Successful education programmes require: healthy, well-nourished and motivated students; well-trained teachers and active learning techniques; adequate facilities and learning materials; and an environment that not only encourages learning but is welcoming, gender-sensitive, healthy and safe. They also require a clear definition and accurate assessment of learning outcomes, including knowledge, skills, attitudes and, values; participatory governance and management; and respect for and engagement with local communities and cultures.

School systems need to focus on evaluating their visions and missions and clearly translate them for both their teachers and learners; they also need to change their perceptions of the learners – as consumers, clients, or participants.

**c) Develop responsive, participatory and accountable systems of educational governance and management**

The experience of the past decade has underscored the need for better governance of education systems in terms of efficiency, accountability, transparency and flexibility so that they can respond more effectively to the diverse and continuously changing needs of learners (Dakar Framework for Action, 2000). Reform of educational management is urgently needed - to move from highly centralised, standardised, and command-driven forms of management to more decentralised and participatory decision-making, implementation, and monitoring at lower levels of accountability. These processes must be buttressed by a management information system that benefits from both new technologies and community participation to produce timely, relevant, and accurate information. The following are useful recommendations: ensure that decentralisation does not lead to inequitable distribution of resources; make more efficient use of existing human and financial resources; and improve capacities for managing diversity, disparity, and change. Other recommendations are: integrate programmes within education and strengthen their convergence with those of other sectors, especially health, labour, and social welfare; and provide training for school leaders and other education personnel. Such recommendations, if fully adopted, would positively influence leadership and management of schools and ensure good performance as defined in this paper.

**d) Create safe, healthy, inclusive and equitably resourced educational environments conducive to excellence in learning, with clearly defined levels of achievement for all**

The quality of learning is and must be at the heart of education. All stakeholders - teachers and students, parents and community members, health workers and local government officials - should work together to develop environments conducive to learning. To offer education of good quality, educational institutions and programmes should be adequately and equitably resourced, with the core requirements of safe, environmentally friendly, and easily accessible facilities; well-motivated and professionally competent teachers; and books, other learning materials and technologies that are context specific, cost effective, and available to all learners. Learning environments should also be healthy, safe, and protective. This should include adequate water and sanitation facilities, access to or linkages with health and nutrition services, policies and codes of conducts that enhance physical, psycho-social and emotional health of teachers and learners, and education content and practices leading to knowledge, attitudes, values, and life skills needed for self-esteem, good health, and personal safety.

There is an urgent need to adopt effective strategies to identify and include the socially, culturally, and economically excluded. This requires participatory analysis of exclusion at household, community and schools

levels, and the development of diverse, flexible, and innovative approaches to learning and an environment that fosters mutual respect and trust. Assessment of learning should include an evaluation of environments, processes, and outcomes. Learning outcomes must be well defined in both cognitive and non-cognitive domains, and be continually assessed as an integral part of the teaching and learning process. Equitable distribution of resources in infrastructural development will ensure learning by all learners in the country under similar situations/environment

#### **e) Enhance the status, morale and professionalism of teachers**

Teachers are essential players in promoting quality education, whether in schools or in more flexible community-based programmes; they are advocates for, and catalysts of, change. No education reform is likely to succeed without the active participation and ownership of teachers. Teachers at all levels of the education system should be respected and adequately remunerated; have access to training and ongoing professional development and support, including through open and distance learning; and be able to participate, locally and nationally, in decisions affecting their professional lives and teaching environments. Teachers must also accept their professional responsibilities and be accountable to both learners and communities. Clearly defined and more imaginative strategies to identify, attract, train, and retain good teachers must be put in place. These strategies should address the new role of teachers in preparing learners for an emerging knowledge-based and technology-driven economy. Teachers must be able to understand diversity in learning styles and in the physical and intellectual development of learners, and to create stimulating, participatory learning environments.

#### **Conclusion**

This paper has outlined the national goals of education, among them fostering of national unity. It has indicated that the achievement of this goal is determined to a large degree by how different stakeholders conceive education, and consequently their roles in achieving these goals. National unity as one of the national educational goals has been achieved to some extent, but certain issues need serious consideration if this goal is to be fully achieved; these issues have been raised in this paper. Finally, the authors have recommended that research needs to be carried out on the understanding of education and the purpose of education. The findings of such research undertaking will unearth any underlying currents that need to be addressed, and provide baseline information for education policy makers and implementers.

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Fig. 1 Hierarchy of Educational Aims, Goals, and Objectives in Kenya